

Chapter 2

Visual Subjects of Tradition

In Kinshasa, during the last few days of August 2008, Jean-Pierre Ekombo, an ordained priest and a Tetela man in his thirties whom I had met in Tshumbe that summer, came over to bring me the two albums of colonial images and other miscellaneous items I had been forced to leave behind in Tshumbe. This was part of an arrangement he and I made: we switched airplane tickets in Tshumbe, and he promised to bring me the rest of my things (they included my motorcycle helmet and were over the weight limit for the small plane Jean-Michel Kibushi, Catherine Lion, and I boarded to leave Sankuru).

Ekombo and I looked at the photographs together. He was one of the few people who “questioned” the image, inquired about the choices that were made. He asked why, in some early colonial photographs, the women were naked from the waist up and not the men. Jean-Pierre said the men were “wearing regular clothes.” The historical fact that, when colonialism arrived, men had easier access to European clothes than did women was not self-evident. In fact the photograph he was talking about showed a chief and his household. The great majority of colonial-era photographs reveal that “European” style clothing, including hats, were items of prestige. These objects acted as visual signposts for social relationships. Cloth and clothing operated as visual evidence: they had a signficatory role in their time. The photographs are also historical evidence as artifacts within archives, which signify and suggest.



Figure 26: *Notable indigène et sa famille à Pena Mutambo*, b&w photograph, 1914 1913, Ethnography Section, Royal Museum for Central Africa. "Native notable and his family in Pena Mutambo."

Looking through the selection of images, Ekombo also asked me why I had a particular interest in musical instruments and musicians. With this question, Ekombo identified another important historical operation in the field of colonial visuality: in the aftermath of the notorious Batetela rebellions, colonial knowledge production began to associate Tetela with musical instruments, and in particular with the Lokombe, a trapeze-shaped “talking” drum. In the Royal Museum for Central Africa’s ethnographic archives, musicians and instruments appeared more often than weapons and warriors in early colonial Tetela iconography. Ekombo also noticed that in some photographs, Lokombe players were not playing, but were instead *posing*. “They were probably told,” he said, “Stand there; we are going to take a photo.”



Figure 27: "*Musiciens Batetela*, b&w slide, 1914, Ethnography Section, Royal Museum for Central Africa.

Around 1912 or 1913, a colonial clerk named Kabududié gave his views to Commandant Ferdinand Joseph Harfeld, a colonial officer with a penchant for ethnography who was serving in Katanga. Harfeld published Kabududié's testimony in the *Bulletin de la Société Belge de Géographie* in an article titled "The mentalities of Katanga natives."¹ The elderly Kabududié, whom the colonial interviewer calls "a negro

¹ Ferdinand Joseph Harfeld, "Mentalités indigènes du Katanga," *Bulletin de la Société royale belge de géographie* 37 (1913). Harfeld also published a longer version as a book: Harfeld, *Mentalités indigènes du Katanga*. I will refer to the book version thenceforth.

raised up by the colony, who reads and writes,”² traveled through much of the Congo in his life and had been living in Katanga since about 1902. He said the following:

Our mothers and fathers told us that all was going to change in our country. And so it was. I saw white men pass through [near] Lusambo at two in the morning [...] We saw that their bodies were covered in clothing. Their feet seemed enclosed, like buffalo hooves. They mixed eggs with manioc flour. They always had pipes in their mouths [...] People who brought food to the white men received little red pearls and red handkerchiefs [...] Never had our fathers seen so many cases, bundles, trunks. But our fathers said that the country was going to change. And it was true.³

To his interviewer, Kabududié announces himself as a “*noir civilisé*” (“civilized negro”), ostensibly, for Harfeld’s benefit, on the side of the colonial “civilizing mission.” His memories, though, transmit the ominous tone of his parents’ and elders’ warnings, which gave meaning to children’s glimpses of worrisome creatures passing through in the middle of the night. Indeed, Kabududié speaks of “changes” as portents of evil, seen, but not yet fully understood in their implications. His words, moreover, present an array of elements that constituted the “new” for the colonized. Mixing eggs with manioc appears here as the strongest literal and symbolic representation of the entangled, blended, concept of the “new.”

In the late nineteenth-century, as central Africa spiraled down into imperial global capitalism, epistemological chasms opened as temporalities and discourses of history crashed into one another. These spaces became “habitations of modernity.”⁴ These were spaces that held objects and technologies associated with new times: initially cloth, clothes, hats, guns; then cameras and phonographs; later bicycles, radios, cars, trains,

² Harfeld, *Mentalités indigènes du Katanga*, 11.

³ *Ibid.*, 13.

⁴ Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Habitations of Modernity: Essays in the Wake of Subaltern Studies* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002).

syringes.⁵ “Things” have use functions, but they also have visual functions. Conversely, visual artifacts are objects.⁶ There are inevitable associations and articulations between the experience of very rapid change, visibility as a principle of seeing subjects and seen objects, and the prestige bestowed by possessing and displaying specific objects. There is also the discursive move, on the part of the colonized, toward representation and inscription.⁷

Heir to Leopold II’s Congo Free State after 1908,⁸ Belgium remade its colonial administration in the 1910s and 1920s into an elaborate bureaucratic structure articulated to the needs – in “workers and food” – of capital.⁹ In the 1920s, ideas of “custom” and policies of indirect rule began to supplant the interventionist and assimilationist policies of an earlier era.¹⁰ Colonial rule in the Congo created the conditions for the emergence of the political, cultural, and ethnic category of the “tribe.” It did so through an administrative apparatus that moved away from the Free State’s directly coercive policies toward a form of indirect rule through individuals identified as “legitimate” native

⁵ Hunt, *A Colonial Lexicon*, 161. Hunt refers to certain new objects and technologies as constitutive of “a specific interwar modernity.”

⁶ On photographs as visual and material artifacts, for instance, see work by Elizabeth Edwards, et al. Elizabeth Edwards and Hart, Janice, *Photographs Objects Histories: On the Materiality of Images* (London: Routledge, 2004); Elizabeth Edwards, *Anthropology and Photography, 1860-1920* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press in association with the Royal Anthropological Institute, London, 1992); Elizabeth Edwards, *Raw Histories: Photographs, Anthropology and Museums*, Materializing Culture (Oxford, U.K.: Berg, 2001); Nuno Porto, “Manageable Past: Time and Native Culture at the Dundo Museum in Colonial Angola (Le passé manipulé. Le temps et la culture locale au musée du Dundo en Angola coloniale),” *Cahiers d’Études Africaines* 39, no. 155/156 (January 1, 1999): 767–787. Also, Hunt, *A Colonial Lexicon*.

⁷ Jewsiewicki, “Peintres de cases, imagiers et savants populaires du Congo, 1900-1960. Un essai d’histoire de l’esthétique indigène (Wall-Painters, Folk Scholars and Image-Makers in the Congo, 1900-1960.” Also, see this dissertation’s chapters 3 and 4 for a more detailed exploration of the possibilities of visual inscription.

⁸ Congo’s take-over by Belgium is known as the *Reprise*.

⁹ Jewsiewicki, “The Formation of the Political Culture of Ethnicity in the Belgian Congo, 1920-1959,” 333. Jewsiewicki cites the rapid industrialization of Katanga’s mining areas in the 1920s as the force driving political and economic policies in Kasai.

chiefs.¹¹ Beginning with the decree of May 1910,¹² the colonial state began to issue guidelines according to which Congolese would be grouped and administered based on what bureaucrats determined were true “native” laws or customs, and “real” chiefs; this new policy was “rigidly enforced in the 1920s,”¹³ even as the Belgian Congo began an intensive process of industrialization.¹⁴ By 1931, so many Congolese had moved to urban areas seeking salaried employment that the colonial state passed legislation creating “extra-customary centers,” thus giving legal status to some workers in urban areas. “We must convince ourselves,” reads a 1914 report or *white paper* issued by the Vice-Governor’s office in the Province Orientale, “that, much more than in Europe, everything in the life of the native is determined by very strict laws, from which we cannot stray in their minds” without dire consequences. The memo goes on to call for an ethnographic assessment of “custom” and the “mechanism” through which “natives” find their group

¹⁰ Poncelet, *L’invention des sciences coloniales belges*, 209.

¹¹ Belgian colonial rule followed neither the French nor British models of “direct” and “indirect” rule. It was instead a combination, where a colonial administrative bureaucracy incorporated a “native” administrative structure. For a discussion of these aspects of colonial rule in Sankuru, see Dimandja Luhaka, “Le pays de Katako Kombe à l’époque coloniale. Volume 1” (PhD Dissertation, Université Catholique de Louvain. Faculté de Philosophie et Lettres, 1974).

¹² *Ibid.*, 82; Jacques Sourdillat, *Les chefferies au Congo belge* (Paris: Domat-Montchrestien, 1940), 18. Sourdillat presents different colonial legal texts regarding *Chefferies*, as well as commentaries.

¹³ Jean Stengers and Jan Vansina, “Western Equatorial Africa: King Leopold’s Congo, 1886–1908,” ed. J. D Fage, vol. 6, *The Cambridge History of Africa* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 357. The decree of 1910, which provided for native administration through so-called legitimate chiefs, was modified by another decree in 1933, which abolished “Sous-Chefferies,” created Sectors, and affirmed the division between “customary” and “extra-customary” spaces for the colonized. Between the early 1910s and the 1930s, administrative correspondence makes very frequent mention of the law of 1910 as something that *must* be implemented.

¹⁴ Jewsiewicki, “The Formation of the Political Culture of Ethnicity in the Belgian Congo, 1920-1959.”

cohesion. It then calls for the identification of the “chief,” that is, the individual who most clearly personifies this mechanism.¹⁵

The 1910s and 1920s were the decades during which colonial understandings of “Batetela” shifted from, variously and many times contradictorily, Force Publique soldiers, Zanzibari and Free State auxiliaries, cannibals, mutineers, but also for a time heroic and noble fighters, to an ethnographically and customarily conceived “tribe.” In the 1910s and 1920s, a bifurcation occurred between “Batetela” as a historical term, evoking in metropolitan imaginations the “wild west”¹⁶ era in the Congo and Belgium’s heroic military past, on one hand; and “Batetela” as the name of a geographically located tribe or ethnic group with specific cultural and material attributes, on the other.

Ethnography, as the praxis of the fairly new science of “cultural anthropology,” or, as it was known in the francophone world, “ethnology,” and a concomitant photographic visuality, played important parts in bringing this shift about, as this chapter will attempt to demonstrate.

Sankuru district was created in 1912, following the general territorial reorganization of 1910. In part this decision was taken in order to resettle the Batetela south of Equateur province, where they had operated as the auxiliaries of the Zanzibari and later the Free State, and where they had dominated and oppressed the area’s populations.¹⁷ In Sankuru,

¹⁵ Vice-Gouvernement de la Province Orientale, “Programme politique. Chefferies indigènes. La coutume: base de l’organisation indigène,” September 25, 1914, AIMO A 34 bis. D1911-1915/1669, Archives Africaines. Ministère des Affaires Etrangères. Brussels, Belgium.

¹⁶ Vellut, “Emeri Cambier (1865-1943), fondateur de la mission Kasai. La production d’un missionnaire de légende,” 58. Vellut refers to Western Kasai in the 1880s specifically.

¹⁷ Saint-Moulin, “Histoire de l’organisation administrative au Zaïre,” 203. Also, “Droits Des Batetelas Sur Les Terres Indigènes De La Lukenie-Tshuapa”, March 24, 1911, G.G. AIMO/1676, Archives Africaines. Ministère des Affaires Etrangères. Brussels, Belgium. This letter from the Governor’s office in Boma orders territorial authorities insure that “autochthonous populations”

the transition between Free State and Belgian rule took place on the heels of two main rebellions in the ranks of the colonial army, known as the “Batetela Rebellions” or Force Publique mutinies of 1895 and 1897. In addition to these long-lasting and high profile revolts, anti-colonial resistance was endemic through the 1930s in the forest regions of Sankuru, and in Equateur province.¹⁸ As I mentioned in chapter one, in areas where the Free State and its concessionary companies harvested wild rubber at the turn of the twentieth century, they recruited many of the former auxiliaries of the Zanzibari to operate as “sentries,” i.e. enforcers of the rubber regime and armed guards of the white company and State representatives. Forest people as well as Belgian administrators and European planters or company representatives knew these auxiliaries as “Batetela.”¹⁹ After 1910, and in order to mitigate the constant harassment of imperial capitalist interests by rebellious Congolese who held secret meetings in the forest and continued to concoct anti-white medicines well into the 1930s,²⁰ Belgian colonial administrators

be given their autonomy [from the Batetela], and their lands back. It goes on to remind the Territorial Administrator of the 1910 decree on customary leadership.

¹⁸ Jensen, “Mission Jensen. Rapport général. I/ But de la mission,” 54. In particular, forest populations in northern Sankuru and Equateur areas used poisoned arrows and lances to repel invaders.

¹⁹ There are many examples. Cotton Grower to M. Tavernier, Report, 1933; Boelaert, Vinck, and Lonkama, “Enquête sur l’arrivée des blancs sur les bords des rivières équatoriales (partie II et fin)” ; Jensen, “Mission Jensen. Rapport général. I/ But de la mission”; “Droits des Batetelas sur les terres indigènes de la Lukenie-Tshuapa.”

²⁰ There are many reports written by colonial administrators that describe and seek to control “superstitious practices,” especially when these gather many people into so-called sects. See for instance, *Province du Congo-Kasai. Territoire de Loto. Notes sur l’Omatomba*, Rapport à Monsieur le Commissaire de District, May 8, 1925, Papiers Antoine Roger Dimandja, Archives Africaines. Ministère des Affaires Etrangères. Brussels, Belgium; P. Nauwelaert, *Les épreuves superstitieuses chez les Bakela et les Unkutshu. De leur mise en pratique actuelle de leur répression*, Rapport à Monsieur le Substitut du Procureur du Roi, January 25, 1928, Papiers Antoine Roger Dimandja, Archives Africaines. Ministère des Affaires Etrangères. Brussels, Belgium. Other reports give accounts of military operations in the forest regions of Sankuru. For instance, *Opérations militaires dans les régions de Kole et de Loto*, Rapport à Monsieur l’Administrateur Territorial, March 13, 1920, Papiers Antoine Roger Dimandja, Archives Africaines. Ministère des Affaires Etrangères. Brussels, Belgium.

decided to change their political approach by promoting leadership based on “custom.” This, the colonial administration decided, had to be defined through ethnographic style inquests into the social and political traditions of the colonized. Faced with continual armed resistance from forest peoples, which targeted commercial interests and their representatives, the new administration also chose to take the Batetela down from positions of overlordship over forest populations in Equateur in a process that was folded into the new customary politics of the Belgian state. The long report to the colonial government, written by Commissaire de District Jensen in about 1924, makes these facts abundantly clear.²¹

As the Albin rifle bearing auxiliary forces of the Free State, the Batetela were key protagonists in the colonial conquest, standing at the threshold of Congo’s earliest colonial modernity.²² They were its soldier-guardians and for a short time, they became the icons of the colonial army, the Force Publique. In Belgium, where young men were not conscripted to serve in the colonial army, visual representations of African Force Publique soldiers operated as an early visual shortcut for “empire.” Yet, because of the Batetela rebellions, *explicit* associations between Batetela and the colonial army did not endure past the 1900s. Instead the figure of the Batetela-as-a-Force Publique-soldier or auxiliary was pushed back into the historical register and consigned to the “past.”

²¹ Jensen, “Mission Jensen. Rapport général. I/ But de la mission,” 5. Jensen is very explicit about these connections in his 1924 report. He blames the abuses committed by Belgian auxiliaries “who are the one and only cause of the rebellions.” Also see Luhaka, “Le pays de Katakombé à l’époque coloniale. Volume 1”; Renkin, “Minister of the Colony to the Governor-General of the Belgian Congo.”

²² De Boeck, *Les Révoltes de la Force Publique sous Léopold II*; Vellut, “La violence armée dans l’Etat Indépendant du Congo.” Also, see Verbeken, *La Révolte des Batetela en 1895; textes inédits*, 4.

Situated between the “Arab War” and its concomitant “anti-slavery campaign”²³ of the mid-1890s, and the most intense “Red Rubber” scandals (1900 to 1905), these Batetela rebellions were important ruptures in early Free State Congo. For Batetela who had already been the Free State’s auxiliaries, enjoying an important degree of autonomy, during the Arab War campaigns, and who continued to assist the colonial state in their pacification efforts against, for instance the Kaniok or the Chokwe, incorporation into a highly regimented and repressive Force Publique was hard to accept.²⁴

Colonial “cultural” knowledge and its visualities

The visual production of tradition and custom, through much of the Belgian era was a new phase in the creation of a “Tetela” category, and a new moment in Tetela subject formation. In part I am interested in what happens before a photograph makes its way into networks of circulation, and what meanings it has already constituted for itself at the time of its production, and shortly thereafter. Here, I argue for the existence of a colonized agency in ways of being and being seen. Photographs are more than representations of individual subject-positions in simple and dichotomous visual economies of power.

²³ In 1888 French Cardinal Charles Lavigerie called for a sweeping anti-slavery campaign in Central Africa.

²⁴ The Force Publique was conceived as a police force as well as a territorial army. It was an institution of extraordinary brutality and oppression; it endured until 1960 and was among the forces that tore the newly independent nation apart. Punishments in particular were severe: From 1894, regulation provided whipping sentences of up to 100 lashes, to be divided into two 50-lash sessions and to be administered within 24 hours of each other. The Force Publique mutiny of 1895 was due, by all accounts, to the oppressive and unfair practices of the supervising Belgian officers. De Boeck, *Baoni*, 37; Force publique, *La Force Publique de sa naissance a 1914; Participation des militaires à L’histoire des premières années du Congo*, Institut royal colonial belge. Section des sciences morales et politiques (Brussels, Belgium, 1952).

Such an assertion is based partly on speculation (yet it seems certain that domestic servants, who could not always read French, had access to illustrated materials in their employers' homes); partly it is based on a reading of a visual colonial archive against its *temporal* grain: In the 1950s, Tetela chiefs in traditional costumes and regalia were posing for Belgian missionaries in their area who could not seem to get enough photographic opportunities with their pupils, parishioners, catechists trainees, notables, and employees.²⁵ Whether or not these Tetela chiefs or notables were able to obtain copies of these images for themselves, the photographs were occasions for performing a 'Tetelanness' acquired in earlier processes of subject-formation. In 2008 and 2009, when I met with Tetela in and out of Sankuru district, I found that many of these colonial constructions inhabited Tetela ways of being and seeing themselves (literally, when they looked at colonial-era photographs). With this I am not proposing that Tetela somehow *learned* to be Tetela from the practices, visual and otherwise, of colonial ethnography and administration. I am suggesting, instead, that processes of constitution, contestation, reconstitution, invention and reinvention took place as so many dynamic relationships within complex colonial situations shot through with equally complex historical relationships of power and hierarchy. Here it seems appropriate to read the colonial visual archive, as Ann Laura Stoler proposes, *with* the grain.²⁶

Inscription is a linguistic and visual process. The act of *inscription* engages textuality and visuality because it creates an ontological dependence of the one on the other, and because images are also embedded in larger sets of archives and practices. In the following sections, I follow two paths: one considers the constitution of an archive

²⁵ I take up Catholic mission photographs in Sankuru in chapter 3.

that came to life in, and now inhabits the interior worlds (“structures of feeling”) of, many individual members of communities and constituencies; and two, consider the relationships between photographs and histories: semiotically, from the “look” and “meaning” of a bare foot on a dusty road; to the increasingly global flows of mass-mediated colonial knowledge in the twentieth century. There is, moreover, a dialectic at work between glimpsed subjectivities (such as the bare foot on the dusty road) and the wider discursive knowledge productions about macro concepts like “ethnicity,” “natives,” “civilizing missions,” “industrial progress,” and “infrastructural improvements.” Ultimately, I argue that visuality can write its own histories, which exceed textual and contextual frames.

From the end of the First World War to Lumumba’s time, colonial sources did not mention the Tetela with much frequency; Tetela did nothing to “sell” the colony. In metropolitan and colonial mentalities, Tetela were not “photogenic” or “exotic” as were certain other “tribes” in Belgian Africa, like the Mangbetu or the Tutsi. They did not produce significant works of art, as did the Kuba. In this long Belgian era, when they did mention the Tetela, journalists, professional writers, and hired propagandists often used epithets like “bellicose” in their list of “traits.” Yet Tetela photographs from this era tell a different story. The images chosen by publishers depicted Tetela, above all with a particular kind of musical instrument. Trapeze-shaped gongs became object, from the 1910s increasingly, that signified “Tetela.” In Belgian picture books that circulated after the First World War, musical instruments were the favored item to connect particular “tribes” of the Kasai region. The Songye or Basonge people were similarly allied with the

²⁶ Ann Laura Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain: Epistemic Anxieties and Colonial Common Sense* (Princeton University Press, 2008).

Free State in the 1890s, and were similarly connected with musical instruments on photographs.²⁷

More particularly, as concerns the Tetela, the visual aspects of these 1910s and 1920s colonial reorganizations were centered around a trapeze-shaped instrument, known as the Lokombe drum. In Sankuru, it is an object in daily use for all celebrations, and on Sundays, at Christian services.²⁸ Traditionally, I was told during my time in Sankuru, it served not only as a musical drum, but also as a “talking drum,” one which could send elaborate messages over great distances. “Today,” a number of people told me in 2008, the skill of communicating by means of a Lokombe has been lost. On one hand, a Tetela chief’s cortege traditionally included a number of musicians playing different instruments. The Belgian officer Oscar Michaux gives a lengthy description of Ngongo Leteta’s arrival at his camp: Ngongo was preceded by “a battery of drums and tam-tams of every shape and size. Additional performers beat gongs and blew into trumpets made of ivory.”²⁹ Michaux was quite impressed by the entire procession, which included rifle-carrying warriors as well as all of Ngongo’s wives. On the other hand, metropolitan publics, for whom images of musical instruments in the hands of Africans (as opposed to weapons) were probably innocuous, would see Batetela material culture, and in particular its “distinctive” elements, as presented by ethnologists and other authorized commentators.

²⁷ Torday and Joyce, *Notes ethnographiques sur des populations habitant les bassins du Kasai et du Kwango Oriental*. Also see chapter 1 in this dissertation. Ngongo Leteta, some Congolese have argued, may have been Songye, fully or partly; Zappo Zap (mentioned above) and Pania Mutombo, for instance, both of whom, with their retinues of armed men, wives, and slaves were early Congolese associates of the Free State, were also Songye. There are many-layered histories between the Tetela and the Songye.

²⁸ I did not witness religious celebrations other than Christian services.

²⁹ Michaux, *Au Congo*, 95.

The following photographs, taken by the colonial magistrate Emile Gorlia in the 1910s, appear as transitional images, between, as I will show, an earlier mode of representing Tetela prestige and power, and a later way of tribalizing them with decontextualized musical instruments. As I discuss in greater detail below, the Tetela photographs of the Torday expedition of 1907-09, and those of the Maes expedition of 1913-14, stand on either side of that line.



Figure 28 Emile E. O Gorlia, *At Lusambo Tetela Chief with His Wives and Musicians*, Glass negative: b&w, 8 x 10.5 cm, 1917.



Figure 29: Emile E. O Gorlia, *In Tetela Countryside Musicians Playing Drums While Tetela Chief Dances*, Glass negative: b&w, 8 x 10.5 cm, 1915.

Photographs, drawings, and paintings accompanied textual imperial “propaganda”³⁰ and circulated in magazines like *L’Illustration Congolaise* (1924-1940), in books like *Le Mirroir du Congo Belge* (1929), *Le Congo Belge en Images* (1932), or *L’Etat Indépendant du Congo; documents sur le pays et ses habitants* (1904). Missionaries also produced their own images. For religious orders, propaganda had the double meaning of “informing” and “propagation of the faith;” postcards depicting Congo scenes are credited to the “Missionaires de Scheut.” Significantly, interwar colonial visuality recycled earlier images, taken before the First World War by administrators, persons in the employ of private companies, military officers, and occasional ethnographers. An

older set of images contributed to establishing the Tetela more firmly as ethnic and customary.³¹ This new effort at colonial, *Belgian* and increasingly rational, administrative and bureaucratic, accountable, metropolitan knowledge production was accomplished in part through the tension of old and new: old photographs, new order. Despite continuous anti-colonial resistance in the 1920s and 1930s, as I mentioned above, the colonial state was keen to promote its role as civilizer and peace-bringer to “natives,” who until then had been, variously, superstitious, cannibals, and polygamists; who had been engaged, so the Belgian narrative went, in continuous internecine “tribal” wars, who had slaves, who practiced “unspeakable” acts, etc. Belgian colonial ethnology of the pre- and interwar eras, represented by Joseph Maes (to whom I return below), was instrumental in producing the Congo as a peaceful ethnographic field.

Photographs and related techniques³² were key in assisting in the presentation of “custom” as the “ethnographic” register that some among the colonial establishment favored, but also in setting up oppositions between the “traditional” or custom-bound, on one hand, and the “civilized.” The latter belonged to a modern arena of industry. Leaning towards the latter were the interests of the large industrial mining concerns, particularly in Katanga, but also in Kasai, buttressed by a modern military force.³³ The “problem,” as it was debated in colonial and industrial circles, was whether to modernize, civilize, and detribalize subject peoples in the Belgian Congo, or, instead, preserve their traditional ways of life as much as possible, while still regimenting agriculture into cash-crop production and providing the mining industry the workforce it required.

³⁰ Stanard, *Selling the Congo*.

³¹ Ibid. Geary notes a similar recycling process across the Belgian colonial visual field.

³² Halftones and photo-engravings, for instance.

³³ Poncelet, *L'invention des sciences coloniales belges*, 209; 211; 214.

“Culturalists”³⁴ like the Catholic missionary De Jonghe or the Magistrate Georges Van der Kerken, who served as a Royal Prosecutor in Katanga from 1914 to 1919, were among the intellectual forces behind a reappraisal of colonial policy in the post-World War I era. Van der Kerken, in particular, is most famous for his book *L'ethnie Mongo*.³⁵ Influenced by the work of the British anthropologist James Frazer, Van der Kerken favored the creation of an “office of ethnology” at the highest echelons of the colonial administration.³⁶ Unsurprisingly, Van der Kerken was among those who argued against legal differentiations between “primitive (*sauvages*) natives” and “civilized natives.”³⁷

The creation of the administrative and geographical category of “extra-customary” in 1931 was reflective of the tension between preservationists and modernizers. It also meant that the “cultural” camp, which sought to maintain “traditional native ways of life,” had prevailed. Indeed, the 1931 decree creating “Extra-Customary Centers” near “white” urban areas was a reaction to the *fait accompli* that in the 1910s and 1920s so many Congolese left rural areas in search of salaried employment.³⁸ The “culturalists” views were the intellectual bases for creating the categories of “customary” and “extra-customary,” which could only exist in relation to each other. This dual classification system was primarily a means of preservation, but, by organizing populations into urban industrial or mining workers, and rural food producers, it also served the needs of industry.

³⁴ I borrow this term from Poncelet.

³⁵ Van der Kerken, *L'ethnie mongo*. He is the author of other works of colonial historical ethnography. See, Georges Van der Kerken, *Les sociétés bantoues du Congo belge et les problèmes de la politique indigène; étude de la politique coloniale adoptée au Congo belge et de ses problèmes dans l'ordre sociologique, politique et économique* (Bruxelles: E. Bruylant, 1920); Georges Van der Kerken, *La politique coloniale belge* (Anvers: Éditions Zaire, 1943).

³⁶ Poncelet, *L'invention des sciences coloniales belges*, 202.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

In such a metropolitan colonial field that was neither smooth nor consensual, photographs were there ostensibly to make arguments, perhaps in one direction or another, under sometimes a pretense of illustration. But more importantly, photographic images mediated between one intellectual and ideological camp and another. Photographic images, always chaotic in the sense that they are ultimately open spaces, allowed contradiction, and simultaneity of meanings. This is not the case of painting or drawing – other visual techniques employed by colonial knowledge producers in the field. As ultimately uncontrollable visual representations, photographs allowed for the possibilities of multiple visual inscriptions. Tetela transformed themselves into the subjects of custom and tradition from the 1910s to the Second World War.

Foundational moments in ethnography: Emil Torday's 1907-09 Kasai expedition

Emil Torday was a Hungarian-born amateur ethnographer and autodidact, who made a name for himself over nearly ten years of travel, exploration and object-collection in the Congo. Sometime between 1900 and 1901, Torday took a post as an employee of the Congo Free State at Pweto near Lake Mweru in northeastern Katanga, working as a kind of State liaison to the Comité Spécial du Katanga (CSK) company. Twenty days spent chugging upriver from the Pool (Kinshasa) to the Falls on the Congo river (Kisangani) in a steamer: Torday was fairly exceptional in his time in that he actually enjoyed the journey. And, unlike many contemporaries and predecessors, who felt oppressed by what they perceived as a homogenous “curtain” of green, he claims to have found the scenery beautiful.³⁹

³⁸ Sourdillat, *Les chefferies au Congo belge*, 20.

³⁹ Emil Torday, *Camp and Tramp in African Wilds. A Record of Adventure, Impressions, and Experiences During Many Years Spent Among the Savage Tribes Round Lake Tanganyika and in*

In 1900, as he made his journey upriver, Kasai, where Batetela mutineers were fighting against the Free State, was still very unsettled, so much so in fact that traveling through the area was out of the question, and Torday had to go the long way around to Lake Tanganyika, and then south.⁴⁰ In Katanga, Torday had few official duties and spent most of his time collecting birds, shooting game, and touring the area.⁴¹ His contract ended in 1904, and by then, Torday recounts, the Kasai route had been reopened. Torday was affiliated with the British Museum through his professional collaboration with the British curator Thomas Athol Joyce. He made significant contributions to socio-cultural anthropological knowledge about the Tetela, and began to problematize his findings in relation to historical processes, in striking anticipation of the work of historians and anthropologists some fifty years later. Torday writes:

The southern Batetela tribes, who were initially forest populations, migrated and spread out through a relatively open area. Their civilization, therefore, also underwent some modification.⁴²

Given the relative pacification of the Sankuru area after 1904-05, Torday and Joyce decided to organize a collecting expedition to that region. As with other colonial ethnographers, Torday's objectives were "...to make an ethnographical survey of the natives of the Kasai and Sankuru basins, at the same time making extensive collections for the ethnographical department of the British Museum."⁴³ The Kasai expedition of 1907-09 consisted of Torday, a British traveler and occasional writer named Melville

Central Africa, with a Description of Native Life, Character, and Customs (London: Seeley, Service & Co. Limited, 1913), 23.

⁴⁰ Emil Torday, *Camp and Tramp*, 23.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 41.

⁴² Torday and Joyce, *Notes ethnographiques sur des populations habitant les bassins du Kasai et du Kwango Oriental*, 1.

William Hilton-Simpson, and the artist Norman Hardy. The latter had become famous as a “painter of native life” in Australia and New Zealand, but left the expedition before it entered the forest in northern Sankuru. According to Hilton-Simpson, the travelers also received a great deal of support from the Compagnie du Kasai, one of the concessionary companies engaged in harvesting rubber in the Congo Free State, with which Torday had previously been linked.⁴⁴

Hilton-Simpson kept a diary of the expedition (while Torday did not), and wrote its “popular” narrative account.⁴⁵ This volume, *Land and Peoples of the Kasai*, contains anecdotes and stories about traveling and meeting new people, both European and Congolese, casual observations, a few of Hardy’s watercolors, as well as a number of photographs taken by Hilton-Simpson himself. Torday also published his own popularized version of his ethnographic travels, not limited to the Kasai expedition, called *Camp and Tramp in the African Wilds*.⁴⁶ Both books make mention of the “controversies” of the late Leopoldian era. First published in 1911, *Land and Peoples of the Kasai* was almost contemporary with the scandals of the Free State in the Congo; when Belgium took over Leopold’s Free State in 1908, the Torday expedition was still in the midst of its Congolese journey. Hilton-Simpson takes care, not only to thank the Kasai company for the logistical assistance it provided in the field, but also to make a point of saying that he, himself, never *witnessed* any atrocities:

⁴³ Melville William Hilton-Simpson, *Land and Peoples of the Kasai; Being a Narrative of a Two Years’ Journey Among the Cannibals of the Equatorial Forest and Other Savage Tribes of the South-Western Congo* (London, Constable and Co., 1911), vi.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, vii.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ Torday, *Camp and Tramp*.

...this book has no political motive; it is intended merely to be a record of our journey and [readers] will find in the following pages nothing about the atrocities which we hear have been perpetrated in many parts of the Congo.⁴⁷

The reason for not “reporting” any atrocities is his book, Hilton-Simpson explained, was that he and Torday, and, presumably, the rest of their party - the “we” of the narrative - never actually saw or heard anything about white brutality against Congolese. John Mack suggests, however, that *Land and Peoples of the Kasai* is a fairly sanitized version of Hilton-Simpson’s field journal.⁴⁸ And in *Camp and Tramp*, Torday issued a similar “disclaimer” on the book’s opening page:

Some portions of the book were written as far back as 1907, but owing to the embittered controversy that was then waging concerning the Congo, I thought it wiser not to publish it. [I] shall restrict my narrative to facts that have come under *my personal observation... leaving it to the reader to draw his conclusions.*⁴⁹

While Hilton-Simpson appears to have been more of an apologist of Belgian rule (and this includes Free State rule) in the Congo than Torday, who valued his own opinions and Congolese friends more than the company of colonials, it appears that both authors sought to avoid taking position in contemporary debates that felt politically complicated. Torday was careful, it seems, to tell his readers that he would provide accounts based on observation. Yet observation, the practice of empiricism and the basis of science, is here subject to discursive ambiguity. These “conclusions” that Torday calls upon his reader to draw for him or herself may be self-evident, but, then again, may be subjects of disagreement and debate – of interpretation.

The Kasai expedition was funded in part by Torday and Hilton-Simpson, and partly sponsored by the British Museum. The two men collected so many objects in the Congo

⁴⁷ Hilton-Simpson, *Land and Peoples of the Kasai*, ix.

⁴⁸ Mack, *Emil Torday and the Art of the Congo, 1900-1909*. Hilton-Simpson’s journal manuscript is at the British Museum.

that they were able to recoup the costs of the expedition by selling many to museums in Europe and the United States.⁵⁰ The British Museum now owns the majority of the objects and artifacts collected during the expedition, while the *Musée du Congo Belge* (now the Royal Museum for Central Africa) acquired Hardy's watercolors.⁵¹ The academic and non-academic publications that resulted from the expedition were somewhat independent, but also in some ways tethered to the Belgian state and its colonial agendas. In particular, the Museum of the Belgian Congo published a significant ethnographic volume, in French, authored by Torday in collaboration with Joyce.⁵² Another one of Torday's French language publications, *Causeries Congolaises*, was issued in Belgium by an independent publisher.⁵³ Both contained photographs and paintings from the expedition.

In his 1911 book, *Land and Peoples of the Kasai*, Hilton-Simpson included a photograph of a wall painting he labels "Batetela wall painting." When in early 1908 Hilton-Simpson crossed into "Batetela country," east and north of Lusambo on the Sankuru river, he was, according to his own description, surprised and impressed. Earlier that year, the Belgian colonial Magistrate at Lusambo had tried to dissuade the party from attempting to reach the village of Mokundji on the Lubefu river (northeast of Lusambo), warning that its members would surely be attacked by the Batetela, who, according to this

⁴⁹ Torday, *Camp and Tramp*, 17. (Emphasis added)

⁵⁰ Schildkrout, "Revisiting Emil Torday's Congo. 'Images of Africa' at the British Museum"; Mack, *Emil Torday and the Art of the Congo, 1900-1909*.

⁵¹ J. Maes, "L'ethnologie de l'Afrique centrale et le Musée Du Congo Belge," *Journal of the International African Institute* 7, no. 2 (April 1934): 180.

⁵² Torday and Joyce, *Notes ethnographiques sur des populations habitant les bassins du Kasai et du Kwango Oriental*.

⁵³ Emil Torday, *Causeries Congolaises* (Brussels, Belgium: A. Dewit, 1925).

colonial official, had lately been exhibiting “anti-European sentiments.”⁵⁴ When the party arrived at Osodu (a stop on the way to the larger village of Mokundji), Hilton-Simpson, who was ill, expected hostility; instead he found the people of the area eager to help them.⁵⁵ “At Osodu,” Hilton-Simpson writes,

...we first saw specimens of the curious pictures in red, black and white, with which the *modern Batetela* love to decorate the mud wall of their *new* [emphases added] houses built upon the plan of a bungalow. These represent wild animals, natives armed with bows and arrows attacking others equipped with guns, white men traveling in hammocks accompanied by an escort, and, in one instance a white man sitting in a chair drinking out of an enormous bottle! Some of the pictures include horses, which the artist must have seen at Lusambo, where 3 or 4 of these animals are kept.⁵⁶

In the eyes of Hilton-Simpson, the “modernity” of the Batetela was a factor of their familiarity with Europeans and their ways. Although he includes only one photograph of the Batetela wall art in the book.⁵⁷ Nonetheless, he provides a description of these paintings’ subject matter. The reader also learns that the colors used for the paintings were red, black, and white. The new Batetela houses, Hilton-Simpson remarks, are “built upon the plan of a bungalow.” Travelers and observers had, for at least forty or so years, associated rectangular dwellings in Central Africa with the influence of the Zanzibari. And indeed, these new architectural styles in central and eastern Congo formed part of a visual panoply of prestige items that associated one with the gun-toting powerful slave and ivory hunters.⁵⁸ In his description, Hilton-Simpson does not betray any awareness of the events of the previous twenty years, which is shocking. His tone remains upbeat

⁵⁴ Hilton-Simpson, *Land and Peoples of the Kasai*, 31.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 52.

⁵⁷ The editorial choice may not have been Hilton-Simpson’s to make, and in any case these hut drawings and paintings were not the kinds of “primitive” or “ethnographic” artifacts that colonial audiences wanted and expected. This is also, of course, the point I am making.

⁵⁸ See chapter one.

claiming the (false) innocence of the newly arrived observer. But while Hilton-Simpson's tone remains light and innocuous, the narrative content of the images ("natives armed with bows and arrows attacking others equipped with guns;" "white men traveling in hammocks accompanied by an escort;" "a white man sitting in a chair drinking out of an enormous bottle!"⁵⁹) are profound evidence, not only of what "went on" on the ground in terms of gun violence and colonial abuses (suggested by the white man being transported in a hammock with an escort, and especially by the one drinking out of "an enormous bottle"), but also evidence of the ways in which visibility produces its own historical discourses.

What the "Batetela" saw is also significant. The important question, it seems to me, with regard to these wall paintings, is why did these (so-called modern) Batetela paint these particular images on the walls of their own dwellings? Did these images function as denunciations of colonial abuses? Or were they rather the expressions of a certain kind of Batetela modernity, strongly military, and which the colonial state sought to take away in the years that followed Belgium's take over of the Congo? Painting and drawing such images on the walls of their houses, these Batetela signified what they believed was a special status with regard to "the White man," whom they were supposed to protect, whose weaknesses and vulnerability (being transported in a hammock) they witnessed, and whose daily existence they shared – the extra-large bottle emphasizing drunkenness, therefore a certain lack of control. These images also signified the Batetela's special status with regard to "other natives," that is, the ones wielding bows and arrows. In his book, Hilton-Simpson bypasses all possible interpretive layers, sticking instead to non-interpretive empirical observations.

⁵⁹ Hilton-Simpson, *Land and Peoples of the Kasai*, 52.



Figure 30: Melville William Hilton-Simpson, *Batetela Wall Pictures*, b&w photograph, 1907-08.⁶⁰

As an early twentieth-century ethnographer, Torday's interest was decidedly not the "modernity" of Africans. In scholarly articles and publications, he theorized that the Batetela were an umbrella term for a people who came from somewhere in the equatorial forest; it is not clear where exactly. He subsequently argued that several Batetela branches settled throughout a region more or less spanning forest and savanna and crossed, rather than bounded, by the rivers Lukenye (north), Lomami (east), and Lubefu (southeast). These different Batetela branches, he proposed, adapted culturally and physically to their new environments, and acquired cultural and religious attributes from the peoples they encountered, or pushed out, as in the case of the Songye. These various

⁶⁰ In Hilton-Simpson, *Land and Peoples of the Kasai*.

subgroups, according to Torday's classification, fell into two main categories represented by the "peoples of the forest," and those of the savanna.⁶¹

Torday and Hilton-Simpson seemed to have been compatible travel companions who were also close in age (in 1907-09, Torday was in his early thirties, and the Hilton-Simpson in his late twenties).⁶² But Hilton-Simpson's use of the term "modern" differs markedly from Torday's. The latter, in his writing, used the term as a simple temporal marker to mean "now" as opposed to "then." "Modern," for Torday, stands in opposition to "ancient;" modern and ancient were simply expressions of time and statements of fact. On the other hand, Hilton-Simpson's use of the term was more complex. For the latter "modern" denoted not just the present moment, but a sensibility (his own and that of others, perhaps by extension) that was self-consciously attuned to the present moment. In his book, Hilton-Simpson calls certain Batetela "modern," and others not. Modernity was a quality that Hilton-Simpson ascribed to the Batetela, or at least to some among them. He and Torday went on, after their stop at Mukundji, to visit the "Batetela sub-tribes of the forest," whom Hilton-Simpson calls "primitive."⁶³ One sees the contours of Sankuru's savanna-forest dichotomy. In text and image, Hilton-Simpson puts forward two types of Batetela. Those who are "modern" or forward-looking, and those who are

⁶¹ Ibid., 52.

⁶² Ibid., xiii.

⁶³ Torday and Hilton-Simpson both make numerous references to non-modern (Hilton-Simpson) or non-civilized (Torday) Batetela: "The first of the primitive Batetela tribes with whom we came in contact were the Vungi." Ibid. And from Torday, "North of the Lukenye, to the north and east of Kalufei, is a large and important section of primitive Batetela." Torday, Emil, "Culture and Environment: Cultural Differences Among the Various Branches of the Batetela," *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 51 (1921): 371.

“old-fashioned” or “primitive.”⁶⁴ He casts this as a matter of choice: one chooses whether to take the opportunities offered by the presence of Europeans, or one doesn’t.

The modernity of the Batetela was also, itself, “in the eyes” of Hilton-Simpson. It resided primarily in the things he *saw*, and that were there *to be seen*: objects, but also, especially, clothing and architectural styles. In many cases Hilton-Simpson’s attribution of the quality of being “modern” is connected to the sartorial; he notices and describes the modes of dressing, the fashions of Tetela men and women – those he encountered, and those he photographed – in the early twentieth century. Hilton-Simpson “saw” and believed that the ways certain Batetela dressed, mixing European clothing with African elements was the defining quality of a colonial modernity, one where prestige was manifested through the use of European and African elements of dress. Fashion was the category Hilton-Simpson chose for interpreting Batetela styles. According to his particular frame, the Batetela expressed their experience of colonial modernity through dress, through the objects they possessed, and in wall art. “The Batetela as a rule” he writes, “are powerful people; all were attired in loincloths of imported cotton, and many wore suspended from their belts the skins of small wildcats, which are so commonly worn in this district as to form part of the national dress of the Batetela.”⁶⁵

To an even greater degree than in the preceding era (the 1880s), “fashion” and “prestige” became enmeshed categories at the turn of the twentieth century. Photographs, paintings, and other images, together with the visuality of certain texts, demonstrate these

⁶⁴ Such rhetoric seems in keeping with the European vocabulary of “progress” and “improvement” that had particular significance in terms of modernization and rationalization schemes of the European countryside in the nineteenth century.

⁶⁵ Hilton-Simpson, *Land and Peoples of the Kasai*, 42.

entanglements.⁶⁶ “The men in the village, like our porters, were dressed in material imported from Europe, but the women’s costume was remarkable, if scanty.” Hilton-Simpson observes.⁶⁷ He goes on at length about the Batetela women:

The primitive Batetela ladies are nowhere extravagant in the matter of costumes. [...] It struck me as rather remarkable that so near the Sankuru, where the men have discarded their native-made loin cloths in favour of European cotton-stuffs and where any man will wear any European garment that he can lay hands on, that the women should be so conservative [...] There is plenty of European material to be earned in the district, so one can only imagine that the natives prefer their women to dress in the *fashions of their grandmothers*. A few of the more important Batetela, particularly those who have served the white man, will dress their wives in cotton cloth, but this has not yet become the custom with the ordinary inhabitants of the villages.⁶⁸

Perhaps Hilton-Simpson did not realize the extent to which owning European clothing, for these Batetela, was a marker of prestige, and that clearly it was not as easily obtained as he believed. Hilton-Simpson writes that “no coinage had in 1907 been introduced in the Kasai district, Mr. Torday knew we should require very large quantities of trade goods, such as cloth, salt iron, bars, knives, etc., which passes for money among the natives.”⁶⁹ But instead of buying goods in Europe not knowing whether they would be well-received or not, Torday and Hilton-Simpson made an arrangement with the Kasai Company whereby they would purchase necessary trade goods from the company’s factory – the goods that it used, writes Hilton-Simpson, to purchase ivory and rubber.⁷⁰

⁶⁶ Fashion was also, in the 1930s, Pierre Ryckmans’ gloss. In a letter home, the soon-to-be governor of the Congo writes, “Tout le monde est Batetela, avec la coiffure en damier chaque case soigneusement délimitée au peigne fournissant une mèche jusqu’au bord qu’on garnit d’un fil (comme les bracelets indigènes).” [All the women are Batetela, that is, set their hair in a “Batetela” style.] Cited in Jacques Vanderlinden, *Pierre Ryckmans: 1891-1959* (Brussels, Belgium: De Boeck Supérieur, 1994).

⁶⁷ *Hilton-Simpson, Land and Peoples of the Kasai*, 44.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, vii.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

That many of the Batetela the two Europeans encountered were veterans of the colonial army, the Force Publique, is key to Hilton-Simpson's idea of their "modernity." Yet, in Hilton-Simpson's writing the association between Batetela and colonial violence is largely absent. One sees it, most directly in the photograph above (Figure 30). In their publication *Notes ethnographiques sur les populations*, Torday and Joyce also included a few Batetela photographs. The Batetela wall art photograph has been included with, it seems, a photograph of the artist (according to the caption provided in the book). It is remarkable that the young boy in Figure 32 was the artist responsible for the "Batetela wall art."⁷¹

⁷¹ Note Torday's ubiquitous dog behind the artist.



FIG. 141. — Dessins sur le mur d'une maison Batetela.

Figure 31: Melville William Hilton-Simpson, *Batetela Wall Pictures*, b&w slide, 1907-08.⁷²

⁷² Torday and Joyce, *Notes ethnographiques sur des populations habitant les bassins du Kasai et du Kwango Oriental*.



FIG. 140. — L'artiste.

Figure 32: Melville William Hilton-Simpson, *The Artist*, b&w slide, 1907-08.⁷³

In 1908, force still determined political alliances. In Sankuru, civilian administration only took the place of military leadership in 1915 (thus seven years after the *reprise*).⁷⁴ Consider the example of two Batetela chiefs of this period. Colonial administrators put “Jadi” in charge of large villages at Mukundji to facilitate efficient rubber collection for the Kasai Company. Wembo Nyama was formerly a member of

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Luhaka, “Le pays de Katako Kombe à l’époque coloniale,” 82.

Ngongo Leteta's entourage; he entered an enduring alliance with American Methodist missionaries in 1911 and remained in a privileged position at that location until his death in the late 1930s.⁷⁵ In the Batetela photographs printed in Hilton-Simpson's and Torday's volumes, the association between Tetela and the violence of the Free State was at best suggested. One sees its contours in Hilton-Simpson's discussions of "European cloths, and of the "trade goods" used by the Kasai company to purchase ivory and rubber," as well as in descriptions of powerful Batetela chiefs dressing their wives in cotton cloths. One can also perceive it in certain photographs depicting chiefs and their entourages.

⁷⁵ "Jadi" is Hilton-Simpson's spelling of this name; the name is actually Mukundji. The author describes this chief as "...tall, very powerfully built... dressed in garments from Europe." Hilton-Simpson, *Land and Peoples of the Kasai*, 53; 49; 59. The Kasai company had a factory at Mokundji on the Lubefu river. In a somewhat ironic empirical twist, photographs of early twentieth-century Batetela chiefs, such as Jadi and Wembo Nyama, reveal them as physically powerful – tall and muscular – thereby indexing Batetela as the "strongest" warriors, as well as a "right of might" context in central Congo through the first decade of the twentieth century that one gleans from other sources.

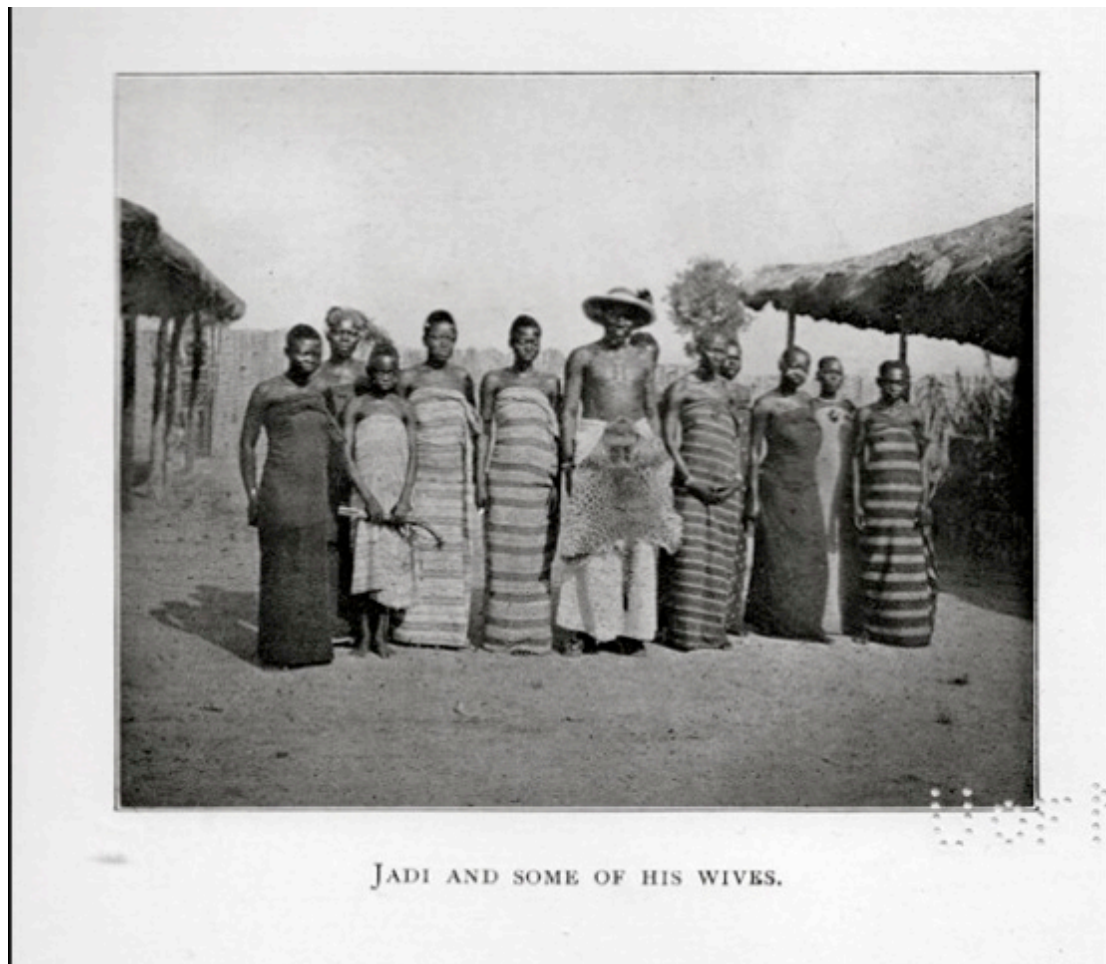


Figure 33: Melville William Hilton-Simpson, *Jadi and Some of His Wives*, b&w photograph, 1907-08.⁷⁶

There are many colonial photographs, such as Figure 33, dating from before the First World War, which show a group of people standing or sitting around a central figure – usually the chief. This kind of group portrait was a genre that explorers and later conquerors introduced in the 1880s and 1890s. Often placed next to, but in many ways independent from, narrative or scientific texts, these photographs produced their own visual information. While these images were taken by colonizers and, in part, came out of the social and aesthetic values evident in nineteenth century bourgeois family portrait,

⁷⁶ Hilton-Simpson, *Land and Peoples of the Kasai*.

they were also, it seems to me, clearly marked by deference and respect on the part of the photographer and the colonial apparatus that supported him. The photograph below, for instance, is one among many “Batetela” photographs from before World War I.



FIG. 27. — Le chef Kasongo Batetela et ses femmes.

Figure 34: Melville William Hilton-Simpson, *Chief Kasongo Batetela and His Wives*, b&w slide, 1907-08.

It is notable that in this photograph, on the right side of Kasongo’s wives, stand two or three “other” figures. These are not dressed in rich cotton cloths, and were likely the servants of Kasongo’s wives. They were not meant to be in the photograph and were

marginal to the reckonings of who “mattered,” yet, because the photographic frame is permeable, they are there.

Speaking about the populations of Western Kasai in the same era, Vansina writes that to adopt Western dress was to manifest one’s alliance to the European foreigners. “Those Lulua men who sided with the ‘modern’ party of Kalamba Mukenge and later Luba refugees were quite eager for Western ways [...] at a time when Kete and Bushong were only interested in blankets.”⁷⁷ Much the same can be said of the Tetela. The prestige stemming from an idea of “modernity” and alliance with the Free State found expression in visibility: in clothing worn and displayed, and in photographs.

These group or family portrait photographs index historical and social relations, which writers of texts do not often make explicit. The images share a number of elements, all of which are connected to visual displays of individual prestige. In the cases of Figure 33 and Figure 34 the chiefs are flanked by their wives, and in the latter photograph, there is a small child, a son, as well. The more wives a man had, the more prestige and wealth he could boast. The immediately preceding era of the Zanzibari slave trade in the 1880s produced such deep social disruptions, and such high numbers of refugees, that the selling and buying value of human beings fell dramatically. In that context for a man to have dozens, if not hundreds, of wives was a way of manifesting high social standing through an association with the Zanzibari.⁷⁸ In the first few years of the twentieth century, these Batetela chiefs were what remained of the earlier era. In Kasai, printed cotton cloth was gaining in popularity, but it was still an “extravagant

⁷⁷ Ibid., 53; 49; 59.

⁷⁸ David Northrup, “Slavery and Forced Labour in the Eastern Congo,” in *Slavery in the Great Lakes Region of East Africa*, ed. Henri Médard and Shane Doyle (Oxford, UK: James Currey, 2007), 114.

expense.”⁷⁹ Most of the women on the photographs are wearing cotton textiles, and it is therefore clearly demonstrated in and by the photograph that their husband can afford these luxury items. The chiefs in these photographs are both wearing hats. Hats were also important prestige items, as were shoes. Until the end of the colonial era, both hats and shoes were important “values” in a colonial economy of race, class, gender, and power relations. As the Batetela began losing their special status with the colonial state after the Belgian *reprise*, group portraits like Figure 33 and Figure 34 began to disappear from colonial publications, when - and this is important - their purpose was to report on the present, to show the “*now*” as opposed to a historical “*then*.” What gradually took over, after the First World War, was an ethnographic presentation of the “primitive,” who cannot, by definition, be “dressed” in the sense understood by Europeans and other westerners.

Another colonial ethnographic and collecting expedition, that of Joseph Maes, director of Ethnography at Tervuren’s Museum of the Belgian Congo, went through Kasai in 1913-14. Although Maes’s party did not chose to pass through Batetela areas around Lubefu, its photographs communicate a quite different set of ideas about the Tetela than did those of the Torday expedition.

Another Kasai Expedition (1913-14) and a Museum Archive

Joseph Maes, a German-born geographer and ethnographer, became the director ethnography at The Museum of the Belgian Congo in 1910. There are intimations that he collaborated with the Nazis during World War II, and he fell into obscurity after the

⁷⁹ Vansina, *Being Colonized*, 304.

war.⁸⁰ Maes led an expedition to Kasai in 1913-14, passing through parts of Sankuru and collecting objects and information about various groups in that general area, including the Tetela, Songye, Luba, and Kuba. The expedition also generated a number of photographs. Maes was a “diffusionist” rather than an aesthetic anthropologist like his successor, Frans Olbrechts.⁸¹ Yet, because *Art Nègre* and a general love of “primitivism” were fashionable in pre-World War II Europe, and because museums of that era were interested in objects as “*objet d’arts*” to be exhibited and admired, aestheticism was often key to Maes’s interest in the material culture of the peoples he visited or wrote about, and whose items he collected and sent back to Belgium.

Most of the Tetela photographs in Tervuren’s ethnographic section archive are credited to Maes (or his expedition) but were taken by his assistant, Philippe Tits.⁸² The latter also wrote the diary, the “Journal de Route” of the Expedition.⁸³ The Maes expedition produced many more photographs in the field than appear to have been catalogued at Tervuren. In 1913, 1914, and in subsequent years, Maes had little to say about the Tetela. His interest, in spite of his alleged diffusionism, was for the most part aesthetic, and it was driven by the logic of exhibition. Regarding the Kuba, for instance, Maes formulated a prevalent metropolitan opinion in writing that they should considered

⁸⁰ “Papiers Maes”, n.d., Divers 61/3859, Archives Africaines. Ministère des Affaires Etrangères. Brussels, Belgium; David Maxwell, “The Soul of the Luba: W.F.P. Burton, Missionary Ethnography and Belgian Colonial Science,” *History and Anthropology* 19, no. 4 (December 2008): 336.

⁸¹ Maarten Couttenier, *Congo Tontoongesteld: Een Geschiedenis Van De Belgische Antropologie En Het Museum Van Tervuren (1882-1925)* (Leuven: Acco, 2005), and personal communication with the author in February 2008.

⁸² Joseph Maes, *Notes sur les populations des bassins du Kasai, de la Lukénie, et du Lac Léopold II.*, Annales du Musée du Congo belge (Bruxelles: Falk fils, successeur G. van Campenhout, 1924), iv.

⁸³ Philippe Tits, “Journal de Route de la Mission Ethnographique du Congo Central I, II, III”, 1914 1913, Divers 61/3858, Archives Africaines. Ministère des Affaires Etrangères. Brussels, Belgium.

“among the most cultured peoples on the African Continent.”⁸⁴ He went on to write they had mastered all arts and crafts (*arts et métiers*) including pottery, basket weaving, metalworking, weaving of cloths, etc., much better than any other “negro races.”⁸⁵ It is also likely that the Batetela did not interest Maes. The Tetela have been classified by colonial anthropology as having no “tribal art” worth collecting, or at all.⁸⁶ They probably also frightened Maes. In fact, in various notes, Maes makes a number of negative comments about former or retired soldiers, refusing them Hilton-Simpson’s admiring “modernity” and calling them polygamists, drinkers, men of low morals, and semi-civilized.⁸⁷ The Tetela objects that the Maes expedition sent to Tervuren were mostly drums.⁸⁸ The photographs of the Maes expedition formed much of the basis for subsequent colonial representations of the Tetela. Through these ethnographic photographs in particular, which received wide circulation in colonial publications, musical instruments and especially the trapeze-shaped drum, became the Tetela’s most common visual identifier. Consistent with the colonial state’s efforts at rationalizing labor and quelling potential unrest, these photographs helped transition metropolitan perceptions of Batetela from “gun to drum,” or from savage, violent and unpredictable mutineers, to another tribe under the protection of a paternalistic colonial state. Some examples follow:

⁸⁴ “Papiers Maes.”

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Heusch, Luc de, “La Beauté est ailleurs. Pour en finir avec les masques tetela. Notice d’histoire et d’ethnographie nkutshu,” in *Objets-signes d’Afrique*. (Ghent, Belgium: Snoek-Ducaju & Zoon, 1995). Heusch is among the more recent commentators in a long line of anthropologists and colonial administrators who did not attribute aesthetic sensibilities to the Tetela.

⁸⁷ “Mission Ethnographique du Dr. J. Maes au Congo (1913-1914). Rapport sur les travaux de la mission ethnographique”, November 1913, D61 (3854) N. 23, Archives Africaines. Ministère des Affaires Etrangères. Brussels, Belgium.



Figure 35: Philippe Tits and Joseph Maes, *Joueurs De Flûte Batetela*, b&w photograph, 1914, Ethnography Section, Royal Museum for Central Africa.

⁸⁸ Ibid. "Inventaire de la caisse n. 143. 909 Deux mailloches du tamtam n. 910 provenance des BATETELA. 910 Tamtam provenant de la région des Batetela."



Figure 36: Philippe Tits and Joseph Maes, *Musiciens Du Sankuru*, b&w photograph, 1914, Ethnography Section, Royal Museum for Central Africa. Published in *Le Mirroir du Congo belge*, 1929.



Figure 37: Philippe Tits and Joseph Maes, *Féticheur Batetela*, b&w photograph, 1914, Ethnography Section, Royal Museum for Central Africa. Published in *Le Mirroir du Congo belge*, 1929.

Unlike Torday or the German anthropologist Ferdinand Georg Frobenius, who also traveled to the Congo and wrote about the Tetela, Maes was Belgian as well as a high-level employee of the Congo Museum. I now turn to a brief history of this key colonial cultural institution, and in particular to its photographic cataloguing procedures.

Archiving, Cataloguing, Disseminating, Recycling

In 1909 the Colonial Ministry's Service of Photographic Documentation (Service de Documentation Photographique du Ministère des Colonies) was transferred, with its existing photographic collections, to the Museum of the Belgian Congo at Tervuren, where it formed the basis for a new section. The old classification system one finds in the museum's ethnographic photo archive today has been preserved. Archivists and curators mounted photographs on special identificatory cards and made notes to go with them. These notations often characterized an image as belonging, for instance, to categories of "material culture" or "musical instruments." The photograph below (Figure 38), for instance, was placed in the category of "Weaving. Manner of dress." In conjunction with the transfer, the Ministry of Colonies directed that all Congo photographs, whether "ethnographic" or not, be organized in a new section, which would combine the offices of "photographic services" and "dissemination to the public," thereby linking photography to the task of educating a larger colonial public.⁸⁹

Upon his return to Belgium, Maes resumed his duties at the Congo Museum, cataloguing objects and publishing scholarly articles, and indeed overseeing the museum's ethnographic archiving practices. After World War I, Maes oversaw another reorganization of the Congo Museum's ethnographic section. Photographs were thence to

be used as forms of documentation, placed in relationship with the ethnographic objects in the museum's collections, and made available to the public:

With a view toward placing this new resource within the immediate reach of all, we, at the ethnographic service, have begun the systematic analysis of the 35,000 photographic images located in the Museum's ethnographic section. All images deemed to be of interest from an ethnographic point of view will be duplicated, analyzed, and classified in our section according to our three classification criteria: ideological, ethnic, and regional.⁹⁰



Figure 38: De Roy, *Femmes Batetela, retour du marché.*

After the Batetela rebellions and the slow transition to civilian administration in Sankuru, the Tetela emerged as a “tribe,” and, started appearing in the mirror of the Belgian Congo’s self-presentation. The title of the book, *Le miroir du Congo belge*,

⁸⁹ Maes, “L’ethnologie de l’Afrique centrale et le Musée du Congo Belge,” 181.

strongly suggests such a reflexive process. Anthropologists and ethnographers were invested in this as well: the maintenance of the customary was their principal scientific framework. The museum made the photographs it collected from administrators and ethnographers in the field available to various projects of colonial dissemination in books and publications like *L'Illustration Congolaise*, or *Le Miroir du Congo Belge*. The latter was a large-format illustrated book containing texts, many photographs, and some drawings. Certain texts are in the style of touring or travel literature, others are “ethnographic.” An essay by Maes discusses “*Art Nègre*” as an ethnographic and aesthetic category. A long essay entitled “Le Kasai” by Paul Fontainas presents a survey of the region as a kind of catalogue. The essay is a self-conscious presentation of a *mélange* of past and present, “customary” and “extra-customary,” of “tribes” who live side by side, and of natural beauty and natural resources, as so many elements that characterize the modernity of Belgian Kasai.⁹¹

Bompas, Batempas, Pania-Mutombo, endless processions of villages and towns; ‘alla podrida’⁹² of Baketes, Batetelas, Balubas, Bakwampatu, Arabisés, Angolais,

⁹⁰ J. Maes, “L’Ethnologie de l’Afrique centrale et le Musée du Congo Belge,” *Journal of the International African Institute* 7, no. 2 (April 1934): 181.

⁹¹ Pierre Daye, J.M Jadot, and et. al., *Le miroir du Congo belge* (Bruxelles: Éditions N.E.A., 1929).

⁹² “*Olla podrida* is a Spanish stew made from pork and beans and an inconsistent, wide variety of other meats and vegetables, often including chickpeas, depending on the recipe used. The meal is traditionally prepared in a clay pot over several hours. It is eaten as a main course, sometimes as a single dish, and sometimes with ingredients separated (i.e., meats from the rest, or liquids from solids).” “Olla Podrida - Wikipedia, the Free Encyclopedia”, n.d., http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Olla_podrida. And from “Merriam-Webster Online”, n.d., <http://www.merriam-webster.com/cgi-bin/mwwodarch.pl?Jun.06.2010>. “In 1599, lexicographer John Minsheu wanted to know ‘from whence or why they call it olla podrida.’ Good question. No one is sure why the Spanish used a term that means “rotten pot” to name a tasty stew, but there has been plenty of speculation on the subject. One theory holds that the name developed because the long, slow cooking process required to make the stew was compared to the process of rotting, but there’s no definitive evidence to support that idea. It is more certain that both French and English speakers borrowed “olla podrida” and later adapted the term for other mixtures whose content was as varied as the stew. The French also translated “olla podrida” as “pot pourri,” an expression English speakers adapted to “potpourri.”

Basonge with their varying appearances, tattoos, hairstyles, make-up, gestures, and mannerisms of far greater diversity than is imaginable, but which are specific to each tribe, making them immediately distinguishable from one another, even by the most novice of colonial ‘greenhorns.’⁹³

And while the texts in *Le miroir du Congo belge* present colonial Kasai as a great bustling melting pot, where the Batetela are placed in a series of “tribes” (none of which the author judges or evaluates in relation to any other), with extremely specific distinguishing visual characteristics, the reader is told. The photographs in the book confirm the “fixing” roles of colonial characterizations. In particular, as concerns Batetela, books like *Le miroir* (especially) and publications like *L’Illustration Congolaise* often used much older photographs, sometimes as much as fifteen or twenty years old. For instance, Figure 39, found in today’s Royal Museum for Central Africa’s ethnographic section, was dated 1905 and credited to someone by the name of Kniteluis. Alexandre Marie Kniteluis, who joined the “Third Chasseurs à Pied” regiment just before turning sixteen, spent much of his career in the Congo, rising through the ranks of the Force Publique. He arrived in Lusambo in 1903 a Captain and a “Commissaire de District 2ème Classe,” and it was in this capacity that he took the photograph below.⁹⁴

⁹³ Paul Fontainas, “Le Kasai,” in *Le miroir du Congo belge* (Brussels, Belgium: Éditions N.E.A., 1929), 40–41.

⁹⁴ “Alexandre Marie Knitelius (ou Kniteluis)”, n.d., *Registre Colonial*, Archives Africaines. Ministère des Affaires Etrangères. Brussels, Belgium.

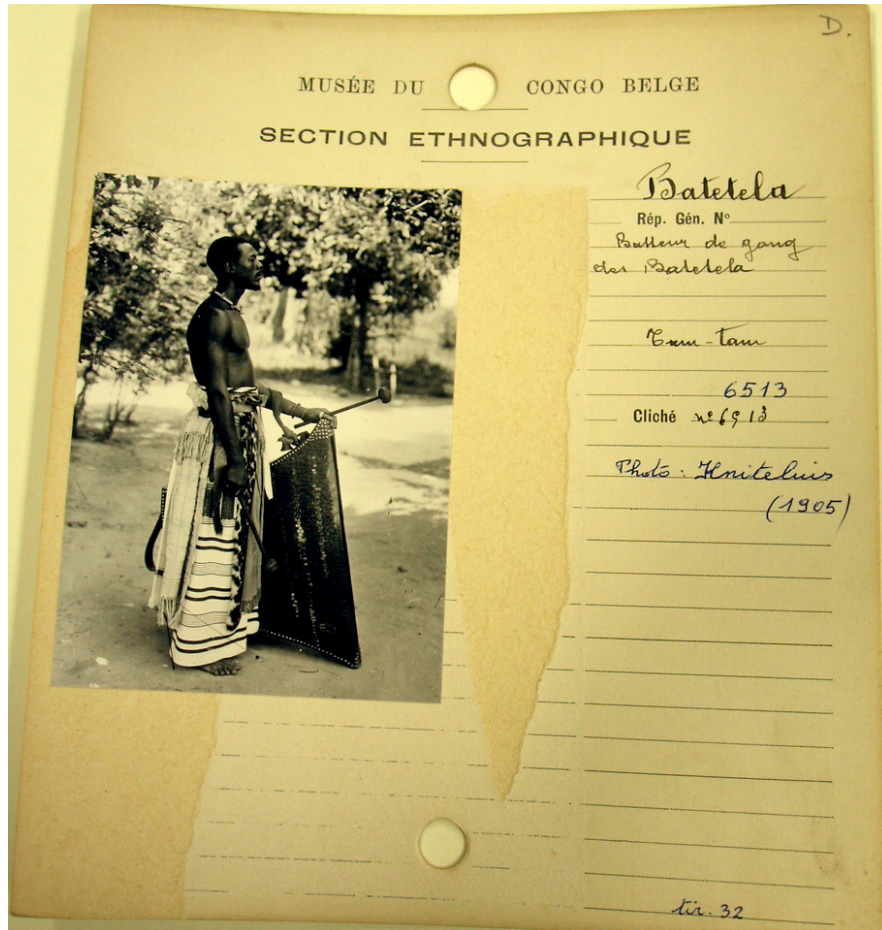


Figure 39: Kniteluis, *Bateur de gong des Batetela*, b&w photograph, 1905, Ethnography Section, Royal Museum for Central Africa.

Taken in the early 1900s, the image, “Bateur de gong des Batetela” (Figure 39) had an especially visible trajectory and appeared in many publications in the 1920s. In addition to being printed in *Le miroir du Congo belge*, it was prominently featured in the “Exposition Caoutchouc” exhibit held in Paris in 1926.⁹⁵ It was also reproduced in *Illustration Congolaise* in 1928, with the caption: “Batetela (Sankuru) un bateur de gong.” It also appeared as a postcard, with a caption reading “Congo Belge. Joueur de

⁹⁵ I have not, thus far, been able to locate the catalog from that exhibition. However, the cover illustration of Marc Poncelet’s book, *L’invention des sciences coloniales belges* shows a photograph of the cover of the “Caoutchouc” exhibit catalog, where the Batetela “gong beater” appears.

tantam.”⁹⁶ Why was this image so well liked? Was it both “honorific” and “repressive?”⁹⁷ The image quality is high, and the textures are rich. It seems to have been well printed from a good original plate. The man is attractive in a classical sense, richly dressed, charismatic even. But he has been made to stand in profile, and his face is almost expressionless. A stiffness to his bearing and a sloping of the shoulders, suggest anger, perhaps emotional absence as a way of coping with what was demanded of him, a sense of tedium, as well as some amount of fatigue occasioned perhaps by the amount of time it took to stand still while the photograph was being taken.⁹⁸

⁹⁶ “Carte postale: Avant 1911.” Editeur: Nels, pour les Missions de P.P. du St. Esprit de Gentinnes.

⁹⁷ Sekula, “The Body and the Archive.”

⁹⁸ In Carl De Keyzer and Johan Lagae's book, *Congo Belge En Images* (Tielt: Lannoo, 2009), Patricia Hayes makes the point that early photographic techniques forced subjects to stand very still for several minutes while a plate was exposed to the light. There is no doubt that this contributed to the experience of being photographed as a colonial subject as potentially oppressive and uncomfortable. Also see Mack, “Documenting the Cultures of Southern Zaire,” 64.



Figure 40: Ibid.

Images of actual contemporary Congolese life, rather than photographs taken in the 1890s and early 1900s, also appeared in books and magazines, but they usually self-consciously showcased modern native life in extra-customary centers around mining areas.⁹⁹ In Sankuru, there were no large urban areas and no serious mining industry. Sankuru was quite rural, and in fact, its relationship to industrial modernity was the “labor drain” of young people going to seek employment in Luluabourg (Kananga) and in the mining districts of Katanga. In the 1950s, however, there were towns and *évolués* clubs, or “cercles” in Sankuru.¹⁰⁰ It is likely, therefore, that using images from the early twentieth century in interwar publications accorded better with a presentation of “customary” or “ethnographic” registers, as so many colonial wishes that placed rural Batetela in timeless folkloric registers. Using older photographs in more recent publications that sought to educate colonial publics about the colony was of course a way of denying “coevalness” to the “other.”¹⁰¹ In a purely theoretical sense, photography “others” simply by making an image; this is its simplest “mirroring,” indexical aspect and, somewhat uniquely, creates the contradictory emotional effects of distance *and* intimacy. Early colonial photographs produced a timeless “other.” A photographed subject is “timeless” by definition because the photographic image captures and freezes *one* moment in time, but early colonial photographs also showed time as having been captured in a “past tense.” These colonial photographs upheld the idea of timelessness by naturalizing ethnographic-colonial discourses of “archaism” or atemporality. This

⁹⁹ There is no doubt that even a category of the “modern native” was caught up in the contradictions and confusions of colonial epistemologies. Yet, ethnographers, policy-makers, journalists, and museum curators still adhered to the dichotomous categories of “tribal” and “modern” to write about the Congo.

¹⁰⁰ “Activité des cercles. Province du Kasai,” *La Voix du Congolais*, August 1956.

recycling of early twentieth-century images continued into the post-World War II era.

The colorful children's collecting cards that came with certain alimentary products (Leibig soup, for instance) in the 1940s and 1950s were often pastel illustrations based on the same ethnographic Tervuren photographs.

Taken in 1914, Figure 35, Figure 36, and Figure 37 (above) were reprinted in the 1929 *Miroir du Congo belge*. Below are a number of examples of photographs recycled, copied, and reused, from the 1910s to the 1940s.

¹⁰¹ Johannes Fabian, *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes Its Object* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983).



Figure 41: Pierre Joseph Florent De Roy, *Groupe de Batetela*, b&w slide, 1898, Ethnography Section, Royal Museum for Central Africa Reprinted in *Le miroir du Congo belge*, 1929.



Figure 42: De Roy, *Femmes Batetela. Type coiffure. Lualaba Kasai*, b&w slide, 1898. Reprinted in *Le miroir du Congo Belge*. 1929.



Figure 43: De Roy *Femmes Batetela*, b&w slide, 1898. Reprinted in *Le miroir du Congo belge* (1929).



Figure 44: Joseph Maes and Philippe Tits, *Batetela. Instrument Musique. Coiffure.*, b&w photograph, 1914.



Figure 45: "*Indigènes Batetela Des Environs De Lusambo, Porteur D'un Énorme Tam-tam En Forme De Cloche Aplatie*, Illustration, n.d., History of the Colonial Era, Royal Museum for Central Africa.

The 1940s pastel drawing (Figure 45) was based on a photograph (Figure 44), taken in the late nineteenth or early twentieth century and printed in *Le miroir du Congo Belge*.

In a visually saturated world, science articulated with the logic of exhibition,¹⁰² with the commercial and political interests of a colonial party/lobby in the private and public sectors (with much overlap among them), the “cultural” and educational work of missionaries, and the curiosity/scopic desires of new kinds of *spectators*¹⁰³ came together

¹⁰² Tony Bennett, *The Birth of the Museum: History, Theory, Politics* (London ; New York: Routledge, 1995).

¹⁰³ For discussions of the (pre)cinematic spectator, the mass-consumer of culture, and the nature of spectatorship at the threshold of technological revolution at the turn of the twentieth century, see Vanessa R. Schwartz, *Spectacular Realities: Early Mass Culture in Fin-de-siècle Paris*

to form a particular universe of colonial visibility. One of the ways that the Free State and later Belgian Congo's presented what it considered its modern, humanitarian progressive actions in the colony, through such historically significant moments as the "Arab War" and Batetela rebellions, was by constructing the Batetela as a warlike tribe, contained and disciplined by the civilizing strictures of colonial governmentality. Colonial publications printed photographs of "civilized natives," a rubric that indexed the fundamental impossibility of such a notion.



Kabinda. — Une famille de civilisés.

Figure 46: *In Kabinda - a civilized family*, b&w slide.. In *Le miroir du Congo belge* (1929).

It is not clear why these four women, standing around a white baby, are called a "civilized" family. Perhaps it is because they are domestic servants, or because they are

(Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998); Vanessa R Schwartz and Leo Charney, eds., *Cinema and the Invention of Modern Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995); Siegfried Kracauer, *The Mass Ornament: Weimar Essays* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1995); Judith R Walkowitz, *City of Dreadful Delight: Narratives of Sexual Danger in late-Victorian London*, *Women in Culture and Society* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992).

able to stand confidently at attention while being photographed. The *Illustration Congolaise* reversed the terms of “civilization” vs. its opposite by using the racist, pseudo-scientific, anthropological vocabulary of “type,” and once again denying colonized subjects any possibility of shared modernity.



Figure 47: *Types one meets in Bas-Congo.* In *L'illustration congolaise*, 1926.

Science and Propaganda

Until independence, the Museum of the Belgian Congo at Tervuren operated as the main site for processing, presenting, reprocessing and representing a range of materials related to the colony. Matthew Stanard argues that Tervuren sacrificed “science” in favor

Also, Tim Barringer and Tom Flynn, *Colonialism and the Object: Empire, Material Culture, and the Museum* (Psychology Press, 1998).

of “imperial propaganda” and that the “Musée du Congo Belge was beset by inherent contradictions because of its dual goals: the pursuit of objective science and the promotion of a particular ideology – imperialism.”¹⁰⁴

Nonetheless the *Musée du Congo Belge* at Tervuren became central to producing “scientific” knowledge and presenting it to growing publics in the first half of the twentieth century.¹⁰⁵ It functioned as the absolute centerpiece of the Belgian Congo’s cultural apparatus from 1897, date of its initial conceptualization, until the 1950s, when the official public relations and colonial propaganda agency Inforcongo took over much production of colonial information and visibility. In a publication designed to summarize the activities of the Congo Museum since the late 1890s, Joseph Maes, then director of ethnography, reminded his readers of Colonies Minister Adolphe Renkin’s January 1910 decree stipulating that all objects coming into Belgium from the Congo and concerning the economic, scientific, moral, and political history of the colony, were to be deposited at Tervuren, in the care of a general public repository or depot, to be labeled “Museum of the Belgian Congo.” Renkin’s decree divided the museum into five sections, four and five being respectively, “ethnography” and “photographic documentation and popular dissemination” (*vulgarisation*).¹⁰⁶

The “Congo Museum” grew out of the Brussels-Tervuren World exhibition of 1897 and was completed in 1904.¹⁰⁷ A French-style “palace” modeled on Paris’s Petit Palais, and set in a grand park at the edge of the immense Fôret des Soignes a few miles outside

¹⁰⁴ Stanard, *Selling the Congo*.

¹⁰⁵ See the work of Maarten Couttenier, *Ibid*.

¹⁰⁶ Maes, “L’ethnologie de l’Afrique centrale et le Musée du Congo Belge,” 181.

¹⁰⁷ “Africamuseum,” n.d.,

<http://www.africamuseum.be/museum/about/histobuildings/museum/about/histobuildings/histom>

of Brussels, it was meant to be grandiose, and it certainly lacks in subtlety; like many of Leopold II's buildings in Brussels, its visual and spatial presentation sought to connect the identity of nation to empire. The museum building is set in a "Versailles" type French garden, and looks out onto a large open vista, with the Soignes Forest below.



Figure 48: *Parc de Tervuren. Musée du Congo. Antwerp Ethnographic Museum*

useum. Its name changed to Royal Museum of the Belgian Congo in 1952, and once more, in 1960, to the Royal Museum for Central Africa, commonly referred to as "the Tervuren museum."



Figure 49: Tervueren. Palais du Musée du Congo. Antwerp Ethnographic Museum

For the World Exhibition of 1897, to be held in Brussels and Tervuren, Leopold II ordered the construction of a “Congo Pavillion,” which provided the seed for the future Congo museum. The guide to the Congo exhibit, the *Guide to the Section*, was edited by Charles Liebrecht and Theodore Masui, both of whom were once military officers. The exhibition’s curators chose a sculpture by Charles Samuels entitled “Vuakusu-Batetela Protects a Woman from an Arab” for the “Region de l’Est” room – a significant choice since space was limited. This sculpture represented the most important aspect of Free State humanitarianism in the Congo: the fight against the “Arab” slave trade. The description reads as: “Vuakusu-Batetela defending a woman against an Arab. The

Batetela are bold and powerful warriors, who were able to successfully stand up to the Arabs.”¹⁰⁸



Figure 50: Charles Samuels, *Vuakusu-Batetela Protects a Woman from an Arab*, Bronze sculpture, 1895, Exhibition Hall, Royal Museum for Central Africa.

In this case, the Batetela were positioned as heroes of the colonial conquest and its humanitarian endeavors, and not the violent mutineers of 1895 and 1897. In the text and in the visual domain of the sculpture, are two important elisions. First, the suggestion that the Batetela “stood up to the Arabs” is a clever twist of the fact that Ngongo Leteta (and his Batetela) went over to the Free State in 1892, severing ties with their former Zanzibari patrons. The role of Batetela as slave and ivory hunters has been erased. Second, the sculpture makes use of the registers of dress/undress to serve up, once again, the tired trope of “the noble savage.” Here the Batetela is a tribesman dressed in a cloth and wielding a spear, in blatant contradiction to the visual, textual, and historical record. As I

¹⁰⁸ Charles Liebrechts, *Guide de la section de l'Etat Indépendant du Congo à l'exposition de*

discussed earlier, and as drawings and photographs from the field show, “Batetela” were many times men who combined European and African styles, and wore hats and shoes, and carried guns; and Batetela were also sometimes women who dressed in luxurious cotton cloths.

Because they were key to the glorification of the Belgian enterprise in the Congo and because there was a military closeness between Free State officers and “their” Batetela, there was always an effort to separate “good” Batetela from “bad” or excessively “unruly” ones in books and articles, and in the colonial visuality produced during the Free State years. A visitor to the World Exhibition could also read the following in *The Guide de la Section de l’Etat Indépendant du Congo à l’exposition de Bruxelles-Tervuren en 1897*, regarding the Free State’s “eastern region”:

The VUAKUSU, who are also known under the name Batetela, and who call themselves Vuafuluka, [...] span the area from the Sankuru to the Congo-Lualaba. Delcommune says the following about them, “These independent and warlike natives are one of the loveliest races I have seen in Africa. They are tall and well-proportioned. Their eyes are nicely set; their noses are straight, and their physiognomy is most agreeable. They wear their hair long and create elaborate coiffures.” Paul Lemarinel is less enthusiastic [...] Gillain, however, says [Batetela women] are the most beautiful negresses he has ever encountered [...] The Vuakusu, who adore ornaments, create hairdos filled with cowries, and belts with skillfully woven pearls; they own huge hats ornamented with red parrot feathers. Among the Vuakusu and the Vurua, chiefs punish their subjects with mutilations.¹⁰⁹

Bruxelles-Tervueren en 1897 (Bruxelles: Impr. Veuve Monnom, 1897), 159.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 166. Full text: “Les VUAKUSU, que l’on connaît aussi sous le nom de Batetela et qui s’appellent eux-mêmes des Vuafuluka, appartiennent aux peuplades si intéressantes des Vuasongo et comprennent les Basongo-Meno, occupant le pays depuis le Sankuru jusqu’au Congo-Lualaba. Delcomune dit, en parlant d’eux : ‘Ces indigènes indépendants et belliqueux constituent une des plus belles races que j’ai vues en Afrique. Ils sont grands et bien faits, les yeux sont bien fendus, le nez aquilin, la physionomie est des plus agréables. Ils portent les cheveux très longs et en font des coiffures savamment édifiées.’ Paul Lemarinel n’est pas aussi enthousiaste ; il convient que les hommes ont les traits réguliers, mais ajoute qu’ils ont l’air stupide avec leurs grosses lèvres entr’ouvertes, laissant remarquer l’absence des incisives supérieures. Pour les femmes, on trouve les mêmes différences d’appréciation ; cependant Gillain les dit êtres les plus belles négresses qu’il ait rencontrées ; il est du reste probable que certains villages sont plus favorisés que les autres et que leurs habitants peuvent causer meilleure impression aux voyageurs. Toujours est-il que les Batetela ou plutôt les Vuatetela sont des

Written in about 1897, after the first Batetela rebellion, and perhaps before or during the second one, the preceding text sets-up Free State officers' testimonies and remarks as the lighthearted observations of tourists. In the preceding chapter, I discussed the "Arab War" photographs of Dhanis and other Free State officers similarly as belonging to a touristic mode of representation. Intended for a public visiting a world exhibition, which mediates between visitor and explorer, the text interpellates the colonial exhibition-goer and at the same time presents the explorer as spectator first and foremost.

Interwar Visualities: Memory and memorialization

If, in 1910, official Belgian pronouncements sought to distance themselves from the brutality of the Leopoldian era,¹¹⁰ from 1920 on, a noticeably more comfortable colonial nation-state would incorporate the King Leopold II and the Free State era into a positive progressive discourse of history, with a representational scheme where the "past" was foundational and heroic (history), and the "present" (modernity, education, infrastructure, technology) built the "future" (history in the making).¹¹¹ Increasingly after the First World War, the Free State appeared in books and magazines as a pioneering era, the

guerriers hardis et vigoureux et qu'ils ont su résister victorieusement aux Arabes. Les riches VUARUA habitent au Sud de la Lukuga ; ils appartiennent à la grande nation des Baluba. C'est une population fort belle et vaillante, très dense, ayant toutes les dispositions artistiques de leurs congénères du Kassai. Cameron s'étend longuement sur les qualités de ces indigènes qu'il a visites du temps où ils formaient le royaume du fameux Kasongo don la résidence était a Kilemba près du lac Kasali. Les Vuakusu, qui raffolent des ornements, se font des coiffures chargées de cauris, des ceintures de perles adroitement enfilées ; ils possèdent d'immenses bonnets de plumes rouges de perroquets. Chez les Vuakusu et les Vuarua, les chefs punissent leurs sujets par des mutilations."

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

cradle of progressive colonial masculinity, purged of all atrocity and misconduct. The pictures I consider below make this argument, and Batetela were key to its construction.

The Congo Free State era contained in fact two somewhat distinct moments. The first, from about 1885 to 1895, has been cast as “heroic” in Belgian colonial historiography.¹¹² The weekly magazine, *L’Illustration Congolaise*, first published in 1924, was an initially an exclusively visual magazine and an example of industrial interwar colonial modernity in Belgium, focused intensely on a “present-future” axis. But once in a while it devoted a few-page photographic spread to celebrating the (past) heroes of the Free State.¹¹³ Much characterization of the early Free State era rested on the military fetishization of dead European soldiers who perished in the Congo, whether in battle or from disease, and for the causes of, variously or simultaneously, civilization, ending “barbarism” and “slavery,” loyalty to the King, etc.

The promotion of this particular past as heroic was a morbid performance in the constitution of an iconography of portraits of the dead, for instance, as so many *mementi mori*, and in the construction, in the metropole and in the colony, of monuments to fallen Belgian heroes in the Congo. Stanard argues that the construction of monuments to dead and martyred Europeans in the Congo, particularly those who perished in the “Arab War,” accomplished some of the work of unifying Belgium culturally and politically in

¹¹¹ Stanard notes a similar recalibration of the Free State past in the interwar era. See, Matthew G. Stanard, “Selling the Empire Between the Wars: Colonial Expositions in Belgium, 1920-1940,” *French Colonial History* 6 (2005): 163.

¹¹² For instance: Ligue du souvenir congolais, *À nos héros coloniaux morts pour la civilisation: 1876-1908*. (Bruxelles: Ligue du souvenir congolais, 1931); Gochet and Gochet, *Soldats et missionnaires au Congo de 1891 à 1894*.

¹¹³ The image-driven early editorial direction was revised after the first year, and the publication began to include text. *L’Illustration Congolaise* increasingly expressed the interests of Belgian mining companies. Within its pages are many gems of modernist industrial photography, where industry itself is presented as heroic.

the early twentieth century.¹¹⁴ In *Le Miroir du Congo belge*, the Congo Free State is recast as inhabiting the present, it is suggested, as an invisible cemetery, which only the dead or the very old can see (or know about): “A graceful vision, this Lusambo, with its epic memories that only the very old still know anything about.”¹¹⁵ The “epic” memories of Lusambo are Dhanis’s “Arab Campaign,” Ngongo Leteta’s joining the Free State, and the anti-Batetela rebel campaigns. The past lurks in the shadow of the present.

I now turn to some of this visual evidence.

¹¹⁴ Ligue du souvenir congolais, *À nos héros coloniaux morts pour la civilisation: 1876-1908*; Gochet and Gochet, *Soldats et missionnaires au Congo de 1891 à 1894*.

¹¹⁵ “Vision gracieuse ce Lusambo, aux souvenirs épiques que seuls connaissent encore les très anciens.” Matthew G. Stanard, “Selling the Tenth Province Belgian Colonial Propaganda, 1908-1960” (Indiana University, 2006).



Figure 51: *La Belgique honore ses grands morts.*¹¹⁶

¹¹⁶ Pierre Daye, J.M Jadot, and et. al., *Le miroir du Congo belge* (Bruxelles: Éditions N.E.A., 1929), 40.



Figure 52: La Belgique Honore Ses Grands Morts Coloniaux. Aux Morts De L'expedition Dhanis. In L'Illustration Congolaise, July 1, 1930.

Figure 51 and Figure 52 come from the pages of a 1930 issue of the *Illustration Congolaise* and document the Europeans who perished in the anti-Batetela campaigns. For if the “Arab War” was a “positive” early moment in the Free State’s history, a war that caused comparatively few European casualties, the Batetela rebellions were another story altogether. These campaigns, with some interruptions, lasted many years, had Europeans officers and their colonial armies chasing and fighting rebels all over Kasai, Maniema and Katanga, and drove up the numbers of European dead to levels that seemed shockingly excessive, especially when fighting against a “savage” foe.

In Belgium, the story of Joseph Lippens and Henri De Bruyne, who died at the hands of Tippu Tip's son Sefu on the Maniema side the Lomami in the opening month of the "Arab War," was narrated as a colonial morality tale. Their story was presented to the public as a particularly poignant military tragedy of love and sacrifice, and was memorialized in monuments and commemorative funereal ceremonies, which in turn were photographed and printed in publications and books. The narrative, with occasional modifications, went as follows: Lippens was a Free State officer and the "Resident" (representative of the Free State) at Kasongo, Tippu Tip's former stronghold. Ngongo Leteta and his Batetela men decided to side with the State. A furious Sefu took Lieutenant Lippens and Sergeant De Bruyne hostage, and marched, in a threatening gesture, on the Lomami river from Kasongo. In an attempt to pressure the Belgians into giving up Ngongo Leteta, Sefu forced De Bruyne to write another Belgian officer, Scheerlink, serving under Dhanis and camped on the Sankuru side of the Lomami, that De Bruyne and Lippens would both be executed if the Free State refused to hand over Ngongo Leteta.

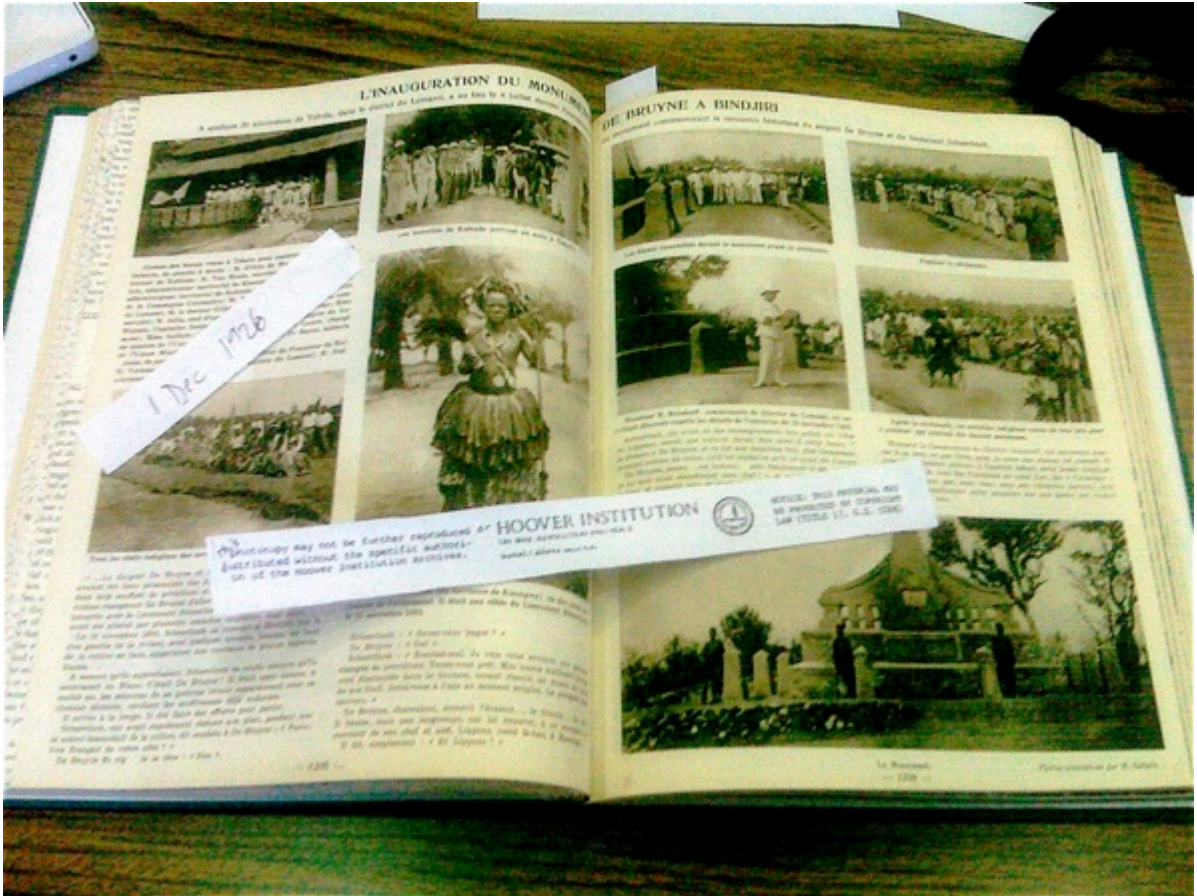


Figure 53: *L'inauguration Du Monument à De Bruyne à Bindjiri*. In *L'Illustration Congolaise*, December 1, 1926.

De Bruyne also wrote Scheerlink that Lippens was very ill and dying. The Lomami river at Ngandu (where Ngongo Leteta’s headquarters were located) is only a few hundred feet wide. Scheerlink communicated (some say wrote, others say that he shouted over to the opposite bank, as the “Arabs” were said to not understand French) to De Bruyne that he could easily escape, and proposed a plan whereby De Bruyne would swim across, and a rescue canoe would be launched while the (loyal) Batetela soldiers shot at the opposite banks to cover the escape. But, although Henri De Bruyne was a fine swimmer, so the story goes, because he had given his word, he refused to abandon his dying friend (his superior officer).



Figure 54: "Le Monument," *L'Illustration Congolaise*, December 1, 1926.

The story of Lippens and De Bruyne, one of the opening acts in the “Arab War,” is also a Batetela story, because of course, it was about Ngongo Leteta who, Sefu perceived, defied his authority. In fact Sefu and Ngongo Leteta had a very difficult relationship. Ngongo was Tippu Tip’s favorite retainer (his ally, assistant, collaborator, and client in later years), while Sefu was the Zanzibari merchant’s son and heir. Sefu envied and disliked Ngongo Leteta, and often sought to “put him in his place.”¹¹⁷ Thus Ngongo’s 1892 “defection” to the State put Sefu in a state of rage. Tippu Tip, in his recollections, remembered advising his son to proceed with caution.¹¹⁸ Ngongo Leteta may have been the *immediate cause* of the opening of hostilities between Zanzibari and Free State in 1892. The episode memorialized as “the story of Lippens and De Bruyne” was actually a

¹¹⁷ See chapter 1: the episode, told by Wissmann, of Ngongo’s humiliation at Sefu’s hands.

¹¹⁸ Bontinck, *L’Autobiographie de Hamed Ben Mohammed El-Murjebi Tippu Tip (ca. 1840-1905)*.

contest between Ngongo and his Batetela men, on one hand, and Sefu and the “Arabs” on the other. Colonial visual and textual narratives about the “Arab War” promoted the “Batetela” to a rank of “trusted” allies, while simultaneously sidelining Ngongo Leteta’s role as their leader. Ngongo Leteta was executed in 1893, and his heirs were exiled (one of his sons was taken to Belgium) and dispossessed of their political inheritance.¹¹⁹ Perhaps this is also one reason that no actual photograph of Ngongo has ever been found.

The black and white photograph above (Figure 54) lends a forlorn air to an incongruous, seemingly enormous, built structure in an “empty” landscape; the photograph seeks a kind of solemnity and shows the monument as guarded only by a handful of Force Publique soldiers. Certainly the military history of the Free State was marked by the category of the Force Publique soldier. The narrative of the “history” of the Free State – as a foundational discourse – relied on the Batetela. It was constructed with and through them, through their existence as a particular group of colonized individuals.

After World War II, Belgian companies, such as Liebig, Superchocolat Jacques, or Astra, the vegetable oil manufacturer (of Huileries Anversoises), began to insert image cards on the history, economy, and ethnography of the Belgian Congo into their products. This was meant to be a series of simple, illustrative, vignettes giving families, and children in particular, something to collect, talk about, and, presumably, learn from. Lippens and De Bruyne were also part of the history told to children. Images like Figure

¹¹⁹ “Succession de chefs. Chefferie des Batetela (disparue). Succession du chef Gongo Lutete.”, n.d., AIMO, Archives Africaines. Ministère des Affaires Etrangères. Brussels, Belgium. Also see, Olela Engombe Asui, *L’Administration coloniale et la question de la succession de Ngongo Leteta au Sankuru (1893-1956)*, Les Cahiers du CEDAF (Bruxelles: Centre d’étude et de documentation africaines, 1991).

57 could be obtained by purchasing pre-prepared soups, sauces, coffee, chicory, or tobacco products from various firms.



Figure 55: "Lippens et De Bruyne" (front) .J.L. Huens and Vanderkelen, *Collection "Nos Gloires,"* Illustration and photo-engraving process, n.d., History of the Colonial Era, Royal Museum for Central Africa.

In Figure 55, the white officer, Scheerlink, is at the center of the dramatic narrative as he yells out to De Bruyne on the opposite bank.¹²⁰ But the Batetela (on the left) are alert, armed, and waiting in the wings. Scheerlink, the Belgian officer, and the Congolese foot soldiers are, importantly, *working together*. These pictured Batetela were the troops that the Belgian officers who took part in the colonial conquest and later wrote memoirs and accounts, called "elite," and praised highly for being most *like* a modern army (if still untrained and given to "headstrong" independence). These "naïve" images are sanitized

¹²⁰ It is not clear why Scheerlink's shirt looks as though he was attacked by a wild animal. There are no such tales in the historical sources. However, the torn shirt only adds an intrinsic quality to the Belgian officer's "heroism," extending to all Free State Belgian officers.

versions of the deep ambiguities that “Batetela” signified for the actual Free State military officers, administrators, and traders who operated in Kasai, Maniema, and Province Orientale at the turn of the twentieth century, and who later wrote about their experiences. There was another side to the Batetela, one connected with the violence of the Free State, which European writings emphasized more willingly before it became the “prehistory” of the Belgian Congo.¹²¹

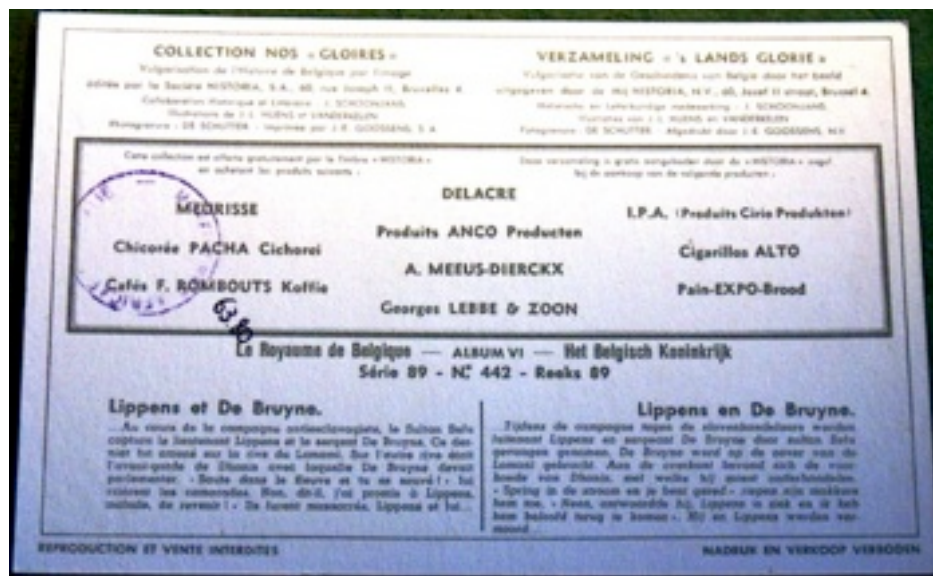


Figure 56: "Lippens et De Bruyne" (back). Ibid.

¹²¹ Chapter one considers these issues in greater detail.



Figure 57: "L'Etat Indépendant du Congo"(front). Ibid.

<p>COLLECTION NOS « CLOIRES » Vulgarisation de l'Histoire de Belgique par l'image éditée par la Société HISTORIA, S.A., 60, rue Joseph II, Bruxelles 4. Collaboration Historique et Littéraire : J. SCHOONJANS Illustrations de J.-L. HUENS et VANDERKELEN Photographure : DE SCHUTTER - Imprimée par J.-E. GOOSSENS, S.A.</p>		<p>VERZAMELING « 'S LANDS GLORIE » Vulgarisatie van de Geschiedenis van België door het beeld uitgegeven door de Mij HISTORIA, N.V., 60, Jozef II straat, Brussel 4. Historische en Letterkundige medewerking : J. SCHOONJANS Illustraties van J.-L. HUENS en VANDERKELEN Fotografure : DE SCHUTTER - Afgedrukt door J.-E. GOOSSENS, N.V.</p>	
<p>Cette collection est offerte gratuitement par le Timbre « HISTORIA » en achetant les produits suivants :</p>		<p>Deze verzameling is gratis aangeboden door de « HISTORIA » zegel bij de aankoop van de volgende producten :</p>	
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<p>Le Royaume de Belgique — ALBUM V — Het Belgisch Koninkrijk Série 88 - N° 438 - Reeks 88</p>			
<p>L'Etat Indépendant du Congo. ...En 1885, la Conférence de Berlin décida que le centre de l'Afrique deviendrait l'Etat Indépendant du Congo, sous la souveraineté totale de Léopold II. Celui-ci obtint de la Chambre des Représentants l'autorisation de régner sur ce vaste pays, quatre-vingts fois plus grand que la Belgique. Il nous le légua en 1908...</p>		<p>De onafhankelijke Congostaat. ...In 1885 besloot de Conferentie van Berlijn dat het centrum van Afrika de Onafhankelijke Congostaat zou worden, onder de volstrakte soevereiniteit van Leopold II. Deze verkreeg van de Kamer der Volksvertegenwoordigers de machtiging om te regeren over dit uitgestrekt grondgebied dat tachtig maal zo groot is als België. Hij zal het ons in 1908 overmaken...</p>	
<p>REPRODUCTION ET VENTE INTERDITES</p>		<p>NADRUK EN VERKOOP VERBODEN</p>	

Figure 58: "L'Etat Indépendant du Congo"(back). Ibid.



Figure 59: *Guerriers Modernes*, Illustration, n.d., History of the Colonial Era, Royal Museum for Central Africa.

In the 1890s and up until the 1910s “Force Publique” may still have meant “Batetela” in metropolitan and colonial minds. Later visual reprocessings of that era maintained these meanings in an alternative temporality. The illustration above, “The Congo Free State” (Figure 57), comes from a series called, “Our glories.” The image is very simple. It makes a connection between past and present. The emblem of the Congo Free State is the Force Publique soldier. Within the temporality that the image recalls, this Force Publique soldier is, in very fundamental ways, Batetela. The image, however, depicts a tension between two temporalities presented simultaneously. The first, the 1890s, occupies a position slightly more in the foreground of the image. It is meant to be a “literal” scene from the field. The military campaign has been rendered bucolic for a Belgian viewership: a campsite in the country on a summer night. The soldiers, protectors and shepherds of the State and its (sleeping?) officers, are staying awake in front of a well-built fire. One of the soldiers stands guard; he is ready with his rifle and bayonet. The Force Publique soldiers/Batetela are looking into the distance – the future. On the

right side of the image, in the “sky,” and on a plane slightly beyond the figure of the Batetela, is a map of the Congo. This is the *Belgian Congo*, with additionally, the mandate territories of Ruanda and Urundi. It is a very basic map, meant as an allegory, depicting the Congo’s main rivers, and the Belgian Congo’s principal cities – its “glories” – which only exist, in the “present” because the Batetela/Force Publique soldiers nurtured their pasts.

Conclusion

In 1910s, 1920s and 1930s Belgian Congo, Tetela transformed into subjects of tradition and authenticity in relation to colonizing processes of indirect rule and the production of customary spaces, processes that betrayed (in the eyes of the Tetela who tell these histories), or perhaps re-routed, the initial possibilities of a “Batetela” modernity connected to their roles as elite soldiers and, for a short time, privileged partners of an early Free State imperialism.¹²² The long era between the Belgian nation-state’s *reprise* of Leopold II’s “Free State” and the Second World War involved gradual productions, inventions and reinventions, of “traditions” and “ethnicities” (on one hand), and the growth of an industrial and agro-industrial machine articulated to the Belgian state that required African labor to operate.¹²³ An expansion, as well as an ongoing production of Batetela ethnic and social identities took place between 1907-09 and 1940. In what follows I examine a number of colonial images that, alongside texts, contributed before the Second World War, to a further elaboration of Tetela selves.

¹²² How “Belgian” was Leopold’s Congo Free State? The question seems secondary in light of so much bureaucratic and personnel continuity on the ground, and in light of the fact that the State was there to extract resources. How this would be done was a different question.

One legacy of the Zanzibari and Free State eras was that “Tetela” acquired a number of meanings and associations, from specific to vague, from constrained to capacious. In the “ethnographic era” that followed Belgium’s takeover of the Congo, new meanings began to emerge, based on the observations and “*enquêtes*” (inquests) conducted by colonial administrators, ethnographers, and their assistants on the ground.¹²⁴ This post-*reprise*, pre-war period saw new efforts to produce knowledge about Tetela and other “tribes.” At the same time, numerous semantic slippages began to “fix” ambiguity and paradox into “Tetela” meanings.

According to Gann and Duigan, after 1914 service in the Force Publique for Europeans provided fewer opportunities for adventure and quick advancement, and limited younger officers to logistics and administration.¹²⁵ Batetela soldiers felt the pressure of an increasingly exploitative and bureaucratic colonial state well before 1914, as the narratives of the 1895 and 1897 rebellions demonstrate. After the State created the Force Publique, the Batetela auxiliaries of the Belgians, who earlier had been relatively free-agents, became subjected to the military bureaucracy of the Free State and *Congo Belge*, to their abusive officers, ethnographic surveys and photographing practices, and to the new and ongoing elaborations of categories that would eventually lead to administrative concepts of “customary” and “extra-customary.”

The Tetela continued to chart a difficult course within the new colonial order. In their estimation, the prestige acquired at the time of the colonial conquest was later

¹²³ For a thorough discussion and a history of Belgian colonial capitalism, see Auguste Maurel, *Le Congo, de la colonisation belge à l'indépendance* (Paris, France: Maspéro, 1962).

¹²⁴ Delcourt, *Les Mongo du Sankuru*. This book was based on a report by Dallons and Delcourt, two administrators who were the first Europeans to write down the oral tradition of Mongo, Akutshu, and his sons Watambulu, Ngandu and Djovu, such as they heard them.

denied to them by a bureaucratic colonial state. But it was never quite forgotten and manifested itself in the ways Tetela related to the state, the representatives of cotton and coffee concerns, and to missionaries as well as other colonized subjects.

Over the course of the first two or three decades of the twentieth century, the Batetela went from being known as warriors or soldiers, or as “warlike,” to being represented in metropolitan colonial publications or exhibitions within a customary ethnographic register as a “tribe” with a trapeze-shaped drum. Musical instruments replaced guns. The former entered colonial visual worlds; the latter got tucked into oblique textual, and only rarely visual, references. The former sets of representations and constructions were direct; the latter implied.

Many Tetela think of their forebears as having been *soldiers* who chose to throw their lot in with the Free State, with “the new.” These were modern identities that mobilized new technologies (firearms), types of dress (uniforms) and effectiveness in combat through Western military discipline and strategy. Batetela saw themselves as distinct from other “native” groups in colonial Congo. In their own estimation, Batetela may not have been quite “natives” during the early days of the Free State.¹²⁶ It had been their job, for instance, to enforce Free State labor regimes and to protect Whites. As people entrusted with guarding the colonial regime, they had advantages and a high, if begrudged, status.¹²⁷ Many early photographs show Batetela “big men” displaying

¹²⁵ Lewis H Gann and Peter Duignan, *The Rulers of Belgian Africa, 1884-1914* (Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 1979), 69.

¹²⁶ The Batetela were “natives” in European estimations, of course. However, their position as middles during the Free State administration turned them into something else; perhaps “not quite” natives. A systematic study of how early colonial texts refer to different Congolese persons and groups may demonstrate this subtle difference in status.

¹²⁷ Dhanis’s thoughts and recollections about “his” Batetela soldiers notwithstanding, colonial documents reveal that Europeans “suffered” the Batetela placing themselves above other

symbols of wealth and prestige, with wives, children, and other household members.

They are often wearing Western clothing: trousers, hats, jackets. For such Batetela men and women, being photographed offered a way to use a new technology and harness it to prestige, and to relationships with colonizers.¹²⁸

Visual associations between Tetela and Force Publique soldiers in the post-mutiny era flicker in and out of evidence. Colonial visual production *about* the Batetela rebellion is limited to a “ghostly” register: to memorializing dead Europeans in portrait photography and public monuments. In this discursive world, connections between “Batetela” and the Force Publique were sometimes more and sometimes less explicit.

This chapter has considered ways colonial knowledge in co-production with certain Tetela actors reorganized the meanings of “Batetela” from a social category of warriors and assistants to the white man, to a “tribe” in a defined geographical area, specifically Sankuru. It has particularly attended to the place of visibility within these redeployments. During the post-reprise era and up to the Second World War, the term “Batetela” acquired more meanings, none of which became really dominant over the others, or really fixed. Multiplicity, fusion, and contradiction continued to attach themselves to the ways Tetela think of themselves individually, collectively, historically, and ethnographically.

Two core meanings of “Batetela,” began to diverge in the *reprise* and post-*reprise* years. The “Batetela” of the early Free State were part of visual-historical narratives that staged imperial conquest, the “Arab War,” and the fight against the slave trade. The

colonized people. Yet, Free State Europeans both feared and needed the Batetela. The latter also offered colonizers a means of disavowal by blaming the violence of the Free State era on them.

¹²⁸ Jewsiewicki and Geary (separately) discuss these political-aesthetic dynamics with regard to other colonized groups in the Congo. See, Jewsiewicki, “Peintres de cases, imagiers et savants populaires du Congo, 1900-1960. Un essai d’histoire de l’esthétique indigène (Wall-Painters, Folk Scholars and Image-Makers in the Congo, 1900-1960.” And Geary, *In and Out of Focus*.

Batetela were also those who rebelled against the colonial order in 1895 and 1897. Another meaning concerned Batetela as a tribal name, one that contained the Zanzibari and Free State auxiliaries, but encompassed a great deal more. As might be expected, Tetela were never shown brutalizing or even supervising an exploited labor force of rubber collectors. Did these darker aspects inhabit in oblique or invisible ways, meanings produced about Tetela in Europe? They certainly haunt contemporary Tetela self-understandings and memories. When, as I mentioned in chapter 1, the immigration agent at Lodja told me about his research on the role of the Batetela as oppressors of forest people, he was speaking à propos of what I had told him about my own work and purpose in Sankuru. Yet the agent's words were also directed at Papa Rudolphe, whom he knew to be a savanna Tetela. Other interlocutors in Sankuru, in the savanna usually, told me things like "we, Tetela, have never been slaves; we enslaved other people."

From the 1910s to the Second World War, colonized Congolese created new selves and identities, some publicly performed, others carefully hidden. They implicated themselves in forms of resistance and accommodation given the possibilities available to them. Colonial knowledge, about "tribes," "traits," and histories, was plural. It was produced, circulated, and debated in the Congo and in the metropole, with greater or lesser degrees of scientific pretention, by colonials, businessmen, missionaries, journalists, administrators; and by Congolese clerks, cooks, servants, and soldiers, and increasingly teacher, catechists, drivers, and skilled industrial workers. This knowledge came in many forms and was endlessly exchanged, interpreted, re-exchanged, and reinterpreted.¹²⁹ Photographers and photographed participated in the exchange and

¹²⁹ Many have written on the mutual constitution of metropolises and empires: Antoinette Burton, Catherine Hall, Ann Laura Stoler, and Simon Gikandi. Kwame Anthony Appiah continues to

construction of colonial knowledge; but the photographs, by their very nature, escaped rhetorical and discursive strategies or agendas. They inhabited the tensions and ruptures of colonial knowledge.

In 2008, Kiomi and neighboring areas of Katako Kombe territory's forest zone had not yet been rebuilt after the Rwandan invasion at the turn of the twenty-first century. At the *Paroisse*, we sat, ate, and slept inside a ruin. When children went to school, they listened to lessons surrounded by crumbling walls and by the vines that had squeezed themselves into fissures and gaps. This was the poorest area I saw in Sankuru. It was a difficult place, which seemed like it had dropped off the side of the world. During the Free State era, it was located in Leopold II's old Crown Domain ("Domaine de la Couronne"), where rubber collection took place at the turn of the twentieth century. Some weeks later, when I was in Lubefu in the south, the parish priest and my host, Abbé Marcel, talked to me about Kiomi, mentioning its location in Leopold II's old domain. Marcel thought the area was very rich in resources. He thought there might be oil there too.

In Kiomi, the young idealist priest, Abbé Antoine, was more or less in charge. As a Catholic priest, he had the moral authority and the education that elicited respect, and people solicited his opinion on most things. Being connected to the Tshumbe Diocese, Antoine also had access to resources; he could, for instance, decide to rebuild schools,

pursue a similar line of thought in his writing about the postcolonial twenty-first century. See in particular, Antoinette Burton, *Empire in Question: Reading, Writing, and Teaching British Imperialism* (Duke University Press, 2011); Stoler and Frederick Cooper, *Tensions of Empire: Colonial Cultures in a Bourgeois World* (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1997); Catherine Hall, *Civilising Subjects: Metropole and Colony in the English Imagination, 1830-1867* (Oxford: Polity, 2002); Simon. Gikandi, *Maps of Englishness: Writing Identity in the Culture of Colonialism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996); Kwame Anthony Appiah, *The Ethics*

etc. During the so-called second Congo war at the end of the 1990s, Kiomi saw a lot of violence between government troops and “Mai-Mai,” who in this part of Congo, were basically deep-forest people. The Mai-Mai, people told me, committed atrocities¹³⁰ against the villages of the Hamba, the *Arabisés*, the Mbole, and the Asambala,¹³¹ all of which are closer to the road and in a slightly more mixed eco-system, although they are still in Katako Kombe territory, and still very much in the forest. In this instance, Tetela “families” as they are sometimes called, or groups, such as Hamba and *Arabisés*, whose relationships have been historically difficult and are now tense, got together and fought the Mai-Mai back into the forest. Abbé Antoine, a “vernacular historian” or perhaps just a historian in his own right, collected and wrote local histories, stories, and testimonies.

of Identity (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005); Kwame Anthony Appiah, *Cosmopolitanism: Ethics in a World of Strangers* (W. W. Norton & Company, 2007).

¹³⁰ This was the word they used.

¹³¹ See introduction and chapter 1.