

# Up in the Air and Down on the Ground

The UN and Economic Policy Design and  
Implementation during the Congo Crisis, 1960-1964

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# The Congo Crisis in the UN Archives

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- ▶ Policy issue: transfer of economic institutions after Congolese independence on 30 June 1960
  - ▶ Creation of a new central bank
  - ▶ Reform in the taxes and customs administration
  - ▶ Continuation of planning infrastructures
  - ▶ “contentieux congo-belge”: colonial debt and share portfolio
- ▶ UN military and civilian intervention (1960-1964)
- ▶ What do the archives reveal about the UN intervention?
- ▶ 3 sources
  1. United Nations Career Records Project (Oxford)  
Photographs and “reminiscences” from practitioners
  2. UN archives (New York)  
Coded cables and traditional policy documents (reports...)
  3. UN Oral History Collection (Dag Hammarskjöld Library)  
Oral histories from policy-makers

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- I. United Nations Career Records Project (Oxford)  
Photographs and “reminiscences” from practitioners

Policy from “below”

Challenge ideas about development implementation in the Congo

Introduce new visual imaginaries for the postcolonial world

Reveal tensions, motivations, beliefs

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Photos have been removed to respect copyright.

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“I am able “to fulfill my destiny,” or in more Quakerly terms, to act on a concern. Gustavo Duran called me “Sir Galahad” when he heard that I was returning to the Congo. And it is easy to exaggerate in ones mind any contribution I can make. Perhaps it is a situation in which a Friendly approach can help, perhaps, on the other hand, I shall find myself out of my depths, as I sometimes felt during my last stint. (...)”

**Letter, Antony Gilpin to his wife, 27 Feb 1962, Brussels-Leo, ACG Papers, UNCRP, Oxford**

“Wearing a blue beret does not necessarily turn a soldier into a saint. Not that UN civilians were blameless; the UN had made an elementary mistake at the outset paying daily allowances in US dollars, and this had served to accelerate the development of a black market in foreign exchange. The mistake was corrected only belatedly after the damage had been done; by that time the black market had been further stimulated by the dogmatic insistence of the IMF on the maintenance of a seriously over-valued exchange rate for the Congolese franc.”

**Letters from the Congo, Part II (undated), Introduction to Part II, Papers of Antony Gilpin, 1952-89 --- MS. Eng. c. 4675 -- folder I (fols 6)**

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## 2. UN archives (New York)

Coded cables and traditional policy documents (reports...)

View from the middle-ranks of the government machine

Attitude towards the organization

Structure and chains of policy design

Common ideology (pragmatism – “getting the job done”)

Frustrations

Allegiances and perceived role in the organization

Reluctance to engage with political issues

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“The Congo at this moment does not so much need wise guys with brilliant, wild new ideas, as people who can help the Administration to do the job there is to be done. I am personally not particularly happy with the legal and administrative traditions which the Republic of the Congo has inherited. But I am certainly not here in order to try to impose upon the young republic any pet ideas of my own.”

Gustav Cederwall, “Final Report on Technical Assistance in the Field of Public Finance,” 30 April 1964, Series S-0728, Box 18, File 2.

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3. UN Oral History Collection (Dag Hammarskjöld Library)  
Oral histories from policy-makers

View from the top policy makers

Mood of the situation

Claims to expertise

Motivations, beliefs

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“There was no reason why I should know anything about the Congo but nobody else knew anything about the Congo except [for the anthropologist Heinz] Wieschhoff whose knowledge also was not up to date, who had gone back and he had some idea about tribal groups. Ralph Bunche did not, although he had some African background and no one else did. And we never -- and this surprises me -- we never had anybody come to our meetings or our lunches or to tell us about the Congo as such. So it was interesting that we operated without any intelligence about the people.”

Schachter, Oscar. 1985. “Schachter, Oscar | United Nations Oral History.”

# Conclusion

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- ▶ Avoid the “intellectualist bias” in decolonization and modernization history
- ▶ Reintroduce the political aspect in the workings of international organizations
- ▶ Need to complement of a micro-history approach to the practices of development practitioners to recover their intentions, their beliefs and their loyalties