

Leopold's Legacy

The resistance against King Leopold II's brutal reign over his colony the Congo Free State (CFS), originated in Antwerp harbour in the 1890s. Edmund Dene Morel (an official at the Elder Dempster shipping company) started his initial campaign against slavery and the misrule of Congo after he observed a fortune in rubber returning from the colony, while only guns and manacles were being sent in return. Over the years, this grew into the first international humanitarian campaign to use photography in its cause.

I started working on *Leopold's Legacy* more than five years ago after returning from Sri Lanka, where I had photographed the remains of three decades of civil war and the monuments that were quickly erected in its aftermath, thus reflecting on the influence of British colonial rule on the conflict. When visiting Belgium, I was struck by the presence of colonial monuments in public spaces. They were hidden in plain sight. I passed them on a daily basis, without being aware of their meaning and history. When I began photographing colonial monuments and researching Belgian colonial history, I took a documentary approach, which was fuelled by my interest in how colonial histories and certain truths are

represented and inscribed in cityscapes. Along the way, my project turned into visual research on the various forms of representation of the colonial history of Congo in Belgium, including additional topics such as architecture, street names, historical postcards and collaged sculptures for alternative monuments.

The launch of *Leopold's Legacy* coincides with a wave of anti-racism protests that has swept the globe following the death of George Floyd in Minneapolis. The protests have once again stirred up arguments about how society deals with colonial monuments. All over Belgium, statues of Leopold II have become targets of activists' actions against racism, leading to the removal of some colonial monuments, - for example, in the city of Ekeren.

In my artist's contribution for TRIGGER platform, I am revisiting the book and partly unpublished visual material with a focus on colonial remnants, relics and monuments in the city of Antwerp, to clarify existing links in the publication and establish new layers of meaning between its eight chapters.

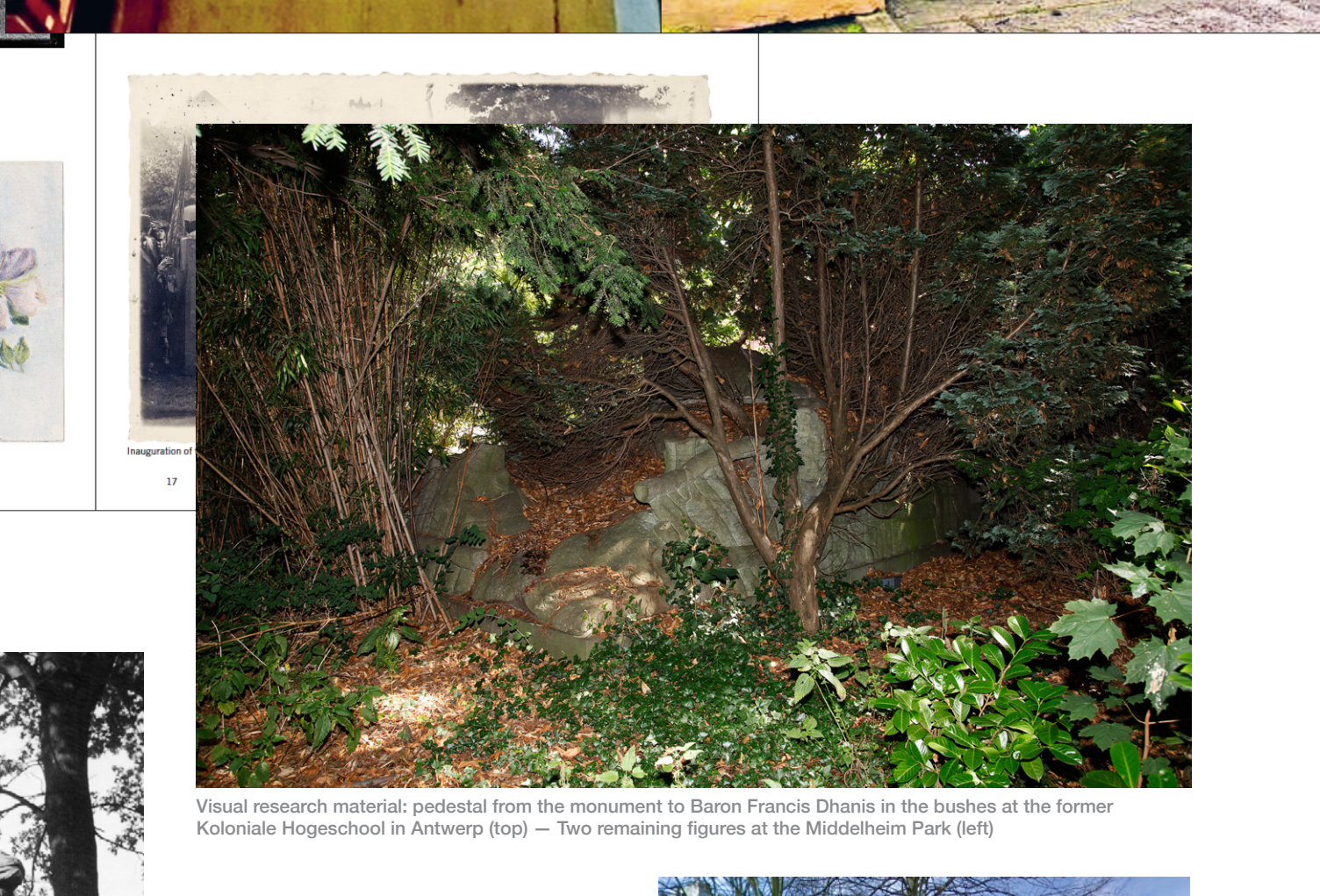


magnum

BRUSSEL 11/1/2017 © BRUZZ DELEN: f t

De hangjongeren van beeldhouwkunst

om 05:00 door Dirk Martens · Print · Corriger



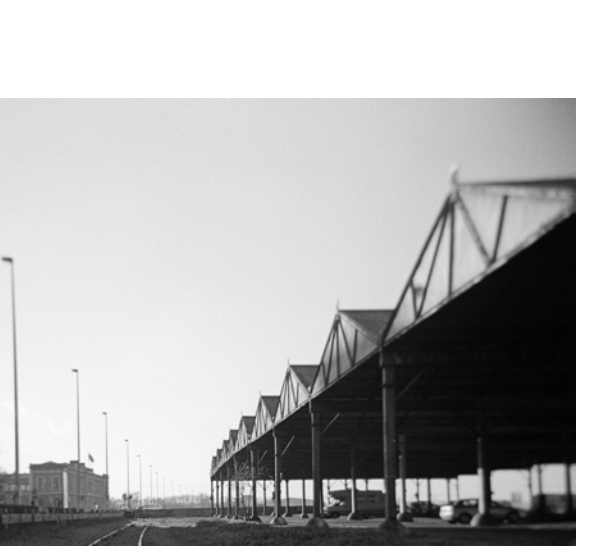
Visual research material: pedestal from the monument to Baron François Dhanis in the bushes at the former Koloniale Hogeschool in Antwerp (top) — Two remaining figures at the Middelheim Park (left)



Google Street View, Baron d'Hanstaal, Antwerpen (2000)



Google Street View, Generaal Cabrastraat, Antwerpen (2020)



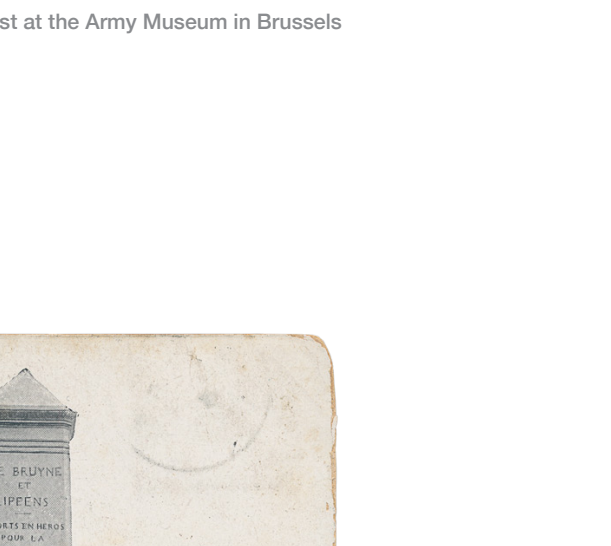
Google Street View, Stanleystraat, Antwerpen (2018)



Google Street View, Luitenant Lippenslaan, Antwerpen (2140)



Google Street View, Van Kerckhovestraat, Antwerpen (2020)



Google Street View, Sergeant de Bruynestraat, Antwerpen (2140)



Google Street View, Lambermontstraat, Antwerpen (2000)



Google Street View, Pater dekenstraat, Antwerpen (2610)



Google Street View, Korte Kongostraat, Antwerpen (2600)



Google Street View, Baron Joostenstraat, Antwerpen (2018)



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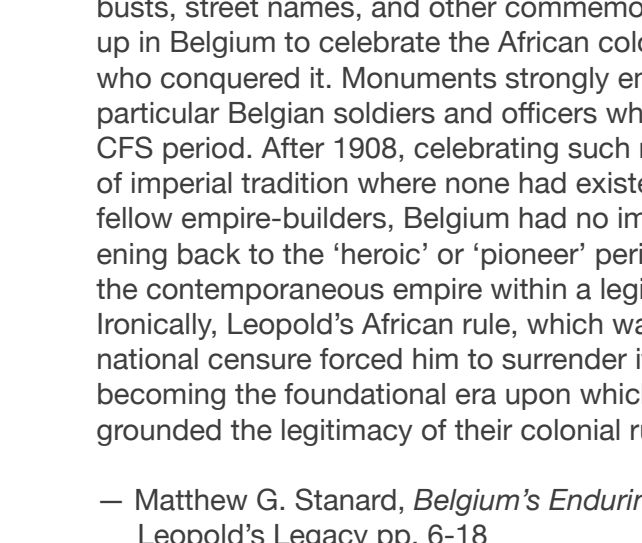
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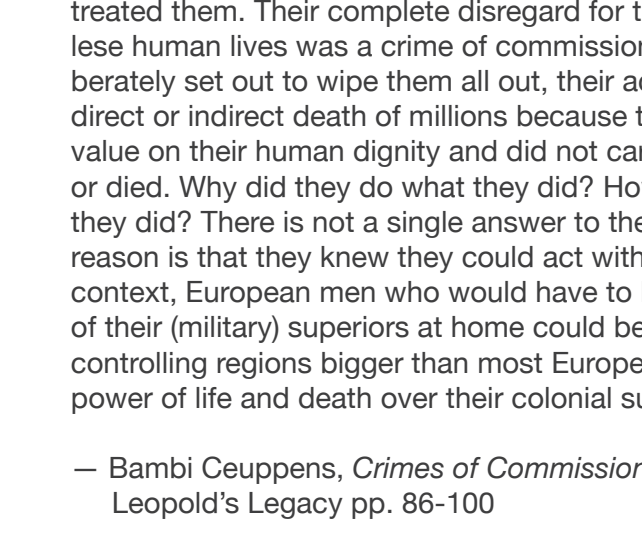
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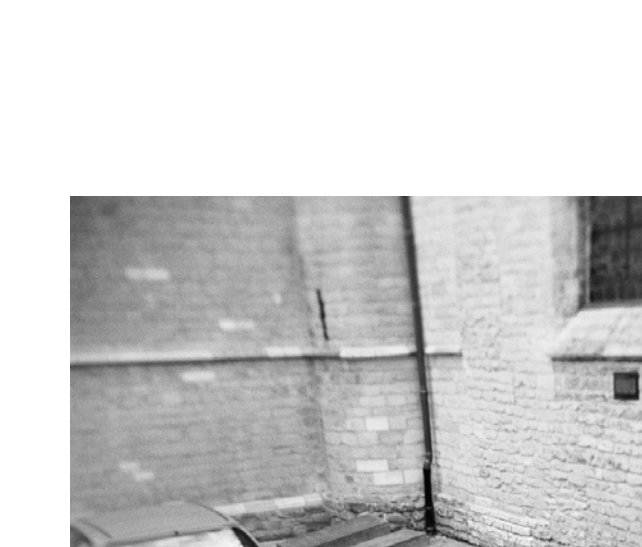
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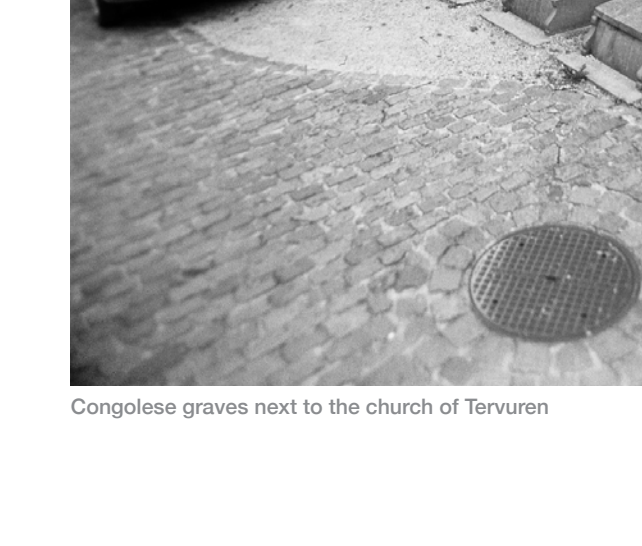
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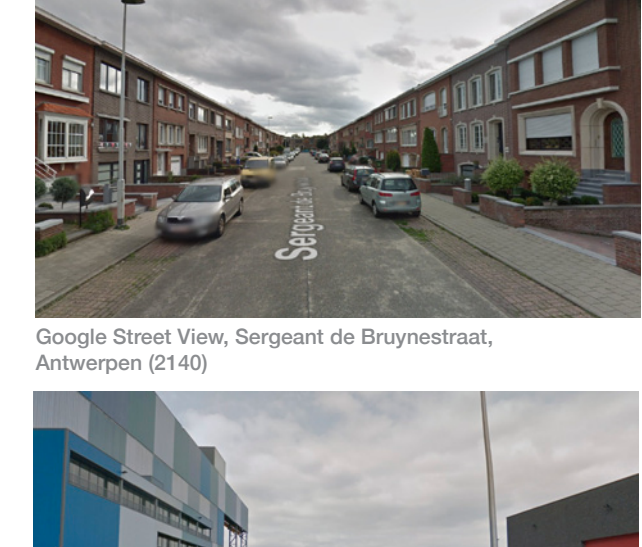
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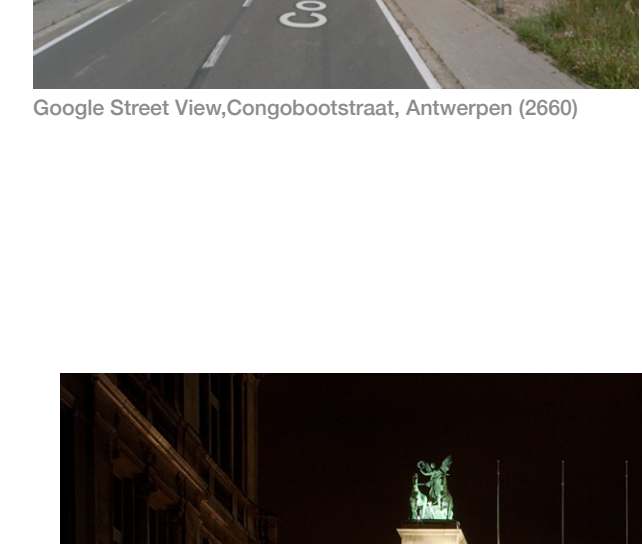
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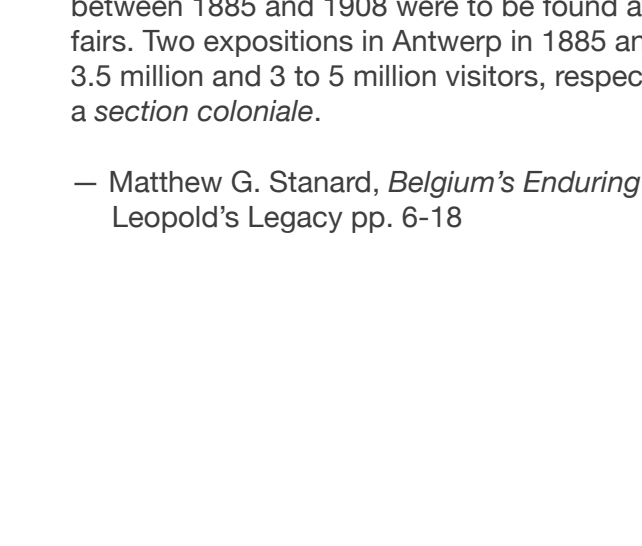
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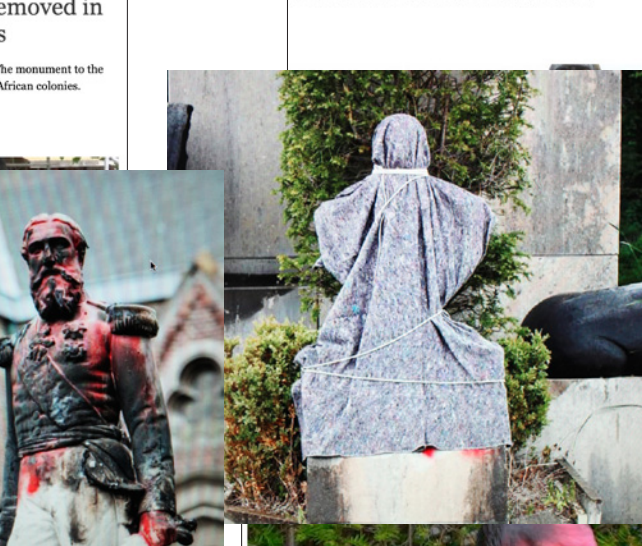
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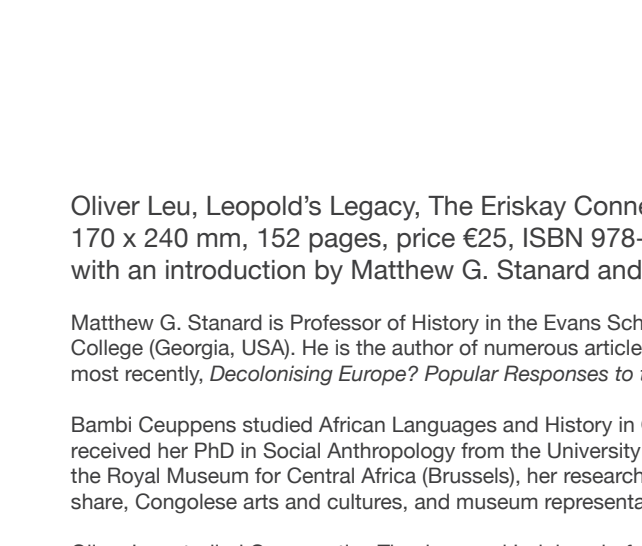
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Imperialist monuments ... date back to the very first years of the Leopoldian colonial endeavor. Hundreds of plaques, statues, busts, street names, and other commemorative markers were put up in Belgium to celebrate the African colony and to honor those who conquered it. Monuments strongly emphasized the military, in particular Belgian soldiers and officers who had served during the CFS period. After 1908, celebrating such men generated a kind of imperial tradition where none had existed, because unlike its fellow empire-builders, Belgium had no imperialistic past. Harkening back to the 'heroic' or 'pioneer' period of the CFS foreshadowed the contemporaneous empire within a legitimate colonial history. Ironically, Leopold's African rule, which was so horrific that international censure forced him to surrender it to Belgium, ended up becoming the foundational era upon which Belgians subsequently grounded the legitimacy of their colonial rule.

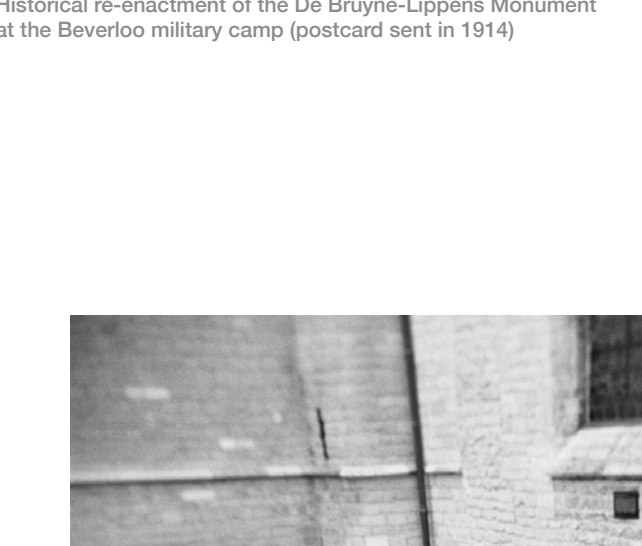
— Matthew G. Stanard, *Belgium's Enduring Imprint of Empire*, Leopold's Legacy pp. 6-18



Historical re-enactment of the De Bruyne-Lippens Monument at the Beverloo military camp (postcard sent in 1914)



De Bruyne-Lippens Monument in Blankenberge



Congolese graves next to the church of Tervuren



King Leopold II statue in Brussels



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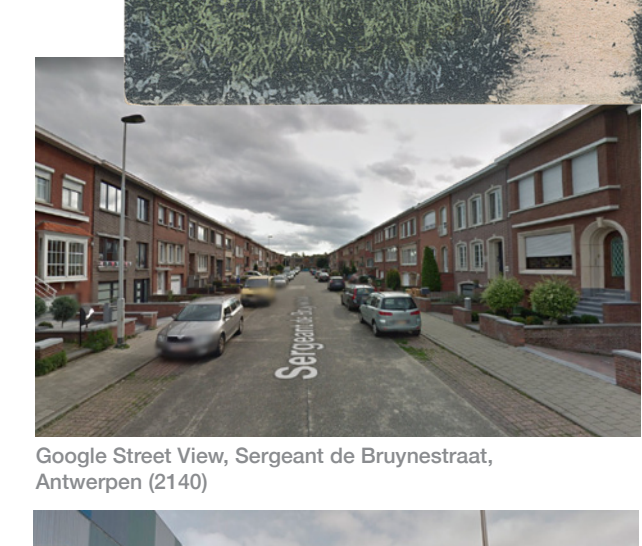
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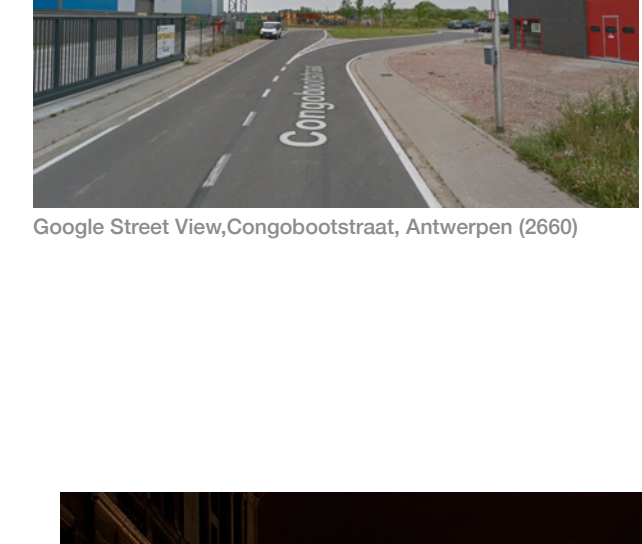
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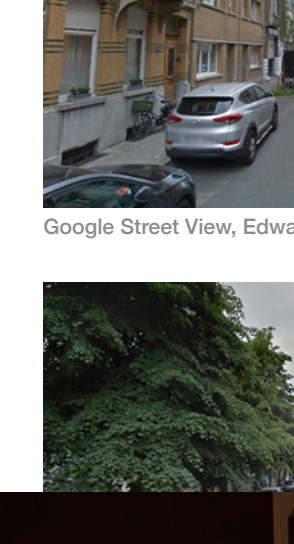
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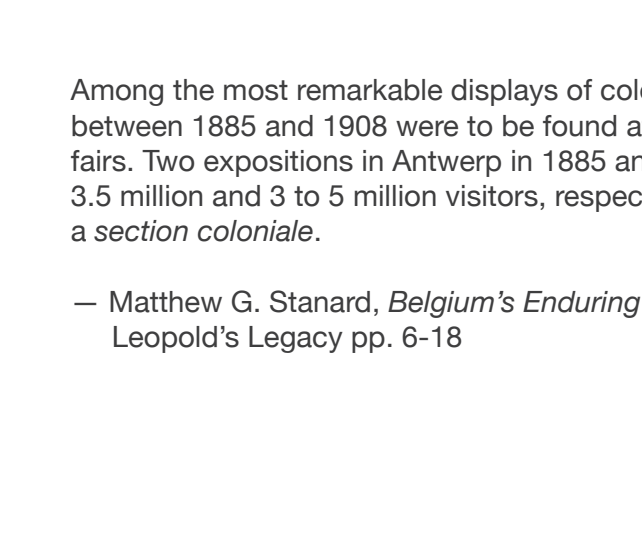
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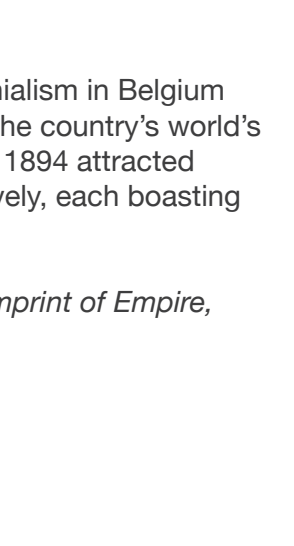
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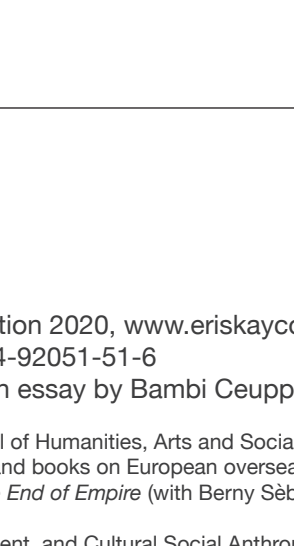
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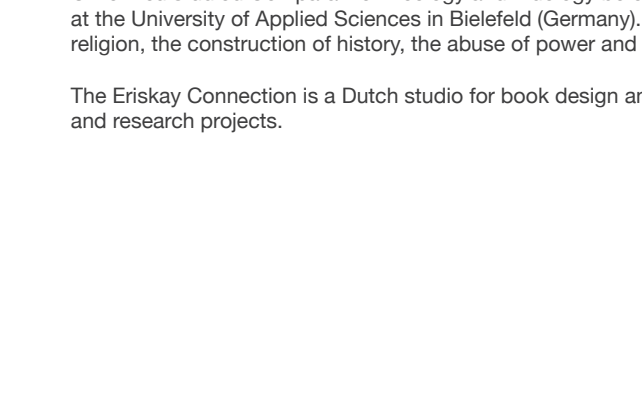
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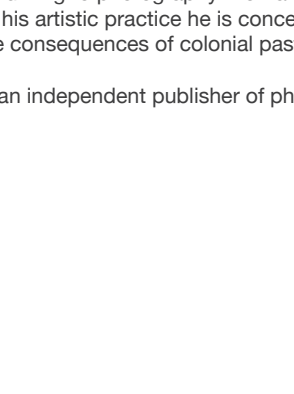
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