

**Pierre-Philippe Fraiture (ed.). 2022. *Unfinished Histories: Empire and Postcolonial Resonance in Central Africa and Belgium*. Leuven: Leuven University Press. 440 pp.**

Recent studies of modern imperialism have come to favor interrogating the mechanisms of domination implemented by European empires across geographical boundaries, rather than stand-alone political events in one territory. In contrast to British and French colonialism, however, Belgium's colonial enterprise in Central Africa is repeatedly omitted from these discourses. Nevertheless, Belgium created a vast empire in Central Africa, not only by occupying an enormous territory that is now known as the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), but also by conquering Ruanda-Urundi during World War I, over which it later gained official control as a "mandate territory" by the League of Nations. Therefore, Belgium's imperial program and its legacy are worthy of studying in its entirety, across the present national boundaries. *Unfinished Histories: Empire and Postcolonial Resonance in Central Africa and Belgium* is admirable for its examination of the continued reciprocal influence of Belgium's colonial past on the metropole, Congo, as well as Rwanda and Burundi. Considering a broad range of subjects, including literature, museology, visual art, education, and architecture, the collection of essays seeks to frame the effects of Belgian imperialism on these countries.

The book's staggering seventeen essays are divided into five sections. The first lays bare Belgium's relationship to its colonial past and exemplifies some of the country's contemporary perceptions. The book opens with an essay that critiques the 2018 renovation of the AfricaMuseum in Tervuren, followed by two essays that discuss the 1994 Rwandan genocide through the analysis of three Belgian novels, as well as genocide education in the Belgian French-speaking region Wallonia. The second section searches for "international resonances" through a case study of the Congo/African Training Institute in Wales, a discussion on how contemporary performances can counter "colonial amnesia," and a study of the Ciluba language in a globalizing world. The third section considers specific imperial practices through an examination of media representation of Burundi's 2020 election, "grey" architecture in Kongolo, colonial agricultural politics and its afterlives, and the work of philosopher Alexis Kagame. The final two sections focus on more recent literature, art, and cinema. The discussed authors and artists, such as Sony Labou Tansi, Saverio Naygiziki, V.Y. Mudimbe, Antoine Ruti, Gaël Faye, Sinzo Aanza, and Maisha Maene, reconsider the past and their work offers new, contemporary perspectives on the colonial period.

The concept of "postcolonial resonance" counters linear histories and attempts to overhaul progressive, modernist approaches to Central African history and culture. This approach creates an avenue through which to investigate the shared experience of Belgian imperialism but, at times, leaves no room for the possibility that the discussed artists and authors can create outside of the specter of colonialism. This is not to say that for many contemporary artists the colonial trauma is not a crucial theme. However, scholars need to be wary that African culture is not only deemed relevant in-so-much-as it relates to its colonial past. Besides the important essays in *Unfinished Histories*, Central African culture should also be investigated on its own terms, outside the framework of "postcolonial resonance."

In addition to the subversion of linear histories, the positioning of Rwanda and Burundi next to the DRC is an important intervention. Yet, the comparative study of literature, art,

colonial policy, museology and education across current national boundaries remains underexposed. The different countries are examined alongside each other but are not directly compared. Aside from the essay by Maëline Le Lay that traces the landscapes of the Great Lakes region in the work of Mudimbe, Ruti, and Nayigiziki, the book does not consider many connections, networks, and interactions across the geographical borders of the Belgian empire in Central Africa. This remains an acute gap in existing scholarship.

*Unfinished Histories* is an important contribution to the study of history and culture in Central Africa as it opens up the possibility of discussions on Belgian imperialism across time and space. The book grants readers critical analyses on a wide range of topics ranging from recent Congolese literature to the legacy of cash crop agriculture. The central argument that the colonial past keeps influencing the present remains poignant, especially in light of the persistent violence and political upheaval in the Great Lakes region of Central Africa. The well-researched, interdisciplinary essays offer refreshing perspectives and will spark discussions in many academic fields from art history to comparative literature.

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