



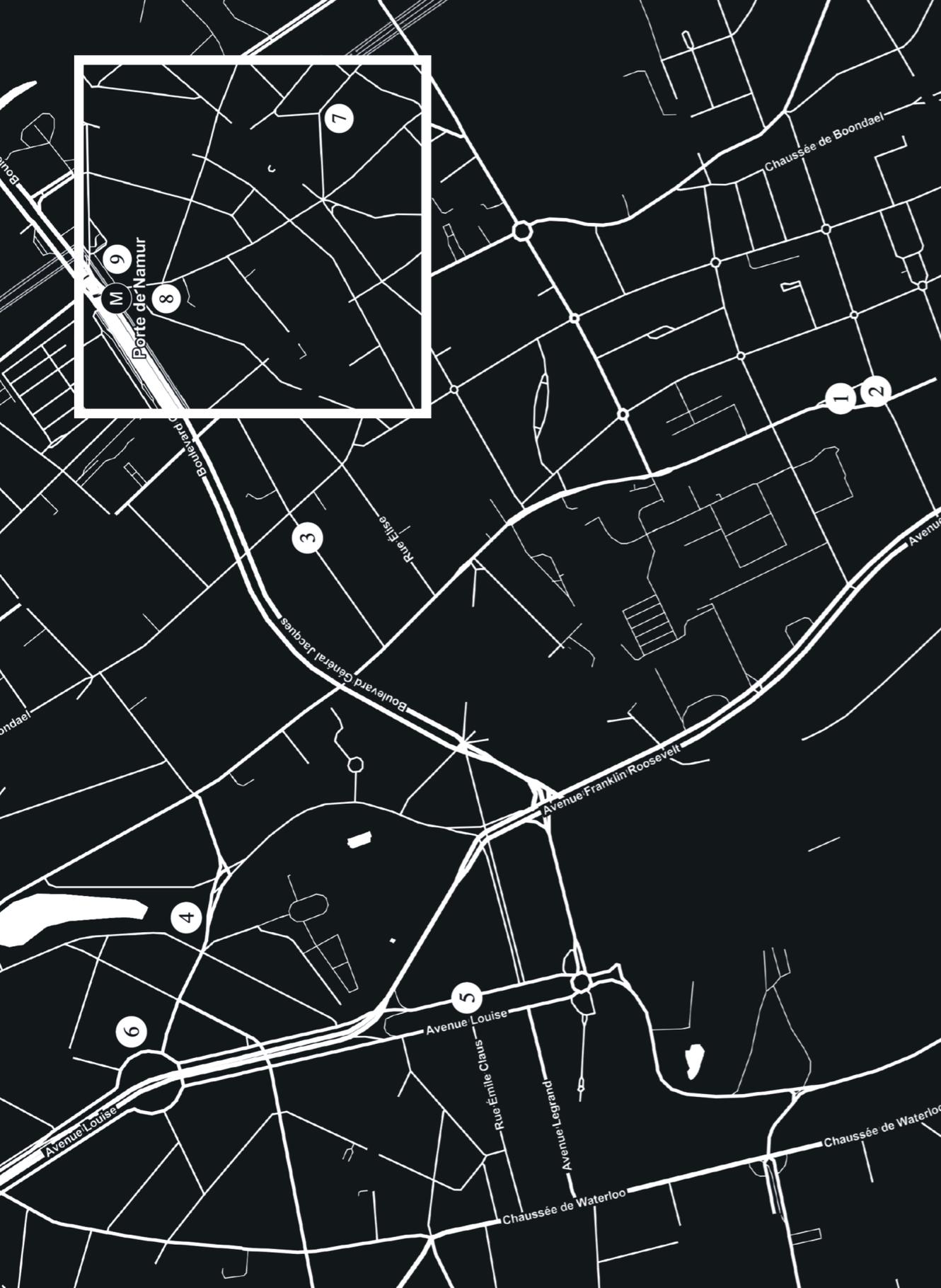
Arthur Dupagne belonged to a tight-knit group of artists—together with Thomas Vinçotte, Charles Samuel and Arsène Matton—with close links to the colonial administration. Deeply indebted, from an artistic perspective, to his time spent from 1927 to 1935 in the Kasai region of Congo as an engineer for lumber and mining conglomerate Forminière, Dupagne's work defined itself by its obsessive focus on the African body as seen by white men, of which the *Tireur à l'arc* is one of the most public, and controversial, examples. Inaugurated in 1962, two years after the Congolese independence, the bronze statue's stereotypical imagery—exaggerated muscular features, menacing stare, suggestive posture and threatening demeanour—contributed towards reinforcing the founding colonial principle of Congolese as a primitive people in need of “civilisation.” The very fact that such an overtly racist statue was installed, let alone approved, by local authorities as recently as 1962, making it one of the latest monuments bequeathed to the Brussels public space, ^{Curto, 2018} points to the enduring legacy left by Leopold II's colonising myth, one anchored in the belief of a people's superiority over another, and how profoundly established these colonial beliefs were in the upper echelons of Belgian society. Furthermore, the statue's location on the periphery, on a relatively quiet crossing in an otherwise non-descript neighbourhood, reveals the colonial administration's cunning ability to exploit every little fringe of the public space in its zeal to impose a view of the Congolese as the mysterious “Other.” In this respect, the importance of the statue's location, a short walk from Place du Roi Vainqueur, whose many residential buildings welcomed colonial returnees after Congo's independence, should not be overlooked, as it suggests a calculated need on the part of the administration to usurp the public space in order to coddle returnees in colonial nostalgia. Dupagne himself died in 1961, meaning he never actually saw the statue exist in the public space. That being said, he did enjoy considerable success during his lifetime, his work in high demand both from colonial administrators as well as gallerists. As such, he remains best known for two works: the *Henry Morton Stanley* statue in Kinshasa as well as his *Bantu couple*. The former was controversially financed in a public-private partnership to the tune of 8 million Belgian francs, with half that amount provided by Belgium and its colony and the rest financed by private benefactors. ^{Compagnie des Bronzes, La Libre Belgique, 1951} The latter, his *Bantu couple*, created for and exhibited during *Expo 58*, remains one of his most well-known pieces on the international art market, part of a 300-strong body of work. In the end, however, Dupagne's work, and the *Tireur à l'Arc* in particular, must be remembered as one that reduced and exploited the Congolese form to further Leopold II's colonial ideology.

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Ixelles :

Congolese traces

and tributes .



Despite the many colonial imprints dispersed throughout its territory, Ixelles—home to Matongé, the capital’s historically Congolese and, to a larger extent, Afro-descendant district—distinguishes itself for the rare presence of colonial counter-narratives and Congolese memorial markers in its public space. The commune’s commemorative plaque to Paul Panda Farnana, Freddy Tsimba’s statue made using reclaimed bullet casings as well as Chéri Samba’s mural all serve, to a certain extent, to correct the Congolese invisibility which the wider Brussels public space stands guilty of. In this sense, and despite still having a long way to go in completely eradicating the presence of colonial traces from its streets and squares, Ixelles is one of the few communes in Brussels having taken certain steps to dismantle the hold colonial narratives continue to exert on the public space at large, working towards creating a public domain which reflects the historical memories and cultural affinities of a people all too often erased and expunged from the public discourse.



Paul Panda Farnana continues to be celebrated for his foundational work in Congolese activism, his Pan – African militancy and his abject rejection of the colonial memorial discourse



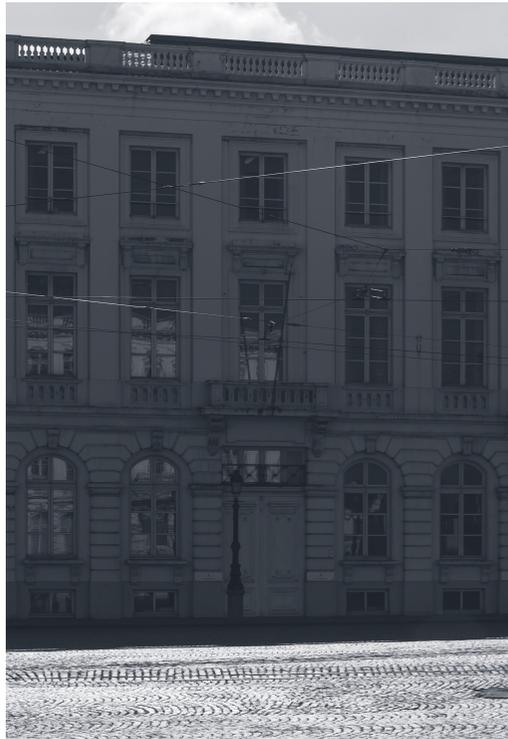
7 Commemorative Plaque to Members of the African Administration



The star embossed at the top of this plaque references the Congo Free State flag's yellow star, a symbol meant to evoke "civilisation" being brought to the "darkened" African continent. Its inscription, "Homage to Members of the African Administration that served in the Belgian Congo as well as Ruanda-Urundi," employs the colonial spelling of Urundi which, in its most basic form, means "The other Ruanda" and which today is called Burundi. Setting aside the plaque's vagueness (what, exactly, is an African administration?) and ambiguity (the dates confusingly allude to different periods of Belgian rule with no clear explanation as to their context), its semantic aberrations and historical oversight signify a coloniality that continues to dominate the public domain.

○ Place Royale (1000). The plaque is affixed to the façade of the Hôtel Bellevue.

8 Ministry of Colonies



The Ministry of Colonies was created in 1908, when the Congo Free State transitioned from Leopold II's private fiefdom to one governed by the Belgian parliament under its new appellation, the Belgian Congo. The ministry, which replaced the International African Association's administrative wing, was initially located in offices spread out across Rue de Namur, Rue Brederode and Rue de la Pépinière, right behind the Royal Palace, only to take up its new offices in the Hotel Bellevue in 1925, where it remained until 1962. ^{Vanhove, 1968} Here again, the ministry's very spelling, employing the plural form of colonies, suggests how much the Belgian state considered Leopold II's colonial activities an after-thought. At the time of the ministry's creation in 1908, Belgium only had one colony per se—Congo, although one could argue that the Lado enclave qualified as such too—and it is only in 1916 that Rwanda and Burundi became Belgian protectorates, and never actual colonies in the legal sense of the term.

○ 7, Place Royale (1000).

9 Hotel Coudenberg and the Cercle Africain



Hotel Coudenberg, situated at the angle of Place Royale and Rue de Namur, is significant in that it was the location of the first colonial lobby group, the Cercle Africain, founded on 7th December 1887 by Albert Thys. ^{Defauwes, 2005} Part chamber of commerce, part stomping grounds for the colonial bourgeoisie—in addition to Thys, some of its members included the financiers Baron Brugmann and Baron Lambert ^{CMCLCLD, 2020} as well as Jules Renkin, Belgium's first Minister of Colonies—the Cercle Africain's main aims were to publish favourable colonial propaganda, constitute an African library of colonial references as well as establish courses of colonial preparation. It would go on to become the Union Royale Coloniale in 1912, moving to new headquarters on Rue de Stassart in Ixelles, and is today better known as the UROME, a colonial apologist association that continues to actively promote what it considers Leopold II's genius.

○ 5, Place Royale (1000).

10 Hotel Coudenberg and the Association for Colonial Veterans



Founded in 1928 by General Henry de la Lindi, the Association for Colonial Veterans, whose headquarters were in the Hotel Coudenberg, operated as an organism whose objective was to defend the interests of veterans having participated in the pre-Congo Free State era of colonisation. Positioning itself as an umbrella organisation intent on solidifying the social fabric that glued veterans together, ^{Juste, 2014} the association was relentless in its preservation of colonial memory, with its periodical, the *Bulletin de l'Association des Vétérans Coloniaux*, acting as something of a propagandist reference for colonial nostalgists. General Henry de la Lindi would remain the association's president until 1947, working tirelessly to ensure that what he considered the pioneering actions of early settlers were both celebrated and promoted in the Belgian public sphere.

○ 5, Place Royale (1000).

The first thing that strikes you when entering Brussels' Royal Museum of the Armed Forces and Military History is how outdated it is. Its cramped and crumbling galleries and display cabinets bursting at the seams with collections of military memorabilia—everything from emblems and weapons to commemorative busts, uniforms and other military textiles—that almost exclusively glorify white men in a curatorial context which, essentially, celebrates violence. Beyond its antiquated displays, it is the museum's reduction and relegation of Congolese contributions to Belgian military history as nothing more than a footnote that smacks of both wilful ignorance and systemic coloniality. Ultimately, it is further testament to how Eurocentrically biased the public space, of which a federally-funded museum is very much part of, is. As such, the museum's inclusion of Congo in its galleries amounts, essentially, to two passages. The first is a set of three cabinets, entitled "Arab campaigns, 1892–1897" that aims to present the Belgian military campaigns Leopold II initiated against so-called Arab traders in Congo. Other than the display's total lack of context, it is the museum's regurgitation of colonial-era terminologies (the "Arabs" were in fact Zanzibaris, and the only "massacre," as one note describes, that happened was that perpetrated by the invading colonial forces) and propaganda (the Belgian military men tasked with the first punitive expeditions in Congo were far from humanitarian heroes; to be sure, they were mercenaries in the pursuit of clear economic advantages: the takeover of the slave and ivory trades) that remains problematic, not to say anything of the three nameless statues laden with stereotypical imageries that dominate the section. The second is a lone mannequin meant to illustrate the Force Publique's Congolese contingent that participated in some of the most strategically-important battles of the 19th and 20th century. Given the considerable contribution these Congolese soldiers made alongside allied forces against the German army, as well as their non-negligible participations in battles throughout the world, from Tanzania, Cameroon and Zambia to Ethiopia, Somalia and Madagascar, Jacqui, Lierneux and Peeters, 2010 the very fact that just one mannequin—to put this into context, the United Kingdom and its colonies are allocated no less than eight cabinets—is dedicated to the Force Publique reinforces the quasi-invisibility imposed upon the memory of Congolese soldiers. Although these successful military campaigns, won on the back of the bravery of Congolese foot soldiers often conscripted against their will, resulted in tremendous diplomatic, territorial and reputational benefits for Belgium, their continued lack of recognition and remembrance remains yet another stain on Belgium's path towards true decolonisation, one which the museum, through the colonial narratives it recycles and reproduces, falls short of correcting.

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