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Deconstructing ‘Belgian’ chocolate

From Colonial Delicacy to a Symbol of National Identity

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I hereby declare that, in line with the Faculty of Arts' code of conduct for research integrity, the work submitted here is my own original work and that any additional sources of information have been duly cited.

Abstract

Dit onderzoek belicht de huidige disconnectie tussen de beroemde nationale identiteit van Belgische chocolade en zijn koloniale verleden. Het onderzoekt hoe chocolade, aanvankelijk een koloniaal consumptieartikel, geëvolueerd is tot een symbool van de Belgische cultuur en identiteit. Door de representatie van Belgische chocolade op de Wereldtentoonstellingen van Brussel (1897, 1910, 1935 en 1958) te analyseren, belicht het onderzoek de complexe processen van toe-eigening en betekenisgeving die chocolade hebben verankerd als een integraal onderdeel van de Belgische cultuur. Door gebruik te maken van kritische discoursanalyse en visuele analyse van documentatiemateriaal van deze tentoonstellingen, onderzoekt de studie zowel het officiële discours als de beeldtaal van Belgische chocolade. De historische analyse van de Wereldtentoonstellingen onthult een bewuste inspanning om chocolade te positioneren als een nationaal symbool door middel van nationalistische representatie. Het geconstrueerde nationale verhaal vermeed vaak de koloniale oorsprong van chocolade, wat wijst op een selectieve herinnering dat de Belgische verwezenlijkingen in de verf zet en de koloniale uitbuiting die aan de basis ligt van de cacao-industrie negeert. De manier waarop Belgische chocolade in de loop der jaren werd voorgesteld, heeft een cruciale rol gespeeld in de beeldvorming ervan. Aanvankelijk werd het geassocieerd met koloniale inspanningen, maar geleidelijk verschoof de aandacht naar de Belgische productie, waarbij de nadruk werd gelegd op vakmanschap, kwaliteit, technologische innovatie en traditie. Hoewel de koloniale oorsprong van cacao bijdroeg aan de exotische aantrekkingskracht van chocolade, werd dit aspect na verloop van tijd minder benadrukt. Bijgevolg werd chocolade steeds meer een symbool van de Belgische identiteit en cultuur, los van zijn koloniale context. De resultaten onderstrepen de rol van culturele en nationale representatie in het proces van vererfgoeding. De transformatie van Belgische chocolade van een koloniaal consumptieproduct tot een nationaal symbool illustreert hoe culturele identiteit in de loop van de tijd wordt geconstrueerd en onderhandeld, waarbij bepaalde verhalen naar voren worden geschoven en andere worden gemarginaliseerd.

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Introduction

> Bruxelles aujourd'hui permet de le constater : en notre vingt et unième siècle ultra-touristique, le chocolat est un argument de poids dans cette ville, jusqu'à être revendiqué comme élément patrimonial national (Hanotiaux 2024, 4).

When strolling through the capital, it quickly becomes clear that chocolate in Belgium is a national symbol, representative of Belgian culture and identity. Although it is not on the UNESCO list of intangible cultural heritage, both the Belgian federal government and the chocolate industry have made multiple attempts to define and protect Belgian chocolate (Garrone, Pieters, and Swinnen 2015, 25). This underscores the importance of chocolate to Belgian national identity. However, this consumer good, of which the base ingredients are not even found in Belgium, is rooted in a colonial past. This colonial history is also part of Belgian identity. Today, however, a complete disconnection exists between the claimed national identity of this consumer product and its colonial past.

Occasionally, the colonial origin of this 'Belgian product' unconsciously surfaces. A recent example is a newspaper article about Belgian prince Emmanuel de Merode who, "with the help of Belgian entrepreneurs," opens the first chocolate factory in the Democratic Republic of Congo in Virunga National Park, where, notably, the Belgian prince serves as director.[1] "There are some 10,000 cocoa plantations around Virunga, the cocoa beans were practically growing in people's backyards, but nobody knew what to do with them," a Belgian chocolatier told the Brussels Times. This Belgian chocolatier teaches the Congolese the tricks of the trade. However, these cocoa plantations were originally planted by the Belgians with the dream of turning Congo into a major cocoa plantation colony. Consequently, some very interesting questions arise: What is the relationship of the Congolese with chocolate and cocoa? Do they see chocolate or cocoa as an important part of their identity? Do they attach cultural significance to them? These questions gain additional weight when the same newspaper article mentions that "few locals had ever tasted chocolate".

Unfortunately, due to constraints in time and scope, this thesis will only focus on the Belgian perspective and not on the Congolese. The central question that will be addressed in this research is:

1 Lauren Walker, "'Glimmer of hope': Congolese chocolate saves region from violence," *Brussels Times*, February 25, 2023, www.brusselstimes.com/365947/glimmer-of-hope-congolese-chocolate-saves-region-from-voilence.

Why have Belgians appropriated this colonial consumer product as part of their national identity? What transfer of meaning took place? Thus, how did chocolate, a typical colonial consumer product, become a symbol of Belgian culture and identity? To understand this, it is necessary to deconstruct this cultural process. Indeed, the core and added value of research on heritagization lies not in simply tracing and interpreting the heritage itself, but in analyzing and interpreting the ways and motives behind why particular individuals or communities engage in processes of appropriation and meaning-making (Beyers, Segers, and Geyzen 2018, 269). This research therefore draws, among others, on studies on the relationship between food and national identity (Benedict 2006; Billig 2012; Ichijo, Johannes and Ranta 2019; Ichijo and Ranta 2016), the heritagization of food as a process of appropriation (Di Fiore 2019) and the importance of representation in the process of meaning-making (Du Gay, Hall and Janes 1997).

The research follows a similar method to the study on the heritagization of Belgian beer culture by Yves Segers, Chantal Bisschop, and Greet Draye (2023). It examines the representation of Belgian chocolate at the world's fairs in Brussels (1897, 1910, 1935, and 1958) to gain deeper insight into how Belgian chocolate was represented, appreciated, and positioned as a national symbol. The use of historical case studies allows this cultural process to be placed in a broader historical context and to be analyzed in depth. The choice of these cases is based on three criteria. First, the world's fairs were important venues for (national) representation. Secondly, they took place in Brussels, the center of the Belgian chocolate industry. Finally, the chosen period begins before the boom of the Belgian chocolate industry in the 1900s, allowing its full development to be followed from the beginning. Due to the limited time and scope of my thesis, the studied period only extends to 1958, the year of the last world's fair in Belgium. The world changed dramatically after this, such as Congo's independence in 1960.

The study employs a critical discourse analysis and a visual analysis of documentation materials from these exhibitions, studying both the representation of Belgian chocolate in the official discourse and in visual language. The analysis focuses on three aspects: the democratization of chocolate consumption, the national aspect, and the colonial aspect. In this way, this research seeks to uncover how chocolate, a typical colonial consumer product, has evolved into a symbol of Belgian culture and identity. Since processes that produce cultural paradigms can be deconstructed by historicizing them (Di Fiore 2019, 35), it is crucial to investigate the Belgian appropriation of chocolate against the historical background of chocolate in Belgium and the colonial history of cocoa. The

structure of the thesis is as follows. The first section elaborates on the theoretical framework, discussing the topics mentioned above as well as the relationship between food, national identity and international exhibitions. This is followed by a description of the methodology and an extensive analysis of the representation of Belgian chocolate at the Brussels World Exhibitions. Finally, the thesis concludes with a general conclusion.

1 Theoretical framework

1.1 Chocolate and Belgium: a historical overview

In exploring the historical context of chocolate in Belgium, this study relies significantly on the seminal work of Peter Scholliers. Scholliers has conducted extensive research on this topic, offering invaluable insights into the evolution of chocolate consumption in Belgium. His studies are fundamental in understanding the transformation of chocolate from a luxury item to a mass-consumed commodity within Belgian society. Given the limited scope of scholarly research on this particular subject, Scholliers' work stands out as a pivotal contribution, offering a wealth of data and analysis. Therefore, this study will extensively reference and cite Scholliers' research findings. Through a critical examination of his research, the aim is to provide a comprehensive understanding of the socio-economic dynamics underlying the emergence and integration of chocolate into everyday life within Belgian society. In the following sections, various facets of chocolate production, distribution, and consumption in Belgium will be explored.

As a hot and cold drink, in a sauce, on a slice of bread, as a dessert, accompanying a coffee or simply as a snack, today, chocolate is an integral part of the daily diet of people from all social classes (Scholliers 1996, 163). However, "Belgians' general love for chocolate is fairly recent", states Peter Scholliers (2009, 59). From the 17th century until the start of the twentieth century, chocolate was a real luxury product, available only for a very small part of society (Scholliers 1996, 163). When exactly in the seventeenth century chocolate was introduced in the Southern Netherlands is not yet clear (Swaelen 1996, 60). Like in other European countries, chocolate was consumed predominantly by the clergy, the nobility, and senior officials. The price of chocolate remained high for a considerable time. Throughout the 18th century, the average price of chocolate was fourteen times higher than the price of bread. Even on the threshold of the industrial revolution, a worker could savour chocolate only very exceptionally (Swaelen 1996, 60). Suddenly, around 1900, the price of chocolate fell and more and more people could have a taste of the delicacy (Scholliers 1995, 127). So, "Within the time-span of a few years, chocolate shifted from an elitist consumption item to a product that was on its way to become mass-consumed" (Scholliers 1995, 127).

1.1.1 Rise of chocolateries in Brussels

The first *chocolateries* in Belgium were established in Brussels near the end of the 17th century (Scholliers 1996, 163). According to Peter Scholliers, “these were small with very limited production, and only using human energy. The city of Brussels played an important role, being the capital of the Southern Netherlands where the demand for luxury goods was high” (Scholliers 1995, 127). In this period, chocolate was consumed in liquid form, and “cocoa became a fashionable drink” (Scholliers 2009, 59). The *chocolateries* sold chocolate biscuits made from cocoa beans, sugar and various other ingredients such as cinnamon, vanilla, pepper or nuts, besides other sweets and beverages (Scholliers 1996, 163). These biscuits were melted in water (later milk) or eaten plain which was far from being the norm at the time. Brussels producers amply satisfied the local demand of a small group of people, namely the court and the haute bourgeoisie. Like luxurious clothing and lavish houses, food was a means for the wealthy to display social success to fellow citizens. Chocolate was instrumental to this end (Scholliers 1996, 163). The aristocracy would have this beverage throughout the day, preferably at breakfast and dinner time, at home or at coffee houses (Swaelen 1996, 60). As it was the case in other European cities, a real “chocolatomania” emerged in the 18th century. Chocolate was the drink of the Rococo period, just as champagne was the drink of the Belle Epoque and whisky that of the silver fifties (Scholliers 1996, 164). Until the end of the 19th century, chocolate remained a very expensive delicacy consumed exclusively by the wealthy (Scholliers 1995, 127).

1.1.2 Mechanization, expansion and foreign competition

In 1835, the first steam engine of the Brussels chocolate industry was established (Scholliers 1996, 164). However, this was an exception because no steam engines were added until the early 1850s. In 1846, small scale and craftmanship prevailed in Belgium (Scholliers 1996, 165). The number of places that produced chocolate in Brussels is estimated between 25 and 30 (Scholliers 1996, 164). Brussels producers were catering almost entirely to the local market, and in the 1840s-1850s, the entirety of Belgian chocolate producers exported only 500 kilograms a year (Scholliers 1996, 165). The production of chocolate was always combined with other professions, like confectionery manufacturer or pastry baker (Scholliers 1996, 164). As Peter Scholliers points out, the jury at the 1847 industrial exhibition had little faith in a prosperous future for chocolate production, as the jury states that “La fabrication du chocolat tend à se développer chez nous. Mais c’est une de ces industries dont la manutention ne

présente pas de grands avantages pour le pays, parce qu'elle demande peu de main-d'œuvre et les matières premières nous viennent en partie de l'étranger" (Scholliers 1996, 165). The situation hardly changed until 1860, when between 1860 and 1871 fifteen new steam engines were established in the Brussels chocolate industry. Still, mechanization remained extremely modest, since far from all manufacturers had acquired a steam engine (Scholliers 1996, 165).

Meanwhile, wealthy Belgians started to prefer foreign chocolate (primarily German and French) (Scholliers 1996, 165). In the 1840s, Belgium imported two tonnes of foreign chocolate every year. By the 1870s, that quantity had increased tremendously: no less than 83 tonnes of foreign chocolate was imported annually. The foreign competition from the 1860s-1880s hardly worried Belgian producers as they retained more than sufficient local sales (Scholliers 1996, 165). In the early 1880s, however, foreign competition started to unsettle Belgian producers: imports were almost three times higher than in the 1870s (Scholliers 1996, 166). In order to help the Belgian chocolate producers, the state intervened: from 1898 onwards, cocoa could be imported freely, resulting in a decrease of production costs. Additionally, in 1903, the wholesale price of sugar, the second base ingredient of chocolate, declined, and even a complete tax exemption was applied to sugar used in chocolate products intended for export (Scholliers 1996, 166).

Belgian chocolate producers did not wait for state intervention and took matters into their own hands, copying what had previously been done abroad: extensive mechanization and upscaling were hailed as the solution (Scholliers 1996, 167). Mechanization coincided with rapid decentralization as Brussels was gradually losing its prominence, and factories moved to the Brussels peripheries (Scholliers 1996, 168). Similarly, there was a significant growth of important chocolate producers in the provinces of Antwerp, Henegouwen and Liège. From the 1880s, existing artisanal shops were transformed, or entirely new firms were founded: Martougin and Meurisse in Antwerp, Jacques in Verviers and Kwatta in Bois-d'Haine, for example (Scholliers 1996, 168). The chocolate industry joined the ranks of Belgium's strongest growing industries (Scholliers 1996, 167).

The many innovations in a relatively short period of time were the response to rising competition from France, Germany, England, the Netherlands and Switzerland: Belgium was indeed flooded by foreign chocolate (Scholliers 1996, 170). Producers from those countries had highly mechanized the preparation of chocolate long before, and in order to survive, Belgians had to mechanize and specialize. As a result, Belgian producers could benefit from experiences and techniques that had existed

elsewhere for a long time (Scholliers 1996, 170). They acquired the most recent technology and, just before the First World War, managed to turn the gap into an advantage (Scholliers 1996, 171). This is reflected in the price evolution. The wholesale price of exported and imported chocolate was mostly the same from 1835 to 1895, but between the periods 1895-1899 and 1910-1913, the price of Belgian chocolate decreased by 27%, while the price of imported chocolate diminished by only 16% (Scholliers 1996, 171).

The years 1900-1903 were truly crucial for the decline in the wholesale price of Belgian chocolate (Scholliers 1996, 171). In Belgium, mechanization was even stronger than in other countries, explaining the bigger fall in the price of Belgian chocolate after 1895. In this context, the favorable trade policy mentioned above needs to be taken into account as well. Between 1900 and 1912, Belgian chocolate remained on average 13% cheaper than imported chocolate, a significant advantage for Belgian producers (Scholliers 1996, 171). The intense mechanization, multiple innovations and trade policy allowed cheaper, more varied production. As a result, the international position of the Belgian chocolate industry improved considerably (Scholliers 1996, 171). The major breakthrough occurred in the 1900s, when exports rose to 75 tons in 1905 to 300 tons in 1913 (Scholliers 1996, 172). Between 1890 and 1913, Belgian chocolate exports grew by 3170%, while imported chocolate increased by only 130% (Scholliers 1996, 172). In 1913, Belgian chocolate was shipped to 17 countries. Our direct competitors Germany, England, France and the Netherlands accounted for 29% of exports, and new markets in North Africa and the Near East represented 59% of Belgian exports. As Peter Scholliers indicates, “This can be considered as a real success, since it was precisely this latter market which was the subject of harsh competition between the European producers” (Scholliers 1995, 130).

1.1.3 Belgian innovations

The changes in Belgian chocolate production involved not only rapid mechanization from the 1890s onwards, but also diversification and specialization of production and the application of new marketing techniques starting in the 1900s (Scholliers 1996, 170). Many typically Belgian chocolate treats were invented around this time. In 1912, Jean Neuhaus, son of “*confiseur, chocolatier, pharmacien* Frédéric Neuhaus” from Brussels, invented the most distinctively Belgian delicacy: the praline (Scholliers 1996, 168). Not long after, his wife designed the “ballotin” packaging, a cardboard box that replaced the paper cone in which the pralines would often be damaged. Later, in the 1920s, the Kestekides family from

Anatolia launched the *Leonidas* company (Scholliers 1996, 168). They managed to sell pralines at a lower price in 1935 by applying new sales techniques, such as selling through the shop window. Another Belgian invention is the chocolate bar, but unlike the praline, the chocolate bar enjoyed little success abroad (Scholliers 1996, 169). Until the early 1920s, Belgium and abroad had been producing tablets of chocolate weighing between 150 and 1000 grams. In 1921, Kwatta started producing small bars of chocolate weighing 30 and 45 grams, a technique which was soon picked up by other manufacturers. Milk chocolate bars or chocolate bars filled with all kinds of confectionery or nuts are and remain a typical Belgian consumer good (Scholliers 1996, 169).

A final but crucial Belgian innovation concerned the distribution of *chocolat de couverture* (liquid chocolate) (Scholliers 1996, 170). In 1920, Charles Callebaut realized that many costs could be saved if instead of hardened chocolate, liquid chocolate was transported. The main advantage was that liquid chocolate could be supplied to all kinds of small, local producers as well as abroad who were not (or no longer) involved in the actual preparation of chocolate, but only in the finishing. As mentioned before, Belgian chocolate producers sought to diversify and specialize their production. Peter scholliers (1996, 169) examined which chocolate products Belgian consumers could buy in the 1930s based on price lists from department stores or consumer cooperatives. Relying on the Brussels *Union Economique* price list, he observed that in 1939 consumers were able to choose between as many as 117 types of chocolate tablets, bars and more from 17 different labels (Scholliers 1996, 170). Additionally, Belgian brands had approximately the same price as imported ones. Every consumer, rich or poor, was able to find something to their liking among this abundant selection.

1.1.4 From luxury to mass consumption

But who could actually afford to eat chocolate, and as of when? In the 1890s chocolate was still an expensive good, and an uneducated bricklayer had to work 6 to 7 hours to buy half a kilo of cheaper Belgian chocolate (Scholliers 1996, 176). The situation changed around 1900, when the price of chocolate decreased considerably. In 1913, an uneducated worker had to work only slightly more than one hour to buy the same amount of Belgian chocolate. Thus, over the course of 20 years, the situation had changed remarkably (Scholliers 1996, 176). Between 1890 and 1910 the consumption of chocolate became widespread among the working class as well, and probably especially after 1900 when the

price of this product fell significantly. This was a real revolution as this product could only be dreamed of before (Scholliers 1996, 177).

The introduction of chocolate into the working-class diet happened very slowly initially, but rapidly after the First World War (Scholliers 1996, 177). In 1910, average consumption for a working-class family was still very little (182 grams), and it was probably only eaten on special occasions, such as birthdays, Easter and probably especially Christmas Day and *Sinterklaas*. The latter is a children's feast "that goes back to the 1850s [...] Presents for children are essential, but food has always played a role. The nature of presents has changed over time, of course, but candy in all forms remains a genuine treat. Since the late nineteenth century, chocolate has been a favourite" (Scholliers 2009, 166).

However, not only children but also adults fell for this sweet treat**.** After 1920, chocolate was part of the daily diet of many members of working-class families, including children and adults, regardless of the economic climate (Scholliers 1996, 178). The rapid and general acceptance of chocolate by the working class is illustrated by the fact that between 1919 and 1939 the price of chocolate and cocoa powder was part of the official cost-of-living index (Scholliers 2009, 60), an instrument designed in 1920 to allow wages to fluctuate with the evolution of lifespan (Scholliers 1996, 178). The index then contained the prices of only 56 products and the price of chocolate and cocoa weighed as much as that of bread, meat or butter. In July 1930, already the crisis was being felt, a four-person family bought 250 grams of chocolate every week. This was not a luxury purchase then, but literally a weekly expense (Scholliers 1996, 178).

The working class was fond of chocolate, and it had increased its consumption much more than the other social classes since the First World War (Scholliers 1996, 180). According to Peter Scholliers, the fall in price was the main reason for this. Nevertheless, the rapid spread of chocolate among the working class had other reasons (Scholliers 1996, 181). A. Boden, at the 1930 International Conference of Chocolate Confectioners in Antwerp, attributed the success of chocolate among the working class to the advantageous relationship between the high calorific value and its price. Peter Scholliers confirms this statement, noting that chocolate was (and is) a convenient, compact and tasty package of a high number of kilocalories for a relatively favorable price. A bar of chocolate was the ideal snack for workers who needed to fulfil their energetic needs quickly and relatively cheaply (Scholliers 1996, 181). As Scholliers points out, "Chocolate was not only eaten as a snack, but also as the working class's everyday tidbit" (Scholliers 1995, 134). In fact, chocolate consumption was just one facet of the growing

global fascination with sweetened foods (Scholliers 1995, 134). The interwar period, often referred to as the 'sugar years', witnessed a significant rise in sugar consumption in all European countries. Therefore, chocolate consumption represented only one element of this emerging trend. From just five kilos of sugar per head and per year around 1895, consumption went very quickly to almost 30 kilos in the interwar years (Scholliers 1996, 180).

1.1.5 Marketing techniques for mass consumption

A new mass product was sold through new distribution channels and that required new sales techniques (Scholliers 1996, 182). In the 19th century, advertising was limited and involved simple messages published in newspapers, and chocolate was far from having the status of a mass product that could be sold through simple advertisements. In the 1870s, for instance, chocolate producers like Schreurs Frères promoted themselves by referring to their modern production processes ("usine à vapeur modèle") (Scholliers 1996, 165). Additionally, already "in the early 19th century, factories advertised their chocolate as being 'hygiénique'," as healthy (Scholliers 1995, 133). Around 1900, as chocolate began to transform into a mass product, manufacturers showed a growing interest in the opinions of medical experts (Scholliers 1996, 183). This was especially the case as these experts recognized the benefits of chocolate (when consumed in moderation). Manufacturers were quick to use medical recommendations in their marketing, because the "fact that chocolate had been declared 'healthy' by many researchers was not without significance: it made socially acceptably the eating of chocolate by the young and the old" (Scholliers 1995, 133). This reached a peak around 1920, after which it no longer seemed necessary to convince consumers of the health benefits of quality chocolate.

After World War I, advertising techniques undertook a significant transformation, and campaigns became much more sophisticated (Scholliers 1995, 134). Advertising campaigns happened massively, pervasively and at different levels (1996, 184). From then on, it was sufficient to arouse interest in a product using minimal text, a neat layout and a recognizable logo (Scholliers 1996, 182). In 1939, for instance, Cote d'Or used an advertisement with a little elephant, the brand name, and the slogan "Le bon chocolat belge" to advertise their chocolate. A crucial aspect that helps explain the popularity of chocolate specifically is its association with an exotic and luxurious atmosphere (Scholliers 1996, 181). After 1920, chocolate became accessible to the general public, whereas previously it was seen as a symbol of luxury and status. This perception of status persisted even after 1920; workers felt

that buying chocolate immediately granted them a certain status, not only because of the luxury aspect but also because of chocolate's associations with health, luxury, exoticism, sports, fun, adventure and nationalism (Scholliers 1996, 181).

However, “Advertising campaigns were not limited to publicity in papers and magazines” (Scholliers 1995, 134). Advertisers drew attention with colorful billboards and brochures, strategic positioning of products at the cash desk, and temporary discounts to lure customers (Scholliers 1996, 181). Also, producers often distributed free chocolate: Cote d'Or, for instance, handed out *Dessert* chocolate bars during the 1935 World's Fair (Scholliers 1996, 183). In addition, manufacturers introduced customer loyalty systems for both young and old, by offering points, images, and various promotional items with the chocolate (Scholliers 1996, 183). An exemplary instance of this strategy is the creation of chromos, which served as collectible images. For example, in 1910, Maison Strickaert-Deschamps produced a series of chromos (colorful images) depicting Belgian history for Senez-Sturbelle chocolates (Hoebanx 1991, 52-53). In 160 chromos, great historical figures are staged in order to forge a national and patriotic feeling. Notably, in 1910, Belgium was merely 80 years old. The significance lies in the profound role chocolate played in cultivating a shared national consciousness.

In the 1930s, chocolate really breaks through as an everyday product, especially when it is included in the recommended diet for schoolchildren (Collet 1996, 12). With the growing focus on children and the increasing variety of brands on the market, the semiotics of chocolate evolved through every possible medium of information, such as posters, press announcements, and packaging. Even images illustrating patriotic history and the development of arts and sciences soon appear on chocolate wrappers (Collet 1996, 12). Although this initiative is not exclusively Belgian - companies such as Cadbury in England and Suchard in Switzerland did it before - there are subtle differences in how different countries present their national identity (Collet 1996, 13). Despite these differences, the essence remains the same: chocolate reflects reality in all its facets, bringing together family life, technological progress and national history. Belgium, for example, addresses highlights of its history and the royal family, not forgetting to highlight rural tranquility, urban development, industrial achievements and colonial successes as well. Despite occasional instances where chocolate is used for propaganda (such as for Catholic missionary work, the labor movement, or the Flemish and Walloon struggles), a sense of national unity still prevails (Collet 1996, 13).

Furthermore, the rapid growth in chocolate consumption is also partly explained by its availability at many and various selling points, and the emergence of new distribution forms (Scholliers 1996, 181). It was possible to buy chocolate not only from the local neighborhood shop, but also from newspaper kiosks and all kinds of street vendors, who sold a wide range of chocolate tablets, bars and toffees. From around 1900, however, as well as with increasing success during the interwar period and after 1945, chocolate was offered on a much larger scale and almost systematically in new types of shops. Consumer cooperatives, department stores and chains such as Delhaize, some of which even produced their own chocolate, offered a very wide range of products (Scholliers 1996, 181). Chocolate was also available through vending machines that appeared everywhere: not only against the wall of shops, but also in train stations, hospitals, swimming pools and other locations where many people congregated. Using such machines to obtain chocolate was seen as a very attractive form of modernity during the interwar period (Scholliers 1996, 182).

1.1.6 Conclusion

The historical evolution of chocolate in Belgium provides an essential context for understanding its contemporary cultural significance as national heritage. From being an exclusive delicacy for the elite to becoming an everyday treat for people from across all social classes, the evolution of chocolate reflects not only shifts within Belgian society but also the interplay of economic factors, technological advancements, and cultural perceptions. This transition in status and accessibility has fostered a deeply rooted cultural identification with chocolate, where it serves not merely as a foodstuff but also as a symbol of national pride and heritage. This historical background provides a valuable framework for a critical analysis of the cultural transmission and meaning-making processes surrounding chocolate in Belgium.

1.2 Chocolate and the Colony

> Porter son attention sur les traces de la colonisation à Bruxelles mène logiquement à la statue du roi Léopold II, propriétaire sanguinaire du Congo, au boulevard portant son nom, ou à d'autres lieux commémoratifs dans la ville. Et si l'héritage colonial se situait plus près encore de notre intimité ? Par exemple sur nos papilles gustatives, lors du dépôt d'un morceau de ce célèbre chocolat belge… (Hanotiaux 2024, 4)

The history of Belgian chocolate is inextricably linked to the colonial period. Chocolate, a product that sourced its base ingredients, namely cocoa, from the colonies, was thus essentially a colonial product. Although Belgium only imported a small percentage of its cocoa from Congo, the dream of making Congo a leading cocoa producer played a crucial role in Belgium's economic and cultural history. Today, we hardly reflect on the colonial origins of chocolate and primarily consider the product as a typically "Belgian" phenomenon. This disconnection between the origins of the base ingredients and the national identity of the final product illustrates how colonial history has influenced the perception and appreciation of Belgian chocolate.

This section of the thesis explores Belgium's colonial ambitions and their impact on the chocolate industry. It begins with a brief overview of Belgian colonial history and the associated economic interests. Subsequently, the focus shifts to the specific role of cocoa in the colonial plans, including production efforts and the challenges encountered. Then the consequences of Belgian cocoa plantations for the indigenous population are discussed. Although the ambition to turn Congo into a cocoa-producing colony was never fully realized, this dream has left a lasting influence on the cultural perception of chocolate in Belgium. Exploring these topics reveals how deeply rooted the colonial legacy is in the Belgian chocolate industry and how this colonial history has contributed to the integration of chocolate into the national identity.

1.2.1 Cacao and the Colony

The history of cacao and Belgium did not begin in Congo, but much earlier and in a different place. The arrival of the cacao bean in Europe dates back to the early phase of European colonization. The discovery of chocolate has been linked to colonial enterprises from the outset, when European ships docked on the shores of present-day Latin America (Hanotiaux 2024, 4). The first shipment of cacao beans arrived in Europe from Mexico in 1585 (Hanotiaux 2024, 4), with Spain initially holding a monopoly on the supply of this 'miracle bean' (Collet 1996, 10). This changed in 1822 with the planting

of the first cacao trees on the Portuguese island of São Tomé, located in the Gulf of Guinea (Collet 1996, 11). São Tomé is widely recognized as the first place in Africa where cacao cultivation was introduced (Vantieghem 1996, 145). Cacao production grew significantly and spread across Central America and Brazil, West Africa—which had by then become a formidable competitor—and to a lesser extent, the Dutch East Indies (Collet 1996, 11).

The world's cocoa production was largely supported by small-scale, individual farmers in tropical regions (Vantieghem 1996, 145). However, from the end of the nineteenth century, attempts were made to establish large-scale plantations in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. These plantations were financed with European capital and were entirely owned by European or Western entrepreneurs. The work on these plantations was carried out by local, inexpensive laborers. On the African continent, significant plantations were developed on the islands of São Tomé and Principe, as well as in Cameroon, British colonies on the west coast, and French Equatorial Africa (Vantieghem 1996, 145). During this period, cocoa plantations were also established in the Congo Free State under Leopold II.

During the colonization of Congo by Leopold II and Belgium, Congo was not the only source of cacao for the Belgian chocolate industry. In 1883, at the beginning of the well-known Belgian chocolate brand Côte d'Or, a significant portion of the cocoa beans originated from a region in West Africa under British colonial rule: the Gold Coast. This name derived from the numerous gold mines exploited throughout history by various European colonial powers (Hanotiaux 2024, 5). Since chocolate had its origins in the non-European plant world, it remained a symbol of the colonial foods for a long time (Collet 1996, 9).

1.2.2 Belgian colonial history

Belgium's colonial history traces back to the late 19th century, with King Leopold II being the driving force behind the expansion into Africa (Vanthemsche 2012a). Leopold II's colonial motivations were complex and multifaceted. They encompassed not only economic greed but also political and social motives, such as strengthening the nation, affirming its greatness on symbolic and diplomatic levels, reconciling conflicting social groups, and mobilizing national energies for greater achievements (Vanthemsche 2012a, 17). All these elements were present in his expansionist vision. However, they are all undeniably linked to Leopold's primary motive, wealth: "Wealth created from colonial activities would support the more noble ideals" (Vanthemsche 2012a, 17). Within this ambition also fitted his

aspiration to make Congo a leading cocoa-producing colony, with cocoa even serving as a means of supporting these ‘noble’ ideals.

Leopold II gained personal control over an enormous territory in Central Africa, known as the Congo Free State. The Congo Free State was established in 1885 as the private property of Leopold II, not as a colony of the Belgian state (Vanthemsche 2012a, 21). At the onset of the colonial period, Belgium as a nation was not interested in acquiring colonies (Vanthemsche 2012a, 14-15). There was little public and political support for colonial projects: “The opinion of the great majority of the country’s political decision makers and economic players [was] that Belgium had little to gain and much to lose from a colonial policy” (Vanthemsche 2012a, 16). Nevertheless, cocoa production would prove to be an exception to the rule, as this project enjoyed considerable public support and investment.

The reign of Leopold II in the Congo Free State was characterized by atrocities, forced labor, abuse, and mismanagement. The brutal methods of exploitation sparked international outrage, ultimately leading to the transfer of the territory to the Belgian state in 1908, officially making it a Belgian colony (Vanthemsche 2012a, 25-26). In Belgian Congo, the focus was on economic development and the exploitation of natural resources, including cocoa production, albeit with varying degrees of success. It wasn't until after the First World War that a coherent agricultural policy emerged (Denayer 2018, 2), including efforts to intensify cocoa production.

1.2.3 The Belgian dream

The king's colonial enterprise was a cruel and appalling exploitation of natural resources and indigenous populations. Rubber and ivory were the primary exports, but cocoa was also considered a potentially valuable commodity. By the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century, cocoa consumption in Europe and particularly in the United States grew massively (Vellut 1996, 123). In response to this increased demand, cocoa production was raised by establishing new plantations and expanding old plantation zones, for example, in Ecuador, Brazil, and São Tomé. It seemed a logical step to introduce this plantation system to new tropical areas, such as the Congo Free State (Vellut 1996, 123).

During the 1890s, the first agricultural inventory of Congo was compiled, with tasks entrusted to Emile Laurent, a professor at the Institute of Gembloux (Vellut 1996, 123). Laurent was quickly convinced that Congo would become an important area for cocoa. He was particularly enthusiastic about the Mayombe region (Vellut 1996, 123). It is not precisely known when the first cocoa trees were

planted in Congo. However, it is established that in 1895, cocoa farmers were mentioned in Kinshasa and Basoko. Most likely, these were European settlers who imported cocoa, as decades later, indigenous farmers still hardly planted any cocoa. Plantations in Lukolela and Mayombe, owned by European settlers, followed swiftly (Denayer 2018, 6).

The production and establishment of cocoa plantations were actively encouraged by the government, and even enforced as mandatory for a long time (Vantieghem 1996, 145). Starting from 1895, instructions were given to allocate personnel solely to coffee and cocoa plantations at every state station or post (Vellut 1996, 123), typically situated near the coast in the Mayombe region (Hanotiaux 2024, 5). This was done without consideration for the environment, the local population, transportation options, or the qualifications of the personnel (Vellut 1996, 123). These mandatory plantations were established without sufficient technical and botanical knowledge, and with little attention paid to the climatic and soil requirements of cultivation; thus, it is needless to say that most of these plantations did not last long (Vantieghem 1996, 145). A second indication of government involvement was the decision in 1896 to construct a second railway in the Mayombe for the exploitation of the area: les Chemins de fer vicinaux du Mayombe (Hanotiaux 2024, 6). The significance of this is evident from the economic development of the Mayombe: after 1898, the number of agricultural enterprises in the region increased dramatically (Vantieghem 1996, 147).

The dream of making the Congo Free State a prominent cocoa producer was rooted in the hope that the region could benefit from the rising global demand for cocoa. Leopold II and his advisors saw in the fertile soil and favorable climate of Congo an ideal opportunity to establish a profitable cocoa industry. The proximity to foreign markets, the perceived consistent climate, and the assumed exceptional fertility of the soil in regions like Mayombe reinforced the belief that success was guaranteed (Vellut 1996, 125). However, these initial expectations later proved to be unfounded. The underground and soil of the area turned out to be highly diverse, leading to many plantations being developed on pieces of land that later proved unsuitable for cocoa cultivation (Vantieghem 1996, 146). The history of the Congo Free State demonstrated that it was often a graveyard of geopolitical utopias and grand failed plans (Vellut 1996, 125). The lack of expertise and a tendency towards improvisation characterized the administration (Vellut 1996, 125). Despite cocoa being considered by the authorities of the Congo Free State as one of the most important crops of the entire colony, its production remained limited, and genuine expertise in this area was lacking (Vantieghem 1996, 145).

Remarkably, before 1914, Belgian capitalists often invested their resources in other colonies, such as palm tree plantations in the Dutch East Indies, but not in Congo (Vellut 1996, 125). However, the cocoa plantations of Mayombe formed an exception to this rule. Apart from state-owned plantations, the most significant Belgian private agricultural enterprises in Congo before 1914 were concentrated there (Vellut 1996, 125). Moreover, the economic development of this region would for a long time be almost exclusively focused on this large-scale cocoa production, leading to the rapid emergence of numerous plantation companies with this goal. In this way, the area would occupy a somewhat remarkable place in the colony (Vantieghem 1996, 145). The region seemed to hold great promise, and there was a belief that it would be possible to develop a thriving cocoa industry here. It became an important domain for cocoa and simultaneously an experimental ground for Belgian capitalism in Congo. Outside of Mayombe, there were hardly any examples of capitalist production on state-owned lands (Vellut 1996, 125-126).

The experiment in Mayombe brought together various social and financial actors (Vellut 1996, 126). Noteworthy is the number of nobles who were active in several companies in the Mayombe. Mayombe appears to be the only region where notable interest from the aristocratic class was evident (Vantieghem 1996, 152). Aristocratic families and wealthy investors in Belgium, who were generally hesitant to invest in Congo, made an exception for Mayombe and engaged in various agricultural companies. Count Hippolyte d'Ursel and Baron de Stein were pioneers in this endeavour, obtaining concessions for cocoa cultivation in 1896 and 1898 (Vellut 1996, 126). Their successful enterprises, such as Urselia, became symbols of this ambitious attempt to establish Congo as a leading cocoa producer. An important consequence of this was that colonial investments and enterprises came to be viewed in a much more favorable light than was typically the case. For a long time, colonial enterprise was seen as the domain of adventurers and various unreliable, unscrupulous criminals (Vantieghem 1996, 152).

Besides aristocratic investors, there were also former state officials, often of modest origins, who pursued social mobility by acquiring plantation concessions. Auguste Jacques, a former state official, became the symbol of the independent cocoa planter (Vellut 1996,128). He was one of the first individual planters to settle in the colony, although he was already familiar with the area from his time as an officer of the Force Publique. In that capacity, he had participated in the initial exploration expeditions in the Mayombe (Vantieghem 1996, 155). Moreover, the development of Jacques'

plantation occurred in close collaboration with the plantation at the Scheutist mission of Father Natalis De Cleene, established in Kangu in 1905 (Vellut 1996,128). The involvement of religious orders, such as the Scheut congregation, in the exploitation of cocoa plantations demonstrates that the church not only played a spiritual and educational role but also actively participated in economic activities and the development of the cocoa industry in the Congo Free State. The mission post had very close ties with Urselia, and it was this company that also engaged in selling the yield of the mission plantations (Vantieghem 1996, 154).

Moreover, Leopold II himself was directly involved in the cocoa industry (Vellut 1996, 129). In 1906, he purchased two parcels of land, each measuring 20,000 hectares, with the intention of cultivating cocoa, and the profits solely benefiting him (Vantieghem 1996, 154). This acquisition underscores how the ambition to establish Congo as a leading cocoa producer was shared across various layers of society, from the monarchy and aristocracy to religious and individual investors. Unlike any other area in the Congo Free State, the Mayombe region saw a patchwork of diverse plantations emerge, owned by a large number of different entrepreneurs or companies, and for years, cocoa cultivation would dominate the economic development of the area (Vantieghem 1996, 160).

Although production peaked in 1910 at 900 tons, this achievement proved relatively modest (Vellut 1996, 131). In 1907, the export value of cocoa was merely 14% of agricultural exports from Mayombe. Moreover, this performance contrasted sharply with that of São Tomé, which exported as much as 30,000 tonnes of cocoa in 1912 (Vellut 1996, 131). On the eve of the First World War, Congolese cocoa represented only 10.8% of Belgian cocoa imports, a modest result rarely surpassed, and moreover, the commercialization of Congolese cocoa largely occurred in Belgium (Vellut 1996, 132). Production peaked again in 1929-1930, but this quantity was insignificant in the vastly expanded global market. At that time, Congolese production accounted for a meager 8.70% of Belgian cocoa supply (Vellut 1996, 138).

In reality, however, it was an area full of challenges and obstacles, and the ambition to turn Mayombe into a leading cocoa producer was but an illusion. Disparities in cocoa production outcomes in Mayombe were significant. The cocoa culture proved to be intricate, unreliable, and seldom profitable under local production conditions (Vellut 1996, 125). Cocoa is a cultivation with a number of strict climatological requirements, and due to these strict conditions, only a relatively small part of Congo is suitable for cultivation (Denayer 2018, 7). After about a decade, cocoa cultivation in the area was

considered a failure by many societies, and after World War I, a number of planters would resolutely turn away from it to switch to other products, such as bananas and especially palm oil (Vantieghem 1996, 160). Many regarded cocoa cultivation during this period as an *idée fixe*, a collective fantasy that the planters in Mayombe had pursued for years. This dream now proved entirely misguided, and moreover, it became apparent that the notion of the region's suitability for cocoa cultivation had not been based on genuinely reliable assertions (Vantieghem 1996, 160). In 1924, all cocoa plantations in Mayombe were operating at a loss, except for the plantation of the Scheutist mission. Factors such as poor plantation management, inadequate replacement of cocoa trees, insufficient understanding of the local climate, diseases, and highly fluctuating market prices contributed to the difficulties (Vellut 1996, 133).

The dream of cocoa production in Belgian Congo did not end in Mayombe (Vellut 1996, 136). Although production in Mayombe barely surpassed the peaks it had experienced before 1914 during the 1920s-1930s, European planters continued actively seeking new opportunities elsewhere in the colony (Vellut 1996, 135). In the Equator Province, a competitive production center emerged, again initiated by a former agricultural official of the State, V. de Bellefroid. He began a cocoa plantation in Lukolela in 1920-21 (Vellut 1996, 136). This venture grew into a true success story, as by the 1950s, Lukolela became the leading cocoa producer in Congo. Just a decade after its establishment, Lukolela was regarded as the most developed cocoa enterprise in the colony (Vellut 1996, 136).

However, this was merely an exception. "The hopes placed on cocoa were high. The disappointment between the two world wars was equally great" (Vellut 1996, 139; own translation). Congolese cocoa became a planting that necessarily had to be accompanied by other crops (elaia, timber, etc.), to spread the risks. Cocoa production lost its significance in Mayombe, as well as in the rest of Congo (Vellut 1996, 135). In 1952, Belgium only imported 11% of cocoa from Belgian Congo (Vanthemsche 2012b, 193), and Congolese cocoa production represented a meager 0.4% of global production (Vellut 1996, 141).

1.2.4 The impact of cocoa plantations on the indigenous population

It is essential to step away from the Belgian focus and the economic facts, and to examine the consequences for the indigenous population. Initially, cocoa was not produced in Congo (Denayer 2018, 6). Cocoa was not an indigenous crop cultivated by the local population, unlike, for example, palm oil

plantations. However, as discussed above, starting from 1895, all colonial posts in Congo were required to plant cocoa trees (Hanotiaux 2024, 5). The Belgian dream of developing Congo into a cocoa-producing colony imposed this cultivation, and in this process, no consideration was given to the environment and the population (Vellut 1996, 123). In the early 1900s, "capitalist plantations were established as good and as bad as they could": the existing environment and structures, as well as the desires of the population, were completely disregarded as European entrepreneurs came to establish capitalist plantations (Vellut 1996, 130; own translation).

Of course, they needed workers for these plantations, and they were sought among the local population. A very large part of the population in the Mayombe region would be employed on the European plantations (Vantieghem 1996, 160). The initial treatment of the African population on the cocoa plantations in Mayombe reflects the broader colonial exploitation and the power dynamics characteristic of that time. Recruitment and management of labor on these plantations were often based on compulsion and intimidation. The plantation enterprises of Jacques and the Scheutists are a prime example of this. In the early stages of their plantation enterprises, workers were often forced to work on the plantations (Vellut 1996, 130). Jacques, one of the prominent figures in these enterprises, was known for his brutal methods of obtaining workers. He compelled local chiefs to provide workers and used violence to retrieve and enlist "deserters". Recruiters divided villages among themselves to efficiently recruit workers (Vellut 1996, 130).

Various kind of workers were used on the cocoa plantations and the diversity and hierarchy of the workforce on these plantations reflected the colonial labor organization. Like in Mayombe, Lukolela was a Belgian enterprise, with the capital also of Belgian origin (Vellut 1996, 136). In addition to Belgian capital, the white staff was limited, consisting mainly of Europeans in leadership positions, usually trained on-site by black skilled workers recruited from other colonial areas such as São Tomé (Vellut 1996, 131). A prime example is the staff of the Urselia plantation in 1908. Here, there was a hierarchically structured labor organization with four clearly distinct classes within the plantation. At the top were four white administrators, below whom worked eight technicians from São Tomé and 54 black skilled workers, including supervisors and bricklayers. However, the largest group consisted of about 400 black unskilled workers (Vellut 1996, 131). These workers, often local residents, carried out the heavy physical labor necessary to keep the plantations running. They were often exposed to the

harshest working conditions and had the fewest benefits. Together, they earned only 48% of the total labor costs (Vellut 1996, 130).

Later, keeping the experience of the early colonial period in mind, European planters learned to adapt their approach to local conditions (Vellut 1996, 137). They acknowledged that Mayombe, due to its geographical location and the diversity of agricultural production, occupied a unique position where the African population had some degree of bargaining power within the plantation economy (Vellut 1996, 137). Thus, to convince local laborers to work, cocoa plantations had to respect the existing power dynamics. This meant that the planters could not simply interfere with the villagers' traditional palm plantations. Moreover, wages on cocoa plantations had to be competitive with those in the oil and palm trade and the quality of food had to be good to ensure that workers were willing to work on the plantations (Vellut 1996, 138).

However, some questions about these precious beans remain unanswered: “dans quelles conditions sont-elles cueillies, rassemblées, emballées, acheminées…?” (Hanotiaux 2024, 6). Unfortunately, very little to no scientific research exists on the subject. The cocoa plantations were a microcosm of the broader colonial society in Congo, in which white administrators supervised black workers from the local population, and where work proceeded in anything but human and fraternal harmony. This hierarchical structure reflected the deep-seated racial and social inequality inherent in the Belgian colonial project. Although some planters adjusted their approach to accommodate local circumstances, the exploitation of the indigenous population remained a fundamental feature of the colonial economy, accompanied by extreme cruelties.

1.2.5 Conclusion

Although the ambition to turn Congo into a cocoa-producing colony was never fully realized, this dream has had a lasting influence on the cultural perception of chocolate in Belgium. In 1895, while the Congo Free State introduced cocoa in Congo, the Governor-General in Belgium started publicity campaigns to promote colonial crops, particularly coffee and cocoa (Vellut 1996, 123). Meanwhile, it became evident that these tropical crops, destined for European mass consumption, could enhance the previously dubious reputation of Congolese enterprises. The development of an agricultural sector would ensure an honorable future for Congo: it would no longer be synonymous with raids and plunder, but an example of constructive colonization (Vellut 1996, 124). In line with this notion, significant

emphasis was placed on cocoa at the Brussels World Fair in 1897 (Vellut 1996, 124). This aligned with the political and social motives of Leopold II, who sought to strengthen the Belgian nation through the colony and symbolically affirm its greatness (Vanthemsche 2012, 17). Thus, cocoa served as a means to support these 'noble' ideals.

Chocolate brands like Côte d'Or, founded in 1883, explicitly referenced their colonial roots. The name Côte d'Or refers to the Gold Coast, a region in West Africa under British colonial rule, from where many of their cocoa beans originated (Hanotiaux 2024, 5). In 1936, the Alimenta company also stocked Congolese cocoa for the production of Côte d'Or chocolate (Vellut 1996, 139). The brand logo, an elephant, is significant: this animal is definitely not a Belgian species but is a clear reference to the colony (Hanotiaux 2024, 5). Even more explicitly, during the Second World War, Alimenta introduced a chocolate bar to the Belgian market under the name Congobar (Vellut 1996, 139). Chocolate became increasingly popular, thus bringing the colony into the daily life of the Belgian population. In this way, chocolate, and indirectly cocoa as a colonial product, contributed to improving the image of the colony (Hanotiaux 2024, 6).

The colonial history has had a profound influence on the cultural perception and appreciation of chocolate in Belgium, demonstrating how deeply rooted the colonial legacy is in the Belgian chocolate industry. However, today we often remain unaware of this legacy, resulting in a total disconnection between the origin of the base ingredients and the national identity of the end product. In the capital, for instance, shops selling Belgian chocolate are everywhere: "À Bruxelles, grâce aux fèves congolaises, une forme d'héritage colonial dans l'espace public est donc présente…partout" (Hanotiaux 2024, 6). This colonial legacy still exists, albeit often unconsciously. For example, the name and logo of the elephant of Côte d'Or, the most famous and emblematic chocolate brand in Belgium, are deeply ingrained in the collective subconscious and this brand still remains an integral part of our daily lives (Hanotiaux 2024, 5). Other brands such as Delacre, which, as a Belgian chocolatier, designed the "Salon des Grandes Cultures" at the first colonial exhibition in Brussels and was one of the first companies to use Congolese cocoa (Vellut 1996, 124), still exist. This continuous presence of colonial symbolism and history in the Belgian chocolate industry underscores how the colonial legacy has persisted, even though we are often unaware of it. It is a silent but tangible continuation of a past that carries on into the present.

1.3 Food, (national) identity and the international exhibitions

1.3.1 Introduction

Food is not merely a necessity for survival; it also plays a crucial role in the formation and expression of national identity. Throughout history, certain foods have gained profound symbolic value, making them emblematic of a nation's culture and identity. Nationalities are still characterized and depicted through references to food and specific eating habits: the French are known for baguettes and croissants, Italians are sometimes called 'spaghetti eaters,' and Germans are fond of sausages (Beyers, Segers, and Geyzen 2018, 271). This phenomenon is also evident in the case of Belgian chocolate. Chocolate has become a symbol of Belgian culture and identity. However, this identity also carries a colonial past. Today, there is a complete disconnection in the minds of Belgians between the 'Belgian' product chocolate and its colonial roots. Chocolate, originally a colonial product *par excellence*, was appropriated by the Belgians and promoted as something quintessentially Belgian. Thus, the relationship between (national) identity and food is complex: “this is not a matter of simple identification, but it is a complicated, dialectical process of adaptation, rejection, and interpretation” (Scholliers 2001, 15).

1.3.2 Food, (national) identity and the international exhibitions

But what is a nation? And how do people come to feel part of a particular nation? Benedict Anderson defines a nation as "an imagined political community," explaining that it is "imagined because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion" (2006, 6). But, as Michael Billig examines, how come we do not forget our national identity? "The short answer is that we are constantly reminded that we live in nations" (Billig 1995, 93 in Ichijo and Ranta 2016, 7). Food plays a crucial role in this constant reminder of the nation and thus in the construction and daily reproduction of national identity. It serves as a tangible and everyday element through which citizens of a country perceive themselves as part of one cohesive whole: the nation (Parasecoli 2022a, 115).

Consider the numerous *chocolateries* you encounter while walking through the capital. “The national branding and labelling of food are literally found everywhere, conveying particular images of the nation, constructing and reproducing it in our everyday lives” (Ichijo and Ranta 2016, 7-8). ‘Belgian’

chocolate is everywhere and conveys a certain luxury. However, its colonial roots are often forgotten, as if they never existed. As Ichijo and Ranta remark, “As a consequence, we have become almost oblivious to the fact that the food is routinely constructed and reproduced as national [...] these constructs convey particular images of what the product and the nation are” (Ichijo and Ranta 2016, 8). Thus, the nation is daily anchored in the lives of its citizens (Billig 2010, 7). They are shaped into members of the nation through their most everyday activities, such as producing, buying, cooking, and eating food (Parasecoli 2022a, 116).

Also at events such as world’s fairs, people are strongly reminded of their national identity. Nations are presented side by side in a simplified manner. The identity, culture, and uniqueness of a nation are displayed and thus represented to both an international and domestic audience. This includes food, a tangible element to represent a nation. Here, “a particular food item or dish … comes to represent the nation” (Ichijo, Johannes and Ranta 2019, 4). Therefore, at such events, a link is forged between food and a nation, and food is imagined and constructed as national (Ichijo and Ranta 2016, 3). Food presented at these exhibitions as representative of a nation signifies that the nationally presented food, in the sense of Ichijo and Ranta's term ‘national food,’ “is seen as national by at least some members of the nation […] National food simply provides a description of what is being considered national.” The term “captures the way food is seen and experienced by people” (Ichijo, Johannes and Ranta 2019, 3).

Determining what constitutes national food and what does not is a process of appropriation: “food as an identity heritage is not an ontological entity but the product of appropriation dynamics” (Bienassis 2011), and it is “triggered by certain groups, communities, and societies” (Di Fiore 2019, 35). Chocolate, a consumption product whose primary ingredients are sourced far from home - that is, in the former European colonies -, was claimed and appropriated by the Belgians, and perceived and constructed as something typically Belgian. Thus, the process of heritagization “rests on a cultural construction of food that tends to invest it with an identity paradigm and sense of belonging” (Di Fiore 2019, 35). One aspect of the relationship between food and nationalism/national identity, according to Ichijo and Ranta, is the “official/top-down” connection, where the relationship between food and nationalism is directly mediated by the nation-state (Ichijo and Ranta 2016, 6). Universal exhibitions could be seen as an example of this, as the government of the organizing nation-state largely decided

which foods were presented (and appropriated) as national. Here, food can be used as a political instrument, especially when the food presented as national is a deeply colonial product.

By presenting this colonial product as something typically Belgian, as part of the Belgian identity, the Belgian identity becomes intertwined with, perhaps even reconciled with, the colonial identity. The way individuals and groups perceive their food culture helps them to imagine themselves as part of the nation (Ichijo and Ranta 2016, 2). In this case, they see themselves as part of a nation that includes a colony. Thus, presenting chocolate as typically Belgian at world exhibitions can convey the message, "Chocolate is part of our identity, we should be proud of it (and therefore also of our colony)". Food can thus be political, as it can merge a Belgian identity with a colonial identity, thereby legitimizing this colonial identity. As Nelleke Teughels states, "Food plays an important role in the construction and legitimation of a nation, and it was used as an instrument for forging and maintaining nationhood and conceptions of identity" (Teughels 2015, 7).

People perceive food as national because it is constructed as such: “Cultural meanings do not arise in things but as a result of our social discourses and practices which construct the world meaningfully” (Du Gay, Hall, and Janes 1997, 14). But how does a consumption product like chocolate acquire meaning? According to Paul Du Gay and Stuart Hall, meaning is produced through the way we represent things (13). Objects or concepts take on a range of cultural meanings, partly as a result of how they are represented visually and verbally (24). Representation is “the practice of constructing meaning through the use of signs and language” (24). By presenting chocolate as something national, specifically as a Belgian specialty, this product takes on that cultural meaning. The primary method of representation in culture is language, which includes not just written or spoken words but any system of signs and symbols that allows us to convey and represent concepts, images, or ideas. Language is essentially a system of signs used to represent things and share meaning about them (Du Gay, Hall, and Janes 1997, 13).

Assigning geographical indications, such as attaching place names to products or dishes, is a process of meaning-making (Beyers, Segers and Geyzen 2018, 267). National, regional, urban, or rural eating habits only assume these identities when labelled as such. By using geographical terms and place names, certain products or dishes take on new meanings, and these are not neutral, but ideologically colored (Beyers, Segers and Geyzen 2018, 267). This also applies to colonial products like chocolate, claimed as Belgian. Assigning geographical designations of origin subjects a natural

given to a cultural process, with certain communities assigning new meanings to certain products or dishes (Beyers, Segers and Geyzen 2018, 268).

World's fairs were prime venues for representation, showcasing a vast array of goods, cultures, and national identities. The organization of national pavilions provided a distinct identity for each exhibitor, encouraging every country to highlight its unique specialties (Vabre 2015, 194). They were one of the main occasions for Belgium to display itself and its products during the 19th and early 20th centuries (Segers, Bisschop, and Draye 2023, 1). These exhibitions allowed the Belgian state to represent the country's distinctiveness and unity in culinary terms to both an international audience and its own population. Chocolate notably occupied a prominent position at Belgium's world exhibitions (Van Acker and Verbruggen 2015, 22). Universal exhibitions were not only places where products were displayed, but also where (their) national identities were constructed (Vabre 2015, 196).

1.3.3 Conclusion

This chapter focused on how food is used as a symbol of national identity, with particular emphasis on the role of international exhibitions in this process. These events served not only as showcases for technological and artistic progress but also as platforms through which countries could present and construct 'their' culinary specialties. By incorporating food as a tangible representation of national identity, these exhibitions helped in constructing and promoting national narratives and community formation. For Belgium, these exhibitions played a significant role in positioning chocolate as a distinctive national product.

2 Methodology

This research employs a qualitative approach, focusing on carefully selected historical case studies. The aim is to explore how chocolate, a colonial consumer product *par excellence*, has become a symbol of Belgian culture and identity. By using historical case studies, this cultural process can be placed within a broader historical context and analyzed in depth. To investigate this cultural transformation, the analysis will focus on how Belgian chocolate has been represented over time, as "an object takes on a range of cultural meanings, partly as a result of how it has been represented in visual and verbal forms" (Du Gay, Hall, and Janes 1997, 24). The study will examine how Belgian chocolate has been depicted, consumed, and appreciated in different periods. By studying these representations, a deeper understanding of the development of chocolate as a cultural product within the Belgian context can be achieved. This analysis will help to understand what narratives and images were created and disseminated, and how they contributed to the perception and appreciation of chocolate in Belgian society.

The research is limited to four case studies, specifically the universal exhibitions held in Brussels (1897, 1910, 1935, and 1958). The selection of these cases is based on three criteria. Firstly, the world's fairs were significant venues for (national) representation. Secondly, they took place in Brussels, the center of the Belgian chocolate industry. Lastly, the chosen period begins before the boom of the Belgian chocolate industry around 1910, allowing to trace its full development from the outset. Due to the limited time and scope of this thesis, the studied period extends only until 1958, the year of the last world's fair in Belgium. The world underwent significant changes after this, such as the independence of Congo in 1960, making 1958 a suitable endpoint for this research.

International exhibitions were “one of the main occasions to show Belgium and Belgian products during the 19th and first half of the 20th century” (Segers, Bisschop, and Draye 2023, 1). These events played a crucial role in presenting national identity and economic progress, providing a platform for countries to display their cultural and industrial achievements to a broad, international audience. The exhibitions offered a unique opportunity to promote and present the Belgian chocolate industry as a significant part of national pride and identity. By analyzing the representation and promotion of chocolate at these events, insight can be gained into how chocolate was presented to a wide audience and the role it played in the construction of Belgian national identity. Brussels was chosen as the focus

because the capital was a major center for chocolate trade and production in Belgium during the 19th and 20th centuries. The city was home to some of the most influential chocolatiers and brands of the time, making it an ideal location to study the evolution of chocolate from a consumer good to a cultural product.

To investigate how chocolate was represented at the Brussels World Exhibitions, a critical discourse analysis and a visual analysis will be conducted on documentation from these exhibitions. This includes official documents such as exhibition catalogs and Livres d'Or, congress reports, and other official records. These sources will provide insights into how chocolate was represented and promoted in the official discourse. Additionally, the analysis will focus on the specific stands and pavilions of chocolate producers and the Belgian section. This involves examining both the physical presentation of chocolate and the visual language used to promote and present it. This includes studying photos, illustrations, and descriptions of the stands and pavilions, as well as other promotional materials, to understand how chocolate was presented visually and symbolically. When there is insufficient material available from a specific World Exhibition, this is supplemented with documentation from periodicals of that time.

To uncover the evolution of chocolate from a colonial consumer good to a national cultural product within the Belgian context, this study analyzes the representation of chocolate at world exhibitions based on three predetermined aspects derived from the literature: the democratization of chocolate consumption, the national aspect, and the colonial aspect. First, the democratization of chocolate consumption is examined by analyzing the target audience and how chocolate was positioned as a product for broad consumption in Belgium. Second, the national aspect is explored by investigating how chocolate was linked to Belgian national identity. This includes identifying the symbols, narratives, and visual elements used to present chocolate as part of Belgian cultural identity, thereby looking at how national pride and cultural values were reflected in the presentation of chocolate. Third, the colonial aspect is examined by looking at how colonial elements were integrated into the representation of chocolate. This involves analyzing the presentation of cocoa sourced from the colony and the role of colonial narratives in promoting Belgian chocolate. This helps to understand how colonial elements contributed to the perception and representation of chocolate as a Belgian product. The emphasis is on how these colonial connections were utilized in the presentation of Belgian chocolate and how this contributed to the association of Belgian identity with a colonial product over time. The aim is to identify

an evolution in the representation of chocolate at the four World Exhibitions held in Brussels and trace its development from a colonial consumer good to a national cultural product within the Belgian context over time.

The case study method may present some limitations, such as generalizability. Focusing on specific cases of Belgian participation in international exhibitions risks findings that may not be entirely representative of the broader phenomenon of chocolate representation at such events or in Belgium generally. Additionally, other relevant cases may fall outside the scope of this study, potentially hindering a comprehensive understanding. The analysis of archival material can be constrained by the availability and accessibility of relevant sources. Despite the aim for a thorough analysis of documents, images, and other materials related to chocolate presentations at international exhibitions, limitations in the available resources may impact the completeness and depth of the analysis.

Moreover, interpretation differences and subjective assessments can impact the reliability of findings derived from the analysis of documentation materials. Additionally, the limited timeframe of this thesis may result in a restricted amount of archival material being analyzed. Consequently, this research may not encompass all relevant sources, affecting the depth of the analysis. It is crucial to acknowledge these limitations when interpreting the findings and assessing the overall validity of the research. By using this methodology, the study seeks to gain a deeper understanding of the factors and processes that contributed to the development of chocolate as a national symbol and cultural product in Belgium.

3 Analysis: The Representation of Belgian Chocolate at the Brussels World's Fairs

3.1 Exposition Internationale de Bruxelles – 1897

Brussels has organized several World Exhibitions, with the 1897 "Exposition Internationale de Bruxelles" being the first. These international events aimed to showcase the technical and industrial progress of each participating country. In addition to displaying Belgium's industrial and commercial achievements, colonial endeavors were also highlighted (Hanotiaux 2024, 5). The international exhibition took place at two locations: the Jubilee Park and the Tervuren Park. At Tervuren Park, the Pavilion of the Prince of Orange was demolished to make way for the Colonial Palace (Hanotiaux 2024, 6). At this second venue, a colonial section was dedicated to the Congo Free State, where Congo was introduced to the general public and the first results of the colonial enterprise were showcased. The exhibition aimed to make the Congolese work widely known (Vellut 1996, 124).

Belgium did not exhibit its chocolate at this exhibition, as there was no category for the food industry. However, cocoa samples were displayed in the colonial section and received special attention. Along with coffee and tobacco, cocoa was exhibited in the "Salon des Grandes Cultures" as one of the "produits-types des grandes cultures coloniales".[2] Cocoa was considered one of the most important products of the colony. There was a strong belief that Congo would become a leading cocoa-producing colony: "Si nous envisageons la situation, telle qu'elle se produira pour nos contemporains, nous pouvons déjà augurer qu'à une époque peu éloignée le Congo prendra un rang honorable parmi les pays exportateurs de la précieuse denrée".[3] The dream of making the Congo Free State a prominent cocoa producer was rooted in the hope that the region could benefit from the rising global demand for cocoa (Vellut 1996, 125).

Until the end of the 19th century, chocolate remained a very expensive delicacy consumed exclusively by the wealthy (Scholliers 1995, 127). It was a very exclusive and luxurious colonial product

[2] Liebrechts, *Guide de la section de l'Etat indépendant du Congo à l'exposition de Bruxelles-Tervueren en 1897*. (Bruxelles: imprimerie veuve Monnom 1897), 29.
[3] Liebrechts, *Guide de la section de l'Etat indépendant du Congo à l'exposition de Bruxelles-Tervueren en 1897,* 29.

with a high-standing reputation. At this time, the Belgian chocolate industry was rapidly growing, becoming one of Belgium's strongest growing industries (Scholliers 1996, 167). Since the Belgian chocolate industry did not exhibit at this World Exhibition, promotional material of Belgian chocolate producers from the same period was studied. Chocolate was indeed still a true luxury product, whose target audience was the wealthy class. It was presented as a real luxury item without any reference to its colonial aspect.

Leopold II's colonial enterprise saw in this booming industry an opportunity to promote his colony. Cocoa was used as a tool to promote the overall colonial project to the Belgians, enhancing its reputation. It became evident that these tropical crops, destined for European mass consumption, could improve the previously dubious reputation of Congolese enterprises (Vellut 1996, 124). The development of an agricultural sector would ensure an honorable future for Congo: it would no longer be synonymous with raids and plunder, but an example of constructive colonization (Vellut 1996, 124). Not only was the idea of constructive colonization important, but even more so was the association with chocolate, a product with a high-standing reputation. Through cocoa production, the colony could be framed as a valid and beneficial undertaking, providing the necessary raw materials for this popular luxury product. This connection likely inspired enthusiasm for the colony among the Belgian visitors, by associating the colony with a high-standing product like chocolate.

The association between the colony and the Belgian chocolate industry was explicitly emphasized at this exhibition. It was mentioned that the first cocoa beans from Congo were processed by Belgian chocolatiers.[4] Belgian chocolate was presented within the context of the colonial project: Belgian chocolatier Mr. Delacre demonstrated “de la façon la plus intéressante les transformations que subit le cacao avant de devenir du chocolat”.[5] Visitors could even taste this chocolate made with Congolese cocoa. This allowed people to experience and taste the colony, which was a positive experience since chocolate was a delicious and popular luxury product.

Chocolate played a significant role in fostering enthusiasm for the colonial project. It helped establish a positive association with colonialism, intertwining the Belgian chocolate industry with the

[4] Liebrechts, *Guide de la section de l’Etat indépendant du Congo à l’exposition de Bruxelles-Tervueren en 1897*. (Bruxelles: imprimerie veuve Monnom 1897), 464.
[5] Liebrechts, *Guide de la section de l’Etat indépendant du Congo à l’exposition de Bruxelles-Tervueren en 1897,* 464.

colonial project. Through chocolate, a luxurious product, the colonial effort was given a more positive image. Visitors likely left the “Salon des Grandes Cultures”, the exhibition's final section, where cocoa and chocolate were displayed, with a positive impression of the colony. Remarkably, in the promotion of chocolate by Belgian chocolatiers, there was no reference to its colonial origins. However, to promote the colony, the luxury product chocolate was used. This reliance on chocolate to enhance the image of the colonial project demonstrates the strong and positive reputation chocolate enjoyed at the time.

3.2 Exposition Universelle et Internationale de Bruxelles – 1910

In 1910, the second World Exhibition took place in Brussels. This exhibition featured a greater diversity of categories than the previous one, including a specific category for food products called "Groupe X – Aliments".[6] This group occupied a significant part of the Belgian section, highlighting the importance of the food sector. Food products were nationally classified, with some even carrying national adjectives such as "pâtes d’Italie”,[7] or explicitly emphasizing their national identity: "Produits divers de patisserie propres à chaque nation”.[8] An official document from the exhibition emphasized the national representativeness of the exhibited items: “Localisées par leur objet matériel, elles s’offrent d’abord à nous comme la synthèse extériorisée de la vie nationale même”.[9] Everything exhibited in national sections at this World Exhibition was seen as the externalized synthesis of national life itself. Consequently, certain food items were seen as representative of a nation, as part of a particular national identity.

The Belgian chocolate industry had a prominent presence in the Belgian section of this exhibition. Seventeen chocolate producers presented themselves as a collective, the "collectivité de la chocolaterie”,[10] within the category “sucres et produits de la confiserie; condiments et stimulants”.[11] In an elegantly decorated hall, visitors could taste chocolate while witnessing the production process: “tous

[6] *Exposition universelle et internationale de Bruxelles 1910: catalogue général officiel* (Bruxelles: Rossel, 1910), 152.
[7] *Exposition universelle et internationale de Bruxelles 1910: catalogue général officiel*, 123.
[8] *Exposition universelle et internationale de Bruxelles 1910: catalogue général officiel*, 123.
[9] *Le livre d'or de l'exposition universelle et internationale de Bruxelles en 1910* (Bruxelles : Rossel, 1910), 29.
[10] Ministère de l’industrie et du travail, *Exposition universelle et internationale de Bruxelles 1910: catalogue spécial officiel de la section Belge* (Bruxelles: Guyot, 1910), 327.
[11] *Exposition universelle et internationale de Bruxelles 1910: catalogue général officiel*, 154.

croquent ou dégustent, au ronflement des machines. [...] La dégustation des cafés et chocolats est colossale".[12] The humming of machines producing chocolate live impressed visitors, highlighting the technological progress and craftsmanship of the Belgian chocolate industry.

Chocolate producers like Meurisse had stands where visitors could taste and purchase various types of chocolate products. In a well-organized and luxuriously presented and decorated shopping space, visitors could closely observe the chocolate production process. This contributed to the perception of Belgian chocolate as a product of refinement and quality. Elegant packaging, neat displays, and decorative elements reinforced the association of chocolate with luxury. The use of aluminum foil packaging underscored the exclusivity and innovation of the product. Belgian chocolate radiated craftsmanship, refinement, and luxury. The emphasis on the combination of luxury and craftsmanship was also reflected in the professional presentation of the staff. The presence of uniformed staff behind the counter indicated an organized and professional approach to both the production and sale of chocolate, underscoring the association with luxury and refinement by positioning the product as a result of high-quality craftsmanship.

At this World Exhibition, there was again a colonial section, this time for the Belgian Congo. Cocoa was still presented as one of the colony's most important products: "Les principaux produits de la colonie sont le caoutchouc, l'ivoire, le copal blanc, les noix palmistes, l'huile de palme, le cacao".[13] As in the previous exhibition, when the colony was still the personal possession of Leopold II, the association with the Belgian chocolate industry was used to promote the colonial project, particularly the cocoa production. It was emphasized that the quality of Congolese cocoa had improved to the point that it was now used by both Belgian chocolatiers and American producers.[14] However, in the presentation of Belgian chocolate, there was no reference to the colonial origin of the cocoa beans or the colony in general. The focus was on technological progress, craftsmanship, and the refinement of the final product.

By presenting Belgian chocolate in the national section of the exhibition, the product increasingly came to be seen as something representative of Belgium. This national representation led

[12] *Le livre d'or de l'exposition universelle et internationale de Bruxelles en 1910* (Bruxelles : Rossel, 1910), 465.
[13] Ministère de l'industrie et du travail, *Exposition universelle et internationale de Bruxelles 1910: catalogue spécial officiel de la section Belge* (Bruxelles: Guyot, 1910), 182.
[14] Ministère de l'industrie et du travail, *Exposition universelle et internationale de Bruxelles 1910: catalogue spécial officiel de la section Belge* (Bruxelles: Guyot, 1910), 323.

people to view Belgian chocolate as an integral part of Belgian culture and identity. National pride was aroused for the Belgian chocolate industry and Belgian chocolate in general: “L'introduction de cette industrie en Belgique ne date que de 1840. Les progrès furent lents au début et en 1870 on ne comptait qu'une douzaine de fabriques. Actuellement, nous possédons en Belgique 110 usines qui alimentent, non seulement notre marché, mais exportent encore une quantité considérable de leurs produits”.[15] This progress highlighted the growth and success of the Belgian chocolate industry, enhancing national pride in this sector.

A significant difference between this exhibition and the previous one was the shift in the perception of chocolate from a colonial luxury product to a symbol of Belgian craftsmanship. Chocolate was still associated with luxury, but this luxury was no longer tied to the exclusivity of a colonial product. Instead, the luxury was associated with the fact that it was a product of real craftsmanship. The focus shifted from the colony to the production process in Belgium, rebranding chocolate as a Belgian product. The representation of Belgian chocolate at the 1910 World Exhibition played a crucial role in the evolution of the perception of chocolate from a luxury good of colonial origin to a symbol of Belgian culture and identity, emphasizing craftsmanship, technological innovation, luxury, and refinement. It was presented and therefore appropriated as something typically Belgian. This shift in focus led to chocolate being perceived as a product that was typically Belgian, a symbol of national pride and industrial progress, rather than a colonial product.

3.3 Exposition Universelle et Internationale de Bruxelles – 1935

In 1935, the third World Exhibition of Brussels took place. This exhibition marked an important moment for the Belgian chocolate industry, which presented itself impressively in the "Palais de l’Alimentation". This centrally located pavilion emphasized the significance of food in the Belgian economy and culture. Whereas the food industry had been only a category within the Belgian section at the previous World Exhibition, it now had an entire pavilion dedicated to it. This pavilion was even considered the most important part of the Belgian section: “Onder de paviljoenen van de Belgische gemeenschappen, is het

[15] Ministère de l’industrie et du travail, *Exposition universelle et internationale de Bruxelles 1910: catalogue spécial officiel de la section Belge* (Bruxelles: Guyot, 1910), 323.

Paleis van de Voeding het belangrijkste".[16] It was dedicated to various branches of the food industry and divided into four major sections: "La communauté de la brasserie belge", "la section des exposants divers", "la communauté des confiseries" (in which chocolate held a prominent place) en "les raffineries Tirlemontoises".[17]

Food was presented in this pavilion as a national symbol, representative of Belgium. It served as a means to spark national pride: "Donnons, en bons Belges, l'exemple du patriotisme de l'estomac", said the Mayor of Brussels, Adolphe Max.[18] The chocolate industry was regarded as one of the most important departments within the pavilion: "De belangrijkste afdelingen die er bij vertegenwoordigd zijn, zijn die van de chocoladebereiders, de beschuitbakkers en de suikerbakkers, klassen 57 en 59, die allen bijna 2000 vierkante meters bezetten".[19] Thus, chocolate was given a prominent place in the Palais de l'Alimentation, highlighting the importance of this industry to Belgium. As a result, chocolate was represented as an essential part of Belgian culture and identity.

In this pavilion, impressive machines were displayed that demonstrated the entire chocolate production process, giving visitors the impression of a factory in full operation. These demonstrations were particularly successful with the audience: "On concoit le succès que pareille démonstration a rencontré auprès du public, d'autant plus que, à la sortie des machines, de charmantes vendeuses lui offrent de déguster les produits fabriqués sous ses yeux".[20] Additionally, there was an elegant tearoom present, which completed the experience.

Chocolate was presented here as a product of advanced technology and craftsmanship. The impressive machines and the production process, carried out before the eyes of the public, emphasized the modernity and technical expertise of the Belgian chocolate industry. These live demonstrations not only showcased the complexity and care with which chocolate is made, but also the high quality and craftsmanship that goes into each product. The presence of an elegant tearoom and charming

[16] *Exposition universelle de Bruxelles 1935: guide officiel = Wereldtentoonstelling van Brussel 1935: officieele gids* (Bruxelles: Van Der Donck, 1935), 357.
[17] *Exposition universelle de Bruxelles 1935: guide officiel = Wereldtentoonstelling van Brussel 1935: officieele gids* (Bruxelles: Van Der Donck, 1935), 13.
[18] Le livre d'or de l'exposition universelle et internationale Bruxelles 1935 (Bruxelles: Comité executif de l'exposition universelle et internationale, 1935), 303.
[19] *Exposition universelle de Bruxelles 1935: guide officiel = Wereldtentoonstelling van Brussel 1935: officieele gids* (Bruxelles: Van Der Donck, 1935), 357.
[20] *Exposition universelle de Bruxelles 1935: guide officiel = Wereldtentoonstelling van Brussel 1935: officieele gids* (Bruxelles: Van Der Donck, 1935), 19.

saleswomen, offering the freshly made products to visitors, reinforced the association of chocolate with luxury and exclusivity. Tasting the chocolate right after the production process gave the audience a sense of privilege and refinement. This created an image of chocolate as a high-quality and carefully crafted product. In this presentation of Belgian chocolate, there was no reference to the colonial origins of cocoa; the focus was entirely on the Belgian production process.

Even outside the Palais de l'Alimentation, Belgian chocolate was prominently represented. At this world's fair, a Belgian chocolate producer, Côte d'Or, had its own pavilion. This was the first time a Belgian chocolate producer had its own pavilion, highlighting Côte d'Or's increasing ambition to promote their brand internationally. Strategically located on the main central boulevard, the pavilion served as a clear example of the importance of the chocolate industry to Belgium. The Côte d'Or pavilion was one of the first buildings visitors saw upon entry, emphasizing the growing significance of chocolate to Belgian culture and identity.

Here too, visitors were invited to closely observe the production process of pralines and chocolate. This underscored the technological advancements and craftsmanship of Côte d'Or. Visitors gained insight into the precision and care required for the production of high-quality chocolate products. The presentation of the Côte d'Or pavilion continuously emphasized the quality and craftsmanship associated with the production of Côte d'Or chocolate. The pavilion was neat and luxuriously decorated, with finished and packaged chocolate lavishly displayed on a counter.

In contrast to the chocolate producers in the Palais de l'Alimentation, Côte d'Or explicitly referenced the colonial origins of cocoa production in the presentation of its chocolate. An elephant statue, the brand logo, proudly stood on a pedestal with its trunk in the air. The walls of the pavilion were richly decorated with frescoes depicting cocoa cultivation. The setting was lush and tropical, emphasizing the exotic and distant origins of the cocoa. The images in the Côte d'Or pavilion showed African workers engaged in cocoa production, presenting a romanticized view of colonial labor. These depictions showed the workers in idealistic and serene conditions, contributing to an image of productive and harmonious work, without highlighting the harsh realities of colonial exploitation. This created an idyllic portrayal of cocoa production, ignoring the severe conditions of colonial labor.

Côte d'Or used the colonial origin of cocoa as a marketing strategy to promote their chocolate. By integrating colonial narratives, they enhanced the exotic appeal of their product. The emphasis on exoticism increased the value of the chocolate, positioning it as luxurious and unique. A clear example

of this is the choice of the elephant as a brand logo. The elephant and palm trees in their imagery referred to the exotic and tropical origin of cocoa. These African elements, such as workers, elephants, and tropical plants, were used both in promotional materials and in the design of the pavilion to exoticize and romanticize the source of the cocoa. These images gave the chocolate an exotic appearance that contributed to the luxury and exclusivity of the product. The images of African workers not only highlighted the colonial origin but also suggested a form of cultural superiority, presenting Belgium as a civilized and advanced nation that adds value to raw colonial products.

These colonial associations reinforced the exotic and luxurious image of Côte d'Or chocolate, positioning it as a superior product rooted in Belgian craftsmanship. Thus, Côte d'Or not only emphasized the high quality of their chocolate but also strengthened the connection between Belgium and its colony. The romanticized images of African workers and tropical landscapes created a vision of productive and harmonious collaboration, which likely gave Belgian visitors a good feeling about their colony and possibly even evoked a sense of pride. By presenting exotic and romanticized images of African workers and the colonial context, not only was the superiority of Belgian chocolate highlighted, but also the economic benefits of the colonial enterprise were legitimized. However, this idealistic portrayal of cocoa production concealed the harsh reality of colonial exploitation and the difficult working conditions of the laborers. This narrative, which depicted colonial labor as peaceful and productive, completely ignored the exploitative working conditions and the human costs of the chocolate industry. As a result, it became part of the broader colonial narrative. References to the colonial origin of cocoa in the Côte d'Or pavilion thus had a double effect: they increased the appeal of the product by giving it an exotic and luxurious appearance, while simultaneously justifying colonial practices by romanticizing them.

The Belgian state naturally benefited from this. Belgian chocolate thus became not only a symbol of national craftsmanship and luxury but also a means to reinforce and maintain colonial pride. The industry contributed to promoting a distorted and glorified image of the colonial enterprise. Cocoa was still regarded as one of the main export products of the colony and was once again showcased within the colonial section, specifically in the official pavilion of Belgian Congo. This part of the exhibition

was intended to inform visitors about the diverse products from the Belgian colony.[21] Through the chocolate industry, the Belgian state could evoke national pride in the achievements in the colony and thus strengthen the bond between Belgium and its colony.

Despite Cote d'Or's emphasis on the colonial origins of cocoa, Belgian craftsmanship, technological innovation, and the quality and refinement of the final product were central to the representation of Belgian chocolate at the World's Fair of 1935. These associations with Belgian chocolate stuck with visitors, both Belgian and international, and possibly strengthened their sense of national pride and identity. The combination of impressive technological demonstrations and the luxurious presentation of chocolate products ensured that Belgian chocolate was seen as a product of superior quality. The craftsmanship and care with which the chocolate was produced underscored the innovative character of the Belgian chocolate industry. The presentation of chocolate at the 1935 World's Fair contributed to an image of superior quality, technological progress, and luxury. This image not only reinforced the reputation of Belgian chocolate as a high-quality product but also legitimized colonial practices by wrapping them in a romantic and appealing narrative. As a result, visitors were given a glorified view of both the chocolate industry and the colonial relationship between Belgium and Congo.

3.4 Exposition Universelle et Internationale de Bruxelles – 1958

The 1958 World's Fair in Brussels provided a crucial platform for the Belgian chocolate industry to showcase its products to an international audience. As with previous world's fairs, there was a pavilion dedicated to the food industry, the "Palais des Industries Alimentaires", which was regarded as one of the exhibition's most important Belgian sections. The Government Commissioner-General declared, "De voedingsnijverheden bekleden een zeer belangrijke plaats op de tentoonstelling 1958".[22] Belgian chocolate producers had a notably prominent presence at the exhibition, with nineteen participating manufacturers. Within the Palais des Industries Alimentaires, Belgian chocolate producers were

[21] Le livre d'or de l'exposition universelle et internationale Bruxelles 1935 (Bruxelles: Comité executif de l'exposition universelle et internationale, 1935), 364.

[22] L'industrie alimentaire belge à l'exposition de Bruxelles 1958 = De Belgische voedingsnijverheid op de tentoonstelling te Brussel 1958 (Bruxelles: Industrie alimentaire, 1958), 4.

featured in the “Biscuiterie, chocolaterie, confiserie” group. Additionally, several brands, including Meurisse, Victoria, Côte d'Or, and Jacques, had their own separate pavilions. These pavilions were all located close to one another and near the Palais des Industries Alimentaires, near the central entrance.

The prominent presence of Belgian chocolate producers at the 1958 World's Fair highlighted Belgium's pride in its chocolate industry and its economic significance for the country. This presented chocolate as one of Belgium's most important products, contributing to the image of chocolate as an essential part of Belgian culture and identity. The renowned reputation of Belgian chocolate was already evident at the exhibition, as noted in an official brochure from the pavilion of the food industry, which praised "les tablettes de chocolat, qui font la renommée des chocolats belges".[23] The use of the national adjective by chocolate producers, such as Côte d’Or, demonstrates this statement. This brand advertised its chocolate with the phrase "Le bon chocolat belge". Due to the established reputation of Belgian chocolate, the national adjective "Belgian" became a quality label. Consumers associated Belgian chocolate with high quality and refinement, making the term "Belgian chocolate" an effective marketing strategy that played on existing positive perceptions.

Regarding the promotional materials of Belgian chocolate producers at the World's Fair, they strongly emphasize their rich tradition, which conveys trust and reliability, thereby playing on the good reputation of chocolate. Meurisse highlights its status as the oldest chocolate factory in the country, indicating a long-standing tradition. Victoria emphasizes the trust of generations of consumers since 1896; Illustrations of people from different generations further suggest a long tradition. All brands emphasize their craftsmanship and the high quality of their products, reinforcing the reputation of Belgian chocolate as a quality product. For instance, Martougin underscores its specialization in ‘real chocolate,’ suggesting craftsmanship and authenticity. Similarly, Jacques positions itself as a premium brand specializing in chocolate bars, highlighting craftsmanship and high-quality products. The brand logo of a medieval knight adds an element of prestige. Thus, the promotional materials of the Belgian chocolate producers convey an image of tradition and quality.

[23] L’industrie alimentaire belge à l’exposition de Bruxelles 1958 = De Belgische voedingsnijverheid op de tentoonstelling te Brussel 1958 (Bruxelles: Industrie alimentaire, 1958), 71.

In the Palais des Industries Alimentaires, chocolate manufacturers produced their products "sous les yeux du public".[24] This industrial setting, equipped with advanced machinery and production techniques, highlights the technological innovation within the Belgian chocolate industry. As a result, Belgian chocolate is associated with high quality and superior craftsmanship. The stands are visually appealing, featuring lights and decorations designed to capture visitors' attention. Illuminated showcases and displays present the products in an attractive manner. These displays are neatly organized, giving a professional and neat appearance. The stands of the chocolate producers are lavishly filled with a variety of products. A wide range of chocolate products and packaging is displayed in glass showcases. Brands such as Victoria and Parein advertise their products with large, eye-catching signs and posters. The stands convey elegance and modernity, contributing to a refined appearance.

Every Belgian chocolate producer with their own pavilion emphasized different aspects of their products, highlighting the increasing differentiation among Belgian chocolate brands. Jacques showcased modern production techniques and hygienic conditions. Visitors could observe the stages of chocolate production, such as molding and packaging, up close via a walking bridge around the machines. Meurisse focused on the historical and cultural aspects of chocolate, particularly the discovery of cacao by Ferdinand Cortez and its use by the Aztecs. Their pavilion offered a unique experience with a short trip in small submarines for a three-dimensional exploration of the sea, symbolizing innovation and adventure. Victoria presented chocolate in a futuristic setting aimed at children and families, creating a sense of accessibility. The pavilion had a futuristic design and offered rocket rides that took children through a city of the future, reinforcing the association of chocolate with children, adventure, fun, and family. Côte d'Or's pavilion had a playful and colorful design with illuminated elephants. A series of modern machines demonstrated the production of chocolate, while robotic elephants distributed chocolates inside. Côte d'Or thus conveyed technological progress and innovation. Four panels narrated the history of chocolate, blending tradition with a modern presentation.

The presentation of Belgian chocolate at the World Expo avoids mentioning the colonial context of cocoa production at the time. In the Palais des Industries Alimentaires, the focus is on technological

[24] L'industrie alimentaire belge à l'exposition de Bruxelles 1958 = De Belgische voedingsnijverheid op de tentoonstelling te Brussel 1958 (Bruxelles: Industrie alimentaire, 1958), 30.

innovation, quality production, and craftsmanship, without direct references to the colonial origins of cocoa beans. While Meurisse does highlight a historical colonial context, the colonial context of the time is omitted. Cocoa is depicted as a mysterious substance in the historical context of its introduction to Europe, referencing Ferdinand Cortez and his role in bringing cocoa to Europe during the era of conquests and discoveries in the New World: "L'Europe doit le chocolat à Ferdinand Cortez, aventurier ambitieux qui suivit les traces de Christophe Colomb".[25] The Mexican name for cocoa is also mentioned: "Les Mexicains l'appelaient 'cacao-centli'... et le breuvage 'chocolate' ce qui veut dire 'eau amère'".[26] This description emphasizes the exotic and mythic origins of cocoa. However, there is no mention of the colonial sources of cocoa at that time.

The Cote d'Or brochure also references the historical and mysterious introduction of cocoa to Europe. It begins with a story about the Mexican god Quetzalcoatl and the mythical origins of cocoa.[27] The historical context highlights the earliest European discoveries of cocoa and the role of explorers like Ferdinand Cortez, emphasizing the exotic and mysterious nature of cocoa. Following this, the brochure delves into the botanical and agricultural details of the cocoa tree. It connects cocoa cultivation to various tropical regions worldwide, including Africa (and Belgian Congo), Asia, and the Americas, but provides no further context. There is no explicit discussion of the colonial context or labor conditions in these regions.

The description of the cocoa cultivation process primarily focuses on the technical and agricultural aspects, such as cultivation methods, ripening periods, and harvesting techniques. While the brochure does contain some references to the colonial origins of cocoa, such as mentioning "Congo Belge," the emphasis is mainly on the historical, botanical, and technical aspects of cocoa and chocolate production. The modern colonial context, including labor conditions and economic dependencies, is largely ignored. By highlighting the mythical and exotic origins of cocoa alongside detailed descriptions of the production process, the brochure portrays chocolate as a product of both tradition and modern

[25] *Les participations étrangères et belges. Exposition universelle et internationale de Bruxelles 1958* (Bruxelles: Commissariat général du gouvernement près l'Exposition universelle et internationale de Bruxelles 1958, 1961), 346.

[26] *Les participations étrangères et belges. Exposition universelle et internationale de Bruxelles 1958* (Bruxelles: Commissariat général du gouvernement près l'Exposition universelle et internationale de Bruxelles 1958, 1961), 346.

[27] Brochure van het paviljoen van Cote d'Or op de Wereldtentoonstelling van 1958, Usines Alimenta, 1958, in "Emballages" in Collection Fauconnier, 713. Archief van de Stad Brussel, Brussel.

innovation without directly addressing the colonial context. The presentation of Belgian chocolate generally avoids the colonial context of cocoa production at the time, instead focusing on historical and mysterious anecdotes and the technologically advanced production process in Belgium.

In the pavilion of Belgian Congo and Ruanda-Urundi, cocoa was once again presented as an important export product of the colony, particularly through the efforts of the “Union Professionelle des Planteurs de Cacao au Congo belge”.[28] The official exhibition brochure noted that a special section was dedicated to the cocoa tree: “Une classe a été consacrée à cet autre arbuste dont le Congo n’a pas encore pu tirer tout le profit possible: le cacaoyer”.[29] This statement indicates that people still saw great potential in cocoa production in the colony. Notably, the presentation of cocoa made no references to the Belgian chocolate industry. Similarly, the presentation of Belgian chocolate did not mention the Belgian colony or its colonial cocoa production.

Over the years, the target audience for Belgian chocolate has evolved significantly. Once considered a luxury item for the elite, it is now marketed as an accessible treat for families and children. Stories about the mythical origins of cocoa and its associations with fun and adventure highlight this shift. Chocolate producers adopt a playful and educational approach in their pavilions, appealing to both young and old. Brands like Parein, featuring images of children, suggest that their products are suitable for families, making them appealing to a wider audience. Additionally, Côte d'Or's brochure emphasizes the nutritional value and health benefits of chocolate, such as its high caloric value and stimulating effects. This brochure targets people of various ages and lifestyles, explicitly addressing children, families, students, intellectuals, and athletes. Chocolate is presented as a healthy snack for everyone. This demonstrates that Belgian chocolate now targets the entire population.

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[28] Exposition universelle et internationale de Bruxelles 1958. Catalogue général., = Algemene wereldtentoonstelling te Brussel 1958. Algemene cataloog, = Universal and international exhibition Brussels 1958. General catalogue, = Exposicion universal e internacional Bruselas 1958 (Bruxelles: Impr. Puvrez, 1958), 518.

[29] *Les participations étrangères et belges. Exposition universelle et internationale de Bruxelles 1958* (Bruxelles: Commissariat général du gouvernement près l’Exposition universelle et internationale de Bruxelles 1958, 1961), 242.

3.5 Conclusion: How did chocolate, a typical colonial consumer product, evolve into a symbol of Belgian culture and identity?

The representation of Belgian chocolate over time and the associations made with it have significantly contributed to its current image as a symbol of national pride and cultural identity. The way Belgian chocolate was presented at the World Exhibitions likely played a role in shaping this perception. Originally a colonial consumer product, chocolate has evolved into a symbol of Belgian culture and identity. This transformation is evident in the way Belgian chocolate was presented at the Brussels World Exhibitions of 1897, 1910, 1935, and 1958.

During the first World's Fair in Brussels, chocolate was not yet on display since there was no category for the food industry. However, cocoa from Congo received special attention in the colonial section. Cocoa was considered one of the colony's most important products. By linking cocoa with the Belgian chocolate industry in the presentation, the economic value of cocoa and the potential of Congolese agriculture were highlighted, fostering a positive perception of the colonial enterprise among the Belgian public. Chocolate was viewed as an exclusive colonial luxury product, highly popular among the elite. This association promoted the colonial cocoa industry as a valuable enterprise contributing to the Belgian economy.

At the 1910 World's Fair, Belgian chocolate was prominently showcased for the first time in the category of the food industry. Presented as an essential element of Belgian culture and identity, this exhibition fostered national pride in the chocolate industry. Visitors were invited into an elegantly designed hall where they could observe the production process and taste the chocolate, highlighting the technological progress and craftsmanship of the Belgian chocolate industry. The emphasis was on refinement and quality, with no mention of the colonial origins of cocoa. This presentation marked a shift in the perception of chocolate, transforming it from a colonial luxury item to a product of Belgian craftsmanship and technological innovation.

During the 1935 World's Fair, chocolate was even more prominently showcased, with extensive demonstrations of its production process in the Palais de l’Alimentation. Food gained increasing importance at the World's Fairs, becoming a crucial element in the presentation of national identity and even meriting its own pavilion. Within this pavilion, the chocolate industry was highlighted as one of the most important sections. Notably, Belgian chocolate brand Côte d’Or even had its own separate pavilion. Chocolate was presented as an essential aspect of Belgian culture and identity, emphasizing

craftsmanship, technological progress, high quality, and refinement in its presentation. The colonial origins of cocoa were ignored, with the focus solely on the Belgian production process, further strengthening the association between chocolate and Belgian identity. Côte d'Or was the only producer that referred to the colonial origins of cocoa, using exotic associations to make their products more appealing. However, this was romanticized and obscured the harsh realities of colonial exploitation.

At the 1958 World's Fair, Belgian chocolate producers had an enormous presence in both collective and individual pavilions, reinforcing the perception of chocolate as an essential part of Belgian culture and identity. By that time, Belgian chocolate was already renowned, and the producers utilized this reputation. The national adjective had become a quality label. The presentation of Belgian chocolate highlighted its long-standing tradition, craftsmanship, high quality, and technological innovation. Chocolate was positioned as a quality product accessible to a wide audience, including families and children. In the presentation of chocolate, the colonial context of cocoa was omitted, with the focus placed on Belgian production. This approach further reinforced chocolate as a symbol of Belgian culture and identity while concealing its colonial roots.

The way Belgian chocolate has been represented over the years has played a crucial role in shaping its perception, with world exhibitions likely contributing significantly to this. Initially, chocolate was associated with colonial efforts, but this gradually shifted to a focus on the production process in Belgium, emphasizing craftsmanship, quality, technological innovation, and tradition. While the colonial origins of cocoa contributed to the product's exotic appeal, this aspect became less emphasized over time in favor of highlighting Belgian production and quality. As a result, chocolate increasingly became a symbol of Belgian identity and culture, detached from its colonial context. This evolution may explain the current disconnection between Belgian chocolate and its colonial past.

Conclusion

Food plays a crucial role in the construction and expression of national identity. Throughout history, certain foods have gained profound symbolic value, making them emblematic of a nation's culture and identity. This phenomenon is evident in the case of Belgian chocolate, which has been appropriated and promoted as typically Belgian. This thesis explored how chocolate, a product with colonial roots, has become a symbol of Belgian national identity. By analyzing the representation of Belgian chocolate at the Brussels World Exhibitions from 1897 to 1958, this research has tried to illuminate the complex processes of appropriation and meaning-making that have firmly established this consumer good as an integral part of Belgian culture. These events attracted a global audience and provided a platform for chocolatiers to present and promote their products, making the exhibitions crucial in constructing and enhancing the reputation of Belgian chocolate. The historical analysis of the World's Fairs reveals a deliberate effort to position chocolate as a national symbol through its nationalistic representation. Understanding the concept of appropriation is central to this transformation. Appropriation involves the process by which a cultural product is adopted and redefined by a certain group, often leading to a shift in meaning and significance. The national narrative constructed around chocolate often overshadowed its colonial origins, reflecting a selective memory that highlights Belgian achievements while ignoring the colonial exploitation underpinning the cocoa industry.

Initially, at the 1897 World's Fair, chocolate was not yet on display, but cocoa from Congo received special attention, highlighting its economic value and fostering a positive perception of the colonial enterprise among the Belgian public. Chocolate was viewed as an exclusive colonial luxury product, popular among the elite. By the 1910 World's Fair, Belgian chocolate was prominently showcased for the first time, presented as an essential element of Belgian culture and identity. The exhibition emphasized refinement, quality, and Belgian craftsmanship, marking a significant shift in perception. Chocolate began to be seen not merely as a colonial product but as a symbol of national pride. This period marked the beginning of the appropriation process, where the Belgian production process was emphasized while deliberately omitting the colonial context of cacao production.

The 1935 World's Fair further solidified this transformation, with extensive demonstrations of chocolate production highlighting technological progress and Belgian craftmanship. The focus was solely on the Belgian production process, ignoring the colonial origins of cocoa. This strengthened the

association between chocolate and Belgian identity. Here, appropriation meant transforming chocolate into a symbol of Belgian innovation and quality, further distancing it from its colonial roots. At the 1958 World's Fair, Belgian chocolate producers had an enormous presence, reinforcing chocolate as an essential part of Belgian culture and identity. Belgian chocolate had by now a renowned reputation. The presentation emphasized tradition, craftsmanship, high quality, and technological innovation, positioning chocolate as a product accessible to a wide audience. The colonial context of cocoa was again ignored, further detaching chocolate from its colonial context and solidifying its status as a national symbol. This final stage of appropriation involved fully integrating chocolate into Belgian cultural identity, making it a symbol of national pride and heritage.

The way Belgian chocolate has been represented over the years has played a crucial role in shaping its perception. Initially associated with colonial efforts, the focus gradually shifted to Belgian production, emphasizing craftsmanship, quality, technological innovation, and tradition. While the colonial origins of cocoa contributed to its exotic appeal, this aspect became less emphasized over time. As a result, chocolate increasingly became a symbol of Belgian identity and culture, detached from its colonial context. This evolution may explain the current disconnection between Belgian chocolate and its colonial past.

Chocolate has not only been a cultural symbol but also a political instrument. At times, it was used to foster enthusiasm for the colonial project and convey a positive image of the colony. For instance, during the 1897 World's Fair, cocoa from Congo was showcased to highlight its economic potential and promote the colonial enterprise. This positive association aimed to enhance the reputation of the colonial enterprise by linking it with the luxurious and high-standing reputation of chocolate. By presenting chocolate made with Congolese cocoa, visitors could experience the colony in a positive light, associating it with a desirable product. Similarly, at the 1935 World's Fair, chocolate producer Côte d'Or used romanticized images of colonial labor to enhance the exotic appeal of their chocolate. These depictions, while omitting the harsh realities of colonial exploitation, fostered a sense of pride and legitimacy in the colonial project among Belgian visitors. Chocolate, through its romanticized framing of the colonial enterprise, was part of the broader colonial narrative. This political use of chocolate underscores how food can be deployed to support national narratives.

The findings of this thesis underscore the role of cultural and national representation in the process of heritagization. Belgian chocolate's transformation from a colonial commodity to a national

symbol illustrates how cultural identity is constructed and negotiated over time. This process involves both the elevation of certain narratives and the marginalization of others, revealing the power dynamics inherent in identity formation. Furthermore, this research highlights the ongoing disconnection between the celebrated national identity of Belgian chocolate and its colonial past.

While this thesis has focused on the Belgian perspective, future research should include the Congolese perspective to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the cultural significance of chocolate. Investigating how Congolese communities perceive and interact with cocoa and chocolate today could offer valuable insights into the ongoing impacts of colonial legacies. Additionally, extending the study beyond 1958 would allow for an exploration of how globalization and the rise of state-controlled heritage institutions such as UNESCO have further influenced the representation and perception of Belgian chocolate.

In conclusion, this thesis has deconstructed the cultural process by which Belgian chocolate, rooted in a colonial past, has been appropriated as a symbol of Belgian national identity. Through historical case studies and visual analyses, it has uncovered the selective narratives that shape cultural and national identity.

SWOT-Analysis

Strengths:

- The research uses an interdisciplinary approach: it incorporates historical, cultural, and political perspectives.
- This study contributes to a better understanding of how cultural products are created and how this process unfolds and provides insights into the dynamics of identity formation.
- The research raises awareness of the colonial history of products that Belgians, often unaware of this history, promote as national symbols. This can contribute to broader societal discussions and reflections.

Weaknesses:

- The research primarily focuses on the Belgian perspective, leaving the Congolese perspective and their experiences with cocoa and chocolate underexplored.
- The study stops in 1958, excluding recent developments and the influence of globalization and international heritage institutions like UNESCO.
- The study focuses only on the representation of Belgian chocolate at World Exhibitions, which may not be fully representative of its broader cultural significance and promotional activities outside these events.

Opportunities:

- Future research can focus on the perception and involvement of Congolese communities with cocoa and chocolate, contributing to a more comprehensive understanding of the cultural significance of chocolate and a more inclusive history of Belgian chocolate and Belgium's colonial history.
- Investigating the period after 1958, including the impact of globalization and contemporary heritage politics, could provide new insights.
- There is potential for future research to explore broader promotional materials and the incorporation of chocolate into Belgian traditions and culture, providing deeper insights into how Belgian chocolate is integrated into national identity.

Threats:

- The risk remains that the selective memory of colonial history will persist, leaving the complex reality of the cocoa and chocolate industry underexposed. The limited availability of secondary source material on the conditions of Congolese workers on cocoa plantations demonstrates this situation.
- As a Belgian, there may be unconscious bias in the analysis and interpretation of Belgian cultural products, such as chocolate.

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