

**Deconstructing Visual Culture:
The Colonial Discourse Behind Brussels' Leopold II Statues**

Master's Thesis

Global Conflict in the Modern Era

Emmanuelle Ledure - s2851520

s2851520@vuw.leidenuniv.nl

Supervisor: Nicolas Rodriguez Idarraga

Humanities Faculty, Leiden University

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Universiteit Leiden

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Abstract

In the past decade, global protestations have targeted colonial monuments in former metropolises and settler nations' public spaces. The contestations denounce the colonial discourse behind the monuments. This research investigates how colonial monuments produce and perpetuate a colonial discourse in the public space. The research rests on two case studies: a Leopold II statue and a Leopold II bust present in the Brussels' public space. Gillian Rose's (2016) *Visual Methodologies* serves as a methodological basis to address both cases. First, an image analysis based on sites and modalities unravels the various colonial characteristics of the monuments. Second, the discussion reflects how these colonial characteristics support the four pillars of colonial discourse: knowledge, subjectivity, institutions, and practices. The research concludes that the content of the depiction, production context, location, and circulation of the monuments produce and perpetuate the colonial discourse that legitimised the violent colonisation of Congo under Leopold II.

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Introduction

In May 2020, the death of George Floyd triggered a wave of mass protests in the United States, mainly led by the collective Black Lives Matter (BLM). Quickly, the movement spread throughout the world. It specifically affected former colonial metropolises and settler nations. Protesters advocated for change with regards to police violence, social justice, racial discrimination, and oppression. (Landman & Makakavhule, 2021; Rahim & Picheta, 2020). In Belgium, the protests echoed similar demands. However, activists also pushed forward their personal agenda: the need to come to terms with Belgium's colonial past (Pronczuk & Zaveri, 2020; Birnbaum, 2020).

Former metropolises and settler nations have struggled to confront their leading role in the colonisation of overseas territories. For many countries, the colonial past has long been - or still is - a taboo. Until recently, in Belgium, the colonisation of Congo remained largely unquestioned. Denial persisted through colonial institutions, such as the Royal Museum for Central Africa, and the absence of colonial history in education programmes (Bobineau 2017). Only small groups of activists were concerned with shedding light on the past (Stanard, 2019).

In the past years, however, there has been renewed interest for the topic of colonisation, both in society and academics. Increasingly, a movement of 'decolonisation' has underlined the need to rid institutions, norms, behaviours, and places from their colonial discourse. In theory, everything can be decolonised. The academic field of decolonisation has tremendously expanded to cover numerous topics (Mossavi, 2019). Nevertheless, in practice, the 2020 protests underlined how popular contestation centred around colonial monuments, specifically those representing colonial figures (Williams, 2020; The New York Times, 2020).

Colonial monuments have been vandalised or knocked down in the past. In Belgium, activism against statues has been around for the last twenty to thirty years (Stanard, 2019). Back in 2004, for example, activists had cut off the hand of a Congolese individual depicted in a colonial monument glorifying Leopold II (Goddeeris, 2015). Such actions had national, short-term resonance but would never lead to change (Stanard, 2019). In the past decade, repeated actions against monuments have occurred throughout the world. It has brought decolonisation of the public space to the forefront of national and international debates (Parker, 2018; Chaudhuri, 2016).

Colonial monuments spark such upheaval because they are images. In our world, images are essential (Mitchell, 2002). Not only are images objects of seeing, but they are subjects that shape our politics and world. Images are said to have an agency of their own: they frame and impact

our reality and interactions (Bleiker, 2018). The recent protests have underlined how vital images are and how they have shaped world politics. The video of George Floyd's death, the images of BLM protests worldwide, and the pictures of defaced statues have sparked emotions, triggered behaviours, and influenced relations.

Colonial monuments, as three-dimensional images, are so provocative because they support a colonial discourse. Colonialism was not only an economic, territorial, or civilisational enterprise; it was also a visual one. Visual traces of the colonial past often served the purpose of propaganda. However, images that promoted colonialism still shape national presents (Faulkner & Ramamurthy, 2006). Therefore, there is a need to study and understand images, specifically in International Relations, where their importance and agency are underestimated (Bleiker, 2018).

Within the realm of images, International Relations has widely ignored the importance of monuments. Monuments are nonetheless essential to the academic field and its ideological project. They contribute to shaping national sovereignty and identity, which are crucial to organizing international actors' relations (Vale, 2018). In the historical context of colonialism, monuments' visual discourses confirmed national identities and international power relations. Their discourses promoted a narrative that legitimised colonial exploitation (Faulkner & Ramamurthy, 2006; Wilkens, 2017).

This research departs from the assumption that colonial monuments convey a colonial discourse, which clashes with former metropolises and settler nations' diverse societies (Arens, 2020). Therefore, it will explore how these monuments convey their colonial discourse in today's public space. The research focuses on Belgian colonial monuments. Belgium has been slow in addressing its colonial past, specifically in academics, contrary to other former metropolises (Goddeeris, 2015). Additionally, Belgium's former King, Leopold II, was a principal instigator of a violently exploitative colonisation process in Congo. The benefits from his practices supported a reshaping of the Brussels public space. Belgium is thus an interesting case of the close link between the public space, the images it displays, and the wrongdoings of colonialism.

There are around fifty colonial monuments in Belgium (Stanard, 2019), and at least fifteen amongst them represent Leopold II (Goddeeris, 2015). This number does not even entail the monuments present in museums. The Africa Museum, for example, is a critical public space to study colonialism. Therefore, the analysis will be limited to two statues of Leopold II present in the Belgian public space. The first statue of Leopold II can be found at the Place du Trône, in the Royal neighbourhood, in Brussel's city centre. The second statue is displayed in the Royal Museum for Central Africa (Africa Museum). The Museum is situated in Tervuren, Brussels, and was an estate

of King Leopold II, before it became an essential space to his colonial propaganda (Silverman, 2015). The research will seek to answer the following question: How do Leopold II statues, defined as three-dimensional images, produce and perpetuate a colonial discourse in Brussels' public space?

In the first chapter, the research will address key historical and theoretical implications regarding the Belgian colonial past, decolonisation of the public space, and Visual Studies. It will identify and explain the main gaps this thesis is trying to address. The second chapter will expose guidelines for visual discourse analysis based on Gillian Rose's *Visual Methodologies* (2016). The author proposes to analyse images through four categories: their content, production, display, and circulation. The information provided by this primary analysis then serves the discourse analysis. The four components of discourse - knowledge, subjects, institutions, practices - will guide the discussion of the findings. Additionally, the chapter will address the choice of sources and the limitations of this thesis. The third chapter will present the analysis of the Leopold II statue at Place du Trône and the Leopold II bust displayed in the Africa Museum. The fourth chapter will survey key findings and expand on the contribution of these findings to the study of colonial monuments. Finally, the conclusion will review critical takeaways that have been unraveled during this research. It will conclude with suggestions to encourage further research.

Chapter I

Colonial visual cultures: How colonial images affect former metropolises

Since the decolonisation of Congo in 1960, initiatives to raise awareness about the Belgian colonial rule were sporadic, temporary, and led by smaller activist groups (Goddeeris, 2015; Stanard, 2019). Well-known initiatives mainly entailed (artistic) actions against monuments that alluded to the colonial rule in Congo. In contrast to activism, there remained widespread indifference towards the colonial past or appraisal for Belgium's 'civilising' deeds in Congo. A lack of action from Belgians and their governments crippled activists' efforts to address the wrongdoings of Belgian colonialism (Stanard, 2019; Bobineau, 2017).

Belgium's colonisation of Congo took place in an era of 'modern colonialism'. European countries engaged in modern colonialism from the 15th century on. Through their colonial projects, they sought to appropriate land, exploit it, sometimes settle on it, and rule its population (Jackson, 2018). Belgium pursued an extractive form of colonialism. Extractive colonialism encompasses the appropriation of a territory, the subjugation of its population to the metropole's rule¹, and the extraction of its wealth to benefit the metropole's economy (Tuck & Yang, 2012; Moore, 2016).

Congo's colonisation was an initiative of King Leopold II. At the Berlin Conference, which divided the African continent amongst European colonial powers, the territory was recognised as his possession. He officially ruled over what was named the Congo Free State from 1885 to 1908. Although the King never went to Congo, his reign was characterised by the massive and violent exploitation of the Congolese people to extract natural resources. From 1908 on, following national and international criticism about the violence of his rule in Congo, Leopold II divested the colony to the Belgian authorities. The territory remained under their custody until Congo declared its independence from Belgium in 1960 (Van Reybroeck, 2010).

The colonisation of Congo has had an important impact on Belgium. The Belgian colonial experience shaped an entire colonial culture. Both the cultural effects of colonisation and the effects of colonialism on the metropole's society are two disregarded topics by scholars (Stanard, 2019). After all, colonial culture allowed for the integration of a colonial discourse by an entire population. This colonial discourse is considered a basis for inequalities and discrimination in Belgium today (Arens, 2020).

¹ Metropole is a widely employed term that designates the colonising country.

Colonial discourses convey two essential elements that support colonialism: knowledge and power. Colonial discourses emerged from scientific narratives that proclaimed the superiority of certain races over others. Mainly, these unquestioned narratives promoted the superiority of modern and rational Europeans and North Americans over barbaric and irrational non-European 'others' (Wilkins, 2017). 'Colonial' knowledge was used as a political tool to justify the physical oppression of non-European others, as well as the marginalisation of their voices (Hiddleston, 2009).

These discourses legitimised the power relations within which the Europeans had established themselves as the dominant party. On a physical level, colonial discourse justified the colonial expansion of European countries and its abuses against non-Europeans. On a discursive level, European power established European knowledge and ideas as hegemonic throughout the world. This knowledge depicted and promoted non-Europeans as subalterns (Boylan, 2020; Faulkner & Ramamurthy, 2006; Wilkins, 2017).

Images were essential traces of colonialism: they conveyed colonial discourses. Photography, film, and publicity are examples of two-dimensional images that portrayed the colony (Faulkner & Ramamurthy, 2006). Colonial powers mobilised both two-dimensional and three-dimensional images for colonial propaganda. In Belgium, colonial propaganda was vital under Leopold II to defend his colonial project to national and international audiences (Stanard, 2012).

Monuments belong to the category of three-dimensional images (Bleiker, 2018). All images produced by metropolises were able to convey an imperial gaze that reflected the power relations implied by colonial discourse. These images found their way in the metropole's public space and the homes of its citizens (Faulkner & Ramamurthy, 2006).

The visual confrontation of citizens to a narrative that promoted a 'self' and an 'other' contributed to the consolidation of a national identity (Faulkner & Ramamurthy, 2006). It strengthened the legitimacy of the metropole as a nation-state (Rai, 2018; Wells, 2007; Steele, 2018). The nation-state is a foundational element to the field of International Relations. However, the role (colonial) images have played in the legitimisation of the nation-state is understudied (Vale, 2018).

At the end of the 20th century, the academic field of Visual Studies emerged. It proclaimed the existence of a 'visual' turn or 'pictorial turn'. Since this turn, people increasingly perceive and understand the world through images rather than language (Bleiker, 2018). Visual Studies underlined the increasing importance of images in our world (Mitchell, 2002).

Visual Studies holds that seeing is not a universal and homogenised act. Instead, it is facilitated (or hindered) by what is (or is not) rendered legible, normalised, made evident, or accessible (Boylan, 2002). The act of seeing is thus not natural; instead, it is taught. Mitchell (2002) states that “vision is a cultural construction, that is learned and cultivated, not simply given by nature” (p. 166). This cultural construction has a history and “is deeply involved with human societies, with the ethics and politics, aesthetics and epistemology of seeing and being seen” (Mitchell, 2002, p. 166). Scholars commonly refer to this cultural construction as visual culture (Boylan, 2002; Mirzoeff, 1999). In other words, visual culture can be conceived of as the visual habits of seeing and not seeing. Individuals integrate these visual habits through their participation in a community, defined by rules, norms, power relations, and institutions.

Visual Studies allow understanding colonialism through a new lens. The field supports the existence of a visual culture that is colonial. Metropolises shaped individuals’ visual abilities through the circulation of images that depicted or supported colonialism. As such, they contributed to constructing a colonial visual culture.

The recent protests in Belgium against colonial monuments address colonial visual culture in Belgian public spaces. Monuments, particularly those depicting Leopold II, were painted red, paint-sprayed messages on or taken down in several cities (Pronczuk & Zaveri, 2020; Birnbaum, 2020). On social media, in the news, and through petitions, the monuments drove countless discussions (Rannard & Webster, 2020). Although past actions had already targeted monuments, they never had popular resonance or drew a lot of media attention (Stanard, 2011). Nevertheless, past and present actions underline the tense relationship between visual traces of colonisation in the public space and the unquestioned Belgian colonial past.

The most recent actions against monuments were part of a transnational movement of 'decolonisation of the public space' (Parker, 2018). The origins of this movement date back to the 2015 Rhodes Must Fall (RMF) campaign. RMF advocated for a decolonisation of the university of Cape Town. One of RMF’s projects was taking down the statue of Cecil Rhodes, a symbol of colonialism in South Africa (Chaudhuri, 2016). This symbolic removal led to attempts in other countries to remove monuments bearing a similar colonial narrative. As a result, the movement grew internationally and was called the All Monuments Must Fall initiative (AMMF, n.d.). With the 2020 protests, the actions against colonial monuments multiplied. Consequently, protesting reinforced the demands of groups advocating for removing colonial monuments all along (Grovier, 2020; Robert, 2018).

The RMF and AMMF campaigns underline how essential images have become locally and globally. As argued by Bleaker (2018), images are not simple objects of vision anymore. Instead, they are subjects, actors of global politics. They have become crucial in understanding local, national, and global events, which two phenomena can explain. On the one hand, images travel faster than ever before, thanks to inventions such as the internet. On the other hand, almost anyone can produce images with small cameras or phones, for example. The number of images available and their circulation is essential elements that influence our way of seeing and interacting globally.

In the case of colonial monuments, the production and circulation of images have shaped the local and global agendas by putting the question of decolonisation of the public space at the forefront of the debate, especially in Belgium.

Decolonisation, or 'de'-colonisation, can be widely considered as the undoing of colonisation (Karabinos, 2019). The most common conception of decolonisation is characterised by the wave of independence declarations that shook the world throughout the 20th century. On the other hand, physical decolonisation, sometimes referred to as constitutional decolonisation, was a process whereby the former colony rejected the rule of a foreign metropole (Faulkner & Ramamurthy, 2016).

Following physical decolonisation, scholars of newly independent nations sought to address the decolonisation of institutions² that the coloniser's rule had shaped. They proposed to decolonise knowledge, and the societal structures colonisation had shaped under the banner of intellectual decolonisation (Moosavi, 2020). In Congo, for example, Belgians had constructed entire cities and transportation networks. In addition, they had set up administrative, legal, and medical infrastructures, an education system, and religious habits (Van Reybroeck, 2010). Thus, the movement of intellectual decolonisation focused on deconstructing the remnants of the coloniser's rule, which had shaped former colonies' internal structures.

In the past decade, Western scholars have increasingly researched the topic of intellectual decolonisation (Moosavi, 2020). However, intellectual decolonisation emerged late in Western academics. Many Western countries have long refused to question the negative consequences of their colonial rule (Ghandi, 2019). As previously mentioned, this is the case of Belgium, where the colonial experience in Congo has been a challenging topic to engage with at the national level (Stanard, 2019).

² Institutions, as will be further developed throughout this thesis, is to be understood in the broad sense of structures.

The process former metropolises and settler nations³ are going through can be considered a form of 'internal decolonisation'. Internal decolonisation entails the "varied processes of dismantling, contesting, and disrupting oppressive narratives and discourses that perpetuate colonial ideology" within the former metropole (Landman & Makakavhule, 2021, p. 2). As a result, western scholars are massively devoting attention to how colonial ideology is perpetuated within their respective countries (Moosavi, 2020).

In Belgium, protests against monuments focussed attention on the decolonisation of the public space. The public space is an 'institution' where colonial ideology is still present and still circulates (Goddeeris, 2015). More importantly, it is a visual space, where "graffiti, performances, sculptures, statues, monuments, panels, murals, and posters" are just some of the images presented to us (Huetz, Lehec & Maeder, 2019). Varna (2014) defines the public space as:

"the concept referring to all public areas, that are publicly owned by democratically elected bodies, well connected in the surrounding urban grid and designed according to principles that foster activity and social interaction, used by a large and diverse public in a variety of ways, controlled in a nonoppressive manner (...)" (2014, p. 54).

This definition encompasses the various nuances that complicate the understanding of public space: private/public, inside/outside/virtual, restricted/unrestricted access, democratic, inclusive, or even state-owned (Gehl & Matan, 2009; UNESCO, 2017). The public space is thus a physical area containing images and contributing to the circulation of discourses.

The Belgian public space, specifically of certain cities such as Brussels and Ostend, is intimately linked to colonialism. First of all, the construction of their public space was a colonial project. During his reign, Leopold II aspired for Belgium to become a powerful Empire. He wished for Brussels to become a capital rivalling other great European capitals (De Bruyn, 2016). This led "le Roi Bâtisseur" (the Builder King) to implement significant urban changes designed to 'embellish'⁴ Brussels. The capital changed on an architectural and a structural level. The colossal revenues of rubber extract from the Congo Free State financed these projects (Darteville, 1990).

³ Settler nations have a different history of colonisation than extractive colonial powers such as Belgium. However, they are currently facing the same movement of intellectual decolonisation. This is because settler nations are still metropolises; they are still occupying territory - physically and intellectually - that was not theirs originally. Examples of settler nations are the United States, Canada and Australia (Tuck & Yang, 2012).

⁴ The idea of embellishing is very subjective, as it reflects architectural beauty as conceived of during that time period in Western European countries (De Bruyn, 2016).

The changes were modelled on other European Empires, which had profited from the material resources and the financial gains from their colonies to develop their economy, society, and public spaces (Stengers, 2020). Therefore, it is relevant to bear in mind that the construction and the aesthetic characteristics of the Belgian public space bear a link to the ruthless extractive colonialism enforced in the Congo (Dartevelle, 1990).

Secondly, the conception of public space includes museums, of which the Africa Museum⁵ is the most important one. Historically, the building and gardens of the Africa Museum were an estate of Leopold II situated in Tervuren, Brussels. The Museum developed through the collection of artefacts and resources Belgians brought back from Congo. Following the 1897 World Fair, the exhibition of artefacts transformed into a museum that entirely stood under the sign of colonialism (Silverman, 2015). The existence of the Museum and its institutionalisation were an essential element of Leopold II's colonial propaganda (Petit, 2020).

The Africa Museum possesses various statues and monuments that depict the colonial enterprise in Congo. Additionally, the Museum's building is marked with architectural characteristics such as Leopold II's initials engraved in the walls perpetuate its colonial character. In 2013, the Africa Museum closed to decolonise its space. At its reopening in 2018, however, the depth of its decolonisation was heavily criticised. As a result, the Museum remains a place perpetuating colonial discourses (de Block, 2019).

One can conclude that the Belgian public space hosts several monuments that commemorate the colonisation of Congo. Commemoration is one of the primary purposes of monuments, which were abundantly produced and displayed in the European public space under the statuomania trend at the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th century. Erecting statues further served to consolidate national identity, promote political ideology, and educate the population (Agulhon, 1978). The building of colonial monuments fitted all of these purposes.

Most importantly, through their presence in the public space, monuments produced a colonial visual culture. Although monuments are important in conveying a colonial discourse and shaping a national sense of identity and state legitimacy, they are understudied in International Relations (Vale, 2018). The lack of attention given to monuments is a gap this research seeks to bridge.

⁵ The Africa Museum is a federal Museum (“owned by a democratically elected body”) that seeks to sensitise the public to scientific and historical knowledge about Central Africa, its nature and its colonisation (“designed according to principles that foster activity and social interaction, used by a large and diverse public in a variety of ways”) (Varna, 2014, p. 54; ‘Mission, ethics and organisation’, n. d.)

This chapter sought to shape an understanding of how colonial monuments have come to be so contested today. As three-dimensional images, colonial monuments have had an essential role in conveying colonial discourses. In addition, they have been essential tools to Leopold II's colonial propaganda. Consequently, colonial monuments have contributed to shaping a colonial visual culture in Belgium and other former metropolises.

After a wave of independences, a two-fold process took place. On the one hand, former metropolises refused to confront their colonial past. On the other hand, former colonies sought to pursue further the decolonisation of the coloniser's physical and intellectual structures. Today, academic and societal initiatives seek to address the silence around former metropolises' colonial rule. In an era where images are more important than ever, activists advocate for a decolonisation of the public space, specifically colonial monuments in the case of Belgium. These demands put the issue of a persisting colonial visual culture, perpetuating colonial discourses, at the forefront of the debates.

The following chapters will respond to the question: How do Leopold II statues, defined as three-dimensional images, produce and perpetuate a colonial discourse in Brussels' public space? By answering this question, the research aims to address several gaps in current research. First of all, it aims to develop academic research on Belgian colonialism and its cultural traces, two understudied topics. Secondly, it seeks to contribute to the convergence of International Relations and Visual Studies by underlining how images have become actors in global politics. Thirdly, it seeks to expand the study of monuments, which International Relations overlook, yet is crucial to the historical essence of the field. Finally, it seeks to open International Relations to alternative methodologies, as presented in the following chapter.

Chapter II

Visual Discourse Analysis

Throughout the years, Western academic research and social initiatives have gradually taken an interest in the topic of decolonisation of former metropolises. Socially, contestation mainly targets the presence of colonial monuments in the public space. However, International Relations' academic research is lagging as it does not include the study of images - specifically monuments. Consequently, International Relations fail to address images' influences on the construction of national and international realities, shaped by a persistent colonial visual culture.

This thesis has constructed a research question that addresses the identified gaps in the literature and analyses how colonial monuments still reflect colonial discourses today. The research question guiding this methodology is: How do Leopold II statues, defined as three-dimensional images, produce and perpetuate a colonial discourse in Brussels' public space? The research will apply visual discourse analysis to two colonial monuments representing Leopold II and displayed in the Brussels public space.

Discourses in International Relations

International Relations have long rested on fixed theoretical assumptions about the relations between states or institutions. Gradually, scholars challenged these assumptions and advocated for the inclusion of diverging narratives in International Relations (Milliken, 1999). Postcolonialism is one of these critical theories. It argues, amongst others, that colonial discourses shape identities and relations between international actors. Postcolonial discourse theory specifically addresses how colonial relationships are reproduced at the local and global level, despite territorial decolonisation (Wilkins, 2017). The shift within International Relations to critical theories such as postcolonialism implied discourse analysis became a fundamental methodology. It is used, for example, in studying securitisation issues or the impact of discourses on foreign policy decisions (Solomon, 2016). Discourse analysis contributed to establishing which discourses were dominant in the field and which non-hegemonic discourses had been historically ignored (Milliken, 1999).

Since the beginning of the 21st century, images have become central in global politics (Bleiker, 2018). Similar to text and language, images contain discourses. As such, they can be the subject of discourse analysis (Rose, 2016). Nevertheless, International Relations generally disregards visual discourse analysis as a method. Its development and use are thus encouraged by

various scholars. These scholars wish to open the academic field to new techniques, new assumptions, and new discourses (Bleiker, 2018; Cooper-Cunningham, 2020; Faulkner & Ramamurthy, 2006).

Further, there is a tendency in International Relations to focus on discourses at the international level. For long, actors such as international institutions and nation-states have been at the centre of the research. However, discourses take shape at other levels of analysis influence international relations, too (Godinho, 2016). Thus, there is a need to study both local and cultural discourses in International Relations. Therefore, this research aims to broaden the academic field to other levels of analysis, by analysing a cultural and local visual phenomenon.

Sources

There are around fifty colonial monuments in Belgium (Stanard; 2019), which meant the number of sources for analysis needed to be narrowed down. This was done so according to several criteria:

- 1) The monuments were chosen according to their geographical location.
- 2) They were chosen according to the person they depict: Leopold II.
- 3) The number of sources was reduced by choosing out of the various statues of Leopold II still displayed in the Brussels public space.
- 4) The contextualisation of the monuments determined the choice of the two statues that will be analysed.

The first choice in narrowing down the number of sources was to focus on the Belgian public space. First of all, Belgium is a former colonising country. It fits the aim of this research to focus on the consequences of colonisation within metropolises. Secondly, Belgium is known to struggle with its colonial past. Belgian society has encountered great difficulties in acknowledging the wrongdoings of colonialism until recently. Finally, Belgium has historically been less engaged in activism and academic research around the topic of decolonisation than other countries (Goddeeris, 2015; Stanard, 2019). Within Belgium, this research focuses on the public space in Brussels. As exposed in the previous chapter, the transformation of the public space in Brussels bears close links with Leopold II's enriching colonial enterprise in Congo.

Further, the research narrowed down to statues of Leopold II. Statues were very popular in Western Europe at the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century. As previously mentioned, this phenomenon is called statuomania. Some monuments in Belgium were erected during the statuomania period. During that period, monuments served amongst others to convey

political ideology. This is the case of colonial monuments, which served as propaganda for that colonial ideology (Stanard, 2011).

At least fifteen statues represent Leopold II in Belgium (Goddeeris, 2015). Leopold II is the most represented colonial figure in the Belgian public space. As the initiator of Belgian colonialism and his role in the violent exploitation of Congo, his figure is particularly controversial (Stanard, 2019). Protests against Leopold II monuments have underlined the tensions his presence in the public space creates. Therefore, Leopold II statues were considered essential elements of analysis, more so than other representations of colonial figures in the Belgian public space.

In Brussels, there remain four standing Leopold II statues in the open space. They are situated at the Parc Duden, Place du Trône, Jardin du Roi, and Boulevard du Souverain (Fontaine, 2020). Out of these four statues, the statue at Place du Trône has received extensive media attention. It is located in the centre of Brussels, easily visible, and has been a significant spot for popular contestation. The statue has been defaced multiple times in the past and during recent protests (Stanard, 2011; Belga, 2020). Its defacement is an additional dimension for visual discourse analysis.

A second important set of statues are those present at the Africa Museum in Tervuren, Brussels. The Africa Museum is sometimes called the 'last colonial museum in the world'. Since 2018, it is an essential part of the public space that addresses Belgium's colonial history (de Block, 2019). Unlike the Brussels public space, the Museum underwent a project of decolonisation. There was an attempt to rid the museum and its content from its colonial discourse. It makes it interesting to analyse how the Museum, despite its decolonisation, still conveys colonial discourses. Seen the recent polemic about the Museum's reopening and decolonisation, choosing one of the two statues present in the museum seemed a crucial choice. One statue of Leopold II ("The Congo, I Presume") stands in the Museum's gardens. The other statue, an ivory bust, is displayed in the permanent collection. The analysis will focus on the ivory bust, as its contextualisation and its relative discretion might provide interesting elements that can contrast the Leopold II statue at Place du Trône.

Both depictions of Leopold II bear many similitudes - the subject, the sculptor, the period -, but are situated in two very different public spaces - the open space and the Museum. To suggest two such different contexts adds an extra element of analysis to contrast how these statues perpetuate colonial discourses today.

Research Method: Visual Discourse Analysis

The guidelines of visual discourse analysis for this research stem from Rose's (2016) *Visual Methodologies*. Rose (2016) defines discourse as a "group of statements that structures the way a thing is thought, and the way we act on basis of that thinking" or "particular knowledge about the world which shapes how the world is understood and how things are done in it" (187). A visual discourse is thus a group of statements, conveyed by an image, that structures behaviours.

A discourse rests on four 'pillars' that will form the analysis's core: knowledge, subjectivity, institutions, and practices. First of all, discourses produce and convey truth. A discourse is based on a specific type of knowledge, which the discourse conveys as truth (Rose, 2016). The literature review noted that the production of knowledge is linked to power. Discourses and the knowledge they convey reflect and shape power relations.

Secondly, discourses create subjects. A subject is "a recognizable type of individual – recognizable by his or her membership of a social category with its associated assumed attitudes, behaviour, appearance, values, and, important in the context of this book, language use." (McNamara, 2019, p. 10). In other words, discourses determine how individuals are perceived. They create subjects that identify as a 'self' and are identified as an 'other' (McNamara, 2019).

Thirdly, discourses circulate through institutions. Institutions are created by actors who shape their content and their structure, in other words, their discourse. These discourses are received by an audience. Institutions convey discourses in two ways. Firstly, institutions convey discourses through their institutional apparatus. The power and knowledge that emanate from these institutions perpetuate the discourse. The law, morals, and the scientific treaties of an institution, for example, are all institutional means to convey a discourse. Secondly, institutions convey discourses through their institutional technologies. These technologies entail more 'technical' ways in which discourse, in this case, the image that contains the discourse, can be displayed. Examples entail the position of the image and its relation to other objects or texts (Rose, 2016).

Finally, discourse creates and perpetuates practices. Rose (2016) writes that "discourse disciplines subjects into certain ways of thinking and acting" (p. 189). Discourse thus creates social practices that are integrated and reproduced by the individuals who receive the discourse.

This research will apply visual discourse analysis in two steps. First, it will analyse the statues and their components, in the third chapter of this thesis. The sites and modalities proposed by Rose (2016) will serve this purpose. Then the fourth chapter will seek to answer the research question by understanding how the sites and modalities support the four pillars of discourse. In

other words, it will analyse how relevant elements present in the statues produce colonial knowledge, subjects and practices, and how institutions support colonial discourse.

Rose (2016) argues that discourses can be 'seen' in four different sites of an image: the site of content, the site of production, the site of audiencing, and the site of circulation. These four sites constitute the core of 'image analysis', the first part of the discourse analysis that will be performed. The content site encompasses what the image itself depicts and which elements it is composed of. The production site considers where and when the image was created, by whom, and for what purpose. It focuses on the initial discourse an image aims to project. The site of audiencing covers the context of seeing, the image's display, where the image is seen, and by whom. Finally, the site of circulation is encompassing how the image circulated and which effects its circulation had on the discourse. All four sites together offer a comprehensive understanding of an image's discourse.

Each site can, in turn, be analysed following three modalities: technological, compositional, and social. The technological modality is concerned with the 'core' of the image. It analyses the type of the image (picture, painting, statue, video, parade). The compositional modality analyses the image's composition (material composition, genre of the image, relation to text, or other images). Finally, the social modality asks questions about who, for whom, when, where, and why. It seeks to understand how the social context within each site influences the discourse behind the image (Rose, 2016). In the table below, all sites of production and modalities are presented in the form of questions. The questions are a mix of three chapters proposed by Rose (2016). Towards a Critical Methodology (chapter 2) outlines the sites and modalities. For each, it proposes one or two short questions. Discourse Analysis I (chapter 8) elaborates on the image's content, its purpose, and how it produces knowledge. Finally, Discourse Analysis II: Institutions and ways of seeing (chapter 9) focuses on the site of audiencing. All three chapters have contributed to creating the questions presented below.

	Technological modality	Compositional modality	Social modality
Site of content	What or who does the image depict? What can be seen and not seen?	What is the (material) composition of the image?	What is the meaning behind the image?
Site of production	How was the image made?	What genre does the image belong to? (which type of artistic expression or current?)	Who made the image? When was the image produced? For whom was the image produced? Why was the image produced?

	Technological modality	Compositional modality	Social modality
Site of audiencing	Where and how is the image displayed?	How is the image related to other text and images?	Who created and organises the audiencing site? How does the public interpret the image? Who constitutes the public? Why is it perceived that way by the public?
Site of circulation	How has the image circulated?	Does the circulation affect the (material) composition of the image?	What processes are influencing the image? By whom is the circulation organised? How is it organised? Why is it organised?

Table 1. Analytical questions for each site and modality.

The second part of the analysis, which corresponds to chapter IV, will perform the core of the discourse analysis. The research rests on the assumption that the statues convey a colonial discourse. The literature review has exposed the characteristics of colonial discourse. These characteristics will help establish a link between the content of the statues and how this content conveys a colonial discourse. The discussion will address the following four questions:

- 1) How do Leopold II statues produce and convey knowledge that is considered colonial? How does the knowledge conveyed by the statues inform us about power relations?
- 2) How do Leopold II statues create colonial subjects?
- 3) How do the institutions that display the Leopold II statues convey a colonial discourse?
- 4) How do Leopold II statues produce and support colonial practices?
- 5) These questions aim to provide four main elements of response to understand how the Leopold II statues conveyed and now perpetuate a colonial discourse.

Limitations

The first limitation of this research is that the analysis of images is always open to some interpretation. Therefore, the exact replication of the method to achieve the same analytical results is impossible (Cooper-Cunningham, 2020). However, this can be addressed by being particularly careful to explain the methodological steps and develop the argumentation.

A second limitation is the analysis of the social modality for the site of audiencing. It proposes to answer the following questions: How does the public interpret the audience? Who constitutes the public? Why is it perceived that way by the public? These questions are crucial in understanding how the public receives colonial discourse because it informs us about whether these

discourses are effectively conveyed, and how the public feels the statues convey these discourses. An additional methodological tool would contribute to answering the questions mentioned above. The opinion of the public could have to be taken into consideration through interviews, surveys, or even focus groups. This is not possible within the context of this thesis, but it can be a solid foundation for further research.

A fourth important limitation is that the author of this research is Belgian. Therefore, her viewing practice is shaped by Belgian colonial (visual) culture. As a result, some elements might not appear visible to her for some questions that appeal directly to the act of seeing (specifically with regards to the image's content). Again, this limitation could have been addressed by including the viewing experiences of other individuals in the research. However, as mentioned above, it would have entailed establishing contact with the statues' audience through qualitative methods. This was, again, not a possibility in the context of this research.

A final limitation regards the scope of the study. There exist numerous colonial monuments in Belgium, various other statues of Leopold II throughout the country, and many more images in the public space that reflect a colonial discourse. Further, the question of monuments and colonial discourses is not restricted to Belgium, and their analysis can be crucial in understanding the site of circulation of these monuments and their colonial discourse. Nevertheless, this short research cannot encompass all of these aspects. Consequently, methodological choices have been made, such as the location and number of analysed sources. Although they might seem to limit the research, they also invite researchers to pursue visual discourse analysis for other colonial monuments. Such an invitation might establish similarities and comparisons between countries or visual objects in the long term.

Chapter III

Leopold II Statues: Sites and Modalities of Analysis

This research has so far established that two trends have emerged in parallel. Firstly, International Relations has slowly opened up to Visual Studies in an era where images are central in global politics. Secondly, the idea of decolonisation of institutions, knowledge, and spaces has grown to become a key topic of analysis in Western academics and former metropolises. In this chapter, the visual discourse analysis of two colonial monuments will support the convergence of these two academic phenomena.

Two Leopold II statues from the Brussels public space - one in the open space, the other one in the Africa Museum - will be analysed through Rose's (2016) framework for image analysis. Each picture used in the analysis has been taken by the researcher unless referenced otherwise. The chapter aims to unravel information that will answer the research question: How do Leopold II statues, defined as three-dimensional images, produce and perpetuate a colonial discourse in Brussels' public space? By analysing the different sites and their modalities for each monument, the research seeks to understand how each image of Leopold II projects a colonial discourse.

Leopold II Statue at the Place du Trône

Site of content

The statue of Leopold II depicts the king on a horse that is bending its head. He is sitting straight, keeping his head up and looking into the horizon. His facial expression is serious. He is depicted with the beard commonly associated with him by Belgians, which makes him easily recognisable. One of his hands holds the horse's bridle, while the other is grasping something, although it is empty. It is unclear what he is wearing: either a long traditional coat or a military coat. The statue and its pedestal are several meters high. It is reflecting strength, grandeur, and seriousness. Depicting the king with such attributes reflects the position of power Leopold II occupied both as King of the Belgians and private owner of the Congo Free State.

The statue is made out of copper, tin, and bronze. These three materials were supplied by the Union Minière du Haut Katanga (UMHK) (Stanard, 2019). The UMHK is a Belgian company that extracted resources in the region of Katanga throughout the entire period of colonisation in Congo.



Image 1. Léopold II at the Place du Trône.

The UMHK had control over crucial resources and became immensely rich from the exploitation of these resources (“L’affaire de l’union minière du Haut-Katanga”, 1967). The compositional materials are not indicated on the statue. The audience, therefore, does not necessarily know this piece of information. However, it is a crucial element of analysis, as the compositionally of the statue emphasises the hidden links between the statue and the colonisation of Congo.

The social modality of the site of content suggests to analyse the meaning of the statue, to understand how it conveys its discourse. The meaning of the statue can hardly be analysed based on its content. Therefore, meaning will be analysed further through the production's context, the association of the statue to text and images, and the circulation of the image.



Image 2. Side of the Leopold II statue.



Image 3. Front of the Leopold II statue.

Site of production

Available information around the actual production process of the statue is relatively limited. It is known, however, that the statue was produced in two times. Thomas Vinçotte first designed it in 1909. Then, due to the sculptor's illness, the production process was suspended. It was only reinvested by another artist, François Malfait, and completed in 1926.

The sources cited throughout this research all agree on the image's genre: it is a monument. The statue was created in the early years of the 20th century. Therefore, it still belongs to the statuomania movement that had made statues so popular in European public spaces. The statuomania movement supports the multiplication of monuments in public spaces to consolidate national identity. Monuments are conceived to convey political ideology, knowledge and to commemorate events and well-known figures.

The purpose of this statue is commemoration. Leopold II died in 1909. That same year, the statue was conceived by Vinçotte, requested and funded by Leopold II's family and allies, public donors, and private companies such as the UMHK. These different groups wanted to commemorate the reign of the king.

Site of audiencing

The statue has been standing at the Place du Trône since 1926. Place du Trône is situated along the "petite ceinture", the inner belt road that encircles the centre of Brussels. The square is itself situated in the "Quartier Royal". This neighbourhood encompasses the Royal Palace, the Royal Park, and other significant buildings and monuments that reflect the history of Belgium and its royalty. The neighbourhood itself contains several other hints at the colonial era under Leopold II (Wasseige, 1995). For example, one of the figurines from the nearby Mont des Arts chime is a Congolese 'tam-tam' player, who symbolises the Belgian colonisation of Congo. At the other side of the Royal Parc, the street name *rue des colonies* (literally: street of the colonies) serves as another reminder of the colonisation era (Jacobs, 2018).

Two elements provide insight into the colonial message of the Leopold II statue: related text and related images. First of all, there is an inscription on the statue, which reads "Regi Belgarum, 1865-1909, Patria Memor". It translates to "King of the Belgians, the country remembers". The text states the length of the reign of Leopold II. It confirms the purpose of commemoration of the reign of Leopold II.

Secondly, closeby images, specifically the statues of Godefroid de Bouillon and Colonel Emile Storms, could influence the discourse behind the Leopold II statue. The Godefroid de Bouillon statue stands at the other side of the Royal Palace. According to Stanard (2019), it emphasises the colonial character of the Leopold II monument. Godefroid de Bouillon was an important historical Belgian figure. He participated in the first crusade to Jerusalem against the Arab occupier. Further, he was a vehement defender of Christianity (Stanard, 2019). It was common, in the past, to glorify the colonisation of Congo as a philanthropic mission, whereby Leopold II was portrayed as anti-Arab slave trade figure (Stanard, 2012). Therefore, Stanard (2019) draws a parallel between de Bouillon's imperial and civilising crusades and the colonial project of Leopold II in Congo. Both statues thus reinforce each other's imperial message in the Quartier Royal.

The same argument applies to the Emile Storms statue. It stands only a few streets away from the Leopold II monument, in the Square de Meeus. Emile Storms was known to be a key figure in the exploration and later the exploitation of Congo. The colonel is infamous for his violent actions in the Congo Free State. Storms was known for killing Congolese heads of tribes that would resist the colonisation of their territory. He would collect and send their skulls to Belgium (Jacobs, 2018). From time to time, just like the Leopold II statue, the Storms statue is painted red by activists who denounce his prominent role in the violent colonisation of Congo (Braeckman, 2020).

The statues of Godefroid de Bouillon and Emile Storms are not within direct eyesight of the Leopold II statue. However, their imperial character contributes to reinforcing the general colonial discourse that emanates from the Quartier Royal.

The final modality of analysis for the audiencing site focuses on the perception of the Leopold II statue by the audience of the public space. The perception of Belgian colonial monuments is at the core of the societal debate that has recently been taking place. Current contestations support the idea that a part of the audience perceives the colonial discourse reflected by the statue. However, other parts of the audience do not see the same colonial elements in the statue (RTL Info & Belga, 2020). As exposed in the limitation section of the methodology, this modality requires further research about how and why audiences (do not) perceive a colonial discourse in the statue. However, in light of the current contestations, one can only conclude that some parts of the audience do receive the colonial discourse conveyed by the Leopold II statue.

Site of circulation

There is no indication in sources concerning the Leopold II statue at the Place du Trône that it would have ever been moved physically since its inauguration in 1926. Nevertheless, the statue has been reproduced several times. With the money raised to produce the statue in Brussels, an almost exact copy was inaugurated in Kinshasa. Later on, a smaller reproduction was placed in Lubumbashi (Stanard, 2019).

The copy in Kinshasa was inaugurated in 1928 and displayed in front of the Palais de la Nation (the current presidential palace). It was taken away during the reign of Mobutu, who sought to restore a Congolese culture through his process of 'zaïrisation'. Since then, it has been taken out of the open public space and moved to the presidential park of Mont-Ngaliema (Belga & AFP, 2020).

Congo has not participated in the 2020 wave of contestations against colonial monuments. The statue has quietly remained unnoticed in the presidential park, as Congo faces a more urgent economic and health crisis. According to the historian Isidore Ndaywel, the debate around the Leopold II statue is own to Belgians, amongst others, because of the Congolese, Rwandese and Burundese⁶ diaspora living in Belgium. The diaspora condemns the underlying racism and discrimination the statue implies (Belga & AFP, 2020). However, one might wonder to what extent

⁶ Rwanda and Burundi were former Belgian protectorates. It is assumed by certain authors such as Stanard and Goddeeris that activism in Belgium is mainly led by the Congolese, Rwandese and Burundese diaspora.

colonial monuments are also contested in former colonies. Although this is not an aim for this thesis, the site of circulation does invite investigating such questions in further research.

Circulation is not restricted to the physical transportation of the image. Different technologies can allow the image to travel, of which the internet is an important one. In addition, circulation occurs through other media, such as social media, television, (online) newspapers, or personal communication, to name a few (Rose, 2016).

Pictures of the defaced Leopold II statue have circulated in the world. It is difficult and time-consuming to establish how social media or television technologies have contributed to the circulation of the image. However, there are abundant traces of the circulation of the image through online newspapers. The BBC (Rannard & Webster, 2020), the Africa Times (2020), Le Monde (Englebert & Jené, 2020), and CNN (Greene, 2020) are some of the newspapers that covered the protests against the statue. They presented their readers with an image of the defaced statue. Although it is not a circulation of the statue itself, it is the circulation of an image of the statue, which implies the discourse of the image circulates too.

The translation from a three-dimensional monument to a two-dimensional photograph does have consequences for the image itself. A photograph of the statue does not reflect all the characteristics of the statue. For example, the picture will not reveal its size or composition unless mentioned in the text accompanying the image. In the Africa Times, the image presents the statue before it was defaced, while in Le Monde, it is presented after it was defaced. In parallel, the angles from which the picture has been taken vary depending on the article. Parts of the statue, the text on the statue, or the surroundings are not appearing in the pictures. Consequently, elements visible at the Place du Trône, which influence the content of the colonial discourse, now escape the viewers' gaze.



Image 4. Defaced Leopold II statue, Place du Trône (Englebert & Jené, 2020).

The Leopold II Bust at the Africa Museum

Site of content

The Leopold II bust in the Africa Museum is slightly bigger than a real-life bust. It depicts Leopold II precisely like the statue at the Place du Trône: similar long beard, high head, and distant look. The coat covering the body of the bust is a military coat, which one can notice from the insignia, the buttons, and the shoulder pads. The bust reflects seriousness, calmness and a militaristic theme.

The composition of the bust is essential. It is made out of elephant tusk (also called ivory). Elephant hunting was unregulated in the Congo Free State. It allowed an entire business around



Image 5. Leopold II bust at the Africa Museum.

ivory to develop. During Leopold II's entire ownership of the Congo, 4700 tons of ivory were exported, as explained by the text that accompanies the bust (displayed below). Thus, the composition of the bust highlights a direct visual link between the depiction of Leopold II and colonialism.

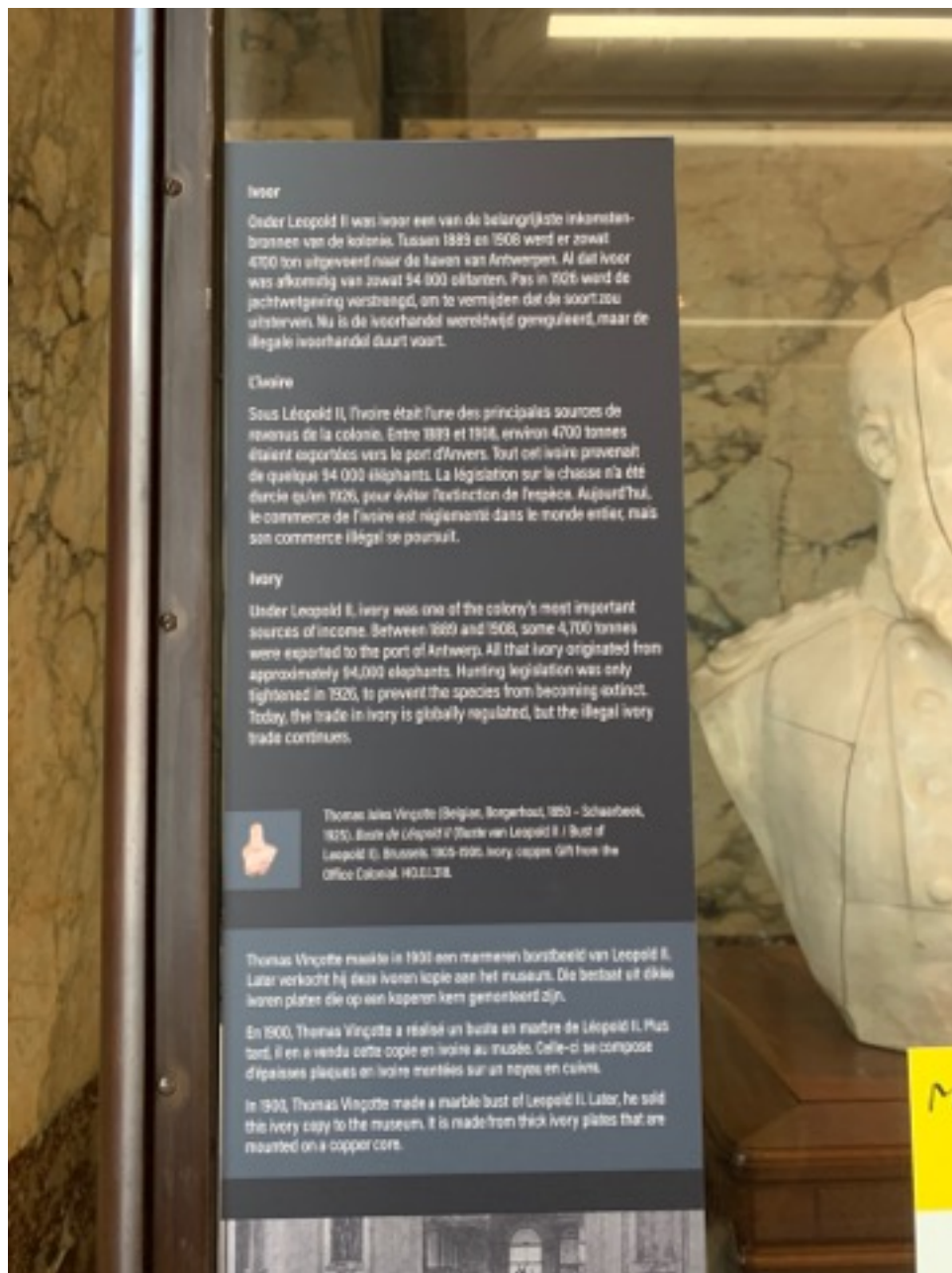


Image 6. Explanatory text to Leopold II's bust at the Tervuren Museum.

Site of production

Such as for the statue at the Place du Trône, the production conditions for this bust remain opaque. The only related information given by the museum is the explanatory text that accompanies the bust (image below). It states that the original copy of the bust was made out of marble in 1900. The ivory version was then modelled after the marble bust in 1905-1906 and sold to the Africa Museum.

The bust can fulfil different roles. It can be considered as a simple ivory object, such as in the Congo River exhibition that will be subsequently mentioned. Further, it can also be classified as a statue, as it belongs to the statuomania period, such as the Leopold II statue analysed previously.

The bust was designed and produced by Thomas Vinçotte, the same sculptor as the Leopold II statue. The purpose of the bust is most likely not one of commemoration. Leopold II was still alive at the time of the creation of both the marble and the ivory bust. The bust is made of elephant tusk supports the idea that the bust serves colonial propaganda.

Site of audiencing

The bust is currently displayed in the Africa Museum, which is an essential element to the analysis. It is displayed in a showcase, in one of the main exhibition rooms on the ground floor, called "le Paradoxe des Ressources" (literally translating into the Paradox of Resources). This room in the Museum is dedicated to the many natural resources present in Congolese nature. It traces back past and present exploitation of these resources and its link to Congo's paradoxical poverty (Africa Museum, n.d.).

The site of audiencing is significant in the case of the bust, because the Africa Museum is tightly linked to colonialism. It was created under Leopold II in the 1890s. The initial purpose of the Museum was to expose the raw materials, cultural artefacts, and everyday objects Belgians brought back from the Congo Free State. In 1910, it was officially established as the Royal Congo Museum, until its name changed to 'Royal Museum of Central Africa/Africa Museum' (Silverman, 2015). Despite its transformation between 2013 and 2018, which aimed to decolonise the space, the museum's colonial character has not entirely disappeared. Critics of the museum have emphasised how the architectural characteristics of the museum, its location⁷, its content, and its historical purpose have escaped decolonisation efforts (de Block, 2019).

Efforts have been made to contextualise the bust. It is associated with text that explains that ivory was a significant resource imported from the Congo Free State. However, there is no mention of the violence perpetrated to collect the tusks, which supports the criticism addressed to the Museum's decolonization.

The social modality of the audiencing site addresses who the audience is, how it receives the image and why. Again, it cannot be determined, from the research methods used in this research, how the audience in the museum receives the image and the text that accompanies it. This would entail establishing contact between the researcher and the public. However, the analysis stresses how the audiencing site influences the interpretation of the image. The Museum's decolonisation

⁷ The Tervuren Museum was a former property of Leopold II. It contains many references to the King and his reign (Silverman, 2015).

supports the idea that the Museum is willing to confront its audience with the wrongdoings of the colonial past and the colonial discourses supported by its collection.

Site of circulation

The bust has physically circulated to different places. It was displayed in the rotunda of the Africa Museum from its purchase in 1906 to the 1950s. After the 1950s, it was removed from view. In 2012, the bust was again displayed in a temporary exhibition called "Congo River" (Crenn, 2020). Since the reopening of the Museum in 2018, it stands in the 'Paradox of Resources' room. Unlike the Leopold II statue, the bust has not widely circulated through digital means. Its characteristics and message remain 'trapped' in the Africa Museum.

The composition of the image itself has not changed during its physical circulation, but there have been attempts to contextualise its meaning. The narrative it presented in the early years of its display is different from its narrative in the 2012 exhibition, which is yet different from today. Initially, the bust served as a tool for colonial propaganda. Crenn (2020) holds that in 2012, during the exhibition "Congo River", the bust was presented as a simple ivory artefact. Today, it is contextualised as a symbol for the violent hunting practices and ivory business in the Congo Free State. Thus, the circulation of the image (through time) impacted the way the colonial discourse was presented over the years.

Chapter IV

Two Leopold's and their Colonial Discourse

The research departed from the assumption that Leopold II statues are colonial monuments that convey a colonial discourse. The analysis uncovered ways through which both statues of Leopold II depict, address, reinforce colonialism and its ideas. The following paragraphs will review the findings and establish how the different components of the statues produced a colonial discourse and perpetuate it. This chapter will be divided into four sub-sections. Each section will address one pillar of discourse analysis - knowledge, subjectivity, institutions, and practices - by responding to the four related questions proposed in the methodology.

Knowledge

Discourses convey knowledge and contribute to establishing this knowledge as truth. The literature review underlined that colonial discourses reflect knowledge on race that justified the hegemony of Western populations over non-Western populations. This section seeks to understand how Leopold II statues produce and perpetuate such type of knowledge.

First of all, both statues' production sites underlined that the Leopold II statues were tools of colonial propaganda. Colonial propaganda is the propagation of colonial discourses. Under Leopold II, it sought to promote narratives of race and superiority that legitimised violent extraction practices taking place in the Congo Free State. Therefore, the statues contributed to producing a colonial discourse at that time.

Secondly, the site of audiencing of the Leopold II bust, the Africa Museum, is an institution where knowledge is produced and conveyed to an audience. The Africa Museum initially was - and still is - a scientific institution. The Museum fulfilled its scientific role by displaying resources, Congolese people⁸, and objects, reflecting its anthropological, ethnographic, and natural interests. Thus, the Museum was born as a colonial scientific institution and produced ideas that constitute 'colonial' knowledge. This knowledge shaped the objects it displayed. Therefore, the Leopold II bust reflects the colonial discourse conveyed by the Museum.

Finally, as will be unravelled in the following sub-sections, the statues imply power relations that shaped the colonial enterprise and global politics. The knowledge behind the discourse justified hegemony, as will be illustrated in the section about subjectivity. Further, the Museum and the

⁸ Groups of Congolese people were 'displayed' almost as artefacts at fairs. They were depicting what life looked like in the Congo Free State to the Belgian public (Silverman, 2015).

public space, as institutions, convey colonial discourses. These discourses inform us about who has the power to perpetuate the discourse and who does not.

Subjectivity

Discourses produce subjects. In the context of colonialism, the knowledge behind the discourse called for the distinction between a hegemonic, European 'self' and a subaltern, non-European 'other'. The Leopold II statues perpetuate colonial subjects in the measure that they depict one. First of all, the site of content of both monuments, namely Leopold II, most directly support this assumption. Historically, Leopold II was a hegemonic European King. Further, Leopold II is depicted as a hegemonic, European subject. The analysis has revealed how both statues mirror strength and power. These themes support the hegemonic character of the 'self'.

Neither of the two statues depicts an 'other'. However, Rose (2016) underlines the importance of the unseen. It is not because an 'other' is not depicted that his subjectivity is not implied and thus produced by the statue. Previously, the literature review established that images did not necessarily have to depict power relations between two individuals to imply them. Consequently, the depiction of a 'self' and the implying of an 'other' in both Leopold II statues perpetuate colonial subjects and the power relations between them.

The category of audience is essential in the context of colonial monuments. Monuments are images. Thus they produce viewers. These viewers are sensitive to the discourses conveyed by the statues. Arens (2020) noted that the reason for the clash around the statues today is that some feel offended by the monuments. The statues perpetuate a discourse that legitimises discrimination from some people in society towards others. Discrimination today stems from the colonial discourse that created the subjects of 'self' and 'other'. Thus, the statues continue to shape identities within today's society. Unfortunately, as noted in the limitations of this research, this assumption remains academic. Further research that involves a contact with the audience could contribute to understanding how the public receives the subjectivities constructed by the colonial discourse behind the statues.

Institutions

Institutions are central in the circulation of colonial discourses. In this research, the public space is the analysed 'institution'. It is a space of images, controlled by the Belgian state and by curators in the case of the Museum. This element informs us about who has the power to impose and change the perpetuation of a colonial discourse. Both these public spaces are designed to address an

audience. Therefore, analysis of the site of audiencing and its modalities was critical to understand the role of institutions in conveying colonial discourses.

The site of audiencing of the Leopold II statue at Place du Trône was the open space. The surroundings in this part of the public space contributed to reinforce the link between the monument and the colonial discourse it conveys. First of all, the surrounding images, such as the statue of Godefroid de Bouillon and Emile Storms, conveyed their own colonial discourse. Thus, they contributed to reinforcing the colonial discourse of the Leopold II statue.

Secondly, the Quartier Royal represents the commemoration and celebration of the monarchy (Wasseige, 1995). According to Kodan (2018), the commemoration of a country's monarchy is inherently linked to commemorating imperialism. This is because the institution of the monarchy has thrived off the oppression of colonised populations. The historical dynamics between monarchies and colonialism can thus not be overlooked. Place du Trône, and the "Quartier Royal" are a part of the public space dedicated to the commemoration of the monarchy. Consequently, this part of the public space commemorates the monarchy, thus the historical ties between the monarchical institution and colonisation. Therefore, Place du Trône and the "Quartier Royal" contribute to reinforcing the colonial discourse of the Leopold II statue.

On the other hand, the Leopold II bust belongs to the public space of the Africa Museum. In the previous section about knowledge, the Museum was defined as an institution that conveyed colonial knowledge. Attempts to decolonise the Museum aimed to stop the perpetuation of its colonial discourse. However, these attempts are insufficient, as exemplified by how the text associated with the bust only shyly addresses colonisation (de Block, 2019). This example is only one of many that support how the structure and content of the Museum contribute to conveying a colonial discourse.

According to Hicks (2020), museums such as the Africa Museum can not be decolonised, because they are inherently colonial. Their existence and collections were only made possible through the violent dispossession of artefacts belonging to other populations. Paired with the colonial scientific discourse such museums still promote, it is impossible to see past colonial character. Therefore, if the Africa Museum is inherently colonial and cannot be dissociated from its colonial origins, it is impossible to decolonise it completely. The institution and its content will thus always perpetuate a colonial discourse to some extent.

Practices

Finally, discourses create practices amongst the individuals that receive them. The colonial discourse behind the Leopold II statues contributes to creating or supporting certain practices, of which the practice of seeing has been established as the most important one in this thesis.

According to Boylan (2020), the audiences of museums have no agency in how they receive visual discourses. Museums are institutions that present their content in a calculated way. They choose what to present and what not, how to present it, and what other text and images they associate with the image. Museums propose a pre-established narrative to their audience, which means the audience can thus not interpret the discourse; it can only integrate it. This research would like to extend such argument to the public space in general and conclude that these monuments because they are in a specific setting, decided upon by specific entities, construct specific viewing practices that are colonial.

In a previous paragraph, Higgs (2020) argued that museums continue to perpetuate colonial discourses, no matter their attempts to decolonise their space. As established in the literature review, visual cultures are constructed and perpetuated by institutions. If audiences do not have agency in the reception and interpretation of the discourses presented by museums, this means the Africa Museum contributes to perpetuating a colonial (visual) culture in Belgium.

Secondly, the digital circulation of pictures of the defaced Leopold II statue gave even more indications about how colonial monuments reinforce viewing practices. The pictures of the King's statue were associated with other colonial monuments in other countries. These monuments were also being defaced or taken down in widespread protests. This type of 'digital' circulation explains why Belgium and other former metropolises or settler nations are struggling with monuments linked to the colonial past. The images and their circulation reinforced the idea that these statues were bearing a colonial discourse that should not be present in the public space anymore.

Further, the circulation of images sheds light on a global shift occurring in the world today. The discussion around the presence of colonial monuments in the public space is not restricted to Belgium. It takes place in former metropolises and settler countries that have very different colonial experiences from Belgium. However, all these countries have one thing in common: they developed colonial visual practices. These practices, which are part of colonial visual culture, continue to reflect the colonial discourse constructed by (Belgian) colonisation.

The site of circulation has confirmed how vital visual practices are in global politics. Bleaker (2018) had underlined how images were crucial today, as they were produced more easily and circulated faster. Pictures of the Leopold II statues circulated worldwide through (online)

newspapers, television, and social media. Their circulation was made possible because of how easily the defaced statue could be photographed and propagated.

The site of circulation not only confirmed how vital images are today in the conceiving and reinforcing of colonial discourse. It also revealed how the circulation of images reinforced contestation in Belgium and abroad. As contestations are taking place against these colonial monuments, we can observe a clash between those who see the colonial discourse and those who do not. The circulation of images thus support the argument by Bleaker (2018) that images have an agency of their own and are powerful actors in global politics.

Conclusion

This research emerged from the protests against colonial monuments that profoundly affected Western countries since May 2020. It sought to understand the foundations of a global movement against colonial monuments. The initial assumption of the research was that colonial monuments today perpetuate a colonial discourse. Therefore, the research was constructed around the question: How do Leopold II statues, defined as three-dimensional images, produce and perpetuate a colonial discourse in Brussels' public space? Consequently, visual discourse analysis was applied to two colonial monuments in the Belgian public space. Two Leopold II statues were analysed: the monument at the Place du Trône and the bust displayed in the Africa Museum. Following the guidelines for image analysis provided by Rose (2016), the research could establish several concluding points.

First of all, the site of production established that the Leopold II statues were a tool for colonial propaganda. Colonial propaganda conveyed knowledge on race and justified power relations between populations. Thus, both the content of the statues and their production modalities support colonial knowledge production. Further, the site of audiencing contributed to establishing the Africa Museum both as a tool for colonial propaganda and an institution of colonial knowledge production. Thus, the first concluding element is that the Leopold II statues, through their site of content, production and audiencing contribute to producing and perpetuating colonial knowledge and legitimising colonial power relations.

Secondly, as the Leopold II statues convey colonial knowledge, they support the production of colonial subjects. The site of content established that the depiction of Leopold II proposes a visual image of a hegemonic, European 'self' to the Belgian public. Consequently, the contestations against Leopold II statues in Belgium support the idea that the statue perpetuates colonial subjectivity.

Thirdly, colonial institutions such as the public space contribute to the perpetuation of colonial discourse. On the one hand, surrounding colonial monuments to the Leopold II statue at Place du Trône reinforce its colonial character. Further, through the link between monarchy and colonisation, the statue's location in the Quartier Royal adds to its colonial character. On the other hand, the Africa Museum perpetuates the colonial discourse behind the Leopold II bust. Despite attempts to decolonise the Museum, its space and its collection remain colonial. The Africa Museum was created to convey colonial discourse, which no project of decolonisation can entirely erase.

Finally, the Leopold II statues perpetuate not only a colonial discourse but a colonial viewing practice. Through their colonial discourse, the statues continue to sustain the colonial visual culture that exists in Belgium. Through the analysis of the site of circulation, the research further established that this colonial visual culture was a global, and not just national, phenomenon.

In conclusion, the Leopold II statues produce and perpetuate a colonial discourse. The content, production, audiencing, and circulation sites have uncovered how the Leopold II statues' characteristics supported the pillars of colonial discourse. The Leopold II statues produced colonial knowledge, colonial subjects, and power relations in the past. Further, knowledge, subjectivity, and power are perpetuated mainly through the institutions that display the statues and the visual practices the statues create.

The research asserted the importance of Visual Studies in International Relations. Each site and modality contributed to establishing how each Leopold II depiction conveyed a colonial discourse. Although not all elements contributed to the discussion, they do suggest ideas for future research. Most importantly, the site of circulation uncovered that visual colonial discourses are perpetuated at a global level in the public space of former metropolises and settler nations. Thus, it confirms that in International Relations, studying local and cultural phenomena is important for understanding global phenomena.

Within the field of Visual Studies itself, the research contributed to expanding visual methodological tools. Rose's sites and modalities have provided the necessary elements to unravel the essential characteristics of the Leopold II statues' colonial character. Additionally, visual discourse analysis was applied to colonial monuments, which are disregarded in Visual Studies and International Relations. The research allowed studying aspects of images that cannot be seen when coming across colonial monuments. Visual discourse analysis further established how images produce and perpetuate a colonial discourse.

There were some limitations to the methodology. To address the social modality of the sites of audiencing, qualitative methods such as interviews, surveys, and focus groups could have contributed to a better understanding of how the public interprets the statues. Although this was not performed in the context of this research, it could well be a path for further research on the topic of colonial monuments.

Finally, this thesis uncovered a certain number of ideas or assumptions that need further research. First of all, more colonial monuments should be analysed through visual discourse analysis to expand the understanding of visual colonial discourse. Research could compare different countries, their relation to colonial monuments, and their colonial visual culture. Examples entail

the effects of the Leopold II statue in Kinshasa on colonial culture and its relation to Belgian colonial culture.

Secondly, the dynamics of circulation can be further explored. The thesis focussed on understanding the discourse behind the images but not the process of circulation. The literature review of this thesis introduced the RMF and AMMF movements to provide context to the phenomenon of decolonisation of the public space. However, the site of circulation has underlined the importance and complexity of such global cultural movements. As such, the topic is worthy of further research in the field of International Relations.

Finally, one could research how audiences perceive colonial images, especially by involving the public's opinions in the research. The public's perception of the statues would contribute to understanding how people see and who sees what. This could lead research on how colonial monuments affect subjectivity and identity production in former metropolises' increasingly diverse societies.

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