Belgian memories, African objects:
Colonial re-collection at the Musée Africain de Namur

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> Ich bin die Herrin Zeit, Ich mische alles,
>
> Freude und Grauen, Gut und Böse,
>
> Verwirrung und geraden Weg.
>
> *Luc Bondy & Marie-Louise Bischofberger* (1999, p26)

Museums, time and anthropology[1]

In their call for papers, the organisers of this workshop formulated the following question: 'Comment la future présentation donnera-t-elle au visiteur les moyens de comprendre sa propre inscription dans le temps?' This specific question can be taken to invite the participants to reflect on how the future 'Musée des Arts et Civilisations' at Paris could deal with what Fabian (1983) called intersubjective time, in this case the shaping of a shared time in the confrontation between visitors on the one hand and represented objects and the museum on the other. This reformulation allows me to broaden the initial question in three directions. To start, we must equally consider the inscription of peoples, their objects, history and culture in the museum representation. Now, more than ever before, any representation in a metropolitan museum of the 'envergure' envisaged at the quai Branly, is likely to raise issues of appropriation and homogenisation. The time-frames used may strengthen or problematise the temporal matrix in which the metropole represents the history of global progress and local diversity. One way of activating visitors to reflect on their inscription in time could be

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1. This is a working paper, earlier versions of which were presented in London (MEG Conference 'Glimpses of Africa', 25/5/1999), in Ghent (Conference 'Belgium's Africa: reassessing the Belgian legacy in and on Africa', 21-23/10/1999), and in Paris (Workshop 'Temporalité et muséographie', 27/11/1999).

presenting how the represented peoples understand theirs. This means paying attention to whether and how 'the represented' feel history has been taken away from them and located in other spaces such as 'the globe' or 'Europe' and, indeed, its museums.

This reformulation raises at least one methodological and one political issue. First, in order to start this work of presenting local temporalities and constructions of history, the museum has to engage, allegedly through anthropology, with the ways people understand their historical subjectivity in a wider world. There may be a certain predisposition by museum anthropologists to stress local cosmologies relatively closed off from global change, or at least to present these two as somehow mutually exclusive. The challenge it seems lies in locating and bringing into the museum local/global cultural practices in which both are articulated jointly. Museum as sites where self-representation combines with various forms of cultural tourism, may prove to be of particular interest.

Second, focussing on 'présentation', the way in which (the medium by which) temporal inscription is addressed, somehow steers clear of taking on board the kind of institute the national, metropolitan museum is, how it is perceived as representing dominant culture and tends to marginalise the people it sets out the represent. The nationalist and modernist overtones in the way the quai Branly project is presented (Féau 2000) will inevitably provoke questions about its state-driven nature and about its attempts to bring together ('collect'), categorise ('discipline') and represent ('signify') 'others' and 'otherness' both within and without its national borders. Museum anthropologist need therefore to try to understand the museum's inscription in (national) time or the way the nation inscribes people and objects in its time through the use of museums.

I will address these questions in one form or another while looking at the case of an 'auto-museum': a museum built by people to represent themselves. I think basically that is what all museums do, only some may be more successful in hiding their partiality (predilection) and partialness (incompleteness) behind their alleged comprehensiveness, assumed scientific neutrality or behind an ideology of being democratic and open for criticism. The museum that I will be looking at, the Musée Africain de Namur, has no such pretensions: it concedes to its partiality, its amateur and non-scientific character, it heavily attacks points of view which it does not share, and does not hide its aspiration to propagate its view of things to its visitors. In this paper I will not go into theoretical matters but merely situate this work at the crossing of critical museum studies (Bennett 1995) and discourse oriented ethnography (Fabian 1983, 1999). This attempt to deal with Belgian colonials' self-representation has profited greatly

from the work of Marie Dembour (2000) which advocates a transparent and reflexive way of dealing with former colonials; my struggle with objects and texts that seem entangled in the parallel albeit unequal appropriation of 'Africa' and, in my case 'Belgium' was helped forward by studying the work of Nicholas Thomas (1991).

Ethnography and the 'other' museum

The Musée Africain de Namur (hereafter MAN) is a local museum set up and run by former colonials most of whom are members of the *Cercle Royal Namurois des Anciens d'Afrique* (hereafter CRNAA). The Museum is situated near the city centre of Namur and presents African material culture and colonial history while some special attention is given to colonials from the Namur region. In general terms, it is a niche of museum practice and historical imagination, a site of, quite literally 'post-colonial' self-representation. The museum and the special interest group that organises and visits it, posit themselves as subaltern.[2] They speak self-consciously of their subordination and deem that theirs is a counter-discourse that goes against the grain of official, maybe better defined as, 'majority' historiography (see e.g. Dembour 2000, p69, 72, 77, 82 etc.). My research at the MAN, is an attempt at writing an ethnography of the way this local group of former colonials articulate their nationalist, colonialist nostalgia in a contemporary world. This they do not only by running the Museum and holding CRNAA meetings, but also by organising memorial ceremonies, and quite intensive publishing, such as the quarterly CRNAA newsletter (the *Bulletin*) and historiographic work.

Re-collecting at Namur

Much of the ways in which objects are handled, obtained, selected, stored, and displayed at the MAN can be covered by the term *re-collection* in three possible meanings. Firstly, the verb 'to recollect' means 'to recall' but can be taken to point to the simultaneous process of remembering and collecting. This typifies the museum in that most of the objects in the collections are personal *mementoes* donated by former colonials. Mr. Eugene, one of the people actively involved in the upkeep of the museum, explained to me that former colonials

2. The terms 'subaltern' and 'subalternity' have a very specific history going back to Gramsci and designating nonelite or subordinate groups. In the hands of the 'Subaltern Studies' group the concept becomes more richer and more ambiguous in that it is amplied to a 'floating buffer zone of elite-subalternity' (Landry and.Maclean 1996, p203-4).

sometimes bring objects to the museum because, moving into a flat, they have no space to keep them and their children are not interested in them. The reason for the latter's indifference, according to the donors in Mr. Eugene's story is that 'They (their children) did not know Africa as we knew it'. The objects, clearly, are seen as invested with memories conceived of as personal knowledge/experience which is shared by a 'we'. Seen within the action context of transferring objects to the museum, it implies that their value as mementoes of a lived Africa is somehow preserved by transferring them to the museum that represents ('stands for') the 'we'.

Secondly, re-collecting from the point of view of the museum refers to its recycling of existing collections, either private or public. There are instances of people who have no longer the space to keep their personal objects, but there are other examples. For instance, the museum was recently given a collection of African objects (mainly masks and 'colon' statues) by the communal museum of Arlon that had no space for it. This argument, according to Mr. Eugene is also used by the next of kin of deceased former colonials. In all these instances, MAN practices a kind of second-hand 'collecting'. Yet remark, how 'shortage of space' is a neutral, apathetic motivation for divesting oneself of the objects; this may cover a whole lot of causes. It could be that the former colonials substitute their houses for flats because they get older or poorer. In the case of children or relatives, or of other public or private collections, space shortage may be an elegant way of justifying one's lack of interest or low esteem for the objects. This was never stated in such a straightforward way in my presence but hinted at by acknowledging that the objects the museum receives are of limited economic value and sort of left-overs from the objects that enjoy the attention of the general public or that are considered economically valuable. This is just to indicate that the museum people are acutely aware of their *re*-collecting practices. The museum sees itself as restoring or conserving some of the original value to the objects by re-embedding them in a context of respectful remembrance and understands its role as resisting – with considerable resilience – a widely observed process of forgetting colonials and colonial history.

Thirdly, re-collecting at Namur refers to the repeated attempts to build a collection. The Museum was twice entirely (building and objects) destroyed – during the First and the Second World War – and recreated from scratch. At these occasions not even the name was retained. The 'Musée Colonial' of 1912 re-emerged as the 'Musée National d'Art Africain' in 1934 and as the 'Musée Colonial Scolaire de Jambes' in 1951. In 1985, after having changed locations 6 times and changed names 5 times, the 'Musée Africain de Namur' found its present accommodation in what remained of the vacant Leopold army camp of Namur, that is to say

the guardroom and a handful of adjacent prison cells (Anonymous s.d.). Only in the course of the last few years the discontinuous history of the museum, summarised above, has been retraced. Besides, this process of reconstruction is still going on – the brochure telling the 'historique' of the museum, is constantly being re-edited. Like for re-collection in its first and second meaning, re-collection as persisting in rebuilding a colonial museum at Namur is explicitly part of the museum's heroic history.

In an interview, I asked Mr. Eugene[3] how he appreciated the fact that the collection held mainly personal objects donated to the museum which therefore could be seen as 'a depot of colonial souvenirs, of memories of a lived Africa'. Rather unexpectedly, his answer did not pick up the 'memory' sense of my question but commented on the fact that 'depot', 'souvenir', and 'personal' made 'his' collection into an incomplete and inconsistent whole. He answered that one could only aspire, but never attain, comprehensiveness. However, he added, considering the fact that the collection of objects and books in the library grew rapidly, sometime in the future, it could become of interest to researchers who are looking for more or less representative collections of objects. In conclusion, and entirely in contradiction to my question about the 'presence of the past' in the museum, he said: 'One has to look at the future', and 'One must always try to make progress'.

From the above observations, we get a glimpse at how the people of the museum and the CRNAA perceive themselves. First an foremost they consider themselves as members of the disappearing species of colonial agents. As 'veterans' – 'ancestors' as they sometimes call themselves – they form a peer group of self-conscious 'gente perdita': they know that colonialism has become a dirty word and consider themselves caught between their unrelenting enthusiasm for the Belgian colonial project they worked in, and a Belgium that has basically changed its mind.[4]

The MAN and CRNAA people can be seen counteracting this trend towards disappearance and marginalisation in several ways. Since the independence of Belgian Congo in 1960, they have opted for a wider definition of themselves, namely 'anciens d'Afrique', opening the doors of their association for other 'out of Africa' military and civil serviceman, such as the

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3. All names of informants are pseudonyms; names of local authors of articles or books and listed in the bibliography are real.

4. Huberland (1998, p3) finds that 'au lendemain des indépendances' the 'rôle joué par les expatriés' is negatively assessed on the basis of the false generalisation that 'la Metropole n'avait jamais eu d'autres objectifs que le pillage du Congo'.

'coopérants' – civil servants working for the Ministry of Development Aid – peace mission soldiers and NGO personnel. Also, a number of Africans feature on the membership list of the CRNAA. Even if this opening of membership does not secure the existence of the 'anciens d'Afrique', the museum may. The museum – its 'historique' of successes and defeats and its present vitality – is inscribed in a long-term project for remembering the Belgian colonies, for maintaining a 'lieu de mémoire' of colonial activity in Africa. Mr. Eugene pointed out how the museum envisages a more secure, scientific future for its collection. In the likely case that the objects lose their value as mementoes, they are seen as gathering a possible new interest: an archival/scientific one. This may serve as an alternative to (or a first step towards?) the formal official recognition of the museum as a cultural/pedagogic institution.

The Museum in national space and time

MAN is located in the guardroom of the otherwise largely demolished Leopold army camp. The site and the museum are still property of the national government (the Ministry of Defence). That in itself is exceptional in a country that has been federalising itself for the last 30 years, in the process transferring property and ministerial responsibility from the federal government to the two regional governments – Namur is the political capital of the Walloon region. Mr. Joseph from the museum explained that, taking into account the ongoing regionalisation in Belgium, the fact that the museum is located on 'national territory' is a threat to its future existence. This should be understood, I think, with reference to the fact that the museum is considered to be of local if not regional significance, and, as a cultural institution could be taken to fall under the authority of the local and regional rather than the federal administration. Under the present conditions of ongoing regionalisation, it would be unsurprising for the federal government to cease to support the MAN.[5] As it sees itself, the 'national connection' of the museum exceeds the fact that the federal minister of defence is its landlord. One other important aspect is that the museum entertains good connections with people from the military and the state police (both still under federal authority). More important, however, is the museum's explicit royalist and belgicist allegiance. Being on this 'Belgian island' in the heart of Walloon country is, in spite of Mr. Joseph's disclaimer, a foothold for a museum that since its creation has shown great devotion to Leopold II, and the Belgian royal family. It is interesting to see how this loyalty is inscribed in the history of the museum.

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5. Culture and education are matters that fall under the authority of the regional governments.

Over the last few years the museum has attempted to be granted the status of *royal* institute. One of the conditions for this is that the museum must prove a continuous existence for a period of at least 50 years. In the immediate context of writing the application, people at the museum began to put together the 'historique' of the museum, connecting the different projects to build a colonial museum at Namur over the last 80 years. As it happened, the application was turned down: the claimed continuity was not accepted. This, however, has not prevented the organisers from publishing this 'chronique' as the official history of the museum. As I explained before the 'historique' can be understood to illustrate the perseverance of the present organisers to row against the tide of forgetting and neglecting colonial history – embodied by the disappearance and marginalisation of the *namurois* colonials – but there are at least two other aspects to it.

First, the asserted continuity forges links between the present organisers and the so-called 'pionniers', the first generations of explorers and personnel of Leopold II's Congo Free State. Several rooms in the museum are named after these 'pionniers'. One of these people, to which I will come back later is, Josué Henry de la Lindi, a *namurois* military man who started his successful career under Leopold II and was later knighted by Leopold III. In 1999 Josué's grandson André was elected director of the museum. In the Henry family converge the many threads that the museum is trying to weave between more than 100 years of shared history of Namur and Africa. Through links of kinship and friendship, through professional ties, and regional proximity ('les namurois'), the present museum people link up with the 'pionniers', the heroes and devotees of Leopold's Africa project.

Second, the history of the museum is a chronicle of small and big disasters (among which the two times when it was completely destroyed); from it emerges a museum constantly under threat of annihilation from allies and enemies alike. This is what Mr. Joseph could have been talking about when he regarded the museum's federal connection as a possible menace to its existence – like the bombing of the museum by the British during the second World War, the museum could now be eliminated by its 'friends', or better still, its natural allies. To see friends acting as enemies may speak of a certain apprehension, a kind of attitude which will also be found back in the way the museum rewrites colonial history.

Museum history

When overlooking the auto-historiography of this colonial museum one cannot miss the interesting parallels with the colonial history that the museum and people connected to it, try to tell.

In order to illustrate this, I use the story of the aforementioned Josué Henry de la Lindi as it is told in the museum display and in speeches and publications by *namurois* former colonials. Our main sources here are a kind of biography of Henry written by Maurice Huberland (1998) and the speeches that accompanied the opening of the newly furbished Room 'Henry de la Lindi' at the museum in May 1999.

Henry is remembered for two sorts of activities. He won important battles against the two important kinds of enemies at the time, the so-called Arab slave traders and the Batetela rebels; also it is believed that in 1895 he discovered gold at Kilo and thus lay the basis for the exploitation of the Kilo-Moto gold mines under Leopold II and beyond. Among Henry's notable victories are mentioned: (i) the capture of Stokes, 'a British arms dealer who said he was German', (ii) the capture of one of the latter's important clients, the slave-trader Kibonge 'killer of Emin Pacha' who was 'betrayed by his own soldiers'; (iii) and finally Henry's success in quashing the last off-shoot of the so-called Batetela rebellion during the battle near the river Lindi in 1897. These battles, Huberland considers as decisive moments in the pacification of the Congo Free State: they broke 'Arab' power and restored authority in the Congo.

However, Henry is felt to have not been properly recognised for his major achievements – speaking of Henry and another 'pionnier', Mr. Herneupont said 'l'histoire ne rappelle guère leur courage et leurs actions' (1999, p23). Huberland (1998) from his side gives much attention explaining the reasons for this lack of recognition. The fact that Henry was not officially acknowledged for his discovery of gold at Kilo is said to be the work of Leopold's Secretary of State Liebrechts who during his lifetime tried everything in his power to conceal the identity of the true discoverer. The same person is also held responsible for provoking misunderstandings between Henry and Leopold II concerning a mission to the Nile that followed shortly after his victory at the river Lindi. The imbroglio that followed from this made Henry retire from service in Africa for 13 years. His 'come back' in 1913 ended with a dispute between Henry and his commanding officer, Tombeur. In 1916 Henry returned to Belgium where he joined the army and 'assisted in the liberation of Flanders' (Herneupont 1999, p23). Huberland's biography draws the conclusion that the recognition Henry received, came with difficulty and only late in his life: in 1938 Henry was knighted by Leopold III and allowed to add an aristocratic extension, 'de la Lindi', to his family name, in remembrance of his 1897 victory; and only in 1952, five years before his death, a Belgian court granted Henry the honour of having discovered gold at Kilo (idem, p181).

It is first of all clear from the above story that although Henry did not receive any recognition from Leopold II, the latter is at no point held responsible. At the end of Huberland's book Liebrechts and Tombeur are listed in the chapter 'enmities'. They are seen as opposing Henry's work which consisted in helping forward in a substantial way Leopold's project of 'pacification' (cf. battles and captures) and exploitation (cf. gold). At all times Leopold II rises high above the rivalry that reigned among the highest ranks of the Congo Free State administration. This scheme of things is also found back in the way the museum tells its own history: (i) the reverence for Leopold II, the dedication to his 'oeuvre humanitaire' (as I heard it once called) but, in all, the relative lack of recognition (cf. denial of *royal* status), and (ii) a systematic apprehension about the bad intentions of colleagues and friends-in-arms. These parallelisms are important, I think, because they form the kind of mechanisms that are put to work to articulate subalternity both of the museum and of the colonials for which it is built.

In order to grasp this we need to look more carefully at how this 'systematic apprehension' or paranoia is developed in the colonial historiography produced in and around the museum. In the above story of Henry I have cited the kind of details with which the *namurois* historians comment on the treacherous nature of people Henry was dealing with, ranging from Stokes who feigned to be a German, over Kibonge who was betrayed by his own soldiers, to the so-called Batetela rebels who are also characterised as 'mutineers', 'insurgent soldiers who 'threatened the very existence of the new Congolese state' who paid them (Huberland, p23). At other instances the same dangers of deception and constant menace are also located in the natural environment (animals, forest, unpredictable weather conditions, unknown territory). From this arises a 'pionnier' as a solitary figure who ultimately could only rely on his own intelligence and courage and that of a handful of real friends.

Moreover, this image of the pionnier is sometimes generalised to that of the colonial of later years. When I visited the Henry Room at the museum Mr. Guillaume stressed the fact that during military campaigns and expeditions, the Belgians were very few in comparison to the amount of black troops and carriers and of course in comparison to the masses of inimical natives. He then put to me the rhetorical question: 'How then could the Belgians have committed the amount of crimes which certain books talk about?' Underlying this question is a generalised image of the colonisers as a 'pionnier', a minority, threatened by people, animals and natural phenomena that are unpredictable and deceitful. Moreover, I would argue, to the extent that Leopold II as a power figure is left out of Henry's biography, power (either in the form of gunpowder, money, troops, and the penetration of the Congo through indirect

rule) is dissociated from the colonisers. It is indeed not so that these power tools are not mentioned, only it is not the sort of thing 'pionniers' or 'coloniaux' rely on. What is foregrounded as their essential qualities are, apart from dedication to Leopold's project, intelligence and cunning (the positive side of 'paranoia'), and individual strength (the flip-side of being perceived as operating in relative isolation).[6]

Guillaume's rhetorical question further connects this image of the Belgian colonial to the present-day context in which this image is contested by 'certain books'. This I will look into presently. It offers the occasion to grasp more effectively the kind of subalternity of the colonials which I have hinted at several times.

Subalternity of the doubt

In 1998 Adam Hochschild published his 'King Leopold's Ghost: a story of greed, terror and heroism in Colonial Africa'. The same year the book was translated in Dutch and French, sold very well, and received much attention in the popular media. In the fall issue of the *Bulletin de CRNAA* of 1998 then Claude Gautier, president of the CRNAA, launched an attack against the book in the editorial column of the *Bulletin*, and in the same issue José Clément composed a collection of quotes which were meant to contradict Hochschild's claims.

To start with Gautier's editorial note (1998, p3), he spends only one paragraph accusing Hochschild for spreading lies, and proceeds in four other paragraphs attacking (i) those 'écrits diffamatoires' by 'nombreux compatriotes' who provided the historical data which Hochschild reprocesses, and (ii) the media 'qui se dit belge' who take delight in broadcasting the old and new lies. The middle paragraph expresses sadness over the fact that 'l'oeuvre admirable réalisée durant trois-quart de siècle' is thrown into disrepute and considers it a blow to the royal family who during four reigns has shown great interest in 'this country' (the Congo).

Qua lay-out, the column takes the form of a letter. It opens with the – somewhat ornate –

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6. The idea of a colonial paranoia is taken from Richards (1993) who situates roughly in the 'age of empire' around the turn of the last century, the emergence of what he calls an 'epistemological paranoia' most clearly expressed in the new genre of the invasion novel. He characterised this paranoia as a 'thouroughgoing conflation of knowledge and fear' whereby the perception of the phenomenal world is 'in a permanent state of red alert' over the contingency plans of the enemy; an enemy who may not even be named or outlined in substance and shape (Richards 1993, p114).

name of the addressee, 'Pauvre Léopold II', and addresses the 'grand Souverain' directly in the following way: 'Toi qui pensais, après une vie bien remplie, pouvoir enfin jouir du repos éternel, tu t'es bien trompé'. The letter ends with a paragraph in which the current negative image of the 'colonial belge' is being deplored, and with a salutation which takes the form of an invocation: 'Dieu, que c'est triste...et pitoyable' (ibidem).

Above all, this example provides a condensed image of how the *anciens d'Afrique* of Namur position themselves in relation to two other poles: (i) Belgium, Leopold II, the royal family and their colonial project, and (ii) the pseudo-Belgian attackers of Leopold II, the anti-royalists, and anti-colonialists. The 'letter' format, the direct addressing of the king, and the invocation of god, I understand as aspects of *directly* connecting with the state and the royals, but at the same time, conceding to one's subordinate position as an admirer, an honest but no longer respected (colonial) worker, and a simple believer.

I should illustrate this point in more detail, but let it suffice for the moment to contend that de former colonials are clearly seen seeking alliances outside the realm of civil and political society, contaminated as these are by what Huberland (1998, p3) called 'les médias avec l'aide de certains théoriciens de nos grandes écoles et des milieux progressistes'. Who remains as reliable partners are the Belgian royals (symbols of a what remains of a degenerated Belgium), and occasionally God. It does not need much arguing that Leopold II exemplifies the royal interest in Congo. How this is done and what this implies for the self-positioning of the former colonials becomes clearer from the introduction of Clement's article in the same issue of the Bulletin:

> 'Les chiennes de l'enfer sont à nouveau déchaînées contre le grand Souverain qui avait fait de la Belgique une nation universellement enviée et respectée et contre les artisans de ses desseins grandioses. Leurs successeurs conservent aujourd'hui la fierté d'avoir contribué à la réalisation du vaste projet qui unissait les Congolais et les Belges avant 1960'.

Two continuities are being forged here: the first links the present-day colonials (successeurs) to the colonial workers of the past and to the 'great architect' who laid out the long-term plans. Secondly the 'à nouveau' establishes a connection between the attacks on Leopold II – one remembers Morel and Cassement as the main activists of the anti-Leopold II propaganda – and Hochschild's book. The first continuity articulates well with the connections we saw established in other discourse presented above. What becomes more clear than before in this example is *the absence of power*. Leopold is the artist and the colonials of the past, the artisans, the workers who helped realising the project. Like in the case of the 'pionnier' and

the 'pionnier'-like colonial, there is no trace of physical power other than personal energy, no trace of commercial interest and no power other than moral authority in furthering a just cause. This is the way in which biographies like the one of Josué Henry de la Lindi can be presented as that of a 'small fish', marginalised by some superiors and forgotten by history. This and other biographies of the 'small fishes' emphasise the greatness and the quality of their work and this is perceived to stand in an inverse relationship to the importance contemporary society and majority historiography attributes to them. To quote from a letter I received from the author of the Henry biography, who had also written a biography of Joseph Rhodius (Huberland, 1999), an industrialist from Namur who set up many companies in Belgian Congo: 'des types comme cela il y an a eu beaucoup au Congo malheureusement on n'en parle pas'. This articulates clearly the predilection for the numerous, silent and silenced *workers* ('artisans') of the colonial endeavour. This makes the 'petit belge' an ambivalent creature, not in the least because he 'avait vu grand' or at least – in the words of Pétillon who said about Pierre Ryckmans: 'il aimait les petits moyens pour faire des grandes choses' (in Halen 1993, p30). This ambivalence of the 'petit Belge' is best understood with reference to 'the absence of power': as a 'Belge' he (she?) is part of the grand design of nations and history in which he as a 'petit' does what he has to do, realising unpretentiously the big plans. Power, in other words, resides in history (History) itself not in the people (either powerful or numerous); history is seen as self-empowered. From this absence of power arises a rather helpless colonial subject that must sustain relentless attacks by its many enemies. The self-effacing practice of the 'petit Belge' went as far as effacing him from history.

These 'enemies' are made in the counter-image of the 'pionnier'-like colonial: they have personal or commercial interests to defend (cf. Stokes) or serve unjust causes (cf. slave-traders), and, assume the kind of agency and power to change the course of history that the colonial overtly disclaims (cf. Batetela rebels). Similarly, in Gautier's speech Hochschild is said to be 'en mal de copie et de notoriété'.[7] Clément (1998, p12-13) cites several authors who stress the fact that Morel and Cassement were German spies and thus need to be considered as traitors. Finally, in Huberland's introduction the Belgian colonials are pictured as 'amener progressivement' the Congolese towards 'notre propre culture occidentale', while

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7. In his review of Huberland's book, André Henry de la Lindi (1999a, p16) deplores the fact that the author was unable to find an editor; the latter arguing that with books on Congo no money can be made, 'à l'exception d'auteurs subversifs'. Here Henry makes an interesting connection between economic interest and morally unjust intellectuals.

the leftist media and scholars 's'efforcent d'imposer...des systèmes pseudo-démocratiques' in the new African states (3). More importantly maybe than these characterisations of the enemies is the fact that they are found among the very group of people of which it is implied that one could expect agreement or solidarity. In the story of Josué Henry de la Lindi these enemies from within were Secretary of State Liebrechts and General Tombeur. In colonial history one finds them in the form of disloyal 'auxiliaires' (collaborators) or disobedient troops. In the trade of colonial historiography, we have seen how Gautier (1998, p3) was particularly saddened by the collaboration of fellow countrymen ('compatriotes', 'qui se dit belge') in vilifying the work of Belgian colonialism. As it happens this group of people who likes 'to scoff at our colonial past' is perceived as large, it comprises 'les Universités, les bibliothèques, les milieux intellectuels, les historiens, et les cercles politiques' (Henry de la Lindi 1999a, p17). Finally, it is remarkable how, against the 'subversive' or otherwise 'irreverent' ideas of this majority group no direct arguments are formulated. As in the collage of excerpts which Clément presents to counter Hochschild, one leaves it to 'eminent specialists' to throw doubt ('mise en doute') on the malicious fantasies that some authors present as facts (Henry de la Lindi, 1999b, p15). In the analysis of the auto-historiography I spoke of a certain paranoia that went together with perceiving or constantly expecting inimical moves in one's direct social (or natural) environment. Taking on board the fact that in the self-representation of the *namurois* colonials this is linked to an assumed minority position and that counteracting is more a matter of discrediting the 'immoral majority' than fighting back with facts and figures, I prefer to rephrase this paranoia as a *subalternity of the doubt*, a fundamental condition of distrusting majority opinion in civil and political society.

Time and subalternity
Throughout the above analysis of colonialist discourse in and around the MAN, it has become clear that the discursive strategy of 'the absence of power' is deployed against a certain conception of history which could be qualified as 'idealist'. Libotte (1999b, p38) for instance, states this very openly when he concludes his reconstruction of the history of European colonialism saying: 'La colonisation...est...une des émanations de l'esprit et du génie de l'Europe. [...] la colonisation fait partie de notre "authenticité" européenne à tous, coloniaux ou non'. In this scheme of things the subject renounces a substantial part of its agency and relegates itself to the role of a 'historic worker'.
The above scheme does not stipulate which course history takes. When analysing the 'the subalternity of the doubt' we have come across a whole number of instances in which

parallels are drawn between the early colonial period and the present, between the predicament of the 'pionniers' and that of the 'anciens d'Afrique'. In between lies a period of regular colonisation, or in Clément's words that 'vaste projet qui unissait les Congolais et les Belges'. In the self-narratives one finds this three-fold periodization in the three 'generations' of colonials, 'pionniers', 'coloniaux', and 'anciens d'Afrique' which roughly correspond to the Congo Free State, the Belgian Congo and independent Zaïre/Congo. Connecting this again with 'the subalternity of the doubt' the epoch of the Congo Free State and the present epoch are characterised by fierce critique from the 'immoral majority' first directed at Leopold II and presently at the former colonials. Again, in between these two epochs, is situated a period of alleged national consensus about the desirability of the colonial undertaking. I concede that it would need a lot more evidence to establish that the former colonials perceive a certain cyclical movement in the history of the Congo; nonetheless there are strong indications that the present situation is somehow compared to what Leopold and his 'pionniers were facing when pacifying Central Africa. Although I'm not sure about how the Mobutu era is/was appreciated, the Kabila period is seen as characterised by (i) political instability and territorial disintegration, (ii) wide-ranging insecurity of the simple peasant in the face of bandits, warlords, rebellious troops and unscrupulous merchants, and maybe more importantly (iii) the obvious dilapidation of 'des grandes choses' realised by the Belgians: education, health care, and infrastructure (roads, railway) being among the most important. (Huberland 1998, p28-49, p88-103; Libotte 1999b).

A certain contradiction may be detected between the first concept of time which dehumanises history and reduces human agency, and the second conception which constructs a cyclical movement and may serve as a model for possible postcolonial action – re-pacification? or deployment of massive resources in order to regenerate the exploitation of this potentially rich country, as Henry (1999b) seems to imply?

Further research could solve this contradiction by looking more carefully into the contexts in which one or the other conception of time and history is used and for what purposes. I have been mainly interested in how the former colonials construct their own subalternity in contemporary society. In this respect I have come across a third time frame which is particularly interesting because it tries to accommodate the 60 years of history of colonisation as shared time. The *namurois* former colonials perceive of themselves and their values and activities as residual, as remnants of a lost world, in a 'federalised' Belgium. The contemporary world which they imagine and which they want to stand up for is a postcolonial 'metropole/colony'. This is a bi-national zone that consists of a 'Belgium' and a 'Belgium's

Africa' (i) that share the parallel predicament of falling apart – Belgium through regionalisation, and 'Belgium's Africa' through violence and mismanagement – and (ii) that are both subject to moral decay. In consonance with 'the absence of power', the present position of the former colonials is described as one of resistance against the perceived loss of 'valeurs ... qui s'appelaient; la Patrie, le Devoir, l'Abnégation' (Huberland 1998: 4).

The perception of this simultaneous 'progression' of Belgium and Belgium's Africa can best be understood when looking at how the museum (particularly the larger and older part of it, the right wing) is organised. The right wing consists of (i) a central corridor – the 'espace Ryckmans' whose dead in 1960 signifies independence, the end – dominated by the figure of Leopold II – the beginning –, (ii) the rooms to the left which tell mainly about the conquest history ('les pionniers') and early missionary activity at the time of the Congo Free State, and (iii) the two rooms to the right displaying the two sides of 'culture': 'the uncultivated' – traditional culture and religion illustrated with 'ethnographica' – and 'the cultivated' – showing specimens of 'natural history' but mainly displays of 'useful' products such as cotton, coffee, tea, different kinds of wood, etc., not in their wild form but in their aspect of domesticated (dried, burned, smoked, cut) natural products.

With the help of some sort of structuralist – a Leachean 'Sistine Chapel' – analysis one could easily reveal an implicit chronology and left-right contrast. What is more relevant may be the fact that whatever the theme or the subject matter of the 'period rooms', the rooms, themes, and epochs are kept together by a coherent way of displaying objects in a homely way. To give one example, in almost every room there is a mantelpiece which is used *as such*, namely to put photographs and small statues on, to put chairs and benches around, and to put a small table with table cloth and ashtray in front. Asked about this, people at the museum readily agree that these displays are meant to evoke living rooms ('rather primitive, like we had in the Congo').

There is little space here to go into this matter, but my general point is that the themes and the chronology do not so much represent the period of regular colonisation (of Belgian Congo) but represent the programme of activities associated with the Congo Free State: pacification, liberation (from slave trade and pagan beliefs) and the 'mise en valeur' (of people and natural resources). Colonisation is not represented as such but presented in the form of the living-room settings, not by the kind of objects (from 'fetishes' to gold coins and pamphlets) but by the way they are arranged on the mantelpiece, for instance, and on/ in other furniture (tables, cupboards, shelves, and even a birdcage).

Now we are in a position to fully recognise the import of the re-collecting that takes place at the MAN. What is straightforwardly represented as (objectified) history is not so much colonialism but what counts as its model: the time of the 'pionniers', of the great designer and the great design, of the ideals of pacification and liberation, of 'setting free' the human and natural resources for future exploitation. In the living-room setting is presented 'the Africa as we knew it' (cf. Mr. Eugene), the place to which the *colonial worker* returned in a life filled with ordinary hardship and never too predictable routine.[8] This common life under the tropics, one could conjecture, may have been compensated at the time by the mirage of fame at home or at least the honour of having assisted in the realisation of a Belgian plan in Africa, but once the plan was called off and the fame was replaced by blame, what remained was an African way of life in Belgium – amidst enmity and suspicion, the vision of a grand plan and the life of a simple worker emerges subalternity in a particularly mundane form.

Concluding remarks on other temporalities

Chatterjee (1993) has turned the term subalternity into a research programme which is present but as yet not properly spelled out in my research at Namur. Considering the entanglement of the two domains of the 'elite' and the 'subaltern' in colonial Indian history, Chatterjee contends that 'the task is to trace in their mutually conditioned historicities the specific forms that have appeared, on the one hand, in the domain defined by the hegemonic project of nationalist modernity, and on the other, in the numerous fragmented resistances to that normalizing project' (Chatterjee 1993, p13).

From the introduction it is clear how I see the 'hegemonic project of nationalist modernity' embodied in the future quai Branly museum, and how the above (preliminary) ethnography tries to capture the discourse of the *namurois* former colonials as local resistance to 'that

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8. These terms try to capture some of the main images evoked in the course of a detailed description of work and life in the colony given by Mr. Eugene (interview 20/5/1999) which stressed three points: (i) the enormous range of activities of the 'agent territorial' (ii) his regular tours and absence from home, and (iii) a combination of everyday, petty hardship and routine interrupted by occasional calamity, not too frequent special missions, and irregular gatherings with colleagues. This is obviously the men's side of the story. The centrality of the 'living room' in colonial representation at the museum adds an interesting gender aspect to this overal image because 'home' was the place where the female companion (wife and/or the 'ménagère') awaited the return of the territorial agent.

normalizing project'. In this I have highlighted the conceptions and experiences of history in the Belgium-Africa 'space-time' of the former colonials – as the background against which *re-collecting* takes place.

It may seem provocative to attribute the same subalternity to colonisers as was done to the colonised. I use the term subaltern, however, more as a heuristic device in order to start discovering how, what looks like a middle-class, not-too-bad-off group of people with rather mainstream, if slightly conservative, ideas about politics and society, construct themselves as a subordinate, marginalised minority. The transfer of 'subalternity' to the realm of the coloniser is not meant to be politically upsetting but methodologically correct in that I attempt to deal with colonised and coloniser in the same analytic field.

This I think is also the goal John Kelly (1999, p264) – with reference to Fabian's coevalness and Asad's 'asymmetrically structured political terrain' – set for anthropology when he asked to:

> 'seek the temporality within the political confrontations already in place. What are the terms of trade in temporal consociality? Is common occupation of space-time always a matter of sharing?'

This challenge seems particularly vast for the quai Branly museum anthropologists who are now busy putting the world under one roof.

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