

EAP844 Recovering the Middle Congo archives at Pointe-Noire, Republic of Congo: new steps towards the social history of the Congo

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Survey: Searching for the colonial Middle-Congo archives (and other documentation relevant for the Congo's social history) at Pointe-Noire

1) Introduction: Congo-Brazzaville – a former colony with a lost colonial archive

Within the context of former French colonies in sub-Saharan Africa, the Republic of Congo presents a very unusual situation regarding the access to historical archives. Under French colonialism, most colonial territories had a territorial government whose documents were preserved in the capital of the territory in question (like Libreville in Gabon, Bangui in Oubangui-Chari, current-day Central African Republic, Fort-Lamy, current-day N'Djamena in the case of Chad, to mention just the Central African cases), but belonged at the same time to a federal administration with a government-general seated in Dakar (for French West Africa) or Brazzaville (for French Equatorial Africa). That means that for most of these former territories, archival resources for the colonial period (including, frequently, the conquest period with, often, rudimentary structures of European control over African populations) can be found in two places, the territorial archives and the archives of the governments-general.

This is not the case for the populations of the current Republic of Congo (called Middle-Congo under French colonial rule from 1894 to 1960), whose regions have a rich if understudied history. The principal trend in historiography of colonial (Central) Africa over the last four decades has been to increasingly concentrate on themes of social and cultural history of local populations, doing thus justice to their importance as historical actors. The Congolese cases have much to offer in that regard. The issues that are important for the social history of the Congolese populations under French colonialism include fields such as urban life and the creation of amalgamated cultural traits in cities and urban agglomerations, like for Brazzaville and

Pointe-Noire; religious “syncretism” exemplified through at least two major messianic movements, under the names of Matsuanism and Lassyism; the especially impressive experience of coerced labour regarding the scandals of the construction of the infamous railway line, the Congo-Océan connection, combined with other forms of exploitation of labour such as forced rubber collection and coerced road maintenance; and for the contact of, and redefinition by, local inhabitants faced with the programme of interventions in medical terms that was represented by colonial health agents – and this is just to mention four particularly interesting themes of analysis that could yet be deepened. But research on the history of the Congolese between the 1890s and 1960 suffers from an anomaly in archival practice in the Congolese territory – which is the (at least temporary) loss of the territorial archives. These archives disappeared, probably as a consequence of the transfer of the Middle-Congo’s capital from Pointe-Noire to Brazzaville (which had formerly been the federal capital of French Equatorial Africa but never been used as the territorial capital) in 1958. That year of 1958 was of immense political turbulence within the former French colonial empire: after a referendum (of 28 September) the former colonial territories were transformed into “autonomous states of the French Community”, leading to the creation to a number of new organisms and administrative structures, and the transfer of others from the level of the colonial federations to that of the territories. At the same time, the existence of French Equatorial Africa (AEF: *Afrique Equatoriale Française*) ended in 1958.

For practical issues of research, this means that the Republic of Congo lacks, for the time being, *any* territorial colonial archives that could be relevant for historical research – and this is indeed a massive exception, especially given that, in comparison with other former French colonies with a comparable size of populations, a volume of several thousand boxes of archival dossiers seems to be lost. It was, therefore, a priority to attempt to locate these lost archival holdings – together with a deeper reflection and better information on other potential archival resources in the Republic of Congo, including colonial and postcolonial series. A principal place of research is Pointe-Noire – where, to my best knowledge, no archival research has ever been carried out with the only exception of the studies of Héloïse Kiriakou, focusing on the period after independence and using in fact the city’s municipal archives. EAP844 therefore attempted the search for the lost colonial archives of the Middle-Congo in that city, relying on the hypothesis that, eventually, other (yet unknown) series of documents could also be found.

2) Alternative archival sources and distribution of sources from the former Middle-Congo after independence

These unusual conditions of the archival data from the Republic of Congo have, in my view, never been discussed by historians. This may be partly the case because regarding archival documentation on the territory; some other relevant archives exist, and have been more abundantly consulted. Specialists of the Congo have so far normally contented themselves with the Congo-related files from the Government-General of French Equatorial Africa – by independence, one half of these archives was declared French

patrimony and “repatriated” to finally constitute the series *Gouvernement-Général de l’Afrique Equatoriale Française* (GGAEF), accessible at the *Archives Nationales d’Outre-Mer* (ANOM) at Aix-en-Provence. The series offers an abundant coverage of correspondence of the federal services, and includes, for all four territories under the government-general based in Brazzaville, regional reports from the districts. However, those are relatively incomplete as far as the Middle-Congo is concerned (there are next to no such reports for the period after the Second World War, but a good number are also missing for the first 45 years of the 20th century).

The National Archives of the Republic of Congo in Brazzaville hold the other part of the former archives of the government-general. They also include information on all four territories of which the federation was composed, but have some more interesting dossiers that are perhaps somewhat more important for the social history of Congolese populations; petitions from the 1940s are such an interesting example. In my view, in spite of descriptions of the inventories, it is entirely impossible to understand the logic of separation between the two parts of the archives. The holdings in Brazzaville lack the variety in terms of regional reports, but offer a view on the experience of central services, which is linked to social historical conditions and their possible study.

Much less known as source for the history of Congolese society under colonial rule are the holdings of the *Centre des Archives Diplomatiques de Nantes* (CADN), branch of the French diplomatic archives. The CADN keeps Congolese files from the colonial period, which had been part of a series of old “colonial archives”; those (apparently under curious circumstances) had been “repatriated” via the French embassies (a fact that explains their storage in a diplomatic archive). In 2014, during a process of “reclassification”, these archival holdings were integrated into the archival series of documents from the French Embassy in Brazzaville. The reclassification makes little sense from a historical point of view, because it distracts the readers’ view from the existence of archival dossiers in Nantes that are from genuinely colonial services.

In contrast to the archives coming from the old government-general, it is relatively complicated to get a clear opinion on the origins of these “colonial archives” in possession of the CADN. The old “Fonds Brazzaville” (now part of the embassy series) consists especially of a number of regional reports from the level of the subdivisions or districts (reports that are partly identical with material present in the GGAEF dossiers at Aix-en-Provence, but much richer and more detailed with regard to local information), to which some information on local individuals (so-called “educated natives” and post-1945 politicians) is complementary. This series could (partly) originate from the territorial Middle-Congo archives, but there are indications that they might rather come from the inspectorate-general of French Equatorial Africa, which also collected copies of the reports.

In sum, while these three archives constitute indeed a place of research on the colonial Congo, their holdings are incomplete, and the search for the

territorial archives remains an important goal. Where colonial documents exist, they are mainly representative for processes in Brazzaville, and not in Pointe-Noire (with the exception of a part of the boxes to be found at Nantes). This panorama makes it clear that further research in Pointe-Noire was indispensable.

3. The *Archives de la Préfecture de Pointe-Noire* (APPN-CON)

Overview of the categorized dossiers (preliminary inventory)

The *Archives de la Préfecture de Pointe-Noire* were the most obvious place to seek colonial archives from the Middle-Congo; the hasty transfer of the central administration from Pointe-Noire to Brazzaville led to a situation in which, most likely, a number of older archives remained in the hands of what was now established as provincial administrations. However, the material conditions of the archives held by the Préfecture are extremely problematic, making a systematic search impossible and an unsystematic search extremely hazardous. In most cases, it was inevitable simply to screen material as it was found and to secure it in new boxes, drafting at the same time a preliminary inventory. Older inventories do not seem to exist.

The archives themselves can be consulted by researchers, eventually, but this has not happened before (however, in June 2017 (just after the end of the mission), the archives were visited by Meike de Goede, lecturer from the University of Leiden in the Netherlands and specialist of the religious movement of Matsuanism in the Congo, and she was given access via authorization of the provincial director of the archival services of Pointe-Noire). The archives of the Préfecture consist of one mixed “office”/storeroom (in which conditions of work are depressing, but where at least two desks exist as workplaces; a number of boxes with new processes from the 2000s mainly, are also conserved here, plus the ninety-nine historical boxes that were established during the stay. The “historical archives” can be found in a small storeroom next door – with material to be found in piles, thrown on the ground, but normally, at least, in certain groups of dossiers. The lateral parts of this storeroom are filled up to the ceiling. Calculating from the number and the size of boxes prepared during this mission, the available material could amount to 2000 to 2500 boxes.

The unsystematic research by the project team allowed identifying four groups of documents, which are categorized in this survey with regard to their chronological place. The reflections made on the frequency of dossiers containing material from specific periods are, of course, preliminary. Given the nature of the storeroom that restrained access to some of the lower parts of the piles of documents, it is not entirely impossible (if unlikely) that whole groups of dossiers from earlier periods are somewhere hidden in the inferior parts of the room. However, it was attempted to screen as widely as possible, and there is no real reason to believe in the existence of such concentrations (in chronological terms) of older material. The observations made on the dates of the material are therefore important:

1) It was possible to find documentation on the early period of the French colonial presence, and which is also important for and useful to supplement the analysis of concession company rule over Congolese populations, discussed already in the classic study by Catherine COQUERY-VIDROVITCH. However, the examples found were exceptionally early files in an archive where the dossiers seen were mainly on much later periods; the dossiers containing such detailed material amount to two boxes only (dossiers 95.1 and 97.1). Also, part of these dossiers (especially in the case of 95.1) seem to be later compilations of older material, used in the 1940s to decide in cases of land litigation or regarding the rights of concessions/companies. Finally, it is also remarkable that the files found containing material on the period between 1890 and 1920 are exclusively focused on the city/region of Loango, and they do not necessarily constitute files that could have been kept within the colonial territorial archives (although Loango had an important status as urban nucleus before that was finally given to Pointe-Noire). It is more plausible that these files were used by the authorities of the District of Kouilou and thus belong to the context of administering the urbanized part of a principally rural district. The existing decrees on and descriptions of rural concessions for the early period of the territory (dossiers 54.1 and, eventually, 54.2) might also fall in such a district perspective rather than in one of the central services.

2) A number of the later materials of the APPN, but especially those regarding the period between 1946 and 1958, are most likely from the disappeared Middle-Congo territorial archives. This is the case for processes that are clearly not from the district level – such as “Territoire Moyen-Congo. Commune-Brazzaville. Divers” (1954) (dossier 4.3), “Sécurité. Maintien de l’Ordre. Moyen-Congo (1948)” (dossier 28.1), “Affaires Politiques” (1946) (dossier 31.3), “Moyen-Congo. Affaires Sociales” (dossier 31.4), “Affaires Militaires Moyen-Congo” (1950–1958) (dossier 35.2), or “Moyen-Congo. Correspondence administrative” (1948–1953) (dossier 66.1) and “Moyen-Congo. Correspondence officielle” (1956) (dossier 80.4). Generally, documentation on military or political affairs should be part of the files of the central services (see boxes 34,)

In the case of local reports like the highly interesting information ofnMvouti subdivision (dossier 2.6), it is impossible to understand if the existing report was destined to the district administration of Kouilou or to the governor in Pointe-Noire (but it probably went to the district level); the same is true for a report on Niari District (dossier 17.4, but which was probably rather expedited to the central services). While it can therefore be argued that documents from this source were integrated into the holdings of the Préfecture (and probably forgotten at some point), their lacunae are striking and give the picture of a very incomplete process. Only very few documents from the territorial services from the 1930s could be located (an example for exceptional such files are dossiers 61.1 and, within limits, 69.2), in some cases it appears logical that they had been regrouped and used during socioeconomic and legal processes in the period after the Second World War.

A second part of the files belonging to the years 1930 to 1958 are clearly from the colonial district administration and not from the territorial central services. They can clearly be identified whenever they refer to public works, infrastructure projects and economic plans having to do with the city and

agglomeration of Pointe Noire (see the different dossiers in box 11); the files are clearly of a more regional nature. The economic cooperatives (*sociétés de prévoyance*) of the Kouilou district (dossier 20.1) or the “native courts” (*tribunaux indigènes*) (dossier 22.1, dossiers of box 24, dossier 25.2.) of the same district are also part of that logic. The archives of the Préfecture also hold information on recruitment processes of personnel specifically for the Kouilou District (dossiers 50.1 and 59.3, see also dossier 51.2), including the European teaching staff (dossier 49.1) and other correspondence that is marked as having taken place between the districts of Pointe-Noire and Mvouti in the 1940s and 1950s (dossier 58.3) or of internal administrative correspondence of the Kouilou District (dossier 65.5). Even clearer is the more local nature of the files in the relatively frequent, more technical dossiers including reports on processes and decisions in the city of Pointe-Noire and the surrounding district (see boxes 70 and 73, dossier 77.3). Like for the documents coming from the central territorial services, it seems to be rare to find files that would be earlier than from the 1940s.

A third part of this group is more likely to belong to the district context, but it is often complicated to be certain – this includes, e.g., reports on administrative inspection tours in subdivisions (a highly useful and interesting source for social history), which seem to clearly favour the subdivisions under the administration of the Kouilou District. The reports of chieftaincies (e.g. dossier 7.4.) are representative for that problem of categorization. This issue becomes even more complicated in the case of confidential political reports (dossier 20.2) or of prison reports (21.1; 79.5) from the Kouilou region of the 1940s and 1950s, which could have been part of the documentation received from the central services, but are more likely to be copies of the versions sent to the governor, held by the district services.

3) A small number of important files illustrate the moment of transition and give both a local and regional panorama of social processes (on themes like trade unions, xenophobia, or religious movements), sometimes paired with information on a more territorial level. It is relatively complicated to make sense of the background of these files, especially where they comment on political and security-relevant issues. In some cases, it is likely that the information comes from security services and gendarmerie units that are still based in Pointe-Noire, in spite of the transfer of the central services in 1958. In others, it is entirely unclear why information that is probably produced in Brazzaville ends up in a (now) provincial archive, such as, for example, in the case of security reports from Madingou and Mouyondzi (dossier 2.5) and for political reports from the Pool region (dossier 33.3), or for other security reports on the territory that lack the district perspective (dossier 33.1); it seems nevertheless obvious that they were not produced for a regional or district but for a territorial perspective. Some administrative overall reports for the entirety of the territory can also be found for that transition period (dossier 78.3).

The situation is different for processes that were clearly linked to regional observation, like that of the reorganization of “traditional rule” in the Madingo-Kayes and Mvouti districts belonging to the Pointe-Noire region (dossier 3.4, see also 7.7), on local credits/loans and budgets (dossiers 25.1 and 73.4), or on electoral lists in the region and complaints with regard to regional elections

(dossiers 70.5 and 76.1). Questions of ministerial residences in the (now) second city of Congo-Brazzaville also appear to belong to internal discussions within the district (dossier 59.1). Clearly marked as “urban files” were those of dossiers on the Pointe-Noire gendarmerie and verbal processes taken up by that service (dossiers 65.2 and 77.5), and files on urbanism, forestry, police, commercial chambers and postal services (within dossier 71.3); some other correspondence is also marked as coming from the services of the city (dossiers 72.1 and 76.2). The exchange correspondence between the city of Pointe-Noire and the surrounding Kouilou District also belong to this group of regional files (dossier 81.1).

Some territorial files now produced in Brazzaville may have ended up in the Pointe-Noire archives just because of a distribution of copies in various regions: this is likely to be the case for protocols of the member territories of the former AEF (dossier 40.3). The same probably applies for the file discussing (and recapitulating the plan of) Charles de Gaulle’s visit of Congo-Brazzaville in 1959. The case is much clearer whenever it is pointed out that the regional services were the recipients of correspondence, e.g. from the French High-Commissioner of the Middle-Congo (dossier 83.1), or where the correspondence is explicitly marked as “regional” (dossier 92.1).

For some dossiers, only a detailed analysis might allow putting them into one or the other category. This is definitely the case for a dossier on security (“maintien de l’ordre”) (50.3) that seems to focus on the Pointe-Noire region (and could thus come from the regional authorities), but should normally be expected to be a product of the central services. The question of transports (dossier 60.1) would also need an in-depth analysis, and the same is true for a dossier on reorganization of chieftaincy between 1959 and 1962 (dossier 64.4). In some cases, the analysis could be carried out: an interesting dossier of police information from the year 1958 to 1960 (dossier 61.3) could be identified as belonging to the regional services, and the (scanned) dossier from the 1961 security services (96.2) is certainly part of such a context.

Fourth, within the APPN-CON, at least one half of the available documents is from the postcolonial Republic of Congo. Those files have not been a priority of the EAP project, and they could in some cases be left without categorization, but in others, it was not possible to simply put these dossiers back and they were thus included in the process of the preliminary inventory. The resulting analyzed files give us a first impression of the opportunities of research for historians interested in the Republic of Congo’s postcolonial past. Many of the dossiers present are simple lists and invoices, as it appears that no selection of files has ever been attempted. However, the dossiers studied include some spectacular possibilities: I would simply like to mention a group of surveillance reports on persons from just before the Marxist-Leninist state in 1967 (dossier 3.3); verbal processes of enquiry from the Pointe-Noire region (dossiers 79.1); two dossiers on the victims of xenophobic outbreaks against Congolese citizens in the neighbouring Gabon in September 1962, leading to their repatriation (dossiers 91.2 and 94.1); written essays and contributions by members of the youth organizations of the unity party in the Pointe-Noire region and activities of state and other companies (dossier 93.7); monthly local reports from Mvouti and other districts (dossier 94.4). Some of these dossiers also appear to come rather from a context of the national

services (see dossier 94.3), but are nevertheless to be found in the archives of the Préfecture.

Explanation of scanned dossiers

The dossier 97.1 was scanned as example of a series of letters and correspondence having to do with the organization of the concession domains in the area of Loango, by then a principal first outpost of the French presence in the Congo basin. Until 1920, the city of Loango remains the principal city of the Kouilou and thus of the coastal region of the colony of the Middle-Congo; it is therefore particularly important for early export agriculture under colonial rule. The economic role of the region made it interesting to discuss, from the perspective of the administration, the rights of “the natives”, and to interpret the eventual difficulties that could appear as consequence of harsh economic regimes.

This dossier is centered on the perspective of the administration, but, nevertheless, highly relevant for the social history of the region, and, at the same time, a valuable complement to the views of early French concession company rule as they appear in COQUERY-VIDROVITCH’s classic study. The correspondence especially comes from regional, but also local administrators who give their opinions on the political potentials of the concession situation. This documentation is valuable for the (frequently uneasy) relations between settlers and administrators; it also helps to reconstruct relations of dependency and the debates on economic projects within the coastal part of the territory.

The files include views on other actors within the project of exploitation of African societies by concession companies. The opinion of the Catholic missions (and the discussion of administrative agents on the behaviour of the missionaries) also appears as part of the dossier. The internal discussions also comment on the elaboration of a “native policy”, as part of a complicated experimentation in the creation of structures of rule. The dossier has few to offer in terms of letters or reports that are not written by the administration; we can thus speak of a bias within this group of documents. Even so, the administrative perspective transcends a purely technical dimension and offers wide discussions on social life in the Loango region in the period under company rule.

The dossier contains a number of very early files, from the 1880s, which most luckily add to those used in the older studies on Congolese history in the 19th century. The larger part of the documents comes from a specific phase of this period of concession-company activity, which is between 1907 and 1910; most of the administrative discussions have to do with the situation of concessions (or of the situation of “natives” having to deal with these concessions) in that particular period. A smaller part of the files also refers to the conditions of 1920, this decade initiating dramatic change in the Congo with the official elimination of privately organised socioeconomic exploitation in the colony of the Middle-Congo. A small but useful number of hand-drawn maps and designs join the documents.

Contrary to other dossiers containing older documentation within the APPN, dossier 97.1 was apparently not compiled in view of offering material for later,

e.g. land processes of the 1940s and afterwards. It can be regarded as a dossier with an autonomous, internal logic.

The war years were quite dramatic for social life in Congo-Brazzaville, leading to an intensification of forced labour and forced production and leading to flight movements within the territory. In part, these situations can be studied on the basis of material from both the *Archives Nationales Congolaises* in Brazzaville, and the district reports that were brought into the Nantes archives. However, more systematic appreciations (including with abundant testimony from local populations) are rather rare. In that regard, dossier 96.1 offers an impressive discussion of local views on the situation of hardships under the war regime, including views that are difficult to be reconstituted from alternatives sources.

The local reactions that are debated and interpreted in the reports and the correspondence include the attraction of new religious movements (including here the Watch Tower), sexual abuse of local women by “native soldiers” and the risks of such incidents happening in a war situation (leading to a long process on the effects of the garrison at Fouta), and the effects of rumours leading to desertion (this included a possible future role of the United States in the region).

Equally interesting is a well-documented dispute of a French agent with a colonial agronomist accused of holding racist positions and practicing racist language against the Congolese populations; this process was the result of a written complaint of the Congolese workers of the coffee store of Loemba against the withholding of their wages. For 1941, the dossier includes an impressive police report on the behaviour and attitudes of local population of the Kouilou region, which cited on African residents interpreting the intensification of coerced labour as a kind of “new slavery” (which is interesting because this connection was rarely voiced in local comments and normally appears, where it can be found, in elite propaganda and discourse).

Other processes are interested in the effects of the war situation on economic behaviour. Smuggling networks between the Pointe-Noire region and neighbouring Angolan Cabinda district were run by Portuguese merchants and lorry drivers. The activities of the director of the Pointe-Noire prison, using the penal labour force for a kind of clandestine shadow economy are a second issue in that context. The behaviour of a certain kind of French (and Belgian) settlers mistreating the “natives” found coverage in such reports.

Finally, it is also possible to find discussions that immediately connect with the abovementioned possibilities of material from other, Congolese and French, archives. This is the case, e.g., for a discussion about widespread flight of local Congolese labourers from the work sites of the *Société de Construction de Batignolles* in 1942, leading to detailed enquiries of the colonial police authorities into the conditions of labour. Clandestine meetings of the African employees of the CFCO were also a subject of discussion within the dossier. A number of such cases are transmitted with long verbal processes, often in hand-written form, discussing (with a colonial bias) the experiences of Congolese employees.

In 2015, Jean-Pierre BAT published a book characterising the post-independence Congo as field of action of French spies and security

personnel, as part of a *fabrique des barbouzes*. His approach, which ultimately belongs to a whole universe of interpretation around the French neocolonial networks created by notorious schemer and Secretary of African and Malagasy Affairs of the French presidency, Jacques Foccart, overinterprets the French role in Central Africa. But one particular part of that story is quickly forgotten: files from the security services, if rightly interpreted, can indeed be highly important for the social history of Congo-Brazzaville and its various regions.

Dossier 96.2 offers a type of documentation that is rare or inexistent in the Foccart archives or the private archives consulted in other work: the security reports of a (most probably French) agent reporting on local events in Pointe-Noire shortly after independence. The information also contains a number of annexes that present copies of personal correspondence on the one hand, and pamphlets and trade union libels on the other hand. It is very likely that these reports were destined to the Congolese ministry of the interior in Brazzaville or the Congolese presidency, but it is plausible that copies of the reports reached the French embassy or the military-security personnel installed by the Foccart secretariat. However, the local take inherent in the dossier is most spectacular. The principal (unnamed) author of the reports seems to have a good network of informants that offer input on local situations. 1961 is of course a late year with regard to the goals of the project – but the importance of the source justifies its inclusion into the dossiers that were analyzed and digitised in this survey.

The discussions contained in such documentation include various themes on which information is difficult to obtain. They include the internal life of local political party cells and the development of trade unions in the context of Pointe-Noire, but also give an impression of the atmosphere of life in the public sector, where the early economic setbacks and cutbacks after independence had visible effects from the first months of the existence of the new state onwards. The atmosphere in the port city was therefore very tense in this early phase after decolonization, as the reactions on a visit by President Fulbert Youlou clearly demonstrated. Consequently, what was identified as the “security situation” in Pointe-Noire, was highly important for a debate on social life in the city and agglomeration.

Other themes are perhaps less obvious, but well represented within the reports that constitute the dossier. One is on religious cults and their importance in the Koulou region: this discussion includes the ‘messianic’ movements of Lassism (Bougism) in the region, also in competition with other religious groups such as Kimbanguism, which was better known from the (former) Belgian Congo. Another discussion concerns ethnic issues of the Vili population of the Pointe-Noire region, and of their importance as compared to other motives of group mobilization. Thirdly, xenophobia is also a subject, as the files contain information on xenophobic outbreaks against Dahomean and Togolese immigrants (the “Popos”) in the country.

4. The Archives de la Marie de Pointe-Noire (AMPN-CON)

As compared to the situation at the *Archives de la Préfecture*, the municipal archives are much more functional. Like at the Préfecture, the service is still in use for current affairs, but the AMPN-CON also have a working order of many

postcolonial dossiers, which sometimes start as series from the early days of the independent state, sometimes from the moment of radicalization of the Marxist-Leninist regime by 1972. The archives offer a hand-written inventory that helps to find files, although they are not always dated and although the descriptions are quite rudimentary. According to the archival staff in place, the internal organization of the archives profited from the contribution and supervision by Eugène Loubou, who was also responsible for the internal organization of the municipal archives at Brazzaville, and is said to have initiated the classification and inventory of the files. The logic of the organization is indeed close to that of the Brazzaville municipal archives.

As a test, I consulted the reports from the police in Pointe-Noire between 1958 and 1964 (Box M8), which contained information on several cases that are relevant for the everyday history of the city. This is doubtlessly important empirical material of a type that has rarely been used in studies, and might give a reason for future research stays of historians in these archives. Even so, the documents consulted clearly showed to be local files related to events in the municipality, and did not represent correspondence from national territorial services.

The project obviously wanted to inquire if the municipal archives are the holders of any colonial series that could come from the Middle-Congo territorial archives. Therefore, all uncategorised colonial boxes and dossiers that could be shown to project members (around twenty) were consulted. A number of these dossiers were photographed: these include the unclassified dossiers on Social Affairs (1957), and the copies of correspondence sent by the mayors of Pointe-Noire. In general, the material analyzed was from the late colonial period, but it related in all cases to life in the capital of the territory, i.e. urban problems, and those of the infrastructure of the agglomeration. For specific kinds of studies, e.g. on migration into the city that became an important issue after the Second World War, those materials are of great interest.

The postcolonial dossiers presented in the inventory are grouped into 21 categories. Researchers might want to consult the archives as a repository for access to an amount of (partly published) documents from the presidency that are difficult to get elsewhere, including the 1972 regional conference in Kouilou (series A). Information on the city of Pointe-Noire and its relations (apparently including correspondence) with the neighbouring districts are the subject of another series – including details on the various elections from after independence, but also on visits and audits, and on the sessions of the Popular Council between 1972 and 1996 (series C). Two other parts are dedicated to the individual town quarters (or *arrondissements*) (series D) and to the (extremely detailed) personnel files of the secretariat office of the town hall, which are joined by details on funerals, marriages, and births (series E). Of the financial services (series F), the inventory provides only the most rudimentary information on the structure of the dossiers. Many other series (development: G; planification/urbanism: H; land questions and cadastral issues: I; equipment and technical services: J) are much less specifically presented – but those on health issues (series K) and on the police in particular (series M) appear to contain valuable reports (as mentioned above, this has been checked for the police files). The information on educational structures (O) and organization of transport (P) also appears to be

appreciable, while the contents of the sports (L), cultural activities (N) and labour (S) and trade union (U) affairs seem quite reduced. It is a problem that for all these series, their chronological position is not indicated. Access conditions are equally unclear; it is, for instance, not specified if there is an embargo period for very recent documents. In any case, apart from the unclassified colonial series from the municipality (mainly regarding the 1950s), no colonial documents seem to be available at AMPN-CON.

5) The Archives du Chemin de Fer Congo-Océan (ACFCO-CON)

Rumours said that the CFCO might have a good number of colonial documents currently in its possession, eventually going beyond themes that strictly concern the affairs of the public railway company. Therefore, it seemed a sensible idea to dedicate some research time to understand the structure of these archives, and to attempt some sample consultations. It was hoped that the information thus provided could at least give clues on the social experience of railway personnel during the colonial period, describing the situation of one principal category of public sector employees over time.

The archives of the CFCO are to be found in a two-floor building. It remained unclear in spite of conversations if these archives can really be regularly consulted; information given by the archivists was contradictory but seemed to indicate that free consultation was rather difficult to imagine. Our conversation partners at the level of the archives commented that many processes were “political”, and therefore unguided research at this repository was difficult to authorize.

The archivists of the place have an internal inventory that is relatively well-organised, with short descriptions of various files within a dossier, and indication of the date ranges. However, this inventory does not contain any reference to colonial documents at all. The different dossiers mentioned appear to be on rather technical and engineering issues on the one hand (interesting perhaps for researchers focused on infrastructure maintenance and transport in postcolonial Central Africa), and on political issues and party representation in the company on the other hand (certainly a most fascinating source for any future approach to write the history of the Marxist-Leninist phase of Congo-Brazzaville).

Insisting on the need to see older files on the colonial period, it was possible to get an impression of the personnel files of the CFCO, for which a big part of the storeroom of the lower floor of the building is reserved. The collection is impressive. It would apparently allow to get detailed information on any employee who ever worked for the company from 1934 onwards, and perhaps partly even for the construction period from 1921. As far as it could be ascertained, these personal processes seem to be organised by cohort and then by the name of the individual employee. Overall, this is a well-ordered part of the archive, indispensable for scholars who would want to understand the Congo-Océan railway, deepening the existing studies.

After further insistence, the members of EAP844 were shown the upper floor of the archives building, which has an impressive mountain of papers just piled up. Shelves to the back of the large room also contain hundreds of folders, but which are mainly on various types of affairs from the 1980s and 1990s or even later (and most seemed to be rather technical). Amongst the

piled documents (which amount to a volume that reminds the dossiers of the Préfecture archives storeroom), it was possible to locate processes from the 1950s, but they were not frequent. It seems difficult to know if older dossiers might be at the bottom of the mountain, but that would rather be a surprise. The reorganization of that part of the archives (or saving them, for instance, as the files are unlikely to be conserved under these conditions for more than a couple of decades from now) should be another priority for alternative future archival projects carried out in Pointe-Noire.

To finish the analysis of the CFCO Archives (and given the absence of consultable colonial dossiers of greater number or size), I managed to get access to one of the dossiers of party cell documentation that are (at least in theory) available at these archives. The dossier (148) contained important documentation on party cell meetings of the early 1980s, which give insight into the conflicts and debates characterizing the building of worker participation into an (allegedly) Marxist-Leninist society and state. A number of similar processes already appear in the inventory, and (provided that the archivists and the CFCO are ready to allow access to them even to individual researchers that do not arrive in the context of a particular group or mission) could well be at the heart of an analysis of workers' life in Congo-Brazzaville during the popular republic phase.

6) Conclusion

If discussed exclusively in terms of finding a coherent colonial archive in Pointe-Noire, the mission EAP844 would need be considered a relative failure. For a good number of processes especially from the conquest and the interwar period, the archives in Nantes, Aix-en-Provence and Brazzaville continue to be the principal repository of sources. Only fragments of what had been documentation coming from the territorial Middle-Congo archives were located, a great mass of these archival holdings remains disappeared. How such a massive territorial archive could have entirely disintegrated (as opposed to all other African territorial archives that are known to me, or on which one can receive information) or remain impossible to locate is an enigma. Even so, the current research has not brought any indications that a collection of that or similar nature and size could be available in any of the more obvious places that were visited during the mission.

Parts of the territorial archives seem to have fed into the archives of the Préfecture at Pointe-Noire, but if that is likely to have been the case, their integration must have been a very unsystematic activity. If the archives had fully remained in the problematic environment of the archives of the Préfecture, the formerly complete collection could be expected to appear in bigger clusters within the space – which is not the case. Of course, it cannot be entirely excluded that there is still the equivalent of some hundreds of boxes of colonial material just stacked into the corners of the space that was visited (and therefore not located during this activity); therefore, only a future activity of further analysis could bring definite results. For the time being, it is at least difficult to see how that could ultimately be the case. Any future research mission in Pointe-Noire that aims at targeting the Middle-Congo territorial archives would probably need an entirely different approach, relying on more intense conversations (going beyond what this mission could deliver)

with former public-sector employees who might have an idea of the whereabouts of such material that was still in place by 1958. It is not impossible but difficult to find informants that were alive sixty years ago and could offer testimony on the measures taken regarding the territorial archive. This being said, and from a pragmatic point of view, one needs to point to the many spectacular findings, and to the importance of Pointe-Noire for research on, especially, the late colonial Middle-Congo and the first three decades of the Republic of Congo under very variable political regimes. The archives of the Prefecture offer a great number of files that are relevant for the social history between 1940 and 1960 (partly focusing on the Kouilou, but in many cases going far beyond that), but also an important collection of processes for a study of social life in the Congo's coastal areas between 1960 and 1991. These could be supplemented with material from the well-organised municipal archives of Pointe-Noire, with their abundant possibilities for research on the city of Pointe-Noire and its agglomeration at the end of colonial rule, and then, again, through the various decades of postcolonial regimes. The archives of the CFCO also offer (despite their many problems) deep insight into the social life of those employees who made a living from serving one of Central Africa's principal (and still active) railway lines.