

with the role his father—and Israel’s Founding Fathers—played in creating obstacles to a just peace between Israel and the Palestinians.

Can this problem ever be resolved, when there is so much emotion and passion on each side? Benvenisti believes that Israelis must recognize that their actions in the war, which precipitated the refugee crisis, were not all justified, and he tackles some of the most difficult questions underlying this issue. For example, he devotes a chapter to the question of whether the Arabs left their homes willingly, or were driven out by Israeli aggression. Were the Israelis guilty of “ethnic cleansing”?

Was it conscious policy of the Israeli leadership, and of Ben Gurion, for instance, to drive Arabs from the land? On this point, he admits, the evidence is not conclusive. The statements of Ben Gurion that he cites indicate “contradictory positions.” But, “[o]ne way or the other,” he writes, “the Jewish state was emptied of the overwhelming majority of its Arab inhabitants, who, according

to the terms of the Partition Plan, were supposed to be full citizens of this state, with equal rights.”

#### A Just Solution

This is not an abstract, impersonal history, although at times the sheer density of “objective” material can be overwhelming. Instead, Benvenisti offers the American reader an inside look at the wrenching emotional issues which confront people in Israel today, as they attempt to reconcile the contradictory nature of Zionism: That it was a movement to offer Jews an opportunity to escape the anti-Semitism in Europe, and to live, free, in a “homeland,” that would allow Jews to establish a nation in which they could fulfill the Biblical injunction to “be a blessing unto mankind”; while, at the same time, that “homeland” was already a home to people who did not greet Jewish refugees with open arms.

In the Introduction, Benvenisti bares his anguish, which stems from this contradiction, to his readers: “Have we transformed a struggle for survival into an ethnic cleansing operation, sending another

people to exile because we wanted to plunder their land?” And finally, he asks, “How much compassion and guilt can I allow myself to express in order to pacify my troubled conscience, thereby exposing myself to accusations of betrayal on one side and hypocrisy on the other?”

Benvenisti understands that recognition of the Palestinians as victims is not in itself the basis for peace. What is necessary, he writes, is to provide economic justice, in the form of providing water and electricity, schools, health care, and housing. In addition, he advocates that the government set aside funds from the lucrative sale of agricultural land to developers, to establish a fund to compensate the original Arab owners.

This is a bold, provocative book, written by an Israeli who is serious about achieving a lasting peace with the Palestinians. It is only through such an approach, by questioning the assumptions and shibboleths of one’s upbringing, that the “Right of Return/refugee problem” of the Final Status talks in the Oslo Accord will be resolved.

—Harley Schlanger

## Colonialist Hauntings

Right off the bat, I’ll tell those not familiar with the history of the Congo (now called the Democratic Republic of the Congo-D.R.C.), and even those involved with Africa like myself, that you will find it worthwhile to read this book.

*King Leopold’s Ghost* is divided into two parts, telling two distinct stories, which overlap. Part I, “Walking Into Fire,” tells the story of the hideously brutal imperialist butchery of the Congo by the degenerate Belgian King Leopold II (1835-1909). Unfortunately, Part II, “A King at Bay,” is less satisfying, as it suffers from a severe fallacy of composition.

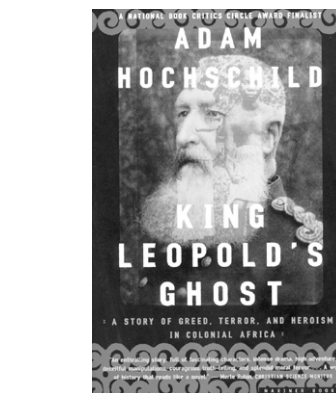
Part I, however, is necessary reading, if one wishes to know sensuously the horrible level of oppressive exploitation of the Congo that began at the end of the last quarter of the Nineteenth century. It is not possible to understand the condition of the D.R.C., and Africa in

general, today, without being aware of this ugly, but all too real chapter of African history.

King Leopold II was a first cousin to Queen Victoria, thus a member of the extended House of Hanover/Windsor. It is hard to find a more brutish, egotistical, immoral monarch than Leopold, not only in his treatment of the Congo, but also in the insanity of his immediate family relations, which Hochschild discusses. His personal obsession to control and exploit a colony in Africa, was clearly only the flip side of his degenerate personal life—or, is it the other way around?

#### Pre-Nazi Slave Labor

In 1878, Leopold hired the explorer Henry Morton Stanley to secretly claim as much of the Congo as possible. H.M. Stanley himself, whose parentless childhood turned him into a social misfit with a streak of sadism, was a perfect



**King Leopold’s Ghost**  
by Adam Hochschild  
New York and Boston, Houghton Mifflin, 1999  
366 pages, paperback, \$15.00

co-conspirator, to brutalize and swindle the Congolese out of their land. By 1884, Leopold was organizing internationally to establish personal control over this vast area of central Africa. He realized his imperialist desire on May 29, 1885, when the Congo Free State was official-

ly brought into existence, albeit through duplicity and manipulation.

There was nothing free about the newly created Congo Free State, except all the material wealth that Leopold was “free” to steal. Initially, he stole as much ivory as he could, but that was nothing compared to rubber, which took off as an industry in the 1890’s. It was in collecting rubber sap from “the wood that weeps,” that the most brutal methods of slave-labor were employed.

All forms of coercion were used to force natives to join the slave-labor armies required to collect the rubber. Leopold’s private army, the Force Publique, was the “rule of law” in the Congo. The following is a report of the methods of the Force Publique written in 1899: Its method “was to arrive in canoes at a village, the inhabitants of which invariably bolted on their arrival; the soldiers were then landed, and commenced looting taking all the chickens, grain, etc., out of the houses; after this they attacked the natives until able to seize their women; these women were kept as hostages until the Chief of the district brought in the required number of kilogrammes of rubber.”

Hochschild reports that, “more than eleven million pounds of rubber a year” were being shipped out of the Congo by the turn of the century. This was accomplished by forced conscription of a large

number of laborers, who were treated like animals. The Anglo-Belgian India Rubber and Exploration Company (A.B.I.R.), “responsible for only a small fraction of the Congo’s rubber production, listed 47,000 rubber gatherers.”

#### Off with Their Hands!

Only the most brutal methods of repression could succeed in enforcing such slave-labor policies on an entire population. One was the use of the *chicotte*, “a whip of raw, sun-dried hippopotamus hide, cut into a long sharp-edged corkscrew strip,” which was applied across the bare buttocks of men, women, and children, from 25 to 100 strokes, often resulting in death. Usually it was applied by one Congolese against another.

Sometimes entire villages were exterminated by the army or companies, since they were interchangeable, to break the resistance of another village nearby. The soldiers needed to prove they had used each rifle cartridge to kill a native, so they would cut off the right hand of each corpse. The hands were then smoked, to preserve them for counting at a latter date. Sometimes, hands were cut off living people, either to make “count,” or to terrorize the population. One district commissioner recalled that, when it came to gathering rubber, “one must cut off hands, noses, and ears.”

#### Partial Truth

In Part II, Hochschild tells the story of how Edmund Dene Morel, a British journalist, and Roger Casement, an employee of the British Foreign Office, waged an international propaganda war against Leopold’s brutal rape of the Congo.

Much of what Morel and Casement wrote about Leopold was true. However, anyone knowledgeable about African history, will ask certain questions, when he reads that Morel exonerated British imperialism in Africa, and Nigeria in particular. More suspicions are raised, when it is revealed that Morel received financial, and political support from the British establishment itself, along with the “deep admiration” of racist Bertrand Russell. This ought to have provoked Hochschild to ask: Were the attacks by Morel and Casement against Leopold, a British operation, using a legitimate cause to eliminate an imperialist rival, and divert attention from their own nasty operations?

Hochschild’s refusal to at least raise such a hypothesis is disturbing, because it is how the British routinely escape scrutiny for their own evil imperialist practices in Africa.

—Lawrence K. Freeman

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## The Great Project of the 15th Century

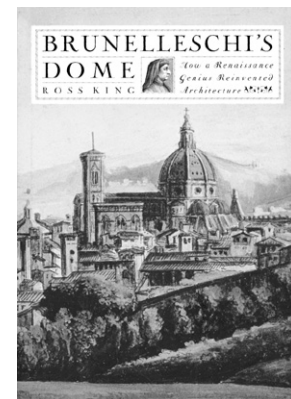
*“What man, however hard of heart or jealous, would not praise Pippo the architect when he sees here such an enormous construction towering above the heavens, vast enough to cover the entire Tuscan population with its shadow, and done without the aid of beams or elaborate wooden supports?”*

—Leon Battista Alberti

Most Americans today are unaware that the founding of this nation is, in significant part, the outcome of a “great project” of the early Fifteenth century in Florence: the design and construction of what is, even now, the largest (and, arguably, the most beauti-

ful) dome ever built. Now, with the release of this new book, Americans, who are the beneficiaries of the revolutionary events which took place in Florence, Italy, during the first half of the Quattrocento (1400’s), can become familiar with this spellbinding tale.

Indeed, the dome of Santa Maria del Fiore, the Cathedral of Florence, which still today towers over the city, has, appropriately, come to symbolize the Renaissance itself. Although the project involved the entire Commune of Florence, its workforce, its artisan class, and its population, who followed every development—in the same way that the American population followed the space



### Brunelleschi's Dome: How a Renaissance Genius Reinvented Architecture

by Ross King  
New York, Walker & Company,  
2000

192 pages, hardcover, \$24.00