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Article:

Towards a History of Mass Violence in the Etat Indépendant du Congo, 1885-1908[*]

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Although the 'atrocities of epical proportions' in the Etat Indépendant du Congo (EIC, Congo Free State) are 'legendary', no up to date scholarly introduction to the issue is currently available[1]. In providing such an overview, the present article aims to offer a point of access to the extensive literature and historical debates on the subject, while also making the case for exchanging the currently prevalent top-down narrative, with its excessive focus on King Leopold's character and motives, for one which considers the EIC's culture of violence as a multicausal, broadly based and deeply engrained social phenomenon[2].

The coherence of the 'Congo Atrocities' as a clearly definable and bounded historical phenomenon owes as much to the humanitarian campaign mounted to denounce their occurrence as to the nature of the events themselves[3]. Reformers, and historians after them, have mainly focused on those features of the Leopoldian regime which violated the emerging international norms of colonial government, in particular those associated with

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[1] O. Likaka, Naming Colonialism: History and Collective Memory in the Congo, 1870-1960 (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2009), 35; K. Grant, A Civilized Savagery. Britain and the New Slaveries in Africa, 1884-1926 (New York: Routledge, 2005), 29. The overview by J. Stengers and J. Vansina, 'King Leopold's Congo, 1886-1908', in R. Oliver and G. N. Sanderson, eds, The Cambridge History of Africa. Volume 6: from 1870 to 1905 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 315-58 is now a quarter century old. Jan Breman's essays 'Primitive Racism in a Colonial Setting' and 'The Civilization of Racism: Colonial and Post-colonial Development Policies' in J. Breman, ed, Imperial Monkey Business: Racial Supremacy in Social Darwinist Theory and Colonial Practice (Amsterdam: VU University Press, 1990), 89-121 and 123-52 are slightly newer but less comprehensive. French speakers enjoy the advantage of two solid introductions by Jean-Luc Vellut: J.-L. Vellut, 'La Violence Armée dans l'Etat Indépendant du Congo. Ténèbres et Clartés dans l'Histoire d'un Etat Conquérant', Cultures et Développement, 16, 3 (1984), 671-707 and J.-L. Vellut, 'Réflexions sur la Question de la Violence dans l'Histoire de l'Etat Indépendant du Congo' in P. M. Mantuba-Ngoma, ed, La Nouvelle Histoire du Congo: Mélanges Eurafricains Offerts à Frans Bontinck (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2004), 269-87.

[2] In line with its purpose as an introductory text, this article takes a high-gliding approach which omits the details of lived history but favours broader generalisations. The references do not merely support the specific statement to which they refer, but are mainly intended to point readers to more detailed literature on the subject.

[3] The point is also made by F. Cooper, 'From Free Labor to Family Allowances: Labor and African Society in Colonial Discourse', American Ethnologist, 16, 4 (1989), 745-65.

commercial monopolies, forced labour, and capital transfers to the metropole. Causes of violence which also marked other colonial regimes were pushed firmly into the background[4]. The account of the violent birth of colonial rule in the Congo basin offered here nuances this ascribed exceptionalism (though it does not minimize the terror) and facilitates the reintegration of the EIC into the broader historiography of, firstly, the global impact of European colonial expansion and, secondly, Central Africa's turbulent history in the longue durée.

The argument is divided into five sections. Following a general outline of the EIC's violent system of administration (§1), a discussion of its social and demographic impact (and the controversy which surrounds it) brings out the need for more regionally focused and context sensitive studies (§2). The dispute surrounding demographics is also useful in highlighting that what is fundamentally at stake is the place extreme violence in a colonial setting should occupy in the history of European 'modernity'. Approaches which hinge on Leopoldian exceptionalism and top-down economic imperatives alone are particularly unhelpful in clarifying this issue: §3 relates how such approaches came to dominate the distinct historiographical traditions which emerged in Belgium, Leopold's successor as a colonial power between 1908 and 1960, and abroad. In §4 the causes underlying the EIC's violent nature are explored in more detail, adding some flesh to the argument that mass violence was a complex and multilayered phenomenon. While state actors remain in the limelight, the focus here shifts from the state as a singular, normative agent, towards what Christian Gerlach has labelled an 'extremely violent society' in which various individuals and social groups within and outside of the state committed violent acts for multiple reasons[5]. Some of the arguments advanced are, by necessity, general, tentative or patchy: a discussion of available source material with which historians can fill some of the gaps (§5) concludes this article.

1. General outline

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[4] Moves by humanitarians to maintain the special status of the Congo Atrocities in the context of other dubious colonial practices are discussed in Grant, A Civilized Savagery. Attempts to break this mould can be found in Vellut, 'La Violence Armée' and Breman, Imperial Monkey Business.

[5] C. Gerlach, 'Extremely Violent Societies: an Alternative to the Concept of Genocide', Journal of Genocide Research, 8, 4 (2006), 455-71.

The establishment of colonial rule in the Congo basin consisted of two simultaneous developments: a European one involving international diplomacy, the raising of capital, the development of a monopolistic legal system and a series of legitimizing discourses, and an African one in which European power was articulated. The latter involved adaptation to and interaction with a variety of dynamic social and political structures[6]. The transition to colonial status in 1885, resulting from the skilful way in which King Leopold II of the Belgians capitalized on European international rivalries, brought few immediate changes to the territory enclosed within the EIC's liberally drawn borders[7]. The chain of posts connecting the coast to Stanley Pool, established earlier by Leopold's auxiliaries under the command of Henry Morton Stanley, formed the basis from which colonial power was gradually extended[8]. During the first years of its existence, the EIC's African presence consisted of a growing but loose network of armed trade posts grafted onto African trade networks along the shores of the Congo River and its tributaries, complemented by reconnaissance expeditions which gradually expanded the state's knowledge of its territory and subjects. A number of mission stations and private trading posts following similar paths completed the European presence[9].

This European network was but one of several expansionist movements encroaching on the Congo basin. At the end of the 19th century, many areas of the Congo were in a state of turmoil and warfare as they became incorporated as frontier zones into the militarized

[6] The literature on pre-colonial Congolese societies is extensive, but studies which cover the transition to colonialism are relatively scarce. A good introduction to the main political developments of the nineteenth century can be found in D. Birmingham, Central Africa to 1870 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), Chapter 3. Also see J. Vansina, Kingdoms of the Savanna. A History of Central African States until European Occupation (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1966) and J. Vansina, Paths in the Rainforests : toward a History of Political Tradition in Equatorial Africa (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1990).

[7] See J. Stengers, 'King Leopold's Imperialism', in R. Owen and B. Sutcliffe, eds, Studies in the Theory of Imperialism (London: Longman, 1972), 248-76; J. Stengers, 'Léopold II et la Rivalité Franco-Anglaise en Afrique, 1882-1884', Revue Belge de Philologie et d'Histoire, 47, 2 (1969), 425-79; J. Willequet, Le Congo belge et la Weltpolitik (Bruxelles: Presses Universitaires de Bruxelles, 1963); B. Emerson, Leopold II of the Belgians. King of Colonialism (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1979); R. Anstey, Britain and the Congo in the Nineteenth Century (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962); R. De Maximy and M.-C. Brugaillère, 'Un Roi-Homme d'Affaires, des Géographes et le Tracé des Frontières de l'Etat Indépendant du Congo (Zaïre)', Hérodote, Revue de Géographie et de Géopolitique, 41 (1986), 46-74.

[8] H. M. Stanley, The Congo and the Founding of its Free State: a Story of Work and Exploration (London: Sampson Low, Marston, Searle, & Rivington, 1885). Stanley's services to the EIC are documented by his biographers: F. McLynn, Stanley: Sorcerer's Apprentice (London: Constable, 1991); J. L. Newman, Imperial Footprints: Henry Morton Stanley's African Journeys (Dulles: Brassey's, 2004); T. Jeal, Stanley: The Impossible Life of Africa's Greatest Explorer (London and New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007).

[9] R. Slade, King Leopold's Congo: Aspects of the Development of Race relations in the Congo Independent State (London: Oxford University Press, 1962); Stengers and Vansina, 'King Leopold's Congo'.

slave- and ivory economies centred on the Nile, Zanzibar and Angola[10]. Early European incursions into this arena were by no means free from violence, brutality, plunder and impressments of forced labour. However, until around 1890 the colonial state generally infiltrated and manipulated rather than conquered and subjected African trade networks and polities[11]. Around this time its approach shifted to an open assertion of supremacy. A series of military confrontations ensued which were aimed at eliminating competitors and monopolizing coercive power for the state, its allies and its auxiliaries. Campaigns against the 'Arabs' in Eastern Congo[12] and expeditions to the Nile[13] involved some of the many large military columns composed of white officers, African mercenaries, allied troops, slaves, porters, women and children which became a regular feature of the remainder of the EIC's history[14]. Such columns were plunder machines as well as conquering armies: not or inadequately provisioned they largely lived off the land, raiding for food, slaves and war booty wherever they passed[15]. Their disruptive passage constituted an unmistakeable but transient demonstration of the emerging state's power: the colonial administration's dominance remained uneven as successful armed resistance and mutinies of the state's African soldiery excluded sizeable regions from its control, provoking a prolonged war of conquest which was still incomplete in 1908[16]. Elsewhere, administrative and military posts remained spread thin so that the routinized exercise of

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[10] Birmingham, Central Africa, B. Jewsiewicki, 'Notes sur l'Histoire Socio-économique du Congo (1880-1960)', Etudes d'Histoire Africaine, 3 (1972), 209-41; I. Ndaywel e Nziem, Histoire Générale du Congo: de l'Héritage Ancien à la République Démocratique (Bruxelles: De Boeck & Larsier, 1998), 239-48; D. Northrup, 'Slavery and Forced Labour in the Eastern Congo 1850-1910', in H. Médard and S. Doyle, eds, Slavery in the Great Lakes Region of East Africa (Oxford: James Currey, 2007), 111-23; Vellut, 'La Violence Armée'; Vellut, 'Réflexions'.

[11] J.-B. Gewald, 'More than Red Rubber and Figures Alone: a Critical Appraisal of the Memory of the Congo Exhibition at the Royal Museum for Central Africa, Tervuren, Belgium', International Journal of African Historical Studies, 39, 3 (2006), 471-86; A. M. Delathuy, De Kongostaat van Leopold II, 1876-1900. Het Verloren Paradijs (Antwerpen: Standaard Uitgeverij, 1989); J. Fabian, Out of Our Minds : Reason and Madness in the Exploration of Central Africa (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000). A. M. Delathuy is the alias used by Jules Marchal for his earlier, Dutch works. The revised and extended French editions which appeared later under his own name are also included in the bibliography.

[12] P. Ceulemans, La Question Arabe et le Congo, 1883-1892 (Bruxelles: Académie Royale des Sciences Coloniales, 1959); P. Maréchal, De "Arabische" Campagne in het Maniema-gebied (1892-1894): Situering binnen het Kolonisatieproces in de Onafhankelijke Kongostaat (Tervuren: Koninklijk Museum voor Midden-Afrika, 1992).

[13] R. O. Collins, King Leopold, England, and the Upper Nile, 1899-1909 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1968); G. N. Sanderson, England, Europe, and the Upper Nile, 1882-1899 (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1967).

[14] Ndaywel, Histoire Générale du Congo, 284-286; Vellut, 'La Violence Armée'.

[15] Vellut, 'Réflexions'.

[16] Ndaywel, Histoire Générale du Congo, 280; Stengers and Vansina, 'King Leopold's Congo'; G. De Boeck, Baoni: Les Révoltes de la Force Publique sous Léopold II, Congo 1895-1908 (Berchem: EPO, 1987); Vellut, 'La Violence armée', A. M. Delathuy, E. D. Morel tegen Leopold II en de Kongostaat (Berchem: EPO, 1985); Delathuy, De Kongostaat van Leopold II.

power usually depended on its delegation to local rulers and mercenaries restyled as allied chiefs, several of whom retained considerable independence and coercive capabilities[17].

Within this institutional framework the EIC organised the forceful extraction of natural resources, foodstuffs and labour. A weak capital base, largely limited to Leopold's personal input, coupled with King's desire to finance his costly imperial projects from local taxation led to a continuous drive to cut expenses and increase revenue[18]. In face of the paucity of taxable economic activity the state routinely turned to tribute collecting and forced labour as a way to marry both objectives[19]. Moreover, limited finance forced local government posts into an increasingly parasitic relationship with their environment while at the same time loosening their ties with the central administration. Regular levies of foodstuffs and labour for porterage and other services were widespread but varied in intensity with the local state presence, hitting the Lower Congo district hardest[20]. Imposed as an obligation, the quantity and timing of such levies were left to the discretion of state officials, their collection in many cases taking the form of razzias. In the Upper Congo, the forceful appropriation of stocks of ivory proved another useful way of complementing state and private incomes[21]. For several years, recruitment for the

[17] H. Vanhee, 'Over Heren en Knechten: Chefs Médaillés in het Koloniale Congo' in J.-L. Vellut, ed, Het Geheugen van Congo: de Koloniale Tijd (Tervuren: Koninklijk Museum voor Midden Afrika, 2005), 79-82; D. Dibwe dia Mwembu, 'Un chef Songye Face au Pouvoir Colonial: le Cas de Lumpungu (1892-1919)', Cahiers de Tunisie, 33, 3-4 (1985), 49-70. Het Geheugen Van Congo has also appeared in French (La Mémoire du Congo: le Temps Colonial) and English (Memory of Congo: The Colonial Era).

[18] Accounts of the drive to increase revenue are nearly unanimous in focusing on Leopold's desire to obtain a personal profit from his imperial venture, the unique feature of direct capital transfers from a colony to its metropole, or both. See the popularisations by N. Ascherson, The King Incorporated. Leopold II in the Age of Trusts (New York: Doubleday, 1963); A. Hochschild, King Leopold's Ghost. A story of Greed, Terror and Heroism in Colonial Africa (London: Macmillan, 1999); M. Ewans, European Atrocity, African Catastrophe. Leopold II, The Congo Free State and its Aftermath. (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2002); D. Renton, D. Seddon and L. Zeilig, The Congo: Plunder and Resistance (London: Zed Books, 2007). My own views are closer in line with Vincent Viaene's interpretation of Leopoldian colonialism as an essentially political project: V. Viaene, 'King Leopold's Imperialism and the Origins of the Belgian Colonial Party, 1860–1905', Journal of Modern History, 80 (2008), 741-90. This imperial agenda involved considerable capital outlay in the colony (such as the expensive Nile expeditions) as well as the metropole (such as the encouragement of grand imperial architecture). It should be noted that, in its political and socio-cultural objectives, Leopold's colonialism did not differ significantly from that of imperial ultra's in Britain, Germany or France.

[19] Budgettary constraints were exacerbated by the 1885 Berlin Treaty's prohibition on the levying of import duties (relaxed by the Brussels Treaty of 1890). See A. B. Keith, The Belgian Congo and the Berlin Act (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1919).

[20] K. E. Friedman, Catastrophe and Creation: The Transformation of an African Culture (Philadelphia: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1991); S. Axelson, Culture Confrontation in the Lower Congo: from the Old Congo Kingdom to the Congo Independent State with Special Reference to the Swedish Missionaries in the 1880s and 1890s (Falköping (Sweden): Gummessons, 1970), 251-65.

[21] Maréchal, De Arabische Campagne; Ceulemans, La Question Arabe.

colonial army relied heavily on the 'liberation' of slaves (enlistment of prisoners of war) in the East as a way to reduce its bill[22].

The impact of such measures on the EIC's budget deficits was little more than palliative until it capitalized fully on the global rubber boom[23]. The 'rubber regime' found its origin in a combination of a surge in the metropolitan demand for rubber, the development of a legal framework and justifying discourse in Brussels, and an increase in the state's extractive capacity[24]. Forced labour was presented as a form of taxation, justifiable in the absence of a monetary economy by the principle that colonized peoples should bear the cost of their own administration and civilization. The legal theory of state ownership of vacant lands was invoked in 1891 to appropriate the vast majority of the country's rubber-bearing forests; large sections were subsequently leased to private concession companies, such as the infamous Abir and Anversoise, in which the state retained a large financial interest[25]. In combination, both principles legally transformed much of the country into an enormous plantation on which Africans were obliged to harvest rubber in payment of their taxes. The claim of state ownership over the country's main rubber districts also excluded European traders from much of the potentially lucrative rubber trade, provoking protests from European commercial circles which formed the nucleus from which later a humanitarian reform movement developed[26].

The everyday reality of rubber exploitation was defined less by such legal underpinnings than by the methods used to obtain high levels of production. The triple limitations of an underdeveloped state structure, the large size of the rubber area and a thinly spread

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[22] D. Northrup, 'The Ending of Slavery in Eastern Zaïre', in S. Miers and R. Roberts, eds, The End of Slavery in Africa (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1988), 462-82; Delathuy, De Kongostaat van Leopold II; Vellut, 'La Violence Armée'. Forced recruitment for the Force Publique (which included a military and civil element) continued into the Belgian colonial period.

[23] 'Rubber', in J. Mokyr, ed, The Oxford Encyclopedia of Economic History. Volume 4 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 406-12.

[24] While the legal framework and moral justification for forced labour were developed in Brussels, it would be worth exploring to what extent they were shaped by ideas formulated by local administrators based on their experience of African labour and local methods of surplus extraction.

[25] The reliance on concession companies to develop the colonial estate was yet another way to minimize costs. It was a feature of cash-strapped administrations throughout the region. For the French Congo, see C. Coquery-Vidrovitch, Le Congo au Temps des Grandes Compagnies Concessionnaires, 1898-1930 (Paris: Mouton, 1972), for Mozambique L. Vail, 'Mozambique's Chartered Companies: the Rule of the Feeble', Journal of African History, 17, 3 (1976), 389-416.

[26] S. J. S. Cookey, Britain and the Congo Question, 1885-1913 (London: Longmans, 1968).

population, which combined to render direct control over labour impossible[27], were overcome through a process of copying, adapting, extending and intensifying the economic organisation of the Eastern slave frontier[28]. From improvised beginnings, a system developed consisting of rubber collecting posts backed up by a highly mobile military and served by a network of armed African auxiliaries (called sentinelles, gardes forestières or capitaos) stationed in the villages upon which regular rubber quotas were imposed[29]. Violence and terror tactics were used as a deterrent and as means of enforcement and repression[30]. Rape, torture, mutilation, cannibalism, surprise raids and summary executions were part of a repertoire of terror and psychological warfare. More commonly, failure to meet set quotas was countered by corporal punishment and hostage taking. Punitive expeditions dispatched to repeat offenders routinely massacred and burned crops and villages[31]. From its birth in the Equator district in 1893 this brutal mode of exploitation spread rapidly to other rubber growing regions[32]. The number of state and

[27] Breman, Imperial Monkey Business; The problem of labour control is a central theme in F. Cooper, 'African Labor History', in J. Lucassen, ed, Global Labour History. A State of the Art (Bern: Peter Lang, 2006), 91-116 and F. Cooper, 'Africa and the World Economy', African Studies Review, 24, 2-3 (1981), 1-86.

[28] Delathuy, De Kongostaat van Leopold II; N. R. Hunt, A Colonial Lexicon of Birth Ritual, Medicalization, and Mobility in the Congo (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999), 38-49; R. W. Harms, 'The World Abir Made: the Maringana-Lopori Basin, 1885-1903', African Economic History, 12 (1983), 125-139; Vellut, 'La Violence Armée'; Vellut, 'Réflexions'; Northrup, 'The Ending of Slavery'.

[29] Robert Harms offers this description of the system in operation in the Abir territory (Equateur District): 'the rubber agent made a list of all the men in the villages under his control, giving each man a quota of four kilos of dry rubber (eight kilos of liquid rubber) per fortnight. To oversee the collection he placed armed sentries, who were often former slaves, in the villages. The sentries, who lived in luxury at the expense of the villagers, made sure that each man collected his quota. They flogged, imprisoned, or shot villagers who fell behind […] Abir apparently had little difficulty containing resistance during the first decade of its rule. Each post kept a force of about eighty men armed with modern Albini rifles to put down resistance or punish villages that lagged behind in their quotas. To crush large-scale rebellions, the State kept a large force at Basankusu that could reach any part of the Abir territory by river steamer within a few days after being called by a rubber agent', R. W. Harms, 'The End of Red Rubber: a Reassessment', Journal of African History, 16, 1 (1975), 79.

[30] As noted by Jock McCulloch, the disciplines of the market-place and the authority of states were so ineffectual within the colonial African context that colonial administrators, unlike their counterparts in Western Europe, had few non-violent means of enforcement available to them: J. McCulloch, 'Empire and Violence, 1900-1939' in P. Levine, ed, Gender and Empire (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 236. The same point is made in G. Krozewski, 'Contextualizing Violence in Colonial Africa: European National Development, Empire, and Lineages of Conflict', Development Dialogue, 50 (2008), 69. EIC rule also involved negotiation and persuasion or propaganda, but their effectiveness or otherwise has not, to my knowledge, been studied systematically.

[31] Delathuy, E. D. Morel tegen Leopold II ; Delathuy, De Kongostaat van Leopold II; D. Vangroenweghe, Rood Rubber. Leopold II en zijn Kongo (Brussel: Elsevier, 1985); D. Vangroenweghe, Voor Rubber en Ivoor. Leopold II en de ophanging van Stokes (Leuven: Van Halewijck, 2005); Vellut, 'La Volence Armée'; R. Anstey, 'The Congo Rubber Atrocities. A Case Study', African Historical Studies, 4, 1 (1971), 59-76; Harms, 'The World Abir Made'; Breman 'Imperial Monkey Business', Ascherson, The King Incorporated; Hochschild, King Leopold's Ghost; Ewans, European Atrocity, African Catastrophe.

[32] Delathuy, E. D. Morel tegen Leopold II; T. M. Ngbwapkwa, 'L'Exploitation du Caoutchouc par l'Etat Indépendant du Congo dans le Territoire de Banzyville, district de l'Ubangi', Civilisations, 66, 1-2 (1993), 291-306. The system was

company posts was steadily increased in order to extend the area brought under production. From a budgetary perspective the system was a success: by the turn of the century financial deficits had given way to sizeable surpluses[33].

While coercion was a central feature of labour mobilization throughout the EIC, the relative autonomy of administrators and company agents coupled with variations in local circumstances, such as relations with African elites and the type and quantity of produce claimed, led to significant regional differences in the methods of tribute collection and, consequently, the violence involved[34]. However, the latitude enjoyed by the men on the spot was circumscribed by incessant administrative pressure and pecuniary incentives aimed at increasing production, often leading to spiralling violence and ruthless over-exploitation[35]. In time, this chaotic reality of unchecked local plunder machines was streamlined into a legal framework which gradually subjected labour requisition to rules and procedures. In November 1903 a limit of 40 hours of forced labour per month per adult African was decreed, although it was coupled with a complex system of equivalences in produce which still allowed for considerable elasticity in practice. The most brutal forms of repression were outlawed and others were more strictly regulated. The practical effect of these regulations was limited due to inadequate means of enforcement together with the Brussels administration's clear message that refinement of the legal framework was intended to regularize, not reform, existing practice, and that revenues should therefore continue to increase[36].

In part, the definition and narrowing of the boundaries of legitimate violence in the EIC's legal system were a response to international humanitarian action and political pressure challenging both the morality and the legality of Leopold's administration. Early protests from trading circles were strengthened and eventually superseded by atrocity revelations

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also exported abroad: D. Vangroenweghe, 'The 'Leopold II' Concession System Exported to French Congo with as Example the Mpoko Company', Belgisch Tijdschrift voor Nieuwste Geschiedenis, 36, 3-4 (2006), 323-72; C. Coquery-Vidrovitch, Le Congo au Temps des Grandes Compagnies.

[33] J. Stengers, 'The Congo Free State and the Belgian Congo before 1914', in L. H. Gann and P. Duignan, eds, Colonialism in Africa (1870-1960) (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), 272.

[34] Vellut , 'La Violence Armée'; Stengers and Vansina, 'King Leopold's Congo'.

[35] J. Stengers, 'The Congo Free State'.

[36] The Hubert Droogmans Papers at the State Archives (Rijksarchief/Archives d'Etat) in Brussels contain many of these circulars. The point about increased revenues is made in H. Droogmans to Gouverneur Général, 27 Jan 1904, Droogmans Papers, I/1/6/13-17.

from ex-state officials, travellers and, especially, missionaries[37]. An international humanitarian movement spearheaded by the British Aborigines Protection Society and, from 1904 onwards, the Congo Reform Association widely publicized the brutality of the EIC regime and elevated the subject to an issue of international politics[38]. Even though mismanagement of the EIC also became a domestic political issue in Belgium following the report of the Commission d'Enquête[39], continued international pressure contributed significantly to the country's decision to annex the EIC in 1908[40]. As a Belgian colony, the administration of the Congo became subject to parliamentary control. Significant legal reforms were implemented between 1908 and 1910, including a phased replacement of the forced labour tax by taxes in coin, but evidence that annexation also constituted a watershed moment in practice remains sparse[41]. In some areas the exhaustion of natural rubber supplies, the decimation of the African population and desperate African

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[37] Many of these witnesses figure in Hochschild, *King Leopold's Ghost*. Somewhat appart from other early critics of the EIC stands the African-American George Washington Williams. See J. H. Franklin, George Washington Williams: A Biography (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985).

[38] W. R. Louis, 'The Triumph of the Congo Reform Movement, 1905-1908', in J. Butler, ed, Boston University Papers on Africa (Boston: Boston University Press, 1966), 267-302; Cookey, Britain and the Congo Question; W. R. Louis and J. Stengers, eds, E. D. Morel's History of the Congo Reform Movement (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968); Delathuy, E. D. Morel tegen Leopold II; C. A. Cline, E. D. Morel, 1873-1924: The Strategies of Protest. (Belfast: Blackstaff Press, 1980); K. Grant, 'Christian Critics of Empire: Missionaries, Lantern Lectures, and the Congo Reform Campaign in Britain', Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History, 29, 2 (2001), 27-58; J. B. Osborne, 'Wilfred G. Thesiger, Sir Edward Grey, and the British Campaign to Reform the Congo, 1905-1909', Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History, 27, 1 (1999), 59-80.

[39] Published on 30 October 1905. See J. Stengers, 'Le rôle de la Commission d'Enquête de 1904-1905 au Congo', Annuaire de l'Institut de Philologie et d'Histoire orientales et slaves, 10 (1950), 701-726 (=Mélanges Henri Grégoire); Breman, 'Imperial Monkey Business'.

[40] G. Vanthemsche, La Belgique et le Congo. Empreintes d'une Colonie, 1885-1980 (Bruxelles: Editions Complexe, 2007); J. Stengers, Congo. Mythes et Réalités. 100 Ans d'Histoire (Paris: Duculot, 1989); A. Stenmans, La Reprise du Congo par la Belgique (Bruxelles: Editions Techniques et Scientifiques, 1949). For an account which focuses more strongly on on internal pressures from an increasingly independent colonial lobby see V. Viaene, 'Reprise-Remise. De Congolese Identiteitscrisis van België rond 1908' in V. Viaene, D. Van Reybrouck and B. Ceuppens, eds, Congo in België: Koloniale Cultuur in de Metropool (Leuven: Universitaire Pers Leuven, 2009), 43-62.

[41] The claim was made in Stengers 'The Congo Free State', but see S. H. Nelson, Colonialism in the Congo Basin, 1880-1940 (Athens: Ohio University Center for International Studies. Africa series, 1994); D. Northrup, Beyond the Bend in the River: African Labor in Eastern Zaire, 1865-1940 (Athens: Ohio University Center for International Studies, 1988) and O. Likaka, Rural Society and Cotton in Colonial Zaire (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1997) for cross-period case studies. Also see Jules Marchal's trilogy on forced labour after Belgian annexation: J. Marchal, Travail Forcé pour le Cuivre et Pour l'Or. l'Histoire du Congo, 1910-1945 (Borgloon: Bellings, 1999); J. Marchal, *Travail Forcé pour le Rail. l'Histoire du Congo 1910-*1945 (Borgloon: Bellings, 2000); J. Marchal, Travail *Forcé pour l'Huile de Palme de Lord Leverhulme. l'*Histoire du Congo 1910-1945 (Borgloon: Bellings, 2001).

resistance brought the rubber regime to an end prior to Belgian annexation[42]. Elsewhere, for example in the Kasai and Lomami, forced collection continued past 1908[43].

The terror of the rubber regime was only part of a much wider wave of violence and dislocation affecting Congolese societies over a period which exceeded the lifespan of Leopold's African empire. Preceded by years of intensified warfare, plunder and slave raiding which saw the disintegration and reconfiguration of the area's largest political systems, the first decades of the colonial encounter considerably deepened the political, social, economic and cultural disruption experienced by Africans[44]. Colonial officials and missionaries linked worrying increases in venereal disease, alcoholism, and witchcraft accusations, as well as dropping birth rates, to the demoralising effects of European administration[45]. The forced labour system created serious demographic imbalances while devastating sleeping sickness and smallpox epidemics spread along the states' extended communication routes[46]. Mortality rates were heightened by exhaustion, malnutrition and unhealthy working conditions, contributing to a severe decline in the Congo's population which continued into the interwar period[47]. Under Belgian rule the colonial state's control was further extended and became more centralised, labour

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[42] Harms, 'The End of Red Rubber'; Ngbwapkwa, 'L'Exploitation du Caoutchouc'.

[43] Osborne, 'Wilfred G. Thesiger'; O. Likaka, 'Rural protest: the Mbole against Belgian rule, 1897-1959', International Journal of African Historical Studies, 27, 3 (1994), 589-617. After the liberalization of trade in 1910, there was a short boom in private rubber trading which awaits study.

[44] P. M. Martin, 'The Violence of Empire', in D. Birmingham and P. M. Martin, eds, History of Central Africa. Volume 2 (New York: Longman, 1983), 1-26. The chronology of libeli rituals, which Nancy Rose Hunt uses as a prism through which periods of intense strain on Lokele authority structures can be identified, shows how amongst the Lokele incursions by the Swahili, EIC forces and the Belgian colonial administration were experienced as different waves of colonial occupation: Hunt, A Colonial Lexicon, 27-79. In an ironic comment upon to colonial state's abolitionist pretentions, the Mbole branded EIC officials Atama-Atama, the name previously given to the slave raiders from which they had alledgedly been liberated: Likaka, Naming Colonialism, 102-5.

[45] E.g. the alarming accounts by the Flemish missionaries M. D'Hossche, 'De Ontvolking in Kongo', Onze Kongo, (1912), 221-28 and 390-95 and L. Bittremieux 'Over de Oorzaken van 't Verval der Zwarten', Onze Kongo (1912), 211-20. The inclusion of alcoholism in the alledged causes of decline is interesting given the EIC's legal restrictions on the import of alcohol and its sale to Africans. The experience of trauma is a central theme in N. R. Hunt, 'An Acoustic Register, Tenacious Images, and Congolese Scenes of Rape and Repetition', Cultural Anthropology, 23, 2 (2008), 220-53; demoralisation as an aspect of the destruction of native peoples is treated in C. A. Bayly, The Birth of the Modern World, 1780-1914. Global Connections and Comparisons (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004), 432-50.

[46] B. Fetter, Demography from Scanty Evidence: Central Africa in the Colonial Era (Boulder: L. Rienner, 1990).

[47] Hunt, 'An Acoustic Register', 228; N. R. Hunt, '"Le Bebe en Brousse": European Women, African Birth Spacing and Colonial Intervention in Breast Feeding in the Belgian Congo', International Journal of African Historical Studies, 21, 3 (1988), 401-32; W. Blondeel, 'De "Commission Permanente pour le Protection des Indigènes" en het Demografisch Probleem in Belgisch Kongo. De Alarmkreet van 1919', Académie Royale des Sciences d'Outre-Mer. Bulletin des Séances, 3 (1976), 273-315; J.-P. Sanderson, 'Le Congo Belge entre Mythe et Réalité. Une Analyse du Discours Démographique Colonial', Population, 55, 2 (2000), 331-55.

mobilization was rationalized, new economic sectors appeared and the gravest forms of physical abuse were gradually curtailed, leading to a new set of constraints and limited possibilities for social mobility and increased wealth[48]. Changes in the exercise of state power were significant, but coercion and systematic violence were never purged from a colonial system which cemented racial inequality, stifled African initiative and furthered the forceful integration of its subjects at the bottom tier of the economic system[49].

2. Social and demographic impact and the vexed question of modernity

As established above, the intensity, substance and impact of European occupation varied across regions and evolved over time. African experiences of EIC conquest and rule were equally determined by political or social affiliation, gender, cultural identities and the way in which individuals were able to negotiate changing pressures, constraints and opportunities. As an agent of 'creative destruction', the colonial state fostered more than physical violence alone: the disintegration of existing social structures was linked to attempts at establishing a new order which, in the European imagination, provided the ultimate justification for the abuse, murder and plunder which accompanied the colonial encounter[50]. Taking such diversity and complexity into account is important, but should not detract from the fact that EIC rule entailed extreme, gratuitous, large-scale and inexcusable violence, widespread suffering and death.

How widespread? An intense controversy has erupted on the issue of the EIC's demographic impact. A maximalist position, which currently appears to be dominant, estimates that roughly fifty per cent of the Congo's African population perished under

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[48] Nelson, Colonialism in the Congo Basin; G. Nzongola-Ntalaja, The Congo from Leopold to Kabila. A People's History. (London: Zed Books, 2002); Ndaywel, Histoire Générale du Congo; R. Anstey, King Leopold's Legacy. The Congo under Belgian Rule 1908-1960 (London: Oxford University Press, 1966). Still useful as an introduction to the interwar period is R. L. Buell, The Native Problem in Africa. Vol 2 (New York: Macmillan, 1928).

[49] M.-B. Dembour, 'La Chicotte comme Symbole du Colonialisme Belge?', Canadian Journal of African Studies-Revue Canadienne des Études Africaines, 26, 2 (1992), 205-25. On Africans' continued critiques of colonial violence and domination, particularly in rural areas, see Likaka, Naming Colonialism. How the failure of the liberal intermezzo of 1910-1914 led to more stringent state controls on the economy and African labour awaits further study. For a more general introduction to structural violence in African colonial economies, largely drawing on Rhodesian and South African examples, see J. McCulloch, 'Empire and Violence'.

[50] An obvious implication is that there is an important structural side to colonial violence. The rejection of the claim that 'civilization' or 'development' is the greater good redeeming the violence of colonialism constitutes the core of the post-colonial critiques of empire. A solid introduction to this 'post-liberal' position in relation to the destruction of native peoples is offered in A. D. Moses, 'Conceptual Blockages and Definitional Dilemmas in the 'Racial Century': Genocides of Indigenous Peoples and the Holocaust', Patterns of Prejudice, 36, 4 (2002), 7-36.

EIC rule, which would imply a death toll running into the millions[51]. Opposed to this is a group of minimalists or, more accurately, agnostics which stresses the unreliable and extremely rudimentary nature of available demographic data while also pointing to often unspecified regional variations and the multiplicity of causes of population decline, with epidemics –for which Europeans alledgedly bear little responsibility– figuring most prominently[52]. According to this group, the claim that EIC rule constituted a massacre 'of holocaust proportions' is based on shaky data, largely unsubstantiated and overdrawn[53]. While a firm estimate of the number of victims must indeed remain elusive, pleas of ignorance should not lead to an evasion or minimization of the issue of population decline[54].

More relevant than a sterile polemic about aggregated numbers would be the compilation of a more precise geography of the impact and experience of EIC rule. Even at a lower level of aggregation no precise 'body count' can be expected, as most deaths have never been recorded[55]. However, aside from indirect evidence provided by skewed age pyramids in later population surveys, there is an abundance of qualitative evidence of demographic crises at the local level[56]. African testimonies and memories of specific massacres as well as various accounts by European eyewitnesses bear witness to the extent of turmoil, famine, warfare and population decline in most parts of the EIC[57].

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[51] E. D. Morel, The Black Man's Burden: the White Man in Africa from the Fifteenth Century to World War I (Manchester and London: National Labour Press, 1920); M. Twain, King Leopold's Soliloquy. A Defence of his Congo Rule (Boston: The P. R. Warren Co., 1905); Hochschild, *King Leopold's Ghost*; Ndaywel e Nziem, Histoire générale du Congo; L. De Saint Moulin, 'What is Known of the Demographic History of Zaire since 1885?', in Fetter, ed, Demography from Scanty Evidence, 299-325.

[52] The prime target of such criticism is Henry Morton Stanley, who's fanciful demographic calculations alledgedly formed the basis of some of the dramatic extrapolations. See Stengers, Congo. Mythes et Réalités, 306-7.

[53] The quote is from Hochschild, *King Leopold's Ghost*, 225. The critique is formulated in Stengers, Congo. Mythes et Réalités; Louis and Stengers, E. D. Morel's History; J.-L. Vellut, 'Prestige et Pauvreté de l'Histoire Nationale. A Propos d'une Histoire Générale du Congo', Revue Belge de Philologie et d'histoire, 77, 2 (1999), 480-517 ; M. Dumoulin, Leopold II, un Roi Génocidaire? (Bruxelles: Académie Royale de Belgique, 2005) and Vanthemsche, La Belgique et le Congo, 40-1.

[54] Gewald, 'More than Red Rubber'. Hunt, 'An Acoustic Register' notes, rightly, that percentages are more reliable than absolute numbers. Population piramids from later periods also provide clues.

[55] State sources are, for example, largely silent on casualties resulting from punative expeditions, eufimistically called promenades ('walks'). Ngbwapkwa, 'L'Exploitation du Caoutchouc', 298.

[56] Hunt, 'An Acoustic Register', 228.

[57] Many of these are documented in Delathuy, E. D. Morel tegen Leopold II; Delathuy, De Kongostaat van Leopold II; Vangroenweghe, Rood Rubber; Vangroenweghe, Voor Rubber en Ivoor. The terms in which Africans spoke of the EIC regime are often revealing in themselves. Te Mobusa Ngbwapkwa relates how the Ndekere remember the punetative expeditions sent against them in 1901 as 'Zo kpi, nda Zo ko' ('a true massacre, having led to the quasi-extermination of the population'), and Osumaka Likaka notes that, in the Upper Congo, the EIC's representatives were collectively

While generally impressionistic on demographics, travellers to the Lower and Upper Congo in the early 20th Century were distinctly alarmist: they described severe hardship and decimation of the African population devastating entire districts[58]. Whether this population decline was due to high mortality, low natality, migration, or a combination of these is not always clear. What is certain is that the crisis was widespread and severe, and by no means confined to the rubber areas. A more refined historical geography is still needed which relates the experiences of trauma, demographic decline and social change within Congolese societies to the uneven development of the EIC's political and economic structures.

It is impossible to neatly distinguish the impact of the different scourges of famine, disease, warfare, forced labour and state violence which ravaged the African population. Nonetheless, here too a completely agnostic attitude should be avoided. Minimalists have correctly pointed out that demographic decline was by no means the direct result of violence alone[59]. The epidemics which swept the region, sleeping sickness and smallpox in particular, had a particularly severe effect. Failed harvests caused several famines. The spread of 'moral evils' such as venereal disease and alcoholism and the low birth rate of Congolese women, two issues which preoccupied missionaries and colonial officials alike, point to the experience of severe trauma and social problems unleashed or exacerbated by the colonial encounter[60]. This multiplicity of causes has been used to argue that the demographic deficit of the early colonial period was only marginally related to the 'Congo atrocities' and state violence[61]. While this point has some validity, the 'collateral damage' of epidemics and malnutrition was not unrelated to the forced

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known as 'Ipanga Ngunda' ('he who destroys the country'). Ngbwapkwa, 'L'Exploitation du Caoutchouc', 298; Likaka, Naming Colonialism, 85-7.

[58] One sensitive observer was the British consul Roger Casement, whose diaries and report are published in S. Ó Síocháin and M. O'Sullivan, The Eyes of Another Race: Roger Casement's Congo Report and 1903 Diary. (Dublin: University College Dublin Press, 2003). Hunt, 'An Acoustic Register', 226-9; Sanderson, 'Le Congo Belge'.

[59] This has never been contested by maximalists: see Hochschild's discussion of multiple causes of population decline in King Leopold's Ghost, 225-34. It is a regular feature of mass violence that the demographic impact far exceeds the number of deaths by physical violence alone. See, for example, a report by the International Rescue Committee on the recent (post-1996) conflict in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, where it is stated that only 0.4 per cent of the estimated 5.4 million casualties is directly attributable to violence: 'the majority of deaths have been due to infectious diseases, malnutrition and neonatal- and pregnancy-related conditions', Mortality in the Democratic Republic of Congo: An Ongoing Crisis (International Rescue Committee: 2007), 4.

[60] E. g. D'Hossche, 'De Ontvolking'; Bittremieux, 'Over de Oorzaken'; Sanderson, 'Le Congo Belge'; Hunt, 'An Acoustic Register'.

[61] Stengers, Congo. Mythes et Réalités; P. Maréchal, 'Kritische Bedenkingen bij de Controverses over Leopold II en Congo in de Literatuur en de Media', in Vellut, Het geheugen van Congo, 43-9, Dumoulin, Léopold II.

labour regime[62]. Scorched earth tactics, plunder, population displacement, exhaustion, neglect of farms due to tax obligations as well as unhealthy working conditions considerably (but immeasurably) increased Africans' susceptibility to famine and disease. Moreover, famine and disease have their own geographies, and sharp demographic decline has equally been noted in areas which were unaffected by the major epidemics[63].

The heated debate over population decline, with critiques of demographic data bordering on the obsessive, concerns more than figures alone. Minimalists generally recognise that even a serious downward revision of the estimated 10 million victims forwarded by Morel, Hochschild and others does not substantially alter the picture of a brutal colonial system engendering widespread violence, death and devastation –even if they tend to confine the most serious excesses to the 'red rubber' episode alone[64]. What they do take issue with is the association with genocide and the Holocaust which a demographic crisis of this proportion evokes. Drawing on Joseph Conrad and Hannah Arendt, Sven Lindqvist has popularized an approach which sees colonialism as the prime expression of modernity's capacity for evil and a laboratory for genocidal, exterminatory ideologies[65]. In Lindqvist's account the EIC is transformed from a dysfunctional, brutal colonial system based on the exploitation of forced labour into the first and major instance of mass violence of the Twentieth century. The view that the decimation of native peoples around the globe can be at least partly attributed to genocidal tendencies at the heart of the western intellectual tradition is not uncommon amongst historians of American and Oceanic aboriginal societies, but the extension of the argument to the EIC is relatively new and remains contested[66].

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[62] Gewald, 'More than Red Rubber'; Hochschild, *King Leopold's Ghost*, 225-34.

[63] E.g. Osborne, 'Wilfred G. Thesiger'.

[64] As in Stengers, 'The Congo Free State'.

[65] S. Lindqvist, 'Exterminate all the Brutes'. One man's Odyssey into the Heart of Darkness and the Origins of European Genocide (London: Granta, 1997); J. Conrad, Heart of Darkness (1902); H. Arendt, The Origins of Totalitarianism (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co., 1951). The theme has achieved considerable popularity among historians of colonial genocide, in particular in relation to the violence of the settler frontier. E. g. P. Wolfe, 'Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native', Journal of Genocide Research, 8, 4 (2006), 393.

[66] Despite the increased attention being paid to colonial violence, the EIC has not, as yet, conquered a place in the academic literature on genocide, R. G. Weisbord, 'The King, the Cardinal and the Pope: Leopold II's Genocide in the Congo and the Vatican', Journal of Genocide Research, 5, 1 (2003), 35-45 being the exception that proves the rule. The category of 'colonial genocide' is still largely reserved for areas where Europeans settled, but this is starting to change with shifting interpretations of the concept (See Moses, 'Conceptual Blockages'). To my knowledge, Mark Levene's stimulating account of modern mass violence stands alone in linking the EIC's 'extreme exterminatory violence' to a more nuanced global context than the one proposed by Lindqvist. M. Levene, Genocide in the Age of the Nation State. Volume 2: The Rise of the West and the Coming of Genocide (London: I.B. Tauris, 2005), Chapter 5.

Three objections are advanced against the incorporation of the EIC into such a narrative on the modernity of mass violence: (1) no premeditated large-scale extermination took place, (2) the roots of violence were at least partially endogenous, and (3) reducing colonialism to racism, greed, and violence ignores the ideas of moral and material improvement which constituted the European 'civilizing mission'[67]. These points are worthy of consideration. It is particularly the case that, in a discourse whose underlying purpose is not the study of the colonial encounter itself but the critical questioning of European modernity, the extent to which colonial violence was fundamentally shaped by dynamics in the contact zone, and not merely acted out in it, threatens to get lost[68]. Acknowledging such complexities does not however preclude the existence of important linkages, not necessarily of a linear variety, between extreme colonial violence and European arguments about race, development, labour, masculinity and sovereignty[69]. Without these, instances of mass violence on the colonial periphery appear as isolated aberrations from an otherwise progressive norm[70], and connections between centrally imposed transformative development and structural violence are obscured[71]. The question is not whether the EIC's demographic catastrophe can be integrated into the history of modern mass violence, but how, and, consequently, what this wider history should look like. Exceptionalist, statist, and top-down perspectives dominated by King Leopold's

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[67] Vellut, 'Réflexions'; Maréchal, 'Kritische Bedenkingen'; Dumoulin, Léopold II; J.-L. Vellut, 'Préface' in Vanthemsche, La Belgique et le Congo, 11-28. Note that Mark Levene considers the absence of intent at extermination 'a unifying factor' of Fin de Siècle Colonial Genocides: M. Levene, 'Empires, Native Peoples, and Genocide' in A. D. Moses, ed, Empire, Colony, Genocide: Conquest, Occupation, and Subaltern Resistance in World History (New York, Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2008), 194.

[68] For a critique of the concept of modernity see F. Cooper, Colonialism in Question. Theory, Knowledge, History (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 113-49. An important blind spot is the active participation in (and experience of) violence by Africans, and the often locally generated tensions which produced these. The approach's Eurocentric periodization also veils much lived experience, privileging suffering at the hands of colonial agents over pre-colonial violence and ignoring the continuities in administrative practice following Belgian annexation and legal reforms as well as, crucially, the difficult processes of coping with trauma and re-integrating victims and perpetrators into society. Vellut, 'Prestige et Pauvreté'; Hunt, 'An Acoustic Register'.

[69] Krozewski, 'Contextualizing Violence'.

[70] This is, of course, exactly what humanitarians were arguing. Cooper, 'From Free Labor', 750.

[71] The connection between economic development ('modernization') and exterminatory violence is encapsulated in the concept of 'developmental genocide'. See H. Fein, 'Scenarios of Genocide: Models of Genocide and Critical Responses' in I. W. Charny, ed, Toward the Understanding and Prevention of Genocide (Boulder: Westview Press, 1984), 3-31; V. Lal, 'Genocide, Barbaric Others, and the Violence of Categories: A Response to Omer Bartov', American Historical Review, 103, 4 (1998), 1187-90. It is also a central theme in M. Levene, Genocide; Krozewski, 'Contextualizing Violence'; Moses, 'Conceptual Blockages'.

greed and the EIC's legal system are ill-suited to the purpose. It is to the dominance of such perspectives that we now turn.

3. Historiography and the dominance of top-downism

Past and present interpretations of mass violence in the EIC are dominated by the figure of Leopold II, the personification of greed, presiding as absolutist monarch over a machinery of death aimed at squeezing extortionate quantities of rubber out of his African subjects[72]. This close identification of the EIC (as a political institution and an era in the history of the Congo) with its sovereign developed in two distinct settings. In Belgium, a posthumous glorification of Leopold served both national and colonial interests[73]. Elsewhere, in particular in the English-speaking world, it was the humanitarian campaigners' casting of Leopold as the rogue of the Congo Atrocity saga which left an enduring legacy[74]. While Leopold's absolute power at the centre of the EIC's administration justifies some of this attention, the resulting narrative is reductionist on two counts: mass violence has been confined to a bounded temporal and geographical arena (the EIC's rubber districts between 1890 and 1908) and provided with a monocausal (Eurocentric, top-down) explanation[75].

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[72] A recent example is revealing: 'Although he [Leopold] never set foot there, he ran the Congo as a private enterprise, extracting wild rubber by brutal coercion, killing or maiming countless Africans', M. Shipway, 'Belgian Imperial Policy' in P. Poddar, R. S. Patke and L. Jensen, eds, A Historical Companion to Postcolonial Literatures. Continental Europe and its Empires (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009), 31. Also see Hochschild, *King Leopold's Ghost*; Ewans, European Atrocity, African Catastrophe; Ascherson The King Incorporated; Renton, Seddon and Zeilig, The Congo; E. D. Morel, King Leopold's Rule in Africa (London: W. Heinemann, 1904); M. Twain, King Leopold's Soliloquy. A Defence of his Congo Rule (Boston: The P. R. Warren Co., 1905); A. C. Doyle, The Crime of the Congo (London: Hutchinson & Co., 1909).

[73] V. Viaene, 'La Crise Identitaire Congolaise de la Belgique aux Alentours de 1908 et les Origines de la 'Mémoire' du Congo Léopoldien' in R. Giordano, ed, Autour de la Mémoire. La Belgique, le Congo et le Passé Colonial (Paris, Torino: L'Harmattan, 2008), 61-96; M. G. Stanard, 'Learning to Love Leopold?: Belgian Popular Imperialism, 1830-1960s' in J. M. MacKenzie, ed, European Empires and the People: A Comparative Survey of Popular Imperialism (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2010), forthcoming; G. Vanthemsche, 'The Historiography of Belgian Colonialism in the Congo' in C. Lévai, ed, Europe and the World in European Historiography (Pisa: CLIOHRES, 2006), 89-119.

[74] N. R. Hunt, 'Rewriting the Soul in a Flemish Congo', Past and Present, 198 (2008), 192-3.

[75] Collective memories and historical studies from the Democratic Republic of the Congo are not discussed in this section. The former will be touched upon in §5, for an overview of the historiography see I. Ndaywel e Nziem, 'L'Historiographie Congolaise', Civilisations, 54, 1-2 (2005), 237-54. Despite hopeful beginnings in the 1960s and 1970s, Congolese historians have had a limited impact on the academic debate on the EIC due to difficult working conditions and limited resources. The strength of Congolese contributions has been their regional focus and use of oral testimony.

During the final years of its existence, the EIC's administration had become the subject of vigorous debate and bitter criticism, as well as praise and paid propaganda, in the Belgian public sphere[76]. However, following Belgian annexation in 1908 and Leopold's death a year later, critical discussion of colonial matters became increasingly confined to an inner circle of colonial experts while Leopold was rather spectacularly rehabilitated in an increasingly homogonous historical consciousness. Stripped of both content and context, the dead king became the embodiment of the moral virtues –energy, vision and generosity– at the core of the socio-cultural agenda of the Belgian colonial lobby[77]. For domestic as well as international reasons (the protection of the monarchy and the warding off of potential colonial rivals), official discourse based the legitimacy of Belgian sovereignty over the Congo on its continuity with Leopold's EIC, ignoring the salient fact that the transfer of power had been due to domestic and international criticism of its violent and exploitative nature[78]. The EIC became coterminous with heroic pioneers and the suppression of the slave trade, and the Congo reform campaign was henceforth dismissed as a dubious attempt at robbing Belgium of its rightful colonial possession[79].

It was not until the 1950s, when Jean Stengers directed some critical attention to the EIC's administration and the missionaries Hulstaert, Boelaert, and Bontinck documented dissenting perspectives from Africans, that cracks in this triumphalist narrative started to appear, as yet without significantly impacting Belgium's complacent self-image[80]. While decolonization subsequently inspired a more critical attitude towards European colonialism, the end of colonialism also marked a dwindling of interest in and funding for

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[76] Viaene, 'King Leopold's Imperialism'; Viaene, 'La crise Identitaire Congolaise. Critical works include F. Cattier, Etude sur la Situation de l'Etat Indépendant du Congo (Bruxelles: Larcier, 1906) ; A. Vermeersch, La Question Congolaise (Bruxelles: Bulens, 1906) ; E. Vandervelde, Les Derniers Jours de l'Etat du Congo (Mons: La Société Nouvelle, 1909) ; A. J. Wauters, Histoire Politique du Congo Belge (Bruxelles: Pierre Van Fleteren, 1911). On the EIC's propaganda machinery, see R. Wiggers, 'De "Fédération pour la défense des Intérêts Belges à l'Etranger" en het Persbureau van de Onafhankelijke Kongostaat, 1903-1908'', Académie Royale des Sciences d'Outre-Mer. Bulletin des Séances, 38, 2 (1992), 135-83.

[77] Viaene, 'King Leopold's Imperialism'.

[78] Stanard, 'Learning to Love Leopold?'.

[79] Louis and Stengers, E. D. Morel's History; Vanthemsche, 'The Historiography of Belgian Colonialism'; Vanthemsche, La Belgique et Le Congo, 42-4. Feelings of angst and guilt did inspire some dissonant voices from the Congo's European inhabitants: Hunt, 'Rewriting the Soul'.

[80] J. Stengers, 'Belgian Historiography since 1945' in P.C. Emmer and H. L. Wesseling, eds, Reappraisals in Overseas History (The Hague: Leiden University Press, 1979), 161-81.

African and colonial history in Belgium[81]. The closure of the 'politically sensitive' EIC archives until the 1980s further contributed to the lingering survival of the official discourse[82]. When they were finally opened, this enabled Daniel Vangroenweghe and Jules Marchal to published studies which contrasted sharply with what had gone before[83]. Infuriated by the obfuscation of violence and the glorification of Leopold, these authors produced a mirror-image centred on violence in which Leopold was degraded from visionary genius to black hearted villain. While now playing a very different part, the king remained the lead actor in the saga of the EIC[84].

While the Anglophone historiography was not troubled by Belgium's nationalist counter-discourse, here too a shared appreciation for the progressiveness of colonial rule had marginalized the study of colonial violence until the end of the colonial period[85]. When interest in the Congolese past resurged in Britain and the United States during the 1960s, the EIC regime was rediscovered through the lens of the Congo reform campaign which had left numerous traces in the press, government files, missionary archives, travel literature and a wide range of publications[86]. As it was through the study of this humanitarian movement itself that the issue was brought back to prominence, the Anglophone historiography was again dominated by its perspective and, especially, Morel's sharp analysis of the forced labour system[87]. One of the enduring characteristics of the humanitarian perspective has been the notion of Leopoldian exceptionalism. As previously noted, the reformers' mobilization of public support largely depended on their

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[81] G. Castryck, 'Whose History is History? Singularities and Dualities of the Public Debate on Belgian Colonialism' in C. Lévai, ed, Europe and the World in European Historiography (Pisa: CLIOHRES, 2006), 78; Stengers, 'Belgian Historiography'.

[82] Vanthemsche, 'The Historiography of Belgian Colonialism'.

[83] The works in question are Vangroenweghe, Rood Rubber and Delathuy, E. D. Morel tegen Leopold II.

[84] The commotion and controversy following the popularization of this perspective by Adam Hochschild and the fierce reactions to more radical reinterpretations demonstrate that the place the EIC should occupy within Belgian historical consciousness remains contested. See Dumoulin, Léopold II; Castryck, 'Whose History is History?'.

[85] The sympathy Belgium gained as a victim of German aggression and a wartime ally further contributed to the relative neglect of EIC history.

[86] The main works are H. R. Fox Bourne, Civilization in Congoland: a Story of International Wrong-doing (London: P.S. King & Son, 1903); E. D. Morel, Red rubber. The Story of the Rubber Slave Trade Flourishing on the Congo in the Year of Grace 1906 (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1906); Doyle, The Crime of the Congo; Twain, King Leopold's Soliloquy.

[87] R. Wuliger, The Idea of Economic Imperialism, with Special Reference to the Life and Work of E. D. Morel (PhD thesis, University of London, London, 1953); Louis, 'The Triumph'; Louis and Stengers, E. D. Morel's History; Cline, E. D. Morel; B. Porter, Critics of Empire: British Radical Attitudes to Colonialism in Africa, 1895-1914 (London: Macmillan, 1968).

ability to present the evils of the EIC not as a consequence but a distortion of the core principles of colonial rule[88]. The labour tax, land alienation, commercial monopolies and Leopold's love of money were the central tropes of a discourse which left the fundamental progressiveness of Europe's engagement with native peoples intact.

With this analysis, reformers succeeded in conquering the public mind –the public heart was mainly targeted through the medium of photography. Photographs of mutilated Congolese bodies were particularly successful in eliciting a strong emotional response and were therefore obsessively repeated in print and in the magic lantern shows which were a prominent feature of the Congo Reform campaign[89]. This privileging of mutilation and atrocities excluded other forms of ruination from view, be it sexual predation, starvation or more diffuse forms of violence with a wider geographical application[90]. The essence of the humanitarian legacy lies in the combination of this horrific visual imagery with an analysis of the peculiar legal system which Leopold engineered, and the obvious implication that one directly caused the other. The rediscovery of Joseph Conrad's Heart of Darkness as a condemnation of Leopold's maladministration of the Congo further raised its profile in the Anglophone collective memory, where the identification of the EIC with mass violence is now deeply embedded[91]. In Belgium, where the humanitarian perspective has also acquired a domineering presence, the picture remains more complex as remnants of the colonial discourse and national pride oppose its hegemony.

4. A violent state/a state of violence: explaining mass violence

Violence was an integral feature of colonialism, as it involved the imposition and maintenance of expatriate minority rule and, often, strong interventionism in the economic life of its subjects[92]. This does not imply, however, that brutal and violent acts were always, or even usually, centrally planned or directed. Often, violence occurred in

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[88] Cooper, 'From Free Labor'; Grant, A Civilized Savagery.

[89] S. Sliwinski, 'The Childhood of Human Rights: The Kodak on the Congo', Journal of Visual Culture, 5, 3 (2006), 333–63; T. J. Thompson, 'Light on the Dark Continent: The Photography of Alice Seely Harris and the Congo Atrocities of the Early Twentieth Century', International Bulletin of Missionary Research, 26 (2002), 146-9; Grant, 'Christian Critics of Empire'.

[90] Hunt, 'An Acoustic Register', 23.

[91] H. Hawkins, 'Conrad's Critique of Imperialism in Heart of Darkness', PMLA, 94, 2 (1979), 286-99.

[92] McCulloch, 'Empire and Violence'; Cooper, 'African Labor History'.

localized settings, was improvised, and committed by subordinate officers, African auxiliaries or non-state actors. The EIC's territory was marked by a society-led culture of violence quite separate from the policy objectives of its administration[93]. Nonetheless, the colonial state decisively shaped the contours of mass violence in two important ways. First, by setting the terms on which Congolese producers were forcefully integrated into the international economy it generated and deepened conflicts, notably but not exclusively between its own representatives and African producers, thus determining the structural relationship between perpetrators and victim groups[94]. Second, the administration displayed a very high tolerance for violence against Africans, officially and unofficially condoning means of enforcement well beyond those acceptable in a European context. This climate of impunity was a reflection of both state weakness and the leniency of a heavily biased judicial system and moral code which minimized or justified violent transgressions by reference to the need to uphold European power and prestige in the face of African barbarity[95]. A comprehensive account of mass violence in the EIC should encompass the role of the state as well as the concrete social contexts, interactions and actors in the contact zone.

This section offers seven perspectives on the state of violence surrounding Congo's colonial encounter with Europe. Individually, these are part-explanations of a complex phenomenon; taken together they point to ways of moving beyond the top-down approach which attributes its occurrence to a particular legal system or Leopold's rotten personality. This list of causes is merely a starting point for a more refined historical analysis: the task of reconstructing how, in different parts of the EIC and at different times, they interacted to produce specific historical outcomes still lies ahead. The

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[93] Gewald, 'More than Red Rubber'. In so conceptualizing colonial violence, I draw inspiration from Gerlach, 'Extremely Violent Societies' and Wolfe, 'Settler Colonialism'.

[94] The term 'state' in its singular, normative form –as used here for the sake of brevity and clarity– obscures the existence of a complex and hierarchic state bureaucracy, which renders the duality between the state and its local representatives somewhat problematic. The legislative and executive branch (respectively in Brussels and Congo) did contribute to the escalation of violence in different ways, but in the important case of the rubber regime the use of extreme violence was at least in some cases ordered by high ranking officials in the executive branch (such as the Vice Gouverneur Général or Commissaire de District) –an observation which somewhat qualifies my statement that mass violence in the EIC was not centrally planned. See Stengers, 'The Congo Free State', 280-1 for the differing responsibility of the legislative and executive branch. For the organisation of the rubber system see Vangroenweghe, Rood Rubber; Vangroenweghe, Voor Rubber en Ivoor; Delathuy, De Kongostaat van Leopold II; Delathuy, E.D. Morel tegen Leopold II; Hochschild, *King Leopold's Ghost.*

[95] M. Taussig, Shamanism, Colonialism, and the Wild Man : a Study in Terror and Healing (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987) argues that colonial violence mimics the ascribed barbarity of indigenous peoples.

argument here mainly concerns the need to embed the colonial state within its widest possible context.

1. Political culture and the establishment of sovereignty

The implantation of the colonial state and the assertion of its sovereign rights involved military conquest and the elimination of powerful competitors. The assertion of dominance was a drawn out, mediated and often truncated process[96]. However, even though control remained superficial in some parts, and was 'delegated' to allied chiefs and warlords in others, the logic of the colonial state legitimized and necessitated a number of interventions, notably the raising of revenue and the subjection of the African population to the rule of law. The identification of the state interest with its own survival and expansion and the implementation of a loosely defined model of development sensitive to metropolitan needs, helped define the contours of legitimate violence[97]. As 'good' colonial government entailed the successful enforcement of a legal system designed to bring about the desired social transformation, the state entitled itself to use its military power and machinery of criminal punishment to settle conflicts over land, labour, the direction of trade, tax obligations and production methods[98].

In the eyes of EIC officials and European opinion, a powerful civilizing discourse which presented colonial domination as a precondition for Africa's social, cultural and economic improvement provided the ultimate justification for the culture of violence it engendered. Such ideas enabled the rationalization of violence as being supportive of the greater good and led the administration to accept high worker mortality and disruptive recruitment practices as the inevitable costs of progress[99]. No less important for being

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[96] Ndaywel, Histoire Général, 280; Stengers and Vansina, 'King Leopold's Congo'.

[97] The 'development plan' mainly consisted of unlocking Congo's labour power, stimulating primary exports, developing a rudimentary infrastructure, guaranteeing secure title to land and property to European investors, and enforcing civil order. These 'normal' features of EIC policy have not received much attention in a historiography dominated by the (atypical) rubber system which grew primarily out of the imperative of state survival. For a broad view, see A. G. Hopkins, 'The "New International Economic Order" in the Nineteenth Century: Britain's First Development Plan for Africa' in R. Law, ed, From Slave Trade to 'Legitimate' Commerce: The Commercial Transition in Nineteenth-Century West Africa (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 240-64.

[98] Krozewski, 'Contextualising Violence', 58.

[99] On the post-liberal refusal to accept 'modernity' as the good which redeems colonial violence, see Moses, 'Conceptual Blockages'. Also see Mark Levene's suggestion that 'colonialism may have been inherently incompatible with its lofty aims', Levene, Genocide, 239.

inadequately understood is the impact of the imperial elite's social Darwinian worldview, in which the domination of 'inferior' races was naturalised and seen as crucially important to the strength and survival of the Belgian 'race'[100].

2. Ruthless economic exploitation

Revenue collection and labour mobilization were the most visible, pervasive and disruptive aspects of the colonial administration. The crucial importance of rubber to the state's solvency accounts for both the intensity of its exploitation, and the prominence of the 'rubber regime' in explanations of the mass violence sweeping the region. The rapid development of wild rubber exploitation in the EIC was part of an international speculative rubber boom which also affected producers in the rainforests of Latin America and other African colonies[101]. King Leopold fully capitalized on the opportunities world demand for rubber offered him to improve the state's precarious finances and to fulfil his private imperial ambitions[102]. The relentless pressure he personally exerted on his subordinates to increase production, and a perverse system of bonuses which rewarded the excesses of state and concession company agents, spurred on a ruthless and deadly scramble for revenue.

Following the analysis of Edmund Dene Morel, leader of the Congo Reform Association and a prolific writer, the legal system by which the state obtained forced tax labour to work the 'vacant' lands which it appropriated dominates explanations of its violent outcome. To Morel, the crucial issue was access to land: the EIC's seizure of the rubber forests implied the substitution of freely enacted and mutually beneficial trade

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[100] For the argument that the social darwinistic outlook of imperial elites could render violence 'necessary' see Levene, 'Empires', 199 and Krozewski, 'Contextualising Violence'. The mental horizon of the Belgian, metropolitan colonial elite is explored in Viaene, 'King Leopold's Imperialism'.

[101] B. Weinstein, The Amazon Rubber Boom, 1850–1912 (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1983); Taussig, Shamanism; J. F. Munro, 'Monopolists and Speculators: British Investment in West African Rubber, 1905-1914', Journal of African History, 22 (1981), 263-78; J. F. Munro, 'British Rubber Companies in East Africa before the First World War', Journal of African History, 24 (1983), 369-79; Coquery-Vidrovitch, Le Congo; Vangroenweghe, 'The "Leopold II" Concession System'. Roger Casement, the British consul whose damning report on the EIC did much to push the British government into action, would later write a similar report on rubber gathering in the Amazon: M. Taussig, 'Culture of Terror - Space of Death. Roger Casement's Putumayo Report and the Explanation of Torture', Comparative studies in society and history, 26, 3 (1984), 467-97.Guinée's experience provides an interesting contrast to the EIC: E. L. Osborn, '"Rubber Fever", Commerce and French Colonial Rule in Upper Guinée, 1890-1913', Journal of African History, 45 (2004), 445-65.

[102] Viaene, 'King Leopold's Imperialism'.

relationships with African rubber collectors with coercive means of labour extraction which by definition relied on violence[103]. Forced labour systems indeed share a reliance on violence for preventative and repressive purposes[104], but the EIC's legal system does not suffice to explain the nature and intensity of violence used. The forced cotton cultivation of a later period, for example, was equally coercive but was not accompanied by the same culture of violence[105].

The brutality of the EIC's regime was linked to a more complex process of interaction with, and adaptation to, local circumstances. In its most general sense, this represented the articulation of capitalist expansion with indigenous modes of production and distribution[106]. Europeans were hampered in their search for wage labour and revenues by the limited commodification of social relationships in the societies they encountered, and the ease by which those who preferred not to engage in production for the market could avoid doing so through subsistence production, flight, or migration[107]. Explanations for Africans' reluctance to engage in the kind of market production colonial governments desired centred on the idea of the 'lazy native', which was used to justify forced labour as an educational measure[108]. To organise the profitable extraction of natural resources under these circumstances, EIC officials resorted to copying and adapting the social organisation and terror tactics of the Eastern slave trade[109].

3. Under-capitalization and state weakness

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[103] Most succinctly argued in E. D. Morel, 'The "Commercial" Aspect of the Congo Question', Journal of the Royal African Society, 3, 12 (1904), 430-48, but also see Morel, Red Rubber. The legal appropriation of 'vacant' land was of paramount importance, but the state did not, and could not, in practice separate Africans from the land they held. The legal appropriation of land was enforced through a ban on selling its produce, and did not include lands used for subsistence agriculture.

[104] Breman, Imperial Monkey Business.

[105] See Likaka, Rural Society and Cotton; Likaka, Naming Colonialism.

[106] Cooper, 'Africa and the World Economy'.

[107] Cooper, 'African Labor History'; G. Austin, 'Resources, Techniques and Strategies South of the Sahara: Revising the Factor Endowments Perspective on African Economic Development, 1500-2000', Economic History Review, 61, 3 (2008), 587-624; Taussig, 'Culture of Terror - Space of Death'.

[108] W. J. Samarin, The Black Man's Burden. African Colonial Labor on the Congo and Ubangi Rivers, 1880-1900 (Boulder: Westview Press, 1989); Cooper, 'From Free Labor'.

[109] Vellut, 'La Violence Armée'; Delathuy, E. D. Morel tegen Leopold II.

An influential current of thought attributes much of the brutality of the EIC's rule to the absence of sufficient resources to effectively administer King Leopold's extensive territory[110]. The state's shortage of funds lay at the basis of both a fanatical drive to generate short-term revenue to finance colonial conquest and occupation and a reduction of expenditure to a bare minimum. Even after 1895, when the state's financial outlook had improved markedly as a result of the rubber boom, the administration continued to be starved of much needed resources as a result of Leopold's decision to reserve substantial sums for his imperial projects and self-aggrandizement[111].

Such economizing had far-reaching consequences for the make-up of the state. The colonial infrastructure, transport links and medical services remained rudimentary. The underdeveloped central administration and embryonic judicial system were only able to exercise minimal control over the interior, leading to a climate of impunity which was particularly grave in the vast tracts of rubber forests contracted out to private concession companies[112]. The lack of both support and supervision from the centre left local administrators and company agents often alone in improvising ways of obtaining food, labour and the expected revenues. Periodic shortages in trade goods, logistic difficulties and other inefficiencies further weakened the fabric of the state, forcing many state posts into a parasitic relationship with their environment. While in some areas institutionalized and negotiated forms of tribute collection proved manageable, much of the EIC fragmented into local plunder-economies in which state officials, concession company agents or the state's African allies raided their territory for food, labour and resources. The violence committed was spurred on by pressure from the centre to collect taxes and to rely on force when needed, but also responded to and varied with local circumstances.

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[110] This is the interpretation in, amongst others, R. Oliver and J. D. Fage, A Short History of Africa (New York: Penguin, 1984); J. F. Munro, Africa and the International Economy, 1800-1960 (London: J. M. Dent, 1976); W. G. Clarence-Smith, 'Business Empires in Equatorial Africa', African Economic History, 12 (1983), 3-11; A. G. Hopkins, 'Imperial Business in Africa. Part II: Interpretations', Journal of African History, 17, 2 (1976), 267-90.

[111] Stengers, 'The Congo Free State'. But see Jean-Phillipe Peemans' caveat that too much causal weight is often attributed to the exceptional but relatively modest capital transfers to Belgium: J.-P. Peemans, 'Capital Accumulation in the Congo under Colonialism: the Role of the State' in P. Duignan and L. H. Gann, eds, Colonialism in Africa, 1870-1960. The Economics of Colonialism (London: Cambridge University Press, 1975), 165-212.

[112] Harms, 'The World Abir Made'. The combination of a weak state and strong companies is well rehearsed in Mozambican historiography. See for instance Vail, 'Mozambique's Chartered Companies'.

Lack of resources prevented the EIC from establishing a close-knit network of state posts. Even more so than in other African colonies, state power in the EIC was 'arterial' rather than 'capillary': the state presence was largely concentrated in the Lower Congo and in a series of administrative and military posts occupying strategic positions along long-distance trade routes[113]. Beyond these posts, the state was most commonly represented by African mercenaries, allied chiefs and warlords, each often also pursuing their own economic and political agendas[114]. The impossibility of establishing direct control over the movements and activities of its African subjects limited the arsenal of disciplinary methods the state had at its disposal. Hostage taking, raids, the stationing of sentries in villages and the threat of corporal punishment, torture or open war were among the most effective methods available to put an unwilling population to work when production could not be directly supervised.

An undercapitalized EIC, then, possessed the determination and capacity to extract considerable resources from its territory, but lacked the ability (and arguably the will) to control the means by which such extraction occurred. It was this combination of official preoccupation with revenue and the absence of an effective civil administration which to influential observers such as Lord Cromer, Wilfred Thesiger and Félicien Cattier lay at the core of the 'maladministration' of the EIC[115].

4. African resistance

Africans did not passively submit to the EIC's claim to sovereign rights or its demands for labour and produce, and it was mostly through the brutal repression of such resistance that the latent violence of colonial rule and impressments of involuntary labour became overt. Contrary to the myth of peaceful occupation propagated by Belgian colonial discourse, 'primary resistance' from African rulers refusing to submit to European rule necessitated a prolonged war of conquest which outlasted the EIC[116]. In areas where the state's military dominance was established, Africans continued to resist its demands for

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[113] The terminology is derived from F. Cooper, 'Conflict and Connection: Rethinking Colonial African History', American Historical Review, 99, 5 (1994), 1516-45. Stengers and Vansina, 'King Leopold's Congo'.

[114] Vellut, 'La Violence Armée'.

[115] Osborne, 'Wilfred G. Thesiger'; F. Cattier, Etude sur la Situation.

[116] Vellut, 'La Violence Armée' ; Stengers and Vansina, 'King Leopold's Congo' ; Ndaywel, Histoire Générale.

labour and produce in a variety of ways[117]. Instances of outright rebellion, murders of state or company representatives, the evasion of duties through permanent migration or temporary flight as well as industrial sabotage (for example by cutting the rubber vines) have been documented[118]. A series of mutinies within the state's military also seriously challenged the EIC's rule over large parts of its territory[119]. The violent response such challenges provoked reflects the seriousness of the danger African resistance posed to state authority. In many cases, officials saw no other effective response than to further raise the level of violence in an attempt to terrorize their subjects into submission[120]

The degree of violence required to contain the enduring unrest and quell the resistance to the state's labour demands did much to expose the emptiness of the civilizing discourse on which its legitimacy depended[121]. Africans testified in great numbers before state officials, judicial officers, missionaries and the Commission d'Enquête[122]. The stark contrast between the presumed moral and material benefits of colonial rule and the systemic terror which these witnesses described provided sufficient ammunition for an international humanitarian campaign to successfully challenge Leopold's rule. By refusing to submit to the EIC's exploitative practices, Africans had played an important part in this process[123].

5. Interaction with African societies and political structures

Resistance was but one of the ways in which Africans engaged with European expansion. Differences, divisions and conflicts between and among African ethnic and social groups

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[117] Likaka, 'Rural protest'.

[118] Delathuy, E. D. Morel tegen Leopold II ; Delathuy, De Kongostaat van Leopold II; Vangroenweghe, Rood Rubber; Nzongola-Ntalaja, The Congo from Leopold to Kabila; Stengers and Vansina, 'King Leopold's Congo'.

[119] De Boeck, Baoni.

[120] Consider, for an extreme example, the following quote from a letter by Jules Jacques, Commissaire de District at Lake Leopold II, a high ranking state official, to his subordinate Chef de Poste: 'Decidedly, these people from Inongo are filthy scum. They have come to cut down the rubber vines at Ibali. We need to beat them into absolute submission or complete extinction [...] Warn them that if they cut down another vine, I will exterminate them to the last man'. ('Décidément ces gens d'Inongo constituent une bien vilaine engeance. Ils sont venus couper les lianes à caoutchouc à Ibali. Nous devrons taper sur eux jusqu'à soumission absolue ou extinction complète [...] Prévenez-les que s'ils coupent encore une liane, je les exterminerai tous jusqu'au dernier'). Quoted in J. Marchal, L'Etat Libre du Congo: Paradis Perdu. L'Histoire du Congo 1876-1900 (Borgloon: Paula Bellings, 1996), 360. My translation.

[121] Likaka, Naming Colonialism.

[122] As a result, African voices are present in the colonial archive. Hunt, 'An Acoustic Register'.

[123] Likaka, Naming Colonialism.

were fundamental to shaping the patterns of resistance and collaboration, mutual adaptation and intercultural exchange which defined the colonial encounter and the violence which accompanied it[124]. Explanations of the mass violence of the EIC era need to take into account such pre-existing social and political configurations and dynamics as well as the ways in which these were exploited by Europeans and their continued evolution in interaction with the colonial state.

During the second half of the 19th century the Congo Basin was the locus of dramatic social change[125]. Historians have documented migrations and conquests, increased social stratification, disintegration of large political units and attempts by ambitious leaders to forge new ones, transformations in and intensification of slavery systems, a marked militarization of societies, intensified competition for wealth and power and changes in gender patterns. The societies the EIC tried to contain within its borders were neither unified nor uniform, nor were they isolated from each other or the outside world. Many of the region's dynamics were related to the incorporation of large parts of it as raiding frontiers into Africa's expansive slave trading networks[126]. Although long-distance trade in ivory and slaves brought considerable wealth to some, its effects on the frontier regions in the Congo were mostly destructive, generating a climate of generalized warfare, deep divisions, antagonism and extreme violence.

As the EIC sought allies and collaborators through which to solidify its power, it was drawn into and exploited these conflicts and rivalries. While the abolitionist discourse deployed in Europe prescribed the active suppression of the slave trade and the protection of its victims, military and political expediency, as well as cultural preferences, more often led to the establishment of collaborative relations with dominant groups and conquering slavers[127]. Rather than being abolished, slavery systems and inequalities in

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[124] Vansina, Paths in the Rainforest.

[125] See Birmingham, Central Africa for an introduction.

[126] P. E. Lovejoy, Transformations in Slavery: a History of Slavery in Africa (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); J.-L. Vellut, 'Rural Poverty in Western Shaba, c. 1890-1930' in R. Palmer and N. Parsons, eds, The Roots of Rural Poverty in Central and Southern Africa (London: Heinemann, 1977), 294-316; Jewsiewicki, 'Notes sur l'Histoire'.

[127] E. J. Glave, 'Cruelty in the Congo Free State', The Century, 54, 5 (1897), 699-715; Likaka, 'Rural Protest'; Vangroenweghe, Voor Rubber en Ivoor. Some of these alliances were short-lived and ended in conflict when the power balance shifted, famously so in the cases of Tippu Tip and Ngongo Lutete. Others, such as Lumpungu, retained considerable autonomy and power within the colonial structure.

power were incorporated into the colonial framework as a means to mobilize the labour colonialism required[128]. African intermediaries not only mattered to the physical exercise of state power, but also made up the channels through which information on the region, its peoples, their practices and suitable modes of administration was gathered. The prevalence of Zanzibaris and Afro-Arabs as culture brokers appears to have been constitutive to the borrowing, extension and adaptation of the violent Afro-Arab system of resource extraction for the benefit of the EIC[129].

Over time the EIC's conquest and military dominance eroded the power of the country's ruling elites. However, this effect was not always immediately apparent, and in some cases enterprising Africans were able to consolidate or expand their wealth and power through political alliances with the state[130]. The outcome was an uneven distribution of burdens and opportunities. The more powerful leaders were able to mediate the incorporation of their subjects into the colonial order and mitigate some of its effects, often by shifting the burden of the EIC's demands for labour and produce to their weaker neighbours and subjected peoples. Elsewhere, the Afro-Arab 'sentry system', involving the stationing of armed state auxiliaries inside village communities, was widely adopted. Often, these sentries exploited their position of state-backed power to appropriate wealth, wives, and sexual services, while their usurpation of local political power hampered the negotiated, indirect exercise of state power on the long term[131].

6. Perpetrator motivation and character

Even though the extraction of labour and resources was at the heart of EIC state violence, the atrocities committed were not the result of measured economic rationality alone. State and company agents and their auxiliaries were more than profit-maximizing stick-figures increasing levels of brutality in a calculated response to financial bonuses for increased

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[128] Northrup, 'The Ending of Slavery'.

[129] Vellut, 'La Violence Armée'

[130] Vanhee, 'Over Heren en Knechten'.

[131] An account of the sentry system in operation in Katanga is given in a letter by the Scottish missionary Dugald Campbell in Morel, *King Leopold's Rule*, 452-62. These African auxiliaries are understudied: their origin, role and subsequent re-integration into society deserves further scrutiny. At times, they appear to have been drawn from dominant groups, building upon existing patterns of domination, while on other occasions they may have been merely locals faced with the unenviable choice of being 'among the hunters or the hunted'. See Hunt, 'An Acoustic Register'.

rubber production. The banality and pervasiveness of violence and the sadistic brutality of some of the atrocities committed require a broader understanding of perpetrator motivation[132]. Europeans and their African associates often used their position of unchecked power for the fulfilment of a variety of personal economic, psychological or sexual ambitions, with relative impunity leading to cumulative brutalization[133]. Comparative evidence also suggests that the arbitrary nature of autocratic political systems could profoundly influence the behaviour of their own administrations[134]. The socialisation of agents into an administration where official approval, promotions, financial benefits and even timely provisioning could depend solely on their success in raising revenue merits further study, as do more personal psychological processes such as desensitization, group conformity, indoctrination, victim dehumanization, cumulative brutalization, racism, fear and paranoia which facilitated the commitment of violent acts[135].

Historically, such questions have been marginalised by narratives which focused instead on the 'quality' or 'character' of state officials. Serving an unscrupulous and rapacious King Leopold, critics identified a local administration staffed with dubious personnel of low moral standing[136]. While Jean Stengers spoke of 'ordinary Belgians' locked into a violent system, doubts about the poor intellectual, moral and organisational qualities of state and concession company personnel have been commonplace among the administration's higher echelons, external observers and historians alike[137]. At times,

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[132] Gewald, 'More than Red Rubber', Breman, Imperial Monkey Business, Taussig, 'Culture of Terror'.

[133] Baron Nisco, Acting President of the Court of Appeal at Boma, noted in December 1903 that the violence which Europeans, including state officials, routinely inflicted upon Africans had no legal basis whatsoever. Coercion and corporal punishment were used arbitrarily to uphold the power and prestige of European officials and civilians alike partially because a legal framework encapsulating the reality of racial domination and forced labour was lacking. Such violence, while illegal, had to be tolerated since the legal system provided Europeans with insufficient means to impose their will on 'unwilling natives'. Quoted in Vangroenweghe, Voor Rubber en Ivoor, 377-9. It is following in this order of ideas that I typify the EIC's culture of violence as partly society-led. A similar argument is made for Rhodesia in McCulloch, 'Empire and Violence'.

[134] I. Kershaw and M. Lewin, eds, Stalinism and Nazism: Dictatorships in Comparison (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

[135] Jan Vansina hypothesizes that the loneliness and disease may have been important factors, in Stengers and Vansina, 'King Leopold's Congo', 352. Johannes Fabian has also remarked that, quite often, Europeans were not in full possession of their senses, but ill with fever and under the influence of drugs and alcohol. Fabian, Out of Our Minds.

[136] See, for example, Morel in Louis and Stengers, E. D. Morel's History. Also see the observations made, for the Katanga region, by J. B. Thornhill, Adventures in Africa under the British, Belgian and Portuguese Flags (London: John Murray, 1915) and R. R.Sharp, Early Days in Katanga (Bulawayo, Southern Rhodesia, 1956).

[137] Stengers, 'The Congo Free State'; Stengers and Vansina, 'King Leopold's Congo', 352.

such perceived shortcomings linked into essentialist conceptions of race, nationality or class. Doubts were cast over the colonial aptitudes of the Belgian 'race', while the petty bourgeois background of the lower ranks of the state machinery equally raised questions about their fitness to rule. Lack of 'character' (a concept closely related to ideals of masculinity) was held to cause Europeans to succumb to the degenerative and brutalizing effects of the African climate, environment and people[138]. The most common 'genetic' explanation of violence, however, concerned African auxiliaries and native troops which, if inadequately supervised, were argued to be prone to surrender to their 'savage instincts'[139].

While the explanatory value of 'character' to the problem of mass violence is limited at best, the EIC did experience difficulties in attracting suitable personnel due to high mortality rates, undesirable working conditions, modest wages and the low prestige of the Congolese colonial service[140]. As a result, recruitment standards were low and discredited personnel were retained to complement the structurally understaffed administration. A rapid turnover in personnel, the lack of education for colonial service and the loose ties with the central administration left many state posts in the hands of young and inexperienced recruits who improvised ways to assert their dominance over an environment often perceived as hostile. Agreements with the Belgian and Italian army, the enlistment of Scandinavian officers and West African subordinate cadres somewhat alleviated the EIC's staffing problems, but also ensured that the administration became strongly infused with a military spirit[141].

7. Racism

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[138] D. N. Livingstone, 'The Moral Discourse of Climate: Historical Considerations on Race, Place and Virtue', Journal of Historical Geography, 17 (1991), 413-34; D. Kennedy, 'The Perils of the Midday Sun: Climatic Anxieties in the Colonial Tropics', in J. M. McKenzie, ed, Imperialism and the Natural World (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1990), 118-40.

[139] Breman, Imperial Monkey Business, 95.

[140] Emerson, Leopold II of the Belgians, 237.

[141] L. H. Gann and P. Duignan, The Rulers of Belgian Africa 1884-1914 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979).

The attribution of inherent characteristics on the basis of 'race' or ethnicity was deeply engrained within European thought[142]. Racism was also at the centre of the EIC's colonial ideology. It was Africans' assumed backwardness and slaving instincts which justified colonial conquest, their inherent laziness which justified forced labour, and their insolence, dishonesty, violent nature and childlike behaviour which justified the state's authoritarian rule and the use of force in excess of what was acceptable in Europe. In the eyes of state officials, the particular barbarity of the EIC's African inhabitants necessitated a firm, ruthless and often brutal exercise of authority[143]. The idea that colonial rule brought civilization to these 'benighted' Africans proved a powerful tool in playing down the severe disruption it caused: as the great task of remaking Africans seemed impossible to achieve without it, violence, turmoil and demographic decline were accepted as necessary evils offset by colonialism's ulterior benefits. A fatalistic attitude towards violence and social upheaval masked the state's failure or unwillingness to safeguard African societies from the excessive and arbitrary requisitioning of workers, food and taxes or to control the violence committed by its representatives.

By dehumanizing victims and precluding empathy for the suffering inflicted upon them, racism was also crucial to facilitating the commitment of extreme and sometimes sadistic acts of violence[144]. Writings from Europeans residing in the Congo often reveal aversion, intense hatred and deep contempt for the Africans amongst whom they lived. Parallel to (and in tension with) conceptions of the civilizing mission and African moral improvement circulated notions of native irreclaimability, depicting Africans as beasts of burden and dirty brutes whose lives counted for little or nothing. Such racist depictions underlay the banality of violence against Africans and the thoughtlessness with which some Europeans resorted to physical abuse, murder, plunder and warfare. Low penalties for crimes against Africans and their lax treatment by the administration and courts structurally reinforced the idea that African life was cheap[145].

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[142] Levene, Genocide; Moses, 'Conceptual Blockages'; M. Banton, Racial Theories (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); C. Bolt, Victorian Attitudes to Race (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1971).

[143] Taussig, 'Culture of Terror'; Breman, Imperial Monkey Business.

[144] Gewald, 'More than Red Rubber'; Breman, Imperial Monkey Business.

[145] Compare to McCulloch, 'Empire and Violence'.

Racism was not a strictly European preserve. Jean-Luc Vellut notes the contempt the Islamised 'Waungwana' displayed towards the pagan 'Washenzi' and the way in which in this case too the marking of difference facilitated the commitment of brutalities and extreme violence[146]. Nor were racist notions uniform: Europeans held varying and sometimes positive ideas on African racial characteristics, and could interact with Africans accordingly. Few rigid institutional boundaries yet separated Europeans from Africans, leading to the development of close and sometimes intimate relationships between them. Cutting across this pluriformity of attitudes and interactions, however, fundamentally uneven power relations, racial inequality codified in law, and the twin ideas of white superiority and the legitimacy of European dominion remained unquestioned.

5. Sources

The above overview of the roots of the EIC's culture of violence remains static and incomplete. Its main aims have been to pave the way for more geographically precise and dynamic approaches and to point to ways in which the study of violence in the EIC can usefully be refocused. What is now needed is a clearer picture of the variations in impact and experience of EIC rule (and their causes), a shift from state-centred, top-down interpretations to an understanding of violence as deeply rooted and society-led, the investigation of multiple actors and social groups in interaction with the colonial state, and a broader contextualisation of the EIC's violent history within broader currents of European and African history[147]. The focus in this article has been predominantly on causes and perpetrators, but the recovery of lived experience and the exploration of structural change are at least as urgent. Although the EIC period is one of the most intensely studied in Congolese history, the research agenda remains long. Fortunately, there exists a wide range of sources with which to tackle it. This final section serves as a rough introduction to this material[148].

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[146] 'La Violence Armée'. It should be noted that in this case religion, not race, was the significant marker of difference, which (in a limited number of cases) left the door open for co-optation through conversion.

[147] A good bibliographic guide to the existing literature up to 1996 is J.-L. Vellut, F. Loriaux and F. Morimont, Bibliographie Historique du Zaïre à l'Epoque Coloniale (1880-1960): Travaux Publiés en 1960-1996 (Louvain la Neuve: UCL. Centre d'Histoire de l'Afrique, 1996). Also see J.-L. Vellut, Guide de l'Etudiant en Histoire du Zaïre (Kinshasa and Lubumbashi: Editions du Mont Noir, 1974).

[148] A comprehensive guide to archival material on Belgian colonial history held in Belgium and abroad (but apparently excluding archives in the DRC) is currently being prepared by Lien Ceûppens and Laure d'Ursel for the Belgian State

Belgian archives contain most of the material required to offer a comprehensive inside perspective on the colonial administration and the violence it engendered[149]. For information on the latter, researchers no longer need to rely on published accounts and testimonies circulated by the regime's critics: the EIC government and related records which have been gradually opened up have provided most of the detailed information on which the highly critical studies by Jules Marchal and Daniel Vangroenweghe are based[150]. Wilful destruction of compromising material and years of relative neglect mean that records can be fragmentary, scattered, poorly organized and inadequately inventorized, but the remaining material is still far richer than is often suggested[151]. Official documents and personal papers of state officials ranging from the rank and file up to the Gouverneur Général, Secrétaire d'Etat and some of King Leopold's personal entourage offer a wealth of information on state policy as well as personal testimonies, correspondence and reports[152]. Some of these reports are surprisingly critical of state practice, while others are noteworthy for their blatant racism and boastful descriptions of extreme violence[153]. Travel accounts and autobiographical notes of various private individuals who visited the Congo offer another interesting perspective on the country, its

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Archives and the Royal Museum for Central Africa. Publication is scheduled for 2012, but online access to the database is promised sooner (see http://arch.arch.be for more details).

[149] A couple of general introductions to African archives held in Belgium give a useful overview of the most important collections. See, for example, H. Legros and C. A. Keim, 'Guide to African Archives in Belgium', History in Africa, 23 (1996), 401-409. Most introductions to Belgian archive collections are now themselves historical artifacts, but still worth consulting are M. Van Grieken-Taverniers, La Colonisation belge en Afrique centrale: Guide des Archives Africaines du Ministère des Affaires Africaines 1885-1962 (Bruxelles: Ministère des Affaires Etrangères, du Commerce Extérieur et de la Coopération au Développement, 1981); F. Peemans and P. Lefevre, Les Sociétés Coloniales belges: Archives et Données Bibliographiques (1885-1960) (Bruxelles: CEDAF, 1980) ; and Vellut, Guide de l'Etudiant.

[150] These records are now held at the African Archives, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Brussels (AA). See Van Grieken-Taverniers, La Colonisation Belge; Legros and Keim, 'Guide to African Archives'.

[151] Although a large part of the EIC archives were famously burned at the time of Belgian annexation, it is not clear exactly what was destroyed. It seems likely that what Leopold's collaborators aimed to cover up was not the human cost of his administration, but the King's financial machinations. G. De Boeck, 'EIC: les Cadavres dans le Placard' (http://www.congoforum.be/upldocs/EIC_%20les%20cadavres.pdf, accessed 22 Mar 2010).

[152] The main repository for personal papers is the Royal Museum for Central Africa, Tervuren. See P. Van Schuylenberg, Le Mémoire des Belges en Afrique Centrale. Inventaire des Archives Historiques Privées du Musée Royal de l'Afrique Centrale de 1858 à nos Jours (Tervuren: Museé Royal de l'Afrique Centrale, 1997). Other relevant private papers and correspondence are included in the Fonds IRCB (AA), while the State Archives, Brussels hold the records of high functionaries such as Edmond Van Eetvelde and Hubert Droogmans. The papers of King Leopold and some of his immediate entourage can be consulted at the Archives of the Royal Palace, Brussels. The series Service Personnel Africaine at the AA contains files on most colonial officials.

[153] Much depended on circumstance: reactions against humanitarian agitation were almost unanimously defensive, but internally discussion and criticism were possbile. See, for example, Dhanis on the Abir concession in Hunt, 'An Acoustic Register'.

administration and its people. Many archival sources, such as the records of court cases, which are now accessible up to 1910, still await their historian[154].

Missionary sources rival government records both in the detail they provide and in their wide geographical scope[155]. State officials exempted, protestant and catholic missionaries were the most numerous group of Europeans residing in the EIC. As missionaries were also less concentrated in the urban areas of the Lower Congo, they were the most prominent European observers of, and participants in, developments in the interior[156]. Unsurprisingly, this privileged position implicated missionaries directly in the Congo atrocity campaign as their testimony and endorsement was much coveted by humanitarians and the state alike. The decision to participate on either side of the debate mostly depended on strategic considerations related to evangelisation, which remained the missionary societies' primary concern[157]. Public interventions by missionaries were

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[154] These are held at the AA. Files become available after a 100 year closure period. I do not include records held in the Democratic Republic of the Congo in this survey. While there is no doubt that important official records and correspondence can still be found at the Archives Nationales de la République Démocratique du Congo and at various archives at the old administrative centres, no up to date introductions to this material currently exist. For the situation in the 1970s see Vellut, Guide de l'Etudiant.

[155] The different missionary orders and organisations each focused on a specific geographical area, which renders missionary sources particularly suitable for regional studies. For a useful map of the Catholic missionary districts see K. T. Streit, Katholischer Missionsatlas: Enthaltend die Gesamten Missionsgebiete des Erdkreises (Steyl: Verlag der Missionsdruckerei, 1906). R. Slade, English-speaking Missions in the Congo Independent State (1878-1908) (Brussel: ARSOM, 1959) also has a good map which includes protestant missions. Archives of Catholic missions are held at the mother house in Tongerloo, Belgium for the Premonstratensians (Uele District), Westmalle, Belgium for the Trappists (Equateur District) and Borgerhout, Belgium for the Sacred Heart Fathers (Stanley Falls and Aruwimi); at the Vatican for the White Fathers (Lake Tanganyika); both at the Vatican and at Heverlee, Belgium for the Jesuits (Kwango District); at KADOC in Leuven, Belgium for the Scheutists (Equateur and Kasai Districts) and Redemptorists (Bas-Congo District); and at the Mill Hill Missionaries Heritage Centre, Liverpool for the Mill Hill Fathers (Lac Leopold II). My sincere thanks go to Vincent Viaene for providing me with much of this information. Protestant missions included the Baptist Missionary Society (archives at Regent's Park College, University of Oxford), Congo Balolo Mission (archives at the Centre for the Study of Christianity in the Non-Western World, University of Edinburgh), American Baptist Foreign Mission Society (archives at Mercer University, Atlanta, GA), American Presbyterian Congo Mission (archives at Montreat, NC) and the Svenska Missionsförbundet (archives at Riksarkivet Marieberg, Stockholm).

[156] Although I have not discussed their complex roles, missionaries themselves were, in various ways, participants in the EIC's coercive system and culture of violence even as they were (sometimes) highly critical of its excesses. See A. M. Delathuy, Missie en Staat in Oud-Kongo, 1880-1914. Witte Paters, Scheutisten en Jezuïeten (Berchem: EPO, 1992); R. Kinet, "Licht in die Finsternis": Kolonisation und Mission im Kongo, 1876-1908: Kolonialer Staat und Nationale Mission zwischen Kooperation und Konfrontation (Berlin: Lit Verlag, 2003); W. François, 'De Onderzoekscommissie voor Congo (1904-1905) en de Missies van de Jezuïeten', Belgisch Tijdschrift voor Nieuwste Geschiedenis, 37, 1-2 (2007), 79-142.

[157] P. Kennedy, Black Livingstone: A True Tale of Adventure in the 19th Century Congo (New York: Viking Press, 2002); Delathuy, Missie en Staat in Oud-Kongo; D. Lagergren, Mission and State in the Congo: a study of the Relations between Protestant Missions and the Congo Independent State Authorities with Special Reference to the Equator District, 1885-1903 (Uppsala: Gleerup, 1970); Slade, English-speaking Missions; S. Shaloff, Reform in Leopold's Congo (Richmond: John Knox Press, 1970); C. A. Cline, 'The Church and the Movement for Congo

thus somewhat skewed to favour the missionary cause: critics were keen to present the excesses of Leopoldian colonialism as evidence of the shortcomings of a materialistic colonialism in need of moral improvement through increased missionary involvement. However, missionary evidence is by no means limited to such public pronouncements. Missionary archives contain a wealth of internal correspondence and detailed reports which provide information not only on the missionaries and their daily lives, but also on the social, political and economic context in which they operated and on the people they tried to convert. The writings of two prominent missionaries, Émeri Cambier (Scheut) and Fernand Allard (Jesuit), which are available in published form, provide just a taste of the richness of this missionary evidence, as does a recent compilation of correspondence by American Presbyterian missionaries[158].

Other interesting sources include the consular reports which provided foreign powers with the ammunition they needed to exert diplomatic pressure on King Leopold, as well as the correspondence originating from foreign diplomatic representatives residing in the Congo[159]. The famous report compiled by the British consul Roger Casement in 1903 may have been more significant as a landmark in the politics of Congo reform than it is for the information it provides on the EIC administration, but it was but the first of a series of more detailed and analytical reports written by an extended British consular staff during the decade which followed[160]. American, Portuguese, Italian, Dutch, and French consuls also wrote reports on violence and maladministration within the EIC, though of

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Reform', Church History, 32, 1 (1963), 46-56; D. Northrup, 'A Church in Search of a State: Catholic Missions in Eastern Zaïre 1879-1930', Journal of Church and State, 30, 2 (1988), 309-19; Axelson, Culture Confrontation.

[158] D. Gallez, ed, Fernand Allard: Journal du Congo (1905-1907): un Apprentissage Missionnaire (Bruxelles: Institut Historique Belge de Rome, 2001); A. Cornet and F. Bontinck, eds, Émeri Cambier: Correspondance du Congo (1888-1899): un Apprentissage Missionnaire (Bruxelles: Institut Historique Belge de Rome, 2001); R. Benedetto, ed, Presbyterian Reformers in Central Africa: A Documentary Account of the American Presbyterian Congo Mission and the Human Rights Struggle in the Congo, 1890-1918 (Leiden: E. J. Bril, 1996).

[159] Cookey, Britain and the Congo Question ; W. R. Louis, 'Roger Casement and the Congo', Journal of African History, 6, 1 (1964), 99-120; W. R. Louis, 'The Philosophical Diplomatist Sir Arthur Hardinge and King Leopold's Congo, 1906-1911', Académie Royale des Sciences d'Outre-Mer. Bulletin des Séances, 11, 6 (1965), 1402-30; W. R. Louis, 'The Triumph of the Congo Reform Movement'; Osborne, 'Wilfred G. Thesiger', A. Porter, 'Sir Roger Casement and the International Humanitarian Movement', Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History, 29, 2 (2001), 59-74.

[160] The full report has been published, first as D. Vangroenweghe and J.-L. Vellut, eds, Le Rapport Casement (Louvain la Neuve: Université Catholique de Louvain, 1985), and subsequently, jointly with Casement's important Congo diaries, in Ó Síocháin and O'Sullivan, The Eyes of Another Race. Hunt's 'sensory reading' of the report is successful in recovering African experience: see Hunt, 'An Acoustic Register'.

variable quality and often based on second-hand information[161]. While consular reports have lost some of their earlier importance due to the opening up of government archives in Belgium, they still contain much valuable information besides offering an interesting insight in the troubled process of defining sound practice in colonial policy. Humanitarian activists and organisations which campaigned against the Congo administration left another rich archival legacy. The voluminous collection of Edmund Dene Morel's papers at the London School of Economics is particularly useful. Its relevance extends well beyond Morel's handling of the Congo Reform campaign itself, as it contains a very rich correspondence with a range of local informants as well as sympathizers, politicians and the ideologically unconverted[162].

Although the written record represents a wide range of perspectives, it is almost exclusively European in origin. Nonetheless, Europeans regularly recorded the concerns and testimonies of the many African victims, perpetrators and witnesses of colonial violence who related their experiences. Official reports often quote native informants, albeit in a mediated form, so that a careful reading of these documents can reveal much of the way in which Africans experienced and interpreted the transformations and hardships brought about by colonial occupation. Of particular value is the evidence given by African men and women to the Commission d'Enquête, which investigated allegations of state violence in the Equator province, and can be consulted at the African Archives in Brussels[163]. In addition to contemporary written sources, historians can make use of personal and popular memories of the violence of the EIC which have endured until the late colonial period and beyond[164]. A number of these memories, which appear to have been very vivid in the Equator's rubber districts, have been collected or transcribed by the Flemish catholic missionary Edmond Boelaert[165]. Some of these testimonies have been subsequently published, others are preserved at the Centre Aequatoria[166]. Overall, however, relatively little has been done to

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[161] Foreign Office files at the National Archives, London contain several of these reports.

[162] Another important collection is the archive of the British Aborigines Protection Society held at Rhodes House, University of Oxford.

[163] 258 Africans testified in front of the commission, including 13 women. See Hunt, 'An Acoustic Register', 225.

[164] In their study of rubber atrocities in the Equator province, Roger Anstey and Robert Harms have made use of some of this oral testimony. Anstey, 'The Congo Rubber Atrocities'; Harms, 'The world Abir Made'. For the Ubangi District, the same was done by Ngbwapkwa, 'L'Exploitation du Caoutchouc'.

[165] N. R. Hunt, 'Rewriting the Soul'.

[166] E. Boelaert, H. Vinck and C. Lonkama, 'Arrivée des Blancs sur les Bords des Rivières Equatoriales (partie 1)', Annales Aequatoria, 16 (1995), 13-134 ; E. Boelaert, H. Vinck and C. Lonkama, 'Arrivée des Blancs sur les Bords des

record or recover African memories and interpretations of the EIC's conquest, administration and forced labour policies[167].

At the time of the events, most of the above sources were not publicly available. Instead, information reached European audiences through the numerous pamphlets and articles published or inspired by either the humanitarian reform campaign or the equally vociferous counter-campaign financed by King Leopold[168]. While news on Congolese affairs was thus ideologically filtered and often contradictory, the 'rubber atrocity' revelations left a deep impression on the European conscience and imagination. The skilful use of sensational photographs, touring lantern shows, gifted orators, evangelical grassroots organisation and a prodigious output of pamphlets, books, and newspaper articles turned the Congo Reform campaign into the largest sustained protest against colonial exploitation during the early Twentieth century[169]. Their direct political achievements aside, these protests left visible traces in European culture. The space the EIC occupied in European literary and cultural production opens its own avenues for historical research. An atrocity literature which displayed, aestheticized and exoticized violence against Africans, affirmed Central Africa's acquired image as a primitive and barbaric 'Heart of Darkness' in need of external salvation[170].

Taken together, a detailed examination of this rich archival record and the possibilities for recovering African experience allow for a much fuller appreciation of both the complexity and brutality of the colonial encounter than the one provided by the current state-centred literature. The dragging of the EIC from under Leopold's shadow and its re-integration into the broader historiography on European expansion and African adaptations to colonial rule is both possible and long overdue.

Rivières Equatoriales (partie 2)', Annales Aequatoria, 17 (1996), 7-415. The Centre Aequatoria has a very informative website (www.aequatoria.be).

[167] A recent exception is Likaka, Naming Colonialism which makes effective use of the collective and individual names given to Europeans as a point of entry into African experiences and prespectives.

[168] R. Wiggers, 'De "Fédération pour la Défense"'; G. Vanthemsche, 'The Historiography of Belgian Colonialism'.

[169] Grant, A Civilized Savagery; Grant 'Christian Critics of Empire'; Sliwinski, 'The Childhood of Human Rights'; Thompson, 'Light on the Dark Continent'.

[170] S. Gehrmann, Kongo-Greuel. Zur Literarischen Konfiguration eines Kolonialkritischen Diskurses (1890-1910) (Hildesheim: Georg Olms Verlag, 2003); K. Dunn, Imagining the Congo: the International Relations of Identity (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003); J. Peffer, 'Snap of the Whip/Crossroads of Shame: Flogging, Photography, and the Representation of Atrocity in the Congo Reform Campaign', Visual Anthropology Review, 24, 1 (2008), 55-77.

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