

‘The indigenous, I presume?’ A Digital Study of Mental Models and Mental Decolonization in the *Biographie Coloniale Belge* and *Biographie Belge d’Outre-Mer*

Nick Majchrowicz & Sara Budts

Abstract

The *Biographie Coloniale Belge* (BCB; 1948-1958) and *Biographie Belge d’Outre-Mer* (BBOM; 1968-2015) are the scientific flagships of the Belgian colonial enterprise. The BCB/BBOM is a nine-volume encyclopaedia with biographic sketches of people who have contributed to the colonial project. While the majority of them are ‘westerners’, a few Congolese received a lemma too, and even more of them play a part in the background of other biographies. This article analyses the constructed mental models concerning the Congolese population in the BCB/BBOM. How often are Congolese mentioned, how are they portrayed, from which contexts are they absent and how do the ‘westerners’ position themselves in relationship to them? To enable a discourse analysis of this scale, we digitised the complete BCB/BBOM semi-automatically and made it computationally searchable for future studies.

Samenvatting

De *Biographie Coloniale Belge* (1948-1958) en de *Biographie Belge d’Outre-Mer* (1968-2015) vormen het wetenschappelijke vlaggenschip van de Belgische koloniale onderneming. De negendelige encyclopedie bestaat uit lemma's van mensen die bijgedragen hebben tot het koloniale project. Hoewel de meerderheid van hen ‘westerlingen’ waren, kregen sommige Congolezen zelf ook een lemma. Nog veel meer van hen figureerden in de lemmata van anderen. Dit artikel analyseert de geconstrueerde mentale modellen met betrekking tot de Congolese bevolking in de BCB/BBOM. Hoe vaak worden Congolezen genoemd, hoe worden ze geportretteerd, in welke contexten zijn ze afwezig en hoe positioneren de 'westerlingen' zich ten opzichte van hen? Om een discoursanalyse op zulke schaal mogelijk te maken, hebben we het hele naslagwerk gedigitaliseerd en volautomatisch doorzoekbaar gemaakt voor vervolgonderzoek.

Keywords – Belgian colonial history; Congo; Scientific colonialism; Mental models; Digital humanities

1. Introduction

Just like its neighbouring colonial powers, the Belgian propaganda machine wanted to honour the ‘achievements’ that its ‘pioneers’ had accomplished in Africa (Stanard, 2011, 2020). Like elsewhere, the endeavour went hand in hand with a nationalistic discourse that propagated the colonial pioneers as national heroes (Vanthemsche, 2011). Some of them received a statue in their hometowns, others gave their names to streets or public buildings (Stanard, 2011; Goddeeris, 2015, 2020). Until well after the Congolese independence, the idea prevailed that these protagonists of the imperial project had ‘conquered’, ‘civilised’ and ‘moralised’ the African population (Vanthemsche, 2011). Until recently, this ideological influence of Belgian colonialists being portrayed as ‘enlightened’ or ‘legendary’ could still be found in historical scientific works (Van Bilsen, 1993). This narrative turned out to be very effective: long after Congo's independence in 1960, many in Belgium still thought of their colonial history as a story of civilization and remained unaware of the systematic atrocities committed there (Castrycck and Vanhee, 2002). A more nuanced and critical view of these so-called heroes has only recently begun to emerge (Goddeeris, 2011, 2015).

A major driving force of western European imperialism is the idea of scientific progress (Seth, 2009; Whitt, 2009). Scientific knowhow was not only a practical prerequisite for the colonization to happen in the first place (e.g. the creation of the steamship and guns), it also motivated the endeavour in spirit. In this light, the Congolese scholar Valentin Mudimbe (1988) introduced the notion of the ‘colonial library’, a body of scientific knowledge, certain historical paradigms, and a political project, consisting of information gathered by Europeans since antiquity right up to the Scramble for Africa in the second half of the 19th century. Such ‘colonial libraries’ frame everything and everyone that is ‘Non-Western’ or ‘Other’ above all as not being ‘Western’, which in turn makes it subject to conversion and transmutation. Mudimbe’s (1988) argument is in line with Foucault’s ‘objectification’ (1983), where through social dividing practices, people of a particular group are classified as ‘different’ through the mediation of (pseudo)science and the value attached to the power of these

scientific claims. In this process of social objectification, a dichotomy is established, where the ‘westerner’ is portrayed as the superior and ‘modern’, whilst the ‘Other’ is objectified as being inferior and backward (Mudimbe, 1988, 1997, 2021). As Hudson writes, “‘Othering’ as a ‘colonial’ tool is a complex yet systematic process of subjugation, reflecting a pattern where the Self first establishes dominance by making the colonial Other aware of who holds the power, then entrenches the Other’s inferiority, culminating in the denial of access to knowledge and technology” (Hudson, 2016, p. 5). By framing a certain narrative as scientifically true, its inventors can impose it upon other people and exploit it to sway the power balance in their favour, ultimately creating European culture as ‘universal’. This narrative then enabled Europeans to justify their attempts to introduce the concept of ‘modernity’ in the African continent (Taíwò, 2010).

Belgian colonialism was no exception to the rule; as Ruben Mantels (2020, p. 338) writes: “the colonization of Congo was preceded by science”. In 1876, Leopold II organized a conference on the geography of his soon-to-be colony (Foeken, 1985). The territory that was being visited by his ‘pioneers’ was seen as Africa’s last uncharted territory, in dire need of mapping (Poncelet, 2020). Scientific know-how between 1884 and 1908 shifted its emphasis to medicine, ethnological and anthropological ideas, but remained devoted to the taming of the ‘wild’ colony (Vellut, 1992; Mantels, 2020). In 1908, Leopold II was forced to sell his colony to the Belgian state due to the ‘red rubber’ atrocities that were exposed by the works of Roger Casement and Edmund D. Morel and their organization, the Congo Reform Association (Hochschild, 1999; Vangroenweghe, 2004). The Belgian government eventually took over the colony (Viaene, 2009). In an effort to legitimize its colonial project, Belgium aspired to be as efficient and ‘modern’ a colonizer as possible. The 1920s saw a rapid series of scientific institutions being set up to enhance the knowledge of the Congo (Poncelet, 2008, 2020). One such institution was the Royal Belgian Colonial Institute (RBCI). Founded in 1928, the RBCI was responsible for expanding the scientific knowledge about Congo and served as a think tank, debate forum, and showcase for Belgium’s colonial project (Poncelet 2008, Vanthemsche, 2011). The organization changed its name twice: in 1954 to the Academy for Colonial Sciences, and in 1959 to the Royal Academy for Overseas Sciences, which it remains known as today. After the Second

World War, some scientists tried to systematically distance themselves from the colonial project and its ideology (Mantels, 2020). The Belgian missionary Placide Tempels (1946), for instance, questioned the classical colonization and evangelization doctrines in his famous work 'Bantu Philosophy'. Yet, science, through a series of social and economic reforms, still played an important role in presenting Congo as a 'model colony' (Etambala, 2008, Vanthemsche, 2020).

In combination with the desire to propagate colonial 'heroes', the ideal of scientific progress through colonial ideology led the Royal Belgian Colonial Institute to command the creation of the *Biographie Coloniale Belge* (BCB) in 1941, an encyclopaedia dedicated to the lives of the early colonials in Congo. The first volume was finished seven years after the initiative. It comprised the lives of Belgians, Europeans and Americans – henceforth 'westerners' – that had contributed to the colonial project of Leopold II (Vanthemsche, 2011), but some Africans received their own lemma too. Because the original aim was to include as many people as possible, also those who played only a minor role in the enterprise had been taken up. While some individuals' lemmas spread over several pages, others only contained a few sentences. The first volume, finished in 1948, was received enthusiastically, and more would soon follow suit (Dellicour, 1950). In contrast to the earliest volume, the later ones also included biographies of people, 'western' and African, who had worked for Belgian Congo after Leopold II's death. By then, an entire network of 'colonial specialists' in Congo and the Belgian scientific Institutions had been established (Poncelet, 2020). People from and active in the mandate territories Ruanda (Rwanda) and Urundi (Burundi) would also be incorporated. Even historical figures that predated the colonization, like Kongo kings with Portuguese names such as João II of Lemba (Nzuzi A Ntamba) would appear. By 2015, nine volumes had appeared in the shape of eleven publications [1].

Drawing on this information, Figure 1 shows the dispersion of the lemmas through time. In 1968, with the publication of volume VI, the encyclopaedia changed its name to *Biographie Belge d'Outre-Mer* (BBOM) to reflect the Congolese independence in 1960. With a total of around 3.3 million words, processed into 5 300 lemmas and spread over 8 136 pages, it had become a hefty tome. While the

majority of the lemmas is written in French, a substantial share is in Dutch and a few negligible exceptions in English and German.

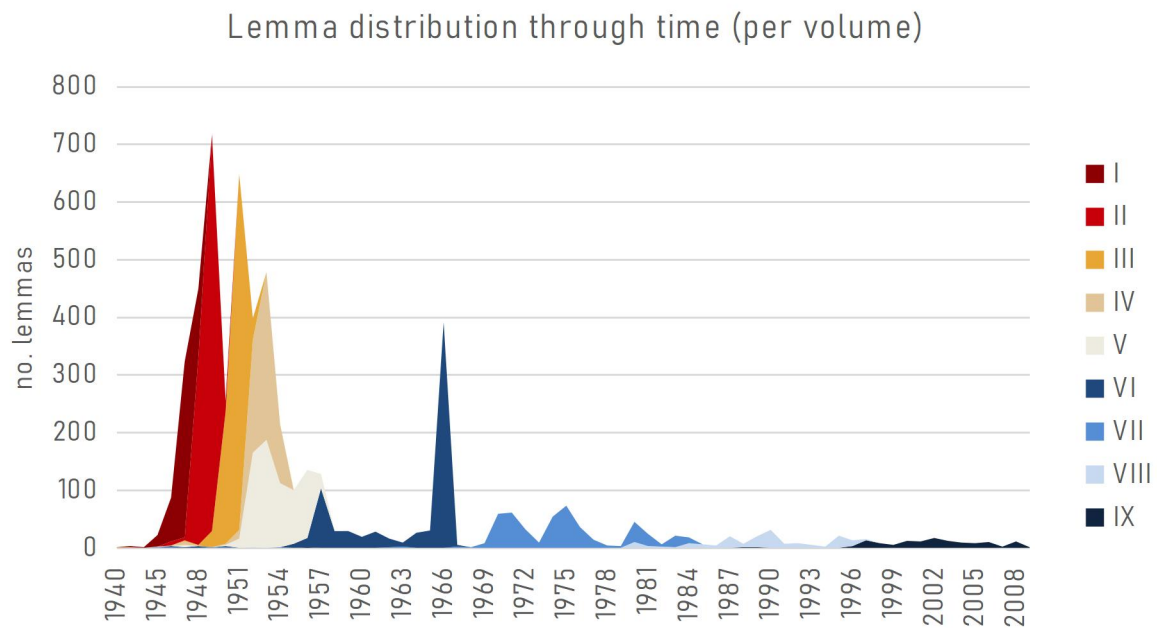


Figure 1 – Distribution of individual lemmas through the nine volumes over time

When it comes to the colonization process itself, the scientific quality of the biography is rather questionable (Vanthemsche, 2011). The editorial guidelines of the central committee of the RBCI stipulated that lemmas needed to both praise the individual, and be critical at the same time (Devroey, 1946). This implied that the encyclopaedia was being subjected to censorship by the central committee, as they decided what would be published (Vanthemsche, 2011). At times the lemmas take the shape of hagiographies rather than biographies and in the introductions to the first volumes, Leopold II is hailed as a genius. This is in line with Belgian colonial propaganda at the time (Stanard, 2020). Especially entries that deal with relations with the local population contain some questionable value judgments, as historian Jean Stengers already noted in 1949. The first authors were so-called ‘pioneers’: people who were active in or around the colonial project, like engineers and doctors (Vanthemsche, 2006). Later, this generation would be gradually replaced by people who had come into contact with developing countries through their academic education (Vanthemsche, 2011). But all of them remained European.

Although the BCB and BBOM were a prestigious project of the scientific colonial endeavour, the content of the source has thus far remained largely *terra incognita*. Researchers, such as Zana Etambala (2023), have used its ‘scientific’ content for their own research. The only recent studies of the colonial biographies themselves, however, are the ones by the historian Guy Vanthemsche (2006, 2011), but his analysis focusses more on the creation of the work itself and how it fits in with Belgian colonial history than on the actual content. The BCB and BBOM contain a wealth of information on discoveries of Congolese fauna and flora, its resources, geography, geology, diseases, ethnological and cultural studies gathered by the so called ‘pioneers’. In other words, the BCB and BBOM reveal the mental model, the internal representation of an external reality, of what the authors thought of as Congo, both on a geographical and on a social level. Such mental models can tell something about the way an individual or a group interprets a certain structure, a social group, or themselves (Norman, 1983).

Our contribution is the first to put the emphasis on the contents of the encyclopaedia at large. In an effort to extract a small part of the constructed mental models in this source, our pilot study aims to deconstruct the mental image of the Congolese – not Burundian, Rwandan – prevalent in the BCB/BBOM, either in the biographies of ‘westerners’ or, exceptionally, in lemmata of their own. It is important to note that names of tribes or clans have not been included into this study. An analogy from feminist studies could provide a useful insight. In her work ‘Women and history. 1 : the creation of patriarchy’, the feminist historian Gerda Lerner (1986) explains the patriarchal system by means of a metaphor from the realm of theatre. Women and men, she argues, live and perform on the same stage. Everyone is assigned a role and both are needed to make the play work, but the play has been written by men who have assigned themselves the most interesting roles. The women, by contrast, have been cast as mere supporting actors (Lerner, 1986). In other words, men created a mental model of the world in which they ‘Othered’ women. Similarly, the BCB and BBOM can be described as a play, written by ‘westerners’, in which the Congolese play a supporting role. To extend the analogy, our research investigates the discourse used by these ‘westerners’ and the specific roles they have assigned to the Congolese people. As Carley and Palmquist (1992) argue, mental models must be

unveiled through language. In order to extract the social mental images, this paper takes a closer look at the (post)colonial discourse of the BCB/BBOM in order to investigate (1) the ways in which the Congolese people are portrayed and (2) whether that discourse changes over time. Is there a distinction between the image of the 'Other' as an object and later on as a human subject? If so, could there be a notion of a 'Mental (De)colonization'? In this contribution, 'Mental Decolonization' is understood as the notion of either appearing or disappearing of colonial ideological ideas in the discourse of the authors (i.e. the mental models). We have extracted the images of Congolese people portrayed in the BCB/BBOM, paying particular attention to stories of coercion and repression and also analysing commonalities, without reducing them to oversimplifications.

In addition, our research will focus on how 'westerners' position themselves in relation to the Congolese population. In his 'Orientalism', Edward Said (1978) develops the notions of strategic location – the author's position in his text about the Orient – and strategic formation, a method of analysis to compare texts written about the Orient. Using these two concepts, we aim to unveil how 'westerners' are portrayed by the authors of the BCB/BBOM, at the same time comparing these views through the different volumes, guided by two crucial concepts introduced by Valentin Mudimbe (1988): epistemological and cultural ethnocentrism. The first describes the idea that nothing scientifically is to be learned from the 'Other' (Congolese), and if so, it is part of the Western universe. The latter describes the behavioural and intellectual attitudes of the 'Other'. Simplified, the African 'is' like this, because the 'westerner' is like this. In the 1950s, the French politician and essayist Aimé Césaire (1955), who battled the notion of the created dichotomy, noted that 'westerners' tended to portray themselves as heroes and take all the credit for colonial achievements, whilst the colonized were the ones needed saving. In the case of the BCB/BBOM, our research looks at ways in which the biographies of 'westerners' implicitly or explicitly rely on a highly stylised portrait of the Congolese population as a basis of comparison.

Our study is embedded in existing literature on colonial images of the 'Other', or to a larger extent the colony itself, by 'westerners', in the vein of the works of Martin Thomas (2011), who uses the same notion of mental maps, and David Cannadine (2001), who looked into how the French and British

viewed their colonies. On a smaller scale, Ideland (2018) studied how science is culturally dependent, by extracting both the images of and the silences on colonial scientific knowledge in Swedish science textbooks. In the case of Belgium and Congo, Depaepe, Vinck and Herman (2009) studied images of Congolese in Belgian history books, whilst Benvato & Van Nieuwenhuysse (2019) focussed on the evolving representation of the colonial past in both Congolese and Belgian textbooks. Landmeesters and Tousseyn (2019) analysed the notion of ‘civilization’ in Belgian legal journals, using the same methodology as we do in our study.

Moreover, encyclopaedias like the BCB and BBOM have been created by all of Belgium’s neighbouring states who were involved in colonial affairs. At the turn of the 19th century, Maxime Petit’s ‘Les colonies françaises, petite encyclopédie coloniale’ was published in France. In the Netherlands, the ‘Encyclopaedie van Nederlandsch West-Indië’ appeared in 1917. Shortly after, in 1920, former colonial Heinrich Schnee produced a ‘Deutsches Kolonial-Lexikon’ for Germany. Great Britain followed suit in 1925, with Charles Domville-Fife’s ‘The Encyclopedia of the British Empire: The First Encyclopedic Record of the Greatest Empire in the History of the World’. All four encyclopaedias contain lemmas about geographical places, people, animals and events, but the BCB/BBOM is unique in its restriction to people. It thus seems that Belgium was a late adopter, which isn’t entirely surprising given the country’s lack of experience with expansionism or colonialism. However, none of these encyclopaedias have been subjected to a large-scale and systematic discourse analysis. The German encyclopaedia is mentioned by Winfried Speitkamp (2015, p. 55), but his chapter on German colonial heritage only refers to the work itself and its place in the German African memory, rather than the content. As far as we are aware, no study like ours has been done yet on a scientific colonial biography.

Because a large-scale analysis of such an extensive source requires computational searchability, we first decided to digitise the entire BCB/BBOM through a series of semi-automated steps. First, we converted the images of the printed volumes into digital text by means of open-source OCR software. Next, we divided each volume into the original lemmas by means of tailormade python-scripts. To ensure that all lemmas had been successfully extracted, we automatically matched all names in the

page headers to the ones in the page’s running text and manually corrected the pages where the matching process threw an error. In a final step, we enriched all lemmas with some metadata by semi-automatically extracting each lemma’s language, author and date of writing. These metadata were then converted into excel sheets and manually cleaned up and corrected to get rid of all inconsistencies. Methodologically, our approach is composed of a quantitative and qualitative part. The first part makes use of distant reading techniques and charts how often Congolese people show up throughout the entire BCB/BBOM as well as the terminology that is used to describe them (Section 2). In Lerner’s analogy, this bird’s eye view of our primary source serves as an analysis of the stage. The second part, by contrast, zooms in on the actors themselves by means of a systematic discourse analysis of the text fragments detected in the first part of our study (Section 3). Instead of charting how often Congolese people are mentioned, this part tries to uncover recurrent patterns in the roles they have been assigned to in the BCB/BBOM, using discourse analytical methods (Beyen, 2019).

2. The Stage

The first part of our analysis focusses on the mentions of Congolese people in the BCB/BBOM as well as the terminology that is used to describe them. The aim is to get a sense of the presence of the Congolese in the encyclopaedia. To do so, we first carefully selected 79 (spelling variants of) French and Dutch terms that could be used to describe Congolese people. The list was compiled by means of secondary literature (Ceuppens, 2003; Poncelet, 2008) in combination with a manual search through various random samples of texts taken from the BCB/BBOM. The resulting keywords were grouped into four categories – ‘administrative’, ‘geographical’, ‘dehumanizing’ and ‘phenotype-based traits’– based on the provenance and meaning of the term at stake. The last category has been split into two parts: ‘Phenotype-based black’ and ‘Phenotype-based n-word’, as we believe that the latter has a different connotation, yet it remains phenotype-based (cf. Table 1).

	French	Dutch
Administrative	Indigène; Evolué	Boy; Inlander; Inboorling; Evolué
Geographical	Congolais; Africaine	Congolees; Afrikaans
Dehumanizing	Sauvage; Civilisé	Wilde, Wildeman, Wildeling, Beschaafd

Phenotype-based traits	Nègre; Noir	Neger; Negerin; Zwarten; Zwartjes; Negerjongen, -bevolking, -chef, -dokter, -hoofd, -koning, -predikant, -volk
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Table 1 – Overview of French and Dutch keywords per category

Because the majority of our keywords are not exclusively used to describe humans, we manually went through all hits and marked the ones that described human beings, either as a noun or an adjective, illustrated respectively by two examples from volume IV (1955): “Mais ce vieil africain était trop attaché à l’Afrique pour y renoncer.[2]” and “Badjoko laisse le souvenir d’une figure congolaise de premier plan qui, pendant près d’un demi-siècle, a magnifiquement participé au développement économique de son pays.[3]”.

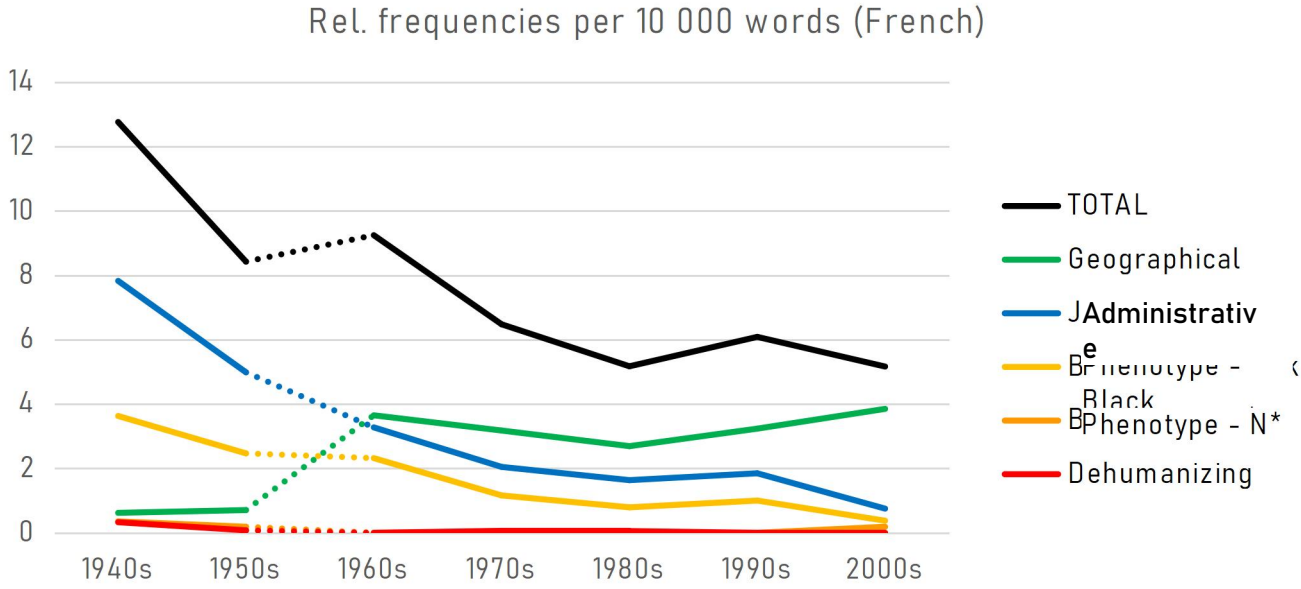


Figure 2 – Quantitative overview of the 4 categories through time (French lemmas)

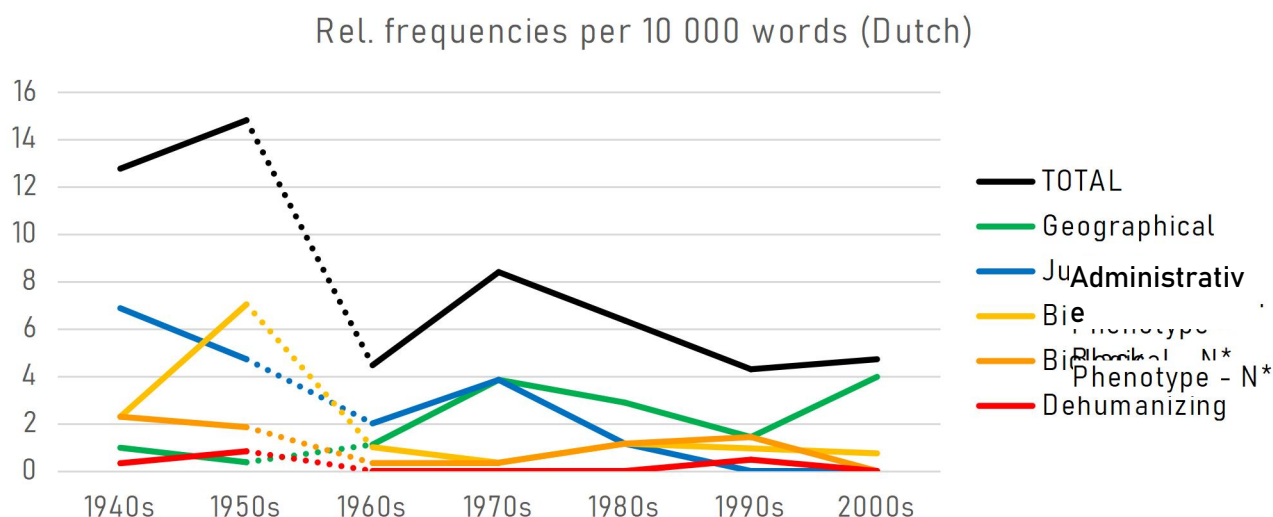


Figure 3 – Quantitative overview of the 4 categories through time (Dutch lemmas)

Figures 2 and 3 show the frequency of each category of terms through time [4]. A first finding to be noted is that the total presence of Congolese people is only small. This result is not surprising, since the main goal of the source was to honour the western ‘heroes’ of the colonial project. In addition, we see a more or less steady decline in the total number of mentions through time. The decline is more volatile in the Dutch corpus, but that might be due to rather small absolute numbers. The dotted line indicates the period that Congo gained its political independence.

2.1 Geographical

The geographical keywords consist of the terms referring to landmasses or geographical locations, the most common of which are Congolais/Congolees and Africain/Afrikaan. Initial research showed that this category was the largest in absolute numbers in all volumes of the BCB/BBOM. After the noise removal stage, however, it turned out that the majority of references describe actual geographical landmasses or items originating from the region (e.g. flora and fauna, companies, the African club, or an honorary award).

When the relative frequency of the geographical terms is compared to those of the others, the geographical keywords are actually the odd ones out: whereas the importance of the other categories diminishes over time, the geographical terms grow more frequent, in both the Dutch and in the French subcorpus. This evolution is probably an effect of the Congolese independence in 1960: from that

period onwards, the geographical terms clearly outnumber the other categories. Another factor might be the semantic neutrality of the term. In the present paper, we also chose to refer to the Congolese population by means of a geographical term, simply because that is the most descriptive adjective available.

2.2. Administrative constructs

The second category consists of words created for judicial and administrative purposes that were commonly used by jurists, lawyers and civil servants. Although Congolese people received the right to Belgian citizenship after the annexation by Belgium in 1908, this did not automatically make them full Belgian citizens. The Colonial Charter established four categories: Belgians, registered Congolese, foreigners and the indigenous population (Brailon, 2011). These designations were legal, administrative and colonial constructs and served to define the rights and duties of each category (Dufrenoy, 1946). The keywords ‘indigène’/‘inheems’ and ‘évolué’ are examples of this.

In the BCB and BBOM, administrative constructions, both for the French and Dutch start off as the biggest category but their rate rapidly drops in the later volumes. Interestingly though, the rate of decline is different in French and in Dutch. While administrative terms have almost entirely disappeared from the Dutch lemmas by the time the BCB/BBOM was completed, the terms still occasionally show up in the most recent French lemmata.

The keyword ‘indigène’ appears to be linked with more loaded terms such as ‘untrustworthy’ and ‘aggressive’ than, for instance, the keyword ‘noir’. As Tom de Meester (1998) and Mutamba Makombo (2020) argue, racial discrimination found its way into judicial and administrative practices despite new terminology. Throughout Volume I (1948) to Volume V (1958) there are many references to Congolese as ‘indigènes’ who appear as ‘primitive tribes’: they are portrayed as aggressive, attacking people with spears, shouting loudly and living tribal lives. When Congo became an independent state, these people lost their Belgian nationality, which in turn made the word ‘indigène’ grow obsolete in that sense. After 1960, the word either implied a continued presence of colonial consciousness from the part of the writer, or a reference to Congolese people as indigenous to their

own country. The latter use of the word has an anthropological touch to it (Béitelle, 1998). Equally striking is that the word ‘évolué’ barely appears in the source. Even though this social group played a prominent intermediary role in upkeeping, and eventually dismantling, the colonial project and somewhat broke the traditional image of the ‘inferior’ Congolese (Tödt, 2018). ‘Evolués’ were seen as a separate category created after the Second World War (Mutamba Makombo, 1998). They had ‘enjoyed’ a higher education, something the Belgian colonial government was rather suspicious of (Depaepe, 2017). According to the constructed racial hierarchal ideal, they were more ‘evolved’ than other Congolese and thus received more privileges, but they were not treated equally to ‘westerners’ and remained the ‘Other’ (Tödt, 2020) (e.g. lemma of Jeanne-Marie Rogissart in volume VI (1968): “C'est à cette tâche dont l'importance et l'urgence aujourd'hui soulignées par les plaintes de nos évolués à la recherche souvent vaine d'épouses assorties à leur évolution.[5]”). The use of ‘nos’ or ‘ons’ (our) suggests a possessive relationship that indicates a power relationship. At the same time, ‘our’ suggests an idea of affection, partially masking the power relationship (Ceuppens, 2003). This could indicate that a paternalistic ideal was still present in 1968.

2.3. Phenotype-based traits

The Phenotype-based traits category contains keywords that refer to skin colour, such as ‘noir’/’zwart’ for ‘Phenotype-based black’ and ‘nègre’/’neger’ for ‘Phenotype-based n-word’. Throughout the volumes other phenotype-based traits are also mentioned or used to describe Congolese, such as height, weight and physique. Adjectives such as ‘physique robuste’ (a robust physique), ‘avantageux’ (advantageous), ‘musclé (muscular), ‘sterk’ (strong) and ‘klein’ (small) are used to describe Congolese.

The use of phenotype-based words remains present in both languages throughout all the volumes of the BCB and BBOM (figures 2 and 3). With around 4 out of 10 000 words, the rate of usage is highest in Volume I for French. From this point on, the category declines slowly, but never disappears. The phenotype-based n-word in French hardly even appears in any volume. Curiously enough, this category reappears in the last volume (2015), due to several references in Victor Wallenda’s lemma to

'l'art nègre'. In the Dutch language, phenotype-based language is much more frequent, at times even increasing. Eventually the usage of n-word variant disappears in volume IX (2015).

The BCB/BBOM consistently emphasizes that there is a distinction between 'whites' and 'blacks', while not acknowledging that cultural mixtures existed. The colonial government tried to enforce a harsh hierarchal separation between 'whites' and 'blacks' (Mutamba Makombo, 2020). Jan Breman (2021, p. 178) articulates it as a 'colour line', giving society a dualistic character. As Gloria Wekker (2016) argues, the reality is more nuanced. The explicit and frequent use of the word 'race' by authors in a post-world war II scientific colonial encyclopaedia is also interesting, since the term and the ideas behind it, had become sensitive in the west due to the Holocaust (Poncelet, 2020). This could indicate that former ethnographic ideas, that became popular in Belgian scientific circles at the end of the 19th century, remained present with these 'colonial experts' (Couttenier, 2014). It is known that amongst the Belgian colonizer, the word 'race', was a synonym for 'ethnie' or a 'population group' (Mutamba Makombo, 2020). For example, the concept is found in every volume in conjunction with skin colours. From this flows the idea that there is a difference between a 'white race' and a 'black' one, which, to make clear, has no scientific ground.

2.4. Dehumanizing

The last category exists of keywords that strip the Congolese away of human elements, where they are positioned as completely different from 'westerners'. In both French and Dutch, the dehumanizing keywords constitute the smallest category and hardly occur in the BCB and BBOM, most probably because of the scientific aspirations of the source. Nevertheless, there remain some attestations of Congolese people described as 'sauvage' or 'savage', which is in line with the imperial ideology that colonialism was meant to 'civilize', 'develop' or 'educate' Africans (e.g. Hendrina-Margo Kloekers (1951): "Mme Bentley était la première Européenne qui visitât la région; aussi l'effet fut-il décisif sur les sauvages, pour qui une femme blanche avec un bébé constituait une véritable apparition.[6]".) Surprisingly, as section 3 further shows, these keywords aren't used for loaded contexts.

For French, dehumanizing terms only occur in volume I (1948). In Dutch however, dehumanizing keywords are used at a higher rate. In the volumes published between 1950 and 1960, they even overtake the geographical category. The rate drops again around the 1960s, where it remains the smallest category until the 1990s, when it briefly outnumbers the administrative constructs category – due to the name Wildeman – before its final decline and disappearance in Volume IX (2015).

3. The actors

The first part of our research has painted a picture of how often Congolese people occurred in the BCB/BBOM and what terms were used to describe them. In the second part, we shift the focus from the stage to the actors, or from bare word counts to the more detailed discursive strategies that were used to characterize Congolese individuals. Following Michel Foucault's (1969) ideas surrounding discourse, it being a body of statements wherein representations and relations about a certain matter are present, section 3 of our study does not zoom in on a text's literal meaning, but rather on the cultural conventions, norms, values and mindset that underpin it, in order to get a better understanding of the constructed mental social models. In order to retrieve recurrent patterns in the discourse of the BCB/BBOM, we took all keywords referring to human beings that we collected in section 2, and we subjected them to a close reading analysis. In a scientifically representative approach, we analysed a random sample of half the attestations for all keywords with over 30 hits. The contexts of keywords with less than 30 hits were analysed exhaustively. This close reading stage unveiled four different roles – to keep with the Lerner analogy – in which Congolese regularly appear throughout the biography: 'Congolese in a grateful role', 'Congolese in a need of help role', 'Congolese in a dangerous role', and 'Congolese in a supporting role'.

3.1. 'Congolese in a grateful role'

The first role that can be distinguished – the one that is most prominent and stable throughout all volumes – is the portrayal of the 'Congolese in a grateful role'. The ideals to 'advance' and 'develop' the Africans were at times translated into an idea that Congolese were depicted as children and the colonizers as father figures (Pomeranz, 2005; Vanthemsche, 1999). This was a very paternalistic way of thinking, which has clearly found its way into the BCB and BBOM, in the shape of passages

stating that the Congolese are affectionate towards the colonizers and grateful for the work they have done.

In volume I (1948) and V (1958), this role is dominated by the presence of an external enemy that had to be defeated. One of the main arguments that Leopold II and his supporters legitimized their colonial ambitions with, was that the Congolese were victims of the Arabo-Swahili slave traders and had to be rescued from their clutches (De Roo, 2020). These were Arabs who came from Africa's east coast – present-day Tanzania and Zanzibar – and traded in slaves and ivory (Nzongola-Ntalaja, 2002). Some examples are the small empires of Msiri and Tippu Tip, that captured Congolese and enslaved them. Fighting the Arabs was thus seen as a progressive mission. As of 1890, the Congo Free State was officially at war with these slave traders (Vanthemsche, 2012). Between 1892 and 1894 this conflict reached its height, but kept on going until 1912 (Marechal, 1992) (e.g. Van Kerckhoven's lemma (1948): "Ponthier, d'accord avec Van Kerckhoven, toujours à Bima, eut à nettoyer le pays des Arabes qui s'y étaient établis, notamment sur la Makongo et dans les îles du Bomokandi, pour procéder à leurs razzias habituelles. Il y parvint au prix de quelques' combats assez vifs, aidé du reste par les indigènes, auxquels la présence des esclavagistes était devenue insupportable.[7]"). The situation was apparently so tenuous for the Congolese that they fought along with 'westerners' against the Arabs. This suggests that, if 'westerners' had not intervened, they would not have been liberated, which subtly expresses the supposed, or even required, gratitude of the part of the Congolese. Using the word 'nettoyer' (to clean) in reference to Arabs makes it seem as if there was dirt present that needed to be cleaned up. It shows that the image of Arabo-Swahili traders in the BCB/BBOM was particularly negative, which in turn made the 'westerners' the heroes of the story. From volume V (1958) through volume VIII (1998), the *topos* of grateful Congolese occurs abundantly in the biographies of 'westerners' – often missionaries – who are told to have brought civilization through religion, education and labour, the three elements that became the pillars of the Congolese emancipation. By equating Christianity with modernity, these missionaries are celebrated for having created new Christian societies that resemble European ones (Christopher, 1984; Taiwò, 2010). In these biographies, the 'westerner' was portrayed almost as a friend whom the local population looked

up to, and who was praised for his devotion. The few times women appear, is in this role. In some cases, the biographies discuss the love the Congolese feel for these individuals, who are viewed as a father or mother figure (e.g. Rhyove's lemma (1968): "Les Congolais de Léopoldville considéraient le P. de la Kethulle – Sango Raphael – comme leur père et leur ami.[8]"). This becomes very clear in the text excerpts when a 'westerner' leaves Africa or dies, where sadness reigns among 'whites' and 'blacks' (e.g. Verstraete's lemma (1968): "De Zwartten, zeer gehecht aan hun bwana Luwi (mijnheer Louis), zagen hem met lede ogen vertrekken.[9]"). The 'westerner' taught the Congolese a lot and had won their respect. Usually this was done in a friendly manner, yet sometimes respect was commanded through insolence (e.g. Vermaesen's Lemma (1958): "Hij, die altijd, door zijn eenvoudige opgewektheid, door zijn vrijmoedig en rond optreden bij Blanken en Zwartten enkel sympathie en meewerken had gevonden, zocht nu nog enkel stille ingekeerdheid en rust.[10]"). Again, it is striking how 'westerners' and Congolese are presented segregated in a racial discourse, where multiple references are made to 'blancs'/'witten' and 'noirs'/'zwarten' (e.g. Geldof's lemma (1958) : "Il n'est pas étonnant dès lors, que sa mort prématurée le fit regretter par tous, Blancs et Noirs.[11]"). In volume VIII (1998), the role diminishes, but the discourse remains the same (e.g. Antoine Sohier's lemma (1998): "Encore à ce jour, les Africains se souviennent de ce maître prestigieux à suivre et à s'inspirer et c'est bien là justice à lui rendre.[12]").

The image of the Congolese as a grateful people keeps recurring until the very end of the BCB/BBOM, despite the variety of authors on the different contributions. This is especially interesting when contrasted to Belgium's official stance towards paternalism: in her article about international adoption, Chiara Candaele (2020) writes that after 1960, Belgium wanted to present itself as a 'colour-blind' nation and exchanged the paternalistic idea for a more caring 'motherland' ideal, a nation that should take care of the ex-colony. As it turns out, this shift in mentality appears not to have made it into the BCB/BBOM, where a distinction and narrative persists that Congolese were actually grateful for the work done by 'westerners' and that the passed-on-knowledge and presence of Belgians in the Congo was good for them. Up until the end, the colonials, as 'experts' 'or 'geniuses', often remain the heroes of this grand imperial narrative (e.g. Bricteux' lemma (2015): "La vie

d'Auguste Bricteux fut celle d'un génie par le bon sens, un bon sens touchant à la sagesse antique.[13]”). The next role has similar characteristics to ‘Congolese in a grateful role’, but has nuanced differences.

3.2. ‘Congolese in need of help role’

The idea of ‘civilization’ was a pervasive and essential motivating factor of imperialism (Pomeranz, 2005). Colonial officials were responsible for ‘civilizing’, and later on ‘developing’, ‘primitive’ populations to a higher moral and spiritual level, modelling them after ‘modern’ European societies (Christopher, 1984). Missionaries ensured that ‘barbaric’ practices and superstitious forces such as witchcraft were eradicated (Taíwò, 2010). The latter was seen as a typical idea of backwardness, as opposed to European scientific intellectualism (Mudimbe, 1988). Raising the ‘poor Africans’ was exactly what Rudyard Kipling once so famously called ‘a white man’s burden’. In Congo this translated into educating what Belgians perceived as a ‘lower race’ (Depaepe & Kikumbi, 2020). In the BCB and BBOM, these ideas come together into the second role: ‘Congolese in need of help’.

From the very start of the BCB/BBOM Congolese appear regularly as victims that had to be helped and freed from the Arabo-Swahili traders (e.g. Dhanis’ lemma (1948): “Dans tout le pays il n’était question que de ce jeune lieutenant, hier encore inconnu et qui avait par son initiative hardie anéanti la puissance arabe, délivrant ainsi la race noire du cauchemar de l’esclavage.[14]”). Many battles had erupted between these Arabo-Swahili traders and the Force Publique. Belgian propaganda presented this campaign as a justification for the colonization (De Roo, 2020). In volume I (1948), an additional role comes to the fore, in which ‘westerners’ have to assist Congolese in educating them to move toward a society where Congolese can take care of themselves (e.g. de Witte’s lemma (1948): “Il dressa beaucoup de noirs en ces différents métiers et dota ainsi les Missions et les postes de l’État de bons et précieux artisans.[15]”). Note especially the use of the term ‘dresser’ (‘tame’) in reference to Congolese). In volume V (1958) the work of developing and moralizing the Congolese becomes more prominent (e.g. Guillemé’s lemma (1958): “On moralisait cette gent enfantine par l’enseignement, la prière et le travail. On formait ces enfants à divers métiers. Les plus grands se mariaient et travaillaient à la culture des champs pour nourrir leur famille. À Kibanga est une magnifique mission,

pleine d'avenir, comprenant un immense terrain où sont établis nos villages chrétiens. Ensuite viennent les villages indigènes où nous exerçons l'apostolat.[16]”). The three great pillars of the civilizing offensive are discussed: (primary) education, labour and faith. The words ‘civilization’ and ‘moralization’ are also used explicitly in the biography. Mission education had been present since the beginning of the Congo Free State, but was characterized by a low level and patronizing nature. Starting in the 1920s, there was a greater commitment to the education of the Congolese in cooperation with the missions (Depaepe & Kikumbi, 2020). The emphasis was on elementary learning content and, of course, religious education (Mantels, 2007). This trend continued in volume VI (1968), albeit with a growing emphasis on independence. Although true independence is an anachronistic concept, the idea reigned that Congo had to be prepared to become an independent society, which could only be achieved with the help of ‘westerners’. Volumes VIIB (1977) through IX (2015) describe a new flavour of the ‘Congolese in need of help’. From the late 1970s onwards, the Congolese are portrayed as victims of colonization. While this might seem at odds with the very purpose of the BCB/BBOM, the ‘western’ point of view still dominates in these fragments (e.g. Archbishop Malula’s lemma (2015): “Un témoignage du père Ceuppens de 1949 le décrit comme blessé que les Européens sous-estiment la capacité intellectuelle des évolués.[17]”). In contrast to the previous role, this lemma, where the need was felt to take care of the ex-colony and its inhabitants, illustrates that the abandonment of paternalistic feelings for a ‘colour-blind’ ideal, as Candaele (2020) argued, can be found in the last volume of the BCB/BBOM. This shows that different colonial ideas could be associated with various roles.

As we have shown, the trope of ‘Congolese in need of help’ is the most varied one, as it displays three different sub-variants (liberation from the Arab yoke; need for education, moralization and civilization; and finally help for victims of colonization). It differs from the previous role, in the sense that the focus lay more on Congolese as victims, rather as them undertaking actions (i.e. expressing their gratitude). The word ‘develop’ is still used by some authors in 2015, in line with the Belgian colonial efforts of the late 1940s (Vanthemsche, 2020). Ultimately, an image emerges, both from the

role and the discourse, that Congolese had to be raised like a child and then let go, but failed to do so without help from the colonizer.

3.3. 'Congolese in a dangerous role'

A third portrayal that stands out is the idea that Congolese are dangerous. It is now known that Congo was conquered *manu militari*. Belgian colonial propaganda presented this takeover at first as peaceful, with the Congolese welcoming them, but in fact Congo was conquered only gradually by Belgian officers and their colonial troops (Etambala, 2023). The idea of the Congolese as military opponents is especially present in the first two volumes, because these zoom in on the early stages of the colonization. Here it is very often the heroic 'westerners' who somehow manage to overcome the 'wild cannibals' or fall victim – after putting up a memorable fight – to the excesses of Congolese.

There are two variations of this role, in lemmas written before and after the independence. After the independence – the minority of BCB/BBOM lemmas (graph 1) – there is a discourse shift. In volume I (1948), Congolese were described as untrustworthy, aggressive, primitive peoples who had not yet been subjugated. This was already noted by historian Jean Stengers' (1949) review of volume I, in which he called the role of Congolese 'notorious'. Terms like 'massacrer' ('to butcher') occur frequently in a pejorative context. They must be overcome and subdued, by force or charm (cf. Hanssens' lemma (1948): "Il avait l'aspect imposant ; sa voix sonore, sa belle barbe pleine impressionnaient les indigènes et son franc sourire lui gagnait leur cœur.[18]"). The image of heroic colonials triumphing despite all adversity is evident (e.g. sister Lentz lemma (1958), "Nooit hadden blanke vrouwen de voet gezet in het zwarte land ; waar ze ook kwamen, stonden ze bloot aan de grootste gevaren : zowel van de kant van wilde inboorlingen als van gevaarlijke dieren.[19]"). In general, there was indignation among the authors that Congolese dared to attack 'westerners', when in reality these people were simply defending themselves against what was a takeover of their territory. Violence was a last resort for the Congolese (Gondola, 2020). This language, in which Congolese threatened 'westerners' with spears, occurs up to volume VI (1968), but the discourse is no longer infused with negative terms such as 'inconstance' ('fickleness') and 'insouciance' ('recklessness'). From then onwards, the authors described Congolese as more 'civilized', most probably because the

authors assumed that the Belgian endeavours had actually elevated the Congolese through education, religion and labour. This interpretation is supported by narratives where ‘westerners’ are almost surprised that they are being attacked, as they are only there to help the ‘poor’ Africans.

From volume VIIB (1977) onwards, this discourse is interrupted by fourteen lemmata on the 1962 event where troops of the Congolese National Army shot twenty – nineteen Belgian and one Dutch – missionaries. The discourse on this issue is divided, with one half speaking of ‘killed’ and the other of ‘massacre’ or ‘mass murder’. In any case, ‘westerners’ here are portrayed in a victim role. In the following volumes, there is a variety of reasons why Congolese are aggressive. The category of ‘Congolese in a dangerous role’ finally disappears in volume IX (2015). Interestingly enough, as section two shows, ‘dehumanising’ words were not numerous which could seem somewhat surprising and contradictory concerning the context in this role. This indicates that there is a distinction between language and context, and that authors could describe Congolese with more neutral terms, yet position them in loaded circumstances. The shown examples in this section confirm this stance.

3.4. ‘Congolese in a supporting role’

A fourth and final category is formed by ‘Congolese in a supporting role’, in which ‘westerners’ see Congolese merely as a labour force. Labour conditions in both the Congo Free State and Belgian Congo were poor, although they did improve as time progressed (Dibwe dia Mwembu, 2020). Congolese have to assist the colonizer and it is almost taken for granted that they are actually willing to carry out these jobs. Whenever Congolese refuse to fulfil their tasks, they are seen as ungrateful. Running like a thread through this category is the discrepancy between the perceived work ethic of ‘westerners’ and that of Congolese.

In volume I (1948), and in part in later volumes, Congolese appear in this role as troops of the Force Publique: as auxiliaries or porters to a caravan, native Congolese men helped the ‘westerners’. This police/military force formed the public resistance troops of the Congo Free State and its (first) main objective was to destroy the Arabo-Swahili traders. It also had to preserve the order and assist ‘westerners’ on their tours of the Congo. Regular rebellions took place in this army, which had to be

suppressed (Vanthemsche, 2012). Even as late as volume IX (2015) Congolese still appear in this role (e.g. de Witte's lemma (2015): "Par voie terrestre, il fit avec des porteurs indigènes le trajet à Stanleyville (environ 365 km) en dix jours, sans voir un seul Européen.[20]"). In volumes V (1958) and VI (1968), Congolese mainly appear as workers and soldiers of the Force Publique during the First World War. Work appears in many ways, often as manual labour in agriculture. The dominant image here is of Congolese appearing in the background and performing their duties. In a rare case, Congolese figure in positive terms, but this constitutes an anomaly. The lemma on Aupiais, a French missionary and ethnographer in volume V (1958), describes what he saw as the ideal 'black person': "Par son attachement à la communauté familiale, par sa fidélité à la tradition, par son sens, de l'autorité et sa soumission à elle, par son étroite communion avec la nature et ses mystères, par son habitude de remonter directement, par-delà les causes secondes, jusqu'à la divinité, maîtresse des éléments, en qui il a une absolue confiance, ce paysan noir a une moralité vigoureuse et délicate.[21]". Here a comment on what follows in the same text is appropriate : "par son sens de l'autorité et sa soumission à elle.[22]". Another passage from volume VI about Nepper, the head of an export company, illustrates that it is the 'westerners' who ensure that Congolese are helpful: "Deux années durant, sans voir un seul Européen, courant jour et nuit de grands dangers, Nepper chercha le contact avec les indigènes, qu'il réussit finalement à se rallier et dont il fit de nouveaux récolteurs.[23]". The 'westerner' continues despite all the dangers, while Congolese are eventually hired as workforce. Interestingly, this role disappears more into the background in volumes VIIB (1977) and VIIC (1989), only to reappear in VIII (1998) and IX (2015). A quote from volume VIIC (1989) reads as follows: "Etienne Capelle était non seulement un grand constructeur et un maître agriculteur, mais il savait partager ses connaissances avec les Africains qui travaillaient avec lui.[24]". 'Westerners' continue to pass the buck by transferring their knowledge to Congolese working for them. Traces of this kind of language still surface in volume IX (2015) in Mortier's lemma: "Transposés dans leurs parcelles définitives de la ville, aidés de leur main-d'œuvre africaine qui partageait au moins provisoirement leur sort.[25]". This incorporates, as Bambi Ceuppens (2003) argues, a paternalistic idea by describing them as 'their' labour force.

Up to and including the last volume, Congolese appear as people supposed and/or eager to help. The BCB and BBOM are mostly silent on forced labour in relation to Congolese, creating a traditional monolithic picture in this source where Congolese were free to work. More recent research (Seibert, 2020) on forced labour has shown that there was no hard break between working conditions in the Congo Free State and the Belgian Congo. There is also no mention of the poor working conditions of the first decades of Belgian colonization, even in the later volumes. These were, according to Dibwe dia Mwembu (2020, p. 146-147), ‘abysmal’ and many Congolese fell ill or died due to these substandard conditions between 1906 and 1928. This, as Jan Breman (2021) argues, is hidden behind the facade of the idea of the model colony. The idea is recreated into this portrayed image of Congo in the encyclopaedia. Although the occasional exception exists, most Congolese are not praised for their labour or help, and as soon as they do something wrong, they are immediately punished by the authors in negative terms. ‘Westerners’, on the other hand, are given full credit for their work and contribution.

4. Discussion and conclusion

As Lerner (1986) states that the image of women is created by men, we can conclude that images of Congolese are created by ‘westerners’. The *Biographie Coloniale Belge* (1948-1968) and *Biographie Belge d’Outre-Mer* (1968-2015) can almost be described as a microcosm of colonialism, where different complex images of the colonized come together. The source presents at times a black and white picture concerning the relations between the ‘westerner’ and the ‘Other’. Yet, in this juxtaposition, nuance exists in how the ‘Other’ is viewed. Our research has taken a first significant step in dissecting some of the constructed mental models that are presented in the *Biographie Coloniale Belge* and *Biographie Belge d’Outre-Mer* regarding the way it portrays Congolese people, and has shown patterns of continuity and change.

First, we have shown that the presence of the Congolese in this encyclopaedic work is extremely low. Even if the source is dedicated to ‘westerners’, their presence merely resembles that of extras. Secondly, Congolese are not portrayed in a uniform way in this scientific colonial encyclopaedia; Four *topoi*, or roles, which Congolese people have been assigned throughout the biography have been identified. A clear evolution concerning the discourse towards a less colonial ideology has been demonstrated. As our frequency overviews show, a more neutral geographical

discourse gains ground at the expense of administrative, phenotype-based traits and dehumanizing terms. Regarding diachronic shift, the discourse of the BCB does not appear to show a hard break with the colonial past in the BBOM after 1960. The decrease in the total number of mentions, combined with a slight increase in the number of positive mentions of Congolese in the later volumes suggests a move toward ‘mental decolonization’, but the lingering presence of the colonial *topoi* in the representation of the Congolese shows that the shift is only gradual. The later volumes subtly differ from their predecessors: they include more colonially critical lemmas, indicating that a ‘mental decolonization’ has taken place in at least some lemmas of the BBOM. At the same time however, continuities with the old colonial ideals found in the earlier volumes persist even in the most recent contributions, and new colonially critical concerns are regularly projected onto the past. Thirdly, throughout the BCB/BBOM, the ‘westerner’ remains the protagonist, as they are consequently positioned against the ‘Other’ and gain all the credit. Of course, the encyclopaedia is dedicated to these ‘westerners’, but the way they are portrayed as paternalistic heroes, who first ‘civilized’ and later on ‘developed’ the Congolese through hard work and diligence, remains surprisingly present up until the last volumes. Loaded images of the colonization and the adventurous colonizer of the first volumes might have disappeared, but the notion of a ‘good colonizer’ who taught and modelled the ‘Other’ in the way perceived by ‘the west’, is still there. In this way, it does seem that the Congolese is trapped in his role as the ‘object’. Our findings tie in with Mudimbe’s (1988) epistemological and cultural ethnocentrism – the idea, that nothing is to be learned from the ‘Other’. Images of the Congolese are seen through the lens of another culture. They have little to no agency in the events described in the source, nor how they are framed in it. This indicates that while ‘mental decolonization’ might have happened at a surface level, with the disappearance of the most offensive terminology, beneath that first layer remains, at times, a whiff of colonial ideology.

Two crucial points concerning our extracted roles and the discourse need to be addressed. Firstly, it is important to point out that the roles we discussed are not mutually exclusive categories. In fact, they repeatedly co-occur and several are present in the same lemmas. Moreover, the roles were not always easy to identify, as the use of language was frequently subtly obfuscating. Interestingly, the four roles did not straightforwardly map onto the categories of keywords we identified in the first

part of our research. We had expected that the trope of ‘Congolese in a dangerous role’ would have patterned with words from the ‘dehumanizing’ category, but no such connections turned out to exist. Secondly, regarding chronology, it should be noted that the roles fluctuate less by volume than by the period an individual lemma is about. In the early colonization – the Congo Free State period (1885-1908) – we mainly find the first ‘explorers’ and ‘colonial heroes’. The second period is that of World War I and the interwar period, from 1910 to 1940. The third period runs from World War II to Congo's independence in 1960. The last period is the post-colonial (political) period and runs from 1960 to the present, which received remarkably little coverage. Our study has revealed some shifts in comparison with the older volumes, but these changes were not sufficiently consistent to be considered genuine breaks. While the number of colonially critical lemmas does rise, decolonization awareness remains limited. Various attitudes to colonization often co-exist within the same volume: a volume can acknowledge that Congolese were victims of colonization while at the same time elaborating on the positive aspects of the ten-year plan, an important element of the Belgian development ambitions. As already mentioned, some roles shift more to the foreground, such as ‘Congolese in a supporting role’, and others get backgrounded or disappear entirely, such as ‘Congolese in a dangerous role’.

Our findings thus concur with Vanthemsche's remark about the scientific content of the biography (Vanthemsche, 2011). Although the source was meant as a scientific encyclopaedia, which is underscored by a low presence of dehumanizing keywords, it is very clear that at times the opinions of authors found their way into this work. The fact that the BCB and BBOM are ‘scientific’, makes it at times troublesome. The source itself holds a certain authority, by which it can be seen as a justification for the colonial project. A scientific narrative is created in which Congolese appear in certain roles. This narrative, however, is embedded in colonialism, as colonialism and science go hand in hand (Ideland, 2018). Because of its scientific nature, the biography's colonial images of Congolese come across as facts rather than as tropes, and as such implicitly legitimize the colonial endeavour.

Above all, our study has made clear that further research is absolutely needed on multiple fronts. Our study focused on the portrayal of Congolese in this colossal encyclopaedia, but there is still a wealth of ethnographical and geographical material. With our state-of-the-art digital

methodology, further research of this scope is possible. Instead of analysing mental images of social phenomena, one could also examine the mental geographical map. What was the Congo that the authors portrayed, and how does it compare to the actual Congo? Could there also be evolutions here? Our methodology shows that research questions of this scope can be answered. Another obvious avenue for further investigation would be a biography or prosopography of the authors. The current research has extracted the predominant images of Congolese, but how did these come about? A series of critical questions about the authors should be asked. To broaden the scope, we would like to point out two bigger research inquiries. First, this encyclopaedia could form a passageway to extract the constructed mental models of the entire Belgian scientific corpus. Research on the relationship between colonialism and (colonial) science in Belgium is starting to grow (Poncelet, 2008, 2020; Mantels, 2007, 2020). These works however never depict the actual mental models (maps and social images) that the Belgian scientific institutions created. This is an entirely untapped research field, that could show a potential link between contemporary (popular) images of Congo, or even Africa, and the mental models that the Belgian scientific institutions created. Secondly, the British, French, German and Dutch equivalent to the BCB and BBOM have remained relatively untouched. A comparative study would chart whether the same images reappear in these sources, which could indicate a broader imperialistic idea at play, or whether they are more nationalistically determined.

If Mudimbe's (1988) 'colonial library' were an actual library, the BCB and BBOM would make a fine addition for the shelves. In order to understand the 'Other', one must deconstruct the mental map(s) of the person(s) who portrayed them. By separating the events that are described from the language that is used and the discourse they are embedded in, this article has aimed to demonstrate that science and ideology are by no means mutually exclusive.

Notes

[1] Volume 7 consists of 3 publications

[2] "But this old African was too attached to Africa to give it up."

[3] "And Badjoko is remembered as a leading Congolese figure who, for almost half a century, contributed magnificently to his country's economic development."

[4] To trace the diachronic evolution of each term in an accurate way, we grouped all lemmas per decade, worked out the number of hits for each keyword category for each decade, divided this by the total number of words written in that decade to get rid of differences in corpus size and multiplied the resulting number by 10.000 for the sake of legibility. As such, the numbers in the following graphs represent how often every (group

of) terms to shows up on average in any random sample of 10 000 words taken from the lemmas written in the relevant decade.

[5] “This is the task whose importance and urgency the importance and urgency of which is underlined today by the complaints of our advanced for wives to match their evolution”

[6] “Mrs Bentley was the first European to visit the region, so the effect was decisive on the savages, for whom a white woman with a baby was a real apparition.”

[7] “Ponthier, in agreement with Van Kerckhoven, still in Bima, had to clean the country of the Arabs that had settled there, particularly on the Makongo and on the isles of Bomokandi, to set about their habitual razzias.”

[8] “The Congolese of Léopoldville considered the P. de la Kethulle – Sango Raphael – their father and their friend.”

[9] “The Black, very much attached to their bwana Luwi (mister Louis), regretted his departure.”

[10] “He, who always, through his simple cheerfulness, through his bold and fair conduct, had found sympathy and collaboration with Blacks and Whites, now only looked for quiet reflection and peace of mind.”

[11] “It is not surprising that his untimely death was regretted by all, blacks and whites.”

[12] “Even then, the Africans remembered to follow, be inspired by and do justice to that prestigious tutor.”

[13] “Het leven van Auguste Bricteux was dat van een genie met gezond verstand, een gezond verstand dat oude wijsheid raakte.”

[14] “In the entire country, all people could talk about was this young lieutenant, yesterday still unknown, who had annihilated the Arab powers by his headstrong initiative, as such liberating the black race of the nightmare of slavery.”

[15] “He tamed a lot of blacks in these different trades and thus endowed the Missions and the state post with good and valuable artisans.”

[16] “We moralised this child-like people through education, prayer and labour. We trained their children in various trades. The oldest got married and worked out on the field to feed their family. In Kibanga is a wonderful mission, full of future, consisting of a vast domain where our Christian villages have settled. Next are the native towns where we carry out the apostolate.”

[17] “A testimony of father Ceuppens in 1949 describes him as blessed that the Europeans underestimate the intellectual powers of the ‘évolués’.”

[18] “He was an imposing figure; his resonant voice and beautiful, full beard impressed the natives and his heartfelt smile conquered their hearts.”

[19] “Never before had white women set foot in the black country; wherever they went, they were exposed to the gravest dangers: both coming from wild natives as from dangerous animals.”

[20] “With the help of native porters, he completed the trajectory to Stanleyville (about 365 km) on land in 10 days, without ever seeing a European soul.”

[21] “By his attachment to the family community, by his fidelity to tradition, by his sense of authority and submission to it, by his close communion with nature and its mysteries, because of his habit to go straight, bypassing secondary causes, to divinity, mistress of the elements, in whom he has absolute confidence, that black farmer has a vigorous and delicate morality.”

[22] “because of his sense of authority and his submission to her”

[23] “During two years, in which he hasn’t seen a single European, in grave danger night and day, Nepper tries to get in touch with the natives, who he finally manages to win over and turn into new harvesters.”

[24] “Etienne Capelle was not only an important builder and a master farmer, but he also knew how to share his knowledge with the Africans who worked with him.”

[25] “Settled in their final plots of the town, helped by their African workers who shared at least temporarily their fate”

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