

## Citation

Likaka, Osumaka. "Naming Colonialism: History and Collective Memory in the Congo, 1870-1960. Chapter 2. *University of Wisconsin*, 2009.

## Central Questions, word count-295

The author uses this second chapter of the book to explore the devastating consequences of Belgian colonialism on the Congolese village structure and traditions. Some of the central questions the author discusses are about the local economies. What effects did colonialism have on the local Congolese economies? How was the exploitation of rubber, cotton, and other resources destructive to Congolese people? The author explains the many changes that the Belgians made to the labor system to benefit themselves. How did the colonial government, and Belgian companies change the labor systems in the Congo? What were the labor conditions in the Congo? How were they paid, and what effect did that have on the local village economies? How was the role of women changed in villages? What was women's role under this new labor system? The author highlights how the colonial government's treatment of Congolese people created harsh prison systems. How did these prison systems come about? What were the conditions in these prisons, and how did it force change in the everyday lives of Congolese people? Why were they so critical in the establishment of the brutal Belgian control on the Congo region? The Belgian colonization saw the establishment of Christian missionaries who sought to change the traditions of local communities. Why did these missionaries seek to change marriage practices? Why did they try to stop polygamy? And what were the resulting consequences of their attempts to stop polygamy?

The author interweaves secondary sources and primary sources together to support their claim about the oppressive and destructive practice of colonialism, and resource extraction from the Congo. The author uses archival evidence from the Belgian colonial government to describe the behavior of the Belgian officers, soldiers, and company employees, as well as the Congolese people themselves.

Thesis, word count- 94

Belgian colonialism was a devastating and inhumane action that caused deep, lasting suffering for the Congolese people. The establishment of colonial companies that sought profit from the Congo imposed harsh labor conditions that caused poverty, malnourishment, and even death for its workers, and it damaged the local economies. The rubber extraction was particularly brutal. The introduction of Catholic missionaries from Belgium meddled in local marriage traditions and practices, passing laws to stop polygamy in attempts to increase the fertility rate but it only disrupted everyday life in villages all over the Congo, and overwhelmingly disadvantaged women.

Examples of evidence, word count- 787

Osumaka Likaka uses various colonial archives in supporting their argument about the devastating impacts of Belgian colonialism on the Congo. Many of the footnotes in the bibliography are from “AA Brussels” which denotes that the information comes from the “African Archives” of the Belgian government. Some of the other archives include “APO, Kasinga” which seems to be archives found within the Congo itself. There are many specific documents from both of these archives that report details on various labor conditions in the mines or railroads or just reports on the regions of the colony. Some examples include “

“Rapport d’inspection du territoire d’Ango,” 1938, A.P.O., Kisangani. 49,” ““Rapport d’inspection du Territoire de Dungu,” 1952, 24. 50.” and “Rapport d’inspection du Territoire de Buta,” 1954, 43. 51.” Likaka uses these quotes from various Belgian officers and employees to build an argument about the negative Belgian attitude towards the Congolese people.

There is a marked inclusion of oral histories, particularly the testimony of several Congolese survivors of Belgian colonialism. These testimonies include perspective on the brutal labor conditions under which the Congolese people suffered. According to the footnotes, the author even interviewed some of these survivors themselves.

Osumaka Likaka’s goal of the book is to argue there were terrible, devastating effects on the Congo in every aspect of the daily life of Congolese people. He uses archival evidence, along with other historians’ works to create a strong narrative which depicts the Belgian government as cruel, destructive, and self-serving. Belgians used the Congo to expand their own personal wealth, without investing and supporting the Congolese people. This chapter of Likaka’s book showcases the ways that the Belgians managed to disrupt the labor system, agricultural practices, and marriage traditions. This crippled Congolese people for decades. This new post-colonial narrative that Likaka and many other historians are now writing is critically important because it pushes back against the European narratives of colonization which glorify exploitation and death that have dominated the world for decades. In using the Belgian colonial archives themselves, Likaka can point out the failures of those archives, and the European attitudes they represent.

Likaka writes “Many witnesses observed that the collection of wild products not only interfered with food production but also “was done under conditions harmful to population growth.” Likaka uses quotes like this to underscore how the Belgian colonization was not just devastating to the

Congolese economies, but also the daily lives of the Congolese people. Likaka is pointing out that through the introduction of Belgian colonization there has been tampering with the labor system that caused damage to agriculture practices, and food supply. Those everyday things can have devastating and often deadly consequences when they are disrupted. Part of the quote was sourced from the Belgian archives. The document Likaka uses is called “Relèvement moral des indigènes, service de la justice” which translates to the “increasing morals of Indigenous people, serving of justice. This indicates that the Belgian attitude towards the Congolese people was racist and derogatory, but also that they had the intention of changing Congolese practices.

Another part of Likaka’s argument focused on how Belgian colonization and authoritarian power was built on the manipulation of the prison system. Likaka writes “a magistrate inspecting prisons in Niangara in 1949 observed, “Prisoners were whipped for sneaking women, making nightly noise and defecating inside prison cells.” Defecating inside prison became both a punishment and a reason to be whipped.” The decision to include this firsthand observation of a Congolese prison reinforces Likaka’s argument that the prison conditions were abismale and unsanitary. He explains that these dangerous practices made prisons unsafe, and contributed to very high death rates. The quote includes a sentence taken from a Congolese archive in Kisangani. There is a small difference in using a source from the Congo compared to a source from Belgium because this source was still created under the establishment of the colonial regime. However, the inclusion of Congolese archives is still important because it serves as a reminder that the Congo was an active participant in its history.

The third part of Likaka’s argument focused on Catholic missionaries who sought to disrupt marriage traditions, and how it negatively impacted women’s autonomy and health. He writes “Catholic missionaries campaigned for abolishing bridewealth, polygyny, methods of breast

feeding and long intervals between births, public expressions of indigenous religions, traditions, gender ideologies, and any institutions that shaped sexual behaviors and practices and social and biological reproduction they deemed obscene, repulsive, or immoral.” This quote has several sources attached to it under its footnote. They are all archival sources from the Belgian archives. Likaka uses them to demonstrate that the Belgian-backed Catholic Church attempted to destroy the daily livelihoods of the Congolese people.

Critiques/questions/reflections, word count- 203

There has been a long history of colonization throughout Africa, and the Congo is one of the most brutal examples. For so long, there has been a narrative perpetuated by old European attitudes and assumptions about African people, their traditions and their way of life. One of the strengths of this article is that it pushes back against those dated, and racist beliefs by including vast detail about the Belgians’ behavior and the Congolese traditions themselves, forcing people to rethink their perceptions of the Congo. In addition, the inclusion of African voices in African history has long been neglected. One of the other strengths of the article is that it includes many testimonies and stories from Congolese people about what they experienced under Belgian exploitation which is imperative when writing Congolese history.

The article raises interesting perspectives on the role of women in Belgian controlled Congo. While the details of labor exploitation are ones that have been slowly coming to light over the past few decades, the role of women as decision makers, contributors, and breadwinners is still often overlooked. Osumaka Likaka’s decision to include the way that women were impacted by colonization was interesting and contributed to the strength of his argument.