COLONIAL ATTITUDES TOWARDS WOMEN, SLAVERY AND GENDER-VIOLENCE IN THE CONGO (1900-1930s)

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ABSTRACT

This thesis analyses colonial discourses and practices about women, slavery and marriage in the Congo. By examining archival sources this work investigates the actions, motivations and agendas of historical actors and institutions that focused on these issues. It shows that stories about Congolese sexualities were instrumentalised to justify colonial control. Colonialists were keen to highlight Congolese gender relations that they perceived to be dangerous and oppressive, while minimising examples of colonial sexual abuse and exploitation. How did this impact the types of stories that were perpetuated about colonial rule and Congolese people? How did these narratives evolve and shift as they interacted with international anti-slavery initiatives and activism? In what ways did Congolese people navigate colonial and missionary moralities? This work provides insight into the effects of imperial power on marriage practices and women in a colonised territory. My research may be useful to those who focus on colonial histories related to gender, sexuality and enslavement.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis to Christine and Mark for their endless encouragement and confidence in me.

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ABBREVIATIONS

AA Archives Africaines (African Archives)

ABIR Anglo-Belgian India Rubber

APCM American Presbyterian Congo Mission

APS Aborigines' Protection Society

BCK Compagnie de Chemin de fer du Bas-Congo au Katanga

BMS Baptist Missionary Society

CFL Compagnie du Chemin de Fer du Congo Supérieur aux Grands Lacs Africains (railway)

CFS Congo Free State

CPC Child Protection Committee

CRA Congo Reform Association

DC District Commissary/Commissioner

FO Foreign Office

GG Governor General

LoN League of Nations

NGO Non-governmental organisation

RAI Royal Anthropological Institute

SCF Save the Children Fund

SCIU Save the Children International Union

SGBV Sexual and Gender Based Violence

TA Territorial Administrator

TO Territorial Officer

TSC Temporary Slavery Commission/Committee

UN United Nations

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1: Introduction

This thesis evidences how the Belgian administration constructed ideas of Congolese gender relations to justify ongoing colonial intervention. African marriage practices were often portrayed as dangerous and akin to slavery. African women were portrayed as victims who needed white protection. I argue these constructions were maintained by developing double standards in policies addressing slavery and marriage. This is highlighted through different approaches of the Belgian administration to examples of colonial versus Congolese gender violence. Colonial inconsistencies emerge in the archives through an intense furore around practices of polygamy, bridewealth and trafficking while European sexual abuse was muted. The latter examples did not flatter the colonial system and were therefore muffled, downplayed and dealt with less harshly. Colonial readings of slavery and sexuality bolstered imperial power and reinforced the importance of certain types of emancipation and gender relations that benefitted the colony.

Colonialism in the Congo spanned the years of 1885-1960, however, my work focuses on the period 1900-1930s. I explore the ways Europeans inside and outside the Congo shaped concepts of slavery and encouraged circumscribed livelihoods outside enslavement. Western European and North American ideas about gender and chattel slavery produced binary understandings of slavery in Africa. Men were often recognised as slave labourers and women as slave wives. As a result, forms of emancipation and ideas of freedom were also gendered. Men were usually emancipated for purposes of colonial labour, a type of freedom that has

been noted as largely "unfree" by scholars.[1] Women's liberation was less coveted, because their independence remained undesirable. Like other colonial governments, the Belgian administration was fearful of provoking the ire of male African elites and slave owners. According to Jan-Georg Deutsch, similar anxieties were expressed by colonial administrators in German East Africa too.[2] In the Belgian Congo, they were also uneasy about the role of free, uncontrolled women in the colony. Freed people had to be productive for the colonial economy. Little space existed for Congolese people to produce their own ideas of how they wanted to live. Emancipation for women was framed as liberation from indigenous marriage practices and gender relations. Missionaries and colonialists regarded white women's trajectories as appropriate for Congolese women. Free women were to be married and domesticated in monogamous Christian unions to male wage earners. Unequal European gender relations were transposed to Africa. Emancipated women were still envisaged as non-autonomous, because white women were subordinated to men in marriage. Ideas about women's positions did not drastically change over thirty years, except to become more entrenched in the 1920s-1930s.

[1] See Suzanne Miers; Richard Roberts (eds.) *The End of Slavery in Africa* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press: 1988); Julia Seibert. "More Continuity Than Change? New Forms Of Unfree Labor In The Belgian Congo, 1908-1930." In *More Continuity Than Change? New Forms Of Unfree Labor In The Belgian Congo, 1908-1930*, (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 2011); Alice Bellagamba (2005). "Slavery and Emancipation in the Colonial Archives: British Officials, Slave-Owners, and Slaves in the Protectorate of the Gambia (1890-1936)." *Canadian Journal of African Studies /* Revue *Canadienne des Études Africaines*, Vol. 39, No. 1: pp. 5-41; Christine Whyte (2015). ""Freedom But Nothing Else": The Legacies of Slavery and Abolition in Post-Slavery Sierra Leone, 1928-1956." *The International Journal of African Historical Studies,* Vol. 48, No. 2, Special Issue: Exploring Post-Slavery in Contemporary Africa: pp. 231-250; Benedetta Rossi (2017). "From Unfree Work to Working for Free: Labor, Aid, and Gender in the Nigerien Sahel, 1930–2000." *International Labor and Working Class History*, Vol. 92: pp. 155-182.
Other scholars have noted how ex-slaves were also used for forced labour by missionaries who claimed to have "redeemed" them. David M. Gordon (2017) "Slavery and redemption in the Catholic missions of the Upper Congo, 1878–1909." *Slavery & Abolition,* Vol. 38, No. 3: pp. 577-600

[2] Jan-Georg Deutsch. *Emancipation without Abolition in German East Africa c. 1884- 1914.* (Oxford: James Currey: 2006), pg 244

Two distinct eras of European rule characterise imperial control in the Congo. From 1885-1908, the territory was known as Congo Free State (CFS) and was the personal property of King Leopold II of Belgium. The Belgian Monarch amassed immense wealth structuring a system that extracted natural resources including ivory, and from the late 1880s, rubber. This system was based on the forced labour of millions of Africans.

The second period of imperial rule began in 1908 after a persistent international campaign, spearheaded by the Congo Reform Association (CRA) in London, led to the transfer of management of the colony to the Belgian Government. The CFS became the Belgian Congo and the Belgian colonial administration dedicated itself to carrying out the paternalist, abolitionist and "civilizing" mission first promised by Leopold at the Berlin Conference in 1885.[3] The Belgian Congo was modelled on Leopold's previous system and, in its early years, the impact of its administrative practices on the Congolese was not unlike that of the previous period. From 1908 until 1913 there was much debate about the level of practical reform that had occurred in the Congo. It was after WWI that the colony took on features of its own, pursuing indirect rule like other imperial powers and producing almost frenzied narratives about depopulation and infertility. The interminable anxieties of the colonial government led to the implementation of policies that interfered with the most personal aspects of people's lives, including marriage, childbearing and family/kinship. As Nancy Hunt points out, legislation addressing these areas was not only being implemented in Congo, but the Congo's

[3] The Berlin Conference (also known as the Berlin West Africa Conference or Congo Conference) convened from November 1884- February 1885. European powers became signatories of The General Act of the Berlin Conference on West Africa. This Act pledged to end slave trading in Africa and enable free trade for the signatories in the Congo basin. Conference representatives also demarcated African territories for colonial occupation. At this conference Leopold made the case for why he should manage the territory of the Congo. He insisted that his agenda was philanthropic: he wanted to bring commerce, civilisation and Christianity to Africans. See Thomas Pakenham. *The Scramble for Africa.* (London: Abacus: 1991), pg 254.

programs were the most invasive and systematic.[4] Policies attempted to clone European norms in Congo, and while they served to disrupt indigenous practices, they were not met without resistance and negotiation. The convergence of different European and Congolese ideals and practices influenced gender relations in ways unique to the conditions of certain locales, among various communities and specific administrative domains.

This thesis draws attention to the ways that Congolese women and girls became relevant to the colonial establishment. I analyse how certain framings of black womanhood and saviourism became useful for imperial, missionary and (white) feminist aims. Colonial ideas about protecting and improving the lives of women/girls occurred in circumstances and modalities that projected a positive image of Belgium. Women/girls were rarely acknowledged as the victims of colonial sex and gender-based violence (SGBV) and their experiences as enslaved persons *outside* of marriage often went unrecognised. There were certain Protestant missionaries who confirmed the existence of colonial sex and gender violence and held the administration accountable. At the same time, women became central to debates on enslavement through bridewealth, concubinage and polygamy and were portrayed as beneficiaries of colonial/missionary intervention. Discussions about women were embedded in colonial concerns, particularly about infertility and depopulation, which were major issues for a colonial government keen to ensure a thriving, stable work force. I explore colonial commitments for reform and the "liberation" of slaves and women. These

[4] Nancy Rose Hunt (Spring 1990). "Domesticity and Colonialism in Belgian Africa: Usumbura's Foyer Social, 1946-1960." *Signs* Vol. 15, No. 3, The Ideology of Mothering: Disruption and Reproduction of Patriarchy: pp. 447-474; Nancy Rose Hunt (1988). ""Le Bebe en Brousse": European Women, African Birth Spacing and Colonial Intervention in Breast Feeding in the Belgian Congo." *The International Journal of African Historical Studies*, Vol. 21, No. 3: pp. 401-432.
For another example in colonial Uganda, see: Nakanyike Musisi. "The Politics of Perception or Perception as Politics? Colonial and Missionary Representations of Baganda Women, 1900-1945." In *Women in African Colonial Histories*. Edited by Jean Allman, Susan Geiger, and Nakanyike Musisi. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press: 2002)

are interesting areas to analyse, because freedoms for the Congolese were often circumscribed, limited to certain people and channelled to meet the needs of the colony.

White colonial clamour around issues of marriage, slavery and gender relations in the Congo produced chatter, indignation, and frustration among missionaries, the media and international activists, including European women. White women had their own part to play in imagining what Congolese women's lives should look like. The white women involved in campaigns addressing norms regarded as damaging to the well-being of black women emphasised the latter's victimhood. The source of African women's "oppression" was represented differently according to the political allegiances of the white women proponents. A discursive focus on protecting and defending Congolese women/girls was utilised to pursue Belgian agendas, and protection for them was often conditional on the racial identity of alleged perpetrators. In highlighting stories that have been deliberately kept away from the forefront of colonial discussions about black women/girls, I point to the ways in which the colonial authorities responded differently to specific forms of violence. Gender violence committed by the Congolese was usually harshly penalised and publicised, while colonial sexual violence or abuse was dealt with more leniently. Records of colonial SGBV were maintained with more discretion. In this way, gender violence was framed as solely a Congolese problem that required outside intervention.

My research explores intersecting themes of enslavement and sexuality and the ways that these categories were negotiated and manipulated during the period of European colonialism in Africa. It therefore draws on and contributes to scholarship in multiple areas. Broadly, these are areas concerned with gender and imperialism, colonial violence, sexuality, slavery and emancipation.

1.2: Married or enslaved? Contextualising conflations between free and slave women

The convergence of Social Darwinism and discourses on race, class and sex in the 19th century produced hierarchical understandings of humanity in the West.[5] White men of the upper classes were placed at the top of the scale. Accordingly, they represented everything that was good and 'civilised'. Ranked below them were white women followed by working class white people. Africans were positioned at the bottom of this system. Josephine Beoku-Betts points out that Western ideas of African women represented a "convergence of two stereotypes". As Africans they were imagined as uncivilised and hypersexual and as women as submissive and dull. Beoku-Betts notes that "African women represented to western observers in the nineteenth century something of a demarcation line between being human and animal."[6]

Social Darwinists used Darwin's idea of evolutionary "natural selection" to explain the domination of some people over others. By suggesting that certain categories of humans were naturally inferior, they could justify their subordination at the hands of others (in particular, by white people) as an inevitable process of nature. Social Darwinism provided validation for colonialism and exploitation.

Understandings of sexuality became entwined with discourses on race and biology. Victorian concepts of sexuality were employed to frame black people as uncivilised.[7] Elizabeth Elbourne explains how concepts of sexuality and honour overlapped with conversations

[5] "West" refers to Western Europe and North America.

[6] Josephine Beoku-Betts. "Contested Representations: Gender in Africa. Western Perceptions of African Women in the 19th and Early 20th Centuries." In *Readings in Gender in Africa,* edited by Andrea Cornwall, pg 24. The article was originally published in 1976 in the *Africana Research Bulletin,* VI (4), pp. 86-114

[7] Ann Laura Stoler explores this issue in her work *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power: Race and the Intimate in Colonial Rule*. (London: University of California Press: 2002)

about race in the Introduction to *Sex, Power and Slavery.* She suggests that the "honorable man" was represented as having "control of his own sexuality". In contrast, African men and women were "often portrayed as highly sexed and unable to control their own sexuality".[8] Framings of race and sexuality were used to legitimise a colonial presence in Africa. It was the "White Man's Burden" to protect and improve Africans and this included showing them the best model of sexuality, marriage and domesticity.

A mandate of abolitionism enabled Europeans to justify their presence as colonisers in Africa. Early links were made between African marriage practices and slavery in Congo. However, narratives of colonial concern were instrumentalised only when it was convenient for the colonial administration. Despite early insistences that African marriage practices were damaging, scholars such as Amandine Lauro and Charlotte Braillon have shown that, in the 1920s, the colonial government took a more favourable approach to a construction of homogenous "customary rule" and "traditional" forms of African marriage as means of controlling colonial subjects. It insisted that indigenous customs and authority were the best modes to preserve Congolese ways of life, as well as to maintain order. Of course, as pointed out by Braillon, by codifying these so-called "laws" the administration was flattening differences between various communities, as well as insisting that these practices were fixed and not subject to ongoing negotiations and change.[9] Colonial nostalgia for "traditional" systems of authority increased in the 1920s, particularly with the growth of urban areas and

[8] Gwyn Campbell; Elizabeth Elbourne (eds.). *Sex, Power and Slavery.* (Athens: Ohio University Press: 2014), pg 27

[9] Amandine Lauro. "'Une oeuvre d'étaiement et de reconstruction'. Notes sur la fabrique du droit coutumier, le pouvoir colonial et l'ordre du mariage dans le Congo Belge de l'entre-deux-guerres." In *Droit et justice en Afrique coloniale. Traditions, productions et réformes,* edited by B. Piret, C. Braillon, L. Montel and P-L. Plasman. (Bruxelles : Université Saint-Louis : 2013) ; Charlotte Braillon (2011). "La représentation du droit autochtone dans le discours colonial : le cas du Congo belge et de la 'coutume indigène' (1908-1960)." In : *Cahiers du Centre de Recherches en Histoire du Droit et des Institutions* : pp. 137-164

a heightened concern about their decaying influences on the people who lived there, especially women. Controlling and confining the roles of women and their sexuality were a large part of the colonial process.

To contextualise the links that colonialists made between African marriage and slavery, it is worth understanding how historians and anthropologists have dealt with this issue. In the classic text, *Slavery in Africa: Historical and Anthropological Perspectives,* Igor Kopytoff and Suzanne Miers argued that African concepts of slavery and freedom had different expressions to those in Europe.[10] African systems of kinship and 'rights-in-persons' ensured arrangements of mutual duties and obligations between people. Belonging to a kin group was a foundational aspect of 'freedom'; an "attachment to a kin group, to a patron, to power - an attachment that occurred within a well-defined hierarchical network".[11] The opposite condition of this was 'marginality', when a person belonged *to* but not *in* a community. 'Marginality' defined the slave experience. Kopytoff and Miers conceived of a 'slave'-to-kinship continuum, where slavery existed on a spectrum with other states of belonging and unbelonging. A slave's increased 'belonging' in a group was affected by their level of integration in the host community. Incorporation into a host society not only depended on the age, gender, skill set and personality of slaves but also the type of slave society they had been absorbed into and the extent to which slavery was institutionalised. Recently purchased slaves were usually the most marginal and vulnerable. They were the first to be re-sold, pawned and sacrificed. Kopytoff and Miers emphasised that it was easier for children and women to assimilate into host societies. Children were less difficult to control

[10] Suzanne Miers; Igor Kopytoff. "Introduction: African Slavery as an Institution of Marginality." In *Slavery in Africa: Historical and Anthropological Perspectives*, edited by Suzanne Miers and Igor Kopytoff. (London: The University of Wisconsin Press: 1977)
[11] Ibid, pg 17

and could be shaped to fit their new community and women could be incorporated as *slave wives*. Their capacity to reproduce was valuable for building lineages, accumulating dependents, and therefore, power. As a result, their children might be regarded as free and fully merged into the host society with the same rights and protections afforded to other members of the group. Kopytoff and Miers argued that the control of a slave woman's sexuality was a central aspect of her enslavement. Her movement along the slave-kinship continuum hinged on her ability to reproduce. Miers and Kopytoff's arguments demonstrate how slave women's integration into host societies may have made them less visible as enslaved persons, particularly to those who were not familiar with these systems. The incorporation of slave wives possibly made it easier for colonialists to insist that they were not really slaves, at least not in the same sense as more marginal slave labourers.

Other academics have strongly disagreed with the ideas put forth by Miers and Kopytoff. Claude Meillassoux disapproved of what he considered to be sweeping generalisations; he argued, it was not necessarily easier for slave women to assimilate. Furthermore, Meillassoux disagreed with any importance of a slavery to kinship 'continuum' that emphasised movement and opportunity. From his perspective, slavery was the result of violence and a condition that represented the absolute opposite of kinship in Africa.[12]

In Claire Robertson's and Martin Klein's edited volume, *Women and Slavery in Africa* they posited the following crucial question; why were most slaves in Africa women? Meillassoux explained it as a sexual division of labour. He argued that women carried out the most labour-intensive work and the enslavement of women made this a practical model. He

[12] Claude Meillassoux. *The Anthropology of Slavery: The Womb of Iron and Gold.* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing PLC: 1991)

disagreed with long-standing scholarship which argued that reproduction gave slave women primacy over slave men.[13] Perspectives that supported reproduction as the most valued slave 'commodity' highlighted how slave women were more effortlessly incorporated into owners' lineages. This was not only because they could have children, but also because they had been socialised to view themselves as the inferior gender. Klein considered some of these arguments valid, as did others.[14] In the case of Congo, these perspectives resonate with older colonial ideas that considered all African women submissive and only visible in relation to sexuality, marriage and their apparent oppression at the hands of black men. My own work points to the ways that ordinary slave women were visible to colonial authorities in discussions about polygamy, migration to the towns, and as potential wives in monogamous unions, but invisible as individuals.

Meillassoux challenged theories about women and their ease of "assimilation", asserting that other factors were relevant, such as whether or not lineages were delineated according to gender and seniority. For example, where slavery was institutionalised it was unlikely that women could acquire close relations to owners' families.[15] Meillassoux asserted that his perspective was supported by evidence which suggested enslaved women had fewer children. Why, if in some cases slave women were known to have children at a slower rate, would they have been valued most highly for reproduction? However, despite Meillassoux's calls for contextual specificity, he risked making the same kinds of generalised assumptions for which he criticised Kopytoff and Miers, through his reductive insistence that it was largely

[13] Claude Meillassoux. "Female Slavery." In *Women and Slavery in Africa,* edited by Claire Robertson and Martin A. Klein. (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press: 1983)

[14] Claire Robertson and Martin Klein. "Women's Importance in African Slave Systems." In *Women and Slavery in Africa*, edited by Robertson and Klein, pg 6; see also, Paul Bohannan and Philip Curtin. *Africa and Africans.* (New York: Natural History Press: 1971)

[15] Meillassoux, "Female Slavery", pg 50

only women's *productive labour* which made them so valuable. Meillassoux's work complicates the idea that slave women may have been less visible due to their so-called integration into host families. He demonstrates how a sexual division of labour may have veiled the true status of slave women carrying out similar work to free women. However, he also emphasises how women were enslaved in different ways and their integration into host families depended on a variety of factors.

In the context of the Congo, authors such as Wyatt MacGaffey and Susan Herlin Broadhead have drawn attention to the specificities of slave women's conditions in matrilineal systems. MacGaffey and Broadhead highlight that while the control of slave women's sexuality was key to their enslavement, it is not the case that this aspect of subordination necessarily enabled easier integration into host lineages. MacGaffey focuses on the Mbanza Manteke community in the Kongo kingdom (Lower Congo) during the 19th-20th centuries, whose marriages only permitted the transaction of a woman's domestic services not her reproductive abilities, i.e. women's children belonged to their families, not to the relatives of fathers. The people of Mbanza Manteke reportedly divided themselves into "houses"; each owned a piece of land. Jan Vansina has written in depth about the socio-political systems that characterised life in pre-colonial Central Africa. In *Paths in the Rainforests* he argues that 'Houses' usually consisted of many dependents and slaves.[16] According to MacGaffey, slaves could be incorporated into the kinship system, but only if the "relationship between owner and slave was that of father and son".[17] All dependents of a house (including slaves) as well its land composed its overall wealth and resources. People

[16] Jan Vansina. *Paths in the Rainforest: Toward a History of Political Tradition in Equatorial Africa.* (Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin Press: 1990), pg 73-77

[17] Wyatt MacGaffey. "Economic and Social Dimensions of Kongo Slavery (Zaire)." In *Slavery in Africa: Historical and Anthropological Perspectives,* edited by Miers and Kopytoff, pg 238

and land could be sold, pawned, lent or gifted between houses. These transactions elevated the social status of the provider and positioned the beneficiary as a dependent.

In Kongo matrilineal communities, the presence of slave wives was invaluable for bolstering the number of dependents and resources of the houses. If a man married a free woman, he had no rights to the children produced by their union; they belonged to the mother's family. Therefore, it was beneficial for men to marry slave women, for they gained full rights over their children whose mothers were kinless. The practice of marrying slave women enabled the group to increase its numbers through both female *and* male lines of descent.

Slaves could improve their social standing. They might be chosen to head clans, or even own their own slaves. When slave lineages (the descendants of free men and slave wives) increased in wealth and power they were often co-opted into the free lineage in order to avoid any destabilisation of the established order, as well as to increase the size of the main group.[18] Free people and slaves were not always identifiable to those who did not belong to the community but a person's origins were well-known to elders who could use their status against them in the future. MacGaffey therefore suggests that the main difference between slaves and free people was "not an absolute condition but a scale of relative political security".[19] Through use of pronouns MacGaffey implies that slaves were male. Therefore, the opportunities afforded to slaves through social mobility seems largely applicable to men only. MacGaffey mainly refers to slave women as *slave wives*. Was this the only role that slave women served? Did slave wives have some opportunities for social mobility in the same ways

[18] Ibid, pg 246-247
[19] Ibid, pg 247

that slave men did? It is unclear if his reference to slaves being male is intentional or whether he is merely echoing colonial blind spots. What is interesting is that there seems to have been much bigger differences between free and enslaved men than between free and enslaved women. These differences existed, particularly in the extent to which a woman could control her sexuality. The difference between enslaved and free women possibly hinged on their capacity to decide *who* gained from their reproductive abilities. Slave women had little choice in the matter and were beholden to their owner, whereas free women may have had some influence and power over who could benefit from their sexuality. It is important to point out that the meagre control that slave women did have over their lives likely depended on their abilities to use male desire for their own social mobility and gain.

The gender gap displayed in MacGaffey's analysis is addressed by Broadhead who further illuminates the choices that may have been available to free women in matrilineal communities like the Manteke. She writes about the position of women in Bakongo society (the community that the Manteke were thought to be related to) during the 18th and 19th centuries in her chapter in *Women and Slavery in Africa.*[20] She was interested in finding out about their role and the differences between the status of "wife" and "sister". Women were valued for both their productive and reproductive capacities among the Bakongo. This was because the community relied on agriculture and lineages were matrilineal. Broadhead draws on the argument made by Karen Sacks in her 1979 work, *Sister and Wives: The Past and Future of Sexual Equality,* that in societies where means of production are controlled communally by kin groups and lineages the defining and most important relationships are those between siblings. In this type of situation women's roles as wives and sisters are delineated. Sacks

[20] Susan Herlin Broadhead. "Slave Wives, Free Sisters: Bakongo Women and Slavery c. 1700-1850." *Women and Slavery in Africa,* edited by Klein and Robertson

suggests that the position of 'wife' becomes oppressive, demeaning and confining, whereas the role of 'sister' provides for opportunity, independence, and a sense of familial unity. Younger women would likely function in the role of wife and reproduce children for the family, while older women would supervise younger women and provide some political guidance. Broadhead suggests that Sacks's concept can be applied to Bakongo women to make sense of the differences between enslaved and free women. Slave women received no rights and protections as sisters, despite their presence providing children for the lineage in the same way that free sisters did. Broadhead draws on Sacks' idea to suggest that slave women were therefore restricted to the subordinate position of wife. She highlights that,

..*the greatest contradiction in the spouse-sibling roles in the case of the Bakongo women appeared not during the different stages in a single woman's life, but rather between the roles of different categories of women. The most obvious distinction was between that of free and slave women, with the latter confined, as we have seen, to a permanent wife position.*[21]

Broadhead points to the ways that slave women were doubly dependent because of their statuses as slaves and their inability to attain the status of 'sister' and the legal rights that accompanied it (which was, itself, a consequence of their slave status). This seems like a slightly cyclical way of explaining the social dependency of slave wives, but it certainly exemplifies how sexuality was a central part of women's slavery in central Africa. Broadhead also demonstrates how women's reproductive capacities did not always lead to integration or increased autonomy.

[21] Ibid, pg 161

Clearly, there were some key differences between enslaved and free women, but were their lives in any way comparable? David Northrup presents another picture of how sexuality and the sexual division of labour functioned within systems of slavery in his extensive work on slavery and labour in Eastern Congo; *Beyond the Bend in the River: African Labor in Eastern Zaire, 1865-1940.*[22] According to Northrup, there existed a division of labour based on status and gender. A sexual division of labour was evident among free people. Women grew and cultivated crops and made products of pottery, cloth and baskets. Men hunted for meat, prepared land for farming, worked with cattle and fought in conflicts. Slavery was most pronounced in the northern savannas, among communities such as the Mangbetu, Zande and Babwa who raided for slaves.[23] Most slaves were women, particularly among the Mangbetu. What is interesting is the distinction between the function of women slaves among ordinary people versus their role among those with high status and power. Female slaves were often used to increase the size of "commoner lineages", whereas among the elite and royals they served as food producers. Northrup notes that the Zande also circulated captured slave women as a form of social and political capital. Women were important resources and markers of class and privilege.

Northrup's work demonstrates some of the continuities between pre-colonial and colonial times in his discussion about the capture of women for wifehood in East Congo. According to Northrup, there was a common practice of abducting or buying women for the purpose of making them wives, as noted by David Livingstone in 1869 during his trip through the south east (Maniema). Livingstone reportedly found that slave men captured women for

[22] David Northrup. *Beyond the Bend in the River: African Labour in Eastern Zaire, 1865-1940*. (Athens, Ohio: Center for International Studies: 1988)

[23] The Mangbetu have also been discussed in work by Curtis Keim in "Women in Slavery among the Mangbetu c. 1800-1910." In *Women and Slavery in Africa,* edited by Klein and Robertson

themselves. Additionally, during times of war in Kivu women were often kidnapped and enslaved as wives. The enslavement of women in order to control and benefit from their sexuality was not uncommon. Furthermore, as Northrup argues, "Even allowing for the sparseness of the historical record, examples of economically motivated slavery were rare before the influence of the Afro-Arab intruders."[24] This changed with the incursions of Zanzibari traders and the conquests of the Zanzibari leader Tippu Tip. There were increased mobilisations of labour which encouraged a more systematic and commercial form of slave traffic. Women were increasingly captured and integrated into the harems of Zanzibari leaders during the last decades of the 19th century. My own work examines colonial anxiety around the ongoing traffic of women and children in the 1910s and their incorporation into the harems of "sultans". Women, both free and enslaved, were acquirable assets that could be taken in war and made into wives.

Male slaves were forced to engage in labour for commercial purposes as porters, as well as to cultivate crops (traditionally regarded as women's work). Younger male captives were recruited for the military or made into servants. They had some opportunities to increase their status and power through loyalty to their owner and by efficient use of skills. Obedient slaves who brought their owners wealth and prestige were rewarded, as in the case of Ngongo Lutete, a famed slave of Tippu Tip, who was put in charge of a station in Kasongo and provided thousands of guns for his work collecting ivory and slaves.[25] Zanzibari trading produced transformations in labour systems in East Congo. It also transformed slave systems and the role of slaves. In these accounts, women were predominantly sought after for sex and the comfort of powerful men. Slave women were also unable to enjoy forms of autonomy

[24] Northrup, *Beyond the Bend in the River*, pg 19
[25] Ibid, pg 26-29

experienced by some of the more socially mobile male slaves, like Ngongo Lutete and others. Clearly, sexuality was a highly valued commodity and was a large part of women's enslavement. It provided some openings for an improvement in conditions but also denied them opportunities that were available to slave men.

What about other ways that women were enslaved? In particular, what about more detailed examples of slave women's use as labourers? Robert Harms has written about women's subordination through sexuality *and* labour during the same period in middle Congo. In systems where slavery was built into the socio-economic structure, the capacity for slaves to be upwardly mobile bolstered the institution of slavery and control over enslaved peoples. Robert Harms's research discusses this in the functioning of commercial towns in middle Congo during the latter part of the 19th century. Originally, slaves had been claimed by traders as they passed along the caravan route on their way to the Atlantic coast. From this, traders had built their own firms, based on the labour of their dependants. In this context, marrying slave women was also important. It enabled husbands to produce children that were loyal only to them, as they had no other lineage on their mother's side. As Harms explains, wealthy slave owners "manipulated the marital arrangements of female slaves".[26] Slave women had little control over their children and as Harms points out, perhaps as a response, did not have many. Traders had to continue buying slaves to maintain their commercial villages. Harms also points out that the institution of slavery was one that enabled plenty of room for enslaved people to gain power. As slave men took on roles as canoe paddlers and went away on trading trips for their owners, women produced vast quantities of food for them. The labour that they performed was not so different from that of free

[26] Robert Harms. "Sustaining the System: Trading along the Middle Zaire." In *Women and Slavery in Africa,* edited by Klein and Robertson, pg 95.

women. Harms suggests that the most efficient way to maintain control of slaves was to "provide positive incentives for hard work and cooperation- rewarding ambitious and talented slaves".[27] Slave men might be provided with some of the gains from trips and accrue enough wealth to buy their own slaves and establish trading businesses. They could inherit their master's business too. Again, women slaves did not have as many opportunities for self-advancement, but they could potentially thrive as food producers and buy slaves of their own.[28] In this way slaves were controlled, and the system maintained. Harms's work demonstrates how women were not only oppressed through their sexuality and position as wives and mothers, but also as workers. Furthermore, they were subjugated by other women, both free and enslaved. The visibility of women as slave labourers *and* slave owners exposes the falsity of colonial narratives that largely focused on women's enslavement in marriage. This reality has also been noted in other contexts by scholars like Ifi Amadiume, who explained in her work, 'Male Daughters, Female Husbands' that Igbo women in more powerful positions in Nigeria exploited the labour of other women and men in both domestic and slave systems, highlighting that it was not merely the category of 'gender' that produced social hierarchies.[29]

Returning to Meillassoux's supposition emphasising the importance of slave women's productive labour, it is important to consider how this type of debate has evolved over more recent years. Martin Klein produced a response to Meillassoux's earlier critiques in Gwyn Campbell's and Elizabeth Elbourne's masterful edited volume *Sex, Power and Slavery*. He refers to Meillassoux's ideas about sexual manipulation/abuse in slavery being a by-product of ownership as opposed to a central aspect of enslavement. Klein reinforces ways the control

[27] Ibid, pg 98
[28] Ibid
[29] Ifi Amadiume. *Male Daughters, Female Husbands: Gender and Sex in an African Society.* (London: Zed Books: 1987)

and abuse of sexuality has been tied to slavery, while understanding Meillassoux's point about slave women's labour. However, he remains sceptical that Meillassoux's arguments explain the prevalence of women slaves' higher value across Africa and argues that it is women's *sexuality* that allows them easier assimilation into societies (as opposed to childbearing per se, or their "submissive" behaviours).[30] This seems a possibility, but in the case of the Congo, as argued by Northrup and Keim, this was not always the case. Were slave women more thoroughly integrated or were they simply in roles (sometimes as slave wives) that required closer intimacy with owners and owner's families? It is likely that in some cases the slave status of wives was just as distinct and fixed as that of other slaves despite any improvement in their conditions that may have been attained through sex.

Campbell and Elbourne concur with Kopytoff and Miers, as well as Klein on the centrality of sexuality to women's slavery. Elbourne emphasises that women among different communities existed on a "continuum of degrees of self-ownership and corresponding obligations to provide sexual services".[31] Binary Western concepts of slave vs free person did not resemble African realities. Elbourne expands on her point:

How much control a woman had over with whom she had sex, and under what circumstances, reflected her status, but very few women (including wives) had complete freedom to choose or refuse sex. The individual's degree of obligation to provide sexual labor was a marker both of freedom and of status, in ways that overlapped.[32]

[30] Martin Klein. "Sexuality and Slavery in the Western Sudan." In *Sex, Power and Slavery,* edited by Campbell and Elbourne, pg 65-68
[31] Elizabeth Elbourne. "Introduction: Key Themes and Perspectives." In *Sex, Power and Slavery,* edited by Campbell and Elbourne, pg 17-18
[32] Ibid, pg 17-18

Status and sexuality intertwined differently for women and men. Therefore, slave women's routes to emancipation and the types of lives they could lead diverged from those of slave men. Sexuality and reproduction may well have served to aid their integration or manumission; equally, it may have entrenched their slave status and prevented an escape from slavery. This is emphasised by Elbourne pointing out that while motherhood provided space for improvements in status, it also left some women in positions of extreme weakness. Slave women might have had to experience the trauma of their children being sold and sent away. On the other hand, women could be manipulated into remaining with their owners even if they had the opportunity to escape or become emancipated because of a fear of losing their children who they had no legal rights to and who belonged to the owner/father.[33]

There were some important distinctions between free and enslaved women, although their conditions displayed similarities. Europeans often chose to focus on women's servitude in marriage. By taking this approach it became easier for colonialists to conflate marriage and slavery, justify colonial rule and seek to impose a type of emancipation and gender relations that suited the colony. My research reveals an interesting paradox in the existence of two parallel narratives; one asserted that marriage was like slavery and therefore required reform, and another suggested that domestic slavery was "benign", not particularly arduous and only needed gradual abolition. Stories about slavery could be manipulated to suit different colonial agendas.

[33] Ibid, pg 22

The types of livelihoods and experiences available to slave women in the early 20th century were circumscribed by colonial governments, missionaries and other groups of Europeans who involved themselves in questions about African women and gender relations, including humanitarian/abolitionist organisations. There is a great deal of scholarship on the impact of colonial abolitionism. This has also been complemented by a focus on women's strategies and trajectories. How was emancipation experienced by women during the colonial period? What options were available to them and in what ways did sexuality affect their ability to navigate these choices?

1.3: Women's emancipation when convenient and controlled

Academics have written about the ways that colonialism provided new opportunities for freedom but have also emphasised how colonialists introduced new forms of coercion that benefitted the colony. In the case of colonial Congo, systems of forced labour were so entrenched and abusive that European imperialists and humanitarians campaigned against them. After the administration of CFS was transferred to Belgium, reforms were implemented to improve labour standards, but there remained various continuities between the administrations, and forced labour remained a crucial part of the colonial economy. Examining processes of colonial labour is only one part of the story. In the case of the Congo, the prevalence of forced labour gives obvious indication of the type of lives envisaged for male ex-slaves and dependents after emancipation, but what about women- how were their roles conceived of in the colony? In histories about forced labour in Congo, women's conditions were often of secondary importance. What were the trajectories of ex-slave and free women; how did they negotiate Western imposed gender roles after emancipation?

Conversations about African women's roles and conditions during colonialism cover the overlapping experiences of free and enslaved women. Ideas of slavery and freedom reinforced colonial claims to legitimacy and enabled a colonial categorisation of slavery, which labelled some of its forms as "benign" and others as severe. Understandings of slavery impacted imperial approaches to women's servitude. What did a post-emancipation gendered colonial world look like? Colonial slave emancipation was engineered to meet the needs of the economy. Ex-slave women found themselves emancipated into colonial situations that circumscribed their roles and sexualities.

In *The End of Slavery in Africa*, Suzanne Miers and Richard Roberts explain how women's opportunities for emancipation were more restricted because "all women were in general subordinated to men, and slave women suffered under the double disability of being both female and slave".[34] It is true they likely had more difficulties establishing economic independence and under certain circumstances might have felt safer remaining with their owners. However, is it fair to suggest that women "in general" were subordinated? Pervasive ideas about African women as apathetic victims have been thoroughly critiqued by black scholars and writers of colour. Christine Qunta writes that, "The African woman of the rural area is portrayed as little more than a slave, who goes about her tasks with silent acceptance… she never speaks for herself but is always spoken about".[35] My own work provides new historical analysis of white people's shifting ideas and representations of African women among both colonial milieus and activist groups who formed the early non-governmental organisations (NGOs). While Miers and Roberts might not be entirely wrong, Qunta and

[34] Suzanne Miers; Richard Roberts. "Introduction: The End of Slavery in Africa." In *The End of Slavery in Africa,* edited by Miers and Roberts, pg 38-39

[35] Christine Qunta (eds.). *Women in Southern Africa.* (London: Allison and Busby: 1987), pg 11

others demonstrate the ways that insidious colonial ideas about the superiority of Europeans continue to infiltrate analytical concepts. Second wave feminism positioned the experience of the white European/American woman as the default, erasing the realities of many black and African women.

in Angola among the Imbangala, and in the Sahara among the Moors and the Tuareg.[36] According to Miers and Roberts, women slaves were frequently regarded by colonial officials as *slave wives*. Therefore, their situation converged with that of free wives, and accordingly, they were regarded in the same way: as dependents of their husbands whose authority they should respect. Other authors, including Joseph C. Miller and E. Ann McDougall have noted how it could be difficult for outsiders, including colonialists, to distinguish slave wives from free ones, particularly in scenarios where enslaved women's reproductive potential was utilised to build lineages and they were more fully incorporated into host families, as A common observation among academics is that colonial administrators did not want to upset the balance of gender relations, because they needed to make alliances with African elites/slave owners.[37] On Central Africa, Wright has drawn attention to European's disapproval of their perception of overly generous freedoms for women in matrilineal societies. She notes how colonial authorities worked together with African leaders to reduce the "excessive liberties" of Bemba women in colonial courts.[38] Paul Lovejoy suggests that, certainly in the case of the British in Northern Nigeria, marriage was conflated with slavery,

[36] Joseph C. Miller. "Imbangala: Lineage Slavery (Angola)." In *Slavery in Africa: Historical and Anthropological Perspectives,* edited by Miers and Kopytoff*,* pg 211-215; E. Ann McDougall. ""To Marry One's Slave is as Easy as Eating a Meal": The Dynamics of Carnal Relations within Saharan Slavery." In *Sex, Power and Slavery,* edited by Campbell and Elbourne, pg 140-141

[37] See Robertson and Klein. "Women's Importance in African Slave Systems", pg 17

[38] According to Wright, this quote is taken from a comment made by a magistrate in the Tanganyika District called H.C. Marshall. Marcia Wright. "Bwanikwa: Consciousness and Protest among Slave Women in Central Africa." In *Women and Slavery in Africa*, edited by Klein and Robertson, pg 248

perhaps in order to downplay the severity of women's enslavement.[39] Perhaps this alleviated some internal/external pressures on the colonial government to more thoroughly deal with women's slavery**.** According to my findings, a similar case may be made for colonial strategies in Belgian Congo. Often for colonialists, the statuses of 'free' and 'enslaved' women overlapped. All women were regarded as persons that required some form of male control. Full emancipation and independence were envisaged more for men than women.

By presenting certain types of slavery as benign, colonial governments were able to justify their policies of *gradual abolition* as well as avoid exposing state deficiencies.[40] A number of writers who focus on African women's experiences of slavery, including Elbourne, Klein and Marie Rodet in their contributions to *Sex, Power and Slavery,* suggest that colonial authorities declined to acknowledge the "inconvenient unfreedom of women" after slavery had been outlawed.[41] For example, Rodet discusses how colonial French authorities tolerated marriages between previous owners and their "ex"-slave women in Mali and in the process accepted an idea of marriage that hinged on the notion of wives as slaves.[42] In the Congo, the Belgians followed the Indian model of abolition; preferring to minimise social disruption by granting emancipation only to slaves seeking freedom through official mechanisms. However, as demonstrated by scholars like Northrup and Curtis Keim, this was often far more difficult

[39] Paul E. Lovejoy (1988). "Concubinage and the Status of Women Slaves in Early Colonial Northern Nigeria." *The Journal of African History,* Vol. 29, No. 2: pp. 245-266, pg 248-249. See also Barbara M. Cooper. *Marriage in Maradi: Gender and Culture in a Hausa Society in Niger, 1900-1989.* (Portsmouth: Heinemann: 1997).

[40] Miers and Roberts, *The End of Slavery in Africa,* pg 48-49

[41] Elbourne, *Sex, Power and Slavery,* pg 18

[42] Marie Rodet. ""I Ask For Divorce Because My Husband Does not Let Me Go Back to My Country of Origin with My Brother": Gender, Family, and the End of Slavery in the Region of Kayes, French Soudan, 1890-1920." In *Sex, Power and Slavery,* edited by Campbell and Elbourne

for women.[43] According to Keim, for female slaves among the Mangbetu in Upper Uele it was almost impossible to navigate their way out of slavery as the legal avenues through which they might claim freedom were controlled by the slave owners themselves.[44] Their situations remained largely the same; they continued to form part of bridewealth payments and served as important resources signifying the wealth of the powerful.[45] Women and children in Africa were more often pawned to pay off debts to creditors than men.[46] Pawnship, though regarded as a different state to slavery, nonetheless led to conditions analogous to it and could evolve into slave status when people defaulted on their loans. Those who controlled the most women were those who had social influence and prestige.[47] Women's slavery remained prevalent across the Belgian Congo, as demonstrated in this thesis. Colonialists repeatedly referred to domestic slavery as "benign". By linking slavery and marriage it was possible for colonial authorities to present the conditions of slave women as less harsh. Therefore, colonial officials could platform as abolitionists without causing social and economic disharmony in the colony, while providing alternative gender models that suited European moralities.

In her work on the Cape, Pamela Scully considers how European abolitionism can be seen to have produced a "post-emancipation patriarchy" that was supported by law in different colonies. She notes that freed women were still vulnerable to violent abuse by

[43] David Northrup. "The End of Slavery in the Eastern Belgian Congo." In *The End of Slavery in Africa*, edited by Miers and Roberts, pg 473-474
[44] Curtis Keim. "Women in Slavery among the Mangbetu c. 1800-1910." in *Women and Slavery in Africa*, edited by Klein and Robertson
[45] Ibid
[46] Robertson and Klein. "Women's Importance in African Slave Systems", Pg 11
[47] Ibid

partners, husbands, and other men.[48] Scully's rich analysis of gender relations and its impact on emancipation resonate deeply with work that has been done on the role of women in Belgian Congo, as well as my own findings. Similarly, in *Women and Slavery in Africa* Robertson and Klein argue that colonialism did not ameliorate male control over women. In fact, there are numerous works that have been produced by feminists and historians which concur with this argument. These scholars point to the ways that women were subject to intense surveillance and oppressive policies in order to control them. This theme is explored in Dorothy L Hodgson's and Sheryl A. McCurdy's edited work *"Wicked" Women and the Reconfiguration of Gender in Africa,* which provides many examples of the dynamic ways that colonial governments sought to control women and any expression of their full autonomy in different parts of Africa.[49] Judith Van Allen, Nancy Hunt, Gertrude Mianda and Jean S. La Fontaine have written about the structural ways that the Belgian administration in Congo enacted forms of gender violence through denying women equal education and employment opportunities, narrowing their opportunities outside of domesticity, codifying laws that ensured women were economically dependent on their husbands and restricting their free movement across the colony.[50]

[48] Pamela Scully. *Liberating the Family? Gender and British Slave Emancipation in the Rural Western Cape, South Africa, 1823-1853.* (Oxford: James Currey: 1997), pg 128-129

[49] Dorothy L. Hodgson and Sheryl A. McCurdy (eds.). *"Wicked" Women and the Reconfiguration of Gender in Africa*. (Oxford: James Curry Ltd: 2001)

[50] Judith Van Allen. "*Memsahib, militante, femme libre*: political and apolitical styles of modern African women." In *Women in Politics,* edited by Jane Jacquette. (New York: John Wiley: 1974); Barbara A. Yates. "Colonialism, Education and Work: Sex Differentiation in Colonial Zaire." In *Women and Work in Africa*, edited by Edna G. Bay. (Colorado: Westview Press Inc.: 1982); Nancy Rose Hunt (1990); Gertrude Mianda. "Colonialism, Education, and Gender Relations in the Belgian Congo: The *Evolue* Case." In *Women in African Colonial Histories,* edited by Jean Allman, Susan Geiger, and Nakanyike Musisi. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press: 2002); Jean S. la Fontaine. "The Free Women of Kinshasa: Prostitution in a City in Zaire." In *Choice and Change: Essays in Honour of Lucy Mair,* edited by J. Davis. (Oxford: Berg: 2004)

How did women in the colonies deal with these restrictions? Slave and ex-slave women could be powerless, vulnerable *and* resourceful strategists. In Wright's research on women's slavery in Central Africa (1886-1911) she highlights that despite insistence from both European and African men that the work of female slaves was not "onerous", slave women viewed their situations quite differently and sought creative ways to free themselves.[51] Wright traced the life story of Bwanikwa, a woman who was determined to redeem herself. Even when Bwanikwa was regarded as free by European observers, she worked hard to make a profit through selling produce and crafts in order to buy the same type of gun that her husband had bought her for. Bwanikwa gave her husband the gun in exchange for her redemption. She wanted respect as a free woman and his wife, not his slave wife which inferred a relationship of inequality.[52] Wright's work not only indicates how women manifested their own ideas of self-determination, but also exposes the ways that colonial forms of emancipation were not necessarily regarded as real by those who had been legally "liberated". Women clearly had ideas about their own enslavement/emancipation that differed from the perspectives of African men and colonial governments. This thesis engages with studies that concentrate on gender, colonialism and sexuality. In the case of the Belgian Congo, women's lives were controlled, but women resisted these restrictions. Sexuality was circumscribed and mobilised to benefit Congo's colony as Belgian imperial power utilised ideas about African sexualities and gender relations to justify colonial authority. Validating its imperial presence in the Congo was important for Belgium given the past exposure of red rubber atrocities in the Congo Free State). How were sexuality and certain readings of

[51] Wright, "Bwanikwa: Consciousness and Protest among Slave Women in Central Africa", pg 246
[52] Ibid, pg 260

marriage practices exploited by the colonial state in its assertion of power and in what ways did these factors shape women's lived experiences?

1.4: Expanding imperial power through the regulation of women's roles and sexualities

The Belgian administration tried to control Congolese women, their sexuality and labour in a multiplicity of ways. When women challenged or contravened colonial restrictions, Europeans responded by labelling them as deviant women. African women were expected to be modelled in the image of white European women; to serve the private realm, maintain the household, bear children and uphold moral standards. The Belgian colonial period saw changes in gender relations in the Congo. Women's lives were gradually more constricted through different colonial measures in education, employment and movement. These types of approaches to African women were not only seen in the Congo but in other parts of Africa too. Amadiume points out that among the Igbo there existed "flexible gender constructions in terms of access to power and authority", but "Western concepts introduced through colonial conquest carried strong sex and class inequalities supported by rigid gender ideology and constructions".[53]

In the Congo, limited types of education served to cut women out of the formal labour market and direct their capabilities into the private and domestic realm only. Various locales had different pre-colonial gender practices and adapted to new policies in their own ways.

[53] Amadiume, *Male Daughters, Female Husbands*, pg 119

Barbara Yates and Gertrude Mianda have drawn attention to the education system in particular. Mianda's article 'Colonialism, Education and Gender Relations in Congo' sets out in detail the various ways that girls' education, even among the elite, was different to that of boys.[54] Schooling for girls was rare, especially at the secondary stage. The practical education they received was limited to home economics or teacher training and equipped them to become wives/mothers. If boys had access to mission or state education, they could be taught a professional trade or trained as clerk assistants for white people. They were also taught French. Colonialists near the top of the administration, such as the advisor to the colonial minister, M. J. Van Hove, questioned whether teaching girls French was wasteful, particularly when the primary aim was for them to become good, Christian wives in monogamous relationships.[55]

Mianda argues that education in Congo was modelled on a

..patriarchal educational ideology which governed the training offered girls in the colonial metropole, Belgium. The colonial system of education in the Belgian Congo thus consolidated social-sexual roles on the basis of existing sexual discrimination, by offering women a feeble instruction which confined them to the household...[56]

Colonial intentions were clear; the education available to boys and men was ever evolving and expanding, although still limited in many areas. They were provided with economic options outside the home and prospects that would serve them in a post-colonial context. Girls and women on the other hand, were placed in *fixed* roles by the colonial system through an educational philosophy that left its traces long after Independence. This form of

[54] Mianda, "Colonialism, Education, and Gender Relations in the Belgian Congo", pg 146-148
[55] Ibid, pg 147
[56] Ibid, pg 147-148

gender violence had lasting consequences in women's employment, an area that has been explored in Barbara Yates's study of 'Colonialism, Education and Work: Sex Differentiation in Colonial Zaire'.[57]

Yates highlights that "Belgian Congo had one of the highest Third World [school] enrolment rates for males and one of the lowest for females".[58] She focuses on women's inability to access jobs where post-primary education (at the least) was a necessity. Women also faced prejudices. Yates draws attention to a meeting of Catholic businessmen that was held in Leopoldville (now called Kinshasa) in 1958. They were discussing women's employment in textile factories as typists and other domestic occupations. The moral implications of their employment, even in these limited roles, were at the forefront of the conversation. Working in the factories for long hours was regarded by these men as damaging to women's "moral standards", their health, and interfered with their "family duties".[59] Yates explains how the "Belgian colonial education system meant that career opportunities for Africans in the modern sector were much broader for males than for females and that jobs were stereotyped by gender".[60]

Both Yates and Mianda argue that the colonial education implemented largely through a Catholic system in Congo was instrumental in entrenching European forms of patriarchy that shifted gender relations towards women's overall subordination.[61] The extent to which this occurred in different places across the colony is beyond the scope of this thesis. The influence and impact of colonial ideas would have differed according to the social/economic

[57] Yates, "Colonialism, Education and Work"
[58] Ibid, pg 142-143
[59] Ibid, pg 145
[60] Ibid, pg 143
[61] Ibid, pg 142; Mianda, "Colonialism, Education, and Gender Relations in the Belgian Congo", pg 158

relations of different communities and their proximity to administrative posts and city centres. However, Mianda has demonstrated that the constructions of the "domesticated" woman became insidiously fundamental to Congolese elites in the later decades of colonial rule. She provides interesting insight into the ways that a particular class of men received colonial gender logic. Through Western systems of education and socialisation, the *évolué* had become an aspiring middle class in urban Congo. Imperial domination had constructed an idea of *évolué* men just as much as it had women. The former entered job roles they had been prepared for in education. Men in these positions both resisted and participated in colonial expectations in ways that benefitted them. According to Mianda, their strategies were not necessarily advantageous to women. She explains how *évolué* men did not support gender equity, although they did demand better domestic education for their daughters. Their wives, on the other hand, were only to engage in limited employment to support the household. Women also required their husband's permission to work.[62] There are some important exceptions, such as Lokele women in Stanleyville and Yakusu who, according to Reuben Loffman, helped their communities gain wealth and power during Belgian rule by successfully balancing their integration into Baptist "mission domesticity" and 'respectable' monogamous marriage with independent trading activities that they had engaged in before the onset of colonialism.[63] The *évolué* did not challenge the idea that women should be subordinated under male control. They agreed that education for women should be managed, for fear of their "sexual liberation".[64] Like colonial officials and missionaries, the *évolué* regarded the cities as places of immorality, which needed to be controlled. They supported

[62] Mianda, "Colonialism, Education, and Gender Relations in the Belgian Congo", pg 148-150
[63] Reuben Loffman (2012) "Men and Women of the Water: The Lokele of Stanleyville and Yakusu under Belgian Rule, 1895–1960." *African Studies*, Vol. 71, No. 1: pp. 52-70, pg 54-55
[64] Mianda, "Colonialism, Education, and Gender Relations in the Belgian Congo", pg 152

colonial measures to address sex work. *Evolué* men were not averse to attempts by the colonial administration to regulate and funnel women's sexuality into monogamous unions when it suited them. On ideas about eradicating bridewealth and polygamy, however, some *évolué* men were more reticent. For example, men from patrilineal lineages were anxious about monogamous divorce in relation to maintaining their rights as fathers.[65] Mianda furthers the discussion about sex differentiation in education by exploring how it helped implement a class and gender system that was utilised by *évolué* men:

..they preserved those "traditions" which accorded them privileges as men vis-à-vis women, and they adopted those of white "civilization" which favoured their indisputable role as head of the nuclear family.[66]

Mianda demonstrates how European systems of patriarchy settled into different sectors and hierarchies of Congolese life while being resisted, adapted and reshaped. In Amandine Lauro's work on colonial regulations of Congolese marriages she borrows Jean Allman's term "gender chaos" to describe widespread colonial fears about the consequences of women negotiating their "liberty". Women were perceived as having neither the skills nor experience to live autonomously.[67] Imperial anxieties about liberated/free women were endemic. These women were not under the supervision of men and could travel around of their own volition. The colony was so concerned about their movement into cities and the

[65] Ibid, pg 152-154
[66] Ibid, pg 154
[67] Amandine Lauro. "'Le législateur n'envisage en l'espèce que le point de vue physiologique'. Régulations du mariage 'indigène' et politiques sexuelles au Congo Belge (1908-1940)." In *Le contrôle des femmes dans les empires coloniaux. Empires, genre et biopolitiques,* edited by Martine Spensky, 183-190. (Paris : Karthala : 2015). See also, Jean Allman. "Rounding Up Spinsters: Gender Chaos and Unmarried Women in Colonial Asante." In *"Wicked" Women and the Reconfiguration of Gender in Africa,* edited by Dorothy L. Hodgson and Sheryl A. McCurdy. (Oxford: James Curry Ltd: 2001)

growth of sex work in these centres that they implemented travel permits for single women.[68] Having control of women's sexuality was crucial to displays of colonial power.

Writers, such as Jean S. la Fontaine and Judith Van Allen, have examined the situation of "femmes libres", the free women that so disturbed the administration.[69] Fontaine highlights how prostitution became associated with urban life as single men migrated to the cities for work. Women who lived in the towns were gradually linked to immorality and the centres were described as places of squalor and degradation. They were also places where people could potentially organise against the colonial state, so it is unsurprising that the administration expressed unease about city life. "Detribalised" centres came to be viewed as an impact of negative European influences, negating all that was traditionally "African".[70] The loss of control of young people, especially women, signified the ruination of an essentialised idea of African "custom". The colonial perspective on the social and economic changes occurring in the cities conceals webs of Congolese resistance, refusals and manipulation of the colonial system. In what ways did women and men exert agency and how did they negotiate oppressive colonial structures?

In the case of girls/women, limited and minimal schooling did not necessarily result in the outcome wished for by the colonial administration. While marriage was presented as the "moral" option for women, plenty of them repelled it. With limited employment opportunities due to a lack of training and education, women chose sex work over marriage or petty trading.[71] *Femmes libres* could be both longer-term courtesans or one-night sex

[68] Mianda, "Colonialism, Education, and Gender Relations in the Belgian Congo", pg 152
[69] La Fontaine, "The Free Women of Kinshasa"; Van Allen, "*Memsahib, militante, femme libre*"

[70] La Fontaine, "The Free Women of Kinshasa", pg 89-91
[71] Ibid, pg 93-94

workers. The term *femmes libres* became illustrious. In the postcolonial period successful courtesans have become exceptionally wealthy.[72]

Women found ways to adapt to colonial constraints and support themselves and their kin. They were not the only ones. As the colonial government tried to indirectly eradicate polygamy by taxing husbands with more than one wife, men from both the working and *évolué* classes partook in systems of informal "camouflaged" polygamy. Nancy Rose Hunt elucidates on these practices in her work 'Noise over Camouflaged Polygamy, Colonial Morality Taxation, and a Woman-Naming Crisis in Belgian Africa'.[73] To meet colonial tax and forced labour expectations men engaged informal partners/wives to assist them with work and crop cultivation. This type of system was referred to as *La Petite.* On the other hand, men from the elite classes had *supplementaires/*concubines; women who acted as courtesans and accompanied them to places their wives could not, including bars. In contrast to men who engaged in *La Petite* to avoid prison and fines, *évolué* men took part in camouflaged polygamy to display wealth and status.[74] Interestingly, *évolués* supported the colonial control of women in order to maintain their "moral virtue", while freely expressing their own sexuality. They resisted colonial impositions on themselves but maintained the importance of control over women.

The colonial response to women who defied imposed European gender norms was to categorise and label them in negative ways. Women who did not live up to colonial gendered expectations as ideal wives and mothers were branded as disobedient and given names,

[72] Ibid, pg 99-100

[73] Nancy Rose Hunt (1991). "Noise over Camouflaged Polygamy: Colonial Morality Taxation, and a Woman-Naming Crisis in Belgian Africa." *The Journal of African History*, Vol. 32, No. 3: pp. 471-494

[74] Ibid, pg 478-480

including *femmes libres.* Women were constructed in an image that required further imperial intervention. Authors, such as Van Allen and Hunt disagree over the origins of the term *femmes libres*. Van Allen believes it a colonial legal categorisation of women who "qualified for residence in the African townships in their own right".[75] The concept later became linked to prostitution. Hunt, on the other hand, suggests that the term evolved out of the process of the,

..'liberation' of women 'slaves' from slave owners, polygamist husbands and who knows what other variety of situations which were defined as a form of slavery at a time when there was a need for monogamous wives for the 'new men' of Congo Independent State missions, work camps and military stations. The term became synonymous with prostitute instantly, when these women could not so easily be controlled..[76]

From my own investigations into the panicked colonial discourses on trafficking and polygamy, Hunt's explanation is particularly viable. The point at which increasing numbers of freed women without economic/social support were seeking work in the cities coincided with colonial cries about migration, immorality in the centres and depopulation.

Structural gender violence codified and maintained by the colonial state aimed to confine women. Hunt has explored the reactions of some Congolese women to colonial labelling. When a tax on women in Usumbura "theoretically living alone" was introduced it became informally known as the 'prostitute tax'. According to Hunt, this "sexual insult", combined with the 1950 ban on polygamy, infuriated people, particularly Muslims in the Buyenzi district of Usumbura. Women protested in the 1950s and many declined to pay the

[75] Van Allen, "*Memsahib, militante, femme libre*", pg 318
[76] Hunt "Noise over Camouflaged Polygamy", pg 490

tax. Eventually, as a result of the protests, older women were made exempt from paying it. In time, women suffering from illness as well as mothers with more than two children were also allowed to avoid the tax.[77] The agency and collective action of women enabled some colonial policy changes.

Congolese women's lives and bodies were regulated in different ways by the imperial regime. They became relevant to colonial discourses usually when it was politically expedient, which reveals the double standards of colonial authorities. Discussions about their well-being were often shadowed by specific agendas, including those related to abolitionism, maintaining a labour force and transforming gender relations. Against a backdrop of worry about depopulation and infertility, debates about polygamy and monogamy took place. Supporters of polygamy or monogamy both claimed that their recommended marriage practice would improve population growth.[78] Hunt astutely remarks that debates about women in Congo usually emerge in the archives at points when "moral panic surfaced, settled and festered".[79] My own work attests to this. The issue of depopulation was attributed to African practices of marriage and birth spacing. Lauro notes that this made it possible for the administration to ignore its own role in processes of subjugation (violent rule, forced labour and taxation) which produced an environment where the bearing and raising of children was an unappealing, dangerous and burdensome prospect.[80]

This thesis explores imperial discourses on early marriage and the union of young "non-nubile" girls to older men. The focus on this issue became an obsessive theme of the 1910s-1930s and portrayed a colonial attitude of paternal care and protectiveness of

[77] Ibid, pg 486-491
[78] Lauro, "'Le législateur n'envisage en l'espèce que le point de vue physiologique'", pg 186-187
[79] Hunt "Noise over Camouflaged Polygamy'" pg 471
[80] Lauro, "'Le législateur n'envisage en l'espèce que le point de vue physiologique'", pg 186-187

Congolese females. These framings concealed concern about a loss of imperial power and colonial labour. They also distracted attention away from colonial hypocrisies which exposed themselves in a lack of action at the sexual abuse/exploitation of young girls by European men. Lauro explains that the regulation of early marriage was linked to controlling girls' sexuality.[81] The method of indirect rule which the colony had been trying to adopt did not lend itself to making early marriage illegal. Administrators had a better idea; make the *consummation* of early marriages illegal. This law was implemented in 1936 through the "marriages of non-pubescent girls" decree and prohibited sex between men and girls that had not yet reached puberty.[82] The topic of girls' consent was irrelevant- it was their capacity to bear children after being prematurely introduced to sexual intercourse that was important. The concern was that girls were becoming infertile through this practice.[83]

Lauro surmises that this law had little to do with the well-being of young girls and more with colonial priorities to ensure that girls entered into intimate relations at the most advantageous moment and were successfully directed towards "heterosexual, penetrative, conjugal and reproductive" sex.[84] She makes a convincing case which is difficult to disagree with given my own findings. The most invasive focus of the administration was more often than not aimed at women. Investigations into the approximate age of puberty of Congolese girls were requested of doctors in the colony. In Chapter Three I analyse how this became relevant in one example at an administrative post where the colonial official allowed his soldiers to abduct women and girls and engage in forced conjugal relations. When confronted about his actions by a Protestant missionary, the official explained that the local physician

[81] Ibid, pg 193
[82] Ibid, pg 194-195 from the Official Bulletin of the Belgian Congo, 1936: 941-943
[83] Ibid, pg 193
[84] Ibid, pg 195

had “examined” the girls to check that they were sexually mature. Their consent was not an issue. In her article on female puberty, Lauro explains the impact of “climate theory” which developed in the 19th century.[85] The idea behind the theory was that African girls reached puberty at an earlier age than white girls because of the hot climate in which they lived. They were regarded as having libidos that developed sooner too. Such ideas can be identified as affecting the responses of colonial officials to accusations of sexual assault by Europeans. In Chapter Four, I discuss a case where a number of young Congolese girls had accused a white man of abuse. In the records the girls are described by a colonial officer as “vicious” and debauched, despite all being under the age of twelve years old. Lauro explains that the investigative outcomes of invasive gynaecological examinations of young girls indicated that Congolese girls did not reach puberty at an earlier age, but these othering ideas persisted well into the middle of the 20th century. Colonial discourses on race and sexuality required European protection (and control) of African girls and women. These narratives also empowered and excused the predatory and exploitative behaviours of white men.

How were colonial gender roles imposed and negotiated? Hunt has written at length about the ways that colonial actors attempted to relegate women to the domestic realm. These were the imagined roles of all women (both free and enslaved). By limiting women’s roles to the household, they also confined their sexuality. Women were envisioned as the caretakers of men and children. They were to support and motivate men to labour for the colony as well as reproduce future workers. This scenario would ensure social order and cohesion. The “domesticating” process took place through colonial *foyers sociaux* (“social homes”) which served as places where Congolese women in Usumbura were taught

[85] Amandine Lauro (2013). "De la puberté féminine dans les 'zones torrides.' Expertise médicale et régulations du corps des jeunes filles dans le Congo colonial." *Sextant*, Vol.30, "Regards sur le sexe": 33-45

household skills. This type of training was viewed as an answer to women's perceived degradation in the cities. Courses were taught by white women (from missionaries to social workers). Training included child rearing classes and housekeeping. Mentors could make unannounced "house visits" or inspections at the participants homes. Hunt writes that, "The foyer was a prized agenda because it enabled colonial knowledge of African urban households, their redefinition and bounding as the domestic, private sphere, and their differentiation according to new colonial representations of social class".[86] The intrusions of colonial initiatives into the personal lives of Congolese people and their families was meant to alter gender roles and relations and shape families into ones that imitated Europeans'. The Christian, monogamous, patriarchal family was presumed as the superior form.

Hunt has also conducted research into colonial interference in African breast-feeding and child rearing practices. Her work draws attention to the ways that white women also engaged in violent colonial practices that controlled and managed women's bodies. In Congo it was regarded as taboo to have sex while breastfeeding. Therefore, Congolese women were encouraged to stop breast-feeding at an earlier stage in order to resume conjugal relations, produce more children and increase what was thought of as a rapidly declining population.[87] Hunt's work has always considered the spaces in which Congolese people declined to conform to colonial expectations and the ways that they adapted imperial programs to suit their own ends. She points out that many women declined to join colonial programs, such as the *foyers sociaux*. Perhaps this was because, as Hunt suggests, the program was perceived as adding unwanted further responsibilities to their workloads. Additionally, European inducements to

[86] Hunt "Domesticity and Colonialism in Belgian Africa", pg 447, 469-470
[87] Hunt, ""Le Bebe en Brousse"'"

end breast feeding practices earlier in a baby's development were used by Congolese women in different ways. For example, the introduction of powdered milk, which was meant to serve as a substitute for babies, was used instead as medicine or as a dessert for young children.[88]

This discussion has considered some of the ways that colonial rule led to certain framings of ideal forms of living that entailed the curtailment and confinement of women's roles and sexualities to certain spaces. If controlling Congolese sexualities and gender relations was central to colonial power, how did this manifest in the individual behaviour and strategies of colonial agents? Furthermore, how was this represented and discussed by colonialists?

1.5: Colonial sexual violence: a performance in domination, impunity and hypocrisy

Important work has been done on colonial sexual exploitation and violence and their legacies. Mama writes about the way sexual violence was "an integral part of colonization". She refers to Frantz Fanon who linked the "conquest of land and peoples and the violation of women". The colonisation of Africa included the sexual abuse and rape of women who were kin to men that belonged to resistance groups. Attacks on women formed part of an attempt to threaten and "humiliate" these men. Mama argues that to "simplify the nature of colonization and the violence that it deployed as just another instance of "male violence" is to obscure the full character of imperialism and the internal contradictions it has so successfully exploited".[89]

[88] Ibid, pg 428

[89] Amina Mama. "Sheroes and Villains: Conceptualizing Colonial and Contemporary Violence against Women in Africa." In *Feminist Genealogies, Colonial Legacies, Democratic Futures,* edited by M. Jacqui Alexander and Chandra Talpade Mohanty. (New York: Routledge: 1996), pg 51

Hunt, and Charlotte Mertens have written about forms of sexual violence that occurred in CFS. Both Hunt and Mertens refer to the SGBV that was committed during Leopold's rule by sentries and members of the colonial military police, the *force publique*. My own work contributes to this discussion by highlighting the forms of rape and sexual assault that occurred in Belgian Congo, *after* the reforms were supposed to have been implemented. The sexual violence that women were subjected to under Leopold's "rubber terror" was not seen as a separate issue requiring special attention and thus SGBV was not identified as an area requiring colonial intervention. Rather, it was a secondary, unsavoury by-product of the forced labour system.

Hunt and Mertens provide insightful examinations into the ways that specific stories about rape were rarely repeated, while other narratives were chosen for frequent circulation in the Congo reform movement.[90] Rape became a background issue that could be solved once the main problem of abusive forced labour had been solved. Hunt explains how photos were used in the campaign and the impact they had:

The mutilation shots, in particular, have directed interest away from the more hidden, tactile, and out of sight, away from another modality of violence, the sexual. And this modality of violence was intrinsically more reproductive and transgressive in its nature.[91]

In the colonial period stories about amputation and cannibalism were more easily relayed- rape and incest were not. Sexuality and gender abuse against women were subjects

[90] Nancy Rose Hunt. "An Acoustic Register: Rape and Repetition in Congo." In *Imperial Debris: On Ruins and Ruination,* edited by Ann Laura Stoler. (London: Duke University Press: 2013)

[91] Ibid, pg 42

that were not fully explored in CRA humanitarianism. Hunt astutely asserts that the CRA portrayed Congolese women in very particular ways, as inherently vulnerable and maltreated:

Such representations reduce women to suffering alone, with no faculty or scope for struggle, reflection, negotiation, witnessing, anger, or mockery. Morel's generation of humanitarians rarely used a sex card or alluded to rape when speaking about the plight of Congolese women.[92]

Women's experiences of these events were little explored beyond tropes. This helped enshrine Congolese women in humanitarian fields as solely persecuted persons requiring aid. Avoiding these derogatory portrayals of black women, Hunt explains "sexual capital" versus sexual abuse, the former being the modality through which women navigated their lives and sought safety, and the latter, the violence that was committed against them outside of their control. Both sexual capital and sexual torture overlapped at points in colonial Congo.

Hunt draws attention to colonial traces in contemporary violence in Congo, as well as its representations. In some of the evidence that she recounts, historical gender violence resonates with contemporary forms that manifested in wartime to terrorise communities at the end of the 20th century. Colonial memories emerge through families being forced to have sex with one another, the disembowelment of pregnant women and the use of objects to vaginally rape and damage or destroy the reproductive organs of women and girls.[93] Both periods have seen the use of "shock-photos" to convey a message and encourage Western donations of funds. Hunt recommends that shocking archival photographs not be used in research; instead, scholars should consider "parsing the archives" and "listening for images

[92] Nancy Rose Hunt. *A Nervous State: Violence, Remedies and Reverie in Colonial Congo.* (London: Duke University Press: 2016), pg 43
[93] Ibid, pg 52

and sounds in the eye of memory". Damaging forms of repetition could be replaced with those that inform and "produce debate about war crimes and commissions of inquiry".[94]

Charlotte Mertens has focused on the topic of sexual violence in CFS and modern imagery on SGBV. Her work on 'archival traces' highlights the colonial underpinnings of stories about sexual violence in contemporary Congo, which reinforce racist narratives about the country as a place of barbarity. Mertens also draws attention to the similarities between the forms of gender violence that manifested in colonial Congo as in today's Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). In Mertens's view, the "memories and testimonies" of SGBV are "traces from a violent past" that "reshape historical understandings of colonial violence and open new avenues for rethinking past abuses and their endurance into the present".[95] Any national, international or humanitarian focus on "ending" or "eliminating" sexual violence must therefore account for these histories rather than exclude them. Mertens questions how colonial framings impact the research and interpretations of scholars in this field and considers, "what it means to 'undo' research from a 'violent' space by disrupting received knowledge on sexual violence and critically exploring the researcher's responsibility in representing violence as experienced by others and his/her complicity in perpetuating harmful framings".[96] Mertens astutely employs understandings of histories of colonial sexual violence in Congo to reflect on her field of study and critique it. Due to this history it is the researcher's responsibility to historically contextualise sexual violence and avoid reinforcing negative imperial representations.

[94] Hunt, "An Acoustic Register", pg 58-59

[95] Charlotte Mertens (2016). "Sexual Violence in the Congo Free State: Archival Traces and Present Reconfigurations." *ARAS,* Vol. 37, No. 1 (2016): pp. 6-20

[96] Charlotte Mertens (2018). "Undoing Research on Sexual Violence in Eastern Democratic Republic of Congo." *ACME: An International Journal for Critical Geographies,* pg 1

A great deal of emphasis of women's historical sexual abuse in Congo has focused on the period of the CFS. Less research has focused on sexual abuse in the era of Belgian colonialism. An important exception is the work of historian, Osumaka Likaka, who has shown that sexual violence and intimidation continued well into the Belgian era in various ways. Colonial mentalities of white superiority led to the sexual entitlement of European men. Likaka writes about examples of Congolese leaders who had been staunchly loyal to the colonial regime. These same leaders were removed from power for refusing to allow colonial officials to have sex with their wives.[97] Leadership positions of Congolese men were conditional on the sexual access of European men to Congolese women. No doubt, the sexual requests of white men were rituals intending to demonstrate to Congolese male elites the power of the colony (whether superficial or not). Since women were valuable resources and the control of them indicated social significance and prestige this would seem a particularly damaging form of colonial abuse, as was intended. Abuses against women angered many and provoked retaliation by other Congolese chiefs. Likaka provides two examples of poisoning that occurred in the 1930s. Lele and Topoke men took these measures against territorial administrators (TAs) in the Sankuru and Aruwimi districts respectively. In Sankuru, TA Dossogne was poisoned for having killed women in a punitive raid, and in Aruwimi another administrator was poisoned for allowing the sexual abuse of women by white workers during the absence of the women's husbands. Both attempts to kill these men were unsuccessful. Likaka highlights how,

The ideologies of masculinity influenced also local interpretations of relations of women with colonial officials, including sexual relations. The reactions of leaders and ordinary

[97] Osumaka Likaka. *Naming Colonialism: History and Collective Memory in the Congo, 1870-1960.* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press: 2009), pg 114-118

men show that any abuse committed by colonial officials against women meant an assault on their masculinity.[98]

In my own research I came across a case during the early years of Belgian rule where colonial Congolese soldiers attacked a village and abducted inhabitants; men for the colonial militia and women to be their "wives". Chapters Three and Four demonstrate how colonial sexual violence and intimidation persisted in the years of Belgian rule. James Giblin has written about similar types of practices occurring in German East Africa in the late 1800s. According to Giblin, as the Germans warred against leaders that challenged their power, they adopted particular warfare strategies that were inspired by their African allies; they allowed their troops to abduct numerous women as spoils.[99] Klein has also detailed the practices of African armies in Senegal and Mali that comprised of men of slave, or ex-slave, status. During their raids, slave fighters would abduct women to become their "wives". These women performed multiple functions; they carried equipment, grew crops, produced food and acted as sexual partners.[100] Their support was indispensable. The French military, led by white officers, adopted some of the same types of practices as African armies during their campaigns. French soldiers (made up of African men) captured women and used them for labour and sex. When the French seized Sikasso, a stronghold in West Africa, their army ravaged the city. Children were sold to slave dealers. Captives, including hundreds of women, were stripped naked and disseminated amongst the soldiers. European officers selected women for themselves and ensured that the men under their command were similarly rewarded. Klein notes that "The French army was not in Africa to serve the state but rather

[98] Ibid, pg 117
[99] James Giblin. "The Victimization of Women in the Late Precolonial and Early Colonial Warfare in Tanzania." In *Sexual Violence in Conflict Zones from the Ancient World to the Era of Human Rights,* edited by Elizabeth D. Heineman. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press: 2011), pg 89-91
[100] Klein. "Sexuality and Slavery in the Western Sudan", pg 67-68

to serve its own ends".[101] Slavery was a convenient institution for disseminating the plunders of war.

Punitive expeditions and warfare were not the only ways that colonial states used the sexuality of African women to assert power. This was also achieved through double standards that condemned concubinage and polygamy as slavery when it was practiced by Africans but tolerated (and in the earlier days of colonial rule, encouraged) between white men and black women. In the Congo, this area of focus has been addressed by those such as Likaka, Lauro, Vincent Viaene and others.[102] What types of relationships were these? Likaka writes that for some women, having relationships with white men was beneficial and provided some economic security and physical protection from the uncertainties and brutalities of colonial rule.[103] Can we use Hunt's term of "sexual capital" to describe women's participation in these liaisons? Often these types of relationships would begin with Congolese girls/women becoming *ménagères* (housekeepers) to white men. Relations that developed from these arrangements were condemned by missionaries and certain groups in Belgium. In fact, as time went on, white women were encouraged to travel to Congo not only to serve as role models to black women and carry out 'charitable' work but also to discourage white men from engaging in these types of "immoral" affairs. Likaka argues that the nature of relationships between *ménagères* and employers was exploitative, particularly when one accounts for the

[101] Ibid, pg 72-73

[102] Amandine Lauro. *Coloniaux, ménagéres et prostituées au Congo Belge 1884-1930.* (Loverval : Editions Labor 2005); Vincent Viaene (December 2008). "King Leopold's Imperialism and the Origins of the Belgian Colonial Party, 1860–1905." *The Journal of Modern History,* Vol. 80, No. 4, A Special Issue on Metropole and Colony: pp. 741-790, pg 783-784; See also, J.L. Vellut. "Materiaux pour une image du blanc dans la societe coloniale du Congo Belge." In *Stereotypes nationaux et prejuges raciaux aux XIXe et XXe siecles,* edited by J. Pirotte, (Leuven : 1982), pg 102-103. See also the work of Florence Bernault who discusses the prevalence of *ménagéres* in colonial Gabon until the Second World War in *Colonial Transactions: Imaginaries, Bodies, and Histories in Gabon.* (London: Duke University Press: 2019), pg 17

[103] Likaka, *Naming Colonialism*, pg 112-113

ways that girls/women were chosen for this role. Often, they would have to go through intimate medical examinations to ensure they did not have any venereal diseases, making it clear that their domestic role entailed other sexual services.[104] With some exceptions, Western focus on these relationships was related less to any concern about the exploitation or abuse of Congolese girls/women than the damage that could be done to white men (and Belgium's) reputation in the Congo.[105] Ann Stoler has written in depth about how important it was for colonialists to present a picture of European superiority, morality, health and sexual restraint to colonial subjects and themselves in order to legitimise their rule.[106]

In the French case, Klein has elaborated on the roles assumed by enslaved women after the conquest of cities. He emphasises that while women were important as domestic labourers and sexual companions for African fighters, they were largely subordinated to European men as "sexual servants". They, alongside their soldiers, maintained control of households of women. According to Klein, when a mission at Segu complained to the local administrator about the actions of one French official who frequently sought out more local women to add to his already burgeoning household, it received a disappointing response. The local commander could not offer much assistance when, as he explained, his own superior was known to keep many women, five of whom were girls between the ages of ten to fifteen years old.[107] Engaging in systems of enslavement was advantageous for colonial men. Klein's research highlights other circumstances where young girls were sexually exploited by Europeans. Perhaps this type of behaviour was more normalised by colonialists across Africa.

[104] Ibid, pg 114

[105] British Protestant missionaries Reverend John Harris and his wife, Alice Harris were among those who raised the issue of these relationships with the Aborigines' Protection Society.

[106] Ann Laura Stoler. *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power: Race and the Intimate in Colonial Rule*. (London: University of California Press: 2002)

[107] Klein. "Sexuality and Slavery in the Western Sudan", pg 72-73

Klein's work draws attention to the pretences of colonial authorities that chose to overlook these examples while condemning polygamy as a problematic institution when practiced by Africans.

These works are all valuable and present different, overlapping pictures of the kinds of sexual abuse that constituted state power during the colonial period in the Congo. Some were overtly violent and others exploitative and coercive. Yet, as Likaka points out, sometimes sexual relationships between colonizers and the colonised were also consensual and mutually beneficial (even if the power dynamics were problematic). My own work adds to scholarship on the area by providing new insight into the types of abuse committed by white men against young Congolese girls (below the age of twelve years old) and official responses to them. These were some of the inconspicuously discussed cases of colonial sexual violence/exploitation which highlight inconsistencies that were present in colonial policies focused on "protecting" Congolese girls/women. While women's conditions in African forms of marriage were obsessively scrutinised, stories of white men's violence were controlled and discreetly kept.

Sexuality was intertwined with women's enslavement and emancipation. In the colonial period discourses on sexuality and gender formed a part of imperial propaganda and subjugation. The idea that women were enslaved in African marriages justified a shift towards Western gender relations. Paradoxically, however, women's enslavement was portrayed as not being harsh enough to warrant direct colonial interference; an approach that suited colonial authorities who were keen to maintain alliances with African slave-owning elites. Narratives of slavery, marriage and emancipation were used to benefit imperial agendas and fulfil the cravings of individual men. Understanding how sexuality has been entangled in

histories of domination is important for contextualising the stringent policies that were introduced to restrict women's movement, education and employment. It also provides background for the types of sexual violence and exploitation that occurred as European officials attempted to assert their power. This thesis builds on scholarship that focuses on sexuality and colonial power, gender and imperialism, and slavery. It maps sexual relations- some between Africans, and others between Africans and Europeans- and provides a close-up analysis of how these associations were represented, moralised and problematised in political and legal framings by different white Europeans.

1.6: Methodology

I chose to concentrate my research on the period 1900-1930s because it signalled several particularly important transitional shifts for the colony; a movement for reform and the conversion from a CFS administration to a Belgian one. Furthermore, the expansion of an international legal system that dealt with slavery and the evolvement of early NGO activism in the 1920s-30s impacted how the Belgian Congo functioned and presented itself to the world. I sought to understand the effect of these developments; how they interacted with colonial policy and how these policies were received, interpreted, implemented and represented by colonial authorities.

This research draws from historical evidence from a variety of sources, including the colonial archives in Belgium, the Morel Papers at the London School of Economics, and material at the University of Liverpool, Birmingham and the Oxford Bodleian Library.

In August 2016 I made a first visit to the Federal Public Service of Foreign Affairs in Brussels for a period of five weeks. My aim was to find information on colonial perspectives and ideas on marriage, slavery, violence and gender relations in early 20th century Congo. This research trip was my introduction to archive work and examining Belgian colonial texts. I gathered material from the *Archives Africaines* (AA) collection, which holds documentation about Congo under the *Gouvernement Général de Léopoldville* (1885-1908) and *Ministère des Colonies* (1908-1960). I focused on material from the latter grouping on Belgian Congo. My first foray into archives was a daunting task because of my limited French language skills. Nonetheless, I identified different areas for investigation, beginning with the file on Indigenous Affairs. I immediately came across voluminous colonial discussions on African marriage, adultery, divorce, polygamy, and domestic slavery. The records made it clear at the outset that these were areas of intense concern during the colonial period. I copied correspondence between the colonial ministry in Brussels and governors, deputy governors and inspectors in Congo. I collected reports, legal codes and newspaper clippings. Work began by sorting through this research and considering how debates on these issues shifted and were shaped by external international institutions, like the League of Nations (LoN). I was interested to make sense of how European perspectives of slavery, marriage and consent related to colonial ambitions in central Africa, as well as to European concepts of femininity, race and sexuality.

I spent four weeks examining archives at the Royal Anthropological Institute (RAI) in London. I looked at the diaries of Melville William Hilton-Simpson, which describe a two-year expedition with Emil Torday and Norman Hardy across South-West Congo from 1907-1909. Crucially, the RAI had a box on the 1931 International Conference on African Children, as well

as material on the organisation, Save the Children Fund (SCF). The RAI also had microfilm reels detailing the meetings, reports and articles of the Aborigines' Protection Society (APS).

In the next part of my research I consulted the Anti-Slavery Papers at the Weston Library at the Bodleian Library for a couple of weeks. This collection contained material ranging from the early 20th century (1912-) to the 1950s-60s. Working on the anti-slavery papers in Oxford was a good way to maintain some continuity between documents seen at the RAI on the APS before it merged with the Anti-Slavery group. I made a shorter trip to the University of Liverpool's main library to find articles written for the *Committee for the Protection of Coloured Women in the Colonies*. At the Library of Birmingham, I photographed reports produced by the *Ladies' Negro's Friend Society for Birmingham* (West Bromwich) and at the Cadbury Library in the University of Birmingham I gained further knowledge about SCF and the APS. I also spent five-six weeks reading and analysing documents in the Morel Papers collection at the London School of Economics' Women's Library. My research on activist networks supplemented the material that I had on colonial and missionary debates and provided context to the pressures being applied to the colonial government. It also gave some insight into historical continuities and the unequal power dynamics between Western non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and people living in historically exploited nations.

In February 2018 I made a second research trip to Brussels to examine the *Fonds Ministère des Colonies* in the AA collection. The archives that I consulted were grouped into themes on marriage, slavery, sexual violence and justice and dated from the early 1900s to 1960. It was helpful to examine the period of overlap between Congo Free State and Belgian Congo and identify colonial/missionary practices and attitudes that changed little after the immediate transfer of the colony. Themes took precedence over regional focus. Records

comprised reports on slavery, responses to questionnaires from district commissioners, letters sent between governor generals' in Boma/Leopoldville. They included letters/circulars from Belgian Ministers' of Colonies and Ministers' of Foreign Affairs, as well as letters and appeals from missionaries and Belgian politicians. I also collected reports and letters from the League of Nations, the United Nations (UN), ethnographies and documentation on the legal processes of rape accusations. Material that I gathered in Brussels had to be translated from French to English before I could thoroughly analyse it. This process took some months.

Some of the most valuable, rich primary material that I examined came from the Belgian colonial archives and included testimonies and statements of people beyond the colonial administration. For this reason, as well as due to issues of time and resources, I chose to draw largely from these sources in my work. I sought to examine intersecting debates and ideas from across the colony as they evolved and were resisted and challenged. I traced discourses on Congolese women and SGBV as they met with other political forces, including international law and women's movements in Europe. However, there are other archive sources that can also be useful in this type of research. For example, the Africa Museum in Tervuren (Belgium) holds a variety of documentation produced by private companies, individuals and missionaries on the CFS and Belgian Congo.[108] The perspectives of different missionaries could be analysed in more detail through an examination of missionary records, including those of the Presbyterian Historical Society in the United States.[109] The archives of other Missions, such as the Plymouth Brethren, which operated in Katanga, may provide

[108] The Royal Museum for Central Africa in Tervuren, Belgium. Visit: <https://www.africamuseum.be/en/research/collections_libraries>
[109] The Presbyterian Historical Society: The National Archives of the PC(USA), Philadelphia. Visit: <https://www.history.pcusa.org/>

another interesting angle on polygamy and slavery in Eastern Congo.[110] There are also valuable published sources that contain important primary material on Protestant missionaries, including Robert Benedetto's *Presbyterian Reformers in Central Africa.*[111] Other important perspectives could be analysed through secondary sources, including the recent work of Robert Burroughs, which centres and emphasises the importance of African contributions to the Congo reform campaign. The agency of different African actors and their testimonies gives vivid and essential insight into the everyday experiences of people who were subjected to colonial rule.[112] Clementine M. Faik - Nzuji is another scholar whose research focuses on the lives of Congolese people through the 20th- 21st centuries. Her work carefully traces the life histories of family members, as they navigated systems of colonialism, decolonization and Independence, right up to the contemporary period.[113] These types of sources enable enriching opportunities for future research.

My work raises some important ethical issues. Some are related to positionality and others to specific aspects of research. For example, this project examines processes of colonial 'justice' in relation to allegations of sexual assault. The records surrounding these cases contain the full names of victims, most of whom were girls under the age of twelve. Their names and the names of their family members, as well as their stories are open to the public in Belgium. Would the individuals and families concerned have wanted the records of

[110] The Christian Brethren Archive, The University of Manchester Library. Visit: <https://www.library.manchester.ac.uk/search-resources/special-collections/guide-to-special-collections/christian-brethren-collections/>

[111] Robert Benedetto (eds.). *Presbyterian Reformers in Central Africa: A Documentary Account of the American Presbyterian Congo Mission and the Human Rights Struggle in the Congo, 1890-1918* (Leiden: Brill: 1997)

[112] Robert Burroughs. *African Testimony in the Movement for Congo Reform: The Burden of Proof.* (Abingdon: Routledge: 2019)

[113] Clementine Madiya Faïk - Nzuji. *Tu le Leur diras : Le récit véridique d'une famille congolaise plongée au cœur de l'histoire de son pays : [Congo 1890-2000]* (Brussels : Alice Editions : 2005)

their experiences to be kept in the public domain? In a contemporary context in the UK traumatised individuals, especially children, are protected and their identities and stories maintained confidentially. Therefore, I decided to only use the first names of girls' in my thesis. It seems important that their abuse at the hands of white men is exposed, rather than kept discretely hidden in the archives.

My work has benefitted from information held in colonial archives in Europe. Yet, there is distinct discomfort knowing that records of the lives and experiences of the Congolese under colonialism are far more accessible to people in the West than to their descendants. This point raises a more general issue with colonial archives and the continued imperial hoarding and controlling of information about nations that were colonised. Unequal access to archive material impacts the research that can be carried out by African and Western scholars and cements unfair power dynamics with regards to knowledge. It also leads to a distorted perspective of history that continues to be written by Westerners and Western-educated people.

Scholars that draw from decolonial ideas attempt to make sense of inequalities in research and the relationships between Western researchers and indigenous communities. They provide critical approaches to methodologies and suggest insightful ways to decolonise research.

Decolonial theory emerged in the 2000s. Peruvian scholar, Anibal Quijano, coined the term "coloniality of power" in 2000. He referred to the ways that notions of superiority through conquest became linked to biology and race and people in the colonies were categorised and stripped of humanity. European knowledge and ways of understanding the world were regarded as the only valid knowledge and Europeans positioned themselves as

more advanced and superior than the people they had subjugated.[114] Maria Lugones used Quijano's concept to evolve her own theory about the 'coloniality of gender'.[115] She highlights that gender is just as essential to colonial power as race and claims that gender hierarchies were also used as a tool of domination. As females were categorised into "women", they were "subordinated to men in all situations" and made "ineligible for leadership roles".[116] Lugones's work evidently resonates with histories of gender and colonialism in the Congo.

In the years since Lugones's publication, a number of insightful and important articles have been produced which evolve her concept into other related areas. One such piece includes, 'Decolonizing Sexual Violence: Professional Indigenous Women Shape the Research'. This work places the voices of indigenous women at the centre for understanding "the dynamics surrounding speaking out and seeking justice for survivors of sexual assault". Roe Bubar argues that to understand what is valuable and useful for communities, "representation and participation in research" is essential. This is achieved through indigenous people being involved in "interpreting findings". In this way, indigenous methodologies displace subject/object relations between the researcher and the researched and, according to Bubar, complicate "issues of power, power relations, privilege, and oppression, which can give power back to participants" and the communities involved.[117] Regarding the SGBV that has occurred in the Congo, methodologies such as these could be useful in transforming representations of life in Congo, counter negative framings of Africa

[114] Anibal Quijano, (2000). "Coloniality of Power and Eurocentrism in Latin America." *International Sociology*, Vol 15, No. 2: pp. 215–232.
[115] Maria Lugones, (Spring, 2008). "The Coloniality of Gender." *World & Knowledge Otherwise,* Vol. 2*:* pp. 1-17 See also, Lugones, M (2010). "Toward a Decolonial Feminism." *Hypatia: A Journal of Feminist Philosophy,* Vol. 25, No. 4: pp. 742-759
[116] Ibid, pg 8
[117] Roe Bubar (2013). "Decolonizing Sexual Violence: Professional Indigenous Women Shape the Research." *International Review of Qualitative Research,* Vol. 6, No. 4: pp. 526-543, pg 532-533

and Africans and highlight issues that are important to the community. Critical work of this kind led me to consider wider scholarship on representations of African women in the colonial and post-colonial periods. It provided an awareness of how some of these ideas have persisted into contemporary research in fields of slavery studies and areas concerned with 'development' and SGBV in Africa.

Other authors, including Nompumelelo Motlafi, Azille Coetzee and Louise du Toit have also drawn from Lugones ideas in their work. Motlafi has written about the 'coloniality of the gaze on sexual violence' and indicates another reason why indigenous methodologies should be incorporated into research. Focusing on South Africa she writes that to "speak of a colonial gaze is to consider how the position or location of the gazer affects how the gazer looks at the subject or object he/she sets his/her sights on, and what the gazer sees in the process".[118] She describes how,

The Western-centered academy (on which most universities are modelled) requires that the scholar be able to demonstrate a mastery of his/ her area of study. There is congruence between the mastery of the area of study and knowledge of the people being studied on one hand, and the mastery of the people themselves on the other hand. Thus, at the basic level, the colonial scholarly gaze is a downward-looking gaze.[119]

Coetzee and du Toit suggest that, particularly in South Africa, the issue of sexual violence is part of colonial legacies.[120] Studies that incorporate decolonial ideas into studies

[118] Nompumelelo Motlafi (2018). "The coloniality of the gaze on sexual violence: a stalled attempt at a South Africa - Rwanda dialogue?" *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, Vol. 20, No. 1: pp. 9-23. Pg 12
[119] Ibid, pg 12
[120] Azille Coetzee and Louise du Toit (2018). "Facing the sexual demon of colonial power: Decolonising sexual violence in South Africa." *European Journal of Women's Studies*, Vol. 25, No. 2: pp. 214-227. Pg 219-220

of gender and gender violence are beneficial, not only to research into contemporary gender relations, but also to historical studies such as my own.

The Eurocentricity of feminist frameworks has informed research into the lives of African women. This is particularly relevant to contemporary studies into SGBV in the DRC. The near pathological international focus on wartime sexual violence in Eastern Congo has been heavily criticised. It has reinforced "dark continent" imagery of the Congo and resulted in a channelling of donor funds for this issue alone; other major concerns affecting people's lives being neglected.[121]

The period of the 1970s-1980s produced resistance to imperial framings of Africans, African diasporas and black people. Writers such as Beoku-Betts sought to interrogate the origins of Western ideas about African women.[122] She highlights how European concepts of femininity were imported to an African context and influenced how white travellers, missionaries and colonialists perceived the position of women on the continent. African women were regarded as having a lower status to women in other parts of the world and were considered as enslaved in marriage. Beoku-Betts examines the institutions that most repelled Westerners (polygamy and bridewealth) and exposes how little effort was put into understanding how Africans themselves perceived such practices. She highlights how the sexuality of African women became an enduring obsession for Westerners; a point that cannot be dismissed when examining the large amount of literature and media coverage on wartime sexual violence and women in contemporary Congo.[123]

[121] Limited health care and fragmented legal systems, lack of education and employment opportunities are issues on their own but they also exacerbate the after-effects and trauma of being violently assaulted.
[122] Beoku-Betts, "Contested Representations", pg 22
[123] Ibid, pg 24

Many authors have resisted the ways that African women have been portrayed, in both colonial and post-colonial situations, as well as analysed how white women have transposed their own struggles to an African context. In 'Under Western Eyes', Chandra Talpade Mohanty highlighted the categorisation of the "Third World Woman" in certain feminist writing. She uses the term 'Western feminism' not as a way to generalise many different strands of feminist thought, but as a way to refer to scholars who assume "Others as non-Western and hence themselves as (implicitly) Western."[124] Mohanty argues that in some of these feminist texts women identified as 'non-Western' are portrayed as being subject to the ""Third World Difference": that stable, ahistorical something that apparently oppresses most if not all the women in these countries."[125] Such an idea inspired paternalistic approaches to women in these parts of the world. She stated that the "homogenization" of women's "oppression" in "third world" countries exposed the power being instrumentalised in feminist discourses and insisted it be challenged.[126] Mohanty argued for historical analysis and "specificity", rather than an assumption that the same forms of oppression affected all women. In the case of women in ex-colonies, racism and imperialism were intrinsically linked to their struggles. Without a recognition of this, any notion of trans-national sisterhood was impossible.

Other writers who contested Western representations of black and African women include Hazel V. Carby, who wrote an article in 1982 called 'White Woman Listen! Black

[124] Chandra Talpade Mohanty (Spring- Autumn 1984). "Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses." *boundary 2,* Vol. 12, No. 3, On Humanism and the University I: The Discourse of Humanism: pp. 333-358. Pg 334-335

[125] Ibid, pg 335

[126] Ibid, pg 335, 352

Feminism and the Boundaries of Sisterhood'.[127] She charged the women's liberation movement with alienating black women by not acknowledging their "lives, experiences and herstories".[128] For example, she highlights that while the Family is viewed as a site of oppression for white women, for black women it has also been a space of refuge and "political and cultural resistance" to systems of racism.[129] Like Mohanty, she reiterates how the,

…anonymity and the tendency to generalize into meaninglessness the oppression of an amorphous category called "Third World women" are symptomatic of the ways in which the specificity of our experiences and oppression are subsumed under inapplicable concepts and theories.[130]

Thanks to this work, I had a better understanding of damaging representations so that in my own research I could avoid repeating and reinforcing them. Motlafi's theory of the 'coloniality of the gaze on sexual violence' added a further layer to my responsibility as a researcher and the importance of historicising forms of sexual violence in Africa. As a white researcher examining colonial histories in Africa and of Africa it was crucial for me to interrogate my own biases throughout the research process, especially because I was largely analysing sources and records produced by imperialists.

1.7: Chapter overviews

[127] Hazel V. Carby. "White Woman Listen! Black Feminism and the Boundaries of Sisterhood." In *The Empire Strikes Back, Race and Racism in 70s Britain,* Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (Race and Politics Group). (London: Hutchinson: 1982)
[128] Ibid, pg 112
[129] Ibid, pg 112
[130] Ibid, 117-118

Thesis chapters are organised chronologically, beginning with crucial debates and themes that emerged during the Congo reform movement. Chapter Two provides background on the campaign as it evolved in the United Kingdom. I chose to work largely on activism in the UK because it was the hub and centre of a growing movement with important connections in both Belgium and the United States. This chapter explores the ways that public pressure was applied to the colonial state to reform its practices. Activists (including missionaries) used the British media to shape the narrative about Congo, eventually making it very difficult for people to speak in support of Leopold's rule. It also examines the role of white women on both sides of the debate and considers how the campaign for women's suffrage in Britain impacted the ways that Congolese women were represented in the campaign. The men of the Congo Reform Association were supported by different white women who had an important impact on the movement. However, the largely male leadership of the CRA may have affected its aims and main concerns. SGBV against women in Congo Free State was not given special attention. It was not something that could be publicly discussed in Victorian society with as much ease as forced labour and was therefore subsumed in these discussions. These erasures of colonial brutality had consequences not only for the ongoing existence of unchallenged sexual imperialism and exploitation but also for Western representations of Congolese gender relations and the position of Congolese women.

Chapter Three describes a story of colonial SGBV committed against the inhabitants of Lulua villages in Kasai. The decision to focus on this case related to the volume of records it had produced. I was interested to understand why this event had caused so much colonial anxiety and furore. It argues that colonial condemnation of indigenous practices, including domestic slavery and early marriage, was steeped in hypocrisy when very similar realities were being produced in the colonial system. Gender violence benefitted the colonial state in

raids that terrorised Congolese communities into compliance. Protestant missionaries, such as William Morrison, held the state and importantly, *white men*, responsible for violence and exposed the spuriousness of colonial discourses that attempted to distance colonial activities from abuse and destruction. The story undermined discourses of civilised control and white superiority over Africans. The colonial system was enabling marital/sexual relations, some forced, between young Congolese girls and colonial soldiers. In response to Morrison's complaints, Belgian officials attempted to control and project a story about the event that focused on the disobedience of a chief rather than colonial sexual abuse and terror. The irony is that these events occurred against a backdrop of discussions about implementing "reform" in Congo after its transferral to the Belgian state. Again, these debates made no clear statements about altering the treatment of women.

Chapter Four moves on to expose cases where European men were accused of committing sexual violence against young Congolese girls. Highlighting these examples of sexual exploitation leads to questions about colonial assumptions about SGBV in Congo and the identities of perpetrators. Despite making claims about protecting Congolese women and girls, colonial authorities were more inclined to take action if the alleged offenders were African. This chapter draws attention to the inconsistencies of the colonial judicial system and its propensity to be more concerned about the reputation of Belgium than applying any notion of justice, recompense to victims or punishment against white abusers.

Chapter Five focuses on shifting colonial concerns as they evolved to focus more explicitly on slavery and trafficking in the late 1910s-1920s. Changes in colonial discussions were impacted by international debates emphasising slavery and its necessary eradication. Imperial anxieties about trafficking and the movement of women were related to fears about

depopulation and a loss of colonial control. This chapter also focuses on colonial distinctions between 'voluntary' slaves and slaves that had been taken by force. These discourses reflected a prioritisation of certain cases of slavery for colonial intervention. I consider the identity, gender and experiences of slaves that may have been overlooked in the pursuit of the abolition of slavery. This chapter contributes evidence that exposes the ways that women's interests were side-lined when it did not suit the administration. Colonial officials wished to maintain good relations with powerful Congolese men who owned domestic slaves, while also appearing proactive and conscientious about ending slavery. The next chapter explores how this contradiction was achieved.

Chapter Six analyses Belgian reports and letters that were sent to and from officials across the colonial hierarchy and the LoN in the early 1920s. When the LoN requested that its member states provide information on slavery Belgium obliged. However, as with other countries, the information Belgium supplied attempted to portray its colony in the best light. It was enslaved men who were most visible and considered for emancipation. Women were present only as 'servile wives' in these framings. The colonial administration tried to legitimise its approach to domestic slavery by claiming that it was a "softer" form of slavery much closer to "serfdom". Through these narratives, the experiences of women slaves were denied. The colonial separation between domestic slavery and trafficking were crucial to supporting the Belgian argument that domestic slavery required slower processes of abolition. These representations framed slow abolition as deliberate rather than the result of confused policies, different interpretations of slavery and colonial failures to completely control colonial populations. I also draw attention to the fact that while Congolese women were extremely visible in conversations about "trafficking" and "early marriage", they were discussed more discreetly in relation to colonial violence and European sexual assault.

Congolese “womanhood” was conceived and used to benefit colonial aims, to portray the government as protectors and to condemn the actions of Congolese men and indigenous social systems.

Chapter Seven expands the discussion beyond the imperial context and examines the increased discursive focus on “protecting native people” which emerged in the 1920s-1930s. Galvanised by new international legal systems, activist groups became concerned about improving the conditions of women and children in the colonies. However, ideas about protection and advancement were contextual to imperial ideology and in many ways reflected colonial ideas. During this period dominant attitudes about “domesticating” Congolese women prevailed. Europeans maintained and evolved their perspective about knowing what was best for Africans. In the process, the role of white women in the colony was expanded. Many middle-class European women were encouraged to travel to Congo and help teach Congolese women to be dutiful and obedient Christian housewives and mothers. Furthermore, white women’s presence in the colony was perceived to restrain any “immoral” behaviour by white men. This chapter examines the international role of Save the Children (SC), its perspectives and approach to women in Africa. I interrogate the viewpoints of two white women from different background who focused on the conditions of black women in Africa/Congo; one an imperialist and another a suffragette. I consider how their ideas clashed and overlapped.

Chapter Eight explores some concluding ideas.

1.8: Conclusion

These chapters come together to form a perspective of the changing colonial/activist debates about Congolese women and gender relations in Congo. The thesis demonstrates how sexuality and violence was used to subjugate colonised populations. I analyse the representations that ensue from different processes of colonial interests as they met with rapidly evolving structures of international scrutiny and law. This work exposes some of the erasures and distortions of colonial narratives that emphasised the ways that Congolese women suffered in marriage but distracted from colonial forms of SGBV. Even in the realm of activism, I did not find too much difference between early 20th century portrayals of the roles of Congolese women and those that emerged some thirty years later. The ideas of activists and NGOs outside the colonial establishment maintained an idea of women as passive victims requiring European intervention. Amina Mama notes that given the history of gender violence in Europe, it was "ironic that the Europeans,…had the audacity to pose as heroic protectors and uplifters of women when they arrived in the colonies".[131]

[131] Mama, "Sheroes and Villains", pg 48-49

CHAPTER 2: IMPERIAL CONSTRUCTIONS OF WOMEN IN AFRICA: WHITE WOMEN AND THE CONGO REFORM MOVEMENT

2.1: Introduction

This chapter examines early Western representations of Congolese women and gender relations that emerged in the international campaign for colonial reform in Leopold's Congo Free State (CFS). It explores the tumultuous years of 1900-1912, when activist/media agitation was the most prevalent. I reflect on the Congo Reform Association (CRA), its networks and media clashes with those who declared their support for CFS. The discourses examined in this chapter mark a point at which Leopold's endeavours had failed. Due to his failure to implement a system based on abolitionist logic, he was being cast aside by other imperial powers. What unfolds in these private and public discussions is an outrage at the forced labour of men in Congo, but how did women feature in these stories? How were Congolese women constructed through Western gender discourses and what was the role of white women in these processes?

The Congo became subsumed in debates on anti-slavery reform. The story begins here because it marks the point at which imperial ideas were making significant shifts towards ending types of colonial regimes like the CFS. Different strategies of actors/activists shaped notions of gender and sexuality in this period. Debates on reform were foregrounded in conversations about forced male labour; the experiences of Congolese women were only relevant to this context. Humanitarian activism disseminated stories about Congolese slavery and marriage that helped reinforce the need for ongoing colonialism. Certain white women became involved in conversations that focused on highlighting the plight of Congolese

women, but in the process, imposed Western understandings of gender relations and marriage on an African context. Some also considered themselves responsible for representing African women. I trace the ways in which these white women differed to one another, as well as how their ideas complemented and diverged from the views of imperial men. During the intense international focus on Congo, new power structures were carved out, space was made for other forms of white saviourism, and colonial ideas about Congolese social structures became crystalized. Some of the concepts and narratives produced at this time endured into the 21st century, particularly in relation to the lives of Congolese women, 'development' in Africa, and sexual violence. Hence, it is an important historical moment to commence a scholarly investigation.

2.2: The early years of the Congo reform movement: 'Improving' colonialism

From 1885-1908 the Congo territory was administered by Belgian King Leopold II's colonial apparatus. By the early 1900s the CFS was being exposed internationally as a fraudulent colonial system. Accusations against Leopold's colony had been emerging since 1890, but it was the CRA's campaign that brought these issues to the front of the British Press. The Secretary of the CRA, Edmund Dene Morel, had worked as a clerk for the Liverpool shipping company, Elder Dempster, in the 1890s.[132] During his employment there he had become aware of what he called the "true character of the Congo Free State Govt."[133] Elder Dempster were shipping large quantities of arms to Congo in return for rubber and ivory. This made

[132] Bernard Porter. *Critics of Empire: British Radical attitudes to colonialism in Africa, 1895-1914.* (Long: St. Martin's Press: 1968), pg 254-255, 260

[133] Morel, *MS. History,* p. 5; E.D.M.P., H. Morel's work "History of the Congo Reform Movement" (possibly 1912) in Box H. In Morel's papers in the British Library of Political and Economic Science at the London School of Economics (L.S.E.)

Morel suspicious that the Congolese were receiving no real goods in exchange for their exports. He was correct; only Leopold and concessionary companies were financially gaining from this system.[134]

Morel was an imperialist, but he took issue with concessionary companies monopolising trade in Congo. As Bernard Porter states, for Morel the "root cause of evil, therefore, was the system which robbed the African of his land and forbade him to trade on his own account either with other Congolese or with the outside world".[135] Morel considered free trade, "based upon the recognition" of African people's "right to ownership of all the land and its produce", as fundamental to the paternal imperial project.[136] His focus was on reforming the economics of colonialism, not ending it.

The influences of famous writer, Mary Kingsley, and the leader of the Liverpool merchants, John Holt, helped inspire Morel to imagine new forms of colonial control. Kingsley died in 1900 but impacted a number of influential figures, Liberal politicians, traders and academics, including Charles Dilke, Alice Stopford Green, Alfred Emmott and Josiah Wedgwood. These people also opposed what Kingsley had regarded as the relentless pursuit of 'New Imperialism'; a form of colonial control that was characterised by the pursuit of profit over all else. It involved the forced labour and complete exploitation of lands and people through monopoly capitalism.[137] Kingsley supported free trade with colonial indirect rule and supported the idea of maintaining rather than eroding indigenous cultures and institutions. Holt represented the interests of Liverpool traders who required a system of free trading with

[134] Porter, *Critics of Empire*, pg 261
[135] Ibid, pg 262-263
[136] Ibid
[137] Ibid, pg 239-240

West Africans in order to flourish. The Liverpool merchants were adversely affected by business monopolies in the interior.[138] Together, Kingsley and Holt imagined a system of colonialism that would later be incorporated into mainstream colonial policy. Porter explains how this type of imperial management was conceived as 'Morelism' after Kingsley's death, when Holt and Morel worked closely in the years leading up to the reform movement and Morel added the importance of Congolese land ownership to the agenda.

2.3: Mary Kingsley: the limits of white feminism

The irony of Kingsley's life was that while she was alive her influence was circumscribed, but after her death her ideas became more popular as they were reconstructed and disseminated by men. Many of the listed figures were open about being inspired by Kingsley's ideas. Kingsley was an ethnographer and writer. She was one of the first white women to embark on travels across West Africa. Her respected position may have been a result of her ability to balance the expectations of certain gender roles while indirectly challenging others. She insisted on "ladies'" respectability and was unsupportive of the suffrage movement, but also engaged in activities far beyond the roles of women of her class. Kingsley was a more palatable figure than women who directly challenged gender inequality. Still, as Porter points out, when she was alive, she was also criticised for being "unwomanly" and had difficulty galvanising people to her cause.[139]

Kingsley confronted the status quo in many ways, but it is crucial to remember the ways that she also supported and was limited by it. She was a proud imperialist and expressed

[138] Ibid, pg 244-245
[139] Ibid, pg 250

her concern about the negative impacts of Africa on the well-being of white men. While she argued for a more "humane" form of colonialism, she also reproduced imperial discourses about an inherently dangerous Africa that justified colonial control. Kingsley and her peers worried about the effects of abolishing indigenous practices without providing alternatives, particularly when this resulted in the emergence of 'educated' black people.[140]

While some might argue that Kingsley's imperial intentions were less abrasive and violent than her contemporaries, she still maintained views about the inferiority of Africans.[141] Her imperial ambitions and ideologies cannot be separated from her career. Indeed, the perspective that she was a "brave" female "explorer", defying gender stereotypes is rooted in damaging framings of Africa.

The debate over Congo lasted years. Today, Leopold's colonial state is largely recognised as an abusive, inhumane system that killed millions, but at the time, there was struggle over the Congo narrative. In early 1904, on the promptings of Sir Roger Casement- an Irish nationalist who made his own inquiries into the Congo - Morel organised the CRA.[142]

Casement worked as a diplomat for the British Foreign Office.[143] He travelled to the Congo colony in 1903 for a period of 2-3 months and recorded witness statements from the Congolese. The report he produced painted a damning picture of CFS. Writing to fellow Irish contemporary, Alice Stopford Green, he commented that events in Congo belied "a tyranny beyond conception save only, perhaps, to an Irish mind alive to the horrors once daily enacted

[140] Ibid, pg 241-242
[141] J. E. Flint (1963). "Mary Kingsley- A Reassessment." *The Journal of African History,* Vol. 4, No. 1: pp. 95-104. Pg 99
[142] Porter, *Critics of Empire*, pg 267
[143] Ibid.

in this land".[144] He recorded stories of forced rubber collection through murder, abduction, imprisonment and mutilation. These were punishments enacted by the Congolese colonial military forces and the white officials who led them. The report was published in summary in February 1904 and sent to the signatories of the Berlin Act (1885).[145] Interestingly, his full account was not released until 1985. In the early 1900s, his investigation fuelled conversations across Europe. It is important to understand how these discourses evolved to find out where stories about women emerged and were instrumentalised.

2.4: The Congo debate: 'apologists' and 'reformists'

Britain was the centre of abolitionist fervour and the Congo reform movement was largely shaped there. Conversations about CFS became polarised. Media narratives constructed two groups to represent the perspectives of people debating Congo; 'defenders/apologists' and 'reformists'. The first group supported CFS and the other argued for its administrative handover to the Belgian government or another imperial power. Investigating the debates and agendas enables a clearer view of media simplifications, as well as the successful strategies of reform activists.

From 1903 onwards Congo coverage angled towards the sensational, increasing public pressure and scrutiny of Leopold's administration. Many individuals and organisations had been galvanised by the Protestant missionaries Reverend John Harris and Alice Seeley Harris. The couple were strong advocates of reform. They had been sent to work at the Balolo-Congo

[144] Ibid. Follow Porter's reference on pg 267. "Casement to Alice Stopford Green, 24/4/1904, in A.S.G.P., N.L.I., MS. 10464"

[145] The Berlin Act of 1885 was the result of meetings between representatives of various European countries. These representatives marked out territories across Africa and decided which European countries would be designated specific areas for colonisation (described as the Scramble for Africa).

Mission in 1898. Alice took many photographs while stationed there. Some of these images depicted abused Congolese people. The Harris's displayed their photos at public meetings across Britain.[146] They hoped to pressure organisations and the British Government to help end the brutal treatment of the Congolese by Leopold's colonial regime. Their strategy had impact. Different economic, political and religious agendas converged to form the beginnings of a reformist movement against Congo's administration.

"In Defence of Congo Free State": a colonial system no worse than others

Some public figures were adamant in their defence of CFS, implying that British activism was related to British envy of Leopold's colony, as opposed to humanitarian interests.

In June 1903, The Times published an article about Mr. Alphonse-Jules Wauters. Wauters specialised in the History of Art and was the Secretary of the Brussels Geographical Society. He created *Le Mouvement Geographique,* a Belgian mouthpiece for colonialism. He wrote about Congo complaints by the British media and members of parliament. Wauters argued that "colonization has always been accompanied by a greater or lesser number of individual excesses, which being for the most part grossly exaggerated, bring into disrepute all that has been accomplished in the right direction".[147] He pointed out that other imperial powers had the same issues and asked why the English had not raised their indignation in the years prior to Congo's rubber industry becoming "prosperous". Wauters responded to accusations that the CFS did not adequately punished colonial agents/soldiers committing

[146] T. Jack Thompson (2002). "Light on the Dark Continent: The Photography of Alice Seeley Harris and the Congo Atrocities of the Early Twentieth Century." *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*. Via <http://www.internationalbulletin.org/issues/2002-04/2002-04-146-thompson.pdf>

[147] "The Congo Free State. (From our Correspondent) Brussels, June 2." In The Times, 4th June, 1903. MOREL F15/1/5

"excesses". From his perspective, "in many instances the sentences have exceeded in severity what might have been expected from magistrates dealing with those of their own race in a country peopled by savages."[148] Wauters had lower expectations for standards of justice in Congo, *because* of his sense of superiority to Africans. He drew attention to a discourse in defence of Belgium; one that insisted that Leopold's administration was no worse than others.

The idea that CFS was not dissimilar to other colonies in Africa was frequently invoked by the Congo administration to shield itself from allegations. The Times published its defence. The CFS stated that "the Government of the Free State has never denied that crimes or illegal acts have been committed, as has been the case in every other country or colony".[149] However, according to the State, these abuses had been addressed adequately through tribunals and punishment.

In reference to the many criticisms about practices of forced labour, the administration asked:

Upon what legitimate grounds can the native be exempted from all taxes, when he is the first to benefit by the material and moral advantages introduced into his country? In the absence of payment in money he is asked to contribute in manual labour….Taxes are obligatory in all countries: to refuse payment involves the use of force.[150]

The CFS had been accused of forcibly recruiting men for the military. The State described the recruitment of men as "voluntary engagement" because it was organised between local commissaries and the chiefs in their areas. According to the administration, the

[148] Ibid
[149] "The Congo Free State: Reply to the British Note" by their Correspondent in The Times, 12th October 1903. MOREL F15/1/5. The following quotes are from the same article
[150] Ibid

lives of the Congolese had improved through colonialism; excessive porterage and the sentry system had ended, and schools and training programs had "multiplied". The administration argued that the Congo system did not contradict the original aims of the Berlin Act, as had been claimed. "Commercial freedom" still existed. It asserted that the Congolese were punished when found to be trading in *stolen* goods, because "never to the knowledge of the Administration" had the "demands for purchasing natural products been addressed to the legal proprietors" (i.e. the government and monopoly companies).[151] The idea that the land and resources did not belong to Africans was normalised. The article suggested there was a lack of evidence to substantiate allegations made by British campaigners against the CFS. It implied that the British were complaining about the Congo system in order to undermine a successful colonial endeavour that was not theirs, perhaps with the intention to annexe Congo themselves.[152]

Different backgrounds, comparable conclusions: British defenders of the Congo Free State

The Belgians were not the only ones who implied that British discussions about CFS were unfair and hypocritical. Prominent British actors, such as Alfred Jones and Harry H. Johnston also among those who suggested that the Congo was not exceptional in its practices.

Alfred Jones was a businessman, ship-owner and leading figure at Elder Dempster. He hoped to monopolise West African shipping. Reformists like Morel and Alfred Emmott

[151] Ibid
[152] Ibid, The Congo administration stated that "The "anti-Congo campaign" coincides with the era of commercial expansion of the Free State, of which the exports have increased from 10,000,000f. in 1895 to 50,000,000f. in 1902".

regarded him as a man without principles.[153] Emmott described Jones as someone "whose patriotism allows him to sail his ships under any foreign flag which suits his pocket for the moment".[154] Jones became the Liverpool Consul for CFS and wrote to the newspapers about a letter he had received from a Captain A. Flemyng of the ship, Nigeria.[155] In his correspondence, Flemyng had described the treatment of the Congolese by the colonial state to be "fair and just".[156] Jones also referred to the "severe" punishment meted out to people charged with committing abuses. His comments, as well as those of Wauters and the Congo administration, raise certain questions about who the CFS viewed as "perpetrators" of abuse and what consequences they met. Were they Congolese soldiers or white agents? This question becomes particularly relevant in Chapters Three- Four. What types of behaviour was regarded as 'abusive' or a deviation on the part of colonial officials/armies from legitimate colonial action? These are salient considerations because certain colonial officials who were alleged to have carried out atrocities claimed that they were following the instructions of superiors.[157]

[153] Alfred Emmott was a Liberal Party MP and supported on the CRA. He and his wife, Gertie Emmott, were in frequent correspondence with Morel during the Congo Reform movement.

[154] Letter from Alfred Emmott to Morel, dated 26th June 1904. MOREL F8/54

[155] This ship belonged to Compagnie Belge Maritime du Congo

[156] Letter sent to Sir Alfred Jones, Consul at Liverpool for Congo Free State from Captain A. Flemyng, of the steamer Nigeria (belonging to Compagnie Belge Maritime du Congo). Published in the Times? Dated 18th April 1903. MOREL F15/1/5

[157] In MOREL/F15/1/5 there are articles in the Standard and Morning Post that hint at the complicity of superior officers being complicit in atrocities. In the Standard ("British Subjects in the Congo State", May 19th- no year stated), a Lagos National and British subject, Silvanos Jones, was reported as having been condemned to ten years "penal servitude" in the Congo Free State. Questions were raised about his lack of defence and it was highlighted that Jones had claimed to be acting on orders. The article quotes Lord Percy representing the British Government stating that: "While this judgement of the Court corroborates the justice of the complaints made by his Majesty's Government against the system of administration prevailing in the Congo State, we dissent strongly from the view that the conduct or approval of superiors can be pleaded in excuse for murders committed by their agents." In another case reported in the Morning Post ("The Congo State. Revelations Before the Courts. Story of Atrocities. Complicity of the State", 6th May 1904), a Belgian man called Phillippe Francois Charles Caudron was condemned for twenty years of jail time for, in October 1902, ordering his workers to shoot villagers in Liboke (post of Akula in the Melo region). Caudron was the local head trading commissioner of the Societe Anversoise du Commerce au Congo. He also ordered the shooting of villagers in the Banza area in early

Another British man from a very different background involved himself in the debate; Sir Harry Hamilton Johnston. In September 1903, Johnston wrote his "Case for the King of the Belgians".[158] He was interested in African languages, cultures and wildlife. He wrote about his experiences travelling in Africa and produced ethnographies.[159] He was well respected for his experience and was made the first British Consul General and Commissioner in what the British called Nyasaland (now Malawi).[160] Johnston had been involved in demarcating Africa's borders. He had travelled with Sir Henry Stanley, stating that he had the "highest admiration" for him.[161]

Johnston wrote to The Chronicle about his experiences travelling around Congo for eight months in 1882-1883 (during which time he met Stanley). He stated that he had felt "warm friendship and esteem" for the Belgian agents. From his perspective, Leopold was acquiring a "magnificent tropical possession" for his country. Johnston explained that while people in Katanga were not eager for any form of European rule, he had "never received any complaints

1903. Both instances were attempts to intimidate and force people to collect more rubber. Cauldron insisted that he had been authorised by his superiors in both cases. Such authorisations came from policeman at the station in Binga; M. Nagaut and M. Jamart.

[158] "The Congo Free State: The Case for the King of the Belgians", by Sir Harry H. Johnston, in the Daily Chronicle. September 1903. MOREL F15/1/5

[159] See for example, Harry H. Johnston. *The River Congo, from its Mouth to Bolobo*. (London: London Sampson Low, Marston Company: 1895); Harry H. Johnston. *A Comparative Study of the Bantu and Sem-Bantu Languages. Vol. 2.* (Oxford: Clarendon Press: 1922)

[160] Johnston later became a Consul General in Tunis, until he was offered the post of Special Commissioner in Uganda, which boasted the prospect of a much larger salary. Gordon H Pirie. "Johnston, Henry Harry (1858-1927)." In *Dictionary of Nineteenth Century British Scientists, vol 2,* edited by Lightman, B., 1088-1093. (Bristol: Thoemmes: 2004).

[161] Henry Morton Stanley was a British "explorer" of Africa, known especially for his travels across Congo in search of David Livingstone (a well-known missionary and ethnographer of the time). Stanley spent time travelling the country and acquiring "treaties" from African chiefs in the 1870s, which he declared promised land to the Europeans. He approached King Leopold with his documents after having failed to convince the British government to assume control of the areas that he had demarcated. Stanley became famed for his writings on Congo. He is also remembered as having been violent to Congolese porters and as having forced Congolese people to labour for him. Stanley referred to porters in his diary as "faithless, lying, thievish, indolent knaves, who only teach a man to despise himself for his folly in attempting a grand work with such miserable slaves". Adam Hochschild. *King Leopold's Ghost: A Story of Greed, Terror and Heroism in Colonial Africa* (London: Pan Books: 2006), pg 50

"The Congo Free State: The Case for the King of the Belgians", by Sir Harry H. Johnston (and for all the following quotes)

from natives or Europeans at that time which tended to show that the natives were ill-treated by the Belgians". Additionally, he employed Congolese people from different districts to accompany him on his journeys and neither had they made complaints against the State.

Johnston asserted that he had "seen too many misdeeds" of his "own countrymen in Africa to be very keen about denouncing other nations for similar faults", but admitted, however, that this did not excuse abuses of power in Congo. Johnston proposed that, "if one half of these charges can be substantiated an indictment should be drawn up against the administration of the Congo by the King of the Belgians which ought to bring that direct administration to an end".[162]

Johnston suggested that monopolies may have been the only avenue for Leopold to "provide funds necessary for the existence of the State". From his perspective, the solution was to hand the colony over to the Belgian government to manage if finances were too low.

At this point, Johnston was clearly reluctant to completely condemn a colonial state whose practices he viewed as not so different to those used in British colonies. Perhaps he was cautious not to encourage too much criticism of Congo for fear that it would it backfire and invite the same scrutiny of British-held Africa. What is revealing is that, while Johnston was careful to criticise the CFS's internal systems, he was less reserved about highlighting his disapproval over Leopold's land-grabbing in the Nile basin. Here, Leopold's ambitions clashed with British interests. According to Johnston: "It must be admitted that in this direction the King of the Belgians has shown sharp practice and an unfriendly attitude towards England".[163] His priorities exposed themselves. Johnston's public statements about Congo, however,

[162] Ibid
[163] Ibid

shifted as Casement's report was made known and political pressure mounted against CFS. It became politically less tenable to ally oneself with Leopold's rule.

State-sanctioned violence: were atrocities symptomatic of the 'New Imperialist' colonial system?

Other historical evidence suggests that atrocities were not simply an unfortunate side-effect of individuals abusing their colonial positions and power, but part of a systematic process of punishment and dehumanization that was required to make the indigenous population compliant and subservient to colonial occupiers.

Although Casement's report was published in early 1904, by late 1903 the tone of his work was known, and questions were being raised about how he had conducted his investigation. That December, John Henderson wrote an article in Today urging the public to take a "fair view" of the situation.[164] From Henderson's experience in the Congo, anyone that committed cruel acts were "severely punished". He claimed that the colony's "industrial and commercial development" was something that Leopold could be proud of. For Henderson, the colony's success overrode any negative impact on Congolese people; its economic growth and prosperity was the main concern. He was quick to deny that he was an "apologist" of CFS, but that he required "strong evidence" to make him think that intervention was necessary.[165]

[164] "A Topic of To-day: The Congo Free State and Mr. Consul Casement's Report", by John Henderson, in Today, 16th December 1903. MOREL F15/1/5 (and for the following quotes)
[165] Ibid

Henderson was far from an impartial observer and had been sent by Alfred Jones to investigate claims against the colonial state.[166]

On the other hand, as a strong advocate of imperial reform, Morel sought to end practices in Central Africa that were a "disgrace and danger to European prestige".[167] He considered the economic structures of Congo to be the main problem and urged a focus on that. He warned,

It is the system which must be understood, exposed, and rendered clear to the average man, because its existence threatens every legitimate European interest in Africa; because it is, politically, suicidal to permit it to continue; because it involves, necessitates, and renders inevitable and endemic terrible oppression upon the natives.[168]

The order of Morel's priorities lists the negative impact on Congolese people last. This may or may not have been a political strategy to appeal to the interests of colonialists. Morel argued that the reputation of white people and colonial control was threatened by Leopold's regime. Playing on people's fears, he expressed concern about the possibility of an "African mutiny" among the Bantu. Morel and his team relied on a variety of tactics to attract attention to their campaign. They attempted to shock, shame and scare the public and various people in the British Government as well as those involved with the Congo.

[166] P.N. Davies. *The Trade Makers: Elder Dempster in West Africa 1852-1972.* (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd.: 1970), pg 143

[167] "Congo Maladministration", by E.D. Morel in The Morning Post (published as a letter to the editor), 31st March 1904. MOREL F15/1/5.

[168] "The Root of the Congo Evil: Present Atrocities and Future Perils" by E.D. Morel in The Daily News (published as a letter to the editor), 26th March 1903. MOREL F15/1/5 (and for the following quotes)

Morel was not convinced that the Congo consisted of a few badly-behaved colonial agents. He insisted that atrocities were being carried out in the name of the state and were orchestrated by officials much higher in the administration.

In the aftermath of Casement's statements about the Congo, Johnston wrote another article to The Times. The tone of this piece was different, although he maintained that, "Belgium as a country deserves an opportunity of showing what she can do in the education of backward peoples and the development of unworked lands".[169] Johnston sought to explain his previous comments. He stated that the possible reason why he, and others, had been able to "give a good report of the eastern borderlands of the Congo Free State" was because concessionary companies had not yet taken de-facto administrative control of parts of the colony that he had seen. At that time they were being "conscientiously administered by Belgian and Swedish officials of the Free State carefully chosen for their good qualities.."[170]

Johnston admitted that his knowledge of Congo was limited to specific regions and outdated. He blamed the concessionary companies for abuses being committed in North Congo. The reason for his change of tact and clearer alignment with the views of Morel was conveyed as thus; he respected Casement and his skills as an "impartial investigator".[171] Johnston may have also been influenced by the fact that Casement's evidence was shifting the mainstream debate in favour of reformism. For Johnston it was imperative that an "international commission" make its own investigation of the Congo system and the Belgian Government take control of the colony.

[169] "The Congo Free State", by H.H. Johnston in The Times (unclear on the date). MOREL F15/1/5 (and for the following quotes)
[170] Ibid
[171] Ibid

Fair treatment under colonial rule

Recognisably, ideas about just treatment were applied very differently to the activities of white people than to the Congolese. Through their contribution to the debate, some defenders of the CFS exposed how these concepts masked types of colonial treatment that were being highlighted as abhorrent by members of the CRA.

Regardless of the small changes expressed in the opinions of people like Johnston, other testimonies insisted that Congolese people were well-treated. Standards of colonial 'good treatment' were different when applied to people who were viewed as inferior. An article in the Anglo-African Argus and Gold Coast Globe described the perspectives of traders in the Congo who witnessed the "Methods of the Judicial Administration".[172] It described the statements of Captain Thorston Larson, a Swede who had worked in Congo for over six years. According to him, Congolese people had to be "dealt with with a very firm hand". Reportedly, Congolese people were "scarcely even respectful, and often actually provocative." The article goes further to point out that Larson, "considers that the Black is treated far too well in the Congo State".[173] Larson claimed never to have witnessed any abusive behaviour of colonial agents. In his view, white colonialists practiced moral restraint when dealing with a recalcitrant indigenous population that needed more discipline.

[172] "The Congo State. Some Interesting Experiences. First-Hand Testimony as to Methods of the Judicial Administration. Twenty-Two Years Trading in the Territory. Remarkable Accounts. Special Interviews; and a Chat with M. Seve" in The Anglo-African Argus and Gold Coast Globe, 14th May 1904. MOREL F15/1/5 (and for the following quotes). Additionally, it explained how Tribunal Territorial courts existed in every district. In Boma, there was also a Tribunal of First Instance, which was an appeals court. At this court there were three judges, as State Procureur and a Director of Justice.

[173] Ibid

Reinforcing the idea that cruelty did not exist in Congo and that witnesses were either unreliable or liars, the article drew upon the perspective of German Robert Visser, who had worked in Congo for 22 years. He compared Leopold's system favourably against Arab slave traders who had, in previous decades, committed "barbarities of the worst possible description" against the Congolese. Leopold's CFS was a "splendid example" of colonial rule. The article described Visser's perspective as the following:

As regards cruelties, he said that the native soldiers have to be allowed to get a bit of their own way or the lives of their officers and other Europeans would quickly be in danger. A man, to live in Africa, must, as he graphically termed it, play a very strong hand. Moral, and, if necessary, physical measures are required. If a native should do wrong and is not punished he will never be of any more use to a European; and it is only by giving punishment, perhaps sometimes more than would appear on the face of it absolutely necessary, that the native can be made to learn that the white man is his superior.[174]

It seems possible that much of what Larson and Visser normalised as reasonable and "firm" treatment of Congolese people was exactly what was being identified and confronted as inhumane by reformists. Larson and Visser's sense of superiority to Africans impacted what they regarded as appropriate punishment for Congolese rebels. What is implied is that by virtue of their race, the Congolese could be, and ought to be, treated more harshly. If these were standard colonial perspectives, it would support the arguments of Morel, Casement and others that colonial violence was only part of a bigger system. For some brief context, it is important to reflect on some of the Belgian discourses that were prevalent in the media and politics at the time.

[174] Ibid

While the public conversation about Congo was framed in terms of reformism and apologists in Britain, in Belgium those criticising CFS were described as "Anti-Congolese". British politicians and activists who highlighted abuses were portrayed as an imperial threat. An article in People, published in October, 1904, made accusations against British forces in Africa.[175] The Belgian author of the piece, Dalziel, wrote about the "constant disputes" between CFS and the British.[176] He described the latest "despatches" that he had received from the Congo on these affairs:

The British are said to have made several attempts to take possession by force of certain territory to the south of Lake Albert, belonging to the Free State. So far, the vigilance of the Congo State has prevented them from securing a firm footing in the coveted territory, but according to the latest mail the ultimate success of the British is only a question of time.[177]

This article frames the "reformist" stance as an *extension* of British colonial aggression, rather than something that could exist separately from (and indeed, as well as) British imperial agendas.

The King's commission of inquiry: a tool to absolve Leopold becomes the nail in his coffin

King Leopold's Commission of Inquiry was created to disprove the charges that had been made against CFS, but it became one of the key instruments for shifting debates in favour of reform and bringing an end to Leopold's rule of the colony.

[175] "British in the Congo, Critical Situation", by Dalziel (in Brussels) received "despatches" from the Congo. Published in People on 16th October 1904. MOREL F15/1/5
[176] Ibid
[177] Ibid

In 1904, in response to the growing Congo reform movement, Mouvement Géographique, announced that a commission would be set up to investigate the alleged crimes of CFS.[178] The members of the Commission of Inquiry had been selected by King Leopold and included Baron Giacomo Nisco (Italian), Head Judge at Boma's Court of Appeal; M. Edmond Janssens (Belgian), the Attorney General of the Supreme Court In Brussels and Dr Edmund de Schumacker (Swiss), who was in charge of the justice department in the administrative area of Lausanne, Switzerland. In interviews these men claimed that they would be collecting testimonies from Congolese people, missionaries and traders. Congolese witnesses were to be protected from reprisals by officials against whom they gave evidence.[179] They were to be assisted by three other Belgians; Victor Denyn, Henri Gregoire, and Professor Dupont.[180]

Soon after news of the investigation was announced, it was accused of being a "mock enquiry".[181] One that would serve the purpose of upholding Congo's administrative practices and legitimising its judicial system. An article in the Critic drew attention to the viewpoint of the Secretary of the Aborigines' Protection Society (APS), Mr. Fox Bourne, who questioned the British Government on its support of a Commission made up of these members.[182] Fox-Bourne was eager to ensure that the British Government was represented in the enquiry, preferably by someone with knowledge in International and Congo law.

[178] Produced by the Brussels National Institute of Geography
[179] "The Congo Commission. Interview with the Members." In the Morning Advertiser. No date. No author. MOREL F15/1/5
[180] "Congo Commission of Inquiry. Interview with its Members." In The Daily News, 17th September, 1904. No author. MOREL F15/1/5
[181] "The Powers and the Congo". Article in The Critic. No author cited. September 3rd, 1904. MOREL F15/1/5
[182] The APS had already spent years trying to draw attention to the atrocities occurring in Congo Free State.

Fox-Bourne was particularly critical of the Commission's potential to be impartial. He did no favours for his argument by making incorrect assertions about the relationship of members of the Commission to King Leopold.[183] His point was to suggest that these members were not "independent" investigators. Fox-Bourne's statements were inaccurate, but it was true that the members were not separate from the Belgian colonial establishment. In the end, however, the shocking "revelations" of the Inquiry overshadowed this reality. One article positioned "England" as the arbitrator of justice, stating that "A strong moral as well as political obligation rests on her to see that civilised methods prevail in the whole administration".[184] This contextualises the heavy involvement of British activism in "reforming" Congo and the moral role that British campaigners gave themselves.

The Commission of Inquiry went on to confirm allegations made by Casement, the Harris's and many others about brutal practices in CFS. It collected evidence about the desecration of communities refusing to collect rubber, hostage-taking, rape and murder, forced cannibalism, and cutting off hands. The report was such that when a member of the administration committed suicide in March 1905 (Vice Governor-General Paul Costermans), it was blamed on the potential repercussions of the report's exposure. In an article written for The Telegraph: "Several of the Congo companies are now on tenterhooks dreading the revelations to be published in the report of the Commission".[185] Whether these suggestions were accurate or not, they certainly added to the sense of anxiety around the contents of the report, the publication of which was initially delayed. The Commission arrived in Boma, Congo

[183] The Secretary of the Commission was barrister, M. Victor Denyn. According to one article in The World (published on 4th October 1904, MOREL F15/1/5) Fox Bourne had claimed that the Secretary of the Commission was "the brother of King Leopold's private secretary.". He later went on to suggest that the Secretary was actually "the son of King Leopold's private attorney, M. Henri Gregory by name".

[184] "England and the Congo" in The Lancashire Post, no author cited, 22nd September 1904. MOREL F15/1/5

[185] "The Congo Commission- Terrible Atrocities". In the Telegraph, 23rd March 1905. In the section "From Our Own Correspondent". MOREL F15/1/5

in early October 1904. They returned to Britain in February 1905 and the report was released in November 1905.[186]

Figures such as George Grenfell, a Baptist missionary, ethnographer and man with considerable reputation and influence, also began voicing concerns about the CFS. Grenfell's ideas echoed reformist discourses when he stated that he considered CFS's *system* destructive. He had many years' experience working in Congo and his shifting perspective heralded great news for reformists.[187] Grenfell's changing position counteracted the comments made by other admired figures, such as Emil Torday, who had publicly defended Congo officials against accusations of cruelty. Torday was an anthropologist who argued that CFS officials were doing the best they could without much pay. He asserted that atrocities were being committed by the *Congolese*. Those who criticised the actions of the CFS, such as Reverend William Morrison (discussed in more detail in the next chapter) were merely acting out personal grievance for being prevented from building Protestant missions in Kasai. Torday supported the word of Catholic missionaries who had reportedly witnessed no abuses against the Congolese. He also expressed his suspicion of the motivations of missionaries who claimed to have witnessed years of state violence without having raised the alarm previously.[188]

[186] Berber Bevernage (2018). "The Making of the Congo Question: truth telling, denial and 'colonial science' in King Leopold's commission of inquiry on the rubber atrocities in the Congo Free State (1904-1905)." *Rethinking History: The Journal of Theory and Practice,* Vol. 22, No. 2: pp. 203-238

[187] William T. Stead's letter to the Editor of the Morning Post. He points out that soon the Congo State would be left "without a single respectable advocate". Published on August 18th, 1905. MOREL /F15/1/5. See also the article in the Daily News, 2nd September "British Missionary Interviewed. "No Improvement"", pg 162 of MOREL/F15/1/5

[188] See Emil Torday's letter to the Editor of The Times, "The Congo Free State" (written August 20th, no year dated) pg 86 of MOREL/F15/1/5 and "A Congo Official's Testimony. Does not Like the Government. But Denies Outrages. A Plain Tale of Facts." In The Catholic Herald, Friday, 11th November, 1904. An Interview with Mr Torday. MOREL/F15/1/5

There were also prominent white women on both sides of the debate who used their femininity to gain influence. White women who travelled around Africa were represented as brave role-models for other women in Europe even when they allied themselves with colonial agendas that abused women in Congo. Western constructions of white women as independent "lady travellers" made them appealing to middle-class Euro-American women struggling to escape the patriarchal European household. Therefore, some of the women who opposed reform in Congo were still encouraged and sought out in humanitarian/activist networks.

White women contributed to the conversation on CFS in different capacities. They had diverse backgrounds, perspectives and aims, but their gender provided them with a justification to speak authoritatively about the conditions of Congolese women.

2.5: White women's constructions of Congolese women as enslaved victims

Clara Cahill Park and May French Sheldon both portrayed Congolese women as sufferers of gender oppression but provided different arguments about the cause of their misery. The solutions suggested by them to end the abuse of Congolese women, however, was rooted in the same source, the continued intervention in the lives of Congolese people by white people.

Clara Park appeals to her peers

Park belonged to the American wing of the CRA and wrote "Native Women in Africa. Their Hard Lot in the March of Progress" in late 1904.[189] She used Western constructions of femininity to appeal to American women to support the CRA's cause. At the same time, she made sure that men's sensibilities were unthreatened by her ideas:

I am not surprised that men, who are doubtless wiser than we in political matters, should push this document aside. A superior practical sense tells them, perhaps, how hopeless, in a world so preoccupied with other nearer, more immediate and more personal concerns, an appeal to right the wrongs of a helpless savage people is.[190]

She manoeuvred gender relations and drew on Victorian ideas of race and white womanhood to bolster her case. African women were her charitable project and responsibility.

But women are good at lost causes. Their insight is not obscured by too much knowledge. When the cry of suffering reaches them, they answer it. Their innocence of practical affairs permits them to do this. When to the logical mind of man there is nothing one can do, then the natural instinct of "telling mother" seems to return. We cannot see how hopeless it is, so it has to be done. Women have ever been the last resource of the helpless and the forsaken. That is their function. It is the great mother spirit that at the last refuses none of her children.[191]

At the time, Park's essay was regarded as humanitarian and progressive among reformists. She used her position to draw attention to injustices in the Congo through a lens

[189] "Native Women in Africa. Their Hard Lot in the March of Progress", by Clara Cahill Park, in the Boston Transcript. Published on Friday, 4th November 1904. MOREL F15/1/5 (and for all following quotes)
[190] Ibid
[191] Ibid

that focused on African women. She was writing for her American peers, white middle-class women; the ones who formed "clubs" and had the financial capacity to assist the "forsaken". Park reminded the reader of her respectability as a woman who accepted her subservient role. Nonetheless, Park considered a woman's "gift of sympathy" a strength that should be utilised. If colonial regimes were paternalist in attitude, the addition of white female *maternalism* could only add something beneficial to colonial dynamics and systems.

In Park's work she drew attention to Kingsley's perspective that "the position of women in the native African culture is much less undesirable than one has been led to believe". Kingsley described the ways that women in Africa were revered as mothers. In her writing, Park quoted Reverend John Leighton Wilson. Wilson had worked in West Africa and wrote a number of books in the mid-1800s. He was Secretary of the Presbyterian Foreign Missions and had also been quoted by Kingsley:

Whatever estimate we may form of the African, we may not doubt his love for his mother. Her name, whether dead or alive, is always on his lips and in his heart. She is the first being he thinks of when awakening from his slumbers, and the last he remembers when closing his eyes in sleep…[192]

The dehumanizing language about 'the African', formed part of an imperial stereotype that positioned Africans as different and as objects to be studied. His quote defines someone who is 'African' as male and refers to an ideal relationship between a mother and son, whereby a mother's love is irreplaceable. This idea of femininity matched Western concepts of womanhood linked with servitude and motherhood. Park used the quote to assume some maternal common ground between her white women readers and women in Congo. She drew

[192] Ibid

on this example to demonstrate the importance of women as stabilising figures in Congolese communities and contrasts them with the abusive treatment meted out by the CFS. Park quoted Mr. E. H. Glave (the British Chief of Station at Lukolela in Equateur Province), who wrote a pamphlet containing details of the suffering and indignities that black women had to endure during forced rubber collections:

"In stations in charge of white men, Government officers, one sees strings of poor, emaciated old women, some of them mere skeletons, working from two to six, tramping about in gangs with a rope around their necks".[193]

Glave painted an image that likened forced labour to chattel slavery. He went on to report that,

They are naked, except for a miserable patch of cloth in several parts, held in place by a string around the waist... They live in the guardhouse under the charge of black native sentries, who delight in slapping and ill using them. Some of the women have babies, but they go to work just the same.[194]

Part of women's ill-treatment consisted of rape and beatings, but Park may have refrained from highlighting that aspect of abuse for fear of alarming her readers, who were considered to have delicate sensibilities. Park noted how men ("perhaps also women") were focused on "the hurried march of civilization and progress blazing its bloody way through the heart of Africa". However, according to Park, because she and her fellow peers were women, they were able to understand the "private, personal way of looking at things, which sees in these wretched women,…in the hundreds of orphaned youngsters,…on their way down the

[193] Ibid
[194] Ibid

river, not the glorified march of civilization but only the living image of misery and despair".[195] Park claimed that the women taken hostage would sit and think of the infants that they had been forced to leave behind. By drawing on an idea of sacred motherhood, Park intended to portray the shared humanity between Congolese women and her white female audience.

Park chose to emphasise the plight of women and children in her campaign to get American women involved in the Congo reform movement. Congolese women were being forced to become the "wives" of soldiers and often murdered in front of their children. Park wrote about the "career of rapine and violence marked out as the duty of the young men of the native soldiery". These men were being removed from their homes and forced to work for the state acting as "taxgatherers and slave drivers". Park centred the colonial state as the main perpetrator of violence in Congo, because Congolese soldiers were committing abuses in the state's name and were also victims in her eyes.

Park used the narrow ideological confines of Western gender roles to argue for reform. The construction of her womanhood as "emotional" was utilised to imply that she had insight into the issue. Park did not consider the ways that white women were complicit in systems that abused Congolese women through dangerous reproductions of ideas about race. Middle-class white women's perspectives/solutions were viewed as safe and universally representative because they were controllable and assumed hierarchies that placed white men in positions of superiority.

Park disagreed with any destruction of indigenous social systems and cultures, but she infantilised Africans as "children in the family of nations" who required a softer guidance and approach. Euro-American women were therefore required to use their "tact" and "sympathy"

[195] Ibid

to “interpret their lives and make them intelligible to the world, and above all to protect them from the well-meant, but ruthless programs of “civilisation” and “progress””. Park was careful not to threaten imperial ideas too much. She still wanted to convince people to her cause and so remained within the boundaries of acceptability. Her words suggest that she envisioned a role for American women as the advocates and protectors of Congolese people, whose experiences she believed could only be understood and filtered to a wider audience by them. A kind of ‘maternalism’ would, therefore, complement ‘paternalism’ in imperial systems and help bring an end to colonial violence and forced labour. There was no place for Congolese people to contribute to discourses representing their own experiences.

Next, I examine the views of May French Sheldon, another American “lady explorer” who was sponsored by Alfred Jones to investigate alleged crimes in Congo. Sheldon argued for better conditions of Congolese women, but she positioned herself on the other side of the debate, claiming that it was not the State that was ill-treating them, but African men. For Sheldon, the administration was the only salvation for black women.

May French Sheldon: no cruelties existed in Congo Free State

Mary French Sheldon (largely known as May French Sheldon) was an author, traveller and member of the Royal Geographical Society. According to one interview, she “hated injustice… whether it was to the natives or as affecting the reputation of the governing white men”.[196] Sheldon had travelled for fourteen months through the Congo. She claimed that King Leopold had given her permission to go wherever she liked and that she strategized her travel so that

[196] “The Congo Free State. Interview with Mrs. French-Sheldon.” In The Standard. Published 19th November 1904. MOREL F15/1/5

"there might be no hiding of matters which officials might wish to conceal". One newspaper article stated that,

Mrs French-Sheldon spoke feelingly of the hardships of travel, of lonely journeys accompanied by natives only, of days of wading through water up to the waist in big swamp districts, of trips up rivers where no white woman had ever been before, and of absolutely continuous work practically without rest.[197]

An image of an exceptional woman, bravely travelling to unfamiliar and dangerous places is conveyed. The narrative presents her as someone who, despite her vulnerability, had such a strong sense of morality that she was willing to put herself at personal risk. The racism implicit in this statement draws upon transnational discourses that have historically focused on the sanctity of the white woman and her potential danger at the hands of black men.[198] The piece also draws on gender ideology, highlighting that it was considered unnatural and impressive for a woman to be engaging in endeavours traditionally associated with masculinity; "exploring" Africa and seeking moral justice.

Sheldon's verdict on Congo was that she had "seen worse deeds in the streets of London".[199] She reinforced "dark continent" ideas about Congo by claiming that superstitious beliefs caused Congolese people to commit abuses against one another.[200] Sheldon stated

[197] Ibid

[198] See Angela Y. Davis. *Women, Race and Class.* (New York: Random House: 1981). See chapter 11: "Rape, Racism and the Myth of the Black Rapist"; Angela Y. Davis (November/December 1981). "Rape, Racism and the Capitalist Setting." *The Black Scholar,* Vol. 12, No. 6, THE BEST OF THE BLACK SCHOLAR: The Black Woman: pp. 39-45; Jennifer Wriggins (1983). "Rape, Racism and the Law." *Harvard Women's Law Journal,* Vol. 6, No. 103, pg 102-141

[199] "The Congo Free State. Interview with Mrs. French-Sheldon." In The Standard

[200] "Dark Continent" mythology developed through the literature of white explorations of Africa in the 1850s. The "humanitarian" penetration of Africa had begun in earnest and triggered a flood of literature presenting Africa as the centre of "darkness". Explorers, missionaries, and authors employed the myth for their own purposes and to great effect. Africa was characterised as a place of mystery and barbarity. Africans were categorised as uneducated and "primitive". See Patrick Brantlinger (Autumn, 1985). "Victorians and Africans:

that she had travelled through rubber districts and tried making rubber herself, so that she could "gain a just idea of the work done by the natives".[201] She was impressed by the provision of free medical care, particularly in districts administered by private companies. The Standard wrote that "she added most emphatically that King Leopold did not in any way countenance any sort of cruelty to the natives". Sheldon also highlighted the most "suitable" areas for further "colonisation by white people".

Sheldon drew on Stanley's knowledge of Congo. Like Stanley, she had ambitious ideas for the expansion of imperial control. She was not convinced that the livelihoods of Congolese people were particularly hard in the rubber industry. Her views contrasted with those of Clara Park.

Sheldon did not see abuse or cruelties as a systematic issue in CFS. Why were there such diverging testimonies from the likes of Casement and Sheldon? It makes one question whether she had the same ideas of cruelty when it was enacted against the Congolese.[202] Sheldon's views of Africans were like those of Captain Larson and Robert Visser, the men discussed earlier who saw no atrocities either. Perhaps she also considered actions by the State as "firm" and necessary rather than abusive. Here, the distinction between "the African" and white people was clear. African people were perceived as different and therefore in need of harsh discipline to become "civilised". Any "uncivilised" behaviour of white agents as they imparted serious violence against Congolese communities was perceived as irrelevant. Her

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The Genealogy of the Myth of the Dark Continent." *Critical Inquiry,* Vol. 12, No. 1, "Race Writing and Difference: pp. 166-203

[201] The Standard, 19th November 1904 (and for the following quotes)

[202] This may have some connection to racist historical ideas about the pain threshold of black people being higher than that of white people. This narrative developed during the period of the Atlantic Slave Trade. For information on its more contemporary manifestations see, Hoffman, Kelly & Trawalter, Sophie & Axt, Jordan & Oliver, M. (April 2016). "Racial bias in pain assessment and treatment recommendations, and beliefs about biological differences between Blacks and Whites." *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences.* Vol. 113*,* No. 16: pp. 4296-4301

interview lends credence to the argument that her perspective was not uncommon among colonial milieus and that abuse was so normalised and systemic it had become an invisible issue in CFS.

After the Commission of Inquiry had sent back its first report in January 1905, Sheldon's perspective shifted.[203] The investigations carried out by that point had already confirmed the types of findings in Casement's report. Sheldon commented that, "The Congo Free State needs reconstruction. The enterprise in hand is too vast to be adequately discharged by any power that has not unlimited resources at its disposal".[204]

In the previous month, Sheldon had stated that there was space for "improvement" in Congo State.[205] However, according to her, agents had been helpful, and the Congolese generally treated with "kindness". Her version of Congo affairs gave a boost to the defenders of CFS, including the men of Elder Dempster Company, who suggested that her claims demonstrated how "groundless" the allegations against CFS were.[206]

Despite her previous comments about the ease of working in the rubber industry, in January, Sheldon made the following comments on the concessions:

I do not think it commends itself to the best men of the Administration. It introduces an element of conflict. The native cannot understand a Government that speaks with two voices, and that offers the spectacle of two different if not actually opposing principles of

[203] "II.- A Year on the Congo: Mrs. French Sheldon." In the Review of Reviews, January 1905. MOREL F15/1/5
[204] Ibid
[205] "Congo Free State. Mrs. Sheldon's Statement. King Leopold's Telegram" in the Morning Post, 19th December 1904. MOREL F15/1/5
[206] Ibid

administration. The system of free trade that prevails in the Kasai - the southern - province should be introduced in other regions.[207]

In the end, she stated, "I am for Reform. I am against Destruction". Her ideas for reform looked very different to those of Morel and others, but it is important to note that by this point, even she was adopting the CRA's language.

Sheldon on Congolese women: slaves of their husbands

When discussing potential options for the future Congo State, Sheldon voiced the opinion that she supported "introducing the male native to habits of industry". The interviewer commented that the "phrase" was often used as a "euphemism for slavery". In response to this, Sheldon stated, "Well,…the African women are slaves, bought and sold by the men, and made to do all the work. If the Administration treats the African man as the African man treats the woman, as a woman I don't complain. What is so good for the goose cannot be so bad for the gander". Sheldon framed Congolese women as the oppressed, enslaved victims of Congolese men, thus her comment justified the latter's treatment by the colonial state. According to Sheldon, the State was protecting black women. Her comments completely ignored claims that women also suffered at the hands of the State in violent raids, abductions, sexual abuse and forced labour.

Sheldon fully supported the idea of Africans being forced to work and pay for their introduction to European ideas of "civilisation". She denied any agency or rights of self-determination to Congolese people. She described "civilisation" as an uncontrollable force

[207] "II.- A Year on the Congo: Mrs. French Sheldon." (and for the following quotes)

and fateful inevitability for Africans, rather than a concept created under specific circumstances and utilised by white colonisers to justify occupation and economic expansion in Africa. She pointed out that other colonies, including those administered by the British, also had means of extracting money and labour from their exploited populations. Sheldon drew attention to the moral inconsistencies associated with campaigns that critiqued one form of colonialism while upholding others. Sheldon did not highlight this issue to suggest that all colonial systems be dismantled, but to discredit activists seeking changes to the Congo's status quo.

Sheldon wrote more about the conditions of Congolese women in an article for The Ladies Field later that month.[208] She displayed a sense of admiration for the skills, practices and dress of women from different communities across Congo, but also regarded them as deeply oppressed.

She wrote,

There is much said in many quarters against the forced labour of the black man, and on the plea of humanity much is astir regarding the hardship suffered by black women and children under the new regime; but why is there not some consideration given to these native women, who have always been forced to labour excessively for their lords and masters? Would it not be a wholesome balancing up of human accounts if the native man were compelled to labour and, as a matter of justice and political economy, to retain and pay for the woman's undoubted and habitual facility for plantation work, basket making, pottery, etc.? Only so can she be relieved from the enforced servitude of her black master. It is obvious that if it were

[208] "African Women in the Congo Free State. By Mrs. French-Sheldon, F.R.G.S." In The Ladies Field, January 21st, 1905. MOREL F15/1/5 (and for the following quotes)

possible for the women to make the rubber there would be no resentment or opposition on the part of the native men as to the imposition of this tax by the Congo Free State.[209]

Clearly, Sheldon regarded Congolese men and leaders with disdain. She implied that they were lazy because they had never had to work, instead always forcing their female kin to work for them. Her ideas about the inherent "laziness" of Africans followed a colonial narrative that justified forced labour and the "civilising" mission. Sheldon contrasted these comments with her views on the opportunities that the colonial state provided women. She claimed that the CFS enabled women's independence and encouraged their leadership skills; aspects of themselves that they were apparently unable to explore while living and working solely in their own communities. According to Sheldon, women chose to work for the colony and were "given the privilege to work in sweeping the roads and attending to coffee, cocoa, manioc and banana plantations, and in performing the service of gardeners and brickmakers".[210] Sheldon described it as a,

very interesting sight to see the native woman capita or nynpara (head-man or boss) in charge of a gang of women, directing their work and tailing off lost time or inefficient service for purposes of report... It may also be the first step towards the improvement of the black woman's condition, and to raising her from the state of slavery which has ever existed under the old undisputed rule of the black man. The fashion in which the women laugh and chatter and rest ad libitum while serving the State shows that they are not victims of severe oppression.[211]

[209] Ibid
[210] Ibid
[211] Ibid

Sheldon viewed the CFS administration as providing crucial livelihood opportunities for Congolese women. She described the many skills of women. They took pride in the "art of preparing and cooking" food for the "lords and masters". Were these slave women producing food for their owners or free women preparing meals for their husbands and men of higher social status? Her report does not differentiate between the conditions of free and enslaved women, leading to conflation of the two. This may have been intentional and reinforces her assertion that all women were enslaved by Congolese men.

Sheldon had a positive outlook on Congolese women's practices of motherhood. However, she combined her statements on child rearing with comments that served to other the Congolese. She stated that,

In most tribes the African mother is a devoted creature to her little ones during the limited term of their infancy, and in all polygamous tribes she is permitted to nurse her child until he is a strapping sturdy fellow of three years of age. After the child is once upon his feet and weaned from the mother he soon becomes a little man, so far as taking up the interests and aping the customs of the adults is concerned, and has not that degree of filial love and dependence upon either maternal or paternal care that would seem natural from the point of view of the white race.[212]

Would Sheldon have considered the British practice of hiring nannies/governesses to look after white children in upper middle-class households in the same vein? Such child-rearing methods might also be interpreted as evidence of an absence of "filial love and dependence".

[212] Ibid

Another interesting aspect of her description of mothering practices is the way that she completely bypassed baby/infant girls. This part of her article is reminiscent of Clara Park's piece in her discussion about African mothers. Park also focused only on the relationship between mothers and sons rather than the bond between mothers and daughters. For Park and Sheldon, are relationships between girls and women subordinated in importance to those between men and women or men and boys?

Sheldon explained how Congolese women often had to carry equipment for both European and Congolese men. She commented: "The prowess and staying power of these women are simply astounding, and although in many tribes the women are not very great in stature they possess a concentration of strength and endurance that puts to shame the feeble condition of white women, deteriorated by a long course of civilization".[213] White women, apparently being further along in the 'civilising process' than their African peers, were physically and mentally weaker. It is interesting that despite her analysis, the idea of "civilization" still seemed a desirable prospect. However, imperial discourses on race and gender culminated to represent African women as less feminine, more animalistic and less affected by suffering, pain and subjugation.

The dancing skills of men and women in Congo impressed Sheldon. According to her, female dancers who formed part of chief's harems were not meant to do other forms of work. She described one dance that she witnessed. Women stood in a circle and a couple of them ran into the middle, jumping and twirling. The women made a "fierce rush at those in the circle" who continued circling them "as if to attack".

[213] Ibid

This is done with such violence and physical excitement that one feels as if it were exciting a kind of ferocity that exceeds the madness of intoxication by drugs and might lead to a brutal finale. But, to one's great surprise, at the finish the women return in the mildest and most infantile manner, quite self-possessed, and begin to laugh and talk as if nothing had happened.[214]

Sheldon's "surprise" at the Congolese women's pretence exposes the way the latter challenged and defied Sheldon's ideas of Africans. Her perspective that black women were either "brutal" or "infantile" exemplify European forms of gendered racism and Sheldon's reproduction of it.

In the various dances that Sheldon witnessed during her time in Congo, "The women sometimes put upon their head a grotesque structure consisting of baskets and a poor effigy of a human mask, covered with flowers and leaves". Sheldon's choice of language exoticises and alienates. For Sheldon, these dances were fascinating spectacles to be observed, and she made comments about the way beauty practices of Congolese women and white women were similar. A particularly salient comment that she made about the behaviour of some older black women, exposed another way that Western gender ideology impacted her perceptions. She wrote that,

One may frequently see a woman, perhaps a ci-devant belle, who is not willing to surrender her empire to the younger and more attractive women. She dances with great exaggeration, and at times not in the best of taste, quite unconscious of the spectacle she is making of herself as she persists in her self-imposed exercise with a maudlin expression on her

[214] Ibid

face, which she thinks coquettish. The onlookers laugh and jeer at her, but still she continues…[215]

Her comments resonate with European ideas about sexuality, age and the behaviours of women that are defined as socially appropriate and inappropriate. For example, the well-known British phrase, "mutton dressed as lamb" has been used to shame women for dissenting from a construction of womanhood that prohibits women above a certain age from expressing their sexuality. Since the early 19th century, this phrase has been used to ridicule older women for wearing clothes/makeup deemed too young or sexual for them. In this gender discourse, women's sexuality is imposed and controlled externally by society and the patriarchal gaze (of both men and women), rather than recognised as something that is internally empowered. Women seen to be challenging the acceptable boundaries of female sexuality have been, and continue to be, mocked at best and abused at worst. Sheldon's comments about older Congolese women frames them in this familiar way. Sheldon expresses disapproval mixed with pity at their actions; older women should not express their sexuality especially when they were no longer youthful and regarded as sexually attractive to men. She did not consider that perhaps, despite the "jeers" of the audience, the woman might have simply wished to enjoy herself. In this sense, black women also resisted conforming to the gender norms and expectations of white women (and possibly too, their own communities).

Sheldon described women in Congo as the "greatest asset of the black man". The number of wives and concubines that a man had, demonstrated "his wealth…prestige and position".

[215] Ibid

Many women who are held as slaves in the domestic life of the African mingle freely with all the other women and men, unmarked by any special social degradation excepting that they work and that there is a difference in their lack of ornaments or vestments, the slaves having only sufficient cloth, or leather, or leaves, to cover their loins, if indeed that.[216]

To reinforce her idea that *all* Congolese women were enslaved, Sheldon insisted that the conditions of women who had the status of "slave" in Congolese societies were not so dissimilar to those of free women.

Reformists like Morel and his colleagues regarded Sheldon with curiosity and distaste. Alfred Emmott, Morel's long-time friend, Liberal Party MP, businessman and member of the CRA, wrote to Morel asking if she was English because her language was "peculiar", and she came across as "very muddle-headed".[217] Another member of the CRA, Alice Stopford Green, an Irish nationalist and historian, wrote to Morel in 1909 describing her irritation at the fact that Sheldon had been recognised as the "first African lady traveller" by the Geographical Society.[218] This seems an interesting title for a white woman, completely erasing the existence of African women. Sheldon's identity as a white woman seeking "adventure" and independence appealed to her peers, just a few years before the Suffrage movement made political waves. Her pro-imperialist perspective was only one of many belonging to different strands within a wider struggle for women's emancipation. The suffrage campaign also has an important history of activism and solidarity by working class women in trade unions, by Jewish people, women of colour, abolitionists and anti-imperialists in both Europe and the United States. These groups helped shape women's political demands and influenced the

[216] Ibid
[217] Letter to Morel from Alfred Emmott, dated 1/6/1904. MOREL F8/54
[218] Letter to Morel from Alice Stopford Green, dated September 1909. MOREL F8/72

ideas of more privileged women whose perspectives were also informed by their social class, race, religion and political leanings.[219]

There were individuals, such as Green, who were dissatisfied with Sheldon's acceptance in certain women's circles. A few years later, Green wrote in her letter to Morel about her frustration that Sheldon had been invited to speak in front of the group Women Journalists, considering her role in the Congo debate. The title that Sheldon had been given by the Geographical Society had legitimised her. Green stated that she had chosen not to preside over the lecture and was going to suggest that the group did not raise the issue of Congo.[220]

Despite the discursive shifts that occurred as a result of the Congo reform campaign, many Europeans and colonialists still emphasised the need to maintain strict systems of discipline and control over indigenous populations in colonial territories. This was represented as necessary for continuing the "civilising" mission but was largely about ensuring their compliance with capitalist systems that enriched colonial host countries. In the years following the Congo reform campaign, another woman took to travelling around parts of the Congo. Marguerite Roby was interviewed about her experiences after her return and wrote a book about her journey.

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[219] See work by Ellen Carol DuBois (June 1987). "Working Women, Class Relations, and Suffrage Militance: Harriot Stanton Blatch and the New York Woman Suffrage Movement, 1894-1909." *The Journal of American History,* Vol. 74, No. 1: pp. 34-58; Elinor Lerner (June 1981). "Jewish Involvement in the New York City Woman Suffrage Movement." *American Jewish History,* Vol. 70, No. 4: pp. 442-461; R.S. Neale (May 1967). "Working-Class Women and Women's Suffrage." *Labour History,* No. 12: pp. 16-34; Marjory Nelson (November 1979). "women suffrage and race." *Off Our Backs,* Vol. 9, No. 10, racism and sexism: pp. 6-7, 22; June Purvis. "'Deeds Not Words': Daily Life in the Women's Social and Political Union in Edwardian Britain." In *Votes for Women*, edited by June Purvis and Sandra Stanley Holton, 135–158. (London: Routledge: 2000); Rosalyn Terborg-Penn (January-December 2000). "Woman Suffrage: "First Because We Are Women and Second Because We Are Colored Women." *Negro History Bulletin,* Vol. 63, No. 1/4, Commemorating the Twentieth Anniversary of the Association of Black Women Historians 1979-1999: pp. 63-70

[220] Letter to Morel from Alice Stopford Green, dated September 1909. MOREL F8/72

2.6: The "adventures" of Marguerite Roby and her *chicotte*

Roby deliberately challenged European gender stereotypes that constructed white women as submissive wives, but as she did this, she assumed dominance over Congolese people. Roby was a British woman from a privileged background. Her aim was to ride around Congo on her bike and, like many white male travellers, shoot animals and collect trophies.[221]

In an article by the Evening Standard, published in May 1911, Roby declared that after her excursions in Katanga and North Congo "I can only say that the tales of Congo atrocities when applied to these two districts are absolute fabrications".[222]

In January 1911, Roby published a book called 'My adventures in the Congo'.[223] Even the serious illnesses and fevers that she suffered were framed as part of an exciting escapade. Her work fits in to a genre of literature on Africa that emerged in the mid-nineteenth century and greatly influenced Western narratives on Africa as the "Dark Continent": a place to be traversed, tamed and dominated. Europeans and Americans who travelled through Congo were respected as "explorers" who had survived Africa's harsh and dangerous environment. She also inadvertently challenged the genre because she was not a man. Regarding her trip, Roby stated:

For six months I travelled, on foot and by bicycle, and my first surprise was the difficulty of obtaining labour in the Belgian Congo, because I had read so much about 'forced labour'. It

[221] Kenneth P. Czech. *With Rifle and Petticoat: Women as Big Game Hunters, 1880-1940.* (Lanham: The Derrydale Press: 2002), pg 43
[222] 'Congo Reports.' In the Evening Standard- "Famous Lady Traveller on their Suppression. Native Conditions." 4th May 1911. *Anti-Slavery Papers MSS. Brit. Emp. S. 24 J24.* Newspaper cuttings. Weston Library, The Bodleian at The University of Oxford.
[223] Marguerite Roby. *My Adventures in the Congo*. (London: Edward Arnold: 1911)

was difficult to obtain porters to carry one's baggage, and frequently they would lay down their packs and bolt.[224]

Her description about fleeing porters presented Congolese men as unreliable and lazy, a perspective which becomes more obvious in her further comments. Her words expose an entitlement to African labour which stands out starkly. The abuse of African porters during Leopold's rule of Congo, and before, had already been highlighted, but she failed to mention this. There is no consideration for this history and no questioning of why men may have avoided porterage or indeed ran away while doing so. She went on to state,

From Elizabethville onwards food was particularly plentiful, but the work of cultivation was always done by women, young children, and old men, the young men sitting round smoking and chatting, unless they were away acting as porters.[225]

Roby regarded the relationship between Belgian agents and the Congolese as amicable. She echoed the arguments of defenders of Congo during earlier debates, which criticised the British government and activists for trying to ruin the imperial reputation of Belgium for their own gain. Roby claims that she never saw or took a picture of mutilated persons, blaming any incidents of this kind on "inter-tribal wars".[226]

Roby was cynical of the claims made by reformists about the levels of abuse that had existed in Congo, questioning why she had not witnessed any "horrors". This is an issue that emerges throughout this chapter. Were defenders of Congo lying about their experiences? Had they seen no incidences of colonial violence while visiting the same places or did they

[224] 'Congo Reports.' In the Evening Standard- "Famous Lady Traveller on their Suppression. Native Conditions." 4th May 1911 (and for the following quotes)
[225] Ibid
[226] Ibid

have a different perception of this "violence" altogether? Kenneth Czech notes how Roby walked around with a *chicotte*.[227] The symbolism behind this action is clear. Like many of her peers, she thought that disciplining the Congolese was essential, otherwise one was "simply inviting disaster".[228] Czech relays stories that Roby herself recounted in her book, about porters who regularly refused to listen to her orders. On a trip to South Congo a head porter in charge of Roby's belongings stopped for a cigarette and a rest. In response, Roby used her gun and *chicotte* to intimidate him into returning to his work. Her aim was to set a precedent, but the men ended up deserting her instead. Through her behaviour Roby allied herself with colonial oppression. She had many antagonistic moments like this with porters.[229] No doubt the Congolese people that she encountered were angry at being threatened and ill-treated.

After writing her book, Roby was invited to meet King Albert of Belgium, who, she said, had requested a copy of her book: "He had, he said, to thank me very much for giving such an impartial account about the Belgian administration of the Congo, and remarked that it was only one travelling so extensively through the country as I had who would be able to judge fairly of the conditions there".[230]

The King also warned her against entering areas in revolt and offered an "escort of soldiers", which she declined, informing him that she intended to visit a district where *"sleeping sickness was rampant, in an endeavour to get some photographs for Sir Patrick Manson."*[231]

[227] Czech, *With Rifle and Petticoat*, pg 47
[228] Roby, *My adventures in the Congo,* pg 269
[229] Czech, *With Rifle and Petticoat*, pg 47
[230] "Lady Explorer. Her Congo Adventures. Mrs Roby Sees King Albert" in the African World. Published on 2nd December 1911. *Anti-Slavery Papers MSS. Brit. Emp. S. 24 J24.* Newspaper cuttings. Weston Library, The Bodleian at The University of Oxford. (and for the following quotes)
[231] Ibid. Sir Patrick Manson was a Parasitologist from Scotland who focused on tropical disease and medicine.

The King's overtures portrayed her womanhood as something that needed protecting. The Congo had been constructed as place full of dangers and disease. Evidently, as much as Roby resisted gender stereotypes, she made use of the ones that flattered her in Western discourses as an exceptional, courageous white woman.

On her last exploration of the Congo jungle, Mrs. Roby succeeded in securing some fine specimens of big game; indeed, the food supply of the camp very often depended upon the accuracy of her shooting. This time the daring lady hopes to make a notable addition to her already great collection of the trophies of the hunt.[232]

Roby emphasised that she had no invested interests in Congo and was receiving no help from Belgium's government. She behaved in a way towards the Congolese that made her as violent as colonial men. By aligning themselves with imperialism, certain women assumed the identities of dominant white people in Congo, which gave them a power that they likely had not experienced before.

2.7: Conclusion

This chapter has examined the main narratives that prevailed in the Congo debate in Britain in the early 20th century. It has mapped out some of the conversations that took place in public and private domains among groups of people and has considered the contributions and influence of different white women from various political backgrounds. This chapter establishes some early representations of Congo, African women, and gender relations in discussions about CFS. It also provides an argument that explains why certain people claimed

[232] Ibid

not to witness abuses in the Congo, when they seemed obvious to reformists. The same events were not viewed or labelled as atrocities by those who ascribed to the idea that a harsh "discipline" of Africans was necessary for maintaining colonial control. For those who defended the CFS, abuse was just punishment rather than inhumane treatment.

The next few chapters consider how specific narratives about Congolese women, sexuality and gender relations evolved at different moments in time, the agendas they served and the actors and organisations who produced and perpetuated them. The next chapter examines how, after taking control of the CFS, the Belgian state implemented its idea of 'reform'. I expose how the state used sexuality to assert control of rebellious leaders and their communities.

CHAPTER 3: HISTORIES OF EVERYDAY COLONIAL VIOLENCE AND ABDUCTED "WIVES"

3.1: Introduction

In July 1909 Reverend William M. Morrison, an American Presbyterian missionary, wrote an angry letter to a Belgian Sector Chief in Luluabourg (now called Kananga), Kasai, about colonial raids involving the rape and abduction of Congolese people among villages in the Lulua community. Men and boys had been seized and forced to join the colonial soldiery, and girls and women captured to become their conjugal partners. According to Morrison's testimony, these female abductees were being forced to become "wives". Some had not reached puberty.

Morrison's claims came at a tense historical moment when the Congo colony was transitioning from the rule of King Leopold II to that of the Belgian government. In these early days, when the potential for a "Belgian Congo" was being developed, political discussions centred around how to "reform" the colony. However, it became apparent that this concept meant different things to the various European groups involved. One similarity of views prevailed; reform was still meant to fit within the boundaries of empire.

Through a case study, this chapter examines what reform entailed for Congolese women. Morrison's story revealed cracks at an institutional level. His letter described an abuse of power and highlighted the place of Congolese women in 'reformed' colonial structures. The evidence forces one to reflect on the ways that sexual violence and forced

conjugal relations functioned under the colonial system.[233] It also shows how gender violence served the state's assertion of power by displaying its ability to control Congolese women's sexuality, as noted by Nancy Hunt, Charlotte Mertens and Amandine Lauro.[234]

In the context of transition, colonial concerns for Congolese women were related more to the sensitivity of the moment than a real focus on women's experiences and the violence against them. Writers such as Oyèrónké Oyěwùmí have explained why African women were marginalised in colonial projects. In her work she highlights two core processes of colonisation:

The first and more thoroughly documented of these processes was the racializing and the attendant inferiorization of Africans as the colonized, the natives. The second process,… was the inferiorization of females. These processes were inseparable, and both were embedded in the colonial situation. The process of inferiorizing the native, which was the essence of colonization, was bound up with the process of enthroning male hegemony.[235]

[233] The idea of 'forced conjugal relations' is indicated in Morrison's use of the term "wives" to describe the positions and functions of women abducted by colonial soldiers.

[234] See Chapter 1: Introduction for a discussion on this. Nancy Rose Hunt (1988). ""Le Bebe en Brousse": European Women, African Birth Spacing and Colonial Intervention in Breast Feeding in the Belgian Congo." *The International Journal of African Historical Studies*, Vol. 21, No. 3: pp. 401-432; Nancy Rose Hunt (1991). "Noise over Camouflaged Polygamy, Colonial Morality Taxation, and a Woman-Naming Crisis in Belgian Africa." *The Journal of African History*, Vol. 32, No. 3: pp. 471-494; Nancy Rose Hunt, "An Acoustic Register: Rape and Repetition in Congo." In *Imperial Debris: On Ruins and Ruination,* edited by Ann Laura Stoler (London: Duke University Press: 2013); Charlotte Mertens (2016). "Sexual Violence in the Congo Free State: Archival Traces and Present Reconfigurations." *ARAS* Vol. 37, No. 1: pp. 6-20; Amandine Lauro. "'Le législateur n'envisage en l'espèce que le point de vue physiologique'. Régulations du mariage 'indigène' et politiques sexuelles au Congo Belge (1908-1940)." In *Le contrôle des femmes dans les empires coloniaux. Empires, genre et biopolitiques*, edited by Martine Spensky, 183-190 (Paris: Karthala: 2015); Amandine Lauro (2013). "De la puberté féminine dans les 'zones torrides.' Expertise médicale et régulations du corps des jeunes filles dans le Congo colonial." *Sextant*, Vol.30 "Regards sur le sexe"; Amandine Lauro. *Coloniaux, ménagères et prostituées au Congo Belge 1885-1930.* (Loverval : Editions Labor : 2005)

[235] Oyèrónkẹ́ Oyèwùmí. *The Invention of Women: Making an African Sense of Western Gender discourses.* (London: University of Minnesota Press: 1997), pg 177

Oyěwùmí expands on this by arguing that African women were especially adversely affected by colonisation because "the unenviable position of European women became theirs by imposition, even as European women were lifted over Africans because their race was privileged".[236] Concern about the enslavement of women was only relevant so far as it could be used to condemn African forms of marriage. In general, the issue of women's emancipation was a nuisance to be curtailed so that women remained attached to male authority as controlled dependents. For example, in the Belgian Congo, taxes were only levied on 'able-bodied men', categorised as *hommes adultes valides* (valid adult males).[237] Women were gradually sidelined from the formal labour market. This affected women uniquely during different periods of colonial rule. Women's ethnic backgrounds, locations and the extent to which colonial policy was implemented in areas they inhabited also impacted how they adapted to life under colonial rule.

Lauren Standifer points out that under Belgian colonialism, "As long as women were excluded from wage labor and property ownership, whether under the colonial regime or after independence, they were dependent on men's support in exchange for sexual and domestic labor."[238] She argues that as women were made economically reliant on men and denied access to legal and social protections through colonial policy, they became increasingly vulnerable in marriage to domestic violence and sexual abuse.[239] However, other scholars,

[236] Ibid, pg 178
[237] Crawford Young (1998). "Country Report: The African Colonial State Revisited." *Governance: An International Journal of Policy and Administration,* Vol. 11, No. 1: pp. 101-120. Pg 105
[238] Lauren M. Standifer. "Women's Precarity in the Late Colonial and Postcolonial Congo". MA diss., Emory University, 2017. Pg 58
[239] Ibid, pg 6

such as Didier Gondola, point out that despite the social and legal constraints that affected women in colonial Congo, they exerted significant influence in the cities through cultural mixing. Single women continued to move into industrial centres in the 1930s, despite colonial attempts to regulate and curtail their migration.[240]

In the context of Kasai, Vansina highlights that women from matrilineal backgrounds, such as the Kete and Bushong, maintained certain levels of independence and power during colonialism. They continued market-trading in palm oil and handled their own money. However, any interaction with the colonial state was performed by men because colonial officials would only engage with men on issues of taxes, crop cultivation and schooling. Kete and Bushong women were not unaffected by increasingly stringent policies that denied females equal access to education and excluded them from employment, but they remained in comparably good positions to their counterparts from other areas of the Congo.[241] Vansina has analysed the position of women as the rural political economy of Kasai shifted to suit the needs of a changing colonial state. After rubber trading had dwindled to an end, the government imposed compulsory crop labour in 1917. Anyone who refused to produce cash crops for the colony were penalised with two months prison time, although men who worked for the colonial government and companies were exempt from this policy.[242] In rural Kasai, palm oil, then cotton were the main crops that the colony harvested. Later, as railways, towns and mines were built in Kasai and Katanga, the production of food crops, like maize, manioc,

[240] Ch. Didier Gondola (2005). "Unies pour le meilleur et pour le pire. Femmes africaines et villes coloniales : une histoire du métissage." *Clio. Histoire, femmes et sociétés*, Vol. 6 : pp. 1-12
[241] Jan Vansina. *Being Colonized, The Kuba Experience in Rural Congo, 1880-1960.* (Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin Press: 2010), pg 239
[242] Ibid, pg 214-215

nuts and beans were also required to feed workers.[243] Women were sidelined in their roles processing palm oil, when its production became industrialised in the 1920s. Both men and women produced palm products, but they used different methods to make the oil. Women's procedures took longer but ensured better quality oil. However, companies chose to standardise the less time-consuming technique used by men.[244] As crop cultivation increased and transport was required to move foodstuffs across the colony, space was cleared to build roads. Road- building entailed labour that had traditionally been performed by women; the clearing of weeds and flattening of soil. However, men were compelled to do this work instead.[245] The government eventually introduced the "paysannat" (peasantry) system, which forced the Congolese to practice repetitive cash crop farming on specific areas of land. Male farmers were designated certain plots, but they had no control over what they cultivated and were forced to labour the land by an 'agricultural monitor'. Women, whose knowledge as experienced agriculturalists and food producers, was disregarded.[246] Their value as producers for their families and communities was undermined through this process.

Morrison's story demonstrates another way that girls and women were systematically disadvantaged through colonial occupation because of their gender. His story exposes the way that *colonial structures* enabled forced and early conjugal relations between Congolese men, women and girls. White colonial officers allowed their Congolese troops to abduct girls and women during these punitive raids, and were not therefore, mere bystanders. In East Africa this type of practice was noted by James Giblin as a systematic strategy on the part of

[243] Ibid, pg 215
[244] Ibid, pg 217
[245] Ibid, pg 217
[246] Ibid, pg 219

German colonial officers to incentivise African soldiers enrolled in their armies.[247]

The following sections elaborate on how the Belgian colonial system permitted types of violence close to sexual slavery.

3.2: Morrison's appeal: A story of abduction, rape and forced conjugal relations

On 13th July 1909, Reverend William M. Morrison, of the American Presbyterian Congo Mission (APCM) at Luebo, wrote a letter to the *Chef de Secteur* of Luluabourg in Kasai, Count Ferdinand de Hemricourt de Grunne (the judicial police officer). This document contained serious allegations against a district officer working under De Grunne, 2nd Lieutenant Kervyn de Meerendre. These accusations related to brutal raids, led by De Meerendre, that had been carried out on Lulua villages in June 1909. Boys and girls had been abducted, the chief had been detained and his wife captured. These homesteads were areas where APCM missionaries worked.

Outraged, Morrison also wrote a letter to Kasai's District Commissary (DC), G. Gustin, stating that he "could not believe" that he would "allow such conduct to go unpunished". He further wrote to Gustin that he expected him to defend the local population and aid "the interests of the mission".[248]

In his letter to De Grunne Morrison wrote,

[247] Giblin, "The Victimization of Women in the Late Precolonial and Early Colonial Warfare Tanzania", pg 90-91
[248] Letter sent to district commissioner, Monsieur Gustin, 13th July 1909 from Reverend William M. Morrison, "Legal Representative" of the APCM in Luebo. Portefeuille: JUST 48A, Liasse: 1153, African Archives, Brussels.

It is with deep regret that I am forced to write to you about some very unfortunate events that were recently committed in Lulua villages in the area between Luebo and Luluabourg by your under-officer Mr Kervyn…

Morrison stated that Meerendre had claimed to be acting according to De Grunne's orders.

If Mr Kervyn is telling the truth, I must admit that I am very surprised that you have entrusted a young and inexperienced officer with such an important mission, and especially that you have ordered him to do the revolting things he did during the course of this trip…

First of all, he, without any previous notice, caught a number of young boys in the villages, saying that he was taking them for soldiers. Again, he took several young girls and these have been forced to become wives of the soldiers. One of these girls was seen by Dr. Coppedge and he as a doctor says she was more a child than a woman and still unfit for marriage.[249]

Morrison's revelations challenged colonial representations of a reforming philanthropic imperial rule. His letter hinted at the complicity of superior officials permitting unprovoked attacks and gender violence against civilian populations. These stories disrupted colonial narratives which positioned African women as needy recipients of European

[249] Letter sent to the Chef de Secteur, Monsieur de Grunne (Count Ferdinand de Hemricourt de Grunne), 13th July 1909 from Reverend William M. Morrison, of the American Presbyterian Congo Mission (APCM) in Luebo. Portefeuille: JUST 48A, Liasse: 1153, African Archives, Brussels.

protection. The case exposed colonial forms of sexual, physical and conjugal violence that was committed against Congolese girls/women. The exact types of Congolese practices that were condemned as abusive in colonial circles, such as domestic slavery and early marriage, were also evident in the colonial system.

It is interesting to consider how colonial gender violence and Congolese gender systems related to one another at this time. Did the practice of acquiring "wives" for soldiers pre-exist, or was it introduced under the conditions of colonial occupation? Certainly in neighbouring territories, such as Tanzania, these types of practices had existed as common strategies in war prior to colonial conquest.[250] David Gordon has pointed out that enslaving people in raids was not uncommon in the nineteenth century when East African trade networks of ivory, guns and slaves disturbed the region.[251]

To what extent were these types of relations and practices different to established marriage norms among the Lulua? The use of language suggests that women were expected to carry out sexual services and possibly domestic duties for the men. However, the concept of 'wife' also carried meanings associated with social legitimacy, and familial recognition and exchange. These women were abducted from their homes by men they probably did not know. Furthermore, some of the women were already married. It seems probable that the relationships produced by this violence were not regarded as legitimate by the women's families and communities. Lulua people are descended from Luba migrants that moved from Katanga up to the Lulua river. They continued to share much of the same culture and values.

[250] Giblin, "The Victimization of Women in the Late Precolonial and Early Colonial Warfare Tanzania", pg 90-91
[251] David M. Gordon (2017). "Precursors to Red Rubber: Violence in the Congo Free State, 1885-1895." *Past and Present*, Vol. 236, No. 1: pp. 133-168. Pg 145-146

For Luba people, the family was a central component to the organization of society. Marriage was not only a bond between two people but an important unification between families. No marriage was possible without negotiations between the brides and groom's families and a payment of bridewealth. Additionally, the adultery of women was strictly forbidden.[252] The violent colonial militia sabotaged the familial values and marriage structures of communities like the Lulua.

Morrison went on to inform De Grunne that two girls were also "abused" by five soldiers in the same evening in this village. Morrison wrote two versions of this letter; one in French and one in English. These versions are largely the same, although the French account stated that the girls were "raped/violated" (*violées*). It also described how "Mr Kervyn's soldiers were allowed to abduct/remove (*enlever*) the wife of the chief named Chisimbi", while on the other hand, the English account specified that the soldiers "were permitted to *rape*" her.[253] It is not clear why Morrison described this treatment differently in the two texts, but his accounts both point to colonial forms of gender violence being used to suppress and terrorise Congolese communities viewed as non-compliant to the state.

Morrison added that "several men came to bring goats to Mr Kervyn, thinking that he would not hurt them if they brought him this tribute" but these men were immediately seized. He also claimed that "a number of chiefs and sub-chiefs were arrested and cruelly maltreated, all without even listening to what they had to say in their defence" and "on a mere

[252] Tshilemalema Mukenge (2010). "Family and Religion in Luba Life: Centrality, Pervasiveness, Change and Continuity." *Challenge*, Vol. 16, No. 1: pp. 21-32. Pg 21-22; Georges Nzongola- Ntalaja. *The Congo: From Leopold to Kabila. A People's History.* (London: Zed Books: 2002), pg 102-106

[253] Also spelled "Tshisimbi" in other texts

suspicion".[254] Of what, it is not explained. Perhaps they supported Chisimbi or, like Chisimbi, challenged De Meerendre's authority. Morrison summarised his description of the events as follows:

All this region was plunged into consternation by this officer who seems to have been sent on an expedition to make a general looting and… to take women. Excessive acts of plunder were laid, sometimes under the eyes of Mr Kervyn and sometimes in villages where it seems that he had no other palaver with the natives.[255]

Morrison associated the looting of property, *things,* with the abduction of women. Taken in this context, it is as though the "taking" of women was linked with the damage done to *male* kin and their belongings. Indeed, Morrison made clear the apparent reasons for the raid; to shift local chieftaincy hierarchies and force the submission of Chief Chisimbi to another, more colonially compliant. Morrison wrote, "It seems that according to your orders, Mr Kervyn came to this village and told Chief Chisimbi of the village Kamanga Kalamba [named after Chisimbi's father, his predecessor], that henceforth he should consider himself and his village as under a man named Kabilu.[256] Chief Chisimbi was ordered to move his village two hours away to be within the vicinity of Kabilu's dwelling and become his subject. Chief Chisimbi refused and thus, according to Morrison, was being punished with "outrageous treatment" by De Meerendre. Part of such treatment included the abuse, abduction and rape of women/girls from Chisimbi's village. The entire community was penalised for Chisimbi's

[254] Letter sent to the Chef de Secteur, Monsieur de Grunne, 13th July 1909, from Reverend William M. Morrison
[255] Ibid
[256] Kabilu is also referred to in other texts, including those produced by Meerendre, as "Kambilu". It is difficult to ascertain which is the correct version of his name. For the sake of consistency, I will refer to him as Kabilu throughout.

actions and considered as rebellious to the state.

Morrison argued that it would not be right to put Chisimbi, "whose village was always loyal to the state" under the authority of a man who had a history of revolting against the administration. Morrison reminded De Grunne that he had previously recognised Chisimbi as the legitimate chief: "you had given him a medal of his chieftainship, but this you took away a little while ago, it seems, for what reason I do not know". To add further injury, "it also appears that when Chisimbi showed to Mr Kervyn his certificate of chieftainship, this was seized by force and not returned".[257] He was then arrested and "disgraced" in front of his people. The story tells of the attempted destruction, by the colonial officer, of the authority, respect and patriarchal control held by one chief. The violence and sexual slavery endured by women and girls in this community at the hands of the state was referred to in the context of the emasculation of a chief by colonial powers.

Some of Chisimbi's sub-chiefs were also arrested and given to Kabilu to punish as he wished. Morrison's account claims that after a number of days his APCM colleague, the physician Dr Coppedge, found them "still cruelly tied up at the village of Kabilu" with marks "on their bodies where they had been beaten".[258] Dr Coppedge had requested that these "old men" at least be tied in more comfortable positions. Kabilu allegedly refused this request, stating that he would only do so if ordered by the administration, hinting further that his violent mission had been sanctioned by colonial superiors. Again, "Chisimbi's wife" was mentioned. The French account stated once more that De Meerendre's soldiers had

[257] Letter sent to the Chef de Secteur, Monsieur de Grunne, 13th July 1909, from Reverend William M. Morrison
[258] Ibid

"abducted" (*enlevèrent*) her and the English one claimed that she was "raped".[259] There is no doubt that the treatment meted out to "Chisimbi's wife" (whether abduction and/or rape) formed part of Chisimbi's punishment. She was given no name or identity, save the one that connected her to Chisimbi. This is the only identity that was important to Morrison's narrative. It provides some indication of her status and lack of visibility in his eyes and gives insight into the ways that Congolese women were perceived by missionaries and colonialists. In European framings, women's experiences and stories were suppressed outside those of men.

Morrison drew from colonial narratives to bolster his argument and pandered to the colonial state by portraying chief Chisimbi as a loyal colonial subject, distinguishing him from Kabilu whom he identified as "savage". It is important to highlight other agendas being pursued here. Kabilu had reportedly converted to Catholicism by this point. Therefore, his re-positioning as a chief above Chisimbi, who was Protestant, may have been perceived by the protestant missionaries, to undermine the work of the APCM and Protestantism in general. This was possibly another reason why Morrison pursued the case.

Catholic and Protestant tensions were rife within and between communities at this time. Chisimbi was not the only chief to deny the legitimacy and authority of Kabilu as his leader. Nor was his refusal to submit to a colonial-backed chief unique. De Meerendre wrote about the numerous difficulties he had in attempting to persuade those whom he described as "sub-chiefs" to respect and have "better feelings" toward their so-called superiors in

[259] Ibid

various chiefdoms.[260] He also suggested that there was more to conflicts than religious tensions. In the case of Chisimbi, De Meerendre reported that, "Kambilu complains of his nyamparas [deputies] and especially of Tshisimbi Musiku and Kalola who, under the pretext of making them Protestants, detach the natives from the very village of Kambilu and install them in their neighbouring Shamba".[261] The control of labour denoted authority. Those like Chisimbi and Kalola were accused of siphoning off labourers for their own economic benefit. Chisimbi's insubordination not only indicated a challenge to Kabilu as chief but also to the colonial administration that had installed him. These disruptions were the result of colonialists' meddling in the hierarchies of various chieftainships and the Congolese rebelling against colonial structures.

Morrison no doubt felt that it was important to advocate on behalf of his *Protestant* Congolese congregation. Given the context of a colonial state that seemed to favour Catholic missions, this is not surprising.[262] Morrison wrote a letter to Jules Renkin, the Minister of Colonies, in late August 1909 stating how unfortunate it was that despite having made a recent visit to the Congo, the Minister had failed to meet with them to see their missions and the "issues they face".[263] He also noted how other missions had been allowed to build on sites

[260] Report of Lieutenant Kervyn de Meerendre on different chiefdoms, including the "Chiefdom of Kambilu", the "Chiefdom of Tshifuembe", "Dumba Munene's Chiefdom" and the "Chiefdom of Kaboa Rumba" . Undated and recipient's name missing. Portefeuille: JUST 48A, Liasse: 1153, African Archives, Brussels.

[261] "Shamba" is a term used to describe farming plots.
Ibid, "Chiefdom Kambilu"; Patricia W. Romero (1986). "'Where Have All the Slaves Gone?' Emancipation and Post - Emancipation in Lamu, Kenya." The Journal of African History, Vol. 27, No. 3: pp. 497-512. Pg 499; Michelle Greenfield-Liebst (September 2017). "Sin, Slave Status, and the "City": Zanzibar, 1865-c.1930." *African Studies Review*, Vol. 60, No. 2: pp. 139–160. Pg 145-146

[262] For more information on the relationship between the Belgian state and Protestant missionaries see, David Maxwell (2008). "The Soul of the Luba: W.F.P. Burton, Missionary Ethnography and Belgian Colonial Science." *History and Anthropology,* Vol. 19, No. 4: pp. 325-351. Pg 331-333

[263] Letter sent to Mr. Renkin, the Minister of Colonies, from Reverend William Morrison of the APCM. Dated August 27th, 1909. Portefeuille: JUST 48A, Liasse: 1153. African Archives, Brussels.

that the APCM had previously been denied; his implication was that these were Catholic missions. Morrison stated, "we sincerely believe that there need be no conflict between the different Missions, if only we are given equal rights, and if absolute freedom of conscience is guaranteed to the natives".[264]

In the last part of his letter to De Grunne regarding the raid on Chisimbi's villages, Morrison wrote,

"I presume you may say that this is a matter which does not concern the Mission, that it is a matter in which the state alone is concerned. I wish to disabuse you of that idea at once. We have interests in these villages, in a number of the villages thus outraged by M. Kervyn we have teachers and native schools."[265]

Morrison made clear reference to the ways the upheaval of these events had negatively impacted the mission's ability to carry out its work. His letter also implies that he had previously had similar confrontations with the state, and that these were met by official responses essentially demarcating missionary boundaries and trying to prevent him from interfering in "matters of the state". In late 1909 the author and reform activist, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, forwarded a letter to the Leeds Mercury. This letter had been written by a frustrated Morrison to his colleague Reverend Pere Combier. Morrison was quoted by the newspaper as stating; "When we appeal to the Government of Belgium we are only maligned

[264] Ibid
[265] Morrison's letter to Sector Chief, M. de Grunne.

and sued for our trouble and our motives impugned".[266]

Morrison's letter to De Grunne evidences the ways that APCM missionaries inserted themselves in the everyday lives of Congolese communities. Morrison made an effort to ingratiate himself and the mission with the state by recognising colonial authority. He stated "We have always charged the natives over whom we have any influence to render due submission to the government in all things… but we cannot sit by…without at least raising a protest in their behalf". His writings demonstrate the ways missionary work overlapped with forms of "activist" intervention in the actions of the colonial state.[267] His comment about having always promoted "submission to the government" is less than convincing when considering the history of APCM and Morrison's role in the Congo.

The APCM had a reputation for speaking out against the colonial state and any actions that it deemed abusive to the Congolese. Morrison, among others, including the well-known black American missionary, William Sheppard, provided the CRA with many accounts of violence perpetrated by CFS. They played a large role in whistleblowing about the conditions in Kasai. Additionally, Sheppard and Morrison were taken to court by the Kasai Company in 1908. The Company attempted to sue the pair for libel when Sheppard wrote an article in 1906 for the Mission's Kasai Herald about abuses committed by rubber companies. Sheppard detailed the damage inflicted on the Kuba community in the Congo basin.[268] Charges against

[266] Leeds Mercury Newspaper. Published 11th November 1909. "Congo (text missing): Missionary's Evidence of Forced Labour Outrages, Under State Authority", Portefeuille: JUST 48A, Liasse: 1153. African Archives, Brussels.
[267] I use this broad term to encompass all those who challenged the status quo at different points during the colonial period to bring about forms of social and political change. This includes different organisations in Europe, as well as travellers, journalists and missionaries to Congo.
[268] Reprinted in: "William Sheppard: Christian Fighter for African Rights." *Southern Workman* 39 (Jan. 1910): 8-9

Morrison were dismissed by the court in Leopoldville on a "legal technicality", but Sheppard's case continued.[269] Repeating arguments that had defended Leopold's Congo from the Congo reform movement, the Kasai Company's lawyer, Gaston Vandermeeren, claimed that if there were real abuses taking place, the Catholic missionaries would have also reported them. As such, according to Vandermeeren, Sheppard's article was partly inspired by his bitterness about the idea that the state showed favour toward Catholic missions. As William E. Phipps writes in his book about Sheppard, this was a weak argument when one considered the vested interests that the Catholic missions had in the state and rubber companies. Phipps points out that the Kasai Company was a big donor to the Scheutist Catholic Order. Sheppard was acquitted in October 1909. The judge decided that he had had no ill-intent when writing the article. Nevertheless, a warning had been sounded. Sheppard's allegations against the company were not investigated.[270]

Early 20th century missions existed in conditions which enabled them to act, not just as missionaries, teachers and physicians, but also as activists and mediators. Certain political movements and shifts of the late 19th and early 20th centuries likely influenced Morrison's focus on certain types of colonial abuse, such as the abduction of young girls for conjugal relationships with colonial soldiers. The issue of child exploitation and prostitution was at the political forefront during this time. By the late 1800s campaigns to raise the age of consent had become increasingly popular in parts of Europe and the United States. Belgium had raised

[269] William E. Phipps. *William Sheppard: Congo's African American Livingstone.* (Louisville, Ky.: Geneva Press: 2002), pg 169: "*Their farms are growing up in weeds and jungle, their king is practically a slave…Even their children cry for bread… There are armed sentries chartered trading companies, who force the men and women to spend most of their days and nights in the forests making rubber, and the price they received is so meager that they cannot live upon it."*
[270] Ibid, pg 165-173

its minimum age of consent to fourteen years in 1867.[271] In the 1880s the journalist, William Stead, produced numerous articles highlighting the problem of child prostitution and trafficking in Britain. His shocking revelations provided a catalyst for the emergence of a reform movement which pushed for an extension of the minimum age. As a result, by 1885 the Criminal Law Amendment Act shifted the age of consent from thirteen to sixteen years.[272] These events influenced other groups in the United States to organise and protest for similar changes in North America and by 1920 most states had implemented a minimum age of sixteen to eighteen years.[273] Furthermore, international scrutiny of these issues led to the League of Nations adopting the International Convention for the Suppression of the Traffic in Women and Children in 1921.[274] Morrison made his complaints during a time when these new laws and ideas about the importance of providing protections for children were being developed. His choice to emphasise the young age of captive girls, as well as his reference to women that had been abducted and forced into sexual relationships as "wives" reflect this context. Afterall, marital rape was not acknowledged as a crime in Europe or the United States until many decades later.

The intervention of Morrison occurred in spite of the disapproval and frustration of the Belgian colonial administration. In the past, De Grunne had also been accused by Morrison

[271] Isabelle Wattier. "La Majorite Sexuelle: Quelques Enjeux." Presentation. February 2016. Accessed online on 10th October 2020: <https://scholar.googleusercontent.com/scholar?q=cache:KjPD4eMyPggJ:scholar.google.com/+la+majorite+sexualle+isabelle+wattier&hl=en&as_sdt=0,5>

[272] Kim Stevenson (2017) "'Not Just the Ideas of a Few Enthusiasts': Early Twentieth Century Legal Activism and Reformation of the Age of Sexual Consent." *Cultural and Social History*, Vol. 14, No. 2: pp. 219-236

[273] Mary E. Odem. *Delinquent Daughters: Protecting and Policing Adolescent Female Sexuality in the United States, 1885-1920.* (North Carolina: The University of North Carolina Press: 1995)

[274] *International Convention for the Suppression of the Traffic in Women and Children.* Ch_VII_2, Vol-1., The League of Nations. (30th September 1921). Accessed online on 15th October 2020: <https://ec.europa.eu/anti-trafficking/legislation-and-case-law-international-legislation-united-nations/1921-international-convention_en>

of having committed abuses similar to those of De Meerendre, though nothing substantial had resulted from these allegations.[275] This leads one to question, who could make legitimate claims about the sexual use of women and girls from villages such as Chisimbi's? It is worth asking why this later complaint was taken more seriously. There are over two-hundred archived documents on this issue, containing numerous reports, testimonies and correspondences. What other events and developments were occurring at the time of Morrison's allegations? What kinds of agendas were being pursued at this time and what were the stakes?

3.3: Boundaries of imperial reform: The Commission of Reform for Congo

At this point, after many years campaigning, the CRA had accomplished its initial goal; King Leopold II had relinquished control of the Congo. The administration of the colony had been transferred to the Belgian state. Policies about reforming the Congo administration were central to debates. Opinions on what 'reform' meant and should look like were contentious but remained within the parameters of the imperial civilising project. Nzongola - Ntalaja argues that the abuses that the CRA addressed were merely "symptoms" of a regime that already represented repression, exploitation and western ideas of superiority over Africans.[276] What did this mean for Congolese women and their treatment at the hands of the state?

[275] Henri Anet. "En éclaireur : voyage d'étude au Congo belge."*Société belge de Missions Protestantes au Congo.* 1913. Internet Archive : <https://translate.google.com/translate?hl=en&sl=fr&u=https://archive.org/stream/eneclaireurvoyag00anet_0/eneclaireurvoyag00anet_0_djvu.txt&prev=search>

[276] Georges Nzongola - Ntalaja. *The Congo from Leopold to Kabila: A People's History.* (London: Zed Books: 2002), pg 26

In early 1906, before the Congo was taken from Leopold's control, a five-day Congo debate took place in the Belgian House of Representatives; its proceeds were enlightening. A "Verbatim Report" of this discussion was produced by the CRA in English. Much of the conversation focused on "reform". While Belgian Socialist politicians, such as Emile Vandervelde, made it clear that slavery was "always intolerable", "that the taking of hostages" was "criminal", "that punitive expeditions" were "atrocious", and that it was essential "to stamp out all disguised forms of slavery", there were others who disagreed. Professor Henri Rolin stated that forced labour was "indispensable" and he was far from the only politician to take this stance.[277]

A Commission of Reform for Congo was set up to resolve the issues raised by the CRA and the King's inquiry, although many people remained cynical about its role in establishing real reforms in Congo. This was because it was composed of members that likely had vested interests; four "independent" ones and seven colonial officials. These included Mr. de Cuvulier, Mr. Droogmans, Captain Tombeur, Captain Chenot, Albrecht Gohr, Mr. Arnold and Captain Liebrechts. It also included Commission Colonel Fivé, who was an agent of the King in Persia and China, M. de Hemptinne of the Kasai Society and also, what Vandervelde argued as "almost unimaginable", M. Mols, the administrator of the Anglo-Belgian India Rubber Company (ABIR).[278] De Hemptinne and Mols were individuals who had been deeply embedded in the forced labour system and abuse of Congolese people in Leopold's CFS. Four

[277] *Verbatim Report of the Five Days' Congo Debate in the Belgian House of Representatives (February 20, 27, 28; Marth 1, 2),* (Liverpool: J. Richardson: 1906). In the Internet Archive: <https://archive.org/details/verbatimreportof00belgiala >, pg 30-31

[278] Vandervelde further exclaims: "..that is to say, of the Company against whom the frightful crimes related in the Report of the Commission are brought!", ibid, pg 31

independent members included Messieurs. Van Maldeghem, Janssens, Haitre Nys and Davignon. It is quite clear by looking at this list how the interests of these people prevented any kind of practical reform from stretching beyond the limits of Belgian colonial and economic control.

In the Five Days' debate, Vandervelde expressed his deep concern over the capacity of this commission to bring about change. He stated that Nys was a jurist who "consistently defended, on juridical grounds, the claims applied by King Leopold to the land, the produce of the soil, and the labour of the Congo people".[279] There were other individuals, including M. de Favereau, who offered other explanations for why reform would be difficult to implement. Instead of blaming Belgian officials who were reluctant to enact change, he argued that it was "not possible to remove a population from the frightful barbarism in which it has grovelled for so many centuries, whose morality is often low and degraded, without compelling it to make a considerable effort to which its characteristics and its inveterate habits are opposed". He also did not think it "right" to intervene in the "internal affairs of the Congo".[280]

The sentiments of both Rolin and Favereau expose some of the sympathy felt by Belgian politicians for Leopold's Congo. Another Member of Parliament, M. Woeste, a keen supporter of CFS asked, "is it not true that, twenty-five years ago, the Congo was delivered over to murders, to pillage, to cannibalism, to the slave trade, to hateful superstitions?", implying that past colonial practices had improved the situation.[281] He raised the issue over whether it was only white people that were responsible for committing atrocities and drew

[279] Ibid, pg 31
[280] Ibid, pg 37-38
[281] Ibid, pg 73

attention to the violence being committed by Congolese sentries. In response to this, another MP, the Liberal, M. Lorand, pointed out that sentries were armed by white officials for the purposes of rubber raiding on behalf of the colonial state.[282] Lorand made clear the culpability of white officers. In a similar way to Favereau, Woeste depoliticised the situation in Congo by attempting to place the blame for Congo massacres and abuse on the innate "barbarity" of Congo itself. He distanced the atrocities from any European activity, forced labour or colonial oppression as he partly quoted the Commission of Inquiry:

'"Whatever may be thought", it says, "of native ideas, proceedings such as the detention of women as hostages are too violently opposed to our ideas of justice to be tolerated.."... "The State has prohibited the practice for a long time past, but without succeeding in suppressing it"… It is always thus that things occur in countries which are still barbarous like the Congo… is it not right that Belgium should profit in a four measure from the benefits which she is giving to the Congo?'[283]

This statement fitted well within colonial discourses that emphasised the "darkness" and "savagery" of "Africa"; a place where violent events were typical and inevitable. Men like Woeste placed abuse against women within this context, as a normal symptom of a naturally violent place. According to him Europeans were the ones attempting to prevent such happenings in Congo.

It is particularly interesting to contrast Woeste's statement with the story that was

[282] Ibid, pg 74-75
[283] Ibid, pg 80

told by Morrison - one in which a white man was the centre of accountability. Far from "prohibiting" such practices, Morrison's account highlighted how violence against women *benefitted* the colonial state as it terrorised communities and chieftaincies into compliance. Furthermore, with evidence to suggest that Morrison had already complained about previous raids conducted by Sector Head, Grunne, there is an indication that the abduction and rape of women was not uncommon in this area. Morrison's description of events exposed the falsity of colonial narratives that attempted to distance colonial activities from violence and destruction. His story demonstrated that gender violence denounced by colonial officials higher up the administration was enabled and produced by the colonial system.

Following Woeste's speech, another parliamentarian, M. Colfs, wryly noted that "contrary to its duty, the Belgian government has constituted itself the systematic defender of the Congo administration".[284] Under these circumstances, it seems difficult to understand how any real change could have occurred, especially when those producing ideas for reform were the same groups of people that had been deeply involved in the previous, denounced administration.

By 1908 these reforms were still in limbo and those involved in the CRA had become increasingly frustrated. The Corresponding Secretary of the American CRA, John Daniels, wrote an article on 'The Congo Question and the "Belgian Solution"'. By examining new Belgian documents and treaties on reform he highlighted all the ways that the Belgian system would maintain the same colonial and economic structures as before. He stated:

[284] Ibid, pg 85

There is not a clause in the Colonial Charter, the Treaty of Annexation and the Additional Treaty which restores to the natives the land formerly held by them in communal tenure according to native custom; not a clause which abolishes the labor-tax that now amounts to slavery. Instead is the provision already instanced to the effect that all existing regulations preserve full force of law. It is clear that so far as these three documents may be relied on, they perpetuate by their omissions all the worst abuses. More than that, they positively specify that the abuses shall be preserved.[285]

Further to this, he pointed out that the Colonial Charter specified that the staff of CFS would continue to be employed by the Belgian state, which meant that, "the same men who have under Leopold perpetrated the abuses are under Belgium expected to carry out sweeping reforms".[286] According to Daniels, the Belgian cabinet had also stated that the concessions would remain. In fact, the only small sign of change could be seen in the supposed enforcement of King Leopold's decree of June 1906, which assigned Congolese people "three times the amount of land previously allowed them".[287] However, as Daniels deplored, this offering would only provide them a "minute fraction of the lands formerly held by them in communal tenure."[288]

The slow rate of improvements led many, like Morel, to believe that the Belgian system would merely loosely mimic its predecessor. Alice Stopford Green and Morel

[285] John Daniels, Corresponding Secretary of the Congo Reform Association. "The Congo Question and the Belgian Solution." 1908. Jstor online archives. <https://archive.org/stream/jstor-25106259/25106259_djvu.txt>
[286] Ibid
[287] Ibid
[288] Ibid

maintained correspondence about the situation and the attitudes of prominent British and Belgian figures. Green wrote to Morel about having spoken to the Archbishop of Canterbury, Randall Davidson. He had told her that he was "non-plussed at the possibility of suggesting any really effective course". She also stated that Lord Lansdowne (previous British Foreign Secretary 1900-1905) and Liberal MP, Sir Edward Grey, were "despairing as to the possibility of doing anything, given the situation of the state with its neutrality guaranteed".[289] Here, she referred to British neutrality. In another letter she wrote, "I agree with you that the abolishing of forced labour is likely to be a turn of words and not a reality".[290] Green's important role as Morel's adviser, good friend and networker during the CRA campaign continued after the Congo had been transferred to Belgium. In further correspondence from May, 1910 Green wrote about Vandervelde and other prominent socialists who were apparently satisfied with the intentions of the Belgian government and Renkin (Belgium's Minister of Colonies) on the issue of reform.[291] Morel responded to Green with a following statement, "The situation will probably improve, probably has improved, probably is improving- the reign of hideous atrocities is probably over: it has served its purpose". However, he added, "Meantime the principles of the system haven't been changed". He went on to emphasise the continued existence of "slave labour" and monopolies and the fact that Congolese people were denied rights to land while the state continued to annexe it.[292] Indeed, given such hostility to any real change and obvious white supremacist sentiment, it is not surprising that any type of minimal "reform" was sluggish to arrive.

[289] Letter page 191, April 3rd 1908, Green to Morel, Morel/F8/72, The Women's Library, London School of Economics (LSE)
[290] Letter page 192, 25th April 1908, Green to Morel, in ibid
[291] Letter pages 250-251, May 26th 1910, Green to Morel, in ibid
[292] Letter pages 252-255, 27th May 1910, Morel to Green, in ibid

While the CRA pushed for a practical application of reforms, Morel used his influence and connections with both British and Belgian politicians to gain information about the state of things. Despite his misgivings, he refused to give up. In a letter dated October 10th, 1911, Morel wrote to his friend and fellow Congo campaigner, Alfred Emmott, about how the "Association must try and press between then and now for satisfactory proof that the Reform Decrees are actually being applied".[293] He asked him when Great Britain was going to recognise the annexation of the Congo by Belgium. The following month, Travers Buxton of the Aborigines' Protection Society, wrote to Morel about some good news. According to Buxton there had been some "improvements" in Congo. He noted the reduction in food tax and the repopulation of previously decimated areas. Nonetheless, he emphasised that these developments had not been witnessed countrywide.[294] It was around this time that Vandervelde also wrote to Morel, sympathising with his frustration, but making clear his differing perspective on the matter: "From these conditions you will understand, I am sure, that while fully recognising the legitimacy for you of having a different attitude to mine, I prefer as long as the situation is what it is to reserve myself and to await events".[295]

For those who worked in Congo, including Morrison and Coppedge, as well as the CRA, this period of waiting resulted in a great deal of frustration and sense of injustice. Their hopes that the colonial system would be transformed diminished as time went by. Morrison was impatient to see immediate change. In his letter to Renkin (Minister of Colonies) in August 1909, he stated that he had no objection to Congolese workers paying tax if it was "equally

[293] Letter page 230, October 10th, 1911, Morel to Emmott, in Morel/F8/55, LSE
[294] Letter pages 102-103, 2nd November 1911, Buxton to Morel, in ibid
[295] Letter page 93, (no date), Emile Vandervelde to Morel, in ibid

distributed and humanely and justly collected".[296] However, he went on to accuse the current Belgian tax system of being "destructive both of the spirit of the natives and of the material resources of the country". Morrison requested that the Minister use his "influence" to grant Congolese people land, "individually and communally" and provide them with "more definite ownership of all the products of their ancestral lands".[297] His letter ended in expectation:

We are now looking forward with such eagerness hoping that Belgium, if she is to take over the responsibilities of the Congo Press State, will give to all- missionaries, traders and natives- a rule of justice and will faithfully carry out the Treaty stipulations entered into by the Congo Free State. We wish to feel that we can trust justice always to be done, that we need appeal to no one else, that there will be sincerity and fairness in all dealings. If this is done and if the reforms which I have indicated above are sincerely carried out as far as is possible under the circumstances, I most heartily assure you of the perfect loyalty and support of our Mission.[298]

Despite writing in a tone of optimism and expectation to the Minister of Colonies in August, his letter dated one month later to his peer, Reverend Combier, belied his true feelings. After describing the raid on Chisimbi's village, he despairingly wrote, "How long will all this keep up? How long can the native races stand this drain? I am sorry to say that so far as I can see, no material change in the situation under the so-called Belgian regime. We are

[296] Letter sent to Mr. Renkin, the Minister of Colonies, from Reverend William Morrison of the APCM. Dated August 27th, 1909. Portefeuille: JUST 48A, Liasse: 1153. African Archives, Brussels.
[297] Ibid
[298] Ibid

always told to wait, wait, wait."[299] Morrison was to be sorely disappointed. The Belgian administration absorbed and extended the key systems of control and colonial oppression established by Leopold's Free State.[300]

What is clear in these discussions around "reform" was a focus and emphasis on reforming *labour* practices and its association with slavery. Clearly, practical changes to the system were limited and slow to be implemented. In conversations about reforming the colony, there was no clear statement about specifically altering the treatment of women. The violence against them was viewed as contextual to colonial labour activities and not as a separate issue. The subject remained untouched by the "new" administration.

In this contentious discourse, missionaries attempted to draw attention to what they considered to be abhorrent treatment of a Lulua community. In a period when 'reform' was key to discussions about Congo, this event can be deemed a very damaging one to the narratives and ideals that were being propounded by the new administration. In the next part of this chapter, I consider the colonial responses to Morrison's accusations and the power-struggles that were played out around the account of events.

3.4: Managing the narrative: downplaying a story of sexual violence

The event described by Morrison was reminiscent of the kinds of atrocities that occurred before Congo's administrative transferal to Belgium. In official discourses violent raids such

[299] Leeds Mercury Newspaper. Published 11th November 1909. "Congo (text missing): Missionary's Evidence of Forced Labour Outrages, Under State Authority", Portefeuille: JUST 48A, Liasse: 1153. African Archives, Brussels.
[300] Nzongola - Ntalaja, *The Congo from Leopold to Kabila*, pg 26

as these were meant to be coming to an end. Such terrorising tactics belonged to Leopoldian days gone by, not the new, more "humane" and "reforming" administration. As discussed previously though, conditions in much of Congo remained similar to before. So, what was at stake in the telling of such a story? I suggest that the story deeply undermined colonial discourses of reform and change. The administration wanted to be seen to be dealing with the case. What ensued was a struggle between different individuals over how the story was controlled, developed and shaped.

De Meerendre's reaction to Morrison's letter of complaint against him was to accuse Morrison of defamation. His version of events, which he sent to DC Gustin, stated that his actions were not a result of direct orders made by Lulua's Sector Chief, De Grunne.[301] De Meerendre claimed that he had reasons and "motives" for his actions. De Meerendre disputed Morrison's claims that he had provided no notice before taking soldiers to the village; "prior notice had always been given to the chiefs".[302] However, according to De Meerendre, had such notice been extended to the villagers, they would have all been "in the bush" by the time he arrived. This gives some obvious indication as to the forced nature of recruitment. He went on to state that, as expected, the Lulua villagers had deserted once they realised the purpose of his visit. According to De Meerendre, any women and soldiers taken in raids had been "designated" to him by chiefs. With this statement he implies legitimacy to forced recruitment and marriage.[303] His explanation is ambiguous as it is not clear which leader De Meerendre was referring to; Chisimbi or Kabilu. Other documentation reveals that

[301] Letter sent to District Commissioner, Mr. Gustin, from Second Lieutenant Kervyn de Meerendre. Undated. Portefeuille: JUST 48A, Liasse: 1153. African Archives, Brussels.
[302] Ibid
[303] Ibid

it was Kabilu. Indeed, it was Kabilu who was now recognised as Chisimbi's superior by the administration. It seems to have made no difference whether or not chiefs willingly provided colonial officers with women and soldiers. If they did not designate certain persons, their status was officially erased, their villages ransacked, and their people abducted anyway. Chiefs had limited choices; they could decide whether to work with the state, which would give them some power over who was removed from their communities. In Kabilu's case, it would have been more logical to forcibly recruit people from villages further away from the ones he lived in and near, as well from communities who refused to recognise and respect his colonial position as a superior chief.

In relation to the other accusations held against him, De Meerendre categorically denied that two girls who had been reportedly removed from their homes had been raped by five soldiers, explaining that the girls and women were housed separately, and the soldiers "forbidden" to approach them. He made checks during the night to ensure that his orders were adhered to.[304] De Meerendre had full confidence in his authority over his soldiers and refused to consider the possibility that his orders could have been disregarded when he was busy elsewhere.

De Meerendre absolved himself of any responsibility with regards to Chief Chisimbi's detention, claiming that Chisimbi was placed under the control of Kabilu by De Grunne; thus, he had only followed orders. De Meerendre asserted that he explained the reasons for Chisimbi's arrest in his report on the case and that, because his description had been accepted

[304] Ibid

by senior officials he was “entitled to believe” that he had “done well”. He denied any involvement in giving Chisimbi to Kabilu “to be punished”; stating that he simply suggested that Chisimbi’s men confess to Kabilu and request leniency. The men agreed to this, but as De Meerendre was leaving Kabilu's settlement, he saw some of them being put in chains. De Meerendre claimed he was “too far away to intervene” and taking into consideration Chisimbi and his family's unwillingness to “submit to a decision of the state” he felt that his reaction was not unreasonable; other officials would have “closed their eyes” too.[305]

De Meerendre sought to portray to his superior officers his belief that he had committed no wrongdoing. He implicated the complicity of De Grunne and other officials who accepted his account of events and therefore tacitly approved of his actions. De Meerendre felt entitled to some resentment of chiefs like Chisimbi who refused to bow to the requirements of the colonial administration. De Meerendre could not empathise with the position of Chisimbi or his community; for him they were obstacles to his work. His explanation that he was “too far away to intervene” when Chisimbi's people were being chained up is not convincing, especially when he was still close enough to identify who they were. For De Meerendre, collective punishment was not an issue. After his acknowledgement that he “closed” his “eyes” to some forms of injustice, is it possible that he also ignored other, sexual forms, despite his claims to the contrary?

De Meerendre's version of events regarding the raid on Chisimbi's village illustrates how some types of violence, such as the sexual, were more taboo than others. Violence of

[305] Ibid

this nature was expressed as something more serious. I discuss why this was the case further on in this chapter. What is important to highlight here is that various attempts were being made to control and contain a narrative that included rape and forced conjugal relations with potentially pre-pubescent girls. This became increasingly more difficult as news of the case was disseminated to the public by Morrison and Conan Doyle.

Some correspondence reveals the ways colonial officials tried to downplay the events of the raid. In November 1909, Sector Head, Mr Mûller, stood in for the absent DC Gustin at Lusambo and sent to the Governor General at Boma a summary of the case.[306] He claimed that the Sector Head, De Grunne, had carried out a "thorough" investigation into Morrison's complaints against De Meerendre. Mûller commented on some discrepancies between Kabilu's story and De Meerendre's (Kabilu claimed that he chained Chisimbi's people on the orders of De Meerendre) and Mûller wrote that this statement needed verification. However, overall, Mûller seemed satisfied with De Meerendre's testimony. He concluded by stating that the "recruitment of the militiamen" had "been an exaggeration of the facts that have occurred in the region of Luluabourg".[307] According to him, De Meerendre's report highlighted the "unwillingness of the natives to comply with the recruitment laws". Mûller insisted that among such "indisputable difficulties" a "calm, cautious and experienced agent" was required to make a success of things.[308] He blamed the Lulua community's disrespect for colonial law and De Meerendre's lack of experience for the state of affairs. Morrison's explanation was undermined as an "exaggeration". Mûller was not the only one to largely

[306] To the Governor General in Boma, from Sector Head, Mr Muller (standing in for the District Commissioner, Gustin, at Lusambo). Dated November 1909. Portefeuille: JUST 48A, Liasse: 1153, African Archives, Brussels.
[307] Ibid
[308] Ibid

dismiss Morrison's claims.

Various officials attempted to discredit Morrison's version of events by accusing him of having a vendetta against the state and of therefore being untrustworthy and unreliable. In this sense they made their own attempts to control and downplay the story. This is not surprising; if Morrison's narrative was to be believed and verified, it would have caused harm to the colony's image and to Belgium as a whole. However, what is possibly more revealing was the official disregard for the Congolese testimonies of witnesses to the raid.

In his letter to Reverend Combier, which was also forwarded to The Times newspaper by Conan Doyle, Morrison wrote about a trip that he made down the Kasai river a few weeks after the attack on Chisimbi's village.[309] On the steamer he came across some of the Lulua people that had been abducted in the raid. In full, he described his observations and the conversations that he had with them:

There were about twenty of these people. They said that after being taken they had been sent to Lusambo and put on the steamer to be sent they did not know where. Several of the men had received the usual uniform of the state soldiers, the others were wearing their usual clothes and they had been told that they would become workers. Among these people were three or four women who were taken away from their households and husbands and given to other men. All these people were disembarked on the Upper Congo. They looked very bad. When they were disembarked, one of the men was so weak that he had to be supported

[309] To the Belgian Minister of Colonies, Renkin, from Belgian politician, Emile Vandervelde. Dated 12th November. Portefeuille: JUST 48A, Liasse: 1153, African Archives, Brussels.

by his companions.[310]

The appearance of these people suggests that they had not been well-treated. One man was so unhealthy that he required physical help to leave the boat. They had been through traumatic upheavals; forcibly removed from their homes and confined to new identities as soldiers and wives of men they did not know. Morrison wrote about the uncertainty that now characterised their lives. When the group were being moved, they had had no idea where they were going. They were exhausted. There is no indication as to how relationships between girls/women and soldiers began. It seems unlikely that any bridewealth was exchanged in such circumstances as the group were being taken far from home. The violence meted out to Lulua abductees was ongoing and specific. They had been forced to leave their homes and families behind. They were now alienated from their communities and isolated within violent and hostile colonial structures that sought to exploit their labour. This practice does not seem so different to the ways that slaves were acquired in the 19th century by slave raiders and warring clans. These types of "recruitment" match understandings of slavery put forward by Miers and Kopytoff that centred on marginality and unbelonging.[311] For the women, not only were they being forced to labour, they were also being made to leave their husbands (and possibly children) behind and begin new conjugal relationships with men in the colonial militia. These are forms of sexual violence and enslavement.

The evidence in this letter was regarded with scepticism by Minister of Colonies Renkin, who disregarded the testimonies of Congolese people because he was suspicious of

[310] Ibid

[311] For a discussion of these ideas, see the section on slavery in the literature review in Chapter 1: Introduction

Morrison. The Belgian Socialist, Vandervelde quoted Morrison's story about his conversation with the group of people on the steamship to Renkin. The Minister responded by pointing out that Morrison had complained of such events before, including the capture of women, men and children. He referred to Morrison's previous complaints about De Grunne recruiting people by violent means in Luebo in 1908. The Minister stated that for this case, "photographs were produced to support these accusations" but "it was clear, however, that these charges were unfounded".[312] This conclusion was established because De Grunne had reportedly not recruited any workers at this time. It would be interesting to know more about the evidence, provided by De Grunne, that convinced the administration that he or his under-officers had not carried out such raids and were innocent of the charges. What had prevented the administration from pursuing the origins of the photographic evidence? Renkin finished his response to Vandervelde with the following sentence, "we must wait for the results of the information to judge the value of Mr. Morrison's current accusations".[313] This was not a statement about objectivity. Taken with Renkin's previous statements, it was deliberate obfuscation and denial**.** Renkin's reply to Vandervelde completely ignored the testimony of the Congolese people on the steamer. Their visibility as credible witnesses was easily dismissed.

In the same vein that the colonial administration felt entitled to dominate, terrorise and exploit Congolese people, it also disregarded their testimonies. It is clear from the above evidence that ordinary people were not given the opportunity to speak about their experiences under colonialism. Many may have had few good words to say about their

[312] ibid
[313] Ibid

ordeals. There were only some Congolese witnesses whose statements were considered by colonialists as important enough to record. These were men in leadership positions, such as Chief Chisimbi and Kabilu.

Both Chisimbi and Kabilu's interviews were conducted and recorded by De Grunne. On the 18th September 1909, De Grunne asked Chisimbi what happened on the day that De Meerendre came to the village.[314] Chisimbi described how De Meerendre asked him why he did not want to obey Kabilu and took him to Luluabourg when he found his explanation to be unsatisfactory. Chisimbi stated that De Meerendre also arrested some of his men, named Kapulumba, Musiku, Kasongo Mule, Kabea Kamuamba, Bulangongo, Gia Katawa and Biselele, and handed them over to Kabilu. De Grunne asked Chisimbi if he had provided the necessary soldiers which had been requested by the state and he said no. In his simple answers to such narrow questioning Chisimbi seems defiant. He refused to accept any legitimacy of Kabilu as his superior or of the state's authority over him. His statement provides further clarity as to why De Meerendre, De Grunne and others felt entitled to mistreat and abuse him and his community; Chisimbi was a threat to the smooth running of the colonial system. Chisimbi also explained that soldiers took his wife, Bapende. This is the first time that Bapende is referred to by her name, in any documentation, and it is by her husband. This is significant, because in all European correspondence and records she was simply his “wife”. Chisimbi stated that she was “abused” by two soldiers who “kept her close to them all night”. This occurred despite the “checks” that Meerendre claimed to have made on his soldiers and Bapende overnight. Bapende was also denied the visibility accorded by an interview, so we will never know exactly

[314] “Proces Verbal” of Chief Chisimbi, witnessed by Head of the Lulua sector, Grunne, Ferdinand. Dated 20th September 1909. Portefeuille no. AI 1395; liasse no. 5/6/1, African Archives, Brussels.

how she was “abused” or maltreated.[315] Perhaps she was offered an interview and declined, or her husband declined for her. She may well have been traumatised after her experience and been either too scared or unwilling to speak of it. Chisimbi did not claim that she was raped, although it is possible that he may not have wanted to make such knowledge public if she had been. It could have undermined his authority, masculinity and image as a protector. On the other hand, Bapende may have chosen not to disclose this information and expose herself to scrutiny. There is no sensitivity or consideration for such possibilities. Colonial understandings of what may have been taboo or stigmatised in Lulua society was not present.

The layout of such interviews was clear and brief. The questions only related to the information regarded as relevant to the state. There was no indication as to how Chisimbi felt; De Grunne was not interested in this information. Neither did he ask about the history of the chieftainship. In the document, Chisimbi is bleached of any personality. He may have also been reluctant to cooperate and answer more questions. De Grunne ended the record by stating that Chisimbi insisted he did not know how to sign the document and wrote that the minutes are “the expression of the truth of nothing but the truth and the whole truth”.[316] Considering that De Grunne had also been accused by Morrison of similar crimes a year previously, it may have been in De Grunne's interest to disprove Morrison's current allegations. His own legitimacy as a Sector Head who could control his officers was at stake. This made him an even less objective observer than he already was as an officer pursuing colonial agendas. There is no doubt that this influenced the kinds of questions he asked witnesses.

[315] Ibid
[316] Ibid

On the other hand, the interview with Kabilu was quite different. Kabilu stated that he was asked by De Meerendre to supply him with soldiers, which he did. He accompanied De Meerendre to the village of Chisimbi and asked him for recruits. Chisimbi was, as we know, unwilling to supply these. Kabilu stated that he was told by De Meerendre to keep some of Chisimbi's men prisoner until they acknowledged Kabilu's authority. This part of the story matches Chisimbi's testimony but contradicts De Meerendre's version of events. Kabilu admitted that he had tied these men up, as De Meerendre instructed him to, but that he had not "mistreated" them.[317] De Meerendre had claimed to be only a helpless and passive observer of Kabilu's act of having Chisimbi's men tied up. It is not obvious what "mistreatment" constituted under these circumstances. There were no questions addressed to him about violence against women or rape during the raid. The sexual element of abuse by colonial soldiers was excluded, which betrayed an attempt by officers to shape and project a story that centred on the disobedience of a chief rather than colonial sexual violence. This was meant to counter not only Morrison's narrative about the raid, but also the complaints made against Meerendre by APCM'S physician, Dr. Coppedge.

3.5: Challenging colonial hegemony: a white man positioned as perpetrator

Following the incidents in the Lulua villages and the arrest of Chief Chisimbi, Dr. Coppedge confronted Kervyn de Meerendre a few times at his post in Luluabourg in late June, 1909. He was there on the authorisation of Reverend Morrison to represent the APCM. De Meerendre

[317] "Proces Verbal" of Chief Kabilu, witnessed by Head of the Lulua sector, Grunne Ferdinand. Dated 18th September 1909. Portefeuille no. AI 1395; liasse no. 5/6/1, African Archives, Brussels.

documented these visits and sent the minutes to Sector Chief De Grunne who forwarded them to DC Gustin. According to De Meerendre's account, Coppedge was always accompanied by Chisimbi's "catechists" and many others. On his first visit, Coppedge "protested against the arrest of Tshisimbi" and told De Meerendre "that Tshisimbi was the real leader and that Kabilu had no right to him".[318] De Meerendre wrote that Coppedge, "also insisted each time that I return Tshisimbi to his hands with a promise that Tshisimbi would be returned to the Luluabourg post if his detention was approved by the authority".[319] After De Meerendre denied his requests, Coppedge asked him "several times to confirm this refusal", stating that if he continued to detain Chisimbi, "this palaver would not be over for a long time".[320] However, after this incident, Coppedge continued to confront De Meerendre:

The last time that Dr. Coppedge came to the post he claimed that the soldiers' wives ("les femmes des miliciens") recruited by me were not nubile, I replied that I was not very competent that I believed the chiefs who had handed them to me that they were old enough to be wives, and if I were mistaken, these women would inevitably be expelled from Lusambo by the doctor who examined them.[321]

At this time colonial discourses which focused on protecting "non-nubile" Congolese girls from early marriage was becoming more prominent. In these conversations, colonialists (and missionaries) were positioned as the progressive interveners and saviours, and

[318] 'Procès-verbal des faits qui se sont passés et des propos qui ont été tenus lors des visites du Docteur Coppedge à Luluabourg vers la fin de Juin 1909' from Kervyn De Meerendre to Sector Chief M. de Grunne. No date. Annex to the Governor General's letter of 19/2/1910. Portefeuille: JUST 48A, Liasse: 1153, African Archives, Brussels.
[319] Ibid
[320] Ibid
[321] Ibid

Congolese men as the polygamous perpetrators. By 1913, the administration had prohibited the acquisition of children for marriage.[322] Yet, here is evidence to suggest that the colonial system was actually enabling forced marital/sexual between young Congolese girls and colonial soldiers. It is interesting to consider how and when soldiers working under the administration first began having *femmes des miliciens.* Were some of these soldiers white and did colonial administrators also acquire women/girls for these purposes?

In the face of these allegations, De Meerendre pleaded ignorance and placed the responsibility for acquiring potentially "non-nubile" girls squarely at the feet of the Congolese chiefs who had "handed them" to him. He also stated that this matter would be dealt with by a doctor who examined the girls. He implied that the examination of girls was standard practice, though it was not made clear what kind of process this entailed. The purpose was likely to check on the overall health of the girls and whether they had any transmittable diseases. According to De Meerendre, this was when the doctor had to also ascertain the level of sexual development of the girls/women. Again, De Meerendre distanced himself from any responsibility. His report implied that if any girls were found to be too young to be wives, and therefore, sexually inaccessible, they were "inevitably" ousted from the post. This statement makes it clear what the main use for these girl/women was: to be "wives", sexual partners, and likely, domestic aids. Furthermore, the fact that a standard procedure had been put in place for a doctor to examine any new arrivals suggests that the practice of abducting girls and women was not uncommon. These conversations between Coppedge and De Meerendre are revealing because they show how the main issue at stake was the age/puberty of the girls.

[322]'Rapport au Roi de la Commission instituee pour la protection des Indigenes', "Text for the draft circular IV. - Acquisition of children in view of marriage", portefeuille no. AI 1395; liasse no. 5/6/1, dated 14 Janvier 1913, African Archives, Brussels.

The women's positions as abducted persons were of less concern. Clearly, De Meerendre did not think that he had done anything wrong. The presence of abducted women at the post was normal and accepted as long as they were the right age. These women were regarded by colonialists as a necessary part of having a functioning colonial army. From the evidence, their abduction and use as "wives" was not discouraged or frowned upon by colonial officials.

De Meerendre wrote that on other occasions, Coppedge claimed that another chief called Shabiuma, had given to De Meerendre "as a militia woman (*femme de milicien*), a woman belonging to another chief." Immediately, De Meerendre called for this woman, "who before Dr. Coppedge and Mr. Arbulot, declared to be from the village of Shabiuma".[323] De Meerendre continued his report by telling another story. He wrote:

Last time, Dr. Coppedge brought me a woman from the village of Tshisimbi who claimed to have been abused and raped by two soldiers. I rang the rally and sent for the soldiers… After an investigation which showed me that this woman had not been raped but only ill-treated by these soldiers, I put the culprits in chains for a month and urged them to each pay the woman four brasses which they did.[324]

It is possible that the woman he referred to was Chisimbi's wife, Bapende. In his letter to DC Gustin, he added some further detail:

[323] 'Procès-verbal des faits qui se sont passés et des propos qui ont été tenus lors des visites du Docteur Coppedge à Luluabourg vers la fin de Juin 1909' sent to Sector Chief, M. de Grunne from Second Lieutenant Kervyn de Meerendre
[324] Ibid

I have neither allowed nor violated this woman, who, moreover, has not been raped, as is shown by the result of this inquiry. This woman was brutalized by the soldiers Baruti and Bokakore while I was some distance away from them and my attention was focused elsewhere.[325]

To summarise, according to De Meerendre's description of events, there were three accusations levelled at him by Dr Coppedge after his refusal to free Chisimbi. The first one related to the non-nubility of girls/women that had been recruited as "wives" for the militia. The second one concerned a woman who had been given to De Meerendre by Chief Shabiuma for his militia. Coppedge claimed that she "belonged" to another chief. On a third occasion, Coppedge brought a woman from Chisimbi's village (who may have been Bapende), claiming that she had been raped by De Meerendre's soldiers. Each time De Meerendre told these stories he refuted the accusations made against him. He finished his letter in earnest, stating, "I swear that to the best of my recollection the present minutes are true and are the expression of the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth".[326]

Aside from whether De Meerendre's account of these particular events is accurate, his letter leads one to consider the amount of editing and management of these stories overall. If the issue of protecting pre-pubescent Congolese girls was prevalent and contentious at the time, perhaps he only chose to include events and allegations that he thought he could contest or disprove. It is also interesting to dissect the statements that he

[325] Letter sent to District Commissioner, Mr. Gustin, from Second Lieutenant Kervyn de Meerendre. Undated. Portefeuille: JUST 48A, Liasse: 1153. African Archives, Brussels.
[326] 'Procès-verbal des faits qui se sont passés et des propos qui ont été tenus lors des visites du Docteur Coppedge à Luluabourg vers la fin de Juin 1909' sent to Sector Chief, M. de Grunne from Second Lieutenant Kervyn de Meerendre

provided to repudiate Coppedge's claims. De Meerendre argued that the woman whom Coppedge had said belonged to another chief and not Shabiuma (implying that she had been abducted or was a slave) had, in fact, stated that she came from Shabiuma's village. This may be true, but it is also important to consider the conditions under which women "of the militia" lived and how they were "recruited". If Morrison's story was true, some of these women had not volunteered to be in these positions; they had been abducted or given away by their chiefs. How much autonomy did they have under such circumstances?

The descriptions of women "belonging" to men, as being the "wives" of militia, rather than slaves or abductees and being discussed in the context of looting by both missionaries and colonial officials, gives some indication about their role in the eyes of Europeans. They were not required to consent to these unions, but they did need to have reached puberty at least. Given these conditions, would a Congolese woman have felt able to disagree in front of the man whose control she was directly under? Additionally, if she had been taken as a slave by Chief Shabiuma, would she have wanted to openly admit this to these men (and possibly anyone else who was also present)? What would she have gained from supporting Coppedge's claims so openly? Another argument might suggest that she used the space provided to challenge her role as a prop in the clash between two white men; that she had actively chosen to stay with the militia, possibly because it meant that she was in better circumstances than before. In terms of the final case, De Meerendre did not give any detail as to how he ascertained that the woman had not been raped. He only stated that an "investigation" took place and that he had punished the accused men for their "ill-treatment" of the woman. It is clear from De Meerendre's description that he did not think "ill-treatment" merited the same level of concern and punishment as rape, because he stated simply that the

woman “had not been raped but *only* ill-treated” [emphasis added]. The way in which he distinguished these types of treatment exposes the kinds of European/colonial discourses around sexual violence at the time. De Meerendre was answering to his superiors. If rape had been proven, it would have reflected badly on De Meerendre, especially in a context where colonial and missionary discourses were attempting to portray European structures as benevolent safe havens for Congolese women escaping their male counterparts.

There is another important element about these confrontations between De Meerendre, Morrison and Coppedge; the ways in which Morrison and Coppedge challenged colonial tropes. Morrison insisted on the accountability of a white colonial officer in charge of Congolese troops carrying out violent acts. He held De Meerendre responsible, not the militia meting out the treatment. This countered ideas around imperialists being the protective saviours of Congolese women. Both Morrison and Coppedge centred De Meerendre as a perpetrator. However, there is another point to be made. As De Meerendre described, it was only after his refusal to free Chisimbi that Coppedge made his further accusations. Perhaps this was a coincidence or De Meerendre was intentionally framing it in such a way as to make Coppedge appear like he was trying to smear De Meerendre’s reputation. The APCM had their own motivations for pursuing the case presented by Morrison: being able to peacefully carry out their mission work and spread their Protestant influence. Were the APCM really concerned about the abuse of girls and women or were they more interested in changes around who controlled them? In a time when discourses about Congo reform and child exploitation were rife and narratives around protecting and *controlling* Congolese women had become increasingly pervasive, the APCM whistle-blew on the details of a violent raid; an

event that completely contravened the so-called principles propounded by the Belgian administration.

3.6: Conclusion

The example of colonial abuse examined in this chapter occurred during an administrative transition between the CFS and that the Belgian Congo. Reforming colonialism was key to legitimising it in the face of humanitarian atrocities. However, this case exposed cracks at an institutional level and the brutal realities for Congolese people navigating life through ongoing colonial violence. Morrison highlighted an embarrassing incident for the colonial administration, one that was handled with care and discretion by officials who feared that it would blemish Belgium's reputation. However, it was not an isolated example of colonial gender violence. The archives hint at a wider normalisation of these practices. These are signalled in the responses of a defiant De Meerendre, the complicity of senior administrators, the procedure of medically examining girls/women and the responses of those like Renkin who attempted to discredit Morrison by referring to similar past complaints. Colonial violence of this kind served a purpose: to demonstrate control over women's sexuality and labour and to terrorise communities into compliance. It was not merely a bi- product of forced labour. The evidence analysed in this chapter challenges European discourse that insisted on colonial protection for Congolese women. It demonstrates that, despite publicly condemning "native" practices which it believed were detrimental to the status of Congolese women, such as polygamy and slavery in marriage, the colonial system actively reproduced and enabled violence against women.

CHAPTER 4: PREDATORY WHITE MEN AND A CULTURE OF IMPUNITY: EXPLOITATION AND SEXUAL VIOLENCE AGAINST GIRLS AND WOMEN IN COLONIAL CONGO (1904-1913)

4.1: Introduction

Chapter Three explored the centrality of sexual and gender-based violence to the project of colonial domination and terror under early Belgian rule. The evidence highlights how systematic forms of sexual violence were not simply unfortunate symptoms of forced labour. In fact, rape, abduction and forms of forced conjugal relations assisted in re-organising chiefdoms and ensuring the submission of Congolese leaders and communities to the colonial state. Abducted women and children likely provided important support for Congolese colonial soldiers. Chapter Three focused on lacklustre institutional responses to a violent event that would not have been an unusual occurrence during the years of CFS. A rebranded colonial administration did not eradicate such violence. This is not surprising considering the Belgian system retained many former CFS staff. Additionally, as we have seen, conversations about 'reform' excluded a focus on specifically improving the treatment of *women* under colonial rule.

This chapter takes another angle to expose how sexuality played a role in colonial exploitation and oppression. It examines cases of alleged sexual abuse committed by European men (largely against Congolese girls). Foregrounding these examples makes it possible to expose some of the background conditions which enabled these abuses. Mapping these incidents, as well as other types of relations that existed between Congolese women and colonial officials/soldiers provides a close examination of colonial sexual culture. A context of male entitlement, predatory behaviour and impunity was pervasive. 19th century

Western narratives about African women as sexually promiscuous justified any sexual misdemeanours on the part of men. Colonial discourses reinforced an idea of men as victims with reputations to protect.

This research gives insight into the ways that Europeans sexually coerced, manipulated, forced and groomed Congolese girls and women. This violence was insidious and therefore less easy for activists to expose. The atrocities that took place during Leopold's reign had been publicly condemned, but the type of colonial abuse referred to in this chapter was rarely acknowledged as anything more than ambiguously "immoral" behaviour by some colonial administrators. Only a minority raised concerns about the potentially exploitative nature of these relations. The official discussions that took place around these incidents were discretely handled and largely omitted from public discourse.

This chapter provides evidence to show how women's experiences were used in colonial agendas. In European investigations, what was recognised as abuse against women and who were framed as the main perpetrators? In Belgium between 1867 and 1989 rape was not explicitly defined. Article 375 of the Penal Code only stipulated that:

"Anyone who commits the crime of rape, either with the aid of violence or serious threats, or by deception, by abusing a person who, by the effect of an illness, by the alteration of his faculties or by any other accidental cause, has lost the use of his senses, or has been deprived of them by some artifice, shall be punished by imprisonment. If the crime was committed against a child under the age of fourteen, the offender shall be punished with hard labor from ten to fifteen years.[327]

[327] Wattier, "La Majorite Sexuelle"

This statement is open to interpretation because it does not describe what "rape" entailed (whether penetration with the penis or otherwise). It is associated with violence. Therefore, only minors or women who could not physically fight back due to illness are indicated as rape victims. Any legal notion of marital rape was absent until 1979. Article 375 was ambiguous. It therefore seems unsurprising that women were not necessarily recognised as exploited or abused victims of colonial men. I analyse the legal processes and testimonies produced in these cases, consider whose experiences were prioritised and suggest how the behaviour of predatory men formed an important part of colonial supremacy.

4.2: Sexualised Congolese victims, blameless European perpetrators

The case against Longobardo: a context of ill-discipline and sexual entitlement

In 1907-1908, it was alleged that Eduardo Longobardo had attempted to rape a young girl, called Kalannajo, at the Bima post in the Buta territory of Northern Congo. Longobardo was a forty-year-old from Naples and a captain commander of the *Force Publique*. He had reportedly forced the girl into his room with the intention of having sex with her before she escaped. A complaint had been made that he had also had intimate relations with a married woman while passing through the post of Libokua.

On 2nd September 1907, Longobardo was questioned by the Public Prosecutors Office.[328] They asked if he had "brought a little girl or lover" to his room, and if so, why? Longobardo explained that when he arrived at Bima he had requested that the man in charge of the post, second lieutenant and judicial police officer, Mr. Van de Maele, send him someone

[328] Account of Eduardo Longobardo. Sent to the Attorney General, Herman Weber at the Public Prosecutors Office, Boma. Dated 2nd September 1907. Portefeuille: JUSTICE 49B, Liasse: 977. African Archives, Brussels.

to wash his clothes. Van de Maele recommended one woman that had previously spent three years with another white man who had returned to Europe. Was this woman a ménagère?

The unnamed woman arrived, collected his laundry and returned it to him, clean, two hours later. Longobardo paid her with cloth, pearls and salt. He then asked her if she would return to him in the evening after "mess" to "have a little chat". If she did this, he would provide her with a gift. She accepted his offer and told him that she was in the "house of the white men's wives" (*"oui, je suis dans la maison des femmes des blancs"*). However, she failed to materialise at the arranged time. Longobardo went to her house but she was absent. At the woman's residence Longobardo found a girl, who he thought to be nearly ten years old, and asked her about the whereabouts of the woman. He was informed that she had gone to the nearby village. Longobardo requested that the girl search for the woman and tell her that he would wait for her.

Longobardo's conversation with the woman as well as his insistent pursuit of her suggests that he had expectations of her beyond those of housekeeping. Perhaps she acted as a companion to white men. This is a credible interpretation given Van de Maele's comment that she had previously spent years with another white man, as well as her statement that she was staying at "la maison des femmes des blancs". Was this a type of brothel or a more permanent home for officers' partners? It is unlikely that she referred to the house as one that was inhabited by white female wives, because at this time there were still few white women residing in the colony.[329] Viaene highlights that liaisons between European men and Congolese women were far from hidden.[330] Sources point out how men of all positions and

[329] This is corroborated by other sources. For example, see Edmond Picard's *En Congolie, 1896 : Suivi de Notre Congo en 1909.* (Brussels: Paul Lacomblez: 1896), see the Internet Archive version: <https://archive.org/details/encongolie00picagoog/page/n163/mode/2up>, pg 171

[330] Viaene, "King Leopold's Imperialism and the Origins of the Belgian Colonial Party", pg 784

trades had been engaged in these relations for years. According to one account written by Edmond Picard, the founder of *Journal des Tribunaux,* during the years of CFS many men had their own "petit ménage congolais".[331] He pointed out that domestic slavery was an ongoing practice indulged by European men when they acquired Congolese women for concubinage. In *En Congolie* he wrote that it was a "joy for a woman to be acquired by a white man who does not fail to treat her with some European regard".[332] He presumed that white men treated women better than Congolese husbands. Other publications from the period also highlight the prevalence of mixed-race children in the colony.[333] Given the fact that the Congo administration had only recently been transferred to the Belgian government and that it retained the same institutional structures and staff, it seems unlikely that the pervasive sexual practices referred to above would have disappeared. Furthermore, in Viaene's article he refers to a book called *Udinji* (published in 1905 in Brussels), an early colonial story that he describes as "a kind of Congolese Lolita".[334] The existence of such texts gives indication of a normalisation of sexualised representations of young Congolese girls in colonial discourses. It also gives insight into how predatory behaviour was not only tolerated but romanticised.

According to Longobardo, the girl returned to him sometime later claiming not to have seen the woman and he told her that she could leave. It was at this point that Van de Maele came to look for the child, admonishing her for her absence and claiming that he had been calling her. Longobardo told Van de Maele not to blame her and explained what the child had been doing for him. According to Longobardo, that was the end of the matter. Further questioning led him to claim that he "did not have a single moment" in which to "profit from

[331] Picard, *En Congolie*, pg 170. *Journal des Tribunaux* was a legal bulletin produced on a weekly basis
[332] Ibid
[333] Charles Francois Gommaire Buls. *Croquis Congolais* (Brussels : Bruxelles G. Balat: 1899), see the Internet Archive version: <https://archive.org/details/croquiscongolais00bulsuoft/page/204/mode/2up>, pg 204-205
[334] Viaene, "King Leopold's Imperialism and the Origins of the Belgian Colonial Party", pg 784

this child" and that people were nearby and would have seen them. In relation to the woman that he had been accused of having sex with in Libokua (or Libokwa in the texts): Longobardo claimed she was unmarried.[335]

From this story one can surmise the possibility that the woman who originally cleaned his laundry did not wish to make an evening visit to Longobardo's house. She did not arrive at his residence; she was not at her house and she was also not found in the local village. Longobardo pursued her as much as possible before giving up. This may have been the only way for the woman to comfortably decline his invitation. If this was true, it indicates how Longobardo's entitlement towards Congolese women impacted their lives; they had to safely navigate his persistent advancements. It may have been easier for them to disappear rather than openly decline Longobardo's offers. This demonstrates how women discerned and chose their colonial partners. The woman may have spent three years with one white man, but that did not mean she was willing to service Longobardo in any capacity. However, prevalent racist ideas about black women emphasised their lustful sexual appetites, presented them as sexually accessible and provided justification for any indecent or "immoral" behaviour on the part of men.

Sandra Ponzanesi expertly explains these imperial logics in her work on colonial sexual politics:

..the image of the black Venus became a forceful trope for expressing the contaminated and yet highly asymmetrical relationship between the ruler and the ruled…The appropriation and subjugation of the female exotic body was sustained by a meticulously constructed racial grammar in which the Other was represented as infantile, irrational and

[335] Account of Longobardo

prey to primordial sexual lust, and consequently as mysterious and inherently subversive.[336]

The possibility that the woman was deliberately avoiding a confrontation with Longobardo becomes more likely when one examines the witness statement provided by a twenty-four-year-old Mr Jean Eggen, a Deputy State Prosecutor residing in Boma who was from Ghent in Belgium.[337] Weber asked Eggen what he had found when interviewing the girl. Eggen responded that he had spoken to three girls, aged five to six years old and two women. He claimed that it was "difficult... to question them because they spoke Ababua" and the "children were so troubled". Eggen was told that while the other "whites" had their meals, Longobardo, had taken one of these girls to his room. The girl had refused to engage in any sexual activity, "threw herself under the bed screaming" and then escaped. Longobardo had pursued her and pulled off her loincloth in his attempts to restrain her. A woman then went to the head of post (Van de Maele) to alert him of these events. Eggen stated that he stopped the "interrogation" due to the girls' "state of nervousness", "fear" and "fright". When he wanted to resume his questioning a few days later the women and girls had already left**.** It is unclear if this group of girls included the child that Longobardo referred to in his testimony. It is possible that he inaccurately guessed her age.

The distressed reactions of the children during their interview with Eggen indicate their emotional trauma. Perhaps they were also afraid of angering Longobardo or of potential reprisals. They had disappeared before being able to give any further details of the events. If Longobardo was a violent man as these stories suggest then their behaviour would not have

[336] Sandra Ponzanesi. "Beyond the Black Venus: Colonial Sexual Politics and Contemporary Visual Practices." In *Italian Colonialism. Legacies and Memories,* edited by J. Andall & D. Duncan, 165-189. (Oxford: Peter Lang: 2005), pg 166

[337] Minutes of the questioning of Jean Eggen, Substitute of the State Prosecutor, by Attorney General, Herman Weber. Interview took place on 8th November 1907. Portefeuille: JUSTICE 49B, Liasse: 977. African Archives, Brussels.

been strange. Their mothers' may have also decided against subjecting them to any more upsetting questions. Eggen pointed out that the girl had stated that Longobardo had not committed “indecent assault or rape” against her. Therefore, he did not technically meet the necessary criteria for prosecution. He had simply led her to his bed “intending to abuse her” and she “told him that she was not yet a woman and... escaped”. Weber asked Eggen if Longobardo had shown the girl his penis, but she had responded in the negative. Longobardo had reportedly not committed rape, though this does not seem to be for lack of trying; the girl had “escaped”, before Longobardo could do anything. For the judiciary, attempted rape was not enough to prosecute him.

In August 1907, Van de Maele had written about his own version of events and his opinion of Longobardo.[338] His words implied a certain suspicion and disapproval of the man. Longobardo visited the post of Libokua too. The accusations that plagued him were entangled in another story. In the same letter, Van de Maele wrote about a Chief Bula, whose people lived near the Libokua post. Bula's community had complained to him that their wives, who would visit the post, were being “mistreated by the workers”. Furthermore, these workmen had been having sex with “indigenous women in the forest”.[339] The people around Libokua had responded by refusing to return to work at the post and abandoning their cargo as porters. To his shock, Van de Maele also discovered upon his investigations at Libokua in early August, that the another European (possibly the Head of the Post), Mr. Esposito, “had taken an indigenous woman...between noon hours and that the same woman was sent to the room of the first class commander Longobardo in the evening”. It is not clear if the woman had been

[338] Van de Maele writes a letter to “Mon Commandant”, dated 4th August 1907. Portefeuille: JUSTICE 49B, Liasse: 977. African Archives, Brussels.
[339] Ibid

coerced by the two men, but the idea that a Congolese woman might have been able to decline to have sex with these men under these circumstances is questionable. At what point, if at all, might these relations have been regarded as exploitative? Likaka has noted how sexual liaisons between Congolese women and colonial officials benefitted Congolese women in different ways. Under conditions of colonialism women could engage in relationships that not only provided for them materially, but also safeguarded them from the harsher consequences of forced labour and violent colonial practices (including hostage taking during the time of the CFS administration).[340] However, it is important to remember the context of these associations. Women's relationships with colonial officers were strategies of survival mitigating the worst effects of a structure of oppression which colonial men were themselves (re)producing. Women had circumscribed opportunities. They may have found various ways to navigate and manipulate possibilities in the relationship for their gain, but, ultimately, the balance of power favoured their white colonial partners.

During Longobardo's interrogation, he denied that Esposito had sent a woman to him for sex or any knowledge that Esposito had also had sex with her. According to him, "I remember asking her when I met her on the promenade if she was free. It was on her affirmative answer that I engaged this woman to visit me and she came in the evening. Mr. Esposito told me himself never to use a woman".[341]

Nonetheless, the wider community were evidently unhappy with the treatment of women and their relationships with men at Libokua. They displayed this by resisting compliance with the colonial project, through complaint and a boycott of labour. Were Chief

[340] Likaka, *Naming Colonialism*, pg 112-113
[341] Account of Eduardo Longobardo. Sent to Attorney General, Herman Weber at the Public Prosecutors Office, Boma. Undated. (Probably August- September 1907).

Bula and his contemporaries concerned about the welfare of local women or focused on controlling them? Workers at Libokua were apparently sleeping with women and mistreating them with impunity. Were women employing sexual agency for their own agendas or were they being used and discarded according to the needs of men at the post? The men's behaviour was not isolated. It provides the context for practices that can be traced right up to the leadership of Longobardo and Mr Esposito. Were these types of relations between Europeans officers/workers, indigenous colonial soldiers/workers and Congolese women more commonplace across the colony? Was there a widespread culture of sexual exploitation? Likaka has written about the coercive impositions put upon Congolese chiefs by the colonial administration. He writes about one example where a Topoke chief called Boula, who was well respected as a loyal ally by colonialists in the early 20th century, was demoted from his chieftaincy in the 1930s because he refused to offer his preferred wife to a colonial agent. The man who replaced him, Chief Bolema, was more than willing to give his wife to a tax collector called Charles Van de Lanoitte. He received praise and pay rises despite his polygamous practices and less than vigorous exercise of tax collection and labour recruitment.[342] His wife's sexuality was exchanged for his increased political power. Evidence like this adds another layer to our understanding of how Congolese women were treated under colonialism. This was not only a problem during the transitional period between the administrations of CFS and Belgian Congo. It lasted for many years after. Likaka discusses how Congolese men, infuriated at the harm being done to their women gave names to white men known for hurting and exploiting them, such as *Agomiriya* (one who cannot control their sexual impulses) and *Makpatu* (chaser of women). Other men were called *Mutombo* and

[342] Likaka, *Naming Colonialism*, pg 115-116

Munamia and *Kiranzi* for being sexually abusive.[343] His work indicates that abusive relations between colonial agents and Congolese women were not unusual, and that many Congolese leaders strongly denounced to them.

Regarding the young girl that Longobardo was alleged to have propositioned; Van de Maele did not directly accuse Longobardo of sexually assaulting her. However, his statements implied a distaste for the man's actions:

I must tell you, my commander, that during his time at the Bima post, First Class Commander Longobardo had taken a little girl (Boyesse) by force to his home in the evening. I was forced to go in the presence of Deputy Officer Pirson, to Commander Longobardo's room to get the child out of his house.[344]

Longobardo denied that Officer Pirson (or 'Pierson' in other texts) had been present and claimed that it was a fabrication.

There were other officials who were less restrained in their comments about Longobardo. Prosecutor Rossi, from the Niangara post, was not afraid to make his dislike of Longobardo known. In a letter written to Weber, in November 1907, Rossi stated, “I can not conceal, Mr Prosecutor General, that it is to my great regret that I am obliged to speak to you about this individual who is truly indigent of the situation he is in”.[345] He also wrote that, “it is really unfortunate that a zone commander descends as low as Commander Longobardo”. His complaints against Longobardo related to his habit of trading with merchants and the Congolese, which, according to Rossi, impacted the “prestige” of the colony. If Rossi's portrayal

[343] Ibid, pg 118
[344] Van de Maele writes a letter to “Mon Commandant”, dated 4th August 1907.
[345] Letter sent from Prosecutor Rossi to Attorney General Weber (dated November 17th, 1909). Portefeuille: JUSTICE 49B, Liasse: 977. African Archives, Brussels.

of Longobardo is accurate, Longobardo was a man who had a reputation for doing what he wanted and rebelling against colonial rules, expectations and trading monopolies. Longobardo was most interested in self-gratification and growing his personal wealth. In later years, colonialists would recommend the presence of white women in the Congo to provide a moralising influence on such men.[346]

In the end, the case against Longobardo was dismissed. In a letter from Weber, dated 10th February 1908, to Deputy Governor-General (GG) Fuchs, he explained that as Longobardo's alleged victim, Kalannajo, had claimed "that she was not touched in any indecent way" the case should be discontinued.[347] Weber wrote, "in these circumstances, the beginning of execution, an indispensable element and constitutive of the attempt of rape or even of...indecent assault does not exist".[348] Fuchs responded to Weber, agreeing with his decision.[349] As noted above, Kalannajo was a *boyesse* (domestic helper). This is relevant because in this position she would have been in more regular contact with white men. Her age and dependence on her work made her more vulnerable to manipulation and exploitation. Her situation possibly made it more difficult for her to complain about any abuse, particularly if she feared repercussions and being disbelieved by the authorities (not an unlikely scenario).

Unfortunately, injustices like these were not unusual. For the courts, Longobardo had not committed any offence by propositioning Kalannajo. Furthermore, there were no other witnesses and she escaped before any crime could be committed. The prosecution does not

[346] Stoler. *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power,* pg 55-57, 62-64
[347] Letter sent from Attorney General Weber to the Deputy Governor- General Fuchs from (dated February 10th, 1908). Portefeuille: JUSTICE 49B, Liasse: 977. African Archives, Brussels.
[348] Ibid
[349] Letter sent from the Deputy Governor-General Fuchs to Attorney General Weber (dated 18th February 1908). Portefeuille: JUSTICE 49B, Liasse: 977. African Archives, Brussels.

appear to account for Longobardo's intentions or attempts to assault the girl.

The next paragraphs examine further cases where European men were accused of rape and sexual abuse against young Congolese girls. It is interesting to consider why there were more cases like these. Was it because they were regarded as important and serious by the authorities? Reform campaigns and women's groups that focused on demanding more thorough legal provisions for children had been exerting pressure on governments in both Europe and North America for a number of years. It is likely that the colonial administration was responding to these demands.[350] A few years later (1913) the administration drafted a decree to make the consummation of early marriage illegal in Congo, indicating that sex with young girls was generally regarded as unacceptable. Belgium's legal age of consent was fourteen.[351] Yet, these stories reveal some of the hypocrisies of colonial approaches and policy. Perhaps European men pursued young girls because they were the easiest to take advantage of, had the least power to respond and the least protection; this certainly seems to be the case in at least two of the cases that I analyse. Colonialists were also particularly anxious about the transmission of sexual diseases between Congolese women and white men. Therefore, pursuing virginal young girls, reduced any risks of transacting infections. It reinforces my point that despite making claims about protecting Congolese women and girls, colonial authorities were only interested in taking action if the alleged perpetrators were African. Next, I examine the Kapsopoulos affair.

Challenging pervading norms of unpunishable colonial violence: parents demand answers

[350] Stevenson, "'Not Just the Ideas of a Few Enthusiasts'"; Odem, *Delinquent Daughters*
[351] Wattier, "La Majorite Sexuelle"

about the murder of their young daughter

Georges Kapsopoulos was a Greek "entrepreneur" working on the construction of the Elisabethville-Kambove Railway in Haut-Katanga.[352] At the end of January 1912, he was accused of the rape and murder of an eleven-year-old Congolese girl. Her name was Kiola and her body had been found in the forest by Kapsopoulos's cook, who carried her back. Her father, Mafuta, who was a "Capita" of Kapsopoulos, stated that she had been raped to death and was "filled with blood in her sexual parts".[353] Mafuta was sure that Kapsopoulos was the perpetrator, claiming that he had "slept with" Kiola on "the night of Sunday to Monday in the bush". Mafuta wanted a doctor to examine his daughter's body to certify the cause of her death.[354] In the records of the Public Prosecutors at the court of Elisabethville it states that Kiola's mother confirmed the story of her husband. Mosonda, the mother, also added that Kapsopoulos had confessed to her that he had "involuntarily been the cause of the death" of her child "by tearing her sexual parts while he possessed her". The Public Prosecutor, Sigwald Meek, finished the record by claiming to have read out the document to the "illiterate participants".[355]

There is some confusion in the texts over the placing of Kiola's body. Mafuta claims that she was found in the forest, although when he first made his complaint, he stated that her body was lying on Kapsopoulos's bed. Perhaps this simply meant that the person who found her in the forest had laid her down on the nearest bed in a gesture of care. Mafuta had not

[352] Kapsopoulos is also spelled 'Capsopoulos' in the texts

[353] 'Capita' meaning 'captain' who worked under Kapsopulos. Pro-Justice record. Testimony of Kiola's father Mafuta and mother Mosonda. Signed by the Public Prosecutors Officer, (s) Meek (dated 1st February 1912). Portefeuille: JUSTICE 48A, Liasse: 1764. African Archives, Brussels.

[354] Letter sent from S. Boulton to Mr. Carter (in English) describing the complaint of Mafuta (dated 30th January 1911). Portefeuille: JUSTICE 48A, Liasse 1764, African Archives, Brussels.; Pro-Justice Record, "Proces-Verbal" produced by s. Meek, the Public Prosecutor (dated 1st February 1912).

[355] Pro-Justice record. Testimony of Kiola's father Mafuta and mother Mosonda. Signed by the Public Prosecutors Officer, (s) Meek (dated 1st February 1912).

made this clear initially. Mosonda's claim that Kapsopoulos confessed to his crime was not confirmed, but the disappearance of Kapsopoulos immediately after the incident was regarded as suspicious by the colonial authorities. The police had tried to find him at his home but had been told by other inhabitants of the area that he had left on February 6th, a few days after Kiola's death. According to the police's sources, before Kapsopoulos had left he had sold his property to a Greek subject called Cominos and been accompanied by three Congolese people to the Portuguese border with Angola.[356] His arrest warrant was issued on the 8th February and around this time the Attorney General, Martin Rutten, who was dealing with the case, wrote a letter to Vice GG, Mr. Malfeyt, informing him of the situation. He suggested that Malfeyt send out letters to Angola, Mozambique, and Rhodesia (now called Zimbabwe) and the Union of South Africa, asking them to assist with Kapsopoulos's arrest and extradition to Congo if he was found in their colonies. Rutten reminded Malfeyt of the treaty of extradition that existed between the Belgian Congo and Portugal. He also asserted that while the British were not bound by any such treaty, they might be willing to help because of Mafuta's origins; he was from Rhodesia. Malfeyt wrote letters to the GG's in both Mozambique and Angola. He also sent one to the Union of South Africa's GG, Mr. Herbert Gladstone. Rutten and Malfeyt's eagerness to have Kapsopoulos extradited likely related to shifting political and legal discourses in Europe and North America which emphasised the need for more stringent child protections. In May 1912 a new law on Child Protection was implemented in Belgium. It reiterated fourteen as the age of consent but also extended the presumption of non-consent to people under sixteen in matters of attacks on "modesty". Furthermore, older minors were also protected from rape by family members.[357] Unfortunately, Gladstone replied that his

[356] Police report on Kapsopoulos, signed by Mr. Vereerstraeten and Mr Buscholtz in Elisabethville (dated 8th February 1912). Portefeuille: JUSTICE 48A, Liasse 1764, African Archives, Brussels.
[357] Wattier, "La Majorite Sexuelle"

ministers were “unable to recommend that an application for extradition from the Union should be acceded to”.[358] The violent death of an eleven-year-old Congolese girl was not at the forefront of their interests, although it is possible that such an application would have been accepted had Kiola been European.

In the letters that Malfeyt sent to Congo's neighbouring colonies he included some of the details that had been written in the medical report of Dr. Alfred Liebaert, the physician who examined Kiola's body. Dr Liebaert made his report on the 1st February, at which point Kiola had already been buried.[359] Her corpse was exhumed for his investigation. He confirmed her young age:

The formation of the teeth: (the second dentrition is complete, minus the wisdom teeth) fragility of the limbs, the absence of external signs of puberty: (undeveloped breasts, lack of hair in the genitals and axillae, incomplete development of large and small lips) I conclude that this corpse is that of a native girl of about 11 years of age (eleven years).[360]

He noted that “on direct examination” her vulva was “deeply lacerated” and her perineum torn.[361] Liebaert concluded that these injuries could have been caused by the,

brutal connection with a normally constituted adult male individual that would have occurred on the night of Sunday, January 28 to Monday, January 29, 1912; the violent hemorrhage that was reported and the subsequent natural inflammation of the injured parts could have perfectly caused the death of a non-pubescent girl.[362]

[358] Letter from the Unions of South Africa's Governor General, Gladstone, to Congo's Vice Governor-General, Malfeyt (dated 24th April 1912). Portefeuille: JUSTICE 48A, Liasse 1764, African Archives, Brussels.
[359] 'Rapport Medical' written by Dr. Alfred Liebaert (dated February 1st, 1912) at the request of the Elizabethville Public Prosecutor's Office. Portefeuille: JUSTICE 48A, Liasse 1764, African Archives, Brussels.
[360] Ibid
[361] Ibid
[362] Ibid

His report suggested that the "reason for the death cannot be doubted" if the child had been in full health prior to the event.[363] Liebhaert had confirmed that Kiola's death was most likely the result of rape. She had died a day or two before her body was found and Kapsopoulos had apparently fled the area, perhaps fearing the possibility of her family's retribution more than the slower processes of the colonial prosecutors. Both Kiola's parents claimed that Kapsopoulos had killed her. They reported her death and gave statements to the colonial authorities, but the form of justice that they sought is not clear. The Public Prosecutors in Elisabethville, on the other hand, pursued legal action that involved Kapsopoulos's extradition and trial in Boma.

Despite the efforts of Attorney General Rutten and Vice GG Malfeyt to have Kapsopoulos extradited and trialled, Kapsopoulos spent many months on the run. He was seen leaving Beira, Mozambique in February.[364] His description also matched that of a man on board the "Prinzessin", a German ship on its way from Lourenço Marques (now called Maputo) to Port Said.[365] In November, Rutten informed Malfeyt that Kapsopoulos was to be denounced to the Greek authorities.[366] This had been the Minister of Colonies' decision. At this point Rutten had discovered that Kapsopoulos was working for a company called *Société Pauling et Cy.* in Nairobi. After this, the archive lacks evidence of further legal proceedings occurring in relation to the case, but that does not mean that Kapsopoulos's crime was not prosecuted. If the Greek authorities took control from this point onwards the records of any trial may be in

[363] Ibid

[364] Letter from Vice Governor General, Malfeyt in Elizabthville to the Minister of Colonies in Brussels, dated 29th April 1912. Portefeuille: JUST 48 A, Liasse: 1764. African Archives, Brussels.

[365] A document from the Police Office in Hamburg, dated 19th July 1912. Included the testimony of the chief steward of the ship Prinzessin (of the German East African Line), Auguste Jacobsen, who provided the description of a man which he believed matched that of Kapsopoulos. The man had given the name of Lampros Raphtopoulos. Portefeuille: JUST 48 A, Liasse: 1764. African Archives, Brussels.

[366] Letter from Attorney General Rutten to Vice Governor General Malfeyt dated 5th November 1912. Portefeuille: JUST 48 A, Liasse: 1764. African Archives, Brussels.

Greece.

If it is true that Kapsopoulos's case was referred to the Greek authorities for them to deal with, it demonstrates how colonial legal processes excluded Kiola's parents and her community. They would have been alienated from proceedings taking place in another part of the world and prevented from accessing written information. Perhaps Mafuta and Mosonda already had low expectations of a system that had a history of killing Congolese people en masse. However, the mere fact that her death was reported and recorded leads one to consider the different ways that Congolese people resisted their oppression at the hands of colonisers. Furthermore, they fought against a culture of impunity that attempted to position them in a helpless role and not acknowledge the life of Kiola as valuable. Mafuta and Mosonda demanded some form of justice for their child. Kiola had been horribly abused and violently murdered by a man, that was likely Kapsopoulos; a white European who cared so little for her well-being that he felt entitled to use and kill her for his own sexual gratification. In a context of the constant dehumanisation of Congolese people by Belgian colonisers, Mafuta's and Mosonda's actions constitute a refusal to be ignored and silenced. They would not allow the death of their daughter to be dismissed as unimportant by colonial officials.

Injustices like the ones committed against Kiola and her family were not isolated events. These injustices included initial acts of violence by European perpetrators as well as the dehumanising procedures of the colonial legal system.

Sexual assault or the vicious inventions of debauched young girls? Colonial authorities try to avoid a scandal

In another case, in 1913, an administrative agent in Boma was accused by a number of girls of

having committed “acts contrary to modesty”.[367] It is here that colonial language sanitises such acts through a lack of description and specificity. These stories were generalised and certain words replaced with more palatable terminology, a complete contrast to the exaggerated descriptions of African sexualities as uncontrollable, violent and predatory. The defendant was a Swiss man called Julien Pelet and he was brought to court.[368]

Pelet's accusers were girls all under the age of ten-years old. Their names were Marie, Toya, Josephine, Alphonsine and Isabella. The offences of “indecent assault” and “outrage on morals” were regarded as serious enough to warrant a public hearing. The record states that this was because it was “necessary to foresee debates” relevant to the “public interest”. Issues that would be discussed in a case like this were regarded as a possible “danger” or threat to “order” and “morals”.[369] The document makes it clear that a public hearing is only appropriate because the case relates to such serious matters; a trial like this was not the general rule.

Women and children were prevented from accessing the proceedings. It was decided that the “public” audience would consist of “accomplished men”. It was feared that women's “chastity” would be negatively impacted. As for children, they should not attend because they were more vulnerable to “unhealthy impressions that could thus corrupt” them.[370] Under the guise of providing “protection”, these men removed women and children from the conversation and positioned themselves at the centre of the debate. They made claims about maintaining morality and order Such order denied power to those most deeply affected by the issues at hand. It also ensured the continued authority of male white supremacy. The

[367] 'Tribunal de 1e Instance de Boma. Audience publique du 22 Aout 1913. En Cause Ministre Public Contre Pelet, Julien, Suisse.' Signed by Judge Denis Messrs and Demoulin (the Clerk). Portefeuille: JUSTICE 52B, Liasse: 2980 African Archives, Brussels.
[368] Ibid
[369] Ibid
[370] Ibid

Congolese may have had opportunities to use colonial legal systems for their own advantage and draw from them when their community's processes of justice did not provide certain benefits. Nonetheless, imperial legal systems also served the interests of colonialism and provided legitimacy to some of the exact same violence from which Congolese people sought protection.

Despite the accusations of these girls, Pelet was neither found guilty nor punished. The hearing lasted only two days. According to Deputy Prosecutor General V. Van den Broeck's letter to the GG, "the statements of the girls...were marked with the same lacunae and contradictions", which "left a doubt about the accusations". This benefitted Pelet and "despite the likelihood" of the accusations and the "unconvincing explanations of the accused... the prosecution did not consider that it could usefully appeal the decision rendered".[371]

The conclusion to this trial is not surprising when one reads the letter sent from Broeck to the GG, summarising the inquiry that had been opened against Pelet and describing the nature of the accusations. The following quote is from a "confidentielle" letter that was sent a month *before* the trial took place. Broeck made his attitude clear and explained why he had not previously made his superior aware of the situation:

..according to my predictions, this investigation was to be terminated very quickly and since these were facts tarnishing the honor of the person who is accused I thought it was better to let you know the result at the same time as you would be notified of its opening. However, Mr Pelet asked to have several Europeans resident in Boma hear both about his own morality and the vicious habits of his accusers, and it was necessary to carry out confrontations which

[371] Letter sent from the Deputy Prosecutor General, V. Vanden Broeck to the Governor General. (Dated 19th September 1913) Portefeuille: JUSTICE 52B, Liasse: 2980 African Archives, Brussels.

delayed the closure of the investigation.[372]

His presumption that the trial would be short possibly indicates that he had already decided on the legal innocence of Pelet. His words imply that he had hoped for a quick hearing so that Pelet's (and likely, Belgium's) good reputation could be restored and 'normality' resumed. The “honor” of the colony and the alleged perpetrator appeared to be his priority as opposed to the well-being of the girls.

Although he admitted that the stories of the girls were damning, he pointed out that is was also possible that the stories were “inventions”, “created from scratch by their brains”. He noted that all five girls under the age of ten had been described by several witnesses as debauched and “vicious”. His comments highlight the layers of discrimination faced by young Congolese girls at this time. The intersecting categories of “colonial subject”, “female”, “child” and “black/African”, supported structures of oppression that denied them believability, perceived innocence and access to justice.

The investigation into Pelet's activities began when a Congolese woman was being prosecuted for severely beating her adopted daughter, Josephine. At the woman's hearing she had claimed that her actions were “motivated by the fact that she had realized that the girl, about nine had already had intimate relationships with men”. According to the defendant the girl had “admitted that she had gone to a European home and said that several children who attended the Clementine school had done the same”.[373] This drew some alarm from the prosecution, especially because the girls were so young. They decided to delve further into the issue.

[372] Confidential letter sent from Deputy Prosecutor General V. Van den Broeck to the Governor General. Pelet case. (Dated July 26th, 1913). Portefeuille: JUSTICE 52B, Liasse: 2980 African Archives, Brussels.
[373] Ibid

Marie, Toya, Josephine, Alphonsine and Isabella, aged between eight and ten all had similar stories. According to them they had been:

introduced by him either into his bedroom or into the dark room, where he was engaged in photography... naked, he practiced touching and tried to have sex with several of them in the presence of others, but had to give up because of the little advancement of their development.[374]

Pelet was said to have "energetically denied" that these events took place. He claimed to know the children well and to have invited them to his house. However, he stated these visits had never been for long and were in "perfect correction", despite one of the girls having "lost" her "loincloth".[375] He admitted to sometimes giving them money and allowing them to look at pictures of nude women. However, Judge Denis claimed that these photographs were not indecent, for they included no "erotic, obscene pose" and did not stimulate "sensual passions" or "lustful thoughts".[376]

In this case, the intersections between race and gender under colonial conditions ensured that the girls were portrayed through lenses both sexually and racially violent. Van den Broeck pointed out that the girls had been described as debauched and vicious, despite the "little advancement of their development". Their age did not protect them from colonial, racist tropes which associated Africans and blackness with untamable, unbridled sexuality and "vicious" savagery. Their femaleness and young age added a further dimension. As females they were victim-blamed and disempowered and as children they were disbelieved; their

[374] Ibid
[375] 'Tribunal de 1e Instance de Boma. Audience publique du 22-23 Aout 1913. En Cause Ministre Public Contre Pelet, Julien, Suisse.' Signed by Judge Denis and Demoulin (the Clerk) Portefeuille: 52B, Liasse: 2980. African Archives. Brussels.
[376] Ibid

contradictory testimonies questioned as "inventions". Trauma possibly made it harder for them to give evidence. The Judge presiding over the case commented that unfortunately because of their young age and state of deprivation they contradicted themselves constantly, making it impossible to gain a precise report of what happened.[377] The girls were systematically disadvantaged.

This story provides another example of how vulnerable young girls were to sexual abuse and how difficult it was for them to make a success of complaints against white perpetrators in colonial courts. What occurred when the victim and perpetrator were both European? The next case that I examine focuses on the alleged rape of a settler's daughter by a Deputy Police Commissioner in Elisabethville. I explore the different approaches of colonial agents and compare it to cases involving Congolese girls/women.

4.3: Colonial responses to the abuse of a white girl: prioritising her family's "honour"

The story begins with the washing of a handkerchief. Thirteen-year-old Helene Rosart was, according to her father, behaving entirely out of the ordinary when she carried out this simple act. To the extent that it prompted him to write an urgent letter to Arthur Tahir, the Police Commissioner of Elisabethville, asking him to send for the local physician, Dr. Trolli. The girl's father was a café owner on familiar terms with Mr. Tahir, referring to him as "my dear Tahir" in his letter.[378] Tahir did as request and also questioned Helene. When interviewed about these events, Tahir stated that it was with "great resistance" that Helene had submitted to

[377] Ibid

[378] Letter sent from Mr. Rosart to the Police Commissioner of Elisabethville, Mr Arthur Tahir. Undated (though possibly sent on the 18th December 1911) Portefeuille: JUSTICE 55A 'Ivresse Publique et essais de viol', Liasse: 2135 'Van den Berghe, A. Sous Commissaire de Police 1911-1912: Enquête mais pas de condamnation pénale'. African Archives, Brussels.

questioning.[379] Tahir had "urged her to tell the truth" and finally, she had provided a testimony that incriminated a man near the top of the colonial police force.[380] He was a twenty-three-year-old deputy Police Commissioner, who had been in the post since early 1910; his name was Augustin Van den Berghe. Tahir testified that he believed him to be guilty of perpetrating the acts that Helene had reluctantly accused him of. According to Tahir, Mrs Rosart had not seen anything "suspicious" on Helene's clothing. Only Mr Rosart had seen his daughter wash a handkerchief. Tahir surmised from this small action that Helene had taken deliberate "steps to ensure that there were no traces" of evidence of her interaction with Van den Berghe.[381]

The case surrounds events that took place in the evening and early hours of 17th-18th December 1911. Attorney General Rutten was also in charge of this case. He delegated to his Substitute, Edouard Meurice, to investigate matters. In Meurice's report it states that on the night of the 17th a drunk Van den Berghe had accompanied Helene on a night-time walk from Union Minière to Lubumbashi. During this walk Van den Berghe had attempted to rape her. When questioned about such an allegation Van den Berghe had stated that "he did not disrespect the girl and simply accompanied her because having had an argument with her father, she had manifested intention to commit suicide".[382] Furthermore, Van den Berghe had told Meurice of his love for Helene. Meurice highlighted that Helene had also made her "affection" for Van den Berghe clear and thus, had perhaps volunteered to "surrender to the

[379] Record of the "Proces-Verbal" of Arthur Joseph Ghislain Tahir (Commissioner of Police) on 21st December 1911 in front of the Officer of the Public Ministry near the court of First Instance in Elisabethville. Portefeuille: JUSTICE 55A 'Ivresse Publique et essais de viol', Liasse: 2135 'Van den Berghe, A. Sous Commissaire de Police 1911-1912: Enquête mais pas de condamnation pénale'. African Archives, Brussels.
[380] Ibid
[381] Ibid

[382] Report by produced by The Substitute, Edourrd Meurice (Annexed to a letter to the Governor General Théophile Wahis. Date 30th December 1911) Portefeuille: JUSTICE 55A 'Ivresse Publique et essais de viol', Liasse: 2135 'Van den Berghe, A. Sous Commissaire de Police 1911-1912: Enquête mais pas de condamnation pénale'. African Archives, Brussels.

wishes of the one she loved".[383] For Meurice, this constituted a "broad and attenuating circumstance in favour of Mr. Van den Berghe" although it did not make his actions excusable.[384]

In Rutten's correspondence to GG Wahis, which referred to the results of Meurice's investigation, he wrote that little "doubt can remain" as to the truth of the accusations.[385] Van den Berghe had acknowledged that he was drunk, had admitted that he was in love with Helene, and so, for Rutten, his "nocturnal walk with her could have had no other result". This is a startling sentence because in the same breath that Rutten incriminated Van den Berghe, he also excused him; his actions seen as inevitable. Rutten's perspective is made clearer in the following sentences. He stated that "there is no doubt that the girl was consenting: this is not surprising given the sad education she has received". As a thirteen-year-old, Helene was considered a minor, so even if she had actively chosen to engage in sexual relations, legally she was not able to give consent. Rutten acknowledged this and concluded that Van den Berghe's actions fall under Article 71, paragraph 1 of the Penal Code; "the consent of a child to acts of the species does not justify their author because that consent is given indiscriminately". For Rutten, in the case of Helene, her "lack of discernment" when giving consent was a result of her young age, as well as the "absorption" of alcohol after an argument with her father.[386] The issue around 'consent' requires some analysis. To do this, it is necessary to examine some further details of the case and the different agendas involved.

Rutten states that he would have "sued Mr. Van den Berghe if Mr. Rosart himself had

[383] Ibid
[384] Ibid
[385] Letter sent from Attorney General Rutten to Governor General Wahis, dated December 26th, 1911. Portefeuille: JUSTICE 55A 'Ivresse Publique et essais de viol', Liasse: 2135 'Van den Berghe, A. Sous Commissaire de Police 1911-1912: Enquête mais pas de condamnation pénale'. African Archives, Brussels.
[386] Ibid

not withdrawn his complaint because of the harm his daughter could do to such debates".[387] It seems likely that Rutten was referring to debates concerning the allegations. The Attorney General believed that "in so delicate a matter, the wishes of a family father had to be taken into very serious consideration". Rutten also noted that "disciplinary action is more discreet than the legal action".[388] In another letter also sent just after the incident from Zacharie Rosart to Police Commissioner Tahir, he declared that Van den Berghe had "taken away the honour" of his family.[389] This "honour" was clearly tied to the reputation of Helene, but it seems that Rosart had a damaging reputation of his own.

In the records, both Van den Berghe and the Police Commissioner, Tahir, described Rosart's destructive habits as an alcoholic. Tahir stated in his testimony that he was an "inveterate drunkard" who would insult his wife and daughters when inebriated. When asked about the morality of Rosart, Tahir claimed that it was "very bad, exceedingly bad".[390]

In Van den Berghe's interview he claimed the following:

Had I not accompanied her that night Helene would have committed suicide. It was about quarter to midnight I got out of the Rosart cafe, to satisfy a need, finding myself in the yard I saw Helene who was in her room, she came out, I met her in the corridor that was lit and I kissed her. Her younger sister went to warn her father, he became angry and looked like he wanted to strangle her, and that was the end of the matter. I went back to the cafe and a

[387] Ibid
[388] Ibid
[389] Letter sent from Mr. Rosart (Rosart Zacharie) to the "Commissioner", dated 18th December 1911. Portefeuille: JUSTICE 55A 'Ivresse Publique et essais de viol', Liasse: 2135 'Van den Berghe, A. Sous Commissaire de Police 1911-1912: Enquête mais pas de condamnation pénale'. African Archives, Brussels.
[390] Record of the "Proces-Verbaux" of Arthur Joseph Ghislain Tahir (Commissioner of Police) on 21st December 1911

few moments later I went home, closed my window and my door.[391]

Van den Berghe's description of the abrupt end to this volatile encounter with Mr Rosart suggests that there might be more to this story. Van den Berghe stated that Rosart was drunk that evening, as he was "almost every day".[392] It is true that the accusation made by Rosart against Van den Berghe may have provoked the latter to make these comments about the former. He may have wanted to discredit Rosart or gain some revenge against him. However, Van den Berghe's description of the man also matches Tahir's (the head police commissioner). Tahir was not trying to protect Van den Berghe because he also stated in his testimony that he believed the accusations against the deputy to be true. This lends some legitimacy of truth to Van den Berghe's claims. Although, for Attorney General Rutten, "The denunciations of Mr. Van den Berghe" could not "be taken into consideration".[393]

Van den Berghe went on the describe how he had later heard Helene moaning on the road outside. He went out and accompanied her on her walk because she had told him that she was tired, and "would rather kill herself" than return to her father's house.[394] According to Van den Berghe, he loved Helene, and felt that he ought to join her because she had drunk "several ports and one or two glasses of champagne".

Van den Berghe also detailed the relationship that Helene had with her father. He accused Rosart of being "very brutal and jealous of his daughters, in the sense he would like to have them for himself alone and not allow them to have lovers". He added that other

[391] 'Proces-Verbaux' of the interview with Augustin Van den Berghe at the Public Prosecutor's Office at the Court of First Instance in Elisabethville, interviewed by Substitute Meurice on 21st December 1911. Portefeuille: JUSTICE 55A 'Ivresse Publique et essais de viol', Liasse: 2135 'Van den Berghe, A. Sous Commissaire de Police 1911-1912: Enquête mais pas de condamnation pénale'. African Archives, Brussels.
[392] Ibid
[393] Letter sent from Attorney General Rutten to Governor General Wahis, dated December 26th, 1911. Portefeuille: JUSTICE 55A 'Ivresse Publique et essais de viol', Liasse: 2135 'Van den Berghe, A. Sous Commissaire de Police 1911-1912: Enquête mais pas de condamnation pénale'. African Archives, Brussels.
[394] 'Proces-Verbaux' of the interview with Augustin Van den Berghe

witnesses could attest to this. Van den Berghe gave an example. He stated that “on Sunday afternoon, Helene went out on a bicycle” with a boy. Her father became angry when he became aware of this, even though Helene had simply wanted to learn how to ride a bike. Van den Berghe implored Meurice to read two letters that Rosart had sent to Van den Berghe, which apparently proved that Rosart did not consider him a “debaucher”. Van den Berghe commented that his kissing Helene was not out of the ordinary. In fact, he claimed to have kissed her “more than 20 times in the presence of witnesses in her room while she was sleeping”, including in front of her parents and sisters.[395]

To conclude his testimony, Van den Berghe posited the idea that Rosart’s complaint was “an attempt to blackmail” him. He stated that Rosart knew he had money in Belgium and if Van den Berghe had offered him some of that wealth, Rosart would “not have objected” to him having “ongoing relations with his daughter”. Van den Berghe claimed that Rosart even called him his “son-in-law”.

Rosart may well have been a violent and intimidating alcoholic, but it is difficult to doubt that Van den Berghe had attempted to have sexual relations with Helene, whether “consensual” or not. In Van den Berghe’s interview Meurice asked, “During her interrogation Miss Helene Rosart said that along the way you tickled her vulva with the right hand?”. Van den Berghe responded in the negative, claiming that he was “too drunk to think of that”. If he had not been drunk, he “would have taken her home”. However, Meurice persisted, and went on to tell Van den Berghe the details of Helene’s account of the events. Reportedly, Helene had said that when she and Van den Berghe had arrived in Lubumbashi, he had made her lie down on the grass, removed her petticoats as best he could and laid on top of her between

[395] Ibid

her legs. Van den Berghe had then rubbed his penis "against the edges of her vulva" trying to enter her, but as "she did not enjoy" it, this became impossible. Van den Berghe only desisted when he realised that Helene "could not stand the pain anymore". Van den Berghe protested, claiming that if he had had such intentions he would have brought her back to his own house, which would not have "been very difficult", because she did not want to return to her father's residence.[396]

Despite Van den Berghe's claims to innocence, Dr. Trolli confirmed that there had indeed been "an attempt" at the "defloration" of Helene Rosart.[397] Trolli reported that Helene's genitals had a "small tear" but no other "wounds, bruises or marks of violence".[398] He concluded that she had not been penetrated, despite the tear and some inflammation of the vulva.[399]

Other letters make it clear that Van den Berghe had already been told to keep his distance from Helene. In a letter written immediately after the events, the Director of Justice, Mr. Desan wrote to the deputy, "Despite a written warning you continue to maintain at least equivocal relations with… Helene Rosart, aged 13 and a half years".[400] His letter requested further information about the events of the previous evening, claiming that Van den Berghe had followed the daughter and "motivated the indignation of the father". Desan then asked about Van den Berghe's activities from "midnight until dawn".[401] Van den Berghe's response,

[396] Ibid
[397] Report from the medical examination of Helene Rosart by Dr Trolli in Elisabethville on the 20th December 1911. Portefeuille: JUSTICE 55A 'Ivresse Publique et essais de viol', Liasse: 2135 'Van den Berghe, A. Sous Commissaire de Police 1911-1912: Enquête mais pas de condamnation pénale'. African Archives, Brussels.
[398] Ibid
[399] Ibid
[400] Letter sent from the Director of Justice, Mr Desan to Deputy Police Commissioner, Mr. Van den Berghe, regarding a "request for explanations". Dated 18th December, 1911. Portefeuille: JUSTICE 55A 'Ivresse Publique et essais de viol', Liasse: 2135 'Van den Berghe, A. Sous Commissaire de Police 1911-1912: Enquête mais pas de condamnation pénale'. African Archives, Brussels.
[401] Ibid

dated December 20th, provided more details about the evening. Like his testimony, he was adamant that he did not have any form of sexual relations with Helene. He made bold claims, writing, "and [I] swear to you, Mr. Director, on my honour still intact, that never again will I set foot in Rosart's".[402] Van den Berghe insisted that the doctor examining Helene would "not find any trace" of anything that could imply his guilt. Dr. Trolli released the findings of his medical examination of Helene that same day. Van den Berghe's correspondence seems to provide more questions than answers. In his letter he repeatedly referred to his extreme state of "drunkenness", pointing to this as evidence for why he had not been able to even *think* about having sex. He claimed, "it is useless to explain in detail what I did on the night of 17th-18th December" and "my state of drunkenness was too big". His "proof" for this was that it wasn't until 2.30am that he had "found his good senses" and "recognised the way home".[403] However, if he was so drunk that he had no "good senses" and could not recall the details of the evening, why was he so confident that he did *not* try to have sex with Helene? His letter is confusing. In the next sentence he stated that "with tears" in his eyes and "seeing the stupidity" of his actions he made to take the shortest route back to Helene's house.[404] Presented as a confession, his statement indicates that he understood how his actions could be negatively interpreted. Was he concerned about how it would look if people found out that he had taken an underage girl for a long, night-time walk without her parents' knowledge or was he ashamed of his attempts to rape her?

According to Van den Berghe, the two of them arrived back at 3.30am, but his door was

[402] Letter sent from Deputy Police Commissioner Mr. Van den Berghe to the Director of Justice, Mr Desan. Dated 20th December 1911. Portefeuille: JUSTICE 55A 'Ivresse Publique et essais de viol', Liasse: 2135 'Van den Berghe, A. Sous Commissaire de Police 1911-1912: Enquête mais pas de condamnation pénale'. African Archives, Brussels.
[403] Ibid
[404] Ibid

locked, so he went to the house of the tax collector while insisting that Helene go home. He closed the door and she left some time later. The tax collector woke him, informing him that, according to Rosart, Helene had not yet returned. Van den Berghe then went to the police station, spoke to the commissioner about the events of that night and was given another key for his door. He arrived home at 5am.[405] There are some notable differences between the stories provided by Van den Berghe and Rosart.

In Rosart's letter to Police Commissioner Tahir, (sent on the 18th December- the day following the event) which I mentioned earlier, he wrote that Van den Berghe had brought Helene back to her house at 5-5.30am. Reportedly, this was Helene's own claim. Furthermore, Rosart asserts that, "The proof that he was with her was that he did not come before this hour to inquire whether she had returned and that he was away from home".[406] According to Rosart, Van den Berghe went to Mr. Bory's room when he left.[407] A crucial question would be when Mr. Bory (the tax collector) woke Van den Berghe; was it before 5am or after 5.30am? It does seem odd that in Van den Berghe's letter he wrote that he first brought Helene back to his own place before realising it was locked. Surely if he was so concerned about his "stupid" behaviour he would have taken her straight home?

Van den Berghe was consistent in his negative views about Rosart throughout the investigation. In the letter to Desan he also stated that Helene seemed older; "at least two years older than her real age".[408] He asserted that this was "also the opinion of all those who

[405] Ibid
[406] Letter sent from Mr. Rosart (Rosart Zacharie) to the "Commissioner", dated 18th December 1911.
[407] Ibid
[408] Letter sent from Deputy Police Commissioner Mr. Van den Berghe to the Director of Justice Mr Desan. Dated 20th December 1911

know her".[409] He reported that he had originally thought she was at least sixteen years-old, but after he realised her age he felt, "not love, but great fraternal friendship".[410] His statements about how old she looked potentially read as an excuse for his behaviour. In any case, he blamed Helene's "precocity" on Rosart. He emphasised that Rosart took "little care to avoid" his children's "sight" when engaging in "intimate relations" with his wife.[411] Whether these accusations were true or not, it seems bizarre that a girl of thirteen was allowed to become inebriated with her parents. It could have been a one-off occurrence. However, such antics would seem less unusual if Rosart *was* an alcoholic and abusive father. The evidence seems to point that way. However, that does not clear Van den Berghe of any wrongdoing.

Rosart's view of Van den Berghe prior to the event was considerably rosier. In fact, in a letter to the GG, dated 5th December 1911, he emphasised that Van den Berghe was a "model of a servant". As mentioned previously, the authorities were already aware of the association between Helene and Van den Berghe and had warned him not to engage with her. In this letter, Rosart referred to a solution that was clearly being considered at the time; transferring Van den Berghe to another police post so that he could not look for Helene. Van den Berghe disagreed with this idea, writing, "The gossip that circulate on this subject are exaggerated and besides, I intend to return to Europe because of illness and will take with me my wife and my little girls". Furthermore, he asserted that it "would be useless" to "cause trouble to Monsieur Van den Berghe, and to harm his future". It would also satisfy "jealous… third parties" and "mediators", although he never revealed who these people were and why they

[409] Ibid
[410] Ibid
[411] Ibid

were jealous or interfering.

Following the events of the 17th-18th December and the ensuing investigation, Van den Berghe was dismissed from his job. This happened at the very end of December. The case against Van den Berghe was dropped not long after, because Rosart withdrew his complaint, but Van den Berghe remained unemployed. Rosart would again push his complaint forward the following January and then withdraw it once more. I will discuss potential reasons for this later, but for now, I would like to focus on the official reaction to Rosart re-pursuing the case.

Attorney General Rutten wrote to the Deputy GG of Katanga on January 6th, 1912. He stated that he would be reconsidering his "decision…not to prosecute Mr. Van den Berghe".[412] Furthermore, he highlighted that he had made this decision at the behest of Rosart, "the father of the anxious victim", who had made plain his wishes not to expose his daughter to any publicity that could be "harmful" to her or the "reputation of her family".[413] Rutten explained that, as Van den Berghe refused to remain silent on the affair, Rosart had chosen to move forward with his accusation once more. Rutten ended his letter with the following sentence: "Therefore, the prosecution no longer has any reason not to act: on the contrary, I am rather satisfied with the opportunity to reconsider my decision..".[414] The colonial administration's sympathy for the victim in this case seems more evident than in the attitudes documented in the previous cases. They have noted that no matter the circumstances, the actions of the adult male were still inexcusable. Helene, unlike any of the Congolese girls, was

[412] Letter sent from Attorney General Rutten to the Deputy General Governor of Katanga (unnamed), dated January 6th 1912. Portefeuille: JUSTICE 55A 'Ivresse Publique et essais de viol', Liasse: 2135 'Van den Berghe, A. Sous Commissaire de Police 1911-1912: Enquête mais pas de condamnation pénale'. African Archives, Brussels.
[413] Ibid
[414] Ibid

given the benefit of the doubt. She was believed and bestowed an innocence that made her "victimhood" entirely conceivable. It is no coincidence that she was white.

The case was withdrawn again days later and in a letter from Rutten to the Deputy GG, his disappointment was palpable. His letter commented on the "unexpected departure of Mr. Rosart and his daughter" which made "very uncertain the result of the proceedings" that he was "proposing to bring against Mr. Van den Berghe".[415] No reason was given for Rosart's sudden move. Rutten admitted that in the absence of key witnesses an acquittal was most likely. Rutten's frustration at not being able to pursue the case was obvious. He wrote, "Mr. Van den Berghe will not only benefit from the insufficiency of the schedule administered by the Public Ministry but also the reputation of the Rosart family, a reputation that improved circumstances" for himself.[416] This may have been related to Rosart's image as a drunk, or possibly that they were more working class. He concluded his letter by saying that he "deeply regrets the false steps to which this regrettable affair gave rise".[417]

After the case was dropped, Van den Berghe sought to legally confront the government for having terminated his contract with the Special Committee of Katanga as deputy police commissioner (entered on 31st May 1910 and ended on 24th January 1912) "without cause". A letter to the Minister of Colonies, from Vice GG Malfeyt, dated 24th January, addresses the

[415] Letter sent from the Attorney General Rutten to the Deputy General Governor of Katanga (unnamed). Dated 15th January 1912. Portefeuille: JUSTICE 55A 'Ivresse Publique et essais de viol', Liasse: 2135 'Van den Berghe, A. Sous Commissaire de Police 1911-1912: Enquête mais pas de condamnation pénale'. African Archives, Brussels.
[416] Ibid
[417] Ibid

"new decision of the Prosecutor's Office" to discontinue proceedings.[418] As Van den Berghe was not found guilty and the accusation against him was the main reason for his termination, the GG was compelled to add the other reasons for his sacking.[419] These included "serious violation of the Laws, gross negligence in the exercise of his functions, offenses against his hierarchical Superior" and "non obedience to the orders and instructions given by the Commissioner of Police".[420]

From this evidence it seems clear that despite the non-prosecution of Van den Berghe, figures like Tahir (head police commissioner of Elisabethville), Rutten (Attorney General) and the GG all believed Van den Berghe to be guilty of the acts of which he was accused. They did not want him to resume his post and closed ranks to ensure that this did not happen. This type of behaviour is not something that I noticed in response to the other examples of sexual abuse. Van den Berghe sought some payment to assist him while he was out of work, since according to him, he had been unlawfully sacked. He requested wages and an allowance that were due him for the period up to 31st May 1913. He demanded a plane ticket back to Belgium and travel expenses. Lastly, he wanted money to cover legal damages and interest. The appeals court noted that "very serious presumptions of guilt" existed against Van den Berghe and "the case has remained unaccounted only for reasons of convenience of the girl's family". However, they also stated that his guilt could not be fully established without the consent of

[418] Letter sent from Vice General Governor Malfeyt to the Minister of Colonies, dated 24th January 1912. Portefeuille: JUSTICE 55A 'Ivresse Publique et essais de viol', Liasse: 2135 'Van den Berghe, A. Sous Commissaire de Police 1911-1912: Enquête mais pas de condamnation pénale'. African Archives, Brussels.
[419] Ibid
[420] Court of Appeal of Katanga in Elisabethville, Civil Matters. Public Hearing of 15th June 1912. Augustin van den Berghe, ex-commissioner of the Police in Elisabethville vs. The Belgian Congo Colony on its Director of Finance in Elisabethville. Judgement. Judges were R. de Meulemeester and Delicour. Portefeuille: JUSTICE 55A 'Ivresse Publique et essais de viol', Liasse: 2135 'Van den Berghe, A. Sous Commissaire de Police 1911-1912: Enquête mais pas de condamnation pénale'. African Archives, Brussels.

Rosart and his family. Thus, for the court, “it would be impossible to pronounce or confirm judicial resolution of the contract for serious infringement of the Laws based on simple charges not found at the hearing”.[421]

In the end, Van den Berghe's appeal was granted. He was not provided with the full amount that he requested, but he was given a “holiday allowance, three months' salary and a food allowance, totalling the sum of two thousand one hundred francs, plus the second class travel ticket from Elizabethville to Brussels, and four hundred francs for travel expenses”.[422]

In several documents it is mentioned that the withdrawal of Rosart's complaint against Van den Berghe was for the family's “convenience”. Rosart claimed concern for the reputation of his daughter and his family's “honour”. Given the evidence which suggested that Rosart was an abusive and violent alcoholic, it is also possible that Van den Berghe wished to avoid scrutiny. Tahir made claims about Rosart's “exceedingly bad” character and Rutten pointed to the “reputation” of the family which only improved the legal position of Van den Berghe. Van den Berghe suggested that other witnesses could attest to his claims. If the case was moved forward, Rosart may have been exposed. Rosart and his family were protected by the colonial legal system. His authority as a father was respected and his decision to remove himself and his daughter from view was not criticised. This case provides an example of how the colonial judicial system worked differently when a white family was involved. Legal structures protected white perpetrators and to an extent, white victims, while vehemently condemning black perpetrators and victims.

[421] Ibid
[422] Ibid

The colonial government also had its own agenda. It was extremely concerned about the damage such a story could do to Belgium. In a letter from General Commissioner Harfeld to the Minister of Colonies, dated 30th December 1911, it stated that disciplinary action against Van den Berghe was more appropriate than prosecution because, "the scandal resulting from prosecution would have harmed the police force and the Belgians".[423] Therefore, the outcome of the case was actually quite satisfactory for the colony. A white minor being "indecently assaulted" by a deputy police commissioner was more scandalous than any number of Congolese girls being similarly treated.

It is important to bear in mind the agenda of the colonial government when considering the idea that Helene "consented" to sex with Van den Berghe. It is noted that she was fond of Van den Berghe (while he claimed to be "in love" with her) and therefore, it is suggested that she partook in sexual activities. This is emphasised despite her being younger than the Belgian legal age of consent, which was fourteen at the time.[424] The focus on her consenting, deliberately minimises Van den Berghe's attempts to rape her, thus making the incident seem less serious.

Now let us move onto the intersections between gender and race that were highlighted in this case. I have already mentioned some of them above, but it is important to explore them explicitly. The investigation into Van den Berghe provides a comparison between cases on sexual violence that included white victims and families and those that included black victims and families. No doubt the story would be different again, if Helene's abuser had been Congolese.

[423] Letter sent from General Commissioner Harfeld to the Minister of Colonies Jules Renkin, dated 30th December 1911. Portefeuille: JUSTICE 55A 'Ivresse Publique et essais de viol', Liasse: 2135 'Van den Berghe, A. Sous Commissaire de Police 1911-1912: Enquête mais pas de condamnation pénale'. African Archives, Brussels.
[424] Wattier, "La Majorite Sexuelle"

Most striking of all was the different perception of the victims. In the cases that involved very young Congolese girls, they were not portrayed as “innocent” children. They were regarded as manipulative and “vicious”; inventing stories about white men that were entirely untrue. In the case against Pelet, Marie, Toya, Josephine, Alphonsine and Isabella were viewed as debauched and deviant, despite their very young age. On the other hand, Helene was regarded as having “consented”. Both examples highlight sexism and victim-blaming. Both examples emphasise how girls were regarded as sexual agents and objects of desire for men. However, the difference was that Helene was believed and not regarded as having ulterior motives. Her consent was also based on drunkenness and being in an emotionally vulnerable state. On the other hand, Marie, Toya, Josephine, Alphonsine and Isabella were perceived as liars. The colonial authorities did not care for the “reputation” of the Congolese girls or the “honour” of their families’ and they seemed less interested in protecting Congolese victims.

There are many different ways that the situation could have played out. Perhaps Helene gave no indications of consent and was simply raped. She may have been interested in engaging with him romantically but not been fully aware of what she was consenting to when he tried to have sex with her. Going for a walk with a trusted older man when drunk and possibly kissing or flirting with him did not mean she consented to sex. The difference in power between the two is an added factor. Possibly, due to her vulnerable position, Helene felt like she owed Van den Berghe something. She may have wanted to please him because he seemed to care about her. Van den Berghe claimed that when she saw him again after the event she

had said “do not blame me it's Tahir's fault”.[425] Her statement may have referred to the reluctant testimony that she had been encouraged to give to Head Police Commissioner Tahir. Perhaps Helene said this to Van den Berghe to let him know that she was loyal to him *or* because she feared his negative reaction. It is difficult to know. In any case, the law regarded her as a minor who was unable to give legal consent to sex.

4.4: Conclusion

Many of the legal investigations and conversations about European sexual violence concerned girls (some as young as five-six years-old). Around this period, the colonial administration was becoming increasingly concerned with monitoring prostitution in the city centres and “protecting”/controlling pre-pubescent “non-nubile” girls. However, the cases examined here expose the duplicity of the colonial state. Congolese girls and women were, in many circumstances, vulnerable to the predatory and entitled behaviour of European officials and entrepreneurs. A context of colonial impunity to sexual exploitation and violence enabled space for the targeting of young girls. This was also exposed in the writings of Protestant missionaries, such as John and Alice Harris, who raised their concerns about the relations between Congolese women/girls and white European men with organisations like the Aborigines' Protection Society. The colonial legal system served the needs of the state more than those of the victims of abuse. This chapter exposes cases where colonial law was used to protect white perpetrators from “scandal” rather than defend Congolese victims of sexual violence. By applying legal double standards to cases of white violence the administration

[425] ‘Proces-Verbaux’ of the interview with Augustin Van den Berghe at the Public Prosecutor’s Office at the Court of First Instance in Elisabethville, interviewed by Substitute Meurice on 21st December 1911.

demonstrated how sexuality could be used to dominate and control the Congolese. Colonial officers could engage in exploitative and abusive sexual behaviours without consequences, and they could use sexual violence as a threat or form of punishment for any recalcitrant Congolese people. Simultaneously colonialists could exaggerate and manipulate stories about Africans to justify colonial subjugation.

CHAPTER 5: TENSIONS BETWEEN CATHOLIC MISSIONARIES AND COLONIAL ADMINISTRATORS: TRAFFICKING GIRLS IN SOUTH EAST CONGO

5.1: Introduction

In the early years of Belgian administration concerns about ongoing trafficking and slavery in East Congo were prevalent. Discussions about *Trafic d'Enfant* and the sale of women were highlighted by Catholic missionaries working in the area. Reportedly young girls were being trafficked for the benefit of "Arabised" communities and local Congolese leaders who were greedily amassing wealth. In these conversations both missionaries and colonial administrators positioned themselves as protectors and moral crusaders. This seems ironic given the deliberately quieted judicial responses to colonial and European violence against Congolese children occurring around the same period. This chapter moves on to contribute an analysis of gender abuse that provoked a more intense colonial reaction because it overlapped with Belgian interests to rid East Congo of Arab slave trading and influence. The subject of female enslavement was useful for justifying imperial expansion and control in the area. However, complexities with implementing anti-slavery policies existed where Ministerial orders and recommendations were disseminated and diluted across the colony by officials with conflicting ideas about how to outlaw slavery.

This chapter analyses conversations that emerged between 1912-1914. It traces the complaints of Father Emilio Callewaert, an Apostolic Prefect of the Holy Ghost Fathers (HGF) mission in North Katanga. The HGF (also referred to as the Spiritans) worked on the left bank of the River Lualaba in Kongolo, maintaining a close ties with another nearby Catholic mission,

the White Fathers.[426] How did the state respond to issues raised by Callewaert and his colleague, Father Windholtz? It has been well established that Catholics had a more amicable affiliation with the Congo administrations than Protestants like Morrison.[427] In many respects, Catholic institutions and the colonial state worked in tandem, but historically they had also rivalled for authority and control over the region. Reuben Loffman describes the association between the Congo state and Catholic institutions as one between "competitive collaborators".[428]

Furthermore, certain Catholic missions had closer relationship with the state than others. The White Fathers mission was Belgian, whereas the Spiritans were French. In 1886, after only a few years in the Congo the Spiritans were expelled by Leopold who preferred a Belgian missionary presence. However, the HGF were permitted to return twenty years later. Loffman examines the intricacies of relations between the state and Catholic organisations and highlights some of the antagonisms that emerged between missionaries and colonial staff in Kongolo.[429] Not all interactions between Catholics and colonialists were smooth and friendly, some belied frustration and annoyance as analysed in this chapter.

I reflect on the practices that Catholic missionaries complained of to the colonial government and how they were received by the administration. How much influence did

[426] Reuben A. Loffman. *Church, State and Colonialism in Southeastern Congo, 1890-1962.* (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan: 2019), pg 76-77

[427] For instance, see work by Crawford Young. *Politics in Congo: Decolonization and Independence*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press: 1965); Wamu Oyatambwe. *Eglise Catholique et Pouvoir Politique au Congo-Zaire.* (Paris: L'Harmattan: 1997); Loffman, *Church, State and Colonialism in Southeastern Congo*; Reuben A. Loffman (2016). "On the Fringes of a Christian Kingdom: The White Fathers, Colonial Rule and the Báhêmbá in Sola, Northern Katanga, 1909-1960." *Journal of Religion in Africa*, Vol. 45: pp. 1–28; Gale Kenny; Tisa Wenger (2020). "Church, State, and "Native Liberty" in the Belgian Congo." *Comparative Studies in Society and History,* Vol. 62, No. 1: pp. 156-185.

[428] Loffman, *Church, State and Colonialism in Southeastern Congo*, pg 4

[429] Ibid, pg 79, 3

Catholics have with the central government in Brussels? Pondering on these questions leads one to consider whether Catholic missionaries ever condemned colonial officers for engaging in abusive, unethical activities too.

The Belgian legal framework relating to slavery was an arena for ongoing debate and contestation. Colonial actors did not agree on how to interpret and implement anti-slavery legislation. Therefore, policies were not introduced in a uniform manner across the colony. In these discussions the Congolese were positioned in different ways. For members of the government in Brussels, the Congolese were meant to uncritically absorb and submit to new social and legal systems. The reality was more complicated. Young, inexperienced and overworked officials had to collaborate and compromise with local leaders and communities and rely on the information provided by them. As we have seen, Congolese actors found their own ways to navigate and manipulate colonial realities. Women and girls also used the contradictions between colonial policy and missionary goals to their advantage.

5.2: Catholic anxieties about trafficking in south east Congo: harems and monopolies

Father Callewaert sent the Minister of Colonies an alarming document which galvanised the latter into action. Towards the end of 1912, the Minister of Colonies, Jules Renkin, responded by sending his own letter to Congo's GG Felix Fuchs, informing him of the details of Callewaert's report. Renkin was clearly affected by Callewaert's claims and wrote that, at a time "when all the colonialists and philanthropists are concerned with depopulation by infant

mortality", the government could not "remain deaf to a call like that of P. Callewaert".[430] The Minister's response exposes the types of social pressures that impacted colonial rule at the time. Renkin was concerned with portraying the Congo in a good light. For him, the correct role of colonial authorities was to "protect" and intervene on behalf of the colonial population.

Callewaert's report claimed that Congolese girls south of Kasongo (Maniema) were being given to local chiefs "almost from their birth".[431] He had lived for one year at Montignies St. Antoine's chapel school in Katumba.[432] According to Callewaert, in the nearby village where there were seventy families, there was a distinct "lack of children" (less than thirty).[433] Congolese communities were made up of houses, villages and districts. A 'house' was formed of wider family and slaves. Polygamy formed the basis of this social arrangement. Houses could work together to form villages and then districts.[434] Callewaert learned that the local "sultan" would buy all female children from their birth and "monopolize the whole female sex" with few exceptions. Once the children had grown-up they would be absorbed into his "harem" or become a source of capital.[435] "Arabised" people in the areas of Kasongo paid dowries for these girls, as did the sultan's subjects.[436] Reportedly, all children produced from these unions belonged to the big chief and returned to him as his slaves, increasing his wealth.

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[430] Felix Fuchs who served as Governor General in Boma from May 1912 to January 1916. Letter from the Minister of Colonies, Jules Renkin to the Governor General, Felix Fuchs. Dated 28th November 1912. Portefeuille: M602, liasse: Peres de St. Esprit/Divers- 1912-1914, African Archives, Brussels.

[431] Ibid

[432] Extract from the Report of Reverend Emilio Callewaert, Apostolic Prefect of North Katanga. Dated 19th December 1912. Portefeuille: M602, liasse: Peres de St. Esprit/Divers- 1912-1914, African Archives, Brussels.

[433] Ibid

[434] Loffman, *Church, State and Colonialism in Southeastern Congo,* pg 10

[435] Extract from the Report of Reverend Emilio Callewaert, Apostolic Prefect of North Katanga. Dated 19th December 1912. It seems likely that "grown up" refers to having at least reached the age of puberty.

[436] "Arabised" was the term used to describe people and communities who culture had been influenced by Arab practices in the East of the country. They had come into frequent contact with Arab traders and slavers in the nineteenth century.

Callewaert noted that the people living in the "Arabian pass" of Kasongo were condemned to leave no children or legacy. The chief's subjects knew that their children could be removed from them as soon as they matured and acquired "commercial value", so many chose to remain childless.[437] Maniema had been a trading hub of slaves and ivory in the nineteenth century as Swahili-Arabs from the east coast of Africa travelled into the area to expand their networks and economic power. Kasongo was one of Tippu Tip's bases. By the late 1800s these traders had been pushed out of Eastern Congo by the CFS militia, but certain eastern Congolese leaders and communities had been influenced by the practices and cultures of these traders and had converted to Islam.[438] Missionaries, like Callewaert, were keen to reverse the spread of Islam, regarding it as key to "civilising" the Congolese and help end slavery in the region. Why did Callewaert refer to certain leaders as "sultans"? Perhaps he was naming-calling Congolese chiefs who reminded him of Zanzibari sultans as way to undermine their authority. There were also communities, such as the Songye, who lived in both Maniema and North Katanga and were known to have polities that consisted of *Sultani Ya Miti* (Tree Sultans). According to Loffman, the *Sultani* headed lineages and had been established by the Zanzibari to serve as their delegates in the region.[439] Ashley Leinweber points out that the colonial administration marginalised Muslim communities in East Congo because they regarded them as possible threats to colonial authority and control who might instigate wider revolts against Europeans.[440] In the 1920s these communities began to grow through support from Muslims outside the colony. The Belgian administration responded by knocking down mosques and removing certain Muslim leaders from power then exiling them

[437] Ibid. Here, "commercial value" seems to be directly associated with a girl's/woman's ability to reproduce.
[438] Ashley E. Leinweber (2012). "The Muslim Minority of the Democratic Republic of Congo: From Historic Marginalization and Internal Division to Collective Action." *Cahiers d'études africaines*, 206-207: 517-544. Pg 2
[439] Loffman, *Church, State and Colonialism in Southeastern Congo*, pg 94-95
[440] Leinweber, "The Muslim Minority of the Democratic Republic of the Congo", pg 2

to other parts of the Congo. Muslims also suffered from unequal access to education because Catholic missionaries had a near monopoly over education in the area. They were keen to spread Christianity and rebuff the teachings of Islam. Many Muslims refused to send their children to Catholic schools out of fear that they would be forced to convert to Christianity. Not an unreasonable fear, when, as Leinweber highlights, modern accounts of the descendants of some Muslims in East Congo claim that their ancestors were forced to consume pork and break their fasts during Ramadan as children in order to qualify for schooling.[441]

Catholic mission work existed in a colonial context of suspicion and hostility to Muslims in Maniema and Kasongo. Callewaert claimed that monopolies on girls in these areas was "a scourge more ruinous for the population than the sleeping sickness". He argued that such systems would spread among other sultans as they realised how to "maintain their authority and to create revenues".[442] Callewaert claimed that this type of system was established at Pene Kilala and Pene Lubangi. Furthermore, his colleague, Father Villetaz, who was one of the first Spiritans to set up post in Kongolo, had also found a similar system existing in Mubonga.[443] Callewaert requested that the colonial government end all contracts and purchases of people in this region. He warned that if these practices prospered, local populations would be decimated within years. He reminded the Minister, "I have told you about the Arabised people who move through the villages towards Lomami, buying as many girls as they can in order to populate their harem and grow their crops. It goes on and on."[444]

[441] Ibid, pg 2
[442] Extract from the Report of Reverend Emilio Callewaert, Apostolic Prefect of North Katanga. Dated 19th December 1912
[443] Loffman, *Church, State and Colonialism in Southeastern Congo*, pg 80
[444] Extract from the Report of Reverend Emilio Callewaert, Apostolic Prefect of North Katanga. Dated 19th December 1912

Callewaert chose language to emphasise the severity of the situation. By using terms like "sultan" and "harem" he invoked imagery of large numbers of enslaved women/girls. He alluded to sexual excess and debauchery. Callewaert emphasised the strangeness of such institutions, especially in places where the Spiritans were based, such as Lubunda (Kongolo's main town).[445] Lubunda was a successful Catholic stronghold for the organisation where they founded a school-chapel for local African converts. In Lubunda the mission engaged with communities such as the Hêmbá Bayazi and workers employed on the *Compagnie du Chemin de Fer du Congo Supérieur aux Grands Lacs Africains* (CFL) railway who were from West Congo. The Bayazi people, who worshipped their ancestors, had fled from Zanzibari traders in the 1890s and were spread across the region.[446]

By alienating the practice of trafficking and selling girls and presenting it as an imported phenomenon, Callewaert challenged colonial forces to commit to accomplishing their original aims of ridding Africa of the "scourge" of slavery and Arab control. He appealed to Belgium's sense of "duty" as a colonial power, their territorial pride and paternalism.

5.3: Catholic influence on colonial policy: marriage as a disguised form of slavery

Minister Renkin was extremely concerned by Callewaert's warnings, but in order to make any changes he needed to convince District Commissaries (DCs) and Territorial Administrators (TAs) in the Congo of the urgency of the situation. He repeated Callewaert's claims and stated that "the sale of girls is spreading more and more", particularly in places like Lomami where

[445] Lubunda was next to the Northern Katanga border with Maniema
[446] Loffman, *Church, State and Colonialism in Southeastern* Congo, pg 31-62, 82-84

people reportedly went to buy slaves.[447] He trusted Callewaert because of his vast experience and years spent working in Kongolo. Additionally, Renkin was a member of the Catholic Party. Catholics and colonialists had some shared values where the Congo was concerned. Callewaert's authority of knowledge around the social and cultural customs of Congolese communities living in Eastern Congo was respected by figures like Renkin.

In his letter to Fuchs, Renkin highlighted that the Deputy GG, Justin Malfeyt, had been informed of the Catholic missionaries' issues during his trip to the region. Malfeyt had suggested using more active means to stop the trafficking of girls. He highlighted that the "abuse" was not an indigenous custom or one practiced by "Arabised" people. It had been "introduced" by people who had been in *contact* with Arabised communities. The abuse was a unique consequence of the Congo-Arab connection, outside Belgian control. Malfeyt expressed that because the system was not "based on secular customs" it could be more easily eradicated. Nonetheless, Renkin insisted on the non-complacency of those tackling the issue and stated clearly that if the situation was anything like that shown in Callewaert's descriptions and evidence, it had to be taken seriously. In full he stated to Fuchs:

So you will want, Mr. Governor General, to give formal instructions to the territorial agents concerned, to inquire about this practice… to convene the sultans and natives and solemnly signify that the Government absolutely prohibits the purchase of girls or their re-marriage before their nubility, that the sultan or head has no rights over the children of his subjects, whether they are free or slaves- (since according to the work of Zone Chief Engels, the children of slaves are not strictly speaking slaves, but rather associated with the clan) - in

[447] Letter from the Minister of Colonies, Jules Renkin to the Governor General, Felix Fuchs. Dated 28th November 1912

a word, the Government decides to prohibit this traffic by all the means in its power and possibly by the application of the legal penalties.[448]

This was an ambitious statement by Renkin. He was not advocating the "slow" and deliberate "phasing out" of slavery that many colonial administrators advocated at the time. He drew attention to the Decree of July 12th, 1890, which granted "guardianship, especially over those children whose parents do not fulfil their duty of care and education". Again, there was a focus around protecting "non-nubile" girls. However, as discussed in the previous chapter, the notion of "protection" was often only triggered when the alleged perpetrators were Congolese. He suggested that girls in conditions like those described in Callewaert's report be removed from their owners and "placed at the disposal of the authority". The colonial government positioned itself as the champion of these girls and women. Colonial court decisions were to be re-examined and a more hard-line approach to slavery expected from Congo's administration. The influence of Callewaert's report on Renkin was manifest. Nonetheless, Renkin was situated in Belgium, far from the reality of life in the colony. How were Renkin's intentions translated into practice?

In his letter, Renkin requested that the Attorney General instruct all members of his prosecution to "very carefully" examine the cases of alleged perpetrators, "for the purposes of applying Articles 12 or 71" of the penal code. Renkin set out new standards. Article 12 was legislation that dealt with more conspicuous forms of slavery (to Europeans); the capture of slaves and the process of buying and selling them. Article 71, paragraph 2, on the other hand, potentially addressed trafficking, marriage dation and domestic slavery.[449] For Renkin, this

[448] Ibid
[449] Ibid. "Dation" refers to the action of giving one thing in payment of another

was “an opportunity for…magistrates to study the shortcomings of… legislation on mixed trafficking, domestic slavery or even the disrespect of human personality”.[450]

Renkin sought to put an end to what he perceived as domestic slavery. He was not alone in his view that polygamy pertained to the enslavement of girls and women. Other individuals in the colonial establishment, along with both Protestant and Catholic missionaries and European “philanthropic” groups agreed that this practice had to be uprooted. Renkin defied the idea that only the sale and abuse of slaves was something that colonialists could challenge and insisted that all ranks of the administration had a “social duty to fulfil”. Such obligations could not be met if agents simply noted that “the different modalities used for the prosecution of women and girls” were “covered by the custom of the payment of the dowry and escape the assumptions of Article 12” of the penal code. Renkin asserted that, “they must, especially in cases where the penal law appears to them difficult to apply, use all their influence, all their moral power to extirpate these intolerable practices which will eventually ruin the colony by drying up the source of its population”.[451] This statement implies that his main priority was in maintaining a colonial workforce. Renkin did not underestimate the importance of territorial officials in the process of dealing with trafficking and domestic slavery. They had to be relied upon to make initial assessments about potential slavery on the ground. He wrote that,

It is for this reason that I think it would be preferable to stimulate the zeal of the territorial officials (fonctionnaires territoriaux) above all, by <u>emphasizing to them the importance of the mission that you assign to them.</u> They will need to keep you well informed

[450] Ibid
[451] Ibid

of the results of their investigations and efforts, so that we can judge by the results obtained in the region concerned whether it is possible, and by what means, to extend this civilizing action from one region to another in more remote areas where the existence of such evil is known to us.[452] [emphasis is mine]

Territorial representatives were to be encouraged and stimulated into a sense of personal responsibility. They were invaluable to the administration's agenda.

5.4: A trickle-down effect?

How did the sentiments and instructions of Minister Renkin manifest across the colonial hierarchy? In early January 1913, after the promptings of Renkin, the Elisabethville-based Prosecutor General Martin Rutten, wrote a circular on "Slavery" for the Congo administration.[453] The document stated Renkin's message clearly and emphasised the necessity of attacking the institution of slavery, but it was also critical of particular legal texts in the Penal Code that was meant to deal with domestic slavery. In his circular, Rutten explained that:

On several occasions the Courts of the Colony have admitted that selling or buying a domestic slave is not susceptible to penal qualification, because it does not constitute a fact of trafficking and because articles 11 and 12 of the Penal Code only reproaches the attack on individual freedom when it is perpetrated by violence, trickery, threats or abuse of authority.[454]

[452] Ibid
[453] "Slavery: CIRCULAR", written by Prosecutor General Martin Rutten. Dated January 7th 1913. Portefeuille: M602, liasse: Peres de St. Esprit/Divers- 1912-1914, African Archives, Brussels.
[454] Ibid

Rutten questioned whether such judgements had really taken full opportunity of Article 12 which prohibited acts that perpetuated slavery. According to him, the use of "cunning violence or threats" was not a required criterion by the legislator. Article 12 could be applied to anyone who had "disposed, to sell as a slave, a person placed under his authority, even without exercising any kind of physical or moral compulsion".[455] Still, Rutten exposed his perspective on slavery when he explained how he disagreed with the fact that Article 12 seemed to apply to any person selling someone else when the seller had the slave's "tacit consent".[456]

At this time, some colonial officials were still pointing to slavery's economic potential. In a letter to Fuchs, written in early 1912, the Deputy Prosecutor General, Van den Broeck, documented discussions from a meeting of the Colonial Committee of the Solvay Institute.[457] Broeck claimed that administrative officials chose to recognise domestic slavery in order to prevent a "serious attack to the social and political organization of indigenous communities" which would cause a havoc for the colony's economy. He pointed out the remark of another member of the committee that slavery had economic advantages, *if* regulated. Van den Broeck softened his statements by reasserting once again that the practice of keeping domestic slaves should not, in any way, be sanctioned by colonial officials. He stipulated that in any case where a slave pursued freedom, public prosecutors had the "duty to rigorously pursue… the repression of this offence in all cases coming to their knowledge".[458] However,

[455] Ibid
[456] Ibid
[457] The Solvay Institutes were established by Ernest Solvay for the "advancement of scientific knowledge". Solvay founded the International Institute for Physics in 1912 and the International Institute for Chemistry in 1913. For more information, visit webpage: <http://www.solvayinstitutes.be/html/history.html>
[458] Letter from Deputy Prosecutor General Van den Broeck to the Governor General circular relating to slavery, dated 26th February 1912. Portefeuille: AI 1416bis, liasse: 1, dossier "Traite au Esclavage", African Archives, Brussels.

legislation was open to interpretation and ideas around slavery and how to deal with it differed within the administration. Historically, forms of slavery/forced labour publicised by abolitionists and activists during the Congo reform campaign were descriptive of men's experiences and less forthcoming about women's exploitation.[459] This may have influenced the types of slavery that was visible to Europeans and colonialists thereafter.

The context of difficulties associated with agreeing on what constituted a punishable form of slavery makes the Minister of Colonies' order to address domestic slavery more interesting. There were clear attempts, even by those higher up in the administration, to be less direct with punishing certain forms of enslavement, even if it meant challenging the intentions of the Minister of Colonies. Fuchs, for instance, wrote in a letter to the Minister in March 1914, that institutions of slavery should not be fought with "too active measures".[460] He was supportive of providing slave owner compensation to approach the issue and maintain economic harmony.

What kinds of ideas permeated European's concepts of different forms of slavery? To illustrate an example, it is useful to draw attention to an exchange that occurred in January 1914 between GG Fuchs and Minister of Colonies Renkin.[461] Fuchs had relayed to the Minister the details of a report produced by Lulonga's District Commissary (DC), M. Koolen.[462] According to Fuchs, in his district, Koolen distinguished between the slave victims of kidnapping and war and "voluntary slaves". He also suggested that these forms of slavery be

[459] See the story of Boali in Nancy Hunt (2008), "An Acoustic Register: Tenacious Images and Congolese Scenes of Rape and Repetition." *Cultural Anthropology,* Vol 23, No. 2, pg 223-224

[460] Letter from Governor General Felix Fuchs (BOMA) to the Minister of Colonies (BRUSSELS), regarding domestic slavery in the Haut-Uele district, dated 4th March 1914. Portefeuille : AI 1416bis, liasse 1, dossier "Traite au Esclavage", African Archives, Brussels.

[461] Boma was the Capital of the Congo Free State and Belgian Congo until 1926, when the capital was moved to Leopoldville (today's Kinshasa).

[462] Lulonga would later be incorporated into the Equateur province and then the Mongala province

dealt with separately. For example, in the case of "voluntary" slaves, Koolen argued that compensation be paid on account of their release, either by the slaves concerned or the state (and only if the slaves served the state instead).[463] From his perspective, slaves taken by force required immediate release with no compensation given to captors. If kidnapped victims had already been sold to a new owner then the slaves were to be liberated, but money paid to the new owner for costs rendered in the purchasing of slaves and loss of their services. Compensation was to be paid by the original captor of the slaves or, if the captor was deceased, the state. Koolen provided one exception to this rule with the example of a situation whereby a slave sought release because of ill-treatment by their new owner.[464] The distinction between "voluntary" slaves and those that had been forced into slavery was ubiquitous in British, French and Belgian colonial circles between the 1890s-1910s. It is recognisable in the tone of Rutten's circular too. Debates emphasised the unfair consequences of compulsory emancipation on slaves whose status was regarded as voluntary. This approach justified ongoing servility.

The correspondence between Fuchs and Renkin did not explicate what constituted a "voluntary" slave and neither did it elaborate on why Koolen considered these two conditions of slavery to be different in practice. Koolen was prioritising certain cases of slavery for state intervention. The conversation begged the question of exactly how slavery could be agreed/consented to by enslaved people when the institution itself relied on a complete power imbalance between slaves and their owners. Despite the Minister's intent to eradicate domestic slavery in the colony, conversations like these exemplified the different

[463] Letter from Governor General Felix Fuchs (BOMA) to the Minister of Colonies (BRUSSELS), regarding domestic slavery and the letter of M. Koolen, District Commissary of Lulonga in correspondence with Fuchs (letter no. 1457, dated December 17, 1913), dated 31st January 1914. Portefeuille: AI 1416bis, liasse 1, dossier "Traite au Esclavage", African Archives, Brussels.
[464] Ibid

perspectives held by administrators in Congo and the negotiations, disagreements and obstacles that were associated with prosecuting it.

Rutten's circular raises certain questions. For instance, for prosecutors who condemned practices of slavery only when they occurred alongside violence and/or threats; what did these forms of "violence" look like? What kinds of "abuse of authority" constituted justifiable means to challenge slavery?

Rutten suggested that before introducing new legislation to end the "harmful institution", it was worth first examining how the current legal texts could be improved.[465] Rutten asserted that no Congolese person should be prosecuted solely for selling a slave and violating Article 12 of the Penal Code. He explained that a prosecution based only on this violation would simply be overturned at an Appeals Tribunal. Acts of enslavement had to also relate to other more solid legal Articles to ensure that any Tribunal's decision was not only based on the fluid, less reliable reading of Article 12.

This was Rutten's solution to dealing with slavery in the courts. He knew that the current legislation against slavery was open to interpretation and could therefore be manipulated and challenged. Was Rutten making a real attempt to address slavery in practical terms or simply placating the Minister while maintaining the status quo? It is possible that law enforcers were simply reluctant to apply the law as opposed to confused by it.

Rutten presented his objections to Articles 11 and 12, prefacing that he did not wish to "neglect the curbing of the practice of slavery". In full these were:

[465] Ibid

1) The authority referred to in Article 12 cannot be that of the master over his slave: indeed, under the law, this authority does not exist…. In our legislation, the master has no rights over his slave. Article 12 punishes the abuse of a legal authority and that is why it is so severe: the legislator did not want anyone to divert, for the purpose of trafficking, the slightest bit of authority based on the law.

(2) Articles 11 and 12 of the Penal Code punish attacks on individual freedom; the essential element of these offenses lies in depriving a person of his liberty: but he who cedes to another person a slave who tacitly consents thereby does not commit any attack on the liberty of that slave.[466]

From Rutten's circular to his deputies there was no direct "order" to apply Article 12 of the Penal code to cases of potential slavery. The Prosecutor/Attorney General merely made recommendations, stating that:

In the event that the courts refuse to apply Article 12 of the Penal Code to sales of domestic slaves, the Government wants the judicial authorities to study measures that would gradually undermine the institution of slavery, formulating the results of their studies into clear and precise proposals and, if possible, in the form of draft decrees.[467]

Was Rutten diluting Renkin's orders or more realistically enforcing them? He claimed that productive results had entailed from colonial officials refusing to recognise the status of slavery. However, Rutten informed his recipients that "the Government believes that more positive and direct measures could be taken". He suggested that administrative officials forbid certain customary practices. As an example, he recommended prohibiting people's power to

[466] Ibid
[467] Ibid

"secure a payment" through pledging persons (even if the pledged person had given their "consent"). He argued that the sale and purchase of any person should also be repressed. Rutten hoped that this could potentially "transform" domestic slavery into "a sort of de facto serfdom". He explained that he was striving for the "gradual abolition of slavery" and hoped that his ideas would help stimulate and improve approaches to achieving it.[468]

Colonial aims and methods regarding slavery varied across the administration. The dominant narrative of the slow but deliberate curbing of slavery entailed different approaches. Some officials, like Fuchs, advocated providing compensation to slave owners after the liberation of slaves. Others opposed this. Correspondence dated from October 29th 1913, from the Deputy GG to the Minister of Colonies, refers to a report written in 1912 by a State Inspector called Gerard. Gerard insisted that *no* compensation be paid to African slave-owners, as the "right to freedom, without compensation" had always been "recognized by… officials…, and this way, corroborated by constant practice", had been accepted by the Congolese.[469] There was discord among different sections of the colonial hierarchy. Despite the content of Gerard's report, the writer (the Deputy GG), went on to express his own "opinion that domestic slavery" should not really be "subject to the Government's concerns" as, according to him, "incidents [of slavery]" were "exceedingly rare". The practice of slavery was reportedly being undermined by a series of colonial measures, including taxation, transfer passports, and the recruitment of militiamen.[470] Different agendas expose themselves in this letter. It is particularly interesting to see the ways that colonial officials

[468] Ibid
[469] Letter from Deputy Governor General Eugene Henry in BOMA to Minister of Colonies (BRUSSELS) regarding domestic slavery and the report by State Inspector Gerard (in letter no. 285, 13 August 1912), dated 29th October 1913. Portefeuille: 1416bis, liasse: 1, dossier "Traite au Esclavage". African Archives, Brussels.
[470] Ibid

attempted to portray narratives of order, control, morality and colonial success in Congo in letters to their superiors in Brussels.

Another colonial measure that the Deputy GG argued assisted with bringing an end domestic slavery was the "practical ignorance" of it. He claimed that feigning ignorance was something that colonial officials ought to be "guided" by. Any "proclamation of freedom" for the Congolese should be reserved only for those who requested it.[471] Pretending to be oblivious to institutions of slavery certainly gives the appearance of not actually addressing slave practices, despite claims to the contrary. Such statements also lead to further questions. What might have been the conditions under which slaves "claimed" their freedom? What was the identity, experience and gender of slaves seeking liberation? These questions are addressed in the next chapter. Was this solution conceivable in practical terms or did it conceal colonial apathy and anti-abolitionist perspectives? Two years earlier, in a letter written to the GG from a State Inspector called Meulemeester, it asserted that "there is no place to fight domestic slavery other than in the case of sale or abuse".[472] He paid considerable attention to not tackling forms of slavery head-on, in case it precipitated "disorder" and expressed the fear that liberated slaves might choose to work against the interests of the colony.[473] Such correspondences demonstrated a balancing of colonial priorities; the "respecting" of "customs" alongside a "phasing out" of polygamy, a contradiction which became clearer as the decades progressed.

In Rutten's circular to colonial staff in Congo, he attempted to demonstrate support for the Minister's goal of tackling domestic slavery, but his text appears feeble in intent. He

[471] Ibid
[472] Letter from State Inspector Se. De Meulemeester to Governor General (BOMA), dated 5th December 1911. Portefeuille : AI 1416bis, liasse : 1, dossier "Traite au Esclavage", African Archives, Brussels.
[473] Ibid

toed the Ministry of Colonies' line about ending slavery and trafficking, but also argued that "gradual abolition" was the only viable reality. His recommendations were not compulsory. "Slavery" was already a largely grey area, in both the understanding of the administrative authority and in a legal sense. The notion of "slave practices" was based entirely on the perspective of different territorial agents and the legal authorities taking on cases. Each province was unique. It begs the question about how colonial staff were equipped to identify forms of enslavement. Was Rutten's intent related more to *appearing to do something* rather than making any real change? What kinds of pressures were leading the Minister and others lower down the administration to seek out (or appear to seek out) solutions to domestic slavery? Only a few days prior to Rutten disseminating his circular, a new law was being drafted which aimed at prohibiting the acquisition of children for marriage.[474]

5.5: Refuting missionary accusations

In response to the concerns and complaints of Father Callewaert regarding the "traffic of girls" in Lusuna (Maniema), the Head of the Maniema Zone, F. Losange, sent out a letter to Lieutenant Reinertzen, his chief/head of sector of Matampa. He requested that Reinertzen conduct an in-depth investigation into trafficking.[475] Losange instructed Reinertzen to "attentively read the aforementioned circulars and examine all the points reported by Calewaert, Villetaz and Windholtz".[476] Losange gave the chief/head of sector instructions:

[474] 'Rapport au Roi de la Commission instituee pour la protection des Indigenes', "Text for the draft circular IV. - Acquisition of children in view of marriage", dated 14 January 1913. Portefeuille : AI 1395, liasse : 5/6/1. African Archives, Brussels.

[475] Letter from the Chief Superintendent of the Maniema Zone, F. Losange to the Heads of Sectors in the Maniema Zone. Subject: "Traffic of girls in the Lusuna region". Dated May 23rd 1913. Portefeuille: M602, liasse: Peres de St. Esprit/Divers- 1912-1914, African Archives, Brussels.

[476] Ibid

In each village you will inquire about the number of girls who have been taken from their mothers to be handed over to the village chiefs, or by them to some of their subjects, or who have been sold before their nubility.[477]

He asked Reinertzen to record all "information about this abuse which is not indigenous custom", as well as make notes of "existing custom". Losange assumed that sector chiefs were able to successfully distinguish indigenous customs from outside influences, which seems farcical given the limited experience of many TAs.

Losange also wrote letters to his other sector chiefs.[478] He asked that if such abuses existed in their territories that they be reported to him so that he could implement measures against them. He instructed sector chiefs to inform local Congolese leaders that the government, "absolutely prohibits the purchase of girls" or the marriage of girls that had not yet reached puberty.[479] Furthermore, he ordered these sector heads to tell the chiefs that they had "no rights over the children" of their subjects, free or enslaved, and that the government had decided to forbid the traffic of children "possibly by the application of legal penalties".[480] Losange wanted to send a strong message to his officials and the chiefs living in the Maniema zone; the colonial government would not tolerate the slavery and trafficking of girls and women. If the government's position was related to one of moral obligation, and its primary focus centred on preventing harm to women/girls, why was such a perspective lacking in some colonial officials when it came to addressing the sexual assault of girls by Europeans? This topic was a deliberate blind-spot for some figures of the colonial milieu.

[477] Ibid
[478] Letter from the "Chief Superintendent" (Head of the Maniema Zone), F. Losange (in Kasongo) to the Heads of Sectors in the Maniema Zone. Subject: Child traffic. Dated May 23rd 1913. Portefeuille: M602, liasse: Peres de St. Esprit/Divers- 1912-1914, African Archives, Brussels.
[479] Ibid
[480] Ibid

A few days after sending out letters to his deputies, Losange also wrote to the Commissioner-General in Stanleyville, informing him of his actions, which were then forwarded to GG Fuchs.[481] He told him that Territorial Officer (TO) Mr. Chaidron, who had overseen the "Lusuna substation for more than two years", was soon to be returning to Europe. Losange wrote that he had asked Chaidron to provide him with a "detailed explanation of facts reported by R.P. Windholtz and especially concerning the immorality that reigns at the post of Lusuna".[482] He had also requested that Chaidron report to him the details of a particular case that involved a widow and her daughter, who, without the intervention of Windholtz, "would have become women of polygamy"- a fate largely regarded as terrible by colonialists. Windholtz (and Losange) identified the mother and daughter as Christian, which implied some significance. Windholtz had called upon the colonial state for what he perceived as its two-fold responsibility in such a scenario: to protect Congolese women and girls *and* look after 'good' Christian converts. He used the leverage of Christianity to present parent and daughter as morally upstanding and deserving of his and the state's saviourism. The considerations of Windholtz and Callewaert were taken seriously and they were not attacked or undermined in the same way as Protestant missionaries like Morrison.

Losange concluded the letter by informing the Commissioner that he had attached Chaidron's replies, so that the Commissioner could question Chaidron as he travelled through Stanleyville on his way home.[483] Chaidron, who oversaw the area of Lusuna, had sent two letters in response to Losange, dealing with the reported abuses that "reigned" in his

[481] Letter from the Senior Deputy ("L'Adjoint Superieur"), Head of the Maniema Zone, F. Losange. (In Kasongo) to the Commissioner-General, dated May 27th, 1913. Portefeuille: M602, liasse: Peres de St. Esprit/Divers- 1912-1914, African Archives, Brussels.
[482] Ibid
[483] Ibid

region.[484] He informed Losange that no "sultans" existed in Lusuna. There were only a small number of indigenous chiefs left who had memories of being in contact with communities that had Arab cultural influences. According to him they did not live by Arab practices. In fact, their current "customs and habits" had "existed since the time of their ancestors" and had "not changed, except for the *European* law" [my emphasis].[485] His statement provides a clear example of the difficulties associated with colonial agents distinguishing "indigenous customs". When Losange and others discussed "native customs", they seemed to refer to a fixed idea of beliefs and principles. The narrative around "indigenous customs" centred on the idea of stagnancy, rather than the notion that customs and principles were produced through the movement of and exposure to different people, cultures, histories and changing environments. This fixed concept of customs/practices implied that any "outside" influences should have been easy for agents to identify. Of course, the impact of European values on Congolese communities was not considered an issue. "Europeanness" was portrayed as the apex of civility, progressiveness and success, so accordingly, any influences associated with that were largely perceived as positive at this time. It was not until a few years later that such ideas would change.

Chaidron's letter continued with him informing Losange that while polygamy had existed among communities in Lusuna since the post's establishment in 1902/1903, "trafficking"- to his knowledge- had not. Chaidron had never known of young women and girls being bought in Lomami, writing to Losange, "I can assure you that chiefs, sous-chiefs,

[484] Letter (1) from Territorial Officer in Lusuna, Chaidron to the Head of Zone, Losange, dated 26th May 1913. Portefeuille: M602, liasse: Peres de St. Esprit/Divers- 1912-1914, African Archives, Brussels.

- I will also reference another letter that was also dated on 26th May 1913 and addressed to the same recipient. Both letters were likely sent together in a batch of texts to Losange. For the purposes of my referencing system I will refer to them as "letter (1)" and "letter (2)".

[485] Ibid

nyamparas and natives know their duties too well to indulge in this sale".[486] Chaidron clearly relied on his relationship with people in the area to keep him informed of such activities. His letter asserted that the relatives of any trafficked children would have come to him for assistance if these practices existed. As it was, he had "not received any complaints about this from anyone in the whole region".[487] This view does not account for the fact that people may not have had the confidence in him to deal with the issue if their children *had* been abducted or sold against their will. There is also the possibility that what Europeans identified as "trafficking" was merely the everyday social obligations and duties within and across communities. Was "trafficking" merely a concept used by Europeans to express their moral outrage? Perhaps people with less power and wealth sought recourse to colonial authorities, in order to circumvent certain obligations and customs, such as debt-bondage and wife inheritance.

Chaidron's told his own story about his interactions with the Father Windholtz. According to him, he had met Windholtz in Lusuna when the latter was travelling through the area. Windholtz had asked him if he could "buy children at Lomami". Chaidron wrote that: "being surprised by this question, my answer was that I did not know anything about it". Windholtz claimed to want "young girls for the R.R. Sisters".[488] Loffman has drawn attention to the Spiritan's practice of buying followers when they first began their mission. They ransomed children with ease due to the extensive networks of slave trading in the East. The group eventually decided to stop this form of recruitment because they surmised that they were helping perpetuate slavery.[489] However, from this evidence it seems that these practices

[486] Ibid
[487] Ibid
[488] Ibid
[489] Loffman, *Church, State and Colonialism in Southeastern Congo*, pg 78

did not end completely. Windholtz likely thought that buying girls and sending them to the R.R. Sisters was helping save them from slavery.

In a separate letter to Losange (written on the same date), Chaidron had written about the practice, in Lusuna, of chiefs taking "under [their] protection", the children of recently deceased people.[490] He explained that this usually only occurred when there were no other family members to come and claim the children, for instance, when their parents had originated from another region. Chiefs' would act as the family head and take "care of education and maintenance".[491] They would provide male children with wives and female children with husbands. Chaidron noted that chiefs would receive "dowries" for the girls, which he believed to be fair as they had "raised" them.[492] Men could begin to pay dowries for girls when they were seven or eight years old, however, they could not marry them until the girls were "nubile". If, upon reaching nubility, a girl refused to marry the man that had been paying bridewealth, her betrothal to him was ended and the man's goods returned. Therefore, these practices had flexibility and the girls had an element of choice. They could not simply be sold and trafficked against their will as suggested by Windholtz. At the end of his description of this process, Chaidron wrote, "this usually happens in the most perfect way…without the need for whites to intervene".[493] This sentence seemed to implicate Windholtz, whom Chaidron believed had inserted himself in business that he should not have.

[490] This apparently included both the Bakusu and Malela ethnic groups.

- Letter (2) from Territorial Officer in Lusuna, Chaidron to the Head of Zone, Losange, Dated 26th May 1913. Portefeuille: M602, liasse: Peres de St. Esprit/Divers- 1912-1914, African Archives, Brussels.

[491] Ibid

[492] In this context, Chaidron actually refers to the practice of "bridewealth" (not dowry). The practice of bridewealth involved a man providing goods to the parents of a prospective wife. I use the term "bridewealth" from this point forward to avoid confusion

[493] Ibid

To make sense of Chaidron's comment, it is necessary to look once again at Chaidron's letter detailing the story of the "Christian woman" and her daughter.

5.6: A Congolese woman takes advantage of colonial tensions

Contradictions existed between the policies and principles of colonial officials and different missionaries and the space within these contradictions could sometimes be used to serve the agendas of Congolese people who understood them. This story provides an example of a Congolese woman using the opportunities provided by missionary narratives/pressures to avoid re-marriage to a polygamous chief after the death of her first husband. According to Chaidron, the unnamed woman and child were from the Benia Dungu chiefdom, which was overseen by Chief Luhembwe. Upon the death of her husband, this unnamed young woman (around eighteen- twenty years old) was sent to live with Uncle Pena-Mufunku by Chaidron's predecessor, Sub-Lieutenant Bjornstad. This solution was to safeguard her and her daughter from "engaging in debauchery", because they had no family to support them.[494] Chaidron informed Losange that he did not know if the woman had been forced to submit to this decision or not, but that she had then taken it upon herself to seek out Father Windholtz, who was visiting the area at the time. Chaidron stated that he then called on the "chief, the uncle and relatives" and directed them to Father Windholtz's house. Windholtz had reportedly tried to compensate the uncle. Despite this, neither Pena-Mufunku or Chief Luhembwe were impressed. The chief wanted returns for what the Reverend had taken from him. The chief claimed to have paid Pena Mufunku bridewealth for the woman, as well as given him two

[494] Letter (1) from Territorial Officer at the Lusuna post, Chaidron to the Head of the Maniema Zone, Losange, dated 26th May 1913

servants. Chief Luhembwe told Chaidron that he would be complaining to the judicial authorities at Kasongo.[495]

The whole situation was of some inconvenience to Chaidron, who felt that these issues could have been avoided if Windholtz had not imposed his presence and remained uninvolved in the matter. When he next dined with Windholtz he informed him of Luhembwe's complaints. Windholtz responded by suggesting that he go visit the chief. Chaidron advised him against it and said that the incident had given him a negative reputation among the leaders of the local population, who would no longer provide him with any children (possibly for his missions).[496]

It is interesting to look at these different perspectives. While Chaidron seemed to find Windholtz's involvement frustrating, the Reverend believed that he had committed a good deed, because, as he framed the story to Chaidron's superiors, without his intervention, the widow and her child would have fallen prey to Chief Luhembwe and his polygamous practices. Indeed, without Windholtz's presence and authority, it seems likely that the young woman would have struggled to gain any influence and support from Chaidron. He did not seem open to the perspectives or experiences of independent young Congolese women.

As the sector head of Matampa, which included Lusuna, Reinert Reinertzen was in charge of investigating the complaints raised by Callewaert and Windholtz. He conducted his own study on the topic of child trafficking in his region and sent his findings to the Head of the Maniema Zone, Losange.[497] He also wrote about the case surrounding the "Christian

[495] Ibid
[496] Ibid
[497] Letter from the Sector Head of Matampa, Reinert Reinertzen (from Lusuna) to the Head of the Maniema Zone, Losange, dated July 19th, 1913. Includes his report of "the investigations in the Lusuna area on child trafficking and girl child marriage prior to their nubility". Portefeuille: M602, liasse: Peres de St. Esprit/Divers-1912-1914, African Archives, Brussels.

woman". According to him, on the death of her husband, the woman had been reclaimed by family in Kitumba. Reinertzen asserted that, "the Head of Post (not current) Bjornstad had rightly decided that the widow and her daughter would join their chieftaincy so that they would not be abandoned… they were later handed over to Reverend Father Windholtz by payment to go to the mission".[498] Evidently, Windholtz benefitted from the outcome, which hints at why he may have pursued the case initially.

Even without the young woman's written presence as a witness, her actions provide significant insight. In Lusuna, communities relied on families to support and keep a check on women. Parents supervised betrothals and, according to Chaidron, were willing to break contracts of bridewealth if girls/women decided against marriages. Families provided a form of influence and leverage. If families accounted for the wishes of their female relatives, then such power was also transferable to the latter. It seems that after the death of her husband, the widow had no one left to support her wishes. Chaidron wrote that he did not know if she had agreed to live with the man they called her uncle. She was clearly not willing to marry the chief that Pena Mufunku had accepted bridewealth from. Therefore, she independently sought out a Catholic missionary who she realised was visiting the area and requested his assistance. We do not know if she claimed to be Christian or if Windholtz did. If she made the claim, then regardless of whether it was true or not, the label was relevant and useful. This story highlights the ways that Congolese women utilised the overlap of authority between Congolese chiefs, missionaries and colonial administrators to their advantage, negotiating their options. It draws attention to the tensions that existed around who controlled and kept

[498] Ibid

track of women in Congo. Some colonial officials were wary of enabling women to exist autonomously.

Chaidron finished his letter to Losange by expressing his disappointment in Windholtz. Quoting from Windholtz's letter which he sent Chaidron after his departure, Chaidron wrote that he "was very sorry to read" Windholtz's statement that "it is shameful to see the immorality that reigns at the Lusuna post"".[499] He added that another missionary, Reverend Father Eslander, who was "passing through Lusuna from Mokata to Lomami" had commented on the "good relation between the post and the mission".[500] Chaidron ended his letter by writing of his "quiet confidence of accomplished duty", having no idea that such complaints would be made by Windholtz.[501] Nonetheless, the prompts of Callewaert and Windholtz impelled the administration to make investigations into domestic slavery and trafficking in the region.

5.7: Investigating trafficking: were girls/women wives or slaves?

One such investigation was performed by Sector Head of Matampa, Reinert Reinertzen. Reinertzen informed the Head of Zone Losange, that "14 chiefdoms comprising 64 villages and the villages of licencees" were established near Lusuna. He attached statements of people participating in the survey and stated that all his research was conducted in a "uniform" way.[502] In each village he would call all the men with their identity cards and their

[499] Letter (1) from Territorial Officer at the Lusuna post, Chaidron to the Head of the Maniema Zone, Losange, dated 26th May 1913
[500] Ibid
[501] Ibid
[502] Letter from the Sector Head of Matampa, Reinert Reinertzen (from Lusuna) to the Head of the Maniema Zone, Losange, dated July 19th, 1913

families. He would begin with the village chief and call, by name, “wife by wife and child by child”. At times there were “more children than those registered in the identity book”. Unregistered children would undergo “special examination”, which likely involved establishing their parentage.

Reinertzen’s next task involved finding out whether anyone’s children were staying with another person, be that a chief, nyampara or someone else. Reinertzen carried a book which contained a record of the population of the villages. However, it seems probable that he was not getting a full picture of the people living in them. He admitted that there would have been absent men, women and children and he believed that some people were being hidden away or sent to work on the plantations while he was there.

Reinertzen was confident in his work. According to him, any cases that might have “escaped his examination” were probably infrequent. He would end his visits to villages by informing inhabitants that they were being monitored. Reinertzen wrote that he had also summoned all the chiefs and sub-chiefs to his post and told them of the contents of Losange’s letter. The next pages of his report detailed numerous villages where “no abnormal cases were found” and no claims of trafficking were presented to him. These were villages on a border between Katanga and Maniema, which Callewaert had highlighted as places of child trafficking.

In Reinertzen’s report there were examples of chiefs taking on the maintenance of subjects’ families that had lost their patriarch heads. These examples supported TO Chaidron’s claims. Reinertzen investigated a village called Kasongu, which was overseen by a Kabamba chief called Ba Gubo. According to Reinertzen, this chief “owned a girl named

Kalombo as a wife".[503] It is not clear how Reinertzen defined "ownership" or what he associated with it. Did he consider bridewealth to be a form of ownership or had this chief really *bought* this girl as a slave? The context adds some clarity to the situation. Reportedly, the girl's father, Mokoba, had died and her mother remarried a man elsewhere. Thus, the chief had decided to take Kalombo on as his wife. It was a chief's duty to care for his subjects and for those without male spouses.[504] Was this girl a slave, a wife or both? How did Reinertzen's interpretation of her situation match with the ideas of villagers? Reinertzen provided no indication. His report draws attention to different understandings of marriage and slavery between Europeans and the Congolese. Reinertzen ended the case by stating that the girl would be directed to the Black Guardianship Commission in Kasongo. Reinertzen did not include any input or statement from Kalombo. His information was intended to be brief. It is unclear whether Kalombo regarded herself as a slave and if she preferred to be taken to Kasongo. When Kalombo arrived in Kasongo she claimed that her father was not dead and was living in Kakola village. Reinertzen ended up giving her to Chief Kakola who he wrote was her "legal guardian".[505]

Twenty other places that Reinertzen investigated yielded no evidence of trafficking, which led him to believe that it did not exist in the area. In another case in a place called Okombe, a nine-year-old girl, named Kusu Njandee was registered as the wife of deputy Chief Ongona. Apparently, Ongona had paid additional tax for her. Her father was called Benja Shikami and he was a Congo Azilu chief.[506] Her mother was unknown and when her father

[503] Ibid
[504] Ibid
[505] Letter from Reinertzen (while he was in Lusuna) sent to the Head of the Maniema Zone, Losange, dated August 12th 1913. Portefeuille: M602, liasse: Peres de St. Esprit/Divers- 1912-1914, African Archives, Brussels.
[506] Letter from the Sector Head of Matampa, Reinert Reinertzen (while he was in Lusuna) sent to Head of the Maniema Zone, Losange, dated August 12th, 1913

died, she was taken to a brother-in-law who then sold her to the deputy chief.[507] Again, it is not clear if her status in the community was that of a slave that had been "bought", or if her position was closer to that of a wife. The question is, had Reinertzen made a conflation that did not exist or were these chiefs disguising slaves as their wives?

Reinertzen explained that he could not identify any practices that led him to believe a wider system of trafficking existed in the region. His report suggests that his research was thorough, but his data possibly flawed. It relied heavily on people providing him with truthful, accurately translated information, despite the probability that many communities already knew about the administration's interest in curbing slavery. It also depended on people bringing cases forward and presenting "claims" about trafficking and slavery directly to him. This may have been difficult for people if they were under the scrutiny of their community which may have also included individuals involved in "trafficking".

Nevertheless, one pattern that emerges throughout Reinertzen's text was the practice of children being inherited by male relatives after their fathers' deaths and then being "sold" by them shortly afterwards. This was especially the case for girls. In one such example, a man named Lufaka in the village of Lungumbu, claimed that his sister, Ombo (age six to eight years old), had been sold by Deputy Chief Ongona to a man called Gongo, leader of the Kitete community in the Mokata region. According to the statement of Lufaka:

Ongona, the father of the current chief, took my sister, my brother and mother as slaves on the death of my father Okende, because my father had improper conduct with one of the wives of the deputy leader… my father paid 40 chickens for this foolishness. My mother

[507] Ibid

and brother died as slaves. Now I have just learned that the current deputy, Ongona [II] has sold my sister whom I claim.

Ongona II responded by stating that these events had indeed taken place during the time of his late father's leadership. Ongona II explained that on the death of Okenge, the latter's family was "added" to that of his father's. It seems that despite this, the family were still living an uncertain existence as marginal slaves. They were disposable to Ongona II. He admitted that he sold Ombo. After handing the girl back to Lufaka, Reinertzen recommended to the Chief of the area, Bo Elongo, that the girl remain with her brother. He finished the case by pointing out that Ongona II was a good deputy chief, "devoted to the white". He headed a "clean… well-maintained village" and ensured the "maintenance of the roads". Reinertzen thought that Ongona II understood his perspective and would be "careful in the future".[508] Similar to Likaka's findings, the evidence in my research demonstrates how colonial officials were more willing to tolerate certain behaviours and practices by leaders if their relation towards colonialists was positive and deferential.

5.8: Enslavement as strategy to maintain patriarchal authority and control

Another interesting element to Reinertzen's stories of slavery is the way that practices of selling slaves was used to punish Congolese men for their misdemeanours and challenges to men in positions of power. Examples of this manifested when men had relationships with the wives of men with more authority than themselves; consequently, their own wives or children became more vulnerable to trafficking.

[508] Ibid

In one case reported by Reinertzen, a man named Sundjembe from the village Djefu, made claims that his daughter, Shika/Sheka, had been sold at the village of Manono (on the right bank of the Lomami river). At the enquiry, Reinertzen found that a man called Mandja had sold the girl, to a man called Shohudu in another village (Uliko). Her sale came at the orders of Chief Gongo Okole, the leader of the Benia Okole, who oversaw the Uliko and Okole villages. Reinertzen discovered that Sunjembe, after escaping from his own chieftaincy, had stayed in the village of Manono with his daughter. Once there, he had relations with Mandja's wife. Sundjembe had no way to compensate Mandja, thus Shika/Sheka was given to him instead. Mandja then sold her to a man called Shohudu as part of the bridewealth that he was paying for a woman. Reinertzen wrote that he settled the case by taking Shika/Sheka back to her father. This case provides a vivid example of the ways that women and girls were used to settle disputes and quarrels between men. It also demonstrates how men with more power maintained their positions by expanding their familial networks and having numerous wives, while also condemning and punishing any men who challenged their claims to these women.

Reinertzen's report highlights how certain Congolese men outwardly acted on his recommendations, while reversing these decisions once out of his presence. Men could agree to follow colonial orders, while maintaining practices of trafficking and slavery in less conspicuous ways. Reinertzen's report also draws attention to the limits of influence and power of colonial agents who attempted to prevent the kidnapping of children and sale of slaves.

He wrote about a case where a man called Penia Lozo of the Kalemba village asked for his brother and sister to be returned to him. Lozo claimed that his sister, called Kimpe, a child of around seven years old, had been taken by a man called Kitenge and sold to someone

named P. Lomami who lived in Manono. P. Lomami had then sold her on the left bank of the Lomami river. Therefore, Reinertzen ordered the leader of Manono, Chief Deo, to look for the girl. Reinertzen left for business elsewhere and when he returned to Kalemba, Lozo claimed that his sister had still not returned. During his investigation, Reinertzen found that Lozo had had a relationship with a woman of the name Kitenge (possibly Kitenge's partner/wife). Consequently, because Lozo did not know how to pay Kitenge, the latter took his sister away and sold her to P. Lomami. Chief Deo promised Reinertzen that he would bring the girl back for him.

Lozo's brother (also called Lozo) had been taken by a man called Okoko and was returned to him by Reinertzen. After Reinertzen had departed Kalemba and returned to his own home in Okole, Lozo and his wife visited him to inform him that Kimpe had been returned. They stated that now Renertzen had left, they would keep her in the house. This was likely a safety precaution to prevent Kimpe from being abducted and sold again. Okoko once again attempted to kidnap the young Lozo. Upon hearing about this Reinertzen summoned Chief Deo, Deputy Chief Lokeleka from Kalemba village, Kitenge, Okoko and the children Lozo and Kimpe. All arrived except Okoko, who had fled. Chief Deo and Deputy Chief Lokeleka confirmed Penia Lozo's words. In the end, he proposed that,

being in agreement with the chief and the deputy chief…P. Lozo… leave his village and go to Kasongo to make a commitment to work if he wanted the children to stay at his house; for if he returned to his village, it was more than possible for the children to be kidnapped again.[509]

[509] Ibid

Reportedly Lozo accepted this suggestion and was directed to Kasongo with his wife and young siblings. Colonial agents like Reinertzen did not have the time or resources to enforce their orders.

In another case, two girls, called Osamba and Gole, came to Reinertzen for help. Reinertzen wrote that the girls, "came crying" to tell him that they were slaves of a woman called Fariala. Osamba and Gole were both around twelve to thirteen years old and claimed that this woman had tied them up in the air by their feet and beaten them with sticks. She had also burned them and made them eat excrement. Reinertzen stated that the girls carried "traces" of this abuse. Both had seemingly been introduced to slavery at birth or a young age.

Osamba was born in the village of Djefu. The chief of this village was Chief Tjupa (Mokata). During wartime Osamba fled with her aunt to the village of Asilu, but as Reinertzen wrote, "some time later they were reclaimed by one of his family carrying…a note from the leader of Mokata".[510] This seems to refer to Chief Tjupa. Reportedly, her aunt had been returned to Djefu, while Osamba was "hidden by the natives of the village".[511] These events imply that Osamba was already a slave. Cases like these demonstrate how female slavery was not necessarily perceived as "benign" by those experiencing it. Girls and women sought out ways to escape slavery as exemplified by Osamba and her aunt who made use of an opportunity to flee while their slave owner was distracted with fighting. Unfortunately, as Osamba's story demonstrates, this was not the end of her troubles, as she then encountered Fariala, who enslaved her again.

[510] Ibid
[511] Ibid

Gole was born in the village of Ekoko, which was led by Chief Tjamba Djali. She may have also been born a slave. When she was "very small" she was reportedly taken by "Arabised" Congolese people, who then sold her to a man called Kasasa. On the death of this man, another person called Sula sold her to Fariala.

Both these girls were very young and had been enslaved for some time (or their whole lives). Despite this, they understood what was regarded as unacceptable treatment. They were also sent to Losange (Head of the Maniema zone) in Kasongo but were not considered to be of an age where they could join a state institute or mission. No decision could be made about where to place them. Reinertzen claimed that they, along with some other girls, "pretended to still have their father or uncle". Osamba stated that she had an uncle near the Mokata post and was sent with a note ordering the Head of Post to put her under his tutelage. Gole, who claimed to have a brother at the Lusuna post was handed over to an uncle in Benia Oluka.[512] Both sought to be back in familiar surroundings with kin.

Reinertzen summarised his findings by explaining that in Matampa there was only one Arab chiefdom, headed by Chief Munie Pembe in Shuka, Benia Tsharu. He explained that none of the communities in the Lusuna region, including the Bakusu, Malela and Basonge, had customs allowing a chief or village chief to take the children of any of their living subjects. He then described the correct custom. Children of deceased parents were put under the guardianship of the closest male relative, an uncle or an elder brother. This male relative also gained "possession of goods including women". If a child had no parents then the village head would take them "under his supervision as well as the property".[513] Reinertzen asked Losange

[512] Letter from Sector Head of Matampa, Reinert Reinertzen (while he was in Lusuna) to Head of the Maniema Zone, Losange, dated August 12th 1913.
[513] Ibid

what he thought of an inheritance issue pertaining to women, and made his own concerns known:

The man who is the successor of the estate,… keeps possession of women who have become widows. And why? Because he can dispose of them in a way that they bring back goods. With or against his will, the woman belongs to him and remains at his disposal to be cased later and to obtain the most value. From a woman she becomes a kind of domestic slave, by custom.[514]

Reinertzen asked if these customs ought to be respected in cases where women did not want the men who had received them through inheritance. He stated that he had "always been of the opinion that in such a case we should have the means to leave the woman free to choose". He provided an idea for a solution and suggested that part of the bridewealth paid by her husband be returned to the man who had inherited her. According to Reinertzen, the woman should then have the option of returning to her home or place of origin. Reinertzen concluded by stating that he had decided to work along these lines. He summarised his report by pointing out that "nothing unusual" was found in the Lusuna area; "licenciés have a tendency to resume their old customs and those of Lusuna are no exception. Most of them are polygamous". He made his thoughts clear on the report of Windholtz, tersely implying that the missionary was exaggerating his complaints:

I asked Reverend Father Windholtz if he had anything else to report to me than this question of Polygamy and the Christian woman and her daughter - a question that has been settled for over two years by Deputy Lieutenant Bjornstad. He answered me no.

[514] Ibid

So I do not understand what he meant when he talked about the immorality that reigns in this position of Lusuna.[515]

He suggested that the Head of Post continue to monitor the situation regarding trafficking but reiterated that he had not encountered any types of practices referred to by the Apostolic Prefect Callewaert.[516]

Reinertzen also wrote about girls being married before their nubility in Lusuna.[517] He noted down cases where girls of eight-nine years old were becoming wives. This often occurred when their close male kin had died. Their precarious situation meant that they were more vulnerable to being sold or married, events that colonialists like Reinertzen found difficult to distinguish. A number of these girls were then taken to Kasongo. Some of their husbands reportedly requested their return or suggested that they go back to their parents until they were nubile. They also stated that they did not know that marrying girls before they were fully grown was prohibited. They considered their actions to be legitimate, especially since they had paid extra tax for the girls. Reinertzen explained that he had invited local chiefs, including Chief Lutshembe, to a meeting on the marriage of non-nubile girls. He had provided them a "month and a half to settle" the "situation", but his own outlook on preventing such practices was not optimistic. He wrote that these types of marriages were ordinary and that these men did always adhere to such orders, particularly when it came to women, who for them, were "a question of life".[518]

[515] Ibid
[516] Ibid
[517] Letter from Sector Head of Matampa, Reinert Reinertzen (while he was in Lusuna) sent to Head of Maniema Zone, Losange in Kasongo, dated August 13th, 1913. Portefeuille: M602, liasse: Peres de St. Esprit/Divers- 1912-1914, African Archives, Brussels.
[518] Ibid

5.9: Conclusion

This chapter highlights the type of influence that individual Catholic missionaries exerted on colonial officials high up in the colonial administration, but it also demonstrates how Ministerial instructions were also blocked or manipulated in such ways as to maintain the status quo. The respect and trust that Minister of Colonies Renkin had for Catholic missionaries contrasts significantly with the suspicion and negative views that he had for Protestant missionaries. When Catholics criticised the practices of Congolese men and trafficking this was received more positively than when Protestant missionaries accused white colonial officials of tolerating and accepting the sexual abuse and slavery of girls and women by colonial forces. The official colonial response to the notion of trafficking was significantly more serious than that which dealt with white men's abuse of young girls too. No circulars were disseminated regarding the sexual assault and exploitation by white men.

Catholic influences overlapped with new legislation that outlawed the marriage of pre-pubescent girls. Colonial officials had to accommodate these changes. However, it seems that the slow abolition of slavery was still favoured by many colonialists. Some colonial agents further down the hierarchy resented the intrusions of Catholic leaders and refuted their accusations, explaining that girls were not trafficked, but provided with choices and agency. They also argued against Catholic ideas that Maniema and North Katanga were potent with Arab slave trading, monopolies over women and harems. Catholic and colonial discourses clashed over the extent of domestic slavery in these areas. In these tensions and disagreements some Congolese people were able to manoeuvre opportunities for themselves and their children.

It seems possible that some enslaved women were being disguised as wives. Additionally, girls and women who had newly come under the authority of chiefs/male relatives because their parents or husbands had died were existing in spaces of precarity where they could be sold as slaves to enrich the men who had control over them. How different was this to Catholic missionaries seeking out children/women to enlarge their missions? From some of the evidence it seems clear that certain colonial agents were uncomfortable with the idea of women existing outside male authority.

CHAPTER 6: REPRESENTATIONS OF CONGOLESE WOMEN, MARRIAGE AND SLAVERY IN THE LEAD UP TO THE 1926 SLAVERY CONVENTION

6.1: Introduction

This chapter develops earlier subjects by tracing dominant colonial narratives about Congolese women as they entered international spaces. This section examines evolving conversations about slavery in the early to mid-1920s and the positioning of Congolese women in these debates. It examines the information provided by the Belgian colonial administration to the Temporary Slavery Commission (TSC) and considers how this formed the relationship between Belgium and the League of Nations (LoN). My work gives insight into the type of evidence that the Belgian Congo provided to impact the official 1926 definition of slavery, measures to address slavery, and international ideas about Congo and Belgium. It is crucial to analyse the type of material that was produced by the administration on marriage, slavery and the conditions of women in order to make sense of how these stories interacted with wider international discussions around "protecting African women"; an area of intense concern for British and Belgian women's groups in the 1920s-1930s, and is the main focus of the next chapter. This chapter foregrounds the kinds of narratives that women's groups were responding to. I explore pervasive stories about "dangerous" Congolese sexualities and highlight women's main presence as 'servile wives' but perceived absence as slaves. The 'slave' was understood as male in colonial texts. Through dismissing women's experiences the colonial administration tried to legitimise its approach to domestic slavery; it claimed that it was a "softer" form of slavery, much closer to "serfdom" and easier to seek liberation from.

6.2: A "Memoir on Slavery"

In the lead up to the creation of the TSC, member states of the LoN were asked to provide preliminary information on slavery in their colonies. The aims of the TSC were to record examples of slavery and provide useful recommendations for eliminating its future practice.

Towards the end of 1923 the Belgian Department of Foreign Affairs requested the Colonial Office prepare a "memoir on slavery".[519] This was to "show the colonial work of Belgium in the most favourable light".[520] The TSC was not merely perceived as a mechanism for sharing information on slavery and combining effort to end its existence; it was a platform for exposure, for shaming and for strengthening national images. This impacted what government's chose to share with the TSC. Benedetta Rossi articulates that "Abolitionism became an internationally imposed standard against which the legitimacy of colonial rule was measured and scrutinized in the international arena".[521] In correspondence between departments in the Ministry of Colonies' a further letter noted,

the great advantage to our country's reputation in League of Nations circles which would result from the submission to the General Secretariat of the League of Nations of a well-documented and very careful study of these questions which are of concern to a large number of powers.[522]

[519] Letter from the director of the 2nd Direction (signature not recognised) sent to the 1st Direction (Ministry of Colonies), dated 7th November/December 1923. Portefeuille: AI 1396, liasse: Esclavage I. African Archives, Brussels.
[520] Ibid
[521] Benedetta Rossi (2018). "Periodizing the End of Slavery: Colonial Law, the League of Nations, and Slave Resistance in the Nigerian Sahel, 1920s-1930s." *Les Annales: Histoire, Sciences Sociales*, Vol. 72, No. 4, pg 3
[522] Letter from the director of the 2nd Direction sent to the 1st Direction (Ministry of Colonies), dated January 30th 1924. Portefeuille: AI 1396, liasse: Esclavage I. African Archives, Brussels.

The Department of Foreign Affairs produced a framework for reporting on slavery. It included defining the characteristics of slavery, "diplomatic information on trafficking", and Belgian "efforts to repress" it.[523] The ministry was advised to explain action being taken by Belgium to "bring about the gradual suppression of slavery".[524] Information on slavery in Congo intended to showcase Belgium's colony. There was a clash between the proclaimed international goals of the TSC and national political/economic interests of LoN's members.

Further clarity on the type of information that the commission required was provided in January 1924. The Secretary-General of the LoN asked if it was possible for the Belgian government to provide the TSC with information on the measures applied to end slavery, the results of such measures, whether slavery had been abolished or was slowly ending, the economic and social results, and whether Belgium was introducing new policies.[525]

Albrecht Gohr, the Director-General of the Belgian Ministry of Colonies was made Chair of the TSC. Gohr had previously been in official roles in the CFS, although he left in 1894.[526] Belgium therefore had a central place on the Commission where it could reinforce its interests and viewpoint that domestic slavery should only be gradually abolished and viewed separately to slave trading. Why would Belgium feel required to argue from this

[523] Letter from the director of the 2nd Direction (signature not recognised) sent to the 1s Direction (Ministry of Colonies), dated 7th December 1923

[524] Ibid

[525]Letter from the director of the 2nd Direction sent to the 1st Direction (Ministry of Colonies), dated 30th January 1924

[526] Albrecht Gohr's first position in the Congo Free State was in Boma's Public Prosecutor's office. He became part of the Congo Free State's central administration in 1897 as their Director of Justice but returned to Belgium in 1905. He was incorporated into the Justice Department in Brussels and then became the Director General in the Ministry of Colonies in 1915. Before chairing the TSC and Advisory Committee on Slavery he helped create the journal *Jurisprudence et droit du Congo* (JDC) journal, alongside colleague, I. Gillon. This journal later became known as *Revue mensuelle de doctrine et de jurisprudence coloniale* (RMDJC) in 1924. Nathalie Tousignant (2015). "The Belgian Colonial Experience and legal Journals (1908-1960): An Overview." *C@hiers du CRHIDI*, Vol. 37 <URL : https://popups.uliege.be:443/1370-2262/index.php?id=230>; Daniel Laqua. *The Age of Internationalism and Belgium, 1880-1930: Peace, Progress and Prestige.* (Oxford: Oxford University Press: 2015), pg 67

position? Possibly, because it was aware that domestic slavery had been reported as a widespread practice across Congo and was one of economic and political importance to the colony.

6.3: The destructive potential of the abrupt abolition of slavery

The Belgian perspective on the issue of domestic slavery was supported by the work of authors like Alexandre Delcommune, Louis Vignon and Georges Van der Kerken. Delcommune was an officer in the Force Publique of CFS. He travelled around the country and led expeditions in Katanga during the late 19th century.[527] Delcommune's perspective aligned with the official Belgian viewpoint. He wrote that abruptly eradicating domestic slavery would be "dangerous". It was a beneficial system for the colony and only its gradual end was necessary.[528]

Van der Kerken was a Doctor of Law and a Professor at the Colonial University of Belgium.[529] He suggested that slaves often preferred servility to liberty because their owners were good to them. In Bantu society, the outright abolition of domestic slavery would simply have the effect of creating a "large number of individuals outside any native society and any European society,…deprived of direction in life, without land and often not knowing how to acquire it".[530] Suzanne Miers notes how this type of viewpoint legitimised a tolerant colonial

[527] Alexandre Delcommune. *L'Avenir du Congo belge menacé. Bilan des dix premières années d'administration coloniale gouvernementale (1909-1918). Le mal, le remède.* (Bruxelles: Office de Publicité : 1919), pg 153-155

[528] Ibid

[529] He was also an associate of the Royal Belgian Colonial Institute and a member of the International Colonial Institute. Georges Van der Kerken. *Les sociétés bantoues du Congo belge et les problèmes de la politique indigène: étude de la politique coloniale adoptée au Congo belge et de ses problèmes dans l'ordre sociologique, politique et économique* (Bruxelles: Bruylant: 1920), pg 207-214.

[530] Ibid

approach to slavery. Narratives about freed slaves being work-shy and unable to exist outside slave systems were common.[531] Ven der Kerken believed that any "direct action" by Europeans was likely to erode the authority of local leaders.[532]

Vignon was a colonial writer and professor at the *Ecole Coloniale*, a place that trained colonial administrators. He emphasised the economic function of domestic slavery. Men had many wives to act as "servants rather than companions".[533] He feared economic and political chaos if slavery was abolished.

Vignon questioned why slaves would want to leave a "family group" in which they were "well treated". Vignon praised local colonial administrators. He indicated that colonial officers chose to recognise and tolerate some forms of slavery to maintain harmonious relations with local leaders.

The notion that slaves had potential for social mobility seems paradoxical. Enslavement meant having limited autonomy. An enslaved man or woman may have been able to thrive within his/her bonded family but prevented from prospering beyond the parameters of the family's choosing. Achieving a status of influence as a slave may have been the best option for lack of others.

All three of these writers pointed to the importance of respecting different Congolese social/political institutions and slowly eradicating practices like polygamy and domestic

[531] Suzanne Miers. *Slavery in the Twentieth Century: The Evolution of a Global Problem.* (Oxford: Altamira Press: 2003), pg 129-130

[532] Van der Kerken, *Les sociétés bantoues du Congo belge et les problèmes de la politique indigène*, pg 207-214

[533] Louis Vignon. *Un Programme de Politique Coloniale: Les Questions Indigènes.* (Paris: Plon-Nourrit et cie: 1919), pg 374- 380.

slavery. They argued against any "impulsive" actions of European leaders interested in outright abolition. Fears around alienated individuals congregating around city centres and causing unrest was a theme throughout their works. This material was chosen to support the Belgian position at the TSC and influenced the preliminary report that the Belgian government decided to provide the commission.

6.4: A preliminary report: Belgium's story of triumph and an end to the slave trade

The Belgian report detailed historical practices of slave trade, domestic slavery and forced labour, and the official response to them. It was provided to the TSC for its initial meeting.[534]

The document explained the importance of distinguishing between the slave trade, domestic slavery and forced labour. This distinction was crucial to the Belgians' argument that domestic slavery required slower processes of abolition. It described the slave trade as,

..the capture or purchase of persons for the purpose of selling them as slaves; the sale of persons acquired for this purpose by catch or purchase, and the transport operations to which these persons are subject.[535]

'Domestic slavery', was defined as:

[534] Note from the Director-General Albrecht Gohr, 1st Direction sent to the 2nd Direction (Ministry of Colonies). Report compiled on the slave trade, domestic slavery and forced labour in Belgian Congo, dated March 6th, 1924. Portefeuille: AI 1396, liasse: Esclavage I. African Archives, Brussels.
[535] Ibid

.. a state consecrated by native customs, in which, either by the will of others, by birth or even perhaps by one's own will, a person is placed, with respect to another, in relationships analogous to those that exist between a thing and its owner.[536]

'Forced labour' referred to the "obligation to engage in work, imposed directly by law, cost or abuse of power". The report highlighted Article 9 of the General Act of the Berlin Conference on West Africa (26th February 1885), which in relations to the slave trade stipulated the following: "Each of the Powers binds itself to employ all the means at its disposal for putting an end to this trade and for punishing those who engage in it."[537]

Due to this Act, the CFS reportedly took immediate action against slave trading. From 1886 any person found guilty of arbitrarily abducting, arresting or detaining a person by violence or threats was to be penalised with a maximum of 5 years servitude.[538] From 8th November 1888 it was made illegal for the Congolese to be hired for service against their will. Such decrees did not seem to apply to rubber monopolies and CFS workers who forced Congolese people to collect rubber during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The CFS relied heavily on the role of the Zappo-Zap to accrue power in Kasai and suppress rebellions against colonial rule, including the Luluabourg revolt in 1895. The Zappo-Zap originated from the Ben'eki community, among the Songye people in west Kasai. They fought alongside the CFS army and enforced state taxation. Yet, the group had its own history of slave raiding and trading prior to the arrival of Europeans in the region. The Zappo-Zap's involvement in

[536] Ibid
[537] Ibid
[538] Ibid. "Decree of 7 February 1886- Article 61- Official Bulletin, p.1"

practices of slavery made them invaluable allies with important mercenary skills that were utilised by the colonial state.[539]

Belgium's report asserted that four years after the Brussels Conference, the CFS administration had ended slave trafficking. This was incorrect. Slave trading was discussed throughout the years preceding the creation of the Commission. It continued to be an issue, but the report refrained from acknowledging it. Some countries provided no answers to the League's questions, while others lied, deceived and avoided facts.[540]

As was originally anticipated, this document presented Belgium positively. The report provided a story of Belgians triumphing over the odds, protecting the Congolese and eradicating the slave trade.

6.5: Framing domestic slavery: only a gradual end is necessary

There was hesitancy around abruptly emancipating domestic slaves. The Belgians commented on difficulties with distinguishing slaves from free people. In fact, according to the report, the "docility of the slave does not even seem to be due to fear: it appears as a free adherence to a situation to which, in the eyes of the natives, a traditional practice has printed all the characters which are attached to the natural order of things".[541] There was no analysis about why an enslaved person or slave's descendant might accept his or her social/economic

[539] Jessica Vincent. "'The Black Knights of Fortune': A Study of the Zappo-Zap and Euro-African Encounters in the Late Nineteenth-Century Kasai." MARes diss., The University of Kent, 2015. Pg 7-8
[540] Miers, *Slavery in the Twentieth Century*, pg 123
[541] Note from the Director-General Albrecht Gohr, 1st Direction sent to the 2nd Direction (Ministry of Colonies). Report compiled on the slave trade, domestic slavery and forced labour in Belgian Congo, dated March 6th 1924

situation. The text implied that slaves were content, as opposed to socialised or intimidated into servility. According to this perspective, the slave was a person without understandings of liberty or choice, rather than someone lacking other social/economic options.

The Belgian account explained that those who were experienced in "observing native life closely", asserted that slaves were usually "well treated by their master" and were regarded "as if they are part of his family".[542] To support this perspective, the document referenced Paul Salkin's work on 'The Bantu Societies in Congo'.[543] Given this knowledge, the Ministry of Colonies' 1st Direction questioned whether it would be right to fight domestic slavery: "Was it not feared that this policy would give rise to vehement protests and even armed resistance by those who based their property rights on customary legal rules on their slaves."[544] Belgium's report outlined an approach to domestic slavery which stressed the importance of allowing time for the "evolution of ideas and, above all, of the transformation of economic conditions".[545]

The text clearly stated, however, that it did not recognise or condone slavery from a legal viewpoint. The administrative and judicial authorities would not support people making claims of ownership over others.[546] The Belgians were following the Indian Model of abolition

[542] Ibid

[543] Salkin was a judge of the Appeal Court in Katanga for several years and wrote about his experiences and ideas of the issues facing Belgian Congo. He recognised colonisation as an economic rather than moral endeavour and argued that colonisation was legitimate only when it was controlled by state entities, rather than self-interested individuals. Paul Salkin. *African Studies.* (Brussels: Ferdinand Larcier Paris: Augustin Challamel: 1920)

[544] Note from the Director-General Albrecht Gohr, 1st Direction sent to the 2nd Direction (Ministry of Colonies). Report compiled on the slave trade, domestic slavery and forced labour in Belgian Congo, dated March 6th 1924

[545] Ibid

[546] The report states that "any person claiming the status of a free man, recognised by all the civil law, should be assured of the benefit of this freedom."

as practiced by the British. This entailed outlawing the slave trade and refusing to recognise slavery while not directly making enslaved people aware of their legal capacity to leave owners. This strategy was designed to ensure the smooth and gradual end of slavery so that both slave owners and enslaved people could economically adjust and prevent economic destabilisation.[547] It served the interests of slave owners and colonialists more than anyone. Enslaved people were required to claim their freedom through the colonial authorities or by desertion. How realistic was this for slaves and how did gender affect who could achieve this?

In the view of the Belgian Ministry of Colonies, Leopold's CFS had transformed both the social and economic structures of the country for the better. The 'civilising' policies of the CFS continued to ensure the eradication of domestic slavery, therefore the Belgian administration followed its model. The text stated that "this gradual decline is about to result in the complete extinction of the institution… thanks in particular to the missions which gradually penetrated native circles" and instituted an understanding of the rights "inherent to man".[548] It drew attention to the importance, in this process, of decrees imposing equal obligations (taxes, etc.) on slaves and free people. Rules which ensured that members of the state militia could only patrol areas far from their homes also assisted to sever the connection between ex-slave recruits and their old slave owners. Companies were praised for providing economic alternatives for slaves. The TSC approved of this preliminary piece of work and pointed out the thorough nature of Belgian's response to issues of slavery.

[547] Suzanne Miers and Richard Roberts (eds.). *The End of Slavery in Africa.* (London: The University of Wisconsin Press: 1988), pg 12-13

[548] Note from the Director-General Albrecht Gohr, 1st Direction sent to the 2nd Direction (Ministry of Colonies). Report compiled on the slave trade, domestic slavery and forced labour in Belgian Congo, dated March 6th 1924

Belgian's description of its Congo colony correlates with many of its administrators who felt passionately about ending practices of slavery. However, it also masks other stories and versions of events. In July 1923, a year before the TSC met for the first time, a letter was sent to the GG in Congo from the Secretary General of the Department of Justice and Indigenous Affairs at the Ministry of Colonies in Brussels.[549] The letter detailed the complaints of Reverend Father Rutten of the Catholic Scheut Missions. Rutten highlighted Sudanese Arabs engaging in horse trading in New Antwerp and Coquilhatville (now called Mbandaka- the capital of the Equateur Province). He claimed that men travelled long distances to sell their horses at low cost, "their real source of profit being in the purchase of women". Furthermore, the Bishop of Tabora (East Africa), whom Rutten had met during a trip, informed him that Europeans also made "business trips to Stanleyville, bringing Congolese women back to Tabora as slaves".

These were not the kinds of stories that the Belgian government wished to share with the TSC nor draw attention to. Not only did it demonstrate that the slave trade was alive- it also challenged official narratives around the perpetration of slavery. The Belgian report to the TSC made no mention of Europeans trading in slaves. Trafficking was presented as an African and Arab practice.

In 1924 the TSC convened together for the first time. This group formed the first international body delegated with investigating issues of slavery across international borders.

[549] Letter from the Department of Justice and Indigenous Affairs (Ministry of Colonies) to the Governor General (in Boma, Congo). In relation to R.P. Rutten on Arab men selling horses and buying women slaves, dated July 9th 1923. Portefeuille: AI 1396, liasse: Esclavage I. African Archives, Brussels.

Numerous sessions were held from 9th-12th July in Geneva. Gohr was made President and Mr Freire d'Andrade became its Vice-President.[550]

The committee aimed to share accurate and reliable knowledge. It could not force members of the LoN to share material on slavery in its colonies, but it could exert pressure. During the TSC'S first sessions issues arose around defining slavery, organising a work program and defining the scope of the TSC's work. Belgium's initial report was praised by members of the committee and some questioned whether it was even necessary for countries like Belgium to provide more information when they had already given a thorough response to the committee's initial queries.

Nonetheless, during its existence, the TSC developed a more comprehensive set of questions. *All* Governments' were to provide the Commission with information on the following areas:

1:

a) Raids operated for the purposes of capturing persons and slaves

b) Assignment or devolution of a slave by barter, sale, gift or inheritance

[550] 'Minutes of the First Session of the Temporary Slavery Committee', held in Geneva on behalf of the League of Nations. Meetings held from 9th-12th July 1924. Minutes published on August 16th, 1924. Portefeuille: AI 1396, liasse: Esclavage I. African Archives, Brussels.
Mr Freire D'Andrade was the Former Minister of Foreign Affairs in Portugal and a member of the Permanent Mandates Commission for the League of Nations. Other members of the committee included Mr Louis-Dante Bellegarde, the former Minister of Haiti in France and First Delegate of Haiti to the Third Assembly of the LoN; Mr Delafosse, the French former GG of the Colonies and member of the Colonial Academy of France; Mr H. A. Grimshaw, a representative of the International Labour Organisation; Sir Frederick Lugard, the British former Governor of Nigeria and member of the Permanent Mandates Commission; Commander Roncagli, the Italian Secretary General of the "Societe Geographica Italiana"; and Mr. Van Rees, the former Vice-President of the Netherlands East Indies Council and Vice-President of the Permanent Mandates Commission.

c) Slavery or bondage (domestic or agrarian)

2:

Practices restricting the freedom of persons or tending to the acquisition of a right of constraint on persons, placing them in a situation analogous to slavery:

a) The acquisition of girls by purchase disguised as a dowry, provided that the prevailing matrimonial customs are not in view

b) The adoption of children of either sex for the purposes of enslaving them or disposing of their person.

c) All forms of pledging of servitude of persons for debts or other causes

3:

Measures taken to curb the practices indicated under 1 and 2 and the effects obtained.

4:

Regime of compulsory labour, public and private, paid or not

5:

Measures taken or envisaged to facilitate the transition from bonded or compulsory labour to paid free labour or independent production.

Despite some clear differences in forms of slavery reported across provinces and the ways in which administrators approached them, there were also several similar themes that emerged throughout the colony.

6.6: "Part of the family"

Most Territorial Administrators (TAs) and District Commissary's (DCs) agreed with Delcommune, Vignon and Van der Kerken, that forms of servitude would end naturally as a result of more frequent contact between the Congolese and Europeans. The "economic life" offered by wage labour, the end of slave raiding, exposure to missionary teachings and the availability of an option to seek colonial forms of liberation would herald slavery's death knoll. Allowing for practices to run their course was the most appropriate way of approaching the issue without disrupting livelihoods and social structures. This sentiment was expressed by TAs, DCs and Provincial Governors (PGs) in areas of Bas-Congo, Kasai, Equateur and Orientale.[551] TAs in Kasai highlighted slavery to be so entrenched that only persuasion and an "evolution" of the "way of life" would end it.[552] Kasai had been heavily impacted by forced labour and death during the administration of CFS.[553]

The narrative around slavery provided colonial officials with an opportunity to praise the Belgian occupation and reinforce colonial reasoning for Belgium's control of Congo. In reports from across Kasai and Equateur, colonisation was presented as the main reason for the end or rarity of slave trafficking. Yet, during the years of Leopold's rule, the slaving, looting and plundering of Zappo-Zap soldiers had been tolerated in Kasai by the CFS because they

[551] By 1926, districts had been rearranged into provinces. As a result, some of the documents which overlap the years between 1924-1926, refer to 'districts' rather than provinces. I try to use the administrative terms that were used at the time. However, to reduce confusion, in the main text unless I am referring to them individually, districts have been subsumed into the provinces that they later formed.

[552] The report on slavery for the Luebo territory (Kasai District) from Territorial Administrator Mr Wenner, to the District Commissary (no name), dated 18th July 1925. Portefeuille: AI 1396; liasse: 13/1; African Archives, Brussels.

Also, the report on slavery for Bapende territory (Kasai District) from Territorial Administrator Mr. Roberti, dated 27th May 1925. Portefeuille: AI 1396; liasse: 13/1; African Archives, Brussels

[553] See Jan Vansina. *Being Colonized: The Kuba Experience in Rural Congo, 1880-1960*. (London: The University of Wisconsin Press: 2010)

served as efficient colonial army auxiliaries.[554] Jessica Vincent suggests that new opportunities for slave dealing may have been provided to the Zappo-Zap *through* their work with the CFS and growing colonial power.[555] Reportedly, the colonial authorities made it more difficult to sell slaves through application of Article 12 of the Penal Code, which prohibited the sale of slaves. It was claimed that the Congolese knew they could appeal to the "moral authority" of Belgian officials for liberation.[556] Furthermore, if slavery did exist, it was usually in areas where Belgian occupation had not yet "penetrated".[557] Forms of domestic or agrarian slavery was repeatedly portrayed as benign, and when it existed in more aggressive forms, it was present only among smaller populations. In this way, the Belgian managed to downplay any ongoing bondage while depicting brutal forms as beyond their administrative control. The Belgians were not the only ones to deny the extent of slavery in their colony. Across Africa imperial powers claimed that slavery was not a serious problem or that it was disappearing. Roberts and Miers suggest that colonialism changed the *dynamics* of slavery in Africa which eventually helped bring about its end. This occurred through shifts in the political economy, abolitionist legislation and transformations in markets at local and international levels.[558] However, it had not disappeared by the 1920s and neither was it necessarily "benign".

[554] Vincent. ''The Black Knights of Fortune'', pg 85
[555] Ibid, pg 108-109
[556] Report on slavery by the deputy District Commissary (signature not recognised) in absence of the District Commissary, (in Lusambo) dated 23rd June 1925. Portefeuille: AI 1396; liasse: 13/1; African Archives, Brussels
[557] Report on slavery in the Lake Leopold district (Equateur Province), by the District Commissary J. Van Hoeck (in Inongo), dated 6th February 1926. Portefeuille: AI 1396; liasse: 13/1; African Archives, Brussels
Also, report on slavery within an area that was later incorporated into the Equateur Province (faded illegible text where it states the name of the district), by District Commissary Mr. Bareau, in Lisala. Dated 14th May 1925. Portefeuille: AI 1396; liasse: 13/1; African Archives, Brussels
Also, report on slavery on the Equateur Province by Governor Mr. Parker (in what was then called Coquihatville, now known as Mbandaka) to the Governor General, dated 15th April 1925. Portefeuille: AI 1396; liasse: 13/1; African Archives, Brussels
[558] Roberts and Miers, *The End of Slavery in Africa*, apg 17-18

Labelling certain forms of slavery as benign was a matter of interpretation. In his report on slavery in the Equateur Province, Governor Parker wrote that when it came to domestic slaves, they participated in "family life" and had some freedom of movement. He rarely observed any negative treatment of slaves, although they were given the hardest forms of labour and when they fell ill or became incapacitated, "abandonment and misery" followed.[559] Despite being a fixture of "family life", enslaved people remained social outsiders. Their worth was connected to their capacity to work and their presence in the family depended on this condition. No matter how well a slave was treated, they were still in a position of servitude and vulnerability. In the Lulonga district in Equateur, DC Jorissen pointed out that in some regions slave descendants and ex-slaves were regarded as an inferior caste.[560] Despite this, numerous reports commented on the fair handling of slaves across Congo, highlighting how some slaves could gain influence and power. According to some TAs in both Kasai and the Orientale provinces, domestic slaves were able to inherit their owner's property and become community leaders or chiefs.[561] Which types of slaves were being referred to here? According to the evidence, these opportunities did not apply so easily to enslaved women.

TAs and PGs in all the provinces commented on the positive conditions of domestic slaves who were "part of the family" of their owners. Their situation was described as relatively easy, because they could own a parcel of land and earn enough to pay for their

[559] Report on slavery in the territory of Babinji (Kasai District) by Mr Destray in Mboi, to the District Commissary, dated 8th August 1925. Portefeuille: AI 1396; liasse: 13/1; African Archives, Brussels

[560] Report on slavery in the Lulonga district, by District Commissary Jorissen. Undated. Portefeuille: AI 1396; liasse: 13/1; African Archives, Brussels

[561] Report on slavery in the territory of Dibaya in Kasai District, by the Territorial Administrator Mr Pire, dated 23rd May 1925. Portefeuille: AI 1396; liasse: 13/1; African Archives, Brussels
Report on slavery in the territory of Bakete, Bambesa district from Territorial Administrator Mr Destray to the District Commissary, dated 6th June 1925. Portefeuille: AI 1396; liasse: 13/1; African Archives, Brussels

redemption. Sometimes they were considered as having "consented" to their servile conditions. The practice of providing slaves with wives was considered a clever way to keep them in bondage, as they were then reluctant to leave their wives and children behind. It was a strategy to maintain systems of slavery and kept male slaves compliant and healthy. These unions also produced more slaves. [562]

In Wright's work on Central Africa, she suggests that women were more easily integrated into the communities of their slave owners because of "a persistent ambiguity as to their status and functions.".[563] They fulfilled the same types of work as free women, so they were not always identifiable as enslaved. Male slaves were more conspicuous because they had to carry out the work designated to free women.[564] Wright argues that "absorption phrased in familial terms was well understood as a means of social control preferable to active coercion of slaves".[565] Wright's perspective aligns with that of Kopytoff and Miers who claimed that the legal ban on slavery did not completely transform social systems. This was because slavery was only one of many subordinate relationships in Africa. While abolition may have provided space for more recently captured slaves to claim freedom and return to their homes, it likely did not affect the lives of integrated slaves.[566]

Part of what is fascinating about the colonial narrative that slaves agreed to their situations is the context in which these statements were made. Slaves were represented as

[562] Report on slavery by the deputy District Commissary (signature not recognised) in absence of the District Commissary, (in Lusambo)
[563] Marcia Wright. "Bwanikwa: Consciousness and Protest among Slave Women in Central Africa 1886-1911." In *Women and Slavery in Africa*, edited by Robertson Klein. (Portsmouth: Heinemann: 1997), pg 249
[564] Ibid
[565] Ibid, pg 262
[566] Miers and Kopytoff (eds.) *Slavery in Africa: Historical and Anthropological Perspectives,* pg 73-75

having "consented" to their servile statuses, despite the evidence examined above which highlights their lack of real choices.

"Serfdom" became the term of choice to describe forms of slavery that colonial officials saw across the colony. It was frequently used by TAs, DCs and PGs to refer to a domestic/agrarian slavery and was recognised by TSC members too.[567] This language downplayed the status of slavery and presented slave conditions as similar to those of free people. Stanleyville's DC Mr. Hallez, wrote to the PG of the Orientale province about the mere "traces" of servitude that existed in some areas. According to him, these practices had been "softened" so much that it was no longer appropriate to call them slavery.[568] However, some of the documents which emphasised the comforts of slavery also exposed its realities. A report from the Sankuru district in Kasai pointed out that the name "Mpika" (meaning slave), was considered an insult. It was unkind to refer to one's slave as a 'slave'. Instead, an owner of slaves might say "munti", meaning "he is a man of mine".[569]

Even if the lifestyle of a slave appeared not dissimilar to that of a free person, they were still allocated the status of "slave"; a social category which confined them and their family to a certain social space, demarcated them as different and signalled their inferiority to others. Any influence that they established was filtered through their owners and could be taken away if the slave was disloyal or acted displeasingly.

Another theme that ran through many of the texts providing information on slavery for the TSC was the emphasis on how easy it was for slaves to claim freedom. The colonial

[567] Miers. *Slavery in the Twentieth Century*, pg 134

[568] Report on slavery in the Stanleyville district from District Commissary Mr. Hallez, sent to the Provincial Governor of the Orientale province, dated July 14th 1925. Portefeuille: AI 1396; liasse: 13/1; African Archives, Brussels

[569] Report on slavery from the Sankuru district. No name of author or date. Portefeuille: AI 1396; liasse: 13/1; African Archives, Brussels

authorities utilised this idea to reinforce the notion that any slaves still in existence were in their positions by choice. This helped Belgian officers relinquish responsibility for a slave's situation. DC Hallez confidently asserted that "the situation of slave (serf)…seems easy to bear, for it is rare that an individual of this category, although aware of our principles, solicits his liberty".[570] Slaves reportedly knew that they could easily approach the colonial authorities for assistance and/or emancipation.[571] The enslavement of people seemed to justify their ongoing enslavement. Basil Davidson wrote about the way race was constructed by Europeans to justify the Atlantic slave trade. He describes slaves as people "to whom an unnatural inferiority had given every appearance of a natural inferiority".[572] This type of perspective permeated colonial attitudes to slaves in Congo.

Slaves were dehumanised and viewed as people without the capacity to properly exist outside servility. They were described as having "simplistic" mentalities and as being ill-prepared for freedom. In one document produced by Governor Moeller in Stanleyville (Orientale Province), he wrote that a slave had been "accustomed since childhood" to "subordinate his will to that of his master".[573] Therefore "the domestic slave does not appreciate the benefits of freedom and fears responsibilities".[574] Many colonial officials had similar viewpoints.[575] The colonial claim that liberated slaves would find the realities of freedom unappealing was common across Africa. A frequently expressed concern was that

[570] Report on slavery in the Stanleyville district, by District Commissary Mr. Hallez.
[571] Report on slavery by the deputy District Commissary (signature not recognised) in absence of the District Commissary, (in Lusambo)
[572] Basil Davidson. *Black Mother: A Study of the Pre-Colonial Connection Between Africa and Europe.* (London: Longman: 1970), pg 29
[573] Report on slavery in Kivu District from Governor Se Moeller (Secretariat Service) to the Governor General, dated 16th November 1925. Portefeuille: AI 1396, liasse: Esclavage I. African Archives, Brussels.
[574] Ibid
[575] Mr Ghyselinck, the TA of the Bakuba territory (Kasai), wrote that slaves would be "completely lost in a new environment" once freed. Report on slavery in the territory of Bakuba by the Territorial Administrator, Mr Ghyselinck in Mushenge. Dated 18th May 1925. Portefeuille: AI 1396, liasse: Esclavage I. African Archives, Brussels.

freedom would be difficult for slaves to navigate because they were "lazy" and would find it hard to support themselves. These factors could lead them to become sex workers and criminals. Such arguments were used to support slavery's gradual abolition.[576]

It seems odd that a person who likely worked harder than a free person, who had to juggle slave labour with producing goods for their family and taking care of children and a plot of land (if they had one), would be considered incapable of handling responsibility. A DC in Equateur, Mr Bareau, argued that a slave's "fate is not to be pitied"; when a slave sought liberty, the administration obliged him. However, slaves also rejected the freedom offered by colonialists. This leads one to question what kind of "freedom" was being offered and the type of lifestyle an enslaved person could expect once "liberated".

6.7: Specific freedoms: labouring for the colony

State officials envisaged forms of freedom that benefitted the colony. In various districts there were different "opportunities" to find paid work ("travail libre salarié"). The PG for Bas Congo, among others, pointed out the importance of "creating needs" in Congolese people which would "shake" the "cornerstone of domestic slavery". These were interpreted as needs for liberation, the ability to earn a living, own property and buy products.[577] Some TAs in Kasai claimed that creating "needs" in people was crucial for persuading them to work in agriculture and porterage, i.e. colonial labour.[578]

[576] Roberts and Miers, *The End of Slavery in Africa*, pg 21, 48-49; Miers, *Slavery in the Twentieth Century*, pg 12
[577] Report on slavery for Bapende territory (Kasai District) from Territorial Administrator, Mr. Roberti:
"In order to induce the natives of this territory to work of their own will and thus to make themselves independent, it would first be necessary to create needs which they do not yet possess. It will only happen at successive stages and as traders come to settle in the area".
[578] Report on slavery for Bapende territory (Kasai District) from Territorial Administrator, Mr. Roberti

The report on slavery for Bas-Congo noted "the ease with which natives can hire their services to commercial, industrial and agricultural enterprises".[579] Independence for Congolese people was envisaged as working for the colony or private companies. This was presented as the alternative to former slaves becoming "lost" in their liberated states. As previously noted, the Force Publique recruited ex-slaves. There were also mining companies and railway projects in force. In Kasai there was the Bas Congo-Katanga (B.C.K.) railway and the Forminière lumber and mining company. In Katanga there was the Union Minière du Haut Katanga (UMHK) and in Equateur there were shipyards. Accommodation, education and some health care services were advertised to attract potential workers to these companies.

Many of the answers to the TSC's question about how to curb practices of slavery and transition to wage labour centred around convincing people to engage in colonial (private or public) employment. There was no point forcing the Congolese to work when they would gradually realise for themselves the opportunities it provided. The TA of Babinji (Kasai), Mr Destray, argued that the example shown by freed slaves working on farms, in public works or in the mining sectors, would encourage domestic slaves to seek their own emancipation.[580] Free wage labour was portrayed as the only way forward for freed slaves and the progression of the Congo. Many of these perspectives mirror the ideas of the writers discussed earlier.

Colonial officials therefore found it difficult to understand why slaves would choose slavery over economic independence. In some cases, freed slaves returned to their owners

[579] Report on slavery in the Bas-Congo District (signature not recognised), dated 15th August 1925. Portefeuille: AI 1396, liasse: 13/1. African Archives, Brussels.
Also, the report on slavery for Bapende territory (Kasai District) from Territorial Administrator, Mr. Roberti:
"In order to induce the natives of this territory to work of their own will and thus to make themselves independent, it would first be necessary to create needs which they do not yet possess. It will only happen at successive stages and as traders come to settle in the area".
[580] Report on slavery in the territory of Babinji (Kasai District), by Territorial Administrator Mr Destray

and worked for them as a client. The Governor of the Equateur province, Mr Parker, commented on slavery among the Ubangi community, which was made up of Moguandi, N'Gbandi and Banza people of Sudanese heritage. While the slaves of the Moguandi might be provided with wives by their owners and have children (who were not claimed by the slave owner, although the bridewealth from any marriage was), the situation of slaves among the Banza was "rather miserable". Girls born of slave parents among the Banza were also the property of the owner and could be sold or exchanged at any time. Even so, after a number of slaves were freed around Banzyville (now called Mobayi-Mbongo) in 1916 and grouped together "under the eyes of the administration" they soon decided to leave the site and return to their owners.[581] Parker did not make it clear whether the freed slaves had sought liberation. There is no indication about the living conditions of these freed slaves or the opportunities the administration sought to provide them. Evidently, they considered the option of remaining with their previous owners better than the situation they were being presented with.

A pertinent question to ask would be, how was "freedom" conceived by enslaved people? According to Kopytoff, in Africa to be a free and a "full person is to have true kin".[582] Therefore, for ex-slaves an expression of freedom would include having the ability to dictate his/her own terms of "social dependence" through kin or employers.[583] Wright has shed light on women and the legitimacy of freedom from their perspective. In her examinations of colonial court documents in Central Africa, she found that many women preferred to pay ransoms outside the colonial courts to emancipate themselves, otherwise they did not view

[581] Report on slavery in the Equateur province sent to the Governor General from Governor Mr. Parker, in Coquilhatville
[582] Kopytoff, "The Cultural Context of African Abolition." In *The End of Slavery in Africa*, edited by Roberts and Miers, pg 494
[583] Ibid, pg 494-495

themselves as free. Through this act of self-determination, they did not challenge the institution of slavery. Women also wanted to return to their homes and families, otherwise they did not consider themselves free. Wright' evidence supports the arguments of Kopytoff. She also found that some female slaves sought better conditions for their enslavement and social dependence, as opposed to freedom.[584]

With these understandings of freedom in mind, it seems unsurprising that the notion of being uprooted once again while remaining kinless and having potentially less protection than before *as well* as working for the colony was not considered a true form of emancipation. It seems possible that the liberated ex-slaves at Banzyville found their new circumstances insecure and undesirable, hence their return to their owners. Perhaps they did not consider themselves free because they had not ransomed themselves, or maybe their families had been left behind. From the evidence, it seems that there was a lack of consideration for practical reasons why ex-slaves might have returned to their masters. Instead, their choices were viewed as incomprehensible and related more to their dependent sensibilities.

6.8: Male slaves, oppressed wives: confined colonial spaces for Congolese women/girls

Throughout the previous paragraphs the discussion has revolved around a certain idea of a "slave". The enslaved person is implicitly *male* throughout archival documents. "He" is the default enslaved person who also has the capacity to found "his" own household. He is discussed in terms of "taking wives", of being polygamous and of gaining influence in leadership roles. The male slave could own a plot of land, earn his redemption or even

[584] Wright, "Bwanikwa", pg 262-265

become a notable or chief. He could potentially inherit. It was male slaves who were predominantly being referred to in terms of the ease with which their liberation could be achieved. They were also the ones whom the colonial state envisioned as "free" wage labourers. In the words of Mr. Pire, the TA of Dibaya in Kasai, "the slave is a man who is entitled to his own life".[585] What does this expose about the types of opportunities that were available to slave women contemplating liberation?

Enslaved men had some limited opportunities to accumulate wealth and therefore exist independently from their owners. It was more difficult for women.[586] If women were in situations of enslavement where they had even less economic autonomy than men, they may have been less likely than men to pursue liberation, particularly alone. Women may have been less inclined to flee slavery if their owners had full rights to their children too.

If colonialists were tackling cases of slavery whereby a slave demanded freedom, female concubines or domestic slaves were possibly overlooked or mistaken for wives. In fact, Roberts and Miers argue that officials "often discouraged their departure for fear of upsetting domestic arrangements and because they tended to view women slaves, particularly concubines, as being similar to wives, who belonged with their husbands".[587] Women's servile positions were presented as less arduous. Wright points out that in the lead up to the First World War the existence and experiences of domestic slaves and female dependents became

[585] Report on slavery in the territory of Dibaya (Kasai District) by the Territorial Administrator Mr Pire.
[586] Letter from State Inspector Se. De Meulemeester to the Governor General (in Boma), dated 5th December 1911. Portefeuille: AI 1416bis, liasse : 1, dossier : "Traite au Esclavage". African Archives, Brussels.

[587] Roberts and Miers, *The End of Slavery in Africa*, pg 39

less present in colonial documents.[588] Freeing enslaved women was less of a colonial concern when the administration was mainly interested in acquiring freed men for the wage labouring economy.[589] Roberts and Miers note that even after the outlawing of slavery across Africa, many slaves remained with their owners. In Belgian Congo slavery was outlawed in 1910 but continued to thrive. Roberts and Miers explain that the likely reason so many slaves stayed with their owners across Africa was because most of them were women who had difficulty freeing themselves and establishing economically and socially secure livelihoods.[590]

The intersections of race and gender produced a specific status for Congolese women under colonial occupation. Maria Lugones highlights how "only white bourgeois women have consistently counted as women so described in the West".[591] Women from colonised territories were,

..understood as animals in the deep sense of "without gender", sexually marked as female, but without the characteristics of femininity. Women racialized as inferior were turned from animals into various modified versions of "women" as it fit the processes of Eurocentered global capitalism.[592]

[588] Wright, "Bwanikwa", pg 249-250
[589] Roberts and Miers, *The End of Slavery in Africa*, pg 39
[590] Ibid, pg 40
[591] Maria Lugones. "The Coloniality of Gender", pg 14
[592] Ibid, pg 14

Congolese women were described by some, including Albrecht Gohr, as having less dignity than their European counterparts.[593] They were portrayed as passive and accepting of bad treatment.

Enslaved Congolese women existed within a triad of oppression. Not only were they a colonised person and subject to, as Oyèwùmí describes it, "racial inferiorization", they were also victim to "gender subjugation"[594], through both European and Congolese gender practices, in addition to their slave status. Their marginalised position meant that they were at the very bottom of the social hierarchy and were under the authority of their owner as well as their slave husband. Governor of the Katanga province, Mr Heenen, commented on the importance of a husband "watching over" his wife. If he was not "preoccupied with her fate" she would be catapulted into "native society without any attachments" or restraints and would, "in all likelihood, become deviant".[595] The freedom of Congolese women had to be circumscribed. There were fears that ex-slave women would fall "prey to all the ferments of indiscipline and immorality" in townships.[596] Much colonial anxiety centred around a perceived dissolution of the family in industrialised areas where indigenous customs were seen to have lost their influence. Prostitution ordinances were introduced in 1910 and again in 1914-1915 to register and keep track of single women in the towns.[597] Administrators were anxious about women pursuing lives independent of men, whatever their status. This is

[593] « Note pour Monsieur Denyn » by Directeur Albrecht Gohr. Dated August 1918. Portefeuille: AI 1560, liasse: III, dossier: 'Adultere et Bigamie: Projet de Londres'. African Archives, Brussels.
[594] Oyewumi, *The Invention of Women*, pg 123-124
[595] Report on slavery on the Katanga province, by Governor Mr. Heenen, dated 11th February 1926. Portefeuille: AI 1396, liasse: 13/1. African Archives, Brussels.
[596] 'Adultere et Bigamie: Etudes sur le Projet de Decret: 2eme Etude', pg 1-20, dated 3rd May 1921 (author unknown), Portefeuille: AI 1560; liasse: V. African Archives, Brussels.
[597] 'Ordonnance d'administration generale no. 17, du 30 janvier 1915, reglementant l'exercice de la prostitution', Articles 8, 12, dated January 1915. Portefeuille: AI 1404, liasse: II M/5/G, dossier : 'Mesures de Police : Prostitution (1914-1918)'. African Archives, Brussels

reflected in official conversations and legislation around marriage, divorce and adultery. Women were more harshly penalised for adultery than men as well as condemned if, as adults, they refused to co-habit with their husbands.[598]

'Marriage', 'dowry payments' and 'polygamy' were the colonial discursive spaces where Congolese women were most visible. Discussions around bridewealth, its functions, effects and how it should be addressed by colonial governments varied across Africa.

The practice of bridewealth referred to what social anthropologist Radcliffe-Brown called, the "payment of goods or services by the bridegroom to the bride's kin".[599] This process could involve one or many transactions over time and defined the legitimacy of a marriage. Colonial administrators used the term 'dowry' ("dot") to describe this practice. This was an inaccurate definition, but the main Western reference for discussing marriage transactions. The 'dowry' consisted of property and/or money given to the husband by his wife's family. In a loosely similar way to bridewealth, a dowry was meant to serve as some form of protection or safety net for the wife in case of ill-treatment, divorce or the death of her husband.

With this monetary understanding of 'dowry' in mind, colonial administrators and missionaries then applied it to their ideas of bridewealth, perceiving the process as the purchase of a wife. Radcliffe-Brown highlighted that,

A marriage in many, perhaps most, African societies involves a whole series of prestations (payments, gifts or services), and while the most important of these are from the

[598] The adultery of women was regarded as more dangerous to public order in the colony, because it was thought of as a provocation for fights between men. 'Adultere et Bigamie: Etudes sur le Projet de Decret: 2eme Etude', pg 1-20

[599] A.R. Radcliffe-Brown; Daryll Ford (eds.). *African Systems of Kinship and Marriage.* (London: Oxford University Press: 1950), pg 46-47

husband and his kin to the wife's kin, there are frequently, one might say usually, some in the other direction.[600]

On this basis, bridewealth is an exchange, a building of social relations and kinship. It was not necessarily understood as the "buying" of a woman as a wife. Western people may have insisted on the close link between marriage and slavery, but as Miers explains, to Africans, marriage practices were very different to those of slavery.[601]

The TSC's question about bridewealth reflected a suspicion held by both colonialists and missionaries that bridewealth could be used as a cover for "acquiring" and enslaving girls/women. This wariness of African marriage practices and most importantly, of African men, can be seen in the Congolese context in dramatic colonial imagery surrounding "great polygamists", "harems" and "greedy heirs". Azille Coetzee and Louise du Toit write about how colonial narratives identified "inferiority" in African men through their "perverse sexuality, which in turn" was part of their "flawed, racialised biology".[602] Coetzee and du Toit argue that this particular form of dehumanisation lent justification for colonial control; the "backwardness" of Africans, which was apparently intrinsic to their biology, displayed itself through dangerous sexual activities that needed to be curbed through colonial laws and missionary teachings.[603] Similarly, the sexuality of Congolese men was understood as predatory and polygamy viewed as the logical social outlet for hypersexuality. It followed that polygamy and African institutions of marriage were therefore deeply flawed, exploitative of

[600] Ibid
[601] Miers, *Slavery in the Twentieth Century*, pg 133
[602] Azille Coetzee and Louise du Toit. "Facing the sexual demon of colonial power: Decolonising sexual violence in South Africa." *European Journal of Women's Studies,* 2018. Vol 25, No. 2: pp. 214-227. Pg 219-220
[603] Ibid

black women and in need of transformation. The manner of this transformation, however, was the main issue of contention among different colonial officials.

The provinces of Kasai, Katanga and Equateur all provided evidence to the TSC under the heading of purchase "disguised as dowry". The question as framed by the TSC became a catch-all reference for issues around bridewealth, with different colonial interpretations of what was "legitimate" bridewealth practices and what was not. These forms often overlapped with other TSC areas for concern, including question 1b on inheritance and barter.

In the district of Bas-Congo, negative systems of bridewealth were highlighted in Boma, Caractes-South and Kibambi. An issue raised was the lack of consent of girls getting married. While parents of a child/young woman would agree to her marriage, she would not, necessarily. The topic of consent was also raised in Kasai, in the territory of Tshisuku, where "non-nubile" girls could be bought, exchanged, married off and inherited. "Greedy heirs" might sell the women they had inherited, and orphaned children and pre-pubescent girls were pawns of exchange.[604] In the district of Aruwimi in the Orientale province girls were reportedly "forced" by their parents to live with their future older husbands before they were sexually mature. According to DC Mr Schmitz, such activities were "tolerated" because they were "practiced by the parents themselves" and "anchored in custom".[605] The complicity of parents in these processes lent them legitimacy in the eyes of some colonial administrators.

In certain places heavily impacted by frequent slave raiding of the past, where domestic slavery was reported as common and the transfer and succession of slaves was a

[604] Report on slavery in the territory of Tshisuku (Kasai District) from Territorial Administrator Mr Luja to the District Commissary. Dated 27th July 1925. Portefeuille: AI1396, liasse: 13/1. African Archives, Brussels.
[605] Report on slavery in the District of Aruwimi (Orientale Province), from District Commissary Mr. Schmitz to the PG. Dated 22nd June 1925. Portefeuille: AI1396, liasse: 13/1. African Archives, Brussels.

part of everyday life, the "acquisition of girls through dowry" was also not unusual. In Bapende, Kasai, the TA, Roberti, wrote about girls being "acquired for profit" so that they could be sold as "merchandise" to others.[606] He wrote that this happened to "most" girls acquired through dowry "payments". According to Roberti's evidence, bridewealth did not function as a method to extend kinship and social cohesion among families and it did not protect the girls concerned. Roberti considered domestic slavery to be "rooted very deeply in the Bapende and Bambunda". Children of both sexes could even be adopted for the purposes of enslavement.[607]

This indictment of Bapende society is interesting. According to Roberti, the history of the territory included many raids by Batshok groups who came from the south to capture and enslave people. Roberti noted that several thousand Bapende women and children were being taken and raised among Batshok communities. Socio-geographic histories like these clearly impact the social realities of people in the future. Enslavement and the transaction of women and children were issues among Bapende communities decades later. However, it is important not to disregard the context of relations between those living in Bapende territory and the colonial administration. In the same report that Roberti highlighted practices of enslavement in Bapende areas, he also stated that, "the natives of this region, very indolent, work only when the European, merchant or others obligate them to".[608] Roberti implied his favour for forced labour as well as exposed the antagonistic relationship between the Bapende and the colonial administration. Bapende communities were known to be particularly resistant to colonial control. A few years after this report was produced, the

[606] Report on slavery for Bapende territory (Kasai Province) from Territorial Administrator Mr. Roberti
[607] Ibid
[608] Ibid

Bapende and Bambunda took part in the Kwilu Rebellion against the colonial state.[609] It is important to take this information into account when examining Roberti's evidence. This is not to doubt that slavery existed or was not prevalent among those living in Bapende territory, but that such dehumanising narratives about the "indolence" of people from this group and their "fondness" for slavery must be considered through the prism of Roberti's positionality as an individual doing the work of a colonial state.

Polygamy was an issue that was raised under the topic of dowries as purchase. For TA Mr. Briard, polygamy was a "way of enslaving" Lulua women in Kasai.[610] According to a DC in Equateur, in the Congo-Giri region women could be loaned out for certain periods of time for "remuneration" in crop picking. This was done through bridewealth payments. It is unclear if this was practiced through parents or husbands.[611] Polygamous men and chiefs were highlighted as being much older than their young wives. The colonial administration considered Congolese men particularly dangerous when they had lots of wives; it was important that administrators kept a "close watch on these great polygamists" and increased their taxes.[612]

Other areas highlighted for concern were dowries that included slaves. Slaves were property that could also be part of a marriage transaction. In certain places in Katanga, if a man did not have enough slaves or goods to provide for bridewealth he might also hand over his sister to marry into the family of his future wife. The PG of the Katanga province, Mr.

[609] Jules Marchal. *Lord Leverhulme's Ghosts: Colonial Exploitation in the Congo* (London: Verso: 2008).
[610] Report on slavery in the territory of Lulua, Kasai, sent from the Territorial Administrator Briard to the District Commissary, dated July 31st 1925. Portefeuille: AI 1396, liasse: 13/1. African Archives, Brussels.
[611] A district's report on slavery in part of what became part of Equateur (print faded where it states the name of the district), by District Commissary, Mr. Bareau (based in Lisala)
[612] Report on slavery in the Bas-Congo district (signature not recognised)

Heenen, made his thoughts known on this, stating that "this custom is in my opinion clearly immoral".[613]

The framing of answers to the question on dowry exposes something else. Even though it was the "slave man" that dominated colonial discussions about "slaves" more generally, women's servility was present in various forms. It emerged in questions about domestic slavery, dowry practices, adoptions and pledging/debt/payments. It is important to analyse where their presence as servile persons were most acknowledged. While they were less visible as general enslaved persons, they were at the forefront in discussions around marriage. The information provided by TAs and PGs across the colony often conflated women's servile conditions with their status as wives.

6.9: Undermining Congolese gender practices

What was the purpose of linking a servile status with marriage? Women could be enslaved or made servile *outside* of their marital status. For example, in the territory of Lusambo in Kasai, the deputy DC highlighted the difference in treatment between free and enslaved women married to the same man. He noted that slave women married to their owners were wives just like their free counterparts, however, they did "not have the same respect". Having not paid bridewealth, a husband was not duty-bound to treat her well and she had no family or lineage to defend her. Furthermore, if years went by and slave women did not have any children they reportedly became "unhappy".[614] This may have been because their

[613] Report on slavery on the Katanga province, by Governor Mr. Heenen
[614] Report on slavery by the deputy District Commissary (signature not recognised) in absence of the District Commissary, (in Lusambo)

circumstances, status and treatment improved as they birthed heirs for their husbands. He argued that this type of enslavement ought to be tackled the hardest.

Wright has drawn attention to the ways that slave women have strived to emancipate themselves through escape, alliances and, much to the confusion of colonial officials, ransom. Wright provides the example of an enslaved wife, called Bwanikwa, who was propelled to seek her own emancipation. She worked to make a profit in order to buy an elephant gun; the same object that her husband purchased her with. After handing him the gun she became a free wife and her husband no longer taunted her about being a slave.[615] There were distinctions between the conditions and treatment of enslaved and free wives.

The colonial administration and religious missions hoped to erode "immoral" indigenous practices of marriage in Congo over time and encourage the growth of Christian unions and nuclear families. By constantly associating marriage with slavery colonialists undermined Congolese gender practices. Many other colonial officials considered bridewealth a negative aspect of marriage institutions. The TA of the South - Cataractes region in Bas-Congo described his thoughts on the way forward:

The polygamous chiefs whose harems were generally made up of female domestic slaves disappear one by one, with the class of domestic slaves. The Bas-Congo native naturally tends to replace the old customary marriage by religious marriage and the free consent of the spouses. Among the principles defended by Kimbanguism is the marriage of indissoluble and dowry-free love.[616]

[615] Wright, "Bwanikwa", pg 260
[616] Report on slavery in the Bas-Congo district (signature not recognised)

"Dowry-free love" (marriage) was seen as an appropriate answer to control and confine disruptive forms of Congolese sexuality.

What then, did the colonial officials regard as "legitimate" and moral types of custom? In relation to practices of bridewealth and marriage there were two main factors affecting the perceptions of colonial administrators and commissioners. These included the age at which a girl/woman went to live with her husband and her consent to marriage.

There were officials who refuted the idea that marriage was closely aligned to slavery and denied that bridewealth was a form of purchasing power. In the Katanga province PG Heenen reported that bridewealth was arranged by parents when girls were young, but only "partial payments" made.[617] He pointed out that "some little girls reside in the harem of their future husband until they reach puberty", but that this practice was dying out. Apparently economic changes in the area had changed people's ideas; so much so, in fact, that women regularly refused to endorse their parents' arrangements.[618]

A colonial and missionary focus on "protecting" pre-pubescent girls evolved over the next years. By 1936, the report of the Colonial Committee in regard to a draft decree on the protection of the "native non-nubile girl" (produced by the Colonial Council), emphasised its endorsement for Article 1, which prohibited any person, who did not have the right of custody, to house a girl that had not reached the age of puberty. The article aimed to prevent the premature cohabitation of a girl with a man in view of marrying her.[619]

[617] Report on slavery on the Katanga province by Governor Mr. Heenen
[618] Ibid
[619] 'Rapport de la Commission chargee d'examiner le projet de decret relatif a la protection de la fille indigene non nubile', dated June 1936. Portefeuille: AI 1395, liasse : 5/6/1. African Archives, Brussels.

In Kasai and Equateur, parents negotiated marriage arrangements and bridewealth, but girls would not live with their husbands until they had at least reached puberty.

Debates on co-habitation emphasised some of the difficulties Belgians had with understanding conjugal relationships and regulating marriage in the Congo. For example, the Belgian priest and missionary, Gustaaf Hulstaert wrote that among the Nkundo community in South Congo a clear distinction was made between a girl being housed by her husband and being sexually involved with him. The Nkundo considered it important for a girl to live with her husband, in order that she learn about his character and preferences. Hulstaert recognised that it was easier for colonial officials to regulate cohabitation, rather than rape, but that in the case of the Nkundo cohabitation was almost impossible to ban.[620]

TA Mr Wenner at Luebo (Kasai) explained that it was usual for a future husband to pay only a part of the bridewealth when his betrothed was not of an age to marry. The exception to this rule arose when the future husband was a chief; in which case she would go to live with him immediately.[621] Being the correct age for marriage and consenting to it were important factors for colonial officials determining the legitimacy of marriage according to Western standards.[622]

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[620] Gustaaf Hulstaert. "La Coutume Nkundo (Mongo) et le Decret sur la Protection de la Fille Indigene, Non-Pubere", dated October 1937. Portefeuille: AI 1395, liasse: 5/6/1. African Archives, Brussels.
Hulstaert was a missionary in Belgian Congo from 1925. He had contentious relationship with Catholic missionaries. In the 1950s, he, alongside a Congolese man called Charles Lonkama and another Belgian called Edmond Boelaert, conducted interviews with Africans who had lived through Leopold's "rubber terror". Cited in Adam Hochschild. 'King Leopold's Ghost: A Story of Greed, Terror and Heroism in Colonial Africa' (Boston: Houghton Mifflin: 1998)

[621] Report on slavery in the territory of Luebo (Kasai district) by Territorial Administrator Mr Wenner to the District Commissary, dated July 18th 1925. Portefeuille: AI 1396, liasse: 13/1. African Archives, Brussels.

[622] In the territory of Babinji (Kasai) TA Mr. Destray wrote that sometimes men would "seize" women and pay bridewealth after. This practice was reportedly conducted with the woman's consent. It challenged parental authority by automatically dissolving any marriage projects already in progress that were being arranged between families. Report on slavery in the territory of Babinji (Kasai district) Territorial Administrator Destray (in Mboi). In other places, such as the territory of Bashilele (Kasai), TA Mr Frings claimed that "on the contrary, the parents of the girl are very careful not to accept a dowry too high, precisely, so that their daughter does not

Some colonial officers acknowledged that the "social condition" of women was "quite different" and not always recognisable to Europeans. DC J. Van Hoeck of the Lake Leopold District wrote that women's positions only changed alongside the social conditions of the communities they belonged to. Hoeck argued any quick changes to women's situations were "utopian".[623] DC Mr Jorissen of the Lulonga District highlighted that, "All native women know now that no one can force them to stay against their will with a husband that they have not chosen." According to him, colonial officials and missionaries had "told them enough".[624] Jorissen considered bridewealth a core part of marriage in Congo.

6.10: Conclusion

This chapter highlights how women's presence in debates on slavery and marriage largely assisted colonial subjugation through positioning Congolese sexuality and its social expressions as backwards and oppressive. The full range of women's experiences in domestic slavery were ignored in order to downplay its severity. Slaves reportedly had opportunities for self-advancement. Domestic slavery was imagined as relatively easy to escape. Examining women's enslaved circumstances exposes a different reality. Slave women did not have the same chances as slave men to accrue wealth and power. It was therefore harder for women to earn their redemption. Approaching colonial authorities for assistance was not necessarily

become a bukrome- adopted". A bukrome was a woman acquired after an internal "brawl" or war. A person who killed someone else in these situations had to pay the parents of the dead with women. These women were then considered to have been adopted into this new family. They were not slaves. It is interesting that men were never exchanged in these processes. Women were highly valued for their labour and reproductive capacities and were, in many places (not just Bashilele or Kasai) transferred to pay off debts. Report on slavery in the territory of Bashilele (Kasai district) by Territorial Administrator Mr Frings. Dated 15th June 1925. Portefeuille: AI 1396, liasse: 13/1. African Archives, Brussels.

[623] Report on slavery in the Lake Leopold District (Equateur Province) by the District Commissary J. Van Hoeck (in Inongo)

[624] Report on slavery in the Lulonga district by District Commissary Mr Jorissen (undated)

an option (particularly when many officials were hostile to the idea of female autonomy). Having children likely tied many of them permanently to their owners and was also a key avenue for improving their conditions. Lots of women were trapped in intolerable situations of slavery, but colonial government's focused on their presence as oppressed wives instead and pushed an agenda of Western marriage practices. The next chapter takes this discussion further by analysing the ways that certain women and organisations in Europe perceived the circumstances of African women.

CHAPTER 7: THE PROTECTION OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLE: A REFLECTION OF IMPERIAL INTERESTS

7.1: Introduction

In the 1920s-1930s increasing discursive attention was given to "protecting indigenous people" in occupied territories among colonial and activist networks. These ideas emerged in the 1910s but took on more emphasis as they overlapped with discussions around slavery. These conversations centred on "improving the condition" of people in the colony; claiming to respect indigenous customs while ensuring a shift towards European ideals of 'civilisation'. I argue that these narratives reflected colonial interests across different frameworks. To understand imperial hegemony, I examine discourses on protection in three different contexts; among colonialists in Belgian Congo, their counterparts in Brussels, and NGO organising. NGO activism did not exist beyond the bounds of white supremacy; it was directly influenced by it. Colonial and activist networks in both Belgium and the UK immersed themselves in questions related to improving the conditions of African children and women. They criticised the colonial government for its approach to women and children, but also reinforced negative stereotypes about Africans. Discourses on 'protection' for women and girls often emphasised African sexualities and marriage practices, playing into colonial framings of 'dangerous' African gender relations and justifying ongoing white rule in Africa.

7.2: Protecting the Congolese: disguising colonial needs

Colonial claims about protecting the indigenous population in Congo were inextricably linked to colonialists' capitalist pursuits. To demonstrate how these ideas manifested in the Belgian Congo it is useful to take the example of a committee in Katanga.

A Permanent Commission for the Protection of Indigenous Peoples was established by the Government of Belgian Congo in October 1908 and modified to include sub-committees in March 1912.[625] Sub-committees were then set up to tackle the moral and economic advancement of the colonised. In May 1923, a sub-committee for Katanga was founded. The minutes of their meetings exposes the most prominent issues for debate among groups concerned with 'protecting' the Congolese.

Representatives in Katanga met to discuss the role and agenda of the sub-committee in December 1923.[626] No Congolese leaders were present. 'Expertise' was associated with the guidance of colonisers. Committee members considered the merits and disadvantages of "association policy" (indirect rule) and "assimilation policy" (direct rule). These were cross-colonial terms also used by the French.[627] Association policy recommended that colonisers gently guide Congolese people in the right direction, while ensuring that indigenous societies maintained their distinct characteristics. Assimilation policy, on the other hand, referred to an agenda which,

[625] This was stipulated in Article 6 of the Belgian Colonial Charter on 18th October 1908 and modified on 5th March 1912. 'Note for the Minister' on the Commission for the Protection of Native Peoples (Report of the House of Representatives Committee). Dated 6th February 1934. Portefeuille: AI 1394, liasse: 1/f/2. African Archives, Brussels.

[626] These men were Mr. de Hemptinne, Chief Commissioner Heenen, General Director of the Compagnie de chemin de fer du Katanga (CFK) Mr. Parisse, Director General of the Special Committee of Katanga Mr Pate, and Prosecutor General and interim President Mr Sohier. Hemptinne was elected as Secretary of the Committee. Belgian Congo, Province of Katanga, 'Sub- Commission for the Protection of Native People: Sitting of December 17th, 1923'. Portefeuille: AI 1394, liasse: 1/F/3. African Archives, Brussels.

[627] The French terminology is the *politique d'association* and *politique d'assimilation*

claims to gradually bring the native to the height of his moral and social conceptions, tolerates native institutions as transitional and as a starting point aims at creating a new order of things, in conformity with the principles of our European societies.[628]

Certain members argued against the suitability of indirect rule in Congo, arguing that it was "utopian". Mr de Hemptinne argued that colonial administrators could not control Congolese people this way; eventually the latter would "escape". He thought that if Congolese "emancipation" occurred beyond the regulation of colonials it would be "in the worst conditions". Did he consider Congolese life without European guidance as doomed to failure or was he more afraid of the consequences of colonisers losing authority and power? On the other hand, Chief Commissioner Heenen asserted that in other colonies where indirect rule was appropriate, the societies already consisted of "well organized" and "advanced civilizations". This was not the case for Congo as far as Heenen was concerned; the Congo required a firmer approach.

Ideas around the importance of direct rule became crucial to conversations around 'protecting' the Congolese. This sub-committee imagined protection through more intense control of the Congolese population and their labour. Another member, Mr. Parisse, agreed that there was "too much timidity" around providing "the Colony with a uniform and definitive administration". He considered the colony as "strong enough to impose its views" and highlighted that his own role as Director General of the C.F.K. railway had shown him what

[628] Ibid

could be "obtained from the native when one wants the end and one takes the means to achieve it".[629]

On the other hand, the interim President of the Committee, Mr Antoine Sohier, an experienced colonial magistrate, strongly disagreed with the sentiments expressed by his colleagues. Sohier created the journal '*Société d'études juridiques du Katanga (SEJK)',* which published *'Bulletin des juridictions indigènes et du droit coutumier congolais'* (BJIDCC, 1933-1964). His work recognised customary law as having its own significance and place within Congolese societies and sought to codify it. Sohier argued that "one must not destroy for the sake of destroying", especially if there were no practical alternative models to replace indigenous systems.[630] Sohier articulated that:

Theoreticians lose sight of a vital element, which is the very evolution of custom; they would like to stabilize an order of things which cannot be maintained in the status quo. The organization of the family, of property, of the political power of the chiefs, the economic conditions of life, all this, by the very fact of our occupation, is modified by very complex repercussions and in very different ways.[631]

Members debated whether large or small chiefdoms were most appropriate for colonial rule.[632] Large chiefdoms were beneficial for recording censuses, collecting tax, and importantly, finding labour. In the 1920s, Katanga's colonial industry was struggling from a

[629] Ibid
[630] Ibid
[631] Ibid
[632] Heenen had highlighted that the only big chiefdoms in Katanga existed in Lomami and Lulua. Most other regions had smaller chiefdoms.

labour scarcity, so recruitment was an important factor to discussions.[633] Smaller chiefdoms required more work but yielded positive results and bigger chiefdoms were more difficult to control. De Hemptinne claimed that grand chiefs could take on some of the administrative tasks, however, he did not trust them, stating that most big chiefs were corrupt, carried out "fetishistic practices" and had "harems". They were viewed as a threat to administrative rule.[634] Small chiefdoms were more pliable. In the end, the Committee decided that they would perform a trial in south Katanga to see how aspects of direct rule affected small chiefdoms.[635]

The Congolese were viewed as people who needed to be directly shown the superiority of European civilisation. Under the auspices of a 'protection' committee the control and channelling of labour for capitalist enterprises was a main priority**.**

Furthermore, forced or 'unfree' labour (with appropriate regulations) posed certain "opportunities" according to Committee members. De Hemptinne noted that "freedom of work" was "illusory", and Sohier stated:

The main question even from the point of view of the protection of the natives, must be the success of our occupation and the prosperity of our industry. From two evils one must

[633] Nkasa Yelengi (2000). "Labour Policies and Household Economic Strategies Among the Railway Workers in Katanga, Belgian Congo, 1928- 1960." *Africa* ANNO 55, No. 4: pp. 463-488. Pg 463
[634] Belgian Congo, Province of Katanga, 'Sub- Commission for the Protection of Native People: Session of December 17th, 1923'.
[635] Ibid

choose the least: either one must admit recruitments that are not entirely free, or resign oneself to the ruin of the country.[636]

The Committee also discussed the large amounts of polygamous households that existed where people were employed to work on railways. According to the committee, women were considered a "wealth, an instrument that produces, allowing the owner to live in selfishness". Polygamy was part of a "return" to "primitive life"; a state that existed prior to colonial conquest. The tolerance for polygamy in these "non-traditional" areas (*les villages extra-coutumiers*) had to end. Sohier explained that smaller practices of polygamy were an economic investment of savings. Until there was a replacement for that- another way for men to save money and resources- polygamy would continue. Practices like polygamy and the trafficking of women for increased wealth continued to concern colonial officials; they perceived them as Congolese people's wilful refusal to civilise.

The discussion points of this committee provide a screenshot of colonial narratives about Belgians providing 'protection' for Congolese people. Labour control was paramount to the aims of the group. In response to the labour crisis of the 1920s the colonial government introduced "Labour stabilization" policy to regulate the relations between employers and workers. Yelengi has highlighted that an agenda of "employer paternalism" was pursued, which introduced some employment incentives for African workers, including housing, food, cash and work tools. More than anything else, the introduction of these inducements increased production and served the interests of European employers. Labour stabilisation

[636] Same document. Session of the 31st December 1923

policy gave companies more power over their workers through harsh discipline and by making them largely reliant.[637]

Within this competitive context, strategising ways to obtain more workers for the labour force was amplified in Katanga. Therefore, the committee's focus was not necessarily representative of other protection committees in Congo. However, these minutes demonstrate how colonial ideas about "improving" and "protecting" the lives of indigenous people manifested to reflect imperial agendas. It is important to keep this knowledge in mind when examining discourses on women's conditions in Congo and the types of efforts colonial actors and activists sought to "protect" them.

7.3: Mrs. Van der Kerken- Sarolea and her good (colonial) intentions

Certain organisations and female activists in Belgium and the UK criticised or questioned the approach of the Belgian colonial government when it came to "improving conditions" for Congolese women. Some of these white women formed part of the colonial nexus, others became Members of Parliament, were Duchesses and had significant social status. Some activists were suffragettes and missionaries. Most came from privileged backgrounds, but their objectives and reasons for lobbying and questioning the Belgian colonial government came from different angles. Many of these individuals did not directly challenge colonial rule itself, but the way in which it operated. These women considered it their responsibility to highlight the situation of Congolese women and girls, whom, they argued, needed assistance, and were being overlooked and/or exploited by colonial governments.

[637] Labour Decree of 16th March 1922. Yelengi, "Labour Policies and Household Economic Strategies Among the Railway Workers in Katanga, Belgian Congo", pg 465.

Jeanne Rogissart was born in 1885. Her father was a senior official in the Belgian army, and she went on to marry a DC called Louis Sarolea in 1911. They lived in Lusambo and Coquilhatville together. After the death of Sarolea, she later married Georges Van der Kerken, a man who had been the Magistrate of Katanga and a provincial General Commissioner. To sign her writings, she used both names of Sarolea and Van der Kerken. Van der Kerken was embedded in imperial hegemony.

In 1925 she proposed the idea to Albrecht Gohr that a Special Commission for the Protection of Indigenous Women in Congo be created.[638] Her request was met favourably by Gohr and in October 1926 she founded an organisation called 'Oeuvre pour la Protection de la Femme Indigène'. She also wrote about the importance of educating women in the colony and was a member of the Board of Directors of the League for the Protection of Black Children. In 1932 she helped found the Mulatto Protection Association. This organisation sought to monitor the situation for mixed-race people and 'protect' them from African influences.

In April 1926, the Minister of Colonies (Henri Carton de Tournai) wrote to the Minister of Foreign Affairs (Emile Vandervelde) requesting that "Mrs. Georges Van Der Kerken" and her husband be allowed to attend the session of the International Colonial Institute at The Hague.[639] The Minister described Mrs Van der Kerken as "one of our most devoted colonials, who has been particularly interested in issues relating to native women and black children".

[638] Letter from Director General, Albrecht Gohr, to the 7th Directorate. Dated 3rd June 1925. Enclosed was "Mrs. Sarolea's" letter (dated 21st May 1925). Portefueille: AI 1394, liasse 1/5/a. African Archives, Brussels.
[639] Letter from the Minister of Colonies (Henri Carton de Tournai) to the Minister of Foreign Affairs (Emile Vandervelde), dated 30th April 1926. Portefeuille: AI 1394, liasse: 1/5/a. African Archives, Brussels.

Van der Kerken wanted to be introduced to people in "Dutch circles" who were also interested in these issues in order to see how they dealt with such matters in their own colonies. Van der Kerken was an active and well-known woman within colonial spheres, and she demonstrated initiative and leadership. These traits also caused some irritation among the colonial establishment, especially from officials who considered her to be involving herself in business that she had inadequate knowledge about.

7.4: Colonial guardians: framing 'protection' for women in Congo

What shape did Van der Kerken's ideas about "protecting" women in Congo take? In August 1927, her Committee on the Work of the Protection of Indigenous Women produced an Initiative for the Minister of Colonies.[640] This was published in 'L'Essor Colonial et Maritime' and indicates Van der Kerken's views on Congolese women and the kinds of futures/education she envisaged for them. The article focused on research into the "condition of the "indigenous woman" in city centres". Apart from Van der Kerken (President of the Committee), others who contributed to this work included, Dr Dryepondt (Vice- President), Miss Dupont (Secretary), R. Frere Gabriel (Brothers of the Charity of Ghent), General Henry, R.P. Le Grand (Compagnie de Jesus), M.O. Louwers, R.P. Michaux (Missionaries of Africa), Mrs. Vandenperre and Mr. Van der Kerken.[641]

[640] Excerpt from 'L'Essor Colonial et Maritime'. Article titled: 'A Happy Initiative from the Organisation for the Protection of the Indigenous Woman'. Addressed to the Prime Minister and Minister of Colonies, signed by members of the Committee on the Work of the Protection of Indigenous Women- Mrs Van der Kerken- Sarolea, Dr. Dryepondt and Miss Dupont, dated 11th August 1927. Portefeuille: AI 1394, liasse: 1/5/a. African Archives, Brussels.

[641] Other committee members included Miss Anet, Colonel Bertrand, Mr. Deladrier, Mr. Verlaine and Mr. Colonel Wibier

The Initiative asserted that in order to "improve the moral and material conditions" of indigenous women in the "major centres", the monitoring of their movement was paramount. According to the article the "strict supervision of emigration of women and girls to the city-centres" was necessary. It recommended that women have permits for transportation and residence. Additionally, the initiative suggested that any form of transport (railway vessels, etc.) that could "smuggle" women into industrial areas be checked. The Committee was concerned about women being transferred to the centres for purposes of prostitution. Single Congolese girls and women without permits were portrayed as a potential threat. They were viewed as exploited victims lacking agency. The document suggested that the colonial government punish pimps trying to transport females under twenty-one. Committee members blamed the emergence of these types of prostitution on the encounter between the Congolese and Europeans. The text expanded on this topic:

It is claimed that there are in Kinshasa and Matadi in particular, houses of tolerance [brothels] for Europeans and Blacks, giving the most deplorable example to the indigenous population and likely to seriously damage the prestige of Whites and that of European civilisation.[642]

White Europeans were supposed to be acting as role models for Congolese people. This narrative exposes the inherent imperial logics that existed in European organisations. Van der Kerken was challenging the colonial establishment by making Congolese women more

[642] Ibid

visible in these discussions, but her opinion and representation of them was steeped in imperial ideas of white superiority.

The committee argued for legislation prohibiting the "abduction of indigenous women and girls under 21 years of age". It called for public prosecutors and TAs to be given instructions on how to combat "abuses". The initiative recommended that missionaries assisted these efforts by reporting any issues to the administration. Furthermore, it recommended that "men of colour" or "foreigners" found "abducting indigenous women or girls under the age of 21, living on the exploitation of debauchery or in a state of vagrancy should be expelled from the colony".[643] This statement seems vague; who did it refer to? Congolese men and men from other parts of Africa?[644] Outside of whether this solution was productive (i.e. expelling men to other colonies where they might carry out the same practices), there is an irony to the idea that foreign colonial occupiers felt entitled to expel indigenous people from their homeland.

The Committee was deeply anxious about indigenous people being outside of their "natural" environment when they lived in city centres. Congolese men who were beyond the bounds of indigenous social institutions were "denationalized".[645] The colonial/missionary perception of city/industrial centres as places of depravity and decline extended beyond the borders of Belgian Congo. Michelle Greenfield-Liebst has written about the perceptions of missionaries in Zanzibar who regarded life in the city as the source of a "moral contagion" that

[643] Ibid

[644] She mentions in a later report that "whites" should be "prosecuted" for this where they were involved too: 'Report by Madame Sarolea on the Issue of the Material and Moral Improvement of Indigenous Women' ('Rapport de Madame Sarolea sur la Question du Perfectionnement Materiel et Moral de la Femme Indigene'), dated September 1927. Portefeuille: AI 1394, liasse: 1/5/a. Africa Archives, Brussels.

[645] Excerpt from 'L'Essor Colonial et Maritime'. Article titled: 'A Happy Initiative from the Organisation for the Protection of the Indigenous Woman'.

infected potential ex-slave converts with homosexuality and alcoholism.[646] The shifting conditions of Africans were viewed as having inevitably negative consequences if they were not regulated and influenced by Europeans.

According to the committee, the salary for men in the centres did not provide enough for them to "buy" a wife and look after a family, therefore, if they were not married, they would be forced to stay. On the other hand, if they were married, they might send their wives out to prostitute themselves to complement their finances. The negative impact on women in these areas was thus:

Women and girls in large centres, living outside indigenous society, are no longer held back by the existing social barriers in indigenous society, nor by the fear of what indigenous public opinion will say. Consequently, often having no serious occupation, they give free rein to their instincts and often begin to "live their lives" in a selfish way, completely abstracting from the future interests of the family, tribe or race.[647]

According to this narrative, Congolese women required social restraints in order to thrive and be valuable members of society (and the colony)**.** The Committee's argument for controlling and supervising the movement of women was reinforced by this statement. They suggested that "Advisory Councils" be set up to address these matters. These councils were

[646] Michelle Greenfield-Liebst (2017). "Sin, Slave Status, and the "City": Zanzibar, 1865- c. 1930." *African Studies Review,* Vol. 60, No. 2: pp. 139–160. Pg 140

[647] Excerpt from 'L'Essor Colonial et Maritime'. Article titled: ''A Happy Initiative from the Organisation for the Protection of the Indigenous Woman'.

to include Protestant and Catholic missionaries, businessmen, doctors and traders. It is not clear whether these council were to include any Congolese members.

Finally, the report discussed the types of assistance required to help Congolese girls/women survive. Christian teachings and principles were regarded as key to their personal advancement. It was recommended that girls' schools be set up in the industrial centres with the help of Christian missions so that girls/women could gain skills to help them make money without resorting to prostitution. Students could learn how to become "chambermaids, cooks, washerwomen, carpenters, workers, clerks, typists".[648] The initiative suggested that missions also create employment offices and housing for women. These projects were to be funded by the colonial government.

These final ideas take, as their basis, the notion that Congolese women wanted the same things as working- class women in Belgium. The employment envisaged for women in Congo matched the gendered roles reserved for women in Europe. The Committee was focused on reproducing a necessary imperialist reflection of European class and gender relations in the Congo.

7.5: 'Whitely' limits: appealing to colonial men

The investigation into women's "material and moral conditions" in city centres did not include evidence to suggest that Congolese women had been consulted. This would not have been

[648] Ibid

considered odd practice at the time. The purpose of the initiative was to provide Congolese women and girls in the centres with more employment options and economic choices. It is difficult to say how Congolese women might have received such an initiative. Perhaps they were approached by the committee, but their comments excluded from the text, or maybe their views were regarded as irrelevant. We do not know if Congolese women were asked about how they would choose to improve their own lives. The committee challenged the colonial government to do better but did not extend its mode of analysis to critique an imperial agenda which had helped cause these conditions in the first place.

Marilyn Frye has written about the notion of "whiteliness"; a specific "way of being" and "phenomenon of race". It is a symptom of whiteness that is expressed through class relations but is not defined by them. According to Frye, "Whitely people generally consider themselves to be benevolent and good-willed, fair, honest and ethical". They regard themselves as objective and certain about "whitely authority and rightness". Frye explains the consequences of whitely ways of experiencing the world:

I learned that I, and "we," knew right from wrong and had the responsibility to see to it right was done; that there were others who did not know what is right and wrong and should be advised, instructed, helped and directed by us. I was taught that because *one knows what is right, it is morally appropriate to have and exercise what I now would call race privilege and class privilege*.[649]

[649] M. Frye. "White Woman Feminist." In *Wilful Virgin: Essays in Feminism, 1976-1992,* edited by M Frye, 147-169. (Freedom, CA: Crossing Press: 1992), pg 154

Jawad Syed and Faiza Ali describe this term as "an assumption that several white women make that they have the knowledge and obligation to be ready to jump to the aid of 'Other' women (whether Other women need or want it or not)".[650] In their work on the 'white woman's burden', the term is employed to consider the historical ways some white women have allied themselves with imperialism: "By taking on the mission of relieving the patriarchal plight of women in the colonies, white women acted as enlightened agents to assert their own political rights and agency."[651]

In response to the ideas presented by Van der Kerken and her colleagues on the Committee, Henri Jaspar- the Minister of Colonies at the time- stated that he was glad to have received the "noble sentiments" contained in the letter and that the Commission for the Protection of Indigenous Peoples already covered these areas of concern. He also wrote that government policy kept a close check on the condition of Congolese people "without distinction as to sex". Nonetheless, according to Jaspar, the points raised by the committee's report would be "studied carefully", because "there is still much to be done" to make positive changes to indigenous women's lives.[652] The Minister appeared grateful, although one gets the sense that Van der Kerken was being politely dismissed. This type of exchange between Van der Kerken and Jaspar reinforces the arguments put forward by Frye about how white women mistakenly aspire to whiteliness in order to elevate their status and increase their proximity to power. She writes that,

[650] Jawad Syed and Faiza Ali (2011). "The White Woman's Burden: From Colonial Civilisation to Third World Development." *Third World Quarterly,* Vol. 32, No. 2, pg 351
[651] Ibid, pg 352
[652] Letter to "Madame President of the Work of the Protection of Indigenous Women" (Mrs. Van der Kerken) from the First Minister, Minister of Colonies, dated September 1927. Portefeuille: AI 1394, liasse: 1/5/a. African Archives, Brussels.

white girls aspire to Being and integrity, like anyone else. Racism translates this into an aspiration to whiteliness. The white girl learns that whiteliness is dignity and respectability; she learns that whiteliness is her aptitude for partnership with white men; she learns that partnership with white men is her salvation from the original position of Woman in patriarchy.[653]

However, whiteliness cannot erase the identity of womanhood and its lack of value in a patriarchal society. By supporting whiteliness white women only reinforce their own subordination. As Frye argues, the type of dignity and respect offered by whiteliness is conditional on women being modest, virtuous and deferential.[654] Behaving this way has not always ensured the success and influence of white women and neither did it necessarily garner respect.

Around the same time that Jaspar was writing to Mrs. Van der Kerken, he also sent a letter to the GG at Boma, Martin Rutten, asking for his opinion on the Committee's ideas.[655] Rutten's defensive reply to Jaspar consisted of him proving that he was already aware of all the issues drawn attention to by Van der Kerken's Committee.[656] Rutten listed the many draft decrees that had already been drawn up by the Commission and Sub-Commissions for the

[653] M. Frye. "White Woman Feminist", pg 147-169
[654] Ibid
[655] Letter to Governor General Martin Rutten, from Minister of Colonies Jaspar. About the 'Committee of the Work for the Protection of Indigenous Women. Wishes for the moral and material improvement of the black woman in the major centres', dated 6th September 1927. Portefeuille: AI 1394, liasse 1/5/a. African Archives, Brussels.
[656] Letter to the Minister of Colonies from Governor General Rutten, in Boma, dated 3rd October 1927. Responding to the Minister's letter of 6th September 1927. Portefeuille: AI 1394, liasse 1/5/a. African Archives, Brussels.

Protection of Indigenous Peoples and Women**.** These were decrees addressing vagrancy, the "protection of the non-marital girl", and the repression of adultery. There was also legislation dealing with prostitution and the "debauchery and corruption of minors". He stated that the "insufficiency of rations and wages, as a cause of prostitution, has not escaped our attention" and that the authorities had been liaising with employers to increase benefits for workers. He argued that creating more councils and committees was not a good idea; it would "absorb part of the activity of civil servants and individuals already overloaded". For Rutten, the "recovery of black women through education", along with many of the other issues highlighted by Van der Kerken were already being addressed. Rutten's letter implied that Van der Kerken's committee was stating the obvious and the only original initiative that the Commission produced (to create work and housing offices for women), was "premature".[657] Rutten's response indicates irritation and exasperation. He seemed eager to send a clear message to the central colonial office that he was fully informed of and in control of these issues.

7.6: Improving the conditions of Congolese women: white trajectories and nothing else

Despite the responses of men, such as Rutten, Van der Kerken and her colleagues persisted in their efforts to highlight and publicise the importance of "protecting indigenous women". In 1927, a report was provided to the General Assembly of the Work of the Protection of the Indigenous Woman by the Committees board of directors.[658] This report wrote about the aims of the organisation: to be "interested in all that touches the woman of colour in the colony",

[657] Ibid

[658] Extract from the newspaper, "L'Essor Colonial et Maritime". Article titled: 'Report Submitted to the General Assembly of the Work of the Protection of the Indigenous Woman'. Written by Mrs. Dupont, Mrs Van der Kerken and Dr. Dryepondt, dated 22nd December 1927. Portefeuille: AI 1394, liasse 1/5/a. African Archives, Brussels.

to "work to protect the indigenous woman materially and morally and to make her a better wife and a better mother in native society".[659] The importance of education was emphasised.[660] Van der Kerken and her colleagues had very clear ideas of what a 'civilised' Congolese woman should look like and how she should exist.

Motherhood was and still is an extremely important part of women's lives across Africa. However, European - style 'motherhood' was envisaged as most appropriate for Congolese women by Van der Kerken and others within the colonial establishment. It was supervised by European women and ensured the relegation of Congolese women to the private sphere. Nancy Hunt has written at length about the centrality of colonial schemes, such as *foyer social,* in Belgian Congo that focused on teaching Congolese girls and women to embrace womanhood through domesticity. Hunt describes the *foyer social* as a "colonial project to revise and refashion gender roles, family life, and domestic space enacted by European nuns and social workers and African women within classrooms, households, and an African urban community".[661] State-sponsored projects were replicated by companies in Katanga, such as, Compagnie de Chemin de fer du Bas-Congo au Katanga (BCK) as a way to retain and increase the productivity of staff. Access to training and forms of education for women and children was perceived by employers as the best way to ensure the contentment of husband/workers who were more likely to settle and stay for the long-term. It was also viewed as a useful way to manage workers, by monitoring the more intimate parts of their lives through their families.[662]

[659] Ibid
[660] Ibid
[661] Nancy Rose Hunt. 'Domesticity and Colonialism in Belgian Africa", pg 449
[662] Yelengi, "Labour Policies and Household Economic Strategies Among the Railway Workers in Katanga", pg 468, 473-474

Van der Kerken continued writing about the conditions of women in Kinshasa, who were "completely free" and without protection. In an article for 'L'Horizon Colonial', written in February 1928, she revealed the feelings behind her actions:

We have defended the cause of this native woman too much, we have fought too hard to obtain for her an education similar to that received by her companion for us to be accused of anti-feminism; we can therefore, without fear of being misunderstood, declare that nothing is more dangerous for this woman than the swift and absolute freedom, which she abuses, and the civilizing clarity with which she has been too abruptly inundated.[663]

She argued that "in indigenous environments, there are no isolated women".[664] Even a female slave (*esclave*) was "protected from abandonment, because a master watches over her as if she were valuable property".[665] Reportedly, women were subject to the rules of their communities; they could not rebel against customs without marginalising themselves. Van der Kerken referred to systems of African kinship, duties and belonging to bolster her own argument that women ultimately required dependence on an authority. Of course, the authority that she had in mind was the colonial establishment. She helped reinforce imperial narratives that African women needed monitoring and safeguarding by the colonial state for their own "good". For Van der Kerken, nothing could be worse for African women than a "debauched", economically insecure freedom.

[663] Article, 'La Femme Indigene a Kinshasa', by Mrs. G. Van der Kerken- Sarolea in *L'Horizon Colonial.* Dated 25th February 1928. Portefeuille: AI 1394, liasse: 1/5/a. Africa Archives, Brussels.
[664] Ibid
[665] Ibid

In this scenario, Van der Kerken considered herself an advocate of Congolese women, but there was no hint of the perspective of Congolese women themselves; no sense that her ideas evolved out of conversation with people in Kinshasa. Her status enabled her to uncritically position herself as their spokesperson. Whitely 'good intentions' are a fundamental part of and justification for her actions.[666] The idea that she would be called 'antifeminist' was an affront to her. In her 'L'Horizon Colonial' article, she makes it clear that herself and the Committee had worked "too hard" for Congolese women, to be accused of such things. For Van der Kerken, criticisms against her and her team's ideals and actions were not valid; they were simply the result of ignorance and ingratitude. Perhaps it was the refusal of Congolese women to adhere to Van der Kerken's vision of European domesticity that infuriated her so.

Madame Van der Kerken-Sarolea insisted that more *Maternelles'* (kindergartens) be set up in Congo.[667] She put pressure on the government regarding the education of girls, claiming that it was key to their development**.** Maternelle's were to provide training for young women in "childcare, hygiene and indigenous housekeeping". Van der Kerken suggested that kindergartens take care of orphaned children, as well as "youngsters" whose mothers were working.[668]

Given her attitude about mixed race people, it is possible that she regarded raising children in kindergartens an ideal opportunity to negate influences of indigenous cultures. Therefore, indoctrinating Congolese children into Belgian ways of life and alienating them

[666] M. Frye, "White Woman Feminist", pg 154
[667] 'Report by Madame Sarolea on the Issue of the Material and Moral Improvement of Indigenous Women'
[668] 'Report by Madame Sarolea on the Issues of the Material and Moral Improvement of Indigenous Women'

from their communities. Educating children in schools also provided the space to counteract the "antifeminism of women", according to Van der Kerken. Children would be kept away from the "exploitation" of mothers, aunts and matrons. In fact, school would assist in readying a child for their "future role", which would assist in "the application and the propagation of the measures taken for the improvement of the material and moral conditions of the race".[669] Van der Kerken's support for women in Congo was conditional on colonialists deciding what was best for them. Congolese contestation of white women's authority was labelled antifeminist. White women like Van der Kerken treated Congolese women in a similar way to how colonial men behaved towards themselves: they demanded total conformity to a patriarchal/racist Western ideal and condemned Congolese women who resisted.

7.7: European women in Belgian Congo: role models and educators?

White people envisioned roles for themselves as teachers, benefactors and protectors of Africans. Van der Kerken suggested that "whites should be able to intervene in authority when it comes to a woman and especially a pregnant woman abused by her husband".[670] The presence of European women in the colony was perceived to moderate white men's "immoral" behaviour in the city centres. These women became inspectors and regulators of the more intimate parts of Congolese life: pregnancy, birth, breast-feeding and maintaining the monogamous, nuclear family and household. In her report, Van der Kerken noted various missions' schemes that had been set up in the past to "instruct" indigenous women in ways of European civilisation, including "Black Child Protection", "Infant Consultations" and "Monogamous Homes". These roles were carefully negotiated. Van der Kerken wrote:

[669] Ibid
[670] Ibid

It is understood that these works for infants are intended to take orphans into the cradle, to supervise nurses and infants and that, at no time, should they take any action that might suggest that mothers should not be advised to feed. Criticisms of this kind have been made; they were due to the clumsiness, perhaps well-intentioned, but clumsy nevertheless, of some consultation guidelines.[671]

White women working on such programs were meant to inspire Congolese women to their ways of life. They needed to engender trust and gain influence. The issue of breast feeding was a sensitive one. In the 1920s colonial authorities were anxious to reverse a decline in the colony's population (and labour force) and address infertility; issues that had emerged since the onset of colonial occupation. The authorities explored the reasons behind such phenomena. They considered colonial rule a key factor that had introduced several potential causes for depopulation, but also highlighted certain indigenous practices viewed as damaging. These were practices related to marital and sexual relations and breast-feeding. Hunt writes about strategies of "birth spacing", which consisted of African women abstaining from sex for 2-3 years after giving birth while they breast-fed their babies.[672] It was considered taboo to resume sexual relations at this time. Colonialists argued that Congolese women breast fed for far longer than necessary and were not getting pregnant as regularly as they could. Colonialists worried that practises of sexual abstinence increased incidences of polygamy and adultery.[673] Infant Consultations and other programs like it were meant to persuade Congolese women to breast feed for shorter periods, while also providing milk

[671] Ibid
[672] Hunt, '"Le Bebe en Brousse"
[673] Ibid, pg 407

substitutes. Resuming "spousal duties" was encouraged by white women after one year of breastfeeding.[674]

Van der Kerken was keen to ensure that white people displayed model behaviour while working in Congo. She hoped to "change the deplorable mentality of certain agents and higher officials vis-à-vis the black woman". For her, the administration ought to be more cautious when deciding who to employ for the colony; the "influence of the white" had to be positive. She stated in her report that women who travelled to Congo should be educated, "so that they know how much they can contribute to the work of improving the plight of black women". As Hunt explains, the presence of white women in the colonies was contended during the 1920s but became normalised in the 1930s-1940s. They were encouraged to devote themselves to the cause of 'civilising' Congolese women and to "save the honor of the colonial power".[675]

7.8: Marginalisation despite complicity: the dismissal of a draft decree on marriage

African forms of marriage remained an area of concern for colonialists and activists. In June 1935, Van der Kerken wrote to the Minister of Colonies, Edmond Rubbens, about a draft decree on "indigenous marriage" that a committee focused on the 'protection of indigenous women' had produced.[676] This text had reportedly been put together with the help of missionaries and those who had previously held legal and colonial positions in Africa. Van der

[674] 'Report by Madame Sarolea on the Issue of the Material and Moral Improvement of Indigenous Women'
[675] Hunt, '"Le Bebe en Brousse", pg 414
[676] Letter to the Minister of Colonies from Mrs Van der Kerken, "For the Protection of Indigenous Women". Enclosed is a Draft Decree on Indigenous Marriage, dated 26th June 1935. Portefueille: AI 1394, liasse: 1/5/a. African Archives, Brussels

Kerken explained that the decree proposed numerous solutions to "progressively realize our humanitarian program" and "improve the situation of the indigenous woman and native marriage".[677] The decree and the ideas behind it were meant to serve the interest of the colonial state and successfully continue the "civilizing program in Africa".

The Committee focused on issues of consent to marriage and the illegitimacy of marriages between men and pre-pubescent girls. Polygamy was to be monitored. All polygamous husbands were to apply to register marriages. These unions would only be registered conditionally. The decree stated that women could not enter new marriages, unless any previous marriages had been dissolved or if their spouses had died. A "dowry" or bridewealth could *not* be exchanged before a girl had reached puberty, although gifts "foreseen by custom" were allowed. The decree strictly prohibited,

.. to give or accept girls or women as pawns, to exchange wives, to rent or lend girls or women for the use of their bodies, to prostitute a girl or a woman or to take any profit from a woman's prostitution.[678]

Such actions could incur prison and labour for up to a month and/or a fine of 1-100 francs. This was meant to deal with concerns of females being trafficked into city centres for exploitation and prostitution. Furthermore, "traffickers" making money out of these practices were to be punished with a month to three years in jail and/or a hefty fine of 200-300 francs.

[677] Ibid
[678] Ibid

An interesting aspect of the draft decree ensured equal treatment of both female and male spouses in cases of adultery. In colonial legal discussions of the time, an adulterous wife might be punished upon her husband's command. He could also rescind his complaint and end the legal process against her at any time. On the other hand, a husband could only be punished for adultery if his behaviour was seen to be "injurious" to his wife. The Committee's decree, however, suggested that *both* wives and husbands could be penalised upon their spouses' complaints, along with the "accomplice". In a sense, the draft decree challenged colonial legislation that codified the subjugation of a wife to her husband by proposing measures that equalised consequences of adultery for both genders.

The only difference in the draft's proposed punishments was *how* "accomplices" were to be dealt with. A husband's mistress would suffer the same consequences as him, while the wife's extra-marital partner could serve up to a month in prison (rather than 7 days maximum) and/or 1-1,000 francs (rather than a maximum of 100 francs).[679] This may have been because

[679] Ibid. See in full:

"ART. XIV.- The adultery committed by a native wife, whose marriage has been registered, is punishable by a penalty of one to seven days' penal servitude and a fine of from I to 100 francs, or one of those sentences only.

The accomplice of the adulterated woman may be sentenced to a term of penal servitude from 1 day to 1 month and fined from 1 to 1,000 francs or to only one of these two penalties.

……No prosecution may be brought against the adulterated wife and her accomplice except on the express complaint of the wife's husband who remains free to withdraw it at any time, which ends the prosecution in any event.

The husband can stop the effect of the sentence at any time by agreeing to take back his wife.

ART. XV.- In case of registered marriage, celebrated according to the regime of the Congolese Civil Code or according to the rites of a Christian Church the adultery of the husband is punishable by a term of from one to seven days of penal servitude and a fine of from one to one hundred francs, or only one of those two penalties.

The husband's accomplice may be sentenced to the same penalties.

…No proceedings can be brought against the husband except on the express complaint of the woman who remains free to withdraw at any time, which puts an end to the prosecution in any event. The woman can stop the effect of the sentence at any time by agreeing to take back her husband."

it was regarded as more serious and disruptive to "public order" for a man to be cavorting with another man's wife; a man having a mistress was more socially acceptable.

Van der Kerken stated that the Committee hoped to account for "African contingencies" while protecting women "in and out of wedlock".[680] This statement presumes that Congolese women were unsafe under customary law. Van der Kerken positioned colonial power as having the means to seek 'compromises' that could rectify such a problem. She recognised points at which colonialism negatively impacted indigenous women but sought solutions from the same imperial source. Van der Kerken was part of a colonial milieu and its oppressive, violent structures. Even in her challenges to the system she worked to solidify its influence and power.

The responses to Van der Kerken and her Committee's intervention were not enthusiastic. A note from the 'Director' of the 1st Direction to the Minister expressed the former's negative opinion of the decree. He stated that after briefly examining the text he considered it confused, lacking method and "simplistic". In fact, **"**the ignorance of the rules of the legislation currently in force as well as the realities of native customs; it indicates a lack of study of the questions it intends to settle".[681] The Director referred to provisions related to civil marriage that already existed in the Civil Code. He stated that while the colonial government was interested in these issues, it would only "proceed methodically" and

[680] Ibid

[681] Letter from the Director (Head of Service), 2nd General Management of the 1st Direction to the Minister of Colonies, on the 'Protection of Indigenous Women', dated 17th September 1935. Portefueille: AI 1394, liasse: 1/5/a. African Archives, Brussels

"legislate" in the "right manner and at the right time".[682] The form and timing of the Committee's draft decree was implied as inadequate and inappropriate.

The Minister of Colonies also contacted GG Ryckmans to ask him of his opinion about the Committee's work. Ryckmans's response was similarly critical. He wrote that while the draft was informative, it could not "constitute a serious basis for the examination of the problem which it has the pretension to solve".[683] Ryckmans considered customary marriage of "paramount importance".[684] He agreed that new legislation was required but that customs could only be progressively developed slowly through "piecemeal and prudent measures".[685] The draft decree did not inspire respect from men in high positions in the colony, despite the fact that it had reportedly been produced with the aid of experienced former colonial officials. It seems that a woman-led initiative was easily dismissed by the colonial establishment. The marginalisation of white women like Van der Kerken in leadership roles supports the idea that their complicity in colonial systems of domination did not always assist with their social elevation and certainly not their liberation- particularly when they were perceived as critiquing these systems in any way.[686] Was this type of marginalisation unique to colonial milieus or did it exist elsewhere, such as, in the field of non-governmental activism?

7.9: Imperial influence and non-governmental activism: Save the Children Fund

[682] Ibid
[683] Letter from Governor General Ryckmans to the Minister of Colonies, dated 26th April 1936. Portefueille: AI 1394, liasse: 1/5/a. African Archives, Brussels
[684] Ibid
[685] Ibid
[686] M. Frye, "White Woman Feminist", pg 147-169

This section analyses the historical work of the activist organisation- the Save the Children Fund (SCF)- and some of its colonial influences. Through an examination of this Society, its aims and impact, I study the work of British suffragette and activist Constance Antonina Boyle.[687] How did her perspective compare to women like Van der Kerken and how did her outlook reflect her positionality and circumstances? Furthermore, how were the issues that she raised about African women and slavery received by the SCF?

The SCF was established by Eglantyne Jebb and her sister Dorothy Buxton in 1919. Initially, it served to fund programs feeding and educating children in central and Eastern Europe at a time when famine was rife after the First World War.[688] Jebb envisioned the SCF as an organisation that extended beyond Europe. Other committee members, including Boyle, pushed to make Jebb's idea a reality after her death in 1928.

The "first meeting" of the SCF took place on 10th March 1920.[689] It counted many Lords and Ladies amongst its members. William H. Beveridge was one of those who attended.[690] The organisation provided funds to local Societies that existed in countries earmarked for relief.[691] Children were the main domain of the organisation, while adults issues were to be

[687] Constance Antonina Boyle was known as 'Nina' Boyle. Henceforth, I refer to her by this name.

[688] Kathleen Freeman. *If Any Man Build: The History of the Save the Children Fund.* (London: Hodder and Stoughton: 1965)

[689] Potentially only the first recorded meeting as the SCF had, in fact, been established the previous year in 1919. Minutes from 10th March 1920. 'M1/1 Council of Minutes. 10th March 1920 ("First Meeting") and 10th October 1920'. Micro Film: Western Aid and the Global Economy. Series One: The Save The Children Fund Archive, London. (SCF/A/1/3/1-2; SCF/A/1/5/1-2; SCF/A/1/1/1-5, 7-8, 11. REEL 36). The Cadbury Library, University of Birmingham.

[690] William H. Beveridge was a Baron and economist. He wrote the 1942 Social Insurance and Allied Services Report. This was known as the "Beveridge Report" and outlined the five 'Giant Evils'; Want, Disease, Ignorance, Squalor and Idleness. He proposed a government program that would eradicate these social ills and his report was used to help form the Welfare State in the 1940s by Clement Attlee's Labour Government. Another prominent member of the SCF was Labour politician Ramsay McDonald who would later become Prime Minister.

[691] First Meeting of the SCF

"dealt with by Government action". This position shifted over time as members recognised that they could not assist children without also addressing the conditions of parents (particularly mothers).

A prominent example of an SCF-funded project is the Starehe Boys School in Nairobi which was founded by an ex-British army officer called Geoffrey Griffin in 1959 and took up most of SCF's focus in Kenya. It was heralded as a successful example of post-colonial 'development' in the 1960s-70s but remained reliant on international donations. Matthew Hilton has written about the ways that Northern-backed charities in this period were characterised by good intentions to fill gaps in state welfare systems while having little understanding or knowledge of the local systems and contexts in which they had situated themselves. These organisations often lacked future planning and were dependent on their statuses as charities to garner public attention and financial support. A landscape of (often Northern) donor-sustained NGOs therefore maintained a colonising presence in different countries in Africa and elsewhere.[692] Examining the practices of early NGOs like the SCF is important; they provide critical historical context to the existence and actions of modern NGOs that evolved from similar structures.

During another meeting of the SCF held in October of the same year, new members of the council were introduced. These included Nina Boyle; historian and politician, Lord Acton; the Duke of Atholl; Conservative MP, Lord Hugh Cecil; co-founder of the Salvation Army,

[692] Matthew Hilton (2016). "Charity, Decolonization and Development: The Case of the Starehe Boys School, Nairobi." *Past and Present,* No. 233, pg 266-267

Catherine Booth and the Archbishop of Wales, among others.[693] One of SCF's members, Fr. Paul Bull, stated that "the fund was generating in people a sense of internationalism that was necessary if the League of Nations was to do its work".[694] The LoN was relatively new at this point. His comment, along with the aspirations of people like Jebb, highlight the image that the SCF projected of itself; a "modern", international humanitarian endeavour not firmly bound by national and/or imperial expectations. In this sense, the SCF originated from a different imagination to that of Van der Kerken-Sarolea. While the SCF also sought to "improve" the conditions of perceived 'vulnerable' people living in other parts of the world, unlike Van der Kerken's committee, it was associated closely with the LoN and, in a sense, served as a project of international surveillance. The SCF reported findings back to the LoN which could put pressure on Governments if it wished.[695] The international functions of the SCF typifies why LoN members were reluctant to allow the TSC to consult private organisations in the lead up to the 1926 Slavery Convention.

At a meeting in September 1922, Jebb announced that she had raised the topic of a Children's Charter with the Geneva-based, central branch of the SCF, *L'Union Internationale de Secours aux Enfants* (Save the Children International Union[696]). Her work would include a Declaration of Rights, a "legislative Code to be embodied in a future Convention of Geneva"

[693] "Council Meeting held on Thursday October 7th 1920 at 3.30.pm, at 26, Golden Square". Same microfilm: reel 36.
[694] Ibid
[695] The SCF amended its original constitution to include British children too. It is interesting that British children were not initially included. It suggests that there was some anxiety and tension with the SCF (which was supposed to be an 'a-political' institution) drawing attention to domestic issues. Perhaps this has something to do with the membership of the SCF including British MPs. In the 20th meeting of the Council, British Colonial Administrator, Sir William Grey Wilson, reportedly "urged that more should be done" by the SCF for British children.
[696] *L'Union Internationale de Secours aux Enfants* was meant to handle the "propaganda" while national branches had to organise the work itself.

and a Charter "resuming the work to be done for children both by private organisations and the state".[697] Her Children's Charter was meant to recognise a "minimum standard of child well-being throughout the world".[698] Boyle had suggested that the SCF become associated with other larger organisations, such as the National Council of Women (NCW). After the SCF was accepted as an affiliate of this group, the NCW assisted with revising Jebb's draft Charter to include the wives of unemployed men.[699] Jebb's 'Declaration of the Rights of the Child' was adopted by the LoN and provided the first international legal instrument for establishing the children's rights.[700]

Jebb wrote a report about her presence at the 'Advisory Committee of the League of Nations dealing with Child Protection'. Her document stated: "Last year the Assembly and Council of the League of Nations decided that the work of the Advisory Committee on Traffic in Women and Children (dating from 1922), should be extended to include Child Welfare, and the reconstituted Committee met in May this year" [1923]. Jebb, along with Henri Rollett, Dame Katherine Furse and Eleanor Rathbone were made "Assessors of Child Welfare" for the committee, while others were appointed as "Assessors for the Traffic of Women".[701] Some

[697] "Ninth meeting of the Council held on Friday, 1st September 1922, at 3pm, at 42, Langham Street". 'M1/2 Council Minutes. 19 January 1922 (1st meeting of the Council as presently constituted) 26 October 1923 (23rd)'. Same microfilm: reel 36.

[698] "Special Meeting of the Council held on Friday, 26h January 1923, at 3pm, at 42 Langham Street, to consider the Children's Charter, drafted by the sub-Committee" in ibid.

[699] The Twenty-third meeting of the Council held on Friday, 26th October 1923, at 3pm, 42 Langham Street. M1/2 Council Minutes. 19 January 1922 (1st meeting of the Council as presently constituted) 26 October 1923 (23rd); The Thirty-fifth meeting of the Council held on Thursday, 18th September 1924, at 4pm, at 26, Gordon Street. M1/3 Council of Minutes. 16th November 1923 ("24th")- 31st December 1925 ("51st"). Same microfilm: reel 36

[700] This would later be adapted as the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child

[701] Henri Rollett belonged to the International Association for the Protection of Children, Eleanor Rathbone headed the National Union of Societies for Equal Citizenship and Katherine Furse was the deputy Chief Commissioner of the Girl Guides.
'Report of the Delegate of the S.C.F.I.U. on the Advisory Committee of the League of Nations dealing with Child Protection', by Eglantyne Jebb. M1/3 Council of Minutes. 16th November 1923 ("24th")- 31st December 1925 ("51st"). Same microfilm: reel 36.

principle areas for discussion were 'infant welfare' and 'age of consent and marriage'.[702] It was a feminist and abolitionist project that focused on ending sexual slavery.[703] They carried out an international investigation into these areas. The Committee for Child Welfare found a connection between the trafficking of girls and women and the age of girls in early marriage.[704] Importantly, according to Moschetti:

Whether the case was sexual assault, incest, child marriage or trafficking, civil and penal codes were found to be the gatekeepers of men's sexual access to girls, governing the age at which men had the right to perform sexual intercourse with the implication that girls complied willingly and with informed consent.[705]

The LoN was explicitly linking the exploitation of children to the abuse and exploitation of women. These revelations impacted conversations within the SCF. The conditions of girls and women became an important aspect of Boyle's work as the SCF extended its gaze beyond Europe to Africa.

In the late 1920s- early 1930s, the agenda of the SCF began to shift to other areas. At the 104th meeting of the SCF in January 1931 some of the "most important items on the Agenda" were the Eglantyne Jebb Memorial Fund and plans for the Conference on African

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Carole Moschetti. 2005. "Conjugal Wrongs don't Make Rights: International Feminist Activism, Child Marriage and Sexual Relativism." PhD thesis. Political Science Department, The University of Melbourne. Pg 124

[702] 'Report of the Delegate of the S.C.F.I.U. on the Advisory Committee of the League of Nations dealing with Child Protection', by Eglantyne Jebb

[703] Jessica R. Riley (2010). "Claims to Protection: The Rise and Fall of Feminist Abolitionism in the League of Nations' Committee on the Traffic in Women and Children, 1919-1936?" *Journal of Women's History,* Vol. 22, No. 4: pp. 90-113

[704] Moschetti, "Conjugal Wrongs Don't Make Rights", pg 124-125

[705] Ibid, pg 124

Children, which was to take place later that year.[706] The profound sense of loss engendered by the death of Eglantyne Jebb can be felt through the records of the minutes as the Committee grappled with its continued direction and the management of dwindling funds. Members attempted to interpret Jebb's vision for the future of the SCF, but not everyone's priorities were the same.

Lord Noel Buxton was to preside over the Conference on African Children as its President.[707] By February, the final draft of the program had been produced. However, Boyle was not impressed. The minutes of the 105th meeting state that, in full:

"Miss Boyle said she regretted that the Organising Committee and the British Committee appeared to be associated with a point of view which she could not accept. This was proved by the fact that the question of Child Marriage had been excluded from the programme of the Conference. She thought that the many questions relating to women and young girls, which she considered were of paramount importance, would not receive sufficient consideration at the Conference, and for this reason, as she had spent most of her life in forwarding these interests, she felt obliged to resign her seat on the Council.[708]

It was explained to Boyle that the topics she raised would in fact be included within the section on 'Infant Mortality and Education'. While the "experts" who organised the timetable considered these issues relevant, they did not think that they merited their own

[706] "The 104th meeting of the council held at 26, Gordon Street, W.C.I., on Tuesday, 1st January 1931." 'International Committee of the S.C.I.U'. Reel 36

[707] Lord Noel Buxton was a Labour Politician and was appointed as Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries in Ramsay MacDonald's Government.

[708] The 104th meeting of the council

distinct discussion.[709] The Chairman stated that he hoped Boyle would remain a part of the Council and that she would be present at the Conference so that she could articulate her perspective. Boyle begrudgingly agreed to attend the conference after all.[710]

Those attending the conference included representatives from religious missions, governments, universities and private organisations. Members of the British Colonial Office were there to represent "the various tropical colonies of Africa" and the Italian colonial authorities were also present.[711] According to these minutes, the agenda was not set by Africans but by those who considered themselves "experts" in African affairs. The conference had a paternalist outlook. It was not directly associated with colonial agendas, but the colonial view was represented at the event in a way that indigenous perspectives were not. The SCF was steeped in a context where white people considered their knowledge, ideas, organisation and understandings of the world as more valid and superior to those of black people, particularly Africans.

When the executive committee of the Save the Children International Union (SCIU) first discussed the possibility of organising the conference in 1928, a resolution was passed which stated that, "The problem of the children of indigenous races, and of Africa in particular, is more and more claiming our attention as far as education, hygiene, work, and delinquency are concerned".[712] These were pressing colonial concerns and were interpreted and

[709] Ibid
[710] Ibid
[711] "The 107th meeting of the council held at 26, Gordon Street, W.C.I., on Thursday, 7th May 1931, at 3pm". Reel 36
[712] 'Memorandum: The Present Position re the Enquiry into the Condition of Children of Non-European Origin and the Summoning of a Congress in 1931 submitted to the British Committee of the 1931 Congress on Children of Non-European Origin', M14/12. Miscellaneous Other Minutes. British Committee of the 1931 Congress on

approached differently in each territory by local administrators responding to unique, evolving circumstances. The SCIU's interest in these issues demonstrates how dominant Euro-American ideologies about racial and gender hierarchies impacted different contexts, including non-governmental activity. The program, priorities and invitation list of the Conference was absorbed in an imperial ideology that denied too much scrutiny of women's conditions under colonial rule.

After the conference had taken place it was hailed a "success" by the Chairman of the SCF.[713] New plans were drawn up afterwards with aims to collect data on the issues covered, as well as to organise "practical work in Africa". Regardless of the enthusiasm, these measures had to be delayed until the Committee's finances had increased.

Despite some positive responses to the conference and the ensuing discussions Boyle was dissatisfied. She had been reassured that questions related to women and girls would be included in the conference, but she wrote in a letter to the Committee that she was "disappointed that the report from the Conference did not stress more particularly the shocking treatment meted out to girls when their babies were born".[714] Clearly, she felt that questions related to women and girls had not been treated with the same sense of importance that other issues had. From this point onwards, it becomes more obvious where Boyle's perspectives diverge from those of others in the Council. The Chairman reacted to her letter

Children of Non-European Origin. October 1929- June 1931. SCF/A/4/4/1/1; SCF/A/4/6/1/1; SCF/A/9/1-6, 8-10. REEL 42.

[713] "The 109th meeting of the council held at 26, Gordon Street, W.C.I., on Thursday, 9th July 1931, at 3pm". Reel 36.

[714] Ibid

by stating that the issues she referred to had been included in the Conclusions of "Questions 1 and 2".[715] This information gives an insight into how the SCF prioritised its objectives and highlights which topics were provided more attention. According to the minutes of the 112th meeting, the British SCF would "confine itself, for the present, to the question of Infant Mortality, in order to avoid overlapping with other organisations, which were working on the questions of Education and Labour".[716] As noted earlier, there were deep concerns about depopulation in parts of Africa. Perhaps the SCF was responding to colonial alarms raised at the conference by focusing its attention mainly on infant mortality. Boyle and her objectives were side-lined in a similar way to Van der Kerken and her initiatives. The conditions of women were not a main priority except where they linked to particular phenomena, such as depopulation and male labour.

In early 1932, Protestant Missionary John Harris asked the SCF to write a 'Memorandum on Africa and Slavery' for the LoN. Committee members, such as Mrs Victoria de Bunsen raised concerns that they did not have enough data on this topic. However, the General Secretary put forward the idea that a sub-committee could be organised to carry out research in the area. The group became known as the Child Protection Committee (CPC). Its initial aims were to examine issues relating to Infant Mortality, Child Labour and Education

[715] Ibid
[716] "The 112th meeting of the council held at 26, Gordon Street, W.C.1. on Thursday, 5th November 1931, at 3pm". Reel 36.

and Child Slavery and to keep its report as succinct as possible.[717] Stella Thomas, the first female African magistrate, was a member of the CPC.[718]

At the 118th meeting of the SCF, in May 1932, Mrs de Bunsen updated the Committee on the work of the CPC; it would work with the African Bureau in Geneva to follow up plans made at the 1931 African Children's Conference.[719] The CPC hoped to put together a team of "African Advisors" as well as other panels of advisors for various nations.[720] The CPC had already compiled its Memorandum on slavery. Its next steps were to investigate Infant Mortality and write an "experimental Bulletin for circulation to colonial governments". The minutes stated that African advisors would be "people connected with Africa" rather than African.[721]

In later meetings of the SCF and CPC, Boyle registered her disapproval of relying too heavily on the "expertise" of anthropologists in relations to certain indigenous African customs that she considered harmful. She stated that she "hoped that the anthropologist on the Committee would not be followed blindly".[722] Her comments highlight the tension

[717] 116th meeting of the council held at 26, Gordon Street, W.C.1. on Thursday, 3rd March 1932, at 3pm. 'Publishers Note M1/7. Minutes of 113th Meeting not available at time of filming'. Reel 36;

First meeting to be held on March 9th at 11.15am. To focus on the Memorandum. 'Publishers Note M1/7. Minutes of 113th Meeting not available at time of filming'. Reel 36.

[718] Moschetti, "Conjugal Wrongs Don't Make Rights", pg 138

[719] 118th meeting of the council held at 40, Gordon Square, W.C.1, on Thursday, 19th May 1932, at 3pm. 'Publishers Note M1/7. Minutes of 113th Meeting not available at time of filming'. Reel 36.

[720] Ibid

[721] They included, Dr Agnes Fraser and Mr. J. H. Driberg, Reverend John Harris, Mr. J. F. Horrabin and Captain R.S. Rattray.
146th meeting of the council (mistakenly stated as 136th), dated 13th December 1934. 'Publishers Note M1/7. Minutes of 113th Meeting not available at time of filming'. Reel 36.

[722] 120th meeting of the council was held at 40, Gordon Square, W.C.1., on Thursday, 21st July 1932, at 3pm. Publishers Note M1/7. Minutes of 113th Meeting not available at time of filming. Reel 36.

between female activists, such as herself and others, including Eleanor Rathbone and Duchess Atholl, who were attempting to draw attention to issues of "sexual slavery" in marriage. Their ideas clashed with the arguments of anthropologists, whose work focused on the importance of indigenous social customs, kinship relations and dependency. Rathbone and Atholl, along with Colonial Josiah Wedgewood put together a Memorandum on Female Slavery Within the Family in May 1932. They raised their concern over bride-price, the absence of women's rights over their children and the practice of men inheriting their dead relatives' widows in Africa. The memorandum asserted that even though some women had successfully negotiated situations where their conditions were analogous to 'commercial slavery' it was not excusable to ignore the issue: "Defenders of slavery in every forms have always been able to point to well-fed and kindly treated slaves as an argument for doing nothing".[723] Atholl, Rathbone and Wedgewood raised valid concerns, although their ideas were couched in abolitionist rhetoric which may have hindered their cause and alienated anthropologists. For instance, they compared bride-price to chattel slavery; a reductive, Europeanised understanding of the institution. Even so, their statement about those who defended slavery was accurate and has been evidenced in previous chapters.

The nature of its work meant that the SCF had to maintain good relations with colonial Governments. It provided information for colonial authorities to utilise. Georges van der Kerken, the husband of Jeanne Van der Kerken-Sarolea, referred to the data provided by the SCIU (Save the Children International Union) in one of his reports for the Conference of African

[723] 'Memorandum: On Female Slavery Within the Family'. Submitted by The Duchess of Atholl, M.P., Colonial Josiah Wedgewood, M.P. and Miss Eleanor Rathbone, M.P. Dated, May 1932. XIV.2.1 (17-36), MSS. Brit. Emp. S.22/ G 935a, 'Anti-Slavery Society Papers G9336-935a South West and West Africa'. The University of Liverpool archives.

Children.[724] He drew attention to the SCF's research on children being used for debt payment, becoming the "drudges of the household", and used for purposes of prostitution. According to Mr Van der Kerken, these occurrences were in the minority in the Congo and children employed in "native undertakings and family occupations work under fairly favourable conditions". In fact, "Native mothers may be described as devotion itself; they place in their children all their hopes for the future of the family or tribe".[725] In the case of children working with Europeans, they might be employed in "commercial, industrial and agricultural concerns, in domestic work, and- in the remoter districts- as porters and paddlers". They worked 8-10 hours a day and were supervised to ensure their "physical development" was not negatively impacted. Despite this, he claimed there was still much to be done to improve the situation for child workers and provided various suggestions. His ideas included the prohibition of pre-pubescent children being "lent" out to a "third party", and the "prevention of immoral relations with children who have not reached the age of puberty".[726] He advised that children below the age of puberty should not work for more than six hours a day or be used in public works or as porters and paddlers.[727]

The impact of the African Children's Conference, organised by the SCF, and the attendance of various representatives of colonial governments demonstrates the power that an international institution, like the SCF wielded during this period. Mr Van der Kerken's report

[724] Prof G. van der Kerken, "Ancien Vice-Gouverneur au Congo, membre de Comite executive de l'Institut international des longues et civilisations africaines, Bruxelles." *General Conditions of Work for Children and Adolescents and the Protection of Children at Work: Central Africa.* For the International Conference on African Children, Geneva, 22nd - 25th June 1931. Western Aid and the Global Economy. Series One: The Save the Children Fund Archive, London. Reel 14, inc. African Children's Conference 1931/2

[725] Ibid

[726] Ibid. Here Van der Kerken refers to a decree produced by the Colonial Government in 1930 which would apparently help to end abuses against Congolese girls.

[727] Ibid

and his inclusion of the data provided by the SCF indicates how much of an influence the SCF had over colonial endeavours and the way they addressed certain issues. Mr Van der Kerken sought to address their concerns and highlight the different actions being taken to prevent the exploitation of children in Belgian Congo and Central Africa more generally. He was answering to the SCF and others who might criticise the colonial state. The SCF, under the LoN, had the power to highlight and publicise specific issues for attention and challenge colonial authorities on their treatment of indigenous people. For example, in January 1933 the CPC announced that it was going to write a resolution regarding gold mining in Kenya, "protesting against the expropriation of the natives at Kakamega without an equivalent compensation in land".[728] Boyle posited the idea that another sentence be included: "if this be the wish of the community". This text was given to the British Colonial Office and Prime Minister. The CPC also investigated the lives of children in Liberia, as well as cases of children and women being trafficked in Egypt.[729]

In 1934, Boyle reported to the SCF Committee that she had met with John Harris, who also became an advisory member to discuss the "conditions of African women, including slavery" and how to galvanise government action.[730] Boyle stated that she "thought the SCF should keep in touch with these questions" and informed them of a meeting that Harris was organising to take place at the National Liberal Club later that year.[731] Only one of the

[728] 125th meeting of the council (SCF) was held at 40, Gordon Square, W.C.1., on Thursday, 19th January 1933, at 3pm. On the issue of Gold Mining in Kenya. Publishers Note M1/7. Minutes of 113th Meeting not available at time of filming. Reel 36.

[729] 112th and 130th meetings. Publishers Note M1/7. Minutes of 113th Meeting not available at time of filming. Reel 36.

[730] Publishers Note M1/7. Minutes of 113th Meeting not available at time of filming'. Reel 36.

[731] Ibid

members, Dame Adelaide Anderson, registered her interest. Boyle insisted on raising the topic of women and slavery, despite the lethargic responses that she received from her peers. She was an assertive character, who did not mind intervening in issues considered off-bounds for an a-political society. In one meeting she stated that, "children must not be sacrificed to other people's ideas of what was political and what was not. If the fund wanted things for children, it must ask for them".[732] Her statement was in response to George Peel, an ex-MP and writer, who had commented that the subject of the 'school leaving age' was a political matter and outside the remit of their organisation. Interestingly, this conversation regarded British children. Mr Peel's opinion was in the minority, but his comment highlights some of the internal tensions that emerged when the SCF drew attention to negative conditions of British children rather than only those who lived abroad.

7.10: Nina Boyle on the emancipation of African women

Boyle had a central role in the SCF. She helped produce the first Children's Charter and consistently focused on raising the issue of women's enslavement. Her work and background provide more context with regards to her negative reaction to the lack of coverage of women's enslavement at the International African Children's Conference.

[732] 137th meeting of the council held at 40, Gordon Square, W.C.1., on Thursday, 15th February 1934, at 3pm. 'Publishers Note M1/7. Minutes of 113th Meeting not available at time of filming'. Reel 36.

In one article she wrote about types of women's slavery that she thought had been largely ignored.[733] Despite the 1926 Convention referring to "persons" in its definition of slavery, Boyle claimed that,

It would appear, however, that once more the word person is not intended to include women. Men alone are to be rescued from some of its forms, and the men who must not on any account be allowed to be slaves are to be maintained and reinforced by some of the signatory governments, in the possession of their own slaves- the women of their races.[734]

Indeed, some of the documentation that was sent to the TSC by colonial officials in Congo had a noticeable pattern of emphasis of men's enslavement, men's "freedom" and liberty. As explained in Chapter 6, the concept of "slave" was not genderless; it was male by default. The enslavement of "persons" became centred on men's experiences in forced labour and "serfdom". "Slaves" were discussed in terms of having wives and maintaining families. Women, on the other hand, were confined to conversations on marriage. Boyle endeavoured to highlight forms of slavery that she recognised as affecting women. She was frustrated that women's slavery had not gained the same amount of interest at the LoN as men's servility.

Although Boyle draws attention to the lack of international action on women's enslavement, she also acted out a white saviour complex and reinforced damaging racist colonial narratives about Africans. In her writing she makes sweeping generalisations about gender relations across Africa:

[733] 'Slavery' by Nina Boyle (Parts I-III). Undated. MSS. Brit. Emp. S.22/G 935a. XIV.2.1 (17-36). Liverpool University Library. Potentially written around 1930, like her article 'What is Slavery?'.
[734] Ibid

Throughout the length and breadth of Africa native women rank as property… They are purchasable, barterable, inheritable; they are used to pay a debt, oblige a friend or make a present.[735]

Colonial officials had indeed referred to practices of this kind existing in Belgian Congo. However, her writing is sensationalist. She wanted to galvanise her readers into action. Boyle insisted that women- even those in positions of power- were still subjugated and unfree in marriage. She appealed to white women:

I ask my fellow-women, emancipated now and enfranchised, what are they going to do about it? What is going to be their contribution to history in this century? Are they going to do for their sex what men did for theirs- set them free, and make the Slavery Convention a reality?[736]

She called for female solidarity, but simultaneously invoked oppressive colonial stereotypes. As a suffragette, her perspective was informed by her knowledge and experience of women's struggle for liberation in Europe, which she then applied to Africa. Boyle took a feminist and abolitionist approach to women's slavery along with her female peers, including Eleanor Rathbone. However, she existed within a context that was dominated by ideas of white superiority and her words reflect this. She wrote about how practices of child marriage persisted "over a great part of Africa". Girls could be "pledged at birth…in pure greed, adding

[735] Ibid
[736] Ibid

another to a *bloated harem*" [my emphasis]. Her writing presented these practices as commonplace. Reportedly, if a man had paid bridewealth for a girl, "if he injure or even kill the child with sexual violence it is his own property and no one else's concern".[737] She displayed ignorance of bridewealth practices and the purposes they were supposed to serve; to protect the girl/woman from ill-treatment. While this may not have always been the case, the idea that it was common for a husband to abuse his spouse with no consequences is incorrect. Children pledged to pay debts were not necessarily left unprotected either. The abuse of practices that she referred to did exist, however she presented them as a homogenous norm across Africa.

Boyle decried child marriage as "the foulest form of slavery known". She highlighted how "no Convention protects or rescues its victims". Here she made a valid point about the gaps in the 1926 Slavery Convention. According to Boyle, the convention was useless for women. She wrote that, "Women, it is plain, not being "persons," cannot really be slaves". The movement against slavery was so focused on forced labour that "the overwhelming mass of slaves go unredeemed and unchampioned".[738]

Boyle's position differed to that of Van der Kerken. She hoped to assist with the "emancipation" of women in Africa through international campaigning and action, rather than to "protect" them through further colonial control. She was an unmarried woman, an activist, and she was not embedded within colonial institutions. The way she framed certain issues affecting women in the colonies produced similar representations to those of Van der Kerken;

[737] Ibid
[738] Ibid

African men were perpetrators of violence and abuse and black women were victims. However, unlike Van der Kerken, Boyle seems far less concerned about appearing respectable and appealing to the establishment. Boyle did not shy away from expressing less popular opinions, which is not surprising given her background. She was radical in the sense that she argued that sexual slavery existed regardless of whether a girl/woman was married.[739] The existence of a marriage did not justify the sexual abuse of a woman by her husband. As Moschetti writes, "her style of feminism was to get to the root of the problem, and elicit some form of accountability".[740]

7.11: Conclusion

This chapter looks at specific examples of colonialists and NGO organisations. It is interesting to observe forms of international activism that existed at the time through the lens of the SCF and make sense of how activism challenged as well as reinforced colonial discourses. Van der Kerken and Boyle came from different backgrounds and had their own motivations and agendas. However, by analysing their work and conversations about African women it is possible to highlight how they were *both* ignored and dismissed when they were too critical of colonial rule. This chapter adds a further layer to Western narratives on gender and the experiences of women in colonised territories. It analyses the negative ways that African sexualities were framed and perceived by people in Europe. I highlight some of the ways that European women navigated gender subordination. A discussion of African women's conditions enabled some white women to raise important issues. In some circumstances

[739] Moschetti, "Conjugal Wrongs Don't Make Rights", pg 141
[740] Ibid, pg 141-142

these conversations also served to elevate their social status and strengthen colonial power. It would be interesting to consider how contemporary ideas about women and gender relations in Africa (particularly the Congo) may have been influenced by historical colonial rhetoric.

CHAPTER 8: CONCLUSION

This thesis analyses Belgian narratives and actions relating to gender, marriage and slavery in the Congo to show how Congolese sexualities were central to the entrenchment of colonial rule in Africa. Tales about abuses committed against Congolese women by Congolese men were readily consumed across the colony and in Belgium. These narratives were later consolidated in international conversations about slavery. However, certain other stories, (i.e. colonial violence and the abuse of white men against Congolese girls and women) were kept away from the public eye. This had the result of removing any Belgian responsibility for violence, shielding their international reputation, and portraying the Congo as a source of malevolence. The Belgians were able to enforce their authority by enacting multiple forms of harm, and their power gave them the opportunity to perpetrate and tolerate sexual abuse and exploitation. Often the most vulnerable were targeted, including young Congolese girls and women.

My research gave me insight into the impact of colonial power on gender practices and sexuality in colonised communities. It also provided me with knowledge of the ways that racism and sexism perform in imperial systems of domination to oppress people with less means to defend themselves.

This work relies on archival sources, most of which are Belgian. It provides a close analysis of what Belgians and other Europeans did in the Congo and what they said about the Congolese during the first thirty years of the twentieth century. Examining documents from the position of a contemporary white Western woman I have tried to read the texts against the grain and consider events from the viewpoint of the people who feature in them. Even though the sources are written exclusively by colonial administrators it is possible to see the

ways that Congolese men, women and children resisted the dehumanising ways that colonialists treated them. They made demands, gave evidence, name-called, claimed retribution and took advantage of tensions between colonial staff and missionaries. In these discussions, Congolese people used whatever resources at their disposal to protect themselves from imperial violence and other insecure and unsafe circumstances.

This work builds on the work of other scholars that have focused on gender and colonial histories, and their connections to the present, such as Nancy Hunt and Charlotte Mertens. It provides new insights into colonial sexual exploitation, an area that has been investigated by Amandine Lauro and Osumaka Likaka, among others. My research adds further historical context to the ways that certain legal concepts have formed and evolved, particularly in relation to slavery.

What impact have pervasive imperial discourses had on the Congo? One of the themes that became apparent as I learned more about the topics discussed in this thesis was the links between historical and contemporary discourses about women and sexuality in the Congo. Humanitarian and media discourse have been criticised for providing reductive analyses of more recent violence that has occurred in the DRC, particularly in the East. Conflict has been depoliticised and disconnected from other important factors, such as education, poverty, corruption and ongoing neo-liberal violence and resource exploitation.[741] Congolese women are still represented as passive helpless victims requiring Western intervention and dark

[741] See Michael Nest. *Coltan.* (Cambridge: Polity Press: 2011). Also, David Renton; David Seddon; Leo Zeilig. *The Congo: Plunder and Resistance.* (London: Zed Books: 2007); and *Blood in the Mobile*. 2011. [DVD] Directed by F. Poulsen. Denmark: Dogwoof Films.

continent narratives have persisted to associate the Congo with negativity.[742] These unhelpful framings are what Ann Stoler might describe as "tenacious" imperial "traces".[743]

Furthermore, historical examples of sexual violence that have been referred to in this thesis bear resemblance to the crimes that took place during and after Congo's war (1996-2002). During conflict rape, abduction and forced conjugal relations were used to intimidate "enemy" communities as armed groups from the DRC and surrounding countries fought over land and resources. Current legal and academic debates have focused on whether these abuses should be defined as 'forced marriage' or 'sexual slavery'.[744] Understanding why these types of atrocities have continued requires thorough and reflective analysis that accounts for the historical context, including colonial subjugation and the normalisation of sexual entitlement/violence by European men. Therefore, these types of histories may be valuable for the study of contemporary examples of the same phenomena, particularly humanitarian literature that has often failed to include analysis of historical colonial sexual violence.

The existence of 'imperial traces' has been described by some as the result of a 'colonial library'. V. Y. Mudimbe produced this concept. His idea has been summarised by Zubairu Wai who describes it as the "the immense body of texts and system of

[742] For interesting work in this area see the work of Charlotte Mertens (2018). "Undoing Research on Sexual Violence in the Eastern Democratic Republic of Congo." *ACME: An International Journal for Critical Geographies,* Vol. 18, No. 3: pp. 1-26; also, Maria Eriksson Baaz and Maria Stern. *Sexual Violence as a Weapon of War?: Perceptions, Prescriptions, Problems in the Congo and Beyond.* (London: Zed Books: 2013).

[743] Ann Laura Stoler (2008). "Imperial Debris: Reflections on Ruins and Ruination." *Cultural Anthropology*, Vol. 23, No. 2, Imperial Debris: pp. 191-219.

[744] Bunting; Roberts; Lawrance (eds.) *Marriage by Force? Contestations over Consent and Coercion in Africa.* (Athens: Ohio University Press: 2016)

representations that has over the centuries collectively invented, and continues to invent Africa as a paradigm of difference and alterity".[745] The colonial library:

uses the idea of an 'archive' to delineate and investigate the nature of Africanist knowledge and its condition of possibility, and to highlight the predicament of Africanist knowledge, as well as the discursive and ideological practices that have historically produced Africa as a marginal space dependent epistemically, materially and politically on the west.[746]

This theory posits that knowledge about Africa relies on "Western epistemological" systems. All information on Africa, produced by both Africans and non-Africans is shaped through the logics, traditions and categories of the library. Knowledge and our understandings of it serves as an ongoing colonising force.[747]

Clearly this concept problematises the issue of individual agency and the capacity to overcome oppressive structures. I would like to consider how this idea interacts with my role as a researcher. What responsibilities do scholars, particularly those from countries that have histories of imperialism, have towards interrogating their own practices, disciplines, methodologies and unconscious biases? I think this is a crucial question which links to wider issues about modern structures of imperialism and racism. The idea of the colonial library provides a tool for considering how negative discourses about the Congo have persisted into the modern era.

Over the course of my research I have become more aware of the problematic ground that my work treads. It has been important for me to confront my own prejudices in order to

[745] Zubairu Wai (2015). "On the predicament of Africanist knowledge: Mudimbe, gnosis and the challenge of the colonial library." *International Journal of Francophone Studies,* Vol. 18, No. 2 & 3: pp. 263-290. Pg 270

[746] Ibid

[747] Ibid, pg 268-269

remain constantly reflective and critical.[748] However, as Wai explores in his writing, is it possible to do this in a meaningful way or are researchers doomed to reinforce the same repetitive imaginaries, solidifying the library? Colonisers in Africa were known for obsessively focusing on African sexualities. Contemporary development and humanitarian discourses are similarly captivated by wartime sexual violence in Africa to the exclusion of other important issues. Does my work draw attention to stories that should be public knowledge or simply repackage and perpetuate damaging representations? Wai astutely calls for epistemological awareness and caution.[749]

As with other fields, African Studies relies on its disciplinary traditions, concepts, and practices. These have historically placed Western researchers and anthropologists in powerful positions.[750] The work of African scholars has been shown to be cited less frequently than that of other writers. As Ryan Briggs and Scott Weathers point out, this is a problem for the type of knowledge that is circulated about Africa. They have demonstrated how scholars outside the continent are more likely to generalise about Africa, as well as focus on war or economics.[751] These type of emphases are symptomatic of colonial framings that have insisted on Africa's relevance to the rest of the world in terms of its difference and resources. Another major issue is Africans not having the space and resources to raise their own priorities. Briggs and Weather point out that representation is key in Africanist knowledge.[752] This also relates well to concerns that I raised in the introduction about imperial hoarding of

[748] The work of Reni Eddo-Lodge has been important to this process. See for example, Reni Eddo-Lodge. *Why I'm No Longer Talking to White People About Race.* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing: 2018). Also, Audre Lorde. *Your Silence Will Not Protect You.* (London: Silver Press: 2017)
[749] Wai. "On the predicament of Africanist knowledge", pg 286
[750] J. Fabian. *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes its Object* (New York: Columbia University Press: [1983] 2002)
[751] Ryan C. Briggs; Scott Weathers (2016). "Gender and Location in African Politics Scholarship: The Other White Man's Burden?" *African Affairs,* Vol. 115/460: pp. 466-489. Pg 466
[752] Ibid

information and knowledge about Africa in museums and colonial archives in Europe. These are more accessible to those who live in the Northern hemisphere. Imperialism has benefitted Western researchers. My own work relies heavily on these texts and since my thesis has been written in English, it possibly makes it harder for Congolese Africans to access and respond to.

Producing reflective work with methodologies that do not ignore these realities is paramount.[753] Jen Katshunga points to systematic anti-blackness in academia. She argues that,

The normalisation of knowledge as a commodity to be produced and consumed is inherently capitalist, imperialist and colonial. This regularisation encourages the unhumaning of those deemed marginal figures, flattening us to be orators of trauma and funneling us into 'cradle' roles. Academia has regularised this harm.[754]

She emphasises the importance of asking, "why academia and knowledge production are inequitable and unethical? Why are my respondents' knowledge and even my own not considered knowledge?"[755] How do researchers ensure that valuable space is made for different forms of knowledge? These are pertinent questions.

My thesis contributes an analysis of the consequences of racism, sexism and imperialism and has wider implications for making some historical sense of contemporary

[753] See Roe Bubar (2013). "Decolonizing Sexual Violence: Indigenous Women Shape the Research." *International Review of Qualitative Research,* Vol. 6, No. 4: pp. 526-543 and Anne Sisson Runyan (2018). "Decolonizing knowledges in feminist world politics." *International Feminist Journal of Politics,* Vol. 20, No.1: pp. 3-8

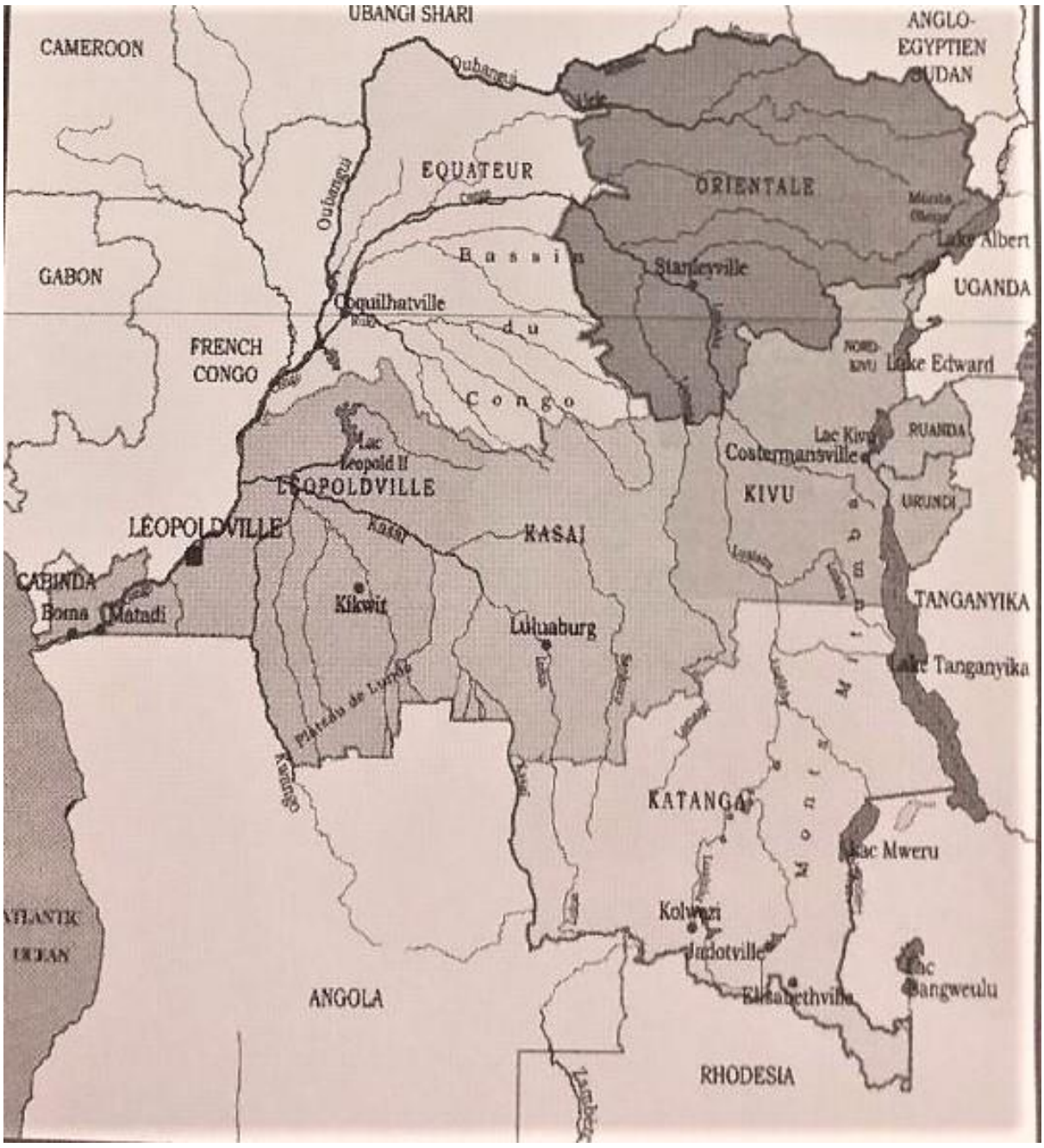
[754] Jen Katshunga. "Too Black for Canada, too white for Congo: re-searching in a (dis)placed body", *Open Democracy Beyond.* Trafficking and Slavery Series. Article published on 28th June 2019: <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/beyond-trafficking-and-slavery/too-black-canada-too-white-congo-re-searching-displaced-body/>

[755] Ibid

forms of this phenomenon. It also links to issues of class and capitalism, although I have not included a thorough analysis of this area. Perhaps this can be included in future studies. This work demonstrates how structures of imperialism, sexism and racism existed and who tried to end them, as well as their backgrounds and motivations. I explore the types of approaches that were taken by these actors; which succeeded, which failed, and which practices were saviourism largely meant to elevate the social status of individuals. As a white Western researcher studying the Congo it seems important to remain cognisant of how these histories affect the present and my own way of interpreting the world. Understanding the relationship between historical and contemporary manifestations of racism provides tools for identifying and critiquing modern forms of 'whiteliness'. Crucially, themes of coloniality/decolonization and a scrutiny of whiteness are becoming more widely discussed.[756]

[756] See, Jawad Syed and Faiza Ali (2011). "The White Woman's Burden: from Colonial civilisation to Third World Development." *Third World Quarterly,* Vol. 32, No. 2: pp. 349-365; and Sara Ahmed (2007). "A Phenomenology of Whiteness." *Feminist Theory,* Vol. 8, No. 149

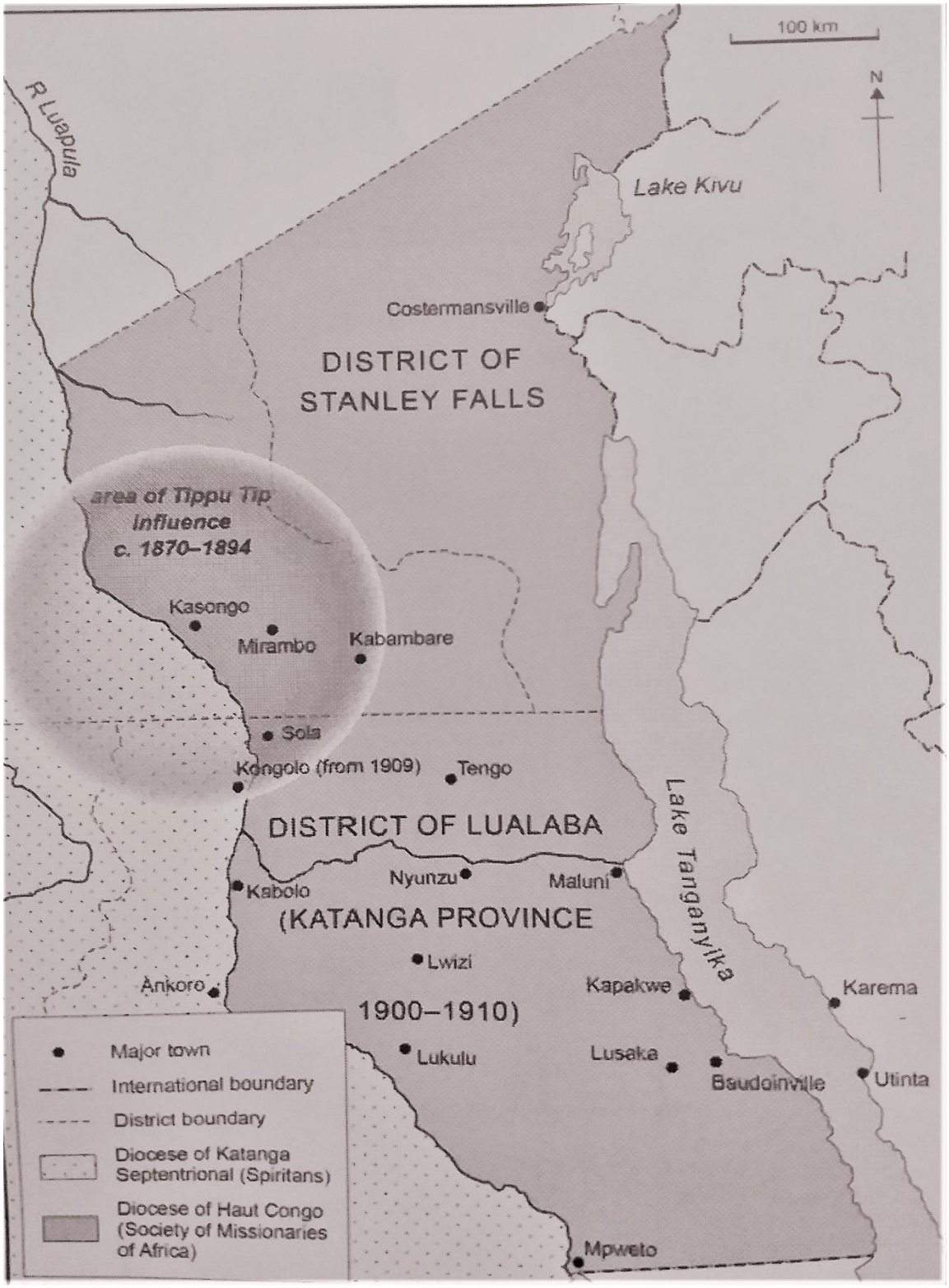
Appendix



Map of the Belgian Congo, 1920[757]

[757] Ewout Frankema and Frans Buelens, eds. *Colonial Exploitation and Economic Development: The Belgian Congo and the Netherlands Indies Compared.* (New York : Routledge : 2013), pg 5


FOREST DISTRICT
Lusambo
Luluabourg
Luebo
Kabumkale
WATERSHED RANGE
Kasai
Sankuru
Lulua
Luebo
Lubudi
Luboma
Luiza
Lubilashi
Luembe
Lubaumbole
Kabinda
Bena Dibele
Lubefu
Mokaia
Lusuna
Riba Riba
Makanga
Difuma
Dlela
Lonkola
Mokunji
Batempa
Gondu
Chola
Luna
Luama
Luvubu
Bakwa Gombe
Wolf Falls
Tombelo
L. Fua
Wissmann Falls
Joko Punda
Bashishombe
Musonenje
Basonge
Butala
Isaka
Zonzadi
1245
Misumba
Hula
Lobefu
Kole
Loja
Katoko Kombe
Kole
Bumbudi
Dikese
Bekoi Ila
R. Lula
R. Lulaka
R. Lukenye
R. Loeto
Loto
Lisaka
Luila
R. Lokoro
Golongo
Kabeya
Pogge Falls
Shimongo
Biongwe
Kafumbola
L. Kapomba
Chitadi
Bakete
Kanda Kanda
Chitonda
Mukoko
Katola
Kampeo
Pamba
Kabango
Kalumbola
Sakambunje
M. Luanda
Bango
Dilolo (Post)
Lutende
Kala
Kabinda
4800
4700
4500
Kisango
Kaumanda
Mt. Shamba
Ngula
Banza
Kaumanda
Kiambwe
L. Kinda
Mupweji
Luamba
Mutomba
Mukulu
L. Lubaumbole
L. Sambo
Goto
Yamwenna
Mt. Kalmea
Katobwe
Lovoi
Lukupa
Lubudi
Loloji
Lubilashi
Luembe
Lubaumbole
Bushimaye
Kasedishi
Maungu
Luiza
Lukula
Lubi
Sankuru
Lubudi
Lubefu
Lubaumbole
Lubilashi
Lubudi
Lubefu
Lubaumbole
Lubilashi
Lubudi
Lubefu
Lubaumbole
Lubilashi



Map of South East Congo, 1885-1910 (including missionary, colonial and trade borders)[759]

[759] Loffman. *Church, State and Colonialism in Southeastern Congo*, pg 70

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