

# The 'Leopold II' concession system exported to French Congo with as example the Mpoko Company

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Between 1899 and 1900, French authorities created a number of concession companies in French Equatorial Africa (hereinafter referred to as French Congo), taking inspiration from the 'Leopold system' that led in the Congo Free State in a short period of time to huge profits. The system entailed forced labour for the natives to bring in the rubber, hostage-taking of women and children and a bonus system for the white employees based on yields.

The best known concession companies in the Congo Free State were the Anglo-Belgian India Rubber Company (ABIR) (Delathuy, 1989; Marchal, 1996; Vangroenweghe, 1985; 1986) and the so-called 'Anversoise' (Vangroenweghe, 2005, 269-363), where the State in each case was the majority shareholder. The same working method had been developed in the Crown Domain around the Leopold II Lake, private property of Leopold of Sachsen Coburg Gotha that was run by the civil service. In other rubber-producing areas, rubber and/or ivory was harvested by State employees (Vangroenweghe, 1985; 2005) or by private traders whose pay was based on a similar bonus system.

This article starts with a general description of the French concession companies (Coquery-Vidrovitch, 1972; Kalck, 1977) that obtained a monopoly over 80 percent of the territory of French Congo and assumed the tasks of an absent French administration. Before delving into the affairs of the French concession companies – in particular those of the Mpoko (Société Anonyme des Établissements Gratry) – the general context of the French administration of the territory is briefly discussed.<sup>1</sup> The Commission of enquiry under the

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<sup>1</sup> Subsequently abbreviated in Mpoko.

chairmanship of Brazza, established in 1905 by the French because of rumours of irregularities in French Congo, will be the guiding principle.

Next there is an in depth discussion about the Mpoko concession company. An extraordinary number of documents on this company have been preserved in the 'Archives Nationales', section d'outre-mer, Aix-en-Provence. Taken together with the Africa-Archives of the ministry of Foreign Affairs in Brussels on the employees of the Congo Free State, these documents allow us to conclude that Mpoko is one of the best documented concession companies of French Congo. Mpoko, controlling an area equal to half the size of Belgium and having adopted the Leopold exploitation system, was one of the few profitable concession ventures in French Congo, as the import and export figures below show.

But the links with the Congo Free State were not limited to the adoption of the Leopold system, and this is the starting point of this paper. Nearly half of the share capital was in the hands of Belgians, and the director in Africa – along with a significant portion of his first white employees – were former agents from the Crown Domain. Selected Africans were also imported from the Crown Domain.

That violence was present in Mpoko was proven by the investigating magistrate Butel, who investigated one of the three areas and who documented 1,500 possible murders and 667 judicially proven murders of natives. Furthermore, a thorough judicial enquiry proved that there was a constant ratio between the use of cartridges and rounds of ammunition and the rubber harvest. Each item has an entry in the accounts. The constancy of the ratio is illustrated by the entries for the trading post at Yaka.

There was one big difference between Mpoko and the Congo Free State: there was no collaboration (except later for the personal taxation) between the State civil and military personnel and the concession company, for the simple reason that there were no civil servants in Mpoko. In fact, there were hardly any civil servants in French Congo. In the Congo Free State, in contrast, there was a close partnership between the civil service and the people of the concession companies. In spite of this fundamental difference, the end result for the native population of French Congo was identical to that for natives in the Congo Free State.

## 2. FRENCH CONCESSION COMPANIES<sup>2</sup>

France started the exploitation period of its colony after the Brazza exploration period ended in 1898.<sup>3</sup> Some sections of French society wanted to emulate the unforeseen economic success of Congo Free State. The Société Anversoise paid out a dividend in 1898 of 1,000 Fr. per share of 500 Fr., and the ABIR paid a dividend of 1,100 Fr. per share of 500 Fr.<sup>4</sup> Leopold II was the major shareholder in both companies.

In 1899-1900 about forty concession companies were created in French Congo. They received together 700,000 square km of the available 900,000 square km. French Congo was divided into four administrative regions: Gabon, Middle Congo, Oubangui-Chari and Chad. In 1904 the four regions together had an armed force of only 1,667 regulars, of which 545 were stationed in Middle Congo. The number of civil servants was very small: in 1905 there were 101 in Middle Congo, and many of them were totally unsuited for their task. There were no public works except in Brazzaville and Libreville, and there was no state education system whatsoever. In the whole of French Congo, which is two-and-a-half times the size of France, there were only three doctors responsible for public health. Small pox and sleeping sickness decimated the population. There was no cure for sleeping sickness at that time, but also no efforts for a vaccination campaign against smallpox – which did happen in certain areas of the Congo Free State.

The concession companies contributed yearly a fixed fee to the State and had to pay 15 percent of their profits. In return they received a monopoly and began to invest where the French State refused to. Investments made were, typically, in direct relationship with the exploitation. Free traders were not tolerated.

The *modus operandi* of the concession companies was characterized by overcropping on rubber and ivory harvested by the natives by cutting the rubber vines.<sup>5</sup> Durable investment in raw materials and/or the local populations was

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<sup>2</sup> Mainly based on Coquery-Vidrovitch (1972, *passim*) unless mentioned otherwise.

<sup>3</sup> Savorgnan de Brazza was commissioner-general of the French Congo from 1883 to 1898.

<sup>4</sup> The French franc was at that time equivalent to the Belgian franc, and amounts to approximately 6 euros in 2006.

<sup>5</sup> The natives were taken hostage and subjected to forced labour (the 'Leopold system').

not made. The low population of the area led to a shortage of labour. All this discouraged durable initiatives.

Big French capital also was not very interested in developing concession companies in French Congo. The shareholders and agents of many concession companies were Belgian agents, along with some with North French and Dutch investors. The Belgians had directorships in twenty-nine of the forty companies and had the majority of the shares in some. Capital for these ventures often came from Antwerp. In this way the directors of the ABIR and the Anversoise had more than half the directorships in six French Congo concession companies – and this despite the French law posing severe restrictions for foreigners (Delathuy, 1989, 55 ff.; Marchal, 1996, 42 ff.). Leopold's Congo also had investments worth 3 million Frs. (18 million euros) in these concession companies out of a total of more or less 50 million Frs. but that never was paid up in full.<sup>6</sup>

In addition to directorships and capital there were energetic European veterans from Leopold's Congo military who worked for the companies because of their Congo experience and knowledge about rubber cropping. Some had become *persona non grata* in Leopold's Congo. Also, former native soldiers and workers from Leopold's Congo were found on the payrolls.

Only a couple of these French companies were profitable in the first colonial phase (1900-1913): Mpoko (area: 13,900 square km) and the Compagnie des Sultanats du Haut-Oubangui (S.H.O.) (area: 140,000 square km) (Coquery-Vidrovitch, 1972, 341 ff.). Their profitability was no surprise: both companies had a policy of over cropping, learned by personal experience of the Africa director and his agents in Leopold's Congo. Moreover, these two companies were located in the best geographical areas and had access to more capital. In addition to size, there was another big difference between the two companies: in Mpoko the population was traditionally politically organized by village, while in the sultanates there was a centralized power structure. Neither company had many imports, and what was imported – arms and ammunition, for example – was not always reported. Durable investments

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<sup>6</sup>. These shares of Leopold's Congo were bought by front men and were not mentioned in the list of movable and immovable goods when the Congo was annexed by Belgium in 1908. They had to stay secret to avoid accusations of interference in the French Congo. They were passed on secretly and ended up in the portfolio of the Ministry of Colonies. They were sold in 1926 and most likely the proceeds went to the Belgian Congo and not to Belgium (Stengers, 1957, 278-280).

were minimal, and any imported goods were accounted for at a far higher value by entering them on landed cost in the concession base (the purchase in Europe, transport, customs and taxes). Total profits were underreported by 20 percent, even up to 35 percent, to avoid paying government taxes.

The costs of maintaining the Company headquarter were high. For S.H.O. in 1901 they were 654,620 Fr. The board directors each got 50,000 Fr. (300,000 euros). Only 3.6 million Frs. in capital was paid up out of the 9 million Frs. authorized, but this was sufficient. The S.H.O. had an exceptionally good political structure. In 1902 the sultan Bangassou gave S.H.O. freedom to engage in any kind of trade, including the means of transport thereof, *i.e.*, the use of rowers and bearers (Coquery-Vidrovitch, 1972, 343; Grootaers, 1996, Ch. 2). Rubber was transported straight from the chieftain's village to the factory. In 1906 the sultan received a guarantee from the French State about his borders in return for a yearly consideration of 18,000 Frs., payable in rubber directly to S.H.O. The huge distances between government posts and the immense shortage of civil servants to keep control in French Congo ensured the State's non interference.

S.H.O. profits were generated by the purchase of rubber at a very low price (0.57 Frs. per kilo wet rubber) and ivory at 2 to 6 Frs. per kilo. Sales prices in Europe were ten to twenty times higher. Strictly speaking, there was no purchase of rubber or forestry products, as they were the property of the concession holder, although the natives received trinkets for the delivery of the products by forced labour.

Some companies (such as the Lobaye Company and the Al-Ké-Lé, which covered the right bank of the Congo between Lefini and Alima, an area of 35,000 square km, and was active until 1929) in French Congo always operated at a loss but nonetheless were kept alive. Their survival cannot be explained from an economic point of view, but an unconfirmed but likely hypothesis holds that keeping these companies in place from a (Belgian) Congo point of view stabilized the border areas (Coquery-Vidrovitch, 1972, 312).

By 1910, twelve companies already had disappeared or were reconstructed, sixteen had merged with permission of the French administration, and five others had come together in a factual merger; only seven continued in reality

or on paper.<sup>7</sup> With hindsight one can say that forty companies were too many. Some had an area of a Belgian province. Each had a registered office and administration, and a merger could reduce costs by two thirds.

Not only the companies but also the State used force in French Congo, collecting a head tax (from 1902 3 Fr.; from 1905 5 Fr. per head). The government collected this tax indirectly through the concession companies. It first was payable in kind to concession holders, and thus a symbol of the collusion between trader and administrator. In 1905, less than 3 percent of the native population paid this head tax, as some areas were still 'undiscovered'. Due to the enormous shortage of civil servants to collect the tax, it would take another couple of decades before most of the Congolese were subject to this tax. Most natives considered this tax unjust, as they received nothing in return for it, in the form of security, roads, justice or schools. The tax nearly everywhere in the rubber areas was collected under great duress. Government agents and concession holders did not shrink from taking women and children hostage, at burning villages, at destroying plantations and chopping down thousands of banana trees.

Civil servants made contracts with trade agents in areas around the trade posts to collect the tax in kind. One kilo of rubber was worth one Fr. in the calculation of the head tax, and this money was paid after deducting some costs by the company to the local civil servant. The price per kilo was calculated to be five times cheaper than the price of the Brazzaville auction. The companies also made an extra profit by paying for the rubber not in cash but in kind (cloth and trinkets), with items that otherwise were not saleable. The natives considered the trading agents as state agents. The civil servant now was interested in collecting tax money (rubber) from the natives because his promotion depended on it. A circular from Governor-General Gentil in 1904 states:

"I will not conceal that in my assessment of you I will mostly base myself on your results of your tax collection from the natives which should be the subject of your constant preoccupation".

In the end, debates in the French parliament led Clémentel, Minister of Colonies, to issue a decree on 22 February 1906 that mandated a review of the Congo regime. Civil servants thus were forbidden to collect indirectly the

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<sup>7</sup>. AEF. Q "Le régime concessionnaire en Afrique française et son fonctionnement (1900-1910)". ('Contrôle des Concessions' s.d.; s.a., 132 pp., pp. 22-23).

native taxes as had been permitted and even encouraged by Gentil, although in practice nothing much changed.

Because detailed information on this period comes mostly from the Commission of enquiry under the chairmanship of Brazza for French Congo in general, and from Mpoko in particular through the dedicated investigating magistrates such as Butel, both are discussed extensively in the sections that follow.

### 3. BRAZZA'S COMMISSION OF ENQUIRY

The direct cause of the establishment of the Commission of enquiry by the Minister of Colonies on 3 March 1905 was a publication about three territorial administrators in Fort Crampel, the crossroad for the carrying service to Chad, in the *Petit Parisien* of 15 February 1905, a story taken up the next day in *Le Matin* and *Le Temps*. The facts dated from 1903 and were told as follows: State agent Proche had caused two natives, who had run away when they saw his soldiers, to be executed without trial. What the newspapers did not know was that the story was much worse: those sent to headquarters for trivialities were simply shot. Toqué, another State agent, had a native drowned for stealing some cartridges; and agent Gaud, to celebrate the 1903 Bastille Day, had killed a native by putting sticks of dynamite around his neck and in his rectum.<sup>8</sup> The story caught fire in part because the Minister of Colonies already was under severe attack from E.D. Morel's 'Congo Reform Association over Belgian and French politics in Equatorial Africa', as reported in all the big French newspapers, including the Socialist group of the *Cahiers de la Quinzaine* (Charles Péguy and Pierre Mille).<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> For Proche (Coquery-Vidrovitch, 1972, 190) and Georges Toqué, *Les massacres du Congo. La terre qui meurt, la terre qui tue*, 1907, réédition avec postface, Paris, 1996. During his trial some documents were kept behind. Toqué had written reports on the acts of violence in the region. The answer of his superiors was: "Conduct business, but do not write about it. Inform your superior only orally". Gaud and Toqué were sentenced in Brazzaville to 5 years, which outraged the whites in Brazzaville. They had only killed a couple of blacks! This aggrieved Brazza who at the time of judgement was still in Brazzaville. Toqué's sentence may have been juridically valid, but morally it was less legitimate. The Human and Citizen's Right League supported Toqué's request for annulment (Autin, 1985, 260).

<sup>9</sup> Charles Péguy (1873-1914) French author and intellectual, founded in 1900 *Les Cahiers de la Quinzaine*. Pierre Mille (1864-1941) was a French author.

The Commission left Marseille on 3 April 1905 and was given six months, including travel time, to accomplish its mission. This timeframe was much too short for any serious work. Pierre Savorgan de Brazza was chair of the Commission and was accompanied by a number of collaborators, amongst others the Inspector General of Colonies Hoarau-Desruissaux, and two more inspectors of the Ministry of Colonies. Félicien Challaye was there on recommendation of Charles Péguy. He was the only non-civil servant and thus the only one able to write freely about his findings after the enquiry.

Even before the departure, there was little collaboration from the Ministry of Colonies. Suspicion, later justified, led Brazza to have a special travelling trunk made at 'Vuillot's' with a double bottom to hide sensitive documents. He was hindered severely in the Congo by the *commissaire général* Gentil and by the State agents on the spot. It was unheard of that a commission with very senior and experienced inspectors from the ministry, who should have had access to all the documents, in fact did not receive vital evidence.

The Commission took the railroad from Matadi to Leopoldville in the Congo State. The French minister of Foreign Affairs, Th. Delcassé, had asked the Belgian government for support for Brazza's mission, a request honoured only very reluctantly.<sup>10</sup>

After his arrival on location, Brazza discovered a later publicized incident that had taken place in April or May 1904. State agent Culard, with encouragement from his superior and to pressure natives to pay taxes, had taken hostage fifty-eight women and ten children in the Lobaye area and sent them on to Bangui, a two to three day march away. There they were locked up in a windowless cell. Forty five women and two children perished of exhaustion within five weeks.<sup>11</sup> A passing doctor witnessed this because of the rotting body odour. The enquiry following this incident came to nothing, as no criminal proof was found, and Culard was promoted in the meantime.<sup>12</sup> Brazza found many similar incidents of women and children being taken hostage. In reality, it was an everyday occurrence that provided the white

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<sup>10</sup>. Archives nationales, Section d'outre-mer (S.O.M.), Aix-en-Provence, 16.1 ff. Cf. Autin (1985, 244).

<sup>11</sup>. Toqué (G.), *Les massacres du Congo. La terre qui meurt, la terre qui tue*, 1907, réédition avec postface, Paris, 1996.

<sup>12</sup>. Challaye (F.), *Le Congo Français. La question internationale du Congo*, Paris, 1909, pp. 102-103.



man with enough bearers, workers and oarsmen and enabled him to increase production at will.

In April 1902 there were so many women and children hostages in Fort Crampel that nearly all the females of one ethnic group in the neighbourhood were taken. A secret telegram (no. 127 in cipher code) dated 26 June 1905 from Brazza to the Minister of Colonies says it all.<sup>13</sup> After describing the incident of the fifty-eight women and the ten children, he continues:

"I found it my duty to draw your attention to the consequences which this affair can have, as this is not an isolated incident. On the contrary, the taking hostage of women in the native villages is an everyday occurrence to exact bearers for the road from Fort de Possel to Fort Crampel (Gribingui today), if only to speak of the area I visited myself. For the moment hostage-taking in this area is considered as the most natural manner for any suppression or coercion. It is so true that as soon as they heard of my mission to Congo there arrived in Fort Sibut (Krédédgé today) 119 women originating from an expedition to suppress the population in the Haute-Koumi area, six days away from Fort Sibut. All means were used during my passage to stop me from finding out. Had I not, in spite of the obstructions, been able to speak directly and personally to the natives in circumstances of which I shall entertain you in person upon my return, the improbable fact would have arisen that my arrival in the area would have been considered as the official sanction of France of all the cruelty that had happened. What is more, there is no mention in the official reports of repression in the Haute-Koumi and about the taking hostage of the women, their removal to Fort-Sibut and their redistribution over the villages around the post".

The impact of these abuses, which started in 1900-1901, on the population was enormous. When Governor-General Gentil first crossed this northern region he noticed immense plantations of millet and cassava which resulted in abundance and wealth. A couple of years later, in 1905, Brazza found no villages, only some huts near the trading posts; no plantations any more; and bearers did not know where to buy food. Everywhere there was wilderness and hunger. In June 1904 the twenty-four-year-old State agent Toqué was ordered to recruit three thousand bearers monthly, otherwise the French troops in Chad would have perished. This recruitment drive was characterized by slavery, raids on villages and concentration camps with female hostages and a terrible treatment of prisoners.

For Brazza it was clear cut: these abuses were not local excesses of a blind repression or to be blamed on some individuals but were consistent with a

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<sup>13</sup> Aix-en-Provence. S.O.M. Fonds Schefer, Gabon-Congo, XIX. Contrôle et inspection.

system for which the general administration of the Congo and the government carried a great responsibility. During his return to France, Brazza died in Dakar on 14 September 1905. In France his report was completed by the 'Commission d'Études du Congo' from 6 October to 19 December 1905. After forty-seven corrections were made, ten copies were printed: 'Rapport de la Commission d'Enquête sur le Congo, présidé par de Lanessan'.<sup>14</sup> Jean Marie de Lanessan was a former minister and Member of Parliament (MP). It seems strange that no author of this report was member of the Commission of enquiry. I do not question the integrity of the authors. The Minister of Foreign Affairs, who was consulted by the Minister of Colonies, asked specifically in the name of national interest that the report, even after forty-seven corrections, 'not bind the government or the decisions over the use they would make of the report'.

Gustave Rouanet, a Socialist MP, asked already in July 1905 for a parliamentary question, but this was continuously postponed. At the end of the debate there was a vote to make public the report and all attachments and documents of the Brazza Commission. This proposal was voted down 345 to 167. The report remained secret even after a complaint from the French Human Rights and Citizen's League. The French government used a change of government to declare itself not bound by the promises of President Clémentel. The enquiry report can be classified from 'average' to good without further mention. Many facts are understated or obscured. The report does not mention specific instances and has no appendices. The responsibility of commissaire général Gentil was questioned. According to the report he was not criminally responsible and could stay on in his post. It was a hell of a job to be commissaire général and not easy to eventually find a successor. Gentil had to rule with little money and with few civil servants, many of whom were more often than not unfit for the job. He had to supplement funds through the head tax on natives.

Where Brazza concentrated himself on the functioning of the State and the civil service, Guibet's Commission of enquiry into the affairs of Mpoko in 1907 would go to the bone. Nonetheless, neither Commission really brought any improvement to the natives; it would take years before the greatest crimes against them were curtailed. Europeans nearly always escaped punishment, and no high-placed person ever was criminally charged. In short, there was class justice topped by race justice.

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<sup>14</sup>. 'Rapport de la commission d'enquête sur le Congo, présidée par M. de Lanessan', Paris, Imprimerie nationale, 1907, 115 p. (Tiré à dix exemplaires seulement). S.O.M. G.C., XIX-4 b.

Up to now a general picture has been drawn of French Congo and the concession companies. We now will analyze thoroughly the Mpoko Company: the shareholders, the personnel in Africa, the export, the import and the profits, as illustrated by the example of the trading post at Yaka.

#### 4. THE MPOKO COMPANY

##### 4.1. Shareholders

The concession company Mpoko was created on 10 July 1899 before two notary publics in Lille, with the purpose of working the concession granted on 12 May 1899 that covered the basin of the Mpoko river and tributaries on the Ubangui river. The concession was in the immediate neighbourhood of Bangui (Fort de Possel) and had a surface of 13,900 square km, less than half the size of Belgium. The registered office was in Lille. Authorized capital was 2 million Fr.; called and paid up capital was 1.2 million Fr. in 20,000 shares of 100 Fr. each.

On 10 July the shareholders paid up 25 percent of their shares. Jules Gratry, a textile magnate from Lille, was the main shareholder with 10,000 shares. A document from Governor-General Gentil states that Gratry was front man for the Belgian Bolle, who was responsible for recruiting white agents in Belgium.<sup>15</sup> There is no real evidence, however, that Gratry was fronting for Bolle. Of the other shares, 9,341 went to Belgians. Among the most important was the 'Belgika Société Anonyme' (2,600 shares), a Congolese company established in Brussels that belonged to Leopold II and whose directors were Adrien Hallet and Emile Vandenperre. Further shareholders were the 'Banque Coloniale de Belgique' (Brussels) also with 2,600 shares; Gustave Buyschaert, an Antwerp lawyer (1,200 shares); Emile Vandenperre, brewer in Brussels (1,000); Nicolas Navaux, yarn spinner in Verviers (500); Ernest Dubois, trader in Moucron (500); and Aloïs Verbeke, a Ghent

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<sup>15</sup> Concessions. A.P. 40. Lobaye. Gentil to the Minister of Colonies. 23 March 1905: "On signale d'autre part des tentatives faites par les actionnaires belges pour accaparer les actions de la Haute-Sangha, d'Ekela-Kadei-Sangha. Le groupe Gratry qui ne serait le prête-nom, accapare la M'Poko, la Compagnie française du Congo [...]; les Sultanats sont belges. Le major Thys intervient de plus en plus dans la Compagnie française (Tréchet Frères)".

industrialist (300). There were some small holdings from Lille, altogether some 659 shares.

Next to Jules Gratry, chairman of the board and managing director, there were two vice-chairmen from Lille. There were two Belgian directors on the board: the brewer Emile Vandenperre from Brussels; and the agricultural engineer Adrien Hallet.

## 4.2. Personnel<sup>16</sup>

### 4.2.1. European – mainly Scandinavian – personnel from Leopold II's Congo

The European personnel, their contracts and the provenance of imported native employees will be discussed in succession. The breakdown of personnel is shown in Table 1.<sup>17</sup>

Year	Total Europeans	Number of non-French	Number of French	Number of factories
1900	10	7 + 2	1	? (1 or 2)
1901	15	10 + 4	1	2
1902	12	9 + 3	0	2
1903	14	11 + 3	0	7
1904	15	10 + 3	2	4
1905	35	13 + 2	20	11
1906	39	9 + 1	29	11
1907	34	6 + 1	27	11
1908	?	?	?	?
1909	8	0	8	4

TABLE 1: BREAKDOWN OF PERSONNEL 1900-1909

<sup>16</sup>. Affaires Politiques, 38.

<sup>17</sup>. Number of non-French, 1900, 7+2: Two whose nationality cannot be retrieved. This also goes for the other figures. Number of factories, 1900, 1 or 2: Coquery-Vidrovitch (1972, 290) mentions 4 posts and 6 branches. The archives of Mpoko, which I have completely excerpted (A.P. 38. Vranckx, Bimbo 22 June 1907), only mention two posts from 1901 on, viz. Konga and Badé. The latter was already abandoned in 1902. Schiötz had sailed up the Mpoko river at the end of 1899 with agent Delvoie; he went by Badjungo, Konga and Bwali and planned to found trading posts after his reconnaissance. Delvoie became the first factory chief in Konga. Schiötz returned to the headquarters Bimbo.

Some five posts mentioned above were abandoned and/or re-occupied. As of 1904-1906, there were six plantation posts and three transit posts. Without exception these were run by Scandinavians who had experience in exploration and rubber harvesting in Leopold's Congo. One of them, the Norwegian Gullbrand Schiötz, was director for Africa from the beginning of 1900 until the end of 1907.<sup>18</sup> From 1894 until August 1900, he had been employed as second-in-command in the Crown Domain of Leopold II situated around Leopold II Lake. He served under Jacques (later baron Jacques de Dixmude). He made reconnaissance, subjugated the 'savages' and made the natives harvest rubber with an iron fist.

Schiötz, together with some other Scandinavians (including Lindström, a captain on the Leopold II Lake) did not renew his contract with the Congo

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<sup>18</sup> Schiötz (1871-Oslo 1941). Cf. *Biographie Coloniale Belge* (1958, tome V, col. 739-740). Captain-commander in Leopold's Congo from February 1894 till August 1900 where he was second in command in the Crown Domain (district of Lake Leopold II) under Jules Jacques, the future baron Jacques de Dixmude, who was the first commissioner-general from August 1895 until August 1898. Schiötz founded the trading post Ibali. Both had to reconnoitre the region and start the rubber harvest. The Swedish lieutenant Knut Svensson mentioned in his diary in 1895 that 527 natives were killed in four months because of the rubber harvest. The Norwegian Halling reported in November 1899 that 245 natives had been killed during a reconnaissance expedition. Jacques himself wrote to post chief Leyder in Inongo after inhabitants of Inongo had chopped down rubber vines in Ibali (the capital of the Crown Domain): "We have to beat them into complete subjection or into complete extermination. [Author's remark: Can this be called a kind of ethnocide?]. With this prospect in mind I send you my boy to retrieve his father to spare him an unpleasant awakening. Warn the people of Inongo a very last time and carry out your plan to take them to the woods as quickly as possible, or gather them in the village with a good club and address yourself to the proprietor of the first shack: here is a basket, go and fill it with rubber. Go and disappear immediately in the woods. If you have not returned within ten days with a basket of 5 kilos of rubber, I will burn down your shack. And you will burn it as promised. You use the intervening time to force those who refuse to leave the village into the woods. If you burn down the shacks one by one, I believe it will not be necessary to go to the limit (sic). Warn them that if they chop down one more rubber vine I will exterminate them to the last one".

Jacques was accused of *homicide volontaire* (voluntary man slaughter) in the territorial court of Leopoldville. He appealed against this decision in Boma. The file with both sentences is missing from the archives of the ministry of Foreign Affairs. It was probably destroyed already at the time of the Congo Free State. The judicial documents of Leyder have been preserved though (Archives Africaines. Ministry of F.O. Brussels. Tribunal d'Appel. Boma. GG. N° 20). Jacques brought charges to him and on appeal Leyder was sentenced to two times two and a half years on account of *homicides volontaires*. One of the extenuating circumstances was the order of his superior Jacques. On the cruelties of rubber exploitation in the Crown Domain and the cover-up of the responsibility of white agents by governor Costermans, see Vangroenweghe (1986; 2005). In 1901 Schiötz became consul in Brazzaville for Norway and Sweden with jurisdiction for the Congo Free State.

after two terms, and instead became director of Mpoko. Lindström became captain of the SS. 'Jules Gratry' and, in early April 1901, together with Schiötz, went recruiting native labour for Mpoko in his old stamping grounds, the Ibali post (on the shores of Leopold II Lake). Schiötz had received permission from Governor Wahis to visit his countrymen there, but no permission to recruit labour. For this trip he had paid a tax of 1,795.20 Fr. to chop wood to fuel his steam vessel. Wahis thought this an extravagant sum of money just to visit some old Scandinavian friends like Lund and suspected it was for a recruitment drive. He had Schiötz tailed, but the authorities on the lake could not catch him red-handed. Schiötz managed to sail back to Bangui unnoticed with thirty labourers and five women, plus his former *ménagère* (housekeeper) – after cutting the telegraph line on the river Congo between Lukolela and Irebu. "Everybody in the Crown Domain knew about it, but was understood to know nothing" he later stated.<sup>19</sup>

Einar Lund, also Norwegian, was the founder in 1905 of the Bødera sector and in February 1905 was promoted to zonal chief of Mpoko-North, until his suicide on 1 August 1907. Schiötz and Lund had been officers in Leopold's Congo and had actively and energetically harvested rubber. Lund had worked for six years in Congo, in, amongst other places, the rubber areas of Aruwimi and Basoko, but had been fired because of a professional error. Lund got a negative review when he applied in Paris with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to go to Mpoko (probably to have as many as possible French nominated in the concession companies), but upon the recommendation of inter alia Schiötz, also the then-Consul of Sweden and Norway in Brazzaville, permission was granted by the Ministry of Colonies on 26 September 1905 for him to leave for Mpoko. Article 5 of the Berlin treaty had been invoked, which bans all hindrance to the movement of persons.

Together with Lund, the following Scandinavians were employed: Wahlquist, Lindström, Linsen, Saunders and Nergaard.<sup>20</sup> Next to them we had the

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<sup>19</sup>. Schiötz was first brought to trial before the territorial court of Leopoldville, which annulled the preliminary investigation on the grounds of procedural mistakes. On appeal the sentence was postponed from April to December 1902 on procedural grounds and it probably ended without any consequences. For Schiötz's expedition to Lake Leopold II, see: Archives Africaines. Ministry of F.O. Brussels. Tribunal d'Appel. Boma, n° 219.

<sup>20</sup>. The Swede Wahlquist (1900-1901). The Swedish captain Mauritz B. Lindström, a veteran of the Crown Domain (1896 - December 1899) worked for Mpoko from 1900 to 1903. Linsen (1901-1905), the Norwegian C.F.F. Neergaard (1902-1906) and the Swede G. Saunders former agent of the Anversoise from the end of 1900 on, sentenced to six months and released on 1

following Belgians: Pierlot (1900-1903), Vranckx (1901-1907), Delvoie (1900-1902), Wolf (1901-1908), Marc Flébus (1903-1907), Ganty (1903-1907) and Vandenperre (1903-1904). De Henau was director of transit in Brazzaville.<sup>21</sup>

The native employees consisted of locally recruited men or imported Senegalese. In addition there were former military men from the Congo Free State and the thirty initially imported labourers (who were engaged as "armed" workers).<sup>22</sup> Schiötz had brought the latter from the shores of Leopold II Lake and he knew thoroughly that they were on the payroll.

#### 4.2.2. *Contracts*<sup>23</sup>

The agents had to sign a contract that included the following:

1. Agents committed themselves for a period of three years with a starting salary of 2,000 Fr. in the first year; at the end of the term the agent received a bonus of a half year's pay.

2. Pay was quarterly, but only up to half was paid in Africa or in kind, money or by cheque issued by the company in Lille. The balance was kept as a guarantee and paid 3 percent interest.

3. Board, lodging and medical attention were free, as was the first-class train ticket from Matadi to the Stanley-Pool.

4. No compensation at all was paid to the agent or his heirs in case of accident, sickness or death in any circumstance. Agents who returned ill received no pay or indemnities from the day they left the concession. In case of death, payments were halted.

5. Agents were vowed to silence on all subjects relating to the Company's affairs, on penalty of at least 1,000 Fr. and immediate recall.

6. After leaving the company, the agent was not allowed to start on his own account for two years in a radius of 500 km of the posts he was employed. Breaking this rule would lead to a fine of at least 10,000 Fr.

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March 1905. I would like to thank Espen Waehle from the national Museum in Copenhagen for information concerning several Scandinavians.

<sup>21</sup> In 1899 Arthur de Henau (1871 - 6 September 1901) became director of transit post in Brazzaville. He set off on 20 July 1899. At that time he had six years experience in the armed forces of Congo Free State. (Aix-en-Provence: Gabon, XV, 22. Graty to the Ministry of Colonies, 12.09.1899). For a biography cf. *Biographie coloniale belge* (1958, t. V).

<sup>22</sup> They were called *touroucoux*, meaning armed men or guards in the pay of the company.

<sup>23</sup> The complete text in S.O.M., AEF, Concessions XXXVIII. Copy made by Butel.

7. The Company could break the contract in case the employee ill-treated the natives. The same went for disobedience, in which case the Company was bound to pay a second-class return ticket.

8. Agents who managed a rubber factory also received 75 Fr. per 1,000 kilos of harvested rubber and 150 Fr. per 1,000 kilos of ivory. Sub-agents and accountants could receive a bi-annual gratification for good services. Gratifications and indemnities were only paid at the end of the term upon the return to Europe.

9. The company could tear up the contract any time it deemed necessary.

#### 4.3. Export, import and profits

Tables 2 and 3 show export details by Customs and the value of imported goods for the Mpoko and Brazzaville concessions.

As goods were also purchased locally in Brazzaville, there is a different way to assess the concession companies' imported goods there in the period 1899-1907, as shown in Table 4.<sup>24</sup>

Year	Ivory in kilos			Rubber in kilos		
	Mpoko Concession	Mpoko Brazzaville <sup>25</sup>	Total	Mpoko Concession	Mpoko Brazzaville	Total
1903	8,122		8,122	14,777		14,777
1904	7,445		7,445	84,928		84,928
1905	3,081	2,975	6,056	81,755	4,734	86,489
1906	996	3,339	4,335	58,249	8,109	66,358
1907	1,640	423	2,063	42,827	9,165	51,992
Total	21,284	6,737	28,021	282,536	22,008	304,544

TABLE 2: EXPORT DETAILS BY CUSTOMS<sup>26</sup>

<sup>24</sup> S.O.M., AEF, Concessions XXXVIII. Data of Vranckx handed to Butel on 19 September 1907. There was an official circular from 1901 that allowed taken women and children as hostages if the men refused to work (Roberts, 1963, 354).

<sup>25</sup> For 1901 and 1902 there are no Customs export figures, but only the collected export custom toll. For 1901: 2,551.42 Fr. and for 1902: 10,386.40 Fr. According to the company data 860 kilo of ivory was harvested in 1901 and no rubber; 1902: 512 kilo of ivory and 775 of rubber.

<sup>26</sup> S.O.M., AEF, Concessions XXXVIII, A.P.



Year	Value in French Francs
1900	28,957
1901	78,442
1902	117,786
1903	96,648
1904	138,920
1905	190,260
1906	520,477
1907	(until 30 September) 190,206
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,361,696</b>

TABLE 3: VALUE OF IMPORTED GOODS IN MPOKO, ACCORDING TO CUSTOMS

Year	Weight in kilo	Monetary value in Fr.
1899/1900	great quantities for vitalizing and site mobilization	
1901	12,702	4,059,439
1902	16,990	5,677,060
1903	18,958	5,187,800
1904	111,378	32,141,607
1905	171,835	49,261,516
1906	252,729	116,410,845
1907 (1 to 23 Jan.)	9,121	4,752,900
<b>Total</b>	<b>593,713</b>	<b>217,491,167</b>

TABLE 4: VALUE OF IMPORTED GOODS IN BRAZZAVILLE, 1899-1907

Remark: the discrepancy between the European and native pay is a fact. Hard facts over this are difficult to find in the concession companies. Therefore, the figures for Mpoko are given as such without knowing the exact number of natives. In September 1905, the budget for food for two Europeans of the Bosakata post in the northern zone was 433.42 Fr., that for the natives 293.73 Fr. The salary of the zone manager was 600 Fr. and that of agent Quennepoix 310 Fr. The pay for the natives was together 708 Fr. For the whole of 1906, the value of the barter merchandise of all the Mpoko posts for rubber and ivory was slightly higher than the total remuneration and bonuses of the European agents.

### 4.3.1. Guns and munitions and the rubber yield

First a global view is given of the number of guns in Mpoko on 1 November 1907.<sup>27</sup> These data are important because there is a constant correlation between guns and the use of cartridges and bullets on the one side, and yields in rubber on the other side. This becomes clear when discussing the unique figure material of the Yaka post. The figure material for Salanga under Vranckx has been published (Coquery-Vidrovitch, 1972, 181).

There were altogether 196 guns (model 874) and 4,635 cartridges in the thirteen factories. This means that there were about 8 to 24 guns per post. Every post also had hunting rifles and some tens of shells and had the use of a revolver with 10 to 30 bullets. Only Bobolo had 444 bullets. The head post Bimbo had 12 revolvers and 1,920 bullets.

#### The Yaka post

The Yaka post has left us some unique figures from 1903 until and inclusive of 1907, of which details appear in Appendix. Its uniqueness is double: munitions use by armed Europeans and native supervisors and the rubber yield; and the correlation between rubbers delivered, payments in Fr. and in piston guns, capsules and powder to the chiefs and harvesters. Table 5 gives us an insight into the correlation between rubber yields and ammunition usage.

Year	Production in Kilo Dried Rubber	Cartridges	Shells	Powder in Grams
1903	6,845	384	170	900
1904	19,900	2,813	606	5,500
1905	18,270	2,694	703	8,750
1906	13,095	1,610	495	4,700
1907	1,645	454	30	1,200

TABLE 5: YAKA – USAGE BY ARMED EUROPEANS AND NATIVES

Remark: The drop in usage during 1906 and 1907 was due to revolts and the Butel enquiry.

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<sup>27</sup> S.O.M., AEF, Concessions XXXVIII, passim.

Details of the rewards of the chiefs and/or harvesters as read in Appendix teach us the following. Powder, shells and piston guns were given to the chiefs mainly to put pressure on nearby villages to harvest the rubber. The chiefs committed themselves to make available to the Company harvesters, who would be paid certain compensation. One contract survived. Chief M'pa from the Bokomo promised to supply twenty rubber harvesters to the service of the Mpoko Company, and they were supposed to produce weekly a minimum of thirty kilos of non-dried rubber. The price was fixed at 0.40 Fr. per kilo of rubber and 0.08 Fr. for the chief. In the original document there was first mention of 0.32 and 0.08 Fr. One must observe that money never changed hands, that valuation and payment was in kind. The document was signed by the post manager Ganty in Yaka and dated 1 August 1905.

Year	Kilos Dried Rubber	Piston Guns	Shells	Powder in Grams
1903	6,845	6	270	3,600
1904	19,900	15	685	8,300
1905	18,270	1	1,310	8,750
1906	12,095	0	335	3,100
1907	1,645	0	0	0

TABLE 6: YAKA – PAYMENTS TO CHIEFS AND/OR HARVESTERS

From 1906 onwards, piston guns were seized during the judicial enquiry as the natives were not allowed to receive them as reward. Production fell to nothing in 1907.

#### 4.4. Profits from Mpoko<sup>28</sup>

There were 20,000 shares of 100 Fr. and 20,000 preferential shares. Profit was distributed as follows: 15 percent for the government, 10 percent for the Board, with the remaining shares divided among share capital holders (75%) and preferential shareholders (25%). As Table 7 indicates, the first time there was profit was in 1904.

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<sup>28</sup>. Only some data are mentioned here. A comprehensive study requires an examination in the archives of the *Crédit Lyonnais* which has preserved all balance sheets.

Year	Profit	Dividend
1904	first year with profit	10 Fr. per share of 100 Fr. (worth 250 Fr. on the free market at that moment)
1905	539,880.20 Fr	Distribution of 6,750 Fr. coupons and 49,636.5 Fr. Rights issue
1906	403,511.40 Fr	coupon of 10 Fr. to the share holders and 1.66 2/3 to the preferential share holders
1907-1909	no data found	
1910-1911	289,855.25 Fr <sup>29</sup>	share coupon: 21.20 Fr. net
	421,267.75 Fr <sup>30</sup>	coupon preferential shares: 5.30 Fr. net

TABLE 7: PROFITS FROM MPOKO BY YEAR (COQUERY-VIDROVITCH, 1972, 177)

The Mpoko coupons could be cashed in Paris, Antwerp or Brussels. In 1910 Mpoko's title was declared lapsed because of the committed crimes. On 21 February 1911, Mpoko went into liquidation, which ended on 21 February 1914. Profits during liquidation came mainly from the sale of 22,000 shares Mpoko had acquired in the 'Compagnie Forestière Sangha Oubangui', which netted 1,521,926 Fr. Thus Mpoko shareholders received a final dividend of 7.80 Fr., and the preferential shareholders a net coupon of 8.20 Fr.

## 5. FURTHER CLARIFICATION ON HARVESTING METHODS

### 5.1. Introduction

Schiötz, the then director of Mpoko, reported on 10 May 1906 that a rebellion had started among the people of Lessé, and he demanded the quick occupation of this territory in the Mpoko concession by the French administration.<sup>31</sup> On 1 June, captain Desclaux, commanding officer of the Moyen-

<sup>29</sup>. The net profit in 1910-1911.

<sup>30</sup>. Money in an interim account in 1910-1911.

<sup>31</sup>. Archives Aix-en-Provence. Contrôle des Concessions. Brazzaville, 15.11.1909. Note. Affaires dites de la M'Poko. Exposition des faits. Enquêtes de MM. Guibet et Michellet. Confidentiel. This 25 pages memorandum was handed to the *procureur* of the Republic on his own request.

Oubangui, wrote to the commissaire général in Brazzaville that the rebellion was growing and that immediate and strong measures were required. "These attacks by the natives are reprisals against the armed workers from the concession company who from the beginning have shown the least human procedures".

In October 1906 (one year after the Brazza Commission had been there) an inspection trip to Bangui was made by Governor-General Gentil, and he sensed the necessity of occupying the area that up to now had escaped any form of control because of its geographical situation and the shortage of military in the local administration. He therefore created by decree dated 22 November the 'Cercle de la Mpoko', with the deputy administrator Guibet as director. Guibet in turn was ordered to build a residence in Bimbo, the Mpoko headquarters. He built a house sixty yards away from that of Mpoko director Schiötz, who immediately called upon him to protest, as the Ministry of Colonies in Paris had promised that the civil service would not interfere in the affairs of the Company. Schiötz boasted his political connections and offered Guibet an envelope with money, but Guibet did not take the bribe (Coquery-Vidrovitch, 1972, 178). At that very moment the chief of Boukiri (in Mpoko) complained to Guibet about the atrocities in his village because of rubber harvesting.

Guibet alerted the judicial authorities in January 1907, and soon Guibet and twenty soldiers were accompanying Butel, who was in charge of the inspection and was accompanied in turn by his deputy Gillon and Judge Michelet. After a couple of months, Michelet sentenced the Mpoko agent Darney to two years of imprisonment for the murder of one of Darney's bearers. They scoured the concession during the first semester of 1907.

Butel wrote various extensive reports that arrived at the Ministry of Colonies in Paris. The complete file weighed 11.95 kilos and contained 23 dossiers and 900 documents. The summary indicted 236 persons, 17 of whom were Europeans.<sup>32</sup> Of that total, about 80 natives and just a couple of Europeans

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<sup>32</sup> What follows is based on the reports of Butel and the several hundreds of testimonials in the files. Report by Butel 3 August and 19 November 1907. In S.O.M., AEF, Concessions XXXVIII, A (2). In 1908 the condition of Europeans involved in lawsuit in Mpoko was as follows: Bouvier, Castelein, Collier, Delvoie, Flébus, Saily, Ganty, Linsen, Dendoncker, Schiötz, Havequez, Deguitre, Vande(n)perre, Wolf and Vranckx had all returned to Europe. Meanwhile, Darney, who had been previously sentenced and who had served his time, had also returned to Europe. Only Guittet and Guittard remained in the French Congo. The French authorities did not know the whereabouts of Faure and Pierlot. Schiötz was charged later than

were in custody. In the southern zone alone there were 1,500 probable murders and 667 (sic)<sup>33</sup> established murders: 106 in Salanga, 283 in Sabokiry, Yambourou and Bimbo, and 275 in Yaka, all posts not thirty km from the Bimbo headquarters where Schiötz resided.<sup>34</sup> The figures were identical for the northern zone. These murders were committed without exception by armed men (*touroucous*) in service of the Company and with the cognizance of the Europeans. There is no way that the Company could not be aware of this. The impounded correspondence between Schiötz and Lund indicates that both were in the know.

This special system worked as follows: "at dawn the factory men beat the tom-tom to call the workers from the villages. Those who did not turn up at roll-call or those who had underperformed the day before were ruthlessly punished. Whippings in front of other workers brought a better sense of duty to all. In case this form of punishment was not stimulating enough, the *touroucous* tied the culprit to a tree and shot him. The *touroucous* drove the labour to the plantation after roll-call and inspection of the previous day's work and were merciless for who did not perform. On Sunday the rubber was taken to the factory and paid for in kind to the value of 0.40 to 0.50 Fr. per kilo". Butel put it as follows: "crime had become a system and was performed in cold blood and chosen from a catalogue of coercion methods according to what was seen to be the most productive".

## 5.2. Mpoko's ups and downs in rubber and ivory

Bar some exceptions, most purchases of rubber or ivory were conducted whilst supplying piston guns or shells and gunpowder to the native chiefs. These transactions were neatly recorded in the monthly returns that the investigators managed to see and copy after a lot of insistence. The company could not pretend further that the shells and guns only served for the personal protection of its agents.

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those 17, but I have not found more precise information. In other letters 27 persons are mentioned. This is probably due to the fact that other persons were charged after those 17, among whom Schiötz.

<sup>33</sup> 667 according to the archives instead of 664 if the other numbers are correct in the archives.

<sup>34</sup> Confidential letter of 15 November 1909 from the inspector of the concessions to the *procureur* of the Republic, in which he quoted Butel.

From the beginning of the occupation of the concession there had been violence. Schiötz, when first reconnoitring in 1899 and accompanied by one or two agents, amongst whom was Delvoie, steamed up the Mpoko River and was enthusiastically welcomed at the first contact with the villagers, who brought him and his escort food. Schiötz at this first contact immediately demanded that the natives bring rubber, and he refused to hear any excuses. When he returned to Bimbo, the company's headquarters, he left Delvoie behind in Konga to start and run a factory.

First Delvoie threatened to put the village chiefs into chains if they did not supply a number of workers to harvest rubber under escort of armed instructors. This did not seem very efficient, so Delvoie introduced the system of direct production through the villages themselves. He ordered an armed gang of Haussas to go to Bombele in the Burusse area and force the natives to harvest rubber. This gave no results, so Delvoie ordered the *touroucou*s to take female hostages and shoot any natives who tried to oppose this.

Delvoie set an example himself by killing two women and also a child by flogging with a whip. The *touroucou*s then went to Bombele to take four women hostage and kill two men whose arms they cut off as proof for Delvoie. The four women hostages were tortured the same day by Delvoie, by whipping, and then shot with his revolver. The same happened in Bimbo, where the natives refused to deliver rubber; eight natives were killed of which five were taken to Delvoie. All were butchered and given to the Konga natives to eat.

Another example is just as characteristic: Delvoie launched, in agreement with Schiötz according to hearsay, an expedition with thirty armed men carrying modern rifles and twenty partisans from the Konga carrying piston guns when one of his guides was killed in N'Dobo. Pierlot, another agent of the first hour, joined the expedition. Six natives were killed. Delvoie had them decapitated and took the heads to Konga, from where they were brought the next day to Schiötz in Bimbo. The partisans from Konga, who were cannibals, got the bodies. Delvoie thereafter was called to Bangui because the families of the Bombele murdered appealed to the administrator. Delvoie left for Brazzaville, probably in 1903, because his name does not appear on the personnel list of 1904. Nothing is found in the archives about censure, probably because of lack of proof. Delvoie probably was advised to leave the colony.

Some agents would 'surpass' even Delvoie. The same working methods were used all over Mpoko: expeditions against villages, followed by murder and more or less long-time hostage-taking of women. After an initial period in 1902, the systematic organization to harvest rubber was intensified. Armed men were stationed in practically every village, and women were taken prisoner and hostages and released in scanty measure against the supply of rubber – after being abused by the armed men stationed in the villages and by the Europeans. Corporal punishment and murder were daily fare. The female hostages were forced to work on the roads and on the plantations. Children also were put to work to cut the rubber for drying. The men were not only put to harvesting but also had to carry the rubber where the rivers were too shallow to the guarded transit posts, and others were made to row.

Practically all the *touroucoux* – there were about 400 in the heyday of Mpoko – killed natives because of rubber. When the villagers fled and refused to harvest rubber, they were taken prisoner or shot. Their womenfolk were taken hostage until sufficient rubber was brought in. The whites condoned this and replaced any ammunition expended for rubber collection. If ammunition was used for other purposes and the chiefs complained to the white agent, the black men of arms were whipped and transferred to another post. The above procedures were common practice and were applied with a certain severity according to the temperament of the European factory boss. To increase the yield in distant villages, some chiefs were given permission to wage war upon their neighbours and were promised piston guns and shells in return. The attacking chief could gather thus his own booty.

Butel stated in a report that the claim of legal self-defence invoked by the agents was untenable.

One sees that it is the agents themselves that attack the natives and that the natives are so pacific that a handful of gunmen suffice to spread terror in the area; that the production is maintained by means of murder and hostage-taking without a general uprising and without a reaction of the population against this violence, bar some isolated attacks on the killers, and even this is reprisal from the natives against the armed company employees, who are always the first proceed in the most inhuman way.

Vranckx, who succeeded Schiötz as director in 1907, together with a couple of European agents demanded, as head of post in Salanga (southern zone), the greatest efforts from the natives. As Table 8 indicates, he succeeded in harvesting a monthly average of 6,716 kilos of fresh rubber from the end of



1903 to June 1904, with a population of some ten hamlets and twenty-one chiefs. This equals 4,483 kilos of dried rubber (drying losses count for one third); in the first half of 1904 he had a total of 40,300 kilos, 26,900 kilos dried, for which was paid 11,742 Fr. This came to 0.29 Fr. for wet and 0.43 Fr. for dried prime quality rubber.

	Jan.	Feb.	Mar.	Apr.	May	Jun.	Total
Albini	30	80	100	100	80	20	410
Gras	10	30	50	60			150
Marga				20		20	40
Revolver				15		15	30
Total	40	110	150	195	80	55	630

TABLE 8: VRANCKX'S MONTHLY HARVEST

One cannot forget that payment was, for a large part, in hugely overvalued cloth, which was supplied by the Gratry Company. A thrifty worker could collect a kilo of rubber in four days. The production required without fail eight hundred to one thousand workers, probably the entire population of working age (Coquery-Vidrovitch, 1972, 182).

In all villages supplying Salanga, men were killed and women were continuously taken hostage under instructions from Vranckx and his successors Flébus and Dendoncker.

These practices were clearly part of a system. The same procedures were applied everywhere. The same hostage method had been practiced by the Anversoise and the ABIR rubber companies in Leopold's Congo and his personal Crown Domain.

Butel surmised that it would stand to reason that a so small an area like Salanga, only counting twenty or so villages and having harvested in three years time 100,000 kilos of dried rubber, would have enriched itself with the produce of their forced labour for the Mpoko company. On the contrary. When Butel arrived in Salanga from Bobassa, a village on the Ubangi river that had escaped the rubber slavery, he was painfully surprised. While the Bobassa population had been well-dressed in cotton loincloths and easily paid up their State tax, the Salanga population was still clothed in bark. The first lot had plenty of chickens and big banana groves; the Salanga had nothing. Since the raids by the Europeans and their armed gangs, they had been robbed of poultry and goats. It was impossible for them to tend food

crops, because the men were forced to harvest rubber non stop and often far away from their fields, and the women were forced to mend the roads or were continuously incarcerated in the factories as hostage to ensure the rubber supply. They thus became dependent for their food supply on the river villages like Bobassa, which managed to escape the rubber draft by calling upon the administration in Bangui for protection. The cotton loincloths and trinkets the Salanga received for the 100 tons of rubber they supplied for the Company were just enough to keep them from starvation during those three years. In some places, as doctor Doumenjou, who accompanied Judge Michelet in the aforementioned Darney case observed, the natives were forced to eat the trunks of the banana trees. In Leopold's Congo, the natives refer to the ABIR, the Anversoise and the Crown Domain rubber period as that of the 'big starvation'.

In the end, the natives went to Bangui to complain to Guibet and ask for a couple of months of postponement of rubber harvesting in order to tend their fields. From then onwards the rubber production declined, a trend that had started already in 1905 because of the progressive disappearance of rubber trees and vines.

A couple of months later, Butel was on the steamer to Brazzaville together with administrator Guibet. He overheard Schiötz, the Mpoko director, reproaching Guibet for having given the natives of Salanga permission to plant new fields. Schiötz added: "As soon as the natives have food they will not harvest rubber any more".

To calculate the decline in population is a difficult task; French Congo until the thirties, and really until independence, remained a neglected area as to investments, education and so on. In the intensely exploited rubber areas, I estimate the decline in population from late 1890 to 1930 at considerably more than 20 percent, 30 percent or more to be more realistic.<sup>35</sup> The following elements played a part: the carrying, the rowing (an extremely heavy task), the harvesting of the rubber, the hostage-taking, the expelling of the

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<sup>35</sup> This remains a difficult matter, but in the otherwise excellent study by Sautter (1966) there are large gaps as far as demography is concerned. Sautter knew too little of the early history and he consulted too few archives. He could not have read Coquery-Vidrovitch (1972) and Kalck (1974). His monographs of five regions in this study do not mention analogous rubber regions such as Mpoko and no regions north of Bangui where recruitment of carriers for Tchad literally decimated the population. Consequently, Sautter has underestimated the impact on demography.

natives from their villages, the destruction of the crops and the shooting of thousands – even in a small concession like Mpoko, with few European agents (their numbers rose from ten in 1900 to thirty in 1907). Traditional society was dislocated. Sleeping sickness and smallpox combined with malnutrition and privation, and abortion – mentioned here and there in the archives – took their toll.

### 5.3. A look behind the scenes: the private correspondence between Schiötz and Lund

The private correspondence (7 July 1906 - 8 April 1907) between Schiötz and Lund, the head responsible man in the northern zone, is most instructive. It provides an overview of their realization of the dramatic demise of the Company and helps us understand the defensive stance before the Court of seventeen (one source speaks of twenty-seven) agents against whom warrants of arrest were issued.<sup>36</sup>

This correspondence, conducted in Norwegian, was seized on 1 August 1907 – the morning Lund committed suicide. The translation under oath was made by Svendson, probably Hjalmar Svendson, a Danish shipwright working for Mpoko. This correspondence is summarized chronologically in the subsequent paragraphs.

In July 1906, Lund reported the Boyili incident, where the natives captured guns. Schiötz regretted this and hoped that Lund would retrieve them.

"Be careful on the left bank, because you'll have to do with people who killed one or two dozen men from the *Maison Hollandaise* (N.A.H.V. – Nieuw Afrikaanse Handels Vennootschap) and were punished by the Krebedje administrator. They are not very eager to become the white man's friend."

On 25 July 1906, Schiötz wrote that the Mpoko business was below expectations. Europe sent sub-standard personnel, and agent Dendoncker had returned home: there was a shortfall of 5,000 kilos of rubber in his store.<sup>37</sup> There were goods missing to the tune of 8,000 to 9,000 Fr. with the French agent Dickson, who was employed in 1905 and 1906.

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<sup>36</sup>. S.O.M., AEF, Concessions XXXVIII. Copie de la traduction des lettres de Schiötz à Lund par Swensen (sic), capitaine du 'Commandant Lang'.

<sup>37</sup>. Did he sell it for hard money to the *Maison Hollandaise*?

In Baba, 500 kilos of rubber were set alight.

Concerning Lund's report about Bodera, Schiötz did not quite understand that if he undertook a trip nothing happened and that a palaver started as soon the two boys arrived (probably agents Wolf and Deguitre). Now follows a very important passage in Schiötz's letter:

"We have no right to 'dispense' justice or to make ourselves respected. We have to content ourselves with 'lawful self-defence'. As such, no report should mention attacks but only defence. Words as *tirailleurs* and *sentinelles* [guards] and 'subdue the chiefs' etc. should be avoided in reports. Use the word *worker* or *guard* instead of *manduko* [armed worker] and never use the word *bassendji* [term of abuse for a native], as in Europe one thinks it refers to a tribe. Compile as many reports as possible on attacks by the natives and explain that, after your efforts in vain to avoid violence, you had to resort to the use of weapons to save the factory and your personnel. Do not forget that any loose word can be used against somebody in this country. Don't trust anybody. I paid a heavy price in these matters (probably in the Congo Free State)".

The recommendations sent by Schiötz to Lund did not fall on deaf ears, as will appear later on in the records of the interrogation of the agents who consistently maintained they were attacked and never took the initiative themselves.

On 29 October 1906, Schiötz sent another letter from Bimbo. He complained about the poor situation in 'zone 3':

"Because of the interference of the Bangui administrator, the chiefs refuse to harvest rubber. Instead of 3 to 4 tons of ivory there are barely 2 tons in three factories. It goes badly everywhere. All hope lying on the northern zone. I'm expecting six agents. In Baba the administrator interfered and the rubber harvest has already fallen to a third from the quantities before. I wrote to the administration in Bangui on 18 October threatening the whole evacuation of zone 3. I have not received a reply yet".

On 2 November 1906, Schiötz wrote again a very hard letter to the administrator and expected to receive an answer this time. Schiötz expected in a letter to Lund dated 11 November that there would be an inspection, because the situation had become untenable. "Very soon we will be considered as beings inferior to the blacks". Schiötz also did not forget to give practical advice:

"Do not forget that small posts (where armed guards were) are not allowed. Call them agricultural posts where it is normal to have an armed guard. So if you create a small post, create at the same time a pro forma rubber plantation, however small,

it does not matter. Consistently call them agricultural posts and therefore require armed guards. Take care that your white and black employees do not molest the natives. There is no question yet of a trip to Baba, the inspection is still investigating in the Lobaye concession. If agent Havequez does not change his brutal manner I will have to fire him. Havequez is not allowed to send out his men any more, as they cannot do so without shooting. I do not want to hear about the amount of ammunitions he uses. Havequez wrote me about two labourers killed by the natives, but people in Bimbo told me it was Havequez who did the killing. To be investigated".

Apparently Lund did not warn his white subordinates strongly enough or they did not take his remarks seriously enough, because on 22 January Quennepoix wrote to Lund from Bossakala:

"Because chief Cagla did not cooperate I have sent Maromani to take a couple of specimens of the opposite sex prisoner. Maromani has not returned to his station yet and I will place him there in March, because the whole of next month I will be waking up the villages in the west (who did not supply enough or no rubber at all). Once the cleanup finished I will install three new posts with armed men".

Instead of Lund or Schiötz, it was Butel who did the investigation. The results are summarized here before continuing to discuss the Schiötz/Lund correspondence. Havequez had Chief Kadouma of Bodera flogged and beaten to death. Chief Schimaschi, who had refused to supply bearers to carry Havequez sedan-chair, was shot along with two other people. On the same occasion Havequez himself shot and killed a native with his revolver. The situation did not improve when Deguire succeeded agent Havequez. Deguire took the station in March 1907, and, in July 1907 when Butel came, he boasted seven expeditions, a couple of which Lund attended. Fifty-five natives were killed, including seven children and fifteen grownups, in revenge for the slaying of one *touroucou*. In the seventh expedition, which took eleven days, every village they passed was raided for people (twenty dead), goats and chickens.

Schiötz had reason to be displeased with Havequez' reports: "I want to hear nothing more of armed patrols in the villages". Schiötz finished this letter by mentioning that Bobichon (the French administrator) had written to him that the director would be held responsible for the behaviour of his agents and that the shootings had to stop. In a last recommendation, Schiötz advised Lund to not forget that the natives still had guns stolen from the Maison Hollandaise and warned that it was up to him to be sure that no shells fell into their hands.

In January 1907, Schiötz reported that the rubber harvest for 1906 was 55 tons, less the 5 tons missing with Dendoncker and the 500 kilos burned at Baba. This was 20 tons less than in 1905. He had just received a telegram from Europe that stated: "We are relying on a great effort for this year". He further wrote that 1907 would be better if they were not frustrated by the administration and if Europe sent him capable people. "They have to stop putting all the blame on the director".

On 9 February 1907, Schiötz again wrote to Lund:

"Since the appointment of an administrator as commander of the 'Cercle de la Mpoko', things will not improve. The case of Kongabuka means that a lot of our armed people have been interrogated. The interrogation in Bokiri has led to the whites (amongst others Saily and Flébus) being acquitted supposedly because of lack of proof. This was in reality because of ministerial pressure from Paris, for reasons of state according to administrator Guibet, that no convictions followed. The man Kongabuka had committed 30 murders according to Guibet.<sup>38</sup> This can become a disgusting affair for the company. Believe me, it is not always a joke being director of Mpoko".

A next letter followed on 16 March:

"The half caste I am sending you [probably Marc Hamac, an independent planter who had worked in Leopold's Crown Domain and who had just been recruited by Schiötz] received an annual salary of 2,400 Fr. and an annual indemnity of 1,800 Fr., but no percentage on the produce. I think it will be a good harvest. I am going to visit the concession company La Bretonne (taken over by Mpoko) and the northern zone after that and I hope to return to Europe on 30 April or 21 May. Bolle, the head of personnel in Europe, has asked me to come back for one term. I have not made my mind up yet, but it probably will be a short stay to allow Vranckx to take some leave. I will write before I leave to make sure that you arrive in Broy (Norway) at the same time as myself. I am expecting a lot of problems with the Congolese administration. I wish I was home because this is starting to get on my nerves. Nevertheless I am feeling not bad and I am weighing 88 2/10 kilo".

On 8 April, Schiötz writes his last letter to Lund to tell him that he probably would nominate him as Mpoko's representative for the delimitation of the northwest of the concession, the only unnatural border. He also mentioned

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<sup>38</sup> Kongabuka, originating from Leopold's Congo, worked for Mpoko as an armed guard. AEF 8/Q 64. letter 56b 1906: "Au début de l'année 1906 Lund arriva. Les tueries (après Sydney, Quinquempoix, Deguitre et Wolf) loin de cesser ne font qu'augmenter à Bossakala". Follows a whole page with the exploits of Lund until June 1907 when the commission was already in the (head office) Bimbo since March.

the fierce arguments with administrator Guibet, who was very friendly afterwards. There follows underlined:

"Unfortunately he threatened to make a trip to the north. I hope he will not do so. I will have you and Vranckx warned in any case. I am now on my way to the homeland (Europe) and am leaving here in two days".

On 25 July, agent Wolf wrote from his post Bosakala to Lund, who was residing in Bongangolo, to inform him that administrator Guibet was on inspection. Wolf had just returned after establishing a new factory 42 km west from Bosakala:

"The rubber harvest is progressing well but the Board of enquiry is arriving. It left Baba on 18 July and is now in Boyombi. It is possible that they come to Bongangolo. The natives tell me that they interrogated the chiefs in the neighbourhood of Baba about the number of dead in their villages. One chief spoke of 24, another of 28, and when one chief said none at all, he was accused of lying by Guibet. Our armed men were also interrogated if the rubber had been paid for, if people were whipped and if women were taken hostage".

Lund received a letter in July 1907 from inspector Butel of the local inspectorate with a whole list of questions. Lund replied to this letter on the 31st with the following:

"Since the establishment of Bongangolo until and including the 25th of July 1907, goods worth 7,596 were distributed. In 1906, 944 Fr. were paid for 1,370 kilos of rubber. In 1907 this amount was 3,289 Fr. for 5,325 kilos. To establish the post, 80 cartridges for Gras guns were used, and 171 in total for this year until 11 January 1907. 117 cartridges were used in the first half of 1907: 18 for game shooting, the balance in conflicts with the natives".

This was Lund's last letter. Together with agent Montvert he finished a half a bottle of brandy, and each went to sleep in one's own house. Wolf found a dying Lund the next day. Help was of no avail. They found two recently opened vials of laudanum. Lund had committed suicide to escape his imminent arrest, which was bound to follow based on the facts unearthed by the inspection and that clearly pointed the finger at him.<sup>39</sup> Butel arrived earlier than Lund had expected. Butel immediately found and impounded the correspondence between Schiötz and Lund.

Montvert was interviewed on 4 August. He testified that every time a village would not cooperate, *i.e.*, whenever the rubber harvest diminished, Lund

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<sup>39</sup> S.O.M., AEF, Concessions XXXVIII. Butel. Rapport de tournée, 03.08.1907.

regularly would take women prisoner. The women were held for two weeks on average and were released only when the rubber production rose. The women were put in chains for the first two to three days and had to work. They received rations and were not beaten. Montvert confirmed when questioned that Lund knew the Boffe post and its surroundings outside the Mpoko territory. "He did not want to occupy them but sent armed gangs to ensure the output". The women prisoners in Bobatoa who had been there already for a week and a half were released one week before Butel's arrival even though the villages had not delivered any rubber. The news of Butel's arrival had provoked their freeing.

There were in fact exactly three men and two children prisoner and four women of which two were breastfeeding newly borne. They were shackled and stayed with the armed guards. Montvert knew that two of the women had been raped. Next to the hostages there were heaps of weapons, arrows and shields seized and put to the torch. "Under Lund even the armed men received corporal punishment (whippings) in a regular fashion", said Montvert, "frequently twenty-five lashes, sometimes only fifteen".

Butel once marched 55 km in one-and-one-half days to prevent the natives whom he wished to interrogate from being bribed to give false statements by the agents. Butel did a thorough job. On 19 November 1907 he wrote:

"Everywhere were witness statements thoroughly checked, minutely and surrounded by all guarantees, out of precaution for a press campaign as for the immense stakes involved".<sup>40</sup>

Butel wrote on 6 August to Wolf that he noticed that shells had been sold to the chiefs and that stolen goats had been returned to the chiefs because he was coming to inspect.

"I am bound to impound the shells and the piston guns that were given to the chiefs and were asked to be returned in view of my inspection. These guns were introduced in the colony exclusively for the protection of the agents and company posts. Under no circumstances could they be put at the disposal of native chiefs as reward for the continuous supply of rubber".

Wolf answered that he had 'bought' forty goats in the villages. On the 65-km-long road between Baba and Bossakala there were no more villages, only ruins. The villages had moved to more tranquil areas.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> S.O.M., AEF, Concessions XXXVIII, A2.



Schiötz had left just in time for Europe. The opinion of inspector Butel was devastating. Schiötz carried a crushing responsibility, as was established during the debates in a complete and unquestionable manner.<sup>42</sup> Butel therefore renewed his request to have the Mpoko concession terminated. Butel put in the summary of his voluminous report that in some three years 667 people were killed in the southern zone of Mpoko alone, in the immediate neighbourhood of Schiötz's headquarters. The names or the numbers of the killed in the other zones remains unknown. It is proven beyond doubt that the company was aware of the murders, however, because whilst reporting, the agents every time spoke about armed expeditions for the rubber and because there was a direct correlation between the number of armed men and rubber output. This is formulated in a typically terse fashion by the commissaire général *ad interim* of French Congo and borrowed from a monthly report by Lund of September 1903: "The more men with guns, the more rubber".

It was clear that the Company was in breach of Article 31 of the *Cahiers de charges* for concession companies. This article states that notice of termination can be served if the Company, whilst running the concession, in this case for rubber and ivory, uses means considered against the public order.

## 6. JUSTICE AND THE RESULTS OF THE BUTEL ENQUIRY

Flébus was apprehended in 1907 and placed under arrest on a warrant from the judge in Bangui. Saily escaped, and the warrant was sent to France.<sup>43</sup> In Brazzaville, however, the prosecutor released Flébus after interrogation under bail of 9,000 Fr. Flébus and Saily were accused of illegal detentions and

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<sup>41</sup>. Butel. Bimbo (20 October 1907). *Compte-rendu de tournée de la région de Bossakala*. AEF 8/Q 64 letter 56b: "Au début de l'année 1906 Lund arriva. Les tueries (après Sidney, Quinquempoix, Deguitre et Wolf) loin de cesser ne font qu'augmenter à Bossakala"; Follows a whole page with the exploits of Lund until June 1907 when the commission was already in the (head office) Bimbo since March.

<sup>42</sup>. Quoted in a memorandum added to the letter of 16 July 1908 to the director of Political and Administrative Affairs. Ministry of Colonies. Paris. The memorandum dealt with the project for the expiry of the Mpoko concession.

<sup>43</sup>. The native terms are telling. Ganty: "je m'en fous". A phrase he used when chiefs complained. Vandenperre (whether he was related to a director I do not know): "Guitambi", the cry of pain of people he had tortured. The Frenchman Fery: "Matabiche pour toi", words he said when he hits his boys. Saily: "Mamoassa", a small rodent that attacks chickens. Lund: "Mbongo", small.

sequestration. In a decision of the criminal court on 11 January 1908, both were acquitted. All the charged natives received five years of custody up to twenty years of hard labour (the man Kongabuka). The acquittal of both Europeans was an attempt at a cover-up by highly placed people in Brazzaville and Paris. There had been major pressure to have the Mpoko case dismissed and let the Europeans simply return home. On 30 September 1907, the business of the northern zone of Mpoko was communicated to the then president of the French Republic, to the State council and to the minister of the Interior by the Minister of Colonies. As soon as Judge Michelet heard of the acquittal of the two Europeans, he asked for his own repatriation.

The five of Mpoko charged at a later stage – Vranckx, Ganty, Wolf, Guittet and Guitard – also were let out on bail. The first three left immediately for Europe upon advice of the Medical Council dated 11 July 1908. The Governor-General *ad interim* wrote to the head of the justice department in Brazzaville on 1 September 1908:

"It appears from the analyses of different documents that the procedure [about the Europeans charged in connection with Mpoko] that has been followed was in the spirit of extreme tolerance towards the accused. Amongst those that returned there were genuine cases of ill health. The file does not inform us if they were sufficiently sick to justify this measure. The other accused were taken under arrest from Bangui to Brazzaville where they got bail in August. It is impossible to glean from the file if a commission of enquiry was sent to France to interrogate those who left".

This diplomatic language is in fact a strong indictment of the head of Justice. He was indeed hiding behind a load of excuses. But the Governor-General *ad interim* only could regret that a case with 667 proven murders and 1,500 probable murders in one zone was not conducted with more method and at a faster pace. "I will report this to the ministry". Commissaire général Martineau wrote on 28 May to the Minister of Colonies amongst others:

"In name of thousands of murdered natives I demand justice. And I have too much confidence in your sense of Justice, Minister, to know that you will find a formula which will reconcile this principle with that of the needs of colonization. This confidence in the minister proved to be misplaced".

Judge Michelet also wrote to the president of the court after the acquittal of Saily and Flébus:

"I will not conceal that I find the verdict by the criminal court in Brazzaville disgusting. The acquittal of those two Europeans accused of being accessories to

murder, together with the punishments meted out against the *touroucou* has left an extremely painful impression and has provoked genuine censure".<sup>44</sup>

Cougoul, head of the justice department, wrote an extensive report on 27 July 1908 upon request from his minister. A couple of sentences of this report make us aware of the reality:

"If in France there was one hundredth of the cruelty perpetrated like that in Mpoko, there would be such indignation that it would stop short any sympathy for the accused... Does one want at random any incident from the file?"

He continues in his letter.

"Take the boy of a *touroucou* who escapes his master's cruelty. A *touroucou* has him taken prisoner, attaches him to a pole and [has him] promptly shot. He then immediately negotiates with the villagers about the sale of the body that is eaten the same day.<sup>45</sup> Another incident: when the *touroucou* in charge of the recruitment of labourers did not have enough food to feed them, they killed passers-by with their guns to give to the men. The file contained hundreds of examples. The order was always to kill, if the villages were abandoned, even if the natives had fled, even if the quantity of rubber was obtained".

Sometimes there was a complete turn-around. On 20 July the concession Commission found that the crimes of the Mpoko employees did not legally warrant the termination of the company. The commissaire général *ad interim* no longer urged justice in his letters to the minister. Soon Mpoko was acquired by the concession company of the Haute Sangha, with the help of the minister.

Hector Coulet, as head of the legal department in service of the Governor-General, recorded that on 29 April the prosecutor issued a verdict of general acquittal (*non-lieu général*) for all crimes of Mpoko.<sup>46</sup> He informed the minister by telegram on 10 May 1909. All the Europeans were acquitted. He also reported this in a letter of 6 August to the Governor-General. This letter is relevant in that the accused natives admitted their crimes but said they were obeying orders from European agents, who in turn referred to the instructions from the Company. The letter expressed an appreciation for the workings of justice in Congo, which was rather surprising coming from the head of the

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<sup>44</sup> S.O.M., AEF, Concessions XXXVIII. Letter n° 144 (25.5.1908) from Michelet quoted in a letter of the *chef judiciaire* to the Lieutenant-Governor of Gabon n° 324 (8.8.1908).

<sup>45</sup> These were anthropophagi who did not recoil from eating members of their own group.

<sup>46</sup> In 1908 Hector Coulet was substitute judge at the court of first instance in Brazzaville and President *ad interim* of the same court, as well as President of the *Cour Criminelle*.

legal department. He noticed that the acquittal of Flébus and Saily – along with the return to Europe of the last accused agents, at a moment when the affair was being resumed and solved on the spot for reasons of ill health and this with "a threefold approval from justice, from the administration and from the medical corps" – makes it difficult for him to establish a Prosecuting chamber, after acting as a high chief of the court and pronouncing himself without appeal or objection about a case that is not mine'. He continues:

"In the presence of the following two alternatives:

1° have the Congo in a state of commotion for many years, make a lot of expenses and have a stream of differing opinions rife in France with a supplementary enquiry; or

2° act arbitrarily when choosing the guilty party, the chief of the legal department thinks it is in conformity with wise administration of justice to have a case relegated to oblivion, a case that surprises by its proportions, as it cannot surprise for other motives in a country where the facts of the same nature are innumerable and continuously happen".

From then onwards colonial justice would behave in "a spirit of exaggerated tolerance towards accused Europeans" as the ministry in Paris put it.<sup>47</sup>

By the end of 1908 not a single one of the twenty-seven accused Europeans remained in Congo. The affair had been hushed up by order of, amongst others, the same minister who had asked Guibet to shut up in the name of the colonial prestige of France (Coquery-Vidrovitch, 1972, 182).<sup>48</sup>

A termination procedure was initiated to remove Mpoko as a concession company. In a telegram from 28 November 1907, Governor-General Gentil asked for such a measure, even if there were legal objections. "It is a question of justice. And it is better that way, even if we run the risk of having to pay compensation". The minister answered that first the legal procedures against the agents had to be completed.

Except for Mpoko this procedure never worked, although a special 'Commissariat spécial du Gouvernement près des Sociétés concessionnaires' was established in 1901. The committee became operational only in 1905 and became a lame duck in 1907 by putting it under command of the Governor-General. Ten concessions were vulnerable to termination according to this

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<sup>47</sup> S.O.M., AEF, Concessions XXXVIII. Note pour le Ministre. 2.11.1908.

<sup>48</sup> In AEF 8Q 64 n° 66 there is a small note from Cureau: "Procureur de la République du service judiciaire rend compte que par ordonnance du 21 avril (1908) que son parquet a fait non-lieu général des affaires criminelles dites de la M'Poko".

commissariat, but in practice, nothing happened. Independent or not, the commissariat was powerless because, by virtue of the charter of the concession companies, once a company forfeited its concession, an immediate public adjudication was to take place of the terminated concession.

Another reason for termination was not an option because all Europeans were discharged. The companies could appeal the termination to the 'Conseil de l'État' in Paris, however, with a great chance of success. Ministers, judges and civil servants were put under great pressure; even journalists were appointed to board positions to ensure a good press.

## 7. SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THE BOARDS OF ENQUIRY IN FRENCH CONGO AND LEOPOLD'S CONGO AND THE JURIDICAL CONSEQUENCES

First we look at the role of the national and/or international press in the setting up of the boards. We then scrutinize the differences and similarities of the enquiry proper and the results. And finally we review the prosecutions that took place after the boards of enquiry.

### 7.1. The press and the comparison between both boards of enquiry

The role of the press in establishing the boards cannot be underestimated. In French Congo, it was mainly the national press; in Leopold's Congo, the international press and the big powers.

The Brazza Commission was established on 3 March 1905 for a duration of six months, as a result of the Gaud and Toqué scandal hitting the French papers. Neither the international press nor the big powers played any role. The longstanding financial dispute with the English companies, who had operated for scores of years on the French Congolese coast before it became a French colony and was about the monopoly position of the French concession companies, was being solved through discrete diplomatic and legal negotiations. It did not give rise to any commotion in the international press, although E.D. Morel did write a book on the subject in 1903: *The*

*British Case in French Congo.*<sup>49</sup> That Morel ceased publishing much on the subject probably had more to do with the lack of informants on the spot. The German press was more lenient, since Germany had no interest in embarrassing France.

In Leopold's Congo, the international press in England, Germany and the U.S.A. played a big part in the establishment of Leopold's Board of enquiry in 1904. The French press and the French politics spared Leopold, although France had a right of pre-emption on Leopold's Congo in case it went bankrupt. Likewise the Belgian Worker party and questions by Vandervelde and Lorand in the Chamber of Deputies played a considerable part in the establishment of Leopold's Board.

The protest began in England with articles in the press by Protestant missionaries and parliamentary questions in the Lower House. Her Majesty's government instructed Casement, consul in Boma, to make an inspection in Upper Congo and to report back.

This 1903 report was sent to all fourteen powers of the Berlin Conference of 1885 who had recognized Leopold's Congo (Casement, 1985). Not a single country responded except The Congo Independent State, which was one of Leopold's greatest personal diplomatic mistakes. The 1903 report resulted in the creation of the Congo Reform Association by E.D. Morel, the first real humanitarian action of the twentieth century. The investigative journalism of Morel analysing the system as such, and the publication of the many true horror stories for the consumption of the masses given to him by the Protestant missionaries of Leopold's Congo, brought about a chain reaction. The British Lower House forced the British government to act. In the end it was Leopold who initiated a Board of enquiry, which was international only because he incorporated an Italian and a Swiss on the board nominated by himself. No member had experience in the Upper Congo, the area of the worst abuses. Brazza, in contrast, had years of experience as explorer and as commissaire général of French Congo.

Both boards stayed in Congo only for some months and visited only a couple of areas. Gentil, the Governor General of French Congo, boycotted the Brazza Commission.

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<sup>49</sup> Edmund D. Morel, *The British Case in French Congo. The story of a Great Injustice, its Causes and its Lessons*, London, 1903.

Leopold's Commission received more support from Vice Governor General Costermans, but received fewer documents from the Congolese government in Brussels and no insight in the finances.

Ten copies of the French report were printed in 1907 but never published for reasons of state. This report, which became accessible only ten scores year later, disclosed the abuses of the system. According to Brazza, these abuses were inherent to the system, and the general administration of French Congo and the government of France were greatly responsible for them. Nevertheless, Félicien Challaye, the only board member without an official function and thus exempt of confidentiality, wrote a book in 1909: *Le Congo Français. La question internationale du Congo*. Leopold's Board of enquiry's report, after many corrections suggested by Leopold himself, finally was published in the official *Gazette (Bulletin Officiel du Congo)* in November 1905. For the legal community it was a completely damning report, but because there was not a single attachment and not a single witness statement from the more than three hundred witnesses, the impact on the great public was negligible. The report did not address the system itself. In 1906 two books were published on the Congo, one written by F. Cattier, professor at the Brussels University and associate member of the international colonial institute, and another by A. Vermeersch, a Jesuit and doctor at law and political and social sciences. Ultimately, the report of the Commission of Enquiry demanded by Leopold II due to international pressure and the reactions to it led to the annexation of the Congo by Belgium in 1908, *i.e.*, during Leopold's lifetime. The king of England was so disgusted with Leopold, a family member, that he forbade any official state visits by Leopold to England. Only a week after Leopold II's death was the ban lifted.

## 7. 2. Judicial consequences

Judges were not appointed for life in Leopold's Congo, unlike in Belgium. Judges in Congo who did not show enough 'flexibility' got never a second term or were just sent away. In French Congo, judges were appointed as they were in France. This did not mean that for big cases with international repercussions – these were the heydays of French nationalism – there was no political influence. Plenty of Europeans were found guilty after the thorough investigation in the Mpoko case, but they all benefited from a general *non-lieu* under pressure from the French ministry. There was a more thorough

investigation in French Congo by Butel, Guibet and Michelet, all three with much experience, in comparison with the one conducted into the affairs of the rubber companies ABIR or the Anversoise in Leopold's Congo. In the king's Crown Domain there was no real enquiry, although crimes were legion. In the Mpoko enquiry, Butel and the special Commission made a scrupulous investigation and took all possible guarantees against a possible press campaign to cover themselves against the huge interests in play.<sup>50</sup> More attention also was given to the native witnesses on location in contrast to that of the Europeans.

All the higher civil servants of Leopold's Congo and/or the traders escaped prosecution or left the Congo in time. In French Congo, twenty-seven Europeans were released or not prosecuted on orders from above. In Leopold's Congo, some lower-ranking Europeans were taken to court and convicted under pressure from the Belgian Chamber of deputies and the few anti-Congo newspapers (Vangroenweghe, 2004, 355-356). Quite a number of papers in Belgium and abroad were bribed by Leopold's Bureau de Presse, whilst in France a number of journalists sat on the boards of the concession companies.

But by 1908, the year of the Belgian annexation, there was not a single European left in the Boma jail, although some had been convicted and had received terms of ten to twenty years. The native employees got far longer prison terms in both Congos.

## 8. CONCLUSION

The profitable concession companies in Leopold's Congo (ABIR and Anversoise) were the model for the French government to found 40 concession companies in the French Congo in 1899-1900. In those companies almost half of the shares were in Belgian hands, some belonged to the Congo Free State through front men. Precise details were seldom published.

An analysis of the French concession company *M'Poko; Société anonyme des Établissements Gratry* (abbreviated: Mpoko) fills this lacuna and sheds new light on the intense direct and indirect influence of the Congo Free State on Mpoko. This company, barely 13,900 km<sup>2</sup>, was situated south-west of Bangui on the river Mpoko, a tributary of the Ubangi river.

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<sup>50</sup> S.O.M., AEF, Concessions, XXXVIII, A, 2.



The Belgians were not only shareholders, they also contributed competent personnel. In the early years European and indigenous employees came almost exclusively from Leopold's Congo. The first director in Africa from 1900 to 1907 was the Norwegian Gullbrand Schiötz, a captain-commander who had worked six years in Leopold's Congo, of which 4 years (1897-1900) in his private Crown Domain to harvest rubber. In total there were seven Scandinavians and as many Belgians. From 1900 to 1904 the European personnel amounted to between 10 and 15 (of which only one Frenchman). The number of trading posts rose very gradually from two to eleven from 1905 on. The first thirty armed surveyors came from the Crown Domain as well and were former employees of Schiötz. Mpoko became a lucrative company.

In Leopold's Congo and in the French Congo Commissions of inquiry were established in resp. 1904 and 1905 under pressure of the national and/or international press and of the international powers. This paper has analysed the similarities and differences between the both. The first Commission – of which no member had any experience in the Upper Congo and which was under enormous foreign pressure – published its report in very juridical terms, excluding the witness reports and without establishing the link between the system and the king. The report of the French Commission, headed by the very experienced Brazza and by some state inspectors, was never published because of the *raison d'état*. But both Commissions indirectly resulted in judicial inquiries, especially under the pressure of members of Parliament and the press.

The judicial inquiry of Butel in Mpoko in 1907 yields unique material on the founding of trading posts, the collaboration of chiefs, the methods of rubber exploitation (terror, the taking of hostages, murder), anthropophagy and the correlation between the rubber harvest and the use of weapons. Butel and his collaborators could confiscate the accounting books per post, figures on the use of cartridges and the private correspondence of the zone chief and the Africa director. They also questioned hundreds of native witnesses on the scene and the Europeans who were still present. In general their enquiry was more professional than in Leopold's Congo.

On Leopold's Congo and the rubber harvest some thorough studies have been published (among others by the present author), but for no concession company (ABIR, Anversoise), nor for the East Congo nor for the private

Crown Domain so many and so detailed documents have been preserved as for Mpoko.

In Mpoko the correlation between the rubber harvest and the use of cartridges is irrevocably and juridically ascertained by the details per month on Salanga and on the post Yaka (see Appendix) and by the correspondence.

For those who doubt that so few Europeans could have killed so many natives, Mpoko is the irrefutable proof. The judicial inquiry charged seventeen Europeans and more than 200 natives. In one examined zone of the three (a scarcely populated zone with barely the surface of a Belgian province) 667 juridically proven murders and 1,500 probable murders were documented. The health of the population was dreadful, as well as the demographic decline. The reasons were murder, illness, malnutrition and hunger because the people were not granted any time to cultivate fields and because all small live stock was stolen by Europeans and armed native surveyors. Additional factors include: the enormous pressure to harvest as much rubber as possible far away from home, the fact that women and children were taken hostage, the work of women on the rubber plantations, and playing villages off against each other by arming one chief.

The charged Europeans, of which many could escape the Congo with the consent of the authorities, were granted a 'non-lieu général des affaires criminelles dites de la Mpoko' by order of the French state because of the *raison d'état*. The native perpetrators however were sentenced, some of them to 10-20 years actually served. Justice was evidently class and race biased.

In Leopold's Congo some subordinate whites who had not left for Europe in time, were prosecuted, but in 1908 when the Congo was annexed to Belgium none of them was still in jail.

APPENDIX: YAKA FACTORY<sup>51</sup>

Remuneration							Use of cartridges by armed natives and whites				
month	Fresh rubber	Dry rubber	Harvesters franc ♦	Piston rifles	Capsules	Gunpowder gram	Cartridges: Gras, Albini, Marga	Capsules	Gunpowder	Revolvers	Shotgun cartridges ♣
<b>1903</b>											
Aug.	740	520	385	1							
	520	364	144	1	35	1000	40				
Sep.	2000	1400	462	2	40	800	35	20	200		
Oct.	666	467	422								
	1922	1345	440	2	70	500	90	40	200		
Nov.	215	150	82								
	2150	1500	400		75	800	100	50	300		30
Dec.	1600	1100	365	?	50	500	119	60	200		
<b>1904</b>											
Jan.	1750	1200	414	3	80	1000	270	45	300	20	
Feb.	2160	1500	509	4	100	500	170	40	200		
Mar.	2575	1800	601	2	70		145	30			30
Apr.	3150	2200	770	1	100	1000	294	75	500		
May	2170	1500	547	1	50	1000	425	50	500		
Jun.	2860	2000	730	2	80	1000	178	50	500	15	
Jul.	2575	1800	719	1	70		326	60	500	23	
Aug.	2430	1700	736		70	500	360	80	500	10	
Sep.	2860	2000	878		70	800	190	66	1000		

<sup>51</sup>. S.O.M., AEF, Concessions XXXIII.

Remuneration							Use of cartridges by armed natives and whites				
month	Fresh rubber	Dry rubber	Harvesters franc ♦	Piston rifles	Capsules	Gunpowder gram	Cartridges: Gras, Albini, Marga	Capsules	Gunpowder	Revolvers	Shotgun cartridges ♣
Oct.	2572	1800	789		50	700	120	30	500	15	
Nov.	2155	1500	661		50	800	110	30	500		
Dec.	2715	1900	854	1	195	1000	225	50	500		
<b>1905</b>											
Jan.	1800	1260	567		90	500	270	60	500		
Feb.	1144	800	358		50	500	225	50	500		
Mar.	100 1144	70 800	49 361		80	500	245	80	500		
Apr.	1860	1300	611		190	750	305	90	750		
May	1715	1200	551		190	750	350	100	750		
Jun.	2572	1800	896		270	1250	304	100	1250		
Jul.	2486	1740	971		60	500	145	13	500		
Aug.	2572	1800	1029		15	500	165	20	500		
Sep.	3000	2100	1380 ♣2150		25	500	230	50	500		
Oct.	2715	1900	1220		90	1000	310	100	1000		
Nov.	2143	1500	975	1	75	1000	235	75	1000		
Dec.	2858	2000	1305		75	1000	310	75	1000		
<b>1906</b>											
Jan.	2858	2000	1305		75	1000	190	75	500		
Feb.	1858	1300	966		50		320	50			
Mar.	1286	900	908		50	500	160	50	500		
Apr.	1286	900	921		50	500	130	50	500		
May	1217	850	857		50	500	60	50	500		
Jun.	1393	975	945				140				
Jul.	1200	840	864		50	500	80	50	500		
Aug.	1315	920	921				145	50	1000		
Sep.	1430	1000	983				100	50	500		
Oct.	1123	730	728				100	50	500		
Nov.	1260	820	823				90			10	
Dec.	1329	860	872		10	100	95	20	200		

Remuneration							Use of cartridges by armed natives and whites				
month	Fresh rubber	Dry rubber	Harvesters franc ♦	Piston rifles	Capsules	Gunpowder gram	Cartridges: Gras, Albini, Marga	Capsules	Gunpowder	Revolvers	Shotgun cartridges ♣
<b>1907</b>											
Jan.	1352	810	812				60	30	1200		
Feb.	1850	110	1104								
Mar.		300	567				84				
Apr.	142	85	100				126				caps.* 240 gunp.* 2500
May	142	85	97				45				
Jun.	164	100	72				114				
Jul.	98	60	47				25			10	
Aug.	114	70	54				10			10	
Sep.	41	25	69				16				caps.* 150 gunp.* 1000
Oct.							7				
Nov.											
Dec.											

♦ Salary and remuneration. Calculated in franc but paid in kind.

♣ Used for fresh meat.

♠ Gratifications to Senegalese soldiers with consent of the board.

caps.\* = capsules

gunp.\* = gunpowder

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## ABBREVIATIONS

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ABIR	Anglo-Belgian India Rubber Company
AEF	Afrique Equatoriale Française
A.P.	Affaires Politiques
ANVERSOISE	Société anversoise du commerce au Congo
Conc.	Fonds Concessions (série AEF) Aix-en-Provence
MP	Member of Parliament
MPOKO	M'Poko, Société anonyme des Etablissements Gratry
N.A.H.V.	Nieuw Afrikaanse Handels Vennootschap
S.H.O.	Compagnie des Sultanats du Haut-Oubangui
S.O.M.	Archives nationales, Section d'outre-mer, Aix-en-Provence

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b. AEF. Fonds Concessions: AEF. XV. Gabon; AEF. XXXVIII, société M'Poko; AEF. XL. Gabon.

c. AEF. Série D. Missions d'inspection 1892-1950. e.a. Bobichon dans le Haut Congo (1904); Brazza (1905).

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## De export van het concessiesysteem in Leopolds Congo naar Frans Congo, geïllustreerd door de Mpokomaatschappij

DANIEL VANGROENWEGHE

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### SAMENVATTING

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In deze bijdrage wordt eerst een algemene schets gegeven van 40 in Frans-Congo (1899-1900) opgerichte Franse concessiemaatschappijen, die samen 80% van het territorium bestreken. Deze maatschappijen waren door de Fransen gemodelleerd naar de winstgevende rubbermaatschappijen uit Leopold II's Congo: de ABIR, de Anversoise en het privégebied van Leopold II, het Kroondomein geheten.

Dan volgt een algemene schets van het koloniale bestuur in Frans-Congo met als leidraad de onderzoekscommissie onder de leiding van Brazza uit 1905. Deze commissie werd opgericht wegens geruchten in de Franse pers over onregelmatigheden in Frans-Congo.

Het hoofdthema is de Franse concessiemaatschappij *M'Poko, Société anonyme des Établissements Gratry* (afgekort als Mpoko). Deze in de nabijheid van Bangui gelegen winstgevende maatschappij had een oppervlakte van 13.900 km<sup>2</sup>. De gelijkenissen tussen Mpoko en de maatschappijen in Leopolds Congo blijken veel groter dan tot nu toe gedacht. Zo waren bijna de helft van de aandelen in Belgische handen en waren de directeur in Afrika, de Noor Schiötz, en zijn eerste Europese agenten (meestal uit Scandinavische landen) allen oudgedienden uit Congo Vrijstaat, meestal uit het Kroondomein. Ze hadden allen veel ervaring in rubberwinning. Ook de eerste dertig inlanders waren uit het Kroondomein afkomstig. Het 'leopoldiaanse systeem' van rubberwinning werd ook overgeplant naar Mpoko: dwangarbeid, terreur, gijzelneming van vrouwen en kinderen, excessief geweld en massaal gebruik van vuurwapens vormden de basis van dit systeem. De maandelijkse statistieken van de factorij Yaka illustreren de correlatie tussen wapens en rubberproductie.

In 1907 vond een rechterlijk onderzoek plaats. Meer dan tweehonderd inlandse opzichters en 27 Europeanen werden aangeklaagd. In één van de drie



zones van Mpoko hadden 667 juridische bewezen moorden en 1.500 waarschijnlijke moorden plaatsgevonden. Het parket te Brazzaville vaardigde onder druk van de Franse minister van Kolonies in 1909 een ordonnantie uit met een algemene vrijspraak voor alle Europeanen. De inlanders werden allesbehalve clement behandeld en kregen zware straffen opgelegd.

Tenslotte worden de gelijkenissen en verschillen tussen de onderzoekscommissies in beide Congo's en de rechterlijke gevolgen behandeld.

### **Le système concessionnaire de Léopold II exporté au Congo français. Le cas de la Mpoko, Société Anonyme des Établissements Gratry**

DANIEL VANGROENWEGHE

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#### RÉSUMÉ

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L'article fournit un aperçu général de quarante sociétés concessionnaires fondées au Congo français en 1899-1900 qui ont pris comme modèle les sociétés à caoutchouc lucratives du Congo de Léopold II: l'Anglo-Belgian India Rubber Company, l'Anversoise et le Domaine de la Couronne (propriété privée du roi).

Les conclusions de la Commission d'enquête menée par Brazza en 1905 permettent d'avoir une idée du fonctionnement de l'administration coloniale au Congo français. Cette Commission a été créée suite aux rumeurs qui circulent dans la presse française au sujet d'irrégularités commises dans ce pays d'Afrique.

Le thème principal de l'article a pour objet la société concessionnaire française M'poko, Société anonyme des établissements Gratry (en abrégé Mpoko). Située aux alentours de Bangui, cette société très rentable s'étend sur une superficie de 13.900 km<sup>2</sup>. Les ressemblances entre Mpoko et les sociétés du Congo de Léopold II sont plus fortes qu'il n'y paraît: presque la moitié des actions appartiennent à des Belges; le directeur de la société, le Norvégien Schiøtz ainsi que les premiers agents commerciaux européens

(pour la plupart des scandinaves) sont des anciens du Domaine privé du Congo léopoldien; trente indigènes travailleurs/militaires ont une large expérience dans la récolte de caoutchouc à tel point que l'on peut affirmer que le régime, mis en place par Léopold II, est transplanté dans la société M'poko. Il se caractérise par le travail forcé, la terreur, la prise en otage d'hommes, de femmes et d'enfants, la brutalité excessive et l'emploi fréquent d'armes à feu. Les statistiques mensuelles de la factorerie de Yaka montrent bien la corrélation entre l'emploi des armes à feu et la production de caoutchouc.

Une enquête juridique est menée en 1907. Plus de deux cents indigènes qui servaient de sentinelles armées et vingt sept Européens ont été mis en accusation. Dans une des trois zones de la Mpoko six cent soixante-sept meurtres ont été établis avec certitude et mille cinq cents d'une façon probable. Sous pression du Ministre français des Colonies le parquet de Brazzaville a ordonné un non-lieu général pour tous les Européens. Aucune clémence n'ayant été accordée aux indigènes ils ont été sévèrement punis.

L'article se termine par la comparaison entre les conclusions de la Commission d'enquête menée au Congo français et celles de la Commission mise en place au Congo léopoldien.