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DOMESTICITY AND COLONIALISM IN BELGIAN AFRICA: USUMBURA'S FOYER SOCIAL, 1946–1960

NANCY ROSE HUNT

By 1957, 15 percent of the African women living in the colonial city of Usumbura, Ruanda-Urundi (present-day Bujumbura, Burundi), were participating in a government-sponsored educational and social welfare program.¹ Foyers sociaux, or social homes, were Belgian domestic training institutions for African women, founded for married women living in colonial urban centers. Some women were learning to cook, mend, iron, and wash clothes, and how to wean their infants and decorate their homes, and a select few were being trained to work (for pay) as auxiliary aids or monitors in the classroom. European women circulated in the African quarters, visiting and inspecting the students' homes and helping women prepare for annual most-beautiful-house contests. Graduation ceremonies, holiday celebrations, and displays of students' projects were other annual events sponsored by a foyer social that marked

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¹ Usumbura, Foyer Social, Rapport annuel, 1957, 1, 4, 9, Bureau de la Mairie, Bujumbura. The total female population figure includes 11,642 women and 2,500 single women. The number enrolled includes 1,885 enrolled at the central foyer as well as 156 newly enrolled and 146 re-enrolled women attending the branch foyer at Ngagara. Figures from the military camp and the Faubourg rural were not used to derive the percentage.

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in a public, ritualized way the continuity of the program and the progress of its students. A colonial centerpiece, Usumbura's *foyer* was proudly celebrated in Belgium's annual reports to the United Nations and served to legitimize Belgian administration of this trust territory.²

Despite the many historical studies that have appeared since the 1970s about the impact of colonialism on African women, surprisingly little attention has been paid to colonial efforts to domesticize women.³ Since the 1970s, and especially since Ester Boserup pointed out that colonial notions of development for women meant "training for the home,"¹ historians have been refining interpretations of changes in African women's economic lives. Yet, the study of the relations between ideology and the construction of gender under colonialism has been slighted.⁵ In refusing to equate women with domesticity, historians have acknowledged this equation as a colonial legacy without exploring its historical content and implications.⁶

The operations and curricular structure of Usumbura's *foyer social* point to important connections between Western family

² Reporting the activities and growth of *foyers sociaux* in Ruanda-Urundi was the principal Belgian response to annual queries by the United Nations about progress in ameliorating the condition of African women. See, e.g., R/UC (139) no. 4, 1951, pt. 3, question 132, Archives Africaines, Brussels (hereafter cited as AA). (*Foyers sociaux* is the plural of *foyer social*.)


⁵ In 1975, 50 percent of all nonformal education offered to African women was in domestic science. Home economics development programs remain "solidly housework-based, a result of the success of women as domestics," despite national development agencies' claims that they are moving away from knitting, cookery, and child care to income generation and appropriate technology projects. See Barbara Rogers, *The Domestication of Women, Discrimination in Developing Countries* (London and New York: Tavistock, 1981), esp. 86, 88.
ideology, the colonial construction of womanhood and domesticity, and the emergence of a colonized African urban elite. Why was reaching and communicating with African women through the *foyer social* a prized colonial agenda? What were the implications of African women's participation? Some African women did rebel against colonial power in Usumbura, but their resistance was not sparked by the seemingly beneficent *foyer social*.\(^7\) Because neither colonial coercion nor African resistance were explicitly expressed, the *foyer* permits us to refine our understanding of what Georges Balandier has called "the colonial situation": "a force acting in terms of its own [sociological] totality."\(^8\) Colonialism has too often been imagined as an "abstract force, as a *structure* imposed on local *practice*,"\(^9\) but it was not anonymous, indivisible, or all-imposing. The colonizing process encompassed a disparate array of actors in metropolitan and colonial contexts, including women. In local settings, colonial encounters entailed mutual processes of cultural incorporation and transformation, rather than complete cultural annihilation.

The *foyer social* was a colonial project to revise and refashion gender roles, family life, and domestic space enacted by European nuns and social workers and African women within classrooms, households, and an African urban community. A "peculiar intimacy between dominators and dominated" intentionally fostered by the homelike atmosphere of the *foyer* belied the tension about authority and deference that pervaded the institution.\(^10\) Inscribed in this tension is the fact that although the *foyer* was designed to instill Western family ideology into urban African life, limits were set on the degree of emulation that was possible. For elite Africans, measures designed to seduce their participation and cooperation were as salient as forms of distancing from the colonizer.\(^11\) Although

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\(^7\) Nancy Hunt, "Colonial Sexual Insults and Female Indignation: Swahili Women's Resistance to the Single Women's Tax in Usumbura" (Madison, Wis., 1988, typescript).


targeted for special attention and inducements by the *foyer*, their distinct place in the racist colonial hierarchy was ultimately reinforced, even as their elite position among Africans was simultaneously delineated.

**The colonial context**

The Union des Femmes Coloniales established the first lay-operated housekeeping and social welfare centers for young girls in two Congolese cities in 1926. Directors of Catholic missions and private social service agencies, with the agreement of the Belgian administration, sent the first social workers to Leopoldville in 1933, Elisabethville in 1934, and Coquilhatville in 1938. *Foyers sociaux* were opened to teach home economics and maternal hygiene, in response to what was considered an urgent problem: women living in urban centers. After the war, Belgian colonial authorities decided to create a specialized service for the *foyers*. This decision reflected a larger shift in colonial urban policy, away from discouraging rural-urban migration and toward fostering the long-term urban residence of certain workers and their families. Although private social-service agencies usually continued to operate the institutions, they received full governmental funding, and the European staff were no longer nuns but social workers.

A large colonial literature that both addressed the social problems facing women in the city and explained why the *foyers* would remedy this social and moral crisis emerged after World War II. The phenomena of adultery, prostitution, alcoholism, divorce, and

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12 See Union des Femmes Coloniales, undated statement received by Première Direction, Justice et Affaires Indigènes, ca. 1927, Fond A. I. 1394, dossier no. 2, “Protection de la femme noire,” Archives Africaines (AA). J. Van Hove, “Situation actuelle du Service Social—ses prochaines réalisations;” *Récue coloniale belge*, no. 114 (July 1, 1950), 463–64. The first social workers were sent to Stanleyville during World War II.


a demographic pattern of men outnumbering women were of long-standing concern to Belgian authorities and missionaries. Colonial commentators thought women in the cities were floundering, disoriented, vulnerable, and corruptible due to idleness, excessive leisure, and a void of custom. The notion that the moral authority of customary culture did not extend to urban centers was ubiquitous in Belgian colonial discourse. To cure these ills, colonial social workers, officials, missionaries, and sociologists hoped to create a new tradition, culture, and source of authority over women, and a new locus of socialization—the nuclear family. This process of inventing a colonized urban tradition would begin through women and in *foyers sociaux*. Whereas men would be useful to the colony as producers, as a labor force, women would be important as reproducers, as mothers and wives ensuring the vitality and perpetuation of this labor force and the proper rearing of children. According to this colonial vision, a woman was not to have any cash-generating activities; this would have conflicted with her central role as the “base of evolution.” She was to represent and radiate moral standards and behavior for men and children, through the “civilized” institution of the nuclear family.\(^5\) This logic was encapsulated in the aphorism: “To instruct a boy is . . . to form a man; to instruct a girl is to form a family.”\(^6\) This new kind of family would be monogamous, authority would be vested in the husband, and its generating force would be a Western “notion of the spouses which must be the base and without which the family cannot play its role of social cell and cement of ‘evolved’ society.”\(^7\)

Colonial domestic education for women was not unique to the Belgian Congo and Ruanda-Urundi,\(^8\) nor was it new to Belgian colonialism.\(^9\) What made the *foyer* novel in Belgian Africa was its

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\(^{17}\) A. Sohier, “Le rôle de la femme dans la famille indigène congolaise,” *Zaire*, no. 4 (1947), 443–45.

\(^{18}\) Homecraft classes for girls and adult women were common under other colonial regimes; in addition to the works cited in n. 3 above, Perlman and Moal’s annotated bibliography is a useful beginning for sensing the range of domestic schools for girls and adult women in colonial Africa. Homecraft and/or maternal hygiene were being taught to adult women in French Equatorial Africa and in colonial Ghana, Zimbabwe, Zambia, Sudan, and Kenya. It is unclear if some of these programs were directed at urban elite women. See M. Perlman and M. P. Moal, “Analytical Bibliography,” in *Women of Tropical Africa*, ed. Denise Paulme (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1963), 288–93.

\(^{19}\) Domestic education for girls was introduced in Belgian Africa in the Leopoldian period (1885–1908); Barbara Yates, “The Missions and Educational Develop-
attention to the urban elite or évolutés. The Belgian term évoluté was loosely applied to those who had been educated by and/or were salaried workers of Europeans. Jean-Marie Domont’s prescriptive manual of proper behavior for évolutés explained that to be an évoluté one had to do more than speak French and wear Western dress. One had to fulfill moral, familial, professional, and civic duties, while serving as a model for less privileged Africans. During the post–World War II period, anxieties about évolutés dominated colonial attention. Roger Anstey has shown that it was a period of “bitter évoluté feeling” because inadequate measures had been taken to permit elite men to assimilate and distinguish themselves from the mass of Africans. Hence, associations of évoluté men received official encouragement, cartes de mérite civique (cards of civic merit) were invented to legally and symbolically reward worthy évolutés, and foyers sociaux were promoted to provide évoluté men with évoluté wives.

Usumbura was the principal administrative and commercial center of the Belgian-administered territory of Ruanda-Urundi.
The city's two main African urban quarters, Belge and Buyenzi, were distinguished from each other by religion. Buyenzi was Usumbura's core community of fishermen, traders, and farmers, who shared a common religion (Islam), spoke a common language (Swahili), and whose urban residence and culture predated colonialism. Most women of Buyenzi were, and are, farmers and petty traders. Swahili was the lingua franca of the other urban quarter, Belge, as well, but the men of this predominantly Roman Catholic quarter held more of the European-created, salaried, auxiliary positions than Buyenzi men. The men and women of both quarters represented a diverse range of residential and ethnic origins: Rwandans, Burundians, and Congolese were found in each. Yet those of Belge were more affected by the new opportunities of the colonial city. While many in Buyenzi had watched the colonial city grow up around their African community, most of those in Belge had migrated to the city where the men sought jobs with European employers. Many Belge women engaged in forms of commerce and artisanal work that could be done in the home, especially beer brewing.24

Until the mid-twenties, African Christians and African Muslims lived together alongside Arab and Asian traders. In 1927, African residents were separated into two urban locations. This forced relocation and segregation was based not on ethnicity but on notions of fulfilling a civilizing mission and what should constitute an African elite to fill the city's labor requirements. Fearful of the influence of Islam, Belgian authorities and missionaries wanted to circumscribe the influence of the Muslim, polygynous Swahili and civilize the Catholic évoluté (evolved) or évolutant (evolving) population as much as possible.25 Belge was supposed to be the évoluté quarter of Usumbura,26 but its occupants were thought by missionaries and colonial officials to suffer from "an unbelievable weakness of character." Family life was "if not nonexistent . . . at least very deficient," and Africans had little sense of the wife's role and duties. One colonial response to this apparently immoral situation of "drinking, dance and misconduct,"27 idle women, and vulnerable

24 Hunt, "'We Refused to Be Insulted'" (n. 14 above), 11, 23–30.
26 Eighty to 85 percent of Belge's residents were Catholic in 1957, and many of them had received some education; Usumbura, Centres extra-coutumiers, Rapport annuel, 1957, p. 34 (hereafter cited as CecRa), Bureau de la Mairie, Bujumbura. Fifty-three percent of the men and 22 percent of the women could read and write in 1959; CecRa, 1959, 22.
27 de Cornillon (n. 14 above), 93–94.
young girls was to teach the wives of évolutés their proper roles and duties. In 1946, the White Father and White Sister missionaries of Usumbura’s Catholic mission created the city’s original foyer social as a complement to their work with male évolutés.

Colonial constructions of wifehood and motherhood

According to the mission guidelines for a program of social assistance for women, workshops and house visits would be organized to teach the wives of évolutés domestic skills. Although only African women would receive the training, the entire family would benefit: “The purpose pursued in the centers . . . [is to] organize a normal social life in basing it on religious and moral principles and particularly to give an important role to the family such as it is conceived in our milieu of ancient Christian civilization. . . . The indigenous peoples of the centers are too mixed together for traditional custom to still have a sufficient influence as moral rule and sanction. The only means of lifting up this new society is to solidly establish the family: father, mother and children.” The missionaries agreed that only women of monogamous marriages in “regular households,” that is, those deemed socially acceptable, and fiancées living “regularly” before a monogamous marriage, regardless of religion, would be eligible since “to act otherwise would risk perverting the entire plan.”

Pleasing husbands was one of the reproductive labor skills advanced by the program. The church generally advised évolutés to look for wives of an equal level of “evolution,” and the program for women was intended to reduce existing incongruities between elite men’s level of “evolution” and that of their wives. Teaching women domestic tasks would give wives educations “parallel” to their husbands’: men and women needed different educations, such “according to the psychological requirements which are appropriate.” It was assumed that women had a natural feminine

29 de Cornillon, 94.
30 Ibid.
31 See, e.g., R. P. Langouche, “Notes sur le mariage des catholiques dans l’Urundi,” n.d. [ca. 1949], dossier no. 862E, 6, PBA.
32 Vicariat apostolique de l’Urundi, Rapport annuel, 1946–47, typescript, 5, PBA.
33 de Cornillon, 94.
psychological propensity for motherhood and domesticity, and the lessons were expected to draw on and shape this tendency, to instill in a wife “devotion, unselfishness and discreet and intelligent collaboration in the profession of the husband.”

On April 15, 1946, two White Sister nuns began giving lessons to Barundi and Congolese women of Belge. They were assisted by colonial women—usually the wives of European officials and other residents. By the end of July, fifty-four women had enrolled and thirty-four attended regularly; by March 1947, 104 had enrolled and seventy-five attended regularly. Ninety percent of these women were said to be wives of the “Catholic elite.” Sister Nolly, a White Sister who helped organize this first foyer, recalled that most of the students tended already to be somewhat “evolved,” having “a bedroom for two for the couple, for example.” It was hoped that this elite would in turn “radiate in the indigenous milieu and prolong our action.” Sister Nolly also recalled that some Buyenzi women came to the nuns and asked to join because they had heard what the Belge students were doing. Thus, in June 1947, the nuns founded a new section for Buyenzi women. The rules requiring that members be “monogamist from a regular situation” did not apply to these Muslim women from a polygynous culture. Rather the nuns hoped that once they gained the trust of the Swahili woman, the moral issues of polygamy could be addressed. By the end of November 1947, 241 women were enrolled, 142 from Belge and 99 from Buyenzi.

In 1948, the work of the White Sisters was assumed by three professional social workers from the private Catholic social service organization, Assistance Sociale au Congo, and the workshop

34 Ibid.
35 de Cornillon, 93; Fond R/ RU no. 1 (139) 1948, Territoire d’Usumbura, Rapport annuel, 1948, pt. 3, 83/7bis, AA.
36 Vicariat apostolique de l’Urundi, Rapport annuel, 1946–47, typescript, 5, PBA.
37 Sister Nolly, untapped interview with Nancy Hunt, December 11, 1984, Bujumbura. Sister Nolly (formerly Sister Rosalie) and Sister Gabrielle de Marneffe (formerly Sister Julienne de Cornillon) interviewed on November 13, 1984, also untaped, were present in Usumbura when the workshop began. They attributed its founding to the influence of Monseigneur Martin who thought something must be done to “evolve” women. Hereafter all interviews will be indicated by interviewee name and the interview date; all interviews were conducted by the author in Bujumbura and were taped unless otherwise indicated.
38 de Cornillon, 95.
40 de Cornillon, 93.
41 Ibid., 94–95.
42 Fond R/ RU no. 1 (139), 1948, pt. 3, 83/7bis, AA; de Cornillon, 95.
became a state-sponsored foyer social. Its location was moved outside of mission property to a government building located just next to the governmental évoluté center for men, the Cercle du Progrès on Route de Cyangugu. Some students moved with the institution and later received certificates from the new foyer. The greater resources, staffing, and physical space of the new institution allowed more women to attend. Programs expanded, and women of all races and religions were encouraged to enroll. A large new building, still standing and in use today, was opened in 1953. Located on the central avenue bisecting Belge and Buyenzi, it was easily accessible to women of both communities.

Like the mission program, the government-sponsored program was welcomed by colonial commentators as a promising counterbalance to the problems of single women and prostitution in the African urban neighborhoods. "The purpose is to withdraw them from a hardly favorable atmosphere, that is, the demoralizing cabarets and dancings, and to form them to the discipline and spirit of body and devotion. It is hoped that the effort leads to the formation of a feminine elite in the largest social sense." The state-sponsored foyer was specifically directed at married women. Like the mission-organized program, the intention was to teach them to be better wives and mothers, not to give them employable skills: "The Foyer Social is not . . . a school where indigenous women learn to become professional seamstresses or cooks by trade, but rather a ' foyer,' that is a house where all the women are at home and feel they are at home, and where the social assistants help them to become prudent ladies of the house, model wives and mothers of the family. The Foyers Sociaux will have filled their mission if the houses of the indigenous centers that they serve become cleaner and more orderly, if the families are better fed, the husbands and children better clothed." In 1953, the number of women seeking to enroll at the foyer exceeded that which could be accepted. European women con-
continued to encourage particular women to enroll. Thérèse Namugisha, a Rwandan beer brewer whose husband worked as a domestic servant for Europeans, recalled that the wife of her husband’s boss taught at the foyer and encouraged her to attend.51 Catherine Mirerekano, the daughter of a Burundian chief, educated by African nuns and married to an agricultural assistant who had attended the most exclusive school in Ruanda-Urundi, lived in the évoluté housing for clerks in Belge. Because of her husband’s social standing, it was assumed she would attend. “At this time my husband was in charge of the petty functionaries. It was indispensable that I go there . . . even the bazungu [white people] came to explain to us.”52

Rather than focusing on évoluté women, as did the White Sisters, the government-organized program instituted a curricular hierarchy through which the “better elements” might advance. All women began with the cours de masse (basic course), general lessons in sewing and knitting for the “mass” of women, intended “not to teach them to make embroidered dresses, artistically made, but simple clothes easy to finish and thanks to which the members of the family will always be clean and well-groomed.”53 Occasionally teachers provided impromptu instruction in domestic and maternal hygiene.54 Moral messages about proper wifehood and motherhood accompanied these lessons, which were held twice a week and lasted from six months to a year, “following the capacities of the women and the regularity of their presence.”55 The provision of free sewing and knitting materials for preliminary exercises may have encouraged higher enrollment.56

The basic course was used to identify a tiny minority of best students who would continue in the housekeeping classes.57 These classes were designed “to form true ladies of the house, capable of maintaining the house, making their house interior pleasant and offering to their husband, when he returns home from work, a clean table, an appetizing dinner, and washed, ironed, and mended laundry. Each week at the Foyer, they wash their laundry, do ironing and mending, and receive as well a few practical notions in

52 Catherine Mirerekano, February 20, 1985.
54 Ministère des Colonies, Deuxième Direction Générale, “Programme d’activités d’un Foyer Social,” n.d., 5, CSE.
growing. Another morning is reserved for a cooking lesson: they prepare a complete meal that they consume together at the Foyer.58 Félicita Zamukwereza of Belge received a certificate in 1955 for completing the housekeeping course. She had regularly attended and passed “tests in knitting, sewing, washing, ironing, mending, cooking and cleaning with Distinction.”59 Lessons in gardening, domestic economy and thrift, familial hygiene, child rearing, and familial education were also included.60 Forty-eight women were admitted to these housekeeping classes in 1950 and 1951, seventy-two in 1952, ninety in 1953, and sixty in 1954.61

In 1953, after the foyer moved to its present location, a “model house” was built for housekeeping lessons. This house, comprising a dining room, kitchen, and bedroom, was the size of an évolué family home of the time. The dining room included a buffet with meat platters, small platters, deep platters with covers, salad, gravy, and sugar bowls, soup and dinner plates, saucers, cups, glasses, salt shakers, and dessert plates with blue flowers. Forks, knives, coffee spoons, and sugar spoons were kept in a covered rack. A crucifix hung on the wall.62 These domestic objects—hardly those of a family of modest means—show the foyer’s curricular emphasis on Western cuisine, dining etiquette, and Christian morality. Although all women who enrolled at the foyer were learning some Western skills, those in the more advanced housekeeping classes were trained in model behavior in a model home, with material accoutrements presupposing a bourgeois standard of living.

A higher, third level in the curricular hierarchy was for the most gifted women, who were trained to be foyer social monitors, that is, assistants of the European social workers. A formal two-year course of training was instituted in 1953, and twenty-nine women from Belge and six from Buyenzi were selected to participate. Eligibility standards were reminiscent of those used by the White Sisters in their original foyer: each candidate, regardless of religion, had to be from a “regular matrimonial situation,” exhibit “irreproachable conduct in order to be able to exercise a favorable influence,” and

58 Ibid., 231.  
59 Certificate of Félicita Zamukwereza, November 26, 1955, miscellaneous files, CSE. 
60 CecRa, 1951, 14; Usumbura, Foyer Social, Rapport annuel, 1954, CSE; CecRa, 1956, 94. 
61 Rapport, 1954, 233. In 1951 and 1952, these courses were held six half-days a week, and the entire course was to last six months. By 1953, as enrollment increased, each group of twenty to twenty-five women had classes three times a week; Rapport, 1951, 114; CecRa, 1952, VI; Fond R/RU no. 3 (140), 1953, 6bis. 
62 Inventory attached to letter, Gilberte De Clerq to Monsieur d’Attaché aux Affaires Sociales du Burundi, October 20, 1961, “Remise-Reprise” file, CSE.
have the consent of her husband.63 These students received special training in sewing (including buttonholes, slits, collars, tapered necklines),64 smocking, home economics, professional ethics, hygiene, child care, first aid, etiquette, and enough elementary reading and writing to "decipher sewing patterns and note attendance in classes."65 Students also received religious and moral lessons regarding the mutual duties of the spouses and the education of children. After receiving their diplomas, these monitors were eligible, following their évoluté husbands, to apply for a carte.
In time, she could purchase a small bed sold at the foyer and prepare sheets and a pillow case for it. The foyer’s nurse also held meetings with mothers, taught familial and infant hygiene courses, visited women who were sick or had just given birth, and until 1954, assisted with the prenatal, gynecological, and infant consultations at the dispensary operated by the colonial health service in Buyenzi. In 1954, the foyer opened a branch in the new, outlying urban quarter of Ngagara, where it operated its own independent program of infant consultations. By 1956, the sociomedical program included infant consultations at Ngagara four times a week; preschool consultations at the central foyer twice a month; and a service once a week for sickly and malnourished children, where children were weighed and received milk and other foods, and mothers learned how to raise and nourish their children. In addition, twice a week open petits soins sessions were held, in which women could receive advice on minor health matters and watch demonstrations in proper child rearing. In these open sessions, which had begun in 1954 as a formal infant-rearing course, women were also taught how to bathe babies, when to wean them, and how to prepare infant pap. The focus was on weaning, “how to proceed, the ideal period, [and] unfortunate consequences if it is realized too late,” since African women were thought to be “strongly ignorant of its importance.” These open sessions and preschool children consultations were open to all women attending foyer classes, and the other layette and hygiene courses were open to any woman. Thus motherhood training was more accessible than housewifery lessons.

Enrollment at the foyer expanded over the years. Those in the monitor and housekeeping classes attended much more consistently than those in the basic course. Measured in terms of numbers of women participating, the sociomedical and mothering classes and programs were the most popular foyer activities.

70 CecRa, 1951, 14; and Usumbura, Foyer Social, Rapport annuel, 1957, 5, 7.
72 The basic course was not exactly well attended: in 1954, average attendance was 27 percent for the women of Belge and 30 percent for the women of Buyenzi. Attendance at the housekeeping classes was 75 percent in the same year, although these women were selected in terms of their attendance record in previous basic classes, a reflection itself of their ability to allocate time for the foyer endeavor (Rapport, 1954, 232; Usumbura, Centres extra-coutumiers, Rapport annuel, 1952, sec. VI, unpaged). Layette classes were also relatively popular; average attendance in 1954 was 36 percent; Rapport, 1954, 232; CecRa. 1952, sec. 6. Least popular were the child care classes in which the average attendance in 1954 was only 21 percent. This lack of popularity might have reflected the fact that participants were subject to home visits after having given birth; Rapport, 1954, 232.
The provision of diverse entry points into this colonial social order was a way of dividing women into categories. First, women were classified according to colonial notions of morality, based on religious criteria. The Christian women of Belge were treated differently from the Muslim women of Buyenzi. Although both Catholic women of Belge and Muslim women of Buyenzi were selected to attend housekeeping classes, the two groups were taught separately, and the women of Belge were given more attention. In 1954, the sixty women were divided into three groups, two of fifteen Belge women each, and one of thirty Buyenzi women. Of the thirty-five women selected to participate in monitor classes in 1953, twenty-nine were from Belge and six from Buyenzi. Classes begun in 1956 to prepare young girls for marriage and to keep them from loitering in the streets were divided into Muslim and non-Muslim groups.

Cross-cutting the division of women by moral criteria, the curricular structure further differentiated between elite housewives and ordinary, non-évolué mothers. The higher up a student went in the domestic curricular hierarchy, the greater the emphasis on her representing a "true lady of the house" and the more concrete was the model projected for emulation. The blocks of évolué houses in Belge were an obvious manifestation of a group of people who had greater access to colonial privileges, with relatively superior jobs, working conditions, and incomes. The structure of the foyer's curriculum—with all women taking the basic course, only a select few taking the housekeeping classes, and yet a smaller number being trained as monitors—also suggested levels of "evolution." Privileging a select few who deferred to colonial values and adopted colonial ways and giving them the aura but not the reality of power may have enhanced an incipient consciousness of class divisions forming among Africans in the city.

House visits and husbands

A continual tension over how to achieve discipline, deference, and emulation without direct coercion marked the administration of the

73 Usumbura, Foyer Social, Rapport annuel, 1954; CecRa, 1954, ch. 7.
74 CecRa, 1956, 94; CecRa, 1959, 57–58; and CecRa, 1960, 37.
75 Dickerman, "Economic and Social Change in an African City" (n. 23 above), 182; and Côme Surumwe, "Histoire de Camp Belge de Bujumbura" (Mémoire, Ecole Normale Supérieure du Burundi, 1970–71), 21, 25.
76 Although Belge was to be the évolué quarter, there were levels of "evolution" within its confines. Salaried, educated workers were the upper echelon in this class structure still in the process of formation. They lived in free housing in durable structures, given to them by their employers (the government as well as private firms), and located in special subquarters; Dickerman, "Economic and Social Change," 102; Surumwe, 21, 25.
foyer. As the foyer nurse explained at a colonial congress in Brussels, the Usumbura staff wanted to foster simultaneously discipline and trust. The curriculum was designed to accept rather than penalize women for their irregular attendance and to be like a “home”: “These classes shouldn’t give the impression of a school, it is necessary that little by little the women consider the Foyer Social as being an integral part of their lives. It is necessary that they should always be welcome, that they laugh and sing there, that they feel free there, that they can come between the hours of the classes.” Yet as part of the foyer’s “methodology” of “moral order,” rules were established, which women were expected to follow. Women were to arrive for lessons on time. They were to wash their hands beforehand. They were to show respect toward their teacher. They had a ticket that they were to bring with them whenever they came to study. They were supposed to inform the director whenever they moved, married, or gave birth so that she could add this to the records. These regulations were printed in Swahili and Kirundi, and students were supposed to take them home to their husbands. Women who were not well behaved were asked to leave.

An emphasis on willing submissiveness and acquiescent emulation especially marked house visits. All women who were enrolled at the foyer were susceptible to home visits. Physical access to women’s homes gave European social workers, and before them the White Sisters, the opportunity to enter into women’s private worlds and inspect for cleanliness, propriety, and display of material goods, and generally to evaluate women’s achievement in emulating what was taught in the classroom. Dorothéa Shabani remembered the early house visits of the White Sisters at the time her mother was attending the mission foyer:

The white nuns used to come and check and see how people lived, how they stayed at home, how the Christians displayed their Christianity at home. To see how the Christians were at home. Or else! . . . At home, they always found

78 Congrès colonial national, La promotion de la Femme au Congo et au Ruanda-Urundi (Brussels, 1956), 271–72.
79 “Impanuro zimwe zimwe zerekeye abiga biga muli foyer social A.S.A.C.,” n.d., mimeographed typescript from miscellaneous files, CSE.
80 Angèle Makala was expelled for disciplinary reasons in 1959, and her polite letter written to the foyer director did not gain her readmittance (Angèle Makala to director of the Foyer social, June 5, 1959, miscellaneous files, CSE).
81 Fond R/RU no. 3 (140), 1953, 6bis, AA.
crosses displayed. They found things like . . . my mother . . . she always displayed crosses with photographs of Blessed Mary. She used to teach us in the morning, asked us in the evening how we played with friends. Father and mother, we all sat in the evening and prayed together. Always before sleeping. . . . When they came, we were always very happy because for children that meant some medals, or some holy pictures. They always gave us some small gifts. This always made us happy.\(^{82}\)

Catherine Mirerekano fondly remembered being visited by *foyer* social workers and monitors.

They came, passed the whole day at the house. They taught us cleanliness at the house, especially the bed, the children’s bed, how to make it, how to cover the bed with bedspreads and checkered sheets. This day was truly joy, a holiday. . . . They visited the whole house. . . . The leader came to see and make the patrol . . . a Rwandan . . . She had a *carte du mérite civique*. . . . The French woman who taught us and examined us was a better friend. It was she who helped us do all the house. . . . They told you in advance in order to obtain good results. If they appreciated the work, they gave you good advice. They helped us a tiny bit. They returned to see if you had put everything in place, there where it should be, if you had cooked. Once the patrol was finished, they went off.\(^{83}\)

Dorothéa and Catherine’s recollections of house visits are cheerful yet not without a shade of ambivalence. Dorothéa’s memory of gifts of medals and holy pictures as well as “*Or else!*” warnings discloses the seductive yet threatening meaning of these visits for a young girl. Catherine recognized a visit’s purpose was “patrol,” to verify the following of lessons, “to avoid,” as she explained, “all cheating.”\(^{84}\) Dorothéa’s memory evokes an image of being rewarded for family togetherness and piety, whereas Catherine’s “holiday” conjures an image of approval for domestic cleanliness and bourgeois taste in interior decoration. For the nuns, Christian medals and crosses were displayed; for the European social workers, bedspreads and checkered sheets. House visits

\(^{82}\) Dorothéa Shabani, February 26, 1985.

\(^{83}\) Catherine Mirerekano, February 20, 1985.

\(^{84}\) Ibid.
advanced colonial knowledge of colonized society because they permitted entry into African households, where colonial representatives evaluated and attempted to alter family behavior and domestic space. In Usumbura, the historical shift from nun visitations to social worker visitations entailed differences in how domesticity and housewifely activity was evaluated and shaped, and signified that "the relationship between family and state was subtly changing."\(^85\)

House visits were considered the "best point of contact" with the foyer's students, and social workers in Usumbura wished they had more time for such visits.\(^86\) They were carefully advised on how to handle them delicately.

At first she [the social worker] won't make any remarks, she will strive especially to be of service and to be interested in all that is told to her. Once confidence is established, after one or two visits, it's then only that the Social Auxiliary will be able to assert her demands; at each visit she will call attention to only one point, she will enter it on the card and will verify at the next visit if this point is observed. For example: lack of ventilation, unwashed dishes, an unmade bed, disorder, etc. These visits will be numerous, systematic and repeated; they naturally mustn't assume the character of meddling or of a police raid; all the trust of the native would be lost.\(^87\)

The house visits were also a means of gathering intimate details about African households. Besides a record for each woman with notes on class progress, household condition, and "information received from third parties, visits to her family, her evolution, etc.,"

\(\rightarrow\) Anna Davin, "Imperialism and Motherhood," *History Workshop*, no. 5 (Spring 1978), 9–66, esp. 13. House visits were not invented on colonial terrain, nor were they always welcome. "Lady health visitors" had been inspecting the hygienic and familial conditions of working-class homes in metropolitan contexts since the turn of the century as part of larger campaigns to transform European working-class life by "teaching the ideology as well as the skills of domesticity" (Davin, 38). For the British case, see a \(\rightarrow\) Celia Davis, "The Health Visitor as Mother's Friend: A Woman's Place in Public Health, 1900–14," *Social History of Medicine* 1, no. 1 (April 1988): 39–59. On the work of visiting nurses in Belgium and extracts of their reports on visits to working-class homes, see *L'assistance sociale et l'Oeuvre Nationale de l'Enfance* (Brussels: Oeuvre Nationale de l'Enfance, n.d. [ca. 1927]).

\(^86\) Usumbura, Foyer Social, Rapport annuel, 1957, 11.

\(^87\) Ministère des Colonies, Deuxième Direction Sociale, "Programme d'activités d'un Foyer Social."
each student of the foyer had a social card. The social cards itemized each woman’s ethnic background, religion, type of marriage, bridewealth payments, sources of revenue (including money received from her husband), husband’s job and salary, the size and condition of housing, and types of kitchen utensils and bedding. “These elements will be gathered only bit by bit,” the foyer staff was informed, “because a first contact will not permit asking all this information, the one concerned will be mistrustful, she isn’t confident yet.”

Although the colonial administration in Brussels expected these visits to be made to all women connected to the foyer, the students of the housekeeping and monitor classes in Usumbura were visited most frequently. In 1951, the staff made 565 house visits. In 1954, the number increased to 1,182: the nurse made 292 visits; forty visits were made to those enrolled in the most-beautiful-house contest; 250 of 1,129 students in the basic course were visited; and a total of 600 visits were made to the homes of the sixty housekeeping-class students. House visits also varied in duration and tone. Thérèse Namugisha, a housekeeping student, remembered a visit as a special, joyful occasion when her home was turned into the foyer and all the students and instructors came. “During the year of completion, if it was a question of preparing food, they cooked at your house. . . . Everybody, with the students, came to prepare the meal at your house. They swept the house, mended your clothes and went home, leaving all [the food] behind. The day after they went elsewhere and did the same thing. . . . They helped me. We cooked together. . . . They knew Swahili. . . . We talked of our works and they looked at how the house was. . . . It was good.” Yvonne Mawazo, a poorer woman who attended the basic course, recalled the house visit as a perfunctory inspection of the tidiness of her home and colonial entry into her private space. “They came one time [to my house]. . . . They found it swept. They found me outside. They entered and went even into the bedroom and found that my bed was well made.”

The Usumbura foyer staff considered the visits the “most beautiful part” of their work because of the “moral influence” the

88 Ibid.
89 Ibid.
90 Rapport, 1951, 114.
91 Usumbura, Foyer Social, Rapport annuel, 1954. The reports calculate the total as 1,082 rather than 1,182.
visits had on the families. The results of this social work tended to be "encouraging" yet mixed: "Many of the houses of graduates can be visited spontaneously: their cleanliness, their appearance are impeccable. Other elements are more rebellious towards the housekeeping training." The colonial administration in Brussels advised that house visits would be more "effective" if they were made after 4:30 because the husband would have returned from work: "It is necessary to interest him also in these initiatives, in order that he help his wife and attach himself to his home." The list of rules and guidelines that were handed out to the students closed with a message to their husbands, asking them to send their wives to the foyer regularly and to help their wives to follow the advice received at the foyer. Before a woman could begin the monitor classes, she had to have the permission of her husband.

In seeking the cooperation and consent of husbands, the foyer attempted to shape marital relations and bolster men's marital authority by delegating the privilege of colonial power to them. For instance, in 1955, the director of the foyer, Mlle Frankard, spoke at the local évolué center for men, Cercle du Progrès, on "The Foyer Social and Husbands." "We have noticed that many women start the course ... but by negligence or lack of perseverance abandon coming after a few tries. A little more severe and regular surveillance on the part of the husband could only lead to excellent results." She reiterated the outlines of the model évolué couple's family life. "I am certain that each of you ... wishes to find a pleasing interior when you return home from work. Isn't there a way, from time to time, to lend a hand in helping your wives create this attractive atmosphere? ... The wife musn't be considered only as the property of the husband but also as his collaborator. To cite only a few examples: meals eaten in common, common meetings and receptions, outings and trips as a family." A savings bank at the foyer where women could save money was another effort to encourage family thrift and reshape spending patterns, perhaps even giving some wives greater monetary control. Mlle Frankard told the members of the local évolué society that establishing a family budget was a good example of collaboration between spouses because a study had just been conducted by the mission

94 CecRa, 1954, ch. 7.
95 Rapport (n. 45 above), 1951, 114.
97 "'Impanuro zimwe zimwe" (n. 79 above).
99 Ibid.
100 CecRa, 1949, 18–19.
showing that most husbands spent a good part of their salaries on themselves. Later in the year, the director thanked the husbands for their assistance and said the *foyer* personnel noticed a marked improvement during house visits: "Here we must especially thank the husbands of our women who have favored by their support the execution of advice given as to the improvement of hygienic conditions, upkeep of the house, etc."  

African monitors were used increasingly to make house visits. Godelieva Murekeyisoni, a Rwandan monitor, recalled how she "helped the people to change."

We organized ourselves in groups to see the cleanliness in the house. . . . They learned to wash their children, dress them, make the bed, clean their husband’s clothes and perform bodily hygiene. They learned to clean cooking utensils, plates. Everything. A pregnant woman would be able to know what to eat the moment of giving birth, how to make the baby’s clothes before giving birth. . . . They changed a lot and in the end it was good. We made sure of that. . . . We went slowly since many didn’t comprehend well, but all the same, they managed to be able to do it.

Visits conducted by African monitors made their African students uneasy, according to the *foyer’s* annual report. “It is rather difficult to visit at home with the monitors. In effect, if the indigenous women very easily welcome the European staff to their homes, they are much more reticent vis-à-vis the monitors and the husbands do not like having other women intrude into the privacy of their household (we have had several remarks on this subject).” The blame for this reticence was directed at the monitors, and more time was spent teaching the technique of the home visit to them. Yet this passage also indicates that the colonial women themselves were not always welcome and encountered reluctance and objections, especially from husbands. It suggests that not all African women and their husbands were interested in colonial approval, and some resented colonial intrusion into their homes.

102 Ibid.
103 In 1951, the monitors were helping with house visits, whereas in 1960 they were doing most of this activity (*Rapport*, 1951, 114; and CecRa, 1960, 38).
105 Usumbura, Foyer Social, Rapport annuel, 1957, 11. The same uneasiness is evident in Mirerekano’s recollection of house visits (n. 83 above).
The institutionalization of domesticity

Although the foyer sanctioned separate spheres for women and men as well as women’s confinement in the private sphere, house visitations by foyer representatives of colonial rule brought the public eye into the private sphere. The foyer’s festive occasions and special events were recurring public rituals that similarly institutionalized a colonial vision of private life by offering urban Africans “new traditions of subordination” celebrating domesticity.\(^\text{106}\)

Christmas, New Year’s, and other holiday teas and parties were organized, and all the women of the foyer and their families were encouraged to attend. Women who completed the housekeeping and monitor classes received certificates at graduation ceremonies. Europeans and évolueses attended, colonial officials made speeches, the graduating women sang songs composed for the occasion, and prizes were awarded.\(^\text{107}\) Exhibits of student work were displayed for the African and European publics.\(^\text{108}\) “We are satisfied in general with the good mentality and cordial understanding reigning among the women of the foyer. At the moment of the celebrations and reunions, the European population is always agreeably surprised by this fine ambience which makes one think that the women find themselves at the foyer a bit like at their homes.”\(^\text{109}\)

In attending these rituals, the women came into contact with the larger colonial world beyond the foyer in their capacity as wives. These repetitive ceremonies were part of the colonial invention of a new tradition of family activity, marital togetherness, and mutual deference to colonial rule. This was most clearly demonstrated by the most-beautiful-house contests: not women but married couples entered these contests, which were funded by the colonial urban authorities as part of a general effort to encourage residents of the African urban quarters to decorate their homes according to European tastes. Mirerekano remembered joining the contest with her husband, the holder of a carte du mérite civique.\(^\text{110}\) “We made demonstrations in front of our house, the most original as could be. . . . Our husbands helped us with the decorations and ornaments on the outside. On the inside of the house we did it ourselves. . . . The

\(^{106}\) For a discussion of the invention of tradition generally, see Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, eds., The Invention of Tradition (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983); the quotation is from 227.

\(^{107}\) In 1951, women received gifts “proportioned” according to their attendance and the grades they received on class projects (Rapport, 1951, 114).

\(^{108}\) Ibid., 114; CecRa, 1951, 15; Usumbura, Foyer Social, Rapport annuel, 1954; CecRa, 1958, 60.

\(^{109}\) Usumbura, Foyer Social, Rapport annuel, 1954.

\(^{110}\) Catherine Mirerekano, February 20, 1985.
white who was in charge passed to see . . . if the preparation was
good, the right place to put the flowers, etc., how you put this, how
it was necessary to put this and that.”111 The director of the foyer social was proud that first prize usually went to a house in which
the wife had faithfully attended the foyer.112

Although in 1954, only twenty-eight families enrolled (this was
attributed to the population having been notified late), “Nevertheless,
we noticed that these families made real efforts to present truly coquettish interiors which amazed the jury which was com-
posed of 12 people this year. . . . The delivery of the prizes will take
place at the end of January and a small celebration will be
organized in order to encourage a large number to enroll for the
next contest. . . . A contest of house grounds (parcelles) will take
place at the same time.”113 The contest was used to help publicize
the foyer social and was intended to let the better students set an
example for the residents of the quarter; it also rewarded them and
their husbands materially and socially for their emulation of Euro-
pean ways. These contests were thought to have a “stimulating
educational capacity,” and the colonial office in Brussels recom-
mented that other contests—for the most beautiful garden and the
cleanest baby—be tried as well.114

Family ideology and colonized domesticity

House visits, contests and ceremonies, sewing, housekeeping,
motherhood classes, and meetings to solicit the cooperation of
husbands in disciplining wives were interlocking elements in the
Belgian colonial project to refashion gender roles and instill a
Western family ideology into African urban life. The foyer was a
prized agenda because it enabled colonial knowledge of African
urban households, their redefinition and bounding as the domestic,
private sphere, and their differentiation according to new colonial
representations of social class.

The foyer was formalized as an institution within a colonial
context of racism. The foyer was not about assimilation or about
Westernization. It was about “colonial mimicry.”115 The word évolué

111 Ibid.
112 “Le Foyer Social et les Epoux” (n. 98 above).
113 Usumbura, Foyer social, Rapport annuel, 1954.
114 Ministère des Colonies, Deuxième Direction, “Programme d'activités d'un
Foyer Social,” 5.
115 Homi Bhabha, “Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Dis-
was always a misnomer in Belgian colonial discourse, for civilization could never be reached by nonwhites. Civilization was exclusively white. Complete duplication of the trappings of European life was not only structurally impossible, but also strategically not permitted by the curriculum and activities of the foyer. As early as 1896, colonial wisdom contained the notion that girls receiving domestic education should not be shown "civilization... in a glass of frothy wine or a beautiful gown nor in unknown or refined food." The aspirations of ordinary women attending foyer mass classes were similarly restrained: they could make simple clothes but not embroidered dresses. Tension over the incorporation and distancing of Western products was most pronounced with the elite. Directions from Brussels encouraged the staff to use local items as much as possible to encourage thrift in family spending patterns. Yet the staff was advised that among évolués, "it is already too late, the European products are employed by preference, and the women have the impression that it would be returning to a savage state." Catherine Mirerekano recalled learning to prepare cauliflower with cream sauce and rare meat as well as many Burundian dishes "in an improved way a l'européenne." Likewise, the contents of the foyer’s model home were hardly those of an African family of modest means; yet they were equally not those of a European colonial family. Instead, a new "not quite/not white" colonized culture of évolué domesticity was being fashioned in Usumbura.

Though many of the city's women learned to make cauliflower with cream sauce, enjoyed the home visits of European critics, and generally deferred to European domestic values and practices, African women were not "simple-hearted victims of colonialism." To reduce the participation of African women in the foyer to an


119 “You see they insisted a lot on the preparation of dishes coming from products taken from tinned cans. The preparation consisted of a mixture with beans in a way that would be conservable and transportable” (Catherine Mirerekano, February 20, 1985).

120 Bhabha, 132.

interiorization of colonial ideology as it was formally articulated would oversimplify what was a contradictory and individualized process of women making choices within a complex colonial situation of varying cultural and economic constraints and opportunities. Moreover, many women chose not to go. Mirerekano explained, "Whoever could enter the foyer, rich or poor. Admission was open to all . . . but the poorest did not like to go there." A woman had to have leisure time to attend the foyer, which despite the impression of colonial observers, was not the case for the majority of women who, married or not, were farming, trading, or engaging in other forms of informal labor to get by, feed their children, or supplement their husbands’ wages. As Dorothéa Mwayuma of Belge recalled, “I was not going there . . . I did not want to, I knew the hoe, to farm only.” Yohali binti Mtoka of Buyenzi echoed: “My foyer was to farm only.” Among those who did go, the foyer vision that women should confine themselves to the domestic sphere and let their husbands be the breadwinners was not easily or fully accepted. Judith Curinyana abandoned her commercial sewing after having participated in the foyer, yet she turned to other forms of petty trade to support herself after being widowed. Her daughter became a professional seamstress. Thérèse Namugisha continued with her beer brewing and make-shift home bar; and Catherine Mirerekano went on to be an independent and successful businesswoman, supporting her family and buying a house, while her husband pursued a political career in pre- and postindependence politics. Finally, in picturing why African women verbalized such ardent memories of their foyer experiences and why so many muted others went, we need to be careful not to assume that their motives and experiences corresponded to colonial intentions, even if their actions met colonial desires. Many Usum-

122 Evidence from the mid-fifties indicates that Burundian women were less inclined to go to the foyer than were Congolese. Within some elements of Burundian culture, high female status was associated with domestic assistance, confinement to the home, and freedom from domestic chores. Attending a foyer where one was learning to wash and iron clothes might have been perceived as demeaning, and in the city Burundian women apparently had domestic servants to do these types of domestic tasks more often than did Congolese women (Foyer Social, Rapport annuel, 1957). Unfortunately, there is not other evidence by which to build this line of analysis. Attendance statistics do not exist in terms of ethnic background or urban quarter.

123 Catherine Mirerekano, February 20, 1985.

124 See Hunt, “We Refused to Be Insulted” (n. 14 above), 51–66.

125 Dorothéa Mwayuma, February 16, 1985.


bura women may not have valued an alien, colonial, and imposed domesticity "filtered uncritically through European categories of thought."¹²⁸ Nor would they have equated domesticity with "denigration."¹²⁹ The African women of Usumbura came from cultures where women were esteemed for skill in creating domestic objects by hand—Barundikazi and Banyarwandakazi for basket making, and Swahili women for prayer mat making. Some foyer opportunities may have resonated with and been interpreted as enriching African domesticities.¹³⁰

Though we cannot know, finally, why African women chose to participate or whether their participation signified a real acceptance of the family ideology promoted by the foyer, the institution and its projected aura of intimacy and homeliness seems to have been most appreciated by those who reached the higher levels of the curricular hierarchy. Reverse communication across the color line (from colonized to colonizer) was planned and expected to occur in intimate colonial encounters between European and African women. Judith Curinyana and Thérèse Namugisha, for example, recalled a mutual sharing of information among European and African women about food.¹³¹ "They taught us to use condiments there . . . European cuisine . . . but they asked us to show them Burundian cuisine and we taught them how to prepare beans . . . how the Barundi and Banyarwanda prepare beans, how to add oil, and then they accepted."¹³²

The negative image of colonial women as more racist than colonial men has inspired recent scholarship on colonial women's


¹³⁰ On such cultural resonance in a related South African context, "where domesticity has never been unambiguously confining," see Gaitskell, "Housewives, Maids or Mothers" (n. 3 above), esp. 251.


“positive” contributions to “mutual understanding” among the races. The danger is in romanticizing the experiences and accomplishments of European women in colonial contexts, as if they were an exception to colonial racism. The incorporation of European women into positions as professional social workers did not “feminize” Belgian colonialism. Rather, embedded within Belgian colonial paternalism was a paternalism which was used among women. Such colonial intimacy did not preclude power relations or antagonism. Maternal tone was selective: the female adult sometimes disciplined and sometimes nurtured the female child.

Not all African women would have cared to teach European women to cook beans. Likewise, the foyer was not identically preoccupied with all women. Colonial domesticity was not a unitary category. Historically, mission nuns and their social worker successors projected it differently. Within the governmental foyer, domesticity was promoted differently to Africans as the institution served to create divisions among them. The state-sponsored program accentuated housewifely and companionate conjugal behavior as students’ socioeconomic and curricular status rose. Elite families received more and different attention—in the classroom, during house visits, and in the new colonial urban traditions of ceremonies and house contests. The foyer was elaborated as an important colonial institution in the post–World War II period when the stabilizing of urban households as nuclear families and representing African elite distinctiveness were significant concerns to colonial authorities. The public rituals of colonized domesticity marked évolué wives and homes as distinct and superior, promoting

134 Callaway has argued that in Nigeria the official colonial worldview was “feminized” as European women were incorporated in greater numbers into professional positions and as wives were allowed to be mothers in the colony (Callaway, 47).
135 Belgian colonial policy is commonly characterized as paternalist; see Thomas Hodgkin, Nationalism in Colonial Africa (London: Frederick Muller, 1956), esp. 51–52. Belgian policy was also paternalist toward European women—at home and even more so in the colony; see C. Debroux, “La situation juridique de la femme europeenne au Congo Belge de 1945 a 1960,” Enquêtes et documents d’histoire Africaine 7 (1987): 14–23.
136 Olivia Harris and Kate Young warn that “we need to investigate the degree to which different social systems . . . affect the unity of this category” (n. 129 above), 112.
an emerging class of Africans who “lived in beautiful houses.” The *foyer social* thus became a key part of colonial efforts to solidify the class structure of Usumbura’s African residents and inscribe within this class structure colonial standards of prestige and status. In so doing, the *foyer* worked to establish, maintain, and enhance hierarchies among women, among Africans, between men and women, and between white colonials and Africans.

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