

Restoring Order, Inducing Change: Imagining a “New (Wo)man” in the Belgian Colonial Empire in the 1950s*

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ABSTRACTS

Kennzeichnend für den kolonialen Kontext für die Zeit nach dem Zweiten Weltkrieg ist eine spezifische Ausdrucksweise im Zusammenhang mit sozialen Interventionen. Europäische Kolonialadministrations planten auf unterschiedliche Weise die Erneuerung imperialer politischer und moralischer Ökonomien. Diese Dynamik manifestierte sich in der Durchsetzung einer Entwicklungs- und Wohlfahrtsrhetorik sowie entsprechender politischer Vorgaben. Die soziale Beeinflussung von Individuen und Kollektiven auf der Grundlage von Ideen vom “Neuen Menschen” wurden von einer ganzen Bandbreite an Institutionen und Netzwerken betrieben. Diese verfolgten nicht nur divergierende Ziele, sondern setzten unterschiedliche Ressourcen ein. So beanspruchten im belgischen Kolonialreich viele Akteure das *savoir-développer* oder das *savoir-transformer* für sich, um ihre Experimente zur „umfassenden gesellschaftlichen Entwicklung“ zu rechtfertigen. Obgleich sie als Wandel ausgelegt wurden, zielten diese Projekte auf den Erhalt der bestehenden Ordnung ab. Dieser Beitrag befasst sich mit dieser Dynamik, indem er die Rolle internationaler und inter-imperialer Organisationen in den Blick nimmt.

The post-WWII momentum was characterized by the emergence of specific languages and repertoires of societal intervention in colonial contexts. Given the new (geo)political circumstances, renewed imperial political and moral economies were envisaged by European colonial authorities, albeit in dissimilar ways. The establishment of a developmentalist and welfarist rhetoric and the formulation of related policies, which entailed political, economic, and socio-cultural calculations and objectives, was one manifestation of these dynamics. The efforts of social engineering, at individual and collective levels, in which the imagination of ‘new (wo) man’ and communities was fundamental, were carried by multiple institutions and networks, with diverse motivations, resources and agendas, operating on many levels. In the Belgium co-

lonial empire, the *savoir-développer* and the *savoir-transformer* were claimed by many, in order to advocate or justify experiments in “comprehensive social development”, mainly designed to induce change with a view to restore order. This paper addresses these issues and explores this case, emphasizing the significant role played by international, interimperial organizations.

1. Introduction

The post-WWII momentum was characterized by the emergence of (more or less) novel idioms and repertoires of societal intervention in colonial contexts, although building on interwar debates, proposals and projects. Given the new (geo)political circumstances, renewed imperial political economies were envisaged by European colonial authorities, albeit in distinct ways. Fresh moral economies were imagined, in relation to revived forms of imperial and colonial legitimation, domestically and internationally. The establishment of a developmentalist and welfarist rhetoric and the formulation of related policies, which entailed political, economic and sociocultural calculations and intents, is just one of manifestations of these dynamics. The efforts of social and societal intervention, at individual and collective levels, were carried out by multiple institutions and networks, with diverse motivations, means, modalities of action, and impact. The imagination of “New (Wo)Man” and communities was not uniform, or linear.¹

The historical trajectories of late colonial developmentalism were therefore plural, responding to national traditions, political contexts, human and financial resources, at home and overseas, among other important aspects.² Similarly to what happened in other cases, from the British and French to the Portuguese, the voices, arguments and repertoires of the “arts and sciences” of development of the Belgian colonial empire were not homogeneous. Those claiming to possess the *savoir-développer*, in the name of science or faith, or both, were numerous, and focused on different topics, with dissimilar competences, resources and agendas.³ The “imperialism of knowledge” was constituted

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1 M. B. Jerónimo, Repressive developmentalisms: idioms, repertoires, trajectories in late colonialism, in: A. Thompson and M. Thomas (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of the Ends of Empire*, Oxford 2018, pp. 537–554.

2 For an overview of the history of developmentalism in Africa see J. M. Hodge, G. Hodl and M. Kopf (eds.), *Developing Africa. Concepts and practices in twentieth-century colonialism*, Manchester 2014. See also C. Bonneuil, Development as Experiment: Science and State Building in Late Colonial and Postcolonial Africa, 1930–1970, in: *Osiris* 15 (2000), pp. 1501–1520.

3 M. Poncelet, Colonisation, développement et sciences sociales. Éléments pour une sociologie de la constitution du champ des “arts et sciences du développement” dans les sciences sociales francophones belges, in: *Bulletin de l'APAD* 6 (1993).

by an heterogeneous corpus.⁴ The objects of schemes of social engineering also varied. For instance, (social, political, and economic) development and welfarism was definitely gendered. The idioms, methods, and instruments to enact them, and the concrete projects that embodied those schemes, from the *centres extra-coutumiers* and the *foyeurs sociaux* to the rural *centres sociaux*, were also not a coherent whole.⁵

But common languages, approaches and techniques were nonetheless shared, within and outside national and colonial frontiers. Certainly with different emphasis, given discrete goals, the shaping of a “New (Wo)man” in Africa was a collective ambition within the metropole and the colonies, generating a particular momentum in knowledge production, transfer and appropriation, in which the human and social sciences participated actively. In many ways, for many, change became a way to reinstate a modicum of social and political order. Social transformative intervention was seen as able to generate political, securitarian, and economic equilibriums. The main disputes were about the ways to achieve these major goals. As importantly, these idioms, methods and instruments circulated internationally and transnationally, being formulated, debated, resisted, or tailored to particular contexts in different forums. Despite the fact that they were *nationalized*, being submitted to processes of domestic appropriation and inter-national or inter-imperial differentiation (see, for instance, the attempts to differentiate the “French” *animation rurale* from the “British” and “American” *community development*⁶) and causing *national* versions of colonial developmentalism and welfarism, those idioms, methods, and instruments were a by-product of the dynamics of internationalization, which included renewed forms of interimperial collaboration, the emergence of “international development” (as a discipline and as a programme), and the growing intersection between modalities of imperialism and internationalism, despite the multifaceted and increasingly global “crises of empire”.⁷

This text explores some of these ideas and analyses some of these dynamics, taking the case of Belgian colonialism in the 1950s as its main focus.

4 F. Cooper, *Modernizing Bureaucrats, Backward Africans, and the Development concept*, in: F. Cooper and R. Packard (eds.), *International Development and the Social Sciences: Essays in the History and Politics of Knowledge*, Berkeley 1997, pp. 64–92, at p. 64.

5 For the policy of the centres extra-coutumiers see J. Kassa, *Politiques Agricoles et Promotion Rurale au Congo-Zaire (1885–1997)*, Paris 1998, pp. 135–182.

6 See, for instance, A. Meister, *Développement communautaire et animation rurale en Afrique*, in: *L’Homme et la société* 19 (1971), pp. 121–138.

7 For the internationalization of colonialism see J. Kent, *The Internationalisation of Colonialism. Britain, France and Black Africa, 1939–56*, Oxford 1992. For the connections between imperialism and internationalism see M. B. Jerónimo and J. P. Monteiro (eds.), *Internationalism, Imperialism and the Formation of the Contemporary World*, London 2017. For the forms of interimperial collaboration see V. Barth and R. Cvetkovski (eds.), *Imperial Cooperation and Transfer, 1870–1930. Empires and Encounters*, London 2015. For the internationalization of development, see M. Frey, S. Kunkel, and C. Unger (eds.), *International Organizations and Development (1945–1990)*, Basingstoke 2014, and C. Unger, *International Development: A Postwar History*, London 2018. For the crises of empire see M. Thomas, B. Moore and L. Butler, *Crises of Empire*, London 2008.

2. The Disciplines of (Psycho)social Transformation

2.1 “Perfecting her Role as Woman, Wife, Mother”

Between 20 November and 4 December 1961, Kampala (Uganda) welcomed the second Symposium on Community Development. One of the most important contributions was offered by Marie-Elisabeth Ysaye. “Experience de service social au Congo (ex belge)” summarized the efforts made at a *foyer social* created in Stanleyville (today, Kisangani) in 1954, “in the middle of the forest.” The *foyer social* was placed in the important urban *Centre Extra-Coutumier*, which had around 100,000 “natives” and 4,000 to 5,000 Belgians and Europeans. It operated in the “most deprived” neighbourhood, “less affected by civilization,” in the left margin of the Congo river. According to Ysaye, its population, made up by around 50 “tribes,” with a predominance of “Arabized” and “Bantous,” included “elements running away from the censuses” being made on the other shore. Adults were mostly illiterate, and worked mainly in public works, in bakeries and garages. They were bricklayers and mechanics, with no instruction. Some were “boys,” domestic servants of European families. Children had access to primary education, but the latter was not mandatory. There were two primary schools in the zone, both administered by the catholic church, one just for girls. The area had no “official, administrative, medical services,” no “post office, bank, stores.” The accommodations were “primitive,” no water or electricity was provided. The river proximity helped to minimize the poor sanitary conditions. There was a hospital, run by the company *Chemin de Fer des Grands Lacs*, which also had three “camps for workers” in the area, and a small medical dispensary, in which a Belgian nurse supervised a “native” male nurse. Around sixty babies benefitted from a “weekly oversight” given by a *consultation de nourrissons* (baby medical checks), initiatives with which the *foyer* collaborated. Two missions operated in the area, one run by the Baptist Missionary Society, the other catholic, the “Mission de Stanleyville Rive Gauche.” One “military camp” (called “Prince Charles”), with “voluntary” soldiers that received a seven-year preparation, was also located in the neighbourhood. In the surroundings, seven villages formed by groups of Wagenia (Enya) fishermen and some others in the forest, “consumed by kitawalism (a secret xenophobe sect),” added to the social universe described by Ysaye, which was within the reach of the *foyer social*. In 1954, 20,000 persons were declared to interact with its personnel, a number that grew considerably in the next years.⁸

What “was the goal of a *foyer social*” in such circumstances? In 1951, in a general assessment of the existing social policies (and of those that should be implemented), an

8 Archives Diplomatiques, Archives Africaines (AA), AGRI 281 – Organismes Internationaux et Interfricains. CCTA/CSA, M.-E. Ysaye, Experience de service social au Congo (ex belge), in: 2ème Colloque sur le développement communautaire (Kampala, 20 Nov.–4 dec 1961), pp. 1–2. For Stanleyville, among others, see the classic by V. Pons, Stanleyville: An African Urban Community Under Belgian Administration, Oxford 1969 and B. Verhaegen, Le Centre extra-coutumier de Stanleyville (1940–1945), Brussels 1981. For the maternal and infant supervision and regulation and its history see the classic by N. R. Hunt, A Colonial Lexicon of Birth Ritual, Medicalization, and Mobility in the Congo, Durham, NC 1999.

adviser of the Belgian Minister of Colonies argued that their main target were, or should be, women. In certain aspects, Julien Van Hove recuperated debates that were present in publications such as the *Bulletin de l'Union des Femmes Coloniales*, organ of the *Union des Femmes Coloniales* (Union of Colonial Women, since 1923), founded after a research mission made by Emilie Alvin to the Belgian colony in 1920-1921 and sponsored by a *Fonds spécial du Roi* (King's Special Fund). He also revived ideas discussed at the 1930 Congrès Colonial National, which included a commission dealing with the “protection of the native woman.” According to him, the goal was to “help and educate the women, who find it more difficulty to adapt themselves to the new life than do the men.” Women were seen as the “educators of the future generations.” For that reason, a “formation centre” for women native social auxiliaries was created in Usumbura (Ruanda-Urundi), encompassing four years of study.⁹

Years later, Ysaye's answer to the question – what “was the goal of a *foyer social*”? – was clear: “the promotion of the native woman,” the “perfecting of her role as woman, wife, mother” and the replacement of her “tribal servitude by an autonomy of thought, of action.” That is, changing her role in the “family cell” and, therefore, in society. To create a new woman. This entailed some obstacles, namely those originated in religious beliefs (the reference made pointed to “Arabized” communities). Other more general traditional obstructions were also active, such as those raised by local males. The result was a recurrent suspicion towards the institution's initiatives. Nonetheless, the numbers were not insignificant: in 1954, 250 women enrolled; 500 in 1955; 750 in 1956; 1250 in 1957; 1750 in 1958; over 2250 in 1959. The motivations for that considerable adhesion were perhaps not the most exciting – “certain women only come to follow others and leave, for an instant, the *ennui* felt at home” – but the attendance was not negligible. The guiding principles of the *foyer social* in Stanleyville aimed at “mass education,” that is, the transmission of basic subjects, of what was “possible to teach an illiterate” audience. In the beginning, *tricot*, which entailed “manual precision,” sewing, and childcare were the main topics. For those that attended regularly, and persisted in their engagement with the *foyer social*, reading and writing was also offered. But the main goal rested elsewhere: “psychological transformation,” facilitating the “acquisition of an attitude,” proactive and *modern*, towards hygiene, education, namely of children, the spread of “urbanity in social relations,” and learning how to have “pride” in achieving an “end.” Of course, this should be accompanied by household governance: lessons about the kitchen (cooking, etc.), on how to ensure a *grand nettoyage* at home, ironing and tidying-up.¹⁰

No references were made to research activities focused on women, as happened in the *foyer social* at Ruashi commune (1955), in Elisabethville (today, Lubumbashi), under the

9 J. Van Hove, Social Service in the Belgian Congo: Present situation and future plans, in: *Civilisations* 1 (1951) 1, pp. 22–27, at p. 22, 26; C. Jacques and V. Piette, *L'Union des femmes coloniales (1923–1940). Une association au service de la colonisation*, in: A. Hugon (ed.), *Histoire des femmes en situation coloniale: Afrique et Asie, XXe siècle*, Paris 2004, pp. 95–117; Comité Permanent du Congrès Colonial National, *IIIème Congrès Colonial National, Bruxelles 6 et 7 décembre 1930*, vol. I: Rapports; vol. II: Comptes rendus, Brussels 1930 and 1931.

10 Ysaye, *Expérience de service social au Congo (ex belge)*, pp. 3–5.

auspices of the *Institut de Sociologie Solvay*. This institution was carrying several studies at the time, from analysing family living standards to the study of “social morphology,” with a view to facilitate schemes of community development. The Ruashi commune was a product of the ongoing *Ten-Year Plan for the Economic and Social Development of the Belgian Congo (1949–1959)* and of the measures taken by *Office des Cités Africaines*. In 1954, the *Office* designed a neighbourhood for around 32,000 inhabitants, to be divided into five sub-quarters, with clear administrative and securitarian aims, and economic preoccupations, given the proximity to a crucial moneymaking mining area of the Belgian colony (Katanga). This surely helped to explain the presence of the *Institut de Sociologie Solvay* in the area.¹¹

2.2 Inducing “Controlled Crises” (and Surveying Their Impacts)

Since the early twentieth-century, a *Groupe d’Études Coloniales*, sponsored by the *Institut de Sociologie Solvay*, focused on many colonial topics, publishing its results on the *Bulletin de la Société d’Études Coloniales*. These included debates about the “perfectibility” of the “primitive mind,” in which social engineering concerns were already dominant, namely through the advocacy of a series of “controlled crises” in Congolese communities to foster social change. As expected, the study of the “native labour” problem was also a topic of interest.¹²

In the post-war momentum, similar guidelines persisted, as a consequence of the fact that the Institute concentrated its initiatives in Africa. Two were the areas of intervention: welfare work and the training of local leaders in this field, and sociological research, including a “sociology of labour.” The latter, especially due to the works of Arthur Doucy, a former director of the Belgian Office for Social Security and expert on labour productivity and social economy, became preeminent, perhaps unsurprisingly, giving the centrality it had on all European colonial empires’ “native policies.” His mission to Katanga to assess local “social problems” in the early 1950s led to several contributions on labour themes, but also to wider issues of social intervention and regulation. He was associated with the creation of *foyers sociaux* for African females and was a leading figure in the combination of paternalism and reformism that characterized the late Belgian

11 For the foyer social at Ruashi see G. E. J.-B. Brausch, The Solvay Institute of Sociology in Belgian Africa, in: *International Social Science Journal* 11 (1959) 2, pp. 238–250; for the development plan see G. Vanthemsche, *Genèse et portée du “Plan décennal” du Congo belge (1949–1959)*, Brussels 1994; for the urban area and its evolution see S. Boonen and J. Lagae, Ruashi, a Pessac in Congo? On the Design, Inhabitation, and Transformation of a 1950s Neighbourhood in Lubumbashi, Democratic Republic of the Congo, in: K. Rütther, et al. (eds.), *The Politics of Housing in (Post-)Colonial Africa*. Online: <https://opr.degruyter.com/the-politics-of-housing-in-colonial-and-postcolonial-africa/sofie-boonen-and-johan-lagae-ruashi-a-pessac-in-congo-on-the-design-inhabitation-and-transformation-of-a-1950s-neighborhood-in-lubumbashi-democratic-republic-of-the-congo/> (last visited 21 May 2019); B. Fetter, *The Creation of Elisabethville, 1910–1940*, Stanford 1976; M. A. Mpala-Lutebele (ed.), *Lubumbashi: Cent d’ans d’histoire*, Paris 2013.

12 For the Institut Solvay de Sociologie, see R. Vanderstraeten and K. Louckx, *Sociology in Belgium: A Sociological History*, London 2018 and P. de Bie, *Les débuts de la sociologie en Belgique. I: La fondation du premier institut de sociologie Solvay*, in: *Recherches Sociologiques* 14 (1983) 2, pp. 109–140. For the research group see M. Poncelet, *L’invention des sciences coloniales belges*, Paris 2008, pp. 155–166.

colonial policy, simultaneously highlighting its shortcomings, proposing developmental solutions, and reinstating arguments of unpreparedness of the Congolese to deal with social change and, of course, political change, without a sociological tutorship. His early Congo works were clear on this: the consideration of the Congolese “social level” advised gradual reform, as their “sociological hinterland” prevailed in contact with modern forms of social and economic organization, as he argued in his co-authored *Problèmes du travail et politique sociale au Congo Belge* (1952). Late in the 1950s, the “customary influences” were still highlighted as crucial in the interaction of the *Bantou* with the rhythms of modern social change. In the 1960s he was director of the *Institut de Sociologie Solvay* and took part in the famous Belgo-Congolese *table ronde* (1960), as an adviser of the *Association Générale des Baluba du Katanga* (BALUBAKAT), favouring a moderate reformism (later he became an adviser of Mobutu).¹³

Doucy was not alone. René Clémens (University of Liege) was another important figure. He went to Elisabethville in 1956 to enact a project of social action and research in a neighbourhood of the respective *Centre extra-coutumier* (Katuba). This project included works of social psychology about the local population’s adaptation to urban life. He also fostered projects of community development, created *foyer sociaux* and even an “experimental village,” financed by the *Union Minière* and by the *Centre d’Etude des Problèmes sociaux indigènes* (CEPSI), which aimed at the creation of a “new Bantou farmer.” With Clémens, Doucy played a major role in the affirmation of the Institute as a centre of colonial knowledge-production, expertise and policy-making.¹⁴ The Institute, backed by the Belgian Minister of Colonies, Auguste Buisseret (1954–1958), became responsible for several institutions, from the “homecraft centre” (1955) and the educational facilities (1956) in the Ruashi commune, in Elisabethville, to two rural social centres, at Bongandanga (province of Equator, 1956) and Pangi (Kivu province, 1957), and a social research centre in Elisabethville, in 1956. The latter, an important focus of knowledge-production, promoted a “survey of the psychological reactions of African women,” generating several contributions about the best ways to carry it on.¹⁵

One of them was by the senior welfare officer in the region, Yvette Pirlot, who aimed to convince the experts of the institute to use puppet theatre in their enquiries. Based on the contribution of a pioneer of group psychotherapy and initiator of the method of

13 A. Doucy, Le rôle des influences coutumières sur les travailleurs du Congo, in: *Revue de l’Institut de Sociologie Solvay* 27 (1954), pp. 817–830; idem, Les causes instabilité des travailleurs indigènes, in: *Bulletin International de Sciences Sociologiques* (1954), pp. 494–503; A. Doucy and P. Feldheim, *Problèmes du travail et politique sociale au Congo Belge*, Brussels 1952; idem, *Travailleurs indigènes et productivité du travail au Congo Belge*, Brussels 1958. Doucy also co-edited, with P. Bouvier, Introduction à l’économie sociale du Tiers Monde, Brussels 1970. For Doucy see B. Rubbers and M. Poncelet, *Sociologie coloniale au Congo belge. Les études sur le Katanga industriel et urbain à la veille de l’Indépendance*, in: *Genèses* 2 (2015) 99, pp. 93–112; and, for his participation at the roundtable, J. Brassinne, *Les conseillers à la Table ronde belgo-congolaise*, in: *Courrier hebdomadaire du CRISP* 38–39 (1989) 1263–1264, pp. 1–62, esp. pp. 40–42. See also J. Nicaise, *Applied Anthropology in the Congo and Ruanda-Urundi*, in: *Human Organization* 19 (1960) 3, pp. 112–117.

14 For Clémens see Rubbers and Poncelet, *Sociologie coloniale au Congo belge*, p. 98.

15 Brausch, *The Solvay Institute of Sociology in Belgian Africa and also his Quelques expériences d’action sociale dans divers pays en voie de développement*, in: *Revue de l’Institut de Sociologie* 4 (1958), pp. 731–775.

psychodrama, the Romanian-American psychiatrist Jacob L. Moreno, Pirlot aimed to contribute to the definition of effective ways to induce the much-desired “psychological transformation.” The adapted use of specific psycho-social-dramatic techniques, puppet theatre being just one of them, was sold as being an efficient way to have access to crucial information about the tenets of “native” life. To know them better was to facilitate social change, and also enhance social order. The transposition of a method credited with being highly effective in solving the pressing (and violent) social conflicts in the United States of America to the Belgian Congo was considered a major example of innovation and scientifically-oriented social intervention by the institute and, by extension, of the Belgian colonial authorities.¹⁶

2.3 An “Experiment in Comprehensive Social Development”

Returning to Ysaye’s précis, and despite the apparent lack of a scientific approach, similar concerns were noticeable: how to induce psychological and social transformation? How relevant could the *foyers sociaux* be in this respect? For women the answer went from an active politics of reproduction, to a certain extent replicating western conceptions of family, domesticity, and womanhood, to a politics of socio-political integration, aiming to administer novel gender relations and the emergence of an urban “elite,” as the case of the *foyer social* of Usumbura exemplified.¹⁷

But the *foyers* dealt with a larger audience and were just a piece of a larger *system* of planned sociocultural, political and economic engineering. They were not strictly restricted to women (or to urban spaces).¹⁸ They involved male auxiliaries in the respective teams. Indeed, there were *foyers* that had men playing an active role, such as the one at Bagira (Bukavu), which was controlled by the *Union Belge de Service Social au Congo* (UBSSAC) until 1957, and then became administered by the *Institut de Sociologie Solway*. The same happened with the government rural welfare centre at Bambesa, where there was an important station of the *Institut National pour l’Étude Agronomique du Congo belge* (INEAC). The formation of “mixed social development teams” in the rural social centres at Bongandanga (1956) and Pangi (1957) was another important, and effective, example. The opening of a Social Centre for men in Ruashi (April 1956) was another milestone: the “whole family,” and therefore the whole community and society, was now covered. In fact, for some social workers with local responsibilities the focus on women caused significant problems, hindering the overall grand scheme of societal transformation. For instance, Pirlot considered that one of the obstacles to the spread of social work

16 Brausch, *The Solway Institute of Sociology in Belgian Africa*, p. 241, including n2. Despite the positive reference made in this text, two years later Brausch lamented the scarcity of similar “experiments” in the Congo in his *Belgian Administration in the Congo*, London 1961, pp. 56–57.

17 N. Hunt, *Domesticity and colonialism in Belgian Africa: Usumbura’s Foyer Social, 1946–1960*, in: *Signs* 15 (1990) 3, pp. 447–474, esp. pp. 448–449.

18 Not least because the social and even spatial delimitation of the rural-urban “divide” was frequently hard to determine, despite the political and scientific efforts to do so. Moreover, there were *foyers sociaux* in urban and also in rural areas.

in the Congo was precisely its limitation to women and “housewifery training.” But, as she also acknowledged, their operation engaged with many other actors and institutions (as Ysaye noted abundantly) and its success depended heavily on this plurality. After all, this was an “experiment in comprehensive social development focused on the entire community.” One example mentioned by Pirlot was obvious: the stand adopted by men in a given context was crucial to the effectiveness of the social workers’ psychosocial intervention. The “need for social development amongst men” was clear and the husband was “the person best fitted to assist those concerned with his wife’s education.” According to Ysaye, in the Stanleyville *foyer social* that issue was directly addressed: every three months, a meeting with “husbands” was promoted, aiming to convince them of the utility of the *foyer*, but also to hear their position in relation to new ways of childcare and education and, also, household governance.¹⁹

But there was more to consider, not necessarily under the responsibility of the *foyer social* but surely with reverberations in its activity. If the *foyers* were part of a larger project of social transformation and control, they were surely conditioned by the social and political contexts in which they operated. The intervention on male constituencies shaped and was shaped by projects and techniques of intervention more focused on women. For the “native” male, games were seen as crucial. The professed “incapacity to play” of the “Bantous” supposedly entailed an “intellectual retardation”. Games, organized and disciplined games (crucial aspect), could counteract years of undesired effects, and pave the ways for individual *and* collective change. For the male teenagers, seen as critically “inactive,” a “practical education,” for instance through gardening or farming lessons with the district agronomist or applied reading and arithmetic, was privileged. As in other contexts, rural development was seen in socio-political terms, not merely in economic ones. In all educational efforts, the relevance of audio-visual means was praised: posters, drawings, “bricolages” and, in tune with the time, the use of mobile teams that brought movies to the communities. Ysaye did not mention puppet theatre, but similar ideas transpired in the text: the need to be creative in the techniques used to foster “psychological transformation” and to think systemically about the variegated role of the *foyers*, pondering about its articulation with other institutions.²⁰

The involvement of local communities was proclaimed to be at the centre of the *foyer social*, replicating some basic organizing principles of the doctrines of community development elsewhere.²¹ In the *reports and recommendations* of the Kampala conference, A. R. G. Prosser, the Deputy Secretary in the Ministry of Social Development and Labour

19 I. Pirlot, Urban community development in Ruashi, Elisabethville, in: Community Development Bulletin 12 (1961) 13, pp. 78–84, at pp. 78–80; Ysaye, *Experience de service social au Congo (ex belge)*, pp. 7–8.

20 *Ibid.*, pp. 4–7. For rural development in the Belgian Congo in the 1950s see, for instance, P. Clement, Rural Development in the Belgian Congo. The Late-colonial “Indigenous Peasantry” Programme and its Implementation in the Equateur District (1950s), in: Académie Royale des Sciences d’Outre-Mer. Bulletin des Séances 60 (2014) 2, pp. 251–286.

21 D. Immerwahr, *Thinking Small: The United States and the Lure of Community Development*, Cambridge, MA 2015.

of Uganda, emphasized this same issue, appreciating the knowledge gathered in the previous decade about the formation of cadres and, also, valuing the “development regarding the techniques of motivation of communities attached to their tradition, to make them act.”²² In the case of Ysaye’s *foyer*, the institutional structure aimed to facilitate that participation. Its council gathered the director and seven “natives,” selected by their perceived representativeness of the population and by their ability to facilitate the diversity of the *foyer*’s activities. In the beginning, the team was composed only of two European social workers. It ended up with four of them and 33 “natives.” As Ysaye argued, without the growing participation of locals, fostering “professional conscience,” “initiative”, “discipline,” not “material accomplishments,” nothing fruitful would happen. What about the results, taking into consideration that her appraisal was written in 1961, one year after the Congo’s independence? Were those transformative, social engineering efforts a “failure”? “*Non, mille fois non!*,” she stated. The “actual situation was the result of an awakening of a submissive population to the imperatives of an international context.”²³

3. Common Imaginaries ... and Shared Developments

3.1 From “Protection” to “Promotion”

The international contexts and dimensions, including those of an interimperial nature, were important for other reasons. These comprehensive experiments, as Pirlot and many others considered them, were significantly moulded by international dynamics. Their understanding is crucial to any assessment of the post-WWII projects of engineering “New Men” and “Women” in colonial Africa (and elsewhere). These were not solely national or colonial histories, far from it: they were related to common imaginaries (economic and social), shared idioms, and repertoires of political action, and, also, similar purposes, notwithstanding all the different traditions in imperial and colonial statecraft, national political cultures and available human and financial resources. It is a fact that the topic of “colonial women” had a long genealogy in Belgium and in the Belgian Congo, at least since the 1920s and 1930s. The “protection” of women in colonial contexts debated at the 1930 Colonial Congress and the creation of the first *foyer social* in Leopoldville in 1933, related to Christian women’s circles, paved the way for a more systematic and institutionalized approach to issues of social service in the Belgian Congo and to the place of women in those efforts. In the beginning of the 1950s, partially as a result of the pressure exerted by the *Union des Femmes Coloniales*, a commission on social service in the colonies was formed, in order to devise new policy options. The creation of a department on the subject, responsible for the coordination of the *foyers sociaux*, deciding the general strategy, funding and in charge of their regulation and inspection, was

22 CCTA/CSA L(62) 15, Reports and recommendations. Second Symposium on Community Development (Kampala: 20th–30th November 1961).

23 Ysaye, *Experience de service social au Congo (ex belge)*, pp. 11–12.

just one accomplishment. Minister of the Colonies Pierre Wigny’s words – “it is through women that the achievements of civilization are transmitted from generation to generation” – became a motto for many.²⁴

From “protection” to “promotion,” the focus on women in colonial contexts grew, meriting an entire session of the National Colonial Congress in 1956, entitled *La promotion de la femme au Congo et au Ruanda-Urundi*. As one of the *rapporteurs* argued, the “problem” of woman was “perhaps the most important of the social problems in our time.”²⁵ Surely, there were national specificities, starting with those related to the particularities of a given “colonial situation” or those resulting from domestic tensions, in the metropole, between competing ideologies and political parties, or between the church and the state. But, as argued in the introduction, they were also formed by the discrete post-WWII processes of internationalization. Below are three examples that offer a glimpse into this more comprehensive and complex picture, which is not reducible to national or colonial histories. The arguments and repertoires of action regarding social policies, focused or not on women, entailed more voices and institutions, operating in different but interconnected spaces.

3.2 “Old Traditions and a New Doctrine”

The first example is related to one interimperial and international organization, the *Institut International des Civilisations Différentes* (INCIDI, International Institute of Differing Civilizations), successor of the *Institut Colonial International* (International Colonial Institute, ICI).²⁶ The INCIDI was a private association populated by imperial and colonial authorities and experts, some more close to national governments than others. As Pierre Wigny noted in 1951, in one of its meetings, the INCIDI “had old traditions and a new doctrine.” Like its predecessor, the INCIDI’s members proclaimed to be guided, essentially, by a techno-scientific reasoning, not by political instructions and purposes. But all the numerous meetings of the organization questioned that standpoint. The “old traditions” were essentially a result of an accumulated knowledge on imperial and colonial statecraft and, for its members, they should guide those who wanted to transform colonial or postcolonial societies. This principle was manifest in the ways in which the INCIDI rivalled with the United Nations and their specialized agencies and commissions, on many issues. For instance, in its XVIth meeting (1951) one of the themes was the “Study of the various means of supporting the plans of cultural, economic, and social development for insufficiently developed territories.” The idea of development animated

24 G. Mianda, L’État, le genre et l’iconographie : l’image de la femme au Congo belge, in: I. Ndaywel è Nziem and E. Mudimbe-Boyi (eds.), *Images, mémoires et savoirs. Une histoire en partage avec Bogumil Koss Jewsiewicki*, Paris 2009, pp. 515–537, at p. 527.

25 *Congres Colonial National, La promotion de la femme au Congo et au Ruanda-Urundi. Xlle session – 1956. Rapport et Comptes Rendus*, Brussels 1956, p. 258 (M. G. Rhodius, *L’Assistance sociale comme moyen éducatif de la femme autochtone en territoires belges d’Afrique*, pp. 252–324).

26 For the ICI see F. Wagner, *Colonial Internationalism: How Cooperation among Experts Reshaped Colonialism (1830s–1950s)*, Ph.D. Thesis, Florence 2016.

multiple international agencies and their potential intervention on colonial societies should be counteracted by those who mastered the old traditions and also learned the new doctrine.²⁷

One of the Belgian contributions in Paris was made by Adolphe Ruwet, president of the *Association des Intérêts Coloniaux Belges* (Association of the Belgian Colonial Interests). Ruwet stressed the institutions focused on *œuvres sociales*, from the *Fonds du Bien-Être Indigène* (FBEI, Native Welfare Fund), created in 1947, to the above mentioned CEPSE, created in 1946 by reformist groups in Elisabethville, and the *foyers sociaux* under the administration of numerous organizations, private and public, scientific, academic, or economic. The *Ten-Year Plan* was also highlighted, being considered the dynamo of the general efforts to provide a sound and effective colonial social policy, capable of contributing to “the efforts of the United Nations.” The multiplication of institutions competing to deliver the Plan’s proclaimed principles and purposes regarding the social question was presented as a proof of the level of commitment of Belgian society, at home and in the colonies. These institutions were actively collaborating with the government to achieve the “moral and social recovery of the de-tribalized blacks in the Belgian Congo and in Ruanda-Urundi.” The efforts directed towards social issues were accompanied by other developmental schemes, on agriculture, with the *paysannat indigène* and the promotion of “native cooperatives,” or in the industrial sector. It was a comprehensive experiment, indeed.²⁸

In the 1958 meeting, in Brussels, the theme was “Women’s role in the development of tropical and sub-tropical countries,” which was recurrently addressed in previous gatherings. Other international forums were scrutinizing the topic and, again, the INCIDI aimed to intervene in the ongoing debates, claiming precedence and authority, aspiring to shape the international developmentalist agenda dealing with colonial societies. Acting as both Belgian Minister of Foreign Affairs and Secretary-General of the INCIDI, Pierre Wigny delivered one of the opening speeches, side by side with King Leopold III and Sarmiento Rodrigues, the former Minister of the Overseas provinces of Portugal and First Vice-chairman of the INCIDI. To Wigny, a civilization was “not founded solely upon a set of ideas but also upon an inclination towards intellectual activities of a certain kind, on modes of reasoning and on a rhythm of mental activity peculiar to that civilization.” Women needed to be brought into this “intellectual and spiritual climate,” as the “neglect” of the “education of one half of the human race” was an “astonishing waste of human resources.” For many reasons, surely not only “moral,” this had to change.²⁹

The report about the situation in the Belgian Congo was authored by Denise Soyer-Poskin, president of the *Commission du Congo Belge et du Ruanda-Urundi* of the influential *Conseil National des Femmes Belges*, building upon the works and the debates

27 INCIDI, *Compte rendu de la XXVIe session tenue à Paris les 12, 13, 14 et 15 mars 1951*, Brussels 1951, p. 69.

28 A. Ruwet, *Étude des divers modes de soutien des plans de développement culturel, économique et social du Congo Belge et du Ruanda-Urundi*, in: INCIDI, *Compte rendu de la XXVIe session*, pp. 229–251, cit. pp. 229, 236.

29 INCIDI, *Women’s role in the development of tropical and sub-tropical countries. Report of the XXXIth meeting held in Brussels on 17th, 18th, 19th and 20th September 1958*, Brussels 1959, pp. 24–25 (Wigny).

that marked the 1956 National Colonial Congress, in which she participated actively, and her participation on the *Congrès mondial de la famille* (World Congress of Families, 1958), where she was one of the rapporteurs. Her main goal was to differentiate the role of Congolese and European women in the colonial contexts, trying to explain the causes behind it. Juridical aspects such as the effects of “customary law” on the status of Congolese women, their rights and duties regarding marriage, including the question of the dowry and polygamy, were signalled as important dimensions to be fully understood if individual and collective change was a goal. So were the economic ones, from women’s role in urban and rural contexts to domestic work. Naturally, the theme of education and social assistance also merited special places in her analysis. Offering a statistical summary, Soyer-Poskin argued that the education of women was far less developed than that of men: in 1955–1956, from a school-age population of 1,282,646 students, only 264,146 were girls (and the disproportion of school attendance in *centres extra-coutumiers* and rural areas was significant). In relation to social work, the role played by *foyer sociaux*, in urban areas, and by “rural social services,” in which social action was, or should be, a “vast global and multiforme action,” was highlighted. They were crucial to deal with a major trial: the colonial woman had to “modify her attitudes, her personality,” in contexts of “considerable moral and material difficulties.” “Less educated,” she was not properly prepared to face such challenges. Many of these ideas were shared at the conference, as the extensive “general report” by Marie-Hélène Lefaucheux, president of the International Council of Women (since 1957) and one of the driving forces behind the UN Commission on the Status of Women, which she chaired from 1948 to 1953, demonstrates. The collective discussions are other good examples of the plurality of voices, arguments, case-studies, motivations and interests involved in the definition of (international, inter-imperial, national, colonial) policies focused on the “promotion” of women in “tropical and sub-tropical territories.”³⁰

3.3 Searching for the Homo Oeconomicus

A second example was provided the study made by Doucy and his assistant Feldheim about “human factors of productivity,” intimately associated with the collective inter-imperial project of the Inter-African Institute of Labour (*Institut interafricain du travail*) of the Commission for Technical Co-operation in Africa South of the Sahara (CCTA), to which we will return below.³¹ Doucy and Feldheim’s participation at the 1954 UNESCO conference on the *Social implications of industrialization and urbanization in Africa South of the Sahara*, which took place in Abidjan (Côte d’Ivoire) and was prepared

30 D. Soyer-Poskin, Congo Belge and M.-H. Lefaucheux, Le rôle de la femme dans le développement des pays tropicaux et subtropicaux. Aspect social et culturel, in: INCIDI, Women’s role in the development of tropical and sub-tropical countries, pp. 126–150, at pp. 138–139 and 421–455, respectively. For an assessment of the centrality of gender in Portuguese late colonialism see A. Stucki, Violence and Gender in Africa’s Iberian Colonies. Feminizing the Portuguese and Spanish Empire, 1950s–1970s, London 2019.

31 Doucy and Feldheim, Travailleurs indigènes et productivité du travail au Congo Belge. See also Rubbers and Poncelet, Sociologie coloniale au Congo belge, pp. 98, 101–103.

by the London-based International African Institute (IAI), surely made a difference in the international integration of Belgian colonial “epistemic communities,” reinforcing dynamics that were visible in the interwar period. The 1930s arguments for the need to systematically assess the “social conditions” in African urban and industrial contexts gained new momentum in the 1950s. And, again, this was certainly an outcome of the internationalization of colonialism and the intensification of instances of interimperial cooperation.³²

In October 1952, in London, an international team composed by an ethnographer (Pierre Clément), a psychologist (Nelly Xydias), a statistical sociologist (Valdo G. Pons), and three field researchers met for three months, under the supervision of Daryll Forde, a renowned anthropologist and director of the IAI, to prepare the major enquiry associated with the UNESCO aims. They also went to Brussels, to receive logistical and intellectual advice. The focus of the enquiry would be Stanleyville, considered a match to the main criteria of the project (for instance, be a “well-established and diversified urban centre showing a considerable variety of full-time occupations and levels of skill,” not that big, being manageable for the designed research). In Brussels they were welcomed by Guy Malengreau, professor in Louvain, author of an important study on the need to engineer – socially, politically, and economically – a “native peasantry” and a key figure in the Native Welfare Fund. They spent a year and a half in Stanleyville and were responsible for the delivery of a substantial report in Abidjan, at a conference that gathered experts but also governments and international organizations.³³

Alongside other international and imperial experts of the time – such as Forde (responsible for the introductory survey), Georges Balandier, C. H. Northcott (expert on “labour efficiency”) or James Clyde Mitchell –, Doucy and Feldheim offered a paper that dealt with the impact of industrialization in the Equator province. Several other experts on the Belgian Congo were also present, such as Fernand Grévisse, author of an important volume about the *Centre Extra-Coutumier d’Elisabethville*. Pons, of the University of Cape Town and later author of a book on Stanleyville, Xydias, director of the Service of *Psychotechnique* in the Institute of Psychology of the University of Paris, Clément, which ended up close to Patrice Lumumba (who was his assistant), and Guy Malengreau were also present.³⁴

32 G. St. J. Orde Browne, *The African Labourer*, Oxford 1933; J. Merle Davies (ed.), *Modern Industry and the African: An Inquiry into the Effect of the Copper Mines of Central Africa upon Native Society and the Work of Christian Missions*, London 1933; C. Schayegh, *The Expanding Overlap of Imperial, International, and Transnational Political Activities, 1920s–1930s: A Belgian Case Study*, in: *International Politics* 55 (2018) 6, pp. 782–802.

33 D. Forde, *Social Aspects of Urbanization and Industrialization in Africa: A General View*, in: UNESCO/The International African Institute (eds.), *Social Implications of Industrialization and Urbanization in Africa South of the Sahara*, Paris 1956, pp. 16–17; G. Malengreau, *Vers un Paysannat Indigène: Les Lotissements Agricoles au Congo Belge*, Brussels 1949. For a classic appraisal of the policy see B. Jewsiewicki, *African Peasants in the Totalitarian Colonial Society of the Belgian Congo*, in: M. Klein (ed.), *Peasants in Africa*, Beverly Hills 1980, pp. 45–75.

34 F. Grévisse, *The African Centre at Elisabethville*; V. Pons, N. Xydias and P. Clément, *Part Three: Social Effects of Urbanization in Stanleyville, Belgian Congo: Preliminary Report of the Field Research Team of the International African Institute*; G. Malengreau, *Sociological Researches in African Urban Centres, with Reference to the Situation in the Belgian Congo*; V. G. Pons, *The Changing Significance of Ethnic Affiliation and of Westernization in the*

Pons, Xydias, and Clément were collectively responsible for a lengthy report on the “social effects of urbanization in Stanleyville,” assessing social and demographic aspects and labour dynamics, including about the “attitudes” of the “natives,” work that came out of a 1952–1953 mission to study the *effets sociaux de l’industrialisation et de l’urbanisation sur les Noirs*. Echoing dynamics seen in other empire-states, namely in the British empire, psychology and its tests of “personality” and “intelligence” became crucial to the scientific understanding but also to the political assessment of late colonial societies, in a context marked by doctrines and repertoires of developmentalism and welfarism.³⁵ In his contribution, Xydias addressed the importance of a “serious study of mental aptitudes,” and used Raymond B. Cattell’s *Culture Fair Intelligence Test* (CFIT), in its Scale 2 (For children aged 8–14 as well as average adults), in his research with Pons and Clément. The test was applied to workers and schoolchildren, albeit differently.³⁶ Malengreau also emphasized the study of the “psychological factor” as crucial to solve many social “problems,” starting with the “spiritual confusion” affecting “natives in non-traditional groupings,” which was contributing to a “low output of native workers in industry.” The lack of education, malnutrition and scarce wages were relevant, but the fact that work was “meaningless” for the Congolese worker was considered more important.³⁷

Malengreau praised the works of André Ombredane – namely “Principes pour une étude psychologique des noirs du Congo Belge,” which were connected to a seminar about psychological research on “the blacks of the Congo” he held at the Université Libre de Bruxelles, where he was a professor in Psychology, after having had a chair in Experimental Psychology at the University of Rio de Janeiro (Brazil) in 1939. Ombredane’s argument that “the inducements offered by the White man are still of uncertain value among people who have not yet entirely shaken off the influence of their tribal customs” was particularly noted. In the late 1940s, Ombredane called for the need to carry on “missions of psychological studies” that could facilitate the understanding of the “factors” that constrained the “behaviour of blacks.” In the 1950s he spent his holidays in the Belgian Congo, responding to a growing demand for psychosocial knowledge capable of improving labour “productivity” or of enhancing social change at an individual and collective level, and stressing the possibilities of both through better education and social intervention.³⁸ Malengreau was more concerned with “inertia,” a “final symptom of the

African Settlement Patterns in Stanleyville; A. Doucy and P. Feldheim, Some Effects of Industrialization in Two Districts of Equatoria Province (Belgian Congo), all in: UNESCO/The International African Institute, *Social Implications of Industrialization and Urbanization in Africa South of the Sahara*, pp. 161–166, pp. 229–492, pp. 624–638, pp. 638–669, and pp. 670–692 (pp. 684–685 for the social services), respectively. See also F. Grévisse, *Le Centre Extra-Coutumier d’Elisabethville*, Brussels 1951; V. Pons, *Stanleyville*; P. Clément, *Patrice Lumumba (Stanleyville 1952–1953)*, in: *Présence Africaine* 40 (1962), pp. 57–78.

35 E. Linstrum, *Ruling Minds. Psychology in the British Empire*, Cambridge, MA 2016. For the context, M. B. Jerónimo, *Repressive developmentalisms*.

36 Xydias, *Labour: Conditions, Aptitudes, Training*, at p. 333.

37 Malengreau, *Sociological Researches in African Urban Centres*, at pp. 633–634.

38 A. Ombredane, *Principes pour une étude psychologique des noirs du Congo Belge*, in: *L’Année psychologique* 50 (1949), pp. 521–547, at p. 534, 547. See also his *L’exploration de la mentalité des Noirs congolais au moyen d’une épreuve projective*. Le Congo T.A.T, Brussels 1954. For Ombredane and the context see P.-M. Schuhl, *André*

crisis” supposedly affecting “native society,” due to the “methods of colonial government,” namely “paternalism,” which “killed all initiative among Africans.” The “social malady” should be understood sociologically, that is, comprehensively and shaped by an “utilitarian standpoint,” with the help of psychology and its instruments, allowing a surgical social transformation of the existing “modes of behaviour,” “restoring social order.” And “social integration” should be the main aim of the expert. The “sickness” of the new cityscapes was “much more moral than physical.” The exemplary case offered by Malengreau was that of the *évolués*, which were declared to be essentially affected by “problems of acculturation,” not by “housing conditions or wage levels.”³⁹

The perspectives offered and the claims made at *La voix du Congolais* (The voice of the Congolese), the journal of the male educated group, were cautiously appraised by some experts and authorities, despite the fact that they more or less reproduced “western” codes regarding gender relations or “civilizational” arguments.⁴⁰ Perfectibility and social engineering had many obstacles, but also many consequences. Sometimes, schemes of social engineering were needed to halt the unintended consequences of other, previous schemes of social engineering. Efforts to create “New Men” and “New Women”, and new “communities” and “societies,” responded to similar processes. Arguments for psychosocial transformation might aim at minimizing, or redirecting, existing dynamics of social change. Indeed, as was stated in Accra, development could mean the refinement of tradition. Inducing change to restore, promoting crisis envisioning the renovation of order. And, in a context marked by growing anticolonial challenges, to change, *develop* and *modernize* was to increase the possibilities to remain (a colonial power), as happened in the Portuguese case.⁴¹ The colonial state and administration were “nervous,” for sure, partially as a consequence of the “crises” they induced, partially as a result of the ability of local actors to provoke anxiety.⁴² The intense projection of tranquillity in the colonies, obscuring significant internal tensions, was not sufficient to appease those anxieties.⁴³

As mentioned above, Doucy and Feldheim authored an important contribution about the question of the “productivity” of African workers and the “human factors” that affected it, *Travailleurs indigènes et productivité du travail au Congo Belge*. As in other em-

Ombredane (1898–1958), in: *Revue Philosophique de la France et de l'Étranger* 149 (1959), pp. 278–280, and A. Lauro, *Sur les traces de la “psychologie ethnique”* (2/2), <https://amandinelauro.wordpress.com> (consulted on 24 May 2019).

39 Malengreau, *Sociological Researches in African Urban Centres*, pp. 635–637. For the *évolués* see D. Tödt, “Les Noirs Perfectionnés: Cultural Embourgeoisement in Belgian Congo during the 1940s and 1950s, in: *Working Papers des Sonderforschungsbereiches 640*, 4/2012, <http://edoc.huberlin.de/series/sfb-640-papers/2012-4/PDF/4.pdf>. See also his *Elitenbildung und Dekolonisierung: die Évolués in Belgisch-Kongo 1944–1960*, Göttingen 2018 and J.-M. Mutamba-Makombo, *Du Congo belge au Congo indépendant, 1940–1960. Émergence des évolués et gènes du nationalisme*, Kinshasa 1998.

40 G. Mianda, *Colonialism, Education, and Gender Relations in the Belgian Congo: The Évolué Case*, in: J. Allman, S. Gerger and N. Musisi (eds.), *Women in African Colonial Histories*, Bloomington 2002, pp. 144–163.

41 For the latter see M. B. Jerónimo and A. Costa Pinto, *A Modernizing Empire? Politics, Culture and Economy in Portuguese Late Colonialism*, in: id. (eds.), *The Ends of European Colonial Empires*, London 2015, pp. 51–80.

42 N. R. Hunt, *A Nervous State: Violence, Remedies, and Reverie in Colonial Congo*, Durham, NC 2016.

43 M. G. Stanard, *Revisiting Bula Matari and the Congo Crisis: Successes and Anxieties in Belgium's Late Colonial State*, in: *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 46 (2018) 1, pp. 144–168.

pire-states, the debates about “productivity,” “instability,” and “absenteeism” of African manpower were pivotal in those about the economics of development. They were also fundamental to the discussions about its socio-political dimensions, that is, the disputes about how they could enhance projects of social and political transformation, not merely improve economic performance. Doucy and Feldheim’s contribution was surely influenced by years of thinking about Belgian social policy at the Université Libre de Bruxelles, which included works by some of Doucy’s students or researchers, such as Maryse Périn-Hockers, author of *L’absentéisme des travailleurs africains et l’instabilité dans les entreprises de la région d’Elisabethville* (1958; introduction by Doucy) and Robert Poupard, author of *Facteurs de productivité de la main-d’œuvre autochtone à Elisabethville*, this one published on the eve of decolonization and still replicating “old traditions,” particularly references to the “traditional rhythm” of the African worker. Périn-Hockers clearly placed her contributing within a genealogy of ideas and debates that characterized the Inter-African Institute of Labour in all meetings, starting with the one in Jos (Nigeria, 1949; see below) and ending with the ones in Beira (Mozambique, 1955) and Lusaka (at the time Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland, 1957).⁴⁴ Doucy and Feldheim, and many others searched for the *homo oeconomicus* in Africa, which Thomas Haighton, the director of the Inter-African Institute of Labour, considered “even more fictitious in Africa than elsewhere.” To find him, or to create him through schemes of social engineering, was a priority. A new (productive, disciplined, with “notions of time”) man was in need.⁴⁵

3.4 The “Improvement of Tradition”

A third example is also related to the CCTA, the institution that organized a Regional Symposium on Community Development in Accra (Ghana), in April 1959.⁴⁶ The meeting followed many others that since the late 1940s had shaped the competing but also collaborative ways in which European colonial powers, and international and interimperial organizations, imagined colonial developmentalism and welfarism, reflecting as well on how the latter could transform colonial societies and respective socio-political relations. Already in 1949, before the formal establishment of the CCTA, in a conference on Indigenous Rural Economy, in Jos (Nigeria), the centrality of methods to ensure the “raising of morale” via “literacy, films and broadcasting” was advocated. To convince

44 Doucy and Feldheim, *Travailleurs indigènes*; M. Périn-Hockers, *L’absentéisme des travailleurs africains et l’instabilité dans les entreprises de la région d’Elisabethville*, Brussels 1958 and R. Poupard, *Facteurs de productivité de la main-d’œuvre autochtone à Elisabethville*, Brussels 1960. For more see Rubbers and Poncelet, *Sociologie coloniale au Congo belge*, at p. 102. For the context see F. Cooper, *Decolonization and African Society: The Labor Question in French and British Africa*, Cambridge, UK 1996, pp. 361–382.

45 T. Haighton, *Introdução*, in: CCTA/Inter-African Institute of Labour (ed.), *Factores humanos da produtividade em África. Inquérito preliminar*, Lisbon 1956, pp. 9–11. See also CCTA/Inter-African Institute of Labour, *Conferência Inter-africana do Trabalho. 4ª Sessão, Beira, 1955, vol. II*, Lisbon 1955.

46 For the CCTA see Kent, *The Internationalisation of Colonialism*.

colonial populations of the benefits of a “policy of self-help” was mandatory.⁴⁷ In certain ways, the 1959 meeting echoed some of the most important debates that animated previous events, for instance those around the meaning and application of “community development,” confronting the ones promoted in 1954, at the Ashridge Conference on Social Development, and those advanced by the United Nations in 1956. Those in Accra preferred the Ashridge perspective, perhaps as a consequence of the rivalry that, like the INCIDI, the CCTA had with some of the United Nations agencies, for instance, the International Labour Organization and the World Health Organization. An important point made in Accra was that “community development” was essentially an “improvement of tradition,” a balance between progress and tradition. “Ancient forms” could be the “vehicle of new ideas,” the “traditions of war” could be used “for peace.” The ways to reach that balance were alphabetization and education of adults, an active intervention “near women and in the *foyer*,” and activities of “vulgarization,” all entailing local cooperation and consultation, to enhance their effectiveness as igniters of individual and collective change.⁴⁸

In order to meet these purposes, some principles and techniques were highlighted as crucial, clearly similar to those being argued for by the likes of Pirlot or Ysaye, among many other voices. In what related to the intervention on the *foyers*, with women, it was stressed that their education “should not be intellectual or scholastic,” especially if that meant “making her unable to fulfil her role as wife, mother and educator,” which was the rule in rural contexts. At the same time, her “growing economic and political influence should not be underestimated.” In order to enhance the efforts of psychosocial intervention and societal change, and, we may argue, of the *utility* of that economic and political influence, all techniques that could positively contribute to that aim were praised. That was the case of “audio-visual techniques,” adapted to local circumstances: posters, theatre plays, puppets, films, group discussions, and radio. Films were deemed “too elaborated and quick to be understood by the village spectators.” The creation of “community camps” where “music and dance” or the collective “administration of common resources” could be promoted was also mentioned, but the preferred techniques were theatre and radio. Pirlot was surely aware of this fact: her emphasis on puppet theatre was not singular. One of the most important documents of the time, the UN’s *Social progress through community development* (1955), known by all involved in social service, also highlighted the centrality of new “methods” available to enhance social transformation at individual and collective levels. Regarding the “methods of communication,” “live and puppet theatres, pageant and amateur folk-theatres” were indicated as fruitful techniques to “dramatize campaigns in health education, to convey a social message and to stir a desire for improvements.” Simultaneously, both Pirlot and Ysaye, and many others, were

47 Final report, in: National Archives, United Kingdom, CO 852/1226/5, International African Conference on Rural Indigenous Economy held at Jos in Nigeria (November 1949) – matters arising.

48 Report. Rural Welfare. Regional Symposium on Community Development in West Africa. Accra, 6–15 1959, CCTA, L. (59) 68, 28 april 1959, p. 8.

also aware of the concern that the political authorities and the experts on developmentalism and welfarism had regarding the levels of local participation. This was clear in Accra. The “indifference of the public” should be combatted and for this to happen, beside an effective indoctrination with new techniques, it was crucial to form “benevolent local leaders” and foster an active “cooperation with local and consuetudinary authorities.”⁴⁹

4. Conclusion

This necessarily brief excursion through problems, arguments, institutions, and events that shaped the imagination of the “New (Wo)Man” and communities in the Belgian colonial empire illustrates the diversity of idioms and repertoires of sociocultural, political and economic development focused on their psychosocial transformation. Discourses and schemes of psychological and social engineering concentrated on colonial populations had multiple origins, voices, purposes, competing to demonstrate exclusive and exceptional aptitudes in the production and mastering of the *savoir-développer*, of the *savoir-transformer* needed to induce change, and, crucially, restore order. The experiments in “comprehensive social development” entailed diverse methods and techniques, from strategies of sociospatial (re)settlement and control (e.g. the *centres extra-coutumiers* or the *foyers sociaux*) to instruments of indoctrination, some more subtle than others. This text also shows that our understanding of these dynamics cannot be reduced to single geographical, national, or institutional analytical frameworks. International and transnational processes significantly influenced these experiments, and were influenced by them. These colonial experiments, which aimed at individual and collective social change, were a product of vast and interconnected, but competing, actors, networks, and institutions that were active at many levels, from imperial-states and inter-imperial coalitions to international, hybrid, and transnational organizations, from the *Union des Femmes Coloniales* or the *Institut de Sociologie Solvay* to the INCIDI and the CCTA, and the UN’s specialized agencies. Of course, they were also active on the ground, in colonial urban and rural contexts, facing specific challenges and addressing particular communities. The latter surely conditioned the enactment of more or less grandiose schemes of psychological and social engineering.⁵⁰

But the role of international, interimperial organizations was pivotal in the diversification of voices, arguments and projects of social change, as the INCIDI and the CCTA demonstrate. They were not only forums in which national and colonial cases were presented, described and evaluated. They were not mere repositories of national experiments in “comprehensive social development.” They were spaces in which those experiments

49 Ibid., pp. 8–9, 13, 15–16. For the UN’s official perspective, see United Nations, *Social Progress through Community Development*, New York 1955, pp. 236–282, at p. 85. See also A. L. Sayward, *The United Nations in International History*, London 2017.

50 Hunt, *A Nervous State*; A. Eckert, *Regulating the Social: Social Security, Social Welfare and the State in Late Colonial Tanzania*, in: *Journal of African History* 45 (2004), pp. 467–89.

were significantly shaped and reshaped, through the circulation and transfer of “old traditions,” but also through the co-construction of new doctrines and modalities of *savoir-développer* and *savoir-transformer*. This collaborative project, which of course did not erase competition and forms of interimperial and intercolonial differentiation, was partially encouraged by the need to counteract the growing intervention of the United Nations and its commissions and agencies, in which anticolonial projects were gradually gaining track. Numerous summits were organized (increasingly in colonial contexts), several epistemic communities focused on colonial or “dependent” territories were promoted, plenty of research works and policy papers were commissioned, published, and widely spread on the international level. These included surveys of the “psychological reactions of African women,” the search for the African *homo oeconomicus*, the study of how to transform the African *homo ruralis* or *homo industrialis* (here including women), and the pondering of the best ways to administer the socio-political effects of urbanization and “de-tribalization,” which had a clear gendered nature and required devising policies of rural welfare. Their influence on policy-making is yet to be thoroughly established, but there are evidences of their important impact in the production of knowledge, in the setting of norms, in the redefinition of legislation and in the formulation of social, developmental, and securitarian policies in late colonialism, in the Belgian colonial empire as in others. Our understanding of the tentative creation of “New (Wo)Man” in late colonialism, in the post-war momentum, needs to include their role and influence.⁵¹

51 M. B. Jerónimo, *Competing Knowledge? Interimperial Cooperation in Late Colonial Developmentalism (1940s–1950s)*, in: G. Castryck and K. Naumann (eds.), *Divided Entanglements of Colonial Knowledge. International, Interimperial, and Intercolonial Production of Knowledge, 1880s–1960s* (forthcoming).