“A Black Girl Should Not be With a White Man”

Sex, Race, and African Women’s Social and Legal Status in Colonial Gabon, c. 1900–1946

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This article reviews representations and lived experiences of interracial sex and métissage in twentieth-century colonial Gabon to argue that African communities and colonial societies debated over “the métis problem” as question of how to demarcate African women’s sexuality, and socioeconomic and political power in the urban locale. These discourses and social realities reflected ambiguous and contradictory colonial discourses and polyvalent struggles among Gabonese populations to recast gender and respectability in the colonial capital city. Mpongwe women’s participation in interracial relationships, frequently brokered by male kin, had unintended consequences that threatened colonial order and reordered gender hierarchies within Mpongwe communities. Following World War I through the 1950s, shifting coalitions of elite African men, colonial officials, and private French citizens—anxious of the social mobility black and mixed race women achieved and sought to maintain—frowned upon and sought to restrict interracial liaisons. Mpongwe women, both black and métis, involved in interracial relationships struggled to maintain control over their property, their labor, and insist upon their respectability in the precarious urban milieu. Using oral and written sources, this article addresses a gap in the scholarship on gender, sexuality, and colonialism by foregrounding how African women and men engaged in and reflected on miscegenation at the center of analysis. Furthermore, this article emphasizes the colonial encounter as a dialectic in which the actions of African women shaped colonial perceptions and policies.

On 10 July 1935, a rather mundane traffic infraction in Libreville led to a heated exchange that revealed broader contestations over sex, race, and the social and legal status of African women in colonial Gabon. An African man drove a car on the wrong side of the road in sight of the French police commissioner. The ensuing exchange took place between the police commissioner and the passenger, a female colonial subject. The confrontation is preserved in the written record because Michel Moutarlier, a French man engaged in the timber industry and the lover of the woman in question, wrote a letter of complaint to the governor of the colony.1 Moutarlier
protested the “disrespectful manner” in which the commissioner treated the passenger, whom he identified as Flavie N’Guia, his wife and mother of his children. Moutarlier recounted that the driver told the police officer that he had left his driver’s permit at home; N’Guia intervened to request that they be allowed to return to the nearby village of Sibang to retrieve the documents. The commissioner, whom Moutarlier intimated was drunk after having spent the entire day at a bar, verbally assaulted and threatened to arrest N’Guia, who responded that the commissioner had no right to do so. She then sought refuge in city hall where the mayor defused the escalating situation by impounding the car and permitting her and the driver to leave. In response to Moutarlier’s letter, the mayor asked the commissioner to account for his encounter with N’Guia.

The commissioner’s report dismissed Moutarlier’s portrayal of N’Guia as a respectable wife and mother. According to the police commissioner, N’Guia was “a native woman”—a French colonial subject, neither white nor a citizen, subject to native law, and of commensurate social and legal status. The commissioner relayed his encounter of N’Guia as such: “A native woman descended from the car without having been addressed by me, nor asked to speak about the infraction. She took me to the side and told me in a tone bereft of any politeness, ‘I am Madame Moutarlier.’” The commissioner asked her to provide her identity card, which proclaimed her to be “Flavie N’Guia,” and he rebuffed her claim that she was Moutarlier’s wife.

To the police officer, the traffic violation involved only him and the driver. However, N’Guia inserted herself in the exchange, insisting on a conjugal relationship with Moutarlier, a white male French citizen, which accorded her authorization over the movement of his employees and property. For the police officer, N’Guia’s non-whiteness and African name on her identity papers belied the intimacy and legitimacy of the relationship she claimed to have with Moutarlier. Furthermore, the commissioner concluded, “native women” involved in interracial relationships were of dubious moral character.

Though frowned upon in metropolitan and elite colonial circles, sexual and domestic relationships between African women and European men were commonplace in twentieth-century colonial Gabon. Nearly all such unions involved women of Myènè ethno-language groups, particularly Mpongwé, and the vast majority were not considered marriage under French law. In all probability, N’Guia and Moutarlier were involved in a sexual and domestic partnership that lasted over several years while Moutarlier lived in Gabon. Nevertheless, N’Guia invoked her popularly regarded status in Libreville as “Madame Moutarlier,” even if state documents did not acknowledge her as such.
N’Guia invoked her sexual and domestic associations with European men not only to shape her status within colonial society, but also within African communities in Libreville. In April 1941, Samba Augustin, an Mpongwe man, wrote to the Governor-General complaining of police mistreatment resulting from his public confrontation with N’Guia, whom he referred to as “Madame Moutarlier.” A few days earlier, Augustin related, he was standing at the port when he overhead N’Guia and another Mpongwe woman making disparaging remarks in French about Charles de Gaulle. Augustin admonished her that she should be speaking in “their” language (Mpongwe) and that when the French solicited African opinions on politics they would “address the men, not women.” For Augustin, N’Guia was essentially Mpongwe and he sought to remind her of an ostensibly Mpongwe understanding of gender roles. N’Guia invoked her descent from a European father in responding to Augustin that a black man (nègre) had no right to limit the speech of a métisse woman. She was in effect challenging Mpongwe gender hierarchies. Though people of European and Mpongwe ancestry in twentieth-century Gabon identified themselves as both Mpongwe and métis, N’Guia here chose to emphasize that her privilege to speak was based on race. Days after the confrontation, Augustin encountered two French men in the market, one of whom, presumably Moutarlier, identified Augustin as the man “who insulted my wife.” The men assaulted Augustin until a police officer stopped the fight. Augustin complained that he was imprisoned for three months without a trial while the two Europeans were let go with impunity.

These public deliberations involving Flavie N’Guia and French colonial civil servants, a private French citizen, an African male wage laborer, and an elite African man demonstrate how the subjectivities and actions of African women shaped how colonial societies and African communities outlined the boundaries of identity and status in colonial Libreville. The catalyst for each confrontation was N’Guia’s claim that African women’s sexual, domestic, and conjugal engagements with European men afforded women social and legal privileges. N’Guia claimed the identities of wife to a French man, daughter of a French man, or métisse woman to subvert colonial and gender hierarchies. French and African men attempted to engineer her social and legal status—wife and mother, native woman, Mpongwe woman—for differing purposes of maintaining colonial governance or individual honor. These confrontations reveal the multidirectional negotiations of gender, race, and sex and social and legal status in the colonial capital city.

This article is a social history of interracial sexual and domestic unions and African women involved in such unions in colonial Gabon from 1900 through the aftermath of World War II. In this period of immense social
and economic flux, the establishment of interracial domestic and sexual relations involved multivalent negotiations amongst African women, men, and European men. Individual and collective African women utilized such relationships to negotiate tenuous avenues for social, economic, and legal mobility. Such negotiations destabilized social orderings of race, gender, and familial authority. In turn, African communities and colonial societies in Gabon debated over “the métis problem” as a question of how to control African women’s sexuality and social, economic, and legal status in the colonial capital city.

Most of the scholarship on sex, race, and métissage (miscegenation) in the French empire has analyzed colonial discourses of “the métis problem”—the quandary for French colonial society of mixed-race individuals as liminal figures between European citizens and colonial subjects. In the consolidation of colonial rule at the turn of the nineteenth century and following World War I, colonial states and societies sought to “domesticate the empire” by limiting interracial sex and increasing the presence of white women in the colonies. Nevertheless, there continued to be a paradox between colonial discourse of difference between “European” and “native” and the reality of populations of métis. Anxiety about métissage and the status of métis, argue scholars of the new imperial history in the French, British, and Dutch empires, demonstrate the porousness of colonial representations of whiteness, citizenship, class, morality, and European gender roles. Yet exploring changes in representations and experiences of interracial sex and métissage cannot be explained by change in European discourses and governance alone. Fluctuations in the establishment of interracial unions entailed dialectic negotiations between “colonizer” and “colonized” societies that ultimately undermined colonial taxonomies of difference.

Scholars of race and sex in colonial settings have not sufficiently researched the indigenous women who were the sexual and domestic companions to European men, how indigenous communities conceptualized the intersections of race and sex, and the dialectical nature of sexual and domestic colonial encounters. Scholars who have researched interracial relationships in West and West-Central Africa in the period of Atlantic World trade from the seventeenth through nineteenth centuries have argued that interracial unions were negotiated according to local customs of marriage and were mutually beneficial for African women and European men. However, interracial sex in the period of colonial rule has been little studied by scholars of African studies. The scholarship on mixed-race persons in colonial Africa has demonstrated the varied ways in which the legal claims of mixed-race communities called into question colonial categories. However, scholars have not adequately examined how African
women traversing sexual and racial boundaries in colonial Africa reflected internal contestations about identity and status within African societies.

Intersecting women’s and gender history, African history, and colonial studies, this article maintains that negotiations over interracial unions amongst Mpongwe and colonial communities reveal the multidirectional vectors of change across the historical landscape of colonial encounters. Whenever oral and written source material has allowed it, the article foregrounds how African women and men engaged in and reflected on interracial sex and *métissage* at the center of analysis. Additionally, the study utilizes written records—colonial and missionary reports, travel literature and fiction, correspondence, newspaper articles, and colonial guides. Written and oral sources are critically examined as snapshots of human experiences that bear the motivational imprint of its recorders, preservers, and scholars interpreting them.

**Interracial Sex, the Atlantic World, and the Transition to Colonial Rule**

Understanding the terms under which interracial sex between African women and European men were to unfold over the course of the twentieth century entails understanding the social, cultural, and economic dynamics of Mpongwe communities and their interactions with Europeans on the eve of colonial rule. Little scholarship has been published on pre-twentieth-century Gabonese social, cultural, and women’s history, and written sources by European visitors focus primarily on trade. Nevertheless, extant oral and written sources do permit a broad outline of Mpongwe societies and cultures. When the French named Libreville the colonial capital city in the mid-nineteenth century, the region was inhabited by Mpongwe communities that had lived there over several generations and had prospered from Atlantic World trade. The Mpongwe are part of the Myenè ethno-language group that settled along the Southern and Northern Gabonese coast around the fifteenth century. The inlet of the Gabon Estuary created a natural harbor that contributed to the convergence of varied Africans, Europeans, and Americans in the period of transatlantic trade that reached its height in 1815. The Mpongwe served as middlemen in facilitating the trade of rubber, ivory, and slaves for cloth, manufactured clothing, alcohol, metal objects, and weapons from European and American traders.

By the nineteenth century, Mpongwe lived along the Estuary in several decentralized settlements populated by three to six thousand free men, women, and children, and slaves. The slave population in the mid-nineteenth century ranged from one third to one half of the total population of
Mpongwé villages. Nearly all households had at least one slave and wealthy households could have one hundred or more slaves. While most Myènè peoples were matrilineal, the Mpongwé were patrilineal. The basic unit of nineteenth-century Mpongwé communities was a household headed by a male head (nago), his wives and children, his sons, his sons’ wives and their children, and other dependents. A few of the most powerful nago held the title of “king” (oga w’inongo) and exercised a degree of influence over several households in decentralized “kingdoms.” Leaders were also often affluent traders.

It is challenging to mitigate the androcentrism of primary sources of Atlantic World Gabon, yet evidence suggests that women played focal roles in constituting wealth and power in Mpongwé societies. In the political tradition of “big men” in Gabon and elsewhere in Equatorial Africa to be wealthy and exercise influence depended on wealth-in-people, particularly in wives, but also including male and female slaves and slave wives. There is no evidence that women held formal political roles or traded actively. However, as the primary farmers, women’s agricultural production was crucial to the sustenance of Mpongwé communities and the increased numbers of foreigners living nearby. Though men initially cleared forests, women cultivated manioc and other produce in plots (plantations) several kilometers from villages. As Mpongwé men increasingly turned towards trade in the nineteenth century, their contributions to agricultural production decreased and the numbers of slaves increased. In more affluent households, lower-status women and male and female slaves engaged in agricultural production and non-slave women ceased to farm.

Marriage was a crucial, yet contested practice for Atlantic World Mpongwé, establishing reciprocal obligations of assistance and networks of allies that household heads could access to strengthen social, commercial, and political status. Since exogamous marriage conferred adult status, single men and women remained rare. By the age of three or four, many girls were betrothed. An Mpongwé man seeking to crystallize alliances with another big man could offer a female dependent as a wife. Yet mothers could also play a key role in selecting their daughters’ husbands. For women married at or after the age of puberty, some sources relay that the bride’s consent was necessary, while other sources indicate that a father could marry off his daughter with or without her consent. Moreover, a woman was at liberty to engage in sexual relations until her family had entered into a marriage agreement for her and she left her birth family to live in her husband’s household. Marriage was not a permanent relationship, as either wives or husbands could seek divorce.

Sexual access to married women also occurred within extramarital relations. In the moral and political economy of Atlantic World Mpongwé
societies, men could accord to male visitors sexual access to Mpongwe women as a gesture of hospitality, in exchange for compensation, and to solidify commercial and political alliances. Mpongwe customs sanctioned some forms of married women’s extramarital sex. An Mpongwe man could temporarily accord a male neighbor, visitor, or trading partner sexual access to his wife in an exchange referred to as asuko. A husband could also recognize a wife’s lover as her legal lover (nokndyé) on the condition that the lover remitted the agreed-upon compensation.31

As trading increased, Gabonese societies incorporated imported goods into marriage negotiations in the nineteenth century, affecting the meanings and practices of marriage. Prior to that time, marriage between Mpongwe consisted of the exchange of women (mipenda) between two clan groups or the groom’s family remitting iron (ikweliki) as bridewealth to the bride’s family. Over the course of the nineteenth century, bridewealth consisted of imported goods and bridewealth costs increased along the Gabon coast. Thus, heads of households could expand their wealth-in-goods in addition to wealth-in-people through the marriage of female dependents. Bridewealth negotiations were men’s domain and representatives from both parties debated the amount to be remitted based on the age, physical appearance, and work habits of the bride-to-be. Bridewealth could include items such as liquor, guns, ammunition, knives, tobacco, china, cutlery, and European clothing valued at hundreds of francs. Additionally, as a minimum requirement, an Mpongwe fiancé had to furnish his bride with a dwelling and two years’ worth of cloth. Escalating bridewealth costs meant that Mpongwe men delayed marriage until they could collect enough goods.

As African and European communities converged along the coast, the Mpongwe adapted conjugal and sexual practices to incorporate interracial unions and European men seeking partnerships with African women adapted to these conditions. As early as the 1600s, European traders docking in Gabon had noted the commonplace occurrence of women from Mpongwe societies, who could have been slave or other low-status women, boarding European vessels to grant sexual services in exchange for remuneration in goods. Eighteenth- and nineteenth-century European visitors recorded that Mpongwe traders would offer their wives as pawns to European traders, granting sexual access to the women in return for a cargo of goods.

By the mid-nineteenth century, Mpongwe women of varied statuses thus came to play a crucial role in facilitating the transatlantic trade in sexual and domestic exchanges with European men. It was common for European traders and Mpongwe women to engage in relationships of long-term concubinage, often sealed with a bridewealth bundle of goods or a cash payment from the European companion. European merchants trading along
the coast could meet the bridewealth requests more readily than Mpongwe suitors. In Lambaréné, a European suitor might remit 600 francs worth of cloth, guns, and alcohol to an Mpongwe companion’s family. European travelers to Libreville might have remitted fifteen to twenty-five francs per month to their Mpongwe wives or the wives’ male Mpongwe patrons. European traders with an Mpongwe wife held an advantage over those who did not have one, as it indicated their acceptance in the “trust system” of trade along Gabon’s coasts. Interracial exchanges also consisted of short term and episodic sex.

As the French consolidated colonial rule at the turn of the century, the presence of African women and the dynamics of marriage and sex continued to shape Libreville’s social, economic, and political terrain. After World War I, Libreville attracted residents of varied Gabonese ethnicities and the Mpongwe became a statistical minority. Yet unlike many other African colonial urban areas, the Estuary region maintained relatively even ratios of African women and men. Myënè women already lived in Libreville at the arrival of the French. Furthermore, Gabonese women of other ethnicities migrated near the town, primarily laboring as farmers in surrounding hinterlands.

As Libreville transformed from an Atlantic World trading hub to a colonial capital city, interracial unions of Mpongwe women and European men continued. The number of white women living in colonies elsewhere in the French empire increased after World War I, but it was not until after World War II that the French sought to increase the reproduction of white families in French Equatorial Africa (AEF) and increased numbers of white women traveled there. Nevertheless, the export of timber propelled European men of varied nationalities to travel to Gabon. European travel narratives and fiction convey that nearly all white men stationed in Libreville, from common workers to the Governor General, engaged a “native wife.” Private businessmen and working-class whites (petits blancs) continued to openly engage in interracial relationships, yet at times faced ostracization from elite colonial circles. Civil servants engaged in interracial relationships with circumspection. Yet who was “a native wife?” How did these relationships come about? What were the expectations of parties involved? And what was the impact of such relationships on the socio-economic and cultural landscape of the city?

Negotiating Interracial Unions in the Colonial Order

It is challenging to quantify the extent of interracial relationships in colonial Gabon. Gabonese and French popular discourses assert the
ubiquitous occurrence of sexual exchanges between Mpongwe women and European men, particularly between métisses Mpongwe women and European men. Mpongwe informants emphasize that métis are present in nearly all Mpongwe families and Gabonese of other ethnic groups often refer to Mpongwe as “the whites” (les blancs). It was not until after World War I that Gabonese of other ethnicities migrated to urban areas in significant numbers. Myènè peoples, particularly the Mpongwe, established a monopoly over sexual and domestic unions with Europeans. Interracial relationships were prevalent in urban centers—Libreville, Lambaréné, and Port-Gentil—where Myènè populations and European male adventurers, traders, and state officials converged. As early as 1912, French colonial officials attempted to keep record of interracial unions, the women involved in such unions, and the children they bore; these documents are missing from the archives. Sociologist Georges Balandier cited a 1918 census of Libreville as recording that about 7 percent of unmarried Mpongwe women lived with European men.

More records are extant for the period after the 1930s, when civil unrest in Africa compelled the French to research social and economic conditions of African societies. Gabon’s total population was small compared to other regions in Francophone Africa, yet the number of métis was high. Authoring a 1938 study on métis in Gabon, a colonial official named Saint-Blancart counted a total of 104 métisses over the age of sixteen in Libreville. Saint-Blancart listed seventy of them, almost 70 percent, as “living in concubinage” with European men. In a 1939 report, the French doctor who headed the Hospital of Libreville estimated that there had been about 1500 union libres between white men and indigenous women in Gabon since 1900. The official further analyzed the racial categorization of women in union libres: 60 percent of them were métisse, 30 percent were black, and 10 percent were quadroon. In a 1941 report on métis, the governor of Gabon wrote that out of a total population of 7,000 Africans in Libreville, there were 550 métis, of whom 325 were under sixteen years old. Thus, extant sources reveal that over the course of the twentieth century, a relatively small number of Mpongwe women engaged in interracial sex, but it does appear that a majority of métisses born of their mothers’ encounters with European men engaged in interracial unions. Overall, the majority of Mpongwe women engaged in sexual and conjugal relationships with African men. Moreover, Mpongwe women in Libreville were in varied socio-economic levels and engaged in a variety of economic activities ranging from agricultural production, housekeeping, sewing, and working in shops. Yet, African and French representations of Mpongwe women’s relationships with European men are key to understanding contestations over respectability and the circulation of material resources in colonial Libreville.
According to late-nineteenth- and twentieth-century missionary publications, nearly every Mpongwe family sent their daughters to engage in relationships with European men. Mission-educated young women were especially valued since they had learned at least rudimentary French and European housekeeping skills. Missionary alarm was so great that Marie Bidang, a Fang woman who attended a catholic school in the 1930s, relayed that the adage “A black girl should not go out with a white man” was integral to the curriculum. A 1913 political report by the colony’s officials recorded with frustration that private and state enterprises in Libreville could not recruit sufficient numbers of male Mpongwe laborers because, “the native lives in idleness, drawing the better part of his revenues from the prostitution of women.” When asked if interracial unions were prostitution, Mpongwe women vehemently denied that those in long-term arrangements with white men practiced prostitution. Informants countered that prostitution was when women stood in the streets waiting to be solicited by a series of men.

Some oral interviews with Mpongwe men and women about their mothers’ or their grandmothers’ interracial unions repeat a common trope of dutiful daughters engaging with the European men their kin chose for them. Some women in Libreville in the 1930s and 1940s selected whom they would marry, but a pattern across ethnic groups was that fathers or other male relatives entered into an agreement of marriage for female dependants, at times seeking the women’s consent and at times not. Mpongwe women relay that they did not enter interracial relationships as acts of individual defiance, but through the initiative and sanction of male kin as would have occurred with a marriage to an African man. For some, fathers, uncles, or senior male relatives initiated women’s relationships with European men. One woman’s account of how male family members facilitated serial interracial relationships in the 1930s and 1940s reflected this pattern: “I had my first partner while I was at the house [of my uncle.] A white man, he was a soldier. Things worked like that. You found a boy, you stayed with him. A relative of mine introduced me to him. He [the relative] came to my house and said, ‘You do not have a boy and I prefer to give you to this boy. I want you to stay with this person here.’ The white man was looking for a girl to stay with him. Then we stayed together in his house and then he went to France. [A year later] I found a [French] policeman to take me to Port Gentil, a white policeman. It is my cousin who gave me this white man.” The woman in this particular account was métisse and recounted that families preferred to partner métisse women to European men. Male kin’s brokering of interracial unions mirrored the authority of men to broker the marriages of female dependents. Like this informant, other women
indicated that once they had engaged in one interracial union, they entered into a series of kin-brokered interracial unions. Such unions followed Mpongwé customary practice in that the European suitor paid bridewealth to the Mpongwé bride’s family.

The composition, remittance, and reimbursement of bridewealth were matters of continuity and change in Gabon over the course of the twentieth century. Cash acquired greater importance in the quotidian lives of the Estuary’s inhabitants from paying colonial taxes to obtaining housing and food to getting married. Across all Gabonese ethnic groups, bridewealth escalated. In 1910, average bridewealth prices among the Mpongwé were 200 to 1,000 francs worth of goods. By 1945, bridewealth amounts in the Estuary region included goods but also from 3,000 to 10,000 francs in cash. High bridewealth costs meant that young men across ethnicities could not afford to marry until later in life. Over the course of the twentieth century, varied coalitions of African political leaders, French civil servants, and missionaries drafted policies and laws attempting to limit bridewealth costs. As the world market economy enveloped Gabonese communities, marriage and women’s reproductive and productive capacities were a sound investment and interracial unions yielded significant capital in bridewealth.

Interracial unions might have not been recognized as marriage under French law, but were legitimate in Mpongwé communities according to rites of bridewealth exchange and family consent. For Mpongwé communities, these relationships, if consecrated with the consent of women’s family heads and sealed with the exchange of bridewealth, were legitimate marriages. Simone St. Denis, an Mpongwé woman with a mixed-race father, emphasized that in the setting up of her grandmother’s union in the early decades of the twentieth century, “We demanded from the Norwegian white man to give bridewealth. He did this. It’s only following this that my grandmother began to regularly go to the man’s house.” In the French novel Souvenirs de Femmes, a newly disembarked French banker in 1920s Libreville accompanied colleagues to the home of his potential wife and her family, declaring his desire to marry “in the native way.” The young woman’s father initially refused the Frenchman’s request, needing to first consult with his wife. The mother responded with her demands for bridewealth: a demi-john of wine, a colored umbrella, bags of rice, packets of sugar, a dog, and 500 francs. This list represented a combination of such luxury items as the umbrella and sugar, and essential foodstuff such as the rice. It would have taken an Mpongwé man several years or a lifetime to amass an equivalent bundle of goods and currency.

Aligning young women with European men in Gabon allowed families to tap into the circulation of cash in the precarious timber economy of the
twentieth century. A 1939 report by a medical doctor in the Estuary region recorded that European men made initial gifts of 2,000–3,000 francs to the families of their Mpongwe wives. Additionally, a European man might also give his Mpongwe wife about 500 francs per month as her own income. The report estimated that with the initial gift and the monthly allowance, a two-year interracial union might result in a total of 14,000 francs for a woman and her family. The twentieth century witnessed extreme fluctuations in Gabon’s economy. Timber exportation precipitously dropped during World War I, the global Depression of the early 1930s, and on the eve of World War II. The livelihoods of Libreville’s African communities depended directly or indirectly on the timber market. When worldwide demand for timber dropped, Libreville’s inhabitants had little access to money, yet prices for imported goods and food only increased. The cash payments of bridewealth and monthly allowances could allow Mpongwe families to meet their necessities.

With family acceptance and the remittance of bridewealth from the European suitor to the woman’s family, Mpongwe communities regarded such unions as marriages and being married remained a key marker of women’s respectability in twentieth-century colonial Gabon. Simone St. Denis reflected: “If luck does not smile upon you, you remain unhappily single. But if you carry yourself like a married woman. And then no one would say bad things about you. With us, when you live in a married way (maritalement) with a man, even if you are not legally married, people talk of marriage.” Reflecting on sexual morality and respectability, Catherine Okili, a Mpongwe woman stated that a woman had to maintain a “certain morality” of engaging in sexual exchanges with one man at a time. Thus, a “living in a married way” and a “certain morality” consisted of maintaining a household with one male partner at a given moment. Even if a relationship had not been sealed with the remittance of bridewealth, a woman’s kin and community could still regard her with respect if she lived with and, to public knowledge, engaged in sexual relations with one man at a time. Mpongwe women carried this collective advice of how respectable wives should behave in their relationships with European men. Mpongwe individuals’ accounts of interracial unions ubiquitously refer to the roles of women in such unions as “wives.”

Mpongwe women in the homes of Frenchmen functioned essentially as wives, as they provided domestic labor for household maintenance as well as sexual services. Amongst varied duties of household maintenance, women in interracial unions completed housekeeping duties, and managed staff and a household budget. Rosalie Antchandi recounted that family members advised her when she was leaving for her European husband’s
home, to carry herself as a married woman: “You had to learn how to stay with your husband as long as he is here. You also had to take care of him: wash his clothes, his socks, darn the linens, choose the colors of the clothes that he would wear to the timber yard, iron the clothes. I had to demonstrate to my husband that I was not a dumb woman!” Mpongwé women’s relationships with French men, while temporary since most French men eventually repatriated back to France, received their family’s approval as marriages sealed with the transfer and acceptance of bridewealth.

Interracial unions, however, also revealed the fault lines of conflict across gender and generational lines as women and their kin struggled over women’s conjugal and sexual relationships and the distribution of material benefits. Other women were often instrumental in negotiating an Mpongwé woman’s relationship with a European man, circumventing male kin’s control over women’s conjugal and sexual relationships. Myènè wives of European men sometimes introduced female kin to European men seeking partners. When asked the question of how her grandparents came to the decision to “give” her mother to a French man, as other informants had spoken of their unions, Catherine Okili countered “My [grand]parents did not ‘give’ my mother to a French man.” Okili recounted that it was her mother’s sisters who were instrumental in her mother’s interracial partnership. The family had twelve daughters and the younger daughters watched as the older daughters entered into marriages with Mpongwé men and died a few years later. Marriage was difficult for young brides, Okili stated, because they faced physical abuse at the hands of the mother- and sister-in-laws. The remaining sisters preferred not to marry at all. But when approached by a single French man who was seeking an Mpongwé companion, the sisters consented to her mother’s marriage to him, as she would not have to contend with any female in-laws. Furthermore, in aligning Okili’s mother with a French man, the sisters negotiated the relationship without any kin intervention, circumventing female and male kin’s control over their persons.

Women who had been involved in interracial unions sometimes sought interracial unions for their daughters. Victorine Smith recounted of the French man with whom she lived for several years and had a child: “I would ride my bicycle to work. He saw me everyday [from his office.] Every time I pedaled, he would look at me through his telescope. One day, when I had left for work, he talked to my mother, ‘I see your daughter, she is grown, she had finished school, she is pleasing. Can you give her to me? I am here alone.’ My mother accepted. She didn’t want me to marry a Gabonese man because I was her only girl child.” Smith’s mother was métisse, born of her mother’s relationship with a European man. In negotiating a
union with a French man for her daughter, Smith’s mother circumvented the authority of her brother as, according to French accounts of customary law, a woman’s brother could determine his niece’s marriage. Such a union was advantageous for Smith’s mother as well, given that the husband would eventually return to France; Smith and the son that she bore returned to her mother’s home after the European man repatriated. In marriage amongst the Gabonese, any children born of a marriage in which the husband had paid bridewealth would remain in the legal custody of the husband’s family in the case of dissolution. In addition to retaining custody of her son after her European husband’s departure, Victorine Smith also became the owner of the cement home in which they lived. That interracial unions permitted some women material benefits would come to be a point of asymmetry within Mpongwe communities and between Mpongwe and other African communities.

Mpongwe women’s sexual, domestic, and reproductive labor for European men sometimes provided an avenue for women to independently accumulate property. Mpongwe women were among the first Africans to own cement homes (cases en dur) like those of European inhabitants of Libreville. As many of Libreville’s African inhabitants lived in precarious structures made of tin, cartons, and any materials that they could salvage, a cement home was significant. As some European men purchased the plot of land on which the homes had been built from the colonial state, some women acquired the land with the houses and leased spaces behind their homes for income. Concerning the many female Mpongwe property owners, Joseph Lasseny N’Tchoveré, a male Mpongwe chief surmised, “Before, the possibility of obtaining loans did not exist. Men constructed with their own means, while women, due to the fact that they lived with Europeans succeeded in obtaining houses.” Benoit Messani, another chief, stated, “It’s because in the beginning our men did not have sufficient means to construct a dwelling for his wife. So, women preferred to be courted by whites, live with whites because as recompense, if there was a child that was born the white gave her a house...” Women’s kin, however, expected to partake of these material benefits.

Women’s ownership of property could result in conflict with Mpongwe kin. Conflict over property could sometimes result in homicide, as in a story recounted by French journalist Albert Londres of his voyage to Libreville in the 1920s. En route on a ship, Londres encountered a European man named Rass who said that he had lived with a woman whom he identified as “ma Gabonaise” in Libreville for seven years. Her aunts had poisoned and killed her, Rass claimed, in order to gain control of her house and clothing. When Rass and Londres arrived at the house where he and his wife lived, Rass is
shocked to find that the aunts now lived in the case and had inherited her material possessions. The unnamed woman’s individual ownership of the house and clothing, and her unwillingness to allow her aunts to access this wealth, challenged the authority of senior women over junior women.

Interracial sex and métissage also offered the possibility of French citizenship to métisses. The 1936 decree Establishing the Jural Status of Mixed Race Persons in French Equatorial Africa (AEF) outlined that métis individuals whose European fathers had not legally recognized them (métis non reconnus) could apply for and be granted acknowledgement of French citizenship (la qualité de français). In AEF, the primary factor for the recognition of French citizenship for métis was jus sanguinis, establishing that the petitioner had a European father from factors including physical appearance, name, and education. In 1936, the highest court of AEF granted Flavie N’Guia’s petition for French citizenship. Court records recognized that Flavie N’Guia was métisse, the child of a French man who no longer resided in the colony and an Mpongwé mother. In theory, as early as 1912, avenues existed for Africans to become French citizens based on varied criteria that included French literacy and exemplary military service or employment for the French. Yet relatively few African women could fulfill such criteria and the numbers of male and female Africans alike who attained French citizenship was relatively low as colonial regimes tightened criteria for citizenship over the course of the twentieth century. However, the 1936 law provided an avenue for “native” women like N’Guia to traverse racialized boundaries of citizenship and whiteness. Of the sixty-one métis to whom the AEF court granted recognition as French citizens from 1936 to 1937, nearly 50 percent were women. In this encounter with colonial officials, initiated by N’Guia, métissage nominally increased her social and legal standing in colonial society.

As interracial unions continued to occur in twentieth-century colonial Gabon, African and French societies shifted in their ideas about their desirability and the status of African women involved in such unions. On a quotidian basis, African women and European men engaged in sexual and domestic exchanges with little intervention from colonial and African authorities. Yet in moments of socio-economic and political crisis, “native wives” appeared in public discourse focusing on the effectiveness of governance and moral and social order in Libreville. In such moments of crisis that occurred in waves following World War I through independence, African men of varied ethno-language groups and colonial state and societies converged in seeking to restrict Mpongwe women’s involvement in interracial unions and the socio-political mobility of such women.
**Mpongwe Women, Protest, and Colonial Policy**

From 1914 to 1946—decades characterized by prosperity from the growth of the timber industry as well economic collapse during the Depression and global wars—colonial officials scrambled to maintain social, political, and economic order. The aftershocks of economic crisis and war resulted in unemployment and economic woes among Libreville’s African inhabitants, demonstrating how vulnerable African communities were to worldwide economic fluctuations. Furthermore, famine and disease epidemics marked World War I and its aftermath as devastating years for Southern Gabon’s African residents. Between 1919 and 1922 in particular, recurrent food shortages plagued Libreville. The already tenuous availability of food was worsened due to a combination of economic, health, and ecological factors. The colonial state sought the assistance of elder Mpongwe men to direct Mpongwe women towards laboring in agricultural production.

Colonial officials blamed food shortages on the supposed laziness of Mpongwe populations and their unwillingness to farm. In earlier years of colonial rule, there had been efforts by colonial officials to recruit a critical mass of African men as peasant producers of foodstuffs or laborers on European plantations; these had met with failure. Officials turned to native chiefs in an effort to compel Mpongwe women to produce food for the town’s population, as did women of other ethnicities. Yet a Mpongwe chief countered to a 1922 commission of inquiry that the Europeans were to blame for Mpongwe women’s refusal to farm—the cash and material resources that European men gave their Mpongwe wives provided women with enough earnings to avoid agricultural work. Another chief argued, “In the past, our women worked on the land, but today they no longer want to and they no longer listen to us!” Mpongwe patriarchs could not fully control Mpongwe women’s labor or how Mpongwe women would participate in the colonial economy.

On a January morning in 1922, a group of sixty mainly Mpongwe women, some holding children in their arms, mounted a cacophonous demonstration at the town hall before the mayor, his deputy, and the police commissioner. The women had come to the mayor’s office in response to a rumor. Officials had allegedly announced the day before that all farmers, mainly Fang inhabitants of Libreville’s hinterland, were to bring produce to city hall, instead of the public market. Colonial officials would then ration and distribute food to the city’s African and European inhabitants. The investigative report following the women’s protest summarized the assembled women as “Mpongwe, without a profession or living in concubinage with Europeans; three or four among them claimed to be seamstresses or washerwomen who have found themselves to be without
work or money, although they were luxuriously dressed and well shod.” The report characterized the protesters as “lazy” women who refused to work in agriculture. Even worse, they would arrive at the market early and purchase large quantities of food, leaving nothing for wageworkers who could only visit the market after the work day. Libreville’s colonial officials reacted angrily to the women’s demonstrations, noting that they had asked the women to present themselves individually, not in a group, and that a committee of male Mpongwe notables had already convened earlier in the week to address native concerns over food rationing. It was the male chiefs, not this ad hoc gathering of women, whom officials viewed as the authorized intermediaries with the colonial state. Though the women were asked to leave the premises, some refused and four were arrested to compel those who remained to disband.

The Mpongwe women gathered at city hall challenged Mpongwe gender and colonial stratifications—thereby proving to be “dangerous” women as seen by colonial officials and elder Mpongwe men. This gathering of an all-female Mpongwe delegation asserted that women could claim a political voice and directly address the colonial state without African men as intermediaries. As alluded to in the summary of the encounter, many of these women were currently or had been previously engaged in relationships with European men. They evoked their position as conspicuous consumers to protest state attempts to restrict their purchasing power and redirect their labor into agricultural production. Carrying children in their arms, some perhaps the métis children of colonial officials, the women invoked their roles as primary caretakers of young children as justification for their privileged access to food. Mpongwe women were protesting in order to maintain privileges that they had gained within the transition to colonial rule. The report concluded that other African inhabitants of Libreville applauded the women’s arrest. In this period of scarcity, less affluent African urbanites might have resented the privileged status that these “women without profession” sought to retain.

In the 1930s and following the culmination of World War II, the French increasingly turned their attention to social policy in Africa and the status of métis, and particularly métisses, was a central topic of research and policy in AEF. As had occurred in decades earlier in other parts of the French empire, in 1936 the colonial state in AEF took on a new role in its relationship with métis populations: a concerned and benevolent father to ensure the material comfort and moral well-being of métis children “abandoned” by their European fathers. Between 1937 and 1946, state-run “orphanages” (internat de métis) opened in major cities throughout AEF. However, even as the French granted the possibility of citizenship and social services to
métis individuals, the French colonial state and society sought to emphasize that métis were to remain members of African society. Some private French citizens living in Gabon sought to increase the presence of white women and families in Equatorial Africa. As such, state, missionary, and private citizens sought to limit sexual access between African women and European men and direct métis women towards marriage with African men.

On the eve of World War II and through the second wave of colonial rule, colonial officials emphasized the “métis problem” was more of a “métisses problem.” The surprise of colonial officials, when métisses continued to seek out interracial relationships even as attitudes in colonial circles in Gabon began to disdain such exchanges, was captured in a 1938 report entitled “Enquête sur les métis” from the office of the Mayor of Libreville. The report was in response to a French Africa-wide survey of métis (Enquête sur les métis). The study argued that the “métis problem” was no longer an issue since the state had begun to allow métis to become French citizens. However, Saint-Blancart maintained, “French citizenship has not given these girls the most minute moral sense, which would prevent them from gliding down the dangerous slope towards prostitution.” The solution, as proposed by colonial employees, social services agencies, missionaries, and elder African men was to direct the moral education of métisses so that they would see their métis and African counterparts as desirable marriage partners. Yet religious directors of orphanages for métisses girls in Libreville and Brazzaville relayed that métisses continued to view “prostitution” with white men as their primary means of making a living and that many girls would not consider marrying African men. Colonial and religious representatives emphasized interracial relationships as prostitution; métisses women earned material resources in exchange for sex since it was rare for Gabonese women and French men to marry according to French law.

Colonial representations of métisse women as immoral women who needed to be reintegrated into indigenous society propelled social policy in Gabon and AEF during and after the war. Subsequent AEF social initiatives for métis sought to provide for their education and placement in jobs, but also to provide loans serving as bridewealth to métis men so that they could marry métisse women. In 1941, a Free French Africa Ordinance Instituting the Protection of Métis of Free France was proposed that included the directive that AEF should “take all dispositions toward preventing the prostitution of métis girls or women.” While there is no evidence that the 1941 proposal passed, in 1946 the post-war AEF administration did authorize the creation of a committee to oversee the management of métis orphanages. The mandate stipulated that the committee would, “exercise supervision over the residence hall of métis girls. To materially and morally safeguard
[them] until the moment of their marriage.”¹⁰³ The committee was to encourage the marriage of mixed-race women to African men. Yet, even as colonial officials, elite colonial circles, and elite African men frowned upon interracial unions, sexual and domestic partnerships between Mpongwe women and European men persisted.

Taxonomies of interracial sexual and domestic unions referred to by varied historical actors as marriage, mariage à la mode gabonaise, concubinage, debauchery, and prostitution reveal the contested terms of what it meant to be a respectable African woman in twentieth-century colonial Libreville. The negotiations and unexpected consequences that accompanied indigenous women’s engagement in sexual and conjugal exchanges with European men reveal the multivalent “landscapes of power” that operated in Gabon.¹⁰⁴ As colonial society and the state attempted to control the landscape of governance in Gabon, African women’s involvement in interracial unions revealed cracks in the edifices of colonial rule and permeability of social and legal hierarchies. African women traversing racialized sexual boundaries also destabilized social orderings of gender, seniority, and wealth within African communities. Struggles amongst Gabonese communities about interracial sex and the gendered negotiations of colonial encounters reveal the polyvalent subjectivities of African communities in determining social and legal status in the shifting urban locale. The topography of race, sex, and gender in Libreville remained fraught with fissures as individuals, societies, and states attempted to demarcate sexual boundaries. Multivalent contestations around the fault lines of sex, race, and gender demonstrate the varied strategies with which African women negotiated colonial rule and how these strategies shaped colonial ideologies and contestations about status within African communities.

Notes

Thank you to the anonymous JWH readers, Shelley Lee, Carol Pal, Patricia Pinho, and Emily Osborn for their comments. Any errors or omissions remain the responsibility of the author.

¹Moutarlier’s letter did not specify if he was an independent businessman or worked for a particular company. Michel Moutarlier, Exploitation Forestier, to M. L’Administrateur Supérieur, 27 July 1935, Administrations Générales documents (hereafter AG), Folder 927, Archives Nationales du Gabon (hereafter ANG), Libreville, Gabon.

²Ibid.

³Renseignements à M. Le Chef du Département de l’Estuaire du Commissaire de Police, 28 July 1935, AG, Folder 927, ANG.
Africans living in Libreville were to carry an identity card that stated their name, place of residence, and occupation. Rachel Jean-Baptiste, “Une Ville Libre? Marriage, Divorce, and Sexuality in Colonial Libreville, Gabon; 1849–1960” (PhD diss., Stanford University, 2005), 159–63.

Samba Augustin to M. Le Gouverneur Général, 6 April 1941, AG, Folder 927, ANG.


Heidi Geigenbach has argued that interracial relationships are “perhaps the most neglected face of the colonial encounter in African historiography.” Nevertheless, Giulia Barrera and Carina Ray, in their respective dissertations on colonial


15The author conducted oral interviews in Gabon between 2000 and 2002. Some informants granted interviews on the condition that they not be identified and thus are listed as anonymous.


17In a retrospective look at her study of prostitution in colonial Nairobi, Luise White urges the critical use of oral histories. Luise White, “True Confessions,” *Journal of Women’s History* 15, no. 4 (2004): 142.


20Myéné participation in the transatlantic slave trade did not become significant until the last thirty years of the eighteenth century and continued until the late nineteenth century. Despite the ban on the Atlantic slave trade by several European countries, clandestine trade to Brazil and Cuba and new markets of São Tomé and Principe accounted for slave exports. The numbers of slave exported in the nineteenth century were comparable to or higher than estimated exports of the eighteenth century. David Karl Patterson, *The Northern Gabon Coast to 1875* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), 84–89.


26Pre-pubescent brides lived within their husbands’ household where they resided with and assisted the husband’s mother or more senior wives. Barrett, *La Sénégalie*, 146–147.


28William Walker, “Mpongwe Laws or Customs” n.d., William Walker Papers, Box 1, file 5, ANG.


37 Patterson, “Vanishing Mpongwe,” 229.


39 By the 1940s, census reports recorded the Mpongwe as less than 5 percent of the city’s population, Jean-Baptiste, “Une Ville Libre,” 186.

40 Gender ratios, however, varied by neighborhood and ethnic group. Sondages Démographiques dans le District de Libreville, Marcel Soret à M. le Chef de Région de l’Estuaire, 25 April 1957, Répertoire de l’Estuaire, Folder 2DA(I)16, ANG.

41 The French cited disease, the lack of potable water, electricity, and roads, and the small number of colonial personnel as making the colony unsuitable for women and children. In 1900, 22 percent of Europeans in Libreville were women. In 1931, women comprised 29 percent of the European population and about 41 percent in 1958. Guy Lasserre, Libreville: La Ville et sa Région (Paris: Centre national de la recherche scientifique, 1958), 201–2.


43 Lasserre, Libreville, 245–46.

44 Commissaire de Police to M. le Chef de la Sûreté, 21 July 1941, AG, Folder 927, ANG.

45 The following interviews took place in Libreville: Jane Posso, 15 May 2002; Louise Délvcat Tati, 9 December 2002.

46 In 1914, the Governor of each French Equatorial African colony compiled reports on interracial unions. The sixty-nine page report for Gabon, which apparently listed the names of individual women, their children and the nationality of the father is not extant in the archives. The report is referred to in: Letter from the Governor of Gabon to the Governor General of FEA, Letter no. 57, 12 March, 1914, Gouvernement Général de l’Afrique Equatoriale Française (hereafter GGAEF), Folder GGAEF 5D44, Centre des Archives d’Outre Mer (hereafter CAOM), Aix-en-Provence, France.


48 “Enquête sur les Métis,” 15 February 1938, GGAEF, Folder GGAEF 5D44, CAOM.

49 Médecin-Chef du Département Sanitaire de L’Estuaire to M. Le Médecin des Services Sanitaire et Médicale de l’AEF, 1 March 1939, GGAEF, Folder GGAEF 5D44, CAOM.
In comparison to French Equatorial Africa, a 1938 census in French West Africa recorded that there were 3,437 métis. Letter from the Governor of Gabon to the Governor of French Equatorial Africa, 21 February 1941, GGAEF, Folder GGAEF 5D44, CAOM.


Soeur Marie-Germaine, Le Christ au Gabon (Louvain: Museum Lessianum, 1931), 90.


Rapport Politique du Quatrième Trimestre, 1913, Rapports Annuels, Microfilm Reel 51-mi-28, ANG.


The following interviews took place in Libreville: Anonymous Informant no. 2, 5 January 2002; Adrien Gustave Anguilet, 2 February 2002; Simone St. Denis Agnoret Iwenga, 8 February 2002; Benoît Messani Nyangenyona, 5 March 2002; Myène Avekaza, 27 April 2002; Rosalie Antchandie, 6 June 2002.

Anonymous Informant no. 2, interview.

Antionette Awuta, interview with author, 1 June 2002, Libreville, Gabon.


Luise White refers to the relationships between prostitutes and clients in colonial Nairobi as “illegal marriage,” as prostitutes provided domestic and sexual services also available in marriage. Luise White, The Comforts of Home: Prostitution in Colonial Nairobi (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 11 and 224.

The following interviews took place in Libreville: Anonymous informant no. 1, 10 June 2002; Antchandie; Smith; Agnoret Iwenga.

Renucci, Souvenirs de femmes, 171–77.

Le Médecin-Chef du Département Sanitaire de L’Estuaire, GGAEF, Folder GGAEF 5D44, CAOM.

Présentation d’un projet d’arrêté fixant le taux de l’impôt pour l’année 1931, 17 October 1930, AG, Folder 406, ANG.
Thérèse Biloghe, interview with author, 17 April 2002, Libreville, Gabon.

Agnoret Iwenga, interview.


Smith, interview; Renucci, *Souvenirs de femmes*, 176.

Antchandie, interview.

Awuta, interview.

Okili, interview.

Smith, interview.


Smith, interview.

This is similar to what Luise White suggests of prostitutes in Kenya, who utilized cash earned from the provision of sexual and domestic services to purchase property. White, *The Comforts of Home*, 79–125.

Lasserre, *Libreville*, 245; Smith, interview.

Smith, interview.

N’Tchoveré, interview.

Messani, interview.


Across the French Empire in the 1920s and 1930s, new laws outlined that métis whose French or European fathers had not legally recognized them could apply for and be acknowledged as French citizens (*la qualité de citoyen français*). White, *Children of the French Empire*; Saada, *Les enfants de la colonie*.


Application du Décret du 15 Septembre 1936, 13 February 1937, GGAEF, Folder GGAEF 5D44, CAOM.
French citizenship granted Africans adjudication under French law rather than the indigénat. The French remained ambivalent about Africans and naturalization, shifting the requirements for citizenship. The path towards citizenship was particularly restrictive between 1935 and 1949 in which only sixteen individuals in French West Africa were granted citizenship. Little research has yet to be completed on Africans and French naturalization, particularly in French Equatorial Africa. Catherine Coquery-Vidrovitch, “Nationalité et citoyenneté en Afrique occidentale française: Originaires et citoyens dans le Sénégal colonial,” Journal of African History 42, no. 2 (2001): 285–305.


Métis organizations across francophone Africa protested that métis recognized as French citizens could not access French employment, health, and educational resources that they thought citizenship would bestow. Amicale des Métis de l’AEF of Brazzaville to the Ministère de la France d’Outre Mer, 2 July 1946, GGAEF, Folder GGAEF 5D44, CAOM; Président Nicolas Rigonaux de l’Union des Eurafri- cains of French West Africa to M. Le Ministre de la France d’Outre Mer, 2 February 1949, Fonds Ministériels (hereafter FM), Folder fm 1affpol 3406/6, CAOM.


Christopher Gray, Colonial Rule and Crisis in Equatorial Africa: Southern Gabon, ca. 1850 to 1940 (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester, 2002), 150.

Rich, A Workman is Worthy of His Meat, 64–86.

The following documents can be found in Rapports Trimestriels, ANG: Rapport du 1er Trimestre 1911, Microfilm Reel 51-MI-26; Rapport Annuel 1913, Microfilm Reel 51-MI-26.

Procès-verbal, Berlan René, Administrateur-Adjoint des Colonies, 11 April 1922, GGAEF, Folder GGAEF 5D53, CAOM.

Circonscription de l’Estuaire et Commune de Libreville: Situation Politique, Ravitaillement Libreville, January 1922, GGAEF, Folder GGAEF 5D53, CAOM.

Ibid.


Orphanages and the conceptualization of métis children as wards of the colonial state arrived relatively late in AEF, compared with AOF in which the first orphanage was opened in 1904. White, *Children of the French Empire*, 49–51.


Problème de Métis, AEF, 1936, fm 1affpol, 2125, dossier no. 2, CAOM.

M. Saint-Blancat, Elève-Administrateur des colonies en service à la Mairie de Libreville, Enquête sur les Métis, 15 February 1938, GGAEEF, Folder GGAEEF 5D44, CAOM.

The following documents can be found in GGAEEF, Folder GGAEEF 5D44, CAOM: Letter from the Directeur de l’Ecole Urbaine de Libreville à M. Le Directeur de l’Enseignement, 8 February 1939; Letter from the Governor of Moyen Congo to the Governor General of FEA, 17 August 1943.

Edict Instituting the Work of the Protection of Métis of Free French Equatorial Africa, May 1941, GGAEEF, Folder GGAEEF 5D44, CAOM.

Arrêtée portant création d’un comité de patronage des enfants métis de l’AEF, 10 April 1946, GGAEEF, Folder GGAEEF 5D44, CAOM.

Richard Roberts defines landscapes of power as “asymmetrical social relations, the agency with which men and women actively engaged with colonial institutions, and the uneven nature of the terrain that men and women traversed in order to accomplish their goals.” Richard Roberts, *Litigants and Households: Colonial Courts and Disputes in the French Soudan* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2005), 19–21.
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