

# The Historiography of Belgian Colonialism in the Congo

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*In dit artikel worden de belangrijkste etappes van de historiografie van de Belgische kolonisatie onderzocht. Van bij het begin van de 20e eeuw werd de figuur van de stichter van Congo, koning Leopold II, het voorwerp van een ware cultus binnen het Belgische establishment, hoewel het regime dat hij installeerde in Congo in het buitenland (terecht) hevig op de korrel werd genomen. Pas in de loop van de jaren 1950-1960 werd de Belgische historiografie over Congo uit de apologetische sfeer gehaald, dank zij de fundamentele studies van de Brusselse historicus Jean Stengers. Toch bleef de geschiedschrijving over het kolonialisme in België weinig beoefend. Samen met Stengers zorgde enkel Jean-Luc Vellut ervoor dat die activiteit niet helemaal van de horizon verdween in België. Vanaf de jaren 1960 werden tal van belangrijke studies over het koloniale Congo dan ook door buitenlandse (waaronder Congolese) historici geproduceerd. Pas tijdens de laatste 15 jaar is er een "revival" te noteren oor de geschiedenis van het kolonialisme binnen de Belgische historische wereld. Recente polemieken over het Belgische koloniale verleden (rond het "rode rubber" van Leopold II en over de moord op de Congolese Eerste Minister Lumumba in 1961) hebben hiertoe bijgedragen".*

## INTRODUCTION

When the Belgians arrived in the Congo, they found a population that was victim of bloody rivalries and slave trade. Belgian civil servants, missionaries, doctors, colonists and engineers civilized the black population step by step. They created modern cities, roads and railroads, harbours and airports, factories and mines, schools and hospitals. This work greatly improved the living conditions of the indigenous people.

This is how colonialism in the Congo is presented to Belgian 12-year old primary school children in 2006, almost half a century after the end of colonial rule in this African country<sup>1</sup>. The rhetoric used in (some) contemporary schoolbooks has not changed significantly since the early 20th century, when the official propaganda discourse on colonialism took form. The remarkable stability of pedagogical clichés not only tells us something about the way school programs are elaborated, but also about the *diffusion* of historical knowledge in society – which is an important, even crucial aspect of its *production*. In this chapter, I would like to analyze how historians have studied Belgian colonialism. Since the study of historiographical developments requires far more than the enumeration of authors' names and titles of books and articles, I intend to link this

scientific production with the general social, political and institutional setting. Even if historical research is not 'steered' directly by political guidelines, it is always embedded in a societal context that pervades its activity.

Needless to say, the above apology of the many blessings of Belgian colonialism is a classical (but nevertheless excellent) example of selective reading of the past. Repression, murder, forced labour, racism and exploitation were intrinsic dimensions of the Belgian rule in the Congo, as they were in all colonial enterprises. This is not to deny the fact that the Belgians effectively did build roads, schools and hospitals and even raised the living standards of some of their colonial subjects. Moreover, the 'dark' and 'bright' sides of colonialism were not present in the same proportions during the different phases of foreign rule in the Congo; in fact, their 'mix' changed as time went by. But anyway, understanding the colonial past (like any historical phenomenon), has nothing to do with an 'arithmetical' addition of 'negative' and 'positive' aspects, since historical research is not concerned with ethical verdicts about 'good' and 'bad'. It is about explaining how a society changed in all its aspects, regardless of how its actors evaluated the moral qualities of some of these. So it is necessary to present the essential features of the Congo's colonial history, in order to grasp the evolution and the significance of historiographical production.

## THE HISTORY OF BELGIAN COLONIALISM IN A NUTSHELL

The origins of Belgian colonialism in central Africa were rather peculiar. Although the leading economic and political forces of his country were opposed to any colonial 'adventure', Leopold II, the king of the Belgians (1835-1909), relentlessly tried to get control of some overseas region which would enable him to develop a lucrative commercial business. This would not only enrich the king himself, but also, so he said, Belgium itself. After many fruitless and often unrealistic efforts in the most diverse and remote parts of the world (in East and South Asia, in the Pacific, in the Middle East and in many parts of North and Black Africa), the king finally succeeded in realizing one of his overambitious projects. Thanks to his immense personal fortune and to his (sometimes bold, even adventurous) diplomatic skills, he managed to exploit the colonial rivalries between Great Britain, France and Portugal in the heart of Africa. In 1885, the participants of the Berlin Conference (but not the Conference as such) agreed to recognize him as the sovereign of a "Congo Free State" (CFS or Independent State of Congo, *Etat Indépendant du Congo*). Apart from the fact that its king was also the head of state of a newly created political entity, Belgium officially had no relation whatsoever with this Free State (although unofficially Belgian diplomats and officers had helped Leopold to create it). The first years of the CFS were characterized by heavy financial difficulties, but from 1895 onwards, it became a very lucrative business, thanks to the ivory trade and, above all, to the large scale collecting of wild rubber. The local population was forced to work in a most inhumane way in order to boost rubber 'production' and export. Arbitrary executions, repression and even mass killings were common things in Leopoldian Congo. This soon became known outside the CFS, thanks to the

denunciations of foreign missionaries and other witnesses of these cruelties. The publication of a report by Roger Casement, a British consul in the Congo who confirmed the existence of these atrocities, had great effect. An international protest campaign, led by E.D. Morel, originated in Great Britain and gained a wide audience, mostly but not exclusively in the Anglo-Saxon countries. Leopold came under heavy pressure, even in his own country where he faced severe criticism from progressive liberals, socialists and some Catholics. But in the meantime, a colonial lobby had been formed in Belgium, and the main Belgian capitalist groups had (although somewhat reluctantly) started investing in important colonial projects (mainly in railroad building and in mining). So from the Belgian point of view, it seemed inconceivable that the Congo would be handed over to some other European power. Consequently, international pressure finally led to the take-over of the CFS by Belgium as an outright colony in 1908. This solution had to be imposed upon the old, obstinate and embittered king, even though the Congo's transfer to the Belgian State had already been envisaged many years before.

From that date on, the Belgian authorities tried to eliminate the worst Leopoldian excesses. But forced labour did not disappear as such; till the very last years of colonial rule, the Congolese had to work 'for free' for at least some days or weeks each year (e.g. for road maintenance); they were obliged to cultivate some cash crops (e.g. cotton); they were subjected to harsh forced recruitments, because the European plantations and the large mining enterprises badly needed labourers. In the 1920s, Belgian capital flowed into the colony, creating an impressive infrastructure and an extensive network of large enterprises (some of them co-financed by public capital and most of them belonging to a few powerful private holding companies). During the Interwar period, the Belgian Congo became one of the world's largest primary commodity producers. After the Second World War, a new inflow of public and private capital boosted economic activity. Colonial authorities also launched a Ten Year Plan in order to modernize the country. They stepped up their efforts in the social, medical and educational sector: Belgian Congo was presented as a 'model colony', where primary schooling and medical treatment was more widely developed than in other colonies. But Belgian authorities anxiously avoided the formation of a Congolese social, political and intellectual elite; only a tiny minority of so-called *évolués* adopted Western habits and acquired a secondary school or technical training. When the colonial bond was suddenly severed in 1960, after an outburst of nationalism in the black population, the country had to face independence completely unprepared. This partly explains Congo's many misfortunes in the next decades.

## POLITICS, INSTITUTIONS AND THE HISTORY OF BELGIAN COLONIALISM

The particular context in which Belgian colonialism was born influenced the first writings on its origins and development. Although he was surrounded by a group of devoted collaborators and although some leading Catholic politicians, who were in charge of the government, had more or less willingly supported his endeavours (mostly from a *donnant donnant* perspective), high-handed, ruthless and stubborn Leopold II was

quite unpopular in his own country during his lifetime. But one thing was clear enough: without his obsessive quest for a colony, Belgium would never have become a colonial power (with all the national pride attached to that status); big capitalist groups would never have made their lucrative investments in the Congo; and the Catholic Church would never have found such an extensive missionary area. In an effort of self-justification and retrospective gratefulness, the Belgian political, economic and cultural elites therefore developed an outright Leopoldian cult immediately after the King's death in 1909 – even if many politicians, business leaders, clerics and other opinion leaders were perfectly aware of the 'dark' sides of his personality and actions (see below). Moreover, this cult contributed to the formation of a true 'colonial spirit' in the Belgian population, an attitude which had been largely absent before the take-over of the Congo. This colonial ideology in turn became a new tool in the forging of a lively Belgian patriotism (we must not forget that Belgium had been created as recently as 1830). Consequently, the King was presented as a visionary, an extraordinary genius who (so the story goes) had fought against the indifference and the indolence of his fellow citizens. The latter had not grasped the 'generosity' and the 'farsightedness' of his actions, all of them directed to one single goal: the gift of a prosperous colony to his beloved Belgium. The King, so official discourse added, also had to sustain the envious attacks of foreign countries, especially of Great Britain, which had 'invented' (or at least grossly exaggerated) the so-called "red rubber" atrocities in order to get hold of this rich colony. This interpretation had been the line of defence adopted by Leopold himself in the last decade of his personal rule over the Congo; it was adopted by Belgian authorities and immediately became the orthodox position of Belgian diplomacy. This was to have some effect on the historiography of colonial Congo, as we shall soon see.

The Leopoldian cult pervaded not only official discourses, but also most of the writings concerning the origins and the history of colonial activity in this region. Publications looking back into the (then still recent) past originated almost from the start of European penetration in central Africa. Of course, these writings cannot be labelled 'historical' in the true sense of the word, but they are important because many 'scientific' studies, later on, relied heavily on them. On coming back to Europe, many explorers and pioneers of the Congolese 'adventure' wrote extensive books recalling their African adventures, either in order to benefit from the financial advantages of what often became real bestsellers, or to contribute to the internal and external propaganda effort launched by the CFS, or else in an effort of self-glorification. It is known that Leopold II carefully watched and even guided these writings. Most famous in this category are of course the books written by Henry Morton Stanley, whom the King had hired after his first east-to-west crossing of the African continent in 1877, in order to help realize and organize his Congolese project. Other Belgian pioneers, mostly officers "on leave" from the Belgian army and collaborators of Stanley, also put their memoirs on paper. This literature was fundamentally apologetic. From then on, the tone was set for the description of the deeds of missionaries, administrators, businessmen, doctors or scientists who followed in the footsteps of these first pioneers. Heroism, unselfishness and unbridled thirst for action became the standard descriptors for Belgian activities

in the colony, also in the works of professional historians. Private journals, notes and correspondence, where the actors and first-hand witnesses of the Leopoldian period plainly laid down their sometimes horrendous deeds and/or observations, only recently divulged their secrets. Since the 1970s, historians painstakingly began to sort out fact from fiction and to fill the gaps left by the founders of the CFS, whose semi-official and auto-celebrative works were, for many decades, the only source used to tell the story of the breaking up of the Congolese interior.

Not only the ‘men on the spot’, but also some of Leopold’s close collaborators and admirers soon looked back on the origins and first developments of the CFS. Amongst them: some of his personal secretaries, a few journalists or diplomats, pseudo-scientific biographers. Their main setting is not the African *brousse* (this was only known through the above mentioned pioneers’ memoirs), but the royal and ministerial offices and the Western chanceries. Their perspective was decidedly European: the focus of their “history of colonization” was reduced to the diplomatic scene or even to the mind of the “great man”. In some of these writings, the cult of the King reached extraordinary, even preposterous proportions. “The birth of the Congo Free State is a fairy tale realized by the Leopold II, a colonizer with a touch of genius”<sup>2</sup>, wrote Edouard Vandersmissen, a professor of the University of Liège, in 1920. In 1948, the *Biographie coloniale belge*, a (still used... because not yet replaced) reference work published by the *Institut Royal Colonial Belge* (to which we will come in a few moments), opens its first volume with a panegyric overloaded with superlatives and capital letters:

Three aspects dominate the glorious life of Leopold II in its colonial aspect: political and diplomatic genius, nobility of sentiments, disinterestedness. (...) He had achieved the work of a Titan; He took rank amongst the greatest Statesmen of History. (...) This builder of Empire, this Gatherer of Lands (“Rassembleur de Terres”) for the benefit of Fatherland and Civilization (...) [always] said that He wanted to give a colony to his country, to open up central Africa to Civilization<sup>3</sup>.

This rhetoric is all the more *piquant* since the author of this eulogy admitted, in a private letter, that he had witnessed the “rubber atrocities”, adding immediately that one should conceal this episode; he also told his correspondent that Leopold was “in some aspects a bad administrator [and] too much dominated by the material problem”<sup>4</sup> and even that he had become “megalomaniac” in his old days. It is difficult to find a more telling example of the abyss separating the inside of some people’s minds and the official discourses they have to produce.

Disseminated and repeated time and again through the school system, textbooks, museums, exhibitions, public statements, etc, this view became the standard interpretation of the Leopoldian past – the generation of Belgians that did not witness this period believed, supposedly in all sincerity, that the CFS and the King had been victim of foreign slander, and that the colonization of the Congo had started as a humanitarian enterprise, the starting point of the ‘model colony’ that was Belgian Congo. But outside of Belgium, this consensus concerning the CFS’s past did not exist. Regularly, journalists or general writers came back to the horror stories concerning Leopoldian Congo. The

anti-Congo campaign had deeply influenced the minds of people and its effects lasted for many decades after the facts. From their foreign posts, Belgian ambassadors always carefully took note of these writings, despatching them to Brussels with some anxiety and/or indignation (See sources for: some examples of the ‘Congo atrocities’ in foreign opinion and the Belgian reactions). Indeed, Belgian authorities always were extremely sensitive about these allegations. In their opinion, the Congo still was coveted by other powers; their sovereignty in central Africa always seemed weak and threatened. In their eyes, the “slander” concerning “red rubber” was more than just a disagreement about a historical event. It was seen as a threat for the foundations of Belgian colonial rule and even as an attack on the country’s national honour.

The Belgian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, who kept (and still keeps) the diplomatic archives, also had at its disposal a History Counsellor (*Conseiller Historique*), whose duty it was to watch over the historical documents, but also to formulate advice concerning all retrospective questions the Department was confronted with. As late as the end of the 1950s, the orthodox and “negationist” view on Leopoldian Congo was still in force, as is shown by a note written by the then *conseiller historique*, Jacques Willequet, also a professor at the Université Libre de Bruxelles and author of an otherwise excellent book on *Le Congo belge et la Weltpolitik (1894-1914)*<sup>5</sup>. This is what he writes when Leopold’s policy was once more was attacked in the foreign press by a journalist, H.D. Ziman, who spoke of “the disgraceful maladministration which he [Leopold] ultimately permitted in the Congo”<sup>6</sup>: “Parler de ‘disgraceful maladministration,’ c’est évoquer un fantôme dissipé depuis 50 ans: la campagne anticongolaise. (...) Le vrai et le faux, l’exagération et le mensonge s’y mêlaient inextricablement, avec bien entendu le minimum de dates, de lieux et de noms”. The fact that both leaders of the anti-Congo campaign, Morel and Casement, had been convicted of intelligence with the German enemy during World War I, is telling enough, according to Willequet: “Ces faits, néanmoins, devraient inciter à la prudence ceux qui, aujourd’hui, continuent à colporter des affirmations systématiquement désobligeantes”<sup>7</sup>. In other words: the Belgian Ministry of Foreign Affairs had developed a ‘standard version’ of the CFS’s history, based first on minimizing, and later on denial and outright rejection of the “accusations” concerning the Congo atrocities. This orthodox view was at same time shared and fed by the ‘scientific’ caution of the renowned professional historians that worked for the Department.

Another institution has played a still more important role in the shaping of colonial historiography in Belgium: the Colonial Academy, or *Institut Royal Colonial Belge* (IRCB), founded in 1928. Originally, the IRCB (renamed *Académie Royale des Sciences Coloniales* (ARSC) in 1954 before adopting its present name of *Académie Royale des Sciences d’Outre-Mer* (ARSOM) in 1959) was essentially composed of prestigious colonial figures: former or actual politicians, administrators, business leaders, missionaries, and leading scientists. It was wholly devoted to the enhancement of colonial action: it would improve Belgian rule in the Congo by the scientific examination of questions related to an extensive range of domains (engineering sciences, agronomy, biology, geology, anthropology, medicine, etc., not to forget the political, economic and even the

so-called ‘moral’ aspects). The spirit in which the IRCB worked is well reflected by the citation given above and taken from the introduction to the *Biographie coloniale belge*, a long-term scientific enterprise conceived in 1941<sup>8</sup> – and which is still going on<sup>9</sup>.

The initiative of publishing this huge reference work on the history of Belgian overseas activity was not an isolated fact. As early as 1925, the Minister of Colonies had created an official commission, whose task it was to write an official history of the Belgian colonial empire (Royal Decree of 16.03.1925). Nothing came out of this project; the commission itself was dissolved in 1928, when the IRCB was founded. Somewhat exasperated, the Minister of Colonies said that the new Institute should take over the commission’s task, since “it was somewhat humiliating to see that the best historical works on the Congo have been written by foreigners”<sup>10</sup> – quite a few books on the Congo Free State had indeed been written by British, American or French authors<sup>11</sup>. A touch of historiographical ‘nationalism’ or even ‘protectionism’ certainly was present in the officials’ minds at that time. At the foundation of the IRCB, this same Minister had also donated important archives of Leopold II, entrusted to the new Ministry in 1909, after the King’s death, by his former secretaries<sup>12</sup>. These were all the more precious since Leopold reputedly had destroyed many documents of the CFS before his decease. It nevertheless took some years before the IRCB resumed the 1925/1928 historiographical project. Only in 1952 did it create a “Commission of Belgian colonial history”. This commission did not have the intention of writing an official history itself; it only wanted to stimulate individual research initiatives in this field. An urgent task, so it seemed, was to explore the Leopoldian archives it had possessed since 1930. Quite tellingly, the commission did not want to make these documents publicly available (“too many documents are of a personal nature and concern too recent personalities”)<sup>13</sup>. Only persons with due scientific credentials could have access to them. Where colonial matters were concerned, Belgian authorities always displayed some kind of fear and adopted a culture of secrecy – an attitude which has not completely disappeared, even at the beginning of the 21st century.

## JEAN STENGERS AND THE BIRTH OF SCIENTIFIC COLONIAL HISTORY IN BELGIUM

In this context, the IRCB elected in 1952 as one of its members a young and talented historian of the *Université Libre de Brussels*, who was to influence deeply the development of Belgian colonial historiography: Jean Stengers (1922-2002)<sup>14</sup>. Only a few articles on early Belgian (i.e. Leopoldian) colonial policy, written since 1949, had established him as an authority in this field. During the 1950s, the IRCB/ARSC started publishing numerous studies concerning the early history of the history of the CFS and its antecedents, either as articles in its *Bulletin des séances*, or as monographs in its *Mémoires in-8°* series. Stengers was the author of many of these publications, but he was by no means the only professional Belgian historian related to the IRCB/ARSC. Other scientists also devoted themselves to early colonial history, most notably Au-

guste Roeykens, a Catholic priest, who published several (essentially document-oriented) volumes concerning Leopold's African initiatives. Still others, like Louis Jadin (1903-1972) (also a priest), specialized in the history of the ancient Kongo kingdom and in the early history of Christian missions in this region<sup>15</sup>. Another important cultural establishment in the colonial sphere, the Museum of Tervuren (now *Musée Royal d'Afrique Centrale (MRAC)*, Royal Museum of Central Africa) also contributed to the development of historical studies on colonialism. One of its directors, Marcel Luwel (1921), for example, wrote several studies concerning the first expeditions in and administrators of the Congo. Not surprisingly, the Tervuren Museum later acquired (and still keeps) the complete Stanley Papers.

Nevertheless, Stengers' significance for the development of Belgian colonial historiography surpasses that of his fellow members of the Academy or of other Belgian colonial historians of the 1950s and early 1960s. There are several reasons for that, apart from his sheer longevity (he continued publishing on the Congo for more than half a century after his first articles appeared). First of all, he changed the historiographical attitude towards Belgian colonial history. While some Belgian historians, even during the 1960s, still wrote within the context of the Leopoldian cult (Roeykens, for example, maintained the King on a pedestal, using terms such as "Leopold's genius" as late as 1976)<sup>16</sup>, Stengers eliminated the hagiographical elements still pervading most studies on the CFS. He was clearly fascinated by Leopold's character and actions, but he never indulged in eulogy or apologetic discourse (only some expressions in his first writings could possibly be interpreted as a sort of 'admiration'). Some of his studies, for example on Leopoldian finances, even aroused the anxiety of his fellow IRCB members<sup>17</sup>. As the immense majority of Belgians in the 1950s, he supported Belgian colonial rule in the Congo – one of his interventions in the IRCB/ARSC discussions is telling<sup>18</sup> – but this positive attitude towards colonialism never directly transpired in his historical work. In that sense, he 'depoliticized' Belgian colonial historiography and gave it a real scientific content.

The second of Stengers' merits is to be found in the link he immediately established with colonial historians of the neighbouring countries. The 1950s were characterized by a growing scientific interest in the history of 19th-century European imperialism. The new generation of historians had of course noticed the importance of Leopoldian Congo in the development of overseas empires. This trend even somewhat alarmed Belgian diplomatic authorities. They feared unpleasant echoes concerning the CFS. In 1959, the Foreign Minister discreetly suggested that a renowned scholar as Ronald Robinson – who, of course, could not be 'influenced' in too crude a way – should nevertheless be brought in contact with Belgian historians such as Stengers and Willequet, in order to avoid some possible "incident" (see Sources, document 17). It is doubtful whether Stengers needed such an introduction, since he had already established some fruitful international contacts. He was not only doing intensive research in foreign archives (particularly in Great Britain); he had also attended international conferences since the beginning of the 1950. Stengers personally got to know very well such leading British, French or Dutch colleagues as Roger Anstey, William Roger Louis, Henri

Brunschwig and Henk Wesseling. He often invited them to contribute to the IRCB/ARSOM's activities and had them publish important articles in the *Revue Belge de Philologie et d'Histoire*, of which he was a director. Some of these foreign researchers were among the first to publish up-to-date, unbiased and scientific syntheses on the history of colonial Congo, most notably Ruth Slade's *King Leopold's Congo* (1962) and Roger Anstey's *King Leopold's Legacy* (1966)<sup>19</sup>. Stengers himself became a member of the editorial board of the *Journal of African History* and contributed to many classic international publications on the history of colonialism, such as the *Cambridge History of Africa*. In short: his own research was the Belgian 'variant' of the broad historiographical current originating in the 1950s and focusing on the European diplomatic and political origins of late 19<sup>th</sup>-century imperialism.

In an impressive series of books and articles<sup>20</sup>, Stengers managed, with great subtlety, accuracy and clarity, to unravel the complex and intricate machinery of Leopoldian action in and around the Congo. In doing so, he shed a crude light on the real nature of the King's methods and also demolished, *en passant*, some official Belgian myths concerning the CFS. He most notably demonstrated that the anti-Congo campaign of Morel and Casement had nothing to do with slander, and that the "red rubber" atrocities were genuine. But this "cleaning up" was done discreetly and without sensationalism. In Belgium, Stengers never was considered an 'iconoclast' or a 'radical' (which he most certainly was not); consequently, he never lost the esteem he had gained in the Belgian intellectual and even political establishment.

During the 1950s and 1960s, Stengers had guided Belgian colonial historiography out of apologetic waters into the currents of modern science. He continued publishing important studies during the 1980s and 1990s, but he never wrote a full-scale synthesis on the CFS (or even on Leopoldian action as a whole). His numerous other studies, some of them of book-length, on different aspects of Belgian contemporary history and on historical methodology (the World Wars, diplomacy, the monarchy, etc.), probably help to explain this fact. Only in 1989 did he agree to publish a collection of his main articles on the Congo<sup>21</sup>. This option somewhat limited the popular audience of his works on the colony; except for academics and some specialists, most Belgians still clung to the old mythical images of colonialism. Moreover, Stengers focused on the 'European' and political/diplomatic, and not on the 'African' aspects of colonialism. Finally, he never analyzed the history of Belgian colonialism from 1908 onwards (except for a few general overviews and some detailed articles on the decolonization).

In other words: two huge fields were still left untouched at the end of the 1960s: first, the evolution of colonial Congo itself during the CFS, and, second, both sides of the colonization (the Belgian *and* the Congolese one) after 1908. Indeed, before Congo became independent in 1960, no Belgian or foreign historian ever made any significant contribution to the study of a phenomenon that *was still going on*, i.e. Belgian colonial rule in the Congo. The archives of the Ministry of Colonies were of course inaccessible to research concerning the post-1908 period. All this would change in the next decade: these gaps were to be filled, piece by piece, from the 1970s onwards.

## BELGIAN HISTORIANS AND THE HISTORY OF BELGIAN COLONIALISM SINCE CONGOLESE INDEPENDENCE

How did Belgium study the history of colonial Congo after this country's independence in 1960? Part of this historiographical work was produced in an institutional setting. From the 1960s onwards, the Royal Academy of Overseas Sciences (ARSOM) had changed quite a lot since the old days of the IRCB/ARSC. After the loss of the colony, this venerable institution quickly lost its political and 'utilitarian' dimension; logically, its composition also changed. Former politicians, businessmen and administrators disappeared gradually from this cenacle. By the 1970s and 1980s, it was composed exclusively of Belgian and foreign academics. The ARSOM extended its scope to the whole of the so-called "Third World" and thereby shifted its attention away from the Congo, Rwanda and Burundi, which originally had been its predominant centre of interest. Nevertheless, since the Independence days, the Academy still continued to publish numerous monographs and articles concerning the history of the Belgian Congo. Many of these contributions found their origin in initiatives by Jean Stengers, who regularly organized important colloquia under the ARSOM's aegis<sup>22</sup>, and who invited Belgian or foreign scholars as guest speakers at the Academy's habitual *séances*. Needless to say, the public echo of these scientific activities was quite limited. Other works published on the 'history' of colonial Congo were far more successful in this respect. Journalists or other persons who had known colonial Congo personally published some books pertaining to the ex-colony, not without the zest of nostalgia and retrospective eulogy<sup>23</sup>. Some former colonial civil servants wrote their memoirs, mostly concerning the turbulent decolonization<sup>24</sup> or persons who had been engaged personally in the colonial adventure started to produce 'historical' studies on their previous domain of action (for example André Lederer, a former transport specialist, published extensively on the history of colonial transport<sup>25</sup>; Louis-François Vanderstraeten, a former officer of the colonial army, published several studies on the history of the Force Publique<sup>26</sup>; medical doctors produced a huge work on the history of medicine<sup>27</sup> and agronomists did so for their own field<sup>28</sup>; railroad amateurs published an extensive work on colonial railroad history<sup>29</sup>). In the eyes of the general, uniformed public, this kind of books "told the history of the Congo"; the important advances in historiography went largely unnoticed.

Indeed, some Belgian scholars made remarkable contributions to the history of colonial Congo. Teaching or research assignments in late colonial or in independent Congo played an important part in the orientation of their scientific activity. The Brussels historian Pierre Salmon (1926-2005), for example, originally trained as a scholar of ancient Greek history, became involved in African history because of his appointment in different central African universities in the late 1950s and early 1960s. He specialized in the publication and analysis of diaries and correspondence of early European travellers, pioneers and colonial administrators in the Congo<sup>30</sup>. Léon de Saint-Moulin (1932), professor at the University of Kinshasa, wrote many studies on Congolese demographic and urban history. Jacques Vanderlinden (1932), a brilliant ULB jurist, originally studied traditional and modern African law systems, but also became interested in the history of coloniza-

tion. Among his many books, one notices a history of Congolese uranium diplomacy in 1940-1955, an edition of diplomatic documents concerning the Belgian Congo and an extensive biography of an important governor general of the Belgian Congo, Pierre Ryckmans – the first study of this kind to be published<sup>31</sup>. In 1992, Philippe Marechal, a historian of Ghent University who became head of the History Department of the above mentioned Tervuren Museum, published a remarkable book on the history of the early military operations in the CFS, shattering the traditional *images d'Epinal* that till then dominated the vision of the early occupation of the Congo<sup>32</sup>.

Historians were not the only scholars to look back into the colonial past. Some economists also did so, using statistics and official published documents, most notably Gaston Vandewalle (Ghent University) and André Huybrechts, Jean-Louis Lacroix and Jean-Philippe Peemans (all three graduates from the Catholic University of Louvain, albeit from different theoretical perspectives)<sup>33</sup>. Every overview of Belgian historiography concerning the Congo should also mention the important contributions made by missionaries living or having resided for many years in this country. A wealth of knowledge was thus accumulated by such *érudits* as, for example, Frans Bontinck (who was professor at the University of Kinshasa)<sup>34</sup>, Léon Verbeek and Honoré Vinck. Their work is concerned, *inter alia*, with pre-colonial Congo, church and missionary history, and the history of education in the Congo.

But the most important contributions to the history of colonial Congo undoubtedly came from Jean-Luc Vellut (1936), a historian trained at the Université Catholique de Louvain (UCL) (amongst his teachers was the above mentioned Louis Jadin) and at the Australian National University (Canberra). After his PhD in 1965, he obtained teaching appointments at the still young and expanding Congolese universities, first in Kinshasa and then at the University of Lubumbashi. There he not only helped to create a thriving History Department, which was to produce excellent Congolese historians (see below), but he also came into contact with the local written sources and with the Congolese dimension of colonial history. He not only thoroughly researched the archives of the former Belgian Ministry of Colonies (which, by now, had been opened to scientific research, albeit with an annoying 50-year limit to accessibility, somewhat tempered by possible derogations), but he also has visited indefatigably foreign archives mainly in France, Great Britain and Portugal. On coming back to Belgium in 1972, he became Professor of African History at his *Alma Mater*, the UCL. Up to this day, he has published extensively on a wide range of subjects, starting from pre-colonial structures<sup>35</sup>, over the economic<sup>36</sup>, social<sup>37</sup>, religious<sup>38</sup> and diplomatic<sup>39</sup> aspects of both the CFS and Belgian colonial period, to basic reference tools such as research guides and bibliographies<sup>40</sup>. His perspective is all-round: he not only focuses on the Belgian face of colonialism, but also on what happened on the Congolese terrain. Moreover, being always in touch with the main research trends abroad, his work has gained a widespread international diffusion and reputation. The synthesis on Congolese colonial history he is currently preparing will no doubt be a landmark in the historiography of Belgian colonialism.

But apart from the work of Stengers and Vellut (and of the handful of colleagues we just mentioned), Belgian interest in colonial historiography cannot be described as overwhelming. In fact, the great majority of Belgian professional historians showed no real interest in this subject, or at least did not deem it necessary to devote part of their own research activity to it. Colonial history was considered ‘exotic’ and was never really “integrated” into the course of Belgian history. Colonial and, even more, non-European or world history only occupied a marginal place in the curricula of the history departments. The history of Congo itself (be it colonial or pre-colonial), never attracted much attention from the public or even academic authorities. A telling example of this neglect was the fact that the anthropologist Jan Vansina (1929), since the 1950s author of many important studies on traditional African societies, was not given the opportunity of continuing his research and teaching career in a Belgian university; consequently, he left Belgium and started to work at the University of Wisconsin, becoming one of the world’s greatest authorities on pre-colonial African history. The conclusion seems obvious: the Belgian historical milieu missed an extraordinary opportunity to stimulate colonial history from an anthropological perspective. Meanwhile, the Belgian public’s view on the Congo remained largely unchanged, shaped by school reminiscences, clichés and popular ‘history’ books.

#### THE CONTRIBUTION OF FOREIGN HISTORIANS TO THE HISTORY OF BELGIAN COLONIALISM

During the 1970s and 1980s, several important contributions to Belgian and Congolese colonial history originated in other countries than Belgium. While interest in this subject was waning in the latter country, it steadily grew abroad. Indeed, probably no other field of Belgian history attracted so many non-Belgian authors. Some of these new studies continued the rather “classical” approach of the 1950s and early 1960s, focusing on institutional and diplomatic history (see, for example, the work on *The Rulers of Belgian Congo* by Gann and Duignan, published in 1979; Emerson’s biography of Leopold II; Collins’s study on Leopold and the Upper Nile; Cookey’s book on *Britain and the Congo Question 1885-1913*; etc.<sup>41</sup>). The synthesis of Congolese history written by the French historian Robert Cornevin, *Histoire du Congo (Léopoldville)*, which went through successive reprints, also offers a very classical, even “conservative” view of the subject – in fact a rather uninspired and uninspiring compilation<sup>42</sup>. Others books on the contrary, some of them written by non-historians, inaugurated a tradition of critical writings and stressed the negative aspects of Belgian colonization. One should mention here Ascherson’s recently reprinted biography of king Leopold II, *The King Incorporated*<sup>43</sup>, but also two syntheses on the history of the Belgian Congo written from a Marxist perspective: the stimulating book by the French author Auguste Maurel (under the pseudonym, Michel Merlier), and more recently, Jacques Depelchin’s work<sup>44</sup>.

But the main advances in our knowledge came from professional historians, who shunned large-scale syntheses, but explored new paths, with original approaches: they

produced extremely valuable studies on some aspects of colonial Congo. Many of these books and articles were published by US historians (just as other scholars from that same country – political scientists, anthropologists, sociologists – also made some fundamental contributions to the study of independent Congo: Young, Turner, Weiss, J. and W. MacGaffey, Lemarchand, Gould, Callaghy, Schatzberg, etc. – but this aspect is beyond our scope). Thanks to these scientists we now know a great deal more on subjects as: city development (Bruce Fetter)<sup>45</sup>; railways and British interests (S.E. Katzenellenbogen)<sup>46</sup>; colonial labour policy (John Higginson, David Northrup, Samuel Nelson and William Samarin)<sup>47</sup>; Christian missions (Marvin Markowitz)<sup>48</sup>; medical practices and gender aspects (Nancy Hunt)<sup>49</sup>; etc. A historian of Polish origin, who has taught in Lubumbashi for a while, and now is at Laval University in Quebec, Bogumil Jewsiewicki, has intensively published on class structure and economic activities in colonial Congo (from a Marxist perspective), before turning, in most recent years, to the analysis of contemporary social and cultural practices in Congo<sup>50</sup>. The German anthropologist, now at the University of Amsterdam, Johannes Fabian, has published – *inter alia* – an important book on language problems and policy in Belgian Congo<sup>51</sup>. The crossroads between diplomacy and economic interests were not neglected either, the United States being the main protagonist in this research. The American historian Jonathan Helmreich studied the relations between the US, Belgium and the Congo (1940-1960); the uranium question figuring prominently in his research. Another US scholar, David N. Gibbs, also concentrated on US policy towards Congo and its mineral wealth in the decade before and after Congolese independence – more or less the same subject that was thoroughly analyzed by the German historian Gerhard Mollin<sup>52</sup>.

Another important turn in the historiography of colonial Congo has occurred in the 1970s and 1980s. From then on, Congolese historians have begun to produce important contributions to the history of their own country. As we have said, the Belgian colonizer started creating universities only a few years before the end of his rule, but historical studies were not included in this educational program. The first full-fledged History department in Congo was created in 1966, at the Lovanium University of Kinshasa; two other university centres, in Lubumbashi and Kisangani, only offered the two first years of studies in history<sup>53</sup>. In 1971, all these history departments were merged into a single one, located at the National Congolese University at Lubumbashi. Inevitably, foreign (mostly Belgian) historians staffed these departments in the beginnings (and until ca. 1976); after the graduation of the first Congolese historians, in the late 1960s and early 1970s, the best elements soon joined the staff and made it up entirely since 1976. Some Congolese historians also obtained their doctoral degree in foreign countries such as France or the United States.

Understandably, the work of these Congolese historians focused on the aspects that largely were absent from the ‘first generation’ studies on colonial history produced in Belgium. The *vécu* of the Congolese population in the social, economic and cultural field figured prominently in their studies based both the local sources (including oral traditions) and the rich archives of the Ministry of Colonies in Brussels. To mention

just a few of those Congolese historians who had the opportunity of publishing (part of) their work in Belgium, France, the US or in international journals: Jacob Sabakinu Kivilu (historical demography and social conditions), Tshibangu Kabet Musas (economic and social conditions during the crisis of the 1930s), Tshund'Olela Epanya (economic aspects), Donatien Dibwe dia Mwembu (social history of Katanga miner families), Jeannot Mokili Danga Kassa (agricultural history), Jean-Marie Mutamba Makombo (rise of independence movements), Osumaka Likaka (cotton culture), Busugutsala Gandayi (educational policies), Charles Tshimanga (youth and education); Mulambu Mvuluya (forced cultures and revolts), Mumbanza Mwa Bawele (transition of social and cultural structures in the early colonial period), Khonde Ngoma Di Mbumba Côme (history of Congo's first capital, Boma), etc.

It is of course impossible to mention here the full titles of these studies: they can be found in Vellut's already mentioned reference work, but also – most significantly – in the extensive bibliography of Isidore N'Daywel's *Histoire générale du Congo*.<sup>54</sup> This book, almost 1000 pages long, is an important landmark in Congolese historiography, since it is the first general synthesis on Congolese history (from oldest times to the present) *written by a Congolese historian*. Of 'classical' facture<sup>55</sup>, this book gives a wealth of factual information on this country's history; it, in a certain way, crowns the work of this first generation of Congolese historians. Another recent synthesis on Congolese history by a Congolese historian (Nzongola's critical book *The Congo from Leopold to Kabila*) is rather sketchy for the colonial period<sup>56</sup>. Still another overview of this subject history was also written by a Congolese historian, C. Didier Gondola. Unfortunately, this book, short and superficial, offers no new insights<sup>57</sup>.

It nevertheless has to be admitted that this promising development lost some momentum in the last decade or two, because of Congo's catastrophic situation. Its formal economy has fallen into a deep crisis; the many years of squandering, corruption and maladministration under the Mobutu dictatorship and the civil war that has torn the country apart after its fall in 1997 have resulted in a grave paralysis of State functions. Universities are, of course, amongst the many victims of this tragedy, and so is scientific research. The many talented Congolese historians do not enjoy the normal material conditions that make historiography possible. They even have to fight hard to keep historical education and research going on a minimal level. Devoid of financial means, the Congolese national archives also struggle to survive, thanks to the efforts of their director, Antoine Lumenganeso, but the 'paper memory' of the colonial period is, in Congo itself, reduced to a minimum. Some archives of the Belgian local administration, most notably the massive document collection of the Governor General's services, were shipped to Belgium on the eve of independence ... and only recently have they been inventoried by the Archives of the Belgian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, where they finally found shelter. But in any case, visiting foreign archives is an almost impossible dream for most of the Congolese historians that have stuck by this rather unprofitable activity ...

## RECENT CONTROVERSIES ON LEOPOLDIAN CONGO

Only on a few rare occasions is historical research drawn into the limelight of public attention. This mostly happens when an author touches upon a controversial subject in a controversial manner. Recently, the history of colonial Congo enjoyed this rare privilege. A best-selling book by US writer Adam Hochschild, *King Leopold's Ghosts*, published in 1998, has triggered such a process. The turmoil caused by this book was not limited to Belgium (although the reactions there were, of course, more pronounced than elsewhere). On the contrary, it echoed through the media in most other European countries and even as far as Japan, where Belgian subjects rarely succeed in making the newspapers headlines ... To understand what happened, we have to come back to our (necessary) digression concerning Belgian official attitude towards the "red rubber" question. Despite Stengers' scientific work, the orthodox discourse (through statements, school books, etc.) as well as the general public view concerning Leopold's (and Belgian) rule in Congo had barely changed. This view can be summarized as follows: maybe some 'excesses' had been committed in the CFS, but they were excusable because of a whole range of elements (isolation of the colonial agents, financial weakness of the CFS, etc.); such abuses had also existed in other colonies, and they had only been temporary; the King was not aware of their existence, and he surely did not want them; etc. The essential conclusion remained unshaken: Belgium had brought progress and civilization to this unfortunate region.

But in the beginning of the 1980s, two researchers, neither of them 'professional' historians, dug into the archives (mainly of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs) in order to examine what really happened during the CFS period. Ironically, it was a Belgian diplomat (who had been posted, *inter alia*, in Africa), Jules Marchal (1924-2003), who was one of the first to do so. His interest in the subject had been awakened by an article published in a Liberian newspaper telling the story of the Congo atrocities. As so many of his predecessors (cf. the many examples we cited), he cabled this information to his Ministry in Brussels. Getting no reply, so he told later<sup>58</sup>, he started to look for the truth on his own initiative. After painstaking research, he published a series of books under the pseudonym of A.M. Delathuy (1985-1989). Some years later, a French version of his books was published, now under his real name; moreover, this same author also published a series of books concerning the story of forced labour in Belgian Congo<sup>59</sup>. Even before the publication of Marchal's first book, a Flemish anthropologist who had done fieldwork in Congo, Daniel Vangroenweghe (1938), also got interested in the Leopoldian period in Congo. His research was also published in 1985, under the title *Rood rubber. Leopold II en zijn Kongo*<sup>60</sup>. That same year, he also published the original and integral version of Casement's report, in a university series directed by Jean-Luc Vellut<sup>61</sup>. Since then, Vangroenweghe has kept digging into the murky Leopoldian past, as shown by his most recent book, analyzing the infamous "Stokes affair" of 1895, one of the many examples of dysfunctions in the CFS<sup>62</sup>.

These 1985-1988 books were important, because for the first time the Congo atrocities had become the subject of separate and in-depth monographs. They were carefully

documented and analyzed the CFS atrocities in detail. So they did not pass unnoticed in Belgium. In a program on the Flemish television, for instance, Vangroenweghe was opposed to Stengers, who defended the position that the atrocities had not been as widespread as the author pretended. Overall, these books changed the view of a small part of Belgian public opinion, but without pervading the deeper strata of the population or changing the official position of Belgian authorities on the matter. On the other hand, professional historians, aware of previous scientific work on the CFS, were not surprised by the facts brought to light by these books; they only comforted their already established opinion on Leopold's regime in the Congo. Nevertheless, the Belgian historical establishment also had some objections against the *methodological* aspects of Marchal's work. His voluminous books essentially were indigestible compilations of documents, overloaded with lengthy citations. Synthesis, interpretation and contextualization – the essence of real historical analysis – were lacking. Consequently, the historical guild did not consider nor present his books as canonical historical research on the CFS, because historical analysis is something entirely different from 'prosecutor's work'...

The result of this situation was that apparently little had changed in Belgium's relation to its colonial past. There still lacked a large-scale, in depth historical work, treating all aspects of Leopoldian Congo (of which the atrocities were only one, albeit an important aspect) – a work that, so to say, could be "endorsed" by the Belgian scientific community and that might influence public authorities in their own discourses and statements. Seen from abroad, 'Belgium' as a whole still seemed to stick by its old 'negationism', refusing to face facts and deliberately organizing a "conspiracy of silence" – a view that was only partially correct, since such an attitude did not exist in professional historical milieus. Nevertheless, the difficulties in getting access to the archives of the former Ministry of Colonies and of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Belgium (partly due to understaffing), coupled with the heavy consultation procedures that still existed such as the 50-year rule, rightly or wrongly contributed to the impression that the Belgian authorities held to a culture of secrecy and did not want researchers digging into Belgium's colonial past. Consequently, the Congo atrocities remained an object of foreign indignation, reflected either in scientific publications, such as the 1990 article published by the Dutch anthropologist Jan Breman entitled "Congo, a state of terror"<sup>63</sup>, or in more popular writings.

At the end of the 1990s, a foreign 'non historian', the American writer Adam Hochschild, once again took up this Belgian-Congolese subject, and denounced the Congo atrocities. He thus followed (maybe unknowingly) the long established tradition that we have documented above and that was never really extinguished, all efforts of the Belgian Foreign Ministry notwithstanding. He also continued the tradition of critical writings concerning the colony we mentioned above. But this time, the talented Hochschild produced a well researched, finely written and very readable book, which immediately became a world-wide best-seller (another book, in the same vein, written by the British author Evans largely passed unnoticed)<sup>64</sup>. For the *connoisseurs*, it contained few

or no new things: not only Marchal's and Vangroenweghe's, but even Stengers' works were heavily relied upon. A polemic nevertheless arose concerning some of the author's objectionable statements, more particularly his use of the term 'holocaust' to describe what happened in the CFS, and, secondly, his 'educated guess' that Leopold's actions caused the death of 10 million Congolese. Belgian specialists such as Stengers and Velut essentially (and, in my opinion, rightly) criticized these two elements, but unfortunately the discussion got entangled into these aspects, thereby missing what could have been (but still can become) a welcome 'wake-up' call for broader audiences, endorsed by the scientific community.

Indeed, Hochschild's book reached very large audiences, even (and foremost) in Belgium itself. Its effect was amplified by a broad echo in the written press and even by a much discussed television program, produced by the BBC. Peter Bates' film *White King, Red Rubber, Black Death* was broadcasted in many European countries, for instance in Great Britain, in France and Germany (Arte-TV), and of course in Belgium itself. It fuelled an already heated discussion in broad circles of Belgian public opinion<sup>65</sup>. An old reflex was awakened: Belgian official authorities were indignant; so were circles of ex-colonial civil servants or employees, some journalists, and many more or less patriotic Belgians. Some of them felt attacked in their national honour and reactivated arguments that, *in some cases*, showed *some* similarity with the ones that had been formulated by the Belgian diplomatic authorities since the early 1920's (if not by Leopold himself...).

In the meantime, Belgian public opinion and the political establishment had been confronted with yet another aspect of the colonial past. In 1999, the Belgian sociologist Ludo De Witte published a book that caused turmoil, not only in Belgium, but also in other countries<sup>66</sup>. Using important new documents found in the Archives of the Foreign Ministry, the author stated that the Belgian authorities had ordered the murder of Congo's first Prime Minister, Patrice Lumumba in January 1961. Strictly speaking, these events fall outside the scope of this chapter, since they have to do with *postcolonial* history. Nevertheless, they have to be mentioned, since they fuelled a heated debate in Belgium. In 2000, a Parliamentary Enquiry Commission was created by the House of Representatives. Political authorities made an appeal to professional historians in order to 'look for the truth' in this matter. After almost two years of research in hitherto inaccessible archives, these historians came to the conclusion that the 'moral responsibility' fell on the Belgian authorities of that time<sup>67</sup>. In short: at the turn of the century, Belgium was confronted twice with its colonial past. Newspapers, media and the general public showed more and more interest in their forefathers' actions in the Congo. The great public success of an exhibition on Belgium's colonial past, organized in the Tervuren Museum, which, at last, started to change its presentation after so many decades of immobility, was a clear sign of this growing overall interest in the colonial past<sup>68</sup>.

## A REVIVAL OF BELGIAN HISTORIOGRAPHY ON COLONIALISM?

This was only the most visible aspect of changing national attitudes. During the last ten or fifteen years of the 20th century, the Belgian historical world itself was shedding its indifference towards the Congo. A historian of Congolese origin, but who has been living in Belgium for many years, Mathieu Zana Aziza Etambala, has written many fine studies on the colonial period, mostly focused on the history of Catholic missions and on the contacts between Congolese and Belgians<sup>69</sup>. Very recently, race relations and gender aspects have inspired some innovative studies, such as those by the historians Valérie Piette and Catherine Jacques (Belgian women in the Congo), Lissia Jeurissen (mulattoes), Amandine Lauro (sexual relations between white men and Congolese women), and by the anthropologist Bambi Ceuppens (perceptions of the Congolese by the Belgians and vice versa)<sup>70</sup>. In this revival of colonial history cultural aspects figure prominently. The following aspects of this vast domain have been successfully studied during these last few years: colonial architecture (Johan Lagae), colonial photography and colonial art (Françoise Morimont and Patricia Van Schuylenbergh), colonial film (Guido Convents), the history of colonial anthropology and museology in Belgium (Maarten Couttenier), the history of missions and propaganda (Luc Vints), the evolution of educational policy in the Congo (Marc Depaepe and Lies Van Rompaey)<sup>71</sup>.

Other aspects were also being analyzed. The Belgian colonial world after 1908 (administration, enterprises, policies) still largely remains unknown. The author of these lines has tried to fill some of these gaps, by publishing a few contributions on Belgian colonial policy, on big business and on the impact of the colony on Belgium itself<sup>72</sup>. What happened on the colonial terrain itself has been analyzed by such authors as Bruno Demeulder (studying the labour policy of big enterprises<sup>73</sup>) and Marie-Bénédicte Dembour (studying the experience of Belgian colonial administrators, through an anthropological approach of their memories<sup>74</sup>). Hein Vanhee and Geert Castryck, two historians of the University of Ghent (who have also been trained in other disciplines, respectively in anthropology and Oriental studies), are currently working on some large-scale studies of Belgian colonial rule in the Congo.

A few years ago, these two authors produced a stimulating essay on the state of the art and the future perspectives of colonial historiography in Belgium, introducing a special issue of the Belgian review of contemporary history, consisting of several articles on Belgian colonial history<sup>75</sup>. This certainly is the symptom of the fact that something is indeed changing in the Belgian historical world. But in comparison to other former imperial countries, Belgian colonial historiography is lagging behind. The heavy institutional and political weight attached to the Leopoldian heritage had something to do with this. Much remains to be done, but luckily, new perspectives and approaches (anthropology, gender studies, cultural studies) undoubtedly will fertilize historical work on colonial Congo. The new generation of Belgian historians has never known colonialism. They do not want to “prove” anything and do not have any special feelings

of guilt, nostalgia or justification towards what happened in the Congo under Belgian rule. In their eyes, there is only one thing left in eulogy and in national pride: these old fetters, which have influenced so deeply the beginnings of colonial historiography, have themselves become objects of scientific enquiry. Understanding and explaining colonialism, a complex phenomenon of societal contact: this is the huge task that lays ahead. If their new approach and the resulting new insights percolate through to public opinion, politicians and school children, these historians will not have wasted their time.

## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> J.-P. Lefevre, *Une ancienne colonie, le Congo*, in *A la conquête du temps. Cycle 10/12*, Ransart, p. B9.
- <sup>2</sup> E. Vandermissen, *Léopold II et Beernaert d'après leur correspondance inédite de 1884 à 1894*, vol. I, Brussels 1920, p. 99.
- <sup>3</sup> O. Louwers, *Hommage au Roi Léopold II, fondateur de l'empire colonial belge*, in *Biographie coloniale belge*, vol. I, Brussels 1948, p. 5, p. 13, pp. 16-17.
- <sup>4</sup> Cited in G. Vanthemsche, *Belgique et Congo: empreintes d'une colonie (des années 1880 aux années 1980)*, Brussels 2006 (forthcoming).
- <sup>5</sup> J. Willequet, *Le Congo belge et la Weltpolitik (1894-1914)*, Brussels 1962, p. 499.
- <sup>6</sup> H.D. Ziman, *Stanley and King Leopold*, "The Daily Telegraph", 14 June 1957.
- <sup>7</sup> Archives of the Belgian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (AMFA), AF-I-26 (1957), J. Willequet to J. Delvaux de Fenffe (Director General of Political Affairs of the Ministry), 19 June 1957.
- <sup>8</sup> "Bulletin des Séances de l'IRCB" (hereafter "Bull. IRCB"), 12, nr. 1, 1941, p. 46.
- <sup>9</sup> Volume VIII of what is now called the *Biographie Belge d'Outre-Mer (BBOM)* has been published in 1998 (Brussels, ARSOM); the next volume is being prepared at the moment.
- <sup>10</sup> "Bull. IRCB", 1, nr. 1, 1930, p. 26.
- <sup>11</sup> See, for example, R.S. Thomson, *Fondation de l'Etat Indépendant du Congo. Un chapitre du partage de l'Afrique*, Brussels 1933, p. 354.
- <sup>12</sup> "Bull. IRCB", 16, nr. 3, 1945, p. 516.
- <sup>13</sup> "Bull. IRCB", 23, nr. 4, 1952, pp. 1064-1066 and 24, nr. 2, 1953, pp. 471-473.
- <sup>14</sup> Detailed biography and bibliography in J.-M. Duvosquel - A. Dierkens - G. Vanthemsche (eds.), *Belgique, Europe, Afrique. Deux siècles d'histoire contemporaine. Méthode et réflexions. Recueil d'articles de Jean Stengers*, Brussels 2005, (published also as a special issue of "Revue Belge de Philologie et d'Histoire", nos. 1-2, 2004). For his activities in IRCB/ARSOM see J. Vanderlinden, *Jean Stengers*, "Bulletin des Séances de l'ARSOM", 49, nr. 3, 2003, pp. 399-407.
- <sup>15</sup> A. Rubbens, *Jadin (Louis)*, in *BBOM*, Brussels 1977, vol. VIIb, col. 213-216.
- <sup>16</sup> A. Roeykens, *Le génie de Léopold II et la Conférence géographique de Brussels de 1876*, in *La Conférence de géographie de 1876. Recueil d'études*, Brussels 1976, pp. 375-413.
- <sup>17</sup> "The lucid exposé given by the author [Stengers] on the obscurities of this subject produces an almost painful impression: his paper projects a dubious light on certain actions of the King by putting into question their rectitude. We would like to attenuate this impression made upon the reader by [etc.];" V. Gelders, *A propos de la communication de M. J. Stengers sur l'histoire des finances congolaises*, "Bull. IRCB", 25, nr. 1, 1954.
- <sup>18</sup> "We should state explicitly in the constitutional text our engagement (...) to exercise the rights [of sovereignty in Congo] that we have received, without renouncing them" – but this should be done "in the primordial interest of the Congolese population"; J. Stengers, *A propos de la révision de l'article 1er de la Constitution*, "Bull. IRCB", 25, nr. 5, 1954, pp. 1362-1363.

- <sup>19</sup> R. Slade, *King Leopold's Congo. Aspects of the Development of race Relations in the Congo Independent State*, Oxford 1962. (she also authored a study on the history of the missions in Congo: *English-speaking Missions in the Congo Independent State*, London 1961); R. Anstey, *King Leopold's Legacy. The Congo under Belgian Rule 1908-1960*, Oxford 1966; see also Id., *Britain and the Congo in the 19th Century*, Oxford 1962.
- <sup>20</sup> We will mention only a few of his books (for the articles see the above mentioned bibliography): J. Stengers, *Combien le Congo a-t-il coûté à la Belgique?*, Brussels 1957; Id., *Belgique et Congo. L'élaboration de la Charte coloniale*, Brussels 1963; J. Stengers W. Roger Louis, *E.D. Morel's History of the Congo Reform Movement*, Oxford 1968.
- <sup>21</sup> J. Stengers, *Congo, mythes et réalités. 100 ans d'histoire*, Gembloux 1989, (second, enlarged edition in 2005).
- <sup>22</sup> *L'expansion belge sous Léopold Ier (1831-1865). Recueil d'études*, 1965; *La Conférence Géographique de 1876. Recueil d'études*, 1976; *Le centenaire de l'Etat Indépendant du Congo. Recueil d'études*, 1988; *Le Congo Belge durant la Seconde Guerre Mondiale. Recueil d'études*, 1983; *Congo 1955-1960. Recueil d'études*, 1992.
- <sup>23</sup> J. Kestergat, *Quand le Zaïre s'appelait Congo. L'aventure coloniale belge*, Brussels 1985; M. Massoz, *Le Congo de papa (1951-1960)*, Bressoux 1982; Id., *Le Congo de Léopold II (1878-1908)*, Liège 1989; Id., *Le Congo des Belges*, Liège 1994.
- <sup>24</sup> E.g. A. Schöller, *Congo 1959-1960*, Gembloux 1982; G. Jacques, *Lualaba. Histoires de l'Afrique profonde*, Brussels 1995.
- <sup>25</sup> E.g. A. Lederer, *Histoire de la navigation au Congo*, Tervuren 1965.
- <sup>26</sup> E.g. L.F. Vanderstraeten, *La Force Publique congolaise de 1918 à 1960*, in *Actes du colloque d'histoire militaire belge (1830-1980)*, Brussels 1981, pp. 193-206.
- <sup>27</sup> P.G. Janssens et al. (eds.), *Médecine et hygiène en Afrique centrale de 1885 à nos jours*, 2 vols., Brussels 1992.
- <sup>28</sup> V. Drachoussoff (ed.), *Le développement rural en Afrique centrale 1908-1960/1962*, 2 vols., Brussels 1991.
- <sup>29</sup> C. Blanchart et al., *Le rail au Congo belge*, 2 vols., Brussels 1993, p. 400.
- <sup>30</sup> See, for example, one of his last publications: P. Salmon, *Lettres et carnets de route de pionniers belges. Etude des mentalités coloniales*, "Bull. ARSOM", 50, nr. 2, 2004, pp. 167-182 (of course with references to his own previous publications).
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## SOURCES

The “Congo atrocities”, foreign opinion and Belgian reactions, some illustrations

## Document 1

In 1916, le Comte de Ramaix, high official of the Belgian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, writes to Baron Beyens, Minister of Foreign Affairs:

*“Beaucoup de personnes même parmi les Anglais (...) se sont demandées si ces deux personnages [=Casement and Morel] n’étaient pas des agents aux gages de l’Allemagne dont la mission aurait consisté à nous brouiller avec l’Angleterre à propos du Congo. (...) Elles font remarquer que dès 1911, Morel qui se rendait compte que la Congo Reform Association devrait bientôt cesser sa campagne, les réformes si bruyamment revendiquées ayant été introduites par l’Administration Congolaise dès la reprise de la Colonie, commença à prôner un rapprochement anglo-allemand sur la base d’un partage du bassin conventionnel du Congo”.*

“Many persons, even amongst the British (...) have asked themselves if both these persons (= Morel and Casement) were not German agent whose mission it was to arouse some quarrels with England concerning the Congo. (...) They noticed that from 1911 on, Morel, who was aware of the fact that the Congo Reform Association was soon to end its campaign, since the reforms that had been so loudly asked for, had been introduced by the Congolese Administration, began to defend and propose an Anglo-German alliance on the basis of a partition of the Congo conventional basin”.

Source: *AMAE*, AF-I-26 (1876-1916), de Ramaix to Baron Beyens, 24.08.1916.

## Document 2

In a report dating from January 1918, the Belgian consul in Johannesburg, Pierre Forthomme, wrote that some people once more had started to mention the “Congo atrocities”. The Belgian Foreign Ministry gives the following guidelines:

*“La plupart des abus invoqués contre l’EIC étaient, ou imaginaires, ou exagérés. [This sentence, mentioned in the first draft of the letter, was deleted from the final version, while the next sentence was added] Il est désormais avéré que la campagne contre l’EIC n’était point inspirée par un souci désintéressé du sort des aborigènes. N’a-t-on pas appris depuis la guerre que les deux anciens chefs du mouvement anticongolais étaient deux séides de l’Allemagne et travaillaient dans son intérêt, qui était de nous brouiller avec l’Angleterre et d’entraîner celle-ci à provoquer un remaniement du statut territorial de l’Afrique. Malgré quelques abus inhérents à toutes les jeunes colonies et plus excusables pour l’EIC que pour toute autre étant donné les conditions de son existence et les faiblesses que lui imposait son statut international irrationnel, l’EIC peut se prévaloir d’une œuvre civilisatrice magnifique. (...) La Belgique n’a cependant pas à discuter le régime de l’EIC ni à se disculper de ses erreurs. Elle n’en était en rien responsable, car elle n’avait aucune part dans l’Administration de cet Etat. Bien mieux, quand elle a appris que tout n’y était pas parfait, elle a invoqué les droits que le Roi Léopold II lui avait accordés pour exiger d’en devenir maîtresse et d’en régler, désormais, les destinées”.*

Most of the abuses invoked against the CFS were either imaginary or exaggerated. [This sentence, mentioned in the first draft of the letter, was deleted from the final version, while the next sentence was added] It is now evident that the campaign against the CFS was not inspired by a genuine concern for the fate of the aboriginals. Hasn't one heard since the war that both former chiefs of the anti-Congolese movement were in fact agents of Germany and worked in its interest, which was to generate some disagreement between us and Great Britain and to lead the latter into a new partition of Africa. Notwithstanding some abuses, inevitable in young colonies and all the more excusable in the CFS's case given the conditions in which it had to live and given the weaknesses imposed upon it by an irrational international statute, the CFS produced an wonderful civilizing activity. (...) Nevertheless, Belgium is not bound to discuss the CFS regime, nor to explain away its mistakes, since it had no part in its Administration. Even better: when Belgium saw that not everything was perfect over there, it has invoked the rights that King Leopold had given to it in order to become the full master of this territory and to henceforth guide its destinies.

Source: *AA*, AE-2, n. 364, Ministry of Foreign Affairs to P. Forthomme, 04.1918. *AMAE*, AF-I-26 (1917-1927), idem, 14.05.1918.

#### Document 3

In 1919, Pierre Daye, a Belgian journalist and colonial propagandist and former officer of the Belgian colonial campaigns in central Africa during World War I), is on a colonial propaganda tour in the United States:

*“Je suis actuellement persuadé qu’il n’existe aucun courant d’opinion hostile au Congo ou à son administration dans ce pays. Il m’arrive parfois – fort rarement – que des gens me demandent s’il est vrai que, du temps de l’Etat Indépendant du Congo (EIC), il avait été commis des atrocités au Congo”.* In that case, he answered that they were *“des racontars favorisés par la propagande allemande”*.

“I am presently persuaded that in this country, no opinion movement exists that is hostile towards Congo or its administration. Very rarely some people ask me whether it is true that atrocities have been committed in the Congo during the Free State period”. In that case, he answered that they were “gossip stirred up by the German propaganda”.

Source: *AA*, AE-2, n. 364, P. Daye to the Minister of Colonies, 04.01.1919.

#### Document 4

In September 1919, a German publication, the *Deutsche Kolonial Zeitung*, published an article on Congo, with a picture of two children with their hands cut off. The Director General of the Ministry of Colonies reacts as follows:

*“Je pense (...) qu’il est préférable de ne pas relever cette calomnie. (...) les faits allégués se se-*

*raient produits il y a une vingtaine d'années: ils n'impressionnent plus. Il vaut mieux, s'il y a nécessité absolue, ne plus rouvrir ces discussions irritantes. Bien entendu, si une vraie campagne recommençait contre la gestion de l'Ancien EIC ou contre l'Administration Coloniale Belge, je soumettrai la question à un nouvel examen”.*

“I think (...) it is preferable not to react to this calumny. (...) the allegations are supposed to have taken place twenty years ago; they do not impress any more. If there is any absolute necessity, it is better not to reopen these irritant discussions. Of course, if a real campaign once again is being launched against the administration of the former CFS, than I will re-examine the question”.

Source: *AMEA*, AF-I-1 (1920-1921), Halewyck, Director General of Ministry of Colonies, to the Director of the Bureau d'Information Belge, 23.01.1920.

#### Document 5

In 1920, Paul Hymans, the Belgian Foreign Minister, sends a note on colonial policy to the main Belgian ambassadors. They don't have to be afraid of the allegations concerning the so-called “Congo atrocities”, he tells them:

*“Au contraire, cette question, n'ayez pas peur, à l'occasion, de la provoquer et de la rencontrer de front, elle ne gêne en rien le Gouvernement et il serait même bon que son opinion à ce sujet se répandit, afin de mettre fin à cette légende qui pèse si lourdement sur notre réputation».* The position of the Belgian government is as follows: *“Le régime de l'EIC ne fut peut-être pas parfait: il compte cependant à son actif beaucoup de mérites qu'on a trop laissés dans l'ombre».* Those who attacked the CFS were in fact German agents. *“Quoi qu'il en soit, la Belgique ne doit pas être rendue responsable des erreurs de l'EIC”.*

“On the contrary, don't be afraid, when necessary, to discuss this question and to handle it frankly. It does not embarrass the Government and it would be good if its opinion gets to be known, in order to put a halt to this legend that weighs so heavily on our reputation”. The position of the Belgian government is as follows: “Maybe the CFS regime was not perfect: it nevertheless had many merits that went unnoticed”. Those who attacked the CFS were in fact German agents. “Whatever it may be, Belgium must not be held responsible for the errors of the CFS”.

Source: *AMEA*, AF-I-1 (1920-1921), P. Hymans, Minister of Foreign Affairs, to the Belgian ambassadors in Paris, London and Washington, 06.05.1920.

#### Document 6

In 1926, the Belgian consul general in Barcelona signals attacks on the atrocities in the CFS published in the Spanish press. The comments pretend that Belgium is incapable of running a colony.

Source: *AMFA*, AF-I-1 (1925-1926), Ch. Bastin, Belgian consul general in Barcelona, to Emile Vandervelde, Minister of Foreign Affairs, 06.10.1925.

#### Document 7

In 1928, Belgian authorities ask their consul general in Sidney to react against negative appreciations of Belgian colonial policy in Congo published in the Australian press, echoing the campaign against the CFS.

Source: *AMFA*, AF-I-1 (1927-1928), P. Hymans, Minister of Foreign Affairs, to Segart, Belgian consul general in Sidney, 18.02.1928.

#### Document 8

In 1929, Octave Louwers, the Colonial Counsellor of the Belgian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, recommends great caution in handling the problems of forced labour on international discussion meetings:

*“La Belgique, sur qui pèse le souvenir du régime du caoutchouc, doit veiller d’une manière spéciale à échapper à toute critique. Il y a trop de puissances désireuses de pêcher en eau trouble”.*

“Belgium, still haunted by the reminiscence of the rubber regime, must carefully watch not be the object of critic. Too many powers try to take advantage of the situation”.

Source: *AMFA*, AF-I-17 (1926-1937), O. Louwers, *Note pour M. le Ministre*, 26.11.1929.

#### Document 9

In 1929, Prince Albert de Ligne, the Belgian ambassador in Washington, tells Foreign Minister Paul Hymans that the anti-Congo campaign has left deep marks in US public opinion. When speaking to a female journalist, the latter spoke of Leopold II as

*‘un ogre’*: “*elle m’avoua que, encore il n’y a pas longtemps, lorsqu’un enfant était méchant, on le menaçait d’appeler le roi Léopold II*”. Now this negative attitude in the US towards Congo starts to change, he adds.

*‘an ogre’* (=a man-eating monster): “she admitted that, not so long ago, when a child had been naughty, one tried to impress it by saying that King Leopold II would be called”.

Source: *AMFA*, AF-I-17 (1926-1937), Prince A. de Ligne, Belgian ambassador in Washington to P. Hymans, Minister of Foreign Affairs, 10.12.1929.

## Document 10

In 1930, the Dutch periodical *Licht* publishes an article on the CFS, with pictures of children with their hands cut off.

*“La propagande anti-belge en Hollande, s’empare volontiers des critiques malveillantes et même des mensonges que l’on répand encore de temps à autre”.*

“Anti-Belgian propaganda in Holland readily takes advantage of the malevolent critics and even the lies that are still being disseminated once in a while”.

Source: *AMEA*, AF-I-1 (1919-1930), E. Lauwers, Belgian consul general in Rotterdam to P. Hymans, Minister of Foreign Affairs, 04.01.1930.

## Document 11

In the 1930s, the British press publishes several articles concerning the “scandalous” private life of Leopold II and mentions the CFS atrocities. These are also recalled in the British Parliament in 1937.

Source: *AMEA*, AF-I-26 (928-1947), diverse press cuttings.

## Document 12

In 1944, a black American, Dr. Med. Joe T. Thomas, presenting himself as the “Representative of the Provisional Government of the Congo Free State” (founded in exile in 1906 in Birmingham, Alabama, and since then transferred to Cleveland Ohio, and to Detroit), writes a letter where he states that “the Belgian government does not own our territory. (...) Belgium stole our land and enslaved our native people. Belgian atrocities shocked the civilized world”.

Source: *AMEA*, AF-I-1 (1943-1945), J. Jennen to P.H. Spaak, Belgian Minister of Foreign Affairs, 15.11.1944.

## Document 13

In 1952, the former Belgian Minister of Colonies, Pierre Wigny, comes back from a visit in the US and recommends the launching of a propaganda campaign in order to gain some sympathy for the Belgian Congo.

*“Au sujet du Congo, j’ai été étonné de constater combien les calomnies mises en circulation contre Léopold II restent vivaces. Partout on parle encore des mains coupées et du caoutchouc rouge. Les livres classiques qui traitent de l’histoire contemporaine rappellent ces atrocités. La littérature courante entretient ces souvenirs d’enfance. Le livre de Bertrand Russell qui vient de paraître contient à l’égard du Congo une allusion des plus déplaisantes”.*

“Concerning Congo, I was struck by the liveliness of the slander against Leopold II. Everywhere one still mentions the cut hands and the red rubber. The class books on contemporary history still mention the atrocities. The current literature keeps these recollections alive. Bertrand Russell’s recently published book contains a most displeasing allusion concerning the Congo”.

Source: *AMEA*, AF-I-17 (1948-1953), P. Wigny, *Voyage aux Etats-Unis 7 mars – 23 avril 1952. Rapport de mission*, p. 2.

#### Document 14

In 1958, Jacques Willequet, the *Conseiller historique* of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, reacts to an article published in *The Times* of 27.10.1958, which, according to him, distorts reality.

*“Pourquoi certains abus inévitables de ce système furent-ils particulièrement reprochés à Léopold II, alors qu’ils étaient universels, et alors que le Roi, lui, avait été acculé par la détresse financière à un système que d’autres avaient adopté par pur égoïsme? La réponse est simple: le Congo était faible, vulnérable, mais riche, donc convoité (...) Et ainsi, quelques naïfs, souvent sincères, donnèrent à la campagne anticongolaise une façade idéaliste; derrière cette façade, des intérêts autrement palpables étaient en cause”.*

“Why was Leopold II blamed in particular for certain inevitable abuses of this system? The latter were in fact universal; and sheer financial distress forced the King to adopt such methods that others introduced by sheer egoism. The answer is evident: the Congo was weak, vulnerable, but rich, and thus coveted. (...) A handful of naïve people, often sincere, gave an idealistic façade to the anti-Congolese campaign; behind this façade, material interests were at stake”.

Source: *AMEA*, AF-I-1 (1958), J. Willequet, *Note pour P/Affaires coloniales*, 17.11.1958.

#### Document 15

In 1959, the British journalist, Peter Singleton-Gates, wants to publish the *The Black Diaries of Roger Casement*. The Belgian ambassador in London thinks that such a publication will be “particulièrement inopportune”, considering the tense political situation in the Congo. It could “servir d’aliment à une nouvelle campagne de calomnies”. Measures should be taken to combat the negative psychological effects of this publication. The Historical Counsellor of the Ministry finds that this document has no historical value whatsoever, since they mainly mention the author’s homosexual adventures.

*“Un passionné, un malade, un anormal – un malheureux. Un malheureux, certes, comme il y en a beaucoup, mais son cas eût exclusivement relevé de la psychiatrie, s’il n’avait été mêlé, de façon bien discutable, à la campagne anticongolaise et au mouvement national irlandais. (...) Avec la même passion, avec la même absence d’esprit critique, Roger Casement devait projeter, cristalliser dans la question congolaise et dans le mouvement national irlandais tout l’envers d’un personnage hanté par ses perversions, torturé par ses complexes de culpabilité”.*

“An emotional and sick man, an abnormal and unhappy person. Unhappy, certainly, as so many exist, but his case should have been treated by psychiatry, if he had not taken part, in a very disputable way, in the anti-Congolese campaign and in the Irish national movement. (...) With the same passion, with the same absence of critical mind, Roger Casement has projected, crystallized in the Congolese question and in the Irish national movement the dark side of his personality haunted by perversion, tortured by his guilt complexes”.

Source: *AMFA*, AF-I-26 (1959), R. Van Meerbeke, Belgian ambassador in London to Pierre Wigny, Minister of Foreign Affairs, 02.02.1959; *AMFA*, AF-I-1 (1959), *Les “Carnets intimes” de Roger Casement*, note written by the “Service historique” of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (= J. Willequet), 03.1959.

#### Document 16

In 1959, a meeting is being held at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

*“M. Xhronet rappelle qu’il a été entendu avec Inforcongo [the official information agency of Belgian Congo] qu’une étude serait établie avec des éléments de réponses que nos Chefs de poste pourraient opposer aux éternelles critiques de l’administration de Léopold II au Congo. N’y a-t-il pas lieu d’établir une collaboration entre le service historique du Département et Inforcongo pour cette étude?”*

“M. Xhronet reminds the fact that it has been agreed upon with Inforcongo [the official information agency of Belgian Congo] that a study should be made containing the elements of response that our diplomatic heads of post should oppose to the eternal critics of the Leopoldian administration of the Congo. Would it not be advisable to establish a collaboration between the History service of the Department and Inforcongo for this study?”

Source: *AMFA*, AF-I-1 (1959), “Compte rendu de la réunion tenue le 19.02.1959, au cabinet de M. J. Delvaux de Fenffe, Directeur général”.

#### Document 17

In 1959, Pierre Wigny, the Belgian Minister of Foreign Affairs has heard that the historian Ronald Robinson intends to publish a book on the history of imperialism in Africa. Wigny writes to the Belgian ambassador in London:

*“Il faudrait éviter que ne soient répétées à nouveau, à propos de la période léopoldienne, les inexactitudes répandues par Bertrand Russell, entre autres. Il me paraît pourtant délicat d’approcher un homme de science pour l’empêcher” de publier certaines choses; en revanche, il me paraît souhaitable de trouver une occasion permettant de signaler au Professeur Robinson qu’en Belgique, M. Jean Stengers, Professeur à l’ULB, est parmi d’autres, un spécialiste des questions africaines, que M. Jacques Willequet, Conseiller historique du Département, possède une gran-*

*de connaissance de ces problèmes, et que l'un ou l'autre sont prêts à répondre à ses questions et disposés à lire, éventuellement, les passages de son manuscrit où il traite du Congo”.*

“One should try to avoid the errors being repeated once again, regarding the Leopoldian period, errors that have been uttered by Bertrand Russell, amongst others. It seems delicate to approach a man of science in order to prevent him from publishing certain things; on the other hand, it seems advisable to me to find an opportunity to say to Professor Robinson that in Belgium, Mr. Jean Stengers, Profesor at the ULB, is, amongst other things, a specialist in African affairs, and that Mr. Jacques Willequet, Historical Counsellor of the Foreign Department, knows a great deal about that matters, and that both of them are willing to answer his questions and to read, if necessary, the parts of his manuscript where he is referring to the Congo”.

A similar letter was dispatched to Jan-Albert Goris, the official Belgian Commissioner of Information in New York.

Source: *AMEA*, AF-I-26 (1959), P. Wigny to R. Van Meerbeke, Belgian ambassador in London, 29.04.1959.

