# Associations and sociability between is and ought (1944-1953)

#### The genesis and control of Congolese associations

During his trip through the Congo Free State in 1899, the mayor of Brussels lamented the lack of associations. According to him, European colonial society required protected social spaces if its members were to come together in ways appropriate to their social status and cultivate bourgeois manners even under adverse circumstances.¹ Over the course of time the association developed into Europeans' most important form of sociability in the Congo. Beginning in the 1920s, however, Congolese too, primarily graduates of mission schools, started to organize themselves into associations. In the colonial situation, the practices and forms of association-based sociability were subject to a complex transformation.² The association culture of Congolese differed from that which arose in the eighteenth century along with the European and US-American bourgeoisies, especially in its relationship to political and religious authorities. While associations in the trans-Atlantic world were distinguished by a certain autonomy,³ in the Belgian Congo they were closely tied to the institutions of state and church and were subject to their patronage and control.

It is no coincidence that the colonial state's involvement in African associations began in the mid-1940s. During the war years, the colonial administration had taken wary note of the growth of informal associations in the cities, though without doing anything about it. The authorities overlooked the fact that these were often mutual aid societies established by new city dwellers, organized based on their places of origin, whose members sought to help each other cope with the challenges of everyday city life.<sup>4</sup> In the eyes of the authorities, these bodies were "hierarchical sects," which they suspected of being potential hotbeds of messianic and subversive movements. These free associations were

<sup>1</sup> Lauro and Piette, "Le Congo Belge," 134.

<sup>2</sup> See S.-L. Hoffmann, "Colonial Civil Society," De Negentiende Eeuw 32 (2008): 146.

**<sup>3</sup>** S.-L. Hoffmann, *Geselligkeit und Demokratie. Vereine und zivile Gesellschaft im transnationalen Vergleich 1750–1914* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2003), 102–105.

**<sup>4</sup>** These mutual aid societies were a widespread phenomenon in colonial Africa. See Little, "Voluntary Associations"; K. Little, *West African Urbanization. A Study of Voluntary Associations and Social Change* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1965), 47–58; Eckert, "Wohlfahrtsmix," 102.

<sup>5</sup> Verhaegen, "Les associations congolaises," 390.

<sup>∂</sup> OpenAccess. © 2021 Daniel Tödt, published by De Gruyter. © This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License. https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110709308-006

commonly understood as a form of "political protest against the prevailing order and the Belgian administration." This perspective became particularly popular after secret groups of *évolués* were suspected of being behind the soldiers' uprisings in Luluabourg in the spring of 1944.

From then on, the colonial state began to expedite the foundation of associations for évolués so as to maintain control over them. The colonial planners had something quite different in mind than the sociability described by French scholar Alexis de Tocqueville, who regarded the self-improvement practised, and the alliances forged, by association members as facilitative of democracy and a means of preventing despotic political systems.<sup>7</sup> In the Belgian Congo associations were supposed to be classrooms of civilized social intercourse, a kind of never-ending preparatory course for a political emancipation to come in the distant future. For the colonial state, the associations were immediately useful as a mechanism of control and domination within elite-making policy. Though sociability and the public sphere were intertwined in the Belgian Congo, much as in eighteenth-century European associations,8 the vernacular elite did not "meet itself" in associations. For as yet the elite was, or the évolués were, chiefly an imagined community, which subsequently took shape through the associations – a shape, however, that had to jibe with the colonial authorities' desires. Certainly, periodicals had attempted to construct a collective évolué identity. And in the name of the évolués, Congolese authors in these publications had communicated interests and demands to the colonial state that overarched the group's social heterogeneity. The first contours of a process of "cultural socialization" <sup>10</sup> among évolués had thus undoubtedly begun to emerge in the media. Yet a de-

**<sup>6</sup>** A. Rubbens, "Perspective démocratique au Congo Belge," *La Revue Nouvelle* 6 (1947). See Verhaegen, "Les associations congolaises," 390.

<sup>7</sup> On Tocqueville's view of sociability, see Hoffmann, Geselligkeit, 7–15.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 27.

**<sup>9</sup>** This is an allusion to the title of an essay by L. Hölscher that combines the analysis of periodicals and associations: L. Hölscher, "Die Öffentlichkeit begegnet sich selbst. Zur Struktur öffentlichen Redens im 18. Jahrhundert zwischen Diskurs- und Sozialgeschichte," in *Öffentlichkeit im 18. Jahrhundert*, ed. H.-W. Jäger (Göttingen: Wallstein, 1997).

**<sup>10</sup>** On the concept of cultural socialization, see Hettling, *Bürgerlichkeit als kulturelles System*, 15–17. Drawing on the work of Rainer M. Lepsius, who saw "forms of socialization emerging from the tension between economic interests and conceptions of order," Hettling interprets bourgeois culture first and foremost as a particular way of interpreting the world; ibid., 17. Within the framework of research on bourgeois culture, Hettling is joined by Lässig in gearing the concept of socialization, introduced into the discipline of history by Lepsius – and ultimately rooted in the work of Georg Simmel and Max Weber – towards more cultural processes and forms; ibid.; Lässig, *Jüdische Wege*, 21–22.

clared set of common interests and a similar social situation did not necessarily lead to the formation of communities that felt related to one another. *Évolués* were not all equal. The *topoi* "*évolués*" and "African elite" subsumed a heterogenous social formation, united chiefly in its ambivalent relationship to the European population: it took its cultural lead from this social group, but the latter kept its distance through enduring practices of distinction. If we wish to know whether the *évolués* saw themselves as a community beyond media discourses, we have to address processes of communitization.<sup>11</sup>

By what means did the colonial state foster the Congolese associations? How were they structured? Several administrative levels of the hierarchically organized colonial state were involved in the founding wave of associations, which surged across the territory from 1944 onwards. In parallel to the state-sponsored periodicals such as the *Voix du Congolais*, the General Government took steps to organize the *évolués*' leisure time. During the war, the scale of association life had still been highly dependent on the initiative of the local colonial administration. The provincial governors exchanged notes by post on the activities, structure and constitutions of the few existing associations, which had been initiated by representatives of the colonial state. After the war and as an aspect of elitemaking policy, however, the know-how needed to run associations spread via periodicals. By publishing reports and minutes of meetings, they provided a blueprint for new associations.

After taking office as colonial minister in the summer of 1945, Liberal Robert Godding had created a subdivision of the *Section de l'Information pour Indigènes* within the General Government in Léopoldville to promote associations for the Congolese elite.<sup>13</sup> In October 1945, the General Government then made sure the provincial governors grasped the objectives of the new association policy: "It will surely be quite possible to encourage the learning circles for *évolués* 

<sup>11</sup> This is not the right place to deal with the differences between socialization and communitization or their conceptual history. For a discussion of this topic with reference to research on the bourgeoisie, see M. Hettling, *Politische Bürgerlichkeit: der Bürger zwischen Individualität und Vergesellschaftung in Deutschland und in der Schweiz von 1860 bis 1918* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1999), 14–17; for a brief treatment, see Schulz, *Lebenswelt*, 72–75.

**<sup>12</sup>** In December 1944, for example, the district commissioner in Elisabethville, responding to a request from the provincial governor, received copies of all the documents concerning the *évolué* association in Stanleyville from the local district commissioner; letter from district commissioner in Elisabethville to district commissioner in Stanleyville, 21 December 1944, AA/GG/6339.

<sup>13</sup> Brausch, Belgian Administration, 66.

[...], to generate an optimistic and loyal attitude among our évolués, which would prompt a sympathetic reaction from the Europeans."14

To provide targeted support for associations, in 1946 the colonial government allocated an annual budget of 500,000 francs to each province, with the redistribution of funds to the various districts being left to the discretion of the provincial governors. 15 At times the funding was in place before there was anyone to receive it, because in many places associations had yet to be established. The provincial governors delegated this task to the district commissioners and territorial officials subordinate to them. In much the same way as with the periodicals for the vernacular elite, the fostering of associations came under the remit of the local colonial officials. They had to attract members from among the local évolué milieu, and, in collaboration with them, draw up a set of rules, come up with a name and find a place for meetings. These officials were the associations' patrons and they appointed advisers from among the European population. This was a considerable and time-consuming task, which the local colonial officials took on with varying degrees of engagement, whether due to lack of time or unwillingness.<sup>16</sup>

By the late 1940s a network of associations had already spread across the colony; it had been initiated not just by the colonial state but also by missions, firms and private European individuals. The missions' lead role in the establishment of Congolese associations reveals the national specificity of Belgium's colonial rule. Catholic organizations dominated even in the lively associational landscape of the metropole, which laid the ground for the pillarization of Belgian society.<sup>17</sup> There was, however, no transfer of party-affiliated associations to the colony. The colonial government envisaged associations as an apolitical space in which évolués were to be indoctrinated and supervised by European advisers. If we compare the foundation of elite associations in the Belgian Congo, which intensified from 1945 onwards, with the Gold Coast under British rule, what stands out is that in the latter the many debating and "self-improvement"

<sup>14</sup> Governor general, quoted in a letter from the provincial governor in Elisabethville to the district commissioner of Katanga, 29 October 1945, AA/GG/6339.

**<sup>15</sup>** Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> When, for example, one territorial official failed to comply quickly enough with the district commissioner's instruction to establish an association, within three months the latter started up the Leopold II - Travail et Progrès Association; letters from the district commissioner in Elisabethville to the territorial administrator in Elisabethville, 31 October 1945 and 14 December 1945, AA/GG/6339.

<sup>17</sup> On Belgium's associational culture, see M. Reynebeau, Histoire belge: 1830 - 2005 (Brussels: Racine, 2005).

clubs serving educated Africans, which had been active since the 1880s, had already given way to other forms of organization. In particular, the political parties that emerged in the wake of Britain's post-war reforms had superseded the associations. Similar developments occurred in French African colonies, though colonial administrations in AEF, for example, sought to maintain their influence on the educated elite through state-guided education programmes with the help of associations, social centres and media.

The total number of *évolué* associations in the Belgian Congo grew rapidly in the decade after the war: from 113 associations with 5,609 members in 1946 to 593 associations with 33,472 members in 1950. Eight years later 114,496 Congolese were organized into 2,078 associations. In the cities especially there was a large number of évolués associations, with one in ten to be found in Léopoldville in the mid-1950s.<sup>20</sup> But these associations were also popular in smaller settlements and remote villages. In the administrative records, meanwhile, the "évolués circles" were categorized by their focus on entertainment, sport or further education. Of the 490 "évolués circles" officially registered in 1948, with their 25,014 members, just one quarter were classified as "learning circles," with a total membership of 5,000. By 1955, the number of these learning circles had grown to 204 associations with a total of 14,878 members.<sup>21</sup> But this classification should not obscure the fact that the associations frequently offered a mixed programme and were similar in their goals and activities, regardless of whether their patrons were the colonial administration, missions or private individuals. The "colonial bloc," consisting of representatives of economy, state and church, and thus all those institutions that dealt with or employed évolués, was involved in organized elite sociability.<sup>22</sup> In the context of developmental colonialism the number of Congolese clerks in particular grew in firms and the administrative system, as evident in the fact that in late 1957 a third of associations were supervised by colonial officials, one in five by missionaries and half by private individuals, chiefly businessmen and other employers.

What can we say about the structure, activities and objectives of the associations, and about the colonial state's attempts to influence them? When it comes to their basic concept and hierarchical structure, the bureaucratic associations in

<sup>18</sup> On associations in the Gold Coast, see Newell, Game of Life; Newell, "Territory of Elites."

**<sup>19</sup>** A. Chemain-Degrange and R. Chemain, *Panorama critique de la littérature congolaise contemporaine* (Paris: Editions Présence Africaine, 2000), 26–34.

<sup>20</sup> Verhaegen, "Les associations congolaises," 390 – 391.

<sup>21</sup> Mutamba-Makombo, Du Congo belge, 53.

<sup>22</sup> Vellut, "Hégémonies."

the Belgian Congo resembled their European counterparts.<sup>23</sup> They had to register officially and adopt a constitution as well as setting out their objectives, access criteria, arrangements for electing the committee, membership fees and their use, forms of sanction and in some cases the *modus operandi* of the affiliated library or bar. In addition, the constitution clarified not only when and how often meetings were held but also how they were supposed to proceed. They usually began with a reading of the minutes of the last meeting; other typical activities included the holding of talks and an associated discussion, preparing for the next meeting and concluding the evening with board games. The committee, re-elected at regular intervals, included several positions: president, vice-president, secretary, treasurer, librarian and a "special representative for parties."<sup>24</sup>

The admission criteria were also laid down in the constitution but varied depending on the association. All former mission school pupils were automatically and exclusively members of their associations; some associations catered to members of particular occupational groups or to those employed in specific firms. Often, membership was open to all *évolués* capable of paying the monthly fees. In general, associations were supposed to fund themselves through feebased membership. In some places, constitutions stipulated that membership was solely open to *évolués*. It is certainly no exception, for example, that the constitution of the *Association des Évolués de Stanleyville* (AES) prohibited the socalled Coastmen from joining. Due to their education, these anglophone immigrants from West Africa, most of whom were in the employ of British firms, represented major competition for the local population when it came to the much sought-after jobs in the administration.<sup>25</sup> Hence, the constitution of the AES prevented the encounter between the Coastmen and the Congolese from becoming

**<sup>23</sup>** On the associational bureaucracy in Europe, see A. M. Banti, "Der Verein," in *Orte des Alltags. Miniaturen aus der europäischen Kulturgeschichte*, ed. H.-G. Haupt (Munich: C.H. Beck, 1994), 108.

**<sup>24</sup>** Constitutions of this kind were regularly published in the *Voix du Congolais*. My remarks here are based on the example of the constitution of the *Cercle Van Gele* in Libenge; Statuts, *Cercle Van Gele* de Libenge, 9 April 1953, AA/GG/6372.

<sup>25</sup> There is a lack of scholarship on the Coastmen of the Belgian Congo, though they are an extremely interesting group of actors for a colonial history focussed on inter-imperial transfers. On their influence, see Lauro, "Politiques," 363. The role of the Coastmen is comparable with that of the "Asian clerks" in British colonies such as Tanganyika. See Eckert, *Herrschen*, 80. On the transnational careers of African employees of the United Africa Company, see D. Van den Bersselaar, "Doorway to Success?': Reconstructing African Careers in European Business from Company House Magazines and Oral History Interviews," *African History* 38 (2011).

institutionalized in associations.<sup>26</sup> This suited the colonial state, which feared the infiltration of critiques of colonialism of West African provenance.<sup>27</sup> Elite formation in the Belgian Congo was a national project, not a starting point for pan-African solidarity.

The colonial ideology of elite formation was translated into cultural practice in the évolué associations. In the debate on the Congolese elite that had been going on since 1944, the association was viewed as a key leisure-time locus, whose goal was to further the évolués' development. With its didactic focus, the association served as a learning laboratory of colonial subject formation. Here the ideal type of the "perfected black," as propagated in the media, was supposed to take shape – as an association member.

Elite periodicals such as the Voix du Congolais ceaselessly sought to persuade their readers to get involved in associations. In an editorial, editor-inchief Antoine-Roger Bolamba called on "the black who is perfecting himself" to join associations as a means of further education and civilizational perfecting.<sup>28</sup> But it was not just the editorials supervised by the General Government that championed the associations. Some correspondents were apologists for organized sociability as well. Over a number of years, Antoine-Marie Mobé, who I have quoted several times already and who was active in numerous associations, published essays such as "On the true role of the évolué associations" and "The need for indigenous associations."29 In the style characteristic of official elitemaking policy, Mobé assigned associations the following tasks: "The perfecting and intellectual, moral and physical development of their members; close cooperation with our custodians in their demanding work of colonizing and civilizing our country; and functioning as linking element between the masses and the authorities."30

<sup>26</sup> The Coastmen's dissociation from the évolués and their supposed arrogance towards them were the topic of many articles. One criticism was that the Coastmen felt more civilized and left the Congolese in no doubt about this; L. Kingansi, "A beau mentir vient de loin," Voix du Congolais no. 63 (June 1951).

<sup>27</sup> By the 1920s, internationally networked anti-colonial groups had already formed among educated Africans in the British colonies. West African students began to band together in London and remained in close contact after their return to Africa. This group produced some of the first politicians in West Africa, such as Kwame Nkrumah and Nnamdi Azikiwe. For a detailed account, see Prais, "Imperial Travelers."

<sup>28</sup> A.-R. Bolamba, "Les cercles des évolués," Voix du Congolais no. 17 (August 1947): 718.

<sup>29</sup> A.-M. Mobé, "Nécessité des Associations Indigènes," Voix du Congolais no. 33 (October 1948); A.-M. Mobé, "Du rôle véritable des Associations d'Evoluants," Voix du Congolais no. 88 (July 1953).

**<sup>30</sup>** Ibid., 470.

The rhetoric of self-perfecting was also to be found in the *Croix du Congo*, in which one contributor related how he had summed up the point of association meetings to an individual known for griping about these institutions: "To make complete human beings of its members: that is their ideal."<sup>31</sup>

The associations thus gave educated *évolués* the opportunity to cultivate an elite self-image. This, however, provoked criticism, as European observers saw it as confirmation of their fears that the elite was sealing itself off socially as a "caste." In the Voix du Congolais, editor-in-chief Antoine-Roger Bolamba assailed the tendency of many "intellectuals" and "office workers" to refuse membership in their associations to ordinary labourers.<sup>32</sup> Bolamba warned these individuals "not to become the core of a pretentious Congolese elite and the living cells of a nascent caste."<sup>33</sup> It is in fact possible to observe in the Belgian Congo the dynamics typical of bourgeois associations in nineteenth-century Europe and other parts of the world, that is, the tendency to operate on an egalitarian basis internally and an elite basis externally.<sup>34</sup> This orientation, however, ran counter to a colonial elite-making policy that aimed to create a national elite across social boundaries, one that was supposed to simultaneously stimulate the development of the uneducated masses: "The elites belong to the nation. It is their obligation to advance the social body in its entirety,"35 as Jean-Marie Domont, patron of the *Voix du Congolais*, wrote to programmatic effect in his book *Élite noire*.

We can gain a fairly precise picture of the associations' concrete activities with the help of association news published in the press. In November 1945, the *Voix du Congolais* established a special section running to several pages that carried reports on association meetings, elections, newly established groups, changes of personnel and programmes. In those cases, in which the secretary or president was not responsible for these reports, an association member was appointed press officer. In the 10 years between October 1945 and October 1955, the *Voix du Congolais* published a total of 550 such reports.<sup>36</sup>

These reports provided information on celebrations, sports events and excursions to other cities. They mirrored an association life dominated by talks given by individual members and locally resident Europeans or even colonial officials and *évolué* representatives who were passing through a given locality. These talks were often published in abbreviated form in the elite periodicals.

<sup>31</sup> P. Mbaya, "Fréquentez votre cercle culturel," Croix du Congo (13 July 1952).

<sup>32</sup> Bolamba, "Les cercles des évolués," 719.

**<sup>33</sup>** Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Hoffmann, Geselligkeit, 43.

<sup>35</sup> Domont, Élite noire, 25.

<sup>36</sup> This figure is based on my own quantitative evaluation of the Voix du Congolais.

Thematically they ranged from customs, technological innovations and specialist professional knowledge to personal travel reports, news on colonial development projects and enacted ordinances. These talks not only reflected the spectrum of topics familiar from articles in the  $\acute{e}volu\acute{e}$  media, but also operated within similar limits of the sayable.

Judging by the reports in the newspapers, the associations were the scene of criticism of members' immediate living conditions only if this was legitimized by the rhetoric of colonial reform. They were not platforms for charged discussions of political topics or the pursuit of decolonization in other African countries, or at least nothing of this sort made it to the outside world. If members brought up awkward topics at an association, having been influenced, for example, by perusing newspapers aimed at European readers, the governor general's advice was to discuss "articles containing false ideas" in the clubhouse and to "put them right" ideologically.37 To ensure control of content, shortly after the war the General Government began to send ready-made topics and talks to associations throughout the colony via the administrative offices.<sup>38</sup> In a letter to the provincial governors, the vice-governor general of the Belgian Congo not only explained the desired approach to talks, but also their indoctrinating purpose for listeners. With its programmatic thrust and paternalistic tone, the letter gives a good impression of how colonial politicians regarded the évolué associations:

The talks should be followed, logically enough, by a discussion led by the speaker. This method allows one to put right many of the false ideas prevalent among the *évolués*. The talks also help liberate the blacks from their intellectual poverty, the fate of all those who attended school a number of years ago. In a general sense they impart to the speakers a desire to read. Libraries should be established in the near future where they can obtain books that provide them with an opportunity for further education and meaningful diversion.<sup>39</sup>

As the colonial government saw it, the associations were sites of the ideological and moral education of Congolese school leavers. The colonial administration tried to steer the development of the associations through various decrees.<sup>40</sup> Prior to its foundation, every association had to write to the district commissioner requesting official permission to proceed. In addition to his powers of author-

<sup>37</sup> Letter from General Government to the colonial minister, 4 September 1947, AA/GG/8693.

<sup>38</sup> From 1946 on, entire series of such texts were sent out in single batches; AA/GG/10384.

<sup>39</sup> Letter from the General Government to the colonial minister, 4 September 1947, AA/GG/8693.

**<sup>40</sup>** Decrees of 11 February 1926, 25 August 1937 and 14 January 1941. See Verhaegen, *L'Association des Évolués*. 9.

ization, the district commissioner also had the right to have the associations monitored by the territorial administrators; in special cases the provincial governors could also bring in the *Service de sûreté*. In general, the territorial officials were to instruct the associations to provide them with the minutes of all meetings and inform them of the location of their clubhouse as well as changes in the constitution and in the composition of their committee, information the official would then submit to the district commissioner. Significantly, the colonial administration could dissolve associations, temporarily or permanently, and this it could do at its own discretion or, to cite the euphemistic language of the law, if associations "are acting contrary to civilization or represent a threat to public order."

Exercising the right of control involved a tremendous administrative effort, featuring regular correspondence between associations and colonial officials. After every committee election, the associations were required to disclose private information about the office-holders, such as their names, background, address and occupation, which were then checked against police records in the districts' administrative offices.<sup>44</sup> Particularly if those occupying the influential post of president had a criminal record or were considered seditious and "hostile," which was all it took for them to be designated a "communist," the colonial authorities raised objections or had the association's activities closely monitored.<sup>47</sup>

**<sup>41</sup>** On the Belgian security service, which began to operate, mainly in urban Congo, in 1947, see J. Brassinne and F. Vandewalle, *Les rapports secrèts de la sûreté congolaise* (Brussels: Éditions Art et Voyages, 1973); A. Lauro, "Suspect Cities and the (Re)Making of Colonial Order: Urbanisation, Security Anxieties and Police Reforms in Postwar Congo (1945–1960)," in *Policing New Risks in Modern European History*, eds. J. Campion and X. Rousseaux (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016). On the example of Burundi, see C. Deslaurier, "Du nouveau pour l'histoire politique au Burundi à la veille de l'indépendance. La documentation secrète de la Sûreté (1958–1961)," *Cahiers du CRA* 9 (1998).

**<sup>42</sup>** As envisaged by the decree of 11 February 1926; circular from Jean Cordy, *chef de la population noire* in Moyen Congo district, to the association presidents, 28 June 1954, AA/GG/20171.

**<sup>43</sup>** L. Strouvens and P. Piron, *Codes et lois du Congo belge* (Léopoldville: Édition des Codes et Lois du Congo Belge, 1948), 561.

**<sup>44</sup>** Circular from Jean Cordy, *chef de la population noire* in Moyen Congo district, to the association presidents, 28 June 1954, AA/GG/20171.

**<sup>45</sup>** Letter from the district commissioner of Tshuapa to the territorial administrators, 27 August 1947, AA/GG/8693.

**<sup>46</sup>** Letter from the provincial governor in Bukavu to the *Service de la sûreté*, 7 June 1953, AA/GG/ 18682.

**<sup>47</sup>** This occurred following the committee elections of the newly established *Fédération des Cercles du Costermansville*; ibid.

In the case of Léopoldville, we have clear evidence that the associations did not always comply with their duty of disclosure and that at times colonial officials neglected their monitoring role. When Jean Cordy, newly appointed head of the Service de la Population Noire in Léopoldville, requested a situation report on the associational landscape in the capital, 48 it emerged that the list of Congolese associations had not been fully updated since 1947. The reason for this review was that in the spring of 1953, the Colonial Ministry, under the leadership of the Parti Libéral, had informed the General Government about a new aspect of the promotion of associations. From now on, urban dwellers in particular were to be encouraged to establish so-called mutualités, whose members saved collectively so they could provide mutual support in times of hardship. Here Brussels made reference to the likelembe savings associations already established in the cities. Likelembe formed the basis for the establishment of many of the so-called "ethnic associations," which chiefly brought together people from the same region of origin and linguistic group for purposes of mutual support. The propagation and simultaneous privatization of systems of social security, of which the savings associations too formed part, were a hallmark of developmental colonialism in Africa. Belgium thus availed itself of measures to which Great Britain and France were resorting at the same time in their African colonies.<sup>50</sup> In any case, Cordy's internal report came to an alarming conclusion: "The lack of monitoring also means a lack of moral support. [...] These days I find associations completely lacking in organization, records and activity."51 After publishing its report, the colonial administration mandated "authorized indigenous associations" to comply within three months with their duty to disclose any changes to the territorial administrator.<sup>52</sup> The membership figures, committee composition, treasury and savings books of all associations were examined and those associations existing only on paper and no longer holding meetings were dissolved.

These attempts to gain an overview of association activities revealed to the colonial administration the shortcomings of association policy and demonstrate that it repeatedly lost control of association activities. The authorities' efforts are

<sup>48</sup> Letter from the General Government to the governor of Léopoldville province, 16 May 1953, AA/GG/16543.

<sup>49</sup> Verhaegen, "Les associations congolaises," 391.

<sup>50</sup> See Eckert, "Wohlfahrtsmix," 104-109.

<sup>51</sup> Report on the associational landscape by assistant to the territorial administrator in Léopoldville to head of the Service de la population noire, 5 August 1953, AA/GG/20171.

<sup>52</sup> Letter from assistant to the territorial administrator in Léopoldville to head of the Service de la population noire, 19 August 1953, AA/GG/19596.

paradigmatic of the growing gulf between the colonial state's aspiration to control Congolese sociability and its capacity to do so, a gulf opened up by an associational landscape that had begun to thrive as the years passed by.

I would like to provide a provisional summary at this point. First, the associations and the press formed two mainstays of a colonial public sphere through which the colonial state sought to maintain its control of Congolese elite formation. The colonial authorities were eager to ensure that no printed or spoken material should make it into the *évolués*' public sphere in unfiltered form. The periodicals and associations of the elite, moreover, were closely intertwined. Typically, authors were simultaneously associational activists. The associations sent reports to the press, which in turn despatched articles to the associations as a basis for discussion.<sup>53</sup> European administrators and advisers in the press presided over the state-sponsored associations as patrons. But what this public sphere created was by no means only a space that enabled the authorities to control the elite. Despite everything, for the latter the public sphere also amounted to an increasingly translocal space of encounters and possibilities.

Second, the association was a privileged zone of contact between Europeans and Congolese. Europeans' prescribed patronage of associations entailed the institutionalization of encounters between colonizers and colonized, which otherwise occurred only in the workplace within a highly hierarchical framework. Nonetheless, for the most part dialogue within the association continued to be one between teachers and students. While carrying out research in Stanleyville in 1952, French urban sociologist Pierre Clément was surprised by the lack of friendships between Europeans and members of the AES. He himself recruited his personal research assistant from an *évolué* association, an individual with whom he remained in contact for years and whose career he supported: Patrice Lumumba.<sup>54</sup> It was guest visits of this kind, whether by representatives of the colonial administration, other European residents or those passing through, that made it easier for association members to make acquaintances and network beyond their quotidian horizons.

Third, for the Congolese elite associational sociability was a social means of cultural bourgeoisification: much as in the global bourgeois associational culture of the late nineteenth-century, associations offered their members a place for further education and self-perfection.<sup>55</sup> Association meetings, with their pro-

**<sup>53</sup>** The General Government in particular sent articles to the state-sponsored associations. But there was also an exchange between the associations and periodicals run by missionaries.

**<sup>54</sup>** P. Clément wrote an obituary of Lumumba in which he described the course of their friendship: P. Clément, "Patrice Lumumba (Stanleyville 1952–1953)," *Présence Africaine* no. 40, 1962. **55** Hoffmann, *Geselligkeit und Demokratie*, 17 and 38.

gramme of talks, facilitated discussion of social and cultural issues. It was above all those Congolese who were eager to ascend within colonial structures that found in the associations an excellent platform to present themselves to the colonial administrators as loyal and in a way that elite discourse regarded as civilized. The intellectual activities involved required a certain degree of cultural capital as well as augmenting this capital, which served in significant part as a means of colonial distinction vis-à-vis the majority of society. Association office holders in particular entered into direct dialogue with their European advisers, who were often the local representatives of the colonial administration.<sup>56</sup>

Fourth, the associations provided a meeting place for educated Congolese who resided in localities scattered throughout the colonial territory but had made a name for themselves through their journalistic work. Authors and readers got to know one another by attending association meetings. If at all, it was there that members of the imagined community of the évolués could meet. That it was not only those who already knew one another because they had attended the same school that forged relationships is evident in the friendship between Antoine-Roger Bolamba, editor-in-chief of the Voix du Congolais, and Antoine-Marie Mobé, the diligent reporter and some-time president of the AES. They first became aware of each other due to their authorial activities for the same publications. When Bolamba stopped off in Stanleyville while travelling through several provinces in 1948, they got to know each other in person and subsequently kept in touch.<sup>57</sup> In 1949, the Voix du Congolais published a photograph of a meeting in Stanleyville showing the pair together with their wives and children. To this day Mobé's eldest son recalls how his father would always pay a visit to Bolamba during his stays in Léopoldville.58 Their example also demonstrates that friendships between representatives of the Congolese elite could function as support networks. For Mobé's career path, his link with the influential editor-in-chief from Léopoldville paid dividends. Mobé held a senior position in Stanleyville as an officer worker at the postal service. When his request for transfer to the General Government in Léopoldville was turned down,<sup>59</sup> Bolamba pulled some strings, so that in 1953 Mobé at least obtained a post in the provin-

<sup>56</sup> That the intermediaries used the room for manoeuvre they were provided with is emphasized in several studies, such as A. Eckert, "Cultural Commuters: African Employees in Late Colonial Tanzania," in Intermediaries, Interpreters, and Clerks. African Employees in the Making of Colonial Africa, eds. B. Lawrance et al. (Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 2006).

<sup>57</sup> A.-R. Bolamba, "Impressions de voyage," Voix du Congolais no. 47 (February 1950): 99 – 101.

<sup>58</sup> Interview with Jean de la Croix Mobé, Kinshasa, 31 August 2010.

<sup>59</sup> Letter from the secretary general of the General Government to Mobé, 24 March 1953, private archive Antoine-Marie Mobé.

cial administration of his home region. Working for the provincial governor's *Direction des Affaires Indigènes*, henceforth Mobé saw to the sales and distribution, as well as the finances, of the *Mbandaka* journal, which sought to attract the province's *évolués* readers. <sup>60</sup> In a letter, Bolamba assured Mobé of his ongoing support. <sup>61</sup> Occasional friendly turns appear to have strengthened their ties; this at least is one interpretation of Bolamba's remark: "Your friend still hasn't given my wife the pillowcase." <sup>62</sup> A job in exchange for bed linen: this appears to be a manifestation of the friendly, symbolic bartering between two leading representatives of the elite public sphere.

Fifth, the colonial state provided the Congolese elite with a public sphere in the shape of media and associations in order to furnish itself with instruments of control. It is, however, reasonable to doubt whether we should even refer to a public sphere in the singular. The cultural and social practice of associational sociability created situational spaces of encounter and exchange spread across the entire colonial territory. Rather than homogenization, associations in the Belgian Congo triggered a process of differentiation, generating several public spheres rather than just one. Through late colonial "social engineering," the authorities attempted to standardize the vernacular elite ideologically and culturally in the crucible of the associations, but they faced one major obstacle: the cultural, confessional, linguistic and ethnic heterogeneity of a territory the size of Western Europe. The associations brought together all locally resident évolués, or at least aspired to. Long-time residents thus encountered Congolese from other parts of the territory whose work had caused them to move. Affiliation to the imagined community of the évolués could create new forms of social affinity and overarch the manifold forms of identity on offer. The évolués' associational sociability, however, did not necessarily always produce social cohesion, but also division and exclusion. Rather than overcoming them, the associations accentuated the social order, based on colonial distinction.

**<sup>60</sup>** Correspondence between Antoine-Roger Bolamba and the governor of Équateur province, 8 April 1953 and 23 April 1953, private archive Antoine-Marie Mobé.

<sup>61</sup> Letter from Bolamba to Mobé, 27 April 1953, private archive Antoine-Marie Mobé.

**<sup>62</sup>** Ibid.

## Cohesion and dissociation among missionary school graduates

A significant role model for the évolué associations were the missions' postschool institutions. The so-called "alumni associations" 63 were the first official Congolese clubs to clothe themselves in the garb of Europe's associational culture. These alumni associations served as an extension of the mission schools and their programme of evangelization; they constituted a key strategic element in the missions' efforts to ensure that their graduates remained permanently committed to a pious and moral way of life.

But the launch of the colonial state's association policy in 1945 did not spell the end of the alumni associations. In fact, the increasing numbers of pupils enrolled in schools and school leavers actually caused their membership to grow.<sup>64</sup> These are superficial figures, however, given that this intake was brought about by the principle of compulsory membership. It is true that every school leaver was automatically admitted, but not everyone participated actively in association activities. Further, many individuals were also members of other associations. Nonetheless, as a rule, all those who were designated évolués also enjoyed the status of alumni. It is crucial to adopt a differentiating perspective on the mission schools and their associations. The alumni associations were organized into umbrella bodies mirroring the numerous missionary orders; there were also branches throughout the colony in the various districts, urban settlements and even different urban subdivisions. Likewise, every individual mission school and even some school-leaving cohorts had their post-school counterparts.<sup>65</sup>

The configuration of the alumni associations ultimately reflected the relative strength of the missionary orders active in the Belgian Congo. There were eighteen umbrella associations linked with these orders, most of which, however, brought together just a small number of former pupils, such as Anepejos, affiliated with the Capuchin Fathers, *Unelma*, associated with the Marist Brothers of

<sup>63</sup> For a general account, see Verhaegen, "Les Associations congolaises," 413-416.

<sup>64</sup> In 1934, 350,000 children attended primary school in the Belgian Congo; by 1946 this had climbed to 897,969, and in 1953 the figure was 1,065,688; Brausch, Belgian Administration, 10; Stengers, Congo, 205. The increase in the number of pupils in Léopoldville is evinced, for example, by statistics for the 1951–1958 period; KADOC/Z/III/d/2/7.

<sup>65</sup> This applied, for example, to the first cohort to graduate from the Scheut mission school of St. Joseph in Léopoldville. The class of 1949 called themselves Asceneuf and maintained an interpersonal network for a number of decades; C. A. Mwissa-Camus, L'héritage Tata Raphael. 1911 - 2011. Un siècle d'histoire à Kinshasa avec les pères de Scheut (Kinshasa 2011), 81 - 84; interview with André Matingu, Kinshasa, 7 September 2010.

the Schools and *Les anciens élèves des pères Jésuites*, which, for example, ran two branches.<sup>66</sup> It goes without saying that the two religious orders with the greatest number of graduates also established the largest and most influential umbrella organizations. These were the *Association des anciens élèves des pères de Scheut* (ADAPES) and the *Association des anciens élèves des Frères* (ASSANEF), mentioned earlier in connection with the elite periodicals.

When the colonial state launched its programmes to support associations in 1945, the ADAPES had already existed for 20 years.<sup>67</sup> Its constitution identified the association's objective as achieving "the total wellbeing of its members: their material and moral wellbeing as well as their development as human beings and Christians."<sup>68</sup> The *Adapesiens* were more than a religious society, for this post-school group was intended to raise its members socially, materially and in terms of their character. In accord with the ideology of Catholic Action, school leavers functioned as a social role model, through a way of life informed by Christian morality, for example.

This umbrella body's premises were in Léopoldville; it was established by Raphael de la Kethulle de Ryhove in 1925. The ADAPES was thus one of the many recreational establishments founded by the ever-busy Belgian missionary of noble descent for the urban Congolese population.<sup>69</sup> The strong presence of the ADAPES in the capital was due to the fact that the Scheutists were in charge of the diocese of Léopoldville and the graduates of their secondary schools found more employment opportunities there, in the administrative system, than anywhere else. Reports from 1944 and 1952 referred to a total of 10,000 former Scheut pupils resident in Léopoldville, comprising two-thirds of *Adapesiens* 

<sup>66</sup> Verhaegen, "Les associations congolaises," 413.

**<sup>67</sup>** The roots of ADAPES lie in Léopoldville. There, seven years after the establishment of the St. Joseph school, an alumni association called the *Association des anciens élèves de l'institut Saint-Joseph à Kinshasa* was founded. The change of name to the *Association des anciens élèves des pères de Scheut* highlights the association's extension to graduates of other schools run by Scheut missionaries; C. Tshimanga, "L'ADAPES et la formation d'une élite au Congo (1925 – 1945)," in *Itinéraires croisés de la modernité Congo belge (1920 – 1950)*, ed. J.-L. Vellut (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2001), 196.

<sup>68</sup> Constitution of ADAPES, 1945, KADOC/P/II/a/4/14/4.

**<sup>69</sup>** On the biography of de la Kethulle, who worked in the Belgian Congo as a missionary from 1917 on, see M. Storme and P. Dephoperé, "Raphael de la Kethulle de Ryhove," in *Biographie Belge d'Outre-Mer*, vol. 6, ed. Académie Royale des Sciences d'Outre-Mer (Brussels: Librairie Falk fils, 1968).

in the colony, of which, however, just 500 or so played an active part in association life and paid their membership fees.<sup>70</sup>

Places on the ADAPES committee were much sought-after and were occupied by individuals of importance in the elite's public sphere. In 1944, for example, Paul Lomami-Tshibamba, whose article had kicked off the post-war debate on *évolué* status, held the office of secretary in Léopoldville.<sup>71</sup> In 1952, Patrice Lumumba and Antoine-Marie Mobé established a branch of the ADAPES in Stanley-ville and assumed the offices of president and vice-president.<sup>72</sup> That Lumumba sought to found this association despite the fact that he had not attended a Scheut school highlights the advantages entailed in admittance to the network of alumni.<sup>73</sup> Holding a high office at the ADAPES promised prestige: apart from anything else, office-holders were central to the reports produced by a diverse range of newspapers, which published photographs and the minutes of meetings.

As mentioned earlier, the ADAPES was part of the Scheut missions' Catholic Action, along with the *Croix du Congo* newspaper. It was thus affiliated with a publication that was primed to carry reports on association activities. For alumni outside the capital, meanwhile, this newspaper was the only translocal medium of informational exchange. The association leaders thus had great expectations of the publication. These were reflected, for example, in letters of complaint from the ADAPES secretaries to the highest authority of the Scheut missionary order, in which they vented their occasional dismay at the abridged publication of minutes.<sup>74</sup>

ADAPES meetings were an intermittent occurrence and typically featured talks and discussions. The committee, elected annually on Easter Sunday, met once a month. The annual celebrations, meanwhile, always took place in a church building in Léopoldville, on the first Sunday after the Catholic feast day of the association's patron saint, Saint Joseph.<sup>75</sup> They began with an early-

**<sup>70</sup>** Letter from Paul Lomami-Tshibamba to *Révérend Père Supérieur*, 11 January 1944, KADOC/P/ II/a/4/14/4; reports on the Scheut missions' extramural and post-school activities, 1952, KADOC/ Z/III/d/2/7.

<sup>71</sup> Letter from Paul Lomami-Tshibamba to *Révérend Père Supérieur*, 11 January 1944, KADOC/P/ II/a/4/4/4.

**<sup>72</sup>** P. Lumumba, "Activité des cercles, Stanleyville," *Voix du Congolais* no. 71 (February 1952): 110.

<sup>73</sup> Mutamba-Makombo, Patrice Lumumba, 38.

<sup>74</sup> Letter from Paul Lomami-Tshibamba to *Révérend Père Supérieur*, 11 January 1944, KADOC/P/II/a/4/14.

**<sup>75</sup>** Constitution of ADAPES, 1945, KADOC/P/II/a/4/14/4; interview with André Matingu, Kinshasa, 7 September 2010.

morning mass, at which the alumni, together with the pupils, formed the choir. In the afternoon there followed a convivial party and a shared dinner, to which members and their families as well as religious dignitaries and representatives of the colonial administration were invited. Songs, speeches and Catholic rituals were the order of the day. The annual celebrations orchestrated a community of equals and a "cordial atmosphere."

The ADAPES was an extramural locus of colonial subject formation in the spirit of Catholic Action. Association president Jean Bolikango, who had taught at St. Joseph's School since 1926,<sup>77</sup> thus used the 1952 celebration to promote the ideal of the association member: "A true *Adapessien* is someone who takes up every invitation to a meeting. He is reliable, paying the required membership fees on time. [...] He is patriotic, civic-minded and sets a good example wherever possible." It was an ideal that, in addition to religiosity and the habit of paying one's fees promptly, chiefly demanded worldly virtues of members.

The second major umbrella organization of former mission school pupils was the ASSANEF. It was founded in 1929, also in Léopoldville, and brought together all the associations for graduates of the schools run by the *Frères des écoles chrétiennes* missionary order. This order had already taken charge of the *Colonie Scolaire* in Boma in 1909, the boarding school for Congolese children whose curriculum was tailored to the needs of the colonial state and that had previously been run by Scheut missionaries. In 1916, the *Frères* established a division within the *Colonie Scolaire* dedicated to the training of "prospective office assistants." The renown of the *Assanefiens* was chiefly based on the function of these establishments as official elite training centres for public servants, who

**<sup>76</sup>** To quote a 1952 report on the annual celebration. See A. Ngwenza, "En marge de la fête anuelle de l'ADAPES," *Croix du Congo*, 8 June 1952.

<sup>77</sup> Mwissa-Camus, *L'héritage*, 73–77. Bolikango held the presidency of the association from 1942; F. Bontinck, "Les missions catholiques à Léopoldville durant la seconde guerre mondiale," in *Le Congo belge durant la seconde guerre mondiale*, ed. Académie royale (Brussels: 1983), 411. **78** J. Bolikango, "Qu'est-ce qu'un Adapessiens," *Croix du Congo* (8 June 1952).

**<sup>79</sup>** The colonial administration initially registered the association in 1933 under the name *Union-Léo Kinoise*; letter from association president Louis Diantama to the district commissioner in Léopoldville, 9 May 1956, ASSANEF archive. The ASSANEF's constitution reveals the various groups included within it when it was founded in 1932: a theatre group, a savings association, sports teams and a brass band; constitution of ASSANEF, 1932, KADOC/P/II/a/4/14/11.

**<sup>80</sup>** Manuscript for a special broadcast on *Radio Congo Belge* in Léopoldville marking the feast day of St. Jean Baptiste de la Salle, 13 October 1950, ASSANEF archive. In 1930, a branch of this official training centre for employment in the colonial state was established in Coquilhatville in the shape of the *Groupe Scolaire*.

were educated for auxiliary roles within the colonial administration.81 But by 1910 the missionary order had founded an école professionnelle in Kintambo near Léopoldville that also taught skilled trades. Ten additional schools had been established by 1956, mainly in Équateur and Bas Congo provinces.82

Much as with the ADAPES, for all these educational establishments there were ASSANEF subgroups.<sup>83</sup> The two umbrella organizations also resembled one another in their aims and ideological agenda: the ASSANEF too was committed to strengthening the fraternal ties among former pupils, fostering a Catholic outlook on life and encouraging self-perfection as well as the assumption of social responsibility.84

This alumni association grew naturally in line with the increasing number of school leavers. In 1934 the ASSANEF had 1,560 members,85 climbing to no less than 30,000 by 1950. 3,000 of the latter lived in Léopoldville, of which 178 worked as office assistants for the General Government and another 300 were employed by the provincial administration.86 It is no coincidence that some of them represented the core workforce of the Voix du Congolais, published by the General Government. In the shape of Antoine-Roger Bolamba and Michel Colin, for example, all the editors-in-chief in the history of the newspaper were former pupils of the Colonie Scolaire in Boma. The association committee featured representatives of the Congolese elite who had been exemplary employees of the colonial administration: Antoine-Roger Bolamba was an active member and also vice-president from 1956.87 Naturally, the Voix du Congolais also reported on ASSANEF activities and meetings. Furthermore, from 1929 on, the aforementioned periodical Signum Fidei served as a medium of exchange and

<sup>81</sup> Interview with Jean Masitu, Kinshasa, 6 September 2010; interview with Jean Casimir Pukuta, Kinshasa, 26 August 2010.

<sup>82</sup> Manuscript for a special broadcast on Radio Congo Belge in Léopoldville marking the feast day of St. Jean Baptiste de la Salle, 13 October 1950, ASSANEF archive.

<sup>83</sup> J.-H. Bumba Mwaka, "Les strategies de communication au sein de l'association des anciens élèves des frères des écoles chrétiennes, ASSANEF" (CIPED Lukunga/Kinshasa, Kinshasa 2009), 6. By 1927 there was an alumni association for school leavers from Léopold II province with 162 members; F. M., "Les oeuvres post-scolaires de Léo II," Signum Fidei, August-September 1936, 254-256.

<sup>84</sup> Letter from association president Louis Diantama to the district commissioner in Léopoldville, 9 May 1956, ASSANEF archive.

<sup>85</sup> Signum Fidei, December 1934.

<sup>86</sup> Manuscript for a special broadcast on Radio Congo Belge in Léopoldville marking the feast day of St. Jean Baptiste de la Salle, 13 October 1950, ASSANEF archive.

<sup>87</sup> As revealed by a list showing the association chairmen in the Congolese section of ASSA-NEF: letter from association president Louis Diantama to the district commissioner in Léopoldville, 9 May 1956, ASSANEF archive.

community formation for alumni. It enjoyed wide circulation in Léopoldville in particular and had around 400 subscribers in 1945, rising to 3,000 by 1954.<sup>88</sup>

The year 1954 saw several milestones in the association's history. First, King Baudouin awarded ASSANEF the honorary status of Association Royale.89 Second, a clubhouse was opened in Léopoldville, with a grand inauguration ceremony in late October 1954. Henceforth, the so-called Home ASSANEF was one of the largest recreational facilities in the Congolese quarter. It accommodated a hall with seating for a thousand people, a stage and film projectors, a restaurant, conference room, library and bar. 90 No other Congolese association in the colony had such impressive premises, which had been constructed to the design of a Belgian architect with the aid of a broad network of supporters. The colonial administration had granted favourable purchase conditions, while the building costs were covered by donations from European and Congolese members, who were awarded honorary membership if they contributed 1,000 francs or more.91 Even the Vatican subsidized the building project to the tune of 100,000 Belgian francs.<sup>92</sup> In addition to association members and representatives of the missionary order, the opening ceremony, which began with an early morning mass according to Catholic protocol, was attended by many worldly guests as well. The governor general sent an envoy, and the provincial governor was also in attendance.93 Henceforth, the building was the scene of regular cultural evenings, association meetings and series of talks. 94 The Home ASSA-NEF clubhouse was an expression in stone of the privileged relationship between the Frères des écoles chrétiennes and the colonial state.

Members of ADAPES noted with envy the construction of the clubhouse and the publication of a bespoke periodical. In October 1951, its president Jean Boli-

<sup>88</sup> For these figures, see M. Colin, "Noces d'or," *Voix du Congolais* no. 95 (February 1954): 146; Bontinck, "Les missions," 411.

<sup>89 &</sup>quot;A l'Assanef," Voix du Congolais no. 106 (January 1955): 188.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid., 183-185.

<sup>91</sup> Interview with Jean Masitu, Kinshasa, 6 September 2010.

<sup>92 &</sup>quot;A l'Assanef," Voix du Congolais no. 106 (January 1955): 183-185.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

<sup>94</sup> Under the rule of Joseph-Désiré Mobutu, in the late 1960s the Home ASSANEF served as a prison and hosted show trials of members of the student movement critical of the regime. On the Congolese student movement, see P. Monaville, "Decolonizing the University. Postal Politics, the Student Movement, and Global 1968 in the Congo" (PhD diss., University of Michigan, Michigan, 2013). In 2006, the building came back into the possession of ASSANEF, which is still active to this day, and is being renovated; see Toulier, *Kinshasa*, 93.



Fig. 10: Annual ASSANEF celebration in the Home building, 1951. Paul Bolya is giving a talk. The front row includes Gustave Sand, head of the AIMO (second from left), Governor General Eugène Jungers (fifth from left) and Georges Six, apostolic vicar of Léopoldville (seventh from left).

kango sent a letter to Georges Six, apostolic vicar of Léopoldville,<sup>95</sup> requesting financial support for the building of an ADAPES clubhouse. He justified his request with reference to the large number of members in the capital and the current plans for the Home ASSANEF.<sup>96</sup> The association president was also keen for ADAPES to have its own periodical as a counterpart to ASSANEF's *Signum Fidei*. He pointed out that the *Croix du Congo*, with its general aspirations, could not advance ADAPES's specific interests. Bolikango reinforced his request for a publication of this kind by describing the press as a modern-day vehicle of the apostolate: "If Saint Paul returned to earth, he would be a journalist."

His wishes fell on deaf ears, however. Instead, the *Croix du Congo* relaunched the association news section in April 1952, with "The ADAPES Page"

**<sup>95</sup>** In the Roman Catholic church an apostolic vicariate is an organizational unit preceding the creation of a diocese. See F. Kalde, "Diözesane und quasidiözesane Teilkirchen," in *Handbuch des katholischen Kirchenrechts*, eds. J. Listl and H. Schmitz (Regensburg: Friedrich Pustet, 1999) 423

<sup>96</sup> Letter from Bolikango to Monseigneur Six, 6 October 1951, KADOC/P/II/a/4/14.

**<sup>97</sup>** Ibid.

reporting monthly on the Scheut mission schools' alumni associations. The association committee, which provided most of the material for this section, intended it to arouse members' enthusiasm, encourage them to get involved and generate more publicity for the association.<sup>98</sup>

The rivalry between the two largest Catholic alumni associations exemplifies the splintering of the *évolués* as a social group.  $^{99}$  It was not just unequal privileges but also associational sociability that positively fostered these divisions. Anyone today who talks to former and still active members of the two associations will be left in no doubt about the rivalry between ADAPES and ASSANEF. At the symbolic level, the association members were fighting out a battle for supremacy – and nowhere did it find clearer expression than on the football pitches of Léopoldville.  $^{100}$ 

Football had grown in popularity in the Belgian Congo from the 1920s onwards and, like other sports, was supported by the colonial state and missions. Physical training through sport was part of the civilizing mission and, with its emphasis on fair play, was not only meant to aid the bodily improvement of Congolese but also help edify their character. From 1919 on, the *Association Royale Sportive Congolaise Indigène* (ARSC) provided an overarching framework for organized club sports in Léopoldville. Raphael de la Kethulle of the Scheut missionary order was one of the founding fathers of this umbrella organization and long held the post of president. In 1924, the ARSC began to organize citywide football championships and grew to encompass six leagues, comprised of a total of fifty to sixty teams, whose matches attracted between 3,000 and 15,000

<sup>98</sup> Ngwenza, "En marge."

**<sup>99</sup>** This discord was apparently due in part to personal frictions between Raphael de la Kethulle and Frère Mathieu, the heads of the two alumni organizations; interview with André Matingu, Kinshasa, 7 September 2010.

<sup>100</sup> I was made aware of this state of affairs by two interviewees from among the ranks of the ADAPESSIENS – Mwissa Camus, who worked as a journalist in the 1950s for the *Courrier d'Afrique, Echo Sports* and *Croix du Congo*, and André Matingu, who also wrote for the *Courrier d'Afrique*. Among other things, both gave accounts of football in Léopoldville; interview with Camille Auguste Mwissa-Camus, Kinshasa, 24 August 2010; interview with André Matingu, Kinshasa, 7 September 2010.

**<sup>101</sup>** On the history of football in colonial Africa, see P. Alegi, *African Soccerscapes: How a Continent Changes the World's Game* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2010). On the case of Senegal, see S. Baller, *Spielfelder der Stadt. Fußball und Jugendpolitik im Senegal seit 1950* (Cologne: Böhlau, 2010). An account of football in the Belgian Congo is provided by B. Van Peel, "Débuts du football congolais," in *Itinéraires croisés de la modernité Congo belge (1920 – 1950)*, ed. J.-L. Vellut (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2001).

<sup>102</sup> Ibid. Sport served the same purpose in Tanganyika; see Eckert, Herrschen, 76.

<sup>103</sup> Alegi, African Soccerscapes, 24.

spectators.<sup>104</sup> The premier league in particular drew widespread interest within urban society and the media.<sup>105</sup> The various football teams were closely associated with missionary orders, firms and even the armed forces, recruiting players from all of them.<sup>106</sup> In institutional terms, the two most successful clubs were affiliated with the two large alumni associations: ADAPES was represented by the Daring team and ASSANEF by the Dragons.<sup>107</sup>

Given the rivalry described above, the encounter between these two teams was more than a sporting showdown. The aggressive partisanship and identification, together with the symbolic interactions inherent in the sport of football, transformed this event into a symbolic battle for the status of most successful and prestigious alumni association. The two teams' supporters emphasized the differences between the two rival associations with particular vehemence. It is thus worth scrutinizing this clash with reference to the season of 1952.

Before the season had even begun, the *Croix du Congo* and *Voix du Congolais* tried to calm down the intense feelings that had been building since the match between Daring and Dragons during the last season, which had seen instances of unsportsmanlike behaviour and violent clashes on and off the pitch. The *Croix du Congo* upbraided the fans for their sectarianism and for insulting the opposing team during this match. The *Voix du Congolais* then appealed to the players, association leaders and supporters sportsmanship and common sense. It reminded its readers that sport was a character-building exercise conducive to "moral and spiritual perfecting." Whatever the result, sportsmanlike and thus civilized conduct was appropriate: "In victory and defeat, show yourselves to be sportsmen, *évolués*, and why not civilized men?" 112

**<sup>104</sup>** These figures refer to 1939 and 1952; Association Royale Sportive Congolaise, Léopoldville 1939, 19; reports on extramural and post-school activities of the Scheut missions, 1952, KADOC/Z/III/d/2/7.

<sup>105</sup> Association Royale Sportive Congolaise, 19.

**<sup>106</sup>** Mémoires du Congo et du Ruanda-Urundi, *Tata Raphael. Témoignage de RP Henri de la Kethulle et de RP Joseph Bollen* (Brussels: Université Saint-Louis, 2010).

**<sup>107</sup>** The matches between these teams were major events in Léopoldville. A football match provides the setting for a chapter in a 1959 novel; D. Mutombo, *Victoire de l'amour* (Leverville: Bibliothèque de l'Étoile, 1959), 56–63.

**<sup>108</sup>** For an analysis of symbolic interactions at football matches, see D. Tödt and S. Vosgerau, "Ethnizität und Ethnische Repräsentationen im Fußball. Am Beispiel Türkiyemspor Berlin," in *Aus der Halbdistanz. Fußballbiografien und Fußballkulturen heute*, eds. S. Krankenhagen and B. Schmidt (Münster: Lit, 2007).

<sup>109</sup> B. Arbo, "Au seuil du championnat 1952 de l'ARSC," Croix du Congo (24 February 1952).

<sup>110</sup> M. Colin, "L'allégresse du fair play sportif," Voix du Congolais no. 73 (April 1952): 214-216.

<sup>111</sup> Arbo, "Au seuil."

<sup>112</sup> Colin, "L'allégresse," 216.

The two newspapers then carried reports on a match at the packed Stade Astrid, which Daring won 3-1, with the son of ADAPES president lean Bolikango one of those taking to the field for Daring. On this occasion, however, the reports were quite partisan and testified to the media's institutional proximity to the missionary orders. "Daring overwhelms the Dragons and extends its lead," 113 stated the Croix du Congo, which carried a euphoric report on the course of the match. The report in the Voix du Congolais read very differently: with no mention of the result, the focus was on the fans and the many fouls on the pitch. Special emphasis was placed on the insults directed by Daring fans against students of the école professionelle, who made up much of the Dragon team. "You are workers we don't need."<sup>114</sup> the Daring supporters are said to have shouted. In view of this abuse meted out to ordinary workers, the author underlined that the reaction of the team and its fans had been exemplary: "Fortunately, workers generally show greater dignity and respond in a simple but intelligent way: 'That's nothing to us, but you will always need workers.' This reply, with its common sense, honours them and is proof of their excellent education."115

This was not an isolated incident. Supporters of ADAPES often made fun of certain ASSANEF members' status as tradesmen. As mentioned earlier, the ASSA-NEF milieu in the capital included many individuals in the employ of the colonial administration. Yet the most important educational establishment run by the Frères des écoles chrétiennes in Léopoldville was dedicated to training for the skilled trades. For graduates of the Scheut mission schools, this provided a welcome opportunity for distinction, for the administrative professions were more lucrative and were considered more prestigious. This selective and elitist selfimage of ADAPES members is still mentioned in interviews with contemporary witnesses. As they remember it, the Daring football team was made up of intellectuals, who worked as typists and spoke better French than the Dragons players, who worked as tradesmen. 116 They also refer disdainfully to the ASSANEF's closeness to the colonial state: the Dragons football club, for example, was funded by the General Government, while ADAPES and its founder Raphael de la Kethulle made financial contributions to the Daring team on a voluntary basis.<sup>117</sup> The Dragons' proximity to the colonial state found reflection, not least, in their strip: the players took to the field in the colours of the Belgian tricolour,

<sup>113</sup> Elima, "Daring écrase Dragons et accentue son avance," Croix du Congo (23 March 1952).

<sup>114 &</sup>quot;Chronique de la vie indigène," Voix du Congolais no. 74 (May 1952): 277.

**<sup>115</sup>** Ibid.

<sup>116</sup> Interview with Camille Auguste Mwissa-Camus, Kinshasa, 24 August 2010; interview with André Matingu, Kinshasa, 7 September 2010.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid.

with black trousers and yellow-and-red jerseys, making this connection visible to everyone in the stadium. 118

This detour around the football pitches of Léopoldville was intended to bring out how the communitization of the Congolese elite in the alumni associations could lead both to internal cohesion and the drawing of boundaries. In particular, the parallel infrastructure of the two largest missionary orders fostered social and cultural processes of symbolic distinction. Through schools and associations, sports clubs and periodicals, the missionary orders created two milieus with their own media and social spaces. This drawing of symbolic boundaries within the social formation of the *évolués* was situational and occurred, for example, based on affiliation with certain schools and occupations. The exclusionary effects that are always part and parcel of communitization ran counter to the emergence of a Congolese elite in the alumni associations.

#### Engaged colonial officials and illustrious circles

*Évolué* associations established on the initiative of the colonial state were dependent on the engagement of European administrative officials. What was the nature of the relationship between the associations and the colonial administration? To what extent did the associations in Léopoldville benefit from the fact that European officials in the employ of the General Government, which was based in the city, were supposed to make good on the promises of late colonial development? And what did it mean for associations if Léopoldville, and thus a pro-reform colonial government, was several hundred kilometres away? In other words, what happened when évolués, insisting on change, had to make do with representatives of the colonial administration who took a sceptical view of the state's elite-making efforts and believed the local power structure to be under threat? Two associations, one in Léopoldville and the other in Stanleyville, furnish us with a good basis for a comparison of locally specific associational cultures. Further, these examples of elite associational sociability make it clear that as a group the much propagandized évolués could fissure, not just due to its members' identification with occupational and educational groupings, but just as much in light of regionally and ethnically based distinctions.

In February 1947, the *Voix du Congolais* reported on the establishment of the *Cercle d'Études et d'Agréments* in Léopoldville, initiated by Emmanuel Capelle.<sup>119</sup>

<sup>118</sup> Mwissa-Camus, L'héritage, 48.

<sup>119</sup> See "Activités des cercles d'évolués," Voix du Congolais no. 13 (January-February 1947): 569.

As *Chef de la Population Noire*, Capelle was responsible for the local implementation of elite-making policy.<sup>120</sup> In his aforementioned study of the African quarters he had commended the activities of associations in the capital, which he saw as evidence that Belgian associational culture had taken hold in the colony: "One might think that the blacks had been born in Brussels, so great is their love of associations."<sup>121</sup>

The association initiated by Capelle sought to bring together the "capital's most educated natives." This select group was a showcase for the colonial state's association policy. Anyone wishing to become a member had to demonstrate "impeccable conduct" and submit references from two individuals, who had to be on the association committee or long-standing members. 122 The list of members reads like a "who's who" of the elite Congolese public sphere, whose representatives in Léopoldville occupied senior positions in the colonial working world, but above all in the civil service. The committee was made up almost exclusively of permanent authors of the Voix du Congolais or founding members of the paper. The first association president, Eugène Kabamba, a graduate of the Colonie Scolaire in Boma, had worked for the General Government since 1928 and at the time of the association's foundation he was also president of the AS-SANEF alumni association.<sup>123</sup> Further, in 1947, together with editor-in-chief of the Voix du Congolais, Antoine-Roger Bolamba, Kabamba had taken part in the official meeting with the colonial minister in Léopoldville in order to make the case for the évolués card in the midst of the contentious debate on status reform. Another committee member of the Cercle d'Études et d'Agréments had attended this highly symbolic meeting: Jean-Pierre Dericovard, a former office worker from the vicinity of Stanleyville, who ran a furniture business in the capital and had become involved in the General Government's Service de l'Information pour les Indigènes in 1944. 124 The association's inner circle also included Paul Bolya, one of the few Congolese doctor's assistants and by now himself a trainer at the École assistants médicaux indigènes (AMI) in Léopoldville. 125 Antoine Omari, a book-

**<sup>120</sup>** On his biography, see J. Vanhove, "Capelle," in *Biographie belge d'outre-mer*, vol. 7-A, ed. Académie Royale Science d'Outre-Mer (Brussels: Librairie Falk fils, 1973).

**<sup>121</sup>** Capelle, *La Cité*, 75.

<sup>122 &</sup>quot;Activités des cercles d'évolués," Voix du Congolais no. 13 (January-February 1947): 569.

<sup>123</sup> Lafarge Bembika, Sur les pas, 145-148.

<sup>124</sup> Lafontaine, City Politics, 219.

**<sup>125</sup>** By 1954 there were 90 Congolese doctor's assistants. On Bolya's biography, see J. Sabakinu Kivilu, "Paul-Gabriel Dieudonné Bolya: de l'assistant médical à l'homme politique," in *Les mémoires du Congo. Le temps colonial*, ed. J.-L. Vellut (Gent: Éditions Snoeck, 2005), 236; interview with Césarine Bolya, Kinshasa, 11 August 2010.

keeper at a leading construction firm, assumed the presidency of the association in 1952. As a contributor to the *Voix du Congolais*, he too had expressed vigorous support for legal assimilation; in the debate on the reform of immatriculation, he had written articles critical of the resistance emanating from the European milieu of Katanga province.

In the *Cercle d'Études et d'Agréments*, then, Capelle the colonial administrator brought together not just the capital's intellectual elite, but also some of the key protagonists in the public debate on post-war colonial reforms. In Capelle the association found a pro-reform colonial official who backed the official policy of elite promotion both theoretically and in practical terms. When Congolese members' demands were consonant with the colonial state's developmental promises, they were assured of Capelle's support.

But even if the relationship between association patron and members with respect to elite-making policy resembled that between lawyer and client, it was still a teacher-pupil relationship. Capelle by no means shed the paternalistic attitude so common among Europeans towards their supposed Congolese charges. Association activities, then, were under his direction and oscillated between lectures and programmes of entertainment. 126 There were highbrow talks that flattered members' elitism: in 1947, a territorial administrator gave a series of lectures on sociology; there were presentations by a legal scholar on the European marriage contract and papers on the Belgian ruling house. <sup>127</sup> Capelle often gave talks himself, for example on Europe's technological and industrial development. While European guests discussed the merits of their home countries, the Congolese members presented themselves as experts on their society of origin. Jean Mavuela talked about indigenous customs, Antoine Omari about the wedding traditions of the Bakusu. 128 In addition to these educational evenings, Capelle frequently organized activities intended to maintain association members' morale: a sightseeing flight with the Belgian national airline Sabena, boat trips, theatre shows and film screenings, with the audience made up of high-ranking members of the colonial government, and trips to the zoo. 129 The association en-

**<sup>126</sup>** The association secretary praised Capelle's diversified programme; P. Bolya, "Cercle d'étude et d'agrément," *Voix du Congolais* no. 75 (June 1952): 369.

<sup>127 &</sup>quot;Cercle d'étude et d'agrément," *Voix du Congolais* no. 14 (March-April 1947): 615; "Cercle d'étude et d'agrément," *Voix du Congolais* no. 17 (August 1947): 748; "Cercle d'étude et d'agrément," *Voix du Congolais* no. 19 (October 1947): 823.

**<sup>128</sup>** "Cercle d'étude et d'agrément," *Voix du Congolais* no. 16 (July 1947): 709; "Cercle d'étude et d'agrément," *Voix du Congolais* no. 18 (September 1947): 788.

<sup>129 &</sup>quot;Cercle d'étude et d'agrément," Voix du Congolais no. 16 (July 1947): 709; "Cercle d'étude et d'agrément," Voix du Congolais no. 58 (January 1951): 50; "Cercle d'étude et d'agrément," Voix

abled its members to gain temporary access to places that were usually reserved for Europeans. Nonetheless, the various events were not a neutral, non-political form of amusement. This was a colonial programme of persuasion, which presented influential members with Europe's technological and cultural progress as well as the Belgian Congo's catch-up development thanks to the Ten-Year Plan. These events gave a Congolese elite loyal to the state a foretaste of the colonial world of tomorrow.



Fig. 11: Members of the Cercle d'Études et d'Agréments prior to a sightseeing flight, 1949.

That Emmanuel Capelle's early death in 1953 also spelt the end of the *Cercle d'Études et d'Agréments*<sup>130</sup> brings out his decisive influence on the fate of this association. Nonetheless, other associations continued to bring representatives of the vernacular elite together with European actors in the capital. The latter included staff of the General Government and administrative offices, who readily implemented the directives flowing from colonial reforms, which included a respectful approach to the Congolese elite. It was this milieu that gave rise to the

*du Congolais* no. 19 (October 1947): 823; Bolya, "Cercle," 369 – 371. At one theatre show in the hall of the Stade Astrid, Gustave Sand, Emmanuel Capelle and Jean-Marie Domont were in attendance; "Activité des cercles des élites," *Voix du Congolais* no. 22 (January 1948): 47.

**<sup>130</sup>** Tellingly, the final report by the association appeared in the same issue of the *Voix du Congolais* as the obituary of Capelle; Ephémérides, "Le décès de M. Emmanuel Capelle," *Voix du Congolais* no. 91 (October 1953): 697–698; "Activités des cercles, Léopoldville," *Voix du Congolais* no. 91 (October 1953): 704.

*Groupement Culturel Belgo-Congolais*, founded in Léopoldville in 1950, with which Capelle too was associated, until his death, as an honorary member.<sup>131</sup> Leading members were editor-in-chief of the *Voix du Congolais* Antoine-Roger Bolamba and André Scohy, an employee of the General Government's Information Service.<sup>132</sup> To quote its constitution, the association fostered the

ever closer convergence between Belgians and Congolese at the cultural level. It puts emphasis on collegiality and friendship among its members. On the basis of respect, racial non-discrimination and the foundations of the Belgian colonial tradition, above all else the association brings together writers, journalists, artists, Congolese and Belgians in the Léopoldville region. <sup>133</sup>

Symbolizing Belgian-Congolese convergence, the inaugural meeting took place in one of the poshest restaurants in Léopoldville, located in the Parc de Boek in the unpopulated so-called "neutral zone" between the African and European quarters. <sup>134</sup> This was where the association subsequently held its meetings, featuring sumptuous dinners, to which twenty-nine Europeans and twenty-nine Congolese were invited. Press releases underlined that they sat at the same table. <sup>135</sup> In addition to shared meals and discussion meetings, the *Groupement Culturel Belgo-Congolais* launched publicity-generating initiatives. For example, in the presence of colonial notables the association members rededicated the Manneken Pis statue, which stood in the Parc de Boek as a replica of the well-

**<sup>131</sup>** Capelle was heavily involved in the association in its early days. In his role as head of the *Service de la Population Noire*, he was in contact with the founding committee to assist it in drawing up a constitution; letter from *Groupement Culturel Belgo-Congolais* to Capelle, 14 October 1950, AA/GG/16230.

**<sup>132</sup>** Letter from *Groupement Culturel Belgo-Congolais* to the colonial minister, 4 December 1950, AA/A54/Infopresse/51.

**<sup>133</sup>** Press release on the foundation of the *Groupement Culturel Belgo-Congolais*, Congopresse, October 1950, AA/A54/Infopresse/51. The quoted text is a summary of the second article of the association constitution: *Groupement Culturel Belgo-Congolais de Léopoldville*, *Projet du statuts*, *Constitution et buts de l'Association*, AA/GG/16230.

<sup>134</sup> Description of the association by press officer André Scohy: *Création d'un Groupement Belgo-Congolais à Léopoldville*, AA/A54/Infopresse/51. For a detailed account of the racist segregation and contested intermediate zones in Léopoldville's colonial urban environment, see L. Beeckmans and J. Lagae, "Kinshasa's Syndrome-Planning in Historical Perspective: from Belgian Colonial Capital to Self-Constructed Megalopolis," in *Urban Planning in Sub-Saharan Africa: Colonial and Post-Colonial Planning Cultures*, ed. C. N. Silva (London: Routledge, 2015), 204–207. 135 Press release on the first dinner of the *Groupement Culturel Belgo-Congolais*, Congopresse, 17 February 1951, AA/A54/Infopresse/51.



Fig. 12: Manneken Pis in Bateke attire. Official speech in the presence of the *Groupement Culturel Belgo-Congolais*. The first row includes the association's two presidents: André Scohy (first from left) and Antoine-Roger Bolamba (second from left).

known Brussels landmark.<sup>136</sup> Taking up a Brussels tradition of clothing the statue, they gave the "city's first citizen"<sup>137</sup> some new attire: a headdress of feathers, a dress of woven raffia and rings dangling from its ankle. In remembrance of the first inhabitants of the area in which the colonial capital had been erected, the Manneken Pis now wore the traditional garb of the Bateke.<sup>138</sup>

By demonstratively bringing together Congolese and European representatives of the capital's cultural scene, the association was consistent with the official rhetoric of reformed colonial policy.<sup>139</sup> In a letter, the colonial minister thus praised the "rapprochement between the whites and blacks of the Congo" as

**<sup>136</sup>** Press release on the dedication of the Manneken Pis by the *Groupement Culturel Belgo-Congolais*, Congopresse, 10 March 1951, AA/A54/Infopresse/51.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid.

<sup>138</sup> Report by press agency Agence Belge: Nouvelles d'Afrique: Léopoldville, 30 January 1951.

<sup>139</sup> Today, contemporary witnesses recall fondly the openness of the recurring encounters between Europeans and Africans; interview with Camille Auguste Mwissa-Camus, Kinshasa, 24 August 2010.

manifest in the association. 140 It was not just the Brussels daily Le Soir, 141 but even *Drum* magazine in South Africa, which opposed the state doctrine of Apartheid, that considered the founding of the "multiracial literature and art association" in Léopoldville worthy of a laudatory article. 142

The associations in Léopoldville such as the Cercle d'Études et d'Agréments and the Groupement Culturel Belgo-Congolais developed an appeal extending beyond the capital. Numerous reports and items of association news appeared in the Voix du Congolais and Croix du Congo, so that their readers were very well informed about the associational scene of the Belgian Congo. 143 The propagandistic staging presented the capital's associations to readers as exemplary sites of encounter between European administrators and Congolese elite, as places where colonial development was showcased. Through their idealization in the media, throughout the colony these associations rose to the status of benchmark for évolué associations. This awareness of the commitment of the capital's colonial administration to the associations encouraged Congolese actors elsewhere. That their expectations were quite often disappointed is evident in Antoine-Marie Mobé's troubled tenure as AES president.

## Fighting a losing battle: the évolué association in Stanleyville

"Since our arrival in Stanleyville, when the old évolué association began to stagger towards its demise, we had been unwilling to believe what the elders here were wont to tell us about the local authorities."144 This is how Antoine-Marie Mobé, who has already appeared in the present study on several occasions as a Congolese protagonist in the elite-making process, began an entry in his notebook of March 1950. There Mobé described a conversation with the local territo-

<sup>140</sup> Letter from Colonial Minister Dequae to the presidents of the Groupement Culturel Belgo-Congolais, 28 November 1950, AA/A54/Infopresse/51.

<sup>141</sup> N.n., "Groupement Belgo-Congolais," Le Soir (23 February 1951).

<sup>142</sup> The report appeared in June 1951; D. C. Woodson, Drum. An Index to "Africa's Leading Magazine" 1951-1965 (Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin-Madison, 1988), 159.

<sup>143</sup> In the first sixteen months after the establishment of the Groupement Culturel Belgo-Congolais, the Voix du Congolais published five lengthy reports, most of them featuring photographs. The Croix du Congo of 18 January 1953 also published a photograph of this association meal. 144 Notebook of Antoine-Marie Mobé, 22 March 1950, private archive Antoine-Marie Mobé, Kinshasa.

rial official, which finally prompted him to resign as president of the AES and end his months-long efforts to set the *évolué* association on a new course.

In 1947, after completing his seminary studies, Mobé had moved to Stanley-ville to take up a prestigious job at the postal service. As an up-and-coming *évolué*, the revival of the association, which had been founded only in 1944 but was now inactive, Provided him with an opportunity to make his mark in a new environment as a representative of the vernacular elite. Mobé selected the *Voix du Congolais* as the media platform for its revitalization.

Mobé had a nuanced but unsparing view of the AES's problems. In the October 1947 issue he adduced several reasons for the association's dissolution and thus exposed the fraught situation in the Belgian Congo's third largest city. 147 First, he criticized the tensions between long-established and incomer *évolués*. He was thus addressing a conflict that had gone unmentioned in the *Voix du Congolais*, one that ran counter to the colonial propaganda of a supra-ethnic Congolese elite. Fully in the idiom of official elite discourse, Mobé called on the residents of Stanleyville to leave such animosities behind them and, as a united elite, to play an active part in the country's fate: "We ask our *évolué* friends to renounce the spirit of the clan, tribe and region, in order to think exclusively of our community of race and skin colour. May they think about the fact that we all have to make up the Congolese elite and lay the ground for the Congo of tomorrow." 148

But Mobé's critique was also aimed at the local colonial administration. As he saw it, the officials were neglectful of the *évolués*, so they too were responsible for the fact that Stanleyville was still a long way from "unity between us."<sup>149</sup>

<sup>145</sup> After Léopoldville and Elisabethville, Stanleyville was the third-largest urban settlement in the Belgian Congo, but was in fact a medium-sized town, with a population of just 40,000 in the early 1950s. But it grew rapidly by the time of independence in 1960 and already had 121,000 inhabitants in 1958. On the development and history of Stanleyville, see V. Pons, *Stanleyville*. *An African Urban Community under Belgian Administration* (London: Oxford University Press, 1969); H. Lanza, "Stanleyville, ville cosmopolite. La localisation des différents groupes dans l'espace urbain," in *Les mémoires du Congo. Le temps colonial*, ed. J.-L. Vellut (Gent: Snoeck, 2005). 146 On the association's history, see Verhaegen, *L'Association des Évolués*, 3–35; Tshonda and Verhaegen, *Lumumba: Jeunesse*, 199–205. The fact that the AES is the only *évolué* association that has been subject to a specific study is due to the membership of Patrice Lumumba, whose life has been the focus of many historians. For his study, Benoît Verhaegen was able to examine a range of documents in the Kisangani provincial archive that subsequently fell victim to looting.

**<sup>147</sup>** A.-M. Mobé, "Chronique de la vie indigène et nouvelles diverses," *Voix du Congolais* no. 20 (October 1947): 877.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid.

**<sup>149</sup>** Ibid.

At the same time, in his article Mobé advocated the communitization of the évolués into a supra-ethnic group and greater support for associations from the colonial state.

The Voix du Congolais, meanwhile, conveyed a different perspective on things. The editors added a comment to Mobé's article, describing association members as solely responsible for its inactivity. The newspaper dismissed his accusation against the colonial administration as an "unfounded assertion." The conflicts in Stanleyville exposed by Mobé made a poor fit with the idealized worldview of the Léopoldville-based newspaper, which preferred to report on the blissful harmony prevailing in the capital as associations brought together Europeans and Congolese.

Given that the local colonial administration was partly responsible for the crisis of the AES, it comes as no surprise that after this rebuke Mobé piped up once again. In a "rebuttal" published later, he complained about the fact that his critique had been described as baseless and affirmed that he could attest personally to the administration's failings. He expressed surprise that the *évolués* of Stanleyville referred to his reporting as courageous. For, as he remarked sarcastically, did the Voix du Congolais not guarantee freedom of expression? Why then should authors have to fear repression? By evoking the self-image of the Voix du Congolais, Mobé lent his critique of the local colonial administration additional legitimacy. He was indignant that the officials had failed to respond to the prescribed written requests for association meetings. Those who nonetheless met, Mobé wrote, were viewed as rabble-rousers and threatened with imprisonment.151

This time the editors did not seek to correct Mobé's critique. Instead, two months later the Voix du Congolais reported that the governor of Léopoldville province had ordered a review of the incidents in Stanleyville. 152 The paper now praised Mobé as an "excellent colleague and friend." 153 With his appeal for help in the media, Mobé had caught the attention of the colonial government in the capital, which was disgruntled by its officials' failure to support, or even their tendency to impede, évolué associations in the provincial capitals.

Mobé had thus assured himself of the support of the Voix du Congolais and he convinced the editorial board of the local colonial administration's shortcom-

<sup>150 &</sup>quot;Chronique de la vie indigène et nouvelles diverses," Voix du Congolais no. 20 (October 1947): 878.

<sup>151</sup> A.-M. Mobé, "Réfutation," Voix du Congolais no. 29 (August 1948): 330.

<sup>152 &</sup>quot;Chronique de la vie indigène et nouvelles diverses," Voix du Congolais no. 31 (October 1948): 432.

**<sup>153</sup>** Ibid.

ings. The time had come to relaunch the AES. At a constitutive meeting in December 1948, Mobé was elected its new president. The *Voix du Congolais* congratulated Mobé, "whose diligence and tenacity have been crowned with success" and called on the local administration to support the association. That the newspaper publicly backed the new president is an indication that the refoundation of the AES had elicited no enthusiasm on the part of Stanleyville's local officials. When the election results and the constitution were submitted to the local territorial official, he refused to authorize the association. He justified this with reference to procedural errors and reservations about an association secretary with a criminal record. Hu Mobé was prepared for this gambit. Two years earlier, the official had used the same argument to force the association to cease its activities. Mobé had thus specified in the new constitution that members' legal transgressions ceased to be relevant if they had maintained a good reputation for a substantial period of time.

Four months after Mobé's election as AES president, the association was able to meet officially for the first time. While the territorial officials had been unable to torpedo the association itself, they exercised their right to monitor and influence its activities. The minutes of the subsequent general meetings bear witness to the severe conflict between President Mobé and the colonial officials, who also showed up, over the association's orientation. What Mobé had in mind was a body in which members bettered themselves and could intervene in public affairs. The representatives of the colonial administration, meanwhile, favoured a programme restricted to recreational activities. 158

In view of the local colonial officials' resistance at the general meetings, Mobé summarily created a new body to help implement his plans. As the forerunner of a *cercle d'études*, the *comité consultatif* was meant to facilitate discussion of pressing social problems. It is important to mention that the meetings of the *comité consultatif* did not take place in secret. The first meeting, on 25 July 1949, was attended by colonial official Vanstichel, who worked for the provincial governor in the *Service de l'Information et de la Propaganda*. At the behest of the colonial government in Léopoldville, Vanstichel had been tasked with support-

<sup>154</sup> Verhaegen, L'Association des Évolués, 39-40.

<sup>155 &</sup>quot;Activités des cercles: Stanleyville," Voix du Congolais no. 35 (February 1949): 83.

<sup>156</sup> Verhaegen, L'Association des Évolués, 41-42.

**<sup>157</sup>** Ibid.

**<sup>158</sup>** The following remarks are based on the minutes of AES meetings of 25 May 1949, 6 July 1949, 25 July 1949 and 27 July 1949. Excerpts of these are reprinted in Verhaegen, *L'Association des Évolués*. 45 – 49.

ing the association when the local authorities' resistance first came to light. 159 As Mobé is likely to have seen it, Vanstichel was an emissary of the Voix du Congolais, who provided him with backing as he set about the controversial process of transforming the association into a Congolese advocacy group.

Mobé's social engagement may have seemed exemplary to the Voix du Congolais in Léopoldville, which congratulated its "loyal colleague" on his "successful initiatives."160 But the territorial officials saw him as a threat to their authority.

While the *Voix du Congolais* presented the Congolese public sphere with the AES's progress, association president Mobé was struggling behind the scenes with the colonial officials, who were seeking to defend their extensive local powers against the critical African elite. Mobé was the loser in this power struggle. It is likely that his interlocutor in the discussion with the "local authority" 161 cited at the start of this section, which led to his resignation, was the territorial administrator of the African quarter, Maurice Buysschaert. 162 According to Mobé's notes, during this conversation there was an escalation of the simmering dispute between him and the local administration over the association's character. 163 The official, these notes record, described the critical association president as a "revolutionary," as a slanderer of the administration who had no appreciation of its work at the local level. Rather than merely debating and criticizing, the official had suggested, the association itself ought to take action and, for example, help out with the drainage of a flooded riverbank. Mobé parried this proposal by echoing the territorial official's statement that the local administration had all problems under control. Why then would it need the association's help? The territorial official responded to this provocation by threatening to dissolve the AES.

Regardless of his composed and impersonal tone, Mobé's notebook entry articulates his shock at the humiliating treatment meted out to him as association president: "In light of this talk I assume that this authority is very probably unaware who it is dealing with! Many Europeans still treat us like children. They

<sup>159</sup> A.-R. Bolamba, "Activité des cercles, Stanleyville," Voix du Congolais no. 45 (December 1949): 488; Verhaegen, L'Association des Évolués, 45.

<sup>160</sup> Bolamba, "Activité des cercles," 488.

<sup>161</sup> Notebook of Antoine-Marie Mobé, 22 March 1950, private archive Antoine-Marie Mobé, Kinshasa.

<sup>162</sup> Verhaegen, L'Association des Évolués, 50; Tshonda and Verhaegen, Lumumba: Jeunesse,

<sup>163</sup> For the following remarks, see notebook of Antoine-Marie Mobé, 22 March 1950, private archive Antoine-Marie Mobé, Kinshasa,

think we are devoid of all capacity for reflection and judgement. This at least applies in the case of the aforementioned authority."<sup>164</sup>

It is unclear whether Mobé's accusatory lines ever made it beyond the relative safety of his notebook. On the one hand, the interpolated references to articles in the *Voix du Congolais* create the impression that Mobé was working on the draft of a publication. <sup>165</sup> He scored through, reworked or reformulated certain parts several times over. That the text was not published does not mean that Mobé did not send it off, as his faith in the support of the authorities in Léopold-ville seems to have remained firm despite it all. It may have been one of the articles that succumbed to the General Government's censorship for showing its colonial officials in too negative a light. On the other hand, it is conceivable that Mobé balked at publication out of fear of repression. In his notebook, he remarked that he would rather not provide a detailed account of the insults he had suffered. He feared that no one would believe him. <sup>166</sup>

When the initial tailwind from Léopoldville had tailed off, Mobé succumbed to the pressure emanating from the local authority and opted to step out of the public spotlight represented by the AES by resigning his post. In one of his didactic talks, which he had given shortly before while still association president, he tackled the notion of honour, which, he stated, was an innate aspect of every human being and must be defended against injury. Hor By resigning, Mobé may in part have been attempting to retain his honour as a responsible citizen – his conversation with the colonial official may have been as much humiliation as he was willing to take. For him, the official's demand that he refrain from interfering in the administration's work was an unacceptable capitulation to the local authorities' power.

In Stanleyville, the AES was beset by crisis just a year after its refoundation, and in Léopoldville issues of the *Voix du Congolais* went to press that disseminated an antiquated and outlandish account of what had happened. The media coverage of Mobé's resignation was characterized by a failure to mention the dispute with the local administration. Reports repeatedly highlighted conflicts between association members as the cause of the new crisis, maintaining an appearance

<sup>164</sup> Ibid.

**<sup>165</sup>** The same notebook contains drafts of articles by Mobé that later appeared in the *Voix du Congolais* or other newspapers. See for example Mobé, "Du rôle véritable," 470-471.

<sup>166</sup> Notebook of Antoine-Marie Mobé, 22 March 1950, private archive Antoine-Marie Mobé, Kinshasa.

**<sup>167</sup>** This talk was published; see A.-M. Mobé, "La fidelité à la parole donnée," *Voix du Congolais* no. 48 (March 1950).

of integrity on the part of the colonial officials. 168 In fact, the Voix du Congolais called on the évolués of Stanlevville to embrace an "entente cordiale" and assailed their envy and bitterness. But even Mobé published no public criticism of the local administration, either in the Voix du Congolais or the Croix du Congo, for which he wrote the "Echos de Stanleyville" section from June 1950. Instead, he too criticized the association members and, in particular, expressed his disappointment at the hostility of the évolués of Stanleyville towards newcomers. In a schoolmasterly tone, Mobé wrote:

May the residents of Stanleyville, that is, those who refer to themselves as natives of Stanleyville and, on the basis of this supposed quality, disregard and envy all strangers while excluding them from the leading posts in their associations, finally understand just what they would be capable of achieving without the generous and dedicated collaboration of these so-called strangers. 170

For Mobé, these spats between association members, which occurred on the basis of ethnicity, meant that the AES had not earned the right to be known as an évolué association: "This is indicative of the fact that they are not yet fully developed."171

Despite his defeat as association president, Mobé by no means abandoned his Sisyphean task as an exemplary and engaged évolué. The former seminarian made the civilizing mission his personal mission. He continued to champion the self-perfection and continued education of the évolués through the associations, <sup>172</sup> for "the number of the developing who have benefitted from schooling and training is still very limited." 173 Mobé's references to the need for évolués to work together with the Europeans to civilize the uneducated masses and modernize the country indicates that he must have seen the hostile territorial official merely as a local Stanleyville aberration. 174 His faith in colonial development appears to have been unwavering.

**174** Ibid.

<sup>168</sup> A.-R. Bolamba, "Note de la rédaction," Voix du Congolais no. 49 (April 1950): 242.

**<sup>169</sup>** Ibid.

<sup>170</sup> A.-M. Mobé, "Echos de Stanleyville," Croix du Congo (4 March 1951).

<sup>171</sup> Ibid.

<sup>172</sup> His notebook contains the draft of an article on the role of associations, which Mobé had already composed four days after his resignation as association president. But this ode to the association as a site of self-perfecting and close cooperation with the colonial administration was only published three years later; Mobé, "Du rôle véritable."

<sup>173</sup> A.-M. Mobé, "Entente dans les cercles dits d'Évolués," Croix du Congo (25 June 1950).

At the same time, Mobé began to pursue new associational projects less dependent on the goodwill of the local colonial administration. Also, in the summer of 1951, he founded two associations in Stanleyville, both of which he headed as president: first the *Association des Postiers de la Province Orientale* (APIPO), which, with the tried-and-tested tools of talks and recreational activities, was dedicated to the self-improvement of Congolese postal workers and to fostering their work ethic, <sup>175</sup> and, second, the local branch of the ADAPES, the association for former Scheut mission school pupils. For his new association projects Mobé had now found a close ally, who supported his foundation of the new bodies and held the post of vice-president in both of them. I am referring to a 26-year-old and highly ambitious colleague from the postal service, who had been on the AES committee since 1951 and, as a correspondent for the *Croix du Congo*, rapidly made his entrance into the colonial public sphere: Patrice Lumumba. <sup>176</sup>

When Mobé got himself transferred to Coquilhatville in 1953, Lumumba followed in his footsteps. He took over from Mobé as president of the APIPO and ADAPES and continued his work as correspondent for the *Croix du Congo* in Stanleyville. The we examine Lumumba's other activities in Stanleyville, we find that he was also heir to the controversial figure of Mobé in another sense: he performed a perilous tightrope act as an exemplary *évolué* who sought to maintain a balance, *vis-à-vis* the colonial authorities, between loyalty and a critical mindset, between ambition and challenging views. As presidents of the AES, Mobé and Lumumba eschewed blind allegiance to the siren song of colonial change. Instead, they amplified the rhetoric of colonial reform and thus challenged the local representatives of the colonial state.

But what does the example of Mobé's presidency of the AES tell us about the local outworking of the state-backed and much propagandized Congolese associations? It is worth briefly recapitulating the key conflicts and determining their general significance.

First, the efforts of Congolese to transform *évolué* associations, sponsored by the colonial state, into sites of elite formation that allowed members to articulate their views and facilitated social participation, entailed a certain risk. What the

<sup>175</sup> Ibid., 40-41.

**<sup>176</sup>** Tshonda and Verhaegen, *Lumumba: Jeunesse*, 209–210. On Lumumba's work as a correspondent for the *Croix du Congo*, see: Mutamba-Makombo, *Patrice Lumumba*.

<sup>177</sup> P. Lumumba, "Nouvelles de l'ADAPES Stanleyville," *Croix du Congo* (14 February 1954). As president of the APIPO postal association Lumumba edited a publication akin to the *Voix du Congolais* in its orientation and content, though the layout was less professional and most articles were on the work ethic.

General Government propagated with the help of the Voix du Congolais could trigger a power struggle between association members and colonial officials over who was in charge at the local level. Elite actors' insistence that the state take steps to develop responsible, politically mature citizens laid bare the local balance of power within the framework of colonial rule. The contradiction between theory and practice, inherent in associational culture as an institution of state elite formation, can fairly be described as glaring. Certainly, Mobé was quite capable of using the *Voix du Congolais* as a public platform for evaluating whether colonial promises had been kept, and his tenacity compelled the editors and the General Government to support him. In Stanleyville, however, such backing from the capital was of limited use. Mobé had to find out the hard way what it meant to gear one's actions to the promises of colonial reforms as propagated in the Voix du Congolais. With his combative articles, he made himself vulnerable to repressive measures by the local colonial authority. And the territorial officials, with their substantial powers, had no intention of allowing Mobé to turn the évolué association into a forum for African critique and demands. While the newspaper in Léopoldville published avowals of solidarity and the General Government despatched a representative of the provincial government's Information Department to assist Mobé, ultimately these acts were merely symbolic and turned out to be half-hearted forms of support.

In Stanleyville, the rhetoric of colonial development was subordinate to the interests of the colonial order – in reality, the Voix du Congolais was powerless. Those who saw themselves as members of the elite and were eager to improve both their character and social position could rapidly come up against the glass ceiling of the colonial hierarchy. In the dispute over the AES we can discern once again the conflict over the local implementation of colonial reforms, along with the concomitant expectations and disappointments of the Congolese elite.

Second, the example of the AES demonstrates that the social spaces of the évolué associations were potentially conflictual ones. They were meeting places for graduates of secondary schools and employees in prestigious roles from several different regions, whose otherness was meant to be overcome through their designation as évolués or elite. The discussion of the treatment of "strangers" 178 in the AES shows that ethnicity and regional background were parallel and highly potent identificatory concepts that undermined the évolués' communitization. Provenance played a major role in the évolué milieus of the colonial cities. A number of studies have revealed that ethnicity was accentuated against the background of these heterogenous social spaces of encounter, if it was not in

<sup>178</sup> P. Lumumba, "La question des 'étrangers," Croix du Congo (18 March 1951).

fact experienced in the cities for the first time. <sup>179</sup> As an association president who was also a newcomer to the city. Mobé lacked local backing, and here he shared the fate of many well-educated Congolese who were installed in administrative offices throughout the colony but could build up little local support. Over the course of the 1950s, associational sociability in the cities of the Belgian Congo increasingly transformed into a laboratory for the cultivation of regional and ethnic patterns of belonging, in which the Congolese elite too, in a climate of anticolonial politicization, was later to discern a means of enhancing its power.<sup>180</sup>

## Illegitimate and disreputable sociability

The "moralization of leisure time" 181 is Tim Couzens's term for the practice of colonial officials, missionaries and firms of imparting to the African elite certain values through recreational opportunities. Here associations played a leading role. 182 Certainly, missions and the colonial state expected recreational associations to be an instrument of social control and colonial subject formation. But they were also an instrument they sometimes – albeit unintentionally – allowed to slip from their grasp. For however much it was meant to control and moralize, this sociability, though to a limited degree, created areas of freedom that at times ran counter to the propaganda of elite-making policy. 183 What the Congolese elite were supposed to do when not working and what they actually did were not always congruent.

<sup>179</sup> There is a wealth of studies referring to the construction and potency of ethnicity in the urban settlements of Africa, so I shall mention only overviews here; D. Anderson and R. Rathbone, "Urban Africa. Histories in the Making," in Africa's Urban Past, eds. D. Anderson and R. Rathbone (Portsmouth: James Currey, 2000), 8; A. Eckert, "'Unordnung' in den Städten. Stadtplanung, Urbanisierung und koloniale Politik in Afrika," Periplus. Jahrbuch für außereuropäische Geschichte 6 (1996); B. Freund, The African City: A History (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 91; C. Lentz, "'Tribalismus' und Ethnizität in Afrika. Ein Forschungsüberblick," Leviathan 23 (1995): 120 - 123. For a general account of this topic, see A. Keese, Ethnicity and the Colonial State. Finding and Representing Group Identification in a Coastal West African and Global Perspective (1850 – 1960) (Leiden: Brill, 2015).

<sup>180</sup> Verhaegen, Les premiers manifestes politiques, 55.

<sup>181</sup> T. Couzens, "Moralizing Leisure Time. The Transatlantic Connection and Black Johannesburg 1918-1936," in Industrialisation and Social Change in South Africa, eds. S. Marks and R. Rathbone (London: Edison-Wesley Longman, 1982).

**<sup>182</sup>** On the case of football in colonial Senegal, see Baller, *Spielfelder*, 56–62.

<sup>183</sup> This applied generally to Africans' leisure time under colonial rule; E. Akyeampong and C. Ambler, "Leisure in African History: An Introduction," International Journal of African History Studies 35, no. 1 (2002): 5.

The contested meaning of the term "pleasure," which appeared in the name of many évolué associations in the Belgian Congo, was laid bare in the discourse and practice of associational life. The Voix du Congolais sought to resolve the antagonism between edification and entertainment in a comment on a reader's letter whose author complained that the published association news provided more information on elections than on substantive debates. 184 Here the newspaper, close to the colonial state, added its voice to the criticism of the lack of association activity while also lamenting that in many places dancing and alcohol were the order of the day. But the editors did not have a fun-free zone in mind either: "The associations should not be puritanical places where laughter is forbidden."185 They called for a middle course between virtue and entertainment. What this squaring of the circle might look like in practice they left to the associations themselves.

Members of the Cercle Gouverneur Pierre Ryckmans in Lisala, discussed earlier in connection with the visit of Antoine-Roger Bolamba, complained about the misappropriation of association funds. In a letter to the responsible colonial official, they accused the association president of using the membership fees to play the "grandee" and entertain his lovers. 186 There is a series of these reports in an alarming tone in the elite newspapers warning of the blurring of the boundary between the moralizing elite associations on the one hand and the indecent bars on the other. In the Croix du Congo, one reader reported from Tshimbane that the associations in the colony's "little outposts" left a lot to be desired, because fewer educated Congolese lived there than in the cities. Rather than acquiring books and improving themselves, members dedicated themselves to alcohol and dancing. "Rather than forging the black elites," he wrote with a view to the association as the official site of elite formation, "we run the risk of training up developed drunkards."188 Another reader, while advocating support for the "backwoodsmen," noted that the popularity of alcohol was a problem affecting urban dwellers as well. 189

And yet it seems that the above-mentioned alcohol consumption in the évolué associations was often tolerated as a means of preventing supposedly worse

<sup>184 &</sup>quot;Activité des cercles: Stanleyville," Voix du Congolais no. 39 (June 1949): 255.

<sup>185</sup> Ibid.

<sup>186</sup> Letter from an "évolué" to the district commissioner of Congo Ubangi, 29 December 1947,

<sup>187 &</sup>quot;Points de vue de nos lecteurs: Cercle dans les petits postes," Croix du Congo (28 September 1952).

**<sup>188</sup>** Ibid.

**<sup>189</sup>** "A propos de cercles dans des petits postes," *Croix du Congo* (9 November 1952).

behaviour. Even in associations initiated by missionaries, whose meetings were held on mission grounds, the focus was not always on cultural elevation. In Coquilhatville, for example, the Catholic mission ran the *Cercle Excelsior*, with a substantial membership of 549 in September 1953.<sup>190</sup> Its appeal was mainly due to its primary role as drinking place. Attaining membership was a simple matter of paying for one's drinks. Some members complained to the provincial governor about "this so-called association that is actually a bar," contending that nothing was known about the fate of its takings and that it lacked sanitary facilities.

Nonetheless, during his visit to Coquilhatville the editor-in-chief of the *Voix* du Congolais, Antoine-Roger Bolamba, had words of praise for the controversial association: "This initiative by the missionaries keeps many young people away from the seedy entertainments of the native districts, where abuses of all kinds help bring the lowest of passions to fruition." Bolamba saw the greater evil in those of Coquilhatville's associations that caused outrage due to their immoral practices: "Their raison d'être consists in the diversions of singing and dancing, [...] and their activities [...] boil down to ignominious drinking sessions." 193 Bolamba's remarks are reminiscent of a report produced by the General Government on the "Associations of the Femmes Libres and Bachelors (clerks)" in Coquilhatville's African districts. 194 It stated that the establishment of these illegal associations, with imaginative names such as Alaska and Américaines, was the doing of Congolese office workers employed in the colonial administration, who fit the general conception of a vernacular elite during working hours, but took time out from the moral precepts of colonial subject formation when work was over. 195 According to the report, the association was frequented by un-

**<sup>190</sup>** Handwritten addendum of 5 September 1953 to a report on the *Cercle Excelsior* produced by the territorial official of Coquilhatville on 22 November 1950; AA/GG/11600.

<sup>191</sup> Undated letter from association members to the governor of Équateur province, AA/GG/ 11600.

<sup>192</sup> Antoine-Roger Bolamba, "Impressions de voyage," Voix du Congolais no. 49 (May 1950): 214.

<sup>193</sup> Ibid., 213.

**<sup>194</sup>** Association femmes libres et de garcons (clercs) du CEC Coquilhatville 1948, AA/GG/12532. We cannot rule out the possibility that Bolamba was the author of the report, given that he had stayed in Coquilhatville for a week around the same time, during his tour through the colony; letter from secretary general of the General Government to the territorial official in Coquilhatville, 15 September 1948, AA/GG/7921.

<sup>195</sup> Ibid.; Bolamba, "Impressions de voyage," 213.

married women and sometimes even underage girls, who danced and sang "obscene songs" for the male guests. 196

If we consider these examples in the round, it is evident that differing ideas about the organization of leisure time and masculinity collided within the associational landscape of the Belgian Congo, ideas underpinning different forms of respectability that coexisted within the vernacular elite. 197 On the one hand, we might refer to the respectability of the exemplary, "genuine" évolués keen to perfect themselves, who wished to be appreciated by the European milieu even in their leisure time. On the other hand, we have the respectability of the grandee and snob, which was the antithesis of a desirable lifestyle in idealistic elite discourse. A demonstrative display of unruly behaviour by association presidents could inspire outrage as well as popularity and allegiance among members.<sup>198</sup> In the latter case, recognition from Europeans, observing and commenting on associational sociability with wagging fingers, seems to have been of secondary importance.

Clearly, not everyone referred to as an évolué and addressed as the subject of elite formation could get anything out of the official association evenings, with their edifying talks and debates under the custodianship of European advisers. The social spaces of the bar and the association, kept separate from one another in elite discourse as ideal types, overlapped in cultural practice. Polygamy, indecent acts and drunkenness could be as much a part of the everyday pleasures of association life as talks and training courses. Hence, as core sites of colonial elite-making, associations sometimes became the kind of places they were supposed to keep their members away from.

Among the strange outgrowths of the associational landscape, in addition to the disreputable associations, were those social coalitions that called themselves associations while failing to satisfy the formal criteria laid down by the colonial administration. Behind this widespread phenomenon lay a form of associational

<sup>196</sup> Association femmes libres et de garcons (clercs) du CEC Coquilhatville 1948, AA/GG/12532. 197 In colonial Rhodesia too, representatives of the educated elite fulminated against ordinary workers and their drinking halls, where immoral encounters took place between men and women; M. O. West, "Liquor and Libido: 'Joint Drinking' and the Politics of Sexual Control in Colonial Zimbabwe, 1920s-1950s," Journal of Social History 30, no. 3 (1997). But given the findings of the present study, the question that arises is to what extent, in Rhodesia as elsewhere, this was merely the discourse of dissociation typical of the elite, which feared for its respectability because some of its own members were also to be found visiting these drinking halls. 198 The latter was the reaction of most members of the Cercle Van Gele to the removal of their president due to disreputable conduct. See letter from Botamba to the policeman in Libenge, 16 August 1952; letter from Botamba to the territorial official of Libenge, 16 August 1952, AA/GG/ 6372.

mimicry, which provides us with an initial indication of how popular and worth emulating the associations were, even among those individuals who, due to their lack of status or inadequate education, could not take part in elite socialization. It is important to realize that the *évolué* associations were eye-catchers in Congolese towns and cities and their events often attracted onlookers. In Léopold-ville, uninvited spectators of associational sociability even had their own nickname, *ngembo*, admirers or bats, because they were denied access but positioned themselves in such a way that they could follow the goings-on undisturbed.<sup>199</sup>

To conclude, then, I wish to explore a key question, one that the meagre material evidence does not allow us to answer conclusively but that cannot be ignored: to what extent did the cultural model of a Congolese elite serve as a role model for broader circles within society? After all, officially the goal of elite formation was for *évolués* to act as disseminators, beyond their own milieu, of moral values and a way of life that were considered civilized. Ideally, the African elite was at all times supposed to provide what contemporary sociology, with the colonial elite in mind, understood as a "standard setting group."<sup>200</sup> In colonial ideology, *évolué* associations were meant to function as the poster child for civilized manners and emulate their historical role models from Europe, that is, associations that had ensured the spread of bourgeois ideas beyond their own milieu.<sup>201</sup>

In the relevant newspapers, however, Congolese authors repeatedly complained that the elite often failed to function as role models for their less educated compatriots, particularly in contexts of direct interaction. Here the elite assumed the arrogance common among Europeans towards those referred to as *indigènes*. Due to their simple clothing, representatives of the vernacular elite treated them as uncivilized, avoided contact, paraded their supposed cultural superiority by speaking grandiloquent French and used their educational edge to position themselves as superior.<sup>202</sup> But just because the Congolese elite failed

**<sup>199</sup>** Maître Taureau began to talk about these uninvited spectators when presented with a relevant photograph. Interview with Maître Taureau, Kinshasa, 2 September 2010. Maître Taureau was a famous figure in the recreational culture of Léopoldville in the 1950s and organized, for example, beauty and dancing competitions in the Parc de Boek, with guests including senior officials in the colonial administration. The local press called him the "Elvis Presley of Léopoldville"; "Au baptême de notre fils 'Congo,'" *Congo* (6 April 1957): 6.

<sup>200</sup> Nadel, "Concept of Social Elites."

<sup>201</sup> On the appeal of bourgeois culture, see for example Kaschuba, "Bürgerlichkeit," 110.

**<sup>202</sup>** On these incidents, see n.n, "Les noirs exploitent les noirs," *Voix du Congolais* no. 23 (February 1948): 81–82; J.-E. Mupenda, "L'Évolué est-il maladroit?," *Voix du Congolais* no. 27 (June 1948).

to exhibit the kind of conduct apologists for elite formation considered exemplary does not mean they lost their aura as persons worth emulating.

I will briefly illustrate associational mimicry through examples that take us to Stanleyville and Léopoldville. The first example is from a study by Valdo Pons, who carried out eighteen months of field research in Stanleyville in 1952. Pons undertook a sociological study of new cities in colonial Africa, an emerging line of research at the time that was institutionalized chiefly by Max Gluckman and A. L. Epstein in Manchester<sup>203</sup> but was also prominently pursued by George Balandier.<sup>204</sup> Urbanization in Africa was a development that, after the Second World War, engendered a great need for expert knowledge on the part of the colonial administration, which social scientists were happy to provide. <sup>205</sup> Pons was one of several sociologists who, commissioned by UNESCO, carried out research in Stanleyville on processes of social adaptation in the urban context. 206 The Belgian colonial government's decision to welcome the international team of researchers to its territory not only furnished it with more hegemonic knowledge, but also signalled to the anti-colonialist UN, as sponsor of the project, that the Belgian Congo had nothing to hide.

Pons followed the "community study approach" 207 common at the time and investigated the social networks and communication processes in a settlement of ordinary workers. Though the residents could not be considered members of the educated évolué milieu of Stanleyville, Pons was struck by the great significance ascribed to the different levels of civility in everyday conversation: "It was common to hear two men discussing a third in terms such as he is 'a very civilized man,' he is 'only a little civilized,' he is 'not quite civilized,' he was 'civilized long ago,' and so forth."208 Interviewees qualified people's personal lifestyle either as backward, using the Lingala term kisendji, or as civilized, kizungu, which

<sup>203</sup> The research projects of the Manchester School, but also of the Rhodes-Livingstone Institute, are considered key forerunners of modern urban anthropology. For an overview, see U. Hannerz, Exploring the City. Inquiries Toward an Urban Anthropology (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980), 119-162.

<sup>204</sup> G. Balandier, Sociologie des Brazzavilles noires (Paris: Presses de Sciences Po, 1955).

<sup>205</sup> Urban researchers were one of the groups of experts active in colonial Africa after 1945. See Cooper, Decolonization, 373.

<sup>206</sup> The research findings are brought together in an anthology; D. Forde, "Introduction," in Aspects sociaux de l'industrialisation et de l'urbanisation en Afrique au Sud du Sahara, ed. D. Forde (Paris: UNESCO, 1956).

<sup>207</sup> Pons, Stanleyville, 5 and 132.

<sup>208</sup> Ibid., 11.

means 'western' or 'European' in Swahili and in this case essentially denoted an urban way of life.209

Pons then observed social practices and symbolic acts, with the help of which ordinary workers assured themselves of their civility. A six-member group of neighbouring masons and carpenters between 26 and 50 years of age, for example, got together at irregular intervals for meetings that they called "association" and at which they had discussions, joked and drank. We have Pons to thank for a detailed description of the fun had by this group giving their gettogethers the sheen of official association meetings. All those present received an honorary title. There was a president, governor and district commissioner, as well as posts such as secretary and chairman, though members constantly swapped roles. Anyone arriving late or being called away too soon by his wife had to pay a fine. Though everyone lived close by, a self-proclaimed secretary informed members of the next meeting by post.<sup>210</sup> While Homi Bhabha discerns elements of mimicry and mockery in colonial subjects' appropriation of European ways of life,<sup>211</sup> here this performance seems to be extended – to ordinary workers who playfully usurp the posturing of the Congolese elite.

For Pons, this associational mimicry represented an attempt at self-reassurance and symbolic self-valorization: "the members of the 'club' saw themselves as a 'civilized' group acting in a 'civilized' way."<sup>212</sup> His study thus shows that associational sociability was received well beyond elite circles, as a form of social interaction associated with civility and prestige in the colonial situation.

But it was also the fascination exercised by ostentation and the appeal of holding office that fostered associational mimicry. An incident in the African quarter of Léopoldville brings this out once more. In the spring of 1953, the colonial administration followed up a lead concerning an unregistered group by the name of the Association of Gentlemen London Stell.<sup>213</sup> Its investigation brought to light a major misunderstanding. The responsible colonial official encountered a seven-member group of young Congolese who, as members of a savings association that had in reality been dissolved, gave each other imaginative and grandiose titles in the French language, though the official believed they were unaware of the terms' actual meaning. There was, for example, a "secretary of defence," a "secretary of the interior" and a "representative of great enjoyment

**<sup>209</sup>** Ibid., 11–12 and 51.

<sup>210</sup> Ibid., 152-153.

<sup>211</sup> H. Bhabha, The Location of Culture (London: Routledge, 1994), 81-86.

**<sup>212</sup>** Pons, Stanleyville, 153.

<sup>213</sup> Letter from R. Huberty, head of the Service de la Population Noire in Léopoldville, to the district commissioner of Moyen Congo, 27 May 1953, AA/GG/16543.

in Africa." In accordance with the regulations, the astonished official submitted his report to the local police, but he expressed opposition to the kind of criminal prosecution these young men would likely face due to their unauthorized association: "All this shows that these lads deserve six years of primary school rather than two months in prison." <sup>214</sup>

It is conceivable that the official's bafflement at the Association of Gentlemen London Stell was matched by its members surprise at the colonial administration's interest in their harmless associational mimicry. In Léopoldville, however, the authorities kept a weather eye even on insignificant bars if an unknown association was said to be gathering there. On closer consideration, however, such cases mostly involved a group of bar-goers who, after being paid, collectively handed over a certain amount to the proprietor so they could afford alcoholic drinks even at the end of the month, and in so doing addressed each other as president or secretary.<sup>215</sup>

The colonial state's control mania was a result of the authorities' fear that one of the many unofficial associations might be camouflage for a political and anti-colonial movement. Knowledge of this state of affairs must have spread among the Congolese elite: one respected resident of Léopoldville's African quarter, for example, played on this fear of subversive groups in order to ensure that the local administration prohibited an association he had come to find disagreeable.<sup>216</sup> He was outraged by its dance events that, according to him, disturbed not just the public peace but also domestic peace. To demonstrate to the colonial authorities the need for prompt action, he portrayed the disreputable revellers as the supposed nucleus of an armed independence movement of the kind that was in the ascendant at the time in other colonies: "Think of the MAU-MAU movement in KENYA. If they had seen it coming it would not have happened. But they waited too long to act."217

That unofficially established associations evaded the authorities' control is indicative not so much of anticolonial politicization or clandestine meetings as of the unintended side-effects of colonial subject formation, which sought to organize évolués' free time with the help of associations. The association became the shorthand symbol of the prestigious sociability of urban Congolese and was detached from its origin as a key site and instrument of control within the

<sup>214</sup> Letter from assistant to territorial administrator A. Croonenborgh to R. Huberty, head of the Service de la Population Noire in Léopoldville, 27 May 1953, AA/GG/16543.

<sup>215</sup> Letter from assistant to the territorial administrator in Léopoldville to the Service de la Population Noire, 9 September 1953, AA/GG/19596.

<sup>216</sup> Letter from Hubert D. to chef de la cité indigène in Léopoldville, 22 July 1953, AA/GG/19596. **217** Ibid.

framework of colonial elite-making. Through its cultural appropriation by a wide range of social strata, the term "association" became synonymous with more or less regular meetings, which did not prevent people from imitating bureaucratic procedures from the world of associations or from marking social hierarchies through the ascription of associational posts. But the colonial administration learned only rarely of such situational and fluid forms of communitization. It is thus difficult to assess the precise extent to which the cultural concept of the association spread throughout society. The state project of fostering Congolese associations slipped right out of colonial officials' hands: it was so successful that they could no longer control it.

In sum, colonial subject formation in the social spaces of the associations was an ambivalent and highly conflictual process. First, the associations failed to achieve the declared goal of "social engineering," namely, to create a vernacular elite as a sociocultural melting pot. First and foremost, associational sociability fostered a process of splintering within that social group that was in fact supposed to grow together as a Congolese elite. The self-description as évolués may have been suited to the formulation of collective claims vis-à-vis the colonial state, as in the case of the introduction of status reform, but it was not an effective means of collective identification. Togetherness was less likely to highlight the prospect of affiliation to the Congolese elite than to foreground a shared background and ethnicity, common life paths and school careers, occupations and leisure pursuits, as well as notions of masculinity and morality. The imagined community of a supra-ethnic elite, which drew its social cohesive force from loyalty to the colonial state, was propagandized in the media<sup>218</sup> but thwarted in the social world.

Second, the colonial state failed to get what it wanted: total control of the communitization of the Congolese population and the organization of their leisure time. The sociability of the elite, whether in évolué associations or unofficial gatherings, sometimes evaded direct control and bore witness to its members' cultural tenacity.

Third, judged against the expectations raised in the elite periodicals, the évolué associations could cause disappointment in practice. The media portrayals of privileged sites of encounter between Europeans and Congolese and of a lively elite public sphere were not always congruent with what a fair number of ambitious association presidents experienced. Even in the associations themselves, representatives of the elite had very limited scope to help shape the Congo of tomorrow.

Considering these examples as a whole, we are left with the impression that their European patrons preferred to let associations get out of control rather than facing up to the demands made of the colonial state by critical presidents. Colonial officials' laisser-faire attitude towards associations that were places of entertainment more than sites of character-building, and their authoritarian crackdowns on critical association members, are testimony to the priority given to maintaining power. The acceptance that organized leisure pursuits tended to bring about the opposite of moralization was more than a sign of the colonial state's limited resources. Ultimately, its tacit tolerance entailed political benefits. It corroborated the idea that the évolués' development still left much to be desired and that their own conduct ran counter to their demand for legal equality with Europeans. This observation of the Congolese elite's lack of maturity was more conducive to the stabilization of the colonial order than the painful - because politically binding – admission that these might after all be potentially responsible and engaged citizens. In a context in which Belgium, by ratifying the UN Charter, had committed to gearing the colonized society's political participation to its maturity, the colonial authorities' loss of control over Congolese associational sociability was one thing above all else: a controlled loss of control.

Nowhere was discontent at the *évolué* associations' failings expressed as much as in the relevant elite periodicals. In the *Voix du Congolais*, for instance, Antoine-Roger Bolamba denied passive and nonconformist association members the right to call themselves elite and enjoy the status of *évolué*: "I hope that the commissions tasked with issuing the *Carte du Mérite Civique* take applicants' lifestyle into account." This quotation speaks to the fact that normative elite discourse on civilizational maturity was crucial to the awarding of elite status. What the associations clearly illustrated was that the is and the ought of elite formation could often be poles apart.

<sup>219</sup> Bolamba, "Note de la rédaction," 185.