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Gabriella Nugent, ***Colonial Legacies: Contemporary Lens-Based Art and the Democratic Republic of Congo*** (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 272 pp., ISBN 9789462702998).

Colonial Legacies, by art historian and curator Gabriella Nugent, makes a compelling argument about how art provides a way to open discussions about the complex and lasting effects of colonial violence. Composed of four dense but carefully argued chapters, along with numerous black and white images and 30 colour plates, the book brings a welcome, detailed analysis of significant lens-based and performance works made by artists born or based in the Congo. The book takes as its focus the work of three contemporary artists, Sammy Baloji, Michèle Magema and Georges Senga, and engages with the work of the Kinshasa-based Kongo Astronauts, an artist collective founded in 2013. Nugent argues that since the late 1990s, when debates about the repressed and unresolved history of Belgian imperial and colonial brutality emerged within Belgium in the wake of the publication of Adam Hochschild's *King Leopold's Ghost* (1998), 'contemporary visual arts have operated as a key site of exploration and crucial discussion of the country's seventy-five years of colonialism' (19).

While the book is not intended to provide a comprehensive account of Belgian imperialism and colonialism, Nugent's study offers an excellent entry-point into this violent history through her thorough and insightful readings of the work of contemporary artists. A key reason for this is the centrality of archival material (and its remediation) in the works of the artists Nugent has chosen to discuss.

The book begins with an analysis of the work of acclaimed photographer and multi-media artist, Sammy Baloji (b. 1978), with a particular focus on his 2006 series of photomontages and video work made with dancer Faustin Linyekula, entitled *Mémoire*. In a video interview made to accompany an exhibition of the artist's work at the Tate Gallery in London (2022-2023), Baloji observes that many archives in what is now known as the Democratic Republic of Congo, have been destroyed since the 1960s as a result of war and conflict ('Sammy Baloji – These images became like testimonies', Tate Gallery, 2023, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=93lo2ehQesM). Baloji draws on surviving archival images to cast light on the long-term catastrophic effects of the intersections between extractivism and racial capitalism.

The poignant works that constitute *Mémoire* situate the cut-out figures of naked or partially clothed mineworkers excerpted from images made in the 1920s and 1930s against backdrops formed from photographs Baloji has taken at the sites of officially decommissioned mines in Lubumbashi.

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As Nugent notes, while critics have read these spaces 'as abandoned or empty' (28), they are in fact still occupied by *creuseurs*, informal or artisanal miners who continue to dig for precious minerals, primarily cobalt, under extremely hazardous conditions. More than 100,000 people in the DRC continue to risk their lives to eke out a meagre living in this way. Nugent's readings of Baloji's work show how the artist 'charts a history of plunder that begins with King Leopold II and continues through present-day Congo' (46). Nugent also draws attention to the representation of women in Baloji's series (only two images include groups of women who are presumed to be the wives of men who work on the mines) and argues that these photographs are best understood as signs of the forms of grief and loss that are redoubled by gender inequality within and outside of the colonial economy, which both excluded and paradoxically depended on women's productive and reproductive labour.

In the second chapter Nugent turns her focus to a reading of Michèle Magema's video installation, *Oyé Oyé* (2002). Magema, who was born in Kinshasa in 1977, grew up in exile in France and left Zaire as a result of her father's opposition to Mobutu Sese Seko. Magema's work juxtaposes two screens – one which includes archival footage and music from the 1970s filmed during Mobutu's reign, and another which depicts the artist wearing a blue dress with a white sash (a version of the school uniform she wore before leaving the country in 1984) and marching, raising her arms and legs in an exaggerated fashion. Magema's head is not visible, and Nugent reads her 'decapitation' through a feminist lens, arguing that the artist's 'strides parody the expectations of the state and a submission to its order' (62) and that through its judicious use of footage, the work brings women's labour into view and 'opens the possibility that their minds remained free' (62). Nugent writes that Magema's work 'expands the lexicon of the political to include strategies of maintenance and endurance typically excluded from grand accounts of historical revolution' (77).

The third chapter centres on the significance of the assassination of Patrice Lumumba in 1961 through an engagement with a series of works by Georges Senga (b.1983). These works were made in collaboration with Senga's former schoolteacher, Kayembe Kilobo, a man who was influenced by, and who bore a physical resemblance to, Lumumba. Nugent shows how Senga's works, like those of Magema and Baloji, resurfaces archival images and invests them with new meanings, producing 'an alternative vision of the world, and a longing for it' (117). Similarly, the fourth chapter, 'From Kinshasa to the Moon', which examines the work of the Kongo Astronauts, explores the creation of alternative worlds and ways of being, and how these are delimited by the radical inequality and forms of violence that are a legacy of colonialism. The work of the collective fuses the utopian desire for a world beyond the earth with the all-too-real material detritus of neo-colonial extractivism – dressed in space suits made from e-waste salvaged from scrapheaps, the collective stages site-specific performance works in the streets

of Congolese cities. As Nugent observes, 'The Space Age and Africa's status as a site of extraction are often treated as two autonomous phenomena' (138) and the work of the collective not only closes this 'supposed gap' (138), but also 'challenge who can take advantage of technology and cyberspace and the freedoms espoused by both' (145). *Colonial Legacies* invites readers to pay close attention to the 'Futures that never arrived, but were once imagined' and how they continue to 'glimmer' (145) in the works of contemporary visual artists, which, as Nugent writes, help us to see both the past and present anew (154).

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