

Licensing luxury fashion in transatlantic and colonial economies: beyond Paris and New York

Licenciamento de moda de luxo nas economias transatlânticas e coloniais: além de Paris e Nova York

Licenciamiento de moda de lujo en las economias transatlánticas y coloniales: más allá de París y Nueva York

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Abstract

During the postwar era, luxury fashion firms entered a new phase of their international growth with the licensing of their brands. The French haute couture firm Dior was pioneer in licenses, and established branches in a series of countries around the world. Inspired by the transatlantic successes of firms such as Jean Dessès, Christian Dior, and Norman Hartnell, French luxury firms registered their brands internationally and replicated the registration of trademarks in numerous countries. This paper further examines the reach of luxury fashion and beauty brands in the colonies of France and of Belgium. This shows that the fashion firms expanded their transatlantic expertise, and that this created newer transatlantic circuits in return.

Palavras-chave: Trademark; Luxury; Transatlantic; Brands; Commerce.

Resumo

Durante a era do pós-guerra, as empresas de moda de luxo entraram em uma nova fase de seu crescimento internacional com a concessão de licenças de suas marcas. A casa de alta costura francesa Dior foi pioneira em licenças e estabeleceu filiais em uma série de países ao redor do mundo. Inspiradas nos sucessos transatlânticos de empresas como Jean Dessès, Christian Dior e Norman Hartnell, as empresas de luxo francesas registraram suas marcas internacionalmente e replicaram o registro de marcas em inúmeros países. Este trabalho examina ainda mais o alcance das marcas de moda e beleza de luxo nas colônias da França e da Bélgica. Isso mostra que as empresas de moda expandiram sua expertise transatlântica e que isso criou novo retorno aos circuitos transatlânticos.

Palavras-chave: Marca registrada; Luxo; Transatlântico; Marcas; Comércio.

Resumen

Durante la era de la posguerra, las empresas de moda de lujo entraron en una nueva fase de su crecimiento internacional mediante la concesión de licencias de sus marcas. La casa de alta costura francesa Dior fue pionera en este aspecto y estableció sucursales en una serie de países alrededor del mundo. Inspiradas en los éxitos transatlánticos de empresas como Jean Dessès, Christian Dior y Norman Hartnell, las empresas de lujo francesas registraron sus marcas a nivel internacional y replicaron el registro de marcas en numerosos países. Este trabajo examina además el alcance de las marcas de moda y belleza de lujo en las colonias de Francia y Bélgica. Esto demuestra que las empresas de moda expandieron su experiencia transatlántica, y que ello generó cambios en los circuitos transatlánticos.

Palabras clave: Marca registrada; Lujo; Transatlántico; Marcas; Comercio.

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1 Introdução

During the postwar era, luxury fashion firms entered a new phase of their international growth with the licensing of their brands. Luxury licenses were contracts between a luxury firm and a manufacturer for production of branded luxury goods. Typical licensing contracts were a couple of dozen pages specifying production conditions and limiting brand usages. The firms that licensed part of their production adapted standard contracts for each producer of their licensed lines. The license duration was regulated, as was product sublicensing – the delegation of manufacturing to a subcontractor. Such clauses were aimed at preserving a standard of quality that aligned with the firm’s image (Maison Dior, Préparation des collections, Standard License contract, pp. 1-19; Pouillard, 2021, pp. 152-155).

A primary objective for luxury brands was to source the right manufacturers for making product lines that included ready-to-wear, sports clothes, accessories, cosmetics, perfumes, and home décor, among others. Once the license contract was set up and production was on the market, the main difficulty for luxury firms was to keep control of the quality of their licensed products. Firms therefore delegated managers to regularly visit the manufacturers producing the licensed lines for the haute couture brands. Christian Dior was one of the major firms that, during the postwar era, developed a new business model for the haute couture industry (Pouillard, 2018, pp. 111-131). Before World War II, haute couture had remained the prerogative of a craftsmanship industry centered in Paris. This situation created difficulties for the high fashion industries in remaining profitable in a context of heightened international competition. Haute couture was an industry that was high in consuming resources. As historian Alexandra Palmer has described it, the creative process involved trying out the designs first as a toile – a test garment made of raw cotton, then executing a toile in the fabric chosen for the design. It was often necessary to recreate the toile several times in expensive fabrics, some of which were wasted in the process. Fittings were also costly in working hours – for the models, the seamstresses, and the designer themselves and their assistants. Then bespoke tailoring and adjustments were necessary for the private customers, adding to the expense (Palmer, 2009).

Another challenge for haute couture was in exporting production. Paris couturiers tried and repeatedly failed to set up in the United States up until the postwar era. Individual cases reveal various reasons for these failures, but many of them relate to one common feature, which is that those Paris couturiers tried to import merchandise made in France to the United States. This created often difficulties with the custom authorities (Dubé-Senécal, 2023, pp. 455-479).

A major change that Christian Dior implemented when he set up business in the United States, was that his firm did not try to import haute couture garments directly from France. Instead, Dior created designs especially for the New York branch. He had the lifestyle of the inhabitants of New York in mind, but also the fabrics and manufacturing skills that were available there. Supported by his manager Jacques Rouët and financier Marcel Boussac, Dior developed an entrepreneurial model that was better adapted to the United States markets than were other previous attempts. Christian Dior and his staff closely followed the production of the New York branch. The archives of the sales at Dior show that each design was photographed and recorded on an active worksheet that was accompanied by details of the quantities sold, and notes on salespersons' and clients' feedback. If some of the design elements or the fabric were poorly chosen, this was also reported on the sheet (Maison Dior, Préparation des collections, New York 1948, 1949, 1950). In so doing, the Dior staff in New York created an ongoing archive that allowed the United States branch to learn from its mistakes, and to adjust to clients' expectations (Palmer, 2009; Pouillard, 2021, p. 153).

During the years following its foundation, Dior established branches in a series of countries around the world. Most branches sold ready-to-wear; and in rarer cases, Dior opened an exclusive haute couture salon abroad, such as in Central America, where the firm catered to affluent clients (Palmer, 2009). The pivotal element in Dior's expansion strategy was the licensing of luxury branded products. Historians have carefully examined luxury license implementation in a series of countries; for example, in the case of Japan, the works of Tomoko Okawa and Rika Fujioka. In their research, historians have shown that Japan was a laboratory for the international dissemination of luxury goods. The presentation of branded cosmetics, perfumes, accessories, and ready-to-wear both perpetuated the image of luxury issued from

France overseas and contributed to its partial democratization for the middle classes (Okawa, 2008, pp. 82-108; Fujioka, 2013, pp. 181-203; Donzé, 2023).

Firms did not engage in such agreements solely for their overseas markets. In France, Dior organized domestic licensing agreements for hosiery production, or women's stockings, for example. Such articles were mass-produced for Dior and packaged in the firm's colors and visual codes, carrying its brand label. This allowed Dior to create supplementary revenue from selling branded goods. With branded licenses, haute couture firms could solve the dilemma of democratizing their production without losing money. It also allowed them to build a presence on foreign markets where haute couture had previously been copied. A key element in the licensing system was that the production could take place anywhere (Okawa, 2008, pp. 82-108; Fujioka, 2013, pp. 181-203).

In the United States, as in Japan, such luxuries were retailed in department stores, which became central to the consumption of luxury. In the present day, the luxury business as such, including the "personal luxuries" like ready-to-wear, cosmetics, and accessories, is thriving. Most of the haute couture houses that had crafted women's fashions are continuing under the umbrella of luxury holdings in the present day. The gradual process of integrating haute couture into luxury groups can be described as the financialization of couture (Donzé, 2023). Scholars have addressed this process, including Pierre-Yves Donzé in his recent book, *Selling Europe to the World*; Donzé and Ben Wubs in several studies about the LVMH group; and Cattani, Colucci and Ferriani about the case of Chanel, for example (Donzé, 2023; Donzé, Wubs, 2019, pp. 83-102; Cattani, Colucci, Ferriani, 2023, pp. 546-588).

A less-researched issue is to understand how the dissemination of licenses from the West came about on markets in the Global South. How, where, and when did licenses of luxury fashion brands disseminate? These issues were approached in previous research projects, such as the HERA II Enterprise of Culture led by Regina L. Blaszczyk (2013-2017), in which several researchers examined cases of the global dissemination of European brands (Blaszczyk, Pouillard, 2018; Kuldova, 2016; Kuldova, 2018, pp. 263-282). The remainder of this article follows in the footsteps of these works, and of research on the internationalization of advertising and trademark (Pouillard, 2005, pp. 120-127). The sources for this article are Christian Dior's archives,

especially its sales records and corporate client files of the late 1940s and the 1950s. The French newspapers, especially those of Algeria during the 1950s and up to the Algerian War of Independence (which started in 1954), and the Francophone press of Vietnam (then Indochina, until 1954), have been consulted as well. A third group of sources consist of the systematic examination of the trademark registrations for the Belgian colony of Congo and the mandates of Ruanda-Urundi (today Rwanda and Burundi) for the postwar years until Congo gained its independence in 1960 (Rwanda and Burundi became independent in 1962) (Nzongola-Ntalaja, 2013, p. 94).

2 What the fashion industry learned from the transfer of haute couture from Paris to New York

In addition to being a pathbreaking case in the international expansion of licenses, New York has remained among the most important marketplaces for the commerce of luxury goods. Another case is Canada, for which the transfers with European fashion were thoroughly examined by pioneering historian Alexandra Palmer (Palmer, 2001). This, in turn, is directing researchers' attention to newer issues. One of which is the ways in which transatlantic fashion developed in places other than North America. Works on cases such as Brazil, for example, can tell us much about the transatlantic history of fashion in the *longue durée* (long-term) (Barbosa, 2016). A complementary issue is in which ways the transatlantic transmissions of fashion, such as the case of Dior in the United States, detailed above, were test cases for the globalization of luxury fashion products elsewhere.

The successful implementation of Dior as a firm and as a brand in the United States provided important learning from haute couture. Several other couturiers succeeded simultaneously in the United States, including another Frenchman, Pierre Balmain, and British designer Norman Hartnell, best known for dressing Queen Elizabeth II. The model of the luxury licenses allowed avoiding the major pitfall of having to pay high entry tariffs to the United States (Dubé-Sénécal 2022; Dubé-Sénécal, 2023, pp. 455-479). During the interwar period, this issue had plagued couturiers such as Marcel Rochas, whose short-lived New York branch closed for this reason. The business model of the luxury licenses required cash flow, and thus founded a renewed creative energy with their integration of haute couture in larger

holdings. Providing a financial safety net was of vital importance to being established overseas (Pouillard, 2021, pp. 101-103, 235-243; Donzé, 2023, pp. 53-57).

Paris as a creative center was very cosmopolitan, but fewer fashion designers from the United States managed to establish their business in Paris. Elizabeth Hawes, a visionary couturière from New York, tried to show her work in Paris. But the reception of her first collection there was cold, and she was quickly discouraged from developing her business in France. The only United States couturier to really succeed in France was Main Rousseau Bocher, known as a designer under the name Mainbocher. His excellent networks on both sides of the Atlantic and previous career with Vogue magazine were among the reasons for his success (Pouillard, 2021, chapter 3).

Besides such exceptional cases, fashions from the United States did not make a breakthrough in France until much broader popular culture phenomena such as blue jeans became fashionable. During the 1950s, acquiring a pair of jeans meant sourcing them from army surplus, and remained associated for quite some time with transgressive cultures, as depicted for example by Raymond Queneau in his novel *Zazie in the metro* (Queneau, 1959). Denim jeans became a major transfer from the United States to France. Popular shops such as Prisunic, as demonstrated by Sophie Chapdelaine in her PhD thesis, completed such transfers by copying in France the American manufacturing staples of women's wardrobes: the separates and the shift dress. All these garments were popular products designed for young consumers (Chapdelaine, 2023).

In this context of fast-paced fashion democratization, it became even more vital for higher- end designers to adapt to changing markets. Once the success of branded licenses became obvious, the challenge was to see whether licenses could be implemented in other parts of the world beyond the Franco-American circuit. The postwar era became a laboratory for the adaptation of branded licenses by other firms, not all of which were necessarily French. The next paragraphs examine how haute couture firms licensed their brands beyond Paris and New York, and how the transatlantic model was exported to other places.

3 Beyond the transatlantic connection: haute couture in North Africa and other French colonial territories

A lesser-known case is the dissemination of Paris couture on the African continent. In the present day, Africa is considered to be “the new frontier,” both for the production of fashion, and for the purchase of luxury, which is somewhat puzzling when considering the immense size of said continent (Barrett, Baumann-Pauly, 2018, pp. 1-8). This view, as we will examine in detail, is not entirely accurate. In the countries that before their independence had been colonies of France, haute couture had a colonial presence both in the media and in retail, especially in Algeria, which was designated as a Department of France by the French administration. Newspapers such as L’Echo d’Oran regularly published reviews of the recent haute couture creations. In an excerpt from July 1954, merely a few months before the Algerian War of Independence began in November 1954, that newspaper published illustrated articles commenting on the latest designs by Jean Dessès, Christian Dior, and Hermès. The same pages commented on higher-end fashions, an example about a bride’s dress, and wearable fashions such as summer dresses and women’s trousers in flexible fabrics (L’Echo d’Oran, 29 July 1954: 3). Production followed suit, with a local industry that offered ready-to-wear and replicas of high-end designs, mostly for colonial elites. Firms from Paris organized the dissemination of these designs in in the French capital. The house of Dior had a small group of clients in Algeria, especially in Oran. These corporate clients bought designs at Dior with the authorization to reproduce them in the French colonies. In doing so, they contributed to the dissemination of French designs overseas (Pouillard, Dubé-Sénécal, 2024, pp. 340-357).

Dior’s buyers lists are a model of mechanism for disseminating Paris haute couture in the colonial territory, where designs were reproduced for the affluent clients of the local couturières. The exchanges between Paris couture and the Department of Algeria did not happen in just one way. Among the several important Paris couturiers from overseas, some were from the North African colonies (Kawamura, 2004, pp. 195-223; Saillard et al., 2014). The best known was probably Yves Saint Laurent, born in Oran in 1936, whose entire fashion career was in Paris but who retained a secondary house in Marrakesh, Morocco, during most of his life. An art patron, along with his

partner in life and in business Pierre Bergé, Saint Laurent infused his designs with borrowings from different traditions and cultures, many of them pointing to a sense of exoticism that has attracted the interest of researchers (Nowinski, 2007, pp. 141- 154). Another case was Michel Tellin, born in Algeria in 1933, who opened an haute couture house in Algiers in 1954, then a branch in Paris in 1955 (Pouillard, 2021, pp. 179-181).

Similar disseminations and exchanges were most successful between France and its colonies of Northern Africa, possibly because the colonial administration considered Algeria to be a province of France. The presence of haute couture productions in other colonies, such as in French Indochina (from 1887 until its demise in 1954, comprising the contemporary territories of Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia) seems to be less prominent. I have not found a trace of buyers from Indochina in Dior's registers, for example. Small couturières from France went to Ho Chi Min City (then Saigon), however, where at regular intervals they based themselves in hotels to present and offer for reproduction dresses inspired by haute couture (Le Journal de Saigon, 10 December 1947, p. 4). Such examples show the coexistence of various forms of transmission of designs, showing their effective spread, beyond the question of the legality of reproduction. Let us now turn to luxury fashion licenses overseas.

4 Beyond Paris and New York: trademark registration in the Belgian Congo

French couturiers, including Christian Dior, disseminated their designs and trademarks in overseas markets. As a French province, colonized Algeria could represent an early market for the dissemination of French fashions. The Dior firm had successfully established Christian Dior-New York in 1948, and the major foreign buyers registered in its files for the late 1940s and the 1950s were from the United States, followed by the European buyers. Several South American countries, South Africa, and Algeria also figured on Dior's buyers list in smaller numbers.

Against this backdrop, the trademark registrations show that the brand licenses set up by Paris luxury firms reached much further than France's colonial possessions. The next section of this paper presents research results from systematic examination of trademark registrations for the Belgian colony of Congo, and for mandates in Rwanda and Burundi. King of the Belgians Leopold II asserted his

ownership over the colonization of Congo in 1885. Following international campaigns denouncing the exactions regime of Leopold II's Congo Free State, it became a Belgian colony in 1908, and gained independence in 1960. The territories of Rwanda and Burundi were added to the Belgian colonies after being lost by Germany during World War I, and gained their independence in 1962. The Democratic Republic of Congo is known today as a nation plagued by the "curse of the resources," meaning that it has large mineral resources in its soil, but that its inhabitants enjoy hardly any benefits from those resources (Ranestad, 2015; Nzongola-Ntalaja, 2013, p. 28). During the twentieth century, Congo's colonial economy under the Belgian rule and in the early postcolonial period already showed that despite the massive extraction organized by firms, the colony economy was fragile and exposed to exogenous crises. The Great Depression era and the 1970s, during which the value of copper, a major export of Congo, dwindled, were periods of deep economic crisis for Congo. Between those two major economic crises, the 1950s were relatively prosperous years during which a consumer society emerged in the colony. A few department stores had been founded during the interwar period, to which new retailers added during the postwar era, among which Coboma and Sarma-Congo were branches of older department stores founded in Belgium. In the largest cities, especially Kinshasa and Lubumbashi, retailers sold mass-consumption items and some luxury products (Vellut, 2017, pp. 288-289). Consumption in contexts of racial segregation have been examined; for instance, in the historical context of segregation in the United States (Weems, 1998). In the colony of Congo and mandates of Rwanda and Burundi, the Belgian colonial authority enforced a color bar. Historians have compared the similarities and differences in the Belgian colonies segregation with that of the South African apartheid system. Segregation was also apparent in consumer society. The largest cities were divided between white and Congolese quarters. Bars, cafés and restaurants were also segregated. During the last three or four years of the colony, initiatives were aimed at creating some diversity in residential areas but, at that point, decolonization was getting near, and the effects of previous segregation policies would remain (Merriam, 1961, p. 66-81).

As far as consumer goods were concerned, the design registration for fabrics sold in the colony mentioned in numerous cases which fabrics were made for

the Congolese populations (Bulletin Officiel, January and February 1953, pp. 119, 120). Although segregation in consumption was not directly apparent for personal luxury goods as detailed in the next paragraphs, economic inequalities were very important in the colony, resulting among other causes from salary inequalities between Congolese and “European” populations (Merriam, 1961, pp. 59, 76).

Periodically, the colonial administration published records of brand registrations and listed trademarks for the Belgian colonies of Congo, Rwanda, and Burundi. It was possible to register brands for the colonies in Brussels, in Kinshasa (Léopoldville), and in Lubumbashi (Elisabethville). Trademark registration was overwhelmingly made by Belgian, European, and other international entrepreneurs; thus a majority of international firms, and some firms founded in the colony. Most of the latter enterprises were owned by Belgian and so-called Europeans, the name used to designate diasporic entrepreneurs in Congo, Rwanda, and Burundi. Among this community, entrepreneurs from Greece, India, Lebanon, and Portugal were represented in higher numbers. A majority of trademarks registered in Congo during the 1950s were from multinational firms headquartered in the West. Belgium, France, Germany, Switzerland, the United Kingdom and the United States were particularly well represented.

This paper qualitatively reviews the findings from systematic examination of trademark registrations for Congo, Rwanda and Burundi during the 1950s. The focus of this paper is on fashion and personal luxuries among those brands. The definition of the fashion industry here is the broadest, including personal luxuries such as cosmetics and accessories (Bulletin Officiel, 1950-1959). One potential bias is that the trademarks registration may include brands that were registered but never commercialized in the Belgian colonies. This possibility is especially relevant in cases of firms that registered trademarks to be used on a very large array of products. It is likely that only part of the products listed in the registry were commercialized. Firms may have listed more products as a strategy to gain a first movers’ advantage on the colonial markets. As far as the eventuality that a trademark would have been registered and never commercialized, this is less likely, since trademark registration demanded administrative work and/or traveling to Belgium or to Congo, and paying a registration fee. It is therefore likely that the firms registering trademarks for the colonies aimed to

commercialize their products there. The emerging consumer society in the 1950s colony, the growth of fashion advertising in the local press, and the presence of department stores reasonably indicates that fashionable products and personal luxuries became gradually commercialized, especially during the last years of the colonial regime (Da Silva Lopes, Duguid, 2010, pp. 1-2; Castro, Saiz, 2018, pp. 1105-1126; Birnhack, 2021, pp. 192-255; Castro, Saiz, 2022, pp. 3-7).

5 The Dior brand in colonial economies

Numerous French fashionable brands were represented in the trademark registration, with broad categories of consumer goods, as well as tooling and machines. This makes these registrations relevant in examining the ways in which fashion licenses were disseminated beyond Paris and New York. The first group of brands identified through systematic examination of trademark registration were haute couture firms headquartered in Paris. The Christian Dior firm was among this group, and registered three trademarks in the Belgian colonies during the second half of the 1950s.

The Christian Dior firm first registered one of its perfume brands, Diorissimo, in the Belgian colonies in 1956 (Bulletin Officiel, 21 March 1956, n. 5035). In France, the first registration of the Christian Dior brand dated from 1946, and was followed by the perfume brand registration the following year. A large number of registrations followed in France, to record variations in production and licenses, and in prevision of international registration for exports (INPI registration, Christian Dior, 8 October 1946, <https://data.inpi.fr/search?q=Christian+Dior&type=companies>). The second brand that the firm registered in Congo was the Christian Dior trademark for licenses. The registration states that it was made in the name of Marcel Boussac and his holding, the Comptoir de l'Industrie Cotonnière. The print from the trademark register shows that the font typical of Dior has been respected here, as a part of the brand image (Bulletin Officiel, 7 March 1957, n. 5391).

One can also read a few more details in the registration

For: jewelry, silverware, jewels real or costume; prints, publications of all natures, newspapers, magazines, bookshop articles and paper; leather goods, handbags, travel articles; belts; canes, umbrellas for sun and rain; yarns; articles for dressing, for men, women, young people, young girls, boys

and girls; clothing of every kind, including sports clothes, underwear, lingerie articles, corsets, ties, hats, gloves and shoes of any kind; stockings, half-stockings, socks, short socks; belts; laces and embroidery, ribbons and laces, trimmings, borders, needles and pins, fake flowers, smoking articles² (Bulletin Officiel, 7 March 1957, n. 5391).

Thus the brand was registered for all the activities of the Dior licenses during the 1950s. For example, Dior had a license for costume jewelry with a German firm based in Pforzheim, and had numerous licenses for men's wear in the United States (Pouillard, 2021, p. 153).

Although I have not found a full inventory of Dior's products retailed in the colony of Congo, one can perceive, from this long enumerative text in the brand registration, the ambition to sell the wide variety of licensed products that were then carrying the Dior brand, if not at once, then in the near future. This trademark registration of Christian Dior was followed by another of the Dior perfumes, Miss Dior, registered in 1958 (Bulletin Officiel, 20 January 1958, n. 5769). Such registrations are an information source about the expansion of branded goods, and about the projections of future expansion to new lines.

Other high-quality French clothing brands recorded in the trademark registries in Congo include relatively few other couture brands. Paris couturier Jean Dessès registered in 1959, with his perfume brand at the address 4 rue Berryer, 8th arrondissement in Paris (Bulletin Officiel, 26 June 1959, n. 6401). A hypothesis is that the Greek origins of Dessès may not have been completely unrelated from his implementation in Congo, where an important Greek diaspora was particularly active in commerce and retail, including couturiers and tailors (Antippas, 2021, pp. 204-208). Other French high-quality textile brands were present among the trademarks, such as Les Fils de Valton & Cie, better known in the present day as Petit Bateau, a manufacturer of high-quality children's clothing. Its section in the register was completed with the brand's drawing of a small ship and manuscript inscription "Petit Bateau" (Bulletin Officiel, 27 March 1958, n. 5848).

As noted above, the first brand registered by Dior for the Belgian colonies was its perfume Diorissimo. Registrations of cosmetic and hygiene brands were particularly numerous in Congo, and many of them were from France. Those

² Translation from French is by the author.

registrations, and the fact that haute couture brands such as Dessès and Dior entered the colonial market by selling perfumes and cosmetics, confirm the importance of the beauty business in extending the outreach of iconic French fashion firms overseas (Jones, 2010). In the further extension of the model of licenses that developed first and foremost in the transatlantic arena, cosmetics and perfumes were the first products to sell. Such cases include the registration for the Bourjois perfume Soir de Paris (Evening in Paris) (Bulletin Officiel, 3 October 1956, n. 5228, 5229, 5230); Piver creams – Lotion Pompéia and Rêve d’Or (Bulletin Officiel, 9 June 1956, n. 5120, 5121); and Roger & Gallet’s Eau de Cologne Jean-Marie Farina, a perennial classic registered for the Belgian colonies in 1955 (Bulletin Officiel, 7 November 1955, n. 4870). Beauty brand registrations from France flourished during the last decade of the Congo colony. It is not surprising to find among those brands, the cosmetics giant L’Oréal, which on April 26, 1955 registered the L’Oréal brand, plus a record number of four sub-brands: Monsavon, Imedia, Dop, and Orél (Bulletin Officiel, 26 April 1955, n. 4571, 4572, 4573, 4574, 4575; Donzé, 2023, pp. 101-104).

Those perfume and cosmetic trademarks in some cases included visual representations and symbols of Paris, such as the Eiffel tower (Bulletin Officiel, 3 October 1956, n. 5228, 5229, 5230). In other cases, the presence of Paris could be imagined, such as in the trademark registration for the shop Chaussures Vendôme by Madeleine Bauvais, 37 avenue Royale in Bukavu. The letter “V” for the initial of the brand was drawn in a swirling calligraphy that revolved around a little drawing of the Vendôme column, the monument at the center of Place Vendôme, the heart of the French capital’s luxury district. Cases of origins real and invented reinforced the extensive cultural reach of Paris for all objects of fashion and beauty. This outreach competed with various representations of exoticism. In the same pages of trademark registrations, brands often representing a variety of products created stereotypical images of the colonies (Pouillard, 2005, pp. 121-125; Bulletin Officiel, 31 August 1956, n. 1200/B).

Belgian brands were present in registrations, but their presence was far from overwhelming and were, in the domains examined in this article, in smaller numbers than French or United States brands. Among the fashion brands, retailers and department stores registered trademarks, such as Inco-Sarma and Coboma. One

Belgian couture firm registered in Congo, Valens, was registered by its mother firm Wittamer H.V.L., based in the Woluwé-Saint-Pierre commune of Brussels (Bulletin Officiel, 28 January 1953, n. 3811). The advantages that European brands derived from their registration in Congo were protection against counterfeits, information of the consumer, and first mover advantage, in the case of several of the brands examined in this paper. Further research however remains to be done in order to assess, for example, whether the establishment of the brands resulted in license contracts for the colony, and about the sales made by those brands on African markets.

6 Nor all brands are from Paris: transatlantic disseminations from the United States to Africa

A qualitative examination of the trademarks registered in Congo, Rwanda and Burundi for the last decade of the colonial rule brings a broader perspective on consumption and on geographies. The transatlantic dimension was not erased by the power of the European brands, quite the contrary. Numerous firms from the United States registered trademarks in Congo, and thus their owners traveled across the Atlantic for that purpose. Many of the United States trademarks registered in the colony represented foodstuffs, brands for machines, and technical equipment. Although the prestige of French fashion and beauty products remained important, firms from the United States also registered trademarks in fashionable goods and personal luxuries. For example, among brands registered during the 1950s were the United States cosmetic firm Avon (Bulletin Officiel, 24 April 1958, n. 5879). Beauty and hygiene brands were well represented within the registrations in the Belgian colonies, which is hardly surprising. Another United States brand that registered was the equipment and hats maker Stetson (Bulletin Officiel, 6 November 1953, n. 4029). The presence of this brand is particularly interesting in the context of the history of consumption patterns, especially of marginal and countercultural groups in Kinshasa (Akou et al., 2010). Studies have shown the important attraction of United States sartorial and musical cultures on groups such as the men and women who labeled themselves Bills, and adopted an Americanized uniform of lumberjack shirts, denim jeans, boots, and cowboy hats. The presence of this brand thus can be read as a symptom of a much

broader phenomenon of emergence of countercultures and resistances to the colonial order in the Congo capital (Gondola, 2016, pp. 86, 139).

The registrations also present trademarks for merchandise produced in the colony. The assessment that sub-Saharan Africa is a “new frontier” for manufacturing prevails in the present day. A report published by New York University in 2019 stressed the emergence of Ethiopia for fashion manufacturing, presenting Sub-Saharan Africa as a new place of production (Barett, Baumann-Pauly, 2019; Rivoli, 2014). This assertion can be nuanced since the countries examined have a history of artisanal textile productions. In addition, several sub-Saharan countries have been through previous attempts at implementing textile manufacturing, often under colonial regimes. The trademarks registration for Congo bears witness to the brands that local textile industries started producing during the colonial era. Their subsequent history is the topic for another study, and they show a complex history of hybrid industries that may be of interest for further works (Bulletin Officiel, January and February 1953, pp. 119, 120).

7 Conclusion

This article has examined the emergence of a new model for the commercialization of haute couture brands during the postwar era. Inspired by the transatlantic successes of firms such as Jean Dessès, Christian Dior, and Norman Hartnell, French luxury firms started delegating the production of branded lines to manufacturers, domestically and overseas. This model was first tried in the transatlantic arena, between Paris and North America.

The fashion firms learned very quickly from this experience. They registered their brands internationally and replicated the registration of trademarks in numerous countries.

Simultaneously with the transatlantic business spread, Paris-based fashion firms started disseminating their brands to the colonies, especially in North Africa, and also in Asia. This reach went further than the colonies of France. The example of the registration of trademarks in the colonies of Belgium in Central Africa shows a large amount of French luxury brands registering during the last decade of the colonial regime, in the context of an emerging consumer society for the middle classes and

international elites. A close examination of the registrations confirms the trend observed in previous research on the cosmetics industry and on the licenses, that the beauty industry was at the forefront of internationalization of fashion brands.

The overall presence of luxury goods brands in the colony of Congo shows that an important number of trademark registrations were for personal luxuries, especially for licenses on perfumes and cosmetics. This point confirms that during the early postwar years, the expansion of luxury brands already centered on the retail of mass products abroad.

Researchers have shown that it is when luxury reached the masses that luxury became profitable. Investments in markets such as Congo, where the previous economic crisis in the 1930s had revealed economic instability, aimed to create a first movers' advantage, with the hope of finding markets in expansion. There was some risk-taking for brands implementing in countries that could be destabilized at short notice economically and politically. The examples examined above give a glimpse into ambitious strategies of expansion. They also point to the fact that although Sub-Saharan Africa is cited in the present day as the newer, emerging market for personal luxuries and a place of expansion for fashion, these international industries were already present under the colonial regime.

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9 Archives

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³ COPY EDITING by Donna Reeder

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