Chapter 6
2010 and Beyond

“Participer à une chasse au Katanga, c’est fouler la terre telle que Dieu l’a créée. […] Le jardin de l’Éden? Il est ici, devant vous.” (To take part in a hunt in Katanga is to tread upon the earth as God created it. […] The Garden of Eden? It is here, in front of you.)¹ — Le Roi du Congo, 2012

“I live in Elsene, and if I’m sitting on the 95 bus going past Troon, it’s disturbing to see the statue of a mounted Leopold II. As a Belgian of Congolese origins, I want to feel at home here, and that’s not easy when you see statues of the oppressor of your ancestors.”² — Tracy Bibo-Tansia, 2017

The year 2010 not only was a year of parliamentary elections, it also marked forty years of federalism in Belgium, dating back to the state reform of 1970, and a half century since the country had been without a colony, which was nearly as long as it had been a colonial power. This anniversary year was not only one in which the Congo and the colonial experience flooded the country’s cultural scene, it and those that immediately followed also represented a unique generational conjuncture. Even though the number of former colonials and their children were perforce declining because of the tyranny of mortality, they were still present. And now they found their own inherent interest in colonial affairs paralleled—if not matched—by the curiosity of many younger Belgians, some of whom revisited the colonial past with verve. In contrast, in important ways the colonial past receded not only further in time during this period, but also in terms of its cultural relevance, and this because of younger generations coming to adulthood and recently-arrived immigrants and their children: for the majority of them the colonial experience simply did not resonate.

The fiftieth anniversary of Congo’s independence led to an outpouring of reflections on the Congo of the time and of the past, all of which occurred in a context of political upheaval that fostered more positive expressions regarding the country’s shared colonial past. The year 2010 witnessed innumerable paintings, films, television events, memoirs, press coverage, commemorations, and other cultural events in Belgium. RTBF produced the documentary series “Congo: 50 ans de l’indépendance—50 ans plus tard,” which to judge by viewer letters was well-received by the public, including
those of Congolese descent. Colette Braeckman described the torrent of new books as “une véritable fièvre éditoriale” (a bona fide publishing fever). 

*Le Soir* issued a double-DVD on 27 April containing Raoul Peck’s *Lumumba* and Thierry Michel’s documentary *Mobutu, roi du Zaïre*. François Ryckmans, journalist and grand-son of Pierre Ryckmans, published *Mémoires noires: Les Congolais racontent le Congo belge*. The exposition “Mayombe: Masters of Magic,” which drew on the Congolese collections of KU Leuven—many of the items having been donated by Scheutist Leo Bittremieux, as discussed earlier—was but one such exposition focused on the Congo. In Antwerp, the Zuiderpershuis’ “Afrik (In)dépendance 50” festival took place throughout the spring, and the FotoMuseum Antwerpen held the exhibition of Carl De Keyzer’s arresting photography, “Congo belge en images.” The Afrika Filmfestival in Leuven, which each year put one African country in the spotlight, chose in 2010 to focus on the Congo. Celebrating fifteen years that year, the Afrika Filmfestival was a major forum to highlight African filmmaking, almost universally uncelebrated. Starting from modest roots in Leuven in the mid-1990s, by the second decade of the twenty-first century the film festival, under the leadership of Guido Convents, had become an established annual event with film screenings not only in Leuven and Brussels but in cities across the country.

Even if innumerable images shown in Belgium in 2010 were fresh, for instance in the films shown as part of Afrika Festival, the 2010 festivities also led once more to a “recycling of images.” One example is the Cinematek’s “Caméra Congo” that showed fifteen films by Ernest Genval, Gérard De Boe and André Cauvin, all colonial-era productions created between 1925 and 1955. Genval, De Boe, and Cauvin had been leading “go-to” directors for colonial authorities, and all three cast Belgian actions in central Africa in a positive light. “Les expositions se suivent, partout en Belgique, pour les 50 ans de l’indépendence de ce qui fut notre colonie,” (Expositions follow one after another, throughout Belgium, for the 50 years of the independence of what was our colony) concluded one commentator. David Van Reybrouck said that, “The word Congo used to have very dark connotations but today some of that darkness has lifted. There’s even a kind of Congo mania in Belgium.” This said, long-term cultural issues preoccupying many people continued to weigh on many minds into the second decade of the century, in particular the kingdom’s long-standing language/cultural divide.

As Idesbald Goddeeris has pointed out, domestic political developments around the year 2010 were such that reflections on the colonial past generally refrained from dwelling on negative, let alone scandalous aspects of Belgium’s past imperialism. The nationalist, separatist New Flemish Alliance’s (N-VA)
The building of this memorial was prompted by the country’s centenary (1830-1930), which coincided with efforts by colonial veterans to build memorials in each of the country’s communes that had lost at least one of its native sons in Africa during the CFS period. In this case, Auderghem, a commune in the Brussels region, decided to create a small place—today’s square du Souverain—and a monument to Leopold II and two native sons who had died in the CFS: P. J. Neuenhaus and E. C. De Cooman. The inscription to these two foot soldiers of Leopold’s empire reads, in French and Flemish, “Died in the Congo for Civilization.” With these words the Auderghem memorial, like so many other such contemporary markers, makes specific reference to the mission civilisatrice, thereby justifying Belgian colonialism as an endeavor to bring a superior, European civilization to backward Africans. Still, the commune’s commemoration of the king in stone and bronze was actually motivated less for his role in securing a colony and more for what Leopold II did to remake the Brussels area, including being the driving force behind the laying out of roadways, including the boulevard du Souverain along which the square du Souverain is located.

Like other memorials to Leopold II, the bust in Auderghem has served both as a site of pilgrimage, where pro-colonials lay wreaths of flowers to honor the king, and of protest. Some kind of explanatory plaque was placed on the stela at some point not long ago, but it has since been removed, leaving a kind of ugly square spot below the memorial’s inscription. A May 2018 visit suggested that someone had colored the king’s eyes, and that the bust had recently been cleaned (albeit not completely) after having been doused with red paint.
breakthrough at the polls in successive elections shook the political status quo and raised once again the question as to whether Belgium would split into two countries. At the federal level, the country went without a government for more than 500 days as negotiations dragged on. Anyone wishing to discuss the colonial past, even to criticize it, had to raise with the concept of “Belgium,” perhaps thereby reinforcing the nation by discussing a shared past, albeit in a negative sense. But those on the left-wing of politics, including anti-racist organizations, who wanted to attack the colonial past likely recognized that to do so would also be to attack Belgium itself, potentially weakening the country at a critical juncture. Contrariwise, again according to Goddeeris, the N-VA shied away from raising questions about the country’s history because of the risk that it would bring up issues of collaboration and World War II, dangerous terrain for Flemish nationalists.  

The end result was a series of cultural manifestations centered on the country’s colonial experience that manifested confidence, perhaps even some nostalgia, rather than being self-critical or raising unsavory chapters of the past. One can consider Ligablo, exposition bon marché at the Royal Library in Brussels as indicative of the many small-scale yet impressive events put together for 2010. Organized by the NGO Coopération par l’Éducation et la Culture (CEC), Ligablo ran from 2010 into 2011 and focused on everyday items from the Congo that marked “the Congolese spirit and imaginary” since that country’s independence, including King Baudouin’s sword, which was famously stolen from him during a 1960 visit to the colony. “L’intention est de privilégier l’expérience, le contact et l’interpellation du public afin de déclencher une évocation vivante et forte de l’univers populaire congolais.” (The intention is to privilege the experience, the contact, and the questioning of the public in order to set off a lively and powerful evocation of the popular Congolese universe.) Even such small-scale exhibits could be intense, as its catalogue suggests, bringing together as it did commentary, albeit brief, from renowned scholars and writers including Valentin-Yves Mudimbe, Antoine Tshitungu Kongolo, and Alain Mabanckou.

The Musée Royal de l’Armée in Brussels got in on the act, breaking what one historian called “un assourdissant silence qui durant des décennies a ignoré la vaillance des soldats congolais” (a deafening silence that for decades ignored the bravery of Congolese soldiers) by putting on the exhibit Lisolo na Bisu, or “Le Soldat Congolais.” The focus was not on the Force publique per se—attention to which traditionally overwhelmingly emphasized its white officers—but more specifically on the African soldier. This was an attempt to compensate for past neglect, as the enlisted African soldier had
been an overlooked subject in past representations of the colonial army down to a 1985 exhibition at the Royal Military Museum.\textsuperscript{19} Not just those exhibits but in history books, the classroom, and elsewhere: any focus on the Belgian Congo’s military force and its actions had always centered on white officers or on the Force publique as an institution. “Dans les manuels d’histoire ainsi que dans les ouvrages édités par les services d’information des armées coloniales, la bravoure militaire des Africains n’est évoquée qu’à travers les qualités des officiers européens.” (In history textbooks as well as in books edited by the information services of the colonial armies, the military bravery of Africans [was] only evoked through the qualities of the European officers.)\textsuperscript{20} In the years leading up to 2010 there had been a slow-growing awareness of Congo’s role in both world wars, some starting to ask whether Belgium had done enough to compensate Congolese not just for colonialism generally speaking, but specifically for their wartime contributions.\textsuperscript{21} Journalist Colette Braeckman, among others, broached the subject of reparations, and a new history by Guy Vanthemsche (VUB) recognized how the Belgian Congo had essentially maintained Belgian sovereignty during World War II.

\textit{Lisolo na Bisu} was spearheaded by Philippe Jacquij, who worked alongside Pierre Lierneux and Natasja Peeters to take advantage of the museum’s collections on the Force publique—some of which had been put on display as early as the 1920s—to create a show for a mere 30,000 Euros. The seven-room exhibit covered the pre-1914 period down to June 30, 1960, its focus squarely on the colonial period. It attracted around 650 people to its June inauguration, and another 15,000 came to see it before it closed at the end of September.\textsuperscript{22} Although the show was not massively attended, press coverage, both domestic and foreign, fed into a growing awareness of the Congo’s contribution to Belgian war efforts.\textsuperscript{23} The growing consciousness of this aspect of the colonial past may have been reinforced by the traveling exposition \textit{Tokopesa Saluti!} (We salute you!), comprising 35 panels showing in chronological fashion the military ties between Belgium and the Congo from 1885 to 2006.\textsuperscript{24} \textit{Tokopesa Saluti!} reached not only larger cities like Antwerp but also smaller towns like Zoersel, Zonnebeke, and Rumst. The tour included visits by schoolchildren, even if, being a small traveling exhibit, it sometimes attracted limited numbers of visitors at its stops, for example only some 400 during its showing at Antwerp’s Vredescentrum from 3-13 January 2011.\textsuperscript{25}

The Palais des Beaux-Arts, whose name was now refashioned as “BOZAR,” put on the festival “L’Afrique visionnaire – Visionair Afrika” to commemorate the fiftieth year of “African independences,” the plural signaling how the
festival focused not just on the former Belgian Congo, but also the dozen-
plus other African countries that became independent in 1960. “L’Afrique
visionnaire – Visionair Afrika” consisted of exhibitions, film showings,
dance and music performances, including the screening of a film by Haitian
filmmaker Raoul Peck, and musical performances by Beninoise Angélique
Kidjo and Malian Rokia Traoré. The event that anchored the festival was
the show “GEO-graphics,” directed by British-Ghanaian architect David
Adjaye, showing 230 ethnographic masterpieces from private collections
from the whole continent of Africa. Although diverse in aims, the events
tended to focus on Belgium’s erstwhile colony, as could be seen during
BOZAR’s celebration of Congolese music in July that included Congolese
performers Papa Wemba, Ferre Gola, Manuaku Waku, among others. As one
commentator put it, “Voor Congolezen is dit alsof Johnny Hallyday, Julien
Clerc en Madonna samen op het podium zouden staan.” (For Congolese
this is as if Johnny Hallyday, Julien Clerc, and Madonna would be on stage
together.) The concert received extensive press coverage in numerous
newspapers, several evening news programs, radio broadcasts, and various
websites. One account, however, warned that the viewing public might
miss some of the greater issues in play during the BOZAR festival, from
questions about contemporary Belgian-Congo interactions to ones about
past relations between the two countries, one wealthy and stable, the other
troubled and unstable:

Impossible donc pour une grande partie du public de comprendre tous
les enjeux. Au risque de voir un nouveau fossé se creuser entre une élite
ayant les armes pour comprendre ce projet et le grand public, restant figé
dans les clichés du passé.
(Thus impossible for a large part of the public to understand all the issues.
At risk of seeing a new chasm open between an elite having the means to
understand this project and the broader public, remaining stuck in the
clichés of the past.)

At the time of its centenary, the Tervuren Museum, which had been inaugu-
rated by King Albert I on April 30, 1910, remained one of the country’s most-
visited museums. A large number of those who saw the museum continued
to be school children, sustaining a tendency dating back a century. Tervuren
held its own celebrations on its centennial—even fireworks—and ran tem-
porary expositions including 100 ans du musée en 100 photos, “Indépendence
cha cha,” and an exhibit on the Congo River itself, Fleuve Congo: 4700 km
de nature et culture en effervescence. The anniversary was accompanied by
In 1929-1930, the pro-colonial interest group the Ligue du souvenir congolais put together a list of all “colonial pioneers” who had served Leopold II in the Congo and who had died in Africa sometime between 1876 and 1908. The former year was that of the Brussels Geographical Conference, taken by many as the start date of the Leopoldian colonial project, and 1908 was the year of Leopold II’s turnover of the colony to Belgium. In 1930, the group sent out notices to more than 500 communes, the goal being to put up a memorial of some kind in each and every community from which a pioneer had come.

Vezin, near Andenne, was one such commune, and it answered the call to honor its three native sons who had left the village, gone to the Congo, and died there: Sergent-Major Dieudonné Palate, Sous-Lieutenant Joseph Hernotte, and Sous-Lieutenant Ernest Poskin. Palate arrived to the Congo just in time for the start of the 1892-1894 anti-slavery campaigns, but then found himself fighting rebels following the Force publique revolt at Luluabourg in 1895. He died at their hands,
reportedly facing the enemy. Hernotte, another soldier, served two “tours” in the Congo, one from 1887 to April 1890, the second from October 1890 until his death at a post at Bomu in November 1891. Poskin was born in 1879, and although he was not born in Vezin itself, he spent his childhood there. He joined the Belgian military, then left it in 1903 to join the Force publique, leaving Belgium that same year to arrive in Boma in November. He died of illness at the post of Rutshuru on October 25, 1895, just shy of two years in the colony, at the age of 26.

The cemetery at the center of the village was relocated, creating a small, sloped green space, which was rebaptized “place Palate.” This is where the colonial monument was erected in 1937. Sculptor Maniquet supposedly carved the monument out of stone from the ancestral church of Vezin. Vers l’Avenir hailed the three as “héros colonyaux.” As at many other such inaugurations in the early 1930s, the unveiling was a grand event. The streets were filled with people, including the families of those being honored. The king and the Ministry of Colonies sent representatives, who figured alongside dignitaries of the colonial and public world who attended including Baron Tombeur de Tabora, the provincial governor M. Bovesse, Henry de la Lindi, and Father Cambier of the White Fathers. The monument still stands in Vezin in the green space at rue de la Colline and rue de Bourgmestre Orban.

the publication of a richly illustrated volume on the museum’s history by Maarten Couttenier. The museum’s events garnered extensive attention in the printed press and on television, as did its impending renovation, announced countless times. All the while, the museum’s collections continued to expand, as when, for instance, the institution in 2013 acquired some 2,000 paintings from Bogumil Jewsiewicki.
The year 2010 once again demonstrated that the half-century old hangover of the last years of colonial rule continued to buttress distorted understandings of the past, that is the endurance of a colonial-era imaginary underpinned by official and unofficial photographs of the golden age of the 1950s. An example was Belgisch-Kongo: 50 Jaar Koloniale Herinneringen by VRT journalist Peter Verlinden and Sarah Hertsens, one of the slew of publications prepared in time to appear during the anniversary year. The book gives voice among others to Carlo Lamote, a Belgian who moved to the Congo in 1950 to work for Inforcongo. Lamote paints a favorable picture, recalling for example that he and his wife got along well with Congolese. Photographs in the book are intermixed with recollections from the era itself, one contemporary Belgian transplant describing life in the Congo in Panglossian terms: “alles is op zijn best in de beste der werelden.” (everything is at its best in the best of worlds.) Many of the photographs in the book are from Inforcongo archives, including images by official photographer Henri Goldstein, and they give a picture of racial harmony and success. No sense of any problems enters the picture, literally, until independence, which the book covers with some photographs of contemporaneous difficulties.

The recycling of images in print was matched by the same on television. VRT marked the 2010 anniversary year by showing the propagandist Bwana Kitoko (1955) again. As Guido Convents put it, “The avalanche of images that VRT showed in May and June 2010 as part of the fiftieth anniversary of the independence of Congo was peppered with colonial nostalgia and culture. That on June 30 in primetime the inferior colonial documentary and propaganda film Bwana Kitoko by Belgian André Cauvin was shown, is incomprehensible.” This was only one of many television productions that summer, VRT alone showing a whole series of documentaries and films including a three-part documentary series comprising ULB historian Samuel Tilman’s Kongo: Black heart, white man about exploitation in the Congo (25 May); Daniel Cattier’s Les Grandes illusions (1 June); Isabelle Christiaens and Jean-François Bastin’s Le Géant inachevé (8 June); and “Nonkel pater,” focused on missionaries (July-August). There was also “Het laatste koloniale taboe” about Congo’s turbulent decolonization, with, once again, Peter Verlinden; Filip De Boeck and Sarah Vanagt’s “Cemetery State,” a fascinating and somewhat quixotic look at life around Kinshasa’s Kintambo cemetery; and Thierry Michel’s documentary, Katanga Business. VRT’s Canvas channel showed Rudi Vranckx’s seven-part series “Bonjour Congo,” which took him across the Congo, surveying the former colonial possession 50 years on. The French-language RTBF likewise broadcast a whole slew of productions on radio, television and online, many of which depicted rosy
Colonial pioneers
Location: Leuven (Louvain), city cemetery
Inauguration: ca. 1930\textsuperscript{43}

This simple commemorative stone plaque at the entrance to the Leuven city cemetery lists the names of thirty individuals from the city who died in the Congo before 1908. The only symbols on the plaque are two flags placed atop a commemorative wreath: one the city flag of Leuven, the other that of the CFS.

This otherwise unremarkable monument is noteworthy because it exemplifies so many themes of colonial memorials more generally. First, it suggests how colonial monuments could have worked to unify Belgians around a shared object, namely their colonial rule in Africa. The memorial is inscribed in both French and Flemish, referencing “l’œuvre congolaise” or the “congoleesch werk.” The presence of both languages is unsurprising since it was put up in Leuven; although in Flanders, the city is a well-known university town where still into the 1930s the language of higher education was overwhelmingly French.\textsuperscript{44} Although they were divided by language, the plaque suggests one way in which Belgians might unite before 1960, namely behind their shared Congolese “project.”

Another element the Leuven memorial shares with others is that it acted as a site of remembrance. Reports from the 1950s suggest that the memorial had become a focal point for celebrations of the colony, the local Koloniale Kring van
views of colonialism. Critical voices were again muffled. “In the interest of delicate diplomatic relationships and particularly in order not to offend the Belgian royal family, the Belgian government actively monitored the commemoration.” Rudi Vranckx’s series “minimised or censored nearly everything that could place Belgian authorities in a bad light.”

Third, similar to the memorial plaque in Anderlecht, among others, the Leuven plaque reveals that many if not most Belgians who died in the Congo during the Leopoldian period died of illness. Of the 30 Leuven pioneers commemorated, half, at least, died of some infirmity. Several died of hematuria, which probably meant malaria or blackwater fever (Boine, Cappuyns, Henrard, Poullet, Stassart, Thiry, Van Hove); others died of dysentery (de Wenckstern, Van Lint, Verdussen); two perished because of fever (Huyghe, Milants); Engels “suc- combait à la peine” (dying either of grief, or of punishment, or of overwork); and Verhaeren of an unspecified illness.

Finally, because the Leuven plaque celebrates those who died in the Congo “before the annexation of the Congo to Belgium (15 November 1908),” it like so many others explicitly connects back to the Leopoldian era. In this small way, it legitimized contemporary colonialism (ca. 1930) by rooting it in the one colonial “tradition” Belgian had, that of the CFS period.
Perhaps the outpouring of 2010 was a sign of a renewed interest in the former colony, or an embrace of an optimistic view of future Belgian-Congolese relations. But many events and cultural productions did not grow out of popular initiative but rather from deliberate state efforts to improve relations with the recognized government of the Congo. After all, it was the foreign affairs ministry that had asked BOZAR to “conceive and present a cultural programme honouring the 50th anniversary of independence of 17 African nations (one of them the former Belgian Congo).” The Tervuren Museum’s wonderful, high-quality book on colonialist films, which included digitized copies of 1950s-era documentaries on several DVDs, is another example. It was initiated by the foreign affairs ministry, with many dozens of copies destined to be sent to the Congo as a gesture of goodwill in order to improve relations with Joseph Kabila’s regime.

A discordant note in 2010 was the debate about King Albert II’s trip to the former colony to celebrate its independence anniversary, after he received an unexpected invitation to do so from Kabila in January. Albert eventually undertook the visit, accompanied by Queen Paola and former prime minister Yves Leterme. The debate that this visit unleashed revealed francophone Belgians were much more in favor of it whereas Dutch speakers were much more inclined to oppose it. Some Flemish once again took a critical position on the colonial connection in order to criticize the monarchy and thereby the nation-state, whereas French speakers now adhered to the king and country more closely than their northern counterparts.

Perhaps the most remarkable moment in Belgium connected to the fiftieth anniversary of Congo’s independence was the publication of David Van Reybrouck’s Congo: Een geschiedenis. This history of the Congo on a grand scale, with journalistic, historical, and anthropological approaches, became a national sensation that also showed how works of history could reach a popular audience. Van Reybrouck based his magnum opus on the historical literature but also on his experiences in the Congo, including numerous interviews. Van Reybrouck said part of his motivation to write the book was because people’s knowledge of the Congo was restricted to the atrocities of the “red rubber” era and the period of decolonization. The book had sold 250,000 copies in Dutch alone by September 2012, an astounding feat considering the size of the Dutch-language communities in Belgium and the Netherlands. By comparison, Hochschild’s King Leopold’s Ghost, which had been translated into a dozen languages, had according to one account sold 600,000 copies by 2013, fifteen years after its initial publication. Moreover, Van Reybrouck’s Congo, clocking in at more than 700 pages in length, was, as one reviewer put it, “a brick.” It was a
triumph nonetheless, and won the AKO Literatuurprijs. As Van Reybrouck explained its success,

À un moment où l’Europe réintègre ses frontières géographiques et voit son influence s’amenuiser dans le monde, le rappel du passé colonial fascine, même si les Européens sont conscients des dégâts que le colonialisme a pu causer.
(At a moment when Europe is reintegrating its geographical borders and sees its influence dwindling in the world, the reminder of the colonial past fascinates [people], even if Europeans are aware of the damage that colonialism could cause.)

There were cultural productions that reached smaller audiences yet that nonetheless suggested not merely the underlying, lasting presence of “the colonial,” but also new ways of looking and thinking through it. Stand-up comedian Pie Tshibanda continued to enjoy success, drawing on colonial history for material, as well as his own experience of escaping the Congo to exile in Belgium in the 1990s. In 2011, Brussels-based artist and filmmaker Sven Augustijnen rolled out Spectres, a documentary paired with a book and exhibition of the same name, the latter of which displayed photographs and prepared archival materials. It was shown in Brussels from May-July 2011, before being exhibited abroad in Bern and then Amsterdam. The exposition and Augustijnen’s film examined how Belgium remained haunted by the assassination of Lumumba. It ended up following Jacques Brassinne, author of a Ph.D. thesis on Lumumba’s assassination, to which Ludo de Witte’s 1999 book was in large part a reply. Whereas de Witte pinned blame on the Belgian government, especially because of one telex transmission calling for the definitive elimination of the Congolese prime minister, Brassinne’s dissertation was much more exculpatory. Some criticized Augustijnen’s analysis for mainly focusing on whites, even though he deliberately drew in African voices as well. But in the final analysis, its focus on white Belgians made sense, because the documentary was above all an exploration of the Belgian psyche and the unresolved tensions of the assassination of Lumumba.

Other cultural manifestations were more traditional, including the 2013 BELvue museum exhibit “Dr. Livingstone, I presume?” that ended on November 11, 2013, and which attracted more than 35,000 visitors. Colonial history had made such a comeback, it formed the backdrop for crime fiction in Alain Berenboom’s Le roi du Congo. Set in 1948, Berenboom gets his history right. Mounting tensions suggest the coming of independence. The presence of Russian bad guys presages the Cold War struggle over the Congo that internationalized its
independence in 1960. As indicated in this chapter’s epigraph, Berenboum even has one character, Doutrement, a long-time resident of the Congo, capture the love many Europeans developed for central Africa, which as discussed earlier, caused nostalgia for the post-World War II years in the colony.

One piece of literature that came under renewed criticism was *Tintin in the Congo*. Mounting calls for a more full reckoning with the past included a 2012 effort to ban the book, led by Bienvenu Mbutu Mondondo, a Congolese national living and studying in Brussels. It received little attention in Belgium and ultimately failed. More recently, *bandes dessinées* like *Africa Dreams: L’Ombre du roi* have come out as means by which to criticize colonialism. All told, the number of novels and comic books dealing with the colonial legacy is small in comparison to the total production of books. One only has to browse through a Brussels bookstore like Filigranes, or one of its shops dedicated to *bandes dessinées* like Brüsel on Blvd. Anspach, or its neighbor MultiBD to realize that colonial themes appear only occasionally in the country’s annual publishing output.

The colonial era seems to have had little influence on music in Belgium until arguably just the past several years, when artists of sub-Saharan African descent like Stromae made a big impact on the scene, and when Belgian Congolese hip-hop artists—who are primarily French-speaking, and concentrated in Brussels—began to be noticed. The messages in Belgian-Congolese hip hop music are mixed. Artists were born after the colonial era and seldom know the Congo well, blaming both Belgians and Congolese for the current poor state of affairs in central Africa. The racism they speak out against is that which they encounter in Belgium, not necessarily a colonial phenomenon.

The comparatively small presence of “colonial” *bandes dessinées* and small number of “post-colonial” hip hop artists tells us that potential signs of a great attention to the colonial past in Belgium should be taken with a grain of salt. Some of these were small-scale and/or driven by merely a few actors. For example, December 2011 witnessed the exposition “Visages de Paul Panda Farnana” a retrospective including a film that centered on the Congo’s first national activist, who was really a nationalist *avant la lettre*, Paul Panda Farnana. But the event was largely driven by one man, Antoine Tshitungu Kongola, and the video of the exposition had just 267 views on YouTube by 2014, and only 2,074 by mid-February 2019. The numerous attacks on monuments in the first two decades of the twenty-first century have garnered some attention in the mainstream press, but have been carried out by small bands of anarchists, anti-monarchists, and anti-colonialists. For instance, the 2018 attack on a bust of Leopold II in Forest, a commune of Brussels, made the news, but seems to have been carried out by a fringe group.
Leopold II (1835-1909)
Location: Forest (Vorst), Parc Duden (Dudenpark)
Sculptor: Thomas Vincotte
Inauguration: 11 May 1957
Funded/built by: commune of Forest and the Donation Royale

This bronze bust on a rectangular plinth does not in and of itself call attention to Leopold II’s colonial rule. Instead, the statue commemorates the king’s role in establishing public parks, including Duden Park, its dedication reading, “To King Leopold II, benefactor of public parks.” Nonetheless, this modest memorial is connected to the sovereign’s rule in central Africa, and in multiple ways. First, in recent years anti-colonial activists have deliberately targeted the bust, lending it a colonial association despite the intentions of those who put it up in the first place. In early 2018, the group Association Citoyenne pour un Espace public Décolonial (ACED) vandalized the statue the night of January 10-11. And this attack was only the latest of several against this particular statue, as well as against others to the king in the Brussels area. This time, in January 2018, the bust itself was “déboulonné,” which can mean literally unbolted and removed, but also “brought down,” as a politician might be taken down by scandal. Scrawled in black letters above the monument’s original inscription was an accusatory demand for an explanatory text: “CONGO FREE STATE & ‘CONGO HORRORS’ EXPLANATORY TEXT = NECESSARY HERE.” ACED also issued a statement lamenting the commemoration of Leopold in public spaces. In an appeal on Facebook, the mayor of Forest, Marc-Jean Ghysels, recognized the vandalism as a political act and called for the return of the bust, and for dialogue. The mayor’s plea emphasized how the statue celebrated Leopold’s role in establishing the park and that the statue belonged to the patrimoine bruxellois. Just a few days after having been removed, the bust was discovered not far away. Although it was reported that it was to be restored within a couple months, it was still missing as of May 2018.

Although some, including mayor Ghysels apparently, might interpret the Parc Duden bust as a tribute to Leopold II’s development of park spaces in the city, the memorial was connected to the colony in fundamental ways from the very beginning. The commune of Forest first built the bust with the permission of and with funds from the Donation Royale, or Royal Trust. Leopold II himself had established the Donation Royale in 1900 to mark the sixty-fifth year of his birth. He did so by bequeathing to the Donation Royale properties and goods from his massive estate that he did not want to see go to his daughters, who had married foreign princes and from whom he was estranged. During his reign’s early years the king had been one of the richest people in all of Europe,
Africa, still on display

As we have seen, there had been the possibility for a more “real” decolonization in the 1970s and 1980s, with the demand for repatriation of African art and other objects to the Congo. This would not have been just about the movement of objects but could have opened up the possibility for a greater questioning of the former colonial connection, creating opportunities for renewed relations and changed mentalités in Belgium. But it was missed. Only in recent years have there been low-level shifts, most connected to generational change. Still, the view continues among many that African art was not really artwork, including among African art dealers in Brussels. Specialists continued their work, for example Marc Felix, a leading example of Belgian consultants, writers, experts,
and promoters of Congolese art who continued to be shaped by it, thereby subtly influencing their country’s cultural scene. Felix became a driver behind the Brussels Non European Art Fair, or BRUNEAF, a major event in the capital each year. The extent to which private collections of African material culture and artwork continued to shape private space in Belgium into the twenty-first century—albeit overwhelmingly among those able to afford collecting—is suggested by what happened to the René and Odette Delenne collection. René and Odette Delenne had begun collecting African artwork after having visited the Congo pavilions at the 1958 Brussels universal exposition. The Cleveland Museum of Art obtained 35 objects from their collection in 2010, and the curator who arranged the acquisition said it would have taken decades to put together any comparable collection by means of purchases on the open market. When put up for auction at Sotheby’s in 2015, other items in the René and Odette Delenne collection sold out, fetching three million dollars.

The collections of dealers, collectors, and individuals represented an important reservoir of Congolese art—or a “database” in Jean-Luc Vellut’s formulation—whose presence in the former metropole sustained a positive view of the colonial past. Organizing exhibits meant enacting or re-enacting claims of authority in which white Europeans exercised ownership and expertise; only recently have Congolese been involved at any significant level in such expositions. By building collections, preparing exhibitions, evaluating art, and helping set market prices, museum curators, collectors, even missionaries and private citizens from across the country’s language divide sustained a shared position of expertise on Congolese art. As Sarah Van Beurden has shown, by the end of the colonial era Belgians had come to exercise a cultural guardianship over traditional Congolese culture. Displaying “authentic” Congolese artifacts and art after 1960 was a subtle way of justifying colonial power and Belgium’s colonial action after the fact. The question of authenticity and who possesses the authority to determine or bestow it remains essential to collectors and experts down to today. Baudouin de Grunne, a longtime mayor of the commune of Wezembeek-Oppem, amassed a huge collection of African artwork, including of Tabwa figures, Mitsogho gongs, and Hemba rattles. His assemblage was among the most significant such private collections before it was auctioned off by Sotheby’s in 2000. His son, Bernard de Grunne, who is also a collector and expert, asserts on his website:

Questions of authenticity in the arts of Africa, Oceania and Tribal Indonesia are of upmost [sic] concern to new collectors. Bernard de Grunne can offer impartial and scholarly advice in this difficult area thanks to his experience in handling great numbers of undisputed masterpieces in these fields.
Colonial pioneers

Location: Ixelles (Elsene), square de la Croix Rouge
Sculptor: Marcel Rau
Architect: A. Boelens
Inauguration: 8 October 1933
Funded/built by: commune of Ixelles

For this memorial by the Brussels commune of Ixelles for “its children who died in the Congo,” sculptor Marcel Rau carved a slender statue out of “pierre bleue de Sprimont.”

Similar to many other colonial monuments in Belgium, a representation of an African woman is central, in this case a striking sculpture of a Mangbetu woman’s head. The Mangbetu became almost iconic in Belgium during the colonial period because of their practice of wrapping babies’ heads to elongate the skull. Adults, especially women, often accentuated this elongation by using materials, their own hair, or a combination of the two to create a coiffure that extended backward. In Rau’s sculpture, the woman’s eyes and lips appeared closed, making her appear meditative. One of her hands holds the Congo star, conjuring up the CFS flag, which was blue with one large gold star in the middle. Like all other such images of Africans in stone or bronze in Belgium—and unlike their European colonial counterparts—the woman remains unnamed and anonymous, akin to the types of European representations of Africans in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In this case this female Mangbetu type tops a monument comprised mainly of a single column on which Rau engraved the names of all Ixelles pioneers on several bands that wrap around a column that also bears imagery, including carvings of a mask, an elephant, huts, a tree, a crocodile, a rhinoceros, and a slit drum. The top of the column reads, “Ixelles à ses pionniers coloniaux” (Ixelles to its colonial pioneers), and the front of the monument includes the landmark dates of 1876 and 1908.
The striking profile of the monument made it popular with photographers, and it was reproduced both in specialist colonialist publications and mainstream newspapers.\(^8\) The speech of Ixelles mayor Armand Huysmans at its inauguration reveals the spirit of the time that motivated the building of such monuments:

The commune of Ixelles wanted (...) to participate in this beautiful moment of recognition. Because they were thirty two, those children of Ixelles who left their homes, their families, and their attachments for mysterious regions where the genius of Leopold II had seen into the incredible future. They brought with them there their youth, their enthusiasm, and above all the strong qualities of their race: love for work and an indomitable will (...) nothing would serve to perpetuate their names if we were to one day allow their work to perish. On this site of greenery and flowers, so suitable for reflection (...) we will come often to think of them.

In few words, Huysmans commemorated the local while praising Leopold II, recommitting to the country’s larger colonial project, trusting the strengths of the white race, and baptizing the monument a site of remembrance and commemoration.

Such immutability of sensibilities is not unique to the Belgian case. As one scholar has noted, “the world of connoisseurs, collectors, and dealers of what once would have been called primitive art” changed little over the years in post-colonial France.\(^8\) Of course, there is a profound irony in that it was white European dealers, missionaries, and curators deeming African art authentic rather than Africans themselves. For decades after 1960, there was no real end of empire in the realm of art dealership in metropolitan Europe.

Some Africana has become somewhat effaced. Antwerp’s Etnografisch Museum founded in 1952 was by the turn of the century in dire straits. When Director Herreman left the museum in 1995, it was not until 2000 that he was replaced by another Africanist, and there were no Africa-focused exhibits at the museum from 1995-2001. After other changes and moves, the museum was merged with three others, including the Maritime Museum, to create the MAS, which opened in May 2011. Ethnographic objects, including those from the former Belgian Congo, have since then been integrated—one is tempted to say lost—into theme-oriented displays on each of the MAS’ several floors. One whole floor covers maritime Antwerp, including some exhibits on colonialism, providing information on Ons Huis, Matadi, and the ivory trade, and showing rubber samples. The colonial era is folded into the history of Antwerp, without mention of colonial-era abuses.\(^9\)
As we have seen, the reservoirs of Congolese artwork in Belgium were periodically mobilized. Dealers, collectors, curators, and academics saw themselves as experts on and guardians of “authentic” African culture. Africana continued to adorn private homes, museum collections, and dealers’ galleries. Belgians’ refusal to return this Congolese patrimony in any significant way could be construed as an unspoken assertion of the legitimacy of the colonial conquest of the late 1800s and the foreign rule that followed. In this realm, decolonization never happened, or it has only just recently begun.

Race and racism

Racism is experienced in various ways by people of color in Belgium, such as being stopped on the street by police to have one’s paper’s checked. Belgian Jean Muteba Rahier, son of a white colonial and his African ménagère, recounted his experience being the only “black person” in the passport line for Belgians when entering the country in 1994, and the extensive inspection his passport and luggage underwent at the hands of the border police.91 Rahier’s account rings true, as this author has stood in line for an extended period behind a black person of African descent at the Brussels airport, watching other recently-arrived passengers streaming through other lines as the traveler before me was questioned at length.

One aspect of the country’s colonial legacy that received virtually zero attention until only very recently was mixed-race couples and their children, either those who ended up in Belgium or the Congo after 1960. One might excuse this inattention if mixed-race children had been excluded from the metropole, but as early as the first years of the twentieth century there were offspring of “colonial” mixed marriages there. An example is Joseph Droeven, Belgium’s first “black” soldier, who was the son of a Belgian gunsmith and his Congolese wife, and who fought for Belgium in World War I. The practice of men having ménagères in the colony was well known, and not only in official circles, where it was a subject of grave concern lest mixed-race children detract from white prestige or create a group with anti-colonial potential.92 People in Belgium were aware of sexual relations between whites and blacks in the colony, as illustrated by Georges Simenon’s Le blanc à lunettes (1937).93 The reader not only learns that the novel’s protagonist, Ferdinand Graux, has a relationship with his 15-year-old African housekeeper Baligi, but that this is known to Graux’s family back home, even to his fiancée who remained there. A rather naïve Englishwoman whom Graux meets on a return trip to his plantation in the colony questions him about personal matters, including his sex life:
“You mean to say you’ve lived five years all by yourself in the Congo and been true to your fiancée all the time? Don’t tell me you’ve never made love to one of those pretty little black girls I’ve heard so much about!”

To which he replied quite coolly:

“I have a housekeeper—like everybody else.”

“What does that mean, ‘housekeeper’?”

“It means—everything!”

(…)

“What about that girl you’re engaged to?”

“She knows, of course. I’ve told her.”94

Simenon himself once asked, “Will we be remembered as benefactors (…) Or for having sown the countryside with small beings of mixed color?”95 The central character of David Van Reybrouck’s Missie bears this out, deriding the Vatican for its adherence to a policy of celibacy.

Estimates of the number of métis in the Belgian Congo show that sexual relations between Europeans and Africans were common, one author putting the number at 10,000 by 1956, another as high as 20,000 by the end of the colonial era.97 Considering that at the height of European settlement there were only 112,000 whites in the Congo, among them some 89,000 Belgians, the possibility that there were as many as 20,000 children of mixed-race descent reveals the great extent to which Europeans and Africans had sexual intercourse.

Despite its significance, the issue of métissage remained taboo, even after the number of mixed-race children living in Belgium jumped after 1960.

(At the moment of the independence of the Congo (1960) and of Rwanda and Urundi (1962), hundreds of mixed-race children residing in the missions were ‘repatriated’ to Brussels by military plane and handed over to the A.P.P.M. [Association pour la Protection des Mulâtres] to be adopted by Belgian families.)

The silence on the issue has only recently begun to lift. Scholar Jean Muteba Rahier explained his origins and difficult childhood in a 2003 autobiographical piece, born as he was in 1959 in the Congo to a European father and an African mother. The 2010 documentary film Bons baisers de la colonie raised the subject of mixed-race relatives in Nathalie Borgers’ family. Many European fathers left their mixed-race children in Church hands rather than recognize them as their legal children, and it was not until April 2017 that the Catholic Church apologized to métis for their poor treatment. That same year appeared De kinderen van Save by Sarah Heynssens, the first book-length monograph tracing the fate of mixed-race children from the colony, through abandonment, to placement with nuns at Save, to relocation to Belgium. In short, Belgian memory has only recently been reawakened to the traumatisme métis of the colonial era, that is the existence of numerous mixed-race “children of empire,” many of whom were uprooted and taken to Belgium at the time of decolonization.

The role of immigration

One reason for the increased attention to race and the colonial past in recent years has been the growth in the country’s population of central African or Congolese descent. Immigration was nothing new; Belgium has for long been a country of immigrants. It is telling that in the 1956 Marcinelle mining disaster that killed hundreds (mentioned in chapter 1), 136 of the more than 250 dead were Italian. The rapid increase in the population of Belgians of Congolese descent was a novelty of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. By 1991 there were some 17,451 Congolese nationals living in Belgium, which declined to 14,606 in 1993 before dropping further to 12,130 by 1998. This can be explained. First, significant numbers of asylum seekers from the Congo sought refuge in Belgium in the early 1990s, and many planned to return home if possible. Second, citizenship and census regulations are such that it is difficult to track the non-European origins of the country’s citizenry. Still today it is a challenge to get a firm handle on the total number of people living in Belgium of Congolese descent—whether Belgian, Congolese, or...
otherwise by nationality—because someone from Congo who took Belgian nationality is not counted as Congolese by official records, and Belgium for decades had a liberal nationality law in terms of according citizenship to foreigners. In any case, by the end of the millennium, with the genocide in Rwanda and then the ouster of Mobutu from power, the influx of political and other refugees swelled, many of whom lived marginal existences, for example Paul Rusesabagina, mentioned earlier. By the first years of the twenty-first century, the population of people of Congolese origin living in Belgium had increased dramatically. By 2006 there may have been as many as 40,000 people of Congolese nationality and a total of 70,000 people of Congolese descent residing there. Still, the combined number of Congolese nationals and people of sub-Saharan African origin remained much smaller than those of other immigrants to the country. If there were in the neighborhood of 12,000-17,500 Congolese in Belgium by the 1990s, already by 1978 there were, according to official statistics, 876,577 total immigrants living in Belgium. By one estimate, by 2008-2012 there were somewhere in the neighborhood of 42,000-45,800 Congolese nationals living in Belgium, not counting other nationals of Congolese descent. In 2007, by comparison, 932,161 of the country’s 10,584,534 inhabitants were foreign-born (8.8 percent), of whom foreign-born Congolese comprised less than five percent. As of the 1990s, the Congolese population of France was larger than its counterpart in Belgium, and by 1992, 52 percent of all Congolese living in Europe resided in France against only 29 percent in Belgium. Difficult as it is to believe, Congolese immigration as a percentage of total immigration into Belgium reached a peak in 1961 at just more than seven percent of total immigration. Since then, Congolese immigration has never amounted to more than five percent of the total. Between 1948 and 2007, total immigrants to Belgium regularly numbered more than 40,000 a year whereas during the same time period the per annum number of Congolese immigrants only once numbered more than 2,500. Or consider how “entre le 1er janvier 1991 et le 1er janvier 2006, la part des personnes nées congolaises est passée de 1,5% à 2,5% de la population totale née étrangère.” (between 1 January 1991 and 1 January 2006, the proportion of people born in the Congo passed from 1.5% to 2.5% of the total foreign-born population.)

When debates about multiculturalism arose in Belgium in the 1980s, they focused overwhelmingly on Turks and North Africans, especially Moroccans, Algerians, and Tunisians. Unlike France and Britain, most “post-colonial” migrants to Belgium came not from former colonial territories but from Muslim Mediterranean countries, making its experience hew closer to that
of post-empire Germany, where large numbers of mainly Turkish Gastarbeiter changed the ethnic makeup of that country. The focus on Maghrebi migrants to Belgium, as opposed to those from central African, led two scholars to call the latter “the forgotten Congolese” in the multicultural debates in Flanders. Since the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks on the United States, even more attention has turned toward Muslims in Western European countries. The case of Muriel Degauque, a Belgian convert to Islam who blew herself up in Iraq in 2005, made headlines worldwide. (U.S. troops shot and killed her husband and would-be suicide bomber Issam Goris, a Belgian Muslim of Moroccan origin.) The group Sharia4Belgium grabbed headlines by calling for the imposition of Islamic rule in the country. This attention only heightened with the Arab Spring and start of the Syrian civil war in 2011, which has attracted radical Muslims from Europe to fight. “Even peaceful Belgium is now asking just who’s living there and what they do when they go abroad.” Congolese even complain about the lack of attention to them, and the greater attention paid to other immigrant communities in Belgium. As one person put it, “jullie negeren ons, erger nog; jullie wijzen ons af. Belgen praten altijd maar over Marokkanen en Turken.” (you ignore us; even worse: you reject us. Belgians always talk more about Moroccans and Turks.)

A visitor walking the streets of cities like Brussels or Antwerp today, or even smaller cities and towns, clearly sees that Belgium’s urban areas are extraordinarily diverse. It is estimated that a quarter of the Belgian population in 2018 has immigrant roots, many of them recent arrivals. What is different today is that many of these have a hard time identifying with either “side” of the Dutch/French language divide, and many also have difficulty seeing the
issue of Belgium’s colonial past as something that relates to them, or an issue in which they should take interest. There may be only 70,000 or so people of Congolese descent in Belgium, but there are many others of African descent. There are more Congolese than ever in Belgium, yet there are not many Congolese in Belgium. In past years, emigration of Congolese sometimes outpaced immigration. The population of Congolese in Belgium has gotten older and has become more female than male. Nevertheless, they have since the late 1990s become more visible, even if they remain a tiny minority. Since 2001, Matonge en Couleurs has been a celebration of the Congolese community in the Matonge neighborhood of Ixelles to coincide with the end of June and the anniversary of Congolese independence. Beginning in 2007, the “Matonge en Couleurs” in Brussels found a parallel in the Dutch-speaking north when the Congolese community of Antwerp organized the first “Congo in Vlaanderen” festival. This festival, in its eighth edition as of June 2014, has been described as “het enige openluchtevenement in Europa dat jaarlijks de onafhankelijkheid van Congo herdenkt.” (the sole open-air event in Europe that annually commemorates the independence of the Congo.) This was a shift from the colonial-era journées coloniales to “Congo in Vlaanderen.” “Black Paris – Black Brussels,” festivals like Congo in Vlaanderen, Matonge en Couleurs in Brussels, and more recently Congolisation—smaller-scale analogues to Congo na Paris—have made the public aware of the important and growing presence of Africans from Congo in the country. Artistic cooperation extends beyond the plastic arts to movie making, theater, art collaborations, and cultural festivals, including the Afrika Filmfestival founded by Guido Convents and Guido Huysmans in 1996 in Leuven that brings African films that do not make mainstream movie theaters to cities big and small across the country’s regions.

The most famous Congolese quartier in the country is Matonge, in Ixelles, a Brussels commune. For all its reputation as a Congolese neighborhood, perhaps epitomized by Congolese artist Chéri Samba’s giant mural Porte de Namur, Porte de l’Amour, very few who live there are Congolese. “Barely 5 percent of the inhabitants of the Matonge neighborhood are of African origin, but the neighborhood remains the symbolic heart of the Congolese community [in Belgium].” From the 1960s into the 1980s the Matonge neighborhood was smaller, and was a stop for well-to-do Congolese politicians and others, such as Sûreté head Kalume (with whom Lieve Joris had a run-in during her voyage to the Congo) who traveled regularly to Belgium, sometimes to get tailored clothing made there. Since the political troubles of the 1990s, Matonge has grown as the Congolese population of Belgium has increased. This neighborhood was one of great movement, of people in and
out, and not so much viewed as a residential area, at least not (perhaps) until the 1990s, when more Congolese started to settle down there and elsewhere in Belgium.\textsuperscript{126} “Dat merk je bijvoorbeeld als het openbaar vervoer staat: dan ligt de buurt er verlaten bij.” (You notice for example as soon as public transport service ceases: then the area is deserted.)\textsuperscript{127}

Even though the Congolese population is more settled today, this does not mean that Matonge is a Congolese neighborhood. Instead, it is a diverse neighborhood known for its Congo connections.\textsuperscript{128} Yes, there is a concentration of Congolese and African shops and restaurants in Matonge, but such establishments are not exclusive to that neighborhood, and they are not necessarily frequented most often by Congolese or Africans. As Thierry Van Pevenage, director of the Maison Africaine in 2010 put it, “Of course Congolese here know Matonge, but even they don’t come here often.”\textsuperscript{129} During the journées zaïroises of 1988, there were as many Europeans as Africans there to celebrate, and the ongoing Matonge en Couleurs involves many besides just Congolese.\textsuperscript{130} Going to an area restaurant such as, for example, Soleil d’Afrique, you are more likely to hear English, Spanish, French, or some other Western language than any African language.

The identity of Congolese in Belgium is complex. While this author was traveling from Brussels to Antwerp in November 2013, a young woman of African descent asked me a question, and we struck up a brief conversation. When I asked her out of curiosity where she was from, she responded, “The Congo.” Having heard her speaking Flemish, I asked, “Were you born in the Congo?,” to which she replied, “No, I was born in Antwerp.” When it comes to the colonial past and potential claims against Belgium, views on the colonial past among Congolese living in the country are heterogeneous, varying in different ways including by generation, as some of these people lived under colonialism while middle-aged and younger people of Congolese descent never experienced formal Belgian colonial rule.\textsuperscript{131} By the 2010s, many Congolese living in Belgium and Belgians of Congolese descent have come into their own, defining who they are and making their own contributions. In Koli Jean Bofane, author of Mathématiques congolaises, has said, “I detest that publishers set aside special collections for us as if we [African authors] formed a separate group. (…) Me, I’m Belgian of Congolese origin, my friend Didier de Lannoy feels himself to be Congolese of Belgian origin, and both of us write in French. These categorizations are absurd.”\textsuperscript{132} Immigrants in general feel rather welcome in Belgium, eight out of ten reporting in a 2009 study that they feel well accepted there, compared even to other European states where they have lived.\textsuperscript{133}
Conclusion

The torrent of events provoked by the fiftieth anniversary of the Congo’s independence in 2010 demonstrated that far from being forgotten, the colonial experience was alive if not always well in Belgian culture. Nevertheless, the extent to which the outpouring of events, books, films, exhibits, television shows, and musical performances was a reflection of popular culture in the country is open to debate because many cultural productions were initiated, funded, or carried out by state agencies. What is more, for many people the “colonial” had little resonance; not because they forgot the colonial past, but because they were recent immigrants for whom colonial history and the “colonial experience” were foreign. Many of the now much more numerous non-European immigrants living in Belgium, including people of Congolese descent, continued to experience racism. Racism or racialist thinking represented one longstanding “hangover” of empire that persisted, even into the period after 2010. Another surprisingly enduring hangover was that of official colonial propaganda images, which continued to appear and reappear, even more than half a century after the Congo won self-rule.