Between Movement and Containment

Forminière, Biopolitics, and Labor in Kasaï, Belgian Congo (1910-1940)[1]

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Abstract

This article explores the operations of Forminière, a major mining company in the Tshikapa region of the Belgian Congo during the early twentieth century, and its influence on labor dynamics, biopolitics, and colonial governance. The article argues that mining companies like Forminière were fundamentally in search of an equilibrium between movement – since migration was essential to maintaining a steady labor force in the mines – and containment, as the company implemented a comprehensive paternalistic system to bind workers to its operations. The authors revisit and nuance earlier characterizations of Forminière as a casual labor system, revealing the intricate and often coercive methods employed to secure a stable workforce. The article draws on primary sources, including archival reports and medical publications, to examine how the company collaborated with the colonial state and the Catholic Church to shape the socio-economic landscape of Tshikapa. While this collaboration was mostly smooth, conflict could emerge, especially in relation to population displacement and public health initiatives.

Introduction

After a short career as a railway laborer, Matabish Kalambo spent most of his life working as a miner for Forminière, the major diamond mining company in the Kasai province of the Belgian Congo. Upon retirement, he settled on vacant land near Forminière's headquarters in Tshikapa

1 The authors thank the two anonymous reviewers of *TSEG* for their valuable feedback, as well as Dr Nicholas Di Liberto for editing the manuscript.

and took up farming. Kalambo was said to be of Luba origin, and the location of his farmland was no coincidence. Colonial authorities considered the Luba – an ethnic group with a complex history – as non-native to Tshikapa, but their migration to the region had been actively encouraged and even forced by Forminière in the late 1910s and early 1920s. By 1931, Matabish settlement had grown into a Luba village of 287 inhabitants. Only people identified as Luba were allowed to settle here, having received permission from Forminière due to their reputation as diligent workers. Forminière and local representatives of the colonial state monitored settlements like Kalambo's, ensuring that residents either cultivated the land or worked in European enterprises.[2] Kalambo's story illustrates the extent to which Forminière structured people's lives in Tshikapa, shaping not only their labor trajectories but also the very places where they built their homes.

Although Forminière was the largest employer in the Belgian Congo in the 1920s, the literature on mining companies in the region has been strongly dominated by research on the Union Minière du Haut-Katanga (UMHK). The present article recenters the importance of Forminière as a hub of expertise and skilled labor in Central Africa's mining industry. It investigates how the company significantly organized the social, economic, and political landscape of Tshikapa. Founded in 1906 under Leopoldian influence and financed by the Société Générale and American capital, the company established its headquarters in Tshikapa in 1912 after a series of successful diamond excavations. To be able to exploit its diamond mines, however, Forminière was highly dependent on another Congolese resource: labor. Through grand migration schemes, the company guaranteed a continuous influx of mineworkers, while also making use of paternalist structures and biomedicine to secure and control this workforce in Tshikapa.[3] Kalambo's case exemplifies the effectiveness of Forminière's strategies in organizing both the migration and settlement of its workers.

We argue that mining companies like Forminière fundamentally pursued an equilibrium between movement – since migration was essential to maintaining a steady labor force in the mines – and containment, as the company implemented a comprehensive

2 Belgian State Archives (hereafter BSA) 2. AimoGG(2000)209, Service de la M.O. de la Forminière. 1931. Extrait rapport d'inspection Kasaï par médecin en chef.

3 See also Mafulu Uyind-a-Kanga, 'Mobilisation de la main d'œuvre agricole. La dépendance de la zone rurale de Luiza des centres miniers du Kasai et du Haut-Katanga industriel (1928-1945)', *African Economic History* 16 (1987) 39-60.

paternalistic system to bind workers to its operations. To attract a workforce deemed adequate by colonial standards, Forminière collaborated closely with both the church and the state. However, this article demonstrates that the so-called colonial trinity of state, church, and capital was not a stable alliance over time, as each entity pursued its own interests. The fragility of this colonial apparatus becomes particularly evident in moments of conflict, where minor individual disputes escalated into broader strategic clashes. The case examined in this article suggests that Forminière, as the dominant economic force in the region, ultimately held the decisive power in matters of local *politique indigène*.

Forminière did not operate in isolation, and its need for labor did not differ much from that of other mining companies.[4] Workers, along with their knowledge and expertise, circulated between Forminière and other major mining companies in the broader region, notably UMHK and Diamang in Angola. In these mining companies' broader strategy of controlling colonized bodies, medicalization was also a central tool. Doctors Mottoulle and Gillet, whose roles in Forminière's medical program are discussed later in this article, contributed to the development of similar medical policies within Union Minière and Diamang as well. In these regards, Forminière, for instance, invested heavily in combatting sleeping sickness in the Tshikapa region.

As Maryinez Lyons highlights, colonial anxiety over sleeping sickness was largely driven by fears of depopulation and labor shortages.[5] It is therefore unsurprising that colonial medicine became a focal point in Forminière's labor camps. The relocation of population groups, too, was closely monitored from a medical perspective. This preoccupation with the demographic – and, by extension, economic – consequences of sleeping sickness was part of a broader wave of colonial panic that led to far-reaching top-down interventions in the living environment of local populations across the continent.[6]

4 See also Tshund'Olela Epanya Shamololo, 'Le Kasai à la péripherie du Haut-Katanga industriel', *Les Cahiers du CEDAF* 6-7 (1984) 1-213.

5 Maryinez Lyons, *The colonial disease. A social history of sleeping sickness in northern Zaire, 1900-1940* (Cambridge 1992).

6 See, for example, Samuël Coghe, *Population politics in the tropics. Demography, health and transimperialism in colonial Angola* (Cambridge 2022); Mari K. Webel, *The politics of disease control. Sleeping sickness in eastern Africa, 1890-1920* (Athens (OH) 2019); Jean-Paul Bado, *Médecine coloniale et grandes endémies en Afrique, 1900-1960. Lèpre, trypanosomiase, humaine et onchocercose* (Paris 1996).

However, it was not only European doctors who moved between these companies. In its first two decades, Diamang relied heavily on experienced Luba miners who crossed the Congolese border in search of better job opportunities. At Diamang, these migrants leveraged their expertise with Forminière to secure promotions as mine overseers. These desirable positions encouraged more Luba migrants to seek employment with Diamang.[7] The movement of doctors and skilled Luba miners between these companies highlights the broader regional networks of labor circulation that underpinned the colonial mining economy. It illustrates how these companies depended on attracting labor—preferably skilled—while also implementing measures to ensure workforce retention.

By examining this double dynamic within Forminière, this article addresses a significant gap in the literature on Central African mining companies. The most recent comprehensive assessment of Forminière and its labor policy dates back over 40 years. In his 1983 article, Derksen critically analyzed Forminière's economic model and labor recruitment strategies. He argued that Forminière's labor organization operated a "casual labor system" due to the large reserves of labor available around Tshikapa. He described this system of so-called voluntary labor as unique in the Belgian Congo and contrasted it with the contractual labor used by UMHK to bind workers from more distant regions.[8] Odile De Bruyn, writing on Sibeka (*Société Minière du BCK*), also confirms that Forminière practiced a relatively flexible recruitment policy, allowing employers to easily dismiss workers, while workers were free to leave when they wished.[9] However, leaving meant that workers forfeited the social and material benefits provided by the company, effectively discouraging turnover.[10]

The present article builds on these insights but adds complexity to Derksen's model by tracing how Forminière affirmed its position in the region not only in relation to its mineworkers but also toward Catholic missionaries and local state officials. It also questions the 'voluntary'

7 Todd Cleveland, *Diamonds in the rough. Corporate paternalism and African professionalism on the mines of colonial Angola, 1917-1975* (Athens (OH) 2015).

8 Richard Derksen, 'Forminière in the Kasai, 1906-1939', *African Economic History* 12 (1983) 49-65.

9 Odile De Bruyn, *Histoires de diamants. La société minière du Bécéka au Congo* (Brussels 2006) 62-63. BCK (Compagnie du Chemin de Fer du Bas-Congo au Katanga) was one of the three big conglomerates created in 1906. In 1919, BCK established an affiliate company named Sibeka, which worked closely with Forminière in the Kasai mining business.

10 Véronique Pouillard, 'An antitrust case in the diamond industry. The United States v. the De Beers Cartel (1948)', *Business History* (April 2024) 4. https://doi.org/10.1080/00076791.2024.2340621.

element in Derksen's assessment within a context of colonial power relations. To this end, we mobilize a set of unexplored archival sources. The *Rapports annuels* (*des Affaires Indigènes et de la Main d'Oeuvre*) are yearly reports written by the territorial administrator of Tshikapa. These reports provide insights that allow us to disentangle the relationship between Forminière, state, and church in Tshikapa, but are only available as of 1932. We therefore complement these records with the AIMO (Affaires Indigènes et Main d'Oeuvre) archives of the former Ministry of Colonies. The archives of Joseph Beernaert, governor of Congo-Kasai in the late 1920s, contain additional sources that shed new light on the prevailing narrative about Forminière. A short report on Forminière's early activity, found in the archives of the governor-general of Congo, has also been consulted. Finally, the doctors of Forminière, who wrote for the *Annales de la Société Belge de médecine tropicale*, provide us with some first-hand testimonies from inside the biopolitical machine created by Forminière.

In our analysis, we pay particular attention to how Forminière's presence in Tshikapa shaped the roles of other colonial actors – missionaries, colonial officials and, notably, doctors. We examine both the impact of the biopolitical machinery that sustained this colonial presence and the ways in which it malfunctioned. First, we explore the population movements of 1919, which were implemented to ensure a steady labor supply for the company.[11] While these initial interventions in Tshikapa occurred in a context of cooperation, the next section of the article demonstrates that such practices also led to conflicts between Forminière and the local colonial administration. A key asset for the enterprise striving to achieve a stable socio-economic situation was the use of tropical medicine, which is further explored in the third part. Finally, we examine the broader working conditions at Forminière, which helps to understand how the company monitored its workers. Matabish Kalambo's trajectory – from migrant miner to farmer and head of a large Luba settlement – illustrates how Forminière not only structured labor

11 This type of colonial migration scheme became more frequently employed in various Congolese regions from the 1920s onward. The general annual report of 1922 even explicitly encouraged local officials to intervene in familial, political, and social matters. For other examples of such interventions in the organizational structure of populations in other Congolese regions, see, for instance, Benoît Henriet, 'Des ethnographes anxieux. Pratiques quotidiennes du pouvoir au Congo belge, 1940-1940', *Vingtième siècle: Revue d'Histoire* 140:4 (2018) 41-54; Margot Luyckfasseel, '"Still so many illusions to cast off!". The territorial unification of the Ngbaka (Belgian Congo) in the 1920s', *African Studies* 78 (2019) 126-143; Gillian Mathys, *Fractured pasts in Lake Kivu's borderlands. Conflicts, connections and mobility in Central Africa* (Cambridge 2025).

Illustration 1 'Kabe Kabe. Enlèvement des graviers'.
(Source: GG20687, 'Société Internationale Forestière et Minière: Notes sur les diamants du Kasai', 18 May 1914. Ministry of Foreign Affairs.)

mobility but also the settlement patterns of workers beyond the mines, ensuring that even after formal employment ended, their lives remained embedded in the company's economic and social order.

The mass migrations of 1919

Despite the portrayal of Forminière as a system of casual labor, the company clearly struggled to attract Congolese workers in the early years. Initially, the local population, ethnically labelled as Chokwe, had fled the region. Although they returned gradually when the first Forminière mine opened in 1913, the labor supply was limited.[12] In 1918, Forminière's Engineer-Director Oliver complained about a shortage of labor and food. He suggested that both mining and agriculture could be carried out by the local population if more Congolese were to move to Tshikapa.[13] Engineer Millard Shaler, technical director of Forminière, therefore decided to inform the Ministry of Colonies about the problems Forminière experienced. He pointed out that the Luba villages along the banks of the Lulua River, in the territory of Luebo – almost 150 kilometers northeast of

12 Société Internationale Forestière et Minière du Congo, *Forminière, 1906-1956* (Brussels 1956) 102.
13 BSA 2. AimoGG (1614)9142, 'Déplacement des Baluba vers Tshikapa (1918-1919)'. Rapport d'Oliver à (Shaler? Direction Forminière?), écrit en (1918?), datum antequem: 19 July 1918.

Tshikapa – were attractive as possible recruitment centers. However, Forminière was not the only firm that had set its sights on these labor reserves; companies in Moyen Congo and in Katanga were also seeking workers from this region. To facilitate recruitment for Forminière, Shaler therefore asked the minister to consider amending the colonial regulations on the relocation of villages and populations so as to allow, and even encourage and organize, migration to Tshikapa.[14]

Attempts by government officials to encourage Luba to migrate from Luebo to Tshikapa led to conflict in 1918. Fearing the loss of their congregations, both Catholic and Protestant missions in Luebo opposed the displacement of Luba communities. According to the district commissioner of Luebo, Jens Jensen, the Protestant missions had contributed to overpopulation in the region, as many Luba had left their villages and concentrated in large agglomerations around the Protestant mission posts in Luebo. In contrast, the Catholic missionaries of Scheut had only a limited number of Luba under their guidance.[15] These census concerns undoubtably evoked tensions between well-frequented Protestant and less successful Catholic missions in Luebo.

The colonial authorities played into that dynamic, and on 18 January 1919, Minister of Colonies Louis Franck wrote to the Scheut missionary Monseigneur Auguste De Clercq, who was at that time the Apostolic Vicar of Kasai. Franck requested De Clercq and his Scheut missionaries start a mission in Tshikapa, as the workers there were not yet receiving religious guidance. The presence of the missionaries could stabilize the labor situation, and the work of the missionaries would be facilitated by the assistance Forminière could provide.[16] De Clercq replied that the Scheut Fathers were ready to go and that the mission would soon be established.[17] Franck's request represented an opportunity for them to reduce the influence of their Protestant colleagues, as the dislocation of villages from Luebo implied a Catholic monopoly in Tshikapa.

14 BSA 2. AimoGG (1614)9142, Lettre du Chef du Service Technique, Millard Shaler au ministre (Renkin?) (des colonies?), Londres, 19 July 1918. The colonial use of such ethnic labels must be approached with caution.

15 BSA 2. AimoGG (1614)9142, Lettre du Commissaire du District de Luebo, Jens Jensen, au vice-gouverneur-général, Luebo, 9 December 1918.

16 BSA 2. AimoGG (1614)9142, Lettre du Ministre Franck à Monseigneur De Clerq, vicaire apostolique du Kasai (Scheut), Bruxelles, 18 January 1919.

17 BSA 2. AimoGG (1614)9142, Lettre de Monseigneur De Clerq, vicaire apostolique du Kasai (Scheut) à Ministre Franck, 28 January 1919.

On 1 March 1919, District Commissioner Jensen informed the deputy governor-general that the minister of colonies in Belgium had reached an agreement with Forminière to establish a Catholic mission in Tshikapa. The mission would be set up under the leadership of Scheut missionary De Munster. At that time, De Munster had already travelled to Tshikapa to find a suitable location for the Scheut mission, accompanied by Forminière's engineer Oliver.[18] In a letter to Jensen, Territorial Administrator Jules Thiemann reported on De Munster's trip. To his delight, Thiemann had also heard that De Munster intended to bring a considerable number of Luba to Tshikapa. He remarked that Luba were "the only farmers worthy of that name," a description that fit within the broader colonial tendency to privilege Luba as more reliable and hardworking than other ethnic groups.[19] In general, the Belgian colonizers frequently relied on and actively shaped the ethnic category of Luba, as they were said to adapt best to new colonial realities. As a result, they were able to advance in the colonial social hierarchy.[20] As the presence of Luba overseers at Diamang in Angola indicates, these privileges also travelled across colonial borders.

Thiemann sensed that Oliver was eager for the Scheut Fathers to begin their work, as their presence would most definitely solidify Forminière's access to labor. It is also noteworthy that De Munster had inquired whether the government post in Kalamba would be discontinued once a new post was established in Tshikapa. De Munster intended to repurpose the existing buildings in Kalamba into a farm/chapel if that were the case.[21] This correspondence reveals that the territorial administration only settled in Tshikapa during the early years of the interwar period. Consequently, 1919 stands out as a pivotal year in the region's history, with both the territorial authorities and the Scheut Fathers preparing to move to Tshikapa to support and facilitate the economic exploitation of the area by Forminière. As such, the company clearly defined the initiatives of state and church in Tshikapa.

18 BSA 2. AimoGG (1614)9142, Lettre du commissaire du district de Luebo, Jensen, au vice-gouverneur-général, 1 March 1919.

19 BSA 2. AimoGG (1614)9142, Lettre de l'administrateur territorial Thiemann au commissaire du district de Luebo, Jensen, 1 February 1919.

20 See Crawford Young, *Politics in Congo. Decolonization and independence* (Princeton 1965) and Georges Nzongola-Ntalaja, *The Congo from Leopold to Kabila. A people's history* (London 2002) 102-104 for a discussion.

21 BSA 2. AimoGG (1614)9142, 'Déplacement des Baluba vers Tshikapa (1918-1919)'. Lettre de l'administrateur territorial Thiemann au commissaire du district de Luebo, Jensen, 1 February 1919.

The Scheut missionaries' move to Tshikapa would bring a large number of Luba workers. Jensen, however, understood that relocating populations was problematic due to colonial legislation which restricted such movements. On the one hand, he believed that the Catholic mission posts in Tshikapa would attract people on their own, potentially reducing the need for large-scale relocation of Luba communities. On the other hand, he was a strong advocate for this forced migration and therefore inquired about the official stance of the government and the provincial governor on the matter. In line with colonial policy, he had initially opposed the fragmentation of the *chefferies* (chieftaincies) around Luebo, but he recognized that many Luba were departing on their own to improve their economic circumstances. Thus, he suggested that entire Luba groups be redirected to Tshikapa under the guidance of their customary leaders.[22] In a follow-up letter, he restated that the economic situation drove him to permit migration to industrial regions and, moreover, to facilitate the movement of whole groups of people.[23]

By March 1919, Oliver was delighted with the news that many Luba would soon be migrating to Tshikapa. At that point, he had already pinpointed about seven sites where these Luba migrants could settle. These locations had been chosen with the mining and agricultural interests of the region in mind. They featured fertile soil, water, and building resources to aid in the creation of new villages. Upon their arrival, all adult Luba (both men and women) would receive a digging tool for farming, and they were promised half a franc per week to work the land.[24]

In the summer of 1919, the process of mass migration was in full swing. In Brussels, District Commissioner Jensen was seen as acting with considerable initiative and expertise. The Protestant missions in Luebo, on the other hand, complained that certain Luba (and Lulua) groups were reluctant to change territories. The Presbyterian Mission also accused Jensen of relocating two of 'their' communities from Luebo to Tshikapa. The minister of colonies informed the governor-general and stated that forced relocations should be avoided.[25] A few months later, Jensen wrote to the deputy governor-general, claiming that the missions' complaints were entirely unjustified.[26] Whatever the case, the

22 BSA 2. AimoGG (1614)9142, Lettre du commissaire du district de Luebo, Jensen, au vice-gouverneur-général, 1 March 1919.

23 BSA 2. AimoGG (1614)9142, Lettre d'Oliver au commissaire du district, Jensen, 14 March 1919.

24 BSA 2. AimoGG (1614)9142, Lettre d'Oliver au commissaire du district, Jensen, 14 March 1919.

25 BSA 2. AimoGG (1614)9142, Lettre du ministre à Bruxelles au Gouverneur-Général, 31 July 1919.

26 BSA 2. AimoGG (1614)9142, Lettre du commissaire du district de Luebo, Jensen, au vice-gouverneur-général, 3 December 1919.

process of migration toward Tshikapa could not be stopped, and the population of relocated Luba groups continued to rise. The migration trend persisted, with more people arriving each year. These migrant Luba lived close to European centers and represented an essential part of Forminière's workforce.[27]

The correspondence regarding the establishment of the Catholic mission post shows that the Scheut Fathers began to settle in Tshikapa in the early years of the interwar period, at the explicit request of Forminière. The exploitation of resources through industrial activities was thus supported by the so-called Catholic civilizing mission, which provided education and, more importantly, supplied new labor. The colonial administration actively encouraged this large-scale migration of workers, even if it came at the expense of the Protestant missions in Luebo. Furthermore, in 1919 there were plans to install a territorial administrator in Tshikapa to represent the state's interests in this region that was quickly growing in importance. Thus, Forminière exerted a centripetal attraction that drew both church and state to Tshikapa. In the early years, Forminière struggled to find workers among the local Chokwe communities of Tshikapa. It was only with the intervention of the colonial administration and the involvement of the Scheut Fathers in 1919 that sufficient Luba labor reserves became available in the Tshikapa area. The complaints from the missions around Luebo suggest that this labor migration was not always voluntary. Moreover, the episode confirms a broader tendency among the Belgian colonial authorities to privilege 'national' Catholic congregations over foreign Protestant ones.[28]

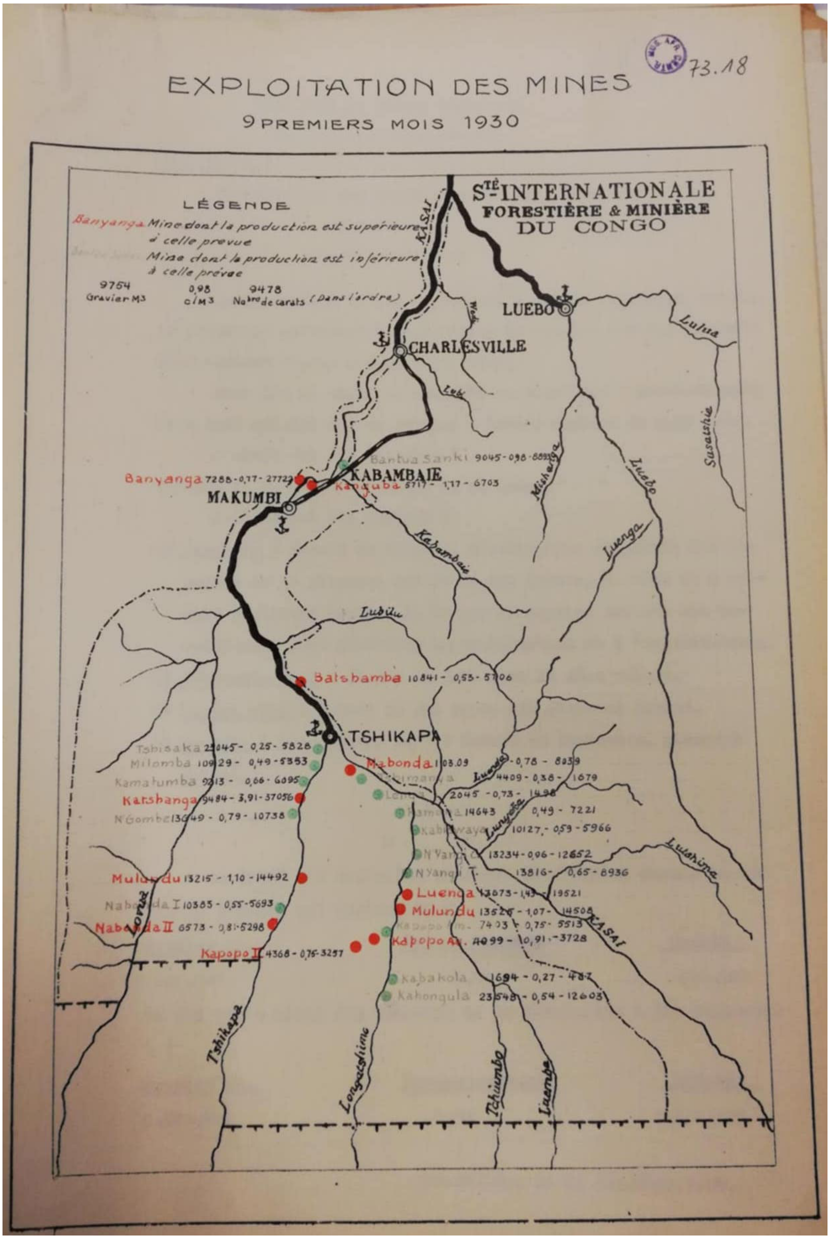
Forminière and the colonial administration

Thanks to the organized Luba migration – in combination with the medical regime and labor recruitment system we discuss below – Forminière's operations boomed throughout the 1920s. By 1921, 10,000 Congolese were working for the company. Eight years later, this number rose to 25,000.[29] By 1930, however, Forminière felt the consequences of the global economic crisis. The diamond industry of

27 BSA 2. RACCB, 422/Tshikapa, 1932-1944, Rapport de 1932, chapter 12, population.

28 See, for example, Gale Kenny and Tisa Wenger. 'Church, state, and "native liberty" in the Belgian Congo', *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 62 (2020) 156-185.

29 Société International, *Forminière*, 113, 121-122.



Map 1 An overview of the different mines in the Tshikapa region in 1930. In red those who produced more than expected and in green those who produced less than expected.

(Source: HA.02.0058, 'Exploitation des mines', 1930. AfricaMuseum Tervuren, Forminière Fonds)

Kasai suffered in 1931 and 1932. Several mines were temporarily or permanently closed, and there was a decline in production. Due to the increasing importance of industrial diamonds, Forminière mostly invested in the Bakwanga region during the 1930s, causing Tshikapa to lose significance, as its diamonds were mainly suited for jewelry.[30] In this tenser climate, the collaboration between Forminière and the colonial state proved to be less self-evident.

Whereas the migration to Tshikapa in 1919 was an initiative pushed by Forminière, with support of Catholic missionaries and state officials, similar interventions around 1930 led to tensions between the involved parties. In the annual report of 1932, Territorial Administrator of Tshikapa Joseph Haentjens mentioned that the presence of Forminière complicated the relocation of villages in the region. In 1929 and 1930, the local administration had attempted to divide Chokwe communities south of Tshikapa into *chefferies*, but the project had to be abandoned because it disrupted the internal social balance.[31] Haentjens mentioned the issue rather casually in his 1932 report, but it had in fact caused deep tensions between Forminière and the colonial administration in 1930.

In the spring of 1930, Joseph Beernaert, provincial governor of Congo-Kasai, based in Léopoldville, and District Commissioner François Wenner, based in Luebo, corresponded about a conflict between Forminière's medical staff and Hector Roulin, the territorial administrator of Tshikapa since 1923. The correspondence shows that Forminière's Dr Jules Fourche had sent a negative report on Roulin to Beernaert. According to the report, the territorial administration had relocated villages among the Chokwe, south of Tshikapa, without consulting Forminière's doctors. Dr Fourche also reported that the villages were moved during the rainy season without proper preparation. The relocation of villages, according to Fourche, should always be done on the advice of the medical services. Administrator Roulin had neither consulted Forminière's medical service nor the state's medical service. Had they been informed, they would undoubtedly have given a negative recommendation due to climate conditions and logistic complexity. Moreover, the issue was part of a larger context of personal conflicts between state agents and Forminière doctors in Tshikapa, as other complaints were also filed for cases in which state agents and company doctors had traded insults.

30 Baudouin Mwamba Mputu, *Le Congo Kasaï (1865-1950). De l'exploration allemande à la consécration de Luluabourg* (Paris 2011) 157-158.

31 BSA 2. RACCB, 422/Tshikapa, 1932-1944, Rapport de 1932, chapter 5.

Both District Commissioner Wenner and Provincial Governor Beernaert questioned the policies of Territorial Administrator Roulin. The district commissioner then decided to travel to Tshikapa himself to speak with the local administrators and the Forminière doctors. He was able to confirm to Beernaert that villages were indeed relocated by Roulin and his administration. They had studied various Chokwe groups and organized them into *chefferies*. The commissioner believed that Roulin had clearly made a mistake by not consulting the medical service, but he also criticized the Forminière doctors. Wenner argued they should have addressed these controversial policy decisions earlier, and most importantly, they had not respected the colonial hierarchy. Dr Fourche had contacted Provincial Governor Beernaert directly, leaving Wenner unaware of what was happening in Tshikapa until Beernaert reached out to him.[32] A few months later, Beernaert learned that villages were still being relocated in Tshikapa without consulting the medical services. Beernaert laconically noted that this arbitrary style of operation seemed to have become the norm in Kasai. This time, he did not hold back when he wrote to Wenner again on 6 May 1930: "Je vous prie d'y mettre un terme immediat!" (I ask you to put an immediate end to it!).[33]

On 28 May 1930, Roulin, who was no longer in charge of the local administration in Tshikapa, wrote a letter to Wenner to provide context for his actions in Tshikapa. He admitted that he had made mistakes, acknowledging he should have been more cautious, and that he should have kept the district and the doctors informed about his interventions. He argued he had deemed it necessary to bring order to the Chokwe territory. Because the Chokwe lived so dispersedly, they had, until then, managed to evade the authorities to some extent. Therefore, Roulin believed that the populations needed to be studied and stabilized.

Roulin's reasoning aligned with the broader trend from the 1920s onward to implement spatial interventions that drastically altered and simplified the geographical and, consequently, the social, political, and economic organization of Congolese populations. Roulin criticized the Forminière doctors for not addressing the situation in a friendly manner, instead of seeking to undermine mutual trust. According to him, the doctors had made the issue personal, which had caused the

32 AfricaMuseum Tervuren, Fonds Joseph Beernaert (hereafter AMT, FJB). HA.01.0065.43: Correspondance concernant la prophylaxie qui s'est produit pendant les déplacements de populations par la Forminière, 1930. (1) Lettre de Wenner à Beernaert, 4 March 1930. (2) Lettre de Beernaert à Wenner, 26 March 1930.

33 AMT, FJB, Lettre de Beernaert à Wenner, 6 May 1930.

misunderstanding to escalate to exaggerated proportions.[34] Because Roulin admitted his mistakes and was no longer active in Tshikapa, the matter was closed.[35] Soon after, however, the Forminière management in Brussels wrote to Governor-General Tilkens to voice their dissatisfaction with the behavior of Tshikapa's administrator. They were puzzled by how one person could make arbitrary decisions that were detrimental to the company's functioning.[36] This episode reveals that Forminière did not shy away from involving the highest colonial authorities to demonstrate to local state agents who was pulling the strings in Tshikapa.

This incident, however, does not necessarily represent the overall collaboration between Forminière and the colonial state. Roulin and Wenner also mentioned in their letters that their cooperation had generally gone smoothly in previous years. Even in the 1930s, Roulin's successors viewed Forminière's presence mainly in a favorable light. In the annual reports of 1934 and 1935, Territorial Administrator Haentjens noted that relations with Forminière were excellent. He expressed his satisfaction by stating that the local population could only benefit politically and economically from the existence of the various mining centers in the region. According to Haentjens, the revival of the industry in 1934, after the economic crisis, and the resumption of mining activities brought tranquility and peace to the local population.[37]

The role of the territorial administration often lay in finding solutions for social dynamics set in motion by the economic activities of Forminière. When the mines revived in 1934 and three thousand new workers were hired, it caused a shortage of agricultural labor. In response, the colonial government issued new decrees in October and November 1934, requiring every adult man to cultivate at least thirty acres of crops. The harvest could then be sold at local markets established by Forminière. These markets did not sell export products; they were solely for the local economy. Farmers could sell their produce under supervision, often directly to Forminière, to supply rations for the mine workers. The local administration was tasked with making sure everyone followed the new decrees.[38] This policy is a prime example of

34 AMT, FJB, Lettre de Roulin à Wenner, 28 May 1930.

35 AMT, FJB, Lettre de Wenner à Beernaert, 1930.

36 AMT, FJB, Lettre de la direction de La Forminière au gouverneur-général de la colonie Tilkens, 1930.

37 BSA 2. RACCB, 422/Tshikapa, 1932-1944, Rapports de 1934 et 1935.

38 BSA 2. RACCB, 422/Tshikapa, 1932-1944, Rapports de 1933, 1934 et 1935.

how state-enforced measures played a fundamental role in stabilizing the region's economic exploitation.

Since Forminière had total control over the agricultural and market economy in the region, the entire adult Congolese population was effectively working for the company. There was no alternative but to work, except for fleeing. The territorial administration also collected taxes, which could only be paid by people who earned a wage in the mines or sold their products at the market. Those unable to pay taxes were required to perform physical labor for the state, known as *emploi des contraints* (bonded labor).[39] In 1936, this group of people was considerably large. The *contraints* first underwent a medical examination that determined the type of work for which they were best suited. Subsequently, they performed various tasks: carrying water, clearing forests to create farmland, maintaining and constructing roads, and carrying luggage for traveling agents. Furthermore, the *contraints,* supervised by state agents, completed numerous construction projects. One notable example was the construction of a kitchen for the Tshikapa prison, which also involved the labor of the prison's inmates.[40] This measure made it virtually impossible not to work for the company in Tshikapa during the 1930s.

Forminière therefore collaborated with the colonial authorities, not only to guarantee the influx of migrant mine workers but also to ensure that people in Tshikapa were tied in one way or another to the company. When food shortages threatened socio-economic stability, the state intervened. Furthermore, tax collection compelled the local population to work for Forminière, either in the mines or in the fields, as failure to pay taxes could result in forced labor. The Roulin case, however, sheds new light on the interactions between state and capital. Forminière did not hesitate to involve the highest authorities to maintain control over colonial policies. The company was unwilling to allow individuals to threaten its economic interests. Decisions made by colonial officials which jeopardized these interests could lead to repercussions. Moreover, the case demonstrates a degree of amateurism within the colonial administration, showing that the colonization process was shaped not only by top-down directives but also by individual actions at a local level. In this sense, Nancy Hunt has identified the colonial state as fundamentally nervous.[41] One of the sources of nervosity was

39 See also Derksen, 'Forminière in the Kasai', 53.

40 BSA 2. RACCB, 422/Tshikapa, 1932-1944, Rapport de 1936.

41 Nancy Hunt, *A nervous state. Violence, remedies and reverie in colonial Congo* (Durham 2016).

precisely the tensions created by the messiness of local conditions, which colonial leaders at the top could not appreciate but nonetheless saw as potentially disruptive. Furthermore, the case also demonstrates that Forminière's doctors held considerable power, which brings us to the role of medicine as a tool to consolidate Forminière's control in Tshikapa.

Tropical medicine as means of control

The provision of medical services was the flagship initiative by which Forminière sought to present its exploitation of the region as part of the civilizing mission of Belgian colonialism. It also served as a strategy to tie workers to the company and as a means of tracking their movements. During its first years, the company struggled to develop its medical services for a number of reasons. Dr Henri Gillet – one of the Forminière doctors who complained about Territorial Administrator Roulin's Chokwe displacements *and* who also spent part of his career at Diamang in Angola – wrote in *Annales de la Société Belge de Médecine Tropicale* that the various mines were located far from each other in an area inhabited by "suspicious and hostile natives". Furthermore, the outbreak of the First World War made it difficult to recruit European doctors, and Forminière was only able to establish its medical service in 1920.

By the early 1920s, more and more mines were opened, often at great distances from one another. Many new mining enterprises emerged during these years. They became part of a consortium with exclusive exploitation rights in Forminière's concession area, contributing to the rapid economic development of the region. These new companies relied on Forminière for medical support. Consequently, the number of doctors increased significantly in the early 1920s, and dispensaries and hospitals were opened in all sectors. In 1920, the construction of Tshikapa's first hospital was finalized, and Dr Dubois, Forminière's first doctor, arrived. By 1923, there were three doctors, ten by 1925, and thirteen doctors worked for Forminière by 1927, supported by 220 Congolese nurses.

Both the European doctors and Congolese staff were trained before they could practice their professions. European doctors who joined Forminière were first required to undergo training at the hospital for Black patients. Typically, these young doctors were well-prepared, having studied at the École de Médecine Tropicale in Brussels. During

their internship, they learned how to run a hospital according to the proper medical and administrative procedures. Additionally, they got to know the local people, learned to communicate with them, and were taught how to 'command' them. They also learned how to inspect the camps without disrupting or undermining the mining operations. After two months of training, a doctor was expected to be ready. Each doctor was provided with a means of rapid transportation, usually a car, along with a first aid kit.[42]

Dr Gillet also described the training of Congolese nurses. The theoretical part of their education included basic concepts of hygiene, anatomy, and physiology. They were also taught antisepsis, parasitology, and essential medications, while their practical training involved administering injections and taking body temperatures. The program usually lasted about a year. According to Dr Gillet, recruitment in the 1920s was somewhat difficult, as they sought men who could read and write in Tshiluba and provide so-called "moral assurances".[43] During the training, 80 percent of recruits were eliminated. Dr Gillet found teaching the theory and routine tasks relatively easy but claimed that instilling a sense of duty and commitment proved to be more challenging. Only a few *sujets d'elite* eventually became nurses who were allowed to work with a degree of autonomy.

With its medical system in place, Forminière also vigorously pursued the fight against sleeping sickness from 1923 onward. A key figure in this effort was Dr Léopold Mottoulle, who also played a decisive role in the 'stabilization policy' of the Union Minière in Katanga, which aimed to retain laborers for the long term by improving their working and living conditions.[44] Doctors compiled reports on hygienic conditions in villages and assessed the presence of the tsetse fly, the primary vector of the disease. They informed the territorial administration of the measures they deemed necessary. Common recommendations included the relocation of entire villages, deforestation, and increased control over mobility. These medical interventions hence entailed public health measures that also functioned as tools of labor management, reinforcing colonial efforts to regulate workers' movement. While

42 H. Gillet, 'Le service médical des sociétés minières du Kasai (Champs diamantifères du Kasai)', *Annales de la Société Belge de Médecine Tropicale* 8 (1928) 233-249.

43 Women were only formally granted access to nursing training in Belgian Congo starting in 1951, see also Pierre Kita Masandi, 'L'Éducation féminine au Congo belge', *Paedagogica Historica* 40 (2004) 479-508.

44 G. De Rosenbaum, 'Mottoulle (Léopold I.J.J)', *Biographie Coloniale Belge*, VII-B (Brussels 1977) 262-264.

Illustration 2 The start of the construction of the hospital of Charlesville (Ndjoko Punda, 150 kilometres North of Tshikapa) in the presence of Doctor Henri Gillet, in February 1925. (Source: Forminière Charlesville, pose de la 1ière pierre de l'hôpital pour noirs, février 1925. Acquired by Jan van der Aa in 2024.)

ostensibly aimed at disease prevention, such policies reflected the broader tension at the heart of Forminière's labor strategy: facilitating migration to secure a steady influx of workers, while simultaneously imposing mechanisms of control to ensure they remained tied to designated settlements.

Starting in 1925, Forminière's mission was incorporated into a larger initiative: the *Grande Mission Autonome de Prophylaxie contre la Maladie du Sommeil* (MPMS). Other major colonial enterprises, such as BCK and UMHK, were also involved in this colonial tour de force. Every individual was to be examined. Medical staff felt patients' lymph nodes and administered thousands of Atoxyl injections.[45] Although Atoxyl proved to be a fairly effective drug in combatting sleeping sickness, it turned out to be a controversial one because approximately two percent of the treated individuals suffered damage to the retina, and in the worst cases, became blind.[46] The massive campaign against sleeping sickness was thus a rather successful but highly experimental way to ensure that Congolese lives could be maximally extended and their labor maintained and exploited.

In 1945, Dr Jean Haveaux reviewed the two-decades-long MPMS effort in Kasai. He described how the disease was initially addressed in a superficial manner from 1923 to 1925, and how, from 1926 onward, the fight became increasingly effective due to a clear strategy. Atoxyl and

45 Société Internationale, *Forminière*, 120.

46 Dietmar Steverding, 'The development of drugs for treatment of sleeping sickness. A historical review', *Parasites & Vectors* 3:15 (2010) https://doi.org/10.1186/1756-3305-3-15.

Tryparsamide injections were administered on a large scale. While he was butting heads with Roulin, Dr Fourche issued numerous new guidelines in 1929 and 1930 regarding the precise administration and dosages of these medicines. Over time, the doctors observed resistance to certain drugs in some patients, and a few treated individuals were diagnosed with eye problems. In 1927, Dr Fourche had tested the preventive effects of Bayer 205. After administering it to numerous subjects, he found that Bayer 205 could prevent infection with sleeping sickness for up to six months. Although this finding was generally positive, there were instances where vaccinated individuals still contracted the disease or developed eye infections. By the 1930s, efforts to combat the disease became more targeted and effective. In 1943, over 200,000 individuals were tested, and only 136 were found to be infected.[47]

As the displacement of villages was a frequent medical recommendation, local state officials similarly engaged in the implementation of sleeping sickness policies. In December 1933, when an outbreak was detected among the Chokwe in the Mungululu Valley, the Tshikapa administration was tasked with the relocation of the affected villages. At the time, while Territorial Administrator of Tshikapa Lesage was preparing his annual report for 1933, efforts were underway to move four villages to a healthier location two to four kilometers away. The relocation of villages remained a relatively common practice, but this time a doctor was present to oversee the intervention.[48] He wrote to the administration that the relocation of the villages would produce positive results if they were placed under medical supervision after 'bayerization'. These measures reinforced the broader colonial logic of controlling mobility: population groups were displaced and contained within regulated, supervised spaces.

According to Dr Van Riel, sleeping sickness accounted for 20 percent of deaths in 1925 and 1926, while pneumonia also caused 20 percent of the fatalities. Up to 30 percent of the deaths were attributed to *misère physiologique*, mostly due to intestinal parasites. Additionally, people died from leprosy, tumors, and ulcers. Notably, Dr Van Riel observed that the number of work accidents was low for an industrial region. There were reportedly only about fifteen serious accidents annually. Serious accidents were those that caused more than two days of incapacity

47 G. Haveaux, 'Vingt ans d'action médicale contre la maladie du sommeil dans le Kasaï', *Annales de la Société Belge de Médecine Tropicale* 25 (1945) 155-203.

48 BSA 2. RACCB, 422/Tshikapa, 1932-1944, Rapport de 1933, section E, partie hygiène. It is not clear whether the doctor was appointed by the state or by Forminière.

and had to be reported to the authorities.[49] In 1927, Dr Gillet reported that 125 workers from the *Sociétés Minières* (all mining enterprises in Kasai, including Forminière, Sibeka, and others) had died. Most of the employees died from various diseases. There were seven fatal work accidents, and three individuals drowned during non-working hours. Of the 38 unknown causes of death, 35 occurred in the Kamonia sector, where people were reluctant to accept European medicine. When they fell ill, they returned to their villages. Many of these deaths were likely due to the flu, and, according to Gillet, a certain number might also have been caused by poisoning.[50]

Thus, Forminière introduced tropical medicine in Tshikapa at a rapid pace, supported by a substantial administrative apparatus. By the 1920s, medical practitioners had the tools to identify where people lived, which diseases they suffered from, what their mental condition was, and what they died from. This biopolitical knowledge was crucial for the effective exploitation of the local population. The role of Forminière's medical service in the process of exploitation can therefore not be underestimated. In the 1920s, all new recruits underwent a medical examination, were vaccinated and received a card documenting future medical treatments. All workers, along with their wives and children, were re-examined on a monthly basis. Workers and their family members were identified and in essence labelled. Through strict monthly monitoring, both the physical and mental condition of the workers could be effectively tracked. Although the medical services seemed to focus mainly on the workers and work camps, every Congolese who visited a hospital or dispensary was treated, according to Gillet. Patients who presented with an illness provided the colonial authorities with a pretext to test and record their family members and neighbors, who perhaps had not been tracked previously. As such, Forminière's medical program allowed for an improved monitoring of Forminière's local and migrant population.

Using medical and epidemiological interventions as a pretext to discipline and surveil movement is a strategy that ties Forminière's modus operandi to more general practices of colonial regimes and private companies elsewhere. As several medical historians of Central Africa have shown, public health was an often repeated paradigm used to justify both the movement and containment of local populations

49 J. Van Riel, 'L'activité du centre médical de Tshikapa (Kasaï)', *Annales de la Société Belge de médecine tropicale* 8 (1928) 47-64.

50 Gillet, 'Le service médical', 242.

and even entire villages.[51] Congolese, nevertheless, regularly escaped this attempt at controlling movement. As Mathys, Schouten, and Luyckfasseel have shown for other regions in today's Democratic Republic of Congo, mobility had been a fundamental essential aspect of life prior to colonization.[52] Mobility was hence not only a default mindset but also an effective strategy to evade colonial biopolitical control.

Living and working in Tshikapa

Beyond regulating labor mobility and medical supervision, Forminière also sought to anchor and discipline workers and their families more permanently through education. By 1934, the company had opened three primary schools near its mines, which reinforced its influence beyond the workplace. Its first primary school was named after Forminière director Jean Jadot, a well-known Belgian banker and powerful figure within *La Société Générale* and the other major colonial concession companies. These schools were operated by the Scheut Fathers, who oversaw the implementation of the official education program in line with colonial objectives. In some cases, families with children attending school were granted an exemption from taxes – another example of how Forminière collaborated with the state and church to consolidate its control over workers.[53] In 1932, each *chefferie* in the broader region had a school, and throughout the territory there were three hundred teachers and catechists active. Haentjens, the territorial administrator of Tshikapa in 1934, viewed this education program as a long-term project, expecting it to take effect only once a newly educated generation would replace certain "customary rules" by "liberal ideas".[54] His statement underscores how the educational initiatives overseen by the Scheut Fathers, conducted in facilities built by Forminière and monitored by the territorial administration, functioned as yet another mechanism of colonial control – one that sought not only to discipline workers but also to shape future generations into compliant subjects of the colonial economy.

51 See, for example, Coghe, *Population politics in the tropics*; and Lyons, *The colonial disease.*

52 See Mathys, *Fractured pasts*; Luyckfasseel, "'Still so many illusions to cast off!'"; and Peer Schouten, *Roadblock politics. The origins of violence in Central Africa* (Cambridge 2022).

53 In 1932, 373 fathers with at least four children from monogamous marriages were exempted from taxes.

54 BSA 2. RACCB, 422/Tshikapa, 1932-1944, Rapport de 1934.

Agents of the colonial state also attempted to regulate certain aspects of Congolese familial relations and private lives, such as the practice of polygamy. In the 1930s, many Congolese still practiced polygamy, prompting the use of legal measures in Tshikapa to combat it. Men who were known to have multiple wives were subject to higher taxes, and the territorial administration meticulously made sure they paid them. If they did not comply, they could be penalized with the *emploi des contraints*. Among the Luba, Tetela and other "imported" groups (as Haentjens referred to these populations), adaptation to colonial expectations happened more quickly than among native groups such as the Shila-Lungu, Kete, and Chokwe. He argued it was because the latter lived farther away from European centers. Haentjes's report confirms the older discourse that had accompanied the 1919 Luba migration, which asserted that certain ethnic groups who complied with colonial ideals were preferred over others. The territorial administration and Scheut Fathers also took action against circumcision, birth rituals, and various so-called fetishist practices.[55]

In 1933, Territorial Administrator Lesage described how adultery was punished under Congolese customary law, typically through a fine equivalent to the bride price. Physical punishment for women caught in adultery was also common. In the years leading up to 1933, the administration had documented and regulated these practices. The fine was reduced to a more proportional amount, and efforts were made to eliminate physical punishment for women.[56] Missionaries promoted Christian values, while the territorial administration mapped local customs and created laws to align local practices with Christian norms. By the early twentieth century, the Catholic Church already had centuries of experience in documenting and regulating the private and sexual lives of individuals. In interwar Tshikapa, it became yet another tool for acquiring knowledge about the local population to better subjugate them and reinforce mechanisms of social control.

After the mass migrations of 1919, Forminière continued to invest in ways of attracting new mine workers. Moreover, its agricultural, medical, and educational programs also required personnel. In 1921, the Boutraka (*Bourse du Travail du Kasaï*) was founded to facilitate recruitment of Congolese workers for all colonial enterprises in the

55 BSA 2. RACCB, 422/Tshikapa, 1932-1944, Rapport de 1932, section B, chapitre 1, état d'esprit des populations.

56 BSA 2. RACCB, 422/Tshikapa, 1932-1944, Rapport de 1933, section B, considérations générales, évolution de la coutume.

region. Forminière was the driving force and also the main shareholder behind this new partnership. It was this very organization that was charged with scouring local villages for laborers in the early 1920s.[57] This agency, patterned after the BTK (*Bourse du Travail du Katanga*) created in 1910, proved to be very effective: between 1921 and 1924 the Forminière workforce doubled from 10,000 to 20,000.[58] We have no reason to believe that the Boutraka's methods were any different than those of the BTK, which included bribing village chieftains to meet the expected recruiting quota. The fact that the BTK's recruiters were often accompanied by armed soldiers, stresses the fact that working for colonial mining enterprises could hardly be called a voluntary decision.[59] However, when the existence of the Boutraka was extended for another fifteen years in 1936, the general assembly decided to refocus the agency's efforts on districts like Sankuru and Maniema. By then, the mining companies in Kasai were recruiting without any intervention from the Boutraka, which made its presence in the mining territories of Kasai no longer necessary.[60]

As mentioned above, Forminière faced significant fluctuations in the demand for labor due to shifting economic conditions in the early 1930s. In 1930 and 1931, as the company sought to maintain a sufficient workforce, it had to recruit laborers from more distant regions, given local shortages. Recruits were transported in groups of 20 to 30 men, covering distances of 25 to 30 kilometers per day. Unlike earlier migrant workers such as Matabish Kalambo, these new recruits were repatriated after the completion of their work. Upon arrival in Tshikapa, they were housed in an acclimatization camp, where they typically spent a week recovering from their journey and undergoing medical examinations.[61] However, economic downturns soon reshaped Forminière's labor policies. As mining activity declined – many mines were temporarily shut down due to unfavorable economic prospects – the company suddenly faced an overabundance of both labor and food in 1932. Consequently, the need for new recruits diminished, and plans for further development of the acclimatization camp were

57 Derksen, 'Forminière in the Kasai', 55.

58 Société Internationale, *Forminière*, 116.

59 Dácil Juif and Ewout Frankema, 'From coercion to compensation. Institutional responses to labor scarcity in the Central African copperbelt', *Journal of Institutional Economics* 14 (2018) 313-343.

60 BSA 2. ST (22), 325. Bourse du Travail du Kasaï. 1921-1951. Avec bilans 1926 et 1930-1950.

61 BSA 2. RACCB, 422/Tshikapa, 1932-1944, Rapport de 1932, chapitre 24, section C, partie main d'oeuvre.

abandoned.[62] By 1933, the camp had been entirely decommissioned, and recruitment efforts were restricted to the local area. It was not until 1934, when economic conditions improved, that mining activities fully resumed, reestablishing demand for a stable workforce.[63] By then, the Boutraka's recruitment efforts were no longer a priority.

The company also kept track of its workers' seniority when assigning work and paying wages. Forminière's Dr Trolli observed in 1931 that this practice only began in 1927, without considering the work done before that year. As a result, by the end of 1930, workers could only have a maximum of 40 months of seniority. Those who took leave without permission or changed work sites improperly could also lose their seniority. This was the case for many workers. Trolli, along with the doctor responsible for the *Main d'Oeuvre Indigène*, was convinced that the actual percentage of workers with more than one year of seniority was not 32 percent but rather 73 percent. The physically hardest work was usually assigned to the veterans, while lighter tasks were given to new recruits. Although veterans were supposed to receive higher wages, in practice it largely depended on the company's ability to track its workers' seniority accurately.[64] In the colonial context, this arbitrary method of allocating wages could easily go unchecked. This dynamic helps explain why experienced mine workers crossed the Angolan border to capitalize on their skills at Diamang, as well as why some locals resisted colonial control.

Not all population groups accepted the imposed migration schemes or tax regulations. The territorial administration struggled to assert its authority over certain populations. In 1932, Territorial Administrator Haentjens reported that a population group labelled "Kwa Kitombe" had attempted to evade tax payments by fleeing to the Kwango district. To prevent a mass exodus, he advised his administration to impose penalties on all dissenters. Similarly, among the Bena-Kalombo, individuals had fled the region to escape forced recruitment by the *Force Publique*, the Belgian Congo's colonial army. This recruitment operated through a lottery system, but those selected by the *Force Publique* had fled the region with their families.[65] Government attempts to search for

62 BSA 2. AimoGG(2000)209, Service de la M.O. de la Forminière. 1931. Extrait rapport d'inspection Kasaï par médecin en chef.

63 BSA 2. RACCB, 422/Tshikapa, 1932-1944, Rapport de 1934.

64 BSA 2. AimoGG(2000)209, Service de la M.O. de la Forminière. 1931. Extrait rapport d'inspection Kasaï par médecin en chef.

65 BSA 2. RACCB, 422/Tshikapa, 1932-1944, Rapport de 1932, section B, chapitre 1, état d'esprit des populations.

them were unsuccessful. Migration as a strategy for control was hence not only used by Forminière and the colonial state; Congolese also used mobility to their own advantage, as a means of shaping their own lives.

Concluding remarks

Since its foundation in 1906, Forminière's operations developed exponentially. The 1920s in particular proved to be a period of significant change in Tshikapa's social organization. After the large-scale, organized migrations of Luba communities from Luebo in 1919, Forminière invested significantly in healthcare and education through establishing several medical posts and schools. As a result, the company defined the contours of nearly every aspect of life in Tshikapa by 1930. In the following years, Forminière felt the effects of the global economic crisis, but overall the company did not suffer any long-lasting setbacks.

In the early 1940s, many white employees returned to Europe to take up arms against fascism. In Congo itself, production continued. The Allies were supplied with diamonds from Kasai,[66] although Farrell-Roberts suggests that the Germans also had access to Forminière diamonds via smuggling routes.[67] What can be said with certainty is that the demand for industrial diamonds increased enormously during and after the Second World War. During the 1940s and 1950s, the diamond business thus remained a very lucrative business for Forminière and all other mining enterprises in the Belgian Congo. However, because of the mechanization and growing efficiency of the mines, the number of Congolese working for Forminière gradually decreased.[68] After Congolese independence in 1960, fighting between Luba and Lulua groups, which had at least partial roots in Lulua frustration over the colonial preferential treatment of the Luba, caused significant damage to Forminière's infrastructure.[69] Without the support of the state, the company was unable to ensure stability in the region, and in 1961 it left the region, never to return.[70]

Through a combination of recruitment efforts, medical interventions, and education initiatives, Forminière sought to regulate

66 Société Internationale, *Forminière*, 125-127, 130.

67 Janine Farrell-Roberts, *Glitter & greed. The secret world of the diamond cartel*, 2nd ed. (Newburyport 2007).

68 Société Internationale, *Forminière*, 125-127, 131.

69 See: Young, *Politics in Congo*.

70 Derksen, 'Forminière in the Kasai', 62.

the movement and settlement of workers. As the case of Matabish Kalambo at the beginning of this article showed, Forminière had a significant impact on the trajectories of its workers, including the place where they eventually settled after their contract ended. The dislocation of villages and groups of people was a recurrent practice throughout Tshikapa's colonial history, whether it was to guarantee a stable workforce for the extractive industries or to combat sleeping sickness, which, from an economic point of view, were parallel interests.

While migration was essential to satisfying the company's labor needs, its policies also aimed to confine workers and their families within controlled environments, ensuring their long-term economic and social dependence on the company. The development of acclimatization camps, tax incentives, and labor regulations further reinforced this dual strategy of movement and containment, which made it virtually impossible for the local population *not* to work – whether directly or indirectly – for Forminière. However, these circumstances do not mean that its labor model went uncontested. Although the colonial archives provide limited insight into the motives and experiences of Tshikapa's population, they do provide hints about the ways in which the latter evaded Forminière's attempt at complete paternalistic control. Workers fled from coercive measures and forced recruitment, or they sought opportunities elsewhere to use the skills they developed working for Forminière, leveraging their expertise in a region where other mining companies were constantly on the lookout for skilled labor.

We have also seen how Forminière collaborated closely with Catholic missionaries and state officials to achieve the implementation of its labor model, which did not differ much from that of other mining companies, such as Union Minière. In fact, the exchange of expertise and employees was common: Forminière created its own labor exchange, the Boutraka, based on Union Minière's example, and doctors such as Mouttoulle developed the medical treatment and surveillance policies of both companies. Forminière's collaboration with other colonial actors in Tshikapa went smoothly for the most part, as the company's interests closely aligned with those of the colonial administration.

However, the Roulin case indicates that the general entente between the local representatives of the colonial state and Forminière, and specifically its doctors, was not always guaranteed. When Roulin displaced Chokwe villages without medical agreement in the early 1930s, Forminière contacted the Office of the Governor-General, the

highest colonial authority in Congo. The displacement of populations, and more specifically the positive or negative consequences it could have for access to labor, was at the core of both the tensions and partnerships between Forminière and the colonial administration.

In this way, Derksen's analysis of Forminière as a casual labor system must be nuanced by a more detailed consideration of the archival evidence. We showed that concerns about a shortage of workers were frequent, which complicates the general idea that Forminière could rely on voluntary workers exclusively. Moreover, Forminière had such a profound impact on the way people's lives were organized that the 'voluntary' nature of work was at best ambivalent, as is de facto the case in a context of colonial power imbalances. While labor was controlled and manipulated when the company and its colonial collaborators (church and state) managed to keep the population fixed and stable, it could easily devolve either when economic conditions changed or when Congolese used mobility to flee oppressive conditions or find better circumstances elsewhere. Thus, the only 'voluntary' aspect of Forminière's labor system was that the workers could flee under the right conditions – otherwise, the company would not have had to rely on all these means of coercion to keep them in place.

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