**Pan-Africanism and Decolonization: Between the Universal and the Particular**

Agency lies at the heart of decolonization, both descriptively and in practice. It is an evolving agency that crashes against the structures, both hidden and visible, that constrain its expression. With this in mind, decolonization can be viewed most appropriately as an ongoing national, social, and personal process and not simply as an event marked by the folding of flags and the heartfelt singing of anthems of liberation. Of course, the ceremonies which marked the end of formal European empires were crucial steps in the decolonization of African and Asian peoples, yet they were not an immediate realisation of liberty. In *A Season in the Congo*, Aimé Césaire’s poignant paean to Patrice Lumumba, this tension is laid bare.[[1]](#footnote-1) In the play, Lumumba’s struggle is not simply for formal independence from Belgian colonial masters, but for a meaningful and substantive measure of liberty from their influence, their legacy, and their ongoing interests. Recognising the way in which this liberty maps onto the broader diaspora in a Pan-African reading of decolonization thus allows an unpacking of what Césaire referred to as the “revolutionary action” for which the colonial situation called.[[2]](#footnote-2) In Césaire’s life and work, we can trace a thread by which to understand decolonization neither as a dissolution in the universal, nor a retreat into the particular, but rather as the recognition and reprise of the agency required to recast an empowered universalism of the spirit.

This chapter will first consider the emergence of the phrase ‘decolonization’ and how its usage reflected European assumptions about freedom being a gift bestowed by reforming empires and taking the form of national independence. As noted by Hakim Adi, ideas of liberation are not realised simply through the vehicle of the nation-state and flag independence. One of the principal vehicles for the evolution of decolonization has been the development of Pan-Africanism and its vision for the liberation of the African diaspora as well as the continent of Africa.[[3]](#footnote-3) Decolonization reflected distinct trends of political mobilization across Africa and the African diaspora, and using the examples of the First and Second Congresses of Black Artists and Writers this chapter will then show how the concept swelled beyond the nation-state and grew to acknowledge the agency of the colonized, engaging particularly with the concept of national culture as described by Frantz Fanon. Finally, this chapter will look at how the term decolonization has come to be discussed in contemporary society following the nominative end of empire and the reality of formal independence, with debates often focussed on diasporic cultural relationships and the need to reconsider the physical and mental legacies of empire.

1. **Decolonization from above: The Late Colonial State**

Todd Shephard locates one of the earliest usages of the term decolonization in the immediate aftermath of France’s invasion of North Africa, appearing in the 1836 tract “Decolonization of Algiers” written by the journalist Henri Fonfrède.[[4]](#footnote-4) This appeared in a Bordelais newspaper only six years after France’s conquest of North Africa had begun, and only two years after a Governor of France’s North African possessions had been appointed.[[5]](#footnote-5) Given this proximity, the appearance of the word “décolonisation” in the article presents a tantalising suggestion of some early awakening to colonialism’s ills. Even at this stage, however, Fonfrède a well-to-do journalist in Bordeaux and the son of a famous Girondin, was not concerned with the liberty of the newly colonised territory or its people. Instead, his article (which was widely dismissed in Paris as being too narrowly interested in *Bordeaux’s* fortunes) called for shifting France’s buccaneering ethic back home.[[6]](#footnote-6) This was far from a recognition of the agency of colonised people, although it captured a meaningful sense of how the term would become associated with the agency of the colonizer. For Fonfrède, a step away from France’s imperial mission was a refocussing of her own good works, not an attempt to respond to injustice or seek to remedy the impacts of colonial expansion. This early engagement with the idea of decolonisation, focussing on it as a process occurring from above and addressing the interests of the colonizer, was somewhat emblematic of the term and the concept as it remained in formation.

Interwar engagement with decolonization revolved around a liberal reading of the so called “civilizing mission”, which would lead colonies closer to a state of “free association” as they graduated towards nationhood.[[7]](#footnote-7) By way of example, in June 1927, *The Times* of London published a report on the 19th Congress of the International Colonial Institute, a collaborative body that had been founded in 1898 as a place for European intellectual and political elites to compare notes on colonial administration.[[8]](#footnote-8) In a discussion of imperial reforms and the introduction of representative assemblies on the route towards this free association, Professor Henri Rolin noted the lasting significance of Woodrow Wilson’s 14 points and the impulse towards self-determination, stating that the “period of colonization will be followed by a period of decolonization.”[[9]](#footnote-9) This reading prioritised a schedule controlled by colonial administrators and intellectuals, in which the gradual opening up of imperial structures would accompany the slow awakening of African agency. Interestingly, even here there was some sense that this was not a process that they could completely control. Rolin, himself a prominent Belgian figure in international colonial legal disputes and networks of knowledge, seemed to doubt at this congress whether subject nations would maintain sentimental links to their former colonial masters after the advance of greater sovereign autonomy.[[10]](#footnote-10) Inchoate though it may be, this forecasting of the breakdown of the imperial compact and the flourishing of more active anti-colonial struggle was indicative of the ways in which shifting agency could be read as a crisis.

Early Pan-African Congresses held in London (in 1900, 1921 and 1923), Paris (in 1919), and New York (in 1927), all heralded a vision of unity which drew together the diaspora with the fate of the African continent. [[11]](#footnote-11) Their formation in imperial cities and their focus on the nation-state which ran through the movement Kehinde Andrews argues, however, meant that their origins “were not in direct conflict with the colonial administration.”[[12]](#footnote-12) This is not to deny the radical vision of these congresses, nor to gainsay the extraordinarily important organising work behind the movement in giving definition and inspiration to the African diaspora, but to stress the means by which the context of the nation-state often defined the horizons for change and limited its revolutionary potential. This was shaken most dramatically at the landmark 1945 Pan-African Congress in Manchester, where emancipatory discussions broke the trend of the interwar era by calling for independence across Africa in a direct engagement with decolonization.[[13]](#footnote-13) This post-war shift marked a change for Pan-Africanism as a movement, but also a period of profound social, cultural and political crisis for European empires, and there is both a historical and historicised meaning to this idea of late colonial crisis. When writing about the history of decolonisation, the 1950s signify, as Koselleck terms it, “a historically immanent transitional phase”.[[14]](#footnote-14) Yet there was also a contemporary reading, in which events were pushing towards a moment that meant action, or some other reckoning, which opened up the horizons of expectation for Pan-Africanists and anti-colonialists whilst raising questions for imperial administrators. For Paul Mus, a philologist who taught Asian languages, served the Free French in Africa and Indochina, and later worked as a Professor at the Collège du France, the French empire was already on “The Path to Decolonization”. His 1956 article laid out the failings of colonial policy more broadly and led him to question whether “Guided by events, will we manage to unleash in Africa, a vibrant and acceptable program of constructive decolonization on the ground and in time?”[[15]](#footnote-15) Georges Balandier noted in the same year that it had “become banal to note that the ‘time of the finite world’ has begun”, suggesting that greater interconnectivity would draw attention to imperial inequality and break open “even the most distant socio-cultural boundaries.”[[16]](#footnote-16) These visions of decolonization reacted to the breakdown of relations between colonizer and colonised peoples in the late colonial state. Be it through Macmillan’s ‘wind of change’, Nkrumah’s ‘raging hurricane’ or the tides of history washing France out of Algeria, European colonialism appeared destined to be overwhelmed by forces beyond its control.[[17]](#footnote-17)

With this realisation, scholars in Europe and in the United States began to engage more actively with the term ‘decolonisation’, yet it continued to be understood as something that was done by empires and imperialists, rather than engaging or empowering subject populations. As Shephard notes, the word decolonization was used to denote “specific shifts of sovereignty in particular territories”.[[18]](#footnote-18) Or, as Stuart Ward tellingly describes the phrase, decolonization served as “a European conceptual innovation that worked to absorb and deflect the phenomenon it ostensibly described.”[[19]](#footnote-19) Yet, as with Rolin’s reading, this increasingly took on connotations of crisis, necessitating recourse to the language of elemental change. In the western historiography of decolonization, the concept moved from being one of elite-led liberal transfer of power, towards a break-down of relationship between imperial power and subject people.[[20]](#footnote-20) The difference seemed to be, as Patrice Lumumba put it, a “liberating breath” which swelled political life across Africa in the late 1950s.[[21]](#footnote-21) Although models of political transfer could build on a long list of examples, such as the fall of the Ottoman or Russian Empires, the formal transfers which took place around 1960 seemed to be marked by a different character. The end of the British and French Empires delegitimised the concept of empire as a political unit, and the decline of other imperial territories (the Dutch and Belgian Empires, and later the Portuguese Empire, for example) seemed to indicate that something broader had changed. As De Gaulle noted in 1963, the project of empire had “passed its expiration date.”[[22]](#footnote-22) Yet, for all this talk of transfer and difference, it is important to note what did not change. The lingering interests which delimited the independence granted by colonial masters defined the horizon of possibility for young states, as Lumumba tragically discovered. Gary Wilder describes Césaire’s recounting of Lumumba’s story as a tragic illustration of “the fatal danger of popular without territorial sovereignty”.[[23]](#footnote-23) After the murder of Lumumba, Frantz Fanon questioned the extent to which the granting of formal independence had represented a meaningful change. In an article originally published in *Action Afrique* in 1961, he cautioned that “Our mistake, the mistake we Africans made, was to have forgotten that the enemy never withdraws sincerely. He never understands. He capitulates, but he does not become converted.”[[24]](#footnote-24)Decolonization from above was conceived and enacted as a way of altering existing imperial frameworks without shattering them. It was the corrupted independence, or “*dipenda*”, that Césaire lampoons in *Un Saison au Congo*, which “arrives with the little white king, the Bwana Kitoko, it is he who brings it to us.”[[25]](#footnote-25)

1. **The Poetry of Revolt: National Cultures of Decolonizaton**

The broader notes of the substantive freedom Césaire outlines can be found in his engagement with Pan-Africanism and Négritude in the 1950s, building on the movement’s landmark 1945 Congress and drawing new conceptions of universalism from across the diaspora.[[26]](#footnote-26) Examining this intellectual development places decolonization in context and stresses cultural expression and freedom of thought as key markers of liberty alongside the formal sovereignty of nation-states. Decolonization was never simply a transfer of power to be initiated by colonial masters, but in the context of its formulation was inextricably linked to African agency. Leslie James contends that when thinking about the Second World War as a tipping point, we must question “how did the war impact the metropolitan perception of its empire and imperial rule, and to what extent did the war transform colonial peoples?”[[27]](#footnote-27) The war had not only changed the material status of the metropole but had also been fought with a progressive vision for post-war reconstruction at the forefront of Allied war aims (with for example, the self-determination promised by the Atlantic Charter, or the reforming promises made at Brazzaville for the French). Yet, these were illusory promises. Césaire’s *Discourse on Colonialism* challenged western cultural authority with direct reference to the Second World War, juxtaposing the struggle against Nazism with the post-war survival of colonialism and the intrinsic, sadistic violence of both.[[28]](#footnote-28) This new reality saw Césaire label Europe “morally, spiritually indefensible”, attacking the premises of Western liberalism and the traditions of humanism.[[29]](#footnote-29) Here, the critique drew on his own interwar activism as well as that of the wider field of anti-colonial and Pan-African activists, who had been pursuing forms of decolonization *avant le lettre.[[30]](#footnote-30)* Between concepts of colonial humanism which sought to recast the outmoded relationships of empire, and the language of anti-colonial nationalism which led to an outright rejection of colonialism, there was an intellectual thread which challenged Western norms and stressed the interwoven nature of national culture and political freedom.[[31]](#footnote-31)

This was, then, a crucial period for cementing many of these discussions in anti-colonial discourse and in the critique of racialized colonization which emerged from the work of Césaire and others. It was a moment that represented, for Malcolm X at least, “a tidal wave of color”.[[32]](#footnote-32). Between the Bandung Conference and the ‘Cultural Bandung’ of the First Congress of Black Writers and Artists, prominent anti-colonial activists and intellectuals described a system of thought which rejected the fact that, as Alioune Diop, the editor of *Présence Africaine,* would say, “History, with a capital H”, could be left to “the universal world-view of the West alone.”[[33]](#footnote-33) Indeed, this was one of the limitations of the otherwise crucial work undertaken at the Bandung Conference.[[34]](#footnote-34) Bandung provided an important moment in which the Third World was able to assert its place on the world stage, and in which newly independent nation states were able to argue for their right to engage in international politics. Yet, as Robbie Shilliam points out, there were problems with the ways in which this was expressed:

““The paradox of the conference was that it took the key method of self-determination from blueprints of the masters’ architecture: the enabling institution was to be the nation-state; and the process was to be development or modernization”[[35]](#footnote-35)

Emerging from this type of analysis there was a need to identify and remedy where structures of oppression had limited and inhibited the expression of cultures outwith the imperial framework. The nation-state itself presented a political, cultural, and historiographical constraint beyond which lay the possibility of challenging counter narratives to imperial norms.[[36]](#footnote-36) For Pan-Africanists, different poles of identity attracted activists and thinkers, and while the tangible promise of independent nation-states loomed larger, the broader liberation of the continent and its diaspora was a loftier goal. Césaire warned that “the *nation* is a bourgeois phenomenon,” and that under “the banner of anticolonialism” forces like American high finance could “raid every colony in the world.”[[37]](#footnote-37) Liberating oneself only to accept the sovereign constraints of Cold War geopolitics was, for some, only a limited and limiting form of independence.

The First Congress of Black Writers and Artists took place in Paris in the Descartes Amphitheatre at the Sorbonne, Paris from 19th to 22 September 1956, chaired by Alioune Diop. At its heart was an acknowledgement that culture was one of the most important elements of the anti-colonial struggle, and one of the clarion calls of the congress was a rejection of assimilation as a dominant colonial policy.[[38]](#footnote-38) Césaire built on the Négritude movement’s “resistance to the politics of assimilation” in his writing, and also in his resignation from the French Communist party, which had reduced the anticolonial struggle to a “fragment” of their wider struggle.[[39]](#footnote-39) So, when Aimé Césaire spoke to the conference about ‘Culture and colonization’, he unpacked the ways by which the formal structures of imperialism crushed the potential of African people, stating that “a political and social regime that suppresses the self-determination of a people thereby kills the creative power of that people.”[[40]](#footnote-40) To address the “cultural chaos” created by colonialism, Césaire proposed to the conference that they would clear the way for future thinkers to continue the process of liberation: “Let the peoples speak. Let the black peoples come onto the great stage of history.” Césaire’s aim was not to call for immediate violent revolution, but instead to reclaim elements of cultural expression previously denied by the structures of colonialism or, in other words, to begin to decolonize culture.[[41]](#footnote-41)

Emergent theories of National Culture were important moderators of the concept that decolonization was something enacted by colonial powers. As Fanon outlined “a national culture is the whole body of efforts made by a people in the sphere of thought to describe, justify, and praise the action through which that people has created itself and keeps itself in existence.”[[42]](#footnote-42) With this in mind, the First Conference of Independent African States in Accra, in April 1958, was an important corollary to the Bandung conference because of its profoundly Pan-African message. It dwelled on the concept of an “African Personality” which united participants in their commitment to a struggle of anti-colonial solidarity.[[43]](#footnote-43) Focussing on the potential of Pan-Africanism to drive a movement connecting and inspiring the wider African diaspora was part of this mission, offering a sense as Césaire outlined, that “the struggle against colonialism is not to be terminated as quickly as is commonly believed and not merely because imperialism has not been defeated on a military level.”[[44]](#footnote-44) This encouraged thinking about decolonization as a project which could only be addressed beyond the level of the nation-state. As such, the political solidarity of Pan-Africanism offered a vehicle through which to pursue decolonization in cultural terms and think through ‘the body of efforts’ to create and sustain freedom, as outlined by Fanon. At the second Congress of Black Writers and Artists in Rome in 1959, Sékou Touré offered his views on the importance of national culture, moving beyond any sense that it referred only to the aesthetic: “To take part in the African revolution it is not enough to write a revolutionary song; you must fashion the revolution with the people. And if you fashion it with the people, the songs will come by themselves and of themselves.”[[45]](#footnote-45) When Frantz Fanon meditated on National Culture, he chose to quote wholesale from Kéïta Fodéba’s poem “African Dawn,” within which lay the obvious double meaning of an awakening both physical and cultural. [[46]](#footnote-46) In Fodéba’s work, he said, “we find a constant desire to define accurately the historic moment of the struggle and to mark off the field in which actions will unfold, the ideas around which the will of the people will crystallize.”[[47]](#footnote-47)

The cultural reprise of the First Congress of Black Artists and Writers was taken up as a challenge following the political statements of Bandung, and developed teeth as it took on the language of national liberation. Tying cultural decolonization to the larger project of liberation acknowledged the realities of economic domination set out by Nkrumah, but sought to tackle this by - to paraphrase Robbie Shilliam - drawing up new blueprints for the architecture of the African people.[[48]](#footnote-48) Hakim Adi notes that at the Algiers Pan-African Congress in 1969, “the struggle against Eurocentrism was viewed not as a question of reclaiming the past, but of taking practical measures to elevate the importance of African languages and the cultures of the masses of the people to unite and free the entire continent.”[[49]](#footnote-49) This aspect of decolonization frames the importance of what Franz Fanon called a “poetry of revolt” in structuring the creative work of ongoing liberation.

1. **Statues and Ghosts: Contemporary Decolonization**

Writing in 1966, five years after Lumumba’s assassination, Césaire’s *A Season in the Congo* was designed to rehabilitate and recover the murdered Congolese leader from the negative caricature he had become in European accounts. [[50]](#footnote-50) This in turn showed another aspect of how we can conceive of decolonization, and Belgium’s engagement with its colonial past provides an instructive example. The end of formal colonialism clearly did not preclude decisive action to defend economic interests, as seen in the tragedy of Patrice Lumumba. Yet, as Césaire’s engagement with Lumumba’s legacy showed, the reconstruction of the past could be a foundation from which to control timelines of change in the present. “History with a capital H”, as Diop had put it, was the domain of national culture, and a vehicle through which decolonization might be continued. Pan-Africanist solidarity is useful here to see how decolonization was not a process limited to former colonies, but encompassing the colonizers themselves, and to note the process of decolonization linking together the experience of diasporic communities and Africans on the continent. In the former imperial capitals, however, forgetfulness threatened to undermine this awakening. In Belgium, where the Congo had slipped from school curricula, children might instead explore empire through its romanticised depiction in Hergé’s Tintin, wherein the exotic adventures of the titular hero were suffused with a viewpoint which stressed a “combination of scientific superiority and paternalistic benevolence” in European interactions overseas.[[51]](#footnote-51) Indeed, the crude depictions of African people in *Tintin au Congo* interpreted the “savage and primitive” exhibits of the Musée du Congo for a much wider audience, serving to popularise and promote a particular vision of Belgian imperialism.[[52]](#footnote-52) This lack of visibility has seen Belgium’s African diaspora struggle to be represented adequately in Belgium’s fractured political system, and thus continue to face racial inequalities and systematic social deprivation as a result.

In the central figure of Césaire’s *A Season in the Congo,* Patrice Lumumba,we can perhaps find an instructive example of how colonial violence lingers and perpetuates structures of oppression. In 1978 Gerard Soete, who was a police commissioner in Katanga at the time of Lumumba’s murder, revealed his role in the gruesome eradication of Patrice Lumumba’s body (along with Maurice Mpolo and Joseph Okito) by dismemberment and dissolution in canisters of acid.[[53]](#footnote-53) Amidst a generalised climate of silence and forgetting, these revelations did not cause uproar. Indeed, this would come later, though as noted by Idesbald Goddeeris, the initial reckoning which followed the publication of *King Leopold’s Ghost* in 1998 and then *The Assassination of Lumumba* 2004 had largely settled into a muted consensus by 2010 and the fiftieth anniversary of Congolese independence.[[54]](#footnote-54) In the meantime, the popular Flemish magazine *Humo,* revealed in an interview that Soete had retained some of the Congolese leader’s teeth as a grisly trophy.[[55]](#footnote-55) In the Flemish daily *De Standaard*, the writer Hugo Claus reacted with a poem called ‘Lumumba’s gebit’ (Lumumba’s teeth), which framed the violent act in classical terms, and recalled Jason’s quest for the golden fleece and the sewing of the Hydra’s teeth.[[56]](#footnote-56) Years later following Soete’s death, that same magazine interviewed his daughter, who repeated the story that he had thrown Lumumba’s teeth into the North Sea, yet revealed to journalists that her late-father had retained one gold-capped molar in a box.[[57]](#footnote-57) This was then given over to be held at the Palais de Justice in Brussels, where its presence is emblematic of the work still to be done in addressing the scars of Belgian colonial (and post-colonial) violence.[[58]](#footnote-58) Indeed, Belgium’s reckoning with its imperial past has been faltering and reluctant, and there continue to be calls for further decolonization of Belgian society. The government inquiry into Lumumba’s execution concluded in 2002, and then Foreign Minister Louis Michel apologised to the Lumumba family on behalf of the Belgian state, which he had concluded was not directly involved in ordering the execution, but nevertheless implicated in the act by the involvement of key individuals.[[59]](#footnote-59) Crucially, no-one faced trial as a result.

In 2004, following the broadcast of a BBC documentary recounting Belgian brutality in the Congo Free State entitled *White King, Red Rubber, Black Death,* an act of vandalism in Ostend targeted a statue commemorating King Leopold II.[[60]](#footnote-60) Part of the statue depicted an enslaved man rendered in bronze, raising an arm towards the king, whilst his other hangs by his side. In an echo of the colonial violence which had been prevalent in the Congo Free State, the statue’s hand was sawn off. The identity of the activists largely remained a mystery, even featuring in a discussion in the Belgian Senate.[[61]](#footnote-61) Interestingly, in an acknowledgement of the situation created by the statue’s vandalization, Ostend’s city officials resolved that the monument was a more effective tool of education if it remained incomplete.[[62]](#footnote-62) As such, it was not repaired, and the absence of the hand communicated its own message, serving as “witness to the dark colonial past of Leopold II”.[[63]](#footnote-63) Again, in the Senate, the journalist and Senator Josy Dubié (for the Ecolo party) praised the decision to leave the monument incomplete, reading reports from 1905 which stated:

“The international enquiry commission sent to the Congo from 1904 to 1905 has noted that soldiers in well-defined regions had been ordered to cut off the hands of natives killed in action in order to demonstrate the effectiveness of cartridges provided.”

The decision to leave the monument with its missing hand was, he said, “a poignant symbol of a particularly tragic episode in our history”, noting that certain historical facts “needed to be underlined”.[[64]](#footnote-64) Raising this discussion in the Senate ensured that once again the historical record contained recognition of past colonial violence and demanded a response which underlined its relevance to contemporary society. The monument became a palimpsest, and its missing hand made it both a valuable text and a site for the performance of debates around colonial legacies. In 2010, for example. the hand was replaced with a replica made of chocolate, seeking to highlight the ways in which Belgium’s contemporary wealth was built on historic exploitation of colonial resources.[[65]](#footnote-65) Following this and other acts of vandalism, the local council had altered the information boards at the monument in 2016, acknowledging more openly the nature of Belgian complicity in the ills of empire.[[66]](#footnote-66)

Yet, this was not the end of the story. In February 2019, an activist interrupted an appearance by Belgium’s Culture Minister to display the hand and demand concessions before its return:

“We are willing to give back the hand but then we want a guarantee that there will be apologies from the royal house for the misdeeds in the former colony […] That it is admitted that our colonial past was a mess. And that we hand over the […] teeth of the murdered prime minister Patrice Lumumba, which are kept in the Palais de Justice in Brussels, to his relatives. It is the only thing left of the man. Then his family can finally officially bury him.”[[67]](#footnote-67)

This removal of the statue’s hand and the subsequent demands saw debates around the decolonization of museums and statues collide with sharp debates around the personal impact of colonial atrocities, the lingering power structures which committed them, and the need for wider education about the colonial past. The statue’s missing hand opened a dialogue which has helped to illustrate the complex and interlinking ways in which decolonization calls for cultural and political reckonings, and the ways in which the colonial past echoes in contemporary society. Importantly, however, this dialogue cannot remain one conducted only in Belgium’s Senate and newspapers but needs to reach out and include those communities who were subject to the state’s imperial ambitions and violence.

Campaigns to rename a Brussels square after Patrice Lumumba were coordinated by a group called ‘Mémoire Coloniale et Lutte contre les Discriminations’ (CMCLD, Colonial Memory and Struggle against Discrimination), which draws together African associations from across Belgium’s federal communities. The renaming had originally been proposed in the Matongé quarter in Ixelles, Brussels, an area around the Maison Africaine where Congolese students settled in 1961 which continues to enjoy a strong diasporic character.[[68]](#footnote-68) Yet, the local council refused. After further campaigning, however, the City of Brussels Council approved the inauguration of Patrice Lumumba Square in April 2018.[[69]](#footnote-69) In charting efforts to respond to campaigns for greater representation, the experience of the Belgian Royal Museum for Central Africa in Tervuren is also useful, involving teams of Belgian and Congolese scholars to plan ongoing exhibitions and re-interpret permanent exhibitions to acknowledge the history of a colonial institution.[[70]](#footnote-70) In some ways, the history of this museum founded in 1910 had charted Belgium’s engagement with decolonisation, with its outdated ethnographic displays and glorification of Belgium’s civilizing mission in the Congo dominating a national colonial memory.[[71]](#footnote-71) Yet, as responses to that renewal of colonial exhibits showed (and continues to show in subsequent engagements), Belgians have a lot of work still to do. The museum’s project to reconstruct a pacified “shared memory” of colonialism, skirts too closely to the definition of decolonisation from above outlined in the first section of this chapter. The inclusion of the diasporic community was criticised as tokenistic and sporadic, and the CMCLD diagnosed a “missed decolonization” in this memory work, offering to continue to work alongside the Museum towards this goal if invited.[[72]](#footnote-72) Indeed, this critique foregrounds the definition of decolonization reformulated by Pan-Africanist thinkers as a participatory and ongoing project, and shows the extent to which the project is incomplete.

The UN Working Group of Experts on People of African Descent recently completed a report on Belgium’s efforts to engage with the past, taking in the controversies mentioned so far.[[73]](#footnote-73) Their statement noted that “public discourse does not reflect a nuanced understanding of how institutions may drive systemic exclusion from education, employment, and opportunity.” In particular, it singled out the profusion of monuments glorifying the imperial past as a symbol of the ways in which this exclusion took root. One of their recommendations gave a strong sense of what decolonization could look like in Belgium:

“We urge the government to give recognition and visibility to those who were killed during the period of colonization, to Congolese soldiers who fought during the two World Wars, and to acknowledge the cultural, economic, political and scientific contributions of people of African descent  to the development of Belgian society through the establishment of monuments, memorial sites, street names, schools, municipal, regional and federal buildings. This should be done in consultation with civil society.”

The story of Belgium’s reckoning is not completed by an informative note attached to a colonial statue, the re-naming of a public square, nor the reconditioning of a museum exhibit. It is advanced by official acknowledgements and apologies, yet, as shown by the case of Lumumba’s teeth, difficult legacies can remain hidden, and apologies do not complete it. As Césaire warned “the salvation of Europe is not a matter of a revolution in methods.”[[74]](#footnote-74) More important is the engagement of Belgian society in the reparative work of decolonization and for example, involving the family of Lumumba in reclaiming his remains, or the diaspora in the work of their own representation. These debates around statues, school curricula, museums and memory display an important element in the discussion of decolonization, Pan-Africanism, and the post-colonial African diaspora.

**Conclusion**

Decolonization, then, is not simply anti-colonial action, nor the transfer of power from a former coloniser to liberated peoples. It is not in itself a project wholly satisfied by an apology for past wrongs, nor the repatriation of looted trophies. It remains an ongoing project to identify and alter structures which continue to support the lingering systems of oppression tied to the racialised politics and violence which made these crimes possible in the first instance. This piece has explored how decolonization was conceived by European thinkers as a process from above, though was then actively reformulated by Pan-Africanist thinkers as an ongoing participatory project, before examining how the tensions between these understandings are still at play in a contemporary context. This chapter has sought to probe different contexts in which decolonization can be understood as intersecting with themes of Pan-Africanism, showing how the term has shifted in usage and meaning around the end of formal empires. In scholarly discussion, the concept of decolonization has shifted from the iniquities of being understood as independence from above, as made clear in the coup against Lumumba, towards the reprise of African agency, painted luridly in the figure of the poetic Lumumba at the heart of Césaire’s play. Yet it also comprises of the grisly legacies that linger in contemporary power structures governing cultural relationships and knowledge, as we can see in the debate around Lumumba’s teeth. Césaire pointed to “universalizing, living values that had not been exhausted” as a shining light for decolonization, without being “dazzled by European civilization”.[[75]](#footnote-75) This stresses the importance of Pan-African solidarity in understanding decolonization as a project stretching beyond the confines of the nation state, while retaining a focus on the revolutionary and expressive work of defining national cultures. In his clear-eyed assessment of the violence inherent in imperialism, he set out the impossibility of decolonization being achieved from above. Instead, decolonization became a work of discovery and assertion, demolishing oppressive structures whilst creating new syntheses, and pursuing a “universal enriched by all that is particular, a universal enriched by every particular: the deepening and coexistence of all particulars.”[[76]](#footnote-76)

1. Aimé Césaire, *A Season in the Congo* (London: Seagull, 2010), 155. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Aimé Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2000), 55. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Hakim Adi, *Pan-Africanism: A History* (London: Bloomsbury, 2018), 3. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Todd Shephard, *The Invention of Decolonization* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006), 5. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Charles-Robert Ageron, *Modern Algeria: A History from 1830 to the Present* (London: Hurst, 1991), 9-14. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Jean-Jacques Hémardinque, ‘Henri Fonfrède ou l'homme du Midi révolté (1827-1836)’, *Annales du Midi: revue archéologique, historique et philologique de la France méridionale*, 88:129 (1976), 458-460. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. See Michael Collins, ‘Nation, state and agency: evolving historiographies of African decolonization’, in Andrew WM Smith and Chris Jeppesen, *Britain, France and the Decolonization of Africa: Future Imperfect?* (London: UCL Press, 2017), 20. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Benoit Daviron, ‘Mobilizing labour in African agriculture: the role of the International Colonial Institute in

   the elaboration of a standard of colonial administration, 1895–1930’, *Journal of Global History,* 5:3 (2010), 479. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. ‘Development of Colonies (From our Hague Correspondent)’, *The Times* (London, England), 14 June, 1927, Issue 44607, p.15. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. ‘ROLIN (Henri Eugène Auguste Marie)’, *Biographie Belge d'Outre-Mer*, vol.6 (Brussels : Académie Royale des Sciences d'Outre-Mer, 1968), col.869-881. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. On the 1900 Pan-African Congress, see Marika Sherwood, *Origins of Pan-Africanism: Henry Sylvester Williams, Africa and the African Diaspora* (London: Routledge, 2011).On the 1945 Congress, see Hakim Adi and Marika Sherwood, *The 1945 Manchester Pan-African Congress Revisited* (London: New Beacon Books, 1995). [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Kehinde Andrews, ‘Beyond Pan-Africanism: Garveyism, Malcolm X and the end of the colonial nation state’, *Third World Quarterly*, 38:11 (2017), 2501-2516. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Marika Sherwood, ‘Pan-African Conferences, 1900-1953: What did ‘Pan-Africanism mean?’, *The Journal of Pan-African Studies*, 4:10 (2012), 106-126; Adi and Sherwood, *The 1945 Manchester Pan-African Congress Revisited*, 102-112; Vincent Dodoo and Wilhelmina Donkoh, ‘Nationality and the Pan-African State’ in *Pan-Africanism and the Politics of African Citizenship and Identity,* ed.s Toyin Faola and Kwame Essien (London: Routledge, 2013), 151-171. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. R. Koselleck & M. Richter, ‘Crisis’, *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 67:2 (2006), 371-372. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Paul Mus, ‘Le Chemin De La Décolonisation’, *Esprit,* 217:8 (1954), 227-46.  [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Christoph Kalter, *The Discovery of the Third World: Decolonization and the Rise of the New Left in France, C.1950-1976* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016)*,* 420 [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Martin Shipway, ‘The wind of change and the tides of history:  de Gaulle, Macmillan and the beginnings of the French decolonizing endgame’, in Larry J. Butler and Sarah Stockwell (eds.), *The wind of change: Harold Macmillan and British decolonization* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 180–94. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Todd Shephard, *The Invention of Decolonization* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006), 5. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. Stuart Ward, ‘The European Provenance of Decolonization’, *Past & Present,* 230:1 (2016), 229. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. Collins, ‘Nation, state and agency’, 18-26. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. J van Lierde (ed), La pensée politique de Patrice Lumumba (Paris: Présence Africaine, 1963), p. 11. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. Shephard, *The Invention of Decolonization*, 7. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. Gary Wilder, *Freedom Time: Négritude, Decolonization and the Future of the World* (Duke University Press, 2015), 202. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. Frant Fanon, *Towards the African Revolution* (New York: Grove Press, 1994), 196. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. Césaire, *A Season in the Congo*, 22. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. See Reiland Rabaka, *The Négritude Movement: W.E.B. Du Bois, Léon Damas, Aimé Césaire, Léopold Senghor, Frantz Fanon, and the Evolution of an Insurgent Idea*, (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2015) [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. Leslie James, *George Padmore and Decolonization from below: Pan-Africanism, the Cold War, and the End of Empire* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2015), 66. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. Bart Moore-Gilbert, *Postcolonial Theory: Contexts, Practices, Politics* (Verso, 1997), 172; Reiland Rabaka, *Forms of Fanonism: Frantz Fanon’s Critical Theory and the Dialectics of Decolonization* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2010)*,* 105-112. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. Aimé Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism* (Monthly Review Press, 2000), 33. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. See especially T. Denean Sharpley-Whiting, *Négritude Women* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), which outlines the political lives of Jane and Paulette Nardal, as well as the activism of Suzanne Césaire. For a study of the formation of anti-colonial networks in Paris, see Michael Goebel, *Anti-Imperial Metropolis: Interwar Paris and the Seeds of Third World Nationalism* (Cambridge University Press, 2015); Daniel Brückenhaus, *Policing Transnational Protest: Liberal Imperialism and the Surveillance of Anticolonialists in Europe, 1905-1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017). [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. Camille Lefebvre, ‘La décolonisation d'un lieu commun. L'artificialité des frontières africaines : un legs intellectuel colonial devenu étendard de l'anticolonialisme’, *Revue d'Histoire des Sciences Humaines*, 24:1, (2011), 78. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. Robin DG Kelley, ‘A Poetics of Anticolonialism’, *Monthly Review*, 51:6 (1999), 1-21 [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. Alioune Diop, ‘Discours d’ouverture’, *Présence Africaine,* 3:8-10 (1956), 9. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. Importantly, this does not discount that work. For a much fuller engagement with the political and cultural projects of the ‘Bandung Era’ see Christopher J. Lee (ed.), *Making a World After Empire: The Bandung Moment and its Political Afterlives* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2010). [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. Robbie Shilliam, ‘Colonial Architecture or Relatable Hinterlands’, *Constellations* 23:3 (2015), 425-435 [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. Antoinette Burton, ‘Introduction: On the Inadequacy and Indispensibility of the Nation’, in *After the Imperial Turn: Thinking with and through nations,* ed. Antoinette Burton(Duke University Press, 2003), 1-23; Frederick Cooper, ‘Alternatives to Nationalism in French Africa, 1945-60’, in *Elites and Decolonization in the Twentieth Century* (ed.s) Jost Dulffer and Marc Frey (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2011), 110-137. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism*, 76. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. Guirdex Massé, ‘Cold War and Black Transnationalism: Aimé Césaire and Mercer Cook at the First International Congress of Black Writers and Artists’, *Palimpsest: A Journal on Women, Gender, and the Black International*, 4:2 (2015), 116. The presence of the conference in Paris was testament to the importance of African diaspora to this understanding of anti-colonialism. For more discussion of the development of the African diaspora and its identity in Britain, see Hakim Adi, *West Africans in Britain 1900-1960: Nationalism, Pan-Africanism and Communism* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1998); Marc Matera, *Black London: The Imperial Metropolis and Decolonization in the Twentieth Century* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2015); Kennetta Hammond Perry, *London is the place for me: Black Britons, Citizenship and the Politics of Race* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015) [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism*, 88; Aimé Césaire*,* ‘Letter to Maurice Thorez’*, Social Text 103,* 28:2 (2010), 145-152. [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. Aimé Césaire, ‘Culture and Colonisation’, *Social Text 103,* 28:2 (2010), 131. [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. Césaire, ‘Culture and Colonisation’, 142. [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. Franz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, 233 [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
43. Hakim Adi, *Pan-Africanism*, 144-145. [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
44. Mbukeni Herbert Mnguni, *Education as a Social Institution and Ideological Process* (New York: Waxmann Verlag, 1998), 122. [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
45. Fanon, *Wretched of the Earth*, 166. [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
46. Andrew WM Smith, ‘African Dawn: Keïta Fodéba and the Imagining of National Culture in Guinea’, *Historical Reflections/Réflexions Historiques*, 43:3 (2017), 102-121. [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
47. Fanon, *Wretched of the Earth*, 183. [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
48. Ama Biney, *The Political and Social Thought of Kwame Nkrumah* (Springer, 2011), 130-133. [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
49. Hakim Adi, *Pan-Africanism,* 197. [↑](#footnote-ref-49)
50. Julie-Françoise Tolliver, ‘Césaire/Lumumba: a season of solidarity’, *Journal of Postcolonial Writing*, 50:4 (2014), 398-409. John Kent, ‘The US and Decolonization in Central Africa, 1957–64’, in L.J. Butler and Sarah Stockwell (ed.s), *The Wind of Change: Harold Macmillan and British Decolonization* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2013), 203. [↑](#footnote-ref-50)
51. Elizabeth Buettner, *Europe after Empire: Decolonization, Society and Culture* (Cambridge University Press. 2016), 425. On Tintin, Hergé and empire, see Hugo Frey, ‘Contagious colonial diseases in Hergé's The adventures of Tintin’, *Modern & Contemporary France*, 12:2 (2004), 177-188. See also, Hugo Frey, ‘Tintin: The extreme right‐wing and the 70th anniversary debates’, *Modern & Contemporary France*, 7:3 (1999), 361-363; Pascal Lefèvre, ‘The Congo Drawn in Belgium’, in Mark McKinney (ed.), *History and Politics in French-Language Comics and Graphic Novels* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2008), 166-185; [↑](#footnote-ref-51)
52. Elizabeth Buettner, *Europe after Empire: Decolonization, Society and Culture* (Cambridge University Press. 2016), 422. See also, Guido Gryseels, Gabrielle Landry, and Koeki Claessens, ‘Integrating the Past: Transformation and Renovation of the Royal Museum for Central Africa, Tervuren, Belgium’, *European Review*, 13:3 (2005), 637-647; Jean Muteba Rahier, ‘The Ghost of Leopold II: The Belgian Royal Museum of Central Africa and Its Dusty Colonialist Exhibition’, Research in African Literatures, 34:1 (2003), 58-84. [↑](#footnote-ref-52)
53. Gerard Soete, *De Arena: Het Verhaal van de moord op Lumumba* (Bruges : Uitgeverij Raaklijn, 1978). [↑](#footnote-ref-53)
54. Idesbald Goddeeris, ‘Colonial Streets and Statues: Postcolonial Belgium in the Public Space’, *Postcolonial Studies*, 18:4 (2015), 397-409; Idesbald Goddeeris, ‘Postcolonial Belgium: The Memory of the Congo’, *Interventions: International Journal of Postcolonial Studies*, 17:3 (2015), 434–451; Adam Hochschild, *King Leopold’s Ghost: A Story of Greed, Terror, and Heroism in Colonial Africa* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1998); Ludo De Witte, *The Assassination of Lumumba* (London: Verso, 2001). [↑](#footnote-ref-54)
55. Gauthier de Villers, ‘Histoire, justice et politique’, *Cahiers d’études africaines*, 173-174 (2004), 197-198. [↑](#footnote-ref-55)
56. de Villers, ‘Histoire, justice et politique’, 197-198. [↑](#footnote-ref-56)
57. ‘De moord op Lumumba: de dochter van de lijkruimer spreekt’, *HUMO*, 16/01/2016. [https://www.humo.be/humo-archief/360145/de-moord-op-lumumba-de-dochter-van-de-lijkruimer-spreekt] Accessed 27/02/2019. [↑](#footnote-ref-57)
58. Sabine Cessou, ‘Belgique: à Bruxelles, le square Lumumba ne met pas fin aux débats’, *RFI*, 21/08/2018. [http://www.rfi.fr/europe/20180821-belgique-bruxelles-square-lumumba-debats-colonisation-histoire-rdc] Accessed: 27/02/2019. [↑](#footnote-ref-58)
59. Gauthier de Villers, ‘Histoire, justice et politique’, *Cahiers d’études africaines*, 173-174 (2004). [↑](#footnote-ref-59)
60. *White King, Red Rubber, Black Death* (dir. Peter Bate, 2003). [↑](#footnote-ref-60)
61. ‘Question orale de M. Josy Dubié à la vice-première ministre et ministre de la Justice sur «l'inculpation d'un journaliste refusant de révéler ses sources»’. Annals, Belgian Senate, 29 March 2007, nr. 3-1479. [↑](#footnote-ref-61)
62. Timmy van Assche, ‘Afgehakte hand van Leopold II-beeld duikt op, maar Oostends stadsbestuur wil ze niet terug: “Beeld zonder hand is sterker statement”’, *Het Laatste Nieuws,* 22/02/2019 [https://www.hln.be/regio/oostende/afgehakte-hand-van-leopold-ii-beeld-duikt-op-maar-oostends-stadsbestuur-wil-ze-niet-terug-beeld-zonder-hand-is-sterker-statement~a5209f04/] Accessed: 27/02/2019 [↑](#footnote-ref-62)
63. Eddy Surmont, ‘Le mystère de la main sectionnée’, *Le Soir,* 27/03/2007, quoted in Julien Bobineau, ‘The Historical Taboo: Colonial Discourses and Postcolonial Identities in Belgium’, *Werkwinkel,* 12:1 (2017), 113. [↑](#footnote-ref-63)
64. ‘Question orale de M. Josy Dubié à la vice-première ministre et ministre de la Justice sur «l'inculpation d'un journaliste refusant de révéler ses sources»’. Annals, Belgian Senate, 29 March 2007, nr. 3-1479. [↑](#footnote-ref-64)
65. Julien Bobineau, ‘The Historical Taboo: Colonial Discourses and Postcolonial Identities in Belgium’, *Werkwinkel,* 12:1 (2017), 113. [↑](#footnote-ref-65)
66. Joris Truyts, ‘Nieuw infobord bij omstreden standbeeld van Leopold II in Oostende’, *VRT Dutch,* 11/09/2016 [https://www.vrt.be/vrtnws/nl/2016/09/11/nieuw\_infobord\_bijomstredenstandbeeldvanleopoldiiinoostende-1-2764959/] Accessed: 27/02/2019 [↑](#footnote-ref-66)
67. Daniel Boffey, ‘Reappearance of statue's missing hand reignites colonial row’, *The Guardian*, 22/02/2019. [https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/feb/22/statue-missing-hand-colonial-belgium-leopold-congo]. Accessed 27/02/2019. [↑](#footnote-ref-67)
68. As noted by Idesbald Godeeris, “Due to the limited number of Congolese people and the varied experiences of other Sub-Saharan migrants, the African diaspora in Belgium does not succeed in occupying much space in the postcolonial memory.” Idesbald Goddeeris, ‘Colonial Streets and Statues: Postcolonial Belgium in the Public Space’, *Postcolonial Studies*, 18:4 (2015), 404. [↑](#footnote-ref-68)
69. ‘Facing the truths of Belgium’s colonial past: The unresolved case of Patrice Lumumba’s death’, *Brussels Times*, 11/09/2018 [http://www.brusselstimes.com/magazine2/12498/facing-the-truths-of-belgium-s-colonial-past-the-unresolved-case-of-patrice-lumumba-s-death], accessed 11/03/2019. [↑](#footnote-ref-69)
70. Guido Gryseels, Gabrielle Landry, and Koeki Claessens, ‘Integrating the Past: Transformation and Renovation of the Royal Museum for Central Africa, Tervuren, Belgium’, *European Review*, 13:3 (2005), 635-647; [↑](#footnote-ref-70)
71. Jean Muteba Rahier, ‘The ghost of Leopold II: the Belgian Royal Museum of Central Africa and its dusty colonialist exhibition’, *Research in African Literature*, 34:1, (2003), 58-84; Aurélie Roger, ‘D’une mémoire coloniale à une mémoire du colonial. La reconversion chaotique du Musée Royal de l’Afrique Centrale, ancien musée du Congo Belge’, *Cadernos de Estudos Africanos*, 1 :9/10 (2006), 1-17. [↑](#footnote-ref-71)
72. Collectif Mémoire Coloniale et Lutte contre les Discriminations, ‘Communiqué : Reéuverture du Musée Royal d’Afrique Centrale – une décolonisation manquée’, 01/03/2019 [ <https://www.memoirecoloniale.be/communiques/communique-reouverture-du-musee-royal-dafrique-centrale-une-decolonisation-manquee>], accessed 11/03/2019. Teri Schultz, ‘Belgium's revamped Africa Museum faces a dark colonial legacy’, *Deutsche Welle*, 08/12/2018 [https://www.dw.com/en/belgiums-revamped-africa-museum-faces-a-dark-colonial-legacy/a-46629177], accessed 11/03/2019. [↑](#footnote-ref-72)
73. ‘Statement to the media by the United Nations Working Group of Experts on People of African Descent, on the conclusion of its official visit to Belgium’, 11/02/2019 [https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=24153&LangID=E], accessed: 11/03/2019. [↑](#footnote-ref-73)
74. Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism*, 78. [↑](#footnote-ref-74)
75. Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism*, 92. [↑](#footnote-ref-75)
76. Césaire*,* ‘Letter to Maurice Thorez’*,* 152. [↑](#footnote-ref-76)