



## From the 'évolué' to the 'genré' man: A decolonial analysis of gender transformative interventions in the Democratic Republic of Congo

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### Abstract

Efforts by development actors to prevent gender-based violence are increasingly rooted in gender transformative approaches which seek to challenge harmful norms and promote gender equality. Such interventions often focus on changing men's attitudes and behaviours through group educational activities, with the objective of breaking down traditional gender roles and fostering more progressive beliefs. However, the historical, cultural and epistemic positionalities of those who design transformative interventions are rarely acknowledged, and neither are the implications of their (mostly Eurocentric) situatedness. Through an analysis of discourses deployed by Belgian colonisers in the Democratic Republic of Congo to 'civilise' natives and by development actors to transform gender relations, this article makes intelligible the (re)incarnations of coloniality which shape interventions. I use examples of the Congolese 'évolué' (evolved) men who were educated by the Belgians into new models of heteronormative families and the 'genré' (gendered) men who are being taught new forms of 'positive' masculinity today to draw out recurring tropes about Congolese masculinity. I argue that discourses and interventions shaped by these tropes convey Eurocentric ideas about the problem (Congolese men as violent), the remedies (adoption of 'universal' norms), and the promises of change ('healthier' relations). Those ideas, while adopted and valorised by the *évolués* and *genrés* men, must be questioned as they have material effects on interventions. While steering clear of notions of an ongoing imperialism, this article reveals shapeshifting continuities in the types of language and paradigms used to justify gender norms change and draws out some of the practical implications.

**Keywords:** Discourse, Eurocentricity, Gender equality, Masculinity, Resocialisation