

King or Knave?: Felix Adende Rapontchombo and Political Survival in the Gabon Estuary¹

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Introduction

In the late nineteenth century, the town of Libreville on the Gabon Estuary went through numerous changes as it moved from a marginal French naval base to become the capital of the rapidly expanding colony of French Congo. European officials, through a combination of force and gifts, had managed to obtain control over the Gabon Estuary from Mpongwe clan chiefs in the 1840s.² The French administration did relatively little to assert their authority before 1875. However, those clan chiefs who had enriched themselves as middlemen between African interior trade networks and Europeans purchasing slaves and ivory, lost both their monopoly over trade and control over their dependents. As increasing numbers of Africans from other regions including migrating Fang clans from Northern Gabon settled in the area, the small collection of Mpongwe clans found themselves at odds with new rivals and an increasingly forceful colonial regime by the 1870s.

Felix Adende Rapontchombo (1844-1911), the leading clan chief of the coastal Mpongwe people, left a lasting impression on American and French visitors during this period, as the greatest advocate of Mpongwe urban interests. Adende descended from the Asiga clan leader Rapontchombo, who had become a major figure through careful negotiations with French naval officers and European slave traders in the early nineteenth century. But Adende struggled to retain a place in formal politics during and after the dramatic growth of French power in Gabon in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. Adende faced a dilemma that many African political leaders confronted in this period. How to maintain their autonomy amidst the imposition of an enlarged colonial bureaucracy, one that slowly superseded older ad hoc arrangements between indigenous polities and foreign authorities. Emmanuel Akyeampong's assessment of the last independent Asante ruler Agyeman Prempeh applies equally to Adende: "For Prempeh the challenge was to situate himself in the discourse of modernity and appropriate the empowering aspects of modernity while appearing demure and non-threatening."³ Adende drew from multiple, often conflicting ideas of "civilization" drawn from Catholic priests, American missionaries, and French republican ideology to justify his continued importance while defending his own interests.

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Adende's story is part of a much larger series of developments that posed challenges for African political leaders and urban communities in West and Central Africa. Early efforts to classify African political leaders in terms of either collaboration or resistance during the initial moments of European occupation have now given way to less simplistic approaches. Scholars have repeatedly criticized the paradigm of resistance/ collaboration favored by nationalist and Marxist scholars of the 1960s and 1970s. This model paid scant attention to the lived worlds, multiple identities, and internal conflicts in colonized communities.⁴ In the last decade, African historians have reconsidered relationships between urban coastal leaders who acquiesced to European occupation and the multi-faceted apparatus of foreign authorities. For example, wealthy and mission educated notables in colonial Lagos claimed a role for themselves as cultural brokers, turning to diverse local and European intellectual traditions to demand a role in shaping colonial policies.⁵ Mtis and Muslim families in the French enclave of coastal Senegal employed divisions in republican ideology as well as a shifting set of identities that confounded colonial social boundaries to spread their cultural and economic influence.⁶ Older legal and political institutions in Accra continued to survive with limited interference decades after the formal occupation of the city by British forces in the 1870s.⁷ Adende, though less successful than some of his West African counterparts, also manipulated colonial hierarchies and reshaped older notions of political authority.

One of Adende's most remarkable achievements was his recognition of multiple sites of power and disparate attitudes on educated Africans among European figures in Gabon. His long campaign to prove his worth to the French colonial administration reveals a complex series of debates among Europeans over the role of educated urban Africans were to have colonial rule. Like many of his fellow Mpongwe, Adende's ability to maneuver between local, missionary, and secular idioms of power unnerved officials trying to keep a sharp distinction between European and African cultures.⁸ His experiences underline those recent studies which question generalizations regarding French colonial policy of "assimilating" Africans through European education.⁹ Adende's case, while underlining these differences, also exposes the importance of individual French officials in determining the limits of African political authority. Fluctuations in his position often resulted more from the arrival and departure of commandants rather than from shifting intellectual currents in high colonial circles.

Adende's struggles also demonstrate how Western-educated Africans detected the contradictions of colonial law as early as the late nineteenth century. Mahmood Mamdani has argued that the colonial state was a Janus-faced entity that treated colonized Africans as a racially defined citizenry bound by law and as subjects governed by a regime of administratively driven justice.¹⁰ Republican values and arbitrary forms of coercion/control coexisted in French colonial regimes in Africa. Adende, recognizing the divergence between the rhetoric of assimilation and the authoritarian nature of French administration in Gabon, pitted the notion of citizenship against the oppressive, ill-defined power practiced by colonial administrators. While efforts such as Adende's became commonplace in French colonies by the 1920s, his activities predate those of other West African political pioneers (such as Blaise Diagne in Senegal) by over thirty years.

Despite his importance to this period, Adende's career has received little attention from scholars. Gabonese historian Anges Francois Ratanga-Atoz, author of the most comprehensive description of the chief's career, has presented him as an articulate victim of French colonial officials.¹¹ Ratanga-Atoz builds his review of the Asiga leader's life as an example of resistance to colonial authority. While Ratanga-Atoz accurately depicts Adende's battle with the French colonial administration between 1876 and 1900, he tends to downplay the Mpongwe clan chief's determination to preserve control over domestic slaves and his own autonomy. Events after 1900 (left out of Ratanga-Atoz's account) highlight the incoherency of policies undertaken by individual local administrators. American Protestant and French Catholic missionary material unavailable to Ratanga-Atoz also sheds further light on Adende's negotiations with colonial authority.

This essay explores Adende's attempts to place himself within the French colonial order from his ascension to power in 1876 until his death. Rather than simply dissenting against French authority, Adende presented himself as a loyal partner to missionaries and government interests without denying his African cultural background. He carefully crafted identities from a patriotic Catholic king to the Asiga clan leader, to bargain with rival missions and government administrators in Libreville. The clan leader's strategies reveal a diverse and complex intellectual background that transcended colonial categories of difference. Nevertheless, the chief's versatility posed a threat to officials determined to place African chiefs in a fixed hierarchical system. Adende's attempts to use republican arguments proved less valuable than his personal relationships with local administrators. Instead of heeding the chief's desires for opening alternative notions of modernity that allowed for African influences, authoritarian French policymakers in Gabon allowed no place for autonomous African participants in the colonial state.

THE FIRST RISE AND FALL OF FLIX ADENDE, 1876-1884

At the death of his father Dnis Rapotnchombo (the first chief to accept French rule in the Gabon Estuary in 1839) Adende became the chief of the influential Asiga clan in 1876. His territory, located on the south bank of the Gabon Estuary, was directly across from the French colonial capital of Libreville. A former clerk for the French customs service and a product of Catholic mission schools,¹² Adende seemed well placed as an intermediary between local and foreign communities. By the late 1870s, the small Mpongwe community had lost much of its former wealth and importance due to both the decline of the Atlantic slave trade and the establishment of French rule. Adende therefore sought to reassert the political rights of the Mpongwe and restore the power of clan chiefs.

The young chief allied himself with Catholic missionaries in Libreville. The French Catholic order of the Holy Ghost Fathers (established in the region in 1844) had encountered varied opposition from Mpongwe people. Indigenous supernatural beliefs, polygyny, and domestic slavery all led to friction with missionary doctrine.¹³ Adende, married to one wife in Christian fashion, gave missionaries hope that he would provide a model for his subjects to follow. Even priests' objections to domestic slavery quickly fell by the wayside. Father Pierre-Marie Le Berre, Bishop of Libreville, wrote glowingly of the chief's faith:

Today, [Adende's 500 slaves] no longer are unfortunates who tremble before a master having over them the power of life or death. They are now the servants of a master who they love and venerate. Brought together in large numbers, they receive from his royal mouth the words of God...¹⁴

In a difficult mission field, Adende's ascension seemed to be a triumph and a indication of the Catholic Church.

Claiming that he rejected local supernatural beliefs and the temptations of European traders, Adende presented himself as a Christian monarch willing to serve the Church and the French state. In 1877, he wrote the head of the Spiritan mission in France, "Advised without doubt by the spirit of evil, the heathens who surround me do not take a liking to my position to always remain a Christian..."¹⁵ Since much of the power of clan chiefs resided in their knowledge of mystical forces,¹⁶ This stance could have put him at odds with others within his community.

Adende also aroused mixed emotions among French officers in Gabon. Administrators generally considered Adende as a "typical" Mpongwe: verbose, attracted to European clothes/language but ultimately decadent and lazy. As a result of their early acceptance of missionary education and involvement in the Atlantic slave trade, Mpongwe men and women had adopted many elements of European consumerist habits.¹⁷ They often dressed in European clothes, used literacy to obtain skilled positions with traders or the colonial government, and believed themselves to be the equals of Europeans. They refused to obey French demands for manual labor, which they believed fit only for their slaves.

European and American observers in the late nineteenth century espoused ambivalent views of the Mpongwe which often reflected in their portrayals of Adende. Officials and missionaries alike repeatedly attacked the Mpongwe community's supposedly superficial civilization, demonstrating a fear that European contact only weakened rather than improved colonized peoples.¹⁸ One administrator declared in 1873, "The Mpongwe continue placidly their bestial and indolent life. In short, the Gabonese have all the flaws of a demi-civilization without having its advantages."¹⁹ However, missionaries and officials were divided over the exact nature of this supposed decadence. Whereas officials tended to write off the Mpongwe as inherently depraved without any hope of reform, American and Catholic missionaries believed that the introduction of European traders into the region had created many moral difficulties.

European observers imposed these general positions regarding the Mpongwe on Adende. Commandant Clment (1875-77), who believed the Mpongwe were "utterly wasted," thought of the young leader as ambitious and "the most dangerous man" in Gabon.²⁰ In January 1876, he accused Adende of resisting a forced labor policy recently imposed in Libreville.²¹ The chief, who had written a complaint to the Minister of Colonies over Clment's harsh policies in 1875, appealed to Catholic missionaries. Though fond of Adende, his willingness to settle legal disputes without government approval, his claims to royal status, his use of European military dress, and his marital disputes all dismayed priests at Libreville.²² But opposed to anti-clerical administrators and defenders of the French monarchy, the Holy Ghost Fathers refused to abandon their protg.

Adende realized that his attempts to maintain authority and autonomy had created many enemies. In 1878, he wrote Bishop of Libreville Le Berre:

[Satan], who knows what a fatal blow my union with the missionaries to do good brings to his rule over [Gabon], makes many efforts to harm me. Men also have a large part in these diabolic machinations...whites and blacks are all on my back...²³

Unfortunately, written sources and oral traditions on Adende do not furnish much information on local attitudes towards the new ruler. European views on the chief dominate the historical record. Government documents describe his dealings with members of the colonial bureaucracy. Some officials, won over by the chief, tried to use him as an auxiliary. Admiral Ribourg, Commandant Clment's immediate superior, assigned Adende to care for the colony's cattle in 1877.²⁴ Henri-Clry, Commandant of Gabon in 1880-1881, assigned Adende to mediate Euro-African disputes.²⁵ In turn, Adende wrote letters to the Minister of Colonies proclaiming his loyalty to France.²⁶

Adende often presented himself as a French patriot and a stalwart Catholic.²⁷ At the same time, he acted to defend his interests as a slave owner and an independent judge. In 1877, he asked the commandant of Gabon to return runaway slaves to Mpongwe masters.²⁸ Though willing to report certain information to officials, he settled some disputes over slaves and supernatural threats without consulting state authorities. After finding Adende had allowed one man to be tortured and had imprisoned another on charges of sorcery, a naval captain demanded the chief's exile to Senegal for insubordination.²⁹ A French doctor wrote in 1877, "[Adende] is accused on occasion of playing both sides and, by flattering both sides, to join with those who appear to serve his interests best."³⁰ Many became skeptical of the Mpongwe chief.

Adende's tactics, rather than being seen as pragmatic political choices, provided ammunition for Europeans convinced of his duplicitous nature. The pervasive stereotype of the untrustworthy African servant, imperfectly educated and willing to betray Europeans, proved quite effective in discrediting Adende. In 1881, a French naval officer had the chief arrested and denounced him to his superiors as a drunkard dependent on superstitious beliefs.³¹ After Adende led a boycott against a French trader in 1882, his adversary wrote an anti-clerical French deputy in Paris to put pressure on the local administration to recover the money. The deputy mocked the chief's ties to missionaries as yet another terrible illustration of "false civilization" introduced by misguided Catholic education.³² Adende's links to the Church thus weakened his position in Paris with the increasingly anti-clerical government.

Adende's position became extremely precarious between 1882 and 1884. He tried to combat his poor reputation through letters to French senators, private citizens, and French priests. One letter, reprinted in *Le Monde*, asserted his eternal loyalty to France and castigated naval officers who claimed he depended on "fetishes" rather than the Catholic Church.³³ The Holy Ghost Fathers remained loyal to their most prominent convert.³⁴ Henri-Clry's successor Commandant Masson (1882-1883) did not concur. Much like his predecessors, Masson found Adende's penchant for monarchy intolerable. He wrote his superiors, "this 'king' has returned to the interior after saying it is due to him that there is peace in Gabon. He forgets that before being 'king' he was a clerk at the local government warehouse making 30 francs a month."³⁵

Refusing to pay his salary as fixed by the 1839 treaty, Masson had Adende's Libreville house stripped of its possessions and told an American missionary that the chief had poisoned his recently deceased wife.³⁶

Adende tried several different strategies to handle the crisis. For the first time, he curried favor with American Protestant missionaries hostile to their "Papist" Catholic rivals and the French colonial regime. Adende told American pastor William Walker that Bishop Le Berre had created problems for him and was "thoroughly disgusted with Roman Catholicism – doubtless because it works against him."³⁷ He then offered American Protestants the opportunity to build a school on the Estuary south bank, where he stayed in seclusion out of reach of the small colonial administration across the bay. Neither approach provided him much protection from the French.

Adende faced his greatest challenge in late 1884. Masson's successor, Commandant Cornut-Gentille (1884-1885), had Adende arrested in late October 1884 for supposedly enslaving fugitives who had fled Portuguese plantations on So Tom.³⁸ The charges appeared dubious to American missionaries in Libreville.³⁹ Government tolerance for dissent had ended. Cornut-Gentille imprisoned Adende on a French ship and ordered his deportation to Dahomey. Feigning a rendezvous with missionaries, the chief escaped the ship and, in a tactic worthy of his resourcefulness, changed his clothes to elude French and African guards.⁴⁰ Hidden by other Mpongwe, he immediately began waging a campaign to exonerate his reputation. He even wrote a letter to the wife of Cornut-Gentille asking her to intercede with her husband.⁴¹

BOYCOTTS AND BUREAUCRATS: ADENDE, COLONIAL AUTHORITY, AND THE POLITICS OF REHABILITATION, 1884-1905

As Adende struggled for a new trial he remained a fugitive well into the 1890s. The French administration in Gabon could not locate the concealed chief. Since many of his relatives and supporters worked for the government, the inability of the administration to capture Adende indicate that he retained the respect of Mpongwe people.⁴² For the next decade, he lobbied French senators and various missionaries for a full hearing of his case.⁴³ Despite his previous criticism of Catholic missionaries, one priest even sent him paper and pens to write his letters.⁴⁴

Adende wrote French Senator Schoelcher and to a colonial court in Senegal asking to have the charges against him dismissed.⁴⁵ After repeating his loyalty to France, he asserted, "the Commandants of Gabon and the naval officers have always had the custom of abusing their authority."⁴⁶ Noting that Senegalese rulers received many benefits from French overlords, Adende demanded his full salary from the Commandant of Gabon and a payment for libel. The Mpongwe chief thus presented himself as a victim of colonial administrators unwilling to follow their own legal code.

Members of the French colonial administration responded to Adende's demands in diverse ways. A French judge in Senegal stated the Mpongwe chief had not been convicted of any charges and that Cornut-Gentille had overstepped his authority.⁴⁷ Senator Schoelcher passed on the case to the Colonial Ministry.⁴⁸ Yet local officials disputed Adende's position. After initially trying to settle the disagreement, Commandant of Gabon Pradier (1885-1886) reported to the Minister that the chief was a pathological liar who was simply exploiting the naiveté of

Parisians unfamiliar with colonial rule.⁴⁹ The Commandant considered Adende an example of the corrupt and 'demi-civilized' Mpongwe, in his view "the most apathetic and lazy negroes in the world."⁵⁰ Pradier's views, loaded with contempt for Africans who challenged rigid distinctions between Europeans and Africans, won out over the Senegal court's legal arguments.

Adende's attempts to retain control over slaves did not aid his cause. In early October 1886, some slaves who had escaped from the central Gabonese coast arrived in Asiga territory. When Adende tried to put the fugitives into bondage, they fled across the Estuary to Libreville.⁵¹ Pointing to this episode, the new Governor of Gabon declared Adende had shown his true colors. In the Governor's opinion, this rebellious chief had duped Senator Schoelder with "long words of civilization, emancipation of the black race, suppression of slavery, loyalty to France..."⁵² The fact Adende was a product of mission education thus made him even more suspect to the governor.

Having little hope of a full pardon from French authorities, Adende refused to return to Libreville. Apparently disenchanted with the Catholic mission's lack of assistance, in the late 1880 he again promised to support American Protestant missionary efforts. One American pastor noted in 1888, "The so-called king of that country wishes to unite with us. I do not know how far he may be sincere but our elders think he really does desire to reach the Lord."⁵³ At the same time, Adende continued to lobby the Minister of Colonies and high-ranking colonial officials for exoneration.⁵⁴

The Commissaire General of French Congo, Pierre Savorgnan de Brazza, who did not share the disdain for Adende prevalent in colonial circles, tried to broker an agreement in 1891. Adende rebuffed de Brazza's polite request to discuss the affair. After repeating yet again that he would do nothing to harm France, he listed off his ordeals:

Lack of respect, suspension of my customary payment, other financial torts, imprisonment (twice), an aborted exile...and [being forced] to hide myself...I will not reappear in public until I have been rehabilitated by the French representatives in Gabon.⁵⁵

Despite his skillful arguments, Adende remained a fugitive through the mid-1890s.⁵⁶

By 1896, three of Adende's daughters were mistresses of high-ranking colonial officers in Libreville.⁵⁷ Though recourse to law did not tame his critics, relationships of a more personal nature did advance Adende's standing. Missionaries often grumbled that nearly every European officer had a Mpongwe lover in Libreville in the 1890s.⁵⁸ He did not neglect the political possibilities of these liaisons. Though no evidence suggests that Adende's daughters' relationships softened the opinions of commandants towards him. These connections allowed Adende to make his presence felt in at least one major moment of strife between Mpongwe leaders and the administration.

In April 1899, the French colonial administration decided to place a high tariff on a variety of imported goods such as salt, alcohol, and tobacco. European traders tripled their prices on these goods immediately afterwards.⁵⁹ Once announced, this decision incited great dissatisfaction among the Mpongwe community. Imported alcohol played a major role in daily

social life, as well as marriage and funeral rituals. It also has become a means of exchange. Thus, the decree weakened the buying power of African residents of Libreville.

Adende and his fellow Mpongwe clan chiefs rejected the arbitrary order. On May 8th, 1899, they announced that they had placed an *omowetchi* beneath the bridge at M'Pyra which leads to the center of Libreville. This item remains shrouded in mystery. Connected with the male power associations among the small Sk (Skiani) ethnic community, fragmentary references describe it as an object, a spirit and a male power association.⁶⁰ In previous conflicts involving European traders and slaves, Mpongwe clan leaders had announced its use as a means of killing their opponents.⁶¹ Clan leaders had used power objects in other social conflicts in the nineteenth century.⁶²

Through the *omowetchi*, Adende and his cohorts asserted their authority over a variety of groups outside their nominal control. They declared that the *omowetchi* would kill anyone who entered a European store any Mpongwe woman who had sexual relations with a European.⁶³ Rural Fang food vendors refused to sell to white customers and as a result the Catholic mission had to close its schools.⁶⁴ The prohibition against Euro-African relationships reinforced the influence of male family members over women. These chiefs had also acted to protect their consumption patterns from colonial state interference.

French tourist and government accounts of the boycott offer contrasting views on the role of Adende. Baron Edouard de Mandat-Grancey, an aristocratic dandy who visited Libreville several days after the end of the boycott, mocked the event: "It was about a strike of women, as appeared in the old days in Athens, according to Aristophanes in the times of Lysistrata..."⁶⁵ Despite its supposed frivolity, the Baron also noted how the boycott caused great concern among officials. He declared the boycott had been abandoned after Adende, the most respected clan leader among the Mpongwe, was brought in chains to Libreville as the instigator.⁶⁶ However, the Commissioner General of French Congo declared Adende had negotiated a settlement with the government and neglected any mention of food in his report.⁶⁷

French missionary sources suggest still another resolution. Infuriated by Adende and Mpongwe chiefs when they no longer could feed their students, the Spiritan priests at Sainte-Marie closed the doors of their schools. On May 14, several chiefs went to the mission to discuss their boycott with Bishop Adam of Libreville.⁶⁸ Although the chiefs promptly declared that they would allow an exception for the mission to buy food, the Bishop refused to reopen the schools.⁶⁹ Two days later, the chiefs agreed to end the protest even after enduring a tongue-lashing from Bishop Adam, who attacked polygyny and the chiefs' willingness to allow female family members to become concubines.⁷⁰ The next day, missionaries at Sainte-Marie received food while government officials decided to lower the surcharge.⁷¹

The protest seems to have ended thanks to missionary intervention rather than state decree. Adende acceded to Bishop Adam's imperatives because of practical concerns as well as moral doubts. By cutting off students from school, Adam offered a threat to their social advancement. Clan chiefs, though willing to oppose state taxation policies, did not want to imperil their children's access to education and material benefits. Though Adende's exact role in this affair is obscure, the documents again denote the complexity of his approaches. Using local expressions of power and manipulating Euro-African relationships to challenge colonial authorities, Adende showed the years had not dimmed his sharp acumen in dealing with

Europeans. Through such tactics, Adende and other African leaders managed to strike both at indigenous and French vulnerabilities.

The Asiga leader's political career continued its rocky course through his final years. Individual administrators remained split over Adende. In 1900, the head of French Congo grumbled that local officials had coddled the aging chief.⁷² Still some European administrators tried to incorporate him directly into the colonial bureaucracy. Around 1903, he collected taxes for the French government on the south bank of the Estuary as a "native assistant."⁷³ Ambivalence surrounding Adende would again lead to disgrace. In 1905, officials stripped him of his title for keeping some of the tax revenue he had collected. Much to the chagrin of his former superiors, Adende continued to collect taxes and threatened to use his supernatural power against anyone who dared to punish him.⁷⁴ After the Mpongwe leader wrote to the Minister of Colonies yet again, the local administration eventually stopped harassing Adende.⁷⁵

Given his perpetual difficulties, it is ironic that a colonial inspector used this chief and his troubles as an example of colonial mismanagement. In 1910, Inspector Frzouls from the Minister of Colonies visited Libreville and scathingly condemned the Gabon administration. In the year of Adende's death, the inspector lamented the administration's denigration of a man who could have served colonial rule. Frzouls reported, "He is reduced to hiding in the forest at the news that a European is coming. This attitude is not going to build up prestige [for the government]..."⁷⁶ Whereas previous officials generally had no faith in African intermediaries, Frzouls' position emerged in official policy after World War I through attempts to buttress the declining power of African chiefs. Fearful of the supposed collapse of "traditional" society and norms, administrators came to believe that chiefs needed their support. Such policies came too late to allow Adende yet another chance for a comeback.

Conclusion

Adende's life illustrates the incoherence and changing attitudes towards the "civilizing mission" in Africa during the early period of colonial French occupation. Rather than presenting a monolithic position, officials in various branches of the colonial bureaucracy were often divided over the legal rights and status of Africans. Such ambivalence offered some literate individuals an opportunity to contrapose different parts of the French state bureaucracy against one another. In his creative responses and challenges to local authorities, Adende took advantage of religious tensions, sexual politics, and dissonance within the colonial state hierarchy to create an independent niche for himself. Although willing to obey French authorities, he also tried to protect domestic slavery and guard his own interests. Raponthcombo thus drew from European and local idioms of political action. Much like African residents of Dakar's *quatre communes* in Senegal or chiefs in the Ivory Coast, Adende's efforts demonstrate the formation of a hybrid political culture among educated Africans.⁷⁷

His approaches also show the limits of these multifaceted strategies. Many European officers ultimately feared or despised Adende and his education. Parisian deputies and senators did little to support their African subordinate. Missionaries, rarely able to influence an increasingly anti-clerical government, could not furnish their former student much tangible assistance. Despite these problems, he remained the leader of the Estuary south bank and kept

his slaves. Given the number of African states and leaders devastated by early French colonial rule, his survival itself was no small feat. However, his declining fortunes also show the inability of educated Africans to gain much support in Paris against the caprices of local colonial administrators prior to the First World War.

Adende's experience was much different than those of leaders elsewhere on the West and Central Africa coast. Compared to Asante ruler Agyeman Prempeh I or the descendants of Umar Tal in Senegal and Mali, Adende's pathways to accommodation only led to dead ends. Why did other African leaders in a similar position receive better treatment from colonial authorities than Adende? One answer might be Adende's confidence in French legal institutions. Willing to reinstate representatives of pre-colonial polities by fiat, French governors and administrators had less tolerance for chiefs that tried to deal directly with Paris using legal strategies. Another possible explanation lies in divergent European attitudes towards African political structures. No equivalent to Lord Lugard or Maurice Delafosse ever emerged in colonial Gabon to argue for the usefulness of older African political institutions.

Adende's struggles left a major impact on subsequent anti-colonial protests in Gabon. Later generations of Gabonese intellectuals and political leaders faced similar difficulties with colonial administrators. Twenty years after Adende's boycott of 1899, Libreville town protestors combined the use of power objects with lobbying of Parisian parliamentary representatives to discredit local officials.⁷⁸ Lon Mba, the first president of Gabon, established a relationship with colonial authorities similar to that of Adende. Another graduate of Catholic mission schools, Mba used indigenous supernatural practices (such as the *bwiti* movement) alongside French bureaucratic models to advance his personal career in ways that created suspicions.⁷⁹ Like his predecessor, he suffered exile but then redeemed himself by convincing French administrators he would ultimately serve their interests. Both cases illustrate how noted ties between sorcery and bureaucratic models of political action actually from the dawn to the twilight of colonial rule in Central Africa.

Notes

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2. For discussions of the occupation of the Gabon Estuary by French forces and African responses, see the following: Deschamps 1965, 92-126, 283-345; Patterson 1975a, 90-92; Bucher 1977, 224-231, 252-272, 297-319; M'Bokolo 1981, 29-48, 50-68.
3. Akyeampong 1999, 282.

4. Starting points for reviewing the lengthy literature criticizing the categories of “resistance” and “collaboration” are Cooper 1994 and Ortner 1995.
5. Zachernuk 2000, 21-43.
6. Diouf 1998, 671-696; Robinson 2000.
7. Parker 2000.
8. The attempt to suppress hybridity by colonial rulers has long been noted by historians. For example, see Cooper and Stoler 1997, 4-11.
9. Conklin 1997.
10. Mamdani 1996, 19.
11. Ratanga-Atoz 1973, 161-208.
12. Archives of the Congregation of the Holy Ghost Fathers, Chevilly Larue, France [Archives CSSP], Bote 4J1.3a, Lettres 1869-1872, Flix Adende to Dupaz, 23 September 1869.
13. The full scope of these debates lies outside the scope of this essay. See Gardinier 1978, 49-74.
14. Le Berre 1877, 439.
15. Rapontyombo 1879, 218.
16. Bucher 1977, 29-36.
17. Patterson, K. David 1975b, 217-238.
18. Attacks upon the Mpongwe for their supposed decadence in the late 19th century are far too numerous to mention in their entirety. For examples, see de Compigne 1878, 58; Briault 1930, 108; Payeur-Didelot 1899, 118-119.
19. Catteloup 1873, 472.
20. Archives Nationales Section Outre-Mer, Aix-en-Provence [ANSOM], Srie 2B28, Commandant du Gabon Clment to Ministre des Colonies, 30 September 1875. And, Archives Nationales, Aix-en-Provence, Fonds Ministriels, Srie Gographique [AN FM SG] Gabon-Congo I-12, Commandant du Gabon Clment to Ministre des Colonies, 22 January 1876.
21. Ibid.
22. Delorme 1877, 137; Archives CSSP, Bote 4J1.3b, Letters 1877-1892, Lettres 1877-1880, RP Stoffel to Monseigneur Le Berre, 25 April 1877 and 23 June 1877; RP Delorme to Trs Rvrend Pre, 9 November and 10 December 1877.
23. Archives CSSP, Bote 2I1.5a, Deux Guines Diverses 1870-1891, Flix Adand to Bishop Le Berre, 1 February 1878.
24. Archives CSSP, Bote 4J1.3b, Letters 1877-1892, Lettres 1877-1880, RP Delorme to Trs Rvrend Pre, 6 August 1877.
25. Ratanga-Atoz 1973, 130-136, 168-169.
26. Archives CSSP, Bote 2I1.5 Deux Guines Diverses 1870-1891, Flix Adende to Ministre de la Marine, 8 October 1878.
27. Rapontyombo 1878, 217.
28. Archives CSSP, Bote 2I1.5, Deux Guines Diverses 1870-1891, Flix Adende to Commandant du Gabon, 7 June 1878.

29. Archives CSSP, Bote 4J1.3c, Correspondance Le Trocquer 1872-1879, Capitaine Le Trocquer to Commandant du Gabon, 20 January 1878.
30. Barret 1888, 141.
31. Ratanga-Atoz 1973, 168.
32. Archives CSSP, Bote 2I1.5, Deux Guines Diverses 1870-1891, Folder 1881-1883, Copy Journal Officiel, Debats Parlementaires, 1 December 1882.
33. A copy can be found in Ratanga-Atoz 1973, 175-176.
34. Le Berre 1881, 411-412; Archives CSSP, Bote 2I1.5, Deux Guines Diverses 1870-1891, Folder 1881-1883, RP Gachon, 2 February 1883.
35. AN FM SG Gabon-Congo I-21, Commandant du Gabon Masson to Ministre des Colonies, 11 April 1883.
36. William Walker Papers [WWD], State Historical Society of Wisconsin, Box 3, William Walker Diary, March 30 and April 12, 1883 entries.
37. WWD, Box 3, William Walker Diary, 17 April 1883 entry.
38. ANSOM 2B13, Commandant du Gabon Cornut-Gentille to Ministre des Colonies, 26 November 1884; Ratanga-Atoz 1973, 178.
39. WWP, Box 1, William Walker Correspondence 1884, Adolphus Good to William Walker, 10 November 1884.
40. Archives CSSP, Microfilm T2 B3 Gabon, Journal de la Paroisse de Sainte-Marie de Libreville 1870-1939, 4 November 1884 entry; Metegue N'nah 1974, 336-338.
41. ANSOM, 63 APC-1 Papiers Cornut-Gentille, Flix Adende to Madame Cornut-Gentille, 9 November 1884.
42. ANSOM 2B13, Commandant Gabon Cornut-Gentille to Ministre des Colonies, 12 and 16 December 1884.
43. Ratanga Atoz furnishes a full account of this correspondence. See Ratanga Atoz 1973, 161-208.
44. AM FM SG Gabon-Congo IV-16 Roi Flix Dossier, RP Gachon to Flix Adende, 25 January 1885.
45. AM FM SG Gabon-Congo IV-16 Roi Flix Dossier, Flix Adende to Senateur, 12 January 1885 and 17 July 1886.
46. AM FM SG Gabon-Congo IV-16 Roi Flix Dossier, Flix Adende to Senateur, 12 January 1885.
47. AM FM SG Gabon-Congo IV-16 Roi Flix Dossier, Tribunal de Saint-Louis, 14 August 1885.
48. AM FM SG Gabon-Congo IV-16 Roi Flix Dossier, Snat 6eme Commission, 24 July 1885.
49. AM FM SG Gabon-Congo I-23, Commandant Gabon Pradier to Ministre des Colonies, 6 September 1885.
50. ANSOM 2B14, Commandant Gabon Pradier to Ministre des Colonies, 14 September 1885.
51. AM FM SG Gabon-Congo IV-16 Roi Flix Dossier, Commissaire de Police Octave Pan, 8 and 11 October 1886.
52. AM FM SG Gabon-Congo IV-16 Roi Flix Dossier, Lt. Gov. Gabon Ballay to Ministre des Colonies, 13 October 1886.

53. Board of Foreign Missions of the Presbyterian Church of the USA [PCUSA Archives], Africa Letters 1837-1903, Stanford University Microfilm Reel 18, Joseph Reading to John Gillespie, 3 July 1888. Though never willing to convert, Adende provided great amounts of support to American missionary Robert Nassau throughout the 1890s such as ethnographic information on Mpongwe customs. See Archives Nationales du Gabon, Robert Nassau Papers, Robert Nassau, "Autobiography," Unpublished manuscript, 1919,1032,1316-1317.
54. AM FM SG Gabon-Congo IV-16 Roi Flix Dossier, Flix Adende to Commissaire Gnrale du Congo Franais, 24 August 1890 and to Ministre des Colonies, 1 October 1890.
55. AM FM SG Gabon-Congo IV-16 Roi Flix Dossier, Flix Adende to Commissaire Gnrale du Congo Franais, 4 April 1891.
56. Presbyterian Historical Society, "Robert Hamill Nassau Selected Documents," MF POS 815 reel 2, Robert Nassau, *Presbyterian Journal*, 19 July 1894.
57. Archives CSSP, Microfilm T2 B3 Gabon, Journal de la Paroisse de Sainte-Marie de Libreville 1870-1939, 25 May 1896 entry; Archives CSSP, Bote 4J1.4b, Correspondance Gabon 1891-1920, Lettres 1893-1900, RP Adam to Monseigneur Le Roy, 1 June 1896.
58. Rich 2002b.
59. Archives CSSP, Bote 4J1.4b, Monseigneur Adam to Secrtaire Gnrale Grisard, 15 May 1899; Mandat-Grancey 1900, 32.
60. Missionary references are generally ambiguous. See Archives CSSP, Bote 2I1.4a, Vicariat des Deux Guines Divers 1843-1869, RP Peureux, "Notice sur la ftichisme au Gabon" (no date, c. 1859); William Walker Papers, Box 1, Correspondence 1864-1870, William Walker to Commandant du Gabon, 26 June 1869.
61. William Walker Papers, Box 3, William Walker Diary, 19 and 21 May 1869 entries; AN FM SG Gabon-Congo I-7, Commandant de la Division Navale des Ctes Occidentales d'Afrique to Ministre des Colonies, 22 July 1869.
62. Rich 2002a.
63. AM FM SG Gabon-Congo IV-16, Roi Flix Dossier, Commissaire Gnral du Congo Franais Lemaire to Ministre des Colonies, 8 December 1900; Ratanga-Atoz, "Rsistances," 205-206.
64. Archives CSSP, Microfilm T2 B3 Gabon Journal de la Paroisse de Sainte-Marie de Libreville 1870-1907, 10-12 May 1899 entries; Archives CSSP, Microfilm T2 B2 Gabon Journal de la Paroisse de Saint-Pierre de Libreville 1884-1914, 11 May 1899 entry; Archives CSSP, Bote 4J1.7c, Correspondance Gabon-Brazzaville 1899-1946, Monseigneur Adam to Monseigneur l'Eveque de Brazzaville, 15 May 1899.
65. Mandat-Grancey, Au Congo, 37-38.
66. *Ibid.*, 40.
67. AM FM SG Gabon-Congo IV-16, Roi Flix Dossier, Commissaire Gnral du Congo Franais Lemaire to Ministre des Colonies, 8 December 1900.
68. The following information is taken from Archives CSSP, Bote 4J1.4b, Monseigneur Adam to Secrtaire Gnral Grisard, 15 May 1899.
69. The following information is taken from Archives CSSP, Bote 4J1.4b, Monseigneur Adam to Secrtaire Gnral Grisard, 15 May 1899.

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76. AN FM Affaires Politiques Mission Frzouls 1910-1911, Dossier 3123, Administration General des Circonscriptions du Gabon, Inspecteur Gnral Frzouls to Ministre des Colonies, 15 March 1911.
77. Other examples are detailed in Groff 1991; Diouf 1999.
78. For a discussion of these manifestations, see Rich 2001.
79. Bernault 1996, 216-234.

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