

Women in the Democratic Republic of Congo

Amandine Lauro

Subject: Women's History Online Publication Date: May 2020

DOI: 10.1093/acrefore/9780190277734.013.544

Summary and Keywords

Since the turn of the 21st century, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DR Congo) has frequently been portrayed in international media as “the worst place in the world to be a woman.” The moral and political economy of gender relations in the largest country of sub-Saharan Africa has nevertheless been shaped by a long history of women’s multiple experiences of agency and disempowerment and competition and solidarity, whose complexity cannot be captured through victimizing narratives. While political boundaries of DR Congo result from late-19th-century colonialism, the territories encompassed in the country have a rich *longue durée* history. In precolonial times, women’s status and access to resources and power varied greatly across different cultural and political formations. From the 16th century, the intensification of the slave and ivory trade, in the footsteps of European expansion, affected normative and effective patterns of gender relations. The creation of the Congo Free State (1885–1908), which marked the debut of Belgian colonialism in Central Africa, created a regime of forceful extraction of resources and labor that had a severe impact on women. The distinctive features of the Belgian Congo regime (1908–1960) also influenced the status and experiences of women. The central role of the Roman Catholic Church and the maternalist visions of Belgian authorities generated a specific lens through which Congolese women were targeted by colonial policies. Despite limited room for maneuvering, Congolese women never restricted themselves to the roles imposed on them, neither during the colonial nor the postcolonial period. During the Mobutu regime (1965–1997) and beyond, transgressions of gender norms, as well as strategies of emancipation, has generated specific—even if ambiguous—paths of mobilization.

Keywords: Congo, Congo Free State, Belgian Congo, Zaire, women, gender, slavery, colonialism

Women in Precolonial Congo, 16th-19th Centuries

The borders of modern-day Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) were established in the late 19th century by European colonial powers during the Conference of Berlin (1884–1885). Located in the middle of Africa and centered on the Congo basin, the territory en-

Women in the Democratic Republic of Congo

compasses a diversity of political, ecological, and social entities, each with a rich and complex *longue durée* history. This diversity is reflected in women's status and gender relations, organized along different lines across time, regions, political formations, and economic configurations. In the wake of the Bantu expansion, agropastoral and technological innovations, as well as the formation of new political entities, generated new patterns of kinship and division of labor in the Congo basin. While Bantu's scheme of wealth in people and the central role of women in farming became dominant in the region, diverse features characterized the gendered organization of these societies. Patrilineal forms of descent coexisted with matrilineality (as the Central African matrilineal belt stretches through the Congo). For instance, women's modes of access to resources and power were very different within the small-scale groups of hunters and gatherers in the rainforests of the northeast part of the country than within the centralized Luba and Lunda empires in the grasslands of the Kasai plateau, or in the Kongo Kingdom established along the Atlantic coast from the late 14th to the mid-19th centuries, or in the Great Lakes region toward the Kivu rift valley, and in the numerous centralized chiefdoms of the savannah.¹ Attempts at providing an integrated historical narrative about women in precolonial Congo before 1500 are further complicated by the paucity of the historiography on this topic, as well as by the overlaps of many of these political formations on territories belonging to modern-day neighboring countries such as Angola, Zambia, or Cameroon.

The Kingdom of Kongo offers a striking example of this situation. A highly centralized state on the Atlantic coast south of the Congo river, governing directly a population of more than 400,000 people in the 16th century (and many more through nearby vassal territories), the Kingdom spans over parts of modern-day Angola, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Republic of the Congo, and Gabon. Some of its major female historical figures can thus be "claimed" by several countries. This is all the more likely to be the case that the Kingdom of Kongo is, in terms of gender history, the most-studied precolonial political entity in the region.

The Kongo political system was based on a matrilineal kinship organization centered on *kanda*, matrilineal descent groups which established the holding of land and control over agricultural surplus. *Kanda* were traditionally headed by two chiefs, a man and a woman (even if the male chief was most dominant). The system provided women with potential strategic power, even if primarily outside formal political roles. As in many other parts of Central Africa, the gendered division of labor saw women being responsible for subsistence agriculture and food production. Religious practices were also gendered, but women could serve as *nganga* (spiritual mediators/healers). From the 15th century, women quickly became involved in the rise of Christianity, in the footsteps of Portuguese expansion.²

This was especially the case of elite women, such as royal wives and elderly women. Some of them played important roles in court and lineage politics, notably as bridgers in the factional disputes that intensified with the political crisis that the Kingdom underwent from the late-16th to the early-17th centuries. By that time, it was not uncommon to have several women serving on the royal council. In the civil war period in the late 17th

Women in the Democratic Republic of Congo

century, some women even ruled as regents, such as Dona Isabel, who ruled in Mbwila in the 1660s. In the 18th century, some queens and female heads of provinces exercised their authority more openly, but the female figure who dominated the century was without doubt Beatriz Kimpa Vita (1684–1706), the “Kongolese Saint Anthony.” A woman of noble birth, Kimpa Vita claimed to have been possessed by Saint Anthony and created her own Christian popular movement, which mobilized thousands of people to get involved with Kongo struggles for power. In 1706, the enemy of one of her political allies had her arrested and burned as a heretic. In the 21st century, she remains a popular figure associated with antislavery, with the affirmation of an African Christianity, and even with anti-colonialism.³

The development and then the intensification of the slave trade and European contact in the 16th century affected normative and effective patterns of gender relations well beyond the Kongo Kingdom.⁴ As the Atlantic demand called mostly for males, children and women formed the largest group of slaves traded in the Congo basin. Along trading centers in the Middle-Congo, women remained the primary cultivators, including being cultivators of the newly introduced crops of cassava. They were involved in craft manufacturing, too, whose gendered circuits of production were also affected by the reconfigurations of the regional networks of trade and of resources’ distribution.⁵ Starting from the 17th century, the expansion of the Luba Empire in the central-southern savannah also rested on complex alliance-building and tribute exchanges between patrons and clients, in which both elite women and female slaves played strategic roles.⁶ Luba (royal) arts offer a striking depiction of the central place of women in Luba political and spiritual conceptions of authority.⁷ Around the same time and among the neighboring Kanyok people, the emergence of new patrilineal polities marked the rise of the figure of the big man, embodied in warrior leaders and/or economic patrons who growingly found and asserted wealth, authority, and prestige through control over women.⁸

With the political turbulence and changing socioeconomic conditions of the 19th century, the boom of the ivory trade and the development of trading towns in the Congo basin led to a renewed demand for female slaves in the region. Women were more central than ever, both in food production and as wives to the traders and their crews. Some of them even played significant roles in the complex kin-groups’ politics and conjugal arrangements that linked and opposed competing Middle-Congo traders in the decades preceding Belgian conquest.⁹ In Eastern Congo, the expansion of Mangbetu kingdoms, starting in the 1820s, also led to new dynamics in the capture, control, and integration of female slaves (*amudjaandro*) into owners’ lineages. Free and enslaved women were carrying most of the production work in the fields and houses; Mangbetu rulers innovated in allowing their wives to become slave owners of *ambeiandro* (female royal slaves).¹⁰

In the south, the renewed expansion of the Swahili slave trade’s long-distance networks and the reconfigurations of political conflicts in the Katanga and Tanganyika regions also increased women’s asset-value and the conditions of their servility, not only as households for men growingly mobilized into militarized activities but also as pawns in disputes between men. The life of Bwanika, a woman born in Katanga in the 1870s, who under-

went successive experiences of servility before a final escape that led her to one of the first Christian communities settled in Eastern Congo, offers a telling case of the ways in which the rapidly changing political economy of the region shaped women's lives.¹¹

Gendered Violence and Early Colonial Rule

The brutal mode of exploitation of the Congo Free State (ruled personally by Belgian King Leopold II) (1885–1908), based on a forceful extraction of resources and labor, meant that violence was used as a common means of enforcement and repression, including against women. While women were not forced to harvest rubber or to carry out portage duties, other constraints weighed heavily upon them. The responsibility of resupplying Europeans and their auxiliaries laid mostly on their shoulders, in a context in which the subsistence of the community was already made more complicated by the hoarding of men in the service of the newly imposed *corvées*.

More specifically, women were targeted by the violence of the Leopoldian regime and of its auxiliaries, who used torture, summary executions, and rape as tactics belonging to a larger repertoire of terror and warfare. Evidence and testimonies of sexual violence exist, even if minimally audible.¹² Some Congo reform pamphlets, such as the Casement report, include statements of Congolese women about their experiences of colonial violence. An English missionary, Alice Seeley Harris, even published a booklet entirely devoted to women's subjection.¹³

But these were the exceptions rather than the rule. Violence against women was never a central theme of the international humanitarian campaign launched at the turn of the century against the "Congo atrocities." Only thirteen women (among 258 Congolese individuals) made statements before the Belgian Parliamentary Commission of Inquiry sent to the Congo in 1905–1906. Among them was Boali, a young woman from Northern Congo, who was shot and had her foot cut off by a sentry from the Anglo-Belgian India Rubber Company's concession after having resisted rape by armed soldiers. Her name and the photograph of her mutilated body reached a global audience through its reproduction in several Congo reform publications. But this visibility also came with the erasure of her testimony. Humanitarian denunciations treated Congolese casualties as "exhibits of victimhood rather than speaking witnesses in their own right," and the gendered dynamics of Victorian empathy and of missionary evidence often meant that women's experiences of violence were presented in euphemistic, moralizing, terms.¹⁴

In addition to armed raids, Congolese women were often used as hostages by Leopoldian military auxiliaries to force native men into the forests to collect rubber until they met required quotas of production. Chained and kept in the stations, women could be submitted to forced labor and abuses. The cruelty of African sentries often took central stage in humanitarian narratives, but this violence was also interracial. *Droit du seigneur* practices were not uncommon, and many colonial tales of Congolese traditions of "sexual hospitality" should be put into this perspective. Nevertheless, explorers, officers, and other white officials often negotiated their relationships with Congolese women with the male

Women in the Democratic Republic of Congo

guardians who regulated sexual access to female dependents, especially in the case of (relatively) long-standing relationships.

In the early colonial period, the martial context of conquest and the political economy of the (sexual-cum-domestic) regime promoted by colonial authorities, made the presence of white women in the Congo undesirable. There were only eighty-two European women (for 1,105 men) (7 percent) in the colony in 1900, and most of them were missionaries. Interracial concubinage quickly became the norm for European colonists. Their relationships with the *ménagères* (literally, “housekeepers”), as these women were euphemistically called in the Belgian colonial jargon, proved in some cases useful to solidify economic and political alliances with indigenous communities. Women were, for instance, presented as welcome and/or allegiance gifts; they could also serve as cultural intermediaries. Though evidence is scarce, it appears that *ménagères* were generally slaves or women of dependent status. More rarely, they could also be of noble birth, such as in the case of the young Mabenjia, the daughter of Jouca-Pava, a Bakongo chief in charge of an important *factorerie* in Boma.¹⁵ While the line between coercion and consent was seldom completely clear, in many cases women’s interracial sexual and domestic labor brought monetary and material wealth to their families. It was only from the 1920s forward that it provided more direct benefits and social openings for the women themselves, enabling them to accumulate independent wealth and to access new forms of status in the new colonial order.¹⁶

In 1908, the Congo Free State became the Belgian Congo (1908–1960), a national colony. Following foreign criticism of the Leopoldian regime, this takeover occurred in a context in which the legitimacy of Belgium as an imperial power was still doubted by many. The “new” colonial authorities were therefore particularly keen to distance themselves (at least discursively) from governance practices associated with the Congo Free State and to promote an exemplary colonial rule, devoted to its civilizing duties. Women’s status in Congolese societies and gender relations at large therefore appeared to be strategic sites of interventions.

Until the late colonial period and as in other colonial contexts, women were primarily perceived, as colonial subjects, through the prism of marriage and gendered transactional bonds. The 1908 “Colonial Charter,” that is, the new constitutional body of laws providing the legal framework to the exercise of Belgian rule, stated that the newly appointed administration was in charge of promoting “the progressive abandon of polygamy.” In colonial discourses, polygamy epitomized the servitude of Congolese women, and this official declaration was soon followed by measures aiming to regulate “traditional” marriage (taxation of supplementary wives, programs of bridewealth minimization, legal redefinitions of conjugal obligations in colonial courts, etc.).¹⁷ But these ambitions were not without contradictions and ambiguities, especially when they clashed with the political economy of colonial exploitation.

Congolese Women and Belgian Maternalism

In the current state of the art, the impact of Belgian colonial rule on Congolese women remains difficult to assess in a comprehensive way. However, by comparison with other colonial contexts, some specificities of the Belgian regime outlined a distinctive configuration that influenced the status and experiences of women. Several elements generated specific lenses through which Congolese women were targeted by colonial policies: the quest for “prestige” and bourgeois exemplarity embedded in obsessive discourses on the “model-colony”; the centrality of the Catholic Church and of its auxiliary (almost sovereign) role in the colonial state apparatus; the unrivaled scale of demographic and fertility anxieties; and the unique extent of biopolitical interventions (“the eugenic modality of Belgian colonial power,” to quote the words of historian Nancy R. Hunt).¹⁸ While the paternalistic features of Belgian colonial rule have often been underlined, maternalism constituted an essential component of the “civilizing” and social control strategies employed by Belgian policy makers. Congolese women’s involvement in society was to be reframed into domesticity and motherhood, both notions being (re)defined according to imperial visions of “traditional” gender roles.

Symptomatic of these ambitions and of their consequences is the extent to which Western-type educational opportunities for Congolese women remained limited until the end of the colonial period, in scope as well as in content. From the opening of the first missionary school in 1879, the main objective of women’s education had little alteration: it was first and foremost about training Christian wives, mothers, and household managers.¹⁹ This program was widely shared in colonial Africa, but the Belgian Congo still represents an extreme case in this regard. On the eve of the independence of the country, there was not a single Congolese woman among the hundred students attending the two (recently created) universities of the country. Even more strikingly, there was only one single female among the approximately 800 general secondary school graduates.²⁰ Sophie Kanza obtained her diploma in 1959–1960; she was also going to become the first Congolese woman to obtain a doctoral degree and to hold a government office in the country. Combined with the Belgian distrust toward colonized elites, the quasi-monopole of the Catholic Church on colonial education until the mid-1950s was a key factor in this situation.

The Congo Free State regime delegated responsibility for education almost entirely to Catholic missions—even though Protestant missions were also entitled to operate. Beyond a few marginal schooling initiatives around the first mission stations in the 1870s and 1880s, education provision for Congolese girls during this period remained extremely limited. It was mainly developed through the only *colonie scolaire* (a schooling structure aiming to educate children deemed to be orphans or freed slaves) devoted to girls, in Moanda, on the western coast. The school was run by the Sisters of Charity of Ghent. The nuns’ mission was primarily defined as seconding the male congregations in their work of evangelization by taking care of the health and education of Congolese women. This situation

Women in the Democratic Republic of Congo

mirrored the general conception of the gendered division of educational policies in the Congo.

Female pupils received an elementary education dispensed in Lingala (while boys were trained in French), and were instructed in cooking, dressmaking, childcare, light agricultural work, and other domestic duties. Literacy skills were dubbed of little use. As in many other colonial contexts, women were primarily trained to become the wives and mothers of the new masculine elite, and to form marriages grounded in European ideals of gender roles, Christian respectability, and nuclear family ethos. Moanda was particularly exemplary of this ambition. It was conceived as a supply nursery of Christian-educated wives for the boys trained to become auxiliary clerks and catechists. This well-planned program was nevertheless not spared by tensions raised by women's agency. In the mid-1890s, the mission closed its doors for several months following rumors that young pupils had engaged in interracial relationships. In the early 20th century, the mission also came under judicial scrutiny after several girls ran away.²¹

The transition to the Belgian Congo did not alter the gendered differentiation of educational goals and opportunities. Catholic mission schools were afforded most of the government subsidies. The reforms of the educational sector in the interwar period did not bring much change either. The emphasis remained on domestic skills, and girls were exclusively taught in Congolese languages. Post-primary opportunities were almost nonexistent. Opportunities of job-oriented training programs remained limited as well. The main professional sector of development for women was offered by the Catholic Church itself: in 1945, there were already 167 Congolese nuns (and eighty-five more in training). The first schools for assistantship in midwifery were also created during the interwar period, but in 1939, they had trained only thirty-four female graduates.²²

After World War II, modernization plans associated with development colonialism and political tensions led to new colonial initiatives in educational policies. However, the reinforcement of secondary and intellectual-focused education opportunities mostly concerned boys. As women were to remain excluded from careers in public service or private companies, and were considered best employed in the service of "development" through a moral, domestic, and maternal contribution, the reforms confined Congolese girls aiming to pursue their formation beyond the primary level to *écoles ménagères* (homemaking middle schools). It was only from the second half of the 1950s that they were offered access to secondary curricula like those available to boys. Training programs for maternity nurses were also developed—even if only on a limited level.²³ In addition, girls had new opportunities to be trained as teachers in pedagogical schools, even if these did not necessarily imply an opportunity to pursue studies beyond the primary level.

Not surprisingly, figures of girls attending schools throughout the colonial period remained limited, in absolute as well as in (gendered) relative terms. Though sources only provide us with estimations, less than 9 percent of two million Congolese girls ages five to nineteen were attending a formal school on the eve of the independence, and this proportion was in large part the product of the late-colonial educational reforms.²⁴ At the pri-

Women in the Democratic Republic of Congo

mary level, this meant that the Congo had one of the highest enrollment rates for boys and one of the lowest for girls in the Global South.²⁵ These figures also hide strong disparities between rural and urban environments. While colonial educators kept repeating that their educational ambitions for Congolese girls were hampered by the social conservatism of Congolese parents, a growing number of Congolese families voiced their dissatisfactions with the quality of education available for female pupils.²⁶

This educative emphasis on domesticity was also at the heart of “*foyers sociaux*” (social homes), an educative and social welfare program developed by colonial authorities from the 1930s and consisting of domestic training institutions for adult Congolese women.²⁷ Predominantly settled in urban areas, their sponsorship by the colonial government aimed at providing an answer to the perceived moral dangers surrounding women in cities and the need to create a new class of elite wives for *évolués* men who had been instructed in Western family ideology and bourgeois gender order. Initially in the hands of Catholic missions, the management of *foyers sociaux* was professionalized after the World War II. Belgian social workers taught classes of home economics, cooking, and maternal hygiene, for example, with the help of a growing number of Congolese auxiliary aids. These (paid) positions of monitors constituted one of the scarce opportunities of wage employment open to Congolese women in the colonial institutional landscape. There were forty-five *foyers sociaux* in the Congo in 1957, and while attendance levels remain difficult to assess with precision, a successful *foyer* could easily attract 1,500–1,700 Congolese women.²⁸ Until the end of the colonial period, there were little contestations of *foyers sociaux*'s courses, of the colonial definitions of womanhood they promoted, and of the racialized hierarchies that prevailed in their management. However, Congolese women's uses of the *foyers* were not necessarily in line with the intentions of the colonial authorities. In Elizabethville (Lubumbashi), urban dwellers ironically nicknamed the *foyers* *J'attends mon mari* (“I'm waiting for my husband”). Many pupils continued (or started) to engage in independent professional artisanal work and petty trade that in some instances built on skills learned in the *foyers*; this was the case of Victorine N'Djoli who, after divorcing her *Evolué* husband, launched a successful business of commercial sewing.²⁹ Others also organized autonomous mutual aid groups promoting collective savings, not so differently from the *likelemba* and other urban associative forms vilified by the *foyers* as sources of female immorality.³⁰

Foyers sociaux were also concerned with the (re)fashioning of Congolese motherhood. This ambition gave rise to numerous other sociomedical initiatives dealing with prenatal care, maternal hygiene, and childrearing practices. In terms of healthcare, women were also primarily targeted as (future) wives and mothers. Colonial records are far more talkative about maternal healthcare and epidemics of sexually transmitted diseases (with a potential impact on the emergence of HIV in the region) than about any other medical issues and campaigns potentially involving women.³¹ The extension of the network of maternal and infant health programs developed in the Belgian Congo was unique in colonial Africa.³² Building on a metropolitan tradition of bourgeois maternalist philanthropy, outcries for the education of African women into “proper” motherhood also built on concerns for depopulation shared across imperial borders. From the interwar period to the late

Women in the Democratic Republic of Congo

1950s, various actors of the colonial society supported these initiatives: the colonial government subsidized infant/mother welfare centers (whether run by Christian missions or by official medical services, often with the help of European women), while private philanthropists, companies, and welfare para-governmental organizations developed their own programs. Congolese women were encouraged to participate through various incentives (in cash or in kind). Private companies sometimes used more coercive methods, as their leverage on workers' wives was more important. While rates of birth in maternity wards increased spectacularly, there is evidence that most Congolese women did not adopt Western models of nursing and infant care, as shown by historian Nancy R. Hunt in a landmark study. Until the late-colonial period, the breast-milk substitutes distributed in postnatal consultations remained, for instance, mostly used as medicine for weak children, an example that testifies to the complex dynamics of negotiation and appropriation at play in these programs, despite the intrusive strategies employed by colonial actors.

But tensions also arose from contradicting imperatives within the colonial regime itself. The maternalist programs that promoted a strict gendered division of roles assigning women to domestic space and excluding them from wage labor often clashed with the political economy of colonial exploitation.

In some regions, women participated in forced labor activities that applied, in theory, only to men (such as road construction, maintenance work, or forest clearing).³³ In rural areas, although colonial authorities aimed officially to spare women the hard labor of agriculture that was to be assumed by men as breadwinners providing for the household, the productive demands created by taxation, migrant labor, mandatory cultivations, and the introduction of cash crops led women to continue to assume a heavy load of agricultural work. This evolution is largely invisibilized in colonial records. The official unit of account for fiscality and labor extraction (the *homme adulte valide*—literally “able-bodied man”) was indeed strictly male. Women are also absent from corporate farming enterprises' statistics, even while wives, mothers, and daughters of workers often represented a significant part of companies' business models, as exemplified by the case of the large oil palm concessions managed by Unilever in the Kasai province.³⁴ This transgression of the official colonial (gender) doctrine was justified in the name of “customary traditions,” excluding women from earning cash in their own name for this labor as well.

From the interwar period, in the context of intensifying (male) labor migrations, the demands of mandatory cultivations were difficult—if not impossible—to meet without women's labor. Introduced from the late 1910s, (forced) cotton cultivation, for instance, relied on women's work in farming, harvesting, and transport. Colonial authorities distributed small amounts of salt specifically to women to encourage their work, but access to cash was still a husband's prerogative.³⁵ Among the matrilineal Kuba studied by historian Jan Vansina, the evolution of the precolonial gendered division of productive activities also shifted “only slightly” under colonial rule, even if state agents dealt almost exclusively with men.³⁶ This evolution was reinforced after the World War II. The largest development plan elaborated in postwar Congo (the *Plan Décennal*), which designed intensive agricultural development schemes, never mentions women's work; the plan was entirely

Women in the Democratic Republic of Congo

conceived as if men alone were in charge of agricultural labor. The expansion of cash crop production was primarily organized under the supervision of men; only men were initiated to new techniques and circuits of production, while women were relegated to subsistence crops.³⁷ Yet in some cases, women managed to find ways to keep a (relative) material independence and/or to gain new forms of access to resources. While they were encouraged by colonial employers to work on subsistence crops so as to complement workers' rations, wives could also maintain exploitation rights on land and sell their own cultivations' products to other employees or villagers.³⁸ Women also seized the cracks and inner contradictions of the colonial system and of its judicial institutions: in cotton production regions, in the 1940s and 1950s, women frequently introduced (and won) lawsuits against their husbands to obtain compensation for their work on cotton fields (whether in divorce or elopement cases).³⁹

Contesting Colonial and/or Gender Order

Despite limited room for maneuvering, Congolese women never restricted themselves to the roles (attemptively) imposed on them during the colonial period. Dynamics of anti-colonial contestations (whether linked to military opposition to early colonial rule to messianic movements to rural revolts to workers' strikes, or to "formal" political movements) gave little room to women. For most of them, transgressions of colonial prescriptions and of gender norms, as well as strategies of emancipation, took different paths.

Women's involvement in anticolonial protest movements remains minimally documented in DR Congo. Women are barely present in narratives of early resistance to colonial rule. As in many other contexts, they are mostly described in passive and/or auxiliary roles: as victims of colonial violence, as logistical supporters of the infantrymen serving in the *Force Publique* employed in the conquest, or as *agents provocateurs* of rebellions.⁴⁰ The involvement of women in uprising movements is more apparent in the spiritual mobilizations that flourished in various regions of the Congo in the first decades of the 20th century. But even there, female leadership seems to be the exception rather than the rule, despite the long tradition of women's involvement in spiritual mediumship and healing movements in central Africa.

The insurgency movement led by Maria N'koi during the First World War in the southern part of the central Congo basin is one of the most well-known examples of those uprising movements. A young woman with the reputation of a powerful healer, Maria N'koi was named after the leopards of which she was rumored to surround herself. She launched influential medicines and claims, pointing at colonizers as causes of social and bodily ills. By the mid-1910s, in the tense context of the war, she prophesied the defeat of the Belgians against the "Germani." The power of her charms and her calls to oppose taxation and refuse forced labor attracted growing crowds, leading to what historian Nancy R. Hunt has called a "therapeutic insurgency," based on a combination of medicine power and armed upheaval.⁴¹ Belgian administration soon decided to send a military expedition to end the uprising. Maria N'koi was arrested and deported in 1915.⁴² The two major reli-

Women in the Democratic Republic of Congo

gious movements that included subversive ideas and practices vis-à-vis Belgian colonial power, Kimbanguism (a messianic movement named after Bakongo prophet and healer Simon Kimbangu), and Kitawala (a Central African offshoot of the Watch Tower movement), also massively incorporated women. Their stories have just started to be unearthed. As Yolanda Covington-Ward has shown in an innovative study of colonial-era female prophets in Lower Congo, women fully engaged in Kimbanguist prophetic activities and divination and healing practices, as well as being prophets in their own rights; they challenged the spiritual authority of European missionaries and of their male counterparts.⁴³

By their presence and activities in urban areas, women also transgressed both colonial and “traditional” norms of appropriate gender behavior. As in many other colonial contexts in Central and Southern Africa, legal regulations of rural-urban migrations restricted the access of Congolese women to cities. Dominant schemes of migrant labor meant that industrial compounds and urban developments were initially conceived as spaces of temporary settlements of (male) workers. Until the interwar period, women’s presence in cities remained largely illegitimate. In Leopoldville, for instance, it was not until the early 1920s that women were officially registered as city dwellers; they nevertheless made their way to urban districts, as demonstrated by their numerous interactions with colonial judicial and police services from the turn of the century.⁴⁴ When adult women were (finally) recognized as legitimate urban inhabitants, it was at first on the condition that they were regularly married to urban workers.

Again, colonial control proved fallible and ambiguous. While their presence remains difficult to quantify, many independent women settled in the burgeoning cities of the Belgian Congo. Some developed economic activities on the margins of colonial surveillance (petty trade, food production, market gardening, beer brewing, charcoal business, etc.). Others made a living of relationships with men—varying in their degree of sexual, material, and time commitment. In most of these cases, women sold not only sex but also the “comforts of home,” including domestic services such as securing and preparing food, providing household maintenance, care, and companionship.⁴⁵ Some women engaged in transactional sex on a temporary basis, while others made it a long-term career or combined it with other productive/commercial activities. Relationships with “clients” ranged from short-lived encounters to temporary marriages.⁴⁶

The activities and mobility of these “vagrant women,” as they were called in colonial jargon, were heavily condemned in colonial discourses. Anxieties about depopulation, declining birth rates and the “plagues” of venereal diseases heightened these concerns. Yet in practice, colonial authorities tolerated the presence of independent women in urban areas with relative benevolence. In the eyes of urban managers, these women contributed to the (social) reproduction of the labor force and were less costly than a full engagement toward stabilization policies. The sex ratio of Congolese cities remained lopsided until independence, even if with significant regional disparities. In the Katangese Copperbelt, for instance, stabilization as a labor strategy was inaugurated as early as the 1920s, leading

Women in the Democratic Republic of Congo

to an important increase in the presence of wives and to a more balanced male/female ratio in the vast mining compounds of the region.⁴⁷

In 1930, the Belgian colonial administration set up a new and unusual system to tax all unmarried women residing in urban centers—whether divorced, widowed, or single. The tax on “women living theoretically alone” provided at the same time a convenient (if loose) system of control over urban “bad” women, and an official recognition of their presence in the city. The tax was due by all adult women living outside of the bounds of marriage—whether petty traders, concubines, fiancées, mistresses, food producers, “additional” wives in polygynous households, or prostitutes. Within this category, Congolese and Europeans alike talked about *ndumba* (a Kikongo word initially alluding to young, unmarried girls), and more often about *femmes libres* (“free women”), to hint at women without matrimonial ties living primarily off of their short-lived relationships with men.⁴⁸ The *femmes libres* impeded the status and gendered authority of indigenous male figures. From the 1940s and 1950s, their newfound economic independence, plus their visibility and reinforced mobility in the city, made them the embodiment of the postwar subversion of gender norms in cities. They played a central role in the elaboration of a distinctive urban culture grounded in new ideas and practices of intimacy, affect, pleasure, and material exchanges. As historian Ch. Didier Gondola has shown, they were also key in the emergence of a rich popular musical culture. Although musical performance remained a predominantly masculine stronghold, women participated in these creations in various ways: as muses (the “gender permutation” at play within the cities’ social landscape was at the heart of many songs), as hosts and *ambianceuses* of the music scene, and as owners and/or managers of beerhalls and *flamingos* (nightclubs).⁴⁹

Not only did bittersweet rumba songs denounce the so-called emasculation of the Congolese man by the *femme libre*, but the new urban masculine elite, the *Evolués*, also revealed themselves as a vocal group, thus establishing the *femme libre* as the antithesis of the “ideal” and respectable Congolese “new” woman. Gender order and familial respectability were regarded as the nucleus of the new social order promoted by colonial authorities—and therefore as central indicators of the developmental progress of the emerging group of *Evolués*. The model of the bourgeois family and of its Congolese domesticated housewife became a strong identity marker for this new elite, as well as a topic of intense political discussions. The pages of the magazine *La Voix du Congolais* (“The Voice of the Congolese”), the most important (state-sponsored) periodical of the *Evolués*, are filled with articles about the state of “development” of Congolese women. As historian Daniel Tödt has shown, there is a striking echo between colonial discourses on the imperfection of male *Évolués* and *Evolués* discourses on female developmental deficits.⁵⁰ In a sense, a similar parallel could be made in regard to the silencing of their (respective) voices. The first article written by a Congolese woman to appear in the columns of *La Voix du Congolais* was only published in 1951, six years after the creation of the magazine. In the following years, women’s contributions remained scarce, and mostly consisted in interviews conducted by Congolese men.⁵¹

Women in the Democratic Republic of Congo

Their content nevertheless was not completely in line with the gender *doxa* of their male counterparts. Louise Efoli, the author of the second ever-published article by a woman in the periodical, pointed out in 1956 that *Evolués* men were not always living up to the ideals they pretended to embrace, and criticized the ambiguities of their rhetoric about women's liberation.⁵² In 1957, Joséphine Siongo-Nkumu, who had just been appointed the Congolese delegate to the World Union of Catholic Women's Organizations, stated in an interview about her recent trip to metropolitan Belgium that she was edified by the sight of a Belgian husband and wife "being one item"⁵³: "They share the same goal, and they make decisions only after mutual concertation. After work, the husband comes back home immediately and with his wife he works in the garden, takes care of the children."⁵⁴ The criticism against male *Evolués* was only thinly veiled. Discussions of possibilities of salaried employment for women were particularly tense. Here again, Belgian paternalism was striking. In 1957, the magazine mentioned as an historic first the engagement of a Congolese woman in the colonial administration (as an auxiliary clerk), and presented it as possible only thanks to the ability of the young woman "to remain at her place" (a place conceived in racialized and gendered terms). Here again, interviews of women such as the young auxiliary teacher and journalist Suzanne Freitas also complicated the male (and not very favorable) narrative.⁵⁵

In the late 1950s, the acceleration of anticolonial movements led to the emergence of new forms of political mobilization. *Evolués* men were the main leaders of the new political scene claiming autonomy. Not surprisingly, women remained largely marginalized from the formal process that led to the birth of a new state in June 1960. The leaders of the major political parties were exclusively men. In 1958, Julienne Mbengi created the FABAKO (*Femmes de l'Alliance des Bakongo*), a women's association linked to ABAKO (*Alliance des Bakongo*), the leading cultural-turned-political association of Lower Congo headed by Joseph Kasa-Vubu, the future first president of the country. The organization was, however, never recognized as a branch of the political party.⁵⁶

The other major political leader of the time, future prime minister Patrice Lumumba, held singular positions with regard to women's emancipation and political activism. His political party, the MNC (the Congolese National Movement), which he led from 1958 until his assassination in 1961, progressively sought to mobilize women. In 1959, Lumumba underlined that he had set up a large women's national organization, the *Union des Femmes Démocratiques du Congo* (Union of Democratic Women of the Congo), but the current state of the historiography does not allow for the elucidation of the political significance of this body within the party's apparatus. Executive members of the MNC were men.⁵⁷

The political collaboration of Lumumba with Andrée Blouin (1921-1986), one of the rare female figures of the Congolese independence with a high public profile, appears therefore as an exception rather than the rule. Blouin was born in present-day Central African Republic to an African mother and French father. Her personal as well as political trajectory bears testimony of the colonial constraints weighting on *métis* women; to sum up, and in the words of Karen Bouwer, as a "woman of mixed race working alongside men, her fluid crossing of boundaries of race and gender unsettles the dichotomies informing

Women in the Democratic Republic of Congo

the discourses of both colonization and decolonization.”⁵⁸ In the late 1950s, Blouin traveled to the Guinea of Sékou Touré before going back to Central Africa—and ultimately to the Congo—with a clear political commitment toward decolonization. In the eve of Congolese independence, she mobilized women in the Kwilu region for the African Solidarity Party (PSA). She caught the eye of Patrice Lumumba and became the chief of protocol in his government in 1960, before being permanently expelled from the Congo a few months later.⁵⁹

Lumumba and his party went from advocating a gradual emancipation to a position in favor of women’s voting rights, a highly singular stance in the political landscape of the period leading up to independence.⁶⁰ Already in 1957, the enactment of a new legal status for urban areas, which had led to the organization of local (and limited) elections of town councils, had excluded Congolese women from suffrage, to the great demise of metropolitan feminist associations.⁶¹ During the political negotiations about independence and the electoral system to be implemented in postcolonial Congo held in Brussels in early 1960, Congolese and Belgian delegates agreed to exclude women from voting rights, apparently without much discussion.⁶²

From Congo to Zaïre to Congo: Women’s Mobilizations, Mobilizing Women

The 1960s were about to generate a flourishing of women’s associative mobilizations in the Congo, including political ones. These were grounded in associative dynamics developed during the colonial period. While these associations did not have political ambitions per se, they nevertheless challenged colonial as well as Congolese norms and often escaped colonial supervision.

These associations were mostly urban, initiated by independent women and organized across ethnic lines. Born in the 1930s, the first women’s associations were centered on mutual aid (*likelemba* in Lingala) and recreation. Other types of associations quickly emerged, particularly those of the *muziki* type, which brought together “free women,” businesswomen, and others having acquired a certain financial autonomy. After World War II, these associations multiplied. They were as much based on collective savings and solidarity as on the promotion of new forms of sociability, especially around music, commensality, entertainment, and fashion. It is also in this context that the first “societies of elegance” emerged. Their activities revolved more specifically around fashion, aesthetics, seduction, and musical recreation. Their names were evocative: *The Light, Beauty, Rosette, The Kind Girl, The Most Beautiful Toilet*, and so on. The most famous of them was undoubtedly the *Diamant* Association, founded in Leopoldville in 1933 by shopkeepers whose rumored acquaintances with prostitution led to a thorough investigation by colonial authorities.⁶³ In urban areas, these associations coexisted with other forms of female groups centered on spiritual affiliations (such as in the case of the *Jamaa* or *Kipendano* movements in Katanga). In spite of their opposite positioning in terms of moral (and gender) respectability, it is also striking to note that these diverse associative forms drew

Women in the Democratic Republic of Congo

inspiration from transregional/transnational influences (between Kinshasa and the Katanga for instance, but also from the French Congo and British Zambia).

Under the First Republic (1960–1965), many of these associations turned more political in the context of the civil war and political conflicts that followed independence. They organized actions (protests, public appeals to politicians, etc.) in different political directions. In March 1965 for instance, several associations joined forces under the lead of Catherine Limaya and Elisabeth Koffi to organize a “march of women” in the streets of Kinshasa to call for peace and to claim that “all mothers of the Congo want peace, want that tranquillity reigns on earth and want that people renounce to war.”⁶⁴ On the eve of Joseph-Désiré Mobutu’s coup (1965), political leaders organized tours to encourage “national reconstruction” in the provinces that had been the most strongly impacted by rebellions, for which they chose to include delegations of women’s associations to address people about the role of women in the process of Congolese reorganization.⁶⁵ While it remains a blind spot of the historiography of early postcolonial Congo, women had been severely affected by the experiences of civil war and military insurgencies, notably in terms of sexual violence.⁶⁶

Among the 1960s rebellions in the Congo, the movement headed by political leader and former minister Pierre Mulele in the Kwilu proved the most distinctive one from a gender perspective. Trained in guerrilla tactics in Maoist China, Mulele organized life in the *maquis* with an estimated 20 to 35 percent of women, and along lines that broke the usual conventions of the gender division of militant (and military) activism relegating women to subaltern and logistical tasks. In this rural-based revolution (that reached approximately one-third of the Congolese territory in the mid-1960s), women served as soldiers in assault teams, commanded troops, organized executions, and gave political speeches. The movement advocated equality between men and women, both in the public and in the private sphere. While effective practices did not always live up to these ideals, women did play significant public roles in the movement.⁶⁷

This was, for instance, the case for Léonie Abo. Abo was born in Eastern Congo and trained as an assistant midwife and pediatric nurse in the late-colonial period (she graduated with the first promotion of its kind in 1957). She joined the armed resistance in 1963 and married Pierre Mulele. She served in medical care, embraced the revolution, and became an important figure of the insurgency. Even after the demise of the rebellion and the execution of Mulele (1968), she remained a spokesperson for women’s rights, anti-imperialism, and later for the defense of Mulele’s legacy.⁶⁸

The promotion of women’s emancipation as part of a decolonial political agenda was also to be featured in Mobutu’s famous doctrine of *authenticité*, whose aim was to connect the value system of the precolonial past with the requirements of “modernity.” Forged and developed as a governmental policy from the second half of the 1960s, this political rhetoric rested on the criticism of colonial attitudes toward women (limited opportunities of education, neglect of rural women, destruction of “authentic” African family values, etc.) and on the promotion of new paths of emancipation and of more egalitarian relations between

Women in the Democratic Republic of Congo

men and women. Significantly, one of the most successful slogans of the (new) regime was *Hommes nouveaux/femmes nouvelles: émancipation* (“New men/new women: emancipation”).

Mobutu also proved keen to mobilize, to his own political profit, the new associative dynamics that had emerged in the years following independence. Only women’s organizations within his single party, the MPR (Popular Revolutionary Movement), were recognized and encouraged; independent groups were banned. Substantial investments were made to encourage girls’ schooling. In 1967, the new constitution finally granted women the right of suffrage. One year before, Sophie Kanza (1940–1999), the first Congolese woman to get a secondary education degree and a university degree, had become the first female minister to take office (as Minister of Social Affairs). A few women were even included in the army and trained as paratroopers; in the late 1960s, they were proudly included in official military parades.⁶⁹

As the scarce historical works devoted to this period have shown, beyond grand political gestures, Mobutu’s rhetoric of women’s empowerment was not translated into effective policies. In the 1970s and 1980s, in spite of the creation of the CONDIFA (a special ministerial department aiming to bring female status and family issues on the political agenda), and in spite of the integration of a new international agenda trending toward “women and development,” women remained a minority on the national political stage. In the words of sociologist Gertrude Mianda, the access (and growing visibility) of “intellectual women” to political positions and public service was a “lure,” whose aim was “to dangle the fruits of female promotion in front of the people and of the rest of the world.”⁷⁰

At the end of the 1980s, Zaïre (the new “authentic” name of the country since 1971) had one of the lowest girls’ schooling rate for sub-Saharan Africa (63.6 percent of enrollment at the primary level, 13.1 percent at the secondary level). Women’s presence in the formal wage-labor force increased significantly in these decades, especially in the private sector, but they rarely occupied senior positions. Anthropological studies realized in the 1970s and 1980s nevertheless reveal that women never resigned themselves to the limited roles offered to them.⁷¹ Already in the late 1960s, several female students participated in the students’ movement and political debates surfacing in the context of the global 1960s.⁷² Rural women also never ceased to mobilize themselves; in the Eastern Congo of the late 1980s for instance, a group of Tembo women farmers of cassava successfully protested against new projects of taxes and tolls.⁷³ On a more structural level and despite the degradation of economic conditions, several women launched successful trade enterprises. In Kisangani, the third city in the country, in the mid-1980s, businesswomen (nicknamed *basi ya poids* [“women of weight”]) accounted for 28 percent of the top trade sector, many of whom specialized in the wholesale/semi-wholesale sector and in activities based on national and international trading networks.⁷⁴ In other (and more recent) contexts as well, investments in cross-border trade offered women opportunities to creatively challenge and/or reinvent gender dynamics.⁷⁵

Women in the Democratic Republic of Congo

The decline of wage labor and growing hyperinflation of the 1980s and early 1990s reinforced Congolese households' dependence on the extra income provided by the informal economic activities of women in petty trade, agriculture, and beer brewing, among others. This contributed to new discourses about alleged shifts in the balance of power between men and women, with men denouncing women's ambition to "wear the trousers."⁷⁶ While women's newfound economic autonomy appeared as a challenge to Christian as well as to "traditional" ideals of Congolese masculinity, it must be underlined that the new (and long-awaited) Family Code of 1988 still stated, despite its modernizing ambitions, that men were the heads of households and that wives had to request their husband's permission to perform certain legal acts.⁷⁷

Since then, the new 2006 Constitution brought the promotion of gender equality to the legal agenda. New legislations on women's rights and on issues such as the prevention of sexual violence have been enacted, but they have not necessarily been put into practice, particularly in rural areas. Similarly, popular songs might have celebrated the empowerment of seductive women who hold men at their mercy since the 1960s, but the realities of prostitution and other forms of transactional sexualities put discourses of Congolese men's "emasculatation" into perspective.⁷⁸ At the turn of the new millennia, the overthrow of the Mobutu regime, the reconfiguration of political order, the Second Congo War, and the Kivu conflict have had devastating effects on women, especially in conflict zones. In addition to impeded access to basic necessities, this context has accelerated the degradation of healthcare, with a (gendered) impact on maternal and reproductive health services.⁷⁹ Congolese women have been subjected to outbursts of sexual violence that have attracted international media attention—and since then have framed most of the scholarly studies devoted to women in DR Congo.⁸⁰

Discussion of the Literature

Compared to other African countries, the history of women in DR Congo remains sparsely studied. It is striking to note that it barely features in general histories of women in Africa, as well as in general histories of the Congo. The first edition of Kathleen Sheldon's reference book (2005) for instance, the *Historical Dictionary of Women in Sub-Saharan Africa*, only contains one single entry for the largest country in Sub-Saharan Africa.⁸¹ Quite tale-tellingly as well, the bestselling book by David Van Reybrouck, *Congo: The Epic History of a People*, opens with a series of vignettes in which a young boy personifies the different eras of Congo's precolonial history; one might wonder what this historical overview would have been if these evolutions had been told from a young girl's point of view.⁸² There is no comprehensive historical work on women in the Congo, despite an early interest of some pioneering anthropologists with an eye for gender and history. Suzanne Comhaire-Sylvain was undoubtedly a particularly important scholar in this regard. The Haitian-born anthropologist conducted fieldwork in Leopoldville's African districts twice—first in the early 1940s, and second in the mid-1960s, leading to the publication of her *Femmes de Kinshasa, hier et aujourd'hui* in 1968.⁸³

Women in the Democratic Republic of Congo

In the 1960s and 1970s, the interest in Congo's *longue durée* past and for oral history did not spark a noticeable interest in women's historical experiences. The 1980s were going to prove to be a point-turning decade. There was first the landmark collective volume *Women and Slavery in Africa*, which features several contributions from scholars specializing in Congolese and Great Lakes' region history.⁸⁴ There was then a pioneering article by Justine M'Poyo Kasa-Vubu on the history of Congolese women under Belgian colonial rule;⁸⁵ together with a first collection of essays on European women in colonial Congo edited by Belgian historian Jean-Luc Vellut, the paper opened new paths of investigation about women's history in DR Congo.⁸⁶ Above all, the end of the 1980s were marked by the publication of one of the first articles of the leading scholar on gender history in the Congo, historian Nancy R. Hunt. From the late 1980s to the present day, Hunt's highly original work (inter alia, on African women and colonial biopolitical interventions, domesticity and colonialism, the medicalization of childbirth, the history of sexual violence, and violence and insurgencies in (post)colonial Congo) has dominated the field of gender history in the Congo. In many respects, it has also set the research agenda on these issues in other African/(post)colonial contexts—and therefore “placed” DR Congo on the map of African women's history. Different lines of analysis were developed in the 1990s. Social histories of the mining regions, as well as the genre of *Histoire immédiate* (“immediate history”), suddenly became an interest for researchers in women's histories. A specialist in Katanga's history, historian Donatien Dibwe dia Mwenbu elaborated on women's roles within the mining communities of the region.⁸⁷ Sociologist Gertrude Mianda investigated the complex relationship between women and *Evolués'* ideology, a line of inquiry she has developed in further publications.⁸⁸ Although focusing on urban history and popular culture, historian Ch. Didier Gondola's work has expanded on urban women's histories and he has since developed innovative research on gender history in colonial and postcolonial Congo.⁸⁹ Since the 2000s, new research has emerged (Karen Bouwer on gender and decolonization and Lissia Jeurissen and Amandine Lauro on *ménagères* and interracial sexualities, among others).⁹⁰ Women are also more frequently referenced in works in which they are not the primary subjects. History is also taken more and more into consideration by the rich anthropological scholarship devoted to gender issues in contemporary Congo and often deals with popular culture.⁹¹ Still, there is no comprehensive overview of the history of women in DR Congo and many aspects of women's experiences and mobilizations remain little known, especially for the precolonial period and for the postcolonial decades. The current surge in expertise on sexual violence and the mass rapes in Eastern Congo has generated an evergrowing body of literature on women in the country, as much as it has unveiled the crucial need to pay more attention to long-term historical perspectives on gender and the substantial lack of Congo-related scholarship in this regard.

Primary Sources

Archival collections in the Democratic Republic of Congo have suffered from the political conflicts in the 1990s and 2000s. The **National Archives**, located in Kinshasa, hosts official documents dating back to the colonial period, including reports and administrative records concerned with women's related issues.⁹² Local repositories of archival collec-

Women in the Democratic Republic of Congo

tions (local administrations' records, court records, companies' and missions' records, among others) and of published material (e.g., local press and publications) may hold documents dating back several decades, but in the absence of precise guides/inventories, research often remains unpredictable.

An important part of Congo's historical evidence can be found in Belgian archives, including for the precolonial period. Tervuren's Belgian **Royal Museum for Central Africa** remains, for instance, a key place for precolonial arts and material culture. It also holds sources written prior to/in the early colonial period by explorers, traders, and soldiers involved in conquest, as well as extensive collections of colonial written and visual documents.⁹³ Ethnographic material dating back to the colonial and the postcolonial (through research records handed down by retired scholars, for instance) period might also be of interest for researchers of women and gender in DR Congo. The **Belgian Colonial Archives in Brussels**, deposited at the Belgian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (but planned to be moved to the **State Archives of Belgium** in the forthcoming years), host most of the remaining records produced by the Belgian colonial administration both in Brussels and in the Congo. Among others, the *Gouvernement Général de Léopoldville's* collection will be of particular interest for scholars concerned with the reconstruction of women's experiences—even through the colonial (archival) gaze. Accessible only since the mid-2000s, this collection is made up of various types of records (including court files, daily administrative reports, police files, petition letters, etc.) produced in the Congo and transferred to Brussels during the decolonization process.⁹⁴ The **KADOC-Documentation and Research Center on Religion Culture and Society** holds records of several Catholic congregations involved in missionary work in the Congo. Protestant congregations active in the Congo, such as the Baptists, often have their archival repositories located in the United Kingdom or in the United States.

Published accounts also provide information about women. For the precolonial period, edited/translated collections of documents from the Kongo Kingdom provide limited but precious information about women's roles; (recorded) oral traditions might also be useful, even if they do not always pay a lot of attention to women and gender roles.⁹⁵ For colonial- and postcolonial-era publications, a few bibliographical records provide good entry points into the published material about/by Congolese women.⁹⁶

Further Reading

Bouwer, Karen. *Gender and Decolonization in the Congo: The Legacy of Patrice Lumumba*. London and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010.

Comhaire-Sylvain, Suzanne. *Femmes de Kinshasa, hier et aujourd'hui*. Paris: Mouton, 1968.

Gondola, Ch. Didier. "Popular Music, Urban Society, and Changing Gender Relations in Kinshasa, Zaire (1950-1990)." In *Gendered Encounters. Challenging Cultural Boundaries*

Women in the Democratic Republic of Congo

and Social Hierarchies in Africa. Edited by Maria Grosz-Ngate and Omari Kokole, 65–84. London: Routledge, 1996.

Hunt, Nancy R. *A Colonial Lexicon: Of Birth Ritual, Medicalization, and Mobility in the Congo*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999.

Hunt, Nancy R. "Noise over Camouflaged Polygamy, Colonial Morality Taxation, and a Woman-Naming Crisis in Belgian Africa." *Journal of African History* 32, no. 3 (1991): 471–494.

Jacques, Catherine, and Valérie Piette. "Féminisme et société coloniale au Congo belge (1918–1960)." In *Femmes d'Afrique dans une société en mutation*. Edited by Phillippe Denis and Caroline Sappia, 77–97. Leuven, Belgium: Academia-Bruylant, 2004.

Kita Masandi, Pierre. "L'Éducation féminine au Congo belge." *Paedagogica Historica* 40, no. 4 (2004): 479–508.

Mianda, Gertrude. "Colonialism, Education, and Gender Relations in the Belgian Congo: The *Evolué* Case." In *Women in African Colonial Histories*. Edited by Jean Marie Allman, Susan Geiger, and Nakanyike Musisi, 144–163. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002.

Mianda, Gertrude. "Dans L'ombre de La 'Démocratie' Au Zaïre: La Remise En Question de L'émancipation Mobutiste de La Femme." *Canadian Journal of African Studies* 29, no. 1 (1995): 51–78.

Sizaire, Violaine, ed. *Femmes-Mode-Musique. Mémoires de Lubumbashi*. Paris: L'Harmattan, 2002.

Thornton, John K. "Elite Women in the Kingdom of Kongo: Historical Perspectives on Women's Political Power." *Journal of African History* 47, no. 3 (2006): 437–460.

Wright, Marcia. *Strategies of Slaves & Women: Life-Stories from East/Central Africa*. New York: Lillian Barber Press, 1993.

Notes:

(1.) For overviews of this *longue durée* history in Central Africa from a gender perspective, see notably David Schoenbrun, *A Green Place, A Good Place: Agrarian Change, Gender, and Social Identity in the Great Lakes Region to the 15th Century* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1998); Christine Saidi, *Women's Authority and Society in Early East-Central Africa* (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2010); and Kathryn M. de Luna, *Collecting Food, Cultivating People: Subsistence and Society in Central Africa* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2016). See also Jan Vansina, *How Societies Are Born: Governance in West Central Africa before 1600* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2004); and Rachel Jean-Baptiste, "Central Africa, 1500–1900," in *The Oxford Encyclope-*

Women in the Democratic Republic of Congo

dia of Women in World History, ed. Bonnie G. Smith (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 302–308.

(2.) John K. Thornton, “Elite Women in the Kingdom of Kongo: Historical Perspectives on Women’s Political Power,” *Journal of African History* 47, no. 3 (2006): 437–460.

(3.) John K. Thornton, *The Kongolese Saint Anthony: Dona Beatriz Kimpa Vita and the Antonian Movement, 1684–1706* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

(4.) Anne Hilton, “Family and Kinship among the Kongo South of the Zaire River from the Sixteenth to the Nineteenth Centuries,” *Journal of African History* 24, no. 2 (1983): 189–206. See also Susan Herlin Broadhead, “Slave Wives, Free Sisters: Bakongo Women and Slavery c. 1700–1850,” in *Women and Slavery in Africa*, ed. Claire C. Robertson and Martin A. Klein (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1983), 160–181; and Wyatt MacGaffey, “Lineage Structure, Marriage and the Family amongst the Central Bantu,” *Journal of African History* 24, no. 2 (1983): 173–187.

(5.) Robert Harms, *River of Wealth, River of Sorrow: The Central Zaire Basin in the Era of the Slave and Ivory Trade, 1500–1891* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1981), 51 ff. For later evolutions, see also Jan Vansina, *The Tio Kingdom of the Middle Congo, 1880–1892* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1973), 139 ff.

(6.) Thomas Q. Reefe, *The Rainbow and the Kings: A History of the Luba Empire to 1891* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981).

(7.) From succession conflicts and investiture rites to spirit mediumship, women were key in Luba political practices, as demonstrated by Mary Nooter Roberts, “The King Is a Woman: Shaping Power in Luba Royal Arts,” *African Arts* 46, no. 3 (2013): 68–81.

(8.) John C. Yoder, *The Kanyok of Zaire: An Institutional and Ideological History to 1895* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 32–36, 57.

(9.) Robert Harms, “Sustaining the System: Trading Towns along the Middle Zaire,” in *Women and Slavery in Africa*, ed. Claire C. Robertson and Martin A. Klein (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1983), 95–110. For a complementary approach as seen from a history of masculinity in the region, see also Ch. Didier Gondola, *Tropical Cowboys: Westerns, Violence, and Masculinity in Kinshasa* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2016), 17–30.

(10.) Curtis A. Keim, “Women in Slavery among the Mangbetu c. 1800–1910,” in *Women and Slavery in Africa*, ed. Claire C. Robertson and Martin A. Klein (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1983), 130–159.

(11.) Marcia Wright, *Strategies of Slaves & Women: Life-Stories from East/Central Africa* (New York: Lilian Barber Press, 1993), 151–178.

Women in the Democratic Republic of Congo

(12.) Nancy R. Hunt, "An Acoustic Register, Tenacious Images, and Congolese Scenes of Rape and Repetition," *Cultural Anthropology* 23, no. 2 (2008): 220–253. See also Lancelot Arzel, "Des 'conquistadors' en Afrique centrale: espaces naturels, chasses et guerres coloniales dans l'Etat indépendant du Congo (années 1880 - années 1900)" (PhD diss., Sciences Po Paris, 2018).

(13.) Alice Seeley Harris, *Enslaved Womanhood of the Congo* (London: Congo Reform Association, n.d. [1907]).

(14.) Robert Burroughs, *African Testimony in the Movement for Congo Reform: The Burden of Proof* (New York: Routledge, 2018), 84. Kevin Grant, "The Limits of Exposure. Atrocity Photographs in the Congo Reform Campaign," in *Humanitarian Photography: A History*, ed. Heide Fehrenbach and Davide Rodogno (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 64–88. See also Hunt, "Acoustic Register," 223–224.

(15.) Alexandre Delcommune, *Vingt années de vie africaine (1874–1893). Récits de voyages, d'aventures et d'exploration au Congo Belge, 1874–1893* (Brussels: Larcier, 1922), 79–84.

(16.) Amandine Lauro, *Coloniaux, ménagères et prostituées au Congo Belge (1885–1930)* (Brussels: Labor, 2005). See also Jean-Luc Vellut, "Matériaux pour une image du Blanc dans la société coloniale du Congo belge," in *Stéréotypes nationaux et préjugés raciaux aux XIXe et XXe siècles: sources et méthodes pour une approche historique*, ed. Jean Pirotte (Leuven, Belgium: Presses de l'UCL/Nauwelaerts, 1982), 91–116; Lissia Jeurissen, "Femmes métisses au Congo-Zaïre: stigmatisation coloniale de la mulâtresse et héritages contemporains," in *Femmes d'Afrique dans une société en mutation*, ed. Philippe Denis and Caroline Sappia (Leuven, Belgium: Academia-Bruylant, 2004), 99–113.

(17.) Nancy R. Hunt, "Noise over Camouflaged Polygamy, Colonial Morality Taxation, and a Woman-Naming Crisis in Belgian Africa," *Journal of African History* 32, no. 3 (1991): 471–494; Amandine Lauro, "Les politiques du mariage et de la sexualité au Congo Belge (1908–1945). Genre, race, sexualité et pouvoir colonial" (PhD diss., Free University of Brussels, 2009), 161–252. On the evolution of conjugal obligations during the colonial period, see the case/regional-studies developed in, inter alia, Mary Douglas, *The Lele of the Kasai* (London: Oxford University Press for the International African Institute, 1963), 113–140; Janet MacGaffey, "The Effect of Rural-Urban Ties, Kinship and Marriage on Household Structure in a Kongo Village," *Canadian Journal of African Studies* 17, no. 1 (1983): 69–84; and Reuben Loffman, "Men and Women of the Water: The Lokele of Stanleyville and Yakusu under Belgian Rule, 1895–1960," *African Studies* 71, no. 1 (2012): 52–70.

(18.) Nancy R. Hunt, *A Colonial Lexicon: Of Birth Ritual, Medicalization, and Mobility in the Congo* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999), 10.

(19.) Barbara Yates, "Colonialism, Education, and Work: Sex Differentiation in Colonial Zaire," in *Women and Work in Africa*, ed. Edna Bay (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1982), 127–151; Pierre Kita Masandi, "L'Éducation féminine au Congo belge," *Paedagogica His-*

Women in the Democratic Republic of Congo

torica 40, no. 4 (2004): 479–508; Marie E. Dunkerley, “Education Policies and the Development of the Colonial State in the Belgian Congo, 1916–1939” (PhD diss., University of Exeter, 2009), 212–243.

(20.) Yates, “Colonialism, Education, and Work,” 127.

(21.) Lauro, “Politiques du mariage,” 165–166.

(22.) Kita, “L’Education féminine,” 503–506. Protestant missions also trained assistant midwives, see Hunt, *Colonial Lexicon*, 215–216, 256–259.

(23.) The majority of (assistant) maternity nurses were trained at the primary level; in 1959, only fifty-nine midwives had been trained at an upper level.

(24.) These estimations rest on maximal figures as they are based on enrollment statistics. See Dunkerley, “Education Policies,” 235; and Kita, “L’Education féminine,” 492–496.

(25.) Yates, “Colonialism, Education, and Work,” 142.

(26.) Yates, “Colonialism, Education, and Work,” 141.

(27.) Nancy R. Hunt, “Domesticity & Colonialism in Belgian Africa: Usumbura’s Foyer Social, 1946–1960,” *Signs* 15, no. 3 (1990): 447–474.

(28.) Pernelle Taquet, “‘J’attends mon mari’ ou la promotion des familles heureuses au Congo Belge. Aperçu du service social féminin au Congo (1945–1960)” (master’s thesis, Free University of Brussels, 2006), 111–112.

(29.) Daniel Tödt, *Elitenbildung und Dekolonisierung: die Évolués in Belgisch-Kongo 1944–1960* (Göttingen, Germany: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2018), 166. Victorine N’Djoli (1933–2015) is also famous for being the first Congolese woman to get a driving license in the mid-1950s.

(30.) Hunt, “Domesticity,” 471–472; Taquet, “‘J’attends mon mari’,” 132–133.

(31.) Maryinez Lyons, *The Colonial Disease: A Social History of Sleeping Sickness in Northern Zaïre, 1900–1940* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 86, 187–188. See also Nancy R. Hunt, “STDs, Suffering, and Their Derivatives in Congo-Zaïre: Notes toward an Historical Ethnography of Disease,” in *Experiencing and Understanding AIDS in Africa*, ed. Charles Becker et al. (Paris: Karthala, 1999), 111–131. The history of sexually transmitted diseases in the Congo has recently attracted new scholarly attention because of its historical connections with the emergence of HIV in the Congo basin. On this topic, see Jacques Pépin, *The Origins of AIDS* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 2011); Tamara Giles-Vernick, Ch. Didier Gondola, Guillaume Lachenal, and William H. Schneider, “Social History, Biology, and the Emergence of HIV in Colonial Africa,” *Journal of African History* 54, no. 1 (2013): 11–30.

Women in the Democratic Republic of Congo

(32.) Nancy R. Hunt, "‘Le bébé en brousse’: European Women, African Birth Spacing and Colonial Intervention in Breast Feeding in the Belgian Congo," *International Journal of African Historical Studies* 21, no. 3 (1988): 403.

(33.) Jan Vansina, *Being Colonized: The Kuba Experience in Rural Congo, 1880–1960* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2010), 222. See also Julia Seibert, *In die globale wirtschaft gezwungen. Arbeit und kolonialer Kapitalismus im Kongo (1885-1960)* (Frankfurt: Campus Verlag, 2016), 69, 91, 154.

(34.) Benoît Henriët, "The Concession Experience. Power, Ecology and Labour in the Leverville Circle (Belgian Congo, 1911-1940)" (PhD diss., Université Saint-Louis-Bruxelles, 2016), 380 ff.

(35.) Osumaka Likaka, *Rural Society and Cotton in Colonial Zaïre* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1997), 60.

(36.) Vansina, *Being Colonized*, 239.

(37.) Catherine Coquery-Vidrovitch, *Les Africaines. Histoire des femmes d’Afrique noire du XIXe au XXe siècle* (Paris: Desjonquères, 1994), 109–110.

(38.) Such as in the case of the Huileries du Congo Belge in the Kasai, as shown in Henriët, "Concession Experience," 376–391.

(39.) Likaka, *Rural Society*, 121–123.

(40.) In the early colonial period, numerous women accompanied colonial troops, mostly as wives/concubines and logistical aids. This was still the case during the military campaigns of the World War I. See, inter alia, Pamphile Mabilia Mantuba-Ngoma, "Les femmes et la Force Publique du Congo Belge dans la Grande Guerre en Afrique centrale et orientale (1914-1918)," in *Quand on parle de colonisation/Wanneer we spreken over kolonisatie*, ed. Vesna Faassen and Lukas Verdijk (Brussels: Publiekeacties, 2018), 71–89. The most significant example in this regard remains the Pende Revolt of the early 1930s, the largest rural uprising of the interwar period. While generated by the *Huileries du Congo Belge*’s modes of labor, land, and fiscal exploitation in a context of economic depression, the revolt was prompted by incidents of abuse and rape of Pende women by some territorial and HCB agents. Louis-François Vanderstraeten, *La répression de la révolte des Pende du Kwango en 1931* (Brussels: Royal Academy for Overseas Sciences, 2001), 118 ff.; Henriët, "Concession Experience," 149–150.

(41.) Nancy R. Hunt, *A Nervous State: Violence, Remedies, and Reverie in Colonial Congo* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016), 63.

(42.) Hunt, *Nervous State*, 61–94.

(43.) Yolanda Covington-Ward, "‘Your Name Is Written in the Sky’: Unearthing the Stories of Kongo Female Prophets in Colonial Belgian Congo, 1921–1960," *Journal of Africana Religions* 2, no. 3 (2014): 317–346.

Women in the Democratic Republic of Congo

(44.) Lauro, "Politiques du mariage," 439–441. For the case of Leopoldville, see Ch. Didier Gondola, *Villes miroirs. Migrations et identités urbaines à Kinshasa et Brazzaville, 1930-1970* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1997), 106–112. For Copperbelt cities (mainly Elisabethville), see Bruce Fetter, *The Creation of Elisabethville 1910–1940* (Stanford, CA: Hoover Institution Press, 1976), 29–31.

(45.) According to the expression used in Luise White, *The Comforts of Home: Prostitution in Colonial Nairobi* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990).

(46.) In a similar way to what has been described for other urban areas in colonial central Africa, in Jane L. Parpart, "Sexuality and Power on the Zambian Copperbelt: 1926–1964," in *Patriarchy and Class. African Women in the Home and the Workforce*, ed. Sharon Stichter and Jane L. Parpart (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1988), 115–138. On prostitution and (new) definitions of conjugal arrangements in urban colonial Congo, see Hunt, "Noise over Camouflaged Polygamy"; Lauro, "Les politiques du mariage," 373–481.

(47.) Donatien Dibwe dia Mwembu, *Bana Shaba abandonnés par leur père: structures de l'autorité et histoire sociale de la famille ouvrière au Katanga 1910–1997* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2001), 53 ff.

(48.) Hunt, "Noise over Camouflaged Polygamy," 490; Sully Faik and Clementine Faik-Nzuzi Madiya, "La néologie comme miroir d'une société: le cas du Zaïre," *Le Français Moderne*, no. 3 (1979): 220–231.

(49.) Ch. Didier Gondola, "Popular Music, Urban Society, and Changing Gender Relations in Kinshasa, Zaire (1950–1990)," in *Gendered Encounters: Challenging Cultural Boundaries and Social Hierarchies in Africa*, ed. Maria Grosz-Ngate and Omari Kokole (London: Routledge, 1996), 65–84.

(50.) Tödt, *Elitenbildung*, 166. See also Hunt, "Noise over Camouflaged Polygamy," 477–478.

(51.) In the form of a literary contribution. Alice Tatete, "Le Léopard et la Gazelle," *La Voix du Congolais*, January 1951, 18–19. On the place of Congolese women in *La Voix du Congolais* and *Evolués'* ideology, see Gertrude Mianda, "Colonialism, Education, and Gender Relations in the Belgian Congo: The *Evolué* Case," in *Women in African Colonial Histories*, ed. Jean Allman, Susan Geiger, and Nakanyike Musisi (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002), 144–163.

(52.) Quoted in Mianda, "Colonialism," 156–157.

(53.) In the 1950s, several collective trips of Congolese elites to the metropole were organized; it was only in 1957 that one of these groups included (six) women. Jean-Marie Mutamba Makombo Kitatshima, *Du Congo Belge au Congo indépendant, 1940-1960: Émergence des Évolués et genèse du nationalisme* (Kinshasa: Institut de Formation et d'études Politiques, 1998), 313–315.

Women in the Democratic Republic of Congo

- (54.) Jean-François Iyeki, "Madame Nkumu Siongo nous parle de la Belgique," *La Voix du Congolais*, August 1957, 599-601.
- (55.) Michel Collin, "La femme africaine face au monde moderne," *La Voix du Congolais*, April 1958, 274-275; Michel Collin, "Vingt minutes avec Suzanne Freitas," *La Voix du Congolais*, May 1957, 346-349.
- (56.) Suzanne Comhaire-Sylvain, *Femmes de Kinshasa, hier et aujourd'hui* (Paris: Mouton, 1968), 278.
- (57.) Karen Bouwer, *Gender and Decolonization in the Congo: The Legacy of Patrice Lumumba* (London and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 25-31.
- (58.) Bouwer, *Gender and Decolonization*, 72. See also Jeurissen, "Femmes métisses."
- (59.) Andrée Blouin, *My Country, Africa: Autobiography of the Black Pasionaria* (New York: Praeger, 1983). See also the chapter devoted to Blouin in Bouwer, *Gender and Decolonization*, 71-99.
- (60.) Bouwer, *Gender and Decolonization*, 30-31.
- (61.) Laure d'Ursel, "Les élections communales de 1957 et les élections communales et territoriales de 1959 au Congo belge dans la province du Katanga" (master's thesis, Free University of Brussels, 2004), 46-47; Catherine Jacques and Valérie Piette, "Féminisme et société coloniale au Congo belge (1918-1960)," in *Femmes d'Afrique dans une société en mutation*, ed. Philippe Denis and Caroline Sappia (Leuven, Belgium: Academia-Bruylant, 2004), 94-96.
- (62.) Piet Creve, "Een voetnoot in de koloniale geschiedenis? Congolese vrouwen en de verkiezingen in Belgisch-Congo," *Brood & Rozen 2* (1999): 150-151.
- (63.) Gondola, *Villes miroirs*, 286-295; Malira Kubuya-Namulemba, "Regard sur la situation sociale de la citoyenne lushoise d'avant 1950," *Likundoli 2*, no. 1 (1974): 63-71.
- (64.) Quoted in Comhaire-Sylvain, *Femmes de Kinshasa*, 291.
- (65.) Comhaire-Sylvain, *Femmes de Kinshasa*, 291-292.
- (66.) In terms of sexual violence, the decolonization mediatic agenda was dominated by narratives of rapes of European women. Pedro Monaville, "La crise congolaise de juillet 1960 et le sexe de la décolonisation," *Sextant 25* (2008): 87-102.
- (67.) Bouwer, *Gender and Decolonization*, 101-130.
- (68.) Ludo Martens, *Abo: Une femme du Congo* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1994); Bouwer, *Gender and Decolonization*, 101-130; Annette Lembagusala Kikumbi and Marc Depaepe, "L'Éducation des filles congolaises au maquis de Mulele: Arme de libération ou force

Women in the Democratic Republic of Congo

d'(auto)destruction?," *Historical Studies in Education/Revue d'histoire de l'éducation* 30, no. 1 (2018): 141-162.

(69.) Comhaire-Sylvain, *Femmes de Kinshasa*, 351-365. On Mobutism, the doctrine of *Authenticité* and women, see Francille Wilson, "Reinventing the Past and Circumscribing the Future: Authenticité and the Negative Image of Women's Work in Zaire," in *Women and Work in Africa*, ed. Edna Bay (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1982), 153-170; Gertrude Mianda, "Dans L'ombre de La 'Démocratie' Au Zaïre: La Remise En Question de L'émancipation Mobutiste de La Femme," *Canadian Journal of African Studies* 29, no. 1 (1995): 51-78.

(70.) Thérèse Verheust, *Portraits de femmes: les intellectuelles zaïroises* (Brussels: CEDAF, 1985). On the persistent difficulties encountered by Congolese women in intellectual/university environments, see Bogumil Jewsiewicki, Jacqueline Kabedi wa Nsumpi, Aime Kasandji Kameke, and Rosalie Malu Muswamba, *Devenir universitaire, demeurer femme: Défi congolais* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2003). Mianda, "Dans l'ombre," 59.

(71.) Wilson, "Reinventing," 167. See also Terri F. Gould, "The Educated Woman in a Developing Country: Professional Zairian Women in Lubumbashi" (PhD diss., Union for Experimenting Colleges and Universities, 1976); Terri F. Gould, "Value Conflict and Development: The Struggle of the Professional Zairian Woman," *Journal of Modern African Studies* 16, no. 1 (1978): 133-139.

(72.) Pedro Monaville, "Decolonizing the University: Postal Politics, the Student Movement, and Global 1968 in the Congo" (PhD diss., University of Michigan, 2013): 22, 448-454.

(73.) Catharine Newbury, "Ebutumwa Bw'Emiogo: The Tyranny of Cassava. A Women's Tax Revolt in Eastern Zaïre," *Canadian Journal of African Studies* 18, no.1 (1984): 35-54.

(74.) Janet MacGaffey, *Entrepreneurs and Parasites. The Struggle for Indigenous Capitalism in Zaïre* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 165 ff.

(75.) Filip De Boeck, "'Dogs Breaking Their Leash': Globalization and Shifting Gender Categories in the Diamond Traffic between Angola and DR Congo (1984-1997)," in *Changements au féminin en Afrique noire: anthropologie et littérature*, ed. Danielle De Lame and Chantal Zabus (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1999), 87-114. See also Sylvie Ayimpam, "Commerce transfrontalier et migration féminine entre les deux Congo," *Revue Tiers-Monde* 1, no. 217 (2014): 79-96.

(76.) Benjamin Rubbers, "When Women Support the Patriarchal Family: The Dynamics of Marriage in a Gécamines Mining Camp (Katanga Province, DR Congo)," *Journal of Historical Sociology* 28, no. 2 (2015): 213-234. See also Gondola, "Popular Music."

(77.) Mianda, "Dans l'ombre," 64-69.

Women in the Democratic Republic of Congo

(78.) Jean La Fontaine, "The Free Women of Kinshasa: Prostitution in a City in Zaire," in *Choice and Change: Essays in Honour of Lucy Mair*, ed. John Davis (London: Athlone Press, 1974), 89–113; Benoît Verhaegen, *Femmes zaïroises de Kisangani: Combats pour la survie* (Leuven, Belgium: Université Catholique de Louvain, 1990).

(79.) See notably Nicole C. D'Errico et al., "'You Say Rape, I say Hospitals. But Whose Voice Is Louder?' Health, Aid and Decision-making in the Democratic Republic of Congo," *Review of African Political Economy* 40, no. 135 (2013): 51–66.

(80.) Among a vast literature, see the recent overview provided by Jane Freedman, *Gender, Violence and Politics in the Democratic Republic of Congo* (New York: Routledge, 2016). See also Sara Meger, "Rape of the Congo: Understanding Sexual Violence in the Conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo," *Journal of Contemporary African Studies* 28, no. 2 (2010): 119–135; Maria Eriksson Baaz and Maria Stern, *Sexual Violence as a Weapon of War? Perceptions, Prescriptions, Problems in the Congo and Beyond* (London: Zed Books, 2013).

(81.) Kathleen Sheldon, ed., *Historical Dictionary of Women in Sub-Saharan Africa* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2005), 158 and 279.

(82.) David Van Reybrouck, *Congo: The Epic History of a People* (New York: Harper-Collins, 2014), 16–23.

(83.) Comhaire-Sylvain, *Femmes de Kinshasa*. See also Suzanne Comhaire-Sylvain, *Food and Leisure among the African Youth of Leopoldville, Belgian Congo* (Cape Town: University of Cape Town/School of African Studies, 1950).

(84.) Robertson and Klein, *Women and Slavery in Africa*.

(85.) Justine M'Poyo Kasa-Vubu, "L'évolution de la femme congolaise sous le régime colonial belge," *Civilisations* 37, no. 1 (1987): 157–190.

(86.) Jean-Luc Vellut, ed., *Femmes coloniales au Congo belge: Essais et documents* (Leuven, Belgium: Université Catholique de Louvain, 1987).

(87.) Donatien Dibwe dia Mwembu, *Bana Shaba*. See also Donatien Dibwe dia Mwembu, "Les fonctions des femmes africaines dans les camps de travailleurs de l'Union Minière du Haut-Katanga (1925-1960)," *Zaire-Afrique* 272 (1993): 105–118.

(88.) Mianda, "Colonialism"; Gertrude Mianda, "Du Congo des évolués au Congo des universitaires: la représentation du genre," in *L'Université dans le devenir de l'Afrique. Un demi-siècle de présence au Congo-Zaïre*, ed. Isidore Ndaywel è Nziem (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2007), 221–236; Gertrude Mianda, "L'Etat, le genre et l'iconographie: l'image de la femme au Congo belge," in *Images, mémoires et savoirs, Une histoire en partage avec Bogumil Koss Jewsiewicki*, ed. Isidore Ndaywel è Nziem and Elisabeth Mudimbe-Boyi (Paris: Karthala, 2009), 515–537.

Women in the Democratic Republic of Congo

(89.) Ch. Didier Gondola, "Oh, Rio-Ma ! Musique et guerre des sexes à Kinshasa, 1930-1990," *Revue française d'histoire d'outre-mer* 24, no. 314 (1997): 51-81; Gondola, "Popular Music"; Ch. Didier Gondola, "Unies pour le meilleur et pour le pire. Femmes africaines et villes coloniales: une histoire du métissage," *Clio. Histoire, femmes et sociétés* 6 (1997): 87-104; Gondola, *Tropical Cowboys*.

(90.) Bouwer, *Gender and Decolonization*; Jeurissen "Femmes métisses"; Lissia Jeurissen, *Quand le métis s'appelait "mulâtre."* *Société, droit et pouvoir coloniaux face à la descendance des couples eurafricains dans l'ancien Congo Belge* (Leuven, Belgium: Academia Bruylant, 2003); Lauro, *Coloniaux*; Amandine Lauro, "Les politiques du mariage"; Lauro. "'J'ai l'honneur de porter plainte contre ma femme'. Litiges conjugaux et administration coloniale au Congo Belge (1930-1960)," in *Clio. Histoire, femmes et sociétés* 33 (2011): 65-84; Amandine Lauro, "De la puberté féminine dans les 'zones torrides'. Expertise coloniale et régulations du corps des jeunes filles au Congo Belge," *Sextant* 30 (2013): 33-45.

(91.) See notably the work of Bob White on popular music, Katrien Pype on pentecostal TV melodramas, or Lesley N. Braun on concert female dancers: Bob White, *Rumba Rules. The Politics of Dance Music in Mobutu's Zaïre* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008); Katrien Pype, *The Making of the Pentecostal Melodrama: Religion, Media and Gender in Kinshasa* (New York: Bergahn Books, 2012); Lesley N. Braun, "Dancing Double Binds: Feminine Virtue and Women's Work in Kinshasa" (PhD diss., University of Montreal, 2014).

(92.) Antoine Lumenganeso Kiobe, *Guide des archives nationales* (Kinshasa: Arnaza, 2001).

(93.) See the inventory of Patricia van Schuylenbergh, *La Mémoire des Belges en Afrique centrale: inventaire des archives historiques privées du Musée royal de l'Afrique centrale de 1858 à nos jours* (Tervuren, Belgium: Royal Museum for Central Africa, 1997). There is no updated published inventory of the archival collections of the Royal Museum for Central Africa. An exhaustive guide realized by the State Archives of Belgium and the Museum on archives related to Belgium's colonial past is forthcoming.

(94.) Christine Deslaurier, "La documentation africaine à Bruxelles. Les fonds du ministère belge des affaires étrangères (Burundi, Congo, Rwanda)," *Afrique & Histoire* 1, no. 1 (2001): 223-234; Bérengère Piret, "Reviving the Remains of Colonization—The Belgian Colonial Archives in Brussels," *History in Africa* 42 (2015): 419-431.

(95.) See the primary sources listed in the article by David M. Gordon, "Kingdoms of South-Central Africa: Sources, Historiography, and History."

(96.) For the colonial period, see the various editions of the *Bibliographie du* (or *Documentation générale sur*) *Congo Belge et du Ruanda-Urundi*, ed. Théodore Heyse (among others, Théodore Heyse, *Bibliographie du Congo belge et Ruanda-Urundi. 1939-1951*) (Brussels: Van Campenhout, 1953). For the postcolonial period, see Jean-Luc Vellut, Florence Loriaux, and Françoise Morimont, eds., *Bibliographie historique du Zaïre à*

Women in the Democratic Republic of Congo

l'époque coloniale (1880-1960): Travaux publiés en 1960-1996 (Tervuren, Belgium: Royal Museum for Central Africa, 1996); Dawn Bastian Williams, Robert W. Lesh, and Andrea L. Stamm, eds., *Zaire*. World Bibliographical Series. (Oxford: Clio Press, 1995).

Amandine Lauro

History, Université Libre de Bruxelles