Acknowledgements

This book was inspired by my doctoral research at Université Saint-Louis in Brussels under the umbrella of the IAP BeJust 2.0 research project and financed by the Belgian Federal Scientific Policy. I would like to thank my thesis supervisor, Nathalie Tousignant, for her mentoring, friendship, and continuous support. She was the first to introduce me to the fascinating history of Congo and colonialism during my second year of study. In the process of designing my study plan, Nathalie constantly encouraged me to go off the beaten path; to investigate new sources; and to critically approach my archives. I would have been another researcher—and perhaps not even a researcher at all—should I not have the chance to meet her.

I would also like to express my gratitude to the members of my doctoral jury: Alexander Keese, Thomas Hendriks, Pedro Monaville and Pierre-Olivier de Broux. They allocated a significant portion of their precious time to helping me improve my work. Their advice, suggestions, and expertise have profoundly helped me refine my analytical framework and improve my research techniques, both in the archives and in the field. Our paths have continued to cross since then, and I hope we will remain in touch for decades to come. I also have to mention how indebted I am to Thomas for his kindness; for the sharpness of his conceptual mind; and for suggesting that I work around the concept of colonial impotence. As it turned out, I took his advice very seriously!

Countless other people have helped me bring this research to fruition. Many thanks to Pierre Dandoy and Rafael Storme (African archives, Federal Public Service Foreign Affairs, Brussels); Joanne Ruff (Unilever archives, Port Sunlight); and Father Jan Evers (Jesuit archives, Kinshasa), who helped me find my way through the intricate paper trails of colonial institutions. I was also fortunate to be able to count on the support and help of friends and colleagues during my field work in the Kwilu. I am particularly indebted to Katrien Pype, for sharing her time and experiences with me, and for giving me the chance to find a family and a home in Kikwit. I am honoured to count someone as knowledgeable, warm and charming as she among my friends. Thanks also to Pierre Clinquart, Clara Devlieger, Jacob Koster, Emery Kalema, Renzo Martens, Trisha Phippard and Kiangu Sindani for their support and advice and for accommodating me. I am endlessly grateful to the Mbwabala family, Bertine, Noël, Héritier, Florence and Winner, for welcoming me into their home and for taking care of me. Above all, I would like to thank Jean-Claude Lufungula, without whom this fieldwork would not have been possible. Jean-Claude devoted entire weeks to my research and drove his motorbike on hundreds of kilometres of asphalt roads and

https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110652734-003
dusty trails for us to meet the remaining witnesses of Leverville. I am also indebted to his tireless and excellent translation work. Finally, I wish want to thank all of those who were willing to share their memories with perfect strangers and who helped me get a clearer picture of what the concession experience could mean for those who lived through it.

Over the years, this dissertation was progressively turned into a book, a process which brought along another set of invaluable contributors. I want to thank Iris Vandevelde (@Zidiris) for making beautiful maps out of the barely legible ones I found in the archives. I am also forever grateful to Marieke Slovin for her fantastic copy-editing work and for her unfailing vigilance in making sure that I remained consistent in my use of the Oxford comma. Marieke not only patiently corrected all of my idiosyncrasies; she also brought clarity and structure to my often hard to follow streams of thought. I cannot thank my De Gruyter editors, Rabea Rittgerodt and Jana Fritsche, enough for being ever so patient, understanding and supportive during the long writing process of this monograph.

Furthermore, I am endlessly indebted to my colleagues and friends, whose invaluable input and review helped me to significantly improve this present research. Many thanks to Geoffrey Pakiam, Miles Larmer, Reuben Loffman, Iva Peša, Romain Tiquet and Amandine Lauro for reading and rereading my work and allowing me to benefit from their insight and expertise. I am particularly grateful for Amandine’s lasting friendship and beautiful intelligence and for the countless projects we designed together, as well as all of those we will pursue in the future. I would also like to thank the two anonymous reviewers’ constructive and critical feedback, which helped me improve the book’s final outlook.

These last several years, I have had the incredible opportunity to work for and with fantastic academics. I want to express my gratitude to the members of the Comparing the Copperbelt project and the School of Area Studies at Oxford University for trusting and welcoming me into their fold. I am also ever so grateful to my colleagues and to the history students of the Vrije Universiteit Brussel (VUB), from whom and with whom I have learned so much every day.

Finally, I want to thank my close ones for their love and support. Some drifted away while others became closer, but all contributed in no small part to shaping the life experience in which this book was formed. I particularly want to thank my fantastic partner, Kevin, for being the best life companion I could dream of; for our community of minds and souls; and for the future we are building together. I am also ever so grateful that he was the kindest reviewer #1 academia has ever seen during the writing of this manuscript, gently channelling his remarks and suggestions through the warmest chord of care. I look forward to the many adventures ahead of us!