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The Badcock Collection from the Upper Congo

Barry Craig

South Australian Museum

Abstract

In 1932 the South Australian Museum purchased a collection of ethnographic items originating from the Congo River basin. These objects had been part of a Congo Exhibition in London in 1909 that was set up by missionaries to draw attention to the atrocities alleged to have been perpetrated by King Leopold's agents who were extracting first ivory, then rubber, from the Congo Free State. This paper describes the collection, the historical context of its creation, and its significance for Australians today.

Introduction

In February 1932, the Director of the South Australian Museum received a letter from Miss Irene Badcock of Woodville in Adelaide. Miss Badcock offered to sell "a collection of New Guinea and Upper Congo Curios and photos" and elaborated:

The Upper Congo curios were collected during 1908. The photographs were taken during 1909 & 1910. The curios were in the Congo Exhibition held in the Royal Horticultural Hall, Vincent Square, Westminster, London (Sept. 1909) at which the missionaries spoke of the atrocities which were taking place on the Upper Congo.¹

The people in the region between the Equator and the most northern extent of the Congo River were, in the late 19th century, termed the Balolo (more recently Mongo). Hence the evangelical Protestant mission operating in that area was called the Congo Balolo Mission, a subsidiary of the Regions Beyond Missionary Union. It was these missionaries who assembled the collection that was sent to London and which (or part of which) was subsequently obtained by Miss Badcock. It is not yet known how or why she obtained this collection of objects and photographs, though it is possible she became custodian to the material following a church program to promote public awareness in Australia of the atrocities she refers to in her letter to the Museum.

¹ Irene Badcock, Letter to the Committee of the Adelaide Museum dated 11 February 1932. State Records of South Australia, GRG19/17.

The Museum's ethnologist, Norman Tindale, viewed the collection and recommended its purchase. His assessment of the monetary value of the collection (African and New Guinean) was twice the £45 asked for and paid. There are 141 artefacts and 26 photographs (seven as stereoscopic images) in the Congo component of the Badcock collection. Dealing first with the artefacts, Table 1 shows the range of types. These are registered A.18340-18464, 18471, 73542-73556.

Table 1. The Badcock Collection in the South Australian Museum, Adelaide

Arrows	46	metal tipped/feathered; includes quiver of poison arrows
Spears	12	metal tipped
Knives	8	Includes wooden throwing knife; others metal
Executioner's swords	2	metal
Shields	3	woven cane
Hippo hide whip	1	'used in atrocities'
Razors	2	metal
Costume items	3	male and female
Body ornaments	29	male and female; for arm, leg and neck
Cloth, loom, fibre	6	includes two Bakuba raffia cloths
Domestic items	14	baskets, ladles, spoons, cup, gourd, headrest, comb, pipe
Musical instruments	9	includes slit gong, thumb piano, bells, ivory trumpet
'Currency'	3	brass wires; cowrie shells
Pigment (red)	2	camwood powder
Crude rubber sample	1	
TOTAL	141	

Most of the artefacts are from Baringa on the Maringa River, with a few each from Ikau, downstream on the Lulanga, a tributary of the Congo into which the Maringa flows; Mongo, on another tributary of the Lulanga; Chumbire; Kassa; and Baenga (see **Figure 1**). Some objects are merely labelled 'Upper Congo.' A few examples of the items in the collection will suffice for the purposes of this article. The 'executioner's swords' or knives and the *chicotte* or hippo hide whip, crude rubber sample and brass wire 'currency' will be referred to later. The shields (A.18438 - 18440) are typical of the Mongo groups of the Congo basin.² These were collected at Baringa on the Mongo River. They are of skilfully woven rattan with vertical stiffening rods and a vertical wood grip fastened at the rear (see **Figure 2**); the context photo published by Benitez and Barbier shows the man holding the shield (*gube*) armed with a spear so it is likely that the shield was used for protection from spears rather than arrows.

² See P. Benitez-Johannot and Jean Paul Barbier, *Shields. Africa, Southeast Asia and Oceania* (Munich/London/New York: Prestel, 2000), 80-81.

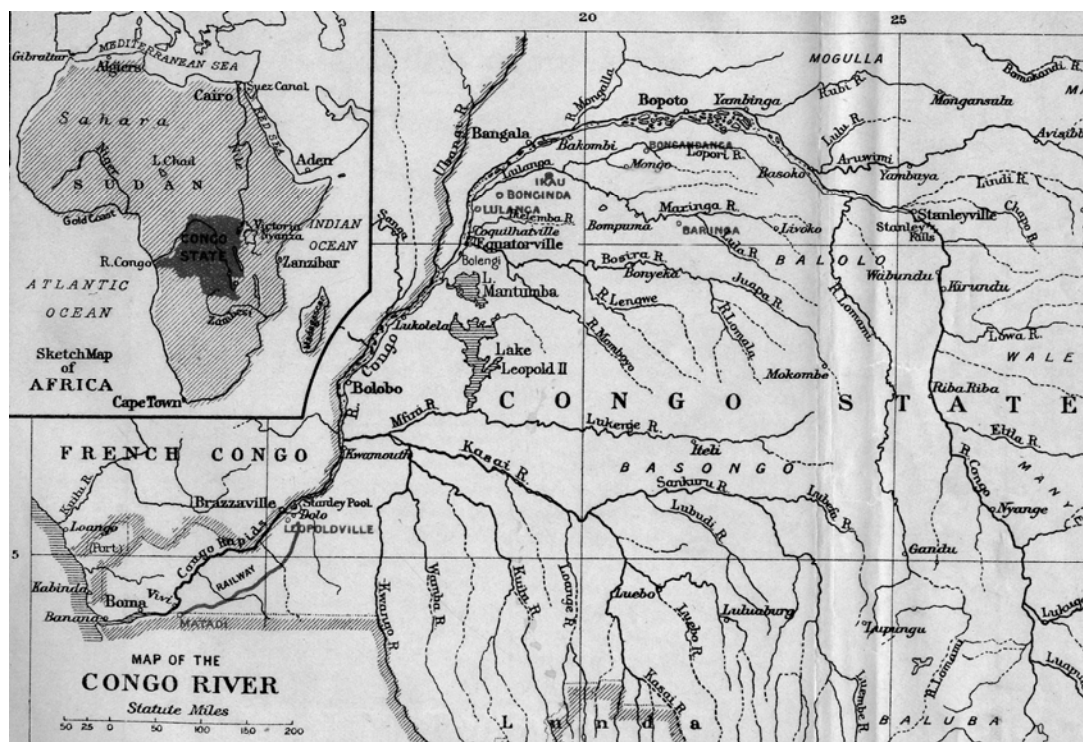


Figure 1. Map of the Congo Region. Source: Harry Guinness, “Not Unto Us”, 1908. Foldout map between pp. 104-105.



Figure 2. War shield (front and rear), 134 cm h. x 40.5 cm w. Baringa, Maringa River, Democratic Republic of the Congo. Badcock collection, 1932. South Australian Museum A.18440.

A wood headrest of simple form but with grooved cross-hatch designs all over is also from Baringa (see **Figure 3**) as is a slit gong and beater (see **Figure 4**). Piet Korse reports that the Mongo call the slit gong *lokole*.



Figure 3. Headrest, 17 cm h. x 18 cm w. Baringa, Maringa River, Democratic Republic of the Congo. Badcock collection, 1932. South Australian Museum A.18415.



Figure 4. Slit gong and beater, 38 cm l. x 15 cm diam. Baringa, Maringa River, Democratic Republic of the Congo. Badcock collection, 1932. South Australian Museum A.18361.

It is used to send messages using the two tone pattern of the language, “to call people together for meetings, to announce a visitor, the birth of a baby, someone’s death or the approach of an enemy . . . In order to transmit messages well, the drum is put on top of an anthill.”³

The loom with partly woven textile (A.18471 - **Figure 5**) is from Baringa and probably used by women. The cut-pile raffia cloth (A.18344 - **Figure 6**) is registered as ‘Upper Congo’ but is certainly an example of ‘Kasai velvet.’ The Kuba people made intricately embroidered prestige cloths of raffia (palm leaf fibre). Men weave the fabrics on vertical looms,⁴ then women ornament these textiles with geometric patterning of cut-loop pile. They were used as mats, skirts or loin cloths, for decoration, for funeral offerings, and sometimes as currency (*mbal*). They are still available today through tribal craft dealers and galleries.⁵

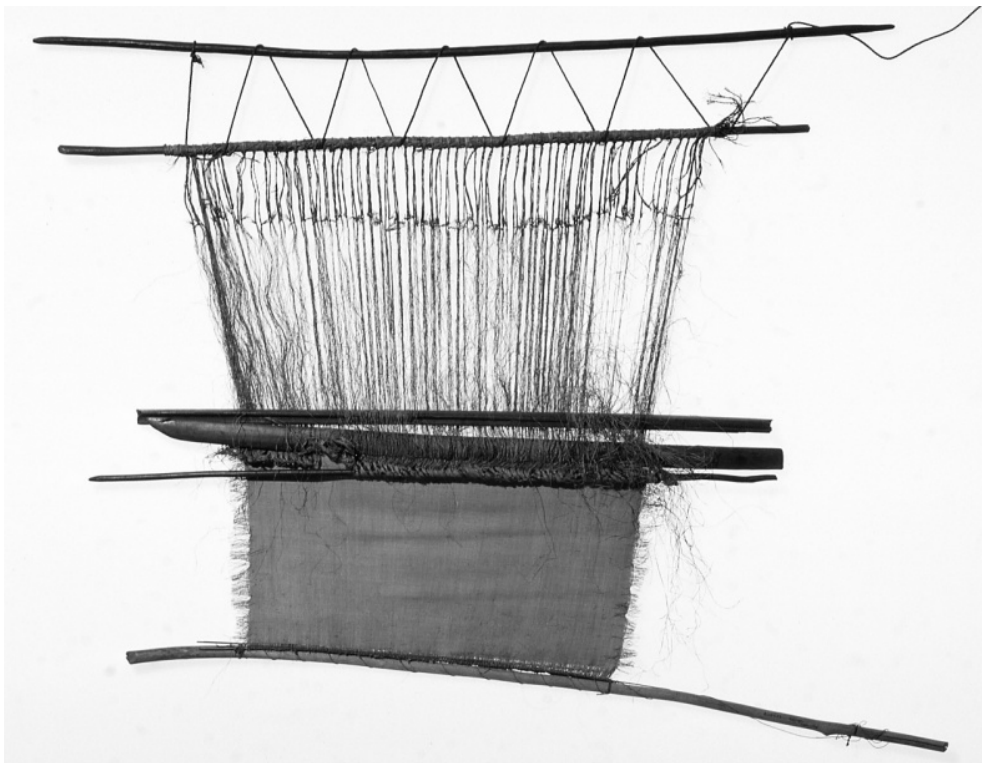


Figure 5. Loom and textile, c.120 cm x 120 cm. Baringa, Maringa River, Democratic Republic of the Congo. Badcock collection, 1932. South Australian Museum A.18471.

³ Piet Korse, *Spiritual Dialogue with the Bantu*, 2009, 40-43, www.lokole.nl/download/inculturation57.pdf (accessed 13 April 2011)

⁴ Museum of Modern Art, *African Textiles and Decorative Arts* (New York: MoMA, 1972), 161.

⁵ Marla Mallett, “Textiles and Tribal Oriental Rugs [Gallery] - Kuba Rafia Embroideries,” Atlanta, www.marlamallett.com/kuba.htm (accessed 13 April 2011); see also Museum of Modern Art, 155, 159, 163.



Figure 6. Raffia cloth, 65 cm x 65 cm. Ikau, Maringa River (but Kuba in origin), Democratic Republic of the Congo. Badcock collection, 1932. South Australian Museum A.18344

A large, heavy (10 lbs 12 ozs = 4.9 kilos) brass anklet (see - **Figure 7**) was a woman's ornament in the upper Congo. One of the stereoscopic photographs in the Badcock collection shows a smith hammering one of these anklets onto a woman's leg. Large brass ornaments were cast in clay moulds, polished and sometimes etched.

The photographs obtained from Badcock cover much the same region as the artefacts. They include several portraits of Ngombe, Bangala and Chumbire men and women illustrating facial cicatrisation, a few women engaged in making skirts and pots, one man demonstrating hunting with a net and bows and arrows, several children playing and several village scenes. One shows a missionary, 'Miss Field,' seated among a group of



Figure 7. Brass anklet, 12 cm h. x 15 cm diam. Baringa, Maringa River, Democratic Republic of the Congo. Badcock collection, 1932. South Australian Museum A.18393.

women; she is probably the Miss M. Field whose cameo image is among those of the deaconesses at the Regions Beyond Missionary Union's Doric Lodge.⁶

The Congo photographs were not taken by Miss Badcock as several of the images coincide with photographs kept in the Otago Museum in Dunedin, New Zealand, taken by Henry Whiteside, a Congo Balolo missionary. These photographs in the Otago Museum accompany artefacts collected by Mr D. K. McDonald, who was the captain of the Congo-Balolo Mission's steamer, *Livingstone*, between 1904 and 1918.⁷

⁶ Harry Guinness, *Not unto Us* (London: Regions Beyond Missionary Union, 1908), 46.

⁷ David Dorward, personal communication April 1999. Cameo images of Mr and Mrs Whiteside are included among those of 91 Region Beyond Missionary Union field staff in a foldout in Guinness between pages 186 and 187; a photo of the SS *Livingstone* is at page 111.

The McDonald collection (over 210 items) is half as large again as the Badcock collection and has a similar representation of material objects (see **Table 2**). Although a photograph in the Badcock collection shows pottery being made at Ikau on the Lulunga River, neither collection includes pots. An obvious lack for the Badcock collection is that it does not include a bow or a skin-headed drum (both of which are represented in the McDonald collection) but important for illustrating colonial domination is the Hippo hide whip and the ball of crude rubber in the Badcock collection, neither of which are represented in the McDonald collection. Both collections include copper and brass wires or rods, and brass rings, used for currency during the early colonial period. A note in the Otago Museum's register states that these trade items were introduced by Stanley.

Table 2. The McDonald Collection in the Otago Museum, Dunedin

Arrows; bows	23	metal tipped/feathered
Spears; harpoons	30	metal tipped, for hunting and warfare
Knives; daggers	34	metal; includes scabbards
Swords	1	metal
Shields	9	woven cane
Fighting stick	1	wooden
Razors	3	metal
Costume items	3	male and female
Body ornaments	17	male and female; for arm, leg and neck
Cloth, looms, shuttle	17	Cotton, raffia
Domestic items	52	baskets, bags, dishes, spoons, headrests, combs, mats, flywhisks, broom, beater, mortar & pestles, etc
Musical instrument	9	includes slit gongs, drums, rattles, ivory trumpets
'Currency'	1	brass rings and rods
Canoe items	6	model canoes, paddles etc
Miscellaneous	7	dog bell, ivory tusk, fish nets, mask, etc
TOTAL	213	

Thus these two collections should be considered together to increase the range of representation of the material culture of the region early in the century. It would also be worth considering an exchange of a few items between the two collections to improve representation in both museums and certainly to ensure both institutions hold copies of all the photographs. There may be components of the 1909 Congo Exhibition in other museums around the world but there is no evidence that the McDonald collection was part of that project.

Irene Badcock

Sybil Irene Winifred Badcock was the oldest of five sons and daughters of James Parker Badcock and Priscilla Ann nee Fatchen. Irene was born in 1889 at Broken Hill, New South Wales; thus when the exhibition took place in London in 1909 she was only 20 years of age and there is no evidence that she travelled overseas. The fact that some of the photographs were reported by her to have been taken in 1910 suggests that the collection and photographs may not have been sent to Adelaide until after 1910.

Ms Badcock lived with either her sister Muriel or her brother Melville most of her adult life; none of the three siblings married. Melville is listed in the Sands & McDougall Adelaide Directory as a music teacher and it is believed by some members of the family that the sisters also gave music lessons.⁸ Irene Badcock died in 1972, aged 83 years. So far, no documents have been located that might throw further light on how she came into possession of the collection. A search of Adelaide newspapers for the period since 1910 has so far failed to locate any reference to an exhibition of the material in Adelaide in support of missionary activity in the Congo.

Historical Context of the Collection

The letter by Badcock to the Museum locates the collection geographically and historically to the northern part of the Congo Free State around the time when King Leopold II handed over his control of the territory to the Belgian Government in November 1908, whereupon it was renamed Belgian Congo.

The events leading up to and following the takeover of the Congo by the Belgian government have been extensively documented and analysed.⁹ However, I will need to provide at least a sketch of the historical context of the collection to proceed to a consideration of the question I pose in this article – does a collection of Congo artefacts from early in this century have any relevance to Australians today?

⁸ R. Badcock, personal communication, April 1997.

⁹ A. Conan Doyle, *The Crime of the Congo* (London: Hutchinson & Co., 1909); Adam Hochschild, *King Leopold's Ghost* (Boston/New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1998); Edmond Morel, *Great Britain and the Congo: the Pillage of the Congo Basin* (London: Smith, Elder & Co., 1909); R. Oliver and G.N. Sanderson, *The Cambridge History of Africa. Vol.6: From 1870 to 1905* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985); Thomas Pakenham, *The Scramble for Africa* (London: Abacus, 1991).

For my purposes, the story starts with Henry Stanley, a brash Anglo-American journalist, eager to explore the great unknown, willing to sell his services to whichever country would support him, though he would have preferred the British. He made his first splash in Africa by setting off from the east coast ‘in search of Livingstone,’ who he duly ‘found’ in November 1871.¹⁰ As a result of this expedition, he was determined “to find the answer to all the great geographical questions of the central [African] watershed left unsolved by Speke, Burton, Grant, Baker and Livingstone.”¹¹

This he achieved during his three-year expedition 1874-77. He started in Zanzibar on the east coast, trekked to and circumnavigated Lake Victoria, then south to circumnavigate Lake Tanganyika, walked west to the Lualaba down to Stanley Falls where it becomes the Congo River. This he followed down to its outflow on the Atlantic coast. He was able to obtain the services of a British Navy vessel to return him and the remnants of his party to Zanzibar.

Upon Stanley’s return from Africa, he was met at Marseilles by representatives of King Leopold II of the Belgians, “to secure his services for an African project.”¹² Thus began Stanley’s association with Leopold, an association of duplicity in that Stanley held long to the belief, as did many others including Protestant missionaries, that Leopold had only humanitarian motivations for his acquisition of territories in central Africa. The king’s true motivation was revealed in an 1877 letter to his ambassador in London: “I do not want to miss the opportunity for our obtaining a share in this magnificent African cake.”¹³

The Belgium of King Leopold II was no supreme power. Belgium had no army or navy that could cause a moment’s consideration among the great powers jostling for supremacy in the Western world. Perhaps for that very reason, Leopold developed a cunning that outwitted the relatively public machinations of the British, the interminable secret scheming of the French and the gruff threats of the Kaiser, at least when it came to his (Leopold’s) intentions for central Africa.

¹⁰ Tim Jeal, *Stanley. The Impossible Life of Africa’s Greatest Explorer* (New Haven/London: Yale University Press, 2007), Chapter 8.

¹¹ Jeal, 156

¹² Jeal, 230

¹³ Jeal, 231; see also Hochschild, 1998: 58.

Leopold had a personal vision of Belgium as a colonial power, believing it would stimulate commerce, strengthen its military and create a merchant navy.¹⁴ The money to pay for this could not be provided from within Belgium. Leopold was prepared to pay for this enterprise himself, thus creating a monument to his genius and generosity. A commercial return could only be had by extracting high-value resources at minimum cost from people who had no power to resist.

First, Livingstone's drive to end slavery in central Africa by opening up the country to missionary and commercial activity increased knowledge of the country's resources. Then Lieutenant Cameron's arduous journey across central Africa during 1873-5 resulted in the following confident assessment: "The interior is mostly a magnificent and healthy country of unspeakable richness."¹⁵ This immediately caught Leopold's attention and even while Stanley was commencing his journey down the Lualaba to the Congo, in September 1876 the king arranged an international Geographical Conference in Brussels, "at which he launched what he himself described as "a crusade" to "open to civilization the only part of our globe where it has yet to penetrate."¹⁶

In the 'Scramble for Africa,' driven partly by the European industrial revolution's search for raw materials and markets for finished products such as textiles, and partly by strategic and political considerations, the Congo was largely *terra incognita*. Stanley saw his destiny and chance for fame as inextricably linked to this great tropical basin and the savanna to the east and he hoped to convince the English to "grasp the commercial opportunity."¹⁷

Surprisingly, the great powers seemed disinclined to stake claims in the raw territory tentatively explored by Livingstone, Cameron and Stanley. Competitively preoccupied with Egypt (to maintain safe passage through the Suez Canal), Britain and France had more than enough on their plates. If Britain was in the least tempted, the pressure from Cape Colony to link the southernmost extremity of Africa to Egypt with a string of colonies along the eastern seaboard completely deflected interest in the Congo.

¹⁴ Pakenham, 14. Leopold also had almost Napoleonic ambitions in town planning, creating avenues and boulevards, erecting public monuments and buildings (such as the Congo Museum at Tervuren) using the profits extracted from the Congo. See Oliver and Sanderson, 320; Pakenham, 587.

¹⁵ *The Times* 11 January 1876, quoted in Pakenham, 12.

¹⁶ Jeal, 230.

¹⁷ Jeal, 229.

Portugal's colonial resources were stretched in Angola on the west coast and Mozambique on the east coast of central Africa. Germany, rather late on the colonial scene, jumped into Cameroon and South-west Africa, and sought to block the British link between north and south with a colony on the eastern seaboard, while struggling with the burden of its possessions in the south-west Pacific. Italy had its hands full in northern Africa and Ethiopia.

But just in case these or any other powers should respond to Cameron's vision and Stanley's discoveries, Leopold cleverly hid his economic program in a humanitarian and scholarly smokescreen he called the International Association of the Congo (IAC). This Association was the successor to "those happy fictions, the International African Association and the Comité d'Études du Haut Congo."¹⁸ The IAC was recognised at the 1885 Congress of Berlin and a million square miles of the Congo Basin was endorsed as the private estate of King Leopold II, who declared it the 'Congo Free State.' Booth remarks that "It was ... neither free nor a state ..."¹⁹

At first, the only means of travelling into the interior of Africa was on foot or by steaming up the great rivers – especially the Niger in West Africa, the Zambezi in East Africa and, of course, the Congo in Central Africa. In this respect the Congo was problematic – its lower course was a series of impassable rapids and navigation of the River above those rapids required that larger boats be transported overland in sections and assembled at Stanley Pool above the rapids. Climate and disease killed large numbers of people in the process and plans were made for a railway to link the coast and Stanley Pool. The construction, commenced in 1890 and completed in 1898, took a fearsome toll in human life but when it was operational, a two week journey on foot was reduced to two days of relative ease and comfort.²⁰ That is, ease and comfort for the colonial masters, but which increased ease of access to the Congo basin, and accelerated its exploitation and the misery of the people.

Initially, the most prized resource taken from the Congo basin was elephant ivory. This phase of exploitation is vividly portrayed in Conrad's novella, *Heart of Darkness*. This work is popularly misunderstood to

¹⁸ Pakenham, 160.

¹⁹ Martin Booth, *The Doctor, the Detective and Arthur Conan Doyle: A Biography of Arthur Conan Doyle* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1997), 273.

²⁰ Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness and Other Stories* (Wordsworth Classics edition, 1995), 20; Guinness, 102.

refer to the darkness, that is, primitive savagery, of the African and the African wilderness but in reality explores the darkness of Leopold's Congo regime and the dark soul of Kurtz, the colonial exploiter. Early in the story, Marlow says of colonialism: "The conquest of the earth, which mostly means the taking it away from those who have a different complexion or slightly flatter noses than ourselves, is not a pretty thing when you look at it too much."²¹

In discussion with his 'excellent' aunt, who had assisted him to obtain captaincy of a riverboat on the Congo, Marlow reports,

She talked about 'weaning those ignorant millions from their horrid ways', till, upon my word, she made me quite uncomfortable. I ventured to hint that the Company was run for profit.²²

When Marlow eventually arrives at Kurtz's outpost, he describes the fruits of that man's labours:

Ivory? I should think so. Heaps of it, stacks of it. The old mud shanty was bursting with it. You would think there was not a single tusk left either above or below ground in the whole country ... You should have heard him say, 'My ivory.'²³

But another resource was ripe for European exploitation – rubber. A material that could provide comfort to the backsides of Europeans (when Dunlop invented pneumatic tyres for bicycles)²⁴ would be more highly valued than human life itself – that is, more highly valued than the life of the Africans charged with harvesting it. It was rubber that turned annual losses in the Congo to annual surpluses.²⁵ And the chief beneficiary of all this exploitation was King Leopold in faraway Belgium.

The man who blew the whistle on Leopold's activities was Edmond Morel. He began work in 1890 as a clerk with Elder Dempster, a shipping line based at Liverpool, and moonlighted as a journalist. He took a close interest in Africa and, through his contacts at Elder Dempster with Congo Free State officials, he slowly realised that Leopold was doctoring the trade figures – that, far from imports equalling exports, as officially claimed, a great deal more of value was leaving the Congo than going in.

²¹ Conrad, 6.

²² Conrad, 12.

²³ Conrad, 48.

²⁴ Pakenham, 524.

²⁵ Oliver and Sanderson, 319.

Morel compared the official figures with the Elder Dempster shipping returns and the sale of rubber by the Free State and its concessionary companies on the Antwerp market . . . Clearly the Free State officials were not paying the natives to bring the rubber from the jungle, nor were the natives doing it for love. The officials must be using forced labour, beating and shooting the rubber out of them.²⁶

Morel was outraged and immediately began writing articles for *The Speaker*, exposing Leopold's true role in the Congo. He teamed up with humanitarian reformers and disgruntled free-traders blocked from trading in the Congo to have the matter debated in the House of Commons and by 1903 even "the craven British missionaries [were persuaded] to break silence."²⁷ Morel developed a network of supporters and informers: dissident state or company employees in the head offices in Belgium, and in the Congo, including Raymond de Grez, a decorated Force Publique veteran, and

. . . he made sure that the critical information found its way into the British press. He even taunted the Congo administration once by printing, in the original French, a long itemized list of confidential memoranda, letters, and other documents that someone had offered to sell him.²⁸

Thus the British Government came to the conclusion that it must confer with the signatories to the 1885 Congress of Berlin and see that measures be taken to end the human rights abuses by Leopold's administration in the Congo. To provide facts, in 1903 the Foreign Office despatched Roger Casement, the British Consul to the Congo Free State, to investigate the alleged abuses. He set out on the Congo on board the American Baptist's steam launch, *Henry Reed*. What he discovered horrified him. Informing Casement of the 'rubber tax' imposed on them, refugees from Leopold's domain elaborated:

From our country each village had to take 20 loads of rubber. These loads were big . . . We had to take these loads in 4 times a month . . . We got no pay . . . It used to take 10 days to get the 20 baskets of rubber – we were always in the forest to find the rubber vines, to go without food, and our women had to give up cultivating the fields and gardens. Then we starved . . . We tried, always going further into the forest, and when we failed and our

²⁶ Pakenham, 591.

²⁷ Pakenham, 593.

²⁸ Hochschild, 1998: 189-190.

rubber was short, the soldiers came to our towns and killed us. Many were shot, some had their ears cut off; others were tied up with ropes around their necks and bodies and taken away.²⁹

Casement's report was published in 1904 and he persuaded Morel to establish the Congo Reform Association that same year. Stanley, increasingly disillusioned by Leopold but reluctant to doubt that the king "was doing what he could to prevent more atrocities,"³⁰ died in 1904 too ill to read Casement's report.

Morel went to the United States to increase the pressure on Leopold for reform. Leopold countered by giving

... Congo concession rights to [Senator Nelson] Aldrich, the Guggenheim interests, Bernard Baruch, John D. Rockefeller Jr., and the financier Thomas Ryan. . . Leopold also gave more than three thousand Congo artifacts to the American Museum of Natural History, knowing that J.P. Morgan was on its board.³¹

To counter Casement's report, Leopold sent to the Congo a commission of enquiry – a Swiss, a Belgian and an Italian – to do a report for him that he intended would contradict Casement's findings. Unfortunately for Leopold, the report of this enquiry, released in 1905, confirmed the information in Casement's report.

In 1906, Baptist missionaries John and Alice Harris, recently returned from the Congo, joined the Congo Reform Association and threw their weight behind Morel's crusade. All this, along with growing protests in a number of countries, especially Britain, led to Leopold handing over control in the Congo to the Belgian government on 15 November 1908. He died in December the following year.

The transfer of the Congo to the Belgium government and the king's death did not immediately stop the protests in England. It was another several years before, satisfied that matters were on the mend, Morel's Congo Reform Association was dissolved in June 1913.³²

²⁹ Quoted in Pakenham, 598-99.

³⁰ Jeal, 450.

³¹ Hochschild, 1998: 243-44.

³² Oliver and Sanderson, 325-27.

The Role of the Missions

Pakenham, as reported above, suggests that it wasn't until 1903 that the Baptist Union was persuaded to speak up against Leopold by calling for an inquiry.³³ Leopold had "maintained his hold over the other British Baptists by reducing their taxes in the Congo"; he invited a deputation to Brussels and they assured the King "how grateful they were for all his 'wise efforts to instruct and elevate the conditions of the natives' in the Congo." However, by February 1904, "the Congo Bolobo [sic] Mission (though not the Baptist Missionary Society) threw its weight behind the [reform] movement."³⁴

In 1908, Harry Guinness published "*Not unto Us.*" *A Record of Twenty-One Years' Missionary Service.* This book consists of contributions written by various missionaries describing aspects of their work in various parts of the world. Part III, 'The Conflict in Congoland', is covered in pp.65-112. After a brief historical introduction by Guinness, there are sections describing the work of the Mission by Dora McKenzie ('How We Entered the Land'), William Wilkes ('Pioneering Work'), Mr W. McVie and Kate Butler ('In the Midst of Sleeping Sickness'), Guinness again ('The Congo of To-Morrow') and a reprint of a June 1907 article by Edgar Wallace, 'the well-known journalist' ('An Outsider's View'). In his contribution, Guinness addresses the matter of 'Congo Mal-Administration' by referring readers to his illustrated pamphlet published earlier in 1908, *The Congo Crisis.* He then recounts the benefits that might accrue to missionary evangelisation of the Congo under a less restrictive and less exploitative regime.

It must have been this same year that planning commenced for a Congo Exhibition at the Horticultural Hall, Westminster, London to raise awareness among the public of the problems in the Congo.³⁵ The motivation was, in part, driven by moral outrage at the "appalling results of King Leopold's rubber regime"³⁶ but in part also came from the concern of the various Protestant missions about being prevented by the Congo administration from expanding their geographical spheres of influence.

³³ Pakenham, 593.

³⁴ Pakenham, 601.

³⁵ The letter from Miss Badcock offering her collection to the South Australian Museum notes that "The Upper Congo curios were collected during 1908."

³⁶ Guinness, 100.

Of course, missionary exhibitions were not a new thing. Modelled on the colonial exhibitions which had been an annual feature on an international scale, the missionary exhibitions were designed to rally support not only for evangelical work but also for medical, schooling and technical training programs.³⁷ A notice in the *The Times* a few days before the exhibition opened, stated that the exhibition's purpose was to bring -

vividly before the people of London the needs of the Congo, to demonstrate the progress made by mission work there during the past 30 years, and to direct attention to the evils resulting from the misgovernment of and slavery in the Congo State. The Baptist Missionary Society, which has undertaken to organize the exhibition, is being aided by the Congo Balolo Mission, the American Baptist Missionary Union, the Swedish Missionary Society, and the Congo Reform Association.³⁸

It was because of Arthur Conan Doyle's links with Morel that there was a coincidence in timing. Doyle's booklet *The Crime of the Congo* was released in October 1909, shortly after the missionary exhibition closed. Doyle also went on a lecture tour through Great Britain with Morel in November 1909.³⁹ Morel's book, *Great Britain and the Congo: the pillage of the Congo basin*, also was released in 1909.

Whereas Doyle's booklet focussed entirely on the evils of the Congo administration, the mission exhibition had additional messages. These were articulated by Sir Harry Johnstone in a message to the promoters of the exhibition, published in *The Times*:

From such an exhibition as that which is about to be presented by the Baptist Missionary Society we ought to be able to deduce two main lessons – one is, that the negroes of the Congo basin, left to themselves without the intervention of the white man, led an existence which was at best almost animal and at worst a succession of horrible tragedies – frightful cruelties inflicted by one tribe on another, and devastating epidemics of disease. Thousands of lives yearly were sacrificed to foolish or nauseous superstitions. On the other hand, through many centuries of

³⁷ Annie E. Coombes, *Reinventing Africa: Museums, Material Culture and Popular Imagination in Late Victorian and Edwardian England* (New Haven/London: Yale University Press, 1994), 173-86.

³⁸ Anonymous, "The Congo Exhibition," *The Times* (London), 14 September 1909: 14.

³⁹ R.L. Green and J.M. Gibson, *A Bibliography of A. Conan Doyle* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983), 270-72.

isolation, these people remained human, and had all the human instincts and talents. That they are capable of a remarkable degree of intellectual advance is made abundantly clear by the writings of many a Baptist missionary.⁴⁰

This theme of inherent primitive savagery is to be found in Guinness's book. The drawing showing 'A Scene on the Congo in the Early Days – Slaying a Dead Chief's Slaves,'⁴¹ a photograph of 'A Congo Witch Doctor' and of Mata Ibenge, at first an enemy of the missionaries, illustrate Dora McKenzie's text which is liberally sprinkled with phrases such as 'a plot to kill us,' 'the habitations of cruelty,' 'barbarous practices,' 'horrible tortures,' 'perfect orgy of murder,' 'killed in sheer wantonness,' 'repulsive and . . . disgusting,' 'hideous and revolting,' 'darkness and degradation.'

The type of executioner's knife shown being used in the first of these illustrations (see **Figure 8**) is represented in the Badcock collection by two examples (A.18488, -9; see **Figure 9**). Spring casts doubt on their attribution as executioner's knives, suggesting more likely a ceremonial function as prestige items.⁴² Fischer and Zirngibl, on the other hand, seem to accept the execution function uncritically, even to the extent of having an execution scene illustrated especially for their book.⁴³

Whatever the truth of the behaviour which drew forth the missionaries' epithets, the story as recounted by Doyle after he had read the reports of Casement and others demonstrates that the primitive savagery of the 'Christian' Belgians descended to depths not previously experienced in central Africa. Doyle reports depopulation in the major town of Bolobo from 40,000 to 7000 and writes of "these unhappy people ... robbed of all

⁴⁰ Anonymous, "The Congo Exhibition" *The Times* (London), 17 September 1909: 2.

⁴¹ Guinness, 70. The source of this illustration in Guinness is not provided; however, the same illustration appears in C. Spring, *African Arms and Armour* (London: British Museum Press, 1993), 85 and is attributed to *The Graphic* of c.1890. Spring notes that it is "typical of those which appeared regularly in the popular press of the time purporting to show the 'savagery' of Congo peoples. The weapons depicted [in this illustration] cover a wide geographical area. The main figure wields a double-headed Ngombe sword from northwest Zaire, while in the background may be seen examples of Kuba-like swords from southern Zaire and spears from the Aruwimi region of northeast Zaire." Another version of the scene was reproduced in W. Fischer and M.A. Zirngibl, *African Weapons* (Passau: Prinz-Verlag, 1978), 108 based on a sketch from the periodical *la Belgique colonial* (May 31, 1896).

⁴² Spring, 85-6.

⁴³ Fischer and Zirngibl, 108-14.

they possessed, debauched, degraded, mutilated, tortured, murdered, all on such a scale as has never, to my knowledge, occurred before in the whole course of history.”⁴⁴

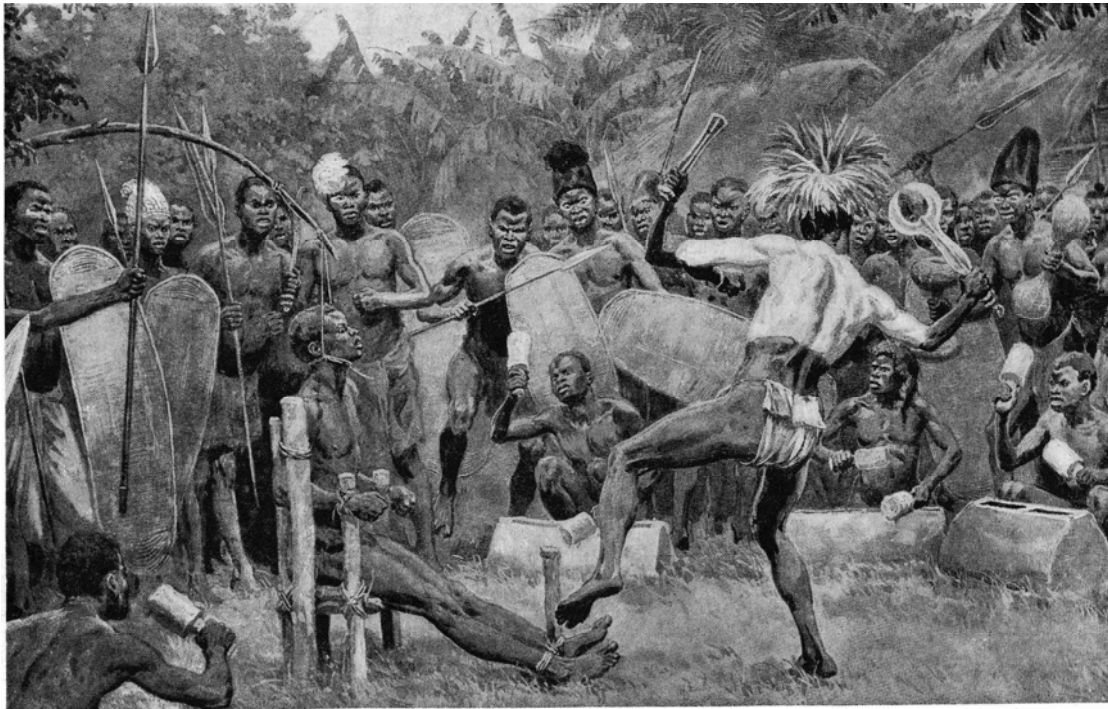


Figure 8. “A Scene on the Congo in the Early Days - Slaying a Dead Chief’s Slaves.”
Source: Harry Guinness, “Not Unto Us”, 1908, p.70.



Figure 9. Executioner’s knife, 67 cm l. x 23 cm w. Lomala River?, Democratic Republic of the Congo. Badcock collection, 1932. South Australian Museum A.18448

⁴⁴ Doyle, 10, 13.

The method used was to place white agents at strategic points throughout the Free State to collect the product desired by King Leopold – rubber processed from the sap of huge vines growing wild in the forests of equatorial Africa. These whites, ‘wretchedly paid,’ supplemented their income with a bonus, which depended upon the amount of rubber collected. Each white agent enforced the collection of rubber in his district through ‘capitas,’ men from other, often enemy, communities, “savages, drawn from the wild tribes, but armed with firearms,” one or two in each village.⁴⁵

Doyle asks us to

imagine the nightmare which lay upon each village while this barbarian squatted in the midst of it. Day or night they could never get away from him. He called for palm wine. He called for women. He beat them, mutilated them, and shot them down for pleasure. He enforced public incest in order to amuse himself by the sight.⁴⁶

If the amount of rubber brought in to the white agent fell below expectations, “the Capita was himself made to feel some of those physical pains which he had inflicted upon others.”⁴⁷

One of the most feared instruments of torture and punishment was the hippo hide whip, an example of which is in the Badcock collection (A.18464). Doyle quotes from the diaries of the Englishman Mr Glave (covering the period 1893-5) in which he describes this method of inflicting terror on the people:

The ‘chicotte’ of raw hippo hide, especially a new one, trimmed like a corkscrew, with edges like knife-blades, and as hard as wood, is a terrible weapon, and a few blows bring blood; not more than twenty-five blows should be given unless the offence is very serious . . . it needs an extraordinary constitution to withstand the terrible punishment of one hundred blows; generally the victim is in a state of insensibility after twenty-five or thirty blows . . . It is bad enough the flogging of men, but far worse is this punishment when inflicted on women and children . . . I conscientiously

⁴⁵ Doyle, 26ff.

⁴⁶ Doyle, 27.

⁴⁷ Doyle, 27.

believe that a man who receives one hundred blows is often nearly killed, and has his spirit broken for life.⁴⁸

Glave also reported the practice of mutilation:

Mr. Harvey heard from Clarke, who is at Lake Mantumba, that the State soldiers have been in the vicinity of his station recently, fighting and taking prisoners; and he himself had seen several men with bunches of hands signifying their individual skill. These, I presume, they must produce to prove their success! Among the hands were those of men and women, and also those of little children. The missionaries are so much at the mercy of the State that they do not report these barbaric happenings to the people at home.⁴⁹

It was well over a decade before these horrors pressed so heavily on the missionaries that they rallied to the cause of the Congo Reform Association and were prepared, rather belatedly, to mount a major publicity campaign against the Congo administration by means of the Congo Exhibition.

The Legacy of Leopold's Congo

Hochschild sums up: "From the colonial era, the major legacy Europe left to Africa was not democracy . . . it was authoritarian rule and plunder."⁵⁰ When Congo's independence was achieved in June 1960, Patrice Lumumba had just won the election for the position of Prime Minister. He wanted the Congo, indeed all of Africa, to be free of European economic colonialism. This was seen as communist-inspired.⁵¹ Within six months he was dead, assassinated by rival factions with the support of CIA agents of the United States of America.⁵² The man identified by some writers as the organiser of Lumumba's murder was Joseph Mobutu, who in 1965 staged a coup and remained in power as the dictator of the Congo until deposed in 1997. He is believed to have

⁴⁸ Doyle, 33.

⁴⁹ Doyle, 35.

⁵⁰ Hochschild, 1998: 301.

⁵¹ George Martelli, *Leopold to Lumumba. A History of the Belgian Congo 1877-1960* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1962), 234ff.

⁵² Hochschild, 302. King Gordon states that Lumumba was killed "probably in the presence of Katangese authorities," see King Gordon, *The United Nations in the Congo. A Quest for Peace*, (Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1962), 96; Martelli, an apologist for Leopold and Belgian colonial rule, states "the exact circumstances have never been established", see Martelli, 242).

amassed a fortune of \$4 billion, much of it deriving from the mining of the Congo's rich mineral resources.

Even before Lumumba's death, the country had descended into political chaos with the secession of Katanga and brutal attacks between rival factions that again inflicted a heavy toll on civilians as well as on government officials and militias. The Katanga government issued a *White Book...about the outlaw activities in some Baluba areas* (n.d. but probably 1961). This contains photographs of victims of alleged atrocities by the 'terrorists.' Whatever the truth of the allegations, the images document disembowling, cutting off of heads, hands, legs and genitals, immolation and mortal injury by beating with a bicycle chain, the modern version of the *chicotte*. Leopold's ghost was abroad.

After Mobutu was deposed in 1997, Laurent Kabila came to power but was assassinated in 2001. He was succeeded by his son, Joseph Kabila, who was confirmed as President in general elections in 2006. Although the internecine wars that characterised the Congo at the turn of the millennium have eased, recent reports state that "crime and conflict remain pervasive in the east of the country. This area is full of armed groups who often trade in minerals."⁵³ One of the most important of these minerals is 'coltan,' short for columbite-tantalum ore. This ore is mined by local people by hand under conditions reminiscent of Leopold's regime.⁵⁴

First there was ivory, then rubber, then huge resources of cobalt, diamonds, gold and copper, now coltan. But it seems that few of the benefits of this wealth of resources have flowed to the people of the Congo.

Relevance to Contemporary Australians

What relevance has this collection from early 20th century Congo to Australians today? Is there any point in dusting off these objects and

⁵³ Irwin van Veen, "There is no quick fix for the mining misery in eastern Congo," 11 Jan 2011, www.guardian.co.uk (accessed 4 April 2011).

⁵⁴ Tantalum has unique properties for storing electrical charge and is a vital component in the capacitors that control current flow in circuit boards of mobile phones, laptop computers, hearing aids, digital cameras and so forth. It is commonly claimed that 80% of known reserves of coltan are in the eastern region of the Congo which happens also to overlap with the National Parks inhabited by the Mountain Gorilla, between the Lualaba River and Lake Kivu. Thus not only are people being terrorised and killed, but so also are the Gorillas as 'bush meat.'

putting them on display in the South Australian Museum? Is the unfortunate history, and contemporary state, of the Congo worth bringing to the attention of Australians, specifically visitors to the Museum in Adelaide?

In the March 1999 issue of *The Adelaide Review*, was an article by John Stone titled 'Some cultures are more equal,' in which he rejects the notion of 'cultural equivalence.' Referring to Africa, he wrote:

The ingrained savagery, the total lack of regard for the sanctity of human life, the pursuit of corruption as a way of life, the whole 'Big Man' approach to social and political relationships – are we really expected to accept that these and other deeply offensive aspects of that culture are of equal merit with our own Judaeo-Christian one? – or for that matter, with most of the other major cultures of the world? The very idea is laughable.⁵⁵

His diatribe was directed at what he terms 'the multiculturalism industry' and he claims that "the great majority of Australians are thoroughly fed up with most of those opinions."⁵⁶

If he happens to be right then clearly both Stone and 'the great majority of Australians' lack knowledge of the colonial and post-colonial history of Africa. It is doubtful that during the twelve years since Stone published his opinions, 'the great majority of Australians' would have changed theirs. An exhibition of early 20th century artefacts can act as a catalyst for understanding how conflict and suffering in present-day Africa, more specifically the Congo, has at its basis the exploitation of valuable resources by interests external to Africa and, in the case of coltan particularly, provides conveniences in which all of us are implicated. That there are Africans who see their desire for wealth and power satisfied by supporting those external interests does not condemn 'the culture' of the majority who are oppressed by that; and ignorance on our part of the suffering of those who enable us to utilise digital technology cannot go unchallenged.

The Australian government has a voice in the United Nations and more direct involvement with African states through commerce and aid programmes. Indignation at the oppression and suffering of people in other countries is something that our elected representatives can express

⁵⁵ John Stone, "Some cultures are more equal," *The Adelaide Review*, March 1999, 19.

⁵⁶ Stone, 19.

on our behalf in the international arena. This is precisely what Morel, Casement, Doyle and others were attempting to do through the Congo Reform Association.

The parallels between Morel's methods of acquiring and publishing confidential and secret information about what was happening in the Congo Free State and the methods of Julian Assange of WikiLeaks are striking. So long as Morel's target was King Leopold and his Belgian operatives, there was little criticism from the British government. But when Morel turned his energies to opposing Britain's involvement in the First World War, he found himself under attack from politicians and the press. "In 1917, [the British government] found an appropriate technicality, and arrested him for violating an obscure law against sending antiwar literature to neutral countries. He was denied bail and promptly sentenced to six months at hard labor."⁵⁷ Roger Casement suffered a worse fate. While he was working for the Foreign Office, he was awarded a CMG in 1905 for his services to the Congo and knighted in 1911 for his work on behalf of the Putumayo Indians of Peru. This did not prevent him being charged with treason for his attempts during the First World War to gain German support for Irish nationalism and he was executed in 1916.⁵⁸

With regard to Assange, "US officials are reportedly searching for ways to extradite him on espionage charges. Vice President Joe Biden recently called the WikiLeaks founder a 'high-tech terrorist' "⁵⁹ and he has been accused of sexual assault against two women in Sweden. Hochschild reports the clever use by Leopold of a journalist's moral lapse to avenge criticism of his regime.⁶⁰ Whether or not we support 'whistle-blowing' is not a simple issue because it often challenges powerful vested interests that attempt to obscure facts, and whistle-blowers are not necessarily without faults and weaknesses. However, as Thomas Jefferson famously remarked, "The Price of Democracy is eternal vigilance" and we may take him to have meant vigilance by a nation's people. It is a fact that governments are often not transparent, for various reasons, and in a democratic state that lack of transparency requires continual challenge.

⁵⁷ Hochschild, 1998: 289.

⁵⁸ Hochschild, 1998: 284-7.

⁵⁹ "Wikileaks Boss Julian Assange Turns on Everyone," *News.com.au*, 21 December 2010 <http://www.news.com.au/features/wikileaks/wikileaks-boss-julian-assange-turns-on-friends-and-foes/story-fn79cf6x-1225974366476#ixzz1JTrAVhfi> (accessed 17 April, 2011).

⁶⁰ Hochschild, 1998: 238

Looking to situations geographically proximate to Australia, the parallels between the activities of the Congo administration in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and the activities of the Indonesian government and military in East Timor and [West] Papua are striking. Not only is the use of military officers and other military personnel a feature common to both situations⁶¹ but also the low rate of salaries which encourages corruption as a means of supplementing an otherwise low income.⁶² The use of militias recruited from among the Africans (usually from traditional enemy groups) and armed by the military to terrorise villagers parallels the use of militias in East Timor.⁶³ The exploitation of a major resource is also a common theme – ivory, then rubber, in the Congo and coffee and timber in East Timor.⁶⁴ The reluctance of the major powers to respond to clear evidence of human rights abuse is also a feature of both situations.⁶⁵ Although the Australian government eventually stepped in to end Indonesian abuses in East Timor, this assistance has not been extended to the people of [West] Papua. The control of the indigenous population by a colonising military and the extraction of wealth, in this case copper and gold from the Freeport mine,⁶⁶ are features that remind us of Leopold's Congo.

Conclusion

Hochschild concludes his book on Leopold by stating,

At the time of the Congo controversy a hundred years ago, the idea of full human rights, political, social, and economic, was a profound threat to the established order of most countries on earth. It still is today.⁶⁷

⁶¹ Compare Oliver and Sanderson 1985: 323, 330-1; with John G. Taylor, *Indonesia's Forgotten War: The Hidden History of East Timor*, Leichhardt, NSW: Pluto Press, 1991, see Chapter 8.

⁶² Compare Doyle 1909: 26-7 referring to the pay of 'white agents'; with International Crisis Group, *Indonesia's Shaky Transition*, Jakarta, 10 October 1999, <http://www.intl-crisis-group.org/projects/etimor/reports/indo01repa.htm> (accessed 25 November 1999):11, with reference to Indonesian army salaries.

⁶³ Compare Doyle 1909: 32 quoting Glave on 'State soldiers,' with almost any 1999 news report on East Timor, for example, Ian McPhedran, "Panic as Hundreds Prepare to Flee Timor," *The Advertiser*, September 3, 1999, p.7.

⁶⁴ Compare Conrad 1902, Morel 1909, Pakenham 1991: 524 and Oliver and Sanderson 1985: 319, 337-9 with Taylor 1991: 125-7, 191-2.

⁶⁵ Chronicled for the Congo by both Doyle and Morel and by Bill Nicol, *Timor: The Stillborn Nation*, Melbourne: Visa, 1978; and Taylor 1991 for East Timor.

⁶⁶ Jim Elmslie, *Irian Jaya Under the Gun* (Adelaide: Crawford House Publishing, 2002).

⁶⁷ Hochschild, 1998: 306.

It happens that a collection of 141 objects in the South Australian Museum arises from a colonial situation of gross infringement of human rights. These objects can be used to tell that story and to draw attention to current conflict and human rights abuses in the Congo.

But they can be used also to draw attention to parallel situations, a lot closer to home for Australians. The question is, would museum management allow a curator to mount an exhibition that sought to draw attention to these parallels? As our museums are state museums, would state governments intervene to close down such an exhibition if management allowed it to go ahead? If an exhibition had been mounted ten years ago to refer to the crisis in East Timor, would the reaction of government have been different to what it might be now? This is territory only tentatively explored by museums in this country.

Museum exhibitions have readily been used by the state for propaganda purposes; for example, the *Art from Zaïre* exhibition of ‘100 Masterworks from the National Collection’ which was sponsored by The African-American Institute and The American Federation of Arts for travel in the United States in 1976. The catalogue includes a Foreword by Mobutu in which he states, “This exhibition will help . . . to strengthen further the friendship and understanding that have always characterized relations between the American people and the people of Zaïre.”⁶⁸

Hochschild critiques the Royal Museum of Central Africa in Tervuren for exhibits that ignore the tragic history of Leopold’s and Belgium’s colonial impact in the Congo.⁶⁹ He reports that various events, including the publication of his book, pressured the Belgian government to replace the museum’s director in 2001, who then “promised a complete revamping.” In 2005, a large temporary exhibit ‘Memory of the Congo: The Colonial Era’ opened; Hochschild states, “Both exhibit and book were examples of how to pretend to acknowledge something without really doing so.”⁷⁰

⁶⁸ Joseph Cornet, *Art from Zaïre. 100 Masterworks from the National Collection* (New York: The African-American Institute, 1975), 10.

⁶⁹ Hochschild, 1998: 292-93.

⁷⁰ Hochschild, Adam. ‘Looking Back: A Personal Afterword’, in *A Reader’s Guide for King Leopold’s Ghost*, c.2008. http://www.houghtonmifflinbooks.com/readers_guides/hochschild_king_leo.shtml (accessed 1 April 2011).

What we need to do as museum curators is to present historical facts through the use of objects and elicit understanding and compassion, not as Stone did in his article, an assessment in terms of superiority versus inferiority of culture – technical, moral, economic, military or in any other way. As human beings, we are all in the same boat, all driven by the same needs and passions, all capable of the same range of thoughts and feelings, judged good or bad. This can be stated no more beautifully than by Ben Okri's opening paragraphs to his 1991 novel, *The Famished Road*.

In the beginning there was a river. The river became a road and the road branched out to the whole world. And because the road was once a river it was always hungry.

In that land of beginnings spirits mingled with the unborn. We could assume numerous forms. Many of us were birds. We knew no boundaries. There was much feasting, playing, and sorrowing. We feasted much because of the beautiful terrors of eternity. We played much because we were free. And we sorrowed much because there were always those amongst us who had just returned from the world of the Living. They had returned inconsolable for all the love they had left behind, all the suffering they hadn't redeemed, all that they hadn't understood, and for all that they had barely begun to learn before they were drawn back to the land of origins.

There was not one amongst us who looked forward to being born. We disliked the rigours of existence, the unfulfilled longings, the enshrined injustices of the world, the labyrinths of love, the ignorance of parents, the fact of dying, and the amazing indifference of the Living in the midst of the simple beauties of the universe. We feared the heartlessness of human beings, all of whom are born blind, few of whom ever learn to see.⁷¹

⁷¹ Ben Okri, *The Famished Road*, (London: Jonathan Cape, 1991).

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