



“Indépendance!”: *The Belgo-Congolese Dispute in the Tervuren Museum*

Véronique Bragard

Université catholique de Louvain, Belgium

veronique.bragard@uclouvain.be

Abstract: 50 years after Congolese Independence was declared on June 30th 1960 with Joseph Kasa-Vubu as President and Patrice Lumumba as Prime Minister, the Tervuren Museum of Central Africa (Brussels), originally built as the “Musée du Congo” by Léopold II, inaugurated the exhibition “Indépendance! Congolese Tell Their Stories of 50 Years of Independence.” This article examines how this event offers a sharp contrast to many Belgian museographic approaches to Belgium’s colonial past and emerges as a groundbreaking step for Belgium in recognizing the devastating effects of its colonial past. The study first analyzes the past of denial experienced by the Congolese community of Belgium to contextualize the Belgo-Congolese dispute and then further analyzes the “Indépendance!” exhibition as a response to the need of museums to embrace non-fixed and creative memory. The exhibit accordingly becomes this contact site in Clifford’s sense, i.e., a place where Belgians, Congolese and Belgo-Congolese people and memories are brought together, and where new meanings can be imaginatively shaped.

I. INTRODUCTION

As I was writing this article, Belgium was celebrating the 50th anniversary of Congolese independence but the country of “Tintin au Congo” is far from having fully entered a postcolonial era of self-criticism, being still trapped in a national myth of glory and civilizing colonialism. Its former Foreign Minister Louis Michel’s words that Leopold II was not such an inhuman exploiter (“*Léopold II ne mérite pas de tels reproches*” [*“Leopold II does not deserve such criticism”*] *Le Soir* 22.06.2010), or the fact that communities are faced with difficulties

when organizing a screening of the film *Lumumba* for independence celebrations, testify to the country’s palpable reluctance to face its colonial past. And yet, the many (post)colonial settings of recent graphic novels or the covering in July 2010 of the statue of Leopold II with a necklace of crocheted chopped hands expose a colonial past that haunts and reaches into the present in strange forms. Contesting the content of Belgium’s community-centered debates (Belgium is divided into three linguist communities about to separate), the social anthropologist Bambi Ceuppens is not the first person to notice that “many Belgians pay more attention to Leopold’s

Véronique Bragard is Associate Professor in Comparative Literature and Literatures in English at the Université catholique de Louvain, Belgium. She has published and edited widely on Indo-Caribbean, Indian Ocean and postcolonial Literatures. She is the author of *Transoceanic Dialogues: Coolitude in Caribbean and Indian Ocean Literatures* (Peter Lang, 2008). Her current projects include postcolonial literatures, the Belgian colonial past and Congolese Literatures, and the representation of trauma and hospitality in post 9/11 literary texts/graphic novels.

statues than to the Congolese people living in Belgium” (2007, my translation). If, as we will see, this anniversary has been an opportunity to organize a number of exhibitions and activities around Congolese history and culture, it has remained mostly a cultural/artistic phenomenon that has not raised any significant political debate on how the Congolese community of Belgium is perceived, helped, stereotyped or acknowledged. The king’s silence when he attended Congo’s official ceremonies is indicative of this lack of engagement with the realities that Congolese people have to face. In the event of such a silence, one must note the growing interest in discussing the Congolese diaspora within the Belgian academia and social spheres.

In an analysis of the presence of Belgium’s colonial past in museums, Stéphanie Planche and I (2009) have demonstrated how the representation of the colonial past of Belgium revolves around two polarized versions: between imperial nostalgia and incrimination, between politically orientated representations and bric-à-brac accumulation of objects brought back by colonials, and between traditional structures/buildings and innovative creative presentations. As emphasized in our analysis, the main debate focuses on the image of Leopold II, a king whose ghost¹ still oscillates between shame and genius.² Adopting a comparative approach to specific museographic representations of Belgium’s colonial past, our article argues that confronting and assessing the colonial past of the country

¹ I am alluding here to the title *L’Ombre du roi*, the first volume of a collection of graphic novels *Africa Dreams* about the colonial past of Belgium that has recently appeared with Casterman 2010. Of course, this title also refers to Hochschild’s famous work *King Leopold’s Ghost*, New York, 1999.

² See the volume Dujardin (V.), Rosoux (V.), de Wilde d’Estmael (T.), Planche (S.) et Plasman (P.-L.) (dir.), *Leopold II: génie ou génie*. Racines, 2009.

reveals the specificity of the postcolonial Belgian context, in which this problematic history has been debated within a broader national identity crisis that is taking overwhelming proportions. Attempting to scrutinize the history of the Congolese diaspora in Belgium, the exhibition “Black Paris—Black Brussels” tackled the question of Congolese migration to Belgium, mostly in a creative fashion. Recent commemoration exhibitions have adopted a similar approach: “Independence” (Tervuren) explores the memory of independence via testimonies and popular culture, *Lisolo Na Bisu (notre histoire): le soldat congolais de la force publique* focuses on the Congolese soldier in the civil service between 1885 and 1960, *Kinshasa Bruxelles: de Matonge à Matonge* (Tervuren) exposes the photographs of Jean-Dominique Burton to establish echoes and dialogues between the two neighborhoods (Brussels’s and Kinshasa’s Matonge situated 6000 km from each other), *Ligablo* presents popular and symbolic objects that have marked the Congolese imagination since the 1960s, *Paul Panda Farnana* (by Antoine Tshitungu Kongolo) explores the emblematic figure of Farnana who migrated to Belgium, fought with the Belgian army during WWI, and founded the *Union Congolaise de Belgique*.

This article focuses on the exhibition “Indépendance! 50 ans d’indépendance racontés par des Congolais” (“Independence! Congolese tell their stories of 50 years of independence”) as a groundbreaking step for Belgium in recognizing the devastating effects of its colonial past as well as the Belgo-Congolese dispute, the effects of which are still felt by the Congolese community of Belgium.

II. CONGOLESE MIGRANTS IN BELGIUM

As Belgium is preparing the opening of a museum of emigration, the *Red Star Line*

Museum of Antwerp, one must remember the country's migration and colonial history. Belgium has evidently been shaped by several migratory movements that started with massive internal migrations. Flemish peasants in the north were attracted by the industrialization of the southern region of Wallonia, followed by Italians who were 'invited' to work in the mines in 1946 when Belgium signed a protocol with Italy. Continuing with Spain (1956), Greece (1957), Morocco (1964), Turkey (1964), Tunisia (1969), Algeria (1970), and Yugoslavia (1970), the Belgian government pursued several bilateral agreements.³ This was followed by stricter policies and even in 1974 an official ban on recruiting new unqualified foreign workers. References to the Italian migrants are now to be found at the Bois du Cazier museum in Charleroi, a museum that addresses the industrialization and mining periods at the same time as it commemorates the Bois du Cazier catastrophe that killed 262 coal miners, among whom many Italians.

One might be surprised by the fact that Congo, Belgium's former colony, is not mentioned in the list above. Although Congo is absent from these references, in the first phase of the migrants' legalization campaign of 2000, as Marco Martiniello and Andrea Rea point out, "two nationalities stood out: Congolese, with 17.6 percent of the applications, and Moroccans, with 12.4 percent." The question I wish to raise here is: What is the status of the Congolese diaspora in Belgium? How have Congolese migrants (not) been accepted in a country that has for decades held colonial power in the Congo, and how are they represented in the exhibition "Indépendance"?

³ <http://www.migrationinformation.org/feature/display.cfm?ID=164>

III. THE CONGOLESE COMMUNITY IN BELGIUM: A PAST OF DENIAL

The starting point of my reflections is the temporary exhibition *Be.welcome* hosted by the Atomium in Brussels in 2010. Central to this exhibit organized jointly between the Atomium and the Musée de l'Europe is the idea that we need to make the problem of migration "less alarming" by showing how people have been migrating since the dawn of times and how, culturally, immigrants and their descendants have both adapted to the local culture they have fruitfully reshaped. Statistics show that migrants in Belgium come essentially from the European union. An interactive and most creative exhibit, it attempts to create a response in the viewer. One example is Aime Ntakiyoica's now famous photographs of a Black man in European folkloric costumes, which ironically questions the idea of a national and fixed identity. Another one, which foregrounds the creativity of the famous Congolese writer and performer Pie Tshibanda, imagines three telephone conversations between migrants and their loved ones back home. Other installations provide the point of view of the immigrant but also those who belong to the host country. Although general, it also depicts the history of migration in Belgium and foregrounds its cosmopolitan cities. Several works, like the photographs of restaurants, point to how immigrants and their offspring have contributed to the diversification of Belgian society—at the popular level at least.

As far as the representation of Congolese people is concerned, the following panel—translated here from the French—is worth scrutiny (see panel, next page).

The second sentence of the panel, although it seems to point to a large community—the third largest non-European group of migrants in Belgium—is somewhat contradicted by the last sentence

How did our former colony participate in this migration process?

On January 2008, one estimated that the population that is born Congolese reaches a little more than 45,000 people. They are the third group of migrants, after Moroccans and Turks, having a nationality that does not belong to one of the European Union countries. Unlike Moroccan and Turkish migration, the Congolese presence did not meet a process of labor recruitment.

recognizing that Belgium has not privileged Congolese laborers. In the permanent museum of Le Bois du Cazier, another analogous panel declares “Historical reasons account for the considerable presence of Congolese people” (my translation). This argument contrasts heavily with the observation of the historian Guy Vanthemsche, for instance, that in the present context “Congolese people living in Belgium only constitute a small fraction of the immigrant population” (290; my translation). What the term “non-négligeable” considerable means and alludes to is quite confusing. One needs to highlight the fact that the number of Congolese people is very small compared to the two other large non-European communities in Belgium: migrants of Moroccan and Turkish descent. If we compare the figures of Congolese (17,451) and Algerian (12,431) migrants in 1991, we can observe that the number of Congolese migrants was almost equivalent. What a comparison of those figures highlights is that the Congolese community in Belgium is extremely small although the Congo DR was a Belgian colony. However, in 2006, the Congolese community counted 40,000 members, twice the size of the Algerian community in Belgium. This rise obviously testifies to a change in attitude either from the Belgian government or/and from the Congolese population. Last but not least, in terms of figures, the fact that the Congolese community is larger in France than in Belgium is also worth noting. As Demart rightfully remarks “Those figures which one has observed since the 1990s break

away from dominant trends in international migration: the ones of the ancient metropolis as first destination for migratory flux. In 1997, 52% of the Congolese of Europe lived in France and 29% in Belgium”⁴ (my translation). The panels mentioned above indirectly reveal through their silences that, as Sarah Demart pursues,

If asylum-seekers are registered in France from the 1970s onwards, in Belgium the status of refugee is associated with shame until the 1980s. It is because of the increasing decline of the economy and of the social conditions in Congo-Zaire that this reality will become obvious (my translation).

Belgium’s relation to its former colony and migrants more generally is imbued with shame, a state that shows through the awkward and opaque references found in the exhibitions above in which the Congolese community is represented with obvious detachment.

The current Belgian public debate on migrants, in particular Moroccans and Turks, has been largely inspired by the electoral success of Vlaams Blok from 1989

⁴ LUTUTALA Bernard, 1997, “L’élargissement de l’espace de vie des Africains: comment le pays des ‘oncles’ européens devient aussi celui des ‘neveux’ africains,”/“The expansion of the living space of Africans: how the country of European ‘uncles’ also becomes the one of African ‘nephews” (my translation) *Revue Tiers-Monde*, 150, pp. 333-346. Cited in Demart.

onwards. At the time, Congolese hardly featured in these debates. Congolese came to Belgium in the aftermath of independence as students; as the political situation in their country of origin deteriorated from the end of the 1980s onwards, they started applying for political asylum. At the time, however, public debates were dominated by Muslims and Congolese remained an absent category. This situation continued when, from the 1990s onwards, following the two Congo-wars, more and more Congolese arrived in Belgium, claiming political asylum. The Congolese diaspora is now one of the largest in the world, with major communities in other African countries like South-Africa, but also Canada, the United States, France, Belgium, China, Japan, Germany, and the UK.

What the panels analyzed above indirectly but certainly point out is that Belgium has been particularly reluctant to welcome Congolese migrants. The first Congolese people who came to Belgium arrived in 1884. Some are also remembered because they were the famous village natives exhibited for Leopold II's world exhibition of 1897 and associated with the panels "Do not feed the blacks" (my translation). Later, some Congolese soldiers, like Panda Farnana, fought in WWI with 31 Congolese in Belgium and, as the "Indépendance!" exhibition highlights, Congolese people strongly contributed to the war effort from Congo as they were forced to participate in the "effort de guerre" (see Verhaegen) that led to massive migrational movements to the Congolese cities.

If Congolese migrants numbered 10 at the end of the Second World War, in 1961 there were 2,585 Congolese in Belgium. This number increased except in "two stagnation periods in 1985 and 1995," which probably confirms the fact that "Belgium turned its back on Mobutu's Zaïre" (Coolsaet 53, my translation). What other figures also obliquely point out is that

the Congolese migration to Belgium has shifted from a student migration to an asylum seeker and family regrouping form of migration.

The idea that Congolese people did not participate in the labor force migrations of the 1950s is of note. Contrary to France or the United Kingdom—countries that welcomed a great number of migrants in the 1950s, such as the Windrush generation—the Belgian attitude reveals itself to many as atypical and even shocking. Reading beyond these panels forces us to consider the attitude of Belgium towards the invisible immigrant community of Congolese migrants. As confirmed by Vantemsche (2007), Congolese migration to Belgium was not at all encouraged by Belgian authorities. Several critics have attempted to explain this "Congolese exception." According to Lusanda Ndamina-Maduka, demographic, political and economic reasons explain the fact that "Belgium did not use colonial labour on its territory" (Ndamina-Maduka: 14). Demographically speaking, Congo had a very small population density and it was already difficult for colonizers to find laborers to exploit natural resources. Politically, Belgian colonials were afraid of losing their prestige and determined to prevent Congolese people from discovering "the taste of affluence" (Ndamina-Maduka: 16). Many also wanted to prevent them from entering into contact with anticolonial communist or progressive ideas. In this context, Cornet observes that the strict color bar and segregationist system imposed on the Congolese population was a system close to Apartheid (Cornet). Within that context, the inclusion of Congolese workers in the Belgian society was conceived as impossible. As Ceuppens adds, "their presence in Belgium was an anomaly which disturbed the colonial order" (2008).

Last but not least, economically, Congo needed its Congolese laborers. Only the servants of former colonials as well as mari-

ners managed to progressively enter Belgian society as they were the only ones to reach the old continent. Many of the sailors stayed and became *carabouyas* (candy) sellers because the colonial lobby did not want them to take higher positions. Bambi Ceuppens further argues that until the 1960s, Congolese people were not allowed to come to Belgium. From 1917 onwards, they could only come to Belgium with the explicit permission of the Governor General; this condition was obviously lifted once Congo gained independence on 30 June 1960. In other words, in the mid-sixties Belgian authorities were forced to deal with the migratory movement from Congo. At that moment, Congolese came as students, with the perspective to go back. Nowadays, Congolese people in Belgium are the migrant group with the highest level of education in Belgian society. The paradox is that this level of education is what one would expect of that particular group of 'foreigners' called 'expatriates,' while in actual fact Congolese have the "the highest rate of unemployment"⁵ in Belgian society. Demart (2010) concludes her observations with the question whether those figures should be considered as the markers of a form of post-colonialism, a question that seems to pervade in the new Tervuren exhibition presented below.

IV. "CONGOLESE TELL THEIR STORIES" TO BELGIAN VISITORS

Scheduled by the Tervuren Museum of Central Africa (Brussels) on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the independence of Belgium's former colony and inaugurated in June 2010, the exhibition "Indépendance! Congolese Tell Their Stories of 50 Years of Independence" explores the inde-

⁵ According to Sarah Demart: "the unemployment rate of Congolese people in Belgium is above all the other populations in Belgium: foreign as well as native" (my translation).

pendence of Congo but also its history and its contemporary agony. The fact that it is presented in the Royal Tervuren museum is extremely symbolic as the RMCA is a controversial site first designed as a colonial propaganda tool by King Leopold II and then turned into an ethnographic museum of Central Africa. As many have observed and Rahier pinned down, the conservatism of the museum "reflects and reinforces a certain denial of responsibility for the colonial past in Belgian civil society" (Rahier 77). The "Indépendance!" exhibition, which is dedicated to all the victims of the violence in Congo, is the result of a collaboration between the Royal Museum for Central Africa, the Institut des Musées nationaux du Congo and the Université de Kinshasa and part of a new reactualization of the museum. One of the curators of this exhibition, Bambi Ceuppens, worked for months with Congolese people to record their experiences of the independence period. The exhibition is based on interviews of very different people who "speak only for themselves, providing subjective and thus sometimes diverging points of view" on a period and past that alight conflicting memories whether in Belgium or Congo. The diversified content of the exhibition made of testimonies, memories, symbolic objects and creative art foregrounds an immaterial heritage. What I underscore in my examination of the exhibition is how this event interweaves a traditional historical approach with a creative appropriation of memory.

Held in a small part of the Royal Museum for Central Africa (Tervuren/Brussels), the exhibition, which records only Congolese voices, starts and ends within the Belgian context, thereby reminding one of the roles Belgium played in Congo's development. This Congolese voice is immediately heard with a reading of Yoka's "Letter from a man from Kinshasa to the village uncle" (1995; my translation) by Congolese writer In Koli Jean Bofane.

The first room opens with "Indépendance cha-cha" (whose first lines express "independence we acquired it⁶"), the famous Kabasele and African Jazz independence song, and plunges visitors into the independence round table discussions that took place in February 1960 in the Palais des Congrès in Brussels. The organization of this first room epitomizes in many ways a strongly critical approach to Congolese history and memory as the room is divided into the political negotiations, on the left, and the economic ones on the right. This division makes clear that Congolese authorities were invited to both Round Tables but as the major leaders were busy with the electoral campaign at the time of the Economic Round Table, they sent young and inexperienced representatives. In many ways in this second Round Table, "the Belgians fulfil(led) their wish for a politically decolonized, economically subservient Congo" (Booklet of the exhibition, 6).

What is more, in the middle of this room filled with the pictures of male participants stands a brightly colored female shoe made out of 'African' fabrics and designed by Anglo-Nigerian artist Yinka Shonibare. This shoe, which reminds the

audience of women's role in the independence movement, is one example of the many objects displayed in the exhibition to convey how collectivity and women in particular participated in the independence days. The lyrics of the famous "Indépendance Cha Cha" song printed on the wall are foregrounded as an instrument of communication that contained the names of the Congolese delegates and became "the independence anthem of other African Countries" (Booklet, 8).

The second room opens with the "Colour Bar," the unfair system upon which the whole history of the country has been built. The power issue central to the past of the Congo Democratic Republic goes back to the colonial segregation system. Within the Congolese heterogeneous society, racial categories separated Congolese "évolués," as they were called, from the Belgian subjects, who were the only ones to attain citizenship. The exhibition emphasizes the segregation in trains, for instance, in which "indigenous and Asians" were separated from the colonials. The next section, which is devoted to the Congolese war effort, presents photographs of Congolese soldiers sent to fight in Burma, Egypt or Madagascar. More relevant still is the way the exhibition emphasizes that the whole Congolese population was involved in the war, forcibly producing uranium and rubber.

Central to this exhibition, which highlights how the Congolese population anticipated and experienced independence, is the question of resistance. The section devoted to "Resistance" shows important Congolese figures like Simon Kimbangu, with a recent graphic novel devoted to this Congolese martyr now considered one of the first to have foreseen the liberation of the country. A Protestant Catechist, he advocated the social message that "whites will become blacks and vice versa" and died a martyr in prison after a sentence of 30 years. Newspaper clips from the Congo-

⁶ Rewritten by Congolese-Belgian rapper Baloji in a song entitled "le jour d'après" with the musicians of deceased Wendo Kolosoy. Baloji's words:

j'ai repris cette chanson fédératrice (I have rewritten this unifying song)
symbole de la crédulité de nos prémisses (symbol of the incredulity of our premises)
entre indépendance et armistice (between independence and armistice)
mais pour que nos démocraties progressent (but for our democracies to progress)
faut qu'elle apprennent de leurs erreurs de jeunesse (they need to learn from their youthful mistakes)
mon pays est un continent émergent (my country is an emergent continent)
bâti en moins de 50 ans (built in less than 50 years)

lese press reveal the social demands of workers for equal salaries. Expanding on the topic of resistance but of another kind, the “Bills” showcase exposes pictures of the marginal counterculture created in 1950s by some indigenous youths who aspired to modernity.

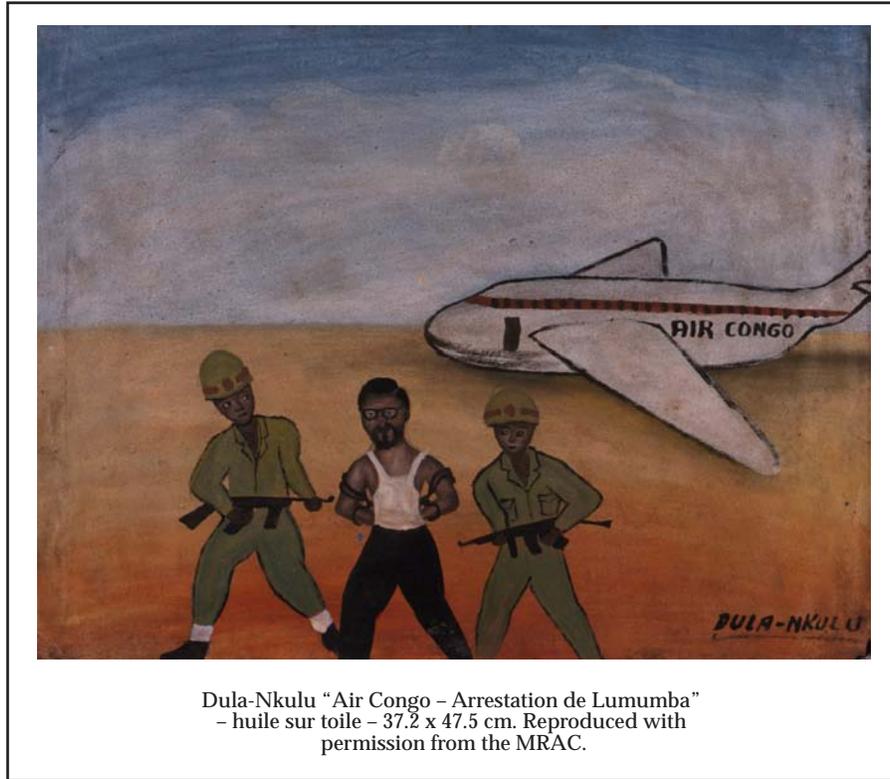
The core of the exhibition is obviously the independence showcase, which presents the act of independence itself and the events that surrounded it. Films and a map of Matonge (Kinshasa) show that two 1959 events led to the independence round table. In January 1959, riots rocked Leopoldville following the colonial government’s decision to forbid a meeting of ABAKO (cultural-political association of the Bakongo). At the same time, the result of a football game in King Baudouin stadium was being contested. The encounter of those two groups in the streets of Kinshasa embodied the coming together of both a political elite and a working-class group. These events culminated in the elections, followed by the Round Tables and the signing of the golden book by two leading figures: Prime Ministers Eyskens and Lumumba. Next to the photograph of the two men signing the convention is a painting representing Belgian King Baudouin and Lumumba signing the Golden Book. The discrepancy created by the juxtaposition of the two images shows how the imaginary memories of that period put emphasis on the role of the monarchy.

The juxtaposition of history and memory is central to this exhibition. The independence days were followed by the Katanga and South Kasai secession, Lumumba’s assassination, violent rebellions and the Mobutu dictatorship. The dates of these historical moments are recorded in a long timeline that, unlike the rest of the exhibition but in a complementary manner, is extremely factual. One showcase presents Mobutu’s Zairianization that advocated a return to authenticity and nationalized companies such as the Union

Minière (which became the Gécamines, the famous company that exploited the copper, symbol of colonial Belgian enterprise). The showcase juxtaposes images of the Mobutu years that marked postcolonial Congo with images of decline and a painting of a Gulliveresque Mobutu brought down by Congolese people.

The second part of the exhibition, more thematic than chronological, concentrates on the violence and the destructive years that followed independence. The question this section raises mainly with creative art is why the situation in Congo deteriorated after independence, leading this young nation to become one of the poorest nations in the world despite its many natural resources. Many of the paintings, sculptures, and photographs presented in this section emphasize the continuity between the colonial and postcolonial Congolese periods characterized by submission and exploitation. From a Congolese perspective, the image of Boula Matari—the stone crusher but also the name given to sculptures depicting colonial agents—is represented with several statues: the explorer Stanley, King Albert I, King Baudouin I and Joseph Kasa-Vubu. The display of these statuettes points to how Boula Matari has come to embody the numerous forms of invasion and exploitation, from the white colonizer to the oppressive postcolonial state.

The room that follows expands on the theme of violence exercised by Europeans through Congolese assistants. Next to some drawings of whipping which evoke the continuity between the slave trade, Leopoldian colonial years and the chains of dictatorship, is Sammy Baloji’s work “Travailleurs à la Gécamine.” This photomontage superimposes old photographs of chained minors in colonial times and contemporary images of abandoned mining sites to evoke rap-singer Baloji’s words that Congo development is like the Gécamines, its growth has stopped like the



Gecamine Company. The shackles of the miners denounce the past as well as the contemporary massive exploitation of Congolese miners and resources of this *Katanga business*⁷. Reminiscent of these exploitative acts and Leopold's taking the best pieces of the Cake at the 1885 Berlin conference (illustrated in the caricature of "Le réveillon des souverains"), Bosoku Ekunde's "The UN and Africa" depicts foreign nations cutting out the best parts of a large piece of meat from which Congolese people only get the leftovers. Faustin Tshobo-i-Ngana's (2009) words presented on the wall that Congo gave the world slaves, latex, copper, uranium, coltan and soon water but has received nothing in return raises the question whether Belgium

is not liable to repay.

The central feature of the exhibition is its creative approach to memory present in the display of fables and paintings from the beginning to the end. These metaphorical approaches to politics and memory have a twofold purpose: they are an indirect way of criticizing political authority in Congo and, within this exhibition, an indirect way of engaging with the Belgian version of Congolese history. The paintings of Chéri Samba, Moke, and Trésor Cherin, among others, illustrate the hopes of the population at the time of Lumumba for example.

One small room is devoted to paintings of Lumumba where the assassinated leader is portrayed as a Christ figure while other paintings like Dula Nkulu's "Air Congo" depict him without his suit, captured and chained. Of course, images such as this one point to the fact that Lumumba made several enemies but also remind one of the

⁷ Title of the 2009 Thierry Michel film that shows the devastating crisis in Katanga where Congolese people and resources are exploited.

Congolese Diaspora: representing by its number the third group of non-European migrants. Congolese living in Belgium say they often regret that Belgium recognizes neither their presence nor the ties that have united both countries for so long.

fact that his violent assassination was the object of a Belgian parliamentary commission which concluded that the Belgian government was morally responsible for the assassination. The 2011 “Truth, Justice, and Reparation” demonstration supporting the lawsuit filed by Patrice Lumumba’s family against twelve Belgian citizens suspected of having participated in the transfer, torture and assassination of Patrice Lumumba confirm Lumumba’s “assassination’s Long Shadow” (Hochschild 2011).

Many of these creative works establish a contrast between the emerging nationalism of a population and its political/economic failure. It foregrounds resistances and repressions in strikes—revolts that led to the independence riots in 1959. Creative approaches like those paintings question the discrepancy between the image/dreams of independence and the realities of a country that has suffered a great deal throughout the centuries because it has been coveted by imperial powers. Several other pieces, among them “Belly,” the sculpture of a female body with bullets, call to mind and denounce the sexual violence perpetrated on Congolese women, who we are reminded, were allowed to vote for the first time in 1977 but mostly participated in the elections of 2006, the first that can be considered democratic. Despite democratic improvements, fighting continues in the DRC.

V. THE UNWELCOMED CONGOLESE COMMUNITY IN BELGIUM

The very last section of the exhibition is devoted to the Congolese diaspora in Belgium and the dreams of Congolese migrants trying to reach Belgium which they call Lola (paradise). Illustrated by

paintings of the Atomium, the site of dreams *par excellence* for Congolese people who attempt to migrate to Belgium or be accepted in Belgium, it evokes a long history of “I love you, me neither,” a love/hate feeling that characterizes the relationship between Belgium and its former colony and Congo and its former colonial invader. The end of the exhibit points an accusing finger at how Congolese people have been (un)welcomed by a colonial power that has exploited their country for decades. This last panel—translated from the French—needs to be examined in depth (see panel above).

If the panel uses similar demographic figures as the tables analyzed at the beginning of this article to point to the significance of the Congolese community in Belgium, it equally denounces that Congolese migrants have never really been welcomed by Belgium since the colonization of their country.

The exhibit closes the way it has begun, with music, one of the most important forms of expression within the third-space of creativity between Congo and Belgium. Short filmed interviews of musicians participating in the Project Heritage Congo (among whom the grandchildren of famous political figures—Banza M’Poyo Kasavuvu and Teddy Lumumba) present how they wish to change the situation with committed urban music. They express how disturbed they feel by the picture they see. They regret that they are not recognized. In view of the colonial past, many of them express the wish to be a privileged community. Some like Senso express they do not feel at home in Belgium and yet Belgium is their home. They want to be welcome and not treated as foreigners.

VI. CONCLUSION

The very last element on the way out of the exhibition is the independence anniversary wax cloth that, again, reminds the visitor of women's participation in Congolese economy and history. More symbolic is the fact that the fabric, originally introduced by the Dutch for African markets, the import of which was forbidden by Mobutu, is still preferred by Congolese women. Now produced in Africa, some cloth is imported from neighboring countries like Tanzania, but the market is controlled by Chinese companies who, among other things, sell cheap imitations of "authentic Dutch wax cloth" (my translation). A symbol of possible but failed economic independence, the wax cloth reaffirms the main message of the exhibition: "indépendance!"

Held in the (in)famous Tervuren museum, the "Indépendance!" exhibition offers a sharp contrast to the Royal Museum built by Leopold II and originally called the "Musée du Congo." The Congolese people who, a century earlier, were displayed in Leopold II's monumental gardens (which for some of them resulted in death), are eventually replacing the stuffed animals and pre-colonial artifacts the museum has been presenting for decades. One can only regret that the contrast between the content presented above and the room where it is held is not itself foregrounded within the framework of the exhibition. A critical comment on the giant 1910 map of the "Congo Belge" on the wall of the room of the exhibition could have constituted an obvious critical response to the colonial presence, reminiscent of the destructive colonial enterprise and point to how the building is nowadays a contested site as it evokes the glorification of the colonial past of Belgium.

If Congolese voices in museums seem to slowly emerge in temporary exhibitions such as "Indépendance!"—something one

can only encourage—their history as well as the assessment of their relationship with Belgium are still to be acknowledged. When the Belgian King attended Independence celebrations in June 2010, some activists in Belgium, like Pauline Imbach, demanded apologies:

The most important thing would be the acknowledgment of this past, which remains taboo. Belgium refuses to acknowledge its historical responsibilities as illustrated in the fifty anniversary celebrations from which the historical question was simply removed (my translation).

If some will disagree with this, most Congolese people believe Belgium still has a role to play in Congo. What Pauline Imbach's comment unveils is probably how this exhibition has been to some extent marginalized and has avoided a number of explicit critical comments. Among the statues of the Boula Matari, Leopold II has obviously been avoided! What is more, the absence of a Belgian government when the event took place did not encourage the way it was received. And yet, the "Indépendance!" exhibition, as this article emphasizes, constitutes a groundbreaking milestone towards an acknowledgement of the Belgo-Congolese dispute which points to Belgium's responsibility in the chaotic situation of the country.

As Adam Hochschild observed in a lecture held in Liège in 2010, there is in Belgium no Congolese population politically strong enough to lobby so that Congolese history is presented in a different light. Nevertheless, as Lusanda Ndamnia-Maduka already asserted in 1994 "despite Belgium's refusal to import Congolese laborers during the colonial period, Belgium will not avoid the problems metropolises are encountering with their former colonies they will continue to attract

as long as the gaps between North and South will not be reduced" (1994:19). What most critics point out is that the Congolese community in Belgium—though somewhat fragmented in a bewildering number of associations (political, cultural, for development aid, etc.) and churches and not devoid of problems—is stable. Of note is the fact that the Congolese neighborhood of Brussels is called Matonge (which is also a district of Kinshasa), probably the only European neighborhood to have an African name.⁸ The fact that some (although very few) Congolese people have recently gained some political visibility is a hopeful sign for the future.

With plural, nuanced and open representations of the past, the "Indépendance!" exhibition testifies to the need of museums to embrace non-fixed memory. By redefining the relations between Congo and Belgium as well as addressing plural colonial and postcolonial memories by means of creative and popular culture, it materializes James Clifford's idea of museums as "contact zones," i.e., of museums' structures becoming "an ongoing historical, political, moral *relationship*—a power-charged set of exchanges, of push and pull" (Clifford 1997:192). The exhibit accordingly becomes this contact site where Belgians, Congolese and Belgo-Congolese people and memories are brought together, and where new meanings can be imaginatively created.

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- ⁸ Strictly speaking it's not an African neighbourhood since very few Africans live there. Most inhabitants are European. It's a meeting place and shopping area for Africans from Belgium and abroad.
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