

# When Congo Wants To Go To School - The Subject Matter



Group photo of pupils in Bamanya, 1930. From MSC Archives

In the previous chapters, what was actually happening during lessons became dimly visible here and there. In this chapter this will be examined more closely. Learning in a class situation can be approached in many different ways. I assume in any case that a combination of various points of view is needed to achieve a picture of 'reality'. What was taught? This can be deduced from the content of curricula tested by the commentary in inspection reports. It can also be partially deduced from the subject matter in the textbooks used. How was this taught? This is actually a question of the pedagogical principles the missionaries adhered to: did they talk about this? Did these principles even exist?

## *What was in the curriculum?*

The curricula for subsidised missionary education have already been discussed in chapter two. By and large the period in question can be divided as follows, using the applicable curriculum guides: the period from 1929 to 1949, under the first curriculum (the *Brochure Jaune*), from 1949 to just after half-way through the 1950s, under the second (and third) curriculum and the second half of the 1950s, in which *métropolisation* was imposed (and, in principle, the Belgian syllabus should have been implemented). Apart from the fact that the transition between the different periods, especially between the second and third, is not very strictly defined, the first curriculum was noticeably enforced for the majority of the colonial period (taking the previously discussed proposal of 1938 into account). It

did not seem worthwhile to analyse the changes in lesson content between the curricula of 1929 and 1948 in detail. After all it is almost certain that there is no general and direct concordance between what was required in the curriculum guides and what was actually taught. The curriculum guides only gave minimal norms, general guidelines and guiding principles. Obviously, it did not include the detailed contents of lessons. The third and final reason was that the curriculum was fragmented in the guide of 1948 through the introduction of the distinction between the normal and 'selected' second grade. This made an orderly comparison more difficult. The evolution of the two curricula in the area of subject content will only be touched upon very briefly.

However, it did seem worthwhile to make a summary comparison of colonial and Belgian curricula, especially to try to counter a certain representation. Otherwise it might be assumed too easily that the education in Belgian Congo was no more than a kind of occupational therapy. The researcher and the reader are faced here with a very subtle balancing exercise. On the one hand, the intention is to discover the reality, or at least to try: the 'how' and 'what' of school reality in the past. On the other hand, it is necessary to articulate what almost everyone will be thinking automatically when reading a story of the period: namely that 'it wasn't the way it is now' and that the attitudes of a number of protagonists, namely the missionaries, were fairly 'old-fashioned', even 'primitive' or 'backward'.

Of course such an opinion seems suspiciously similar to remarks made by the missionaries themselves about the Congolese (which partly causes them) but this does not mean they should not be mentioned. Nor should they necessarily be attacked with moral judgements but, on the other hand, they should be interpreted. In the first instance it is of course only human to distance oneself in one way or another from events that happened in other places at other times. We must, of course, avoid falling into an a-historical position but the reaction itself is not an historical aberration, in the sense of 'very wrong at the time'. After all, in the same way the ideas of the missionaries are not to be considered as thoughts that 'should not really have been thought' and should have given rise to moral indignation. The foundations of the stance assumed in the colonial context are, after all, to be found in structures, positions and reactions in the home context of the colonisers. This can also be shown clearly in the context of the curricula.

The foundation for the colonial school curriculum must, after all, have come from somewhere. Intuitively, but also considering what was said before, it must be

clear that no curriculum was designed *ex nihilo* and it was certainly not based on African precedents. The seeds were brought from Belgium. A first, even diagonal reading of the *Brochure Jaune* of 1929 makes this very clear. Considering that the preparation for that curriculum had already started in the first half of the 1920s, it is interesting to make the comparison with the Belgian curriculum guide for primary schools dating from 1922. With this we can also refer to the societal context in which the Belgian curriculum of 1922 was situated. As Depaepe et alii have already remarked, moral and civil education were perceived by the authors of this curriculum guide as the core tasks of a primary school. The quote referred to in this context is particularly relevant and recognisable from the colonial educational situation: *“Primary school finds in itself its raison d’être; it is not created with the studies the pupils will do after that or the professions they could take up in mind; its aim is the same for all children entrusted to it: to prepare them as completely as possible for their destinies as man and citizen.”*[i]

The colonial translation of this was even more straightforward and stripped of the enlightened ideals that were included in the Belgian version. The remark cited above, made in the curriculum guide for the second grade, made this clear: *“Despite the selection which had been used during admission, not all pupils will go to special schools; thus they need to receive a training which is autodidactic and which educates men that are useful for their native environments.”* Or, as it would later be worded, in the curriculum of 1948, as one of the three essential goals of primary education: *“Provide an education which prepares all natives to live according to their proper genius, either in the ancestral environment or outside this environment.”*[ii]

### *1.1. The Brochure Jaune and the 1922 curriculum guide*

Primary school in the Congo comprised of five school years (2+3). A number of subjects were taught from the first to the fifth year. In the first place these were the basic subjects of religious education, reading, native language, arithmetic and geometric systems. Furthermore, hygiene, singing, drawing and gymnastics were taught in every year. For girls’ school, five years of sewing was added to this. French was optional in the first year. And finally there were three rather specific descriptions in the *Brochure*: the *intuition lessons*, *general causeries/conversations* and *manual work*. Geography was only taught in the second year. The course on theoretical agriculture only started in the third year. Finally, the curriculum of the second grade also prescribed handwriting or

calligraphy and in the last year of the second grade girls received a course on childcare.

The explanation of the content of these courses varied in length and detail. The *Brochure Jaune* contained only the briefest information on religious education as this was left entirely to the religious authorities. But other subjects were also dealt with very summarily, like handicrafts for example. Often a kind of minimum curriculum was stipulated with this for the first year, which was systematically referred to for the following years, with the remark that the curriculum needed further elaboration. Whether or not this caused, in theory at any rate, the basic curriculum to differ fundamentally from that of the Belgian primary school is the question. For example, the Belgian curriculum guide of 1922 also referred to the religious authorities for the concrete elaboration of religion and morality lessons. Language education, on the other hand, was described much more extensively and with more detail and surrounded with conditions. Rather than making a long and elaborate comparison of the two complete curricula, it is perhaps more worthwhile to highlight a few parts: first a main subject, mathematics and then a 'subsidiary subject', geography.

#### *1.1.1. Main subjects*

There are quite a number of parallels between the Belgian and the Congolese mathematics curricula of 1922 and 1929, respectively. In the Belgian curriculum, the pupils started by learning numbers from one to twenty. In the Belgian Congo, they only did this in the second year but the way in which the material was developed subsequently was similar. Similar systems were also used for teaching units of measurement. The basic principle here, as with mathematics, was apparently that the Congolese needed the first year to get used to the subject matter and would subsequently be able to assimilate more material at the same pace, year after year. Of course this meant that in the Congo education was stopped at the level reached in the fourth year in Belgium. As an illustration, a brief comparison is included of the subject matter as found in the *Brochure Jaune* and in the Belgian curriculum guide of 1922. It is clear that the Congolese mathematics curriculum was less extensive than the Western one, understanding that the limitation was largely due to a shorter period of primary education in general.

<p>Congo:</p> <p>1. Notion of and calculations with numbers from 1 to 5 and subsequently from 5 to 10. The four operations with these numbers. Small verbal problems.</p> <p>2. Study of numbers from 1 to 20. The four operations. The dozen. Small verbal problems. Roman numerals.</p> <p>3. Repetition of the first 20 numbers. Study of numbers from 20 to 100. Multiplication tables and division of the numbers up to 100 by numbers from 1 to 10. From a tenth to a hundredth.</p> <p>4. The numbers up to 1000 and the four operations with them. Calculating 273, 348, etc. Calculating thousands. Verbal and written problems. The notion of purchase, sale, profit and loss.</p> <p>5. The four operations on the whole and decimal numbers to 10 000. The simple rule of three. Interest calculation.</p>	<p>Belgium:</p> <p>1. Forming, naming and intuitive and numerical reading of the numbers from 1 to 20. The four operations, combined, on these numbers. Applications and problems.</p> <p>2. The same study of the numbers from 20 to 100. Multiplication tables and dividing the numbers from 10 to 100 by the first 10 numbers.</p> <p>3. Repetition of the material covered. Forming, naming and reading of the numbers from 100 to 1000. Tens, hundreds and thousands. The four main operations. Fractions.</p> <p>4. Practical knowledge of whole and decimal numbers. The four main operations on these numbers. Ordinary fractions.</p> <p>5. Calculations with whole and decimal numbers. Exact quotients to the tenth, hundredth, thousandth. Divisibility by 2 and 5; by 4 and 25; by 8 and 125; by 9 and 3. Elementary theory of ordinary fractions. Converting fractions into decimal numbers. Rule of three. Profit and loss in percentages. Simple interest calculation.</p> <p>6. Revision of material. Multiplication and division of fractions. Calculation of an average. Concept of a savings and pension fund.</p> <p>7 and 8. Revision of material. Roman numerals. Algebra.</p>
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Comparison of the mathematics curriculum in the Brochure Jaune and the 1922 Belgian curriculum guide.

Is mathematics a measure for the other subjects? It seems logical to assert that mathematics has a somewhat more objective basis for comparison than other subjects. With this I mean that as far as mathematics is concerned there was not likely to be any pupil's foreknowledge that differed from what was to be taught (which was the case for a language course, for example), though it must be noted that education experts in the 1950s had objections to this. For example, it was remarked in 1955 in the *Revue Pédagogique Congolaise* that young Congolese found it harder than the Belgians to grasp geometric forms.[iii] They grew up in a very different environment, after all, and in their early years they had only been confronted with flowing lines, while the straight lines of geometric figures were totally alien to them. This is in contrast to the Belgian child that grew up in an environment full of straight-lined figures and abstract concepts.[iv] "So, the European child is introduced at all times to the mathematical and geometric universe of the West. He hears people talking about numbers, hours, minutes, right and left. About countless objects with various shapes which have a set place in him." According to the authors, the result of these things (including other areas and subjects) was a discontinuity between the natural first experiences and the subject matter taught at school.

The solution, however, lay in the systematic implementation of the Western

education system through the further development of nursery education. On the opposite side we have the testimonial of Vertenten, who was already writing about the mathematical ability of his students in 1928: *"If they come to the higher course they need to be good at mathematics and writing and for mathematics they need to know the four main operations well with whole numbers. That is the basis. From that I have, in a fairly short time, been able to teach them the following:*

Can the same mechanisms be found in the other subjects? The other main subject, native language, is harder to study in a comparative perspective. The Congolese curriculum guide itself stipulated explicitly that the education should not be too literary, especially not in rural schools (the first grade of the curriculum). One result of this was that the curriculum stayed on the sober side on this point. After a somewhat more extensive explanation for the first year, in the division *lecture* the text was largely limited to the designation *"lecture courante"*, from the fourth year *"lecture expressive"*. Handwriting was only taught in the second grade, as mentioned above. A comparison with the Belgian curriculum guide is impossible here because the native language took a very central role and was the most extensively covered of all subjects. It was divided in various subdivisions like grammar, composition, pronunciation, etc.

### *1.1.2. Other subjects*

However, the cited mechanisms did apply to other (subsidiary) subjects. Geography was only taught in the second grade according to the *Brochure Jaune*, whereas in Belgium it was provided for in the curriculum guide from the first year onwards. In the first grade however, it only consisted of an initiation into geographic observation. This comprised very simple lessons about the most important geographical information, taught very concretely and without definitions. The curriculum guide further stipulated that this material would, in the first year, be part of the exercises in rhetoric during the native language lessons (about which no further details can be found in the paragraphs concerned). Of course, in the Congolese curriculum nothing was mentioned about this because geography was not taught in the first grade.



Cover and first three pages of Etsify'okili: geography textbook from 1957, compiled by the MSC Frans Maes. This textbook was written for use at the mission school in Flandria. Honoré Vinck, Lovenjoel.

In the *causeries*, for example, in the second year the *accidents géographiques de la region* had to be discussed as well as natural phenomena like night and day, wind, rain, thunder and lightning. In practice it also happened that geographical concepts were discussed in the reading lessons.[vi] The subject matter for the second year was more parallel in the curriculum. As in the Congo, the emphasis in Belgium was also placed on simple concepts, starting from the pupil's concrete living environment. One would leave the classroom and go and explore the world outside in increasingly larger 'circles': the school, the village, the town, the region, etc. As appears from the example reproduced here (figure 1), this was also put into practice by the MSC. The world opened up for the boys through their own classroom, the school building, the football field and... the church.

The worldview that the young Congolese retained from their geography lessons finally did remain more limited than that of their Belgian counterparts. While in Belgium the borders were crossed to neighbouring countries in the second year, for the Congolese the world outside the Congo was limited to Belgium.[vii] Of

course this was not to be considered a foreign country. Some parallels between both curricula can be taken fairly literally. In the fourth year in the Congo, for example “*A few big trips on the sphere*” were studied. This was also to be found literally in the Belgian curriculum guide for the second year. However, there it was specified which voyages of discovery were meant exactly, something for which there was no place in the Congolese curriculum. ‘Belgium’ was covered but only in the second year. The history of the occupation of Congo was on the curriculum in the fourth year. Further geographical concepts concerning the ‘motherland’ were only covered in the last year but it was a very selective approach: “*Situation, some cities, rivers, railways (length), some information about the richness and the activities of the Belgian population, the Belgian royal family.*”[viii] In other subjects the issue of ‘Belgium’ was not covered *a priori*.

### 1.1.3. *Causeries*

The Congolese curriculum further contained the subject *causeries*. These were lessons during which the teacher had to tell educational or edifying stories. It was more or less an extension of what was called “Moral and citizen formation” in Belgium. However, the formulation of the content of the *causeries* in the 1929 brochure is revealing in itself and contains in itself a colonial curriculum. In the five years of primary school the following were to be covered in succession:

Attitude in the classroom, in church, in the street, in the village, relationship with fellow students, school rules, people, things and scenes from their own environment; first notions of politeness.

1. Politeness: respect towards civil and ecclesiastical authority; aiding elders or the weak; tenderness towards animals; geographic layout of the region and natural phenomena.
2. Role of Europeans in the country; habits and practices of the country; politeness.
3. Habits and practices of the country: superstition, bad influence of magicians; natural phenomena: lightning, hail, earthquakes, eclipses, the dangers of alcohol consumption, the use of hemp and other narcotic plants.
4. The most important stipulations from the decree on the *chefferies*;<sup>[ix]</sup> obligations of the population concerning censuses, taxes, militia; most important legal stipulations concerning firearms, hunting, alcohol, hemp and gambling.



In comparison: the Belgian curriculum guide of 1922 summed up in a number of points the various 'obligations' that the students had to be taught. In the first and second years this mainly related to individual and generally altruistic virtues, such as cleanliness, caution, order, regularity, moderation, dignity (individual) and respect, goodness, servitude, friendliness (altruistic). In the third and fourth years so-called "national" education was taught, as well as professional obligations: "*The work considered in the company; the solidarity of workers. Requires conscientious work. The employment contract: obligations of employers and workers. Mutual support in the professions.*" The principles and values touched upon in both curricula were thus not very different, often they even corresponded remarkably well. Yet there was a difference: in the case of the Congolese it seems as though fewer words have been wasted, the tone is slightly firmer and the content was more geared to the acceptance of authority. Finally, the inclusion of a number of issues like "superstition" and "hemp use" were certainly dictated by local circumstances.

### *1.2. The position of girls*

Finally the explanation about moral and civil formation in the Belgian brochure of 1922 also contained a number of extra paragraphs with considerations about girls and women, under the heading "*Observations*". The moral education in girls' schools should be aimed at aspects of home and family life. This concerned the role of young women in their family and the relationship with other family members (parents-in-law); how to become a good housewife; the qualities of the young woman in the household: politeness, foresight, charm, simplicity, equanimity, goodness and devotion. And the most important fault to be avoided: nosiness! Further, marriage had to be considered, its preparation and, of course, the manner in which a woman should function in a marriage. Finally, children also had to be considered, as well as everything involved therewith.

There was not really a specific section devoted to girls' education in the *Brochure Jaune*. Girls' schools would only be treated separately from the first year onwards in the 1938 curriculum. The brochure did however devote some attention to the domestic science school and in that context female concerns or subject matter were of course specifically covered. In the 1929 curriculum, the domestic science school was still a rural economics school, which in itself is revealing as to the social position of woman in the eyes of the colonisers. This education would last three years. The only classes of general education during the time were French

(optional) and *Arithmetic and Metric systems*, in which subject matter from primary school was mainly repeated and how to keep small household accounts was taught. The course *Hygiene* also consisted of material already covered, with additional classes in childcare. Besides this, agriculture, housekeeping and *conversation* were provided as subjects. The last two received considerably more attention than the other subjects in the brochure. Of course, a wide variety of practical activities and abilities were covered in housekeeping. In the *Causeries* the following topics were to be treated: “*The role of the woman in the family; to insist on financial matters and the foresight she will have to show; thoroughly combating the blacks’ tendency to excessive eating and drinking when abundantly available, of having big parties in order to display their resources; to combat the customs, the harmful practice of religion, customs and practices to which, in general, women are more attached than men; to be responsible for caring for and educating children.*”[x] To this it was only added that these lessons should be played out as much as possible in the field, on the farm, in the kitchen and in the workshop. The teaching method suggested in the curriculum was that the pupils would afterwards return to the classroom and, under guidance from the teacher, write down what they had just learned.

One conclusion is evident: women were clearly treated differently, both in Belgium and in the colony. In both cases they had to fulfil a specific role and needed preparing for it. In both cases they had to fulfil extensive domestic tasks. Apparently, their roles had to be described far better and more precisely than those of men. Typically this was worded with far less circumlocution in the colonial context. In Belgium, an extensive description was used to express that other things were expected from women, although there was no underlying image of equality. In the *Brochure Jaune*, on the other hand, it was asserted without too much ado that women were more ‘susceptible’ to certain deficiencies or faults. More generally it can be posited – whether concerning boys’ or girls’ schools – that from the outset the curriculum of the colonial primary school corresponded to the image of a small lapdog being dragged on a lead by its owner: it follows in the same direction but can never keep up, let alone catch up with its owner.

### 1.3. The 1948 curriculum

The reform implemented in the 1948 curriculum has already been discussed in the first chapter. One consequence of the increasing contribution of the administration in the organisation of the education was, among others, that

organisation and subject content were discussed in separate brochures from then on. Despite this, subject content was left relatively undisturbed, even though twenty years had passed since the implementation of the previous curriculum. This was certainly the case for the first grade and the ordinary second grade. There were not really any new subjects. The curriculum guide did now include an "*observation exercises* " section but this simply seems to have been a new name for what was previously called "intuition lessons". The French lessons were described in more detail but it was emphasised that it should be "very simple teaching".

In the 'selected' second grade, the subject content was further elaborated and other priorities were imposed. French lessons were given a prominent place, immediately after religion and the native language. Fairly detailed guidelines were given, more than for any other subject, while it remained a subject as any other in the normal second grade. The theoretical agriculture lessons underwent the opposite fate: they were completely central in the normal second grade and were abandoned in the selected second grade. A section on "manual work" was kept but formulated very concisely. The same trend extended into the second and third year. A "*professional*" subject, with a practical impact, existed for the normal second grade. The biggest difference, of course, was in the fact that the selected second grade was a year longer than the normal one. In the last year, as was the custom, a great deal was repeated but a large portion of new material was also added.

### *The curriculum in practice*

How much of the curriculum was actually implemented in the classroom? There are two ways of finding out more about the content of the lessons. Both ways give a kind of 'side-view' and must for that reason be used in a complementary way. On the one hand there are the inspection reports, which have already been dealt with extensively. On the other hand there are the colonial schoolbooks. The colonial schoolbooks offer insight into the selection made by the teachers. The schoolbook, like the curricula, does not of course represent reality. They both mainly say how things should be. Even so, we can employ these types of sources here because the books are also the product of a specific context. Thus they can present parts of the atmosphere and intellectual reality. To that I wish to attach the educational convictions of the missionaries, inasmuch as they existed and were expressed.

## 2.1. Inspections

In the earliest inspection reports only scarce information is to be found on the subject matter. Of course, this is linked to the absence of binding rules concerning subject matter, curriculum and inspection. The earliest official documents I found date from 1927. In addition, there cannot have been any inspections much earlier because the missionaries were only there from 1925. The first curriculum proposal also dates from then. But reports from before the implementation of the curriculum of 1929 do exist. In a report from 1927 about the girls' school in Coquilhatville, it was pointed out that the school was only in its first year. The girls had never previously received any school education. The Sister herself remarked rather optimistically: *"Over the 1 year the school has been open, we have already noted real progress."* What exactly was happening at this time was not so important but it is certain that sewing was done and the garden was worked in. Besides this no real intellectual activity can be detected. It was reported that the children had not yet been able to sit exams and further that *"In order to obtain discipline we first applied exercises of order and discipline, while marching to rhythmic songs."*[xi] The Daughters of Charity insisted on discipline. They considered that the morality of their girls had deteriorated under the influence of their environment and they attached by far the greatest importance to discipline and zest for work. The following school year they also reported, after listing all the problems, that: *"Meanwhile, despite the problems, we noted great progress amongst the children as far as discipline is concerned as well as work."*[xii] Oddly enough the report does refer to an *official curriculum* that was supposedly being followed. Jardon, the travelling inspector, also frequently referred to an official curriculum.

In the reports about the mission activity in this period, it is clear that the education was not yet bound to a structured curriculum. On Sunday afternoon, the Sisters 'welcomed' all the children: *"We welcomed all the children, both the young and older ones, that came to us. We used our time for different exercises: prayers, songs, games."* A few years later this already produced some results because the report of 1930 informs us that a choir had developed from the Sunday meetings and that learning new songs was much easier, since most of the children could now read. As well as the actual school activity, which was only discussed very briefly, a *"tailoring school"* was also referred to. This meant that four out of five days, the pupils were occupied with sewing for two hours. They covered needlework, crocheting, knitting and making clothes. The clothes they

made themselves were given back to them at the prize draw. The children at the nursery school made plaits with raffia.[xiii]

In the report about the schools at the various mission posts which Vertenten provided for the state inspector in 1929, he only deals with a number of subjects briefly. Mostly he mentioned handiwork, sewing, mathematics and religion. Nothing was said about the content of these subjects; indeed, there was not enough space on the pre-printed forms for this.[xiv] In a report about the second grade of the boys' school in Bamanya, from 1929 or 1930, he referred to the *Brochure Jaune* for the first time. The lessons had been 'inspired' by the curriculum brochure. It appears that here the official instructions were not experienced as particularly obligatory either. It is not too clear what guidelines were used exactly. Probably they were from the organisational project of 1925, even though this was not an official, legally binding text. The *project* fitted into the framework of agreements made between the mission congregations and the government from 1925-1926. Via this detour, the text was probably seen to be a legal guideline anyway.

Hulstaert also referred to a curriculum in September 1928. He said that the primary school in Flandria had organised three school years. In the first year, reading and writing were taught. In the two following years mainly mathematics was taught, at various levels. The implementation of the provided curriculum had not worked yet. This would only be possible step by step, according to Hulstaert. The provincial inspector, Jardon, also referred to "*the curriculum*" in two reports from June 1929. In Bokuma, this curriculum was followed meticulously for all subjects. In the report on Wafanya, Jardon gave slightly more information: "*For religious education, reading, writing and the local language, the students have the right level. As far as arithmetic is concerned I notice a rather considerable progress but the fundamental notions are insufficiently known.*"[xv] Moreover, the missionaries did not have enough control over the moniteurs and the main result of this was that the subsidiary subjects were neglected. Presumably, the curriculum of the *Brochure Jaune* was already being referred to here. The definitive text supposedly dates from 1928, though it was only published in 1929. However, the indications in the reports are not really decisive on this point.

In his inspection report of 1930 about the Sisters' school in Coquilhatville, Vertenten concluded that it was not surprising that the pupils stayed below the level of the curriculum. The school, as is clear from the report, was only in the

first stage (the first year) and had to struggle with the low level of the staff and the poor language ability of the Sisters, as well as the material problems mentioned earlier. Vertenten only referred explicitly to language, mathematics and religion and made a very brief reference to geography in the fourth year. The children were learning to read and write French, though this was not the intention. The mathematics lessons also took place in French. The Sisters who taught in the second grade had no command of the local language but even the moniteurs who taught in the first grade – under the supervision of the Sisters – taught mathematics in French. The situation was probably of such a nature that the inspector, who praised the Sisters extensively, was already happy that there was a school that functioned on a regular basis at all.[xvi] In the rural schools, in any case, there was also no mention of complete teaching activities. In the report to the education inspection in 1932 this was worded rather more optimistically: *“One should not lose sight of the fact that in numerous villages Christian education existed where thousands of children received religious education and learned to read, write and do mathematics at the same time.”*[xvii]

In a report about the girls’ school in Bamanya, Sister Auxilia gave a detailed overview of what exactly the curriculum represented at the school. At that time there were 96 girls. A moniteur taught the three first years, the two higher years were taught by a Sister. Sister Auxilia (who was headmistress of the school) gave a whole list of subjects in her report. For each, she indicated what material was taught in which year. It shows clearly where the emphasis lay:

Religious education was taught every day in every class, the Sister wrote: *“1<sup>st</sup> 2<sup>nd</sup> 3<sup>rd</sup> year, the minor catechism, 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup>, the major catechism.”* A division was made depending on the nature of the lessons: Father Jans explained, the moniteur taught “teaching and explanation” and Sister Auxilia herself taught baptism preparation classes and provided Holy Communion after morning mass. She referred to the catechism pictures as her teaching tool: *“Next year a new series of pictures (for each child separately) will be used. Catechism in pictures with the catechism of HG Cardinal Gasparri.”* And finally: *“In the 3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> years, children practice writing questions without mistakes.”* There was also a separate subject “Biblical history”. Here pictures were also used but it was taught completely by moniteurs: *“A great emphasis is placed on the lively but unaffected transmission of lessons. 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> also take notes on the classes, aided by questions.”*

Writing took place according to the method of the Brothers of the Christian Schools. In order of class the following was on the curriculum: *“1st: letters with small connections of consonants and vowels (pencil), 2nd: all letters and small words (calligraphy in ink), 3rd: capitals, 4th and 5th: capitals and exercises for fluent and regular writing.”* Apparently there had been dissatisfaction with the results of these lessons in the past (from Hulstaert) and so the Sister pointed to the fact that special attention had been paid to this, with good results.

For reading, Hulstaert's reading method was used. The Sister spoke of “the first and second book”, which refers to the *Buku ea njekola I and II*, the reading books published by Hulstaert in 1933. It is striking that every year was started with the first book. The higher the class, the further one got. In the fifth year the pupils worked through the first book and a part of the second, *“as well as other literature”*. Later, Alma Hosten also described a similar system.[xviii] However, also in the lower classes *“the 1st and 2nd books by the English were used alternately. From the 3rd year onwards attention is paid to reading tone and the natural rendering of the subject matter in their own indigenous manner.”* So English books from Protestant congregations were also used, which Vinck later confirmed.[xix]

The sister was quite brief concerning mathematics: *“1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> year: according to the curriculum. 3<sup>rd</sup> idem except for the decimal system. 4<sup>th</sup> and 5th: all calculations up to and including 1000. 5<sup>th</sup> went over 1000 but no particular value was attached to this.”* (...) *“A great emphasis is placed on sums of the metric system, particularly calculations with francs, of which especially also the way of writing was studied.”*

In language education a distinction was made between various parts. It certainly related to Lomongo.

- grammar lessons: *“typed courses by P. Hulstaert.”* (...) *“The higher classes are behind because we have only had the books 1.5 years - and because the material was so unfamiliar both to us and the moniteurs.”*
- dictation: *“for all classes in proportion to their knowledge.”*
- style: *“writing out by heart a song learned, with points of departure for discussing objects, customs, situations, etc.”*
- *“style and conversation lessons or general development classes converge here. Here the children are given the opportunity to explain their own songs, dances or*

*games and so when it comes to learning plays, the children can express their opinion freely and frankly instead of slavishly accepting what we tell them when they don't agree with us in their hearts."*

About gymnastics: *"The same principles are used for gymnastics and dancing. The European way had to yield to the typically indigenous way. The rhythmic movements connected to Congolese conceptions and understandings are the material for beautiful expressive movements. The blacks find their own dances beautiful, really beautiful, but performed as one coherent whole and in order. In this way, with her own singing, her beloved ngomo, gymnastics keeps its appeal for the children and they still receive all the movements of head, hands, feet and torso. Next year we hope to stimulate the children to take part in games, such as rounders, handball, korfbal – also for passing the time on Sunday afternoons."*

Then a few shorter statements follow. French was barely mentioned: *"for the three highest classes, spoken French – very little or nothing is written."* About singing only this was noted: *"melodies by Ghesquiere and Hullebroeck are taught."* Drawing was also only briefly mentioned: *"The children made sketches, without the use of a ruler or compass."* The geography lessons were taught in the two highest classes and were limited to very general concepts: *"General concepts, continents, oceans. The provinces of Congo and their capitals – further the physical division; the Congo river and its side rivers, the lakes, etc. From Tsjyapa, division with prominent places."*

The last item was sewing and this was also treated most elaborately. It was taught in all classes, two afternoons from three to five. Seen relatively, this was rather a lot but the attention devoted to it by the Sister in the report does seem out of proportion. While a total of three pages were devoted to all the other subjects, this subject took up about one whole page, in which a detailed description was given for every year and every object the pupils had sewed, crocheted and knitted.

So sewing was the dominant element on the curriculum. Oddly enough, not a word was said about agriculture in this report. From an inspection report of 1938, five years later, it appears that the same school devoted seven and a half hours a week to "practical agriculture lessons", namely every day from seven until eight in the morning and one afternoon from three thirty until five in the afternoon. Other practical activities became more important depending on how the girls



progressed with their studies. Sewing lessons were taught for two hours in the first year but in the last (fifth) year, it already occupied four and a half hours. "Homework" (housekeeping) went from half an hour to an hour and a half.

According to a document from 1939, the causeries in the first and second year had to cover the following issues: *"Hunting and, in connection with this, the most notable animals and their way of life. Fishing and, in connection with this, the seasons. Swimming, the healthy but also the damaging things for the body. Dancing, the good and bad dances, pointing to the dangers of the latter, the stimulation of folk dances and games. The dead, mourning, the dance, the burial. Drinking, moderate drinking, drunkenness as a scandal, damages the health. Smoking and chewing tobacco, unfitting for girls, damaging to the health, bad for the teeth. Encouraging love for the monarchy through photos, stories, the flags of Belgium, Congo and the Papal flag, the benefit of becoming acquainted with the state in its various workings and institutions. Politeness in general, why we should be polite, politeness in church and at religious ceremonies, courtesy in oneself through order and neatness of dress, taking heed of one's expressions wherever one goes, in all one's doings, while eating, towards parents and elders, etc."*

Father Cobbaut, who inspected the school in 1946, only made a short report and only mentioned in it that, in all classes, all subjects were regularly taught and that they were all generally well known. So there is not too much information to be gained from this. At the domestic science school (which was on a higher level than the primary school) the curriculum was, at that moment, neatly divided into two: in the morning the pupils in groups of two or three carried out all possible sorts of housework in turn. The afternoon was reserved for theoretical instruction. Based on the timetable used in all schools, this of course meant that only a minimal amount of time was devoted to the theoretical education.[xx]

Sister Auxilia again in 1947: *"The morning periods are devoted to housework like mending sheets, tights, socks, sewing and patching children's, women's and boys' clothes, washing, ironing, starching, folding, native and European cuisine, domestic chores, further sewing, tooling tree bark, raffia. This year a new kind of embroidery with raffia was undertaken, namely filet in raffia, very beautiful, if the children become skilled at it. In the theory classes, apart from the revision of the ordinary school subjects and religious studies, the main subjects taught are: hygiene, agriculture and cattle breeding, home economics, childcare, etiquette classes and other development classes, French lessons and drawing paper*

*patterns. 1 x a week the girls worked in their gardens with great diligence.*" Further, every morning the land was worked (probably outside the framework of the lessons). The government inspection thought this was far too little. The inspector actually only had remarks concerned with the time spent on agricultural activity. At the primary school this was better than elsewhere, given that there at least the ordinary portion of morning labour was on the curriculum. Meanwhile, the pupils of the last year of the second grade worked in the kitchen, *"and as a result they did not devote themselves to any rural work."* The domestic science school was a complete disaster: *"Meanwhile at the rural economics school, the timetable is not well balanced and does not leave enough time for agricultural work"*[xxi] Also in a report Hulstaert wrote in 1944, the smallest part of theoretical subjects appeared in the timetable of the domestic science school. According to him only two afternoons a week were filled with other than practical subjects. In this short time religion, mathematics, reading, writing and theoretical revision of the practical work were taught.[xxii]

1 <sup>st</sup> grade 1 <sup>st</sup> year	1 <sup>st</sup> grade 2 <sup>nd</sup> year
catechism 6 x 45 min.	catechism 6 x 45 min.
bible 3 x 15 min.	bible 2 x 15 min.
French reading 6 x 45 min. writing 30 min. declamation 15 min.	French 5 x 45 min. declamation 15 min.
mathematics 6 x 60 min.	mathematics 5 x 45 min.
Lonkundo 3 x 45 min.	Lonkundu grammar 2 x 30 min. reading 4 x 30 min.
hygiene 15 min.	hygiene 15 min.
geography 15 min.	geography 15 min.
	writing 3 x 15 min.
	drawing 45 min.
	gymnastics 30 min.

Timetable for the first grade  
Bamanya boys' school (1944).  
Aequatoria Archive.

Hulstaert also inspected the boys' school in Bamanya in 1944. In the light of what will be said later about the conflicts between Hulstaert and the Brothers of the Christian Schools, who ran this school, it is not surprising that he added the necessary measure of criticism to this. The official curriculum was followed and not that of the *Brochure Jaune*. The extent of the difference in how the timetable was filled is clear from the reproduced summary given by Hulstaert in his report for the first grade. The timetable for the second grade was presented less clearly and could not be reconstructed completely. From the timetable of the first grade

it is clear that the emphasis was on French, not on Lonkundo, which troubled Hulstaert a great deal, of course. The other subjects (hygiene, geography) were taught for a great part in French and so he wrote in the report: *"The courses are almost entirely devoted to French and mathematics."* The *Causeries* also served primarily for practicing French.

There were a few other deviations from the normal curriculum, which Hulstaert had used systematically as his norm, even though the Brothers had in this case chosen to use a different curriculum. *"It is noticeable here that from the first year the curriculum (with respect to mathematics, JB) of the state schools is used, not that of the Catholic schools (however that has not even been changed in the new plan of 1938 in the sense of the official programme). Whatever the reason may be for accepting the state curriculum, I believe that the curriculum is made to be followed and must not be changed on one's own authority."* For example, no intuition classes were taught here, even though according to Hulstaert this was *"one of the most important educational subjects on the curriculum"*. This school also made time available for agricultural activity, but not very much: only an hour and a half or an hour and forty-five minutes a week. Sometimes midday "studies" were devoted to gathering small pieces of firewood or leaves. The pupils needed these to prepare their food. All in all this came down to a *"considerable deviation from the subject and hour divisions proposed by the government brochures"*. [xxiii]

The fact that the guidelines given in the curricula or by the government were not strictly applied is very clearly proved by information in an inspection report written by Gaston Moentjens from the school year 1952, about the primary school and teachers' training college in Bamanya. The extensive report (twelve pages of text) was supplemented with a number of tables in which, for all years, the norm given by the government was compared to the timetables implemented by the missionaries (in Bamanya these were the Brothers). The impression given by these tables is not really surprising. In the first grade, religion was systematically taught more than recommended (4.5 to 5 hours instead of 3). Native language was divided into three subthemes: *reading-writing, copying-dictation* and *recitations*. Far less time than recommended was spent on the first two and far more on the third, just as the component *elocution*. Less time was also spent on mathematics than was actually requested, as was gymnastics. However, drawing, singing and certainly agriculture and traditional activities were taught far more

extensively. So much the more remarkable because, in contrast to the prescribed number of hours, five and a half hours more were taught. This difference was almost entirely caused by religion, agriculture and sewing lessons. Especially in the first grade there were sometimes notable differences. In the normal and selected second grade, the prescribed timetable was followed much more closely. Only singing (much more) and mathematics (much less) retained times that were clearly deviating.[xxiv]

Both the missionary inspector Moentjens and the state inspector Eloye were at that time fairly critical towards the differences between the prescribed and applied time allotment. Moentjens pointed an accusing finger at the *moniteurs*: *"The curricula imposed by the school regulations are, in general, quite well implemented. Moniteurs are well informed to follow the curriculum guide they are given but I don't think that the moniteurs are able to resist their tendency to teach things outside the guide. In any event a more effective control is imposed."*[xxv] In his conclusions, though, he did move the responsibility more to the missionaries themselves: *"Regarding didactic organisation I cannot recommend the headmaster enough to exercise his position as headmaster fully by organising practical and theoretical methods at schools better. This includes drafting good timetables, well defined distribution of subject matter from the different program guides and of all the prescriptions from the educational organisation."*

## 2.2. The subject matter in the schoolbooks

Of course the schoolbooks offer a second possibility to become acquainted in more detail with the subject matter the pupils could receive at school. Honoré Vinck has already done a comprehensive study of a number of the schoolbooks that were published and used by the MSC.[xxvi] In a series of studies he discussed aspects of form and content of primarily MSC reading books. From this it appears all the more that Hulstaert was very active and very influential in this area. Even so, this picture must be looked at with caution. Hulstaert had, as was often the case, his specialisation and his hobbyhorses.

In the first years after their arrival (in 1926) the MSC had to appeal to existing publications due to the absence of their own publications. Thus, they also asked the Brothers of the Christian Schools to bring as many of their own books as possible.[xxvii] A number of publications from the Trappists were also used. Sister Auxilia again, in 1933: *"For arithmetic method the mathematics books of the*

*Brothers of the Christian Schools are followed. These fulfil all the requirements of the curriculum. 1st and 2nd year worked through everything, in the 3rd year we allowed the 10-part fractions, while 4th and 5th year did all the basic operations. For reading method we used the books by the English until August, in September all classes adopted the reading method (3 parts) of Fr. Hulstaert, as well as the 4 parts of his grammar. 4th and 5th studied 1st part in the past months, 2nd and 3rd have also started but have not yet finished the first book."* Use was made of anything to hand, it could even be Protestant. The writing method of the Brothers of the Christian Schools was also applied, the Sister added in her report.

In due course, however, more and more of their books were written in the regional language. Vinck stated: *"The range of books in Lomongo for linguistic and religious education is quasi complete. The whole curriculum of primary school and even secondary school has been covered in the local language, Lomongo. This library has been established within a few years, mainly by one man only and according to his rather pedagogic, linguistic and ideological choice in particular."* In the publications by Hulstaert himself and also later in the studies made about him, attention was paid primarily to books on language and reading lessons. For other subjects, for a long time different books were often used, whether or not they were translated into Lomongo: *"The scientific books (often in a provisional state) would come some ten years later. It was a conscious and chosen strategy. Hulstaert has underlined it a lot in contemporary articles."*[xxviii] Vinck, however, did not indicate in which texts this was.

In any case, it also appears from his study that for a great number of years existing books were used for some subjects. It appears however from the first part of this chapter that the weight of a number of subjects was often less important in the curriculum. Also for mathematics, for example, material from the Brothers of the Christian Schools or the Marist Brothers was used for a long time. A number of these books were translated into Lomongo but others were written in Lingala or in French and were also used like that. For geography, publications were only provided in the 1950s, primarily by Frans Maes. Further, a whole series of fairly practically oriented schoolbooks was published in the framework of so-called observation lessons.[xxix] These 'books' (often only a bundle of copied pages) contained a number of texts on the most diverse subjects: descriptions of traditional objects and their use, interactive skills (*politeness*), hygiene, animals. There was an amalgam of subjects, which were sometimes also taken from the

schoolbooks made for other courses. Furthermore, specific books existed for the fields of hygiene, botany and zoology, interactive skills and drawing.

### 2.2.1. History: Ngoi and the whites

From the early 1940s, Hulstaert himself worked on a history textbook, "*un cours d'histoire mongo*". It was based on a number of reading lessons from one of the reading books he had written in the 1930s, *Buku Ea Mbaanda*. The history textbook itself, *Bosako wa Mongo* (History of the Mongo), only appeared in 1957 but several of the texts used in it had previously been published in the periodicals of the MSC, which also appeared in the regional language. They had probably already been used in this way. The logical consequence for the history lessons must have been that only the teacher disposed of textual material.[xxx] A fairly unique text written by Paul Ngoi was included in the publication of this history book. Ngoi was a pupil of the MSC who was rather close to Boelaert and Hulstaert and was involved as an assistant in editing a number of MSC publications in Lomongo, *Le Coq Chante* and *Etsiko*.[xxxii] In 1939 Ngoi, who can probably be considered an *évolué avant la lettre*, wrote the text *Iso la bendele* ("Us and the Whites"). The text was intended to be an entry for a literary competition, organised by the periodical *Africa*, published in London.

Ngoi's text is a surprising account of traditional customs. The concept certainly does not fit in the Western tradition of historiography, as it was used in the schoolbooks. It is not a chronological summary of political events, forms of state and cultural characteristics of particular periods. Instead, Ngoi treated a number of social problems (*sloth, lying, theft*) and mechanisms (*marriage, death, family, jurisprudence, authority*) of the traditional Nkundo society. The difference, for example, from history books as used in secondary education by the Brothers of the Christian Schools is considerable. The texts appear very much to be accounts of contemporary events, but they weren't. They testify to a way of narration, probably typical of cultures that relate their history through the spoken word, which is very close to the way people from those areas still tell stories of their (or 'the') past.[xxxiii]

Indeed, Ngoi points out at the beginning of his article that there is a great lack of respect for the local population on the part of the whites: "*Because, even at present, most of the Whites believe that our ancestors were wild beasts, without any morals and only with mistakes, without any virtue.*"[xxxiiii] The article was almost completely taken up in the schoolbook, which was compiled by Frans

Maes. Ngoi's descriptions seem objective though. There are no real judgements or criticisms, at least not at first sight. A number of statements are surprising on first reading, such as in the chapter on laziness, which starts with the following phrase: *"Here the laziness is innate and gets confirmed with growth."* Which, however, does not mean that later in the text the author actually claimed that the Mongo were naturally lazy people. On the contrary, after a series of examples, he concluded the chapter with: *"This is the least we can say about laziness here. It is different from the concept the Whites have."* The chapter *"Lust"*, about experiences of sexuality *"aux temps des ancêtres"*, was also objective-descriptive. The *antropophagie* ("people-eating") was also treated here in a short paragraph.

As mentioned above, the chapter in question contained a complaint about the bad conditions caused by the arrival of the whites. Armed combat, rubber exploitation, the damage to villages, destruction of local authority, destruction of the family structure, spread of disease and depopulation of the area were examined successively. Further, there were paragraphs on the suppression and loss of local culture and language and on the temptations caused by wealth, luxury and sexual excesses. Each and every charge was levelled against the influence of Western society. In the midst of all this misery, faith was the only ray of hope: *"We don't complain in the same way as we do about the other importations of the Whites."* On the contrary, gratitude was appropriate here: *"We greatly thank the Whites for that."*[xxxiv]

A number of considerations have to be made here. Vinck continually questioned the extent of the originality of this text and whether there was any far-reaching influence from the missionaries when it was written. The fact that Paul Ngoi was, for a very long time, an assistant of Hulstaert, supposedly played a role in this. From the perspective of this chapter, however, the exact answer to this question is irrelevant. After all, the text was used in a schoolbook by the MSC. The missionaries must thus, in any case, have been in agreement with the statements made therein. The schoolbook seems, at first glance, to be an example of how the subject matter, in this case history, became more Africanised, or was at least moved away from a European perspective. A few marginal notes need to be added here. Firstly, the use of this text is situated fairly late in the colonial period and thus its possible influence coincided with decolonisation. Secondly, Vinck remarked that there are a number of internal contradictions in the text. The matters covered in the first descriptive part of the text (and thus of the book)

were not necessarily positively qualified. Vinck also posited that Ngoi himself often criticised the practices he described. But in the last chapter, where the intervention of the whites was covered, the tone changed dramatically.

This text was an example of the often ambiguous stance of the MSC towards the local culture. This, in its turn, was a result of the position they took regarding a number of social issues, both at home and in the colonial context. Its meaning for the content of the lessons and thus for the pupils is in itself just as ambiguous. The tone of the last chapter was very radical and very negative. The question is how this one example should be evaluated in the totality of the subject matter. Firstly, we can assume that the tone of most schoolbooks and subject matter contrasted somewhat with this critical stance. In other history lessons (often parts of schoolbooks for other subjects, such as geography or religion), a very different tone was employed. An example of this is *Bosako w'oyengwa (Histoire Sainte)* from 1935, in which the arrival of the whites is also described. The text of the lesson in question, reproduced here, takes a far more 'traditional' stance. Secondly, the impact of this book can be questioned, given that it was only used in the sixth and seventh year.

### *The Whites in the Congo*

*The kings of Europe had learned the news of the Congo. They found out it was a big country with a big population. But its people are cruel and sin is very distinct in them. They go to war between themselves, they put each other in prison and they shoot lots of people. The Arabs came to the Congo from the East at Tanganika and through the rivers Tsingitini and Lualaba. They defeated the natives; they captured lots of slaves and took them to their own region to sell them there.*

*The kings of Europe were greatly upset by this news. They gave the Belgian King Léopold II authorisation to keep Congo in order to slow down the wars, to chase away the Arabs in order to free the men from slavery and to teach them the intelligence of the Whites and to raise their wealth through trade.*

*Léopold had sent his men to Congo. But the natives did not appreciate the arrival of the Whites and their teaching; they defeated them and plundered their possessions. Then, the Whites campaigned against the natives. They spread throughout all regions of the Congo and they defeated the natives and dominated them. There were a lot of battles amongst the Arabs and certain men, because they were very cruel. But the Whites had weakened their strength. When the wars*



*ended, they freed the slaves and started to embellish the country. [xxxv]*

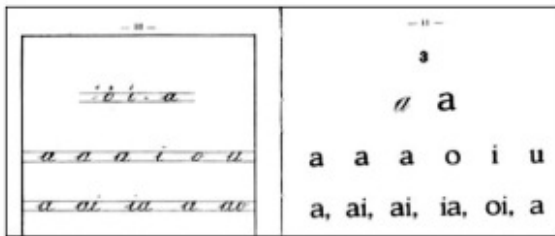
*Extract 3 - Reading lesson on the arrival of the whites in the Congo, from Bosako w'oyengwa III.*

### *2.2.2. The reading books written by Hulstaert*

The reading book, as a specific form of schoolbook, is an interesting object of study in this matter, for several reasons: of all the material, it probably had the greatest distribution; it was used from the first year; the MSC and also Hulstaert in particular, attach quite some importance to it, relatively speaking; this type of book contains a great number of reading lessons, which cover a wide variety of subjects. In this way, they present a good overview of the themes covered during the lessons and of the most important messages the missionaries imparted or wanted to impart to the Congolese youth. In a few recent studies, analyses of reading books published by the MSC were already discussed.[xxxvi] The conclusions of these studies concern didactic, educational and broader ideological aspects of the reading books and their use in the classroom. These aspects are treated separately here, but it is clear that they are correlated.

### *Technically*

The method Hulstaert used to teach the children to learn to read was specifically concerned with writing and forming words and sentences and learning letters. Whether this was all thoroughly thought-out is another matter. Vinck calls Hulstaert's spelling method "*anti-langue-africaine*" but immediately adds that he probably deviated from international standards in this regard because it was too difficult to apply them for learning the language at school.[xxxvii] Further, he did take the characteristics of Lomongo into account, such as grouping certain consonants and vowels and the fact that this language contained seven different vowels. Hulstaert, of course, had written out the majority of Lomongo himself and could thus also determine arrangement and style himself. We can assume that he was very gifted and well grounded in this area and worked with a great deal of insight.



Extract from Buku ea Njekola Eandola I, MSC reading book for the first year.

This does not mean that his method of working was didactically well thought-out, let alone innovative. The didactic guidelines he gave in the reading books *Buku ea Mbaanda* are about the clearest statements he made in this area. Hulstaert wanted to teach the phonetic sounds and subsequently teach the pupils to write the accompanying written letters. In this way, various letters were learned and subsequently placed together, first in meaningless wholes, later in meaningful words. Van Caeyseele calls this an example of a *bottom-up* method. Keeping more with the spirit of the time, I would sooner call it an *analytic* method. This by way of analogy with the analytic-synthetic method as was generally used in the first decades of the 20th century. This method assumed that the letters had to be learned by separating them in a series of 'known' words. The 'new' pedagogy would distance itself more and more from this method to elaborate the 'synthetic' elements within it (more visual, more global, working with meaningful sentences and texts instead of just words, which were not necessarily related).[xxxviii] Hulstaert situated himself even further on the other side. It was typical of his method to treat the letters one by one when learning them. The letters themselves had to be 'deconstructed'. He even wanted to show how letters were actually composed of other letters. A 'u', for example, was an addition of two 'i's. It was also presented in the instructions to the *moniteur* in this way.[xxxix] In part II of the same book there were further instructions for teaching capitals.[xl]

### *Educational-didactical*

The Hulstaert method was a system he had designed quite intuitively, without taking account of (other) educational principles. There is no reference here to a global reading method using the context in which words and letters are found, although this method was known at the time. Vinck and Van Caeyseele refer to Alma Hosten, alias Sister Magda[xli] on this point. Vinck said: "*It seems to me that she had an influence on Hulstaert but it was impossible for me to perceive*

*the exact outline of it.*"[xlii] Van Caeyseele goes even further in her study: *"She was informed of the insights into the new school movement and from these criticised Hulstaert's gradually surpassed method."*[xliii] It is probably exaggerated to speak of real 'criticism' in this context. Indeed, Hulstaert herself published a contribution by Hosten in *Aequatoria*, in which she mentioned reading books.

In this she clearly referred to Hulstaert's method: *"Every reading method for beginners should be illustrated. Illustration captivates! The separation of words into syllables is an unhappy business. It is unmethodical, literally distracts instead of concentrates. I have taken the following test: let a particular group read syllable by syllable, connect those syllables into words and finally achieve fluent reading. Have another group take no account of the divisions between syllables. Group 1 had significantly more trouble than Group 2. It will probably be said: the pupils should not read in separate syllables or parts! But: why place these sections in front of the students and weaken the strength of the reading image then? That is to disturb the literary understanding; when there could be a beautiful harmony between image and speech."*(...) *"Small lessons are far more interesting than separate sentences without a connected content. Those lessons also prepare a suitable base for the style practice. They can also be a great help for a global reading method."*[xliv]

From the correspondence between Hulstaert and Hosten it seems that they got on well with each other and that there was some agreement on Hosten's educational approach. In a letter from April 1942 Hulstaert wrote to Hosten: *"You know that I agree with you completely concerning the purpose and principle methods of teaching."*[xlv] For her part, Hosten complained to Hulstaert about a colleague in Boende, Sister Martha, who she did not feel was cooperating in the implementation of modern teaching methods. For those who read between the lines some envy between the Sisters cannot be discounted.[xlvi] At any rate, Sister Magda boasted that she had qualifications and professionalism as opposed to her colleague.

### *Instructions for the teacher*

The method for teaching reading and writing.

- *Repeat the previous lesson but don't take too much time over it.*

- *Then the new sounds. Pronounce a few words in which these sounds are used. Show the pupils some objects which are meaningful through these words (by fact or by drawing).*
- *The pronunciation of the sound. A few pupils pronounce the sound individually and then all together.*
- *Homework. The pupils think about words which start with the new sound. Then they try to find words in which the sound is located in the middle or at the end of the word. They pronounce it without haste in order to learn how to control the sound in a very clear way. If they don't understand something, or if they hesitate, help them by asking questions.*
- *Writing. Write the letter neatly on the blackboard. Explain the pupils the different parts of the letter. Then teach them the block capitals.*
- *Reading exercise. The pupils read the written letters first and then the letters in block capitals.*
- *Writing exercise. They write the letters on the drawing board with care. After that they correct the mistakes. Then some people write the letters on the blackboard. After that you make them remove what they have written.*
- *Put the new letters up onto the blackboard next to the old ones; (parts of words, the words themselves, then phrases). One by one they read them out loud and then all together.*
- *They read the lesson in the book.*
- *They write the words that are on the blackboard, after that the words that are in the book.*

The method for writing a capital letter:

- *Teach the shape of the letter in italics at the blackboard.*
- *Write your letter in different parts and unite the parts in order to create an entire letter.*
- *Show the pupils the comparison between this letter and some previous letters, or they look themselves.[xlvi]*
- *Some pupils try to write the letter at the blackboard and their friends should look for mistakes and differences between the letter written by the pupil and the one by the teacher.*

- *The pupils copy the letter either onto the drawing board or into their notebooks. After that they correct it.*
- *They imitate the language which is used in the book.*
- *Don't fail to check the force with which the pupils try and the way they hold their pens and the way the notebooks spread out in order to get all things straight.*

Extract 4 – Instructions to the teachers, from the MSC reading book *Buku ea njekola eandola la ekotelo*

### *Ideologically*

Although it is said that Hulstaert pays less attention to the religious in his reading lessons than is traditional, that influence was present nevertheless.[xlvi] From recent research it appeared that this did not follow from the chosen themes so much as from the way in which they were addressed.[xlix] From the analysis of the contents of a few reading lessons, in MSC reading books and those of other congregations, it is apparent that an explicitly religious motif (as the theme of the reading lesson) was not always as clearly present. Where Kita stated in the case of the *Pères Blancs* that 28% of the reading lessons (from reading books published in the 1910s) analysed by him had an explicitly religious theme, Vinck and myself came to only 12% in the case of the MSC's *Mbuku ea Mbaanda* (first published in 1933) studied by us. In a comparable reading book from the 1950s by the Dominicans (working in Uele, North-East Congo) that portion was even lower. Without drawing general conclusions from a rough comparison of three different congregations, I think that the period of publication can explain this difference to some extent. This should be nuanced by stating firstly that the religious theme was part of a broader moralising motif and these were both completely intertwined. When the facts are seen in this light then Pierre Kita's remarks in his study of the reading books of the *Pères Blancs* must be agreed with: *"Religion very clearly occupies a predominant place: not only the themes that are completely dedicated to it, representing around 28% of the total, but also the biggest parts of the texts which are related to social life and even to studies are influenced by religious morals."*[li] In the study of the MSC and Dominican books the same characteristic came up: *"Regarding this topic you should take note that the two types of handbooks contain many references to God and to his glorification, in all kinds of lesson."*[li] Secondly, most reading books, whatever the date of publication, had a long life and were often used for several decades. Kita expresses this in the case

of the books by the White Fathers. This was the same for the MSC, as is apparent from correspondence. This is especially informative as to the moralising element remaining imposingly present in the schoolbooks until the end of the colonial period. *Educational ideas: a measure of nothing?*

### 3.1. Influences and allies

In the second year of *Aequatoria* (1939) an article appeared signed with the initials Z.M., standing for 'Zuster Magda' [Sister Magda].<sup>[lii]</sup> This article was unique, for two reasons. As far as known she was the only woman ever to publish a contribution in the original *Aequatoria* series. Apart from this the content was also unusual for the periodical: Hosten wrote a report on the manner in which she had worked with the school curriculum. The subtitle of the article was literally: "*Application of the primary school curriculum*". She treated each subject that was taught in turn and referred to the curriculum brochure. The general conclusion that can be drawn from the article is that the sister certainly did not feel herself bound to the curriculum to the letter. This started with the first subject, native language: "*The education in letters received an ample share, due to its undeniably great educational worth.*" Yet the curriculum made different emphasises. In the *causeries* she said quite determined: "*The useful and formative subjects of the curriculum were covered, the remaining were omitted.*" In the lessons on medicine: "*Apart from the curriculum, special attention was given to illnesses of local importance.*" From the article it was apparent that much attention was given to the development of the language and mathematics lessons. The descriptions of the performances in the lesson 'native language' were very extensive. The sister mentioned the kinds of exercises that were done and which topics the students had mastered. In the case of mathematics it seems special attention was given to fractions. She also described the methods used.

*May the Sacred Heart of Jesus be loved everywhere*

*Boende, 16.7.42*

*Very reverend Father Superior,*

*I thank you most warmly for your last letter. I often thought that I had become uninterested in class matters. The judgement of others (...) But when I read your letter, I felt clearly that I was not at all indifferent to your approval or disapproval. And I saw clearly - never before so well - how you are a light and support to me. It is most human I know but I confess it to you most simply.*

*Dearest Father Superior, allow me to speak my heart. As far as Sister Martha is concerned... I think it has been enough. I have nothing against her personally and I do not believe that she has anything against me personally. [It is a] very different case than that of Sister Beatrijs. But she is not the person to be left in education any longer. You remember the fate of earlier moniteurs ... and now hers have had enough. They are good and simple boys... they are exemplary, they are our teachers and have a simple good and loving spirit... it is all I ask.*

*Not long ago 3 of Sister Martha's moniteurs went to Father Henri and said plainly that they could not take it any more with Sister Martha, that they had had enough of it. 1000 proofs, facts, ... Far too many to list. Father Henri told them to continue in their duty, not to criticise anyone and to wait.*

*You can see, good Father Superior, all things allowed, that intervention is needed. Her adjustments to new methods are extremely weak... a continuous stumbling block for me, a brake that slows the system. Lately during a visit to the class with Father Paul I saw that she had dropped the mathematics method, without having asked my good advice or permission, and was ploughing on in her own way. The reading method? As long as it is examined in that way... I cannot bring about anything definite... I could continue to write for a long time in this way.*

*Finally it is the spirit of Boende that she will never be willing or able to accept, for she has never loved the blacks in her heart. She says it is singing that wrenches here and everything would be solved if she could teach singing again... Talk. Her spirit has never been different... The singing has made the mood less sweet and finally unbearable... And if she would only see that she is not the person to teach singing, just because she is not an educator.*

*If only she was just harmful to the teachers like this... I could easily tolerate this for another 20 years... but she is damaging to education and that is as precious to me as the apple of my eye. It is a great pity for education that such people busy themselves with it, even if they finally achieve something. Education must work inwards... and such people have never looked into the child's soul. I do not judge people in any way by saying this... for I have my faults as she does.*

*Dearest Father Superior, it is starting to be hard for me... besides, I do not believe she feels much for education... success - even though it is imagined success, the downsides were far greater than the success - kept her up and so still tolerable in some way. I do realise, very reverend Father Superior that it is hard now to find a solution.*

Extract 5 – Letter from Sister Magda to Gustaaf Hulstaert. Aequatoria Archive.

Hosten was a professionally trained secondary school teacher and this clearly showed from the language she used. She referred several times to “the occasional method” or the “purpose occasional education”. She was apparently very interested in these methods and tried to encourage the *moniteurs* to join her in this. That was not a simple assignment she said: *“This is still a plague to those who naturally adhere to the ‘système des tiroirs’ and who don’t dare or know how to make bridges between the parts of a subject or between the separate subjects.”* From the report it also appears that repetition was a very important element. In the subject ‘mathematics’ each year started from the beginning and then went further according to the ‘excentric method’: *“In which the learning material is treated 1) every year and 2) always more extensively.”* She further clarified that she was not using this excentric method exclusively but intermittently with the concentric method. This meant that the subject matter was always studied in more depth. She did mention that the system was not fully completed yet: *“Yet to teach a subject in this way demands a purposeful division of the subject matter. But we have not been able to do this yet for most subjects, due to lack of time. Because this takes a lot of personal preparation.”*

The meaning of this text should not be underestimated. In the inspection reports that can be found on the schools in this period, educational concepts and ideas were almost never being referred to. The emphasis was far more heavily on facts and material data. Especially the fact that Hulstaert put this section in his periodical has its importance. After all, he published the article because he felt that it described a situation as it should be. *Aequatoria* was not a mission periodical; the propaganda element certainly did not play a part. The article had a more normative function. In other words, it can be supposed that in most other schools things were far less progressive and modern. From the last statement it can be deduced that the lessons given by the *moniteurs* were in many cases not so structured.[liii] This puts the direct importance of this specific text for the image that the contemporary reader forms of the colonial class into perspective. Sister Magda was not representative. More than that, she was an exception. Likely she was even an exception in her own environment, which is also apparent from the letter she wrote to Hulstaert about her colleague, Sister Martha. At that moment she was also a young, ‘fresh’ power. Someone who, for the sake of an educational ideal, worked actively, cared heart and soul for her work, and with a desire to put



her accumulated knowledge into practice.

Hulstaert had an interest in the ideas tested by Hosten and certainly was not opposed to them. His correspondence with her was in a fairly friendly tone; he did not criticise her article. From other articles it is only too clear that he would speak his opinion about other's articles without hesitation if he found it necessary. A good example of this was the publication of the article "*Pédagogie Civilisée et Education Primitive*". The article was written by Vernon Brelsford, a British district commissioner in Nigeria. It was originally published in English in *Oversea Education*. Hulstaert summarised it and translated it into French and published it in 1945 in *Aequatoria*. He added: "*No doubt that this remarkable study will interest our readers. We took the liberty, counting on the well-known British open-mindedness, to add a few considerations as notes.*"[liv] In his article the British functionary strongly emphasised the differences between the two types of education. The comparison between the two was consistently to the advantage of Western education. Hulstaert did not hesitate to add some strong doubts on this opinion in the footnotes of the article. In this he presented himself as critical both of the opinions that the author expressed and of European society. He also put into perspective all the differences that Brelsford had emphasised. In opposition to the Brit he saw no incompatibility between the education systems in Africa and Europe and no supremacy of the European system. He did not see parallels between the new trends in education and African education. That conclusion would show too much interpretation. He did enumerate some characteristics of the African system that were essential to him and stood up for the Africans.[lv]

Hulstaert profiled himself very much as an indigenist and by this he expressly meant to oppose himself to the established authority and to be critical.[lvi] His views were fully revealed in the conflicts with the Brothers of the Christian Schools about the way in which they worked in the schools in Bamanya and Coquilhatville.[lvii] Namely, the use of French as the language of education was a constant bone of contention for Hulstaert. In 1945 he wrote an article for the periodical *Aequatoria* in which he gave a 'seven-point plan' of educational principles. Supposedly the reason for writing this article was to be found in the conflicts he had experienced over the past years with the Brothers of the Christian Schools. In the article he argued for a 'general' education as a counterbalance for the so-called 'modern' education: "*Primary school teaching, as*

*teaching in general, needs resolutely to engage in the path of adaptation.” (...) “This conclusion is a result of certain given facts; the social nature of man, the existence of natural societies which have the right to be respected, just like everything that is good in nature; the principles laid down as a basis for the colonisation by the Government of the Belgian Congo, whose aim is to civilise the natives, to refine them in a harmonious manner in all fields while respecting the native organisation and the traditions.”*

It does appear a little contradictory that he so loyally refers to what was almost a kind of official ideology: the civilising mission of the Belgians in the Congo as a justification of their presence. Yet the content of certain schoolbooks corresponded to this. The whole results in a rather schizophrenic image. In a letter to Sister Magda, which we have already quoted, he made it very clear what “adaptation” meant to him. The students needed an education that would prepare them to continue living in their hometown: *“You are quite right to say that success in Bamanya and Bokuma is not the main goal of our education; education should not even take any account of it, whatever may come of boys who continue studies later. But I do have a certain reservation in the case of Bokuma and this because the education there is in the same spirit as with you. An adaptation has to take place eventually.”*[lviii] Bamanya and Bokuma were the only places at that time where some form of further education could be found. It was to this that Hulstaert alluded. He also emphasised this strongly in his seven-point plan, which he published in *Aequatoria*. At least three of the seven points indicated it. The training that prepared the Congolese to be aides in the service of the Europeans could only be taught in the *écoles spéciales*. Even in the *écoles spéciales* that provided a specific, applied training, the personal nurturing of the student could not be neglected. So it was also clear to Hulstaert which conclusion was right concerning primary education: *“It is absolutely necessary to avoid transforming primary school education into a preparatory course to a technical instruction (in the largest sense of the word). On the contrary, this preparatory course should be based on the primary school education.”*[lix]

In December 1941 he wrote a letter to the head of the missions in Bamanya in which he expressed his anxiety about the state of affairs at the teacher’s training college. In the past there had been a decision from the vicariate that there should be a limit on the amount of pupils allowed. Now that there was a new primary school in Coquilhatville that restriction was removed again so that, in principle,

entrance to the teacher's training college was not limited, at least for the pupils in Bamanya. Hulstaert did not like this idea. It posed a number of fundamental concerns for him. The teacher's training college had to "remain a real teacher's college". By this he meant that the training should not take account of other societal needs and that they should exclusively aim at the training of teachers headed for the rural MSC schools in the interior: *"Instead of changing or adapting ourselves to schools in places of exception we will continue to insist on more adjustment of the teacher's college to the needs of the schools in the interior."* He also clarified what the implications of this would be for the curriculum: *"Considering conditions inland the following are the most pressing topics: general formation classes, language (Lonkundo) and grammar, mathematics. Our teachers inland do not need so much knowledge, but rather a general overview, insight, and development of the intellect and everything that can help with this. Courses like French, however useful for other purposes, are of lesser importance for our teachers."*[lx]

The fact that Hulstaert was occasionally on the same wavelength as the followers of *Education nouvelle* seemed to be mainly a result of his indigenism. This ensured that he wanted attention paid to the concrete living environment of the Congolese. But there were other motives beside the purely educational behind this. In reality his religious conservatism as well as his distrust of the modern world remained alive, including in his writings for school. Vinck already wrote that he never progressed beyond an *"éclectisme limité"* in theoretical educational knowledge. That knowledge was based on the possession (and likely also the reading) of certain conservative Catholic-inspired handbooks: *Didaktik* by Otto Willman and the overviews of Frans De Hovre and Victor D'Espallier (*Nieuwe Banen*). It should be no surprise that he consulted these books in the light of what was said earlier about the influences the MSC candidates experienced. [lxi]

### 3.2. Clashing visions

#### 3.2.1. With the Brothers

The views of the MSC corresponded to a great extent with those of Hulstaert, that much is clear. Yet it would be wrong only to mention Hulstaert here. Though he was a prolific writer and a very active and enthusiastic missionary who left the most traces of all the MSC in the colonial period, there were also 'lesser gods'. From the number of confrontations that Hulstaert and the MSC had with other parties in connection with the teaching material, it can be inferred that although

there was often a united view, this was certainly not always the case. The best-documented examples of this are without a doubt the continuing arguments the MSC had with the Brothers of the Christian Schools, although they were brought to their vicariate by the MSC themselves in the 1920s. In this conflict Hulstaert took the lead. Sometimes he dragged other MSC with him in this, whilst others were much more sceptical about his discord with the Brothers.

That his article of 1945 on general training was also directed to the Brothers of the Christian Schools became visible in his standpoint on the language of education, amongst others: *"We cannot continue along the line of polyglotism within primary school education. The already-mentioned programme of reorganisation provides, in certain circumstances, up to three languages at 2nd level. Primary school education, which in nature is meant to be for the mass population, will not know what to do with the whole linguistic requirement, which overloads the programme and confuses the pupils' minds."* The struggle against French as the language of education would finally be lost but the fight against the Brothers was more than a language struggle.[lxii] It was also a power struggle. From 1939 there was an aim to apply the same curriculum guide across the entire MSC vicariate. It is clear that the MSC had at least partial authority in the local education network. All other congregations working in the region were contractually bound to them. At that point the Brothers of the Christian Schools were an exception. In Bamanya they were working for the MSC but not in Coquilhatville, as they worked in an official school there. The inspection authority in the region was allocated to the 'head congregation' in the area and thus to the MSC. Paul Jans, who was the head missionary at the time, wrote to Hulstaert that he had argued to *"make an independent whole of the primary schools with curricula that are as identical as possible. In all our posts, including Bamanya, among others, I emphasised that much more needs to be done for Nkundo and less for French. After the fifth year a certificate could then be given of completed primary education. Boys who do further studies to be a moniteur, in Bamanya as well as other posts of the mission, are then united in a 6th year, taught by an indigenous Brother, that must be followed as 1<sup>st</sup> year vocational training and where there is plenty of French besides a revision of the primary curriculum."*[lxiii]

In general Jans did not seem to follow in the same line as Hulstaert on the subject of holding back the inland children, he thought that they were certainly welcome

at the Brothers' school in Coquilhatville. He even explicitly accused Hulstaert of sowing seeds of hatred and of unconsciously contributing to an aggressive feeling towards the Brothers among a number of his fellows.[lxiv] He wrote the following about Hulstaert's educational ideas: *"I find your theory about Forcing and Leading very nice but wishing systematically to refuse entrance to Coq where we cannot convince our people inland seems very much like 'volontariat forcé'."* Such statements clearly show that even Hulstaert's contemporaries found his way of dealing with the Congolese to be quite patronising. Apparently Hulstaert wished to have a united curriculum not just for the entire region but especially for all congregations. Jans clearly had problems with his method: *"What I propose for the unification of the primary school curriculum for all mission posts that function normally are thoughts that are at least four years old and for which I already had some unpleasantness in '35. But practically, the cooperation of everyone, also the Brothers, is required for the creation of this curriculum. I do not believe in a monopoly on truth or correct thought or correct insight. With nobody."*

Hulstaert kept pushing and would lock horns with the Brothers on more occasions. He wrote to the higher orders when it appeared that the Brothers were planning to follow the official curriculum in their subsidised school in Coquilhatville, instead of the subsidised missionary education curriculum. The curriculum was mainly based on the Belgian curriculum and therefore much 'harder' than what was taught in most Congolese schools. Reisdorff, the government inspector, answered him in the name of the governor general: *"It goes without saying that the Reverend Brothers of the Christian Schools are allowed to follow curricula of official schools, the pupils subsidised being usually destined to continue their studies at the official school of Coquilhatville."*[lxv] Hulstaert retaliated, saying that the use of the official curriculum would lead to a surplus of graduates all of whom would not be able to find work. This would inevitably lead to abuses, a society of 'unclassified'. However, the governor general did not follow him in his reasoning. In a friendly but decided manner Reisdorff refused Hulstaert's suggestions.[lxvi] He suggested that subsidised schools function under the missionary school curriculum completely independently of the official school system. There would then be a selection of the best students to have finished the first grade who would have the opportunity to go to the official school and eventually to middle school. In his reply Hulstaert agreed to this solution but took the opportunity to describe his ideal once again: the complete separation of primary and secondary school, so that primary school could focus

purely on general education, *“without referring to further studies.”* To make the step to middle school an extra *“preparatory year”* could be provided after the fifth year.

Language use was also discussed. As late as 1943 Hulstaert wrote to the Brother Director in Coquilhatville: *“You know that it is absolutely important to us that Lonkundo is the working language. The moniteurs educated in this language will have no problem here. For the foreign pupils, who don’t know the working language, the moniteurs should provide an adaptation system, which to me seems easy to elaborate.”*[lxvii] The fact that his confidence in the Congolese *moniteurs* was noticeably higher than at other times is striking. Brother Director, who had been confronted with the same demand *ad nauseam*, answered Hulstaert in a rather cynical tone: *“According to your desire, once more expressed, the working language called ‘Congolese’ or regional language is, as you say, Lonkundo. Others will say Lingala, some others Lonkundo-lingala for Coq. However, the language the young people will almost exclusively use in the working environment later is French, wouldn’t it be good to give these elements as soon as possible?”*[lxviii]

But Hulstaert did not let up and answered bluntly that decisions on the organisation of education in the vicariate were up to the vicariate itself, according to canon law. From this he drew the equally definite conclusion: the spoken language at school was Lomongo. The study of French as a subject could only begin in the second grade. Only the students at the official schools would need to speak professional French later, those of the free schools would not. It would not be fair to ‘sacrifice’ the whole population for the sake of a minority elite. The main body had to remain *native*. [lxix] On the subject of the official school Hulstaert took an equally clear position, which he often offered directly: *“At the moment the greatest danger for our school is the official school of Coq and if no intervention is made then all those learned, degenerate blacks, the most immoral, the drinkers, the animals as we know them here, bring it to the point when you will again be obliged to place the Brothers in the central schools inland as teaching personnel.”* [lxx] His resistance was to make no difference. In his inspection report of 1943 he had to establish that the Brothers continued to steer their own course (which was in accordance with the guidelines and ideas of the government): *“It was painful to have to note that the directives I gave through a letter no 1965 of March 2 of this year, regarding the curriculum to be followed, the working language and the teaching of French, had not been executed.”* [lxxi]

There was no agreement among the various MSC about Hulstaert's stance towards the Brothers. We have already pointed to Jans' remarks on the subject. Not everyone had such radical opinions, as is abundantly clear from a letter by the rector of the missionary post in Bamanya, Van der Beken. He was reacting to a letter of Hulstaert's, in which he seems to have been particularly shocked by the attitude of the Brothers. Apparently he did occasionally pictured them as real bad guys who would destroy the Congolese youth. Van der Beken was more positive about the Brothers: *"Most honourable and dear Father Superior, I received your letter of May 1. I believe what you write and yet the Brothers do not neglect their religious education, every morning they must prepare this in particular. Brother Director also gives them special lessons on their responsibility as teachers. They are actually Brothers of the Christian schools, how would they bring down our holy faith? I accept that their teaching is not adjusted to the mentality of the blacks as they do not know that mentality."* So it seemed at first sight that he wished to protect the Brothers and wished to deny Hulstaert's accusations. But that was not the case for the *moniteurs*: *"And yet the Christian life is not felt, not experienced, the teachers feel no responsibility for the community, they are not Catholic as they are not universal in their actions, they are egoistic and that only to the bad because their egoism goes to complete independence. They feel themselves to be lord and master and to be subordinate to none."* There appeared to be a very negative vision of the evolution and the possibilities of the Congolese behind this. The efforts that the missionaries went to did not really make a difference since even the Congolese who were raised by missionaries inland got big ideas: *"With their little learning and their cockiness they are just shameful."*

It appears that Van der Beken felt rather powerless, not equal to the 'great' civilising task that was traditionally attributed to the missionaries: *"Of course I don't claim that school is a necessary evil but I do think that the concept of school may be wrongly understood by many of us. What improvements have not been introduced in Europe and daily more improvements and adjustments to the students are sought. Dear Father Superior, our vicariate is quite new and many of our priests including myself are not well enough grounded or developed for a revolution. I am just a very normal everyday priest, one may say 'made in Japan', I should be more aware of current conditions, should apply myself more to serious literature on the missions, be able to understand better the depth of the Negro soul."*[lxxii] This quote clearly shows, in my estimation, that the world of the average missionary at work was not so straightforward, simple and self-assured,

although that impression was often made in missionary and other propaganda literature.

### 3.2.2. *With the government*

There were not only troubles with the Brothers of the Christian Schools. A number of MSC fell foul of the government. There was often an ideological factor connected to this, which sometimes makes it difficult to interpret the content of certain discussions. A conflict broke out in 1951 concerning the inspection by government inspector Eloye. That year, during his inspection round of the MSC, he found a number of things that he did not feel corresponding to the intentions of the education curriculum. He gave an extensive description of this in his inspection reports, which did not earn him many thanks among the missionaries. Complaints were made to the provincial governor Bruels de Tiecken. The case reached the governor general, who tried to reach a compromise and make peace between the brawlers. He decided to send Jean Ney, chief inspector of colonial education, to check Eloye's inspections and to search for a solution in consultation with the provincial governor and the vicar.

It was in Boende, where father Van Linden was responsible for the school at that time that Eloye had been overcome by criticism. Van Linden had told him that he only considered the inspection reports and other official guidelines to be advice, to which he did not feel bound in any way in cases where they did not correspond to his own vision. He accepted no addendum to the curriculum and would not respond to anything communicated to him in French, out of Flemish-nationalistic convictions. In Ney's version the remarks were already put into perspective: *"The Reverend Father has generalised his opinion on the official communications, confirming that if he were the boss, he would not ask for the subsidy because he doesn't like the official and that in this way he would be the boss in his own school."* Ney acknowledged that Van Linden was very active and devoted to the school but he also had to admit that he had a number of old-fashioned ideas, which did not tally with the image that one should have of a school. He did not communicate what these ideas were exactly but he did report that Van Linden had told him literally: *"The schools do more harm than good."*[lxxiii] Which convictions or considerations could have been at the basis of this statement was not clear to me in the conversation I had with Van Linden.

On his part, Breuls de Tiecken complained to the governor general about the fact that the missionaries positioned themselves so aggressively. He then also



proposed to reconsider subsidies again in cases such as Van Linden's. *"Also, the continuous pressure from the people being inspected by the inspectors, either because of themselves, or because of powerful intermediary people or organisations, would succeed in paralysing the control up to a point where it would become ineffective."* He believed that the treasury should not subsidise a person who openly contradicted generally accepted educational and hygienic principles, who often flatly refused to read official correspondence addressed to him and who considered inspection reports and other guidelines to be nothing but simple advice when they did not tally with his vision.

Mgr. Vermeiren then defended his missionaries to Breuls de Tiecken. He referred to a number of other complaints the inspector had expressed. He maintained that he had done everything possible to sketch as gloomy an image as possible of the mission of the MSC. According to the inspector, the handwork in many rural schools consisted almost entirely of laying roofs in *ndele* or in harvesting palm nuts destined to be sold for the benefit of the missions. Vermeiren said this should be checked. According to him, the fact that catechists were in many cases appointed *moniteurs* was a distortion of reality. Actually, the *moniteurs* had to function as catechists as well. The thorniest question, however, was still that of the language of education. Vermeiren seemed to become rather enraged about this: *"A handful of foreigners, instead of integrating into the environment where they are leading a prosperous life, uses its privileged situation as a European to impose the teaching of a foreign language (Lingala, JB) on millions of natives because all in all they are but Negro and (...) because it is easier for the others."*

On this subject, the MSC clearly closed ranks but they were fairly isolated. The province governor thought the missionaries should teach in Lingala because the majority of the population of the province did not know Lonkundo and everyone tried to speak Lingala. The Brothers of the Christian Schools had sensed this and had adapted themselves in their school in Coquilhatville. *"Judicieusement"*, Breuls de Tiecken thought. To the great surprise and probably also dissatisfaction of the MSC, Father Moentjens found the same in Bamanya: *"To my great surprise I noticed that between moniteurs and pupils Lingala is well spoken and even during the lessons certain moniteurs introduce words and expressions from Lingala into their language. I drew this to the headmaster's attention and asked him kindly to put the entire weight of his power to good use to effectively combat this abuse which does not constitute an imaginary or illusionary danger."*[lxxiv]

### 3.2.3. *With the Congolese*

Conflicts also occasionally erupted with the Congolese. These were even less visible to the outside world because the balance of power was to the advantage of the missionaries and the Congolese were never really given the opportunity to make their problems and demands explicitly known. On some occasions there was nevertheless evidence of serious problems between the missionaries and Congolese students. One striking event, which is still mentioned today in conversation with missionaries and which is to be situated in line with the conflicts mentioned, was the 'uprising' of the seminarians in Bokuma.[lxxv] From 1926 the MSC had tried to start a classics degree in Bokuma, relating to the priestly training. Originally Boelaert, together with Petrus Vertenten, was one of the driving forces behind this project. From 1932, when the area of the MSC was raised to the status of 'real' vicariate, things began to move: the training became more professional and became truly a training in its own right, more than just a result of the primary school. It has to be noted that even in this type of school there was an emphasis on handiwork and its educational value. The curriculum seemed to develop prosperously. In any event, Boelaert himself expressed his satisfaction in a letter at the end of 1934: "*When I arrived here four years ago, I found only six students, and now we are closing the year with six well-formed classes, with regular attendance and the best prospects.*" The emphasis was on the study of Latin and the native language.

In 1936, the first seminarian dissatisfaction was observed. According to the Fathers, there were people who wanted to leave to study elsewhere or there were people who were discontented because they had been away from home for a few years. It was not so surprising, at least according to commentaries given by the missionaries themselves about the lives of the seminarians: "*The life at a boarding school and abstaining from contact with family members and people of the opposite sex, the regular enforcement of the regulations, the relatively heavy studies, the constant guarding they are exposed to and the constant effort that is required are all obligations that are far harder for them than we can easily imagine.*"

Sanders wrote the following for 1937: "*Expressions of obstinacy and pride. Amongst other things, they will refuse in class to write down a text because it is in Lonkundo: they must have French!*"[lxxvi] A year later a whole class left the *préparatoire* (the preparatory department of the classics degree): "*Bikoro is*

*leaving, but largely because of Lonkundo.*" What this means exactly is unclear. However, it may be assumed that the pupils from the nearby region of Bikoro were being referred to. The seminary of Bokuma had, after all, received the status of 'regional' seminary some years before. Concretely, this meant that students from other vicariates in the Equator province also went to the seminary there. The level of the training was rated very highly by the missionaries. They assumed that only very few candidates were eligible for it.

In any case, problems concerning the language had clearly developed. Something similar also happened in Bamanya after the Second World War. If possible, information about this is even scarcer. Cobbaut did speak about it in his inspection report of 1946: *"Since the beginning of the school year Brother headmaster has had to deal with a number of serious difficulties, probably caused by the bad atmosphere that must have been prevalent from before amongst the moniteurs and the students. Three moniteurs have dropped out because either they left their work illegally or they had to be sent away because of very bad behaviour. All the students of the third normal year have, in a spirit of revolt, left the school, with two exceptions, who filled the vacant positions of the moniteurs in the primary school."* We don't find out in his text what the exact problem was. One of the former students of the teacher training college in Bamanya, Jean Boimbo, reported a similar fact: *"One day, if I can remember well, the Brothers nearly went on strike because they didn't agree with the vision of the MSC. Then they said: 'if it is for those problems, you can come and teach yourself. But we, we have to teach ourselves, that's not it. Well then the children shouldn't waste their time.' That's when they gave up. Yes."* (...) *"And we followed the strike, if we were not taught following the curricula of the teacher training such as ... (sic)"* However, he situated his studies at the teacher training college after 1949. This indicates that the Congolese also noticed the problems between the MSC and the Brothers and that they slowly became aware that they were in a position to make certain demands. We will examine this in more depth in the following chapters.

## *Conclusion*

The subject matter taught to Congolese pupils at primary school shows clear differences from what was taught in Belgium. However, it must be posited that these differences were not in the essence or content of the subject matter as such. At first sight, the list of the material taught looks largely parallel. Above all, Religious Education was taught. Besides this, the same basic subjects were taught

as in Western schools: arithmetic, writing, reading. Though it seems there were many parallels, there was one important exception. The language of teaching, and the learning of French in particular, was always the stumbling block of colonial education. The discussions on this topic dragged on until the end of the colonial period. The stance of the MSC, with Hulstaert as its most outspoken representative, is probably one of the most illustrative examples of this. Their choice for the native language later appeared to be a strategic mistake and primarily caused a great deal of conflict with the local population and from the 1950s on also with certain government officials.

The rest of the education curriculum, which, however, was not put into practice to the same degree always and everywhere, showed a far-reaching takeover of Belgian habits and subjects. The strong emphasis placed on – at least to the Congolese – strange and exotic geography and history of the motherland and the West on the one hand and the forceful emphasis on handwork and practical skills on the other hand always had clearly ‘metropolitan’ roots, though they were not necessarily included in the curriculum for the same reasons. More fundamental, however, is the position that the share of ‘new’, ‘adapted’ or ‘African’ subject contents was as good as non-existent. In this regard the MSC could actually be considered as exceptions, given their relatively broad concern for the conservation of local language and traditions. Whether this was out of emancipatory convictions can however be doubted, if only because of the fact that language and tradition were offered to the students in a ‘Catholic’ package.

At a level of didactic technique, the conclusion seems clear and uniform: even Hulstaert, who was responsible for the production of the majority of new reading books at the MSC, was not an education expert. A remarkable link between his ideological views and education is formed by the fact that he wanted to maintain the individuality of the local culture. Through this he unwittingly placed himself in the same line as the ideas of educational reformers from the first half of the twentieth century. At first sight, his indigenistic principles were linked to the upbringing “*vom Kinde aus*” and the “*Nouvelle Education*” in general and this led to his designation as a ‘didactic progressive’. He considered himself like this: “*What is the best method? Difficult to say, but mine is based on the language and thus adapted, it also improves the functioning of writing and reading instructions.*”[lxxvii] This was no empty statement. Hulstaert had indeed done his best to take the specificity of the local language into account when writing the

reading books.

It must finally be noted that, certainly in this area, it is easy to overestimate the influence of Hulstaert in the historical perspective. After all, he was a person who published a lot and also played a very active role for a long time within his congregation and the mission territory. Put another way: so many other missionaries who were active in the field and who were undoubtedly also influential remained far less visible. However, it can be shown that these opinions were certainly neither shared nor accepted by everyone: Hulstaert had to deal with opposition and conflicts from the missionaries, in his own or other congregations, as well as from the government and from the Congolese themselves. Despite this, it appears that in the field there were not many revolutionary or progressive ideas concerning education and that classroom practice was more a result of traditional conservative Catholic views on the one hand and the more or less automatic application of known basic principles on the other. The foundation of this image is formed by the scarce testimonies about more innovative ideas or initiatives together with the positions and statements expressed in contemporary conversations and correspondence between missionaries.

## NOTES

[i] I base this on the following publication from 1923: *Programme Type des écoles primaires communales*, Bruxelles: Ministère des Sciences et des Arts. p. 116.

[ii] [Original quotation in French] *Organisation de l'enseignement libre subsidié pour indigènes en collaboration avec les sociétés de Missions Chrétiennes*, 1948, p. 8.

[iii] The *Revue Pédagogique Congolaise* was a joint initiative from the recently founded university of Lovanium and the *Centre d'Etudes des problèmes sociaux indigènes* (CEPSI) in Elizabethville. It was published from 1955 as an appendix to the *Bulletin du CEPSI*.

[iv] Verhaegen, P. & Leblanc, M. (1955). Quelques considérations au sujet de l'éducation préprimaire de l'enfant noir. In *Revue Pédagogique Congolaise*, n° 2. p. XVII-XXXII.

[v] "Uit brieven van Z.E.P. Vertenten aan de studenten der apostolische school te Assche". In *Annalen*, 1928, 10, p. 219.

[vi] See Briffaerts, J. (2003). Etude comparative de manuels scolaires au Congo Belge: Cas des Pères Dominicains et des Missionnaires du Sacré Coeur. In

Depaepe, M., Briffaerts, J., Kita Kyankenge Masandi, P. & Vinck, H., *Manuels et chansons scolaires au Congo Belge*, Studia Paedagogica 33, Leuven: University Press. p. 167-196.

[vii] Inversely, the study of Belgian Congo was on the Belgian curriculum in the third and fourth years.

[viii] *Organisation de l'enseignement libre subsidié pour indigènes en collaboration avec les sociétés de Missions Nationales*, 1929. p. 19. [Original quotation in French]

[ix] The *chefferies* (translated from the lesser used term “hoofdijen”) were the first territorial units in the governing system implemented locally by the colonial administration. In the interior (i.e. not in the cities), the population was divided into chefferies that were subsequently grouped in sectors. In the first instance, the colonial administrative authority was active per sector. According to the law, common law remained applicable to a certain degree (within the boundaries stipulated in law). Hence the designation of city areas by the name “centres extra-coutumiers” or “outside common law areas”, at least for the Congolese districts in those cities.

[x] *Organisation ...* 1929, p. 42. [Original text in French]

[xi] Africa Archive Brussels, Missions Collection, no. 647, “inspection scolaire 6”. “Ecole de Filles des Grands Centres. Coquilhatville. Rapport sur le fonctionnement de l'école dirigée par les Filles de la Charité. Année 1927”. Soeur Borsu, Coquilhatville, 1928. [Original quotation in French]

[xii] Africa Archive Brussels, Missions Collection, no. 647, “inspection scolaire 6”. “Ecole de Filles des Grands Centres. Coquilhatville. Rapport sur le fonctionnement de l'école dirigée par les Filles de la Charité. 1928-1929”. s.n., s.l., s.d. [Original quotation in French]

[xiii] Lazarist Archive Leuven. “Rapport sur les oeuvres des Filles de la Charité de St-Vincent de Paul à Coquilhatville. Exercice 1930”. s.n., Coquilhatville, January 1931.

[xiv] Africa Archive Brussels, Missions Collection, no. 647, “inspection scolaire 6”. “Rapport sur le fonctionnement des écoles primaires du premier degré, mission de Coquilhatville, année 1928”. P. Vertenten, Bamanya, 27 March 1929.

[xv] Africa Archive Brussels, electronic inventory, no. 16.484, documents nr. 36 (Wafanya) and 38 (Bokuma). “Rapport sur le fonctionnement de l'école primaire du premier degré dirigée par les RR. PP. Missionnaires du Sacré Coeur”. G. Jardon, s.l., June 1929. [Original quotation in French]

[xvi] Lazarist Archive Leuven. “Rapport sur l'enseignement des écoles des

Révérèndes Soeurs de Saint Vincent de Paul à Coquilhatville”, P. Vertenten, Coquilhatville, February 1930.

[xvii] Africa Archive Brussels, electronic inventory, no. 12.490, “schoolinspectieverslagen 1932”.

[xviii] Alma Hosten (1909-1985). Mission sister, Daughter of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart. She was originally from Leffinge and from 1934 worked in the boys’ school in Boende. Hosten had an education degree for primary schools and was a teacher of sciences (obtained at the H. Hart Institute in Heverlee). With this, she was by far the best-educated person employed there. See Van Caeyseele, L. (2004). *Gustaaf Hulstaert: katholiek en/of indigenist?* Unpublished Master’s thesis, Leuven; Vinck, H. (2002). A l’école au Congo Belge. Les livres de lecture de G. Hulstaert. 1933-1935. In *Annales Aequatoria*, XXIII, p. 53-54; Venard, M. (1992). *De geschiedenis van de belgische provincie der Dochters van Onze Lieve Vrouw van het Heilig Hart*. Brussel: Dochters van Onze Lieve Vrouw van het Heilig Hart; Corman, A. (1935). *Annuaire des missions au Congo Belge*.

[xix] Vinck, H. (2003). Les livres scolaires des MSC. In Depaepe, M., Briffaerts, J., Kita Kyankenge Masandi, P. & Vinck, H. *Manuels et chansons scolaires au Congo Belge*. Leuven: Presses universitaires. p. 133-166.

[xx] AAFE 12.5.1. Inspectie van de meisjesschool te Bamanya, 1946. F. Cobbaut, Bamanya, 28 September 1946.

[xxi] AAFE 11.3.3-7. Rapport d’inspection de l’établissement des Soeurs Missionnaires du Précieux Sang à Bamanya (école primaire mixte pour indigènes et école ménagère). M. Vanmeerbeeck, *inspecteur-adjoint au service provincial de l’enseignement*, Coquilhatville, 8 May 1947. [Original quotation in French]

[xxii] AAFE 12.5.6. Report on the inspection in the girls’ school in Bamanya, 1944. G. Hulstaert, Bamanya, 17 November 1944.

[xxiii] AAFE 12.5.3-5. Report on the inspection in the primary and teacher schools in Bamanya. 1944. G. Hulstaert, Bamanya, 4 November 1944. [original quotation in Dutch]

[xxiv] AAFE 9.4.2-6. Rapport d’inspection de l’école primaire et de l’école de moniteurs à Bamanya. 1952. G. Moentjens, Coquilhatville, 31 September 1952.

[xxv] Ibidem. [Original quotation in French]

[xxvi] The following paragraphs are also partially based on sources unlocked by him and the studies he made of them. I rely here on the contribution of Vinck, H. (2003). Les manuels scolaires des MSC. In Depaepe, M., Briffaerts, J., Kita Kyankenge Masandi, M. & Vinck, H., *Manuels et chansons scolaires au Congo Belge*. Leuven: Universitaire Pers. p. 133-165; Briffaerts, J. (2003). Etude

comparative de manuels scolaires au Congo Belge. In *Ibidem*. p. 167-196 and Van Caeyseele, L. (2004). *Gustaaf Hulstaert, katholiek en/of indigenist?* Unpublished Master's thesis, Leuven.

[xxvii] AAFE 5.2.6-8. Letter from P. Jans to Frère Visiteur. Bamanya, 8 January 1929.

[xxviii] Vinck, H. (2003) Les manuels scolaires des MSC, p. 158. [Original quotation in French]

[xxix] Vinck situates this in an evolution of educational methods but observation, or "intuition", was a part of the syllabus from the beginning, as was already apparent from the curriculum discussions of 1929.

[xxx] Moreover, Vinck says, there were only 50 copies printed of this book. See Vinck, H. o.c., p. 152.

[xxxi] *Le Coq Chante* was a biweekly MSC publication (1936-1948) that originally dealt with mainly religious and literary themes, mainly in Lomongo, partly in French. After 1940 there was a greater variety of topics. "*In serial stories and sometimes in dialogue form whole courses were published: on biology, on geography of the Equator province, on medicine, on childcare*". *Etsiko* (literally "the palaver tree", from 1949 to 1954) and *Lokole* ("signalling drum") *Lokiso* (1955-1962) were successors to *Le Coq*. With this latter edition the intention was to put the editing and edition fully into the hands of the Mongo, at least according to the MSC themselves. The chief editing was done by Paul Ngoi and Augustin Elenga. Elenga (1920-1986) was a student of the MSC. After studying at the *école pour moniteurs* in Bamanya, he taught at the primary school in Boteka. From 1950 he became the personal secretary of Hulstaert. Paul Ngoi (1914-1997) received primary education with the Trappists in Bokuma in the first half of the 1920s. Later he followed the Latin humanities section at the small seminary of the MSC. He taught there himself in the preparatory department from 1931 to 1937. Subsequently he worked as a clerk at the mission printing press of the MSC. See De Rop, A. (1975) *In dienst van de autenticiteit*. In Vereecken, J. (ed.) *Missionarissen van het Heilig Hart. 50 jaar in Zaïre*. Extra-edition of the MSC-circle. Borgerhout: MSC. p. 26-30, and further <http://www.aequatoria.be/> under "Bio-bibliographie de personnes" and [http://www.aequatoria.be/archives\\_project/](http://www.aequatoria.be/archives_project/) under "Edition & analyse".

[xxxii] In the first instance this caused serious problems on the level of the interpretation of the story of one of the Congolese former pupils of the MSC, namely Stephane Boale. About this problem see also chapter 9.

[xxxiii] Vinck, H. (2001). "*Nous et les Blancs*" (*Iso la Bendele*). *Considérations*



(1938) de Paul Ngoi sur la vie traditionnelle des mongo et leur confrontation avec la colonisation belge. Unpublished text. This is a French translation of Ngoi's text, made in 1999 by Charles Lonkama, secretary of the Aequatoria research centre in Mbandaka. The text is destined for publication in the *Annales Aequatoria*. [Original quotation in French]

[xxxiv] Vinck, H. (2001). "*Nous et les Blancs*". [Original text in French]

[xxxv] Bosako w'oyengwa III, edition 1955, p. 225-245, translated in the framework of a translation project led by Bogumil Jewsiewicki, at the University of Laval, Quebec (code J-34). This text is actually taken from a schoolbook of the Marist Brothers from 1928, *Buku Ya Nzambe*, though Hulstaert claims its authorship for himself. The text of this lesson is also reproduced in the anthology by Vinck, H. (1998). *Manuels scolaires coloniaux: un florilège*. In *Annales Aequatoria*, 19. p. 3-166 also published on the Internet [www.abbol.com](http://www.abbol.com) [Original text in French]

[xxxvi] Here I specifically mean Vinck, H. (2002). *A l'école au Congo Belge. Les livres de lecture de G. Hulstaert 1933-1935. Introduction et textes*. In *Annales Aequatoria*, XXIII, p. 21-196, and the two already cited articles by Vinck and myself in *Manuels et chansons scolaires au Congo Belge*.

[xxxvii] Vinck, H. (2003), *Les manuels scolaires des MSC*, p. 51.

[xxxviii] Van Gorp, A. (2004). *Gedragwetenschap in de steigers. Het psychopedagogisch vertoog van Ovide Decroly ontmythologiseerd? (1871-1932)*. Leuven: unpublished doctoral thesis. p. 111-114. An extensive series about the analytic-synthetic method was published in the educational periodical "Zuid en Noord", the forerunner of "L'école moderne".

[xxxix] Missionnaires du Sacré Coeur (1933). *Buku ea njekola eandelo la ekotelo I*, Coquilhatville: MSC.

[xl] Ibidem.

[xli] Sister Magda was Alma Hosten's name in the convent.

[xlii] Vinck, H. (2003). *Les manuels scolaires des MSC*, p. 54. [Original quotation in French]

[xliii] Van Caeyseele, L. (2004). *Gustaaf Hulstaert. Katholiek en/of indigenist?* [original quotation in Dutch]

[xliv] Z.M. [Alma Hosten] (1940). Notes on reading books. In *Aequatoria*, III, 3, p. 61-62. [original quotation in Dutch]

[xlv] AA, Fonds Correspondance Hulstaert, 161, Letter from Gustaaf Hulstaert to Sister Magda, 16 April 1942. [Original quotation in Dutch]

[xlvi] See p. 293. Source: Aequatoria Archive, Fonds Correspondance Hulstaert

(microfiche 162).

[xlvii] The translator means “or let them look for it themselves”.

[xlviii] See Van Caeyseele, L. (2004). *Gustaaf Hulstaert*.

[xlix] As published in Depaepe, M., Briffaerts, J., Kita Kyankenge Masandi, P. & Vinck, H. (2003). *Manuels et chansons scolaires*.

[l] [Original quotation in French] Kita, P. (2003). Les livrets de lecture des Pères Blancs du Kivu (1910-1950). In Depaepe, M., Briffaerts, J., Kita Kyankenge Masandi, P. & Vinck, H. *Manuels et chansons scolaires au Congo Belge*. p. 83.

[li] [Original quotation in French] Briffaerts, J. (2003). Etude comparative de manuels scolaires au Congo Belge: Cas des Pères Dominicains et des Missionnaires du Sacré Coeur. In Depaepe, M., Briffaerts, J., Kita Kyankenge Masandi, P. & Vinck, H. *Manuels et chansons scolaires au Congo Belge*. p. 182.

[lii] Z.M. (1939). From a school report. In *Aequatoria*, 1939, II, p. 55-58.

[liii] This is developed in more detail in the next chapter.

[liv] Brelsford, V. [translated and commentated by G. Hulstaert] (1944). Pédagogie Civilisée et Pédagogie Primitive. In *Aequatoria*, VII, p.24-27. [Original quotation in French]

[lv] Briffaerts, J. & Vancaeyseele, L. (2004). *Le discours de la nouvelle éducation dans le contexte colonial: le grand malentendu*. Paper presented at the 26th International Standing Conference for the History of Education at Geneva, July 2004.

[lvi] Honoré Vinck also expressed himself in this way in various conversations I had with him, among other things about Hulstaert. He described him as someone who knew how to draw attention to his work and his person, this being one of the reasons that his work has remained far more known than that of Boelaert.

[lvii] Vinck, H. (2004). *Assimilatie of inculturatie. Conflicten tussen de Broeders van de Christelijke Scholen en de Diocesane Onderwijsinspectie in Coquilhatstad.1930-1945*. Lecture for the Belgisch Nederlandse Vereniging voor de Geschiedenis van Opvoeding en Onderwijs (BNVGOO) [Belgian Dutch Association for the History of Education], Amsterdam, 19 March 2004, unpublished.

[lviii] AA, Hulstaert Correspondence Collection, fiche no. 161. Letter from G. Hulstaert to Sister Alma, 16 April 1942. [original quotation in Dutch]

[lix] Hulstaert, G. (1945). Formation générale et école primaire. In *Aequatoria*, VIII, 3, p. 87-91. [Original quotation in French]

[lx] AAFE 1.5.3-4. Letter from G. Hulstaert to Louis Van der Beken, head of Bamanya mission. Coquilhatville, 10 December 1941.

[lxi] See chapter 2, [p. 91 and following].

[lxii] Hulstaert, Boelaert and many others did not have any qualms about speaking French and using it in their daily work.

[lxiii] AAFE 30.1.7. Letter from P. Jans to G. Hulstaert. Coquilhatville, 14 January 1939. [original quotation in Dutch]

[lxiv] AAFE 30.1.8-9. Letter from P. Jans to G. Hulstaert. Coquilhatville, 24 January 1939.

[lxv] AAFE 30.1.10. Letter from the government inspector Reisdorff to G. Hulstaert. Leopoldville, 6 December 1941. [Original quotation in French]

[lxvi] AAFE 30.1.13-14. Letter from Reisdorff to G. Hulstaert. Coquilhatville, 19 January 1942.

[lxvii] AAFE 30.4.2. Letter from G. Hulstaert to Brother Director of the school of the Brothers in Coquilhatville. Coquilhatville, 6 February 1943. [Original quotation in French]

[lxviii] AAFE 30.4.3. Letter from Brother Director to G. Hulstaert. Coquilhatville, 10 February 1943. [Original quotation in French]

[lxix] AAFE 30.4.9-10. Letter from G. Hulstaert to Brother Director. Coquilhatville, 2 March 1943.

[lxx] AAFE 30.5.10. Typed memo from G. Hulstaert, unknown addressee, 14 May 1943. [Original quotation in Dutch]

[lxxi] AAFE 31.1.9. Rapport sur l'inspection de l'école libre subsidiée dirigée par les Révérends Frères des Ecoles Chrétiennes à Coquilhatville. G. Hulstaert, Coquilhatville, 27 November 1943. [Original quotation in French]

[lxxii] AAFE 1.1.10-12. Letter from L. Van der Beken to Hulstaert. Bamanya, 11 May 1942. [Original quotation in Dutch]

[lxxiii] Africa Archive Brussels, electronic inventory, no. 12.452, Inspection V.A. Coquilhatville 1949-1953. "Contrôle des inspections faites pendant l'année 1951. Province de l'Equateur.", Jean Ney, *Inspecteur en chef de l'enseignement*, Leopoldville, 11 December 1951. [original quotation in French]

[lxxiv] AAFE 9.4.2-6. Rapport d'inspection de l'école primaire et de l'école de moniteurs à Bamanya. G. Moentjens, Coquilhatville, 31 December 1952. [Original quotation in French]

[lxxv] This information about Bokuma comes from one single source, a report written during the 1960s by one of the MSC, Remi Sanders, entitled "Historiek van het klein seminarie van Bokuma". This is an unpublished, typed text of 36 pages kept in the archive of the MSC in Borgerhout. This study is based on archive pieces originally kept in Bokuma itself. Honoré Vinck himself saw this

archive piece in the Congo. According to him it was never transferred to Belgium. Where the archive pieces in question are situated now is uncertain, only the text of Sanders was recorded on microfile.

[lxxvi] Sanders, R., *Historiek van het klein seminarie van Bokuma*, p. 10.

[lxxvii] Gustaaf Hulstaert in a letter to Paul Jans, 26 June 1929, quoted by Vinck (2002). *A l'école au Congo Belge*, p. 49. [Original quotation in French]

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## When Congo Wants To Go To School - Educational Practices



In this chapter the focus shifts slightly to didactic and educational practices, insofar as these can be known. This is used in the meaning of every day interaction between missionaries, *moniteurs* (teaching assistants) and pupils. The inspection reports give some insight here into what really happened, although in most cases from a distance. Although the reports and letters from inspectors may be said to be

perfect examples of the normative, this does not mean that they make it possible to see clearly what practices were criticised and for which practices alternatives were offered. Two contrasts that were discussed earlier appear again and 'mark' distinctions between them. The first is the distinction between the centre and periphery, which, in this context coincides with the dichotomy mission school - rural school. In the previous chapters it was obvious that the material situation was very different depending on whether a school was situated at the central mission post school or a bush school. The second contrast between the two types of teachers, missionaries or *moniteurs* corresponds largely with the mission school - rural school situation. These distinctions are, in fact, situated almost entirely within the context of the central mission school, considering that, almost by definition, no missionaries taught in rural schools.

However, they do not correspond completely. Ideally, it should be possible to identify three different situations within the context of (Catholic) missionary education: A first situation in which pupils received education without any, or only sporadic, intervention from missionaries. This is what was found in rural schools; a second situation, in which a *moniteur* gave lessons in a central mission post, near to missionaries but not in their permanent presence; and a third situation in which the missionaries exercised permanent control over what happened in the class or gave lessons themselves. This third situation was, as should already be clear, quite unusual (except in the initial phase of a mission post). In a number of cases one subject was given systematically by missionaries. Usually that was religious education. In other cases one class, and usually the highest one, was entrusted to the care of a missionary. This occurred mostly from necessity because no native teacher could be found who was suitable for the job. In girls education there were, relatively speaking, more female religious who actually taught themselves. This must be explained by the fact that female education was way less developed because of the social context in which Congolese girls functioned and because of the position of the female religious workers themselves.

The organisation of this chapter is not, in fact, along these lines. The available sources were, after all, almost exclusively produced by the missionaries themselves. It also seems to me to be difficult to deal in an even-handed manner with situations in which the missionary staff were absent and to give them, quantitatively speaking, just as much space as the others. For this reason another approach was chosen. It starts from general observations or questions ("topics"). This is probably less structured but at the same time also 'more honest' towards the reality studied in the sense that it has been decided beforehand to start from one particular aspect, to collect information about this and to discuss it, but without causing the reality to 'stop' at a particular moment. In any event this approach is easier to grasp because in this way we avoid telling a too compartmentalised story, whereby for each of the three proposed hypotheses the same topics would need to be dealt with again and again.

## *Discipline*

### *1.1. The school rules: theory...*

In principle every school had to have school rules: *"In every class there hangs a set of rules for the Colony: there is a lot on it, 20 numbers composed by the*

*Father Director of the Colony himself. Get up ... attend Holy mass... Work... school... eat... go to sleep... and so forth...*”[i] The scope of the rules probably differed strongly according to the place and the congregation that was active there. A very interesting example for the study of classroom reality is the rather comprehensive rulebook of the Brothers of the Christian Schools, created for the *Groupe Scolaire* in Coquilhatville.[ii] In theory, the Brothers had been given responsibility for the pupils during school time but in practice their reach went further. The rulebook contained a mixture of instructions that was directed at the *moniteurs* and the pupils. It constitutes a very normative source, to the extent that we can expect it to effectively reflect reality for a large part. The book begins with a list of provisions that applied to the teaching staff. It applied to their behaviour and also to their tasks with respect to the pupils. Among these, a lot of attention is paid to religiously inspired themes. After a few indications for the *maître chrétien* himself (enough prayer, be punctual, make sure that the timetable is respected), there follows the first chapter “*éducation chrétienne*”. Reciting the correct number of prayers a day, the use of a rosary, going to mass and confession at set times: it was the task of the teaching staff to make sure that the pupils certainly did these. “*Enseignement*” was only mentioned in the second section. Here, a number of items were discussed in connection with the teaching method, from which not very much can be deduced about the reality. The teacher must follow the curriculum and make an effort to pass perfect knowledge on to the pupils: “*He shall carefully prepare his lessons and give methodical and graduated education. He shall apply himself to cultivating the intelligence of his pupils as well as their memory and language.*”

The importance of good manners, external behaviour and appearance were underlined again in this section: “*He teaches a course on etiquette and takes any opportunity to teach the pupils politeness.*” An aspect that was comprehensively covered after this, in the second section, was the “*règlement disciplinaire*”. Further, a number of formal, administrative duties were set down, such as keeping lists of attendance and the checking of absentees. In one of the rules it was also expressly determined what the *moniteur* was not allowed to do:

*The teacher must refrain:*

1. *from hitting, mistreating the pupils, from giving them unjust marks;*
2. *from keeping the pupils after the regulatory school hours, from removing a pupil from the class and sending him home without the approval of the*

*headmaster;*

3. *from writing any discourteous note or expression on the pupils books;*
4. *from preventing a pupil from taking part in examinations;*
5. *from sending the pupil on errands outside the school, even for things related to the class;*
6. *from smoking in the schoolrooms in the presence of pupils;*
7. *from reading newspapers in the playground and especially in the classroom;*
8. *from writing his classroom diary or preparing lessons during school hours.*

*Extract 1 - Restrictions laid on the teacher. From the school rules of the Brothers of the Christian Schools in Coquilhatville. Source: Aequatoria Archive.*

The first section ends with the list of prayers that must be used in the classroom and with a few quotations about *“la récompense du maître chrétien”*. These quotations were undoubtedly intended to be motivating. The motivation was not supposed to come from the pay but from the moral satisfaction that flowed from the work of a teacher. Finally there followed the text of the morning prayer for the teacher, which must be prayed before the beginning of every school day (*“To nourish his faith, fan the flames of his zeal and in order to receive the light of heaven he needs to guide the children, the teacher will fervently recite the ‘teacher’s prayer’ before school each morning”*). In the second section purely disciplinary measures are mentioned. Not that there was nothing said about order and discipline in the first part, but here the behavioural rules for the pupils were set down, while the first part was presented more from the teacher’s perspective. In a number of paragraphs the different aspects of the required behaviour were revealed: *entering and leaving, diligence and work, behaviour in class, “classe et classique”* (meaning class equipment, JB), *order and discipline, playground and recreation, behaviour on the road, cleanliness and politeness, behaviour at church, apologetic and polite expressions.*

Order, discipline and self-control were the leading principles in the text. The pupils must always show self-control, they had to fulfil the pattern set down for them both with regard to movement and language. What had to be said, what the pupil had to do and how he had to do it were set down for all forms of communication with adults. If a visitor came into the classroom, the pupils knew what they were supposed to do. They had to stand up and, preferably in chorus,

pronounce the appropriate greeting: *'Some visitors occasionally said: Good day children' or 'Praise to J.C.'*. The pupils responded: *'Good day sir...' or 'Amen'.*" They had to stand up in a particular way: they must look at the visitor *modestly* and show by a "smiling physiognomy" that they were happy to receive a visit. It is not at all clear what that implied in practice and if it was always done effectively as it was set down. After they had seated themselves again, they must pay attention to the visitor if he had come to say something: *"Having sat down appropriately with their arms in the resting position, all eyes and ears were turned to the words of the visitor, who would address them."*

The rules also included prescriptions for behaviour during lessons. The pupils must sit calmly at their desks and should not bother their neighbours. To ask something or to give an answer they must raise their right hand, without snapping their fingers or making other noises. When being asked questions the pupil should stand up next to his desk, *"a straight back, head turned towards the teacher, a smiling face"*, and answer with a loud and clear voice. Apart from this the rule prescribed silence, order and neatness. It was also prescribed what the pupil was allowed to do outside. That was not much: on the stairs or in the gangways there must be no running and no talking, shouting or whistling. On the playground the same applied: the rule determined that the pupils must play. It even suggested quite strongly what should be played: *"The games to be used are ball or Foot-ball (sic)."* Also, during play pupils should avoid lying on the ground, pulling each other or fighting. The same rule continued: *"Fisticuffs are not to be tolerated."* The pupils must also not hang around near the toilets.

Even outside the school the pupils had to follow a comprehensive code of behaviour: in church but also in the street. A chapter *"Behaviour at church"* explained how the pupils had to behave at church, how they should come in and how they must sit: *"At their place they will worship and avoid making any noise, they will bear themselves appropriately while kneeling or sitting and shall look towards the altar without turning their head from one side to the other."* Again, a strengthened form of discipline applied in the immediate neighbourhood of the church. Playing was not allowed around the church, even before the start of the church service. On the way to school or home the pupils must retain their dignity above all. A number of things were bad, such as *"Shouting, racing around; throwing projectiles or giving way to all other misplaced fantasies."* They must greet all those who held positions of superiority with the appropriate respect (and



those were particularly priests, religious workers, teachers, all Europeans and the parents of other children). They must above all be helpful. They must show the way for strangers, though without walking with them. Finally, to streamline contact with the outside world even further, this publication listed a number of summed up formulae for politeness, which the pupils were to use in all kinds of circumstances when speaking to adults.

## 1.2. ...and practice?

It looks very much as if people wanted to control what happened in the classroom and even the behaviour of the children outside the classroom as much as possible by fixing it in formulas and procedures. It remains difficult to judge whether this corresponded effectively to reality, or if it remained a wild dream. The guidelines and rules are recognisable in so far as they were also applied in Europe. Just as in nineteenth-century Belgium corporal punishment still existed in spite of all the fuss and the objections that were made about it, also in Congo corporal punishment was still used, even though it was usually against the rules. Jos Moeyens reported such a case in 1934. Somebody called Bolawa, a *moniteur* in one of the rural schools, in the area of Bamanya, went further than he was allowed to. Paul Jans had him put on the spot for this. According to the report by Moeyens the person concerned had afterwards pulled himself together: *"According to the chief moniteur, Louis Nkemba, this moniteur is more ready to take orders and has paid attention to the remarks that were made by the Father P.Jans, rector of Bamanya, and so has delivered evidence of his goodwill. He beats the boys less and when he is teaching explains the lessons better."*[iii] The fact that people here speak of 'less' shows that the missionaries had nothing much against a slap being delivered now and again. Only in extreme cases such as this did they have to intervene. In Flandria there were similar but less heavy complaints from the director Frans Maes: *"Moniteur Ngola, who is very enthusiastic and competent, has to learn to moderate his expressions and not to react too heavily, for example with Lingala sentences and expressions, as if he was a policeman! I had already mentioned this to him."*[iv]

Again in the number of other cases it is not as clear whether corporal punishment is being referred to or less severe forms of punishment. For example, in an article in the *Annals* about the school of Mondombe: *"'Petelo', asked the Father, 'why haven't you been to Mass today?' Without fear but still somewhat abashed he replied 'Fafa, I was sleepy and too lazy. Was that not a frank answer? Then was*

*heard, severe and earnest: 'come to my office after school'... The office of the Fafa! .. Very many father-like admonitions were given there. It is sometimes more effective and far-reaching with just two people. In any case, it was certainly good for Petelo. Still, the children know the Father not just as the 'Man of discipline'."* What is to be understood by this last expression is not completely clear. The Fathers were certainly against the teachers giving the pupils physical punishments. The Pierre Bolowa mentioned was reprimanded and threatened with dismissal. Another *moniteur* from a rural school in the area was also tackled by the missionaries because of complaints about hitting pupils: *"The moniteur: gives a relatively good impression, is clean and tidy. In the presence of the Father and the head he is rather timid in the classroom. It is said that he teaches regularly and well but at the beginning he hit which had caused a few of the Batswa children to run away. The Father reprimanded him on this subject in the presence of the head and the head catechist, reminding him that the school management formally prohibits hitting pupils. If punishment is required, he can send him to the Chief."*[v]

#### *1.2.1. Order and punishment*

Order and punishment often went together, for example when working on the field or on a plantation. Jos Cortebeeck writes in one of his articles about the coffee harvest. The Sister on duty kept her eyes open and checked the delivered work of the schoolboys systematically: *"At 11 o'clock the coffee gong was beaten and you saw the boys, baskets on their heads, coming from all sides of the coffee plantation, singing and laughing to their mama, by the drying boxes. The Sister busy with the coffee takes the register very carefully, and anyone who has not enough gets a mark and for every mark bakotas (10 cent pieces) are taken away from the week's or month's money."*[vi] In the mission of Mondombe the boys had to work in the mornings in the fields, for example in the peanut harvest. This activity was also carefully checked. Rightly, according to the writer of the article: *"The Father whistles, it is a signal for the end of the work. Those from the nuts must first be checked. 'Arms up! ...' at this command everyone stretches their arms up and more than one peanut falls to the ground. After that is checked behind the ears. There our head finds more than one unpeeled peanut. Embarrassed they leave."*[vii] The pupils often had to provide their own food, either completely or a great part of it. It was therefore not so surprising that they used all the possibilities of doing this. They used the pauses between the lessons but sometimes they had to go about it in the evenings too, although to do this they

had to disobey the rules about curfew.[viii] At the start of the 1930s the state inspector observed that in Flandria the pupils often stayed away for a few days so as to gather rations.[ix]

Taking food belonging to the missionaries without permission was certainly punished. Another quotation about the mission of Flandria shows how this happened: *"Fafa Octaaf has dark but sharp eyes and quick hands. Once he caught two schoolboys who were eating from the 'botanikken' of the Sisters. He caught them by the scruff of the neck (collar we would say) and put them on their knees in the courtyard in the view of everyone. In front of them were spread the few remaining fruits. 'Yes you terrible naughty boys, I will send you to Ingende; this afternoon the administrator will come and throw you in the pen! You can wait here on your knees.' The 'botanikken' referred to the Sisters' garden and the fruits that grew on the trees there. The pupils were not allowed there. This was also complained about in other places: *"We were not allowed to climb up to search for palm nuts because it belonged to the mission, if not we would be sent from school or punished. We had to go behind the priests' territory. We collected all the nuts that fell. That was behind their territory. Even the fruits that fell, good grace, you had to be sure that you weren't seen collecting them!"[xi]**

The Fathers were obviously persons that you had to look out for, at least in the view of their Congolese pupils. In the articles that appeared on this in the *Annals*, that was never said explicitly. In certain passages there was so much emphasis placed on the disciplinary character of the school experience that this almost automatically raises questions about the way in which order and discipline were imposed: *"And this school of 400 boys, you don't hear them, not even in their quarters of stone houses, one house per village, you don't hear them, you see them in the church but you don't hear them: there is discipline there, they are drilled, there is a power under it, the secret of the two Sisters, who never hit, never shout, now and again one just moves her head."*[xii] It certainly shows that in a number of cases the disciplinary rules, just as in the example of the Brothers of the Christian Schools, were also applied effectively. That is also apparent from the story already told about Sister Imelda: *"Remember that for our new boys it needs a lot of effort to live according to the rules day-in day-out without falling short. The Father likes order and discipline. That is necessary with this gang of rogues. The Father takes care of lighting the fires of diligence under them. Now*

*and then he comes in the school and it is not always to congratulate but also sometimes to 'reprimand'.*"[xiii]

From the point of view of the Fathers that was really just one side of the coin. They also saw themselves as rewarders. The following quotation about this comes from the same article and shows that there were indeed other methods used to bring the young people to the right path. Giving the expectation in the future of particular material benefits to be awarded not only constituted a permitted method to get the boys to do what they wanted them to. The point system referred to here clearly illustrates that the control by the missionaries was applied over a very broad area: black marks could be received in the church, at school and at work. Frans Maes reported somewhere that he had developed a specific point system to ensure better discipline. Obviously, black marks were given out for disobeying the rules, but these could be cancelled by the pupils and there was the possibility in any case of 'earning' good points. In this manner, the community also benefited from it: *"DISCIPLINE: left something to be desired at the beginning of the school year. This explains the large number of pupils being sent home, at least amongst the older boys. By applying the system of buying back the bad points by voluntary work, I have obtained a good result and at the same time the levelling of the football field was finished faster than planned."*[xiv]

*On a certain day Father comes into school and says: "it is already fourteen days since the school has begun... everybody knows the rules and I am going to reward those who keep strictly to them." And in every class he showed a pair of beautiful trousers, in a khaki colour with a pocket on the side; and with it a leather 'nkamba' (belt). beautiful... really beautiful... Everybody wants them and in their imagination they are already at the distribution ceremony of these beautiful trousers at new year. Still so much time to wait and to never be naughty. Oh, that is something else! That is not for everybody. The older ones have understood quickly. (...) They are so excited they are unable to make any noise, and they look at their neighbours as if to say: "shall we really all get such nice trousers with a belt and a pocket in it?" One of the worst dares to ask the Father just that. The answer is: "The ones who do not get a single black mark will get them at the next holiday." They are disappointed and their heads are full of questions: "Fafa, is there among the 250 boys only one who will be the lucky owner of the trousers with the nkamba?" The Father has read the quandary from their faces and reassures them, with the assurance that there are many of these nice trousers.*

*And then the diligence is awakened. Now to work. (...)*

*The first month has passed. The Father comes to the school with his register and very carefully this time the black marks are counted up, those from the prayers, those from the school and those from the work. Those that only have one bad mark are forgiven but the others get a big disappointment: their nice trousers are gone and lost forever.[xv]*

*Extract 2 – Sister Imelda about the motivational techniques of the Fathers (1937). Source: Aequatoria Archive.*

### *1.2.2. Nature of the punishments*

Punishments frequently had a utilitarian character, which can be seen from a number of testimonies from former pupils: *“We had to go and look for wood or sticks as punishment if we had to be punished for something.”[xvi]* And: *“There was a punishment, you had to cut so many square metres of grass. Ten metres or twenty or fifty in length and four metres wide. It had to be cut, eh, and this wasn’t like the lawns we have, it was grass that was taller than us. Or, during break we had to cut fifty pieces of firewood, these were called ‘fascines’.”[xvii]* And the missionaries also confirmed this. Fernand Van Linden, who was headmaster in Flandria:[xviii]

*Was there much punishment?*

*FVL: Yes, there was punishment. Gathering wood or getting the food ready. Getting the manioc ready for the women. Or weaving baskets.*

*Was that really punishment for them?*

*FVL: Yes, Yes, some days they really wanted to go fishing or hunting but then they had to gather wood.*

*And if they did not want to do it, would they object?*

*FVL: Then they could go home.*

*And they wanted to avoid that?*

*FVL: Hey, yes![xix]*

These types of punishment were also used with the girls: *“I was given punishment: for one week I had to cut the grass. I was not allowed to go to class.”[xx]* Although this sort of punishment was used conspicuously, the nature of the deserved punishment differed from mission post to mission post and probably depended on the amount of inspiration of the local Fathers. When asked whether there were tasks and chores set as punishment, Stéphane Boale, a former pupil of

the school in Bokote, said in the affirmative, at first: *"Yes, yes, (very affirmative). Clearly. Work with the coupe-coupe. Tidying the terrain. Yes, or sweeping, things like that."* When asked about possible other types of punishment he said: *"That is to say, they all had numerous ways of punishing people. A disruptive person would be expelled if it were serious. If a person did something else, for example with regard to the lessons, if they had not done their homework they were told: "you must write one hundred lines of this or that during your free time."*[xxi]

Nothing was ever published in the MSC publications about real corporal punishment in the sense of beatings. A number of people said that the *chicotte* was still used in other regions until after the Second World War. At the Sisters in Leopoldville: *"They beat you with the chicotte (cane) in front of your parents so that you would not start again."*[xxii] In Stanleyville: *"And during our time, I must emphasise to you: the educational theory of corporal punishment was in force. If you were lucky, when you arrived late or when you were caught talking you would only be shouted at but generally it was the cane, you see. You see that shows something of the relationship we had with the teacher."*[xxiii] That was obviously never done in the area of the MSC. No traces can be found of the cane either with the Fathers or the Brothers. In any case, it was expressly stated in the rules of the Brothers that physical punishment was forbidden; only work was provided as a disciplinary measure.

This is not to say, however, that this always corresponded to reality. The *moniteurs* made the children kneel down as a punishment, or sent them out of the class (in which case they also risked punishment by the missionaries, if they were in the neighbourhood): *"Did the moniteurs give a lot of punishment or penalties? Yes! To correct a person they had to be punished. And what were these punishments? For a disruptive pupil? They were made to kneel."*[xxiv] And some teachers did, in fact, hit the children: *"Being hit did happen, as it always had an effect on everyone. But usually it was prohibited."*[xxv]

Even the missionaries used different sorts of punishments. Suspension: *"If you arrived slightly late, even by five minutes, you would be excluded. So, for example, in the boarding school of the Moniteurs, you were not allowed to talk during the night. The Father supervised there. If you talked and that was found out, it was over. You would be expelled, even during the night."*[xxvi] More physical punishments were also used by the MSC. We have referred previously to statements in the letters from Father Vermeiren, from which it seemed that pupils

were hit from time to time. Jean Indenge told of Father Pattheeuws, who came to work at the mission of Wafanya in 1951. His presence was experienced as a welcome relief by the pupils because he, much more than the others, concerned himself with hygiene and feeding the pupils. There was one problem: he kicked the children and punished them: *“Every Sunday after Mass, he would inspect the pupils to see those who were not clean. And he would kick those who were dirty. And then the punishment.”*[xxvii] These things often happened with the best intentions, from the (biblical) principle “that the rod should not be spared”.

That is also apparent from the anecdote that Rik Vanderslaghmolen told about the school in Bokuma. The primary school there was under the leadership of Father Gaston Heireman. When he built new sanitary installations for his pupils, the following happened: *“Gaston came to me one day and said: ‘Come and look at my new WCs. They’ve all wiped their bottoms on the corners!’ That was really dirty! I said: ‘Gaston: don’t worry about it, it will get better!’ And I had some mortar standing, for I was busy with building. And I took this mortar to the WC, and mixed up quite a lot of pili-pili with it. And I spread this mortar rather thickly on the corners. And the next day we heard the boys running from the WC to the river, yelping. Oh dear, Gaston was really sorry about that. And I was really sorry for what I had done, because he was sorry. That his little boys had so much pain on their bottoms.”*[xxviii]

### 1.3. ‘Trouble in paradise’

It is perhaps not obvious at first sight that the interaction between missionaries and Congolese should not be interpreted one-sidedly as one of patient leaders and obedient or at least docile pupils. Still, a number of indications can be seen. In the previous chapter reference has already been made to a number of conflicts in which the MSC, or some people under them, were involved during their missionary work. There are a number of references to conflicts between missionaries and teachers. We refer here to another conflict, of which many fewer traces are to be found. The events occurred in 1943. In a letter to Mgr. Van Goethem, Father Wauters mentioned a ‘revolt’ by the pupils. A number of the bigger boys who were at boarding school in Bamanya became rebellious and had broken curfew by making extra noise after the second sounding of the gong instead of keeping silent. In spite of reprimands by the missionaries during evening mass they repeated that behaviour on other days. Wauters revealed the case in detail. The way in which he reported the facts gives a completely different

view of the relationship of power between Fathers and pupils.

*After the second “lokole” (gong) they began, just as on the previous evenings, to make still more noise and to throw stones on the tiles of the colony house. I went there myself and P. René came behind. When the boys saw us coming in the moonlight a group of them ran away behind the side of the colony building (the married people’s side) and began to throw stones at us. We fled up to the veranda and the boys who were on the inside square of the colony were quiet when they saw me. Throwing stones on the roof lasted a few more minutes. The big boys, who were there with me, said that it was the children of the married people. I sent them after the stone throwers but they claimed not to have been able to catch any. Then I called the chiefs of the boys and the third class of training college to my room. They insisted that the stone throwers were boys from Bamanya, those of the married couples or those that were lodging with the married people. But the next day they went and told Brother Director that they had not accused the children of the married couples but that I had done so. (Br. Director naturally believed the boys but not the Father.) So with this opinion and going by what the boys of the third year teacher training had told me, the next day before the Mass I called the boys of the married people out of the desks and made them all kneel down in the choir. After the Holy Mass I told them that I was putting them all out of the class. After school the parents came to palaver. They swore up and down that their children were innocent, that it was the boys of the colony themselves who were guilty. Their children went to sleep in good time, they said, and they did not allow them to run around after dark. I began to doubt the guilt of these boys and then I told the two catechists and the five moniteurs to investigate and come and tell me the results. The outcome was that the children of the married people were innocent and that the incitement was from the biggest boys of the colony. (...) When the case was finished, I made the boys who sleep in the colony work all day as punishment. When, in the afternoon after work, they had been to the river and were coming back, on the way they did nothing other than curse the married people with the foulest “bitoli”. When Father René that same evening went to serve a dying man in the village, he was catcalled by a group of boys from the colony as he went by. Then the boys ran away. Then I forbade the boys from the colony from taking the sacrament. The next evening the boys were quiet but when Father René went to his room he found the keyhole of his door blocked up with pieces of wood, so he had to work for a long time until he could get it open. The next day he found his door had been written on with*



*chalk. It made fun of his baldness.[xxix]*

*Extract 3 – From the letter of Father Wauters about the ‘revolt’ of the students (1943). Source: Aequatoria Archive.*

*In spite of this it appears from other witnesses that the curfew was strongly applied. Jean Indenge says the following about a curfew in Wafanya and the punishments connected to it: “A 8 p.m. the bell went, to go to sleep. And then the principal moniteur would call an assembly. If he missed a person – and it did happen that he missed people – older boys who had slipped away for two reasons, one of two reasons. Either they had gone fishing at night – but nobody would tell them that. Or the head moniteur thought perhaps they had gone to the city to look for women. We were 12, 13 years old so that wasn’t our problem. But there were some who were 18 and then they had to be supervised! An absence like that, obviously, that meant being suspended. Not having spent the night inside.”[xxx]*

This story is situated in the 1940s, and it happened in a more isolated mission post, whilst in the incident reported above it was older pupils who were involved, in the neighbourhood of the ‘big’ town. At that moment the pupils had the courage to act against the Fathers, although not enough to do it openly. The authority of the missionaries over their daily affairs was still strong enough to keep them disciplined. In this a number of intermediaries such as *moniteurs* and catechists were also called in, these were close to the missionaries and had themselves a certain measure of authority. According to the testimony of former students this situation also evolved. There are however absolutely no traces to be found of cooperation between *moniteurs* and pupils in the missionary sources we consulted. Jean Boimbo declared though, that private lessons in French were given by the teachers to the pupils outside school hours.[xxxi]

The missionaries must have been somewhat alarmed, however. In inspection reports complaints were sometimes found that there were deviations away from spoken language. Hulstaert and Moentjens sometimes referred to the use of French during and outside the lessons or also to the wrongful use of French by the Brothers but had never talked about the systematic teaching of French by *moniteurs*. The reprimands for such situations certainly did not occur only with the MSC. Also in other regions the language that had been chosen for education was strongly adhered to, made as obligatory as possible and, indeed, there were frequently punishments.[xxxii]

## Rhythm

### 2.1. The rhythmic passing of the school day

#### 2.1.1. The pupils' drill

One of the first accounts of the course of a school day may be found in the *Annals of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart* from 1927. Marcel Es described his work at the mission school in Boende and began with the morning gymnastics of the pupils: *"Then the morning exercises are especially useful to bring in some liveliness: the teacher ensures they warm-up. It goes with 'apparase de repos! En posisson! Un, deux, twa, quat! En ava! en arrière'."* (...) *"But once they are at work together they forget all their small miseries. Then everyone dances forward to the rhythm of their singing: and then they feel no hunger, no thirst, no tiredness or pain, until mouths and arms fall still."* (...) *"Then it is time that the fafa whistles them together to go to the class in ranks. A and o, and e, and i, and u, that goes well;  $2 + 2 = 4$  and  $3 - 1 = 2$ , that goes well too. But when it gets more difficult or if the class lasts too long for their taste - and that is quickly the case - then their heads get so tired! Some I have to wake up from a soft, pleasant nap."*[xxxiii]

If anything can be deduced from this report, then it is the importance attached to drill in the school. In the mornings there was an assembly with physical exercises, in groups. After this came the work and here, too, the rhythm and disciplined character of the activities was very important. It is an element that is always present in the stories and reports. For example, in the account by Sister Godfrieda published in 1934 in the *Annals*: *"Every two hours... lokole! Each person jumps up praying and then goes his own way. Then back to school... The road to the village is black with boys! Quickly the small bell tolls that calls them to the line; they saunter to their places amid great chattering. The main bell!.. they fall silent. Sr. Ghislana is standing on the veranda and orders: 'fiks!' and seven hundred and fifty pairs of arms go down... 'Bum'bakata!' They fold their hands... 'A fina!' They pray a Hail Mary, and then they all go into their own classroom."*[xxxiv] The *lokole* or gong played an important role in the school day, for the most important dividing moments were marked by it, as the school bell did elsewhere.

The former Trappist Brokerhoff also began his description of the working day at the mission post of Wafanya with physical exercises: *"After completion of the daily exercises, which last about half an hour, the morning tasks of the missionary are interrupted by a half-hour rest."* (...) *"It is in this break that one really enjoys*

*the Congo.*" The break was probably for the pupils to go to mass, or to wash themselves. *"Just at half past six or a few moments before a small bell rings in the refectory. It is time for breakfast. In the meantime the tasks of the day are prepared and discussed and after a quarter of an hour this first operation is finished. A pipe is filled or a cigarette is lit and one is ready for the show to begin. Now you hear the word Ngaga! (the bell) and the big bell in the hallway sounds. Twelve good strokes and the person who has sounded them, one of the table boys, rushes like the wind to the tam-tam and, helped by one or two of his friends beats with all his might to tell everyone that work – manual work for the older ones and school work for the small and middle-sized – is starting."*[xxxv] In the teacher training college in Bamanya there was a similar routine in the early 1950s, as related by Jean Boimbo: *"But I was a domestic, a server for the Brothers. What I had to do, preparing food (...) When we left Mass, we had a kind of cupboard, chests, there were three of us, working for the Brothers, serving the Brothers. The chests always stayed there. The Sisters prepared omelettes, the lunch. (JB: That had to be carried?) They were given to us. The Brothers ate and once they had finished eating we cleared everything up. At eight the bell went and we had to go to class."*[xxxvi]

Next, pupils were assembled. This was also done in a quasi-military way: *"Approximately 20 minutes after the beating of the tam-tam they are pretty much all there. In the boys' quarters the scholars and the big boys stand, separately, in two straight lines. The two teachers for the first, and the capita (headman) for the second, stand to one side or behind them. They hardly see us coming before a command rings out and everyone stands in ranks with the little finger lined up with the seam of their trousers. I go to the middle, just in front of the picture of the Sacred Heart, look around to see if everything is in order and say loudly: 'A Jina', at which everybody makes the sign of the cross. Then in the Lonkundo language 'Do you believe in Christ (Fomemi a Jesu Kristo) and all answer aloud 'Bideko l'Adeko'." (...) "Now it is the turn of the schoolboys. Assembly is held in the same way for them. Then when all the names have been called off there is the command 'fiks' and they stand there looking at the 'fafa' and now a half-hour of exercises can start."*[xxxvii]

That quasi-military character is not a gratuitous interpretation. The missionaries, after all, frequently called on soldiers to take care of the physical condition of the pupils. That was certainly the case in the early years of missionary activity. The

*Daughters of Charity* called on the services of an army sergeant during the first school years in Coquilhatville to take care of the *physical education*.<sup>[xxxviii]</sup> A military man was also hired in Mondombe: “*Albert Bomanga, a former corporal, gave gymnastics each day at quarter to seven.*”<sup>[xxxix]</sup> It was also common practice later, in which, according to a circular from Hulstaert from 1939, the administration also cooperated: “*The administration has announced that the cooperation of soldiers is available, especially with the idea of teaching moniteurs gymnastics, so that they can stand on their own feet later. It would be best if the local school management asked the army command concerned (or the A.T.), at least in places where there are soldiers. In the case of important garrisons, instruction can be given by officers and NCOs, so long as it is necessary to train the native moniteurs. The lessons should take place at most twice a week, preferably from 4 to 5 pm.*”<sup>[xl]</sup>

Frequently, the missionaries considered these exercises to be a separate part of the day, not part of the education, although from 1929 it was included in the curriculum. In 1930 Petrus Vertenten wrote explicitly in his inspection report about Mondombe: “*The time given for gymnastics and the experimental garden cannot be taken during lesson time.*”<sup>[xli]</sup> This same thought also comes through in the introduction of the following quotation from Brokerhoff: “*When the gymnastic lesson is finished, school begins. Divided into three classes our little curly heads sit on the school desks to sharpen up their understanding with all sorts of subjects connected with education. Reading, writing, arithmetic, song, geography, introduction to weights and measures, drawing, French, there you see the daily programme.*” In the letter from Hulstaert that was just quoted it seems from the arrangements in connection with the time of the gymnastics lessons that he also does not consider it a part of the school day.

Discipline was often by far the most important element of the programme, although it was not listed as such. The *Annals* relatively often refer to the orderly and disciplined character of the pupils: “*The clarion calls for the second time; in front of every classroom a double line of eager-to-learn youths forms. Here or there a chatterer dares say a word; but the chin of Sister Bernardine goes up threateningly and forces a reverent silence. Now the rows slowly push into the class.*”<sup>[xlii]</sup> In inspection reports, too, order and discipline were invariably considered as important elements and it was emphasised how this was brought into class life in practice: “*The attitude of the pupils: entering and leaving in*

*silence and in a line without any disorder. In class they keep quite, straight, hand on the desk.”[xliii]*

In articles in the mission periodical, the authors liked, probably unconsciously, to play on the difference between the natural disorder of the children and the order that resulted from the intervention of the missionaries. That can be seen, for example, from the same article by Brokerhoff: *“When the first lesson, which lasts until 9 o’clock, has finished and the school bell has rung, they all storm outside to enjoy themselves with a ball or some other game or maybe to take a snack. A half hour break is always over too quickly for their taste; for when, a couple of minutes after half past nine, the bell calls them back into school, patience is needed until the last pupil is present.”*[xliv] Another example, from Father Caudron, again in *de Annals of the Sacred Heart*: *“You were standing chattering and cackling, calling and shouting: the last stroke of the bell sounded and in an instant all the noise stopped and you stood like drilled soldiers stock-still in the ranks. That was discipline!”*[xlv]

### *2.1.2. The (school) timetable*

As present in the sources as the element of discipline is the use of time, the division of the school day into blocks. The lesson times were regularly interrupted to relax, to go to mass or to eat but the actual lesson time was six hours: two times one and a half hours in the morning, and three hours in the afternoon. The ‘rhythm’ of the school day, the division into relatively short lesson units, was typical because it was assumed that the restricted attention span of the Congolese children had to be taken into account. This opinion was very widespread, so much so that even at the start of the 1950s the colonial educational administration distributed a note to all school directors, *Recommendation for the establishment of daily timetables*, in which rules were given for splitting up the school day.

*It is recommended to take the following into account insofar as possible for school management:*

- 1. Plan lessons that require more concentration in the morning and insofar as possible at the beginning of the day or after a break. Courses that require an intense intellectual effort from the pupils certainly differ according to the type of school; in any event it may be said that subjects relating to mathematics, writing, explained reading, grammar and*

*systematic exercises in observation and speaking certainly belong to this category.*

- 2. Avoid excessively long lessons (partly ineffective insofar as they exceed the attention span of the pupils) and lessons that are too short (for example in some subjects, like arithmetic, in which Congolese pupils are relatively slow).*
- 3. If a subject only has two lessons available per week, avoid putting them on two consecutive days.*
- 4. If studying a subject requires more than six lessons a week and if it is consequently necessary to put two courses of the same subject on the timetable on the same day, separate these two lessons with one or more subjects relating to a different subject area than that of the two lessons concerned.*
- 5. If it is necessary to arrange more than two lessons consecutively that require considerable attention from the recipient, have the pupils take some short physical exercise to relax between the lessons (a few minutes of easy gymnastics or rhythmic or free walking, or singing or simply a free break).*
- 6. Each time the morning lends itself to it, include practical work during the lesson itself.[xlvi]*

*Excerpt 4 – From the circular on drawing up timetables, Aequatoria Archive.*

This circular raised the disgust of Frans Maes. He noted a number of remarks in the margin of the article that reflect his irritation well. Concerning the attention span: *“Who will determine that?”* About recreation: *“As though distraction could suddenly stop!”* And on the slowness of the Congolese children in arithmetic: *“Not just them, South African blacks too.”* His indignation was partly based on research that he had carried out himself into the speed of the African children in arithmetic exercises. As a result of this note he carried out a supplementary test with children at the HCB school in Flandria. In the different classes he did a Bourdon test with letters.[xlvii] From this he concluded that even half an hour of concentration was not too long for the children: *“The best performance was even reached towards the end of the ½ hour; so tiredness could not be observed! (naturally, if the effort is not demanded too often per day: e.g. 2x as a maximum for such efforts, which are in fact never demanded in ordinary lessons, even in arithmetic!).”*[xlviii]

He repeated these remarks in a letter that he wrote to Moentjens.[xlix] Maes again rather strongly criticised the education officials who had composed the memo: *"These worthy advisors are very mild with their advice but applying it in practice mostly causes problems that they don't seem to concern themselves with. They just transplant Belgian rules here, without any previous study. And just what sort of rules, too... they stink of old parchment and school grind, of the irresponsible system of 'sticking together like oat ears and chaff'. They seem to be quite some specialists giving you advice such as 'place ... the lessons that need the most attention after a break.' Just as if these boys could go in a minute from relaxation to effort just through willpower."* However, Maes was an exception, probably under the influence of his university training (he had studied education for two years before leaving for the Congo).

Other missionaries seemed to have accepted the popular prejudices about the Africans' capacity for understanding. On this we can refer to the pronouncements quoted in chapter 4. Especially in girls' education and for the Batswas these sorts of difficulties were mentioned. Vertenten wrote about the girls in Bamanya: *"The education is very intuitive. The R. Sister explains herself well in Lonkundo, she lives for her class. That is the secret of her success, which is considerable, when we know how difficult it is to keep the attention of young native girls."*[l] However, according to him that applied just as much to the boys: *"One has to make their classes interesting in all sorts of ways, treating the dry material briefly and clearly, one can ask a short period of attention from them. Sometimes five minutes is already too much; if some begin to stare into space, that is the moment to change the subject before their eyelids close."*[li] Later these sort of remarks disappeared for the most part from the discourse and references to the characteristics of the Congolese became more vague, at least in the context of the sources on school life.[lii] Hulstaert wrote somewhat more carefully about the Batswa in 1939: *"The school curriculum is regularly followed so far as the subjects are concerned, still the pupils cannot follow the prepared division of the material. But this is not so important. We have to adapt ourselves to the lower state of development of the boys. Certainly, the desire for a free life and the memory of it play a certain role in the difficulties of bringing the Batswa to the level of the prescribed curriculum."*[liii]

Still, the timetable used continued to show the same characteristics throughout the colonial period, fitting in clearly with the old-fashioned rules. Only in the

initial period a much less structured curriculum was used in a number of places. In the initial phase the school in Flandria only provided three classes, where a complete subject was taught first before the next one was begun. The children first learned reading and writing, then they learned arithmetic. In the first instance Hulstaert (who was then the head of school) blamed that on the poor material circumstances: *"The lower course is mainly concerned with reading and writing, the two others mainly apply themselves to arithmetic, at differing degrees, you understand. We have not yet been able to introduce the regular application of the planned curriculum. The circumstances simply do not allow it."*[liv] Hardly half a year later, however, he remarked: *"I will content myself simply by saying that the situation is generally the same as during the previous term. The only facts to be noted are that the lower class has started studying arithmetic after having perfected writing and reading written texts."*[lv] Apart from this, school days passed according to fixed and rhythmical changes of subjects. Later, too, such systems remained in vogue in many schools of the vicariate. The examples that are reported here show timetables respectively from the boys' primary school in Wafanya (1930),[lvi] the rural primary school of Mpenjele near Bamanya (1941),[lvii] and the boys' primary school in Bamanya (1954).[lviii]

In Wafanya in 1930, the school day only lasted for half a day, all together three hours and a half per day. The school day was divided into two blocks, one of an hour and a half and one of an hour and three-quarters. They were divided by a break of one quarter of an hour. The first block was divided into three periods, one of a quarter, one of three quarters and one of half an hour, which did contain different subjects, however. Only the first period of a quarter of an hour was always the same: religion (and religious history, but that was of course a very homogeneous package). The second block after the break had only two periods but was all in all much more fragmented. The first period was no less than an hour and a quarter long but in that the most diverse subjects were taught, sometimes three successively. The second period was then only half an hour long and contained one or two subjects.

In the rural school of Mpenjele the curriculum guide of 1941 provided four blocks of a maximum of 60 to 75 minutes. The central point was the morning, with two and a quarter hours of lessons. In the afternoon there was only teaching for an hour and forty minutes. Of this the last twenty minutes were spent singing. Most



time was spent on the subjects religion (40 minutes every day) and reading (45 minutes every day). Sometimes a whole hour was spent on dictation, but not every day. The other subjects took up barely twenty minutes each. The agricultural activity before starting the real lessons lasted, in fact, the longest: an hour every day.

The timetable from Bamanya for the 1950s was much more complete, which shouldn't be surprising considering the year and the place. Still, here too, a number of guiding principles can be observed that correspond in part with the principles used by the administration. The largest part of the 'theoretical' teaching material came first, in the morning. As always, this was headed by the most important part, religion. All together, this lasted less than two hours. Subsequently, there was a second 'cluster', in which no religious work was expected: gym, recreation and handicrafts. The afternoon consisted of two hours of lessons: a first, more theoretical hour, but here again the second half was devoted to 'lighter' material (singing and *causeries*). The second hour was again filled with physical work.

*Wafanya 1930: boys' primary school (original in French).*

	8.00-8.15	8.15-9.00	9.00-9.30	9.45-11.00	11.00-11.30
Monday	religionreligious history	readingdictation	monetary and metric system	writingdrawing ornamentation French 1/4h. <sup>°</sup>	arithmetic
Tuesday	religionreligious history	writingcalligraphy	arithmetic	monetary metric system	readingdictation
Wednesday	religionreligious history	calligraphydictation French <sup>°</sup>	arithmetic	hygieneintuition the time wall charts	readingdictation
Thursday	religionreligious history	readingdictation	monetary metric system	writingcalligraphy	intuitiondrawing
Friday	religionreligious history	readingdictation	writingdrawing ornamentation	arithmeticFrench 1/4h. <sup>°</sup>	clock readingmonetary and metric system geography*

<sup>°</sup>1/4 of an hour French for the first year of the second grade.

\*1/4 of an hour geography for the first year of the second grade.

*Mpenjele 1941: primary school (original in Dutch).*

*08.00-09.00: agricultural work: manioc, peanuts, palm trees, etc.*

*09.00-09.40: religion*

*09.40-10.00: writing*

*10.00-10.15: playtime*

*10.15-11.00: reading*

*11.00-11.30: language, speaking*

*11.30-14.30: noon break*

*14.30-15.00: dictation*

*15.00-15.30: dictation or drawing*

*15.30-15.50: playtime*

*15.50-16.10: causerie – about plants, trees, objects, etc.*

*16.10-16.30: singing*

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*Bamanya 1954: first year primary school (original in French).*

	Monday	Tuesday	Thursday	Friday		Wednesday	Saturday
8.00-8.30	religion	religion	religion	religion	8.00-8.30	religion	religion
8.30-9.00	reading	reading	reading	reading	8.30-9.10	reading	reading
9.00-9.20	cop. dict.	obs. eloc.	obs. eloc.	cop. dict.	9.10-9.40	obs. eloc.	recitation
9.20-9.50	arithmetic	arithmetic	metr. syst.	arithmetic	9.40-10.00	<i>gymnastics</i>	<i>gymnastics</i>
9.50-10.10	<i>gymnastics</i>	<i>gymnastics</i>	<i>gymnastics</i>	<i>gymnastics</i>	10.00-10.25	<i>recreation</i>	<i>recreation</i>
10.10-10.25	<i>recreation</i>	<i>recreation</i>	<i>recreation</i>	<i>recreation</i>	10.25-11.00	metr. syst.	arithmetic
10.25-11.30	<i>agr. work.</i>	<i>man. work</i>	<i>agr. work</i>	<i>man. work</i>	11.00-12.00	<i>agr. work</i>	<i>drawing</i>
					<b><i>agr. work = agricultural work</i></b>		
14.00-14.30	reading	arithmetic	arithmetic	reading	<b><i>man. work = manual work</i></b>		
14.30-15.00	singing	hygiene	singing	causerie	<b><i>cop. dict. = copying &amp; dictation?</i></b>		

15.00-16.00	man. work	agr. work	man work.	agr. work	<b>obs. eloc.= observation &amp; elocution?</b>
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*Extract 5 – School timetables applicable at three different places and times. From Aequatoria Archive.*

## *2.2. The rhythm of the lessons: reprise*

The emphasis on rhythm and regularity is strongly evident in the lessons themselves. References to repetition, and to repetitive patterns, are legion. In 1939, Henri Adriaensen wrote: *“Next door in the school the boys drone out their reading lesson together.”* (...) *“How quiet the mission is now. In the distance I hear boys singing songs in the school. Every afternoon they do that for the last quarter of an hour.”*[lix] De Rop in 1947, about the mission of Imbonga: *“14.00 h.: after the midday break: just go to check whether everybody’s at his place and if the school boys are back in the class. Yes, they are there, I can already hear the droning of the lessons.”*[lx] Here in 1957 again, about the school in Bamanya: *“The roof of the teacher training college shines in the sun. In one class the lesson is being repeated aloud. A moniteur taps his pointer on the board or on his lectern.”*[lxi]

In the classroom itself, and in the context of the teaching activity, repetition was not only a means to discipline, but also an educational principle. There was a lot of repetition, both by the missionaries themselves and by the teachers. Many courses were partially repeated during the school year but this principle was also used when learning new subjects: *“Repetition must really never be neglected, especially in subjects of general education, such as arithmetic, language, science. Not only should one repeat from time to time some part of the material to be taught but also in the meantime (in new subjects too) one should make use of favourable opportunity – just for a few moments – to come back to some point or another.”*[lxii] This repetition, Hulstaert thought, was necessary to bring the pupils to a good understanding of the material to be learned. If it were to go too fast, they would not be able to keep up. This was, in fact, one of the more pedagogically directed points of criticism that he formulated with reference to the education by the Brothers of the Christian Schools in Bamanya: *“We must make a few general remarks concerning the curriculum. We have been following what is common at the school in Tumba. However, this institution has 6 years of primary school. Consequently they are obliged to force the execution of the curriculum, especially for arithmetic. This situation is not beneficial to a good understanding*

*of the subject matter and prevent it from entering into the pupils' minds properly.*"[lxiii] The school in Bamanya only had 5 school years and therefore work had to be done more quickly and there could be less repetition.

In his report about the Batswa school in Flandria, a few years later, he emphasised repetition once again: *"Repetition of what has been seen earlier must be done regularly; otherwise the connection would be lost. The more often this is done the better. This is especially important in arithmetic and language. The metric system should be reviewed carefully in all classes because the foundations are lacking. The subjects of the 4 principal calculation operations also need to be revised, since they form the key to further arithmetic education and without this knowledge and those concepts one is left hanging. The boys will not, then, be able to enjoy arithmetic. The same thing applies, mutatis mutandis, for language teaching."*[lxiv] A few years later he came back to this again in his discussion of the girls' school in Bamanya: *"In general a lot needs to be repeated and improved if one wants to bring the highest class up to a certain level."*[lxv] He did, however, make a clear distinction between repeating material and the slavish repetition of things that had been learned. In an inspection report from 1944 he observed: *"Right down to the lowest classes it is a joy to hear the children explaining Bible stories, for example, in a way that shows they understand what they are saying: it is something quite different from the slavish repetition which one sometimes hears in other schools."*[lxvi]

That slavish repetition was, however, very present in education, which is apparent from several remarks. Vertenten wrote in 1930: *"For arithmetic the results still leave much to be desired. The children do not understand the problems they solve without fault but automatically and without having properly understood them."*[lxvii] Hulstaert himself remarked on it repeatedly. In a report about the girls' school in Bamanya, in 1936, he wrote: *"It is undoubtedly a model school. The Reverend Sister is completely dedicated to her children and is a sound teacher. The curriculum is completely adapted to the mentality and the level of development of the pupils. No bluff, no stuffing memories but a constant striving to make the lessons as practical as possible, to weave them into the thought processes and the emotional life of the children, in a word to stretch them to a real development of spirit and heart."*[lxviii] Too much memorising was also one of the things he accused the Brothers of. In 1944 he stated in his report about the boys' primary school in Bamanya that in all subjects, there was far too much call

on the memory, which was not good for conceptual understanding.[lxix] In the 1950s it was also regularly remarked, particularly in the little bush schools, that too much was memorised and that there was too much automatism in the manner of teaching. In the writing lessons too much was copied and in the reading lessons too much was automatically droned out.[lxx] Moentjens gave the following advice in a report from 1951 to one of the teachers in Flandria: *“With the 2nd year the moniteur must also avoid reading-by-heart, especially by getting the weaker elements to spell the syllables and even the letters.”*[lxxi] The same defect was also later commented on, both in well-established as well as in newly founded schools.[lxxii]

If the lessons were too repetitive in a number of cases there were undoubtedly various reasons for this. Sometimes the material circumstances of education favoured memory work and repetition. It was remarked in this regard in 1956 that writing was difficult in the rural school of Beambo. The pupils had no school desks and they had to hold their notebooks on their knees. In another case, the entire Lonkundo lesson was copied on the board. The teacher himself had no textbook, he had to go and borrow one from a colleague. The pupils themselves had no book. Other missionaries remarked that it was characteristic of the Congolese that they could work well with their memory and following that insight ‘repetitive methods’ were therefore often used. Sister Auxilia, who was greatly appreciated by Hulstaert, also used repetition methods in Bamanya. To her own account, she tried to get more out of that. In the biblical history lessons she started with using the wall pictures but: *“Great importance is given to lively, though unaffected retelling of the lessons. 4th and 5th also reproduce the lessons in written form, with the help of questions.”* Further, songs were also learned by heart. The pupils had to write down the text by heart, whereby starting points for *causeries* were identified, according to the Sister.[lxxiii]

## *Transmitting the teaching material*

### *3.1. Teaching by observation*

In several inspection reports the emphasis was strongly laid on the necessity of a more demonstrative education. Particularly Hulstaert used the term rather often: *“Another remark should be made about arithmetic: this subject should be made more demonstrative, especially in the lower classes, and with more variety (abacus alone for example is not sufficient). In different classes this defect is noticeable, especially in insufficient understanding of division, of fractions, and of*

*the metric system. It is therefore to be recommended that these points should be covered properly, preferably from the beginning, and more graphically.*"[lxxiv] There was not a lot of theory behind this. People especially wanted to use a more concrete method because observation was considered better for stimulating the understanding of the pupils than a purely theoretical form of education. From the tone of the inspection reports it can be inferred that an observation based method was not prevalent always and everywhere: *"The school runs quite regularly. The courses are given carefully and following a method. Nevertheless, it is often necessary to monitor the native moniteurs closely. These, in fact, easily forget to use the method during their lessons which was taught to them and of which they are continually reminded by the Brother Headmaster."*[lxxv] Hulstaert also noted that elsewhere. In Bamanya the principle was, according to him, used correctly in the teaching of agriculture. For example, the use of native fertiliser could be demonstrated well in the experimental gardens: *"However, it would really be useful if the boys could try some real tests in the direction of improving cultivation. It must also be ensured that the boys learn to save seed for the next planting season; that is a point of educational value."*[lxxvi]

He also thought that giving concrete examples in other subjects should be taken up. Practical applicability was used strongly as a criterion: *"For the lessons in hygiene, the same method could be further developed, so the value would be increased. Br. Florent, for example, would certainly like to do that. In lessons about mosquitoes, for example, useful tests could be done; you could add: tracking down breeding grounds, pest control and so forth. In Bamanya this will also be useful from a practical point of view."*[lxxvii] He repeatedly hammered the point home of the necessity of more 'illustration': *"It is further to be expected that especially the boys in the lower classes should get more graphical education in arithmetic. There should in fact be no calculation at all done without everybody doing it using their fingers or having objects before their eyes. The same goes for the metric system."*[lxxviii] Later he broadened his argument to all the teaching material: *"For all subjects the illustrative method could in fact be used more. The pupils could be interested in this. And with a people that are strongly under the influence of superstition that is doubly useful."*[lxxix]

In 1941 he further defined what he meant exactly by that. The director of the school in Flandria had said the level of lower classes was too low because of the lack of preparation by the teachers. Hulstaert agreed with that and advocated

better preparation in general. He also saw another means for improving performance: *"If it does not improve in spite of that, then other causes must be sought and it must be considered whether the initial education needs to be better adapted. I think that, in this sense, particularly your school needs to work on modern methods used in Europe: globality, concreteness, better adaptation to the intuitive nature of your pupils, and so on. Sister Imberta should know about these work methods and it would be good if she could look in that direction."*[lxxx] A couple of years earlier he said something similar about the school in Flandria: *"They give a lot of time to singing, games handicrafts, etc. that are attractive to the children yet still educational."*[lxxxi] These pronouncements seem at first sight to contradict the attitude of Hulstaert as it was described earlier. What he called 'modern methods' were the elements of the New School movement (the global reading method, for example) that could fit into his indigenistic point of view. It is probably not a coincidence that he used these terms in a letter that, according to Vinck, was written at the time that he became aware of certain educational studies. Apart from this it also shows that Hulstaert in his function of inspector thought that methods used in class were not concrete enough.

In the kindergartens of the vicariate the Sisters already worked regularly according to 'modern' principles. According to Hulstaert they used the Fröbel method in Flandria, but it is difficult to discover what that consisted of exactly: *"A lot of attention, sense, observation exercises, etc. were done. A little in primary education, too. This last is kept to a strict minimum and is used only insofar as it helps the Fröbel education method."* In the same report Hulstaert also made a number of suggestions, which implies that these things had not been done previously. In particular, he quite strongly emphasised the use of native games, songs and verses.[lxxxii] Elsewhere there was talk of a Montessori school: it was mentioned incidentally in an article about the mission post of Mondombe. Again, here it was a Sister, Imelda, who was leading the educational project. The only other thing that was said about the school was that the children did a dance in good order and discipline for the Father who was visiting the village.

### 3.2. Visual material

The administration also stimulated schools to use visual material. In 1940 a competition was set up for designing wall posters, in the context of the lessons on hygiene. The purpose was to develop two series of wall posters on the basis of which lessons could be given, with the cooperation of the teaching staff

everywhere in the colony. The first series should illustrate 'cleanliness' in its differing facets (*propreté du corps, propreté de la maison, propreté du linge, le repas familial, le village bien entretenu, ...*)[lxxxiii], the second series must contain information on the tsetse fly, first aid in the case of cuts and wounds and on alcoholism and abstinence.[lxxxiv] That principle was also applied again later, in the context of agriculture, which experienced a *revival* in the early 1950s. In the context of the policy of *paysannats* there was an attempt to combat the exodus from the land and agriculture was promoted again, more than ever, to the Congolese population.[lxxxv] Education played its role in this; the mission inspectors were mobilised. Moentjens recommended the propaganda material from the administration in a circular to the mission superiors. It would be useful as an educational aid in the theoretical agriculture lessons: "*I have the honour of sending you, in a separate package, 6 posters intended as agricultural propaganda. These posters are published for promoting the appreciation of agriculture among the population, especially among young people currently in school, who are all too inclined to turn away from agriculture. They offer the best instructional material when discussing causeries on that subject.*"[lxxxvi]

Other types of wall posters were also very sought after. Especially in the context of religious education this was a regularly used teaching tool. The Sisters in Bamanya used wall posters from *Speybroeck - Bonne Presse* in the 1930s for the lessons in biblical history.[lxxxvii] Hulstaert also noted it in 1939 in the inspection report of the Batswa school in Flandria: "*In the same sense more use could be made of the posters in religious education. The Spanish text of the existing posters could be translated into Lonkundo.*"[lxxxviii] The precise manner in which the posters were used is not apparent from the pieces in the archives.

In some inspection reports from the early 1950s there is an allusion to their use: "*In addition the lesson is illustrated with a picture representing J.C. attached to the scourging post. The moniteur should have used it more and his lesson would have been even more interesting.*"[lxxxix] And: "*Third year: catechism lesson on the readministering of baptism. The text is well written on the board. The lesson started with an explanation of a picture representing the baptism of Jesus where the pupils had to try to recognise the various people. Afterwards we continued learning the text and its explanation.*"[xc] Stéphane Boale, who was at school in the same period in Bokote, spoke in similar terms about the use of the wall pictures: "*There were images for all the subjects. For example, imagine you were*



*giving a lesson on Adam and Eve. Do not think they did not have illustrations to accompany this lesson! For everything, no matter what subject, if you were talking about anatomy, hygiene, religion. First of all, there was an intuitive lesson. Firstly one asked what could be seen and then the pupils would talk about everything they could see and the explanation of the illustrations would only follow afterwards.”[xci]*

Sometimes the use of more ‘visual’ methods came from material necessity. In this way the mission inspector advised the reading lessons to be written on the board *in extenso* in the girls’ school in Flandria because there were not enough reading books to let everyone follow at the same time.[xcii] That this in its turn would give rise to memory work had been mentioned earlier. However, it could be done differently. In the same school, inspector Moentjens praised the reading methods of the teacher a few years later: “*1<sup>st</sup> year Lonkundo reading lesson: this is written on the board and always is explained well first, that is to say, the teacher asks the pupils for the meaning, explains it further and shows the application of every word in one or several sentences. This seems to me to be a very good method of education. Finally the reading on the board is taken up.*”[xciii]

In a number of cases teachers went a step further in this illustrative aspect. At the boys’ school in Bamanya bible scenes were played out during religion lessons from 1937 onwards. Probably they were a sort of *tableaux vivants*, in which the *moniteur* played a role as well. Hulstaert thought that a very positive development: “*They not only go down very well with the pupils; but make it possible to get more into the studied subject better and improve their way of expressing their feelings (sic), which we try hard to make more dignified while preserving their character of natural native. These attempts are done in all classes but they are the most advanced in the lower class under the direction of the moniteur BOMPOSO Antoine.*”[xciv] In a number of schools this was in fact carried out outside the actual hours of lessons. In time they began to put on real plays. These performances almost always had a religious content and were frequently commentated on in the publications of the MSC. After all, they were excellent proof of what could be achieved with young Congolese. At the same time the missionaries wanted to show in this way that they had respect for the local culture.

*Contents of the lessons*

#### 4.1. Examples

Finding an example of concrete lesson content is not straightforward. The inspection reports do describe the performance and attitude of the teachers and sometimes also the names of the topics dealt with but the way in which the teaching material was put across was seldom put on paper. Highly exceptional, in that context, are a few example lessons, which can be found in the *Aequatoria Archive*. These are only two short notes written in 1936 by Petrus Vertenten. They were almost certainly used by the *moniteurs*, probably for a few years. Hulstaert succeeded Vertenten as inspector and he referred to the use of the term “*décimes*” for a tenth of a Franc in a report. This term was, in the context of units of currency, rather unusual but Vertenten did use it in the example lesson shown here. Therefore, it is probable that this example lesson was actually used in the class. Whether the rigorous work methods, which Vertenten described, were applied to the same extent is more difficult to discover. Hulstaert made no comments on Vertenten’s methods. That is unsurprising, for these example lessons started from a concrete situation and it was a school example of learning by repetition.[xcv] Starting with a concrete question (“how much is seven times five centimes?”), an explanation was given of how the franc was divided up (the concepts “centime” – one-hundredth of a franc – and “décime” – one tenth of a franc), which differed from the division the Congolese used. The notation was explained in detail. The operations ‘division’ and ‘multiplication’ were illustrated, coupled to each other, and this in both directions.

Vertenten also gave practical tips for the religion lesson but in this case there was no detailed example lesson as for the subject ‘arithmetic’. More general rules were given to the *moniteurs*. Again here the principle of repetition was present: as much as could be done, certain points had to be raised again and again. It had elements of project learning, with the understanding that these projects were essentially religious or moral in nature. The example lesson itself was no more than a summing up of religious rules. Vertenten only gave a few pedagogical rules in a nutshell at the beginning of the lesson. It was very clear from these to what degree the religious element was a decisive element within education and how in practice this pushed the educational element *sensu stricto* into the background.

—  
*Arithmetic lesson: End first year second grade.*

Write or make them write on the board the value of 7 coins of 5 centimes.

Show the 7 coins

Test the pupils

Praise the one that succeeds in writing down this value

1 lièke: 5 centimes are a 20<sup>th</sup> of a franc.  $1/20$  of a fr. equals 5 centimes.

What's a centime?

It's a hundredth of a franc.

Show ONE CENTIME  $1/100$  of a fr.  $1: 100 = 1/100$

Expressed in francs one centime is ZERO francs 0,

One centime is not a tenth of a franc either, which is called decimal = ten centimes or one LIKOTA.

Show a centimes coin, show the inscription.

So one lièke or 5 centimes is not one franc: fl: 0.

" a tenth: fl: 0.0

You write the units, the tens, hundreds, thousands without the decimal point and before the decimal point.

After the decimal point you write the tenths and hundredths (décimes and centimes)

in our DECIMAL system you NEVER write

either the HALVES/DEMIS (menya)

or the FIFTHS

or the TWENTIETHS but we express the value in tenths or hundredths.

In the monetary system we express the DEMIS or MENYA, the FIFTHS and the TWENTIETHS in décimes or in centimes.

So: ONE centime or one hundredth part of the franc is written as follows:

falanga 0, décime 0, centime 1 : fl. 0.01

One lièke or 5 centimes is written : fl. 0.05

One lièke is a twentieth of a franc. Five centimes is a twentieth of 100 centimes (1 fr.)  $1/20$  of a franc (bya falanga).

We can thus divide one franc among 20 people and each will have a twentieth of a franc or FIVE CENTIMES.

Let's try the division:

$1 : 20$  impossible to give everyone 1 fr.

so  $1 : 20 = 0$ ,

we will change the franc in BAKOTA or DECIMES: tenths:

10 décimes: 20. Impossible to give everyone one LIKOTA

10 décimes:  $20 = 0.0$  (fl. zero, décime 0.)

we exchange the décimes into centimes

100 centimes divided by 20 equals: 5 centimes

20 times 5 centimes equals 100 centimes

santime 5 bekola 20 wete SANTIMES 100

But the above problem requires writing the value of SEVEN bayèkè, of SEVEN coins of 5 centimes.

When you have 7 coins of 5 centimes you have 7 times 5 centimes

In Lonkundo this is said as follows: (5 centimes SEVEN times)

SANTIME ITANO bekola 7: santimes 35

this value equals: falanga 0, décimes 3 = fl. 0.3 or 30 centimes

falanga 0.30 and 5 centimes = fl. 0.35

3 décimes = 6 coins of 5 centimes or  $6 \times 5 = 30$  centimes

in LONKUNDO  $5 \times 6 =$  santime 30

the value of 7 coins of 5 centimes is written as follows: fl. 0.35

fl. 0.05 + fl. 0.05 + fl. 0.05 + fl. 0.05 + fl. 0.05 + fl. 0.05 + fl. 0.05  
= fl. 0.35

35 centimes divided by 7 (between 7 comrades) = 5 centimes

fl. 0.35 : 7 = fl. 0.05

—————  
How many coins of 5 centimes do you add in order to obtain the value of ONE FRANC?

To get ONE FRANC you need 20 coins of 5 centimes

we already have 7. So we still need  $20 - 7 = 13$

centimes itano bekola jum l'esato wete centimes 65

35 centimes plus 65 centimes = 100 centimes = 1 franc

fl. 0.35 + fl. 0.65 = fl. 1.00

etc. etc.

always request the complete deduction

—————  
argue/explain the tables of multiplication:

in Lonkundo:  $9 \times 7 = 7 \times 9 = (7 \times 10) - 7 = 63$

—————  
always argue/explain the problem,

do not allow steps to be left out,  
make them think.

—

Daily conversation/chat (a few minutes only)  
about charity

Every day we will give one of its points,  
we will come back to it later during the day,  
especially if a practical application has to be done.

We can get back to it when doing a dictation.

We will question one child on the point mentioned earlier.

Sometimes we will write on the blackboard or make him write.

We are not at all limited to these texts,  
the best model lesson cannot replace the initiative.

—

But the pedagogy teaches us that you should teach children to respect by  
respecting the others,

politeness is the flower of charity.

More than anything this little chat should be usual practice

*Excerpt 6 - Example lessons by Petrus Vertenten (1936). from Aequatoria  
Archive.*

#### *4.2. The moniteurs in action*

Most information on the progress of the lesson was therefore contained in a number of descriptions, which were given by the mission inspectors in their inspection reports. The contents of these reports certainly evolved over time. The reports of such travelling Fathers as Jans and Moeyens were more summary and did not give much more than an evaluation. Those of Petrus Vertenten, although somewhat more detailed, also do not contain much concrete information on the lesson content. From time to time Hulstaert (from 1937 to 1946), and certainly Moentjens (from 1950 to 1959), actually went more deeply into a number of concrete problems. Hulstaert was a technician and clearly 'short-sighted' because of that. What I mean to say by this is that he paid great attention to well-defined problems, such as spoken language, and as a result these problems occurred more frequently and were considered in more depth. He seldom focussed in detail on the teaching method or the content of a lesson. Whenever he did, it remained in general terms and rather synthetic. In contrast a number of reports survive

from Gaston Moentjens which consider a number of lessons in more depth. These are reports he made in the early 1950s about the primary school and teacher training college in Bamanya. That also entails that it doesn't just give an insight into the primary school but also into training teachers who would themselves be standing in front of the class in future years.

Beside the inspections by the mission inspectors there were naturally also those of the state inspectors. In fact very few of the reports on the Catholic schools in their vicariate have survived. The following paragraphs are therefore grouped around periods in which Hulstaert and Moentjens were active as inspectors. The reports of the state inspectors were also quoted, insofar as useful information could be found in them. In any case, this information was mostly restricted to the teachers and very seldom concerned the pupils themselves. They do contain some evidence of a number of teaching practices. That is why they are so important. The descriptions of these practices were, however, strongly coloured by the 'evaluating' eye of the inspectors, in general with a rather ambiguous attitude towards the abilities of the Congolese teachers. Some people, including Vertenten, said, for example, that initiative from the *moniteurs* was welcome, but in reality the missionaries often reacted in a very aloof and equivocal manner to the contribution of the Congolese teachers.

#### 4.2.1. Under Hulstaert's supervision

Hulstaert's reactions also seem to show some ambivalence: *"With the current moniteurs there has been a great improvement in order in the class, in less wasted time, in improved preparation. In some subjects there is still a lack, yet that is due to the insufficient training of the teachers."*[xcvi] A few lines earlier he had remarked that the greatest change for that year was that every class now had a qualified teacher. It certainly indicates that the level of the training of teaching assistants, even in the view of those directly involved, was not rated very highly. *"Arithmetic and language are poor; there is too little thought put into them. The same must be said of the explanation of the catechism and biblical history, which could also be better. The text is, in fact, well-known except for a few small errors (including the definition of the divine virtues, where attention was not paid to the subjunctive form, instead the normal form was used)."*[xcvii]

Another remark by Hulstaert was more important: *"The general problem of the moniteur paying too much attention to particular boys and neglecting the others somewhat is also present here and people work continually to improve*

this.”[xcviii] In older reports (from the end of the 1920s) this remark was also made but this quotation shows that ten years later it was still a frequently occurring phenomenon. In any case, there were large differences from one class to another. It seems almost impossible to bring everything together in one general picture. In the school of Mondombe, a somewhat smaller and more isolated mission post, there were different classes. The impressions that the inspector wrote down in his report on these classes vary from somewhat approving to very concerned. He wrote about a number of classes: “*Application is good; there is a lot of absenteeism.*” About other classes he remarked: “*Order and discipline leave a lot to be desired, there are not many absentees and it should be remedied energetically.*”[xcix] In the rural school of Mpenjele there were also great contrasts between the teachers.

In fact, the missionaries did not trust the teachers completely. The attitude they had towards Africans in general was just as much present in the class. The *moniteurs* had to be checked and that is apparent from many remarks made in the inspection reports: “*Good, without supervision there is a risk, that he talks too much himself in the explanation of the lessons and neglects letting the children work themselves by using questions.*”[c] “*The girls’ school is under the leadership of Sister Auxilia. She is helped by 4 monitrices who are very satisfactory. More important or more difficult subjects are given by the Reverend Sister herself.*”[ci] Until the 1950s, remarks of this sort were made: “*Undoubtedly the results achieved can still be improved noticeably, e.g. by getting the teachers who otherwise are very diligent and dedicated, to give more careful preparation, with the guidance and assistance of the Rev. Fr Headmaster. For the moment the moniteurs seem to be left rather too much to their own fate and initiative.*”[cii] The fact that it was thought that the teachers were too much left to their own devices naturally says more about the trust that was put in them than about their own qualities. It especially shows that the missionaries themselves were mostly not closely involved *de facto* with the pupils and the actual education.

According to the provincial inspector Vanmeerbeeck the general level of girls’ education was pitiful. That was due to the total lack of expert female teachers. He remarked on that in 1947, on the occasion of the inspection of the school in Bamanya. However, it was, he thought, a general phenomenon: “*As in all the schools for native girls inspected or visited until now, the inability and ephemeral character of the native teaching assistants seems to be an almost insoluble*

*problem. From the 1st to the 4th primary years, the same inadequacy is mentioned in knowledge of the subject to be taught, the same lack of life, of teaching talent, the same mechanical nature of the lessons, the same constant appeal solely to memory.*"[ciii] In the concrete case of Bamanya, Vanmeerbeeck's report resulted in Father Wauters, who was responsible for the school, replacing the teachers by more qualified ones.[civ]

The contrast between Vanmeerbeeck's words and the commentary of the mission inspector on the same school, a year earlier, was striking. Cobbaut had said in his report: *"What is especially noticeable here is the teaching method: it is not mechanical repetition or learning by heart but a lively, practical, instructive education. One immediately feels the masterly hand of the Reverend Sister Auxilia, who does not have as much time as she would in reality like to give to the school."*[cv] However, the difference between both inspection reports was considerable. Vanmeerbeeck wrote a rather detailed report of five pages, in which he went further into different details. Cobbaut on the other hand found a single page sufficient and wrote no more than the remarks quoted here concerning the primary school. Hulstaert had also been more positive in his inspection report from 1944, though not without exception. He did write that the lessons were given well, but attributed the good progress much more to the headmistress, Sister Auxilia, than to the *monitrices*. Firstly, he noted the large turnover of female teachers (see chapter 5). Secondly, he ended his report with the remark: *"Especially with our monitrices it is indispensable that both preparation and control are carefully done if one wants to achieve anything. And for more in-depth education one relies completely on the Sister."*[cvi]

There was really very little information given on the concrete behaviour of the pupils, apart from the disciplinary aspect. A number of remarks can be found on the manner in which they learnt to write. In the boys' school in Bamanya pupils made too many mistakes, Hulstaert stated in a report from 1942: *"A lot of mistakes are still being made when writing in the mother tongue and the moniteurs themselves are not always competent enough to avoid this or correct them. F. Ipoma and A. Bongeli should pay particular attention to that. We must really demand that the teachers should write in their own language without faults."*[cvii] In the girls' school, too, he had already pointed out: *"The monitrices must still pay attention to the attitudes of the children, particularly during writing. They should also learn the sensible and handy use of blotting paper and*



*to turn over the pages of their books carefully.”[cviii] Also, in the school of the Brothers he asked that attention be paid to the attitude of the pupils: “A comment to be made: the pupils’ attitude leaves much to be desired in some classes, particularly during writing. I must add that the poorly adapted desks are the cause for the faulty attitude of many. Also, the moniteurs must continually correct their pupils, which is very difficult for the native, who gets tired easily if the effect is not immediate.”[cix]*

#### *4.2.2. The reports of the 1950s*

##### *On primary education*

In a first report from 1950, on the boys’ primary school, Moentjens especially mentioned a number of aspects of the curriculum. He paid particular attention to the teachers and the way in which they taught their lessons. There is very little about the pupils and what they had to do in these reports. Still, this report shows a number of interesting elements that reflect the way the class operated .

In the first year the inspector followed a religion lesson, in which a student from the teacher training college gave a lesson to the pupils on remission of sins. Using an example from daily life it was described how this concept was connected, in the Catholic religion, with the life of Jesus Christ. Illustrative material was used in the form of a picture of “Our Lord on the cross”, being scourged. Obviously, the illustration was not really used to the full; the missionary thought in any event that the lesson would have been improved if that had been the case. He made a similar remark again in the next year on the religion lesson in the third year: *“The moniteur did not explain the religious picture which should have served to illustrate his lesson and he did not talk enough about the Holy Mass.”[cx]* Positive points, according to the inspector, were that the teacher *in spe* asked the pupils a lot of questions and in this way was ‘stimulating’. In the arithmetic lesson use was again made of lemons, with which the pupils in the front of the class had to illustrate their exercises. Although order and discipline (here again expressly mentioned) were good, Moentjens noticed that the teacher only concerned himself with the pupils at the desks at the front of the class.

Considerably less information was given about the higher years, with the exception of the fifth year. The inspector went into great detail about the religion lesson, so there was not much space left over for other subjects: *“The religion lesson which he gave on the fourth Commandment of God was truly well taught. He considered God’s authority, parents and all other persons invested with*

*authority and considered more or less in depth the reasons for the authority enjoyed by the parents and other superiors. Also considering the fifth Commandment he gave the pupils a glimpse of the fundamental principle on which brotherly love is based and as he progressed he based his lesson on examples from the Old and New Testament which he illustrated using pictures from the holy book. His drawing lesson was less successful. After spending too long considering the structure and function of the leaf he proceeded to the drawing itself without having properly explained how to proceed.”* In the sixth year the lesson was given by a Brother. The performance of the pupils was positively evaluated by the inspector but the teacher was given some advice: not so fast and do not talk so monotonously.[cxi]

In his evaluation Moentjens gave a general impression of education in the school. This was good but he expressly referred to the supervision and efforts of the Brothers, who made sure that the teachers functioned well in their class. *“Bamanya has without doubt good moniteurs but on the other hand it is thanks to the constant surveillance and stimulation of the Fr. Headmaster that they accomplish their tasks so well and that they teach so carefully. It is known elsewhere that at Bamanya moniteurs and pupils are very ‘responsible’.”*[cxii] Moentjens undoubtedly meant that a relatively strong authority was exercised over both groups. That the authority of the missionaries was not at that time as unaffected as it would appear from his words has already been clearly shown by the references to the sometimes rebellious behaviour of the pupils.

The fact that, according to the mission inspector, the missionaries (even if in this case they were Brothers) had the greatest share in the success of the education is very significant. It shows the point of view from which education was discussed. If possible that is made even clearer when these remarks are compared to those Moentjens made in the same year about the teacher training college. He formulated a number of considerations ‘of an educational nature’. Obviously the state inspector, Verhelst, had drawn the attention of the Brothers to the fact that more attention should be paid to educational subjects in the teacher training college. Verhelst had based this on a circular from the vice-governor general. Moentjens put this matter into perspective in the conclusion of his report: *“According to the terms of the letter from the Vice-Governor General, the instructions given in it in this regard are only given as an ‘indication’; in the text it says ‘he had advised’ which contrasts with the imperative tone that Mr Verhelst*

*seems to want to give it. Moreover, in my opinion the part the Vice-Governor General wanted to see reserved for educational theory in the 3<sup>rd</sup> year of teacher training college is exaggerated. Where would there be time left for the other sections of the curriculum if the educational theory course on its own has to be given 2 hours a day? Consequently, I consider 6 to 7 hours a week should be more than sufficient for this subject, at least if one does not want to sacrifice a good part of the general education."* This attitude is strongly reminiscent of the conflict between Van Linden and Eloye, reported in the previous chapter. Van Linden was "accused" of regarding the rules of the administration as incidental.

Still, Moentjens had to observe that the results of education were not completely satisfactory. This could not really be blamed on the Brothers, for they showed 'boundless' dedication. On the contrary, perhaps they even went too far in this and grossly over-estimated the abilities of the Congolese. Particularly education in French was reaching too high. *"It is said that once entered into the realm of higher education (very relatively higher) the intelligence of the blacks is inclined to close up and their capacity for intellectual assimilation goes numb. Perhaps it is because the teaching is given in French. For this reason I would like to advise the Rev. Frs. Masters to take this into account and insofar as possible to use simple and clear language and to give their lessons rather slowly and without precipitation as I saw another time. I would like to add that at this time and according to the extent of their abilities they should also remind the pupils of the notions and terms in Lonkundo for the things they are learning, as it is in this language, their native language, that they will have to teach later."*[cxiii]

In the light of the things that were going on at that time between teachers and pupils, this statement sounds somewhat strange. It probably shows that there were a number of things the missionaries knew nothing about at that time. The French lessons referred to by Jean Boimbo show that reality was really seen in a radically different way by the missionaries and the Congolese. The following example of the practical educational lesson, on keeping school registers and calculating average attendance, should be considered from the same point of view: *"The Rev. Brother gives a short explanation of the number of school days per month, then he gives the rule as it is established (sic) by the department of education and according to which the total number of school days in the month and the average attendance in the month and over many months together should be calculated. At the same time he illustrates the rule well using a concrete*

*example. Afterwards he explains how one should proceed to find the average attendance for two, three, four months in total and so on. The pupils have to do numerous practical exercises in order to become accustomed to the system."* In his conclusions Moentjens returned to this in considerable detail. He thought it was a scandal that in a school such as in Bamanya hardly any *moniteurs* were able to do this. The cause, he thought, was in the excessively theoretical character of educational training. What precisely that 'too theoretical' educational training may have been cannot be seen clearly from the documents available in the archives.

#### *At the teacher training college*

The lessons of the teacher training college that Moentjens reproduced in his report seem rather practical. As, for example, the writing lesson in which the Brother first demonstrated what had to be done. The lesson developed in several stages: a general explanation on the organisation of the letters of the alphabet, then the educational principle to be applied (*in this case*: the easiest group of letters should be taught first). Then the writing rules for the specific group were explained and the letters were written on the board. After the explanation from the Brother it was the students' turn. In groups of six they had to come and give the same lesson on the board. Moentjens also reported a so-called 'didactic lesson'. This was a reading lesson, in which one of the students had to act as the teacher and his fellow students had to play the pupils. Apart from any critical considerations on the teaching method, the typical course of such a lesson can be seen from the text. First the teacher briefly reviewed the previous lesson. Then he read out the entire new piece of text aloud. The best pupils then each had to read out a sentence. Finally, the whole class read the whole text collectively.

In the lessons given in the highest year, rhythm and observation/demonstration (working on the board) also return as primary elements: *"The application is realised without effective control and even without the possibility of proper control because no rhythm is given to the application."* And: *"A lesson in Lonkundo grammar in the 4<sup>th</sup> year by the pupil moniteur Mboyo Antoine. Faults: writing on the board could have been better i.e. tidier; the moniteur only gave one example on the board while 2 or 3 would have been better; the examples asked from the pupils were only given orally, while it would have been preferable and more beneficial to have the pupils come to the board and write the examples they thought they had found. For the rest it was a good lesson."* Moentjens seemed to

be much more concerned about deviations from the prescribed rules. The teacher who dared to do that was really going off the rails, as can be seen from this following passage: *“Capital fault: The moniteur deviates from the kilogram which should have been the subject of the lesson, as well in his written preparation, and the teacher or the Very Rev. Fr. Headmaster should have seen and corrected this in advance, as during his lesson itself; thus he deviates from that which should be taught!”*[cxiv]

Naturally, it is not illogical to think that a lesson given in the presence of the inspector did not follow the pattern of other lessons completely. It may be supposed that both the teachers and students tried to do better than usual. In the light of this it is probably interesting to look for certain remarks of the inspector, which at least allow us to formulate a number of hypotheses about the normal course of events. At the first reading by the teacher, Moentjens remarked: *“He reads the model piece for today, without always having the correct tone, not raising his eyes at any point to see whether the pupils were following.”* During group reading the moniteur made a remark that was very much appreciated by the inspector: *“In the middle of the first paragraph, which was however not so long, he had the entire class repeat what had just been read. Here he made the very correct remark concerning avoiding chanted reading.”* It indicates that this all happened too frequently for Moentjens liking. Immediately afterwards a somewhat contradictory consideration followed on the subject of the rhythm of the reading lesson: *“Afterwards he had the entire piece read simultaneously, which did not succeed very well because it did not have sufficient rhythm.”* From a number of considerations it could be inferred that the moniteurs did not teach in a very structured way under unsupervised circumstances: *“Here he explained what the section contained, which he should have done first or after his model reading as he should have made the reading more comprehensible and more attractive in this way. The moniteur did not correct poor pronunciation at any time, poor connection or a jerky reading although his fellow students gave him many opportunities to do so.”*

The same can also be inferred from some descriptions of more practical lessons, such as traditional work or working on the land. In the first case the inspector seemed to have surprised the students: *“The lesson had started without the assistance of the Ref. Fr. Master or the Very Rev. Fr. Headmaster. On my arrival with the Rev. Fr. Master the explanation has finished and the pupils are busy with*

*the tasks the elected pupil-moniteur has given to a small group of pupils, then he turns to the others who he is checking and to whom he gives useful instructions. A few other pupil-moniteurs assist him in this task of supervision and guidance, but two others are seated and are looking rather disinterestedly while the moniteur in charge is standing with a group of pupils and another pupil-moniteur is helping them carry out their work, making a type of earthenware carafe. All of them, including the head moniteur and the other pupil-moniteurs present would do useful work if they would lend a hand to their colleagues in such lessons." Also in the work in the fields things did not seem to proceed in a very structured way, despite the presence of the inspector: "Two other pupil-moniteurs, with a few of their fellow students, went to the school fields instead of teaching a lesson on crafts. Their work consisted of fixing the beanpoles at the side of the plots ready to be sown with beans. Almost all the pupil moniteurs with the head moniteurs helped out with the pupils. But... each pupil only had two poles to be fixed in the soil!!! Moreover, it was clear that they had difficulty passing, not to say killing, the time available - an entire hour - and the organisation of the work did not seem very good."*

The lack of interest or enthusiasm was a thorn in the flesh of the inspector. He not only made some short remarks on this in the discussion of some subjects, he noticed it in the self-assessment that the students of the teacher training college had to make after the lessons. From what he said it seems clear that a considerable number of the pupils participated little or not at all: *"The pupils are called to make a criticism of the lessons given by their fellow students in which they participated during the day. The Rev. Brother corrected and completed these critiques with his own remarks for the lessons in which he also assisted. The critiques of the pupils have some good elements but the majority relate to remarks of a secondary order and often relate too exclusively to laudatory judgements, which should surely not be neglected if merited; but they pass too lightly over the faults and omissions or possibilities the pupil moniteur should have been able to use beneficially in his lesson. During the practical lessons I had the impression that some pupils were not given a task to complete and that they remained passive as though completely uninterested in the lesson."*[cxv]

That the inspector held the opinion that various matters were indeed the fault of the Congolese and not so much of the missionaries is apparent from the remark he made in his report for 1951 on the primary school: *"On the other hand it is*

difficult to be aware, especially in an application school, of the differences that exist between the timetables that should be displayed in the classroom and those written in the class diaries. Moreover, there were the deplorable breaches of school discipline that I ascertained with the moniteurs and the Rev. Brothers, while the Very Rev. Headmaster spent a whole hour each morning on inspecting the classroom diaries and preparing the lessons of the moniteurs. On numerous occasions during the lessons I was forced to conclude an incomprehensible toing and froing of pupils who came to find one or other object the moniteur needed for his lesson or that was required for manual work after the lesson in progress.”[cxvi] In any case, this contrasts strongly with the Brothers’ rules, which stipulated that the teachers all had to be prepared before the lessons started in the morning.

### *Other testimonies*

Moreover, dissatisfied noises could also be heard from other corners. In the girls’ school in Coquilhatville education was led by the Sisters of Charity. As in the previous period, explicit mention of particular educational techniques was made here in the 1950s. The state inspector Eloye showed that he was rather satisfied with the use of the global method in the first school year and the *centres d’intérêt* in the following years. Still, the same practices were present here. In his comments on the monitrice in the first year, Eloye stated: “*The reading lesson according to the global method: the materials she has available made the task easier. She had the group read too quickly from the board, from the book she must avoid reading by heart.*”[cxvii] Here too, education was characterised by a high degree of improvisation. In the second grade the girls were in the same classroom. The two monitrices tried to solve this by adapting their timetables. “*The monitrice teaches one year while the other works on their exercises.*” Above all, they did not always seem to be well prepared: “*The dictation lessons given by the Rev. Sr. Headmistress and the monitrice should have been prepared before the lesson itself, not as the dictation progressed, and corrected without losing time.*” The same monitrice was also criticised because of her poor teaching, particularly in the arithmetic lesson: “*She exceeded the curriculum with calculations that she had solved wrongly on the board:  $32-18 = 24$ ,  $44-27 = 23$ .*” The moniteur who taught the third year (that was really exceptional and shows there was a lack of capable monitrices) worked according to the method of project learning: the reading lesson fitted into the ‘Stanley’ topic. However, his teaching method did not satisfy the inspector, for the moniteur was much too nervous and

repeated his explanation to the point of boredom. Another surprising report finally came from the HCB-school in Flandria, where Nand van Linden confined his report on the study results for the school year 1958-1959 to the following remark: *“According to the curriculum prescribed for mission schools, the results usually demanded of pupils were not achieved, although the lesson hours have been increased and the subject matter to be taught has been reinforced with new textbooks. The cause is partly due to the pupils’ lack of discipline and application to their studies and mainly to the moniteurs who are not qualified and unable to teach according to the required standards.”*[cxviii]

### *Summary*

The sources that provide us with information on the practical approaches to giving lessons in the mission schools create a picture that is somewhat similar to that of the school in the motherland in certain respects. Particularly the attention to obedience and discipline, to order and virtue, is not really surprising within the context of an educational concept dominated by Catholicism. Considering that most of the missionaries had not had any significant educational training, it should not be surprising that the principles they applied were precisely those they brought with them. These in return corresponded to their own school education. Respect, obedience, respect for authority were very strongly emphasised.

Order and discipline were undoubtedly the leading principles for the missionaries or were supposed to be so. The use of quasi-military drill techniques to deal with Congolese children, to keep them quiet and to be able to teach them, was probably present even more strongly than in the homeland. The fact that no exaggerated attention is paid to it in the sources does not detract from the fact that it was clearly a supporting factor in school life. These physical methods of keeping order (standing in lines, standing up at the same time, moving in groups, answering together and so on) were really the extension of a broad administrative framework surrounding the pupils that was just as much geared to the creation of an orderly, organised and controllable Congolese “mass”.

It is noticeable that the use of punishments was very often connected to utilitarian aims. This connection is not illogical, considering that these aims were perhaps even more present in education as a whole. The practical and utilitarian aspect was very expressly present in the curriculum and in practice. Work was done for the greatest part of the day, both within and outside the context of the official curriculum. This emphasis on handicrafts, on practical tasks, was certainly not



exclusive to primary school, it was also continued at higher levels. It was supported by a double and ambiguous legitimisation: the necessity to contribute on the one hand to the material maintenance of the missions, on the other hand to the essential development of skills that would make the pupils able to work in rural surroundings later on.

The lessons were mainly given by Congolese teachers. Considering the sources available to the researcher are predominately written from the point of view of the missionaries and do not originate from the Congolese, it remains dangerous to make generalisations about the way that happened. In many cases there was certainly a rather comprehensive control over what the moniteurs and monitrices did in class. However, what was noted in inspection reports concerning classroom practice or the education of the teachers is very frequently mainly directed at the things that are not going well or, according to the inspecting authorities, should be done differently. From these reports it can certainly be deduced that a self-disciplined approach was often expected from the teachers, which in theory had to be supported by an enthusiastic and lively approach to the material but which before anything should remain within the prescribed rules and the point of view of the missionaries.

The majority of missionaries in the MSC area had no expertise in the field of education. There were a few who concerned themselves with theoretical principles and with fundamental questions of education and even amongst them it was frequently hard to find a drive for renewal. It is appropriate to make an exception for the Brothers of the Christian Schools, a teaching order that in fact had a somewhat restricted field of work in the region. Despite their better technical training or even their more theoretically oriented (and thus experienced by the Congolese as more progressive) education, it does not look as though they coloured noticeably outside the lines of colonial attitudes. Certainly insofar as the lesson content is concerned it is mostly the MSC who seemed to offer more of an alternative choice to their pupils due to their attention to local facts and traditions.

In conclusion, an important consideration must be repeated: the sources are 'short-sighted', not only because they are mainly written by missionaries but also because, for the most part, they leave a large part of the Congolese schools out of the picture. Practice in the small rural schools which formed a large if not the largest part of the famous education of the masses by the Belgians in the Congo is

much more difficult to uncover than what occurred in the well-populated mission schools. The picture uncovered from the elements that are visible is anything but rich. Due to a lack of buildings, material, knowledge and staff, education in such schools mostly had to be reduced to the most elementary fundamentals, frequently dependent on the goodwill and efforts of a few, and consequently markedly precarious.

## NOTES

- [i] Imelda, Sr. (1937). Something about our schoolboys in Mondombe. In *Annals*, 3, p. 54. [original quotation in Dutch]
- [ii] AAFE 38.5.2-39.1.6. Groupe Scolaire Coquilhatville. *Prescriptions réglementaires et Principales obligations du maître*. s.n., s.d.
- [iii] AAFE 25.3.10. Inspection of the rural school Mpenzele. J. Moeyens, 8 September 1934. My underlining. [Original quotation in Dutch]
- [iv] AAFE 101.4.10-11. Report on the inspection of the boys' school near Batswa in Flandria, 1939. G. Hulstaert, Flandria, 2 October 1939. [Original quotation in Dutch]
- [v] AAFE 25.4.9. Bamanya Mission. Rural school of Boyela (Injolo) inspection for the month of May 1934 by R.P. Moyens. Signed P. Jans. [Original quotation in French]
- [vi] Cortebeeck, J. (1932). "De houtskool-teekenaar" (vervolg). In *Annals*, 7, p. 152. [Original quotation in Dutch]
- [vii] Imelda, Sr. (1937). Iets over onze schooljongens van Mondombe. In *Annals*, 3, p. 54. [Original quotation in Dutch]
- [viii] Interview with Jean Indenge, Brussels, 14 July 2003.
- [ix] AAFE 93.4.12. Rapport sur l'inspection de l'école des Huileries du Congo Belge établie à Flandria (district de l'Equateur), 1933. Report by the provincial inspector (name not given).
- [x] Maes, F. (1950). Straf. In *Annals*, June, p. 88. The Father referred to is Octaaf Everaert. [original quotation in Dutch]
- [xi] Quotation from interview with Jean Indenge. [Original quotation in French]
- [xii] Cortebeeck, J. (1941). Boende. In *Annals*, January, p. 7. [Original quotation in Dutch]
- [xiii] Imelda, Sr. (1937). Something about our schoolboys in Mondombe. In *Annals*, 3, p. 54. [original quotation in Dutch]
- [xiv] AAFE 96.2.6-7. Rapport annuel 1953. Ecole H.C.B. - District Flandria. Ecole primaire centrale à Flandria. F. Maes, Flandria, 3 January 1954. Maes

remembered also during my interview with him: *"There was an assembly every week; then they all stood in front of you, on Saturday morning they had to do their punishment. They had to fetch soil, or make the ground even behind the school to make a football pitch."* [original quotation in French]

[xv] Ibidem.

[xvi] Interview with Jean Indenge, Brussels, 14 July 2003. [original quotation in French]

[xvii] Interview with Jean Boimbo, Ukel, 25 September 2003. [original quotation in French]

[xviii] Fernand Van Linden (°1912) was ordained as a priest in 1937 and left a year later for the Congo. He originally worked as a travelling Father. After 1945 he became head of the school in Flandria, in the course of the 1950s he went to work in the same job in Boende.

[xix] Interview with Fernand Van Linden, Ternat, 11 June 2002.

[xx] Interview by Césarine Bolia with Julienne Aboli, Kinshasa, 29 September 2003. [original in French]

[xxi] Interview with Stéphane Boale, St-Joost-ten-Noode, September 2003. "Coupe-coupe" refers to a machete. [original quotation in French]

[xxii] Interview Césarine Bolia with Joséphine Bongondo, Kinshasa, 29 September 2003. [original quotation in French]

[xxiii] Interview by Césarine Bolia with Bernard Kasusula, Binza, 29 September 2003.

[xxiv] Interview with Stéphane Boale, St-Joost-ten-Noode, September 2003. [Original quotation in French]

[xxv] Ibidem. [original quotation in French]

[xxvi] Interview by Césarine Bolia with Bukasa Mbanvu Sebanjili, Kinshasa, September 2003. [original quotation in French]

[xxvii] Interview with Jean Indenge, Brussels, 14 July 2003.

[xxviii] Interview with Rik Vanderslaghmolen, Borgerhout, 18 August 2004. Vanderslaghmolen worked from 1946 to 1951 in Coquilhatville as an economist. After an interruption in Belgium because of health problems, he worked for a year as head of the school in Mondombe and from 1956 he taught (Latin) at the junior seminary in Bokuma. [original quotation in Dutch]

[xxix] AAFE 30.5.7-9. Letter from Father Wauters to Mgr. Van Goethem. Bamanya, 1 May 1943. [original quotation in Dutch]

[xxx] Interview with Jean Indenge, Brussels, 14 July 2003. [original quotation in French]

[xxxi] Interview with Jean Boimbo, Ukel, 25 September 2003.

[xxxii] Also found in the interviews that Filip Deboeck and Césarine Bolia made with a number of inhabitants of Kinshasa in the context of an investigation into memories of the colonial school time (September 2003). One of the interviewees told of his time at school with the Marists in Stanleyville: *"There was a system applied: a frank was given to people who spoke Swahili for example. So when you went to class, the teacher asked: "Who has the coin? Oh, it's me!". Then you were punished. You had to avoid talking Swahili."* Interview with Donat Salehe Kimbulu, Makala, 16 September 2003.

[xxxiii] Es, M. (1927). Mijn kleine schoolkolonie. In *Annals*, 11, p. 246. My emphasis. [original quotation in Dutch]

[xxxiv] Maria Godfrieda, Sr. (1934). What sort of things they have to do. In *Annals*, 5, p. 108. [original quotation in Dutch]

[xxxv] Brokerhoff, P. (1930). A normal day on a Congo-mission post. In *Annals*, 11, p. 248. [original quotation in Dutch]

[xxxvi] Interview with Jean Boimbo in Ukel, 25 September 2003. [original quotation in French]

[xxxvii] Brokerhoff, P. (1930). l.c.

[xxxviii] Archive Lazarists Leuven. "Rapport sur les oeuvres des Filles de la Charité de St-Vincent de Paul à Coquilhatville. Exercice 1930." s.n., January 1931.

[xxxix] AAFE 15.3.4-8. Rapport sur le fonctionnement de l'école primaire à Mondombe, 1930. P. Vertenten, Mondombe, 24 December 1930. [original quotation in French]

[xl] AAFE 101.4.12. Circular to the managers of the missions. G. Hulstaert, 1 February 1939. A.T. stands for "Autorité Territoriale". [original quotation in Dutch]

[xli] AAFE 15.3.4-8. Rapport sur le fonctionnement de l'école primaire à Mondombe, 1930. P. Vertenten, Mondombe, 24 December 1930. [original quotation in French]

[xlii] Segers, F. (1947). De zingende knapen van Mondombe. In *Annalen*, March, p. 44. [original quotation in Dutch]

[xliii] AAFE 25.4.9. Bamanya Mission. Ecole rurale de Boyela (Injolo) inspection du mois de mai 1934 par le R.P. Moyens. Signed Paul Jans. [original quotation in French]

[xliv] Brokerhoff, P. (1930). Een normale dag op een Congo-missiepost. In *Annalen*, 11, p. 248. [original quotation in Dutch]

[xlv] Caudron, J. (1935). Ik denk aan mijn jongens in Bokote. In *Annalen*, 12, p.

269. [original quotation in Dutch]

[xlvi] AAFE 99.5.14. Memo "Recommandations pour l'établissement des horaires journaliers.", s.n., s.l., s.d. [original quotation in French]

[xlvii] The Bourdon test is a psychological test that measures the capacity for concentration on the basis of the speed of recognition of figures or letters in a set of meaningless texts or figures or symbols. Named after the developer, the French psychologist Benjamin Bourdon (1860-1943). See Nicolas, S. (1996). *Benjamin Bourdon, le fondateur du laboratoire*. In CRPCC, un laboratoire centenaire. On [http://www.uhb.fr/sc\\_humaines/psycho\\_expe/labos/expe/](http://www.uhb.fr/sc_humaines/psycho_expe/labos/expe/)

[xlviii] AAFE 99.5.14. Note "Recommandations pour l'établissement des horaires journaliers.", s.n., s.l., s.d.

[xlix] AAFE 99.5.3-5. Letter from Frans Maes to Gaston Moentjens. Flandria, 26 March 1951.

[l] AAFE 15.4.7-11. Rapport sur le fonctionnement de l'école primaire des Rev. Soeurs du précieux Sang à Bamania (école de Filles). P. Vertenten, Bamanya, 8 November 1930. [original quotation in French]

[li] "Uit brieven van Z.E.P. Vertenten aan de studenten der apostolische school te Assche". In *Annalen*, 1928, 10, p. 219. [original quotation in Dutch]

[lii] For example, even in 1950 Father Pattheeuws wrote: "*Veel negers zijn voor een eerste stap maar ze zijn te rap moet.*" In *Annalen*, 1950, October, p. 140.

[liii] AAFE 101.4.10-11. Report on the inspection in the boys' school for Batswa in Flandria, 1939. G. Hulstaert, Flandria, 2 October 1939. [original quotation in Dutch]

[liv] AAFE 35.4.7. Rapport sur l'école professionnelle H.C.B. Flandria. G. Hulstaert, Flandria, 28 September 1928. [original quotation in French]

[lv] AAFE 34.4.10. Ecole Professionnelle H.C.B. Rapport trimestriel sur l'école, mars 1929. G. Hulstaert, Flandria, 6 April 1929. [original quotation in French]

[lvi] AAFE 15.5.11. Horaire des classes. Ecole primaire (garçons). P. Vertenten, Wafanya, 17 June 1930.

[lvii] AAFE 1.5.1-2. Report about the rural school of Mpenjele, 1941. s.n.

[lviii] AAFE 75.3.5. Horaire de la première année primaire. J. Jacobs, Bamanya, 24 February 1954.

[lix] Rieks, A. (1939). Een doodgewone namiddag. In *Annals*, 3, p. 56. This article was written under a pseudonym. The author, Henri Adriaensen, had been in the Congo from 1934 to 1937, first as head of the mission printing press in Coquilhatville and afterwards as director of the boarding school in Bamanya. The article, which was published after his return to Belgium, is more than probably

about Bamanya. See De Rop, A. & Vlamynck, J. (1971). *Bibliografie van de Missionarissen van het H. Hart. Belgische Provincie. 1921-1971*. Borgerhout: Missionarissen van het Heilig Hart, p. 1-2; Vereecken, J. (1985). *Wij gedenken. Tweede reeks biografische schetsen van M.S.C. van de Belgische Provincie*. Borgerhout: Missionarissen van het Heilig Hart, p. 31.

[lx] De Rop, A. (1947). Een dagje in Imbonga. In *Annals*, May, p. 67.

[lxi] *Annalen*, March 1957, p. 37. [original quotation in Dutch]

[lxii] AAFE 4.1.12 - 2.1. Report from the school inspectors, girls' school Bamanya, 1937. G. Hulstaert, Bamanya, 21 June 1937. [original quotation in Dutch]

[lxiii] AAFE 4.4.5-9. Inspection report on the boys' primary school Bamanya, 1936. G. Hulstaert, Coquilhatville, 23 October 1936. [original quotation in French]

[lxiv] AAFE 101.4.10-11. Report on the inspection of the boys' school for Batswa in Flandria, 1939. G. Hulstaert, Flandria, 3 October 1939. [original quotation in Dutch]

[lxv] AAFE 1.1.4. Report on the inspection of the girls' school in Bamanya, 1942. G. Hulstaert, Bamanya, 12 November 1942. [original quotation in Dutch]

[lxvi] AAFE 12.5.6. Report on the inspection of the girls' school in Bamanya, 1944. G. Hulstaert, Bamanya, 17 November 1944. [original quotation in Dutch]

[lxvii] AAFE 15.5.8-10. Rapport sur le fonctionnement de l'école primaire à Wafania. P. Vertenten, Wafania, 1 June 1930. [original quotation in French]

[lxviii] AAFE 4.4.14-5.3. Inspection of the girls' school, Bamanya, 1936. G. Hulstaert, Coquilhatville, 20 October 1936. [original quotation in Dutch]

[lxix] AAFE 12.5.3-5. Report about the inspection of the primary school and teacher training college in Bamanya, 1944. G. Hulstaert, Bamanya, 4 November 1944.

[lxx] AAFE 75.3.15-4.3. Inspection report of the subsidiary schools, 1954. 8 schools were mentioned, all set up between 1952 and 1954.

[lxxi] AAFE 99.4.7-10. Inspection report of the boy's school in Flandria, 21-23 June 1951. G. Moentjens, Bokote, 28 October 1951. [original quotation in Dutch]

[lxxii] AAFE 75.3.10-13. Inspection report of the subsidiary school of Beambo, 1954. G. Moentjens, Flandria, 28 August 1954.

[lxxiii] AAFE 15.1.3-7. Bamanya. Report about the girls' school. School year 1934, Primary school. Sister Auxilia.

[lxxiv] AAFE 4.1.12-2.1. Report of the school inspection of the girls' school in Bamanya, 1937. G. Hulstaert, Bamanya, 21 June 1937. [original quotation in Dutch]

[lxxv] AAFE 4.4.5-9. Report of the inspection of the boys' primary school in

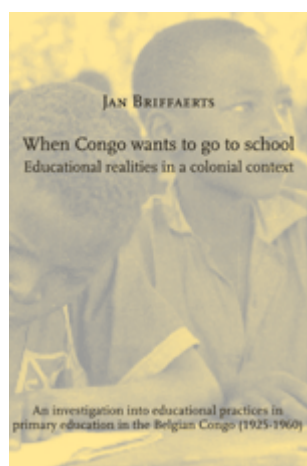
- Bamanya, 1936. G. Hulstaert, Coquilhatville, 23 October 1936. [original quotation in French]
- [lxxvi] AAFE 1.5.6. Report of the inspection of the boys' primary school in Bamanya, October 1941. G. Hulstaert, Bamanya, 7 October 1941. [original quotation in Dutch]
- [lxxvii] AAFE 1.1.2-3. Report of the inspection of the boys' school in Bamanya, 1942. G. Hulstaert, Bamanya, 11 November 1942. [original quotation in Dutch]
- [lxxviii] AAFE 101.4.10-11. Report on the inspection of the boys' school for Batswa in Flandria, 1939. G. Hulstaert, Flandria, 3 October 1939. [original quotation in Dutch]
- [lxxix] AAFE 1.1.2-3. Report of the inspection of the boys' school in Bamanya, 1942. G. Hulstaert, Bamanya, 11 November 1942. [original quotation in Dutch]
- [lxxx] AAFE 101.4.1. Letter from Hulstaert to the school management in Flandria. Bamanya, 5 January 1941. [original quotation in Dutch]
- [lxxxii] AAFE 101.4.9. Report on the inspection in the girls' school in Flandria, 1939. G. Hulstaert, Flandria, 2 October 1939. [original quotation in Dutch]
- [lxxxiii] AAFE 1.1.4. Verslag over de inspectie in de meisjesschool te Bamanya, 1942. G. Hulstaert, Bamanya, 12 November 1942.
- [lxxxiii] [cleanliness of the body, cleanliness of the house, cleanliness of the linen, the family meal, a well cared for village, ...]
- [lxxxiv] AAFE 3.5.10-12, Letter by J. Daxhelet, *chef du territoire ad interim*, to the MSC in Bamanya, with *circulaire* from the *Gouvernement Général*, *fixant les conditions d'un concours ouvert par le Gouvernement de la colonie à la fois en Afrique et en Europe pour appeler, en vue de faciliter l'enseignement des pratiques d'hygiène élémentaire, à l'aide de tableaux didactiques destinés aux écoles pour indigènes du Congo Belge, les oeuvres les meilleurs et les plus éloquents*. 2 p. Coquilhatville, 3 January 1940.
- [lxxxv] The *paysannats* were large enclosed agricultural areas, which were divided among Congolese inhabitants. Led by agronomists the farmers on these lots were taught agricultural methods that combated erosion and increased yields. Through the foundation of cooperatives farmers could buy tools and sell their products together. See Cleys, B. (2003). *Andries Dequae. De zelfgenoegzaamheid van een koloniaal bestuur (1950-1954)*.
- [lxxxvi] AAFE 99.3.1. Letter from G. Moentjes to the school directors. Coquilhatville, 9 January 1952. [original quotation in Dutch]
- [lxxxvii] AAFE 15.1.3-7. Bamanya. report about the girls' school. School year 1934, primary school. Sister Auxilia.

- [lxxxviii] AAFE 101.4.10-11. Verslag over de inspectie in de jongensschool voor Batswa te Flandria, 1939. G. Hulstaert, Flandria, 3 October 1939.
- [lxxxix] AAFE 10.3.8-13. Rapport d'inspection de l'école primaire pour garçons indigènes à Bamanya. 7, 9, 10 November 1950. G. Moentjens, Coquilhatville, 3 December 1950. [original quotation in French]
- [xc] AAFE 9.3.4-4.6. Rapport d'inspection de l'école primaire et de l'école de moniteurs à Bamanya. G. Moentjens, Coquilhatville, 31 September 1952. [original quotation in French]
- [xci] Interview with Stéphane Boale, in Sint-Joost-ten-Noode, 22 September 2003.
- [xcii] AAFE 101.4.9. Report on the inspection of the girls' school in Flandria, 1939. G. Hulstaert, Flandria, 2 October 1939. [original quotation in French]
- [xciii] AAFE 100.1.9. Inspection report of the boys' school (Batswa) in Flandria, 1950. G. Moentjens, Tshuapa, 11 October 1950. [original quotation in French]
- [xciv] AAFE 4.3.12-4.1. Rapport sur l'inspection de l'école primaire de Bamanya, 1937. G. Hulstaert, Bamanya, 18 June 1937. [original quotation in French]
- [xcv] AAFE 101.5.7-8. Leçon de calcul. P. Vertenten, à bord du Theresita, 6 April 1936; AAFE 101.5.9-10. Petite causerie de chaque jour (quelques minutes seulement) sur la charité. P. Vertenten, *Jeudi Saint* 1936.
- [xcvi] AAFE 101.4.10-11. Report about the inspection of the boys' school for Batswa in Flandria, 1939. G. Hulstaert, Flandria, 2 October 1939. [original quotation in Dutch]
- [xcvii] Ibidem. [original quotation in Dutch]
- [xcviii] Ibidem. [original quotation in Dutch]
- [xcix] AAFE 15.3.4-8. Rapport sur le fonctionnement de l'école primaire à Mondombe, 1930. P. Vertenten, Mondombe, 24 December 1930. (original quotation in French)
- [c] AAFE 3.5.13-14. Girls' primary school, Bamanya, 1938. Sister Auxilia, Bamanya, 31 December 1938. [original quotation in Dutch]
- [ci] AAFE 4.1.12-2.1. Report on the school inspection, girls' school in Bamanya. G. Hulstaert, Bamanya, 21 June 1937. [original quotation in Dutch]
- [cii] AAFE 100.1.11-14. Inspection report of the boys' school (Batswa) of Flandria, 1950. G. Moentjens, op de Tshuapa, 11 October 1950. [original quotation in Dutch]
- [ciii] AAFE 11.3.3-7. Rapport d'inspection de l'établissement des Soeurs Missionnaires du Précieux Sang à Bamanya, 1947. M. Vanmeerbeeck, *inspecteur-adjoint au service provincial de l'enseignement*, Coquilhatville, 8 May 1947. [original quotation in French]



- [civ] AAFE 12.1.1-3. Letter from G. Wauters to Pater vicarius delegatus. Bamanya, 23 September 1947.
- [cv] AAFE 12.5.1. Inspection of the girls' school in Bamanya, 1946. F. Cobbaut, Bamanya, 28 September 1946. [original quotation in Dutch]
- [cvi] AAFE 12.5.6. Report of the inspection of the girls' school in Bamanya, 1944. G. Hulstaert, Bamanya, 17 November 1944. [original quotation in Dutch]
- [cvii] AAFE 1.1.2-3. Report on the inspection of the boys' school in Bamanya 1942. G. Hulstaert, Bamanya, 11 November 1942. [original quotation in Dutch]
- [cviii] AAFE 4.1.12-2.1. Report on the school inspection of the girls' school in Bamanya 1937. G. Hulstaert, Bamanya, 21 June 1937. [original quotation in Dutch]
- [cix] AAFE 4.3.11-4.1. Rapport sur l'inspection de l'école primaire de Bamanya, 1937. G. Hulstaert, Bamanya, 18 June 1937. [original quotation in French]
- [cx] AAFE 9.4.7-12. Rapport d'inspection de l'école primaire et de l'école de moniteurs à Bamanya. G. Moentjens, Coquilhatville, September 1951. (original quotation in French)
- [cxi] AAFE 10.3.8-13. Rapport d'inspection de l'école primaire pour garçons indigènes à Bamanya. G. Moentjens, Coquilhatville, 3 December 1950. [original quotation in French]
- [cxii] Ibidem. [original quotation in French]
- [cxiii] AAFE 10.3.5-7. Rapport d'inspection de l'école de moniteurs à Bamanya. G. Moentjens, Coquilhatville, 7 December 1950. [original quotation in French]
- [cxiv] AAFE 9.4.7-12. Rapport d'inspection de l'école primaire et de l'école de moniteurs de Bamanya, 1951. G. Moentjens, Coquilhatville, 10 September 1951. [original quotation in French]
- [cxv] AAFE 9.3.4-4.1. Rapport d'inspection de l'école primaire et de l'école de moniteurs à Bamanya, 1952. G. Moentjens, Coquilhatville, 11 September 1952. [original quotation in French]
- [cxvi] AAFE 9.4.7-12. Rapport d'inspection de l'école primaire et de l'école de moniteurs de Bamanya, 1951. G. Moentjens, Coquilhatville, 10 September 1951. [original quotation in French]
- [cxvii] Africa Archive Brussels, electronic inventories, no. 12452. Rapport d'inspection n° 57. Ecole primaire centrale urbaine pour filles indigènes à Coquilhatville, 29-30 August et 1-2 September 1950. Eloye, provincial inspector. [original quotation in French]
- [cxviii] AAFE 95.3.12-13. Huileries du Congo Belge, s.c.r.l. - District de Flandria. Ecole primaire centrale. Rapport scolaire annuel 1958-1959. F. Van Linden,

# When Congo Wants To Go To School - Part III - Acti Cesa



A few years ago Catherine Coquery-Vidrovitch wrote about the results of the educational system in the Belgian Congo that “(This) in depth work concerning mentalities was started to be felt from 1945. **[i]** We have tried to approach the issue of the effects of the missionary education from two angles. On the one hand, on the basis of the written testimonies that can be found, from which it is apparent how the Congolese reacted, how they acted and what they thought about that education. Publications in which the opinion of the Congolese pupils and former pupils can be found were sought as contemporary sources. Concrete, extensive and detailed research was carried out into one of those publications, *La Voix du Congolais*. On the other hand, it is possible to make use of memories. These are preferably the memories of the people themselves. A number of interviews with the Congolese helped complement the very sparse literature available in this regard.

When considering this theme, the original boundaries of the research subject were slightly deviated from. The research subject was deviated from as regards the material, as the

interviews are situated both within but also partly outside the mission area of the MSC. The existing research results that were consulted and used also relate to areas outside the Tshuapa region. Moreover, the research subject was deviated from with regard to content due to the conclusion that research into the effects of education is inextricably connected to the “memory” of the colonial period. Consequently, it seemed interesting to us to take the memories of former pupils into account. That has the undeniable advantage that the image drawn may be confronted to a certain extent with the memories of the Congolese.

In the previous four chapters, written material was primarily collected that spoke about the events that took place in and around the school in the mission area of the MSC. The image created as a result is perhaps still not very clear but the outlines may be discerned. Naturally coloured by all the information I collected myself as a researcher and undoubtedly also coloured by the information I did not collect, I did not think it very useful to consider all that material again in a conclusive chapter and to attempt to distil a summarising image from that.

I will therefore restrict my conclusion to an indication of the image drawn and the formulation of a number of considerations regarding the way in which this past is handled and the role this research may hopefully play in it.

NOTE:

[i] Tshimanga, C. (2001). *Jeunesse, formation et société au Congo/Kinshasa 1890-1960*. Paris: L'Harmattan. p. 5 (préface). [original quotation in French]

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## When Congo Wants To Go To School - The Short Term: Reactions



*Effects on the colonists: initiation of an African science of education?*

In 1957 Albert Gille, Director of Education at the Ministry for Colonies, wrote that the biggest problem of education at that time remained the lack of well-trained teachers. He claimed that the quality of the teaching staff remained low and that there would be no improvement over the next few years.[i]

There was not much opportunity to climb the social ladder. There were very few signs that the educational principles had changed under the impulse of Buisserets policy, which indeed 'broke open' the educational system. In fact, education in the

Congo then became 'metropolised',[ii] but the changes in the curriculum were not accompanied by a significantly different composition of the body of teachers. The impact of the changes was quantitatively too limited to be able to bring about a general change in the short term. Until after independence, education would still remain almost completely in the hands of the mission congregations.

The early Congolese universities did produce some scientific research on education, but this research did not break out of the familiar straightjacket either. At the University of Lovanium research results and opinions in the field of education were published in the *Revue pédagogique*, which has already been mentioned. At the Official University Paul Georis was particularly active in the area of educationalism, but the results of his investigations only appeared after independence.[iii] Georis was the head of a so-called "interracial" high school in Stanleyville for four years and studied the possibilities of developing educational theory adapted to African circumstances there. His colleagues did the same in Luluaburg and Lodja. The most important elements that came to the fore in the research on such new educational theories, which he published in 1962 (but had written before independence), were the community life of the Congolese, the uniqueness of Congolese culture and respect for foreign cultures. In addition, the importance of an improvement of the level of education was also emphasised. Georis also referred to the splitting of education into mass- and elite-education. That it was necessary to point out, even in this publication, which was written in rather 'progressive' milieus, that "*the qualitative equality of the intelligence of the Black and the White can be proven*" is telling of the zeitgeist. In that respect the author also argued for a uniformity and equivalence in the primary education system for all levels of the population.

However, there were a number of obstacles in the way of the development towards a balanced educational system. Besides the vast size of the country and - here too - the poor quality of the teaching body, Georis mentioned the Congolese attachment to their ancestral traditions and the influence of magic as primary elements. Generally speaking, he seemed to argue for blending the traditional African values with imported Western ideas, which naturally did not prevent him from arguing within a progressive or developmental paradigm. Despite all his good intentions, he regularly remained bogged down in the model of 'civilisation versus primitivism'. The "black", he concluded in his study, could free himself from his neuroses and his complexes. Apparently that was still necessary.

On the other hand, an 1958 editorial contribution in the *Revue Pédagogique* about the “programmes métropolitains” and the adaptation of education, stated that: “*In the Congo, we have for a long time attempted clumsy and timid adaptations, which proved inoperative. Now we are turning away from this path and are increasingly adopting the metropolitan curricula from Belgium, following the example of France, which has applied the French curricula for a long time.*” Consequently, at that time, there was some hard thinking going on in both university milieus concerning the direction of education. In both cases questions were being asked aloud about the manner in which things had been done in the past. It is not illogical that in university circles at that time more discerning and detailed analyses were being made. There was a great deal of political activism at that time: in 1956 the manifestos of *Conscience Africaine* and the ABAKO had already been published and in 1958 the MNC of Lumumba and Ileo was formed; local council elections were also organised in 1958. The predominant attitude, also applicable to the educationalists, was still very expectant, cautious and doubtful.[iv] Even the contribution mentioned above, after initially pleading pro *métropolisation*, stated that it was very unclear what the Africans really wanted. They longed for Western education, to be able to get Western diplomas, because that was the only way to be recognised as an equal. But at the same time they also wanted something else and the next step would then have to be recovering their own cultural identity. The periodical’s attitude was summed up well in the last sentence of the contribution: “*These are the general and imprecise assertions that must nevertheless be taken into account.*”

## *Effects on the colonised: the needle in the haystack*

### *2.1. At a university level*

If we want to judge the effects of education, we must necessarily search for the voices of the people involved and those are primarily the Congolese. In the case of the universities and the science of education itself, this voice did not ring out very loudly. The reasons for this are not hard to find: it was too late and there were too few of them. At the University of Lovanium the first seven Congolese students graduated in June 1955 from the first year of a bachelor in Educational Science. Of these only two graduated three years later in June 1958 with a master’s (these were two priests, Michel Karikunzura and Ildephonse Kamiya).[v] In Elisabethville, where the ‘Official’ University operated from 1956, a ‘School for Educational Sciences’ was set up from the beginning. During the academic year 1957-1958 five African students were enrolled in the first year of the bachelor’s

degree at the school (there were a total of 17 African students enrolled at the University at that time). In Lovanium there were 110 African students, of which 18 studied educational sciences.[vi]

Congolese writing only seldom found its way into scientific publications published in the academic milieu. In 1957 a contribution by the Congolese Kimba, a journalist with the newspaper *L'Essor du Congo*, appeared in the *Revue Pédagogique*. He wrote about *"What the Congolese expect from the teaching of French"*. [vii] His contribution was only four pages long and was even then introduced with a few strong considerations from the editors. The introduction indicates that it was still very uncommon at that time for a Congolese to be able to vent his opinion in a scientific publication or make a contribution at all. It stated: *"It is interesting to hear the opinion of a Congolese on the matter"*. In his contribution Kimba briefly stated the reasons why the Congolese wanted to learn to speak French: it was the only way to create a *"trait d'union"* between all Congolese population groups, and to achieve a common language. Above all French was the only means that would help them to gain access to higher civilisation.

However, the article also contained a very subtle example of the manner in which colonial relations worked. The author summed up everyday situations from which it appeared that Congolese learning French was still not considered as an obvious matter. He stated that differences still existed in the manner in which the Congolese and the Europeans interpreted some situations. By way of illustration he gave the following example: *"One expression has an odd interpretation with the Congolese: this is the common expression 'Il n'y a personne?' [tr.-Is anybody in?] which some Europeans use to ask after the person in charge. The Congolese translate this phrase literally and in this way the Europeans disregard their human nature by considering them beings that do not have the right to be called 'personne = être humain' [tr-a person or human being]. This is certainly an error of interpretation on the part of the Congolese. The sense the European gives to this phrase is different to that of the Congolese. We know that responsible jobs are still held by the Europeans, from which stems the frequent use of the expression 'Il n'y a personne!', i.e. 'European' in the current situation."* However, much the author tried to make this appear as a special or divergent meaning that had to be given to the cited words, the true meaning and scope of this anecdote are still clearly apparent here. It is difficult to decide whether this was very deep

naivety or supreme irony, as the rest of the article does not display any critical attitude at all towards the colonists. Kimba did not give the impression of wanting to wake sleeping dogs. On the contrary his approach tried to be as conciliatory as possible.

The vast majority of the contributions published in the *Revue Pédagogique* were written by white people, of which the majority were members of religious congregations. In the last year the journal was published, two other contributions by Congolese authors appeared. A F. Lumpungu, *teaching assistant*, wrote a piece on the educational value of games.[viii] Antoine Kimponto, *head teaching assistant*, made a brief contribution on the influence the teaching assistant must exercise on the children in an urban environment. His article described the city as a place of ruination. The people had to live so close to each other in the *Centres Extra Coutumiers* that it seemed almost impossible to lead a hygienic and moral life. The teacher was then a man with a mission, and that mission was clearly an extension of the work of 'real' missionaries. He must work as a spiritual guide through the darkness and lead by example of his own lifestyle. That a number of *teaching assistants* did not correspond to that picture was also a true scandal. The opinion put forward in the contribution was overly-simplified and above all showed the religious workers in a good light. "*Undoubtedly, teaching assistants know well that priests are also people with all their failings. But they also know that the priests have a divine mission to fulfil.*"[ix] According to the author, cooperation with the parents and with the priest was one of the most important tasks of the teacher.



## 2.2. In the media

The content of these Congolese contributions was not especially shocking or innovative, and above all too modest to be able to exert any influence. A similar

conclusion could have been drawn concerning the media that reached a broader public (i.e. the daily newspapers). Here again, it was precisely the voice of the Congolese which was seldom to be heard. Van Bol, who wrote a short book on the press in Congo in 1959, stated that it was certainly not originally intended to inform the Congolese, let alone to educate them. On the other hand it cannot be denied that the creation of a Congolese voice in the colonial press must be considered one of the effects of education. Also according to Van Bol several of

these newspapers decided to make space available for reactions from the Congolese themselves after the War. All in all it was not a great success: only the largest newspapers did so effectively. *Le Courrier d'Afrique*, despite being the press organ of the church and the missions in the Congo, had launched a supplement 'by and for the Congolese', which would become a separate publication from 1957 (*Présence Congolaise*, a name derived from *Présence Africaine*). *L'Avenir*, from Leopoldville had also recruited a number of Congolese editors by the early 1950s.[x] Kimba was the only Congolese editor at that time at the *Essor du Congo*. It was not until the end of the 1950s that there was any sign of publications completely in the hands of Congolese editorial staff. The only exception, which can be mentioned, is the publication of *La Voix du Congolais*.

As late as 1959 the following opinions could be read in a scientific contribution on Congolese literature and authors. The fact that the Belgians had taught the Congolese little to no French before the Second World War could not be criticised. The author referred to arguments from people like the Senegalese Cheikh Anta Diop, who was the first to blame the colonial powers in his country for only teaching the Africans French and, in this way, denying them any chance of a form of cultural autonomy.[xi] The Belgians, in contrast, had not done anything wrong in this respect: "*We did nothing, from 1885 to 1921, to systematically detribalise the Congolese.*" Even so, the same author concluded that they had not done anything to prevent the Congolese from shifting from an oral culture to the written counterpart either. After all, education had been a primary factor in the development of literacy among the Congolese and as a consequence in the transition to a written culture. These ideas are also present in the testimonies of the Congolese today. The ancestors had understood that they could make progress by learning to read and write, or at least make advantageous use of it in their relationships with the colonists.

In the same article the first traces of an early Congolese literature (meaning literature written by the Congolese) were discussed. The author gave the periodical *Brousse* as the first interesting publication, published by a society that called itself *Amis de l'Art Indigène*, which stood under the patronage of a whole series of personalities from the colonial establishment (including the governor-general, important industrialists and the Catholic bishops). *Brousse* was the first periodical to publish stories written by the Congolese, from the end of the 1930s. These publications were within the aims of the periodical, the 'preservation of the



oral culture'. In most cases it related to the publication of fables, adaptations of local stories or works of fiction.[xii] A number of stories by Antoine Bolamba, who would later become the editor-in-chief of *La Voix du Congolais*, were published even before the war. However, there are no traces of non-fiction or opinions published in the press or other publications before 1945, at least not in French. Considering the situation of education, that cannot be considered a great surprise. Naturally it is harder to make observations on the formation of the opinions of the Congolese for publications in local languages.

### 2.3. Regional

Similar trends may also be observed at a regional level, for example in the mission area of the MSC. In his overview of the local press Vinck reported a whole series of publications, in which the Congolese only rarely voiced critical opinions. Besides the periodicals that were published by the missionaries, there were also a few initiatives by the administration, although it is probably more accurate to state that these were taken by a few specific officials. That was also the case in Coquilhatville. In 1947 the periodical *Mbandaka* was formed, originally intended for reporting sports news. The publication was in the hands of a colonial official, Victor Brébant, the local *chef du bureau d'information*. After a while the content of the publication was broadened to general news. The editorial staff and the editor in chief were made up of the Congolese clerks at the information service, including Justin Bomboko.[xiii] According to his successor, Albert Bolela, it was under his initiative that the periodical applied itself to social, economic and political topics. All, he added, "*conforming to the general policy of the Government*". That this was probably realised under strong censorship from the administration is apparent from the latter: he described Bomboko's position as "*handicapped by the department of Native Affairs*".[xiv] Bolela wrote that *Mbandaka* enjoyed immediate success, particularly with the "*class of the population who were insufficiently educated*", by which he probably meant those who knew no French.

Most 'Congolese' periodicals that started before independence in the mission area of the MSC, were in fact founded at the initiative of the Catholic (and sometimes the Protestant) missionaries. The publications concerned were mostly those in which the missionaries themselves wrote articles and only allowed a few contributions by the Congolese. Only one of them began, in the course of time, to comment on the news and allowed the Congolese to express their views in their

own language. Paul Ngoi declared in 1955 in the periodical *Lokole*: “*In other regions of the Colony, the natives already have their own press in their own language. Do the Nkundo-Mongo who inhabit a vast territory not deserve their own newspaper? It is not enough to always rely on our civiliser. We are responsible for our country’s progress. (...) consequently we have judged it useful to publish a periodical ourselves under our management.*”[xv] The great problems of colonial society were discussed in the paper according to Vinck: “*In the beginning they were still considered from a traditionalist point of view but these questions were quickly asked with a view to the interpretation of events and development in current affairs: fundamental ownership, the use of African languages in public life and education, the fall in the birth rate with the mongo, the organisation of justice, the development of the colony and when nearing independence opinions were expressed relatively freely on major political topics and the formation of political parties.*”[xvi] This therefore only applies to the last five years of colonisation. We cannot, in any case, state with any certainty that the impact of these publications was very important. The circulations were fairly limited (e.g. 1500 copies of *Lokole* were published in 1956; after a few years Mbandaka managed to reach something over 2000 copies).

### *The voice of the Congolese*

#### *3.1. The universe of the évolué*

It may be deduced from the above that it was the *évolués*, who emphatically wished to become the equals of the whites and therefore also sought and demanded their channels of opinion from the coloniser. *Evolués*, were defined in the first instance by the fact that they had integrated a certain level of western values in their lifestyle. The medium in which they developed emancipation and the best-known and studied example of this question is the publication of *La Voix du Congolais*. The periodical was set up in 1945 and was published until 1959. In the beginning it was published every two months and from July 1946 it became a monthly periodical.[xvii] The precise history of its foundation is rather difficult to reconstruct, but from the different sources reporting on it the following story can be distilled. The initiative for the publication came from the colonial administration. An official in the colonial administration, Jean Paul Quix, is usually indicated. In 1943 he was charged by the governor-general with organising a new department in the colonial administration, the *Service de l’Information pour indigènes*. The original requirement for setting up such a publication would probably have come from *évolués*, who had been admitted to a number of

associations of Europeans (e.g. Antoine Bolamba, through *Brousse*).

On the occasion of the tenth anniversary of *La Voix* in 1955, one of the editors of the periodical, Joseph Davier, wrote an overview in which he revealed the role of Quix. He described his task as “finding a *soupape de sûreté*”, and indicated the existing unrest of a large number of Congolese as one of the incentives for the initiative that was taken. In very moderate phrases he related the unrest that was the basis of the periodical, and the ambivalent attitude that was held by many people towards the initiative: “*I will always remember those stormy sessions in which each of us poured out our excessively ulcerated spleen to Mr Quix, as though he were responsible. I also remember the calm serenity with which he faced our complaints and calmed our poor nerves. Nobody could understand that an official could bear these bitter torrents and criticisms of the Belgian policy without turning a hair; they accused him of ‘l’Oeuil de la Sûreté’ (the Secret Service) that would soon come and cause hardship on the foolhardy people that had confided him all the sorrows of their heart.*”[xviii] The author of the contribution was not excessively critical: the earlier problematic circumstances had improved long ago, and interracial relations had become “(...) *in general (...) excellent*”. This indicates that the references to these relations, made very cautiously and well wrapped up at the time, probably have to be taken seriously. Davier wrote for example about the attitude of the Congolese towards the Belgians: “*It goes without saying that in our Congolese milieu, the Belgians received a bad press.*” It also concedes that the tone of the *évolués* was still not very radicalised in 1955 and that no real open opposition to the coloniser existed or could exist there. Kadima-Tshimanga, who looked at what happened from a very different perspective (and *a posteriori*), stated that the formation of the periodical “(...) *appears an opportunistic political measure. It served, before the official installation of the status of the évolués with the civic and registration certificate of merit, to channel forces which had no outlet.*”[xix]

There is no doubt that the Belgian colonists at first carefully inspected the contents of *La Voix*. The control certainly always continued to exist, the periodical was always under the supervision of an information official, but there is not much more information on that available. It is also impossible to describe in any detail the exact development of the ideas and standpoints and, above all, the degree of freedom of the editorial staff. On the other hand, the periodical does seem to be a good indicator of the post-war development of Congolese society. In the initial

period some articles raised very negative reactions from the establishment. They regularly had to defend themselves, as happened with the article *"Nos écrits et leur but"* by Joseph Tamba: *"On reading our writing, some people appear to have the impression that the blacks and more particularly the 'évolués', are excessively critical and even have a tendency to deny the benefits of civilisation. The proof is that in reply to our articles, we are told again and again who the black people were before the whites arrived and who we would still be today, without the presence of the Europeans in the Congo."*[xx] Thirteen years later, in 1959, Van Bol wrote about *La Voix* (and about another publication of the colonial administration, *Nos Images*): *"These two publications which exactly filled the desires of the indigenous population in their time, today only reflect the more moderate and official opinions of these."*[xxi] Bolamba admitted that: *"(...) we must confess that our periodical is currently no longer able to fulfil its role as the mouthpiece of the Congolese with very great effectiveness."*[xxii] That primarily shows that in the post-war years an enormous increase in consciousness had occurred in the Congolese population, but this does not completely solve the mystery of the exact attitude and ideas of the contributors of the periodical. No matter how well-behaved it was, *La Voix* was an important publication and it probably fulfilled a symbolic function for many Congolese.

Because it was written by Congolese *évolués*, and considered topics that interested them, *La Voix* is a very interesting object of study. In the past decades there have already been a number of academic studies of the periodical, especially by Congolese authors. In his study on *La Voix du Congolais*, Pius Ngandu mentioned a number of criteria that the *évolués* used to define themselves. The contents of these make it embarrassingly clear how contradictory the creation of this category of 'evolved person' was. According to Ngandu a first criterion was the distance to the traditional way of life, to *"coutume"*. The 'evolved' made that clear in their reactions themselves, including those printed in *La Voix*. They loaded the concept of 'primitivism' with a pejorative connotation. Ngandu correctly remarked that in Congo *"the assimilation movement arose, not from the coloniser but the colonised"*. He also stated that neither the missionaries nor the administration had made any attempt to assimilate the Congolese (and, for example, for the MSC that was very definitely not the case). Still there were a number of political choices, or really administrative creations from the colonisers that the Congolese could use as aids to help them to realise their longing for assimilation. For example, the creation of urban areas (the C.E.C.'s), in which a

way of life different from that in the countryside came into existence and where the social control that accompanied the traditional way of life was much less tangible.

Besides this, other even more important factors played a part in this self-definition. There was for instance the general level of education that was reached. The boundary is difficult to define exactly but it was generally accepted that the *évolué* should at least have completed primary school. Knowledge of French seems to have been a clearer evaluation criterion. Whoever spoke French, could always communicate with the whites. The most important element could simply be described as 'lifestyle' but interpreted according to western norms. Of course, these included the moral values inculcated at school, but also the material lifestyle had to be sufficiently similar to that of the West. To fulfil this last condition required sufficient financial means. As a result Ngandu eventually, ten years after independence, regretted that it was precisely this requirement that ensured that the Congolese always strove with inexhaustible eagerness for the highest functions and the best paid jobs: "*Later, it was always in order to achieve a higher salary that the Evolués abandoned the offices to throw themselves onto ministerial positions. The model children of the Belgians sought to impose their will on the masses, in their turn to become exploiters, the oppressors of their brothers.*" Ngabu further claimed that *La Voix du Congolais* had cooperated particularly actively by publishing all manner of articles, contributions, interviews about and with the people who 'succeeded' and who had received formal recognition of their evolved status (the *carte de mérite civique* or the *carte d'immatriculation*). Naturally, the question is whether this occurred only at the initiative of the *évolués* in the editorial staff. It is possible that there was a certain pressure from above to do this, but it would be very difficult to find out.

In any event, from earlier research it seems that *La Voix* offers an interesting universe for the interpretation of the complex relationships between colonists and *évolués*, *évolués* and non-*évolués*, and among *évolués*. The abovementioned criteria were not at all watertight. They leaned on one main foundation: in the last instance the colonial administration decided whether a statute was recognised or not. That was the case *de iure* in the context of the handing out of the *carte de mérite civique* and was, as has already been said, laid down in a very vague legal definition. It is more than likely that this was also the case in daily life. There was a sort of deliberate lack of certainty about what being civilised meant which also

made it possible for there to be different categories of *évolués*. Naturally, the differences among *évolués* were important, to the extent that people were eager to be as 'real' as possible. It was about being as evolved as possible. Whoever was only considered so because he was recognized as such by the Belgians for some obscure reason or another, could be sure to arouse the disdain of the others. They therefore appealed to other 'objective' criteria to distinguish themselves and to position themselves better in society. Merely a normal social phenomenon, one could say.

A consequence of this was that the *évolués* themselves began to consider their land as a land without a culture and they began to take on the role of 'civiliser' towards their non-evolved fellow countrymen. The initiative of Buisseret to generalise the European curriculum in the Congolese schools was very well received as a result. Independent of the motives that formed the foundations of this decision, they represented an end to the fundamental and double frustration that the educational system in the Congo brought with it. Up to this time there had always been Congolese schools and European schools and the curriculum of both had always been different in principle. Bringing the two together not only ensured that the *évolués* were brought to an equal level with the Europeans in an important domain, it also ensured that they were especially distinguished among the other Congolese. The ability to make the distinctions was picked up during education, completely integrated by the *évolués* and illustrated in *La Voix*. In this context the remark made by Kadima-Tshimanga must be quoted: *La Voix du Congolais* was really "*La Voix de l'Evolué*".[xxiii] Naturally, that was the case because the criteria of the concept *évolué* were exactly attuned to this. A person only had a voice when it fitted precisely within the lines of that concept.

### 3.2. Antoine Roger Bolamba: la voix du Congolais.



Antoine Roger Bolamba was a perfect example of this. He was the editor-in-chief of *La Voix du Congolais*. [xxiv] The predominance of the influence of Bolamba in *La Voix*, is apparent from several elements. He wrote the editorial opinions at the beginning of each issue. Of all the journalists of *La Voix* he also wrote the most contributions. In addition he wrote a large proportion of the 'general' sections, such as the *Chroniques* or the *Ephémérides*, in which interesting occurrences and news events were often reported. Above all he did not recoil from taking standpoints or publishing the

contributions by other authors under his own name or that of the editor. In 1975 a study appeared in the *cahiers du CEDAF* in which the content of the articles that appeared in the last full year of publication of the periodical (1959) were analysed linguistically.[xxv] Although it was limited in scope, this study showed among other things that the use of language in the opinion pieces and the politically inspired articles of the editors was rather poor. The difference between the editor-in-chief and the rest of the contributors was very marked, since Bolamba possessed a much more graphic and subtle use of language than his colleagues. Besides this the author also remarked that there were repeated references to the programmes of the *Radio Congo Belge*, which were "better directed than many articles in *La Voix*". The conclusion of the general evaluation of the writing style was: "*If we put aside the articles by Antoine Roger Bolamba and the broadcasts by Belgian Congo Radio, it may be concluded that the writing in La Voix du Congolais is close to zero, i.e. a naïve and unaffected discourse, denuded of any innuendo, which calls 'a spade, a spade'*". These are certainly interpretations that are based on a relatively limited number of sources and come from a study, that was rather technical and used a qualitative linguistic approach. Nonetheless, it seems to me that these pronouncements, which do not concern the essentials of the cited study, are still significant enough for the interpretation of the opinions and contributions of the authors.

This all goes to show, not so much that the periodical was a vehicle for Bolamba, but that his influence was certainly very important and, to consider it from another angle, that he was representative of the ideas and standpoints of *La Voix*. In the last issue of *La Voix* he wrote in a concluding assessment of the periodical:

*"All its attention was paid to the realisation of a fraternal community between Blacks and Whites; it dedicated itself to removing the discrimination which made contact between the two groups of man present here difficult; it stigmatised the abuses of those who made a public display of excessive racism; it always talked in the language of truth and reason, without being afraid of the criticism which evil intentioned men threw at it."*[xxvi] Bolamba probably represented a sort of moderate striving for emancipation on the basis of his own convictions. This meant above all that he did so without being forced by the colonial administration. The fact that he became a cabinet assistant of Buisseret in 1956 indicates that he was on very good terms with the Belgians and that he was a perfectly acceptable character to them. In any event it is certain that he was a very good pupil of the colonial discourse.

In his first editorials Bolamba was undoubtedly the humble servant of his masters. His pen sometimes seemed to be sugar coated. The superiority of the whites over the blacks was certain beyond doubt, and could not have been otherwise considering the long history of western culture. His own people's culture and history was obviously not something that concerned him. This remark should not be understood cynically, it was clearly really the case: *"A large gap actually exists between our civilisers and ourselves. From what does this arise? Very simply from the fact that the Whites have a very superior personality to our own, as a result of slow and profound work over more than two thousand years."*[xxvii] Bolamba was not at all satisfied with the term *colour bar* used by some. He defined the *colour bar* as a form of racial discrimination, either at a political level or at an administrative level. In this he referred to the examples of legal segregation in the United States, South America and South Africa. He claimed that similar forms did not exist in the Belgian colony. However, he would not be so categorical with regard to the administration. It was hard to avoid the concrete examples: segregated shops, station platforms, etc. *"But all this is not intended in a bad way, as we realise that it is not done with a desire to keep us in a position of inferiority and that it is not the result of a rigid political line."* Bolamba had clearly absorbed the colonial discourse very well: *"We can sense in all our civilisers' deeds that they consider the humanity within us and not our ebony skin."*[xxviii]

In 1949 Bolamba published a book (at that time that was an unheard of achievement for a Congolese in itself) on one of the most important social



problems confronting the *évolués*: “*Les problèmes de l’évolution de la femme noire*”.[xxix] Bolamba’s premises were clearly set out in the introduction to his book: Congolese women could not take part in the development of the land, because they were not sufficiently educated. The contrast between education for boys and that for girls, which at that time was also recognised by the administration (it could not be denied) were listed by Bolamba. The concept of *évolution* was prevalent throughout his argument. “*If educated men have taken a leap of ten centuries on the road to civilisation, this is not the same for our women who remain stuck at the initial point of our development.*”[xxx] The problems caused by marriages contracted between educated men and lesser or completely uneducated women would be the subject of the book, he claimed. “*I have shown the abuses which are the main cause for the instability of our households.*”

The book described the marital problem in six chapters: “*On the reflection before marriage*”, “*The serious nature of marriage*”, “*On the harmony and peace within the household*”, “*Practical advice*”, “*Family and morality*” and “*Instruction and education of children*”. It was written completely in agreement with the missionary moral codes and was really just as conservative as the Catholic church itself with regard to women. Its approach was not particularly subtle. The “*caractère sérieux*” of marriage implied for example that marriage with a person of a sickly constitution must be avoided: “*It is necessary to avoid marrying a person from a family where there is hereditary illness, for example, tuberculosis. Some illnesses occasionally have long-term causes. Do not forget, you are called to have children.*”[xxxi] That also implied, in fact, that potential marriage partners should best find out in advance whether they were fertile and this was said in so many words. Marriage should happen as quickly as possible (and that could be at a younger age than in Europe, which was brought in as a reference) and waiting a long time was a bad thing in any event. Once married, it was important to try to be a model family. The woman must be “*matinale*”: she must get up early to do the housework. Naturally, she must take good care of the children. The man had to ensure the woman was well dressed but she must not make unreasonable demands concerning her wardrobe.

There was clearly an attempt to bring about a change in a number of areas in traditional customs and usages of the Congolese. For example with regard to food: “*The housewife should prepare the food in the kitchen itself and not outside,*

*close to the house, in view of passers-by and visitors.*"[xxxii] In fact, the culture of eating posed a number of problems because there seem to have been big differences in that area: Bolamba strongly emphasised that a man should eat at the table together with his wife (which contrasted with the usual custom).[xxxiii] Here, too, the missionary approach was heard in Bolamba's words: *"Discipline is nowhere more apparent than at the table..."* The text was a long list of what was considered exemplary behaviour and was quite without complexes in its prescriptiveness. The woman must be graceful and submissive; the man patient, amiable and understanding: *"Before becoming angry at the vexations of their spouses the men must try to explain their errors to them."* This chapter also practically emphasised that alcoholic drink was the greatest enemy of woman. Drink was also bad for men, but even more so for women. Enough sleep was also important and consequently going out late was not a good idea. Care must also be taken with food, so that the digestion would not hinder sleep. In very guarded and modest terms, warning was also given about sexual excesses or 'abnormalities'. The children, finally, should learn to be obedient and must be disciplined, particularly and above all during their adolescence, which must be considered the period in which a person was the most exposed to all sorts of bad influences and passions.

Throughout this, Bolamba referred to the 'good old times' that he himself had experienced as a young adolescent. It was a time in which it had been much safer and simpler to be an adolescent: *"I often dream of that time when the children of my age steered clear of the dances called 'Maringa', where they would not accept that a man would order them to find loose women at his place, where we would find pleasure in studying, singing, praying, telling stories or when walks in the mountains, excursions in the countryside accompanied by a teacher, a hunter of wild animals, constituted real treats for us. I dream of that time when life was not a dangerous peril for young people as it is today."*[xxxiv] In these places his testimony seems to have a lot in common with what was advocated by the MSC. At the conclusion of his book he finally switched over to an even stronger patriotism and attachment to the colonists: *"We love the Belgians because they are our benefactors, we love them even more because they are our saviours. Let us gather together in the shade of the blue flag with its golden stars, let us search there for the courage and will needed for the development of our fatherland. We entrust our life and our peace to them. Let us give thanks and sing praises as never before for the Belgian Royal Dynasty to which we owe our current*

*tranquillity. The Belgian African Empire will only become a large, strong, beautiful and prosperous country if it respects the following three words: GOD, FAMILY, FATHERLAND.”[xxxv]*

#### *4. La Voix du Congolais: the évolués’ voice*

##### *4.1. Views about society and education*

La Voix paid regular attention to education or related subjects. Most of the articles that had education as a subject were reports about specific schools. The representation that dominated in these contributions was that of optimism, of progress. True to the name they used for themselves, they used phrases like “*jalons de notre progrès*”, “*développement au pas accéléré*”, or “*envisager l’avenir avec confiance*”. Education reached a great proportion of the population, education penetrated to the farthest corners of the primeval jungle, the Congolese themselves gave lessons in very many schools: all of these pronouncements were evidence of an indomitable belief in progress.[xxxvi] This is especially true, because it was just as possible to consider each of these observations from another, less positive side – something that now and again gave rise to more critical approaches. In particular, the demand for more schools was regularly recurring.

In spite of the often conciliatory and sometimes even submissive language used by the people who wrote contributions in *La Voix* there were real problems behind the articles. The problems which came to the fore about the educational system, were part of the broader context of problems linked with the changes taking place in Congolese society now that a large part of its members increasingly adopted the customs and (at least) the vocabulary of European society. Very often more personal problems, that the confrontation of cultures brought about in the relationship between parents and children, were referred to. Mobé wrote about the education of the masses that fell under the responsibility of different groups in society. Besides the missionaries, the colonists and the administration this also included the *évolués*. An exemplary function was reserved for them.[xxxvii] This exemplary function was exercised in the contributions that were published in the periodical. A subject that seemed to be perfectly suitable was that of education in the broad sense and the role of the parents therein. Other important and frequently published themes were the use of language at school, the position of the woman, the development of the educational system and dissatisfaction with the emancipation of the Congolese. That last theme was

almost never present as a subject per se but was often prominent in the background when other subjects were discussed.

#### 4.1.1. *Society and educational problems*

There was a great deal of emphasis placed on the fact that the school should be on the same wavelength as the family. With the regularity of a clock articles or letters were published in which it was stated that education began at home. Obviously, it regularly happened that the parents did not want to cooperate or did not take any account of the fact that the children had certain obligations at school or were not at all interested in school attendance. As early as 1948 a certain Ngandu was very concerned about the deep moral crisis that Congolese society was going through. Dazzled by money, the population only wanted more and more education. This desire for knowledge was certainly positive in itself, but there must be something else to keep the knowledge in check and give it direction. In the moral education of youth the parents had an important responsibility, of which they had to become aware most urgently.[xxxviii] These important social problems in connection with Congolese youth were reported quite regularly. These were usually discussed with great concern by the editors-in-chief: drinking by the young (Colin, 1954), the condition of the youth in the towns (Bolamba, 1956), wholesome literature (Colin, 1956).

In general the contributors often wrote very negatively about their fellow Congolese. In 1948 one contribution stated the following: the blacks had an education without scruples, without shame, and gave way early to their sexual desires. Intellectual degeneration was the consequence. With respect to the European child, *"The latter lives in a more wholesome and less degenerate world. Their parents watch over and follow the development of their senses, they discipline them and arm them against all abuses."* According to the writer, the *évolués* tried to do the same, but once the child left the family circle it only saw bad examples. The only solution was radical: simply shut the children away from the bad environment, by bringing them up in boarding schools. The author compared the blacks with animals and took a Eurocentric point of view, in which the behaviour of his countrymen was talked about in rather pedantic terms: *"Il s'abandonna à sa nature et au déchaînement de ses passions."* It is obvious that a number of people at that time had utterly and completely adopted the European way of doing things and showed no resistance at all to the new way of life, let alone thought about criticising it.[xxxix] Justin Mabanza addressed parents some

years later with a plea that they should educate their own children. He criticised heavily the matriarchate that determined social relations in a number of regions. It was rather common there that children were brought up by other family members than their biological parents. The author described that bluntly as a "*véritable fléau*" and he developed an extended argument to show that this was particularly bad. [xl]

Michel Landu particularly indicated the responsibility of the teachers themselves in an article from 1952. Rather traditionally minded and exaggeratedly law-abiding, his premise was the principle "*The class is only as good as the teacher*", by analogy with classical proverbs such as "*The earth is only as good as man*" or "*We will always end up resembling those we often see*". He followed with a real exhortation: "*That work, politeness, patriotism, Christian virtues stand at the forefront in our classrooms and impose themselves on the public's attention. With patient tenacity and a savoir-faire worthy of high class educators, let us create a climate that forces admiration among our pupils. Indeed, the worth of the class is as good as that of the master.*"[xli] Dominique Iloo, who himself was a teacher, reacted to that article by stating that it was somewhat naive only to look at the teacher. In very many cases the parents' attitude formed a millstone around the teacher's neck. The latter could be as good an example as possible but if the parents did not change their behaviour according to his directions and instruction, it was a lost cause: "*Consider, in passing, the Christian obligation of attending Sunday mass. In the classroom, the teacher talks and helps his children fulfil this obligation. At home the father or mother advise the child against it. (...) Their recurring absences confirm their words and convince their children. In numerous cases the parents are responsible for the misbehaviour of their children.*"

Another important aspect of education did not escape the attention of Iloo. Almost triumphantly he remarked that the level of the pupils was not necessarily improved in comparison to those ten years before: "*What is the reason for this? Is it the books used that are at fault as maintained in n° 73 of the 'Voix du Congolais' (...)?* No! Particularly in the large centres where we live with this modernisation - and unfortunately it is also being felt in the interior - the pupils give way too much to pleasure. The bars and nightclubs they visit make them dreamers at their school desks. The teacher is often mistaken in their looks and their apparent application. They barely remember a few notions which they forget

*the following day.*"[xlii] The observations of another author, Gabriël NgbongboIn, took the same tone. His opinion was that the pupils no longer showed respect any more for the teachers and that the parents agreed with them, rather than standing on the side of the teachers. He begged the parents to do as follows: *"Correct your children if you learn that they have written disgraceful words on the walls. Nor should you allow your children to be members of bands playing in bars. And you parents, do not insult or hit the teachers. They are not insane and would not punish your children without good cause. Allow them to do their work."*[xliii]

Iloo argued, just as others before him, to make the boarding school regime general. Bolamba himself had written an article about it a year earlier. In it he quoted among other things the beliefs of eminent Jesuits, whom he called "specialists in the matter of the black soul". Boarding schools protected the morals of the young black. Youth needed to be confronted with discipline and compulsion: *"If boarding schools, armies, hierarchical associations of young people are maintained everywhere that is because it is considered important for young people to be confined by discipline, a constraint that makes their will more supple and will mould their character."* In many cases these blessings could not come from the parents: *"Certainly, the parents also have an important role to play in their children's education but everyone knows too well that Congolese parents are currently unable to fulfil that role satisfactorily."*[xliv]

According to the editorial staff of *La Voix*, the moral situation of the population did not really seem to improve in the course of the 1950's. Contributions regularly appeared in which authors either regretted the lamentable morals of the young or their parents, or gave tips on 'how it ought to be done'. In 1957 Nkonga wrote: *"Today the time has come that families desire, even make sacrifices for their children's education."* Many parents did not spur their children on with a desire to work, and left that to the upbringing by the school. They agreed with their children too much. According to the author, it did not contribute to a good teaching environment.[xlv] In 1958 a certain Luvuvuma wrote a number of recommendations for the maintenance of a good relationship between the family and the school in *"Quand l'école et la famille formeront-ils une unité au Congo?"* The author observed that very many children were sent away from school. On the part of the school not much effort was made to take account of the character of the children, or simply to find out about it. That caused rancour and regrettable

reactions from the parents. The teachers must remember that they were not employees, they had a vocation. The parents for their part must realise that the child needed good care. Often there were parents who knew nothing about the education and the studies of their children, they were not concerned about them at all: *"But they will be the first to be surprised or even to become angry if their children fail an exam."*[xlvi]

Bolamba also put his penny's worth in here. He found it necessary to regularly cite articles from other periodicals which were considered to have sufficient educational worth for Congolese parents. In 1958 he cited an article from *"L'Afrique Nouvelle"*, a periodical of the White Fathers in the French colonies, in which a list was given of matters that should be avoided in the education of children. In 1959 again, he reacted in a somewhat remarkable manner to an article that told the story of a group of Congolese girls who were asked by Belgian colonists to let themselves be photographed while were performing traditional dances round a campfire, topless. The author of the article reacted indignantly and found such behaviour by the Belgians and the Congolese completely inappropriate. The Belgians should not make the Congolese a source of ridicule. The Congolese parents should take care of their children and give them moral support to avoid such excesses. Bolamba reacted to this in a note from the editor. In the light of his previously cited statements, his position can seem a bit unusual: *"Certainly the parents have an imperative obligation to be concerned with their children, especially young girls; but there is a margin between that and taking exception to folk dances. Male and female dancers in the villages adopt the clothing that fits perfectly with the customs they inherited from their ancestors in their performances. (...) So what?"*[xlvii]

#### 4.1.2. The position of women

We have already referred to the articles that appeared in *La Voix* about women who took up positions in social life, worked outside the house, earned money and made a career. The views of the *évolués* in their own contributions only agreed with this in part. The well-known story of the need for the *évolués* to have wives who could understand them, but at the same time run a household, was never very far away. Someone wrote: *"If the domestic work is not carried out orderly and properly, the man will not stay at home. He will seek distraction elsewhere, which will ruin the harmony of the household."* The author of this article clearly emphasised two requirements: the woman must be a good mother and a skilled

housewife. A girl's education must therefore be developed in this direction. A list of the tasks that were most neglected by women, indicates the importance the author gives to them: washing up, the kitchen, the daily cleaning of the bedroom and the bedclothes, the household expenses (*"The reader will not be surprised at me writing that black women are improvident by nature and that they are unable to order their household expenses"*), the vegetable garden, the chicken run, and finally, care for the children.[xlvi]

In an article from 1957, criticism of girls' education in Boma was hardly veiled: *"Nevertheless we consider it useful to bring it to their (the Sisters, JB) attention that they seem to have missed out on certain points relating to the development of Congolese women, although this certainly is an important problem."* The lack of development of the education was indicated as the immediate origin of its low output. It was not the fault of the girls themselves, but their enthusiasm was simply being destroyed: *"And yet, you should not be mistaken: black women are avid to learn, to perfect themselves. In our opinion the overly rudimentary curriculum is the main cause for the lack of diligence established amongst the school-going population. A lot of girls realise the lack of intellectual and domestic training they will receive if they continue such studies. They are consequently forced to conclude that the final result does not justify such long attendance at the institution."*[xlv] This certainly elicited a reaction from the missionaries, who did not like criticism of their educational approach. They also tried to refute the problem of absenteeism. That was solved for the major part through discussions with the parents of the girls concerned. The staff was also of more than decent quality. If there were complaints in that area, they were caused by the fact that so many female teaching assistants resigned when they started a family. The Sisters also had a difficult task as they continually had to start training new staff.[l]

The positions taken concerning the development of women, were often very traditional and, in many cases, confirmed the existing state of affairs. Like, for example, Evariste Iyolo, from Monkoto who claimed the school must speed up the intellectual formation of women. He refused to comment on the leadership of the administration but certainly did criticise the behaviour of a number of girls, who were showing too little interest. He did not go much further than repeating the statement that a woman should get an education to be able to keep up with the man. That remained the goal to strive for: she should be able to understand her husband better.[li] Dominique Iloo, himself a teacher, called on evolved parents to



show understanding and respect for the teaching staff. He also called on men to help their women in bringing up the children, revealing then a very paternalistic standpoint towards the woman: *"We cannot ignore that as long as black women are not any better educated than they are today, the education of our children will always leave much to be desired. But our companions do not have to be the only ones to fulfil this position of education. We are obliged to support them, or even to take their place if they are incapable. We should help our women. We should induce them to work better for our children. We are supposed to know things, let us show our abilities through examples that will unquestionably convince our still ignorant women."*[lii]

#### 4.1.3. Language use in education.

As early as 1947 Bolamba wrote a commentary on an article that had appeared in the *Courrier de l'Afrique* about examinations in the Scheutist schools. Apparently, a system was applied there whereby several languages were chosen, and there was mention of Dutch and English. Because, unlike the Belgian pupils, the Congolese really had no mother tongue that they had a good grasp of: *"Here our pupils do not have a native language as the native languages or dialects cannot be considered languages."* He asked whether it would not be better to restrict them to French as people already laughed at the Congolese because they could not even speak that language decently.[liii]

Everybody seemed to agree with that. There should be more French at school. This was still being heavily discussed in the second half of the 1950s. Lundulla called for teaching French from kindergarten. He strongly opposed the use of native languages in primary education. These languages were too primitive and could not master the concepts of technology and science. He used a special argument from authority to close his argument: *"According to our information, the teaching of French was developed in Belgium, on the accession of King Leopold I who married Queen Marie-Louise of France soon after. We are proud to say that the latter has a special place in our hearts."*[liv] Iyeki, also regularly exerted himself in his articles to promote French. In 1956 he wrote: *"Our aim is to emphasise – for the umpteenth time – the language to be used in the schools."* He opposed the argument that children who learnt French at school would lose the other languages. Furthermore, he referred to the fact that a child that knew no French would be threatened with isolation: *"French is a language that will facilitate the meeting of new flows of ideas."*[lv]

The lack of knowledge of French in certain schools was also regularly mentioned in contributions.[lvi] A commentary by Okoka on the school for teaching assistants in Tshumbe Ste-Marie seemed to point out situations that were also reported in the mission area of the MSC: *"I established that the teaching was not at the same level as elsewhere. With regard to the French language, the courses were only 30 minutes a week and this was given in a monotonous or even unpleasant tone. On the other hand, those who tried to speak French were immediately singled out and considered a revolutionary element. Indisputably French is a language which is linked to literary and scientific culture in Congo as elsewhere. I maintain that at the moment, French is neglected in the classrooms in our region."*[lvii] The girls' school in Boma, also criticised by Vumuka, had the same problems. *"If the education given in Boma merits consideration and acknowledgement, it no less remains true that it could gain a lot by being improved. A good number of pupils are not even able to stammer the slightest bit in French, or write a letter in Kikongo, their maternal language."*

Still, this language question also exposed a number of ambiguities. Bolamba again voiced his opinion concerning the use of language at school in 1956. He conceded that much had changed in the meantime: educational reforms had taken place, there was education by lay people, university education had started, and *metropolisation* was in full swing. Still, it was necessary to argue for French at school. According to him cultural formation in French should begin at kindergarten, although that did not mean that he wanted to turn away from the traditional usages and customs: *"Nobody will throw the first stone at us, if we dare to confirm and maintain the incomparable superiority of French language to those languages of our native Africa. The teaching of tribal languages is a necessity for our general education but it should not be the object of exaggerated fanaticism. The natives of the Belgian Congo have unanimously opted for the study of French. They understand that prolonged education in a primitive language would hinder the cultural aim they envisage. It should be pointed out that the well wishing European support our theory."*[lviii] The arguments used by Bolamba make it clear that the promotion of the superiority of European civilisation was still intact in these circles.

#### 4.1.4. Level of education

The question of French was only part of a broader movement. Léon Ilunga made it clear in 1945: *"The instruction we receive in general makes us simple auxiliaries."*

*It does not allow us to progress and to complete this development."* In his contribution he asked for the creation of higher education and trade education 'for our children'. Primary education must be reorganised and must become a springboard that would allow these children to reach higher than was now the case. The administration must seriously reform the curriculum (which at that time had not yet happened), make French instruction available to all and ensure that the children who finished school must be capable of tackling further studies. At present one was hardly able to understand French after finishing primary school. The vocational schools must also reach a level that was much higher than that of 'dumb assistants' who could not work independently. To sum up: *"The door to European civilisation having been opened to us, it is a human obligation to allow us and our children to enter."* Ilunga expressed himself somewhat sceptically about the level of the Congolese elite, to which he belonged: *"The knowledge we have is truly very elementary. We talk of a black elite; where can that be sought? (...) Perhaps in the groups of those who claim they know about the affairs of the whites because they can speak French more or less correctly? No, one thousand times, no."*[lix]

In 1950 the question of pre-university education for Congolese was still formulated in a very well-behaved and respectful manner: *"Certainly, we are only children..."*[lx] Bolamba also remained friendly to the Belgians for a long time, but stated in 1953 that the further extension of education should occur as soon as possible, though he was in agreement with the position that it would be a long time before the Congolese would reach the right level and be of equal merit to the whites.[lxi] In 1954, on the occasion of the opening of the University in Kimwenza he then wrote a few remarkable editorials. In contrast to what might have been expected, Bolamba was not brimming with enthusiasm. He observed that everything had been organised a little hastily. He urged speedy arrangements for Congolese students who wanted to go and study in Belgium.[lxii] Towards Buisseret he was again very positive. He defended the views the minister had taken in his first policy statement. Bolamba particularly defended the creation of lay education on the grounds of democratic principles, which "were introduced by the Belgians into the Congo". Furthermore the editor-in-chief mentioned that university education was naturally very welcome, but that above all there was a demand for adequate preparation for that education and that there was a need for good primary and secondary education. He was pleased to say that the scholarships for the Congolese in Belgium had become a fact by that time.[lxiii]

The quality of education or the lack of education in certain regions were recurring themes in *La Voix*.<sup>[lxiv]</sup> A contribution from 1957 looked a little further. The introduction of education at all possible levels had indeed not seemed to be a solution for all problems, the author understood: *“Nevertheless our civilisers that appreciate our intellectual and professional abilities leave us perplexed before the hesitation that they show in granting us our total confidence.”* That lack of trust was indeed expressed in other areas. The development of consciousness by the *évolués* took another step forward: *“We cannot accept to see our graduates subordinate both in relation to wage and respect to white women who work in offices and factories who do not have the equivalent diplomas to these graduates. Acting in this way would be to commit a grave offence.”* In the same article the author also argued for more *“increasingly skilled labour”*.<sup>[lxv]</sup>

The call for emancipation became increasingly louder: *“One cannot deny the value of the studies done by those who finished secondary school. In earlier times it were the middle schools that trained excellent black employees. Despite their average education numerous of them have managed to take on the work as yet only entrusted to the white race. We think it illogical in the current situation of the development in the Congo that young men leaving secondary school become typists in the same sense as those leaving middle school. Why can they not immediately take on the position of editor?”*<sup>[lxvi]</sup> Another author, Ntamba, remarked that there was a great lack of respect from the white bosses for Congolese having secondary diplomas. The only solution was systematically making all types of education equivalent: *“The era of curricula specifically adapted to the native population has passed.”*<sup>[lxvii]</sup> On the other hand, Bolamba himself stated in 1958 that a university level of knowledge did not offer sufficient guarantees on its own. Everything depended, after all, on what exactly was being taught. And in the case of Congo, the knowledge being passed on was obviously still too theoretical. He thought that the new graduates should really be able to travel to Europe. The reason: *“We do not doubt their intellectual ability but, let’s face it, their knowledge is theoretical.”*<sup>[lxviii]</sup>

#### 4.1.5. Dialogue about education

A very detailed article on education that is doubly interesting in this context was published in 1952. The article, written by Bolamba, was the result of a thought exercise, in which thirty or so *évolués* from all over the country had taken part. The discussions, the article reported, were held in the presence of *“a top civil*

*servant from the Department of Education of the General Government*“, who was thanked extensively by Bolamba and described approvingly as “*an impartial guide and informed of schooling issues*“.[lxix] The article summarised a number of criticisms made about the existing educational system. The form of the article and the manner in which the criticism was formulated and subsequently evaluated, revealed much about the colonial relationships at that moment and also reflected the distorted position of the *évolués*. After every point of criticism, an ‘answer’ to the criticism was set down. That was not only a rather paternalistic approach to the readers of *La Voix* (but that was generally the case), it also perfectly allowed any possibly embarrassing points to be neutralised immediately and almost unnoticed.

Most attention at the level of elementary education was paid to language problems. The *évolués* obviously pushed forward the point that French should be generally adopted as the language of education. The list of claims began with the statement that French should be adopted as the national language in the whole colony. At school, education in local languages still played far too great a role. The question was also posed as to whether too much was going wrong because of the excessively free application of the school curriculum. In the answers given to the different points, it was apparent that native languages were indeed no longer a priority at school. In fact, the school curriculum still stipulated at that time (1952) that the language of education had to be a native language. In the remarks that were formulated in this article it was finally stated that the native languages could not be pushed aside completely.

Again, the residency issue for the children in the towns came up during the meeting. The Congolese advocated the introduction of compulsory school attendance but the administration continued to defend that it would be more efficient to systematically send the children back to their village of origin, if they had no family in the town able to accommodate them and they could not find a place in a boarding school. For the first time, the article also formulated a claim, unheard of at that time: a serious and well-organized secondary education must exist for women as well as for men, so that they could also go to work and earn money. Here the *évolués* were confronted with complete incomprehension. The administration evidently saw no need to develop this education. It was still too early for it. All the efforts must be directed to the formation of good housewives and dedicated mothers. The parallels between this answer and the views in

Bolamba's book are striking. The only point of criticism to which those responsible could really formulate no answer was evidently the level of the teachers. People who were employed had often progressed no further than the third or fourth school year with regard to intellectual skills. It is apparent from the reaction that a diploma was still not required for a subsidy.

The laconic reply to the request for university level education was: "it will come, when it comes". The Congolese then asked to be able to send students to Belgian universities. University level education was one of the topics that the editorial staff was very concerned about. Articles were not published on it very often but the editorial staff clearly followed the question carefully. At the end of the first academic year they were ready and waiting to report the scores of the Congolese students in the paper. At that time this still related to a preparatory year, because the Congolese students were not considered ready to go straight to the university level. Of the 31 candidates who began the year, only 11 passed but the editorial staff spoke of a great success.[lxx] When a person could leave for Belgium to go to study there, or if somebody came back with good results, this was also reported.[lxxi] In 1956 the speech Buisseret gave at the opening of the second University in the Congo (the 'state' University) was published in extenso as a supplement in *La Voix*. [lxxii]

The last part of 'the great educational article' included yet another variety of questions and remarks that arose, of which one was about religious education. Again, here the *évolués* and administration were involved in a dialogue of the deaf. The *évolués* had noticed that there was too much religious education in the schools and that less time should be spent on it. In reply it was stated: "*Religious education in schools is not exaggerated at all. This education is necessary for the pupil's moral education. It does not take any more place than that reserved in the curriculum.*" [lxxiii] The attitude of the editorial staff seemed in any case to be ambiguous on this topic. In general the missionaries were treated protectively. "*We must ensure not to find ourselves in the wake of those who denigrate religious education.*" [lxxiv] Rather exceptionally, the missionaries were the subject of criticism from the editorial staff. That normally happened in veiled terms, as here.

However this may be, these contributions, often still dominated by colonial discourse, did not voice critical attacks so much as rather desperate questions on their own fate, their own future. On the other hand sharp analyses were made

about the exodus from the countryside. One author remarked that even if all *imposed works, chiefdoms and native districts* were immediately abolished, people would still continue to leave for the town. The true reason was not to be sought in repugnance for traditional village life (an analysis that was made regularly by well intentioned whites), but was caused by the complete dislocation of these traditions: *"The day the young black boy enters the school, the time he starts to touch the mystery of the alphabet, the key to all knowledge, at that time, he buried his ancestral customs."* The author of this contribution went much further than this observation. Confronted with contradictory expectations, a feeling of confusion overcame many Congolese, he stated: *"And it is the summit of his disappointment to establish that after having initiated him in their pleasures and life, after having him inculcated with European ideas and principles over the years, he is reproached for not having kept his black soul, not having preserved the good things in his ancestral customs, of wanting to abandon his native lifestyle, etc..."*[lxxv] That feeling even led to distrust: *"The increasingly numerous natives are wondering with our friend Tshibamba Paul if they haven't knowingly placed us outside the path that has to lead man to his social destiny."* In an 1956 article about education in Luozi, the author referred to a teacher who stood in front of an apathetic class at the beginning of the school year and spoke to them threateningly: *"This is going to be serious for you."* At which the children answered: *"Those who studied before us are still in the village, why should we do our best?"*[lxxvi]

## 4.2. Local contributions and insights

### 4.2.1. The state in the region.

*La Voix* circulated throughout the entire colony and therefore certainly did not focus exclusively on news from the Equatorial Province. In 1950 Bolamba wrote a travel report on his visit to the Equator and Coquilhatville. He was moderately positive about Coquilhatville: he found people there very pleasant and hospitable, but observed that the material state of the native neighbourhood left much to be desired, in contrast to the European town. Most dwellings were still not built in durable material. Again, four years later he wrote: *"The visitor who leaves for Coquilhatville for the first time, cannot fail to suffer from some deception. While Léopoldville, Matadi, Elisabethville, Bukavu and Stanleyville (only to cite these towns) make giant leaps in the fields of economics and urbanisation, the progress of the capital of the Equator province is slower."* According to Bolamba, much work was also to be done in the black areas and new expansions ("Coq II") looked

like camps. In another contribution an article from *Mbandaka* was quoted in which there was a complaint about the lamentable state of the houses in the C.E.C.[lxxvii] The villages in the surrounding area were not much better. People there lived in very uncomfortable circumstances. Bolamba was very critical towards the *évolués*: they did not behave as he expected of them. The *Cercle Léopold II*, which had been set up some years earlier, as in other towns as a means for social uplift was already disbanded. Bolamba remarked cynically: *"This association has the inevitable bar and an official library that is little used, except by the pupils from the school."*[lxxviii] The relations between the evolved Congolese and the rest of the population were not positively assessed at all, the attitude of the *évolués* was very disparaging and belittling. *"This is very serious. If such a situation should become more generalised, a fatal blow would inevitably be given to Congolese society."*

Bolamba went still further and reported the existence of a number of 'associations' of a very dubious nature at the same time. Again, in a contribution from 1955 he seemed to be especially fixated on the lamentable moral state of the educated Congolese of the area. He referred repeatedly to the high consumption of alcohol among the *évolués*, and moral degeneracy. The tone was clear: *"The civilised men of Coquilhatville must unite and get along. They must blow life into their Leopold II association. They must read numerous books made available to them by the State. They must avoid mutual criticism, the malicious mind of disparagement and the tendency they have to disgrace their fellows with their European chiefs, in the aim of destroying their reputation or career."* The club life did not represent that much, it appears. The *Cercle Léopold II* functioned more as a café than club house. Bolamba described the people responsible and in doing so described also the prevailing atmosphere: they were, according to him, *"indifférents, moqueurs et insouciantes."* From time to time a Belgian passed by to chat, but in general there was very little contact between white and black. In fact, Bolamba called these contacts *"presque inexistantes à Coquilhatville"*. Despite some attempts to get cultural life going again, he said people remained in a deep lethargy.

The news about the *Cercles* in the Equatorial Province and, more specifically, in the Tshuapa was, for that matter, seldom very encouraging. The *Cercles* were initially intended to be a Congolese version of association life after the Western model and sprouted like mushrooms after the Second World War. However, they



had great difficulty freeing themselves from the influence of the Belgians. *La Voix* reported in 1946 that people in Coquilhatville had, for the present, decided not to start their own publication for *évolués*. Louis Ilonga, a clerk with the colonial administration, obediently wrote about “*nos éducateurs*”, and reported only that this postponement was justified by the lack of resources of the authorities responsible for ‘*évolué-affairs*’. In 1949 the existence of a circle of *évolués* in Ingende was reported, but evidently after a few years this had been totally non-existent.[lxxix] In 1950 Bolamba showed his approval for the reader’s remark that in the association in Boende people only talked and complained but that no initiatives were taken. From the text of the letter it seemed that the *évolués* mostly argued among themselves.[lxxx] From the report of a general meeting of the same association, which was also reported in *La Voix*, it did indeed seem that few initiatives were taken: “*Healthy distractions are periodically organised. Evening courses are given to residents who ask for them once the circle has the necessary materials available.*”[lxxxii] In 1951 it was reported that in Bongandanga, again in the Equatorial Province, the local *Cercle* was really led by a Belgian, who was described as “*animateur*”. This ‘animateur’ himself arranged the lectures for the association.[lxxxii]

Fundamental contradictions in discussions between the *évolués* also came to light in the reporting on the Equatorial Province, as well as contradictions between discourse and reality. On the one hand there was a powerful, incorrigible optimism, belief in the future and joy in what the Congolese experienced as emancipation. In a section entitled “*Au tableau d’honneur de l’élite congolaise*” Bolamba reported the people who announced that they had received a *Carte du mérite civique*. [lxxxiii] In 1952, *La Voix* also reported with some pride on the opening of the first African restaurant in Coquilhatville.[lxxxiv] In a majestically optimistic style the periodical invariably carried such contributions as this about the appointment of a new chief in the C.E.C., in which the new representative was introduced as “very dynamic” and “very suitable for the job”. Criticism was not often seen in such contributions and that remained the case to the end. On the other hand, in articles and reports very often information trickled through that showed that reality was very different. In 1957 Iyeki wrote in an “*appel aux amis de Coquilhatville*” on the relations between the *évolués* in Coquilhatville. He spoke of *misunderstandings*, *a lack of community spirit*, and revealed dubious practices therein: “*But also how unhappy we feel to hear them say: ‘Here you cannot do anything. Everything is reported to the authorities by anonymous*

*letters and the people keeping black lists are very numerous.’ What? ... Do anonymous letters still exist where you are? ... But isn’t that an outdated process for the African elite?”* The local administration evidently still had a sturdy grasp on the Congolese elite in this region.[lxxxv]

#### *4.2.2. The position of the évolués in society*

In the first few years editorial staff evidently did not adopt a very assertive attitude towards the colonists. Reports of particular incidents were certainly made. In 1947 the editorial staff gave some commentary on a case in the medical inspection service in Coquilhatville. One of the Congolese officials was found in an obvious state of drunkenness during working hours. In response to this the responsible doctor had announced a general ban, for coloured staff in the medical service, from entering bars. In Flandria one of the editors had been to interview the Congolese employees of the HCB and was on that occasion a witness to how one of the European managers himself misbehaved towards the Congolese: “(...) *a European came to “question” a clerk from the accounting department in a rather ...coarse manner, throwing his hat in the air, under the pretext of him having abandoned his work. This took place at the H.C.B. beach in the presence of a relatively large number of witnesses.*”[lxxxvi] The editorial staff, and particularly Bolamba, clearly condemned this event. It was reported along with another incident, in Jadotstad, in which a European had abused a Congolese man in government service, calling him a *maqaque*. When this man had answered that his job could not be done by an ape, he had attacked him. All in all the reactions from the editorial staff remained relatively ‘well behaved’, but the tone that was used, indicated that this was only the tip of the iceberg.

This same editorial staff compromised pretty well between complaining about, contradicting and agreeing with the coloniser, which regularly led to moralising contributions. At one time the Brothers of the Christian Schools decided to exclude from their school the children whose parents did not live in the town itself. When a complaint was made against this decision in a reader’s letter, the editorial staff made some excuses for it, with the argument that there were probably practical reasons for it. Besides, the editorial staff argued, Brother Director applied the ruling with some flexibility in practice.[lxxxvii] When a report appeared in 1957 on a change to the curfew that had applied for a long time in the *Centre Extra Coutumier* of Coquilhatville, it was accompanied by suitable approval but at the same time with a number of warnings. After all, now the

curfew had been relaxed, cafés and bars could stay open longer. The editorial staff wagged a finger: *"If we applaud this new decree, it is not without reserve. Everything depends on the way in which it will be used. The authorities wanted to satisfy the wishes of the population. We should benefit from this new favour and act as men who may be trusted and relied upon."* At the same time there were warnings about the formation of gangs of young people

This ambiguity was also illustrated by a number of other examples. Dominique Iloo described in 1950 how a common church service was organised as the result of an accident in an army barracks in Bikoro, whereby a Belgian captain and three Congolese soldiers had died: *"Ce jour-là, Blancs et Noirs se sentirent frères."* He wrote that there had never been such an event at which whites and blacks had taken part together since the foundation of Coquilhatville.[lxxxviii] The remarks were made in passing in a report that further attributed heroic qualities to the unfortunate victims of the accident and as a consequence was not free of an exaggerated use of language. However, it does indicate that there was a very great divide between blacks and whites in daily life.

The commentary that Bolamba wrote on the visit of King Boudewijn to Coquilhatville in 1955 is just as typical. In contradiction to his strong views a few years earlier, he now showed no trace of criticism any more in his description of the town. The new black neighbourhoods here were suddenly *"une jolie agglomération en croissance"*, Coquilhatville as a whole was *"une des villes les plus exubérantes du Congo Belge"*. The editor-in-chief of *La Voix* had followed and reported on the whole royal progress. He was obviously gripped by the general enthusiasm, brought about by the propaganda around the monarch's visit, and that seemed to have infected his reporting.

Finally, Bolamba's reaction to an article by Joseph Lomboto, on the materialism to which some women (the wives of *évolués*) were subject was typical of the values held by the paper. The author reported the existence of a number of associations of Congolese women, which kept themselves busy with the cultivation of a certain material living standard: *"I have learnt from a trustworthy source that there is an association of women and young girls called 'pourries de sous' (the 'filthy' rich), who boast of wearing new clothes every Sunday. Yet, by what means can they pay for a new piece of such expensive cotton each week, if not by surrendering to that debase trade that is prostitution?"* Bolamba also added in his commentary: *"For Coquilhatville I would notably refer to the association 'Misses Millionnaires', newly*

*established, that is made up solely of black women, who are the housekeepers for the Europeans. The latter do not want any contact with other women from the city and seek to establish a perfectly homogenous group in which the members share the same desires and needs. All these women dress in identical clothes, have bicycles of the same make and colour, etc. In short they do everything in their power to be distinguished from the masses. Yet is this distinction necessary or even desirable? Is the fact that it is sought not in itself prejudicial to the most elementary morals? And the spirit that pervades this association and the showy luxury of the members constitute sufficient elements to justify its suppression.”[lxxxix]*

On the one hand, this text forms another illustration of the fact that Bolamba had obviously assimilated certain Western values very well. It definitely shows that he had the tendency to take strongly moralising standpoints. On the other hand the example given perfectly illustrates the mechanism the *évolués* were also susceptible to: the formation of groups and the tendency to cut themselves off and set themselves above other groups of theoretical equals. What Bolamba here almost contemptuously defined as the enthusiasms of a group of housekeepers, who wanted to feel they were better than other Congolese women, obviously applied equally well to himself. All the attempts, displayed here, to describe, evaluate, analyse and consequently control the situation of others, were equally a means of winning a position in colonial society for himself. Because of their strongly opinionated content it seems obvious from these articles that Bolamba (and the others) did not notice that at the time.

#### *4.2.3. Observations and discussions on education*

Over the course of the years, local education was also discussed a few times. In 1953 Gabriël Baelenge wrote an overview article on the education in the Equatorial Province. He remarked in it that education was distributed very unevenly across the land area of the province and that the young people who studied further afield often took account in their choice of the nearness of one or another establishment. The north of the province, the Ubangi-district, was the best provided with establishments, with one junior seminary, two teacher training colleges and an agricultural vocational school. Coquilhatville, in the western part of the province, had a teacher training college, a secondary school and a junior seminary. In the Tshuapa area (to the east of Coquilhatville) there was nothing. It was obvious to the author that this uneven spread had a negative influence on the

employment market.[xc] Especially for people who went to work for the state, and sometimes had to move house, it was not easy to find good schooling for their children. Baelenge referred to the fact, obviously generally true in the colony, that children were not allowed to go to school in a place where they had no family living. More had to be done with boarding schools and he considered the argument that the Congolese were not prepared to pay for them as being incorrect.

A contribution such as this makes it clear that the educated Congolese were primarily concerned with the question of how they could fit in with their 'new' community (that of the colonists). They had been to school, had an education and a diploma in demand with the Europeans. They also wanted to make their contribution to the community, but then they were faced with practical problems such as these. The question is naturally whether something like this was possible in any case at that time. The financial argument was not really a problem there. During the 1940s, the MSC had themselves toyed with the idea of charging school fees, but at that time it was obviously not appropriate. The school regulations did not mention anything about *droits de scolarité*. The 1948 school programme included the application of a rather broad subsidy arrangement. It also seems logical to assume that in this context there was no room for alternative financing. However, from inspection reports from the early 1950s it certainly seems that school fees were in fact sometimes charged. The inspector made no fuss about it, which indicates that it was acceptable practice.[xci] However, even if the parents were able to pay for the education of their children and also wanted to do so, there were other obstacles. The organisation and structure of the Belgian Congo with its very large area did not permit education to be organised in the short term in a way that allowed all wishes to be fulfilled.

In fact, Bolamba hardly mentioned education in his travel report for 1950. He mainly discussed the schools of the Brothers, which he – not surprisingly, considering his own educational history – called “*d'excellents pédagogues*”. The MSC were only mentioned in connection with their novitiate in Bamanya. In a contribution from 1954 he did consider some questions of content more deeply. The missionaries taught 'a little' too much Lonkundo to the young. Bolamba was obviously aware of the discussions on the use of language, and referred to it incidentally: “*All kinds of arguments have been put forward to explain this. Only those who forget that the Congolese do not ignore anything of their maternal*

*language are convinced of this preference.*"[xcii] The girls were taught as good as no French. *"Even in Coquilhatville, those who complete the courses at the domestic school are unable to put a few words of French together."* That was heavily criticised, but only because the future housewives would feel inferior to their husbands and this could threaten the proper functioning of the family. He also complained of the moral degeneracy of the young on this occasion. The odd thing is that Bolamba and others in general took on the role of the 'elite' and emphasised a sort of pride and a sort of identification as a group, but that they also criticised *évolués* just as strongly. On the one hand they thought that they were on the right track, that 'evolving' was a necessary and morally responsible employment and that this also happened, but at the same time they gave out signals that in reality things were not proceeding so perfectly. Bolamba liked to use the word *évoluant*, to show that one had not yet reached the final goal.

In the late 1950s some more critical voices could be heard in connection with education. A certain Norbert Mpako reported the problems with which the inhabitants of Monkote were confronted in education in 1956:[xciii] *"There are no school institutions in Monkoto. Young children have to travel 324 km to Wafanya where there is a primary school run by the Sacred Heart missionaries and where the courses are taught by religious missionaries. There are rural schools in our territory but their number is negligible. In addition, the lessons taught there are neither efficient nor profitable for good basic culture."*[xciv] In addition a frustration with the rural schools became apparent here: *"The rural schools that have multiplied so happily are only a trick of the eye. The pupils who attend are of all ages and, consequently, they are not all capable of tackling the primary subjects."* It was again pointed out that it did not make much sense to send the children to the big city, because of the *"politique de refoulement"* that was generally applied. The article clearly touched a sensitive nerve because a few months later a reaction, signed by four people, was published. The authors accused Mpako of not having been to Monkoto for over ten years and that his article was much too negative on the attitude of the coloniser and the state of the region.

Mpako's article started a real polemic. The arguments used in this, tell a lot about the thinking of the *évolués* concerned, the attitude of the Congolese in general and the position of the editorial staff of *La Voix*. An argument against Mpako was that he did not know the current situation he was criticising. He was said not to

have been in the area for a long time. The distance from Monkoto to Wafanya was also reduced to about 50 kilometres (which was correct). This does raise the suspicion that the 350 kilometres from Mpako's article was at the least a 'literary' exaggeration. Concerning the school, it was pointed out that there were at least three central schools in the immediate neighbourhood of Monkoto, of which two were Protestant, and also a whole series of rural schools. It was also remarked that the workforce in the region was large enough, something that Mpako had also denied, and that the colonists were certainly not so unfriendly and racist as it would appear from his article.

The editorial staff (Bolamba) supported the authors in this dispute and condemned Mpako because he had spouted criticism *à la légère*. Mpako reacted, and his reaction was published almost a year later. He conceded that he had not been in the area for more than ten years, but said that the criticism he made was not less valid as a result. He considered the fact that there was no secondary education in the region a particularly sore point, which his opponents did not mention. In a last article yet another writer, Jean-François Iyiky, gave his opinion. He approached the subject in a more balanced way, took a reconciliatory tone towards the missionaries and the territorial officials but still observed that there certainly was a shortage of educational facilities in the area. The remarks he added to this showed more fundamental frustrations concerning the nature of the education offered: *"And who would not want a school with 4 to 6 post-primary years in Boende, the district capital? We are against schools where the pupils are more gardeners or builders than students. And besides, not anybody who aspires to be a schoolmaster, also is one. There are experts in education. They are expensive? Nobody denies it! Nevertheless, the problem is there!"*[xcv]

Iyiky was obviously greatly concerned with this question, and could also place it in a wider perspective. In a contribution published a few months later in *La Voix*, he returned to the problem of education (or the lack of it). In it he assumed, like the MSC, that it was necessary to keep young people in the region and to combat the exodus from the countryside. The foundation of new local schools was a first vital step in this. He did not, however, discuss the contradiction with the observations made previously concerning the nature of education.[xcvi]

### *Conclusions*

At around the time this polemic was underway, an article was published by Thomas Bessembe, who also came from the Equatorial Province.[xcvii] He reacted

to an article that had previously appeared about a *chef de secteur* in another area.[xcviii] Bessembe made a strong plea for the appointment of sufficiently trained *chefs*. Really he was referring here to the problem of the exodus from the countryside. Many *évolués*, he said, were quite ready to go back to their village or area of origin, but they were put off by the lack of understanding for them in the villages and that was obvious from the attitude of the chiefs. He defined the aim of his own article as: requesting the authorities to send a well-educated and progressive chief to his area, so that all the problems could also be solved there. Then, after all, the *évolués* from the town would want to return to the countryside and help develop economic activity there. The article ended with a question directed at the colonists, who, in the best tradition, were still referred to as “*civilisateurs*” in the article. This was typical of the feeling in this group. On the one hand, the time had come according to the *évolués* themselves “*tant attendu par tous les Congolais*”: Congo was “in full development”. But on the other hand the *évolués* could still not stand on their own feet, or so they assumed. The conclusion of this development still had to come from above, from the colonists.

This message came from Bolamba and his colleagues, the editors and writers of *La Voix*, the group which must be considered as the most successful in terms of social standing. After all, they were the people the colonists had allowed to take the positions, which entailed the most risk and therefore also the greatest responsibility. Indeed being the mouthpiece for the Congolese was an immensely important task in a context in which their voice could hardly be heard. It was also obvious that no revolutionaries or idealists could be chosen for this but they had to be very moderate, docile people. They had to be the best pupils of the class, those who had been exemplary at school. Bolamba himself would keep it up to the last issue of his periodical, in his pleas for moderation and caution, but just as much in the style in which he put the message forward. The picture fitted exactly. Undoubtedly, the *évolués* themselves were the most important result of the educational system installed in the colony. They proved this in their attitude and reactions in *La Voix*. They had made the values they had been given their own. One of the most important values was respect for (and dependence on) a higher authority. They had accepted that salvation would come from upbringing and education according to the western model, as propagated by the missionaries and once on that path it was difficult to turn back.

The contributions extensively referred to in this chapter nonetheless showed “that



something was wrong". Often subconsciously, they conceded that they had been set on a road with a dead end and that the development in this sense was a false ideal the coloniser had given them. The debate on moral values, that was fought out passionately at times gave the impression that development under the influence of the western example was in fact not so positively evaluated as it looked at first sight. In my opinion that can be interpreted in two ways. Above all it concedes that Christian morals as a background of "civilisation" were very well integrated in the world image of the *évolués*. Fulfilling this moral standard was probably one of the ways they could distinguish themselves and still be more evolved than the others. In addition it was probably also a way of venting dissatisfaction about the existing situation and these discussions functioned in many cases as a sort of lightning rod for the real problems.

Demands were formulated to solve all those things that weren't right. These demands could only go in one direction. They could never be capable of imagining that an alternative existed to the path they had taken. It would have been outrageous to imagine a return to a classical, traditional model of society. That can especially be seen in the authors' attitudes in *La Voix*. The general tenor of the contributions evolved from an almost general gratitude towards the benefits of "civilisation", to a steadily growing questioning of colonial society and the status of the Congolese in it. In any event this was intrinsically linked with the foundation of the periodical that precisely was meant to respond to the growing dissatisfaction about the existing social situation. Increasingly, demands were formulated and without exception these went in the direction of further emancipation, the further continuation of the process that had been started. The demands for a further development of and a higher participation in the educational system fitted within this. These two naturally had to go together. After all, education was the motor of this evolution, at least at the beginning. Indeed, the initial reason for attending school lay in the improvement of the circumstances of one's own life that one intended to be able to bring about. That is one of the elements that comes out very clearly in the memories of former pupils of the mission schools which are central to the last chapter.

## NOTES

[i] Gille, A. (1957). L'enseignement organisé au Congo belge par les pouvoirs publics ou avec leurs concours. In *Belgique d'Outre-Mer*, XII, 273, p. 909-913.

[ii] From 1956 a new structure was accepted, consisting of three times two years,

and it was announced that the curriculum must increasingly correspond with the Belgian syllabus 1936. From 1958 that became the 1958 syllabus. Kita, P. (1982). *Colonisation et enseignement*. p. 230-231.

[iii] Pol Georis was a colleague of Sylvain De Coster, Professor of Education and Educational Psychology at the Free University of Brussels. During the 1960s he published a number of works on education in the Congo/Zaire, in the context of CEMUBAC, the Centre Médicale de l'Université de Bruxelles Au Congo.

[iv] The periodical mentioned two "publishers": the CEPSE in Elisabethville, and the Institut de Pédagogie of the University of Lovanium.

[v] Bolamba, A.R. (1955). *Brillants résultats à Lovanium*. In *La Voix du Congolais*, XI, 113, p. 678. Colin, M. (1958). *Proclamation des résultats universitaires à Lovanium*. In *La Voix du Congolais*, XIV, 150, p. 570.

[vi] Missine, L.E. (1968). *L'institut facultaire de psychologie et de pédagogie. Son organisation et ses recherches*. Kinshasa: Lovanium; *Universiteiten van Belgisch-Congo en van Ruanda Urundi*, information brochure of the administration. Brussels, 1958.

[vii] Kimba, E. (1957). Ce que les Congolais attendent de l'enseignement du Français. In *Revue Pédagogique Congolais*, n°9, September 1957, p. V-IX. *L'Essor du Congo* was published in Elisabethville and was one of the three important newspapers in the Congo (besides *L'Avenir* and *Le Courrier d'Afrique*). It was traditionally a conservatively-minded newspaper, although after the war some space was given to different opinions about the social situation in the Congo. The newspaper was described as follows in a study of the press in the Congo from 1957: "L'Essor du Congo, conservative, may be classed to the right, perhaps to the extreme right." See Van Bol, J.M. (1957). *La presse quotidienne au Congo Belge*. Bruxelles: La pensée catholique. p. 81.

[viii] Lumpungu, F. (1958). La valeur pédagogique du jeu. In *Revue pédagogique congolaise*, n°12, July 1958, p. XXVI-XXX.

[ix] Kimponto, A. (1958). La fonction du moniteur de la ville et l'influence qu'il doit exercer. In *Revue pédagogique congolaise*, n°11, March 1958, p. XIX-XXII.

[x] One of these was the later general and president José Désiré Mobutu.

[xi] **Sheikh Anta Diop** (1923-1986). A Senagalese scientist (he studied mathematics, nuclear physics and philosophy and was also known as an archaeologist and historian). Diop was one of the African intellectuals who went to study in Paris in the context of the French assimilationist educational ideas. From 1946 to 1960 he studied and worked primarily in Paris, where he defended a doctorate in literature with the theme "L'unité culturelle de l'Afrique noire". At

that time he also published a number of articles on African history and its perception in Europe. Diop was also one of the advocates of African independence, but was excluded from politics for the greatest part of his life. Zorgbibe, C. (2004). Senghor and Sheik Anta Diop or the restoration of African conscience. At [www.african-geopolitics.org](http://www.african-geopolitics.org)

[xii] Jadot, J.M. (1959). *Les écrivains africains du Congo belge et du Ruanda-Urundi. Une histoire – Un bilan – Des problèmes*. Académie royale des Sciences coloniales. Classe des sciences morales et politiques. Mémoires In-8°. Nouvelle Série, 17, 2. Bruxelles: ARSOM. Remarkably enough, a text by a Mongo-teacher from Boende on land laws among the Mongo is also in the same publication. The text, which was sent to the Academie by Boelaert and translated by him into French, won the annual prize awarded by the Academie.

[xiii] Justin Bomboko (°1928) studied political science at the Université Libre de Bruxelles. He founded the Unimo (Union des Mongo) in 1960 in Coquilhatville. In the 1960s he was twice Minister of Foreign Affairs, and now is vice-president of the senate (October 2003). Ganshof Van der Meersch, W. (1960). *Congo mai-juin 1960. Rapport du ministre chargé des affaires générales en Afrique*. Bruxelles, s.n.; Ferrand, I. (2001). *Congo 1955-1960. De aanloop naar de onafhankelijkheid. Een analyse van de berichtgeving in drie Vlaamse kranten*. Masters' thesis Universiteit Gent. On [www.ethesis.net](http://www.ethesis.net)

[xiv] Bolela, A. (1971). Un aperçu de la presse congolaise écrite par les noirs de 1885 à 1960. In *Congo-Afrique*, XII, 1, p. 12.

[xv] Vinck, H. (2000). Périodiques coloniaux en langues africaines dans les archives Aequatoria. On [www.aequatoria.be/archives\\_project](http://www.aequatoria.be/archives_project). Edited version of the article "La presse à Mbandaka", appeared in Vinck, H. (ed.) (1990). *Mbandaka, hier et aujourd'hui. Eléments d'historiographie locale*. Etudes Aequatoria 10. Bamanya: Centre Aequatoria. p. 227-234. [original in French]

[xvi] Ibidem.

[xvii] In total 170 issues were published.

[xviii] Davier, J. (1955). Souvenirs d'anniversaire. In *La Voix du Congolais*, XI, 106, p. 6-16.

[xix]< Kadima-Tshimanga, B.D. (1983). *L'univers socio-politique de l'évolué congolais entre 1955 et 1959. Une étude du vocabulaire de "La Voix du Congolais"*. Unpublished doctoral thesis. Paris, Nouvelle Sorbonne. p. 26.

[xx] Tamba, J. (1946). Nos écrits et leur but. In *La Voix du Congolais*, II, 10, p. 416-418. [original in French]

[xxi] This other publication is described as follows by Van Bol: "*un illustré, qui*

*poursuit avec bonheur sa mission d'éducation populaire.*" [original quotation in French]

[xxii] Bolamba, A.R. (1959). In *La Voix du Congolais*, XV, 163, p. 575-576. [original quotation in French]

[xxiii] Kadima-Tshimanga, B.D. (1983). *L'univers socio-politique de l'évolué congolais entre 1955 et 1959*. p. 76.

[xxiv] Bolamba, Antoine Roger (1913-2002). Born in Boma but a Mongo by origin. He attended school with the Brothers of the Christian Schools, continued his studies at the Ecole pour Assistants Médicaux in Kintambo (near Kinshasa), and worked for a number of years as a clerk for Foréami (*Fonds Reine Elisabeth pour l'Assistance Médicale aux Indigènes*). He became editor-in-chief of *La Voix* in 1946. In 1956 he was a cabinet assistant of Buisseret for a year. The obituaries written on the occasion of his death on 9 July 2002 emphasised his literary qualities, although mainly one work was referred to, his bundle of poems "Esanzo", with which in 1955 he became the first Congolese to receive international recognition for his literary work. After this Bolamba had a short political career. He was appointed to the post of Secretary of State for Cultural Affairs by Patrice Lumumba and later he was Minister of Information in the administration of Cyrille Adula (1960-1964) for a short time. Subsequently, he fulfilled all sorts of positions in the entourage of Mobutu. After zairisation, Bolamba adopted the name "Lokolé" to replace his baptismal name. See MMC (2002). Obituary: La Rdc orpheline du doyen de ses écrivains: A-R. Bolamba disparaît à 89 ans! On <http://64.224.66.88/public/congo/pages/nouvellet.asp?nid=274>. Concerning Bolamba's literary work see above all Gérard, A. (1977). *Etudes de littérature africaine francophone*. Dakar/Abidjan: Les Nouvelles Editions Africaines, p. 97-114.

[xxv] Eloko a Nongo Otshudiema (1975). *Les structures inconscientes de "La Voix du Congolais" (1959)*. Les cahiers du CEDAF, 2/3. Bruxelles: CEDAF.

[xxvi] Bolamba, A.R. (1959). In *La Voix du Congolais*, XV, 163, p. 575-576.

[xxvii] Bolamba, A.R. (1948). Editorial: Relations entre blancs et noirs. In *La Voix du Congolais*, 23, p. 53-54.

[xxviii] Bolamba, A.R. (1948). Editorial: Colour Bar? In *La Voix du Congolais*, 24, p. 101-103.

[xxix] Bolamba, A.R. (1949). *Les problèmes de l'évolution de la femme noire*. Léopoldville: Editions de l'Essor du Congo.

[xxx] Ibidem, p. 12.

[xxxi] Ibidem, p. 33-34.

[xxxii] Ibidem, p. 48-49.

[xxxiii] See on this matter Ceuppens, B. (2003). *Onze Congo? Congolezen over de kolonisatie*. Leuven: Davidsfonds. p. 46-55. She claims that this not necessarily meant that men did not want to eat with their wives or families but that according to the traditions they were expected to eat in public.

[xxxiv] Ibidem, p. 148-149. [original quotation in French]

[xxxv] Ibidem, p. 167.

[xxxvi] Ditungunuka, F. (1954). Les Jalons de notre progrès. In *La Voix du Congolais*, X, 95, p. 96-97.

[xxxvii] Mobé, A.M. (1952). De l'éducation de la masse. In *La Voix du Congolais*, VIII, 77, p. 473-477.

[xxxviii] Ngandu, E. (1948). L'école instruit mais la famille forme la caractère. In *La Voix du Congolais*, IV, p. 242-245.

[xxxix] Bongongo, L. (1948). De l'éducation de nos enfants. In *La Voix du Congolais*, IV, 33, p. 501-504.

[xl] Mabanza, J. (1951). Elever soi-même ses enfants. In *La Voix du Congolais*, VII, 68, p. 602-606.

[xli] Landu, M. (1952). Conseils aux éducateurs. In *La Voix du Congolais*, VIII, 72, p. 132-133.

[xlii] Iloo, D. (1952). A propos de l'article "Conseils aux éducateurs". In *La Voix du Congolais*, VIII, 79, p. 594-596.

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[xliv] Bolamba, A.R. (1951). A propos des internats pour enfants Congolais. In *La Voix du Congolais*, VII, 60, p. 128-130.

[xlv] Nkonga, L. (1957). De l'éducation et de l'instruction des enfants. In *La Voix du Congolais*, XIII, 141, p. 945-946.

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[xlviii] Kangudie, P. (1948). Des écoles ménagères pour nos filles. In *La Voix du Congolais*, III, 37, p. 141-143.

[xlix] Vumuka, J.J.W. (1957). A propos de l'école des filles à Boma. In *La Voix du Congolais*, XIII, 140, p. 904-905.

[l] Delanaye, [Père] (1958). A propos de l'école des filles de Boma. In *La Voix du*

Congolais, XIV, p. 168-169.

[li] Iyolo, E. (1957). L'école doit favoriser la culture intellectuelle de la femme congolaise. In *La Voix du Congolais*, XIII, 140, p. 846-847.

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[liii] L'échotier (1947). In *La Voix du Congolais*, III, 20, p. 881.

[liv] Lundulla, V. (1956). Enseignez le français. In *La Voix du Congolais*, XII, 122, p. 327-328.

[lv] Iyeky, J.-F. (1956). Nous voulons le français dans les écoles. In *La Voix du Congolais*, XII, 127, p. 701-703.

[lvi] Bulangi, A.-J. (1957). L'enseignement à Kalima. In *La Voix du Congolais*, XIII, 131, p. 145.

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[lix] Ilunga, L.G. (1945). L'enseignement dans le Congo de demain. In *La voix du Congolais*, I, 5, p. 175-176.

[lx] Moukeba, J.-D. (1950). Est-il prématuré de parler de l'enseignement pre-universitaire pour Congolais? In *La Voix du Congolais*, VI, 48, p. 149-150.

[lxi] Bolamba, A.R. (1953). L'expérience universitaire au Congo. In *La Voix du Congolais*, IX, 91, p. 655.

[lxii] Bolamba, A.R. (1954). Enseignement universitaire au Congo Belge. In *La Voix du Congolais*, X, 97, p. 243.

[lxiii] Bolamba, A.R. (1954). Après les déclarations ministérielles. In *La Voix du Congolais*, X, 100, p. 513.

[lxiv] Masudi, S.T. (1957). A propos des écoles dans le Maniema. In *La Voix du Congolais*, XIII, 138, p. 687; Ngobongo, G.-A. (1956). Les qualités d'un bon instituteur. In *La Voix du Congolais*, XII, 122, p. 337-338.

[lxv] Zunbgu-Kanda, G. (1957). Quel sera l'avenir des universitaires congolais? In *La Voix du Congolais*, XIII, 139, p. 763-764.

[lxvi] Salumu, B. (1958). Les écoles secondaires au Congo Belge. In *La Voix du Congolais*, XIV, 148, p. 485-486.

[lxvii] Ntamba, L. (1958). A côté des universités, il faut multiplier les écoles secondaires et normales. In *La Voix du Congolais*, XIV, 152, p. 678-679.

- [lxviii] Bolamba, A.R. (1958). Les étudiants africains devraient effectuer des voyages dans les pays de l'Europe. In *La Voix du Congolais*, XIV, 148, p. 486.
- [lxix] It is unclear who it related to precisely, but from the vocabulary used it may be deduced that it was the head of the relevant government department or someone in a similar position.
- [lxx] Colin, M. (1954). Une brillante réussite. In *La Voix du Congolais*, X, 102, p. 709.
- [lxxi] Bijvoorbeeld Colin, M. (1954). Un futur régent littéraire en Nouveau sujet congolais à l'Université de Louvain. In *La Voix du Congolais*, X, 105, p. 880-881.
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- [lxxiii] Bolamba, A.R. (1952). L'enseignement pour Africains au Congo Belge. In *La Voix du Congolais*, VIII, 73, p. 188-203.
- [lxxiv] L'échotier (1953). Enseignement missionnaire. In *La Voix du Congolais*, IX, 92, p. 759.
- [lxxv] Ngandu, E. (1946). Pourquoi le jeune noir fuit son village? In *La Voix du Congolais*, II, 12, p. 492-495.
- [lxxvi] Baniengumuna, A.J. (1956). L'enseignement dans le territoire de Luozi. In *La Voix du Congolais*, XII, 128, p. 783-785.
- [lxxvii] Bolamba, A.R. (1951). Chronique. In *La Voix du Congolais*, VII, 61, p. 207.
- [lxxviii] Bolamba, A.R. (1950). Impressions de voyage. In *La Voix du Congolais*, VI, 49, p. 212-214.
- [lxxix] Bolamba, A.R. (1949). Activités des Cercles. In *La Voix du Congolais*, V, 36, p. 127.
- [lxxx] Bolamba, A.R. (1950). Activités des Cercles. In *La Voix du Congolais*, VI, 48, p. 185.
- [lxxxi] Bolamba, A.R. (1947). Activités des Cercles. In *La Voix du Congolais*, III, 21, p. 934.
- [lxxxii] Bolamba, A.R. (1951). Activités des Cercles. In *La Voix du Congolais*, VII, 66, p. 526.
- [lxxxiii] For example a certain Mr Mosikwa from Boende, reported during 1952. In *La Voix du Congolais*, VIII, 70, p. 56. See also number 73, p. 245.
- [lxxxiv] Bolamba, A.R. (1952). Ephémérides. In *La Voix du Congolais*, VIII, 80, p. 703.
- [lxxxv] Iyeki, J.F. (1957). Appel aux amis de Coquilhatville. In *La Voix du Congolais*, XIII, 133, p. 306-307.
- [lxxxvi] Bolamba, A.R. (1949). Chronique. In *La Voix du Congolais*, V, 35, p. 72.
- [lxxxvii] Bolamba, A.R. (1949). Chronique. In *La Voix du Congolais*, V, 35, p.

70-71.

[lxxxviii] Iloo, D. (1950). Coquilhatville en deuil. In *La Voix du Congolais*, VI, 54, p. 548-549.

[lxxxix] Lomboto, J. (1950). Veillons sur la jeunesse. In *La Voix du Congolais*, VI, 54, p. 518-520.

[xc] Baelenge, G. (1953). L'enseignement dans la province de l'Equateur. In *La Voix du Congolais*, IX, 82, p. 41-42.

[xci] Africa Archive Brussels, electronic inventory, no. 12.452, Commentaire rédigé à la suite de l'inspection d'écoles du Vicariat de Coq de février à juin 1951 par l'inspecteur-assistant, ff., C. Eloye.

[xcii] Bolamba, A.R. (1955). Coquilhatville en 1954. In *La Voix du Congolais*, XI, 106, p. 88-105.

[xciii] Monkoto is to the south east of Wafanya and consequently to the very south of the mission region of the MSC.

[xciv] Mpako, N. (1956). Problèmes complexes de la vie des habitants du territoire de Monkoto. In *La Voix du Congolais*, XII, 127, p. 708-710.

[xcv] Iyeky, J.F. (1957). Vers l'éveil de Monkoto. In *La Voix du Congolais*, XIII, 141, p. 941-943.

[xcvi]< Iyeky, J.F. (1958). La Tshuapa, mon district. In *La Voix du Congolais*, XIV, 143, p. 122-124.

[xcvii] Bessembe, T.C. (1957). Tous les chefs de secteurs doivent au moins être des intellectuels. In *La Voix du Congolais*, XIII, 137, p. 590-591.

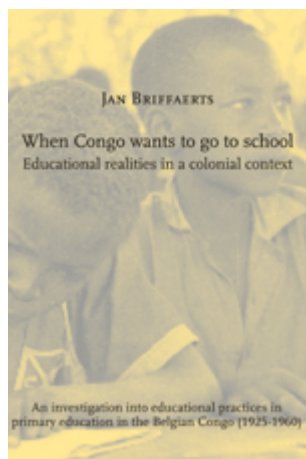
[xcviii] The Congolese filled these positions in the context of the indirect administration that was introduced even before the war. The *secteur* was essentially the lowest administrative level, above the *chefferies* (villages).

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## **When Congo Wants To Go To School - The Long Term:**



# Memories



*“We arrive, it is as though it is some amusement, the people are standing there, we left for school, my poor father stood on the road until I disappeared from view. And I occasionally saw him when I turned around. But, he did not enjoy it. But me, on the other hand, I was attracted as if it were a game ...[i]*

## *A final piece of the puzzle*

After reading the Congolese comments in *La Voix* the question naturally arises of whether these points of view corresponded to reality. It has certainly been adequately shown that a rather large gap yawned between the picture the Belgians gave of the situation in the Congo on the one hand and the actual problems of the colonised population on the other. The “elite” of the time were considered in the previous chapter. However, their contributions are situated in a strongly opinion-oriented framework. How education was experienced in practice by the pupils cannot be discovered directly from that. It is a piece that is still missing in the picture I want to reproduce: what was the experience of those who really encountered it? A search into literature on the memories of the education of the colonial period is not very productive. The information is scarce and very scattered. For this reason I considered it useful, in addition to the relatively large amount of written sources available to me, to search for a few people who had been going to school in the period and the region concerned. What they remember, and the way in which they do that, forms a very interesting supplement to the written sources and at the same time clarifies them and also puts them into context. Parts of their testimony have appeared here and there in the previous chapters because they naturally gave information on classroom practices. In this last chapter I want to place the story and the memories of my main witnesses at the centre. What is left from these experiences, what remained and what is their attitude towards this period?

Within (and perhaps because of) the limitations and uniqueness that accompanies this source of information, it is indisputably very interesting to use it in the

context of this study. The image of school practices and realities can certainly be supplemented and shown more sharply by listening to the people who experienced it all as pupils. Concerning oral history and the problems of memories in general there is a great deal of scientific literature and in the context of colonial historiography and anthropology (oral) testimony, interview or conversations are sources of information that are being used more and more frequently. My intention here is not to subject the precise nature of all sources to a thorough analysis but I do want to mention a couple of sensible ideas, in my opinion, on the way in which this sort of information can best be dealt with.

### *Working with memories*

Bogumil Jewsiewicki puts what he calls *récits de vie* at the centre of his social and cultural historical research.[ii] He has even published a number of these life stories and on this occasion formulated some considerations about the nature of these stories. He states that this really relates to a mixed form, something in between *social history* and telling a story. He emphasised the shifting meaning of stories, which change their context continually between 'I' and 'we'. Your own story simultaneously carries that of the family, the village, the people who share the experience with you. Strongly connected with this is the practice of speaking figuratively; this forms a sort of second layer beneath the facts and events used by the people telling the story or those interviewed. The images used really constitute the assignment of meaning given to the facts and events. On a more direct level Jewsiewicki noticed that in the stories of the Congolese a distinction is often made between 'us' and 'them'. The 'them' was primarily the European, the coloniser.

A more personalised implementation of Jewsiewicki's insights into the 'I' and the 'we' may be found in the study by Marie-Bénédicte Dembour, *Recalling the Belgian Congo*. [iii] Dembour pays a great deal of attention to the process of remembering, which seemed to form a central component of her research into the colonial past. From the start of her research she was confronted by the transforming effect of memories and the fact that people integrate their past into their lives and also adapt it. During her interviews Dembour discovered that the interlocutors often gave generally applicable answers and had difficulty in making a distinction between what they formerly thought and what they now thought: *"Experiences do not get pigeonholed in one's memory in a chronological order; rather they are amalgamated in what already exists, slightly changing the tone,*

*adding a dimension, or completely 'distorting' the images of the past one keeps."* In the same sense Dembour described a whole series of ways in which memory works: forgetting distasteful things, the incorporation of new facts, striving for coherence and synthesis. Memory continues to modify occurrences with a particular connotation until they get another connotation.

Dembour seems to emphasise the fact that memory works in an active manner, in the sense that memories not only fade but things are also added and modified. In a recent paper (*Forgetful Remembering*) Johannes Fabian emphasised another component.[iv] In this he defends the concept that both components of memory must be considered, remembrance and forgetting. He considers the telling of tales (*narration*) as a combination of both components, both considered as active transactions of the narrator. Fabian gives some convincing examples of what one must expect concretely. In the article in question he begins from a conversation that he had with a Congolese man. The conversation fitted into source research carried out by Fabian into a document from the colonial period about which he wanted to know more. At the same time he became interested in the man's life story. Fabian writes: "*We cannot help but notice that the various parts of narrative that Baba Ngoie elected to tell us add up to a remarkably thin story of his life. Despite occasional flashes of the concrete - memories that help us to imagine some of the stations of his life - what he reports is the biography of a strangely abstract colonial subject.*" Besides this his attention was mainly drawn to the fact that the interviewee maintained a conscious distance from certain subjects whenever he is asked about them. That can be seen from the way in which a person talks about something: someone can claim not to remember because of his great age but also sometimes because he had paid no attention to it at the time. Sometimes someone reacted with a brusque 'that could be true' or an uninterested 'maybe'. This is what Fabian is interested in, the finer points of the narrative, including the way in which things are *not* mentioned. This particular manner can therefore tell us something, even if it is only about the reason why someone does not know or do something, but also about the way that someone sees himself in society, in his life.

## 2. Interlocutors[v]

I made extensive interviews with three former pupils of the MSC in the Belgian Congo.[vi] What the three mainly had in common was that they went to school in MSC schools, that they were good students, that they were able to continue their

education after primary school and that they finally ended up in Belgium. They had all been living for a considerable time in Belgium now and have settled there. I would like to introduce them briefly because they will speak in detail below. This biographical information was given to me by the interviewees themselves during the conversations I had with them.

Jean Indenge was born in 1935 in the *territoire de Monkoto*, in the southeast Equatorial province. After attending the village school, he went to primary school in Wafanya with the Sisters of Beveren-Waas. After this he continued his education in Coquilhatville and became a nurse. After independence he also worked there for a short period. After this he went to Leopoldville, at first only to work. Later he resumed his studies there. He became *assistant pharmacien* and worked in the provincial medical services. During the sixties he came to Belgium and finally trained in physiotherapy at the Université Libre de Bruxelles. He received his first degree, his bachelor's. He then worked in a clinic in Brussels. In the 1970s he was called back for a short time to give lessons in Zaïre, while his family remained in Belgium. After this he continued to work in Belgium, in the same hospital, but at the end of the 1980s he had to take early retirement as a consequence of internal restructuring. Papa Indenge is a fairly well known person in the Congolese community in Brussels. At the moment of the interview he was mainly employed in running a café (together with his family), right next to Brussels South station.

Stéphane Boale was born around 1935 in the district of Bokote. He also went to primary school there. Later he studied at the teacher training college with the Brothers of the Christian Schools in Bamanya. He taught for a short time in Bamanya but then did the state examination as a meteorologist. Thanks to that diploma he found employment with the government and was posted to the Equatorial province. In this capacity he also had the opportunity to continue his studies in Belgium, which he did for four years. How long he has lived in Belgium is unclear but probably since the end of the 1970s. He is retired and lives with his wife in Saint-Josse-ten-Noode (Brussels).

Jean Boimbo was born in 1928. Like Indenge he comes from the *territoire de Monkoto*, but from a different village. He also went to school in Wafanya. After this he went to the teacher training college in Bamanya. After working as a probationary teacher for two years in Lombo Lombo (the leper colony founded by the MSC) he began teaching. After getting his diploma, in 1954, he immediately

moved to Leopoldville. When Buisseret started lay education, many extra teachers were sought and he took advantage of this. He taught until immediately after independence and then became *directeur adjoint* and after that headmaster of his primary school. In 1965 he began a career in the civil service. He first worked in the personnel department of the central department of education, after this and after a series of promotions he ended up in the highest ranks of the administration, first as *Agent du protocole d'état* (a department which was under the direct authority of the president), later at the *Commissariat général du Plan*.<sup>[vii]</sup> From the middle of the 1980s he was promoted to cabinet assistant in the ministry of public works. After a change of cabinet and a short period – following his ex-minister – at the *Belgoloise* bank, where he had the title of *Fondé de pouvoir* (“having power of authority”), he was again appointed to a function in a ministry, that of agriculture. Finally Boimbo and his boss were appointed to the *SNCZ* (the Zairese railway company). In 1993 Boimbo retired from this job but he continued to run his own construction company. He moved to Belgium in 1997. He lives in Uccle (Brussels) with his family.

I had one or more lengthy conversations with each of these three. With Jean Boimbo I had one conversation of about two hours. With Jean Indenge I had one conversation of two to three hours and a second conversation that was somewhat shorter. With Stéphane Boale I had three conversations, each one a couple of hours long. I always used the same approach in these conversations. However, the conversations showed considerable differences between each other, not only in length but also as far as the style and fluency of communication were concerned. Without drawing any further conclusions out of this, it seems important to me to explain how these conversations proceeded in a rather general way. The way in which the interview was done was always the same (as was also the case for the interviews with the missionaries): a half open interview, in which I worked from a prepared list of questions but allowed the interviewees to expand further and then tried to follow their story insofar as possible. Jean Indenge, whom I interviewed first, had prepared himself carefully for the conversation and had composed a complete list of things that he wanted to say. He expanded considerably on particular topics. Stéphane Boale was the most difficult for me to grasp and I had the most difficulty in communicating with him. He did not stick to a chronologically based story, and often told me memories and stories that had been told to him, which he did not in the first instance explain as such. At first this rather confused me. Finally, Jean Boimbo answered the questions I asked

without preparation and very fluently. Of the three he seemed to have the most feeling for chronology and could usually quickly say from memory what he had experienced and done and where and when things exactly had to be situated.

*To school[viii]*

### *2.1. The great leap forwards*

I spoke in detail with Jean Indenge about his motivation to go to school. Indenge had, like the other two gentlemen from the Equatorial province, first followed lessons in his own village for some years in one of the little bush schools which, in his experience, were relatively widespread: *"You see in each village, there was a basic cell, in each village there were small schools where children of certain age, say 6, 7, 8 years, would enter and spend around two or three years. That was the case for me, almost three years. And when the curricula available there were completed, well it was a question of going to a properly officially recognised school."* At this village school the children did not learn much: *"They taught rudimentary education, reading and writing, you had to know the alphabet, reading and the elements of arithmetic and after three years those that were talented, they would already have exceeded this level of education."* Indenge's school was a Protestant school and that had one difference to other schools: *"What I know is that I finished this school and that I was unemployed, so to speak, for a few years, before going to another school. And during this period of unemployment and because it was a Protestant school I had a book, the same as the moniteur."* Indenge did just the same as the *moniteur*, on the basis of his own book: reading and singing. And his knowledge thus was as developed as that of the teacher.

For him going to the mission school meant he had to leave his familiar environment and make a long journey. I asked to what extent the children had been able to build up a background for taking such a far-reaching decision themselves. I said to him that he must have been very motivated to start this. He answered with a few rhetorical questions: *"When one went to the village schools, at that age, is there an understanding of what one will be doing at that school? All the more so at that time, those guys who were in our village, who hunted, who knew how to write or who sang Protestant songs, would that affect young people? That, I do not know!"* For himself he had reasoned that behind school there had to be a sort of vocation, although he clearly still had difficulty in explaining this to himself and still seemed to be looking for an explanation: *"But always I was called*

*by something like a wind that attracts you like that. It was only much later that I understood that there was a vocation from I don't know what, attraction, expectation, I don't know what."* Also significant in his case was the fact that his older brothers also went away to school. He described that as the way in which the vocation received an effective form: *"But, in order for the expectation, this call to be effective, it was necessary to have a few brothers in my family who were at the school, even if they stopped in the second or third year of primary education, it was necessary to have that."*

Indenge remembers being very enthusiastic about learning to write. He was a good pupil and practiced diligently, also in the evenings after school. He described his feeling about going to school as a mixture of compulsion and longing: *"It was at the time that we discovered organised school, there were 300, 400 pupils and more, we were not yet completely marked but still we were there because of obligation on the one hand and as though it was a game on the other."* Indenge described a sort of indefinite situation in which the children found themselves and in which they were maintained by the disciplinary rules and the things they had to do, which they sometimes found nice and sometimes not. There was no higher purpose. Indenge was clearly also in that situation and compared that with the European context. He conceded that they had no role models, no reference points: *"Because we did not have any points of reference. The points of reference here (in Belgium, JB), today, that means asking the question to a child of 4, 5 years of age: 'what do you want to be later?' There are those that would say: 'I want to be a policeman', others who say 'I want to be a doctor', etc. etc. What does that mean? What these children are doing is looking for people with whom they can identify."*

He was clearly still thinking about it himself: *"When I ask the question again, it is because it was necessary to have points of references in a person, who works, who has a bicycle or who has 'l'union fait la force', etc. etc. From that moment, one says: 'I, I want to be this ... that occurred then because he was at school.' While we say: 'I am going to school to be like him!'"*<sup>[ix]</sup> That sort of role model was therefore missing and Indenge did not succeed in describing his longing to go to school in more detail. It remained a sort of undefined longing or even something that people just did because it was the established thing. *"But why did one go to school? This desire was due to what? I am still asking that question because I cannot discover it, it was simply a game like that, and: 'I have to go to*

*school, we are talking about school'!"* His parents were really not convinced that he should leave and it was obviously his older brothers who persuaded them to let their youngest son go to the big school. It can hardly be anything other than that they saw the importance of this, although according to Indenge they could only just read and write: *"They were not very successful in their level of education, eh"*. This witness indicates that speaking of conscious strategies, made in advance, is not completely correct.

In *Naître et mourir au Zaïre* Jewsiewicki collected some statements from Congolese witnesses about their lives during the colonial period. These were mostly life stories of illiterate people who were recorded by family members, except for a few exceptions. Most of the stories only briefly treat the school history of the protagonists but do report – even if summarily– things mentioned by my interviewees. For example the fact that children in the countryside only began primary education at a rather late age: *"At thirteen years of age, I left my parents to go to the Catholic mission of Libanda in order to receive my First Communion. After having received First Communion, I registered in the first year of primary school to start my studies. If I had started my studies late, that was because there was no school in the Ngiri."*[x] This is an element that evidently often comes to the fore in people's memories. That was also the case with Jean Indenge and he referred to the same reasons: *"Well, at that time, when we hadn't received the required age, which was around 12, 13 years of age, it was not possible to go to that school that was many kilometres from the village, as I will explain a little later."*

It is not difficult to place this as a memory; it must after all have been a fundamental moment in the young lives of these people. A great adventure, which the person involved liked to talk about in detail so many years later: *"One left one's small village with a small suitcase. In my case, I may say that I was privileged, I had a metal case with a few pairs of trousers, some shirts, a few coins. And we left for a long time. Over twelve months we only had two holidays. And just think: leaving my home to arrive at this mission in Wafanya was two days' walk. On foot, barefoot! And the majority of the time, there were real roads suitable for motor vehicles but we could not follow those because that was too far, we preferred the shortcuts. However, the shortcuts required walking on the tracks where we sometimes would face an elephant before us. Well, so we would leave, very early in the morning from our home and then to spend the night in an*



*unknown village. So just picture that in your head (...) Well. We arrived in the village, a stranger, where we asked for hospitality (accommodation, JB), spent the night if we found hospitable people, or you would borrow mats because there were no mattresses and then, very early in the morning at around four a.m., we would rise to continue the walk through ... the most virgin forest that exists to arrive at the edge of a river. The river had to be crossed to arrive at the mission."*

Stéphane Boale also confirmed during the conversations I had with him that people waited a long time before sending children to the mission school. He thought it was because it was a dangerous journey: *"Ah yes, but why did you have to wait? It was because of the killings! It was dangerous. Even getting married: you had to marry women you knew. Not more than one kilometre away. And when sending children, there was nothing heard about them. If a person left, no news was received."* He himself described the journey of over two hundred kilometres as *"une expérience impressionnante"* and he had trouble with homesickness but recovered from it quickly. Indenge expressed the shock of arrival somewhat pithily by describing his first impression as follows: *"We were no longer in our village, we were somewhere!"* He linked that very expressly to the fact that he was now at a place where whites were continually present: *"Now you would see them, not one, but three and continually."* The presence of female religious workers, too, was a new, alienating experience for him: *"We knew that they existed and that they were called "Sisters". But now we could actually visualise these beings called "Sisters". That clearly had an impact on us (laughs, JB)."*

## *2.2. Motivation*

A completely different question naturally relates to the reasons for continuing education, continuing going to school. In the interviews I conducted that element was never explicitly put forward. In hindsight the gentlemen seemed to consider their continued education the obvious thing to do, although that cannot really have been the case in the given context. Boale implied it to some extent. When he was about seventeen he finished primary school. When I mentioned the junior seminary, he told me spontaneously that he would not have been allowed to go there: *"But I did not have the opportunity to go there. I was prepared but my history was not known. In other words, in order to go to the seminary, the priest had to know your origins. I was the third in the class when I left primary school. But I was not known, my identity was not known."* He certainly suggested that you had to have good connections, be in contact with the right people, to be able

to go to the seminary. Obviously he felt obliged to give a few words of explanation: *"And from all those who went to the higher seminary, only one succeeded, all the others were thrown out."* And then to conclude about himself: *"They did not know where to put me really. I was considered too young to be a teacher."*

In contrast, with Jean Boimbo everything seemed very clear. After primary school he simply went straight to the teacher training college. Once he was there, there did seem to be some problems, because there were too many candidates and the classes were too crowded. The Brothers therefore organised a *concours* and only those who scored more than 90% could immediately go on to the higher year (Boimbo was 19 at that time). His ambitions were already clear at the time, he says: *"We had goals, eh! We saw our elders who were working for the State, in a good job, or teachers, who were clean and who taught, and there were guys who were poor and we wanted to work so that we could help our family. We had determination, we wanted to become like some (...) we liked school, so that we could become someone later."* That partly fits in with what Jean Indenge said about the initial motivation for going to primary school. The example of others played an important role for the children at that time.

This was also true for Josephine Bongondo, who was at school in Kinshasa in the 1950s: *"Each person had their own ideas of what they wanted to do: 'I want to work'; 'I want to get married'; or: 'I want to join a religious order'. But I only had one thought, to work. To work like some friends worked at that time."* In her interview Bongondo agreed that specific expectations existed for the girls at domestic school. Although only a little French was taught, that was still enough to begin to dream of a 'real' job in an office: *"Yes, Ma'am Reine, Ma'am France, Ma'am Rumanne... They gave us the hope that as we had started to talk a little French, we would be able to work in offices."* She said that her parents had a typewriter at home. She wrote the letters and digits from the machine down on paper and during playtime at school she wrote them down again in the sand, then she practiced with her friends: *"We even created our own song: 'We are pupils from middle school, we are to be congratulated, we will work in offices (one day). Love and push (the dance)!'"* These were girls at the domestic school, i.e. a middle school. In comparison with most Congolese women they had a special position. Still, this picture of the future was not obvious for them; *Mama* Bongondo very clearly remembers the sharp reaction of the Sisters: *"Our sister*

*came: 'What? You, a black woman, working in an office? A black woman will not work a single day in an office! She will work in her husband's house! In an office, a black woman would never work! Go on! All of you, you are punished! Go! You, Joséphine, you have invented all these stories! You will remain on your knees for a whole week outside class! Hands raised! You will see, you brat!'"[xi]*

### *The interrelations at the mission*

#### *3.1. The relationship with the missionaries, through the eyes of the pupils*

How close were the missionaries to the young Congolese? In some stories the Sisters appear a faraway spirit, an apparition with whom the pupils had very little contact. *"Sister Josepha, she passed by in the classroom all the time."* The Sisters, who managed the school, had a purely supervisory function. The moniteurs were supervised closely. This supervision fitted well into the hierarchy of authority at the mission which seemed self-evident to the pupils. The general rule was for the pupils not to speak to or to bother the missionaries unless strictly necessary. If there were problems with the subject matter to be learnt, if they didn't understand something, they went to the Congolese teaching staff first, who were naturally closest to the pupils. At any rate, that was Boale's experience: *"You get the idea? Because the moniteurs were not like the professors here. They were the framework. They were close-by. In the mission, close-by."*

The Sister only became involved if the teacher did not know either: *"While we only went to the Sisters for major problems, that the moniteur could not solve. But it was possible, for example mathematical problems, say the rule of three, algebra ... if the moniteur was unable to understand it, the Sister headmistress would come and explain the method."* Since there was always a Sister in the neighbourhood, that almost happened automatically: *"The fact that she was present all the time, '24 hours a day', she immediately knew if there was a problem. And consequently she would intervene, either at the time she noticed the problem in the class, she would explain the method, for very complicated problems."* What exactly was meant by "complicated problems"? *"The story of the Holy Trinity, that was a little complicated. Or if the moniteur started to babble, to change the subject abruptly, the Sister would intervene."* As a second example he used the mathematics lesson. Fractions, dividing by a fraction or decimal numbers were experienced as difficult. Such things were experienced by the pupils as a form of superiority: *"It was very uncommon!!! Because when we saw that, we said to ourselves that the moniteur concerned did not measure up. That*

*irritated the moniteur.*" However, they did know that this superiority was not only because of the higher intelligence of the Sisters: *"She also had help because she had the 'solutionnaires'."*[xii]

Apart from this, the Sisters seemed to be fairly absent from the mission post. Boale said that they just did their job. Once the work was done, they went back to the convent. At the boys' boarding school it was not the Sisters but the Fathers who supervised. Here too, just as in the school itself, tasks were delegated. The Fathers appointed responsible people from among the boys, the *capitas* (*prefects*). The system was probably similar to those used in European boarding schools. These *capitas* had to organise and supervise the others and to report to the responsible Father. He only came along from time to time to check up or if he knew something was not in order. Punishment followed if the rooms were not orderly enough or not clean enough.

Boimbo voiced quite a different opinion, he looked back on a very satisfactory relationship that he had maintained with the Sisters. There are a few explanations for this. At the mission post the Sisters were responsible for the school and therefore they were also responsible for the religion or mathematics lesson. Besides this Boimbo had been a *capita*. Then as an older pupil he had been responsible for younger pupils for some years. In this position he had to hold assemblies and be responsible for the maintenance of good order in his group. In this position he very often came into contact with the Sisters, for he belonged to one of the 'chosen' allowed to work on weaving raffia, an activity that was definitely reserved for pupils who, because of their intelligence, diligence or for other reasons, were in the good books of the religious workers. Boimbo obviously had good memories of this and in the way in which he spoke of it there was still some pride there: *"I assisted. There was a Sister in charge of it and I helped the Sister. I watched the guys who made mistakes. I did the rounds or they came and ordered the raffia. You know what raffia is? Carpets were made from the raffia, with rods. The Sister drew the designs in the evening, with me and the others. For example, a square there, a fish there, in yellow, red. Or the design of a river and a boat."*

However, there was also another side to the iron discipline that both Boale and Indenge could still picture very well. Boale related spontaneously that although the pupils had to be 'inside' in the evenings and lying in their beds when curfew rang, they still enjoyed a certain freedom during the day. He remembered the

boarding school as a domain that was clearly separated from the village (that can also be seen on photographs and maps). But there was no problem in leaving that domain outside the hours of obligatory presence. That more or less meant the pupils could move freely at midday, at some hours in the evenings and probably also at the weekends: *"For example we were allowed to go out and were let back in if we simply wanted to go and buy something to eat. But a person who was in the boarding school and tried to leave during the hours of supervision, or if he could not be found, risked being punished."* He subsequently changed this statement by saying: *"If he did not have a reason for going, he was not allowed to be absent, no? And then, the pupils were there almost all day. In the morning, lessons, at midday, lunch, in the afternoon, more lessons and afterwards it was often study, or the cinema, prayers, activities."*

Indenge expanded on this aspect much more. He particularly made remarkable statements in the context of food provisions. He complained as much about the lack of food as about the quality of what the pupils got to eat (his statement about *peau de cochon* has previously been cited). The consequence of this is that the children exerted themselves to get enough food. Indenge did not give the impression that the Fathers had anything against it. Whoever had money, or could think of something else to trade, could go to the village to buy manioc himself *"At midday, we made do, we said: 'You go and find some water, you go and find manioc flour and another looked for nuts'. In thirty minutes we came back together, we started to prepare it and the manioc leaves we ate contained cyanotic acid (sic)? It had to be heated long enough. But we had less than thirty minutes."* The children obviously had a building available, described by Indenge as a large hangar, where they cooked for themselves. There was no supervision by the missionaries, he said: *"What would they have to supervise? They did not give wood, they did not give anything. We had to make do, as simple as that."*

Boimbo's declarations were less detailed but also fit with these: *"Those who were boarders ate at the boarding school. But there was no refectory as such eh. You had to manage on your own. Each person prepared food for himself."* The missionaries did give food but *"it was bad grub"*. He listed the alternatives: *"There was time until eight p.m. to get yourself food. We would go fishing, we were very close to the river. Or we could go and work for somebody to earn money."* Again work had to be done to pay the moniteurs for their extra French lessons. If necessary this involved working for the teacher himself: *"You would*

*look for kindling or wood for the moniteur's wife or you would iron his trousers, his clothes or his wife's clothes."* So leaving the grounds of the boarding school was allowed, as long as one was back before eight o'clock.

Consequently, there seemed to be a certain amount of freedom for the pupils in a number of areas and there were gaps in the timetables and in the supervision and discipline by the missionaries. However, those were exceptions and in the memories of those concerned the strict and regulated life is retained. That is apparent from the statements of all three. For example in the already quoted statement from Boale that there was always something to do. But Boimbo also said: *"The days ran to time, eh. We had our occupations, there were no empty hours."* And Indenge described the typical course of the days in some detail, from early morning through the curfew to awakening the next morning and concluded with: *"And then the chain continued! Every day!"*

### *3.2. Authority and how to handle it*

#### *3.2.1. Authority*

Stéphane Boale explained the general atmosphere between the teaching staff and the pupils in detail: *"In the army, if you are told: 'Go there', you go there even if there are insects there. The total submission to a superior. You have to show that you have respect for your superiors. Even if you want to ask a question or pursue it in greater depth because you did not understand something. Or when the teacher wrote a mistake on the board, you were not allowed immediately to say 'You have made a mistake', you had to be much more careful. With submission and denunciation, in a normal degree. You were never allowed to say to a teacher or to the Sister headmistress or a person more authorised than you: 'You know nothing, you do not know any French!' or something similar. In your time, that is possible, democracy allows you to say such things. But not for us, that was not done!"*

Although his use of language does not always allow a clear interpretation, a number of remarks between the meanderings of the conversation make it clear that the interaction in class proceeded very strictly and authoritatively: *"Or, the teacher would feel that there were children who were disturbing him and he would say that they had to leave, as a punishment. You, you did not talk, but you knew who was talking. But you would still accept it. So you were punished, even though you had not done anything. (It was like that at school?) Yes, yes, complete submission. And when you wanted to put things in order, it was with a lot of*

*courtesy.*" The relationship between pupils and Sisters (and by extension all missionaries) was one of military discipline, according to Boale. I called the Sisters at one point "*patronnes de l'école*", which he obviously found very funny. He asked me if I had ever been in the army. He compared the situation in the class with that of the army. Strangely enough he changed straight over to the moniteurs, although the question was about the Sisters. The authority obviously passed over from the one to the other in particular circumstances.

Authority was everywhere, and penetrated all parts of the lives of the pupils. Everything was being observed. The girls who were at school in Kinshasa referred repeatedly to interference by the Sisters in their lives. Mama Bongondo had had to endure a great deal of criticism: *"And then you know that the religious workers and the priests were very strict people. They did not allow their affairs to be taken jokingly. But I also liked to put on a lot of powder. Also liked being elegant. When we went to Mass, I took Mama's jewellery, the largest, I wore them in my ears. Ma'am France, Ma'am Romane, Ma'am Gertrie Kanda, all those ma'ams... Eh! They did not joke. Because they were members of a religious order, they also wanted you to be like them: 'You cannot enter the Sanctuary! If you want to enter, you must wash your face as it should be, well, well, well. Remove all the Joli Soir you used to powder yourself! Remove all the gold you have put around your neck, put it in your pocket and then you may 'enter the Sanctuary!'"* [xiii]

This same pupil was repeatedly confronted by the Sisters with the fact that she was relatively well off (she was an only child and got many material advantages from her mother). She must for example explain why she came to school by bicycle (unmistakably an expression of luxury). She also remembered how one of the local missionaries made the claim one day that certain pupils were intelligent because they took part in fetishism. Clearly the Father was looking at her, for he asked her – accusingly – for an explanation: *"I was there, not daring to say a single word. I have never in my life been to a fetishist! And well! You understand how much we were misused! During our time, if you (always) dressed well, if you were a person who claimed her rights, you really had a lot of problems."*

This same Mama Bongondo remembered how she had originally ended up in education. The Sisters had decided that for her: *"We were returning from Mass as we were entering into the enclosure of Saint Petre, our Mother Superior held me back. She said to me: 'Joséphine, from today, you will teach.' I said: 'Eh! Mother superior! What are you telling me?' 'I am telling you, from today, you will be a*

*teacher.' I had to teach in the third year primary. It was subject matter I had never seen. I did not know how to do it but I went anyway."* Intervention in the business of the pupils, both in school and outside, have obviously remained in the memory.

This contrasts with the experiences of their male colleagues in the Equatorial province, who referred much less to that sort of interference. That may naturally also relate to the fact that they went to school in a different sort of environment, an environment which was, if anything, much more controlled by the missionaries. The girls in Kinshasa were confronted daily with two different worlds to live in whenever they went from home to school and back. For the boys 'in the provinces' it was quite different. They were at boarding school and the organisation of their days was ruled by the missionaries. The grip of the missionaries on their daily life could certainly not be less comprehensive than in the city. Still, there was certain interference that the former pupils remembered noticeably well and about which they still got excited. Both Indenge and Boimbo related that with the MSC at the primary school they were not allowed to wear footwear; long trousers were also forbidden: "*We wore our trousers during the holidays. We were only allowed to do so then.*" When asked why these rules were imposed Boimbo said that it had something to do with relations with the opposite sex: "*They said, if you had shoes, slippers, if you wore trousers, you would go and seduce the girls.*"

### *3.2.2. Punishments*

I asked each one of the three whether the teachers and/or the missionaries were strict and to what extent punishment was imposed. All three went into detail about the grounds for the punishments that were imposed. Boale mentioned physical punishment but said that it was rare. Indenge remembered that some missionaries, and also teachers, possibly on their own initiative and possibly not, would hit the pupils with a hand or a stick. Boimbo reported *peines corporelles* very briefly. According to him a few missionaries, directors or *capitas* could impose corporal punishment or physical work as a punishment, the teachers had to keep to lighter forms of punishment. None of the interviewees seemed to find this subject interesting, they did not seem to have been personally confronted with it themselves. Boale remarked that this sort of punishment was normal and he asked me "if I had never had to kneel down in the class?"

But they were more vague about the strictness of the missionaries and the



teachers. Jean Boimbo remembered strict interventions but these were certainly not common: *"There were only some missionaries who were ... Others kept a little more distance. Like Father Albert, he was not in contact with us, Father Jacques, he was the priest at the mission, he was ... no. Like Father Eugène, he was mean! Sometimes, you would say good day he would lash out. You are a man of God and when people say good day to you, you lash out. That is not a man of God! And when he had trees heavy with fruit, when they fell and we went to gather them from the ground, we were expelled from the school. It was better to let them rot! (...) The moniteurs, that depended, there were some very strict ones, there were also less strict ones, eh. There were mean ones and kind ones."*

### *3.2.3. Resistance*

In the literature on this subject there exists quite a considerable discussion in terms of resistance (whether symbolic or not) by the colonised against the colonisers. It is natural that some forms of resistance were provoked, after all the missionaries exercised strong control over their pupils and they decided what would happen and with whom. Finding expressions of resistance in the testimonies of those involved is another matter. Jean Boimbo referred to it expressly when he talked about the secret organisation of French lessons by the moniteurs: *"We wanted to talk French. We agreed with the masters and were against the priests. Because they did not want to teach us French. We were impatient. We even gave the masters the books. In order to learn conversations. 'Bonjour monsieur', 'Où vas-tu?', 'Où est-tu?'. They did that on condition of payment, a phraseology, some kind of dialogue with a gentleman. 'Où vas-tu?', 'Comment allez-vous?', 'Tu es malade?'. So, we would have our book and would recite it with a friend."*

From the fact that the missionaries imposed punishment, one can automatically deduce that disobedience occurred among the ranks of the pupils. Indenge spoke about the boarding school: *"At 8 p.m. the bell for bed. And then the head moniteur would call assembly in case somebody was missing - and occasionally somebody was missing! - The eldest boys slipped out for two reasons, i.e. one of two reasons. Either they had gone night fishing. But nobody would tell them that. Or the head moniteur would perhaps believe they had gone to the city, to look for women. Because we were 12, 13 years old, it was not our problem. But there were some boys there who were 18. And then they had to be watched! An absence like that would naturally mean suspension. Not having spent the night inside."*

Of course, not everything punished can be qualified as conscious resistance. Such a thing depends naturally on very concrete circumstances and the individual disposition of people. That is also clear from the answers that the interviewees gave when they were asked about it. To the question of whether there was a good understanding between the teachers and pupils Boimbo's convinced answer was: *"Yes. We plotted. There was an alliance. We got on together very well!"* After this he confirmed the hypothesis that the picture of the always obedient pupil was not correct but that a great deal happened that was not supposed to, mainly behind the backs of the missionaries.

By her own admission, Mama Julienne Aboli was also a good, though difficult, pupil. She loved to use make-up, something that the Sisters forbade at school. She liked to wear a *pagne* instead of the school uniform. That was not allowed at school but on their way to school the girls did this anyway; it was probably a sort of rebellious deed against "the authorities". That was a risky undertaking, for if they were caught they got into difficulties on two fronts: at school for wearing the clothes and at home because it was confiscated. But they also had to take responsibility for other business: *"One of my fellow students was called H  l  ne Adokozima and she gave birth. Nevertheless, she was a clever girl. And there she gave birth! And I was a bad girl! Well, when she gave birth, we went to visit her. During Mass, I was called: 'Why did you go to visit Adokozima? Why?' I was given punishment. I was suspended from school: 'You went to visit a person who gave birth in mortal sin.' 'The person who has sinned is not her! It is me!' And this reply (by me) caused the suspension."*

An answer such as this must indeed be seen as a conscious act of resistance, insofar as Aboli must have known that this answer was much too frank. This resistance really did not go very far, which is obvious from the outcome of the incident. *"Then we had a religious Sister who taught us dressmaking, her name was Reine Karl. She came to the house. She said: 'Come! You are almost finished. Simply come and ask for pardon.' I went there - what else could I have done? - I asked for pardon so that I could do the exams."*[xiv] Aboli had no choice. Taking the examinations, and thus being able to progress in the school system and keep the chance of a diploma and a future, played a strong part. She had to ask forgiveness for a deed that she supported. It is difficult not to see this as a technique to break possible resistance. Both in the interviews with missionaries and correspondence in the MSC archives a great many references to the

expulsion of pupils as a punishment can be found. The schoolgirl's reaction shows that the school exercised real power.

In the presence of this power factor in the lives of the pupils, different sorts of reactions were possible. Someone like Boale presented an image of himself as a well-behaved pupil. That was given in an unconscious way but this only made it clearer. When our conversation came to the point of learning French, I asked him what opinion the pupils had about it. I then asked him if they also demonstrated in favour of this to the teachers or missionaries. To this he answered, somewhat piqued, as if I had said something very stupid, and the following conversation ensued:

*Boale: But yes, but I am going to return the question: When you were under the Dutch authority, were there laws that could be contested? Congo has been colonised by the Belgians. Just as once, they should prepare food to eat for the prisoners. Can the prisoners claim the right of eating sufficiently? Just like Europeans do? No! It's to show you that the curriculum had to be followed to the letter. It never disappeared. We said to each other: What will we do with Mongo (Lomongo, JB), but anyway.*

*JB: But you thought about it anyway?*

*Boale: The thought was not expressed!*

*JB: But there was anyway...*

*Boale: Yes! Just like you think about your future now and later. We thought about that. It exists inside all of us.*

*JB: But you didn't talk about it?*

*Boale: No no! If you talk about it, you go to prison or you get expelled. Sister Josepha or Father Superior, it's not they who made the curriculum! The curriculum was made here!*

Boale had completely accepted the omnipresent authority and control and considered it to be a normal fact of his life. That actually was true for each of the three gentlemen I interviewed: they hadn't found the authority so difficult or in any case did not let that be seen.

### *Specific memories of school and school times*

#### *4.1. School lessons*

In general it was easier to get the interviewees to talk about the circumstances under which they went to school, and the context in which that happened, than

about what happened in the classroom. This observation is also true for the people who were interviewed in Kinshasa, although that can partly be explained by the more brief and general character of the conversations. In fact, I was already conscious of the difficulty of getting detailed descriptions of classroom behaviour before the interviews began. Simply thinking about some possible questions and applying them to my own time at school was sufficient to realise this.

Boale talked about the curriculum and considered what was presented to him at school as similar to the Belgian curriculum. He thought the two ran in parallel, although that was in fact impossible. The fact that he had to learn much about Belgium convinced him that this was really the case: *"The curriculum implemented at that time was completely the same as in Belgium. It only differed in the language because of the geography ... we studied the geography of Belgium. When I was at primary school in Bokote, I already knew the 9 provinces of Belgium! And the Schelde and the Meuse and things like that!"* He was at primary school from the end of the Second World War, so the changes that followed from the reforms of 1948 can hardly have affected him.

Not many memories surfaced about the subject matter to be learnt. After some questions about the *causeries* Boale did remember that fables were told: *"For example La Fontaine (sic) and also Victor Hugo."* When I referred, in my conversation with Indenge, to the remark frequently made that the history lessons were mainly about Belgian history, he originally answered that there had in fact been a start with Congolese history. I asked him what the content of that was and he referred to the division of the colony into territories, the evolution of the administrative divisions, the travels of Stanley and Livingstone, the exploration travels of the Portuguese in the sixteenth century and the struggle against the slave trade. Indeed, nothing was said at all about 'pre-colonial' history. He also insisted on mentioning lessons in physical education, for he remembered those very well: *"There was athletics. There was no swimming because we did not have a swimming pool and there was football, which in my opinion was as much a part of physical education as leisure (...) There was consequently athletics that consisted of long jump, high jump and then, how do you say, sprinting, what else? There was no gymnastics on the horse and all that, no. There was also wrestling."*

Besides this, I mainly tried to reconstruct the techniques the teachers used when teaching. Repetition also came to the fore as a leading principle in the interviews.

The master began a lesson with the repetition of the material from the previous lesson. He tried to find out if everything had been understood by questioning a few pupils. This could not take too long, for often a lesson was only half an hour: *"And if the pupils truly hadn't understood, we mixed yesterday's lesson with today's."* According to Jean Indenge that was also one of the most important elements. *"When teaching, because teaching really was better than that of today... we could not proceed to the next lesson without repeating what had already been seen."* In addition he emphasised that repetition during the lesson was in fact a necessary element for the pupils: *"We did not have any parents to stand behind (us, JB) we always repeated, it was not possible to progress without having understood what had been done. And naturally there were some slowcoaches, who either had limited intellectual capacity due to their age or had been born like that but they did not understand or they understood late!"*

Indenge was also convinced that this was a good method. It was what the pupils needed at that time. *"It was not possible to go too fast like that. It was something entirely new that had to be put into the head of a person, so it had to be exact and certain so that he had sufficient comprehension, so that there was more or less complete assimilation."* Indenge did not seem to want to say that the requirement for repetition was a logical consequence of the lower intelligence of the Congolese, in comparison with others. He even compared it with how it is done now in schools and drew the conclusion from this that much repetition was certainly better, although he implicitly conceded that the subject matter to be learned was not very broad. But that was exactly an additional reason to have a better grasp of the little that they got: *"What we notice today is that we are always running behind. (...) And the number of courses, just see what there is today, there is a plethora, there are a lot of subjects the young people learn today! So they have to run after time. But there, there was something very precise, we taught such and such a thing for the future. So it was essential to master the little we learnt absolutely, there was nothing else for it."*

#### 4.2. Religiosity

Something that seemed obvious at that time and consequently was probably perceived in a rather unconscious way, is the religious character of the life as set up in the school and, by extension, at the mission. It is, again, not very explicitly present in the stories that the people tell about it afterwards but it is there. It often creeps into particular expressions they use or the way in which

they refer to particular things. It is also dependent on the career they have had since. Mama Bongondo recounted the story of the beginning of her professional career as a teacher. After she had mentioned the – for her totally unexpected – decision by the Sisters to put her in front of the class, she said the following: *“I was given a timetable. That was not too complicated for us with the Catholics, we started school with the catechism, you see? As I was also taught the Catechism.”* At another point she just wanted to make clear to the interviewer where she had got to in the chronology of her story and to make it clear that she was talking about the 1950s: *“Then we have passed 1950... The Holy Year was 1950”*.

In fact, I hardly talked about religious aspects with Stéphane Boale. Still, it was very obvious from different details that he was very religious. On my first visit to him, he suddenly suggested praying before we started the interview. Later he repeated the following message a few times: *“In relation to the teachings of Jesus Christ, we are deaf and dumb. We had to be talked to through signs.”* At a certain moment we were talking about the possibilities of relaxation at the boarding school. Because he was talking about *the cinema*, I asked him if anything was organised by the missionaries to keep the boys busy after school, too: *“No, at the primary school level, no, cinema was rather at the teacher training college level. But if not distractions, there were prayers, that was checked; there were the scouts.”* Boale was the only one who said anything about the youth movement; the other two had not been involved in it or did not mention it. In contrast he told me that he had been in the scouts movement and in the “crusades”. He was not in fact able to describe what the crusaders did exactly. *“It formed character”*. And at the scouts civic values and Christian charity were learned.

Indenge and Boimbo, whom in the meantime had clearly distanced themselves from their religious upbringing, still recounted stories about the obligatory attendance of mass. At five or six o’clock in the morning the boys had to go to mass before they had anything to eat. Even the ones who lived in the neighbourhood and could sleep in at home had to get up at that early hour for assembly and to go to mass. Their presence was checked by the *moniteurs*, who were also obliged to take part in the church service: *“If you were not there, you were asked why you had not come and if there was no reason, you were punished.”* They also talked about religion lessons, catechetics, religious history. It was again very clear from these stories how important the religious aspect was in the curriculum but they did not seem to be very concerned about it. For each of

them religious education was pretty much a practical concern. Neither of them had been baptised as a Catholic, considering that they had spent their early youth in a Protestant environment. They therefore had to know their bible story perfectly (*"the Gospels"*), to be baptised: *"And well, you must reply, knowing religion perfectly, the gospels, each gospel that was given, we repeated."*

Indenge came back to this later in the conversation. I asked him what he thought at that time about the important place that religion played in the curriculum. According to him the boys were not concerned about it: *"We did not think about it. We followed and succeeded. If you did not succeed you would not be baptised. If you were not baptised, you were not a son of God!"* I remarked that he therefore, perhaps unconsciously, must have had a certain desire to be a part of 'God's World'. He did not agree with that. Boys of 12, 13 years old did not think about that, he replied. Baptism much more signified entry to further studies: *"We went to school where we left with a certificate that allowed you a kind of ascendancy... You wanted to finish because in that way you would reach a certain class. That is all! So, in order to succeed, everything you were given, you were obliged to learn whether you wanted to or not and to pass the exam."* That would open doors in the world and allow the pupils to be like others. A second element also surfaced: the appreciation of the people at home, in their original environment, where quite often there was nobody who had a certificate or diploma. It was therefore just as much a symbol of social prestige.

#### *4.3. French*

French was the 'subject' most talked about by everyone. Boale was the most cautious in his comments. He suspected that back then the pupils were already reflecting on what they were going to do later with the Lomongo they had to learn at the MSC school. It was difficult to get him to say that because he did not seem to understand properly what I was getting at. Afterwards, everyone found it natural that they had not had enough French at school, he said. He assumed that the pupils also thought that, but he swore to me that nobody could ever talk about it. Clearly, the fear of punishment was too great for that.

Indenge immediately described the special significance that French had for the children at that time: *"After the second year, we knew the grammar of our native language perfectly, we knew religious history, we had been baptised. In the third year we already felt slightly different because that was when the French lessons started. There were French lessons from the beginning of the third year."* The

content of most subjects was repeated, at least in part, each year, but the difference was, Indenge said, that as from the third year school books in French were used instead of the books in the mother tongue. He also explained the way in which French was taught: *"Eh, there was that, explanations that such and such meant that. That is what you would call French-Lomongo. The introduction, and after that, we only spoke in French. And from time to time, when we had a reading book, on such and such a lesson, we would read and sometimes there were things that were unpronounceable for their level. Well that, they were things they explained to us, pronunciation and what it meant. We were asked the question. Because to some extent we dropped our mother tongue and entered into French but we had to know what these words meant in our own language! Consequently, it was not possible simply to read 'Je suis, j'ai été, etc. etc.' to the end, like that, no! We were asked for explanations. We had to explain in Lomongo!"* It is clear from this that they were trying to reach a form of direct method, without really abandoning Lomongo as the language of education.

It has already been shown that Boimbo was yet more interested in French as a medium for social promotion. He raised the question of the 'forbidden' French lessons himself and immediately made the connection with the intention of the MSC to educate the children as much as possible in Lomongo and to put the study of French off as long as possible. I asked him explicitly again if he had thought the same about it at that time. He was formal: *"We wanted to speak French. We agreed with the masters and were against the priests. Because they did not want us to learn French."* Only afterwards, looking at the matter from a distance, he adopted these insights. It is not at all certain that the Fathers had shared their arguments for their choice of Lomongo with the pupils at that time, but in any event Boimbo had only recognised the value of it afterwards: *"But when you think about it, in the long term, it was not bad. But they should have combined the two. When you combine the two you would learn better than those who only learn French. Because they do not know their own language. And we can see the effects of that here, the Congolese born here, they do not have a culture. They are different. They do not know the language, our proverbs, our mechanisms. The respect of the old. They do not have any African and Congolese culture."*

The pupils considered French an important motor for social promotion. That was also apparent from the story of Mama Bongondo. It was just at the time that the first words of French were taught to them that she began to dream of a real job.



With her, just as with Boimbo, the attitude of the missionaries on that subject was very important in the judgement they pronounced on them. Bongondo declared in her interview that the girls from her school were only satisfied with the education given by the Sisters when they began to learn French. In one of the other interviews the interviewee considered the question of whether the education that he had received at the primary school should be considered inferior. He preferred to describe it as an education that was adapted to the needs of the coloniser and mentioned as a first criterion: 'knowing good French'. In comparisons between pupils, language returned as the criterion: "*x writes French better than y, although he only did two years beyond primary school*". Finally it surfaced in the evaluation of girls' education: "*Our mothers and even our spouses had not learned to hold a conversation in French. They were made to stay in the kitchen.*"[xv] French was a world language, Lomongo was much more for the back rooms of civilisation.

*The long-term effects: what has been retained?*

Edward Berman already wrote in the 1970s about African reactions to the missionaries.[xvi] He collected a number of stories spread over the whole continent of Africa. Most testimonies in his book came from English-speaking colonies but there was also one from the Congo. This told the story of an Angolese-Congolese man who went to a school in the south of the Congo, run by the Franciscans. He concluded his story with a general evaluation about the time with the missionaries: "*In retrospect I feel that the missionaries have done a great deal for me; without them I certainly would not be where I am today. They taught me self-discipline; their insistence on defining and reaching stated goals has been very helpful. The philosophy behind missionary education, at least in my case, was to make me a Roman Catholic priest so that one day I could 'save' Angolans for the Church. But it was never clear what I should save them for, or from.*" It is obvious that the narrator had profited from his time at school and the knowledge he had acquired and had later been able to use. Furthermore, afterwards he declared explicitly that this had been a conscious choice: "*The missionaries had certain aims and goals for me: they wanted me to be a good Catholic, to go to church everyday and to live their version of a Christian life. (...) While they used me for their purposes, I used the missionaries for my purposes. I think this is a fairly common pattern.*"

The narrator then makes it apparent that he was actually never planning to

become a priest and had originally wanted to follow a completely different course of education. He was then forced by circumstances to follow secondary education with the priests at the seminary because his family wanted him to do so: *“My uncle had the support of my father, who felt that several years at the seminary would provide a very strong background for other, non-priestly endeavours. After all, he and his brother studied at a minor seminary for several years, with no intention of becoming priests. For them Catholic education at the secondary level was the best available.”* This claim makes one suspect that there was a sort of distance between the external behaviour and the internal aims of the youths attending school and that this was true even from the previous generation. It sounds as if they conformed outwardly but rebelled internally. That is very clearly apparent in the huge contradiction between two statements in the last paragraph of this story. On the one hand the person concerned states that the missionaries had done a great deal for him: *“Without them I certainly would not be where I am today.”* On the other, he concluded: *“During my schooldays there was, and remains today, a strong resentment towards the missionaries.”*

In this testimony two important characteristics of the attitude of the colonised towards the colonisers come to the fore. Firstly: wrath and anger. In spite of the fact that the missionaries had provided an upbringing by which they had made particular skills their own and through these had been able to achieve some things in their lives, the Congolese were certainly not unqualifiedly positive towards their schoolmasters. Secondly, and following from this: the *quid pro quo*, or to put it another way, the fact that the colonised themselves also made strategic use of the coloniser and not just the opposite. These two elements also came to the fore in the conversations that I had myself.

### *5.1. “Resentment”: the paper by minister “Renquin”*

Jean Indenge was very well prepared for the interview. After our first conversation, which lasted about three hours, we made another appointment because he was very interested and because I wanted to look again at a number of subjects with him. During this meeting, which took place in his café, he brought “the document” up in conversation at a certain point. Indenge’s friends, who had come to sit with us, obviously knew what it was about. “The document” turned out to be a speech, which according to Indenge had been given by the first Belgian minister of the colonies, Renkin.[xvii] The text contained so-called guidelines from the minister to the first missionaries who came to the Congo. In

extremely explicit language it was made clear to them how they must behave towards the Congolese. In summary it seems from this text that the missionaries had to function as an auxiliary of the colonial administration and in this capacity to teach the Congolese to be docile, to turn their attention away from the economic exploitation of the land and try to enrol them as a workforce. The text was, in short, a direct insult to the Congolese and was perceived as such by Indenge and his friends.

As the discussion of this text threatened to steer our conversation in the wrong direction, I did not go any further into it at that point. It was only much later, when I studied the text in detail, that it became clear to me that the text was completely unsound. The name of the minister was not only misspelled ("Renquin"), the source that was noted there referred to a Congolese newspaper, *L'Avenir Colonial Belge*, of October 1920. At that time Renkin had not been minister of the colonies for almost two years. There is no doubt that the text is a historical forgery. Anyway, it is possible to find different versions of this text and these are discussed on Congolese websites and forums on the internet. Each of these texts seems to contain more flagrant historical faults than the last: on one of the websites I found Renkin was introduced as governor of Kinshasa in 1883. If that had been true, the subsequent prime minister would have begun his career very young: he was then only 21 years old.[xviii] However, all versions naturally emphasise the injustice of the colonial order: *"The following is an extract from his welcome speech, also serving as directives and regulations to be followed in the colony. The Belgian minister of the colonies talked to the missionaries who had just arrived in the Congo in order to evangelise it. You can find lies, cynicism, mixed with the policy of exploitation and racism in the head of the Belgians in relation to the Congolese citizens, our grandparents. It is that, the troubled heritage of the Congolese on the part of the Belgian colonists (sic). Alas! We should read and realise from where we come and assume an attitude that defies this past and we should inform our children: the best way to prepare for the future of our people, our race and our culture. (Franklin Katunda)"*[xix]

The way in which Indenge laid the document in front of me fitted in well with the position he had previously assumed. He was very interested, had thought out what he wanted to say well and had clearly also prepared himself in writing. He was happy that someone was coming to listen to his story. During the interview I noticed that on different subjects he formulated very negative criticism of the

missionaries. The living conditions, in terms of food and lodging, the heavy work the boys had to carry out and the sometimes unreasonable strictness of the missionaries (the fact that they were not even allowed to pick up fruit that had fallen from the Fathers' trees, in particular) were still painful memories for him. He still got angry about these subjects. When I asked him at the end of the first conversation (and thus before he put the famous document in front of me) what had stayed with him the most, looking back on the period, he gave me a rather neutral answer: *"The aim of the education was to help the colonial authorities to administer this large, extensive territory that is the Congo."* As an answer, it sounded rather strange; it was somewhat general and sounded much less personal than I had expected. However, he stuck by his comment and repeated again: *"The aim of education was generally to relieve the colonial authorities of some work in all areas."* Teachers first, just because there was a general need for education and subsequently *auxiliaires* for office work, *assistants* for agriculture and for doctors and so forth.

Although the comment was put in rather neutral terms, it could indeed be interpreted as critical. On the question of the degree to which he had been conscious of it at that time, he conceded that he had found this situation normal. I then asked him when he had begun to take a critical position towards the education he had enjoyed. That was much later, he said. In his answer he went on immediately to the fact that the education had been 'too slow'. By this he meant that the evolution to a fully-fledged educational system had progressed much too slowly: *"When did we notice that we were late, that we should go faster? That was when we started to be put together with the Europeans and to demand the same advantages. Then we were told 'Ah, but you haven't seen that, and that...'. So, we thought to ourselves: 'But whose fault is that?' so that is why I say that the Catholics were the cause of the slowness and that the liberals had to come to improve everything."* During the interview, Indenge consequently did not so much speak out critically about the fact that the pupils were used in the colonial system but more about the attitude of the colonisers, particularly the Catholics, who had curbed the development of education too much. Indirectly there is a criticism of the coloniser 'keeping down' the population but that had to be inferred, it was not explicitly present on the surface.

Jean Boimbo was much more explicit. Mention was already made of the importance that he attached to learning French and the consequences or the

judgements he associated with that. Boimbo later said that the missionaries were partially right in their preference for the local languages. The fact that he and his contemporaries had seen that differently at the time was because of their haste to make progress. Nevertheless, the only time he became at all excited during the interview was when he was talking about the missionaries and their manoeuvres to slow down the development of the Congolese. What he said then was especially revealing: *"They were the colonisers! They participated in the colonisation! All the administrators, before coming to the Congo, went to the colonial school in Antwerp. There they were taught how to live with the blacks. And I do not know whether Indenge gave you a photocopy of the speeches there. And the missionaries they were also in on it! They were security agents! And they kept us back, they kept us back..."* Boimbo therefore makes an explicit connection between the curbing attitude of the missionaries and the allegations in the document from Indenge.

The tenor of this document is, of course, very explicit. It contains a summing up of all that could be imputed to the colonial system and its collaborators, written in a very critical and even reproachful tone. According to the text there could be no doubt that the missions and the administration had made very definite agreements about the strategy they would use against the colonised people. The fact that both Indenge and Boimbo referred to this text shows that they still cherish the fundamental distrust towards the role the missionaries played in the Belgian Congo. The fact that this text also circulates on the Internet makes one also suspect that it is a relatively well-known text. What significance must be ascribed to this, apart from the more than enormous question marks about the authenticity of this document as a source of historical research? It is certain that some Congolese (including the interviewees) agree eagerly with the interpretation of colonisation that is made in it. According to this interpretation evangelisation was not the most important task of the missionaries: *"Your role essentially consists of facilitating the duties of the administrators and the industrialists"*, the text states literally. The Good News was mainly supposed to serve to prevent the Congolese from acquiring material wealth. It was therefore not so much about what the missionaries taught or the principles they proclaimed, but about their complicity with the administration. This was experienced negatively in any case, as an oppressor. Ceuppens suggested in her book about colonisation in the memory of the Congolese that this complicity recurs regularly in the imagery and often takes the form of a conspiracy theory.

She added: *"On the other hand some Congolese do in fact retain good memories of specific colonial Belgians, especially missionaries."*[xx] That also came out in the three conversations that I had, although in a different manner.

### 5.2. "Strategic" pupils?

Indenge had very clear memories of Father Pattheeuws, who arrived at the mission post in the 1950s.[xxi] According to Indenge the Father was considered *"rather unruly"* but on closer acquaintance seemed to be a very good man. The fact that he did his best to provide the boys with decent food was particularly appreciated by Indenge: *"Well, I still remember that I was in the group responsible for preparing the food. And that like usual we were given the pig's skin. He arrived, he asked 'what is that?' we explained to him that it was the food that we were given to eat. He got angry and threw it, he went to look for anything with the Sisters, real meat and from that day on we ate real meat!"* Besides, the new Father made sure the boys got soap to wash themselves, which was novel at that time. The fact that he could get shockingly angry or kick the boys did not outweigh the positive impression that Indenge had of him.

Jean Boimbo was also more outspoken on strategic thinking. Probably the difference between the two men has a lot to do with temperament or character traits. From the stories that Boimbo had told me about former times I got the idea that he already knew well what he wanted. He conspired with the *moniteurs*, behind the missionaries' backs. He was also one of those who made a quick career after independence. That he was a person who knew how to deal with problems was obvious from his achievements at school. He made it, as Indenge also did, to *capita (prefect)*. But in contrast to Indenge he seemed to attach much more importance to it and above all remembered the advantages that the position had brought him. As head of a team of raffia workers he had a rather luxurious position, for he was exempt from the heavy work that the other boys had to do. Later, too, in the teacher training college, he reached the level of *serveur* of the Brothers, which undoubtedly again allowed him to live in relatively comfortable circumstances.

Boimbo made very negative comments about the MSC and he did that very explicitly and spontaneously: *"I must tell you something about the MSC: The Sacred Hearts were not made for teaching. And then, the majority of the priests sent to us were not interested in education. And there were a lot of Flemings, who did not speak French well."* Taking this position was very clearly directed against

the MSC, for he even made a comparison with other congregations: the Brothers of the Christian Schools were, like the Jesuits, certainly intelligent and suited to education. He did mention one MSC member to whom he attributed positive characteristics. Father Cuypers was also one of the Fathers of the new generation:[xxii] *"There was a new parish priest (sic), who had been to the university and he did not agree with the policies of the old priests because we were not taught French. He came and gave French lessons himself in the fourth and fifth years. The moniteurs were seated and he gave the lesson. Grammatical analysis, logical analysis, French expressions, yes, yes."*

Both Indenge and Boimbo certainly referred once to a missionary or a Sister of whom they had good memories. In both of those cases that seemed to have a lot, if not all, to do with material advantages. The suggestion of the strategic 'use' of the coloniser by the colonised, here placed in the context of education and upbringing, must really be taken with a pinch of salt for another reason. It looks strongly like an interpretation that those concerned gave to their own life history in retrospect. At least we get this impression if we go by the testimonies that I collected. It does not look as if there were any conscious tactics or strategies put into effect by the pupils. Certainly, Indenge often let it be known during the conversation that he had only later become conscious of many mechanisms and processes which were going on at school. Boimbo, in contrast, made it appear that he had the reins in his hands from the start. He not only created that image by the way in which he told his tale, to my explicit question about whether he was already conscious of the importance of his actions, he answered without blinking: *"For my part I was always a very ambitious person."* He also stated that it was thanks to his ambition that he was able to go to teacher training college. Still, it remains difficult to evaluate how consciously someone acted at the time or whether, on the other hand, he had rationalised it *post hoc* and cast it into his story.

### *5.3. History according to Boale*

My third 'crown witness' seemed to approach it all in a different way. He seemed, in contrast to the two others, not to be concerned with a critical analysis of the colonial occurrences in general or colonial education in particular. I referred earlier to the problems that we had, or that I had, while talking to each other. Particularly typical was his reaction when I asked specific questions about occurrences or facts that he told me. He repeatedly reacted very defensively or

with rhetorical questions, in the sense of “would you have done it differently?” For example, when I asked him whether he had found it normal as a pupil that he had to learn certain things: *“Well yes, for example, would you contradict your parents, when they discussed the food they were going to prepare? Well no, you would accept it! Exactly! And we, we were colonised by those people and at that time no black would go and say that the Congolese should not study Belgian geography.”* Or he tried to make the things that he told me plausible, by highlighting the difference between Congolese and Belgian circumstances: *“You see, it is different from here. Here people live very close together and they are a lot younger when they start education.”* That in doing this he often unconsciously did make a point is not the question here. From these and other ways of reacting I could deduce that he had internalised his upbringing very strongly and did not question it to this day. He often gave the impression that he preferred the course of affairs then to the present one.

On another occasion we got into a discussion about the way in which he told me about certain occurrences. I corrected him a number of times, from the point of view that I must be able to make a distinction between what he himself had experienced and what he had ‘heard said’. At these times it was clear that we started from different views of what was ‘true’. The verifiability of facts and data was not at all as important to him as it was to me. At a certain moment I made a summary of facts that he had told me about his father at our first meeting. At this he told me that these were really about occurrences that he had learnt by being told and probably through his own reading, too. I understood that they did not necessarily have anything to do with his father. I reacted with irritation and told him that he had therefore really told me wrong things. To which he answered: *“Well ok, that is why I tell you: we need to be together to correct it, History is something one tells you.”* He thought it was quite normal to gather historical knowledge out of stories that he had heard and saw no problems in the knowledge being modified as a function of what other people added or changed.

At my second visit to Boale he passed me a paper on which he had written a text with the title *“Création des écoles du village”*. He was probably wrongly convinced that I wanted general information from him about education in the area. I had nevertheless made it clear why I had come and had specified that it was about his personal testimony, about what he had himself experienced. In the story that he had written down there was not a word about conspiracies against



the Congolese. The classical role was attributed to the missionaries in his text: *"They came to evangelise the Belgian Congo in order to allow all the Congolese men and women to be baptised according to their mission entrusted by His Majesty King Leopold II."* The schools were set up for evangelisation because writing was necessary to spread the word of God. After a time, the catechists had convinced their superiors of the necessity of expanding the schools further. The superiors had then informed the administration and this had then begun to award subsidies. That was the start of education that was given following a set curriculum, in contrast to the first rural schools of the catechists.

Boale's text is only two pages long and is a very summary and concise description of the occurrences. In any case the text helped me to better situate his person. What he writes fits in perfectly with the way of writing history at the time of colonisation and the text also contains marked reminders of the style of old school books. It reinforces my interpretation of Boale's attitude towards his school history. He did not feel the need to treat it critically. During my conversations with him that seemed to be very difficult. A good example of this is the moment, during our third conversation, when we talked about the food at the boarding school. Boale's wife was in the room with us at that point and followed the conversation from a distance. I had heard from Jean Indenge that the pupils got too little to eat and wanted to check what he thought of that. He answered that enough food was given in the boarding school but that the pupils could certainly go out to buy food for themselves if they wanted to. Considering the earlier misunderstandings in our conversation and remembering the remarks of Indenge, I did not find that a satisfactory answer. I remarked laughing that Indenge probably had a larger appetite than Boale. At that moment a discussion started between Boale and his wife, of which I only understood fragments. She seemed not to agree with him. When I again asked if the boarders in general got enough to eat, he said to me: *"Eh, if there was no money, how could we make a substantial meal?"*

From reactions such as this I deduced that he showed an inclination to approach the occurrences of the past uncritically, not to call them into question or to see them in rosier colours than they really were. As was stated in the introduction to this chapter, distortions can arise in the reminiscences that someone tells about their past on many grounds. Still, I got the impression that Boale had just had good experiences with school and the missionaries, that he had simply

internalised many things and was therefore simply a good product of his upbringing: obedient and with a great deal of admiration and understanding for the missionaries and other masters.

### *Conclusion*

From the stories told by the eyewitnesses about the past it is primarily obvious that it is not only the past for them but also that it has stayed with them throughout their lives. That can be seen above all in the way they talk about it. It would be difficult, and in this case not very sensible, to draw general conclusions on the basis of these interviews about the way in which the colonial school brought up the people involved. It is even difficult to work out how much the education they enjoyed influenced them in later life, in a positive or negative sense. It seems evident that it did play a role but even between these three people great differences can be seen in the way that this has happened. We cannot even state that all three have come to Belgium thanks to their education. What they do have in common is the awareness that the school could bring them something. It is clear that each dealt with it in their way. One was an obedient pupil, one was a dedicated disciple, and the third a cunning strategist.

That certainly does not prevent these conversations providing useful information in the context of this research. It shows after all that, quite apart from all the problems as experienced and stated by the *évolués* in the 1950s, the school represented an element of great value in the lives of the young Congolese. They did not always appreciate why but Western education exercised a great power of attraction on them. They were drawn, as it were, into that education. As soon as they came to school they were taken up in the unique, internal logic of that education, in which performance was demanded. The school, education, presented itself as the key to the future, although that future was not always clearly perceived.

Separate from all this, the testimonies from these people confirm that the school was a very structured, disciplined and disciplining machine. Again, in the memories of the Congolese, order, discipline and good manners are at the forefront as the central concepts of education. The stories also give more colour to the factual data, such as the existence of resistance, the importance of the knowledge of languages. Above all, a portrait of the opposing players, the missionaries, is shown in a way it could not and would not be done by themselves. That portrait is certainly one of remote but constantly present controllers. The

former pupils also still appear to cherish mixed feelings with respect to their masters. They sometimes appear thankful for the chances missionary education gave them but at other times angry because of the feeling of restriction and suppression they retain from their interaction with the missionaries.

## NOTES

[i] Jean Indenge on the time he left the village of his birth on the way to the mission school. [original quotation in French]

[ii] Jewsiewicki, B. (1993). *Naître et mourir au Zaïre. Un demi-siècle d'histoire au quotidien*. Paris: Karthala; Jewsiewicki, B. & Montal, F. (ed.) (1988). *Récits de vie et mémoires; vers une anthropologie historique du souvenir*. Paris-Québec: L'Harmattan-Safi.

[iii] Dembour, M.B. (2000). *Recalling the Belgian Congo: conversations and introspection*. London: Berghahn Books.

[iv] Fabian, J. (2003). Forgetful Remembering: A colonial life in the Congo. In *Africa*, LXXIII, 4, p. 489-505.

[v] These conversations have already been referred to but because they form the main source of this chapter, I give the full references again. The main subject matter is the conversations I had with Jean Indenge (in Brussels, on 14 July and 14 October 2003), with Stéphane Boale (in St.Joost-ten-Noode, on 18 and 22 September and 24 October 2003) and with Jean Boimbo (in Ukkel, on 25 September 2003). Besides this I have, insofar as possible, also referred to and made use of the material collected by Filip De Boeck and Césarine Bolya, at interviews in Kinshasa, taken during September 2003.

[vi] I was brought into contact with these gentlemen through Césarine Bolya. She was also good enough to introduce me to Jean Indenge.

[vii] The "Plans" referred to were *Plans de développement*, plans for the economic and social development of the country, in the spirit of the ten-year plans of the colonial times.

[viii] The extensive quotations from the interviews that I use here are the result of transcriptions that I made myself. I reproduce the text as literally as possible, in principle, including grammatically incorrect constructions, in order to leave the atmosphere and content of the story of those concerned as intact as possible. I have tried to add a few indications to the text (punctuation, adjectives, changes to the tenses of verbs) where that was really necessary for the comprehension of the written text.

[ix] A "*l'union fait la force*" refers in this context to civil servants or the military,

who wore a uniform with a hat on which the Belgian national arms were inscribed.

[x] “Autobiographie d’Ekoko Munzenga”. In Jewsiewicki, B. (1993). *Naître et mourir au Zaïre. Un demi-siècle d’histoire au quotidien*. Paris: Karthala, p. 155-184.

[xi] Interview by Césarine Bolia with Mama Joséphine Nana Bongondo, at Mama Victorine Ndjoli’s place - rue Itaga - Kinshasa - 29 September 2003. [original quotation in French]

[xii] By *solutionnaires* Boale meant teachers’ answer books that included the solutions to the questions, these were probably just textbooks.

[xiii] Originally in French: “Entrer au Salut”, translated into Dutch as “Naar het Lof gaan” or “go to mass” (“religious afternoon or evening practice”).

[xiv] Interview by Césarine Bolia with Mama Julienne Aboli, 29 September 2003, at Mama Victorine Ndjoli Elonga’s place - rue Itaga - Kinshasa.

[xv] Interview by Césarine Bolya with Bernard Kasusula Djuma Lokali, Kinshasa, 29 September 2003. Strangely enough the opposite system also occurred: in the testimony of another man, who had been to school with the Marist Brothers in the Eastern province, it was related that French was obliged to be spoken and that it was forbidden to speak Swahili. Interview by Césarine Bolya with Donat Salehe Kimbulu, Kinshasa, 16 September 2003.

[xvi] Berman, E.H. (1975). *African reactions to missionary education*. New York: Teachers College Press.

[xvii] The complete text is in Appendix 12.

[xviii] See the biographical note in Dellicour, F. (1954). Renkin (Jules-Laurent-Jean-Louis). In *Bibliographie Belge d’Outre-Mer*. kol. 747-753.

[xix] Commentary with the text of the ‘speech’ to be found on [www.congoboston.com](http://www.congoboston.com), a *community* website for Congolese and Africans in the United States.

[xx] Ceuppens, B. (2003). *Onze Congo? Congolezen over de kolonisatie*. Leuven: Davidsfonds.

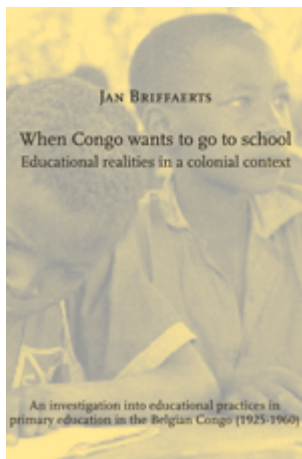
[xxi] Karel Pattheeuws (1912-1981). Worked from 1946 in Bokuma, after that as a travelling Father in the area of Bokote. From 1951 he was responsible for the schools in Wafanya. Vereecken, J. (1992). Wij gedenken. Derde reeks biografische schetsen van MSC van de Belgische Provincie. Borgerhout: MSC. p. 53.

[xxii] Louis Cuypers (1916-1999) worked in Coquilhatville between 1946 and 1957 and was at that time baccalaureus in religion. Later, in 1961, he received the degree of Doctor of Canon Law and from 1967 he was a special lecturer in the

faculty of Canon Law at the University of Leuven. De Rop, A. & Vlaminck, J. (1971). Bibliografie van de Missionarissen van het H. Hart Belgische Provincie 1921-1971. Borgerhout: MSC. p. 50; *MSC Jaarboek van de Belgische Provincie 2001*.

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# When Congo Wants To Go To School - As Justification And Conclusion



*"It puzzled me that colonialism belonged to our recent past. Its legacy was bound to mark our present. I was eager to join in the current research on colonialism that was developing in anthropology. Having completed the study, I remain convinced the Congo was worthy of scholarly attention, although perhaps for different reasons. What strikes me now is that my research illuminates general human processes. I would say that its major significance lies less with either an understanding of the thoughts of Belgian former colonial officers (however these may be needed) or an implicit critique of the literature of the colonial discourse than with an acute perception of the difficulty of attaining knowledge in anthropology. In turn this should make us, as human beings, morally humble and wary of any claim whose legitimacy derives from an easy brand of political correctness. Such a conclusion is not specific of colonialism; it applies to all walks of life."*[i]

I have already tried to summarise the main points arising from the "descriptive" chapters in parts II and III in the considerations concluding these chapters. There is consequently little cause to do so again. Rather than repeating these conclusions in this section I would like to consider a number of elements that struck me while studying those realities and practices, and which seem important to me for a proper understanding of the past. It should allow me to formulate a

number of considerations or questions concerning the meaning of that image and that past: what does it mean and how should we deal with it?

*Colonial education: made in Belgium.*

The image of the interaction between the missionaries and the pupils, the method of teaching used or which should have been used in the classroom, the material used – all this points in the same direction: the North. In the Belgian Congo a system was established that was not only loosely based on that implemented in the homeland but that was a very similar copy of it. It is true that a number of differences arose in the quantity of material taught and that a selection of that material was being made, ‘adapted’ to the local circumstances. That does not detract from the essential conclusion that in this case a western educational system was transplanted to the colony. With all its components: the framework, the buildings, the setting, the administrative body, the daily timetable, the teaching method and naturally also the discipline. The first reaction to this was undoubtedly: “But could it have been any different?” The fact that we find it hard to imagine anything else perhaps precisely indicates the importance of this conclusion. In any event it puts matters in the right perspective. In keeping with the quotation by Fabian which I cited in the introduction: we are used to looking back at colonial history and consequently also at the history of Belgian colonisation of the Congo from the perspective of the results achieved. As a result we often forget that it did not have to be like that. Our frameworks of reference restrict us and that is not any different with regard to colonial education.

Two major conclusions follow from this with regard to this study. Firstly, the discussion of the difference between adaptionism and assimilationism must first be brought back to its true proportions: discussions about differences in styles, about the way matters had to be approached. Both movements operated within a framework that remained western in essence. The question of whether indigenism, as a local variant of adaptionism, was also truly more progressive than assimilationism must be answered rather negatively. In the beliefs of the people who gave indigenism its name and who applied it themselves (Hulstaert, Boelaert and other MSC members) it may have been “progressive”. They wanted to defend the Congolese. That belief by Hulstaert and his followers may seem logical, insofar as they compared themselves to other people or groups of colonisers who were much less interested in the welfare of the Congolese. At the same time that is precisely where the shoe doesn’t fit. Hulstaert and his followers

seem to act from a genuine conviction, often a type of moral indignation. However, in many cases that moral indignation of the MSC was aimed against modernity. They were truly concerned with the welfare of the Congolese but that primarily meant that they wanted to protect them from themselves and the modern world. However, the fact that at some times their assumptions contrasted sharply with those of the authorities or other players within colonial society gave the MSC an “alternative” aura. It is perhaps better not to say “progressive” because if we associate that with “emancipatory” we must conclude that the actions of the MSC show clear indications of the opposite. The way in which they handled the pupils in practice rather gives an image of a very paternalistic attitude.

A second conclusion is that there was a very great gap between the general, theoretical and fundamental beliefs on the one hand and the practice in the field on the other. At first sight this conclusion seems to fit well with the principle of the *grammar of schooling*, as formulated and explained by Depaepe and others. Expressed concisely, that principle claims that classroom practice is resistant to innovation to a relatively far-reaching extent. It claims that practice comprises a set of rules, habits, traditions, in which changes are imposed from above but are very hard to implement. The school practices in the Belgian Congo illustrate this very well but not necessarily because so many attempts at innovation were undertaken. This distance between theory and practice may be explained in more detail as a combination of a number of factors. Firstly, the existing (western) *grammar* had taken root to such an extent with the missionaries that it could literally be imported into an entirely different environment. The consequence thereof was that the missionaries automatically applied personal experiences in the new colonial context. That naturally also had a lot to do with the fact that the majority of missionaries also had a very limited, in some cases non-existent, theoretical *background* with regard to educational theory. The basis of colonial education was low on theory. Gustaaf Hulstaert is a telling example of this in the given context, precisely because he felt a need to improve his theoretical knowledge or at least to brush it up in the framework of the discussions (and the power struggle) he entered into with the Brothers of the Christian Schools.

The grammar of schooling also fitted well in the missionary context because it was embedded here in a strongly ideologically coloured environment. Evangelisation had to work from a strong moral mobilisation. Sending people to

far-off regions, unaware exactly what was waiting for them, even if they were often driven by a desire for the unknown and adventure, could only succeed if those people were given solid support. In the documents concerning the missionary training it is clear that this support was offered to them through a strong religious experience. People who were imbued with faith were more able to cope with their mission. That this faith was given a traditional, conservative character, especially during the interbellum but also for a long time after that, was also shown clearly. Clearly this must also have influenced school life and the ideas about education. In other words innovative, modern ideas could only be given a chance in the colonial schools if they were adequately adapted to the religious, Catholic principles.

Concretely, the actual influence and moral authority of Gustaaf Hulstaert at the MSC and the aura of scientific study that he had built about around him was so overwhelming that it was hardly possible to do something innovative without him contradicting it. And he did so to a considerable extent. Both in his position as inspector and as a researcher he had very clear opinions that regularly brought him into conflict with other players. In his wake other MSC members also regularly came to blows about the education the Congolese should receive or the methods they wanted to implement in education. The fact that some subjects were heavily argued over did not however mean that others assumed an essentially different attitude with regard to the Congolese pupils. The other congregations active in the region under the supervision of the MSC should be placed predominately along the same line. The Brothers of the Christian Schools, who also specialised in education, did not differ essentially from others in this and fitted nicely into the colonial canvas. Even the fact that they argued for further Gallicising of education changes little, even if that allowed them to make a better show with the pupils, who considered French as one of the most important instruments for social promotion.

### *The players*

In hindsight it is naturally easy to see the “larger picture” and to put a finger on it. I have already referred to the difficulty of always finding the correct balance and nuance in the assessment of the colonial system of power on the one hand and the players in that system on the other. Naturally, this relates to a problem that arises more often in scientific historical work. With the *plea for modesty* from the introduction in the back of one’s mind, I would still like to defend the claim



that this study contributed to finding that balance and nuance and consequently is also situated in a historical critical movement. This does not relate to the discovery of striking new facts or data; it relates more to shifts in interpretations. Those interpretations relate to the image of the two groups that meet each other in the framework of colonial education. I would like to try here to describe these two groups better with regard to those interpretations.

### *The missionaries*

The contemporary image of missionaries is clearly not the same as that thirty or forty years ago. I have the impression that today the traditional image of mission heroes that was naturally carefully cultivated by the church and the missionaries themselves over many years does not hold up to the same extent. Naturally, that is only my impression, which I have not based on any scientific research in that regard (which does not exist to my knowledge). Yet I still suspect that the presence and work of the missionaries in the colonial context is still mainly considered in so-called 'evolutionary' terms (today this is more likely called "development"). With that I mean that, to use a popular expression, it is still assumed that the missionaries went to the Congo to help people there. That aid is perhaps not always the same as "civilising" in the meaning given to it in the past. However, if that is not the case it does in any event still have the connotation of "helping people out of their misery", ensuring an "improvement" in their situation.

Naturally, that is logical because missionary activity is also always considered in those terms and because during the decolonisation period the discourse of the Catholic church in Africa and the Congo almost seamlessly switched from evangelisation to development cooperation or aid. In addition the missionaries themselves undoubtedly left for Africa with the idea that they would "bring light into darkness". In the sources researched in this study the testimonies and reactions of the missionaries in the field reflect that they were often dedicated to disciplining, training and educating young Congolese people. However, a number of convictions lay at the basis of that activity which are perhaps forgotten now or that have disappeared somewhat in the mists of time. If it is true that these missionaries carried out their work from a strong conviction, then it is surely necessary to situate and explain those convictions clearly here. Those convictions were primarily aimed at making the Africans, and more specifically young Africans, "good people" in the most Christian meaning of the word. The

“mechanical” salvation of souls may have been a phenomenon for the Catholic Church that was part of the initial days of the colonisation, in essence the aims of the missions and evangelisation clearly remained geared to the expansion of the ecclesiastical sphere of influence.

Obviously the intention is not to judge and condemn the missionaries and their work *in general*. That was never my aim. That would be as pointless as the idolisation and even literal “canonisation” that was the case in the past. Firstly, the missionaries were obviously people of their time. Colonisation and even the economic exploitation of the Congolese territory, its riches and its inhabitants, was normal, acceptable or at least justified, depending on the source and the period. Secondly, the correspondence between “ordinary” missionaries clearly shows in a very different way that they were not at all heroes in practice and that the certainty or assertions of their convictions could sometimes waver. One of the MSC members I spoke to in the framework of this research told me that at some point while out there everybody experienced a moment of uncertainty when they asked themselves “what am I doing here?”. If the impression should appear from all the quotations and descriptions cited that I want to represent the missionaries in a negative light I would formally like to deny that here.

However what has become strikingly obvious to me from this research is precisely the contradiction between the very humane inspiration, the good intentions of the people who worked in practice (the missionaries) and the exploitative and oppressive nature of the colonial regime. That is visible in a great many different areas: The contradiction between the love for and simultaneously the deeply racist human conceptions about other people; the strictness, discipline, the often traumatising working conditions that were imposed on the basis of the conviction that it was for the greater good of the children; the conviction that it was better for the Congolese to reside in the countryside to develop a future in their own region and on the basis of their own traditional roots, while simultaneously trying with all their might to pull up those roots by combating typical institutions (family, balance of power, religion). The reactions of the Congolese in relation to the missionaries probably illustrate that contradiction even more clearly.

### *The Congolese*

Parallel to what has been said of the image of the missionaries, our image of the Congo, and of the Congolese themselves, must also be adjusted to some extent. The image that is still overwhelming and almost ineradicable in Flanders is that of

a country that should have been happy with our presence and help despite everything. "They only have tribal disputes now the unifying factor has disappeared from there, now there is no longer anyone to keep it all under control" Or "Since we left they have not managed to make much of it, have they?" This image is stronger than ourselves and is absolutely not contradicted in modern conceptualisation, particularly as it is shown us in the media. However, it is very uncommon to ask why that is the case and whether colonial history has something to do with it. In response to this claim it will undoubtedly be said that the way things have gone wrong cannot be blamed on the Belgians forty years after the events. It is a remark that is also made by many intellectual Congolese today.

Without considering the complex amalgam of power factors influencing the contemporary political situation of the country and the social malaise it is experiencing, I still think that historical research into colonial education can provide part of the explanation. A number of characteristics of colonial education have exercised an essential influence and probably still do so in some way. I would also like to refrain from any moral judgements or issues of guilt in this regard and rather try to remain with the mechanisms in force. The colonial regime had an educational component that served the general social and economic aims that the regime had set itself. However, it is certain that the education given by the missionaries willingly or unwillingly fitted into an economical logic. It contributed as a factor in the differences which arose in the Congo between town and country and as such also to the dislocation of the economy.

The MSC saw that. Their laments about the uprooted were mainly aimed at the derailment of the conservative morality they stood for and which they tried to inculcate thoroughly in the Congolese youth (those young people did not differ from the Flemish young people in Catholic schools). However, they also warned against another form of uprooting that arose as a result of the young people breaking their ties with their traditional environment and falling between two worlds as a result. Ironically enough they played an important role in that themselves. Education in itself did lead to emancipation but that emancipation was incomplete. The image of a derailing locomotive, used by Marc Depaepe in the conclusion of *In het teken van de bevoogding* was also entirely correct in that sense. The colonial educational system was the embodiment of the *contradictio in*

*terminis* that resulted in the creation of the évolués. The concept of the évolué and the identification of the elite as a group was, separate from the legal affirmation of it, mainly linked to the values given in the education and subjects considered in the classroom.

In addition, as an essentially western system, that education was a mechanism in which young people were placed and in which they were taught to strive for a number of things which were presented as morally defensible or morally good. The seeds of meritocratic ideas were taught at school as the aim was to get somewhere. The selection mechanisms that were built in and primarily intended to set boundaries to prevent overload to the system and only allow the necessary elements to proceed clearly had perverse effects. At the same time values like modesty, obedience and docility were considered of paramount importance and literally imposed on the young people. Young Congolese children were absolutely not allowed to think they were better than they were. They remained inferior to the whites, no matter how much the discourse also turned to a “cooperation” and the “Belgian-Congolese community”. The évolués also sensed that at the time, undoubtedly often rather subconsciously, but could not or did not dare to mention the problem directly. They looked for explanations but it took a rather long time before they truly dared to conclude that it was their ‘half’ or incomplete emancipation that was the problem.

However, the testimonies from people who were at the mission school during the 1950s suggest another important mechanism. The school was generally considered as an instrument to secure a place in the new society. However, that did not necessarily correspond with the inherent characteristics of mission education, in other words with its contribution with regard to content or the skills that it was expected to teach. Language was generally solely perceived by the pupils as something they had to know and master in order to succeed. In addition, the main concern seemed to be obtaining the diploma that was experienced as a kind of cheque that could be exchanged for an attractive social position, a *poste de bureau* [office job]. That direct link can be found remarkably often in the testimonies recorded. In any event the school itself formed a strong attraction, simply because young Congolese citizens had realised that it could assure them a better life. That was realised “notwithstanding” the fact that attending school and enduring a series of less enjoyable things were necessary. Undoubtedly, further and more detailed research will give a better insight into this but, in any event, it

is telling that the people who proved ambitious later on and cleared themselves a path to the top also already used both legal and illegal routes required to achieve a better material or social position at school. Could it be that this defines the foundations of a social mechanism or social practice that has developed fully in the modern Congo in the form of buying diplomas? I am unable to answer this question with the affirmative because according to Pierre Kita this would be precisely one of the things that only pervaded after the influence of the Catholic Church had been short-winged by Mobutu.[\[ii\]](#)

### *Further research*

The fact that documents still circulate today or stories are still told in which the missionaries are depicted without any nuance as the “henchmen” of the colonial regime shows that mutual understanding is still very difficult, even forty years after the events. The need for critical but nuanced studies about the missionaries themselves and their experiences and memories of the colonial period is big because there is still too little non-hagiographical material. The large quantity of material that is currently still available in communities all over Flanders must be catalogued and stories must be told with it. The time has also come to collect the testimonies from the people who experienced this period and are still surviving today. The majority of missionaries who actively worked in the colonial period are now very elderly and it is consequently high time to realise this. It could only contribute to a more realistic conceptualisation of the activities of a large group of Belgians and the Flemish in particular. My argument for adjusting the image is perhaps even more pressing with regard to the Congo and the Congolese because I think that the historian truly has an important role to play here. The need for differentiation is extremely great because it is so much easier to cast what we know of this colonial history in contradictions or to summarise it in clichés rather than representing it with attention for uniqueness, peculiarity, and detail. In other words critical history can find a huge work area here. In that regard I feel strengthened in my scientific task as a researcher. Trying to study the daily life of the various players in a rather intense and important episode from our collective past and then also bring these to the attention of the public is perhaps a rather ungrateful, sometimes not so evident but definitely useful occupation. It is one of the many elements in a larger complex that must contribute to a more contextual approach to history, a less polarised world view and ultimately also to a more respectful interaction with the “other”, in a society in which this is sometimes poignantly lacking.

## NOTES

[i] Dembour, M.B. (2000). Recalling the Belgian Congo. p. 11-12.

[ii] Briffaerts, J. (2002). 'De last van het verleden' Een bevoorrecht getuige aan het woord over onderwijs in Kongo. In *Basis / Christene School*, CIX, 14 September 2002, p. 27-30.