

Pathways to Empire?

Belgian Global Expansion 1830-1930

11-13.09.2024

INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE

KU LEUVEN • CEGESOMA

<https://www.arts.kuleuven.be/conferences/conference-pathways-to-empire>

On September 11-13, 2024, KU Leuven and CegeSoma will host an international conference on the interrelated themes of imperialism and Belgian expansionism. The contributions explore the theoretical and methodological challenges involved in writing new global histories of imperialism between 1830, when Belgium was founded, and the Great Depression of the 1930s.

The peculiar features of 'Belgian imperialism' complicate conventional understandings of Western imperialism. How, for instance, can we connect global dynamics of imperial expansion to Belgian involvement in the construction of railways in the Americas and China, the migration of foreign 'experts' and laborers to Congo, the composition of the Egyptian Mixed Courts, or the involvement in the Amazonian rubber trade? And how did diplomats, military men, engineers, missionaries, translators, educators, shippers, or dock workers negotiate, shape, or contest imperial projects and ideologies? To answer these questions, we follow how people, commodities, knowledge, and technologies embedded Belgium in the world and vice versa.

Organizing committee

Houssine Alloul (University of Amsterdam), Michael Auwers (State Archives of Belgium), Eline Ceulemans (University of Antwerp), Anne-Sophie Gijs (Université Catholique de Louvain), Idesbald Goddeeris (KU Leuven), Gert Huskens (Ghent University), Catherine Lanneau (Liège University), and Janne Schreurs (KU Leuven).

Scientific committee

Kenneth Bertrams (Université Libre de Bruxelles), Benoît Henriët (Vrije Universiteit Brussel), Amandine Lauro (Université libre de Bruxelles), Marjolein Van Bavel (Radboud University), Maarten Van Ginderachter (University of Antwerp), Jan Vandersmissen (Ghent University), Guy Vanthemsche (Vrije Universiteit Brussel), Christophe Verbruggen (Ghent University), Henk de Smaele (University of Antwerp), and Lien Verpoest (KU Leuven).

Wednesday 11.09.24

KU Leuven, Aula B, HIW Kardinaal Mercierplein 2, 3000 Leuven

14:00 **Start** registration

14:15 **Welcome:** Idesbald Goddeeris (KU Leuven)

14:30-15:30 **Keynote 1:** Daniel Laqua (Northumbria University)

Making Belgium Great (Again)? Reflections on Internationalism, Expansionism, and Imperialism

CHAIR: Lien Verpoest (KU Leuven)

15:45-17:00 **Panel 1: The Imperial Mind in the Metropole**

- Mano Delea (University of Amsterdam)

The Impact of the 1921 Pan-African Congress on Transnational Belgium

- Frank Gerits (Utrecht University)

Belgium's Spanish-American War Moment: How Acquiring Ruanda-Urundi Scrambled the Belgian Colonial Mind (1919-1940)

- Jonas Van Mulder (KADOC)

Congolese Pupils in the Metropole: The Case of Nzige Lutete in Louvain (ca. 1885-1908)

CHAIR: Michael Auwers (State Archives of Belgium)

17:00-18:00 **Keynote 2:** Manu Karuka (Barnard College)

The War-Finance Nexus: Tracking a History of Imperialism

CHAIR: Henk de Smaele (University of Antwerp)

18:00-19:00 **Reception** at Income of Leuven Town Hall, Grote Markt 9, 3000 Leuven



Register here

Thursday 12.09.24

KU Leuven, Aula B, HIW Kardinaal Mercierplein 2, 3000 Leuven

9:30-10:45 **Panel 2: Imperial Competition, Transnational Infrastructures, and Local Agency**

- Xiaoxu Yan (The University of Hong Kong)
Beyond a "Tool of Empire": Constructing and Managing the Belgian Tramway in the Chinese City of Treaty Port Tianjin, China, 1905-1918
- Nurcin Ileri (IISG, Amsterdam/Forum Transregionale Studien, Berlin)
The Influence of Belgian Capital and Expertise on the Formation of Istanbul's Energy Landscape
- Emir Küçük (Boğaziçi University)
Belgian Investment and Capital in the Constantinople Tramway Company

CHAIR: Kenneth Bertrams (Université libre de Bruxelles)

11:00-12:15 **Panel 3: Exploiting the Empire of Others?**

- Janne Lahti (Linnaeus University - University of Helsinki)
Finns in the Congo: Mobility, Violence, and Transimperial Lives of Belgian Colonialism
- Kevin Goergen (University of Luxembourg)
Belgian Colonialism from the Margins: Luxembourgers in the Congo Basin (1880-1930)
- Gijs Dreijer (Leiden University – online)
Exploiting Belgian Imperial Expansion? Dutch Entrepreneurs in the Congo Free State and the Belgian Congo, 1870s-1910s

CHAIR: Amandine Lauro (Université libre de Bruxelles)

14:00-15:15 **Panel 4: Diplomacy and Expansionism**

- Taoyu Yang (NYU Shanghai)
The Belgian Presence in Tianjin: Navigating a Colonial Concession in a Multi-Imperial City, 1902-1931
- Houssine Alloul (University of Amsterdam)
The Business of Diplomacy: Consuls, Courtiers, and Capitalists between Brussels and Istanbul (1814-1849)
- Janne Schreurs (KU Leuven)
Founding a Consulate or a Colony? Belgian Expansion in the Brazilian Backlands (1895-1911)

CHAIR: Daniel Laqua (Northumbria University)

15:30-16:30 **Keynote 3:** Amandine Lauro (Université libre de Bruxelles)

Writing Transimperial Histories from/of the Belgian Congo

CHAIR: Idesbald Goddeeris (KU Leuven)

18:30 **Conference dinner** for speakers and chairs

Restaurant 'De Hoorn' (Sluisstraat 79, 3000 Leuven)

Friday 13.09.24

CegeSoma, Luchtvaartsquare / Square de l'Aviation 29, 1070 Brussels

10:00-11:15 **Panel 5: Global Networks and Informal Empire**

- Véronique Pouillard (University of Oslo)
The International and Colonial Expansion of the Belgian Systems of Intellectual Property, from the 1880s to the 1930s
- Darina Martykánová (Universidad Autónoma de Madrid)
Belgium's Informal Empire of Engineers?
- Gert Huskens (Ghent University)
Lost in Translation: Charles Borromée Houry and Belgian Diplomacy's Flirt with Scholarly Orientalism

CHAIR: Manu Karuka (Barnard College)

11:30-12:20 **Panel 6: Congo, China and Transimperial Connections**

- Carl Kubler (Carnegie Mellon University)
Belgian Imperialism and Chinese Migration: Resituating the History of "Coolies" and Asian Indentured Labor in Global Perspective
- Eline Ceulemans (University of Antwerp)
Triangulating Power, Prestige and Play: The 'Congo-missions' of Leopoldian Intermediaries in Late Qing China and the Unequal Pathways to Empire

CHAIR: Benoît Henriët (Vrije Universiteit Brussel)

12:20-12:30 **Concluding remarks**

12:30-13:30 **Lunch** at CegeSoma

14:00-16:00 **Guided historic city tour** of Brussels