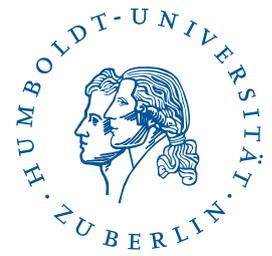
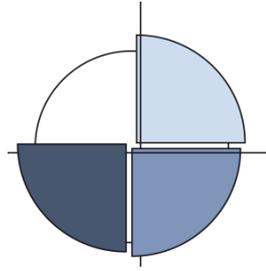


Repräsentationen sozialer
Ordnungen im Wandel

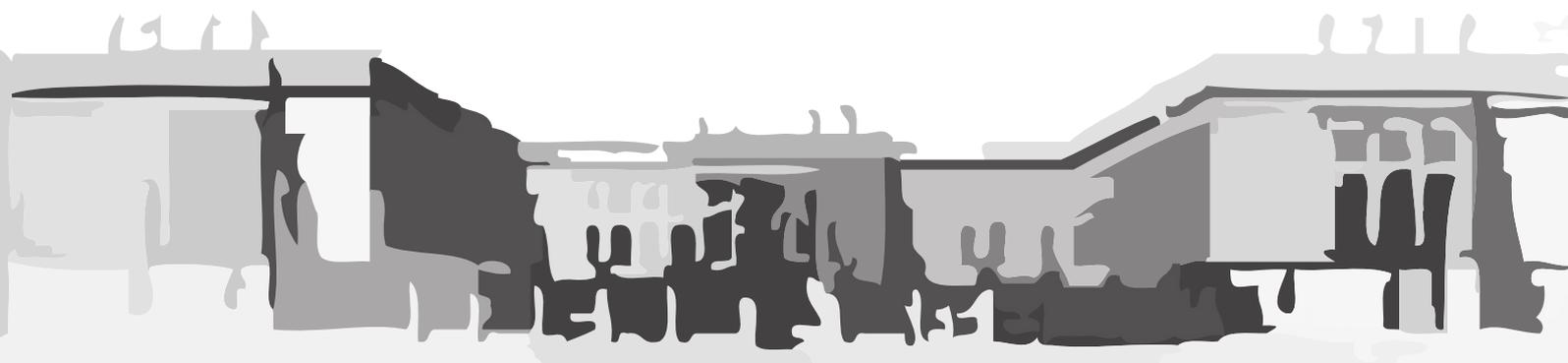
Sonderforschungsbereich 640



Daniel Tödt

»Les Noirs Perfectionnés«

Cultural Embourgeoisement in Belgian Congo during the 1940s and
1950s



Working Papers des Sonderforschungsbereiches 640, Nr. 4/2012

Schriftenreihe des Sonderforschungsbereiches 640: „Repräsentationen sozialer Ordnungen im Wandel“ in Zusammenarbeit mit dem Dokumenten- und Publikationsserver (edoc) der Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin.

ISSN: 2190-314X

Redaktion: Matthias Braun, Vincent Houben, Stefan Kirmse, Reet Tamme

V.i.S.d.P.: Vincent Houben

Daniel Tödt

»Les Noirs Perfectionnés«: Cultural Embourgeoisement in Belgian Congo during the 1940s and 1950s

Zitationsempfehlung:

Daniel Tödt, »Les Noirs Perfectionnés«: Cultural Embourgeoisement in Belgian Congo during the 1940s and 1950s, in: *Working Papers des Sonderforschungsbereiches 640* 4/2012, <http://edoc.hu-berlin.de/series/sfb-640-papers/2012-4/PDF/4.pdf>

Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin
Sonderforschungsbereich 640
Mohrenstraße 40-41
D-10117 Berlin
Web: www.sfb-repraesentationen.de



Universität der Künste Berlin



Wissenschaftliche Koordination:

Matthias Braun

Fon: 030.2093.4864

Mail: matthias.braun@staff.hu-berlin.de



Die Meinungen, die in den Working Papers des Sonderforschungsbereiches 640 geäußert werden, geben ausschließlich die Auffassungen der Autoren wieder. Abdruck und sonstige publizistische Nutzung, die über die in Forschung und Lehre üblichen Zitate hinausgehen, sind nur mit vorheriger Zustimmung der Redaktion sowie mit Angabe des Verfassers und der Quelle gestattet.

Abstract

»Les Noirs Perfectionnés«: Cultural Embourgeoisement in Belgian Congo during the 1940s and 1950s

The working paper deals with the making of the African elite in late colonial Belgian Congo and the role of cultural embourgeoisement in negotiating its place in the social order. It follows the premise that the discourse on social categories and the political attempts to invent, maintain and transform the colonial order has to be combined with what the actors made of it. By investigating the discussion and politics of officially recognizing the African elite as well as their medial, social and private spaces, it argues that by playing out their ascribed intermediary position between colonizers and colonized, the évolués strived for a better place in the social order. The main argument is that *cultural embourgeoisement* was crucial to the making of the African elite. Cultural embourgeoisement will be analyzed as both an empowerment strategy of colonial subjects for upward mobility, and the colonial state's policy to assert difference and maintain social order in times of crisis. The African elite were thus representations of a two-folded and highly ambivalent colonial change.

Author

Daniel Tödt is scientific staff member at the Collaborative Research Centre *Representations* at Humboldt University, Berlin. He investigates African elites in Belgian Congo. Tödt has recently published *Vom Planeten Mars: Rap in Marseille und das Imaginäre der Stadt*.

»Les Noirs Perfectionnés«: Cultural Embourgeoisement in Belgian Congo during the 1940s and 1950s¹

Introduction: The African Elite and its Place in the World of Tomorrow

In March 1945 an article was published in the *Voix du Congolais* (Congolese Voice), the main journal of the so called *évolués*, the *developed Africans*: It was entitled »What Will our Place be in Tomorrow's World?«². There was no simple answer to the question about the position of the emerging African elite in Belgian Congo and it remained a rather crucial issue until independence. The uncertainty of what lay ahead produced and challenged social categories, ideas of collectivity, lifestyles and political imaginations. Not only the content of colonial visions and their implementation were controversial, but also the imaginations about the speed and urgency of its realization. The future of Belgian Congo was infused with the belief in progress and conceived as a better tomorrow. But it remained an elastic and conflicted concept of African modernity that became part of the African elite's vocabulary and stimulated the imagination of their social destiny.

This working paper deals with the making of the African elite in Belgian Congo. Although elite formation was a colonial project of social engineering³, the term *making*⁴ already implies that the European vision of modeling African society was only one part of the story. By viewing this process as a project involving those Africans who were considered and considered themselves elites to an equal degree, the investigation follows the premise that the colonial discourse on

1 Earlier versions of this working paper were presented as a contribution to the conference *Wandel wollen – Vom Umgang mit gesellschaftlichen Veränderungen* at Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin in April 2011 and to the workshop *Congo meets Africa meets New Historical Writing* at the Wissenschaftskolleg zu Berlin in June 2011. For advice and critical comments I would like to thank: Dmitri van den Bersselaar, Frederick Cooper, Andreas Eckert, Steve Feierman, Regina Finsterhölzl, Joël Glasman, Manfred Hettling, Nancy Rose Hunt, Johan Lagae, Julie Livingstone, Thomas Mergel, Michael Pesek and Jean-Luc Vellut as well as all the participants of the above mentioned events who shared their ideas with me. I also would like to thank Lotte Knotte for her help in translating several drafts of this paper and Ivo Komljen for his final correction.

2 Paul Tshibamba-Lomani, »Quelle sera notre place dans le monde de demain«, in: *Voix du Congolais* 2 (March/April 1949), pp. 47–51.

3 Social engineering describes centralized attempts (by the state, for example) to (re-)model the social order of a given society. For a discussion of this concept see: Thomas Etzemüller, »Social Engineering, Version: 1.0«, in: *Docupedia-Zeitgeschichte* (11. 2.2010), URL: https://docupedia.de/zg/Social_engineering?oldid=75535.

4 The term *making* is a heuristic reference to: E.P. Thompson, *The making of the English working-class* (London: Vintage Books, 1963).

social categories and the political attempts to invent, maintain and transform the social order has to be combined with what the actors made of it.⁵

The évolués⁶, *les noirs perfectionnés* (the *perfected blacks*),⁷ are an excellent example to discuss and analyze the dialectics of inclusion and exclusion in a colonial situation, i.e. the ambivalent need to uphold distinctions between rulers and subjects while at the same time introducing the colonial subjects to European culture civilizing them.⁸ The topoi évolués or *évoluants*, the *developing ones*, arose from a colonial semantics of progress which ascribed the African societies a civilizational deficit that could be made up for through long-term individual cultural assimilation.⁹ The évolués were paradoxically located between an attributed imperfection in terms of *being civilized* and the vehemently requested but likewise feared development of Africans along the lines of a European example.¹⁰ Thus, the African elite held a highly contested position in the colonial order that Andreas Eckert described as »intermediary ambivalence«.¹¹

Regarding the Belgian Congo case, the working paper argues that in playing out their ascribed intermediary position between colonizers and colonized, the évolués strived for a better place in a social order that was put up for renegotiation. The main argument is that cultural embourgeoisement played a crucial role in this very process.¹² Cultural embourgeoisement here is understood

5 Cf. Frederick Cooper & Ann Laura Stoler (eds), »Between Metropole and Colony. Rethinking a Research Agenda«, in: *Tensions of Empire. Colonial cultures in a bourgeois world* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1997), pp. 1–56; Cf. Michael Pesek, *Das Ende eines Kolonialreiches. Ostafrika im Ersten Weltkrieg* (Frankfurt am Main/New York: Campus, 2010), in particular pp. 31–33.

6 In francophone colonies the term évolués designated vaguely »tout indigène modernisé au contact de la modernization«. Cf. Claude Liauzu, *Dictionnaire de la colonisation française* (Paris: Larousse, 2007), pp. 281–282. See for a case study on Senegal: James Genova, *Colonial Ambivalence, Cultural Authenticity and the Limitations of Mimicry in French-Ruled West Africa, 1914–1956* (New York: Peter Lang, 2004).

7 The term noirs perfectionnés was used by Roger Bolamba, chief-editor of the *Voix du Congolais*, to describe the fate of the African elite: Cf. Roger Bolamba, »Le Problème des Evolués«, in: *Voix du Congolais* 16 (July 1947), pp. 684–687. To create *perfect indigene* instead of *black Europeans* has not been a Belgian specificity but was typical for the British and French colonies as well. Cf. Andreas Eckert, »Die Verheißung der Bürokratie. Verwaltung als Zivilisierungsagentur im kolonialen Westafrika«, in: *Zivilisierungsmission. Imperiale Weltverbesserung seit dem 18. Jahrhundert*, ed. by Boris Barth et al. (Konstanz: UVK, 2005), pp. 269–283, in particular p. 278.

8 Cf. Cooper & Stoler, »Between Metropolis and Colony«, op. cit. (note 5).

9 In French colonialism, assimilation constituted a key-concept for the politics of a *civilizing mission*; colonial subjects were theoretically able to attain French citizenship under the condition that they accepted and incorporated European values, customs and lifestyles. While in European states the term assimilation signified cultural adaptation of immigrants and/or minorities to the dominant and majority culture, in the colonies this relation was inverted: the tiny minority of Europeans represented the dominant culture to which the colonized society had to adapt itself. For further reading on these issues and the ambivalent French post-war assimilation policy in dealing with the *others* in the metropole and colonies see: Frederick Cooper, »From Imperial Inclusion to Republican Exclusion? France's Ambiguous Postwar Trajectory«, in: *Frenchness and the African Diaspora. Identity and Uprising in Contemporary France*, ed. by Charles Tshimanga et al. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009), pp. 91–119.

10 Cf. Eckert, »Die Verheißung der Bürokratie«, op. cit. (note 7) in particular p. 271.

11 Andreas Eckert, »Cultural Commuters: African Employees in Late Colonial Tanzania intermediaries«, in: *Intermediaries, interpreters, and clerks. African employees in the making of colonial Africa*, ed. by Benjamin N. Lawrence et al. (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2006), p. 251.

12 The term embourgeoisement describes the historical process of bourgeois class-formation. In general, this highly heterogeneous and influential section of society is considered to be a protagonist of political and social change. While scholars traditionally prefer socioeconomic criteria to define affiliation to the bourgeoisie, there have re-

as an empowerment strategy of colonial subjects that was based on the individual accumulation of social and cultural capital in institutions of African elite formation.¹³ It constituted a complex and contingent cultural process of upward mobility under the constraints of a colonial situation.¹⁴ In reference to the title of Frederick Cooper's and Ann Laura Stoler's book »Colonial culture in a Bourgeois World«¹⁵, one could say that the history of African elite in Belgian Congo is a history about *bourgeois culture in a colonial world*.

After a brief introduction into the situation of Belgian Congo after 1945, the medial and political debate about the so-called *évolués status* as well as its implementation and consequences will be discussed. The *carte du mérite civique* (the social merit card), and the reform of *immatriculation* were designed to select an official African elite. But what kind of elite was to be created? By examining journals and associations, the working paper sheds light on the central institutions in the project of state-controlled elite formation and cultural embourgeoisement, providing another example of the transforming space of communication between African elite and European colonial actors that was both a product and a driving force for the crisis of late colonial rule.¹⁶ In bringing together the main arguments, the conclusion argues that the *évolués* stood at the centre of cultural, social and political changes Belgian Congo faced after the Second World War. The African elite were representations of a highly ambivalent colonial change:¹⁷ Their cultural embourgeoisement served as an empowerment strategy of colonial subjects for upward mobility on the one hand, and the late colonial state's policy of asserting difference and thereby preserving social order on the other.

cently been numerous studies emphasizing the importance of lifestyle and values to social mobility. My research on the African elite is inspired by the Simone Lässig's work on Jewish emancipation and social ascent in 19th century Germany. She argued that rather than being a mere side-effect of their socioeconomic affiliation with the bourgeoisie, their cultural embourgeoisement constituted rather a crucial condition for their social advancement. Cf. Simone Lässig, *Jüdische Wege ins Bürgertum. Kulturelles Kapital und sozialer Aufstieg im 19. Jahrhundert* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2004), in particular p. 25.

13 There are a numerous publications on the African middle class although few deal explicitly with the importance of bourgeois self-stylization and identification for African elite in colonial times. See for the case of Rhodesia: Michael O. West, *The Rise of an African Middle Class: Colonial Zimbabwe 1898–1965* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002).

14 The theoretical challenge and heuristic value of analyzing bourgeois groups among colonized society beyond Eurocentric conceptions has been highly discussed. For these questions, see the standard-setting article: Cooper & Stoler, *Tensions of Empire*, op. cit. (note 5). Margrit Pernau convincingly deals with these issues in her case-study on Muslims in colonial Delhi during the 19th century: Margrit Pernau, *Bürger mit Turban. Muslime in Delhi im 19. Jahrhundert* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2008), in particular pp. 8–12.

15 Cooper & Stoler, *Tensions of Empire*, op. cit. (note 5).

16 Cf. Andreas Eckert, »Afrikanische Aktivistinnen und Intellektuelle in Europa und die Dekolonisierung Afrikas«, in: *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 37 (2011), pp. 244–274.

17 Representations are understood here as a means to organize and communicate knowledge and a crucial factor for the dynamic negotiation of social order. Cf. Jörg Baberowski, »Was sind Repräsentationen sozialer Ordnungen im Wandel? Anmerkungen zu einer Geschichte interkultureller Begegnungen«, in: *Repräsentation sozialer Ordnungen. Formen und Theorien*, ed. by Jörg Baberowski (Frankfurt am Main/New York: Campus, 2008) pp. 7–18. The term colonial change is borrowed from: Andreas Eckert, *Grundbesitz, Landkonflikte und kolonialer Wandel. Douala 1880 bis 1960* (Stuttgart: Steiner, 1999).

Belgian Congo After 1945: Reforming the Colonial Project

At the dawn of the Second World War the future of the Belgian colony was put up for renegotiation. When in 1945 the resigning General Governor Pierre Ryckmans declared colonialism outdated, his intention was to symbolize change. The reform of colonial policy was meant to further secure the economic interests of the motherland, but also the common good of the colonial subjects – *le bien-être indigène*. The so called *hundred years plan* from 1949 aspired to a social and economic modernization of the colony and was meant to carry elements of the nascent European welfare state into the periphery.¹⁸ At this time, the »developmental colonialism«¹⁹ also came up in the Congo and the extent of the project signaled the Belgian will for ongoing presence and dominance in Central Africa.

Furthermore, outstanding war debts towards the Africans who had served in the armed forces were to be settled. As early as 1944, the uprising of Congolese war veterans in Luluabourg made the necessity for change obvious to the Belgian administration. The subsequently published complaint of the évolués fueled fears about the spread of revolutionary and nationalistic sentiments among Africans who had passed through colonial educational institutions and now claimed an appropriate place in the Congo of tomorrow.²⁰ These post-war social tensions prompted the Belgian colonial minister to devote his attention to the évolués, and he convened commissions of European experts in Brussels and Leopoldville to negotiate a special legal status. According to a commission member in 1947, it would be necessary to distinguish between the few so-called »assimilable Africans«, mostly priests, and a total number of 40.000 évolués who had a higher social and professional status than the African masses.²¹ They worked mostly as secretaries in administration offices, as teachers, medical assistants and merchants, typical positions of colonial middlemen.²² The »commission to study the question of the évolués« decided that these two social categories of assimilables and évolués should be assigned an exclusive status, which would exclude them from the harsh indigenous jurisdiction and honor their *developmental achievement*. The commission's attempt to establish different social categories for colonial subjects was highly

18 Cf. Guy Vanthemsche, »Le plan décennal et la modernisation du Congo belge«, in: *La mémoire du Congo. Le temps colonial*, ed. by Jean-Luc Vellut (Tervuren: Musée Royal de l'Afrique Centrale, 2005), pp. 104–108; Andreas Eckert, *Exportschlager Wohlfahrtsstaat? Europäische Sozialstaatlichkeit und Kolonialismus in Afrika nach dem Zweiten Weltkrieg* (Bochum: Stiftung Bibliothek des Ruhrgebiets, 2007).

19 Jürgen Osterhammel, *Kolonialismus: Geschichte-Formen-Folgen* (Beck: Frankfurt, 2002), p. 45; Andreas Eckert, *Herrschen und Verwalten. Afrikanische Bürokraten, staatliche Ordnung und Politik in Tanzania, 1920–1970* (München: Oldenbourg, 2007), p. 20.

20 In the 1920s and 1930s the term évolués already appeared in Belgian Congo to describe a highly heterogenic group of (mostly literate) Congolese that differed in occupational, regional and linguistic aspects but shared education and/or employment in colonial institutions and the urban lifeworld.

21 Cf. J. Van Wing, »La formation d'une élite noire au Congo Belge«, in: *Bulletin C.E.P.S.I* 5 (1948), p. 9.

22 The quantification of the évolués constituted a problem for the contemporary actors and scholars. The Congolese historian Mutamba-Makombo estimated the group of évolués numerically by means of different criteria. Based on the number of school graduates and administrative officials he estimates their numbers at 15.000 for 1948, or 25.014 if members of clubs or associations are included. If one uses the feature *employment* this results in a number of 143.000 in 1956. Cf. Jean-Marie Mutamba-Makombo, »Les évolués: situation au Congo belge«, in: *Le manifeste Conscience africaine (1956)*, ed. by Nathalie Tousignant (Bruxelles: Saint Louis, 2009), pp. 83–115, in particular pp. 94–98.

controversial. Official colonial policy thus far had intended to educate and socially advance the African population at the same speed. Given the ideology of »gradual development [that] [...] pervaded the attitudes of Belgians toward the Congo and the Congolese in every sphere«²³, this project of reconstructing African society by defining the African elite represented a major change.

However, compared to other post-war colonial policies, the decision to officially recognize an African elite seems to have been an anachronism. Indeed, European states shared the view that political autonomy of their colonies had to be prepared carefully and required time. But the first steps that were taken differed. While forms of political participation for Africans already existed in the British colony Gold Coast, and the neighboring French colonies granted voting rights for own representatives in the French Parliament, the Belgian colonial experts considered the political involvement of their colonial subjects to be premature. In the colonial imagination, the Congo and its inhabitants developed at a different pace. The proverbial *heart of darkness* was imagined as a place inhabited by mostly primitives, whose presumed enlightenment through European civilization lay in a distant future.

The commission, which was established under the authority of the colonial ministry, nevertheless called for immediate action as they believed the évolués were at a stage where they willingly adopted European lifestyles. The suggestion was to make use of this opportune moment to wield influence before they entered a fragile phase of a return to traditional culture again.²⁴ Thus, the colonial ministry was in favor of drafting a legal special status and prompted the founding of magazines and clubs under the patronage of the colonial state. Journals, associations and juridical distinction were supposed to serve as central institutions that would transform the évolués into a new African elite.

The official recognition of an African elite presented a novelty, as did the role played by the colonial state in their making. Up until now the Belgian authorities had delegated education and other social tasks concerning the African population to the Christian missions. But with the ratification of the Atlantic Charter in June 1945, which demanded colonial reforms to benefit the African population, and the first liberal colonial minister after a thirty-year predominance of the Catholic Party, the making of a new African elite became the centerpiece of a reformed »indigenous policy«.²⁵

Congolese Voices: Mediating the évolués-status

The debate about a status of the évolués was not the first of its kind. Already in Congo Free State (1885–1908) the civil code differentiated between traditional and European law and announced the theoretical possibility for *civilized* Africans to *immatriculate* in the civil registry and thereby gain legal distinction from the mass; but the projects stopped at the discussion about the extent

23 Marvin Markowitz, *Cross and Sword. The political Role of Christian Mission in the Belgian Congo, 1908–1960* (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1973), p. 104.

24 Cf. Congrès Colonial National: *Les évolués* (1947), IV Session, VIII Commission, pp. 2–3.

25 Roger Godding, »La politique indigène du Congo Belge«, in: *Croix du Congo* (16.01.1944).

and conditions of such assimilation in the 1920s and 1930s.²⁶ It would take until the end of the Second World War before the judicial reforms returned onto the agenda.

From 1945 onwards, a lively debate took place among experts in Congo and Belgium. The extent of the involvement of African authors was new. One has to highlight one particular journal that was specifically established for the African elite and created a space of communication in which to discuss their position in colonial society:²⁷ The *Voix du Congolais*, published from January 1945 to January 1960, stood under the aegis of the General Government and can be considered a crucial institution in the making of the new African elite. The *Voix du Congolais* was full of comments, reports and reflections on cultural and social issues.²⁸ Being a rich source to analyze the discourse of the évolués, it provides testimony of the pictures and concepts that were used by the African elite to comment on current events and European debates, how they defined their relationship towards the African and European society, what life to live and what future they envisioned.

Certainly, the *Voix du Congolais* was the colonial state's attempt to make public, mediate and thereby control the discourse of the new intellectual elite. Critical contributions were often commented or withheld; self-censorship was another reason why one should read these sources critically. Thus, the authors did not question colonial rule in general but criticized and challenged its implementation and policies instead. The question remains in what way the self-stylization of the *Voix du Congolais* as an initiator of colonial reforms mirrored or rather masked processes of political negotiation and decision-making. Early findings suggest that it not only served the African elite as a means to make claims towards the colonial state, but that these critics also initiated administrative processes and political consequences.²⁹ This perspective, which has been underestimated in the academic discussion thus far, allows us to analyze the extent to which the authors and contributors to the *Voix du Congolais* were capable of demanding, initiating and evaluating colonial reforms of indigenous politics.

The attention paid to the évolués and their journalistic activities did not remain uncontested. An article in *Essor du Congo*, the oldest daily newspaper of Belgian Congo based in Katanga and directed at a European readership, reflected a widespread opinion within the colony: »Instead of

26 Cf. Michel de Schrevel, *Les forces politiques de la décolonisation congolaise jusqu' à la veille de l'indépendance* (Louvain: Symons, 1970), pp. 129–135; Crawford Young, *Politics in the Congo. Decolonization and independence* (Princeton: University Press, 1965), pp. 75–87.

27 The first media with an explicit African readership in Belgian Congo were founded by missions; Mission bulletins for regional communication among evangelical workers or the *Croix du Congo* published by the Scheut-missionaries in Léopoldville, which had employed Africans for editorial work as early as the 1920s. Cf. Nancy Rose Hunt, »Letter-writing, nursing men and bicycles in the Belgian Congo: notes towards the social identity of a colonial category«, in: *Paths toward the past. African historical essays in honor of Jan Vansina*, ed. by Robert W. Harms et al. (Atlanta: African Studies Association Press, 1994), pp. 187–210.

28 Not by accident, the layout and rubrics of the *Voix du Congolais* as well as the aim to link the far spread évolués were reminiscent of the journal *Signum Fidei* that was published for the *Association des anciens élèves des frères des écoles chrétiennes* (ASSANEF); many members of the editorial team graduated at the *Colonie Scolaire* in Boma, where frères-missionaries educated Africans for auxiliary positions in colonial administration. For instance, chief editor Roger Bolamba was a graduate of the *Colonie scolaire* and worked for the *Signum Fidei* as early as 1937.

29 Cf. *Matadi: Doléances des Evolués*, (1952), Archives nationales du République Démocratique Congo, Kinshasa. AIMO. 73CC. 82/244.

listening to the Congolese voice, we have amplified it». ³⁰ The historic moment of this very critique has to be emphasized. When it was published in March 1945, it took a stand against the ongoing demands of the African authors for juridical distinction.

The special treatment of the évolués by the colonial state became a central topic in the early years of the *Voix du Congolais*. In the third edition, the editor-in-chief Roger Bolamba thought the right moment had come for a »special status for the évolués«³¹. But what criteria defined the évolués and which status they were due as a social class in the colonial order remained highly contested. In general, the colonial discourse was marked by the ambivalence of imagining the évolués as deficient beings on the one hand, and considering them to be the model of civilized Africans for the masses on the other. The widespread idea of the évolués as an unfinished product of the civilizing mission led to the assumption that they required further shaping and perfection before shouldering responsibility. The colonial semantics of the imperfection of the évolués were also reflected in articles of the *Voix du Congolais*. As graduates from mission schools, many authors were used to moral indoctrination. They had accepted the notion of the superiority of European culture but were convinced of the *improvement* of their character and their habits. They were driven by the need of »a treatment according to their individual development«³², which they wanted to see secured by means of an official status. They reinforced their arguments for their claims of distinction in articles propagating an idealistic representation of features that would distinguish the évolués and the duties awaiting them in the *nouvelle société indigène*. The image of modern Africans was created in the process: »les noirs perfectionnés«³³ who followed ideals that were considered to be European and civilized in colonial vocabulary. The *model-évolués* diffused by articles in the *Voix du Congolais* and other media as well as official photographs demanded internalization and determined social affiliation to the new African elite.

In a nutshell, this colonial project of social engineering can be understood as a cultural embourgeoisement of the évolués.³⁴ An underlying assumption of this social and cultural transformation was the alleged mistrust of the European bourgeoisie towards political upheaval which would prevent their African counterparts from supporting revolutionary ideas. Furthermore, in a similar way to the European bourgeois idea of self-improvement, being an évolué meant *becoming* one first and foremost.³⁵ Those who wanted to be considered part of the *true* évolués had to correspond to a range of social and cultural practices, attitudes and moral values that must be outlined briefly.

Education was a central attribute of the new elite and represented their symbolic capital. In missionary schools, the primary locus of colonial subject formation,³⁶ they were already drilled to

30 »Revue de la presse«, in: *Voix du Congolais* 3 (May/June 1945), p. 92.

31 Roger Bolamba, »Oppurtunité de créer un statut pour les évolués«, in: *Voix du Congolais* 3 (May/June 1945), pp. 72–77.

32 Cf. Tshibamba-Lomani, »Quelle sera notre place«, op. cit. (note 2).

33 Roger Bolamba, »Le Problème des Evolués«, in: *Voix du Congolais* 16 (July 1947), pp. 684–687.

34 Cf. Young, *Politics in the Congo*, op. cit. (note 26), p. 44.

35 Cf. Manfred Hettling & Stefan-Ludwig Hoffmann, »Einleitung: Zur Historisierung bürgerlicher Werte«, in: *Der bürgerliche Wertehimmel. Innenansichten des 19. Jahrhunderts*, ed. by Manfred Hettling & Stefan-Ludwig Hoffmann (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2000), pp. 7–22, in particular p. 15.

36 Cf. Albert Wirz, »Einleitung: Körper, Raum und Zeit der Herrschaft«, in: *Alles unter Kontrolle. Disziplinierungs-*

further their physical and mental self-optimization. Having graduated, they were supposed to demonstrate their rhetorical abilities and intellectual proficiency in essays and club debates as a means to prove and accumulate their cultural capital. Education qualified mainly for white-collar jobs in the administration or economy. In numerous articles, the évolués were reminded to be conscious and disciplined workers. Wage labor introduced the évolués to the concept of leisure, which was meant to serve the welfare of the family and promote education.

Associative sociability provided a crucial form of legitimate leisure activity.³⁷ The most important associations before 1945 were old fellows clubs of Catholic missionary schools serving as their extended arm under the banner of the *Catholic Action* in Belgian Congo.³⁸ After the Second World War they inspired the colonial state to foster club activities of the évolués. The associations formed an integral part of the official making of the African elite and were supposed to provide an apolitical space where moral-ideological training was supervised by European mentors. In 1948, the 490 officially registered clubs throughout the country included those of évolués, old fellows, members from the same profession – such as clerks and soldiers of the *Force Publique* – as well as from ethnically and regionally defined groups.³⁹

Club news was published regularly in journals like *Croix du Congo* (Cross of Congo) and *Voix du Congolais*, giving information on membership, meetings and the cultural program. Many associations included a press section responsible for reports of this kind. Moreover, journalistic activities of club members provided insight into their attitudes and opinions; many contributors to the elite journals held high positions in these associations. Associations and journals thus presented noteworthy interconnections and developed a space of communication, a certainly controlled public sphere, which played a substantial role in the self-expression and self-assurance of the évolués.⁴⁰

Moreover, associative sociability was a crucial mode of cultural embourgeoisement. The associations offered their members a place for self-improvement and socialization – similar to the club culture in 19th century Europe. By facilitating (limited) contacts to Europeans outside the workplace, they constituted social contact zones and were sites of network formation. Membership was awarded selectively and official positions promised prestige. The intellectual (bourgeois) activities demanded cultural capital and also served as distinction towards the mostly illiterate African society. Having been inwardly egalitarian and outwardly elitist⁴¹, the clubs offered places where the members of the elite assured themselves and remained among each other; they rarely met the

prozesse im kolonialen Tansania (1850–1960), ed. by Katrin Bromber et al. (Köln: Rudiger Köppe Verlag, 2003), pp. 5–34, in particular p. 9.

37 Cf. Emmanuel Akyeampong & Charles Ambler, »Leisure in African History: An Introduction«, in: *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* 1 (2002), pp. 1–16.

38 De jure, colonial authorities had to authorize and control any association, and were allowed to dissolve those who »contradict civilization or offended public order«. Cf. Leon Strouvens & Pierre Piron, *Codes et lois du Congo belge* (Léopoldville, 1948), p. 561.

39 Cf. Jean-Marie Mutamba-Makombo, *Du Congo belge au Congo indépendant, 1940–1960. Émergence des évolués et genèse du nationalisme* (Kinshasa: Institut de formation et d'études politiques, 1998), p. 53.

40 Regarding the interdependence of journals and associations in Gold Coast: Cf. Stephanie Newell, »Entering the territory of Elites: Literary Activity in Colonial Ghana«, in: *Africa's hidden histories. Everyday literacy and making the self*, ed. by Karin Barber (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 2006), pp. 211–235.

41 Cf. Stefan-Ludwig Hoffmann, *Geselligkeit und Demokratie. Vereine und zivile Gesellschaft im transnationalen Vergleich 1750–1914* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2003), p. 43.

intended target of colonial policy to promote the cooperation and exchange between the African elite and the population at large.

Besides the associations, the family was meant to give the model-évolués another »unspoiled milieu«⁴². The extended family was supposed to make way for the nuclear family, the traditional dowry be replaced by the vow at the Christian altar, and pious monogamy was to be practiced instead of polygamy, which the church had condemned. A crucial element for this civilized family life was the invention of the African house wife, who learned new gender-codes and corresponding cultural techniques in the »foyers sociaux«, social centers led by the wives of Belgian colonial officers.⁴³ The children completed the ideal image of the nuclear family with a well-groomed appearance, education, meaningful leisure activities such as scouting, sports or reading.⁴⁴

The cultural model of the nuclear family had to be strengthened with a stable and standardized housing situation. The »house for évolués« – exemplary dwellings of stable material produced by the *Office des Cités Indigènes*⁴⁵ – was offered for sale to well-off Congolese by means of special credits. The living room was propagated as a »unit of measure for the degree of civilization of their inhabitants«⁴⁶. Decoration techniques made up part of the curriculum of the foyers sociaux.⁴⁷ The cult of the living room manifested itself in nationwide competitions for the prettiest parlor and fostered the »colonized culture of évolués domesticity«⁴⁸.

Social status, modernity and respectability had to be reflected in outer appearances. Heavily advertised consumer products such as flat irons, sewing machines and shoeshine promised an immaculate appearance; together with gramophones and bicycles they were »symbolic markers of évolués status«⁴⁹.

In short, the diffusion of moral values and a specific lifestyle was geared towards the making of a »well-guided class of évolués«⁵⁰. Being ideal representations of the *perfected blacks*, one should be careful not to understand them as mere reflections of African lifeworlds and social practices, but as normative postulates that shaped and directed them. In any case, this highly idealistic discourse dominated the semantics in the *Voix du Congolais* and served the self-assurance of a nascent African elite; an imagined community that demanded a conditioning of its belonging and

42 Antoine Rubbens, »Le problème des évolués«, in: *Essor du Congo* (18.11.1944).

43 Cf. Nancy Rose Hunt, »Hommes et femmes, sujets du Congo colonial«, in: *Les mémoires du Congo. Le temps colonial*, ed. by Jean-Luc Vellut (Gand: Editions Snoeck, 2005), pp.51–57.

44 Cf. Samuel Tilman, »L'implantation du scoutisme au Congo belge«, in: *Itinéraires croisés de la modernité Congo belge (1920–1950)*, ed. by Jean-Luc Vellut (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2001), pp. 103–140; Lies van Rompaey, »The Development of the Catholic Youth Organizations in the Belgian Congo (1908–1960)«, in: *The colonial experience in education. Historical issues and perspectives*, ed. by António Nóvoa & Marc Depaepe (Gent: C.S.H.P., 1995), pp. 193–213.

45 An administration structure established for urban construction, especially for the African neighborhoods.

46 Jean-Marie Mutamba-Makombo, »Im Salon eines kongolesischen Évolué in den vierziger und fünfziger Jahren«, in: *An-Sichten. Malerei aus dem Kongo, 1990–2000*, ed. by Bogumil Jewsiewicki & Barbara Plankensteiner (Wien: Springer, 2001), pp. 153–157, in particular p. 156.

47 Cf. Hunt, »Hommes et femmes«, op. cit. (note 43).

48 Nancy Rose Hunt, »Domesticity and colonialism in Belgian Congo: Usumbura's foyer social, 1946–1960«, in: *Signs* 5 (1990), *The Ideology of Mothering: Disruption and reproduction of Patriarchy*, pp. 447–474, in particular p. 470.

49 Hunt »Letter-writing«, op. cit. (note 27), p. 203.

50 Antoine Rubbens, *Dettes de guerre* (Elisabethville, 1945), p. 117.

a legitimization of its privileged position in a reformed colonial order. But also distinction, that is the recognition of differences between *true* and *false évolués*.

The Social Merit Card: Selecting the *True* African Elite

The ideal image of the African elite propagated by the authors of the *Voix du Congolais* was also informed by what they did not want to be. Numerous articles sounded out the gap between propagated concepts and the everyday lifestyle: many reportedly enjoyed themselves in bars with dance and drinks and indulged in »camouflaged polygamy«⁵¹ rather than studying in libraries or spending time with their families.⁵² Some exhibited an »extravagance« in their clothing, talking, drinking and the way they decorated the house, prompting a contributor in the *Voix du Congolais* to call for »a little more moderation«.⁵³ The clubs persistently bemoaned the lethargy of their members. Obviously not all of them found pleasure in the club evenings with their didactic lectures and debates. One club accused the absent »pretentious évolués« of staying away from the meetings so they could seduce the wives of other members while they were at the club house.⁵⁴ They dismissed the so-called »snobs« who sought »evolution« only in material and not moral terms.⁵⁵ Even the support of the *indigènes* left much to be desired; instead of helping them to civilize, they tended to look down on them in scorn.⁵⁶

At the end of the 1940s, the discourse on true and false évolués was an attempt by the authors of the *Voix du Congolais* to target and invalidate arguments against the special status of the évolués. The *Voix du Congolais* argued in favor of an affirmative elite policy through the propagation of a model-évolué and elite morals. The journal also put pressure on the relevant political authorities. For example, when editor-in-chief Roger Bolamba called the postponed decision about the évolués-status a »political mistake«, the advisor of the Colonial Minister despondently referred to this very headline, fearing that this kind of distrust would open the floodgates for pro-independence propaganda from other colonies.⁵⁷ For the African authors, the elite journal constituted an important medial »space of exchanging representations«⁵⁸ where they could use their symbolic capital to negotiate reforms of the indigenous policy vis-à-vis the colonial state.

Facing both the impatience of évolués who had already been waiting for a special status for years and the rejection of an extensive assimilation by some Europeans, the General Governor introduced the social merit card in July 1948 by decree. It was supposed to serve as an interim solution until a more far-reaching solution regarding legal assimilation would be found.

51 Nancy Rose Hunt, »Noise over Camouflaged Polygamy, Colonial Morality Taxation, and a Woman-Naming Crisis in Belgian Africa«, in: *Journal of African History* 32 (1991), pp. 471–494.

52 Paul Kabasubabo, »Pourquoi les évolués fréquentent-ils peu les bibliothèques«, in: *Voix du Congolais* 21 (December 1947), pp. 904–905. He mentions a cultural practice that is still very popular in bars of nowadays Kinshasa, i.e. drinking beer until the table is covered with empty bottles.

53 Joseph Lomboto, »Pour un peu de mesure«, in: *Voix du Congolais* 34 (January 1949), pp. 18–19.

54 Léon Siffolt, »Absentéisme au Cercle«, in: *Croix du Congo* (27.03.1949), p. 5.

55 Cf. »Chronique de la vie indigène et nouvelles diverses«, in: *Voix du Congolais* 14 (March 1947), p. 622.

56 Cf. Jérôme-Ernest Mupenda, »L'évolué est-il maladroit ?«, in : *Voix du Congolais* 27 (June 1948), pp. 236–237.

57 Cf. Vanhove, *Note pour le ministre*, (dated on 25.02.1948), Archives Africaines Bruxelles. AI/4743/II.T.4.

58 Baberowski, »Repräsentationen«, op. cit. (note 17), in particular p. 18.

Candidates for the social merit card had to apply individually: They had to be monogamous, at least 21 years old, and have been exempt from punishment for 5 years. Illiterates were required to show employment references; women needed to prove their attendance at the social centers. Moreover, they needed to produce evidence of »good behavior and the sincere wish to reach a higher level of civilization«⁵⁹. The legal distinction of the cardholders to the African masses was recognized, but not elaborated upon. Subsequent laws and regulations were issued for this »category of indigene«. The status came with legal and social benefits for the card owner. For instance, they were assimilated to the European in property and criminal law (and criminal proceedings); they were adjudged their own domains in public space and permitted to buy goods in European shops, consume alcohol and move freely at night within the city and in European neighborhoods.

How did the *Voix du Congolais* react to this long-awaited reform? The card was seen as a »symbol of duties«⁶⁰ rather than a guarantee for privileges. Quoting the colonial governor, editor-in-chief Roger Bolamba wrote that it should impose the duty on the beneficiaries to represent the linking element between Europeans and African society, to stand up for the progress of the country and the development of the population.⁶¹ Taking up the official rhetoric, the authors now understood the civilizing mission as a common task of Europeans and the African elite: The évolués were to serve the indigènes as a role-model and present a reliable African partner in the reformed colonial project.⁶² This meant nothing less than a fundamental shift in the colonial relationship, which had thus far been characterized by a highly paternalistic conception of the Africans standing under the guardianship of Europeans. Thus, the ascribed role for the officially recognized elite implied a more influential position and symbolic power for the évolués in the social order; it not only promised distinction from the masses, but also solidarity with the Europeans.⁶³

But the officially recognized and symbolically upgraded évolués were not without their critics. The diatribe of Europeans about holders of the social merit card was commonplace and a big issue in the *Voix du Congolais*. The authors suspected the practice of awarding the card to be the reason behind the ridicule that the official elite faced. A flood of unworthy applicants and false profiteers led the *Voix du Congolais* to demand more detailed character checks from the selection committee. The commissions that awarded the social merit card were assigned to separate the true évolués from the false. They demanded: »they must really belong to the elite«.⁶⁴

But the abovementioned selection criterion to obtain the social merit card, the proof of individual efforts to civilize oneself, was a challenge for the commissions that met on a territorial level and were staffed by government officials, African representatives and other local authorities. Based on questionnaires, they sought to determine the applicant's involvement in clubs and journals,

59 *Normes pour obtenir la carte de mérite civique*, Archives Africaines Bruxelles. AI/4743/II.T.4.

60 Roger Bolamba, »Carte du Mérite Civique, Symbole de devoirs«, in: *Voix du Congolais* 30 (September 1948), pp. 359–362, in particular p. 359.

61 Cf. *Ibid.*

62 Cf. Etienne Ngandu, »Le rôle de l'élite congolaise«, in: *Voix du Congolais* 33 (December 1948), p. 490.

63 The recourse to middlemen was indeed mandatory for the colonial state, considering the *thin white line* of 35.000 Europeans in 1945 in a country of the sixty-seven-fold size of Belgium. Cf. Amandine Lauro & Valérie Piette, »Le Congo belge (1908–1945). Coloniser sans élites?«, in: *Au sommet de l'empire. Les élites européennes dans les colonies*, ed. by Calire Laux et al. (Peter Lang-Bruxelles, 2009) pp. 115–140.

64 »Nouvelle Importante«, in: *Voix du Congolais* 29 (August 1948), p. 322.

their use of libraries and family routines. The Commission of Kivu District, for instance, wanted to know how much of their salary applicants spent on the household; what the opinion of the association's European advisor was on them; whether they paid their membership fees regularly; whether their wife visited the domestic school and the house was neat and tidy.⁶⁵ Unannounced visits served as another means of obtaining information about the applicants.⁶⁶ The commission of District Lac Leopold II was notified about a visit at one of the applicant's homes by the authority of the *Centre-Extra-Coutumier*: the garden was proper, the children polite; and the wife had taken part in the conversation and was treated by her husband »in a civilized manner«⁶⁷.

The numerous minutes of meetings produced by the commissions convey the impression that the idealistic discourse about the model-évolués was tested against the applicants' individual realization of these ideals. They mirror how the criteria to define the African elite were discussed, staged, negotiated and bureaucratically tested by different agents throughout the colony. Furthermore, the politics of selecting the true évolués show the ongoing importance of performative representations in the African elite's quest for social recognition and symbolic power. Similar to other moments of colonial encounters between Europeans and Africans as discussed by Michael Pesek, obtaining the social merit card greatly depended on the candidate's ability to perform the »colonial habitus« and thereby lend credibility to their staging of civilized behavior.⁶⁸ The social merit card can be interpreted as a primary selection mechanism in the official search for the African elite.

Only every third applicant was ultimately awarded the card; there were 395 card holders by 1952, and a total of 1557 until independence.⁶⁹ The strict selection process was supposed to pre-empt criticism from the hostile Europeans and meant to increase the symbolic value of the card.⁷⁰ Most of the holders were representatives of prestigious professions, such as clerks and medical assistants, making up more than 70% in total. Qualified workers and free traders had to expect a rejection, whereas priests, who had acquired the highest education, were not among the applicants.

But the évolués-status failed to fulfill the high expectations as they had been formulated in the *Voix du Congolais* for months. As early as 1952, some holders even returned their cards in protest. It was the reaction of a disappointed group of évolués who did not oppose the status and its

65 Cf. *Procès-verbal de la réunion de la Commission de District Kivu pour l'octroi de la carte de mérite civique du 3-2-1949 à 14heures*, Archives Africaines Bruxelles. GG/18.708.

66 The thorough examination of the jury still dominates interviews in this issue. Furthermore, the house visits was a widespread means to control the private life of colonial subjects; they were commonly undertaken at the participants of the foyer social and in camps of the Force Publique. Cf. Interview with Jean L. (06.08.2010) in Kinshasa; Hunt, *Domesticity and colonialism*, op. cit. (note 48), pp. 461–468.

67 *Procès-verbal de la réunion de la commission chargée de désigner les bénéficiaires de la carte du mérite civique, tenue à Inongo le jeudi 23 décembre 1954*, Archives Africaines Bruxelles. GG/ 19008.

68 Cf. Michael Pesek, »Praxis und Repräsentation kolonialer Herrschaft: Die Ankunft des Staatssekretärs Dernburg am Hofe Kahigis von Kianja, 1907«, in: *Die Ankunft des Anderen*, ed. by Susann Baller et al. (Frankfurt am Main/New York: Campus, 2008), pp. 199–224, in particular p. 222.

69 Cf. Mutamba-Makombo, *Du Congo belge au Congo indépendant*, op. cit. (note 39), pp. 80–81.

70 Cf. *Note pur le monsieur ministre*, (dated on 22. 07.1949), Archives Africaines Bruxelles. AI/IIT.4.; *Cartes de mérite civique*, Archives Africaines Bruxelles. AI/4743/ IIT.4.

strict selection process in general, but called for the abolition of the discriminating application procedure that adversely affected their desire to be treated like mature, civilized individuals.⁷¹

When the immatriculation reform was introduced in 1952, it sought to award a special status to those Africans who distinguished themselves from the larger group of évolués: the assimilables, »the only indigenous elite that really achieved the occidental form of civilization«⁷². It granted them the same civil rights as the Europeans but was still a long way away from full legal equality. As it was awarded to the whole family, wives and children were subjected to even closer scrutiny by the commissions.⁷³ Only 217 persons were accorded this status by the end of 1958.⁷⁴ The rigid schemes for awarding the social merit card and immatriculation strongly suggest that the colonial state had primarily introduced the legal status as a means to hamper the development of the African elite rather than supporting it.

More information is needed about the applicants and holders of the elite-status in order to analyze their motivations and social background. For example, which group of évolués still tried to apply for this status despite criticism and limited advantages, or who refused to apply altogether?⁷⁵ The ongoing appeal of this status could be explained with the privileges, symbolic capital, ceremonial prestige, respectability and access to political participation and economic sectors which it nonetheless promised.⁷⁶ Social merit cards and immatriculation remained the attribute of the official African elite in Belgian Congo and the unsatisfactory answer to their demands for legal and social distinction.

In the scientific debate, the African elite's discontent about failed recognition and the limited chances of promotion have been described as an important aspect in the internal decolonization process of Belgian Congo.⁷⁷ If future became an important topos of the évolués, then disappointment was their defining experience in colonial modernity. From the mid-1950s onwards, the effort to attain a privileged place in colonial society as well as the new social order of a *Belgo-Congolese community*⁷⁸ lost ground to calls for independence. The failure of colonial policy to fully control

71 Cf. *Compte rendu de la Députation permanente, 24e Session* (1952).

72 *Bulletin Officiel du Congo Belge* (1952) p. 1174, cited in: Mutamba-Makombo, »Les évolués«, op. cit. (note 22), p. 106.

73 Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 107.

74 Cf. Jean Omasombo Tshonda, »Je veux la civilisation, mais le Blanc ne veut pas de moi: ou le drame du Congo belge au travers de son élite«, in: op. cit. (note 22), pp. 141–182, in particular p. 152.

75 The different opinion toward the elite-status was in part a matter of generation. The majority of the applicants was born between 1905 and 1929 [Cf. Mutamba-Makombo, »Les évolués«, op. cit. (note 22), p. 95]. Members of the successive generation were criticising the social merit card; »carte mérite syphilis« they mocked about this certificate [Interview with Andre M. in Kinshasa, (07.09.2010)]. Their stories dealt less with évolué-associations and family-life than with night clubs and *femmes libres*; they told about spending money for amusement and clothes and being better paid than holder of the évolué-status, as they benefited from post-war reforms in higher education. Thus, to what extent was there a conflict between the older évolués-generation and the younger one whose lifestyle resembled more the characteristics of the *snobs* than the *perfected blacks*?

76 The two latter aspects were less official than recommended by letters to local authorities. For instance, African representative in the diverse political councils were chosen from the holders of the card. Cf. *Cartes de mérite civique*, op. cit. (note 70).

77 Cf. Schrevel, *Les forces politiques*, op. cit. (note 26), p. 153; Omasombo Tshonda, »Je veux la civilisation«, in: op. cit. (note 22), pp. 141–182.

78 The social order of a Belgian-Congolese community was propagated from 1952 on. It was relying on an associa-

the path and pace of development of the Congo made independence appear as something that occurred overnight. In 1960, many former members of the African évolués-élite reached the levers of their country's destiny yet lacked political experience. When Patrice Lumumba became Prime Minister, he had already turned from an officially recognized model-évolué into a panafrikan anti-colonial thinker: But only half a year into his term, he was murdered in January 1961 at the African front-line of the Cold War. In the end, the future was overtaken by events.

Conclusion: Cultural Embourgeoisement as Colonial Change?

This paper discussed the making of the African elite in Belgian Congo and the crucial role played by cultural embourgeoisement to negotiate its place in the social order. Having shown briefly the discussion and politics of officially recognizing the évolués as well as their medial, social and private spaces, it argues that this group acted as a contemporary indicator for social transformations in Belgian Congo. Through their cultural embourgeoisement, the African elite represented a two-folded and highly ambivalent colonial change.

On the one hand the évolués represented change in the imagination and formation of colonial subjects. While in the 1930s the colonial state yearned for sturdy, resilient Africans to exploit for their physical manpower,⁷⁹ the didactic discourse about the évolués in the post-war era symbolized the need for literate Africans as colonial middlemen. It has been shown that the medial diffusion, individual appropriation and administrative control of ideals shaped the image of *perfected blacks*, which stemmed from ideas vaguely propagated as European and civilized and referred to (petty-)bourgeois ideals.⁸⁰ The évolués were asked to face social and cultural transformations that can be understood as a call for cultural embourgeoisement. Certainly, the idealistic discourse alluded to the colony's two-folded propaganda. It was directed inwards as a normative postulate to the colonial subjects and simultaneously directed outwards to careful observers of the colonial reforms, such as the United Nations. In a sense, the model-évolué as a cultural figure represented the ideal African inhabitant of the much-lauded Belgian *model colony*.

But again, the making of the African elite cannot be reduced to a project of colonial control and propaganda, as this would ignore the agency and motivations of actors who sought to use the ascribed position for their own ends. Some évolués adopted bourgeois principles as they were reflected in the discourse about an ongoing self-development and the perfectibility of character, models of virtue and education, the rejection of materialism, and legitimate social spaces such as the club and the living room. The local and individual adaption of bourgeois principles by African

tion between Europeans and Africans but the idea of cooperation and mutual approval was counteracted by the sluggish pace of political and daily life experiences of ongoing racism. Cf. Guy Vanthemsche, *La Belgique et le Congo. Empreintes d'une colonie (1885–1980)* (Bruxelles: Éd. Complexe, 2007), in particular pp. 79–80.

⁷⁹ Cf. Young, *Politics in the Congo*, op. cit. (note 26), p. 38.

⁸⁰ The standard setting European figure differed regarding the local conditions, the colonial power's tradition and the historical conjuncture. In the Gold Coast the Victorian model of the *gentleman* has been prominent among the African elite of Cape Coast around 1900 – including tail coat and teatime at five o'clock. See for example the satiric play written in 1915: Kobina Sekyi, *The blinkards. A comedy* (London: Heinemann, 1974).

actors enabled the expression of cultural ideas, political visions, social claims and status.⁸¹ The évolués expected and fought for symbolic and legal distinction, social recognition and improved living conditions. As the discussion about the elite-status has shown, the African writers made use of the contested social category of évolués by combining it with substantial claims and rights. Highly influenced by power relations that were typical for a colonial situation, the évolués tried to improve their own standing in the social order by means of their cultural embourgeoisement.

The second colonial change represented by the new elite occurred in the relationship between Africans and Europeans. The use of the évolués as multipliers of moral values and lifestyle among the African population, the delegated civilizing mission, blurred the distinction between colonizers and colonized. The *accomplished civilizing mission*, as it was claimed by some authors of the *Voix du Congolais*, threatened the distinction between Africans and Europeans which had been a crucial element for the legitimization of colonial rule and its social order.⁸² The bourgeois habitus of the African elite challenged the social order and deepened a colonial crisis prior to the calls for independence, which to a certain degree was a crisis of representations.⁸³

At a second glance, however, the cultural embourgeoisement not only gave rise to the empowerment of the African elite but also to their degradation. The concept of a promising future which was crucial in the bourgeois imagination, i.e. the belief that the perfection of character had to be projected into the future and inevitably remained incomplete,⁸⁴ changed its meaning when it was transferred into the colonial setting. One example is the politics of the social merit card commissions that examined the individual internalization of moral and cultural ideals. By certifying that the normative discourse did not correspond to its actual practice by individual applicants, the commissions ascribed the évolués an insufficient degree of civilization and thereby emphasized the inequality between European and African society. Thus, the official recognition of the évolués may be interpreted as a late colonial bureaucratic procedure to assert difference. The making of an African elite and the discourse about their embourgeoisement paradoxically upheld the narrative of the imperfection of colonial subjects – and thereby sought to stabilize the colony's social order.

All in all, the cultural embourgeoisement of the évolués and their social position in the colonial order may serve as an example for the colonial state's reformed »politics of differences«⁸⁵ as well as the general fate of imperial and colonial intermediaries: that of »contingent accommodation«⁸⁶.

Finally, the reports about false évolués and snobs as well as the assumed generational conflict bring up the question about the social limits of the colonial subjects' cultural embourgeoisement. They reveal that this normative discourse was not accepted unquestioningly by the African actors and that the success of propaganda remained limited. Thus, the model évolués as the African

81 Cf. Cooper & Stoler, »Between Metropolis and Colony«, op. cit. (note 5), p. 32.

82 Cf. Pesek, *Das Ende eines Kolonialreichs*, op. cit. (note 5), in particular pp. 31–33; Michael Pesek, »Der koloniale Körper in der Krise: Koloniale Repräsentationen, Ordnung und Gewalt während des Ersten Weltkriegs in Ostafrika, 1914–19«, in: *Dem Anderen begegnen. Eigene und fremde Repräsentationen in sozialen Gemeinschaften*, ed. by Jörg Baberowski, et al. (Frankfurt am Main/New York: Campus, 2009), pp. 59–81.

83 Cf. Ibid.

84 Cf. Hettling & Hoffmann, »Einleitung«, op. cit. (note 35), p. 15.

85 Jane Burbank & Frederick Cooper, *Empires in World History: Power and the Politics of Difference* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010).

86 Ibid., p. 14.

version of a »new man«⁸⁷ was supplemented with a counter-image: This unintended cultural figure of a pretentious évolué or snob was not merely a discursive by-product of elitist self-assurance debates and administrative selection mechanisms, but alluded to alternative life concepts and creative appropriation of urban Africans that evaded colonial control of moral beliefs and self-stylization. In a more general way, these mutually constituting figures can be seen as topoi of a colonial modernity and the embodiment of extensive transformations of cultural practice, social imaginations and moral economies in late colonial Belgian Congo.

87 Hunt, »Noise over Camouflaged Polygamy«, op. cit. (note 51), p. 477.

Bibliography

- Cartes de mérite civique*, Archives Africaines Bruxelles. AI/4743/ II.T.4.
- Normes pour obtenir la carte de mérite civique*, Archives Africaines Bruxelles. AI/4743/II.T.4.
- »Revue de la presse«, in: *Voix du Congolais* 3 (May/June 1945), p. 92.
- Congrès Colonial National: *Les évolués* (1947), IV Session, VIII Commission.
- »Nouvelle Importante«, in: *Voix du Congolais* 29 (August 1948), p. 322.
- Procès-verbal de la réunion de la Commission de District Kivu pour l'octroi de la carte de mérite civique du 3-2-1949 à 14heures*, Archives Africaines Bruxelles. GG/18.708.
- Note pur le monsieur ministre*, (dated on 22. 07.1949), Archives Africaines Bruxelles. AI/IIT.4.
- Bulletin Officiel du Congo Belge* (1952).
- »Chronique de la vie indigène et nouvelles diverses«, in: *Voix du Congolais* 14 (March 1947), p. 622.
- Compte rendu de la Députation permanente, 24e Session* (1952).
- Matadi: Doléances des Evolues*, (1952), Archives nationales du République Démocratique Congo, Kinshasa. AIMO. 73CC. 82/244.
- Procès-verbal de la réunion de la commission chargée de désigner les bénéficiaires de la carte du mérite civique, tenue à Inongo le jeudi 23 décembre 1954*, Archives Africaines Bruxelles. GG/ 19008.
- Emmanuel Akyeampong & Charles Ambler, »Leisure in African History: An Introduction«, in: *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* 1 (2002), pp. 1–16.
- Jörg Baberowski, »Was sind Repräsentationen sozialer Ordnungen im Wandel? Anmerkungen zu einer Geschichte interkultureller Begegnungen«, in: *Repräsentation sozialer Ordnungen. Formen und Theorien*, ed. by Jörg Baberowski (Frankfurt am Main/New York: Campus, 2008) pp. 7–18.
- Roger Bolamba, »Oppurtunité de créer un statut pour les évolués«, in: *Voix du Congolais* 3 (May/June 1945), pp. 72–77.
- Roger Bolamba, »Le Problème des Evolués«, in: *Voix du Congolais* 16 (July 1947), pp. 684–687.
- Roger Bolamba, »Carte du Mérite Civique, Symbole de devoirs«, in: *Voix du Congolais* 30 (September 1948), pp. 359–362.
- Jane Burbank & Frederick Cooper, *Empires in World History: Power and the Politics of Difference* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010).

Frederick Cooper, »From Imperial Inclusion to Republican Exclusion? France's Ambiguous Post-war Trajectory«, in: *Frenchness and the African Diaspora. Identity and Uprising in Contemporary France*, ed. by Charles Tshimanga et al. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009), pp. 91–119

Frederick Cooper & Ann Laura Stoler, »Between Metropole and Colony. Rethinking a Research Agenda«, in: *Tensions of Empire. Colonial cultures in a bourgeois world*, ed. by Frederick Cooper & Ann Laura Stoler (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1997).

Andreas Eckert, »Die Verheißung der Bürokratie. Verwaltung als Zivilisierungsagentur im kolonialen Westafrika«, in: *Zivilisierungsmission. Imperiale Weltverbesserung seit dem 18. Jahrhundert*, ed. by Boris Barth et al. (Konstanz: UVK, 2005), pp. 269–283.

Andreas Eckert, »Cultural Commuters: African Employees in Late Colonial Tanzania intermediaries«, in: *Intermediaries, interpreters, and clerks. African employees in the making of colonial Africa*, ed. by Benjamin N. Lawrence et al. (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2006), pp. 247–269.

Andreas Eckert, *Grundbesitz, Landkonflikte und kolonialer Wandel. Douala 1880 bis 1960* (Stuttgart: Steiner, 1999).

Andreas Eckert, »Afrikanische Aktivisten und Intellektuelle in Europa und die Dekolonisierung Afrikas«, in: *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 37 (2011), pp. 244–274.

Andreas Eckert, *Exportschlager Wohlfahrtsstaat? Europäische Sozialstaatlichkeit und Kolonialismus in Afrika nach dem Zweiten Weltkrieg* (Bochum: Stiftung Bibliothek des Ruhrgebiets, 2007).

Andreas Eckert, *Herrschen und Verwalten. Afrikanische Bürokraten, staatliche Ordnung und Politik in Tanzania, 1920–1970* (München: Oldenbourg, 2007).

Thomas Etzemüller, »Social Engineering, Version: 1.0«, in: *Docupedia-Zeitgeschichte* (11.2.2010), URL: https://docupedia.de/zg/Social_engineering?oldid=75535.

James Genova, *Colonial Ambivalence, Cultural Authenticity and the Limitations of Mimicry in French-Ruled West Africa, 1914–1956* (New York: Peter Lang, 2004).

Roger Godding, »La politique indigène du Congo Belge«, in: *Croix du Congo* (16.01.1944).

Manfred Hettling & Stefan-Ludwig Hoffmann, »Einleitung: Zur Historisierung bürgerlicher Werte«, in: *Der bürgerliche Wertehimmel. Innenansichten des 19. Jahrhunderts*, ed. by Manfred Hettling & Stefan-Ludwig Hoffmann (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2000), pp. 7–22.

Stefan-Ludwig Hoffmann, *Geselligkeit und Demokratie. Vereine und zivile Gesellschaft im transnationalen Vergleich 1750–1914* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2003).

Nancy Rose Hunt, »Hommes et femmes, sujets du Congo colonial«, in: *Les mémoires du Congo. Le temps colonial*, ed. by Jean-Luc Vellut (Gand: Editions Snoeck, 2005), pp. 51–57.

Nancy Rose Hunt, »Domesticity and colonialism in Belgian Congo: Usumbura's foyer social, 1946–1960«, in: *Signs* 5 (1990), pp. 447–474.

Nancy Rose Hunt, »Noise over Camouflaged Polygamy, Colonial Morality Taxation, and a Woman-Naming Crisis in Belgian Africa«, in: *Journal of African History* 32 (1991), pp. 471–494.



- Nancy Rose Hunt, »Letter-writing, nursing men and bicycles in the Belgian Congo: Notes towards the social identity of a colonial category«, in: *Paths toward the past. African historical essays in honor of Jan Vansina*, ed. by Robert W. Harms et al. (Atlanta: African Studies Association Press, 1994), pp. 187–210.
- Paul Kabasubabo, »Pourquoi les évolués fréquentent-ils peu les bibliothèques«, in: *Voix du Congolais* 21 (December 1947), pp. 904–905.
- Simone Lässig, *Jüdische Wege ins Bürgertum. Kulturelles Kapital und sozialer Aufstieg im 19. Jahrhundert* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2004).
- Amandine Lauro & Valérie Piette, (2009): »Le Congo belge (1908–1945). Coloniser sans élites?«, in: *Au sommet de l'empire. Les élites européennes dans les colonies*, ed. by Calire Laux et al. (Peter Lang-Bruxelles, 2009), pp. 115–140.
- Claude Liauzu, *Dictionnaire de la colonization française* (Paris: Larousse, 2007), pp. 281–282.
- Joseph Lomboto, »Pour un peu de mesure«, in: *Voix du Congolais* 34 (January 1949), pp. 18–19.
- Marvin Markowitz, *Cross and Sword. The political Role of Christian Mission in the Belgian Congo, 1908–1960* (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1973).
- Jérôme-Ernest Mupenda, »L' 'évolué' est-il maladroit?«, in: *Voix du Congolais* 27 (June 1948), pp. 236–237.
- Jean-Marie Mutamba-Makombo, »Les évolués: situation au Congo belge«, in: *Le manifeste Conscience africaine (1956)*, ed. by Nathalie Tousignant (Bruxelles: Saint Louis, 2009), pp. 83–115.
- Jean-Marie Mutamba-Makombo, *Du Congo belge au Congo indépendant, 1940–1960. Émergence des évolués et gènes du nationalisme* (Kinshasa: Institut de formation et d'études politiques, 1998).
- Jean-Marie Mutamba-Makombo, »Im Salon eines kongolesischen Évolué in den vierziger und fünfziger Jahren«, in: *An-Sichten. Malerei aus dem Kongo, 1990–2000*, ed. by Bogumil Jewsiewicki & Barbara Plankensteiner (Wien: Springer, 2001), pp. 153–177.
- Stephanie Newell, »Entering the territory of Elites: Literary Activity in Colonial Ghana«, in: *Africa's hidden histories. Everyday literacy and making the self*, ed. by Karin Barber (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 2006), pp. 211–235.
- Etienne Ngandu, »Le rôle de l'élite congolaise«, in: *Voix du Congolais* 33 (December 1948), p. 490.
- Jürgen Osterhammel, *Kolonialismus: Geschichte-Formen-Folgen* (Beck: Frankfurt, 2002).
- Margrit Pernau, *Bürger mit Turban. Muslime in Delhi im 19. Jahrhundert* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2008).
- Michael Pesek, *Das Ende eines Kolonialreiches. Ostafrika im Ersten Weltkrieg* (Frankfurt am Main/New York: Campus, 2010).
- Michael Pesek, »Praxis und Repräsentation kolonialer Herrschaft: Die Ankunft des Staatssekretärs Dernburg am Hofe Kahigis von Kianja, 1907«, in: *Die Ankunft des Anderen*, ed. by Susann Baller et al. (Frankfurt am Main/New York: Campus, 2008), pp. 199–224.

- Michael Pesek, »Der koloniale Körper in der Krise: Koloniale Repräsentationen, Ordnung und Gewalt während des Ersten Weltkriegs in Ostafrika, 1914–19«, in: *Dem Anderen begegnen. Eigene und fremde Repräsentationen in sozialen Gemeinschaften*, ed. by Jörg Baberowski, et al. (Frankfurt am Main/New York: Campus, 2009), pp. 59–81.
- Lies van Rompaey, »The Development of the Catholic Youth Organizations in the Belgian Congo (1908–1960)«, in: *The colonial experience in education. Historical issues and perspectives*, ed. by António Nóvoa & Marc Depaepe (Gent: C.S.H.P., 1995), pp. 193–213.
- Antoine Rubbens, »Le problème des évolués«, in: *Essor du Congo* (18.11.1944).
- Antoine Rubbens, *Dettes de guerre* (Elisabethville, 1945).
- Michel de Schrevel, *Les forces politiques de la décolonisation congolaise jusqu' à la veille de l'indépendance* (Louvain: Symons, 1970).
- Kobina Sekyi, *The blinkards. A comedy* (London: Heinemann, 1974).
- Léon Siffolt, »Absentéisme au Cercle«, in: *Croix du Congo* (27.03.1949), p. 5.
- Leon Strouvens & Pierre Piron, *Codes et lois du Congo belge* (Léopoldville, 1948).
- E.P. Thompson, *The making of the English working-class* (London: Vintage Books, 1963).
- Samuel Tilman, »L'implantation du scoutisme au Congo belge«, in: *Itinéraires croisés de la modernité Congo belge (1920–1950)*, ed. by Jean-Luc Vellut (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2001), pp. 103–140.
- Paul Tshibamba-Lomani, »Quelle sera notre place dans le monde de demain«, in: *Voix du Congolais 2* (March/April 1949), pp. 47–51.
- Vanhove, *Note pour le ministre*, (dated on 25.02.1948), Archives Africaines Bruxelles. AI/4743/II.T.4.
- Guy Vanthemsche, »Le plan décennal et la modernisation du Congo belge«, in: *La mémoire du Congo. Le temps colonial*, ed. by Jean-Luc Vellut (Tervuren: Musée Royal de l'Afrique Centrale, 2005), pp. 104–108.
- Guy Vanthemsche, *La Belgique et le Congo. Empreintes d'une colonie (1885–1980)* (Bruxelles: Éd. Complexe, 2007).
- Michael O. West, *The Rise of an African Middle Class: Colonial Zimbabwe 1898–1965* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002).
- J. Van Wing, »La formation d'une élite noire au Congo Belge«, in: *Bulletin C.E.P.S.I 5* (1948).
- Albert Wirz, »Einleitung: Körper, Raum und Zeit der Herrschaft«, in: *Alles unter Kontrolle. Disziplinierungsprozesse im kolonialen Tansania (1850–1960)*, ed. by Katrin Bromber et al. (Köln: Rudiger Köppe Verlag, 2003), pp. 5–34.
- Crawford Young, *Politics in the Congo. Decolonization and independence* (Princeton: University Press, 1965).