

‘Savage times come again’: Morel, Wells, and the African Soldier, c.1885-1920

Abstract

The African soldier trained in western combat was a figure of fear and revulsion in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. My article examines representations of African soldiers in nonfictional writings by E.D. Morel about the Congo Free State (1885-1908), the same author’s reportage on African troops in post-First World War Germany, and H.G. Wells’s speculative fiction *When the Sleeper Wakes* (1899, 1910). In each text racist and anti-colonialist discourses converge in representing the African soldier as the henchman of corrupt imperialism. His alleged propensity for taboo crimes of cannibalism and rape are conceived as threats to white safety and indeed supremacy. By tracing Wells’s connections to the Congo reform campaign and situating his novel between two phases of Morel’s writing career, I interpret *When the Sleeper Wakes* as neither simply a reflection of past events in Africa or as a prediction of future ones in Europe. It is rather a transcultural text which reveals the impact of European culture upon the ‘Congo atrocities’, and the inscription of this controversy upon European popular cultural forms and social debates.

Keywords: H.G. Wells, E.D. Morel, Congo Free State, Force Publique, World War One, Racism, Humanitarianism, Imperialism

Introduction

In June 1913, at a grand public meeting in the Westminster Palace Hotel, London, the Congo Reform Association disbanded, declaring victory in its battle against King Leopold II and his successors’ notorious colonial regime in central Africa. Tributes showered in upon the organisation’s secretary, E.D. Morel. The Archbishop of Winchester Edward Talbot introduced Morel to the stage as the man whom God had elected to the lead this humanitarian crusade (Pavlakis 1). Morel was acknowledged as a champion of African development and a protector of Africans’ rights, a reputation which has been largely reinforced in recent historical research (e.g. Hochschild).

As war broke out in Europe Morel began new work less likely to win widespread praise, becoming a leading figure in the Union of Democratic Control (UDC). This left-wing pressure group opposed the war on the grounds of its resulting from ‘secret diplomacy’ between governments. By sending UDC material to a contact in Switzerland, a neutral country, Morel breached the Defence of the Realm Act and was sentenced to six month’s imprisonment in Pentonville Prison. Continuing the argument after the war Morel centred his criticisms on French deployment of African soldiers in post-war Germany. Following the armistice French, American, British and Belgian troops occupied the Rhineland, with the former deploying thousands of troops from its colonies. Morel’s article ‘Black Scourge in Europe: Sexual Horror Let Loose By France on the Rhine’ appeared in Britain’s leading left-wing paper, the *Daily Herald*, in April 1920. In it and subsequent publications Morel expostulated that France had ‘thrust barbarians... with tremendous sexual instincts—into the heart of Europe’ (‘Employment’ 893, qtd. Nelson 615). The keynote in Morel’s attack on the ‘Black Horror’ was the sexual rapaciousness of the African soldiers, which in Morel’s words ‘must be satisfied upon the bodies of white women’ (*Horror* 10, qtd. Reinders 5). He also asked his readers to consider their feelings were Germany’s colonial subjects now occupying

British territory, speculating that indeed now the precedent had been set, ‘workers here [in Britain] and elsewhere’ might too one day fall under an African watch (*Daily Herald*, qtd. Reinders 2). Beneath Morel’s claims about sexual exploitation and British freedom lay a fundamental anxiety about the damage to European prestige and supremacy caused by such violent uses of colonial power. ‘A European power’, seethed Morel, ‘has imported and is maintaining on European soil an army of African mercenaries, which can be used as a handy instrument for its domestic as well as for its Imperial policy’ (*Horror* 8-9).

For Peter Fryer, Morel’s earlier defence of Africans of the Upper Congo against European colonialism makes it ironic that he should have attacked imperial warfare in such racist terms (317). However, there are significant continuities in method and ideology between Morel’s crusades on African and European soil. Morel not only utilised campaigning strategies which he had first developed in the Congo reform movement to garner support from throughout Europe and the US, but he also recycled sensational images and rhetoric surrounding the marauding African soldier. Much of his and his colleagues’ anti-Congo propaganda had centred on the so-called Force Publique, the African militia-cum-gendarmerie, which, trained and overseen by European colonial officials, terrorised populations of the Congo during King Leopold II’s control of the area in the 1890s and early 1900s. The irony of Morel’s First-World-War propaganda is dampened by contextualisation of his arguments against colonialism in the Congo Free State, which too actively encouraged racist fear of African militarisation. Though clearly opposed to the methods of colonisation used by Leopold, the Congo reform movement sought not Congolese independence but an improvement in the methods of European rule. Its arguments in favour of humane European dealings in Africa did not preclude racially inflected concern about Africans’ own propensity for violence.

In this article I analyse Morel’s and other Congo reformers’ depictions of the Force Publique, exploring how racist and anti-colonialist viewpoints converge in figuring the black soldier as the henchman of debased and self-destructive empire-building. I then turn to consider ways in which these ideas were brought to bear upon European society and popular culture. Two decades before Morel scathed at the deployment of colonial troops in Germany, H.G. Wells imagines the importation of African soldiers to Europe in his dystopian fiction *When the Sleeper Wakes* (1899). Wells followed the anti-Congo propaganda, to which his associate Joseph Conrad made a famous early contribution. Wells’s novel bears the influence of contemporary humanitarian condemnation of violence in Leopold’s African empire, while also foreshadowing anxious responses to the use of African soldiers in the French occupation of the Rhineland. Situating Wells’s work between the Congo and the Rhine, I interpret it as a transcultural text which reveals the symbiotic relation of colonial and metropolitan cultures in a period of European imperialist ambitions and rivalries, and more specifically the imprint of the Congo atrocities debate upon later strands of European society and culture.

The Force Publique in Congo reform literature

For Morel and his colleagues to highlight the depredations of the Force Publique was an astute campaigning strategy because it centred on one aspect of the Congo Free State which was unusual among European colonies in Africa. In contrast to the other territories carved up at the Berlin Conference of 1884-85, the Congo Free State was not controlled by a European nation but by an individual, Leopold II. Because Leopold could not draw directly upon the Belgian armed forces, the Force Publique was, to a greater extent than other colonial armies, assembled out of migrant labourers from throughout Europe and southern and western Africa.

Some would-be soldiers enlisted out of mercenary motives, though as British consuls realised to their horror in the 1890s a sizeable number of West African migrants were effectively conscripted into armed service that they had never intended to undertake. A Lagosian former sergeant-major in the Congo army named Henry Lewis, for instance, reported a number of cases of summary execution of West Africans by one Captain Francqui, and gave one of the earliest reports of the hand-severing phenomenon which would be a point of great controversy in later Congo reform discussions. Lewis was clear that hands were cut from the bodies of corpses as proof of murders, and at the direct orders of Francqui (Arthur).

Abbott suggests that a lack of trained European officers may have exacerbated the troops' propensity for brutality (20), but this argument overlooks the widespread use of violence by European officers, and it more importantly risks underplaying the ruthlessness of the system in which Europeans and Africans alike served. As with other colonial forces, the Force Publique was deployed in military campaigns to defend and/or extend frontiers. Particularly in territories that were closed from free trade, it also performed the same work as the 'sentries' hired by large private rubber firms: 'policing' the populations of the Congo river basin that found themselves — often quite without their knowledge — newly subject to Leopold's rule. The Force Publique was established in 1888, the same year that the Congo Free State government imposed upon all of its subjects mandatory seven-year labour contracts in repayment for the cost of colonisation. It enforced these contracts by compelling local populations to work for the colony, or the private industries licensed to operate in it, most often in the collection of rubber and ivory. If communities resisted this regime, or simply failed to keep up with its demands, violent punitive raids took place. To outside critics in Europe the Congo Free State appeared to be run as if it were one vast slave plantation, in which the mounting global demand for the region's natural resources were met by a vicious military regime. Morel calculated that in 1891 50% of Congo Free State expenditure was on its military (*King Leopold's Rule* 23).

While critics clearly attributed blame for 'the Congo atrocities' to Leopold and his European officials, they reviled the Congo's African soldiers. The reformers' writings, inflected with racial ideologies of the late-nineteenth century, be they pro- or anti-colonialist, characterise the Force Publique as 'savages' and 'cannibals' rather than as victims acting out of fear, self-preservation, or other complex motivations. 'Black delights to kill black, whether the victim be man, woman, or child, and no matter how defenceless', wrote one widely-cited eyewitness and critic of Leopold's policies (Glave 910). Important to this view was the European conjecture that cannibalism was widespread practice in Central Africa. Cannibalism had proven to be a key trope in enlisting humanitarian concern following the pioneering accounts by Henry M. Stanley and his followers, and in the so-called 'Congo Arab Wars' of 1892-94. Though in retrospect unsurprising given the continuities between the brutal regimes that blighted the region in the final decades of the nineteenth century, the persistence of cannibalism and other gruesome warfare acts led to faintly ironic complaints that 'these soldiers, ... yesterday cannibals, have now become agents and inculcators of civilisation' (Lorand, qtd. Morel, *King Leopold's Rule* 323). In an example of generalising racial thought, reportage of specific, violent episodes gave rise to hyperbolic and rhetorical references to 'an enormous army of cannibal mercenaries' in the writing of Morel (*King Leopold's Rule* 19).

Some seasoned and sympathetic on-the-spot commentators reached more complicated understandings of the Force Publique. Roger Casement's consular report, for instance, complicates the view that innate bloodlust conscripted Congo people to serve in a colonial army. Casement cited one informant who explains his employment in the Force Publique 'to be with the hunters rather than the hunted' (76; Burroughs 61-3). No writer was immune to

thinking about the topic in racial terms, however, and for Morel this included envisioning the danger that an exploited and barbarous African soldiery posed to white people. In the *Daily News* in 1903 Morel suggested to his readers:

ask yourself the reason for the existence of this army. Think of the African mutiny, which is being prepared, by the side of which the Indian mutiny was child's play to stamp out. Is it conceivable that among the Bantu races of the Congo Basin a leader of men will not some day rise? And then? (26 March 1903)

In his best known work, *Red Rubber* (1906), Morel warned of the 'hatred which is being created against the white race in general by the agents of the king of the Belgians in the minds of the Congo Negroes'. He entertained the concern that peoples' rebellions in Central Africa might be led by 'the very soldiers with whom we keep them in subjugation', adding that 'a movement is already begun and is spreading fast, which will unite Negroes against the white race' (xvi-xvii).

While it is true that Force Publique soldiers did rise up against Europeans in the early years of the colony,ⁱ the idea of a pan-African or pan-Congo resistance movement emerging out of central Africa overlooked immense cultural, linguistic and political diversity among peoples of this region. As David Killingray writes:

There were certainly risks in arming colonial subjects to suppress other colonial peoples, but in most cases the risk was surprisingly small. Recruitment policies, ethnic divisions and new foci of loyalty ensured that in most colonies there would always be men ready to enlist as guardians of Empire (17-18).

Morel's writings are nonetheless significant as an instance of *fin-de-siècle* fear of the tables being turned on European colonisers, an anxiety of 'reverse colonization' which Stephen D. Arata has traced across various imaginative fictions (107-132). In the following section I analyse an example of this fiction in which the same fears of African militancy as expressed by Morel are manifest.

When the Sleeper Wakes

Though not discussed by Arata, H.G. Wells's little-known novel *When the Sleeper Wakes* (1899) is highly pertinent to his analysis. It draws upon Wells's knowledge of the Congo, and anticipates in many ways the post-war situation in Europe against which Morel protested. This novel is a transcultural cipher, which reveals the imprint of the Congo upon European culture and politics, and in such a way as to unsettle the notion of historical uniqueness which lingers in writing about the Congo Free State, partly as a consequence of Morel's propaganda. *When the Sleeper Wakes* is the tale of an accidental Victorian hero named Graham.ⁱⁱ After falling into a two-century-long coma, Graham awakes in 2100 to discover that speculation in his name by others on the stock market has made him owner of half the world, and the figurehead of two successive plutocratic regimes. Having supported a coup d'état by the latter of these regimes, and its head-man, Ostrog, Graham realises his error, and helps to mobilise a peoples' rebellion. At the end of the novel Graham takes to the skies in combat against aeroplanes bringing troops of soldiers from Africa to impose martial law on London and Paris.

As long ago as 1922 Evgenii Zamyatin noted that racial division is a political problem in *Sleeper* which Wells tackles by projecting it into the future (265). Much subsequent critical

discussion of the text has overlooked this aspect, however, judging the novel instead on aesthetic grounds which obscure its political significance. *Sleeper* has suffered in terms of its critical reception through comparison to the other 'scientific romances' that Wells wrote in the mid- to late-1890s. In biographical studies it is seen as a lapse in Wells's imagination brought on by onset of illness (kidney disease), and by Wells's increasing prioritisation of social analysis over, or at the expense of, fictional form (Smith 78). Bernard Bergonzi's influential study further points to Wells's failure imaginatively to extrapolate from the present (140-55), echoing a point in Wells's *Experiment in Autobiography* (1934) which distinguishes between the 'fantasy' of *The Time Machine* and the 'exaggeration' of *Sleeper* (ii. 645). The novel's imagining of vengeful African troops trained in imperialistic warfare might appear, in light of the foregoing discussion of the Force Publique, to be part of these writers' concern that the novel becomes too bogged down in current affairs, or too clear a reflection of Wells's own time. On the other hand, for John Huntington *Sleeper*'s 'racism' is a convenient 'way of avoiding real political analysis' (146). In opposition to this view, I regard racism as intrinsic to the novel, its aesthetics and its discussion of social affairs. Its confrontation with 'the race question' is ambiguous and problematic, however, in keeping with much anti-colonialist literature in this period.

Though informed by events in the Congo, the African troops which arrive in Europe at the end of *Sleeper* are not from the Congo. 'French-speaking Negroes' from Senegal, Niger and Timbuctoo are sent in aeroplanes to quell the people's revolt in Paris, while the squadrons of Africans that arrive in London are reportedly from South Africa (181, 196). All of these territories had their own colonial armies, and imperial warfare in South Africa was a controversy which Wells satirises in *The First Men in the Moon* (Worth 77-78). The novel makes reference to Kipling, and possibly by extension to the Mahdist revolt in Sudan, as I discuss shortly. Wells clearly has a greater frame of imperial reference in mind than the Congo alone, and his work is in part an attack on British colonial bluster. Yet while Wells's novel criticises European colonialism in broad strokes, still his knowledge of and attitude toward the African army that encapsulates its corruption is moulded by contemporary events in the Congo Free State. I base this claim not just upon the prominence of the Congo's Force Publique in humanitarian and political debates of the 1890s and early 1900s, but also Wells's knowledge of those debates and their importance in forming his views on race and empire, plus references and allusions to, and resonances of, the Congo atrocities and anti-Congo literature in *Sleeper* itself.

Wells knew the situation in Leopold's colony, mentioning it in several of his nonfictional writings and in his New Woman novel, *Ann Veronica: A Modern Love Story* (1909, 70). The experimental fiction *A Modern Utopia* (1905) discusses Leopold's colony as a case (and not the only case) of misrule exacerbated by European racial bigotry (210). In the socialist treatise *New Worlds for Old* (1908) he writes of atrocities:

in the Congo Free State during the last year or so, hands and feet chopped off, little bodies torn and thrown aside that rubber might be cheap, the tyres of our cars run smoothly, and that detestable product of political expediency, the King of the Belgians, have his pleasures (11-12).ⁱⁱⁱ

The Congo is mentioned in passing in *Sleeper* as part of Graham's vision of the world united under four European languages (128). More telling and timely commentary is found, though, in the deeper-lying thematic associations between the novel and Wells's understanding of the situation in Central Africa: the role of rubber in the creation of globalised industry and the insight that the heads of big business might be 'product[s] of political expediency' — a

phrase that might well also be applied to the puppets who rule in *Sleeper*, Ostrog and Graham.

Rubber bonds the future that Wells imagines to contemporary reportage from the Congo. The source of Leopold's extraordinary wealth, rubber was the main export from central Africa, for which Congo peoples were compelled to work. Rubber became newly lucrative in the 1890s following a series of developments in its industrial application culminating in Dunlop's invention of the pneumatic tire (Hochschild 158-9). 'Red rubber' became a byword for Congo exploitation thanks primarily to the propaganda of Morel. In *The Outline of History* Wells highlighted 'the greed for rubber', particularly but not only in the Congo, in his withering account of the Scramble for Africa (ii. 460). Rubber too plays a key part in creating the monopolistic world order in which Graham awakes. In his future fictions 'A Story of the Days to Come' (1897) and *Sleeper* he envisions rubber's role as an important material in the creation of the so-called 'ways' (which we might call highways) prior to the manufacture of Eadhamite, the cheap durable substance that replaces rubber and upon which much of Graham's fortune is founded. In 'A Story of the Days to Come', which imagines the same, or a closely related, future scenario to that which *Sleeper* describes, Eadhamite is noted alongside printing and steam 'as one of the epoch-making discoveries of the world's history' (735). It was designed probably:

as a mere cheap substitute for india-rubber; it cost a few shillings a ton. But you can never tell all an invention will do. It was the genius of a man named Warming that pointed to the possibility of using it, not only for the tires of wheels, but as a road substance, and who organized the enormous network of public ways that speedily covered the world (735).

As a tale of two lovers' descent into the nightmares of alienated labour, 'A Story of the Days to Come' imagines the suffering that attends the accumulation of great wealth through exploitation. In *Sleeper*, Warming is identified as Graham's relative and his first benefactor. Eadhamite gives rise to the first 'big company' (99) in the accumulation of global resources that Graham inherits. But rubber has clearly played an important part in the process, and the Eadhamite 'ways' are still used by 'narrow rubber-shod vehicles' (126). The insidious role of rubber in creating Graham's dystopia is captured well by one of his first sights upon waking from his centuries-long sleep: 'a curious apparatus of rubber' on his arm, 'bound so cunningly that it seemed to pass into his skin above and below' (26), and seemingly enabling what today we would call intravenous therapy, captures the tendril-like reach of major business into everyday existence.

Wells's depictions of African soldiers also are mediated by anti-Congo writings, including *Heart of Darkness* (1899). Serialisation of Conrad's novella overlapped with that of *Sleeper*, and though Wells is unlikely to have inspected the published form of Conrad's tale prior to writing his own work, he may have consulted a draft version while converting *Sleeper* into book form.^{iv} In Conrad's tale Marlow recounts a sinister close encounter with a Europeanised soldier, 'one of the reclaimed', driving a gang of enslaved labourers (19). He moreover pauses his yarn to imagine much the same situation which Wells's novel dramatizes:

'a lot of mysterious niggers armed with all kinds of fearful weapons suddenly took to travelling on the road between Deal and Gravesend, catching the yokels right and left to carry heavy loads for them' (23).

The resonance of Conrad in *Sleeper* is acknowledged explicitly when in a reading room of the future Graham stumbles upon *Heart of Darkness* alongside Kipling's 'The Man who

would be King'. Though he regards Kipling's as 'one of the best stories in the world', he is unfamiliar with the unattributed 'The Heart of Darkness' (the name of the novella in serial form) and assumes that if it is fiction then it must be written by a 'post-Victorian author[s]' (46). On one level, this allusion is mere game-play. Wells returns the compliment paid to him, and particularly *The War of the Worlds*, in *Heart of Darkness* as Marlow compares his bewildered and incredulous understanding of Kurtz's position in Africa to belief that 'there are inhabitants on the planet Mars' (29; McCarthy 37).

But more than this, *Heart of Darkness* is held up as a tale with its own powerful foresight, and grave forebodings, in contrast to 'The Man who would be King'. In nonfictional writings Wells shared with certain liberal critics of empire, including some Congo reformers, distaste for Kipling's pro-imperial verse, regarding it as the pater by which Europeans marched headlong to world power at the end of the nineteenth century. Wells interprets the title of Kipling's poem 'The White Man's Burden' (1899) to mean 'the lordship of the earth' in his *Outline of History* (ii. 462), a phrasing corresponds to the fate experienced as a burden of responsibility by Graham in *Sleeper*.⁹ Parrinder suggests that 'The White Man's Burden' is further alluded to in the giant white statue of Atlas, a relic of Council rule that Graham sees toppled ('Introduction' xvii). As for 'The Man who would be King', its title too is of obvious relevance to Graham, though his shallow appreciation of it suggests that its applicability has not yet been fully grasped by him. This failure of comprehension ultimately results in colonialism deployed to base and self-harming ends in the form of the African soldiers deployed to Europe. Toward the end of the novel, when black troops have stormed Paris, a propagandist newscaster reports that:

[t]hey fought with great bravery, singing songs written in praise of their ancestors by the poet Kipling. Once or twice they got out of hand, and tortured and mutilated wounded and captured insurgents, men and women. Moral — don't go rebelling. Haha! Galloop, Galloop! They are lively fellows. Lively brave fellows. Let this be a lesson to the disorderly banderlog of this city. Yah! Filth of the earth! Galloop, Galloop!... Savage times come again. Blood! Blood! Yaha!' (169-70)

The allusion to Kipling's poem is reinforced a few lines later as Graham overhears from the mouths of the people, and amid the din of the Babble Machines, 'such phrases as "Lynched policeman," "Women burnt alive," "Fuzzy Wuzzy,"' (180) the latter being the title of Kipling's famous tribute to the martial prowess of the Mahdist rebels in the British-occupied Sudan.

Through 'Fuzzy Wuzzy' (1892), Wells links imperial warfare in his own times to that which Graham witnesses in the future. The newscaster's words capture ironically Wells's message: 'savage times come again' as the present, or rather the future, repeats the mistakes of empires past. Though *Sleeper* looks hopefully toward a (European) peoples' rebellion at its close, this trace of the Mahdist revolt, as distilled by Kipling's poem, figures antithetically as part of the oppressive present. Graham also overhears casual use of the term 'banderlog' (170), Kipling's term for the monkeys in *The Jungle Book* (1894), again suggesting the infiltration of the poet's ideas and phrasings into the everyday future speech of a people indifferent to the consequences of exploitation and militarisation of African labour. His esteem for Kipling shows that Graham has been reading the wrong fictions of empire. Because he has not read the 'post-Victorian' *Heart of Darkness*, and because he has read Kipling, though blithely and without noticing that he too is a 'man who would be king', Graham is not prepared to tackle the imperialistic society in which he awakes, or to comprehend the dangers — for both himself and his subjects -- of his own kingly inheritance. More important than Graham's

ignorance, however, is future society's failure to act upon the warning that *Heart of Darkness* provides for it. Graham must combat the failings of a society, then, even though those failings are inherited from his own era, of which he is representative.^{vi}

In *Heart of Darkness*, of course, criticism of imperialism is compromised by its adherence to racist ideologies which underpinned aggressive colonialism in Central Africa and elsewhere. *Sleeper* too belongs to this troubled, perhaps transitional, moment in English literature's relation to empire. While in the works that followed *Sleeper* Wells pronounced his anti-racism standpoint -- and in *A Modern Utopia* Wells identifies the role of race prejudice in 'the depopulation of the Congo Free State by the Belgians' (210) -- *Sleeper* is ambiguous on the question of racial prejudice. In a brief passage of dialogue between Graham and Helen Wotton published in the 1899 version but removed in the 1910, the novel considers the role of politics in forging and exacerbating racial division, as Graham ponders with Helen the possibility of the Africans' '[v]icarious atonement': 'These blacks are savages, ruled by force, used as force. And they have been under the rule of whites two hundred years. Is it not a race quarrel? The race sinned—the race pays.' (1899, 307) This argument echoes Morel's fearful predictions of an African uprising emerging from the Congo basin, and, even more so, it anticipates condemnations of Morel's and others' racist depictions of the Rhineland occupiers. In the Reichstag in 1920, for example, one German socialist exclaimed that the campaign against the African troops was 'only a racial fight against the blacks. It is the fault of the capitalistic governments that the blacks have remained behind in civilization'. (Qtd. Reinders 19). Through Graham, Wells ponders the role of racial intolerance in forging imperial regimes and resistance, and the term 'atonement' suggests the righteousness of the prospective uprising.

In other parts of the narrative, however, Wells shares his contemporaries' aversion to the prospect of African militancy in his fictional representation of black combatants. Wells depicts both Ostrog and Graham acting upon deep-seated prejudices against Africans, and Graham admits to his own aversion (an 'archaic prejudice', he calls it) to the prospect of blacks ruling over whites (172, 202), and yet despite its suggestion of 'atonement' the novel increasingly shares in racialised angst as to what 'vicarious' violence African militarism might bring to Europe.^{vii} As the Africans descend on Paris and London and are reported to commit 'torture' and 'mutilation' as well as 'an unspeakable horror', Graham's fears are proven right (197). Perhaps it could be argued that these reports of 'unspeakable horror' stem not from observed reality but from the same prejudices to which Graham admits. But the novel itself provides no grounds on which to question the reports. As with the propaganda of Morel, the threat of African militarism is brought home through the 'unspeakable horror', the taboo crime, be it cannibalism or rape, which is represented in racial rather than material or social terms.

Not only the plot but also the descriptive language supports Graham's loathing of the black troops. This is most apparent in the final description of the soldiers, as they face death during the aeroplane battle:

No man of all that black multitude saw the coming of his fate, no man among them dreamt of the hawk that struck downward upon him out of the sky. Those who were not limp in the agonies of air sickness, were craning their black necks and staring to see the filmy city that was rising out of the haze, the rich and splendid city to which 'Massa Boss' had brought their obedient muscles. Bright teeth gleamed and the glossy faces shone. They had heard of Paris. They knew they were to have lordly times among the poor white trash. (226)

In identifying the African soldiers in class terms alongside the ‘poor white trash’, these references recall that the soldiers too are victims, to some extent, of Ostrog’s tyranny. Yet there is much else within the passage to confuse the issue and militate against any sympathy for them. Overall, the passage is revealing in its superfluity, which speaks of a gratuitous desire to narrate the soldiers’ comeuppance. That gratuity leads the narrative unusually far from the limits of Graham’s perspective in peering into the aeroplane, while nonetheless upholding his racist vision, and it is measurable in the insistent, tautological physical descriptions of ‘black necks’, ‘obedient muscles’, ‘bright teeth’ (another hint at cannibalistic propensities) and ‘glossy faces’.

Conclusion

In certain key respects, Wells’s imagining of a future African militia is distinctly of its time. It insists upon a racialised understanding of the soldiers which bars sympathy for them. It conceives of the Africans acting out of lustful vengeance, prey to their own ‘unspeakable’ excesses, and in the service of European geopolitical interests of which they are but dimly aware. In these regards *Sleeper* draws from the same stock of racist imagery as Morel’s anti-colonialist writings from the Congo and the Rhine. Indeed, as the missing link between the Congo reform movement and the ‘Black Horror’ in the Rhine, Wells’s novel helps us further to understand how these campaigns criticised imperialism by reasserting, and reinforcing, an ideology of endangered white supremacy.

Yet where *Sleeper* goes beyond contemporary discussions, and arguably sits alongside *Heart of Darkness*, is in its awareness of the bigger picture. While most of its critics in the late 1890s and early 1900s were thinking about the Congo Free State as a specific problem brought on by Leopold’s policies, encouraging the exceptionalist view upon which the Congo reform movement was mounted, Wells’s temporal and geographical extrapolation of the Force Publique problem allows him to bring his African soldiery to bear upon those European territories that first trained them in western-style combat. As with *Heart of Darkness*, in which Marlow famously acknowledges that ‘[a]ll Europe contributed to the making of Kurtz’ (50), the arrival of militant Africans in European cities at *Sleeper*’s close *brings home*, in the literal and symbolic senses, the consequences of violent colonial rule in Africa. *Sleeper* is an example of *fin-de-siècle* fears of the violence of colonialism coming home to roost, and one which is particularly telling because of its close, literal connections to real-world colonial aggression. By connecting the Congo to Europe, Wells’s work connects imperial wars forged by Europe on African soil to those fought by Africans on European soil. Ironically, nonetheless, in recapitulating the racist arguments of Morel against these wars, the novel unwittingly is locked into the cyclical return of ‘savage times’ which it also fearfully predicts.

Notes

ⁱ Armed rebellions occurred in regions which had prospered through slave and ivory trading, the Garenzanze, Mangbetu and Zande states (Nzongola-Ntalaja 41), though also among ‘mutinous’ Force Publique garrisons (Ascherson 169).

When the Sleeper Wakes was first published in instalments of *The Graphic* in 1899, appearing in book form for the first time in the same year. Disappointed by its poor sales, Wells republished the novel in 1910 with the new title, *The Sleeper Awakes*. While in the rewrite Wells made some significant changes, the majority of the text remained intact. My references to '*Sleeper*' are to both versions, and page references are to the 2005 edition of *The Sleeper Awakes* edited by Patrick Parrinder, unless otherwise stated.

iii

Mentions of the Congo in *The Outline of History* (1919), which was published long after Morel's campaign had ended, and the anachronistic reference to the 'Congo Free State' in *New World Order* (1940), show that the scandal surrounding Leopold's African empire lingered in Wells's mind. The 'pleasures' referred to in this quotation may include the king's affairs with prostitute girls, on which see Hochschild 221-24.

iv See Dryden for detailed analysis, and also McCarthy for an overview of the working relationship between these writers, albeit one which neglects *Sleeper*.

v

In *What is Coming?* (1916) Wells's chapter warning against European expansion in the tropics is called 'The White Man's Burthen'. Again this chapter makes brief reference to the Congo. The Congo reformers also made satirical reference to Kipling. In 1920, Morel published *The Black Man's Burden*, having two decades previously been told by his mentor Mary H. Kingsley that 'it is the Black Man's burden that wants singing'.

vi

Draper identifies this paradox in *Sleeper* in more general terms (62).

vii

Parrinder suggests that *Sleeper* puts racist sentiments into the mouths of its world leaders in order to critique the role of racism in democratic politics ('Introduction' xxi-xxii). However, Graham does not mention the black soldiers in his speech to the people.

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