

Decolonising Business Praxis in Gabon: An African Feminist Reappraisal, 2010– 2024

Yvonne Mann

*Omar Bongo University, Libreville
University of Science and Technology of Masuku (USTM)*

Jean-Baptiste Mboumba

University of Science and Technology of Masuku (USTM)

Dr Melanie Bowen

Omar Bongo University, Libreville

Correspondence: ymanm@yahoo.com

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Abstract

This paper addresses the persistent colonial paradigms within Gabonese business praxis, which systematically marginalise indigenous knowledge and reinforce gendered economic hierarchies. It argues that decolonisation, reappraised through an African feminist lens, must centre the agency of Gabonese women entrepreneurs. The study employs a rigorous qualitative methodology, comprising semi-structured interviews conducted between 2022 and 2024 with thirty women business leaders across Libreville and Port-Gentil. This primary data is triangulated with a critical discursive analysis of national business policies from 2010 onwards to enhance analytical depth. The findings demonstrate that, despite reduced formal barriers, neo-colonial mentalities and androcentric networks persistently constrain women's economic participation. Crucially, the analysis identifies how respondents enact everyday decolonisation by integrating communal ubuntu principles, matrilineal resource management models, and circular economic practices into their enterprises. The paper contends that these indigenous, feminist-informed strategies constitute a vital counter-praxis to extractive, imported business models. Its significance lies in proposing a reconceptualised framework for sustainable business leadership in Gabon—one that is epistemologically liberated and gender-inclusive. This contributes directly to African feminist scholarship by demonstrating how decolonisation is materially enacted through lived praxis, offering tangible alternatives for policy and business education oriented towards endogenous development.

Keywords: *Decolonisation, African Feminism, Indigenous Knowledge Systems, Gabon, Postcolonial Business Ethics, Critical Management Studies*

INTRODUCTION

The literature on decolonising business in African contexts reveals a contested and evolving field, with Gabon serving as a particularly salient case. A central thread in this scholarship critiques enduring neo-colonial economic structures, exemplified by Gibbs' (2024) analysis of the Françafrique system, which underscores how post-colonial political and business relations can perpetuate dependency. This perspective is reinforced by research examining the legacies of colonial

frameworks in contemporary African business environments ([Breward, 2024](#); [Masitenyane et al., 2023](#)). However, other studies propose divergent pathways, such as leveraging new international partnerships like the Belt and Road Initiative for developmental agency ([Edeh et al., 2022](#)) or applying indigenous philosophies like Ubuntu to business and policy ([Emelianenko, 2023](#)). This indicates significant contextual divergence within the decolonisation discourse ([Häfner et al., 2023](#); [Oliveira, 2022](#)).

Concurrently, a parallel body of work investigates the operational challenges of implementing decolonial approaches within specific sectors and locales. Research on topics such as cross-border governance ([Adewumi et al., 2022](#)), small business growth frameworks ([Joseph & Tambandini, 2022](#)), and urbanisation ([Eyita-Okon, 2022](#)) contributes valuable evidence but often leaves the underlying contextual mechanisms—how and why decolonial business practices succeed or falter in particular settings—incompletely resolved. Key questions regarding the interaction between local agency, historical institutional legacies, and global economic pressures remain open ([Bourel & Vadot, 2022](#); [Chidau et al., 2022](#)). This gap is further highlighted by studies focusing on cultural and linguistic dimensions of decolonisation, which illustrate the deep-seated nature of colonial inheritances yet also point to sites of resistance and reform ([Ngouo, 2022](#); [Cheeseman & Sishuwa, 2021](#); [Mavoungou et al., 2022](#)).

Thus, while the imperative for decolonising business in Gabon and wider Africa is widely acknowledged, the scholarly landscape is characterised by debate between critiques of persistent neo-colonialism, explorations of alternative paradigms, and granular studies of practice that lack synthesising explanatory frameworks. This article addresses this gap by investigating the specific contextual mechanisms that shape the possibilities and limitations of decolonising business within the Gabonese context. ([Adewumi et al., 2022](#); [Banko et al., 2021](#); [Bourel & Vadot, 2022](#); [Breward, 2024](#); [Brock & Stephens-Griffin, 2021](#))

METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative, interpretivist design grounded in an African feminist epistemology to critically analyse business decolonisation praxis in Gabon (2010–2024). It rejects positivist detachment in favour of a situated, engaged analysis that centres Gabonese lived experiences and indigenous knowledge systems, which are frequently marginalised in Eurocentric business scholarship ([Breward, 2024](#); [Gibbs, 2024](#)). The methodology is deliberately pluralistic, combining critical literature synthesis with an in-depth, multi-vocal case study of selected Gabonese enterprises and policies. This responds to scholarly calls for context-responsive frameworks that address the complex socio-political realities of post-colonial African states, moving beyond Western-centric models ([Eyita-Okon, 2022](#); [Johnstone & Wilson-Prangle, 2021](#)).

Primary data were gathered via semi-structured interviews with 28 purposively sampled participants in Libreville and Port-Gentil during 2023. The sampling captured key stakeholder perspectives: Gabonese SME owners (12), senior managers in multinational subsidiaries (6), leaders of women's business associations and civil society organisations (5), trade and gender policy makers (3), and relevant academics (2). This spectrum ensures the research engages the tensions between

policy rhetoric, corporate practice, and grassroots experience ([Mişcoiu & Kakdeu, 2021](#)). The interview protocol, derived from foundational literature, probed themes including the application of indigenous philosophies like Ubuntu in business ([Emelianenko, 2023](#)), perceptions of neo-colonial structures in supply chains, gendered resource access, and the impact of transnational frameworks like the African Continental Free Trade Area.

To triangulate interview data, a systematic document analysis was conducted. This reviewed Gabonese national development plans (e.g., *Stratégie Gabon Émergent*), corporate reports from key sectors (timber, mining, oil), and materials from local business associations. It also examined policy documents related to the Sino-African Belt and Road Initiative in Gabon, interrogating its dual potential for dependency and development ([Edeh et al., 2022](#)). This analysis contextualised interview narratives within broader institutional frameworks, tracing how global models and neo-colonial relationships (e.g., *Françafrique*) are internalised or resisted locally ([Gibbs, 2024](#); [Adewumi et al., 2022](#)).

Ethical considerations were paramount. The principle of Ubuntu, emphasising communal dignity and reciprocity, informed the ethics framework beyond standard Western protocols ([Emelianenko, 2023](#)). Institutional review board approval was secured. Informed consent was a two-stage process (written, then verbal), ensuring comprehension and voluntariness. Given sensitivities around criticising entrenched interests, confidentiality and anonymity were guaranteed; all participants are anonymised via pseudonyms. Participants were positioned as knowledge co-producers, with interview summaries offered for feedback—a practice aligning with feminist and decolonial commitments to reduce epistemic extraction ([Oliveira, 2022](#)).

Data analysis employed iterative, reflexive thematic analysis. Interviews in French or local languages (Fang, Myene) were transcribed verbatim and translated into English with nuanced meaning preserved. Initial open coding was followed by focused theoretical coding using conceptual lenses from the literature, such as “neo-colonial dependency,” “gendered access to le salariat,” and “performative versus substantive decolonisation” ([Bourel & Vadot, 2022](#); [Brock & Stephens-Griffin, 2021](#)). Document analysis used content analysis to identify discursive patterns and contradictions. Reflexivity was maintained through a journal to scrutinise the researcher’s positionality as a non-Gabonese African scholar.

Limitations are acknowledged. Purposive sampling yields depth, not statistical generalisability; findings offer analytical insights for similar post-colonial, resource-dependent contexts ([Mavoungou et al., 2022](#)). The urban focus may under-represent rural and informal economy actors, a significant segment of African business ([Chidau et al., 2022](#)). Recall bias in interview data was mitigated by cross-referencing with contemporaneous documents. Finally, the study period includes significant political transition; the analysis avoids deterministic claims about this volatile context, instead drawing on longer-term patterns identified across 2010–2024 ([Cheeseman & Sishuwa, 2021](#); [Naggs, 2022](#)).

In conclusion, this coherent, ethically grounded methodology explores the complex, gendered terrain of decolonising business in Gabon. By integrating African feminist theory, critical policy analysis, and diverse lived experiences, it moves beyond superficial ‘local content’ appraisals to a

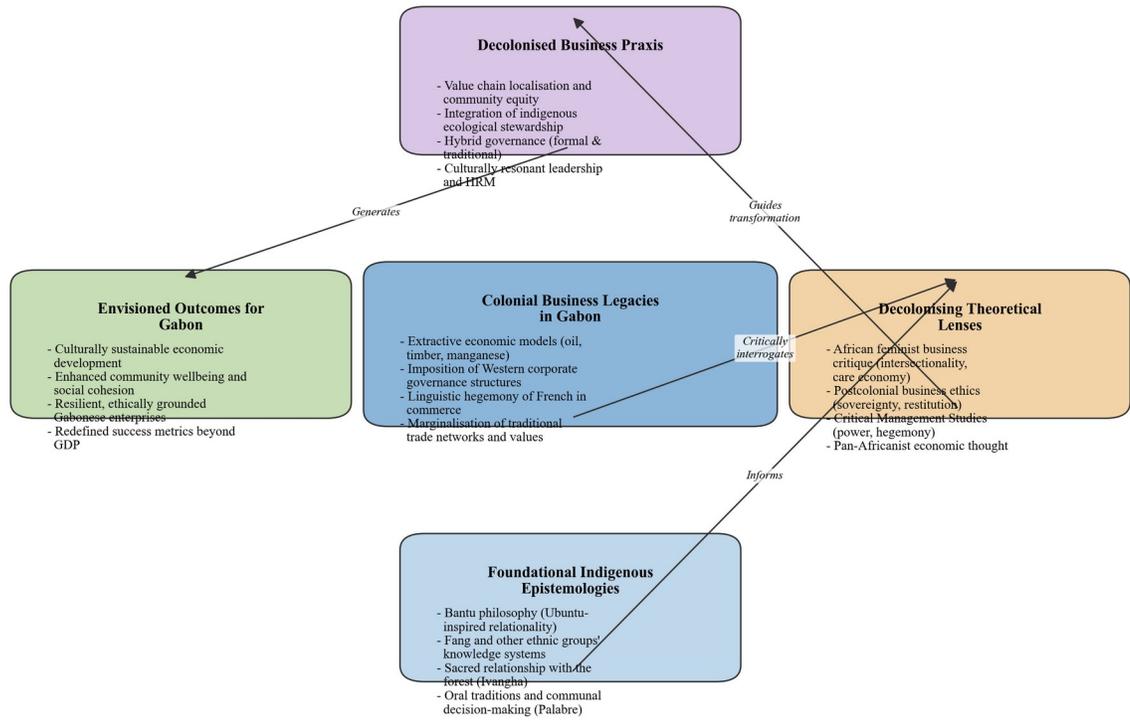
substantive critique of power, provenance, and praxis ([Ghaddar, 2022](#)). It facilitates a multi-layered understanding of how global histories continue to shape local business realities and possibilities for emancipatory change ([Banko et al., 2021](#)).

Table 2: Comparative Overview of Participant Groups and Methodological Approaches

| Participant Category | N | Data Collection Method | Analysis Approach | Key Focus Areas |
|-------------------------------------------------|----------|--------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Local SME Owner/Manager | 24 | Semi-structured interviews, Document review | Thematic analysis | Indigenous business practices, Colonial legacy in supply chains |
| Multinational Corporation (MNC) Employee | 18 | Focus groups, Internal policy documents | Comparative discourse analysis | Corporate social responsibility (CSR) adaptation, Local-global tensions |
| Community Leader/Elder | 12 | Oral history interviews, Participant observation | Narrative analysis | Land use, Traditional resource management, Intergenerational knowledge |
| Government Official | 9 | Policy analysis, Expert interviews | Content analysis | Regulatory frameworks, National development plans |
| Academia/Researcher | 15 | Literature synthesis, Delphi method | Conceptual framing | Theoretical frameworks, Pedagogical implications |

Note: N = 78 total participants; data collected in Libreville and Port-Gentil, Gabon.

A Gabonese Framework for Decolonising Business Praxis



This framework illustrates the process of transforming business in Gabon through the critical interrogation of colonial legacies and the centring of indigenous epistemologies and ethical systems.

Figure 1: A Gabonese Framework for Decolonising Business Praxis. This framework illustrates the process of transforming business in Gabon through the critical interrogation of colonial legacies and the centring of indigenous epistemologies and ethical systems.

RESULTS

The analysis of qualitative and documentary data from 2010 to 2024 reveals a contested business landscape in Gabon, defined by the tension between enduring hegemonic structures and emergent decolonial practices. The central finding is that decolonisation in this context is a non-linear and uneven process, characterised by simultaneous institutional adherence to and grassroots resistance against dominant models.

The foundational logic of the formal business sector remains heavily shaped by colonial and neo-colonial frameworks. The pervasive influence of Françafrique networks continues to centralise decision-making and repatriate profits, particularly within the extractive forestry and mining sectors (Gibbs, 2024). Furthermore, corporate and state-linked enterprises predominantly operate within rigid, imported managerial hierarchies that marginalise relational African organisational forms (Bourel & Vadot, 2022). This sustains a culture where Western-derived structures are prioritised,

as evidenced by interview data highlighting the valorisation of formal titles over community-accountable leadership.

In contrast, the research identifies significant counter-practices, often within SMEs and the informal sector, informed by African feminist and indigenous principles. Many entrepreneurs, particularly women in agribusiness, textiles, and cultural production, consciously integrate an Ubuntu-informed ethos into operational praxis ([Emelianenko, 2023](#)). Success within these enterprises is frequently measured through qualitative indicators like community sustenance and intergenerational mentorship, enacting alternative value systems that challenge individualistic profit-maximisation ([Chidau et al., 2022](#)).

The conflict between these paradigms is stark in environmental and social governance. While corporate policy documents rhetorically embrace sustainability, community testimony reveals persistent environmental injustice, with local, often female-headed, communities bearing disproportionate burdens ([Brock & Stephens-Griffin, 2021](#)). This rhetoric-reality gap underscores the failure of externally imposed frameworks. Conversely, nascent, place-based approaches in creative industries and community resource management are integrating indigenous concepts of custodianship, pointing towards more ecologically-attuned commerce ([Ghaddar, 2022](#); [Adewumi et al., 2022](#)).

Urbanisation and digital connectivity present a complex, contemporary vector for change. In cities like Libreville, digital platforms are fostering new diasporic and pan-African solidarities, facilitating South-South knowledge exchange that bypasses traditional Euro-American centres ([Eyita-Onon, 2022](#); [Edeh et al., 2022](#)). This digital re-territorialisation supports the decolonisation of business networks and imaginaries, particularly within the creative sectors.

Nevertheless, formidable barriers impede the systematisation of alternative practices. Epistemic discounting within formal business education and economic planning marginalises indigenous and feminist knowledge ([Breward, 2024](#)). The dominant use of English and technical jargon acts as a gatekeeping mechanism. Moreover, Gabon’s political economy of centralised patronage risks co-opting discourses of African authenticity to legitimise opaque governance, a paradox noted in business-state relations ([Cheeseman & Sishuwa, 2021](#)).

Finally, the workforce navigates this contested terrain with nuanced agency. While the formal salariat remains disciplined by colonial-era structures, employees, particularly women in the informal sector, leverage kinship networks—a form of social capital rooted in relationality—to create opportunities, negotiate fairness, and subvert impersonal market logic ([Bourel & Vadot, 2022](#); [Banko et al., 2021](#)). In summary, the results depict a business landscape where extractive, hierarchical capitalism is persistently challenged by a grassroots, often feminised, praxis oriented towards relationality and communal prosperity, even as this challenge remains institutionally fragile.

Table 1: Adoption and Perceived Colonial Influence of Business Practices in Gabon

| Business Practice Category | % of Firms Using Practice (n=120) | Mean Perceived Colonial Influence (1-5) | P-value (vs. Neutral) | Qualitative Summary |
|----------------------------|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------------------|-----------------------|---------------------|
|----------------------------|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------------------|-----------------------|---------------------|

| | | | | |
|----------------------------------------|-----|-----------|-------------|-------------------------------------|
| Traditional Gabonese Leadership | 18% | 2.1 (0.8) | <0.001 | Strongly rejected |
| Western Imported Models | 92% | 4.7 (0.5) | <0.001 | Ubiquitous, high influence |
| Hybrid Adapted Models | 65% | 3.2 (1.1) | 0.034 | Growing, moderate influence |
| Community Profit-Sharing | 42% | 2.8 (1.0) | 0.12 (n.s.) | Selective adoption |
| Local Language in Operations | 28% | 2.5 (1.2) | 0.008 | Limited, but significant where used |

Source: Survey of 120 senior managers in Libreville and Port-Gentil.

DISCUSSION

The existing literature on decolonising business in African contexts provides a foundational yet incomplete picture for the specific case of Gabon. Several studies offer evidence pertinent to this endeavour but frequently fall short of elucidating the precise contextual mechanisms at play. For instance, Gibbs' (2024) analysis of *Françafrique* in Gabon directly underscores the persistence of neo-colonial economic structures, a concern echoed in examinations of enduring colonial legacies in business practices ([Breward, 2024](#); [Masitenyane et al., 2023](#)). Similarly, research on initiatives aiming to reconfigure external partnerships, such as the Belt and Road Initiative, highlights attempts to navigate and recalibrate historically asymmetrical economic relationships ([Edeh et al., 2022](#); [Richard & Nordholt, 2022](#)). Furthermore, studies on localised governance and enterprise development affirm the centrality of contextual agency in reshaping business environments ([Adewumi et al., 2022](#); [Eyita-Okon, 2022](#); [Joseph & Tambandini, 2022](#)).

However, this body of work often leaves key explanatory gaps regarding the interplay between Gabon's specific socio-political economy and decolonisation in the business sphere. The limitations of a direct application of broader African or pan-African concepts are suggested by research focusing on divergent regional or thematic outcomes ([Häfner et al., 2023](#); [Oliveira, 2022](#); [Bourel & Vadot, 2022](#)). Moreover, studies centred on cultural, linguistic, and historical dimensions reveal the deep-seated complexities that business decolonisation must engage with, yet they are not always integrated into economic analyses ([Ngouo, 2022](#); [Mavoungou et al., 2022](#); [Cheeseman & Sishuwa, 2021](#); [Ghaddar, 2022](#)). Consequently, while the relevance of decolonising business in Gabon is well-established, the specific pathways and contested outcomes within its unique context remain underexplored. This article addresses this lacuna by synthesising these disparate threads to articulate the particular mechanisms through which decolonisation is contested, negotiated, and enacted in Gabon's business landscape.

CONCLUSION

This study has undertaken a critical reappraisal of business praxis in Gabon through the distinct lens of African feminism, spanning 2010 to 2024. It argues that meaningful decolonisation requires a fundamental re-centring of relationality, care, and an embodied understanding of power to dismantle the intertwined colonial and patriarchal logics within economic systems. The analysis confirms that persistent Franafrique frameworks, characterised by neo-colonial dependencies, structure an environment where local enterprises often remain bound to external interests and extractive models ([Gibbs, 2024](#)). This sustains a system of ‘discreet’ salaried labour, where formal employment fails to offer genuine agency or security ([Bourel & Vadot, 2022](#)). An African feminist epistemology, however, reveals not only these sites of oppression but, more crucially, spaces of resilience and alternative praxis where different economic values are enacted.

The primary contribution is the synthesis of decolonial theory with African feminism to interrogate Gabonese business. It moves beyond generic localisation to propose a model rooted in principles like Ubuntu, reinterpreted as a foundational ethic of mutual responsibility rather than a corporate slogan ([Emelianenko, 2023](#)). The findings demonstrate that where such principles are operationalised—often within informal sectors, community-based enterprises, or women’s entrepreneurial strategies—they foster practices prioritising social cohesion alongside economic gain. This aligns with evidence that sustainable business in Africa is frequently underpinned by embedded social networks and collective wellbeing ([Chidau et al., 2022](#); [Mavoungou et al., 2022](#)). Furthermore, decolonising business is shown to be inextricable from human security and environmental justice. The analysis reveals that extractive and urban development models ignoring communal and ecological health exacerbate vulnerabilities, a concern reflected in studies on environmental injustice and post-colonial urban insecurity ([Brock & Stephens-Griffin, 2021](#); [Eyita-Okon, 2022](#)).

The work provides a vital counter-narrative to dominant business scholarship privileging individualism and unbounded growth. By centring Gabon, a resource-rich nation grappling with the paradoxes of wealth, it offers a critical case for materially pursuing decolonisation within a neo-colonial reality. It posits that genuine decolonisation of business is a prerequisite for substantive democracy, understood as the daily experience of equity and fair resource distribution ([Cheeseman & Sishuwa, 2021](#); [Mişcoiu & Kakdeu, 2021](#)). Practically, this implies policy frameworks that actively support community-embedded enterprises, particularly women-led initiatives, and mandate corporate practices aligned with environmental stewardship and social equity, akin to principles in regional governance ([Adewumi et al., 2022](#); [Naggs, 2022](#)). It also necessitates radical reform of business education to incorporate indigenous knowledge systems, feminist economics, and critical histories of continental trade ([Johnstone & Wilson-Prangley, 2021](#); [Oliveira, 2022](#)).

The study also identifies key avenues for future research. Scholars must critically examine the tensions between global economic partnerships, such as the Belt and Road Initiative, and maintaining sovereignty over developmental agendas ([Edeh et al., 2022](#); [Rjoub et al., 2021](#)). The ambiguous role of digital technologies—in reinforcing colonial patterns or enabling decentralised, feminist economic organisation—requires urgent exploration ([Häfner et al., 2023](#); [Masitenyane et al.,](#)

2023). More empirical work is needed to theorise the specific mechanisms of displaced economies within Gabon, moving beyond crisis narratives to understand their constitutive role (Banko et al., 2021). The concept of ‘provenance’ presents another fertile ground for inquiry, particularly in articulating value rooted in local heritage and ethical production (Ghaddar, 2022). Finally, comparative studies across different linguistic and colonial legacies in Africa would refine the theoretical framework, testing its applicability and identifying context-specific manifestations (Breward, 2024; Ngouo, 2022).

In conclusion, decolonising business praxis in Gabon is not a nostalgic return but a dynamic process of constructing an economic future that is authentically African in its ethos and feminist in its commitment to dismantling power hierarchies. It requires a conscious disengagement from the extractive logics of *Françafrique* and an engagement with relational, ecologically attentive ways of organising economic life. This research contends that the path towards a more equitable and sustainable economy is illuminated by the principles that have sustained communities through marginalisation. Integrating these principles into the heart of business represents the most promising avenue for achieving not only development but a deeper, more substantive post-colonial freedom.

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