

Roger Williams University

DOCS@RWU

Modern Languages, Philosophy and Classics
Theses

Arts and Sciences Theses

2022

The Legacy of Belgian Colonialism in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Republic of Rwanda

Michaela Aptt

Follow this and additional works at: https://docs.rwu.edu/foreign_languages_theses



Part of the [European History Commons](#)

**THE LEGACY OF BELGIAN COLONIALISM IN THE DEMOCRATIC
REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO AND THE REPUBLIC OF RWANDA**

MICHAELA APTT

**A thesis submitted to the faculty of the Department of Modern Languages,
Philosophy, and Classics in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the
degree of**

Bachelor of Arts

Roger Williams University

May 12, 2022

**THE LEGACY OF BELGIAN COLONIALISM IN THE DEMOCRATIC
REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO AND THE REPUBLIC OF RWANDA**

Signature

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Michael" followed by a stylized flourish.

Author

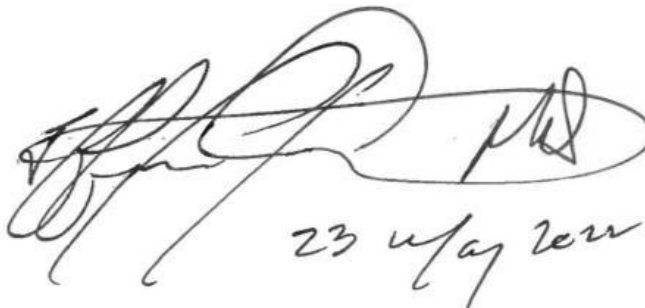
Accepted

Thesis
Advisor: Peter Thompson Peter Thompson

Advisor

Dean

Accepted

A large, stylized handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Peter Thompson" with a large flourish. Below the signature is the date "23 May 2020".

Introduction

The empires of the past spanned vast horizons, covering all corners of the world and setting the course for modern day culture, politics, and conflict. The influence of these historic empires are very prevalent in contemporary global society. Carving up the world for honor and power, these empires drew borders still present today and left their influence deeply ingrained in foreign regions. This was seen significantly throughout the continent of Africa by European powers. Francophone powers of the 18th through early 20th centuries participated heavily in this imperialist agenda. In particular, The Kingdom of Belgium notoriously ran poorly governed colonies based upon economic exploitation without regard for the governed people, their cultures, or previously established settlements. The imperialist goal was to expand the Belgian empire while bringing fortune and abundance to Belgium through the harvest of natural resources and oppression of local peoples. This thesis aims to compare specific differences between Belgian direct colonial administration, and the British indirect colonial administration, with the former leading to significant post independence and neocolonial difficulties including ethnic conflict, poor government, and stunted economic development in previously Belgian colonial territories.

Literature Review

The Belgian colonial empire began its endeavors in the 1860's after gaining independence from the Netherlands in 1830, with fruition occurring between 1901 and 1962. Belgium joined the European chase of Africa later than countries such as the United Kingdom, France, and Germany, missing the opportunity to hold the most

economically promising territories in its own sphere of influence. Belgian colonialism saw a striking difference from its other European counterparts as 98% of Belgian territory in Africa consisted of just one colony, the Belgian Congo, amassing territory almost seventy six times larger than mainland Belgium. Another difference lies within the acclimation of this territory, as it had “originated as the private property of [Belgian] King Leopold II, rather than being gained through the political action of the ... state.” This is significant because even though Belgium was small in size and power, it held significantly more territory in Africa than its more powerful neighbor, Germany.¹

Understanding the legacy of Belgian colonialism can only be done with justice by considering the idea of Post-Colonial Theory. According to Britannica, this theory refers to the state of the modern world and how it directly relates to the aftermath of Western colonialism. It is also used to describe the modern ideological goal of “reclaiming and rethinking the agency of people subordinated under various forms of imperialism.” The goal in doing so is to create a future of overcoming the difficulties left to modern states by colonization. It should be noted that in no way does this theory claim that the modern world is devoid of colonialism, instead focusing on the effect of western colonialism in the last four-hundred years.²³

Sheila Nair, who authored the chapter on Postcolonialism in the E-International Relations textbook *International Relations Theory*, agrees with this statement, and further develops a definition of postcolonialism. Nair states that “Postcolonialism

¹“Belgian Colonial Empire”

² “Postcolonialism.” Encyclopædia Britannica.

³ While this theory could apply to other time periods or other colonial forces, as understood in the international relations community today and for the sake of this paper, this possible application will be overlooked.

examines how societies, governments and peoples in the formerly colonised regions of the world experience international relations, [and] ... it highlights the impact that colonial and imperial histories still have in shaping a colonial way of thinking about the world and how Western forms of knowledge and power marginalise the non-Western world." Believing that "Postcolonialism is not only interested in understanding the world as it is, but also as it ought to be." Post colonialism aims to analyze the "disparities in global power and wealth accumulation and why some states and groups exercise so much power over others." The answer to the latter question revolves largely on theories relating to postcolonialism which will be discussed at a later time including Decolonization and Dependence Theory. An interesting point made by Nair regards how studying post colonialism allows for "alternative readings of history [and] alternative perspectives on contemporary events and issues." Which supports a popular claim that the winners in history write the textbooks, and the truth is often left behind with the losers. Reclaiming this perspective is a main goal of post colonialism and should be regarded as such. Postcolonial Theory aims to "drawn attention to IR theory's neglect of the critical intersections of empire, race/ethnicity, gender and class (among other factors) in the workings of global power that reproduce a [hierarchy] ... centred not on striving for a more equal distribution of power among peoples and states but on the concentration of power." This analyzes postcolonialism from a Realist point of view, believing that the main goal of any state is to gain as much power as possible. Since this drive for power is a main motivator for imperialism, not mentioning it in discussions of postcolonialism would be a disservice as the discourses surrounding this Realist perspective explain why certain modern power relations seem natural or even

inevitable, when in reality they are byproduct of colonialism that otherwise would not have taken place.⁴

In his books *Orientalism* (1978) and *Culture and Imperialism* (1994), Edward Said is regarded as originally developing this contemporary theory, in regards to the modern perception of East Asia. While focusing on a separate region of the world while developing this theory, his idea still applies well to post-colonial Africa. He begins by explaining the idea of the “Occident” versus the “Orient,” creating the idea of “us” versus the “Other.” The concept of the Other being a person whose background is not white and western european, “fabricated by western explorers, poets, novelists, philosophers, political theorists, economists, and imperial administrators since Napoleon's occupation of Egypt in 1798.”

According to Said, these have always shown the Orient as the primitive, uncivilized Other, in an attempt to show a stark contrast to the perceived more advanced and civilized West. Said continues to form the supporting argument for postcolonial theory by discussing the footprint left behind by a powerful colonizer after it imposed its language and culture on foreign peoples. While doing so, the power also ignored and distorted the cultures, histories, values, and languages of the “Orient,” “in their pursuit to dominate these peoples and exploit their wealth in the name of enlightening, civilizing, and even “humanizing” them.” This was purposeful, and not an accidental consequence of colonialism. By depicting other cultures as less civilized, uneducated, etc, European powers were able to justify their colonial endeavors. Instead of being seen as an invading force that exploited foreign populations, instead these

⁴ Nair, Sheila

forces brought prosperity to Europe and their colonies while bringing less fortunate peoples into the modern era. The semantics and dialogues used in regards to colonization matters, and as it will be discussed, has long lasting impacts.

Whether or not western colonizers did have the genuine goal of bringing modernization to Africa is unknown, and to an extent completely irrelevant as the damage done at the time of colonization was outside the scope of this assistance. If modernization was truly the goal, the types of economic exploitation and racism present in the colonial era would not have taken place and care would have gone into the governance of these colonies. Thus, any claim by Belgium specifically to this heroic modernization must be taken lightly. A great point by Said motions that it would be misleading to “consider that such horrors came to an end with the end of direct colonialism.” Believing that the “consequences of colonialism are still persisting in the form of chaos, coups, corruption, civil wars, and bloodshed, which pervade many of these countries, mainly because of the residues of colonization.” This claim asserts Postcolonial Theory.⁵

Like Said, Nair believes that “a key theme to postcolonialism is that Western perceptions of the non-West are a result of the legacies of European colonisation and imperialism.” Essentially claiming that a result of post colonialism is this view of colonized peoples as the “Orient” that Said discussed. Nair quickly mentions how various “discourses – primarily things that are written or spoken – constructed non-Western states and peoples as ‘other’ or different to the West, usually in a way that made them appear to be inferior. In doing so, they helped European powers justify their

⁵ Said, Edward W. *Orientalism, Culture and Imperialism*

domination over other peoples in the name of bringing civilisation or progress.” This supports Said’s position, and sets up the possibility for discussion on the full scope of “Othering” created by colonialism in real world scenarios and fiction which impact biases in the modern world.⁶

To conclude discussion on creating the “Orient” Said establishes, Kamau Brathwaite discusses in *The History of the Voice* (1979) how Postcolonial Theory can be actively proven through the discussion of language. The most obvious way the impact of colonialism can be seen in the modern world is through the languages spoken in postcolonial regions. One of the main languages spoken today in Rwanda and the Democratic Republic of the Congo is French, the language spoken by Belgian colonists. Located in the Heart of Africa, these countries would not naturally speak French, and instead would speak local tribal languages. The victims of colonization are speaking in the tongue of their oppressors.⁷⁸

Of course, there are criticisms of this theory, but not against the bare bones ideas outlined within it. This theory has been proven and re-proven, so the most common criticism, like that of Gayatri Spivak, is that many issues discussed as being a result of colonialism may actually lie outside the scope of this theory, not actually having causation roots in colonialism. While this is a valid point, it can be disregarded somewhat because any conflict or event in a postcolonial region has its ties to colonialism. The events that led to the infrastructure for an event are there because of colonialism and thus can be tied to it one way or another, Western colonialism impacted

⁶Nair, Sheila

⁷ Brathwaite focuses largely on the actual structure of language and the impact it has on sociology in the context of colonization, but this falls outside the scope of this paper.

⁸ Kamau Brathwaite *The History of the Voice* (1979)

millions of people and something as vast as colonialism will have long term consequences.

With this in mind it would be a disservice to this topic not to briefly discuss the literature surrounding Belgian colonialism as briefly mentioned above, and how it provides insight into the justification of colonization through “advancing the Other.” Joseph Conrad’s 1899 novel *Heart of Darkness* depicts a brutal, dangerous, and uncharted place where atrocities are carried out by uncivilized, native peoples. This plays into the idea of the Orient as discussed by Said, but it also showed the gruesome view of Belgian colonizers on the people and landscape of the Congo. Heads are impaled on stakes, Europeans fear for their lives, and the perfect dialogue for supporting Belgian colonialism is born. Sadly, there is a lot of truth in the brutality of this novel, and it is not completely inaccurate, however the narrative point of view is crucial. The narrator comments regularly on the appearance of the Europeans in the book. They insist on wearing crisp, well ironed white garments in the middle of the Congolese jungle, and their demeanor is always that of the elite. The colonists were trying their absolute hardest to keep up their stark European appearance which further ostracized the Congolese. This attitude was reflected in the Belgian model of colonial leadership which ultimately led to its downfall.

This model contrasts quite drastically with that of other larger colonial powers, most notably Great Britain. The competing models of colonial leadership and transitions to independence between the British and the Belgians can explain much of the reasoning behind modern conflicts in Belgian postcolonial territories, with the British

model being seen as successful⁹ while the Belgian model is unsuccessful. “The British employed various systems of governance in their African colonies. These were through the agency of (1) trading companies, (2) indirect rule, (3) the settler rule, and then the unique joint rule of the Sudan with the Egyptians known as the (4) condominium government.”¹⁰ While settler rule and Condominium government in Sudan is outside of the regional focus of this paper, it is important to mention it in the body of this discussion because it shows that the British adapt their rule to best fit a region and ensure more likely success.

Trading companies allowed for economic prosperity of the British while exploiting colonies, however it also created the infrastructure needed for newly independent states to join the global economy. These trading routes were a huge economic advantage, something that Belgian colonies lacked. Once Belgian forces left their previous colonies, untrained citizens were left to fumble around the global economic stage, completely building up their own infrastructure without the advantage of experienced economists. The second system, which is the direct contrast to Belgian colonialism, is Indirect Rule. This is a system of governance where the British decided to “use existing tribal structures and traditions as conduits for establishing rules and regulations while English officials worked behind the scenes and could exercise a veto power. In some cases the British designated a person to act as "chief" in settings where there was no clearly hierarchical structure in place.”¹¹ This means that British rule changed the life of the people it governed as little as possible so that the colony could

⁹ Read here: “Significantly more successful than Belgian, but still terrifically flawed,” as is postcolonial life.

¹⁰ “.” Encyclopedia of Race and Racism.

¹¹ “England's Indirect Rule in Its African Colonies: AHA.

remain stable and allow for less attention from the colonial power, which is also smart from a time and resource point of view. This also allowed for a smooth transition to independence as the power structures in place were not affected by British forces pulling out of the region, the newly independent state had the infrastructure necessary to stand alone successfully without the parent power to govern it.

The Belgians however, similarly to the French, focused on direct rule which is “the idea that ... European officials should call the shots for themselves by establishing and administering the rules and regulations for their African colonial subjects.”¹² This means that Belgian rule changed the life of the people it governed drastically, and that positions of power were filled by foreigners with no regard to native people. As will be discussed in the case of Rwanda, certain administrative positions were filled by native people, but how these people were chosen and the tiny amount of power they held proved to be an incredible problem. This rule required Belgian officials to move to Africa and fill government roles which was a huge use of resources and manpower, and required copious amounts of energy and attention from the colonial power. This provided the rocky foundation for incomplete transitions to independence as the power structures in place were greatly affected by Belgian forces pulling out of the region, and the newly independent state did not have the infrastructure necessary to stand alone successfully without the parent power to govern it.¹³¹⁴

Decolonization deserves a mention in this discussion as the transition from a colony to sovereign state relies largely on this concept. Dominick LaCapra discusses this

¹² “England's Indirect Rule in Its African Colonies: AHA.

¹³ “.” Encyclopedia of Race and Racism.

¹⁴ “Boundless World History.” Lumen.

concept in depth in his book *The Bounds of Race: Perspectives on Hegemony and Resistance* (1991). His comments largely focus on the perspectives left over from colonization, specifically racism. This is significant in this discussion because the impact of racism on postcolonial Belgian territories ultimately leading to genocide. LaCapra states that “Decolonization ... is never simply the physical outstand of the colonial presence nor is it a recanting of the evil of the colonial period as opposed the virtues of traditional culture, rather decolonization has been continuous, to be an active confrontation with a hegemonic system of thought enhance a process of historical and cultural liberation as such decolonization becomes the contestation of all dominant for structures ... and that ... racist perceptions, representations, and institutions ... unfortunately remain with us till this very day in the case of the colonizer.” This largely explains the view of Belgians on previously Belgian colonies and how those racist perceptions follow this theory. He follows this thought with an excellent point that supplements the poor transitions to independence carried out by Belgian forces. LaCapra states that “historically, and because of our conventional unlimited definition of decolonization, the colonized have shoulder the burden of the process alone.” Rationalizing the failure of these newly independent states as “decolonization can only be complete, however, when it is understood as a complex process that involves both a colonizer and the colonized.” Belgium was needed¹⁵ for a successful transition and it ultimately let down these future states drastically.

Why exactly postcolonial Belgian territories struggled as much as they did economically, aside from lacking the infrastructure necessary, can be directly attributed

¹⁵ And arguably, still is...

to Dependence Theory. This theory focuses on the economic dependence past colonial territories have on their colonizers and why these past colonies still seem to choose to interact with their previous colonial power. This theory aims to explain this relationship and how the rich colonial power continues to benefit economically and prosper while the poor, exploited past colony continuously struggles economically.¹⁶ Before discussing criticism, the four basic aspects of dependency theory must be understood. These are: (1) the basic unity of the world system is seen as a complementary relationship between nations; (2) models of the world system are accumulations of these units in sets of hierarchically ordered roles; (3) geographical and social relations are reduced to a simple description preventing any independent analysis of the latter; (4) the basic relations between the units of the system are those of exchange and not of production.¹⁷ One criticism of this theory is it does not take into consideration, and would greatly benefit from adding, information on imperialism and capitalism.¹⁸ However, this criticism is only somewhat valid as the actual structure of the theory has been proven and is exemplified by the Belgian colonial case study.

The idea of dependency covers numerous aspects of postcolonial life, and provides a reason for the stress put on newly independent states and how they struggle. This is manifested through dependence on technology, economic and financial aid,

¹⁶ Read here: “the rich get richer and the poor get poorer.”

¹⁷ The above text is translated, the original text reads: “reliés à quatre aspects fondamentaux de la théorie de la dépendance À savoir: (1) l'unité de base du système mondial est perçue en tant que relation complémentaire entre les nations; (2) les modèles du système mondial sont des accumulations de ces unités dans ensembles de rôles ordonnées de façon hiérarchique; (3) les rapports géographiques et sociaux sont réduits à une simple description empêchant toute analyse indépendante de cette dernière; (4) les rapports de base entre les unités du système sont ceux de l'échange et non de la production.”

¹⁸ “Dependency Theory: A Critique - JSTOR.”

international markets, education, policy and more. However, these are a “conservative list” of the “neglected areas of dependency violations.” Which continues with:¹⁹

1. Academic dependency where the education system in place is that of the colonizer. Due to this, the “flow of ... knowledge, thinking process, academic information, orientation and also the dimensions of colonial problems (and suggestions for the possible solutions) are based on western books and journals published by a few multinational publishing companies.”
2. Cultural dependency
3. Financial dependency “with respect to capital in flows direct foreign investment loans interest on loans and so on.”
4. Market dependency where past colonies are dependent on colonial powers for “various market interactions. To some extent, the domestic inflation rates and currency values of the [past colony] also depend on the [colonial power] in international transactions the [past colony must] submit to the market of the power [of colonial powers].
5. Human resource dependency occurs when “the training of high-quality manpower [is not provided, and] human capital resources are drawn away from the [past colony by the colonial power] without the payment or compensation.”
6. Consumer dependency

¹⁹ For the sake of length, only the aspects most relevant to these case studies will be explained.

7. Bio dependency through which “the whole field of medical research, human pathology, medicines, and treatment process [in past colonies] are almost completely dependent on the western systems which dumps not only cost the medicines but also banned harmful drugs into [past colonies].”
8. Environmental dependency
9. Military dependency occurs when colonial powers provide “so-called securities [for past colonies, providing] the arms and ammunition for fighting wars,” while more often than not, colonial powers “try to sustain the bones of contention ... [to keep past colonies] dependent.”
10. Policy dependency where colonial powers “are directly or indirectly interfering with internal policies of [past colonies] ... with the pretext of “performance evaluations,” required [by colonial powers] to qualify [past colonies] as borrowers from ... international institutions or for aid assistance.”²⁰

As will be highlighted in the below case studies, these various forms of dependency as laid out in Dependence Theory play a large role in the fumbling of past colonial powers post independence and directly supports the claim that Belgian colonial legacy is that of modern day conflict.

Analysis

The legacy of Belgian colonialism is that of ethnic conflict, exploitation, and poor governmental structure which ultimately lead to numerous modern conflicts. Two case

²⁰ “Dependency Theory Revisited.” Google Books.

studies can be used to adequately showcase this, that of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Republic of Rwanda.

Congo

Leopold II regularly discussed his drive for imperialism with the moral justification of enacting a civilizing mission, and he soon earned the title “The Butcher of the Congo,” as millions of Africans suffered and died as his regime operated as a forced labor colony, with murder and mutilation as punishment for villagers who did not yield their rubber quotas, which was the main resource exploited by Leopold II as it was rapidly becoming a valuable commodity due to new automobile use. Starting in 1908, conditions improved as the Belgian government assumed more direct control over the colony through appointing governor generals to lead who exercised essentially absolute power, annexing the “L’État Indépendant du Congo” (The Congo Free State) and turning it into “the Belgian Congo” to combat international outcry against poor treatment of the Congolese people. In doing so, the Belgians established their system of direct rule, which would ultimately lead to infrastructure and power problems.

Laws were enacted that created curfews and restricted the mobility of Africans, but not of Europeans, known as the Bula Matari political system. This displayed some of the innate racism the Europeans held against their African citizens who did not meet the model of European superiority. At this time it also annexed Katanga, a Congo Free State territory, and later merged it with the Belgian Congo. This resulted in the incident that best exemplifies Belgian brutality with an expedition that killed the Katangan king, whose head was cut off and hoisted on a pole in 1910. However, the colony was ill prepared for independence as no democratic institutions were established and little

effort was made by the Belgian government to educate, train, and prepare African leaders. This was done so intentionally. As discussed in the section on Dependence theory, the goal was to keep this territory unstable so that Belgium could continue to exploit it. In no way did this colonial power want to give up any of its territory, as territory meant power. The realist perspective enforces this idea.

Much of the initial trade and travel infrastructure in the Congo Free State was the work of Stanley Morton, who was entrusted with doing so by Leopold II, due to having extensively explored the Congo. However, this infrastructure was not developed like the British trading companies, and instead were poorly developed and in place just to be used by Belgium and through Belgian supervision, they were not meant as a pathway to the international community. “Although the Congo Free State was not officially a Belgian colony, Belgium was its chief beneficiary, in terms of its trade, the employment of its citizens, and the wealth which Leopold extracted which was used for the construction of numerous fine public buildings in Brussels, Ostend, and Antwerp.” “Towards the end of colonial rule, the governor general at the time, Léon Antoine Marie Petillon (in office 1952-1958), wanted to grant Africans more civil rights. However, the government was not in favor, arguing that this could result in political instability.” In retrospect, this was simply another case of European racism and superiority, used to justify the direct rule system and ultimately having the opposite effect, actually causing the instability. As a result, the legacy of colonial rule in the Belgian Congo is “political instability created by tension between clan and central leadership in .. the [newly formed] “Republic of the Congo” (June 30, 1960).”²¹

²¹ “Belgian Colonial Empire.”

The country immediately fell into a civil war, leading to the disintegration of the administrative system and a collapse of the state. This administrative system was left in place by Belgium, however it was more like trying to fill a bunch of vacant positions at a company without any job descriptions or training, an effect of abandoning a direct rule system. In 1965, Lieutenant General Joseph-Désiré Mobutu took control and began a dictatorship by exploiting the left over imperfect colonial judicial and institutional systems and, unsurprisingly for an authoritarian, the Bula Matari political system, renaming the country "The Republic of Zaire." His reign was plagued with cronyism, nepotism, and corruption, causing widespread political discontent. He introduced and enforced a single party political system featuring the Mouvement Populaire de la Révolution party, which lasted until 1990 when Mobutu announced a movement towards numerous political parties, mimicking democracy.

The first Congo war erupted in 1996 as tensions from the genocide in Rwanda crossed the Zairian border. Rwandan Hutu militias fled to refugee camps in eastern Zaire following the ascension of the Tutsi-led Rwandan government, leading incursions from these camps into Rwanda. In October that year, Rwandan Tutsi forces attacked these camps, scattering refugees and sparking a refugee crisis in Zaire. The Hutu militias allied with the Zairian Armed Forces and launched a campaign against Ethnic Tutsis in Eastern Zaire, sparking the formation of Tutsi militias in that area. The Zairian government escalated attacks in November, causing Tutsi militias to erupt in rebellion against Mobutu known as the Alliances des Forces Démocratiques pour la Libération du Congo-Zaïre (AFDL), led by warlord Laurent-Desire Kabila.²² The AFDL

²² "Unu-Wider : Working Paper : Zaire after Mobutu."

stood unopposed for power after these attacks, allowing Kabila the opportunity to topple Mobutu and name himself president, changing the country name to The Democratic Republic of the Congo, ending the first Congo War and promising a new transitional government, an impossible task without the education and training from a successful government.²³

However, Kabila led a government with one political party that faced numerous threats to authority and legitimacy from an ever increasing number of factions throughout the country. The Second Congo War erupted in 1998 as Kabila demonstrated an inability to manage the state, losing the faith and loyalty of his allies. The Republic of Uganda stepped in to try and counterbalance Rwandan influence in the DRC, creating a rebel movement against Kabila called the Movement for the Liberation of the Congo (MLC), led by another warlord, Jean-Pierre Bemba, attacking DRC troops in August of 1998, unpopularity pulling DRC allies into the conflict including Angola, Namibia, and Zimbabwe later followed by Chad, Sudan, and Libya. This outside interference was a necessary course of action because Zaire was incapable of organizing internally due to a poor transition to independence and the design of colonial powers to keep previous colonial territories dependent.

All involved states signed the Lusaka Ceasefire Agreement in 1999, but the MLC did not, causing the ceasefire to collapse.²⁴ Kabila was assassinated in 2001, only to be succeeded by his son, Joseph,²⁵ who “upon taking office called for multilateral peace talks to end the war,” partly succeeded by brokering the withdrawal of Ugandan and

²³ “Capture of Zaire's Capital Complete.” CNN. Cable News Network.

²⁴ “Secretary-General Welcomes RCD Signing of Lusaka Ceasefire Agreement on Democratic Republic of Congo | Meetings Coverage and Press Releases.” United Nations.

²⁵ From here, any reference to “Kabila” refers to Joseph Kabila.

Rwandan troops from inside DRC borders, however many Congolese citizens were outraged, believing Kabila was half Tutsi, continuing discontent stemming from racial tensions.²⁶ These tensions were seen and rising throughout the Congo, visible in the public lynchings of Tutsis in Kinshasha.²⁷

Currently, Ugandans and the MLC hold significant territory in the north of the state, Rwandan forces and the Rassemblement Congolais pour la Démocratie (RCD) control the East, and DRC forces and allies hold the west and south. Reports have been filed claiming that peace agreements are being put off in order to cover up substantial natural resource exploitation within the country including diamonds, copper, zinc, fertile land and a hydrographic climate to name just a few. The DRC is often regarded as a “rich country where people starve,” referring to the majority of the country living in poverty, often finding it difficult to meet basic needs. The economy of the DRC relies heavily on exporting raw materials like diamond, rubber, and copper, an economic system in place from the colonial era, making the economy easily susceptible to collapse. GDP is often used to show economic development, but the DRC had a GDP in the negatives from its inception throughout the first and second wars, showing that the investment into the country outweighs the profit yield from it, the opposite hope of exploitation.²⁸²⁹

Conflict was reignited in January 2022 with ethnic conflicts in the northeast, causing Uganda and Rwanda to reverse their withdrawal policy, sending more troops

²⁶ “Latest News from around the World.” The Guardian.

²⁷ Clark, J. *African Stakes of the Congo War*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2016.

²⁸ “The History of Congo.” Google Books.

²⁹ While this suggests a colony, the dependence present after independence plays the same type of role as a colony, so this is still a fitting description of the relationship

back into the DRC. Kabila and rebel leaders held extensive talks, signing a peace accord that split power between Kabila and rebel leaders. All foreign troops were pulled out of the DRC, except those from Rwanda by June the following year. The international outcry against the disaster seen in the DRC yielded no effective steps to demand accountability for war crimes and crimes against humanity routinely committed in the DRC. The United Nations Security Council has denounced the humanitarian disaster in the DRC, but has shown little willingness to tackle the responsibility issue set forth by occupying powers for crimes committed under their watch, specifically Uganda and Rwanda escaping the consequences of their role in these crimes.³⁰ In this light, no action has been taken to condemn the powers that left the DRC in the place where instability and conflict has taken place, Belgium. This is unsurprising as previous colonial powers the United States, The United Kingdom, and France do not wish to take responsibility for colonial issues as well sit on the Security Council, so they will not make another country answer for those past crimes.

Rwanda

In Rwanda, racial divisions created by Belgian racial preference created intense tribal rivalries between the minority group and majority group leading to genocide. In the wake of WWI, German colonial territories were taken by force and invaded by Belgian and Congolese troops as punishment for German actions in mainland Europe. The Treaty of Versailles, which ended WWI, official designated German East Africa to the British, and control over Ruanda-Urundi, a territory “twice the size of Belgium but only 2% percent of the size of the Congo, was confirmed as a Belgian colony by a League

³⁰ “War Crimes in Kisangani.” Human Rights Watch, April 29, 2015.

of Nations Mandate in 1924, later renewed as a United Nations Trust Territory.”³¹ By the 1990’s, Rwanda was overwhelmingly an agricultural hub and despite its small size, it had one of the highest population densities in Africa. Approximately 85% of the population were ethnically Hutu, while the remaining 15% consisted mostly of ethnically Tutsi populations.

During the German colonial reign, the territory of Rwanda was carved out of the African countryside with no regard to the populations that lived there, as is the case with all western European colonial territories in Africa as “autocratic rule did not need to find ways of negotiating how different factions could cooperate within a sustainable, participatory system of governance or access a fair share of resources.” In doing so, three ethnic groups, the Hutus, Tutsis, and Twa were governed together within the Rwandan border³². Germany was a powerful European power when it established this colony, with the goal of exploiting the fertile land in Rwanda to supply food to the mainland. It is important to note for the sake of this thesis that economic exploitation did take place as it is a main motivator for creating a colony in the first place, however it is not centralized and a focus is often not given to this aspect of the Rwandan story. Due to this, discussions of exploitation will be kept brief as this topic aims to remain qualitative not quantitative. The quality of Belgian legacy and what that entails is more important than the quantity of exploitation reaped from the colony. With that in mind, Rwanda was geographically advantageous and so were its resources, which is what attracted colonizers to the area and convinced Belgium to adopt the land after German establishment.

³¹ “Belgian Colonial Empire.”

³² For the sake of this paper, the Twa group will be omitted

The split between Hutus and Tutsis originally arose as a result of economic differences, not religious or cultural ones, with Hutus largely crop farmers and tutsis as livestock farmers. Gradually, these economic class divisions became seen as ethnic designations. This continued through Belgian rule and the Rwandan fate was solidified with independence.³³ Belgian colonialism favored the minority Tutsi group in all administrative positions over the Hutus who were regularly discriminated against due to European racial preference. The Tutsis were physically more similar to Europeans in stature and complexion,³⁴ and were much more receptive to converting to Roman Catholicism, which was enough to win over Belgian favor. This power structure continued throughout the transition to independence which allowed extensive time for the Hutu disdain against the Tutsis to grow. This created a “legacy of tension that exploded into violence,” resulting in the 1994, 100 day Rwandan Genocide.

The violence began even before Rwanda actually gained independence. The Hutu Rebellion of 1959 forced almost 330,000 Tutsis to flee Rwanda, decreasing the minority size even further. By 1961, Hutus forced Rwanda’s Tutsi monarch into exile, declaring Rwanda a republic, and the territory was granted independence in 1962, finally bringing the Belgian colonial empire to an end.³⁵ In 1973, a Hutu based military group brought Major General Juvenal Habyarimana to power, where he stayed for the next two decades. Once in power, Habyarimana founded the National Revolutionary Movement for Development (NRMD). He ruled through this party as President when the new

³³ Beauchamp, Zack. “Rwanda’s Genocide - What Happened, Why It Happened, and How It Still Matters.”

³⁴ It was also claimed that they had more european personalities and held themselves in a more gentile fashion, but this is most likely a claim used to further bias and alleviate guilt, not the actual truth.

³⁵ “Belgian Colonial Empire.”

constitution was ratified in 1978, and was reelected in 1983 and 1988 as the sole candidate.

In 1990, forces of the Rwandese Patriotic Front (RPF), consisting mostly of Tutsi refugees, invaded Rwanda from Uganda. In retaliation, Habyarimana “accused Tutsi residents of being RPF accomplices and arrested hundreds of them.” Between 1990 and 1993, government officials directed massacres of the Tutsi, murdering hundreds of Rwandan citizens of Tutsi descent in Kagali. A ceasefire in these hostilities in 1992 led to negotiations between the government and the RPF, and in August of 1993, Habyarimana signed an agreement at Arusha, Tanzania, promising the creation of a transitional government that would include the RPF, angering Hutu extremists, “who would soon take swift and horrible action to prevent it.” The mass killings in Kigali quickly spread to the rest of Rwanda, and “in the first two weeks, local administrators in central and southern Rwanda, where most Tutsi lived, resisted the genocide.”

However, after April 18, national government officials removed and murdered several of these resisters, causing other opponents to the genocide to fall silent in fear of retaliation, or actively lead the killing to resume good graces with government officials. “[Government] officials rewarded killers with food, drink, drugs and money. Government-sponsored radio stations started calling on ordinary Rwandan civilians to murder their neighbors.” The government actually imported and supplied average citizens with weapons, notoriously machetes, in order to carry out these massacres, and citizens complied readily. “Within three months ... 800,000 people had been slaughtered.” This included Hutu people as well who were not secluded from the rapes, pillages, and massacres carried out at this time. Nobody was safe from the war crimes committed, but any discussion of genocide often blames solely the Hutu population

which had carried out by far the most crimes, but were able to do so because of how large that majority population was.

Meanwhile, the RPF resumed fighting, and “a civil war raged alongside the genocide.” By early July, RPF forces gained control over most of the country, including the capital city. In response, more than 2 million people, nearly all Hutus, fled Rwanda, crowding into refugee camps in [Zaire] and other neighboring countries.” As discussed in the above section on the Democratic Republic of the Congo, this created an international refugee crisis.

While traveling in April of 1994, Habyarimana’s plane was shot down over the capital city of Kigali, but the perpetrators were never caught. There were no survivors. “Within an hour of the plane crash, the Presidential Guard, together with members of the Rwandan armed forces (FAR) and Hutu militia groups known as the “Interahamwe” (Those Who Attack Together) and “Impuzamugambi” (Those Who Have the Same Goal), set up roadblocks and barricades and began slaughtering Tutsis and moderate Hutus with impunity.” Among the first victims of the genocide, killed on April 7th, were the moderate Hutu Prime Minister, Agathe Uwilingiyimana, and ten Belgian peacekeepers. An interim extremist Hutu government from military high command came to power on April 9th, and in the wake of peacekeeper deaths, Belgian forces were withdrawn and the UN directed any peacekeepers to defend only themselves from there on out, abandoning the Tutsis and anyone else fleeing the genocide. Rwanda was left to fend for itself, after international interference ultimately put it in the crisis situation it was currently facing. The genocide in Rwanda was ignored by the international community, and is a stain on the reputation of the powers who could have prevented or stopped it.

After this victory, the RPF established a coalition government similar to that agreed upon at Arusha by Habyarimana, with Pasteur Bizimungu, a Hutu, as president and Paul Kagame, a Tutsi, as vice president and defense minister. Habyarimana's NRMD party, which had employed the government officials who played a key role in organizing the genocide, was outlawed, and a new constitution was adopted in 2003 which eliminated any reference to ethnicity. The new constitution was followed by Kagame's election to a 10-year term as Rwanda's president and the country's first-ever legislative elections."³⁶ This is seen as a successful, democratic step forward for Rwanda, but the country is still recovering from the affect of a genocide and is slowly trying to recover from and alleviate the refugee crisis it created. However, conflict in the region and international interference has consistently made this endeavor difficult to achieve.

Conclusion

"Following the independence of both colonies, Belgium kept strong but eventful political and economical relationships with the ... succeeding African republics, which still refer to the "special relationship" whenever that seems to suit. colonial legacy that took far more from Africa than it gave."³⁷ This accurately outlines the legacy of Belgian colonialism in Rwanda and the DRC, discussing the continued exploitation and dependence of these post colonial regions by Belgium and western powers. However, this legacy expands deeper, directly influencing the course of history for these states. Belgian colonialism through poor colonial leadership, ethnic preference, and this

³⁶ History.com Editors. "Rwandan Genocide."

³⁷ "Belgian Colonial Empire."

economic exploitation directly caused the infrastructure of the modern conflicts in these states. Had Belgian colonialism not occurred in these states the conflicts seen today would not have happened. Conflict is the legacy of Belgian colonialism.

Bibliography

"Encyclopedia of Race and Racism." Encyclopedia.com. 25 Apr. 2022 ."

Encyclopedia.com. Encyclopedia.com, May 12, 2022.

[https://www.encyclopedia.com/social-sciences/encyclopedias-almanacs-transcripts-and-maps/africa-british-](https://www.encyclopedia.com/social-sciences/encyclopedias-almanacs-transcripts-and-maps/africa-british-colonies#:~:text=entrance%20into%20Africa.-,TYPES%20OF%20BRITISH%20COLONIAL%20RULE%20IN%20AFRICA,the%20(4)%20condominium%20government.)

[colonies#:~:text=entrance%20into%20Africa.-,TYPES%20OF%20BRITISH%20COLONIAL%20RULE%20IN%20AFRICA,the%20\(4\)%20condominium%20government.](https://www.encyclopedia.com/social-sciences/encyclopedias-almanacs-transcripts-and-maps/africa-british-colonies#:~:text=entrance%20into%20Africa.-,TYPES%20OF%20BRITISH%20COLONIAL%20RULE%20IN%20AFRICA,the%20(4)%20condominium%20government.)

Beauchamp, Zack. "Rwanda's Genocide - What Happened, Why It Happened, and How It Still Matters." Vox. Vox, April 10, 2014.

<https://www.vox.com/2014/4/10/5590646/rwandan-genocide-anniversary>.

"Belgian Colonial Empire." Visit the main page. Accessed May 12, 2022.

https://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Belgian_colonial_empire.

Boundless. "Boundless World History." Lumen. Accessed May 12, 2022.

<https://courses.lumenlearning.com/boundless-worldhistory/chapter/the-belgian-congo/>.

Brathewaite, Kamau. *The History of Voice*, n.d.

"Capture of Zaire's Capital Complete." CNN. Cable News Network. Accessed May 12, 2022. <http://edition.cnn.com/WORLD/9705/18/zaire/index.html>.

Clark, J. *African Stakes of the Congo War*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2016.

"Dependency Theory Revisited." Google Books. Google. Accessed May 12, 2022.

<https://books.google.com/books?hl=fr&lr=&id=UtqiDwAAQBAJ&oi=fnd&pg=PT10&dq=dependency%2Btheory%2Binternational%2Brelations&ots=8nAK5lo5Vj&sig=La6O4v61Frtcv7Rjj1dkLmcRiFM#v=onepage&q=dependency%20theory%20international%20relations&f=false>.

"Dependency Theory: A Critique - JSTOR." Accessed May 12, 2022.

<https://www.jstor.org/stable/3340297>.

“England's Indirect Rule in Its African Colonies: AHA.” England's Indirect Rule in Its African Colonies | AHA. Accessed May 12, 2022.

<https://www.historians.org/teaching-and-learning/teaching-resources-for-historians/teaching-and-learning-in-the-digital-age/through-the-lens-of-history-biafra-nigeria-the-west-and-the-world/the-colonial-and-pre-colonial-eras-in-nigeria/englands-indirect-rule-in-its-african-colonies>.

“The History of Congo.” Google Books. Google. Accessed May 12, 2022.

https://books.google.com/books?hl=fr&lr=&id=QY82GNGpcDgC&oi=fnd&pg=PR9&dq=history%2Bof%2Bthe%2Bdemocratic%2Bpublic%2Bof%2Bthe%2Bcongo&ots=pIGOogu0HK&sig=ky_SNI4HioKoxgGuH87sBFL-b4s#v=onepage&q=history%20of%20the%20democratic%20public%20of%20the%20congo&f=false.

History.com Editors. “Rwandan Genocide.” History.com. A&E Television Networks, October 14, 2009. <https://www.history.com/topics/africa/rwandan-genocide>.

“Latest News from around the World.” The Guardian. Guardian News and Media. Accessed May 12, 2022. <https://www.theguardian.com/world>.

Nair, Sheila, and About The Author(s) Sheila Nair is Professor of Politics and International Affairs at Northern Arizona University. “Introducing Postcolonialism in International Relations Theory.” EInternational Relations, August 5, 2018. <https://www.e-ir.info/2017/12/08/postcolonialism-in-international-relations->

