

A “Vortex of Identities”: Freemasonry, Witchcraft, and Postcolonial Homophobia

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Abstract: The recent moral panic in Cameroon about a supposed proliferation of “homosexuality” is related to a special image of “the” homosexual as *un Grand* who submits younger persons, eager to get a job, to anal penetration, and are thus corrupting the nation. This image stems from the popular conviction that the national elite is deeply involved in secret societies like Freemasonry or Rosicrucianism. The tendency to thus relate the supposed proliferation of homosexuality in the postcolony to colonial impositions is balanced by other lines in its genealogy—for instance, the notion of “wealth medicine,” which Günther Tessmann, the German ethnographer of the Fang, linked already in 1913 to same-sex intercourse. This complex knot of ideas and practices coming from different backgrounds can help us explore the urgent challenges that same-sex practices raise to African studies in general. The Cameroonian examples confuse current Western notions about heteronormativity, GLBTQI+ identities, and the relation between gender and sex. Taking everyday assemblages emerging from African contexts as our starting point can help not only to queer African studies, but also to Africanize queer studies. It can also help to overcome unproductive tendencies to oppose Western/colonial and local/ traditional elements. Present-day notions and practices of homosexuality and homophobia are products of long and tortuous histories at the interface of Africa and the West.

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Résumé: La panique morale récente au Cameroun au sujet d'une prétendue prolifération de "l'homosexualité" est liée à une image particulière de l'homosexuel comme *un Grand* qui soumet les jeunes, désireux d'obtenir un emploi, à la pénétration anale corrompant ainsi la nation. Cette représentation résulte de la conviction populaire que l'élite nationale est profondément impliquée dans des sociétés secrètes comme la franc-maçonnerie ou le rosicrucianisme. La tendance d'expliquer ainsi une supposée prolifération de l'homosexualité dans la postcolonie comme liée aux impositions coloniales est balancée par d'autres lignées dans sa généalogie, par exemple la notion des *biang akuma*, ou "médecine de la richesse," que Günther Tessmann, l'ethnographe allemand des Fang, liait déjà en 1913 aux rapports entre conjoints de même sexe. Ce nouage complexe d'idées et de pratiques provenant des fonds différents peut aider à explorer les défis urgents que les pratiques homosexuelles posent aux études africaines en général. Les exemples camerounais confondent les notions occidentales actuelles concernant l'hétéronormativité, les identités LGBTQI+ et le rapport entre genre et sexualité. Prendre des assemblages quotidiennes émergeant des contextes africains comme point de départ peut servir non seulement à renforcer l'élément *queer* dans les études africaines, mais aussi à africaniser les études *queer*. Ceci peut également aider à surmonter la tendance improductive d'opposer des éléments occidentaux ou coloniaux versus d'autres vus comme locaux ou traditionnels. Les concepts et pratiques actuelles de l'homosexualité et de l'homophobie sont des produits des histoires longues et tortueuses sur l'interface de l'Afrique et de l'Ouest.

Keywords: Homosexuality; witchcraft; Freemasonry; Cameroon; Tessman; wealth medicine

When I was asked to present the *ASR* Distinguished Lecture at the ASA's 2016 annual conference, I decided to go for a topic that opens up new perspectives in African studies (and that is also quite new to me). The urgency of the topic I chose will be clear. In some parts of the continent (notably southern Africa) same-sex practices have been a fiercely debated issue for some time. Elsewhere it was only after 2000 that it became a hot issue dominating public debate—even though its politicization followed quite different trajectories. Yet everywhere Westerners' involvement—either in encouraging "crusades" against a supposed proliferation of such "unnatural vice" in the continent, or inversely, in efforts to limit the effects of sudden explosions of homophobia—triggered strong reactions, problematizing the continent's positioning in global networks. A hotly debated question became whether homosexuality had to be seen as a colonial importation. Or was it, rather, that homophobia was a colonial heritage?

It is important to stress that this is not an issue that only concerns certain persons or groups. On the contrary, it is becoming ever clearer that these debates raise challenges to African studies in general.¹ An important one is that any effort toward a deeper understanding of recent confrontations over same-sex issues requires a surpassing of the binary oppositions that keep haunting the social sciences—not only homo/hetero, but also

more general ones like traditional/colonial or African/Western. With the present high tide of identity studies, and in view of the comeback of culturalist contrasts as an unfortunate by-product of some academics' recent fascination with notions of ontology, it is precisely the capacity of this topic to highlight surprising entanglements and articulations of quite different elements that makes it so productive.² Of importance are also its broader political implications. It is not only in Africa that sex, just like gender, has become crucial in debates about belonging, citizenship, and inclusion or exclusion. In the search for alternatives to a political order that many experience as highly unfair, these aspects—all too often seen as not directly political—get pride of place.³

In this contribution I propose to start from a few examples from my own fieldwork in Cameroon that can illustrate the quite surprising articulations that issues of same-sex practices produce in everyday life. In a seminal article exploring possibilities for articulating “queer studies” with “African studies,” Ashley Currier and Thérèse Migraine-George (2016) express the hope this combination will generate “a creative vortex” that destabilizes essentialist categorizations. For them it is vital to see identities as “shifting” or “blurred.”⁴ The salience of the Cameroonian turbulence may be that it offers seminal examples of such a vortex: elements of different provenance—witchcraft, colonialism, and even Freemasonry—are sucked into a vertiginous whirlpool producing a sudden explosion of homophobia. Powerful material for queering African studies. But maybe also for Africanizing queerness?

With this text, I follow up on the productive proliferation of “queer” panels at the 2016 ASA conference in Washington, D.C. This was clearly encouraged by the founding of the QASA (Queer African Studies Association) the preceding year, and by Ashley Currier's untiring activities to promote it. However, it is important to signal that these initiatives are not completely new, precisely because there seem to have been seminal changes in the meantime. In 1994 an organization called GLAS (Gays and Lesbians in African Studies) was founded at the ASA annual conference. It organized several panels at subsequent conferences and was officially recognized as an ASA-sponsored organization in 1996, although I could not find any traces of it after that year. I attended several of its meetings, and I remember the mood as one of uneasiness—the attendees were full of good will but somewhat hesitant. One problem was of course the composition of the attendance: mostly white middle-aged males. I remember Dennis Cordell and Matthew Roberts as central figures. There were also a few younger men present (Wolfram Hartmann, Rudolf Gaudio) and some women—for instance, Deborah Amory, who in 1997 published a seminal text on GLAS's activities.⁵ But hardly any scholars of color (either from the continent itself or from the diaspora) were in attendance.

In retrospect it is striking how uncomfortable we were with the topic at the time. Even for scholars in the West, working on “gay studies” was then seen as a brave gesture that could jeopardize your career. Moreover, being

associated with “gay studies” might create practical problems when doing fieldwork in Africa. Of course, this was even more so for scholars from the continent itself, where also in those days any association with homosexuality could put you in personal danger: arrest, blackmail, or at least contamination with a heavy stigma. In this respect we see clear changes now. The pressures are certainly not less, but scholars of color, from the diaspora *and* from the continent itself, were very present during the QASA panels at the 2016 Washington conference. As Marc Epprecht (and others) have noted, the recent emergence of homosexuality as a hotly debated public issue in many African countries has had the side effect that homosexuals, gays, lesbians, queers—or whatever term you want to use—have become much more visible throughout the continent. This has mostly led to serious problems, but it does affirm their presence.

Of course, input from Africa-based scholars is vital for this new field of studies in which it is crucial to prevent Western notions from muting other forms of understanding that do not conform to the canons of science as developed in the West. The Cameroonian examples below may illustrate the kind of unexpected linkages that come up from everyday life in an African context. The connections between same-sex practices and witchcraft might not be so unexpected, but the ones to Freemasonry and Rosicrucianism might come as a surprise. I propose to follow these linkages below, and then come back to the more general conceptual challenges they raise.

Examples from Cameroon: Different Faces of “Homosexuality” in an African Context

This article was inspired by two surprises I experienced in quite different contexts but pointing in the same direction. The first was at a conference at the Catholic University of Central Africa in Yaoundé (Cameroon) in 2010. The topic of the conference was “Medical Pluralism,” and I presented a paper titled “Witchcraft and Healing.” After the panel presentation the audience members were asked to hand in little notes with their questions. The auditorium was packed (probably more than 500 people), and the organizers hoped that in this way more people could be brought into the discussion. I was happy when I received a substantial pile of little papers. But the first question I opened took me by surprise: “When will you Europeans stop exporting your forms of witchcraft (*sorcellerie*) to Africa: Freemasonry, Rose-Croix, and homosexuality?”⁶

Of course, I should not have been surprised. This was the time when a supposed proliferation of homosexuality was an omnipresent popular concern. I also knew that people often link homosexuality to witchcraft: at their nightly meetings “witches” are supposed to engage in transgressive orgies, and same-sex practices are always mentioned as one of the most spectacular transgressions. Similarly, such practices are easily associated with secret societies like Freemasonry and Rose-Croix, which are supposed to be at the heart of the vagaries of national politics; many elites are said to

be deeply involved with them. Still, the triplet—witchcraft, homosexuality, Freemasonry—gave me a jolt, and I am afraid that my answer was most unclear. But my main regret was that I never succeeded in locating this interesting questioner in the crowd.

The second surprise came as a result of a comparative article I wrote with Patrick Awondo and Graeme Reid for the *African Studies Review* in 2012 titled “Homophobic Africa? Toward A More Nuanced View.” The aim of the article was to show that the image of Africa as one homophobic continent—then increasingly current in the West—needs to be nuanced. We took as a starting point Awondo’s notion, developed in earlier articles (e.g., Awondo 2012a, 2012b), of the “politicization” of the issue in order to highlight two points: that the recent outburst of homophobia in various countries of the continent has followed quite different trajectories depending on the specificities of each context, and also that it triggered many protests and counter-voices. We based the article on a comparison of four countries—Senegal, Cameroon, Uganda, and South Africa—where indeed this politicization of the homosexuality issue followed very different pathways and had different results. Unexpectedly—at least for me, after more than forty years of research in Cameroon—the comparison highlighted a quite special profile of “the” homosexual in Cameroon: that of *un Grand*, a Big Man, rich and powerful, who submits young men in search of jobs to the humiliation of anal penetration. It was this image of the homosexual that triggered a true “moral panic” around 2005–2006 (Awondo 2012a). Indeed, in Cameroon people speak currently of “les pédés de la République” (the faggots of the Republic). In this country, the supreme figure of the so-called phallocrate (“le potentat sexuel”), who in Achille Mbembe’s view haunts the postcolony, is a *pédé!*⁷

Of course, the men and women in Cameroon who have been jailed throughout the last decade—since the regime launched a judicial offensive against homosexuality in order to distance itself from any association with it—certainly do not conform to this stereotype of a “perverted” elite. They bear more resemblance to stereotypes of LGBTQ+ people elsewhere in the continent (and in the world) as marginal and crossing gender boundaries. Cameroonian media (both journalism and television) regularly confirm all sorts of demeaning rumors about homosexuals: for example, that they wear nappies or can be recognized by the way they hold their hips when they walk. In one notorious case a man was denounced, arrested, and jailed because people knew he had a predilection for Bailey’s (the Irish cream-and-whisky drink). But the growing popular worries about homosexuality and the fact that after 2006 these could rapidly develop into a true “moral panic” (Awondo 2012a) were clearly triggered by a very different image of “the” homosexual: a Big Man who perverts the country’s youth.⁸

A crucial moment in the politicization of the issue in Cameroon was the so-called “Affaire des listes” in early 2006 (see Guébo 2006; Awondo 2012a; Nyeck 2013; 2016). In January two newspapers (then still minor

ones), *La Météo* and *L'Anecdote*, published lists of “public persons presumed to be homosexual.” These lists contained familiar names: a former prime minister, some MPs and high civil servants, renowned journalists, music stars and well-known footballers, some Catholic prelates—mostly men but some women as well. For each person on the list there was a name, a small photograph, and a short text. The exact accusations were not clear. A recurrent theme was that job applicants were forced into homosexual acts (“but soon the pants came down . . .”). The lists created great excitement. Other newspapers copied parts of them, but Cameroon’s more established newspapers condemned them as products of bad journalism and disrespect for people’s privacy (see Awondo 2012b). It was clear that these lists had a deeper background. They repeated the message that the eminent Archbishop of Yaoundé, Monseigneur Victor Tonye Bakot, had conveyed from the pulpit in Yaoundé’s cathedral when he lashed out in his Christmas sermon, only one month before, against homosexuality among the Cameroonian elite.⁹

Over the following months reactions to the archbishop’s dramatic denunciation—all the more dramatic since President Paul Biya had been sitting in the first row right under the pulpit¹⁰—and to the subsequent newspaper lists showed that in the broader political context “homosexuality” had become a convenient outlet for the venting of considerable popular dissatisfaction with the regime. The political elite did not seem to know how to defend itself. Neither *La Météo* nor *L'Anecdote* was banned, and while a few of *les Grands* on the lists went to court, they had only limited success. Most of them just kept their heads low. Apparently, these newspapers had found a weak spot in the regime’s armor.

At first President Biya himself seemed to hesitate, demanding respect for people’s privacy. But at the same time the authorities started a witch hunt against “homosexuals”—apparently in order to distance themselves from such suspicions. Homosexual acts had been criminalized in Cameroon since 1972 (albeit by presidential decree; the prohibition was incorporated into formal statutory law only in 2016). In 2006 the authorities, invoking the law, arrested dozens of young men and also a few women, levied heavy fines, and sentenced them to up to five years in jail. In these actions they were supported by the Catholic Church, which contributed greatly to the popular indignation about homosexuality. Cardinal Tumi’s warning against the creeping spread of homosexuality had a particularly strong impact since he had high moral prestige as an outspoken critic of the regime.

Yet it is important to emphasize that there were also powerful counter-voices in this uproar. Alice Nkom, a prominent lawyer from Douala, was willing to defend accused “homosexuals” (until recently the only lawyer willing to do so), and she even succeeded in getting some of them acquitted on legal grounds. She also challenged Cardinal Tumi to a television debate that attracted a lot of attention. Fabien Eboussi Boulaga, one of the country’s academic *éminences grises*, published a special issue of his journal *Terroirs*

(2007) that offered a more analytical view on the rising moral panic in the country. And Achille Mbembe published an article in *Le Messager* in 2006 in which he connected all the excitement to what he calls *le potentat sexuel* as the dominant figure of postcolonial politics.

An urgent question for understanding the specificities of this moral panic in Cameroon is why this quite specific image of “the” homosexual as a Big Man and of anal penetration of young men looking for jobs as the supreme form of “phallocracy” emerged so strongly in this country. Of course there are parallels elsewhere. In neighboring Gabon, for instance, there were similar reports on the national elite’s association with same-sex practices. Alice Aterianus-Owanga (2012) notes that when Ali Bongo Ondimba succeeded his father, Omar Bongo, as president in 2009, and baptized his regime as “L’Émergence” to underline its newness, rappers replied with songs like “L’émergence n’aime pas les femmes” (“The new regime does not like women”) (see Tonda 2016). Yet here such sounds seemed to be drowned out in the rapidly rising uproar about horrible killings of children for the harvesting of “spare parts” (*pièces détachées*) for the production of powerful medicine for *les Grands*. In other countries—Nigeria, Uganda, Zimbabwe, Botswana—there were also rumors about high-placed persons indulging in same-sex practices, but there such rumors often seemed to attribute a “bottom” role to them. In Cameroon the focus of all the dismay about same-sex practices in higher circles has been precisely the “top” role that “les pédés de la République” are supposed to play, imposing anal penetration on “innocent” youths.

Freemasonry and Its Special Dynamics in Africa

So why this quite special image of “the” homosexual in Cameroon? The answer to this question might be suggested by the triad of terms I was confronted with at the 2010 Yaoundé conference: the linking of homosexuality to witchcraft and to secret societies such as the Freemasons and the Rosicrucians which, according to many, are dominant in elite circles and national politics. Again, Cameroon is not exceptional in this respect. Recently *Jeune Afrique* (2016) published an overview of Francophone heads of African states and their ties, explicit or implicit, with Freemasonry. Six of them explicitly claimed membership; three insisted that they were not members; and six others did not deny strong rumors that they were members. In November 2009, only a few months after succeeding his father, President Ali Bongo Ondimba of Gabon even uploaded to YouTube a video of his initiation into the Grande Loge Nationale Française, thus publicizing what in general is a secret ceremony. Throughout Francophone Africa, Radio Trottoir buzzes with rumors about the omnipresence of this secret society and the way these networks control access to power and prestige. In Cameroon, and to a lesser extent Gabon, such rumors have recently focused on what many apparently see as a fixed trait of Freemasonry: a propensity for same-sex practices.

We have stumbled here upon a topic that merits a lot more attention, all the more so since it is still severely understudied: the particular dynamics of secret societies like the Freemasons and Rosicrucians in Africa. Since the 1990s a stream of publications has focused on the interconnections between African notions of the occult and world religions (notably Pentecostal Christianity, and more recently, Islam). But there is less research about the way discourses of Freemasonry and its more or less illegitimate brother, Rosicrucianism, have become connected to local ideas about occult power. As said, Cameroon is certainly not exceptional because of people's general assumption that the vagaries of national politics have to be explained by the involvement of elites in these secret societies. The reason we know so little about these links, there and elsewhere, is that studying them in depth—moving beyond the proliferating rumors toward an empirical inquiry of actions in everyday life—is difficult, not to say dangerous. Yet it is clear that these secret societies, which were introduced during colonial times, have produced their own history on the continent, grafting themselves onto local ideas about power and in the process developing original forms. My aim in the following sections is to try to highlight at least some markers in this history that can help us understand how the supposed link between Freemasonry and homosexuality could have come to play such a key role in the popular concern about dissident forms of sexuality.

Special traits of French Freemasonry, as it was implanted in the colonies almost as soon as these were “pacified,” play a part.¹¹ Historically, Freemasonry first took shape in Scotland and in England around 1700, but it soon spread to France.¹² However the French version rapidly developed its own profile. A much debated question is to what extent Freemasonry in France played a role in the French Revolution (Furet 1978; Jacob 2006; La Franc-Maçonnerie 2016). But there is general consensus that especially in the second half of the nineteenth century, French Freemasonry became a pillar of the Third Republic. In those days it also increasingly developed anticlerical tendencies—in contrast to British Freemasonry, often seen as more conservative. In 1875–77 the largest lodge in France, Le Grand Orient de France, officially abolished the reference to God in its charter, replacing it with a plea for liberty of conscience and respect for the *principe créateur* (lit. the creating principle, also called the Great Architect of the Universe). This was one of the reasons that this lodge, still the main one in France, was not recognized by the United Grand Lodge of England, which still claims special status as the mother lodge of all Freemasons.¹³

Another special trait of Freemasonry in France was its connection to rumors about same-sex practices. In *Brotherly Love: Freemasonry and Male Friendship in Enlightenment France* (2014), Kenneth Loiselle analyzes the romantic language used by Freemasons in letters to one another as a celebration of the values of “friendship between equals”—the leitmotif of his book. Nevertheless, the avalanche of caricatures and satires in the popular press that he discusses in the book—and which strongly resemble similar

attacks in present-day Cameroon—shows that contemporaries thought that it was more than this. One reason that rumors on this topic may have been particularly strong in France (and subsequently in Francophone settings) is that the memory of the Templars and their violent suppression by Philip IV, king of France, in 1307, was quite strong there (although further research is necessary to confirm this).¹⁴ One of the most serious accusations against the Templars was their propensity for “unnatural behavior,” particularly evoked by rumors that the initiation ceremony required the “preceptor” to kiss the novice on the latter’s exposed navel and buttocks.¹⁵

One of the consequences of the increasingly anticlerical profile of Freemasonry in France was that it became a source of discord between Catholic missionaries and civil servants in the French colonies. The hostility of the Catholic Church to Freemasonry goes back to the latter’s very beginnings and to the bull of Pope Clemens XII from 1738, which excluded any Freemason from holy communion (and remains in force, at least formally).¹⁶ But in France the 1905 law on the *laïcité*, imposing a strict separation of church and state, reinforced the distrust of the clergy, who blamed this law on the all-pervasive role of Freemasonry in government circles. In the colonies the rivalry between Catholic and public schools further exacerbated mutual distrust, with missionaries assuming that most civil servants were Freemasons and warning their flocks against their influence. By the 1950s the various Freemason lodges intensified recruitment among the emerging African elites, especially among students staying for longer periods of time in the metropolis. Independence (for Cameroon in 1960) did not bring a change in this respect. The moving novel *L’Initié* (1979) by the Beninese writer Olympe Bhély-Quenum suggests why many young Africans were interested: apart from their feelings of loneliness and disorientation far away from home, they were tempted by the fact that these lodges were now opening their doors enthusiastically to Africans.¹⁷

In both Francophone and Anglophone colonies independence brought a proliferation of lodges, often splitting up and sometimes fusing again in the spirit of balkanization that marks Freemasonry all over the globe.¹⁸ In recent years this process was reinforced in Francophone Africa by the increasing presence of the Grande Loge Nationale Française. While most national lodges in Africa are affiliated with the Grand Orient de France or with the more or less related Grande Loge de France, recently their rival lodge (reputed to be more conservative) has succeeded in initiating a good number of African heads of state and prominent politicians. However, the apparent rapidity with which these initiations took place drew criticisms from more established lodges as being more or less fake, since the long initiation period involved in passing from one level to the next has always been a hallmark of Freemasonry (see Wauthier 2003). Such internal rivalry is also illustrated by the fact that the large-scale meetings called REHFRAM (Rencontres humanistes et fraternelles africaines et malgaches), which take place annually in a different African capital, are boycotted by Masons who are affiliated with the Grande Loge Nationale Française.

This REHFRAM goes to great lengths to present these annual meetings as civilized and full of good intentions. The meetings are, for instance, occasions for organizing mediation efforts in ongoing African conflicts. Yet unfortunately, such interventions have rarely been successful; a notorious case was the vain attempts by a Freemason mission to reconcile the “brothers” Denis Sassou Nguouessou and Pascal Lissouba during the horrors of the civil war in Brazzaville in the late 1990s. Moreover, reports on the meetings show that members are often forced to discuss darker issues. At the 1996 REHFRAM meeting in Libreville a local newspaper (*L'Union*) printed a declaration by the grand master of the Grand Rite Équatorial (Malabo), François Owono Nguéma, denying accusations of “satanism” inside the lodges. The next year at Cotonou another local newspaper, *Le Citoyen*, summarized a press conference held with the Masons with the headline “La franc-maçonnerie n’est pas un groupe de sorciers” (La Franc-Maçonnerie is not a group of sorcerers) (Wauthier 2003:289).

Freemasons and Rosicrucians in Cameroon

It is such worries that can explain the link between the strong presence of Freemasonry in Cameroon and the rapidly increasing popular homophobia in the country after 2000. A special circumstance in this country is the role of Rosicrucianism next to and even in rivalry with Freemasonry.¹⁹ Such rivalry is striking, since in general Masons consider the Rose Cross, the symbol of Rosicrucianism, as a precious element of Freemasonry. One of the highest ranks in the initiations of several Freemason rites is even called Rose Cross. However, in Cameroon the two are supposed to exist more or less as separate networks. The background is what might be called President Biya’s “spiritual pluralism.”

Rumors about the role of Freemasonry and other secret societies among the Cameroonian elite intensified after Paul Biya succeeded Ahmadou Ahidjo as the country’s president in 1982. Ahidjo was a Muslim from the north but Biya, a man from the south (his origins are in Bulu country), is a practicing Catholic and a product of Catholic schools. Indeed, at the time many priests enthusiastically celebrated his rise to power. Yet rumors soon developed that Biya—after having displayed a short-lived interest in Judaism, possibly encouraged by his close collaboration with the Israelis²⁰—was becoming increasingly involved with secret societies from a European background. The general assumption is that he, like Ahidjo, had joined the Freemasons much earlier (according to some, during his time in France in the 1950s). However, in the late 1980s Biya switched to Rosicrucianism, and especially in the 1990s Radio Trottoir became a source of constant rumors about secret confrontations between factions of Freemasons and Rosicrucians in the struggle for power and wealth among the national elites.

In those years the country was also startled by a series of murders of Catholic priests whose bodies were maimed; supposedly their brains had been removed, a detail that was generally interpreted as “proof” that these

body parts had been used for secret rituals in higher circles. When in 1995 Father Engelbert Mveng, a leading Catholic and also Cameroon's prominent historian, was murdered, there was general panic. It made another prominent Catholic priest, Jean-Marc Ela, a sociologist of international reputation, decide to leave the country in haste and go into exile, first in Louvain and subsequently in Canada.

In 1997 a very different event created similar consternation when Titus Edzoa, a former brother-in-arms of President Biya, announced his decision to stand as a candidate in the presidential elections of that year. By that time it was normal for opposition parties like the SDF (Social Democratic Front) or the UNDP (National Union for Democracy and Progress) to put forward their own candidates. But the very idea that someone like Edzoa from inside the CPDM (Cameroon People's Democratic Movement)—Biya's own party and what's more, the former single party—would dare to stand against the president himself was unheard of. As was to be expected, Edzoa was arrested only a few days later, and he was subsequently sentenced to seventeen years in jail for mismanagement of public funds. (This was later extended to twenty years, although Edzoa was released, apparently in response to direct pressure from France; see Edzoa [2012]). Of course, people kept speculating about the reasons that Edzoa, a seasoned politician, had taken such a foolish, self-destructive step. One explanation was that Edzoa felt he could take such risks because he occupied a higher rank than Biya in the Rose Cross. It was the emphasis on such secret links that made all these rumors seem so plausible—after all, secrecy is the hallmark of both Freemasonry and of witchcraft. But this is also why it is so difficult to find firm footholds in this quagmire of allusions and suggestions.²¹

Another aspect marking developments in Cameroon is that, especially after 2000, same-sex practices became an almost inevitable element in all this rumor-mongering about the role of secret societies in elite circles.²² Archbishop Bakot's 2005 Christmas sermon on these "despicable" habits among the elite was in line with such rumors. What was new was only the fact that these suspicions were now being voiced by such a highly placed person and at such a solemn and public occasion. Moreover, the archbishop publicly affirmed a pattern that was becoming more and more current in the popular rumors: the idea that anal penetration, as some sort of initiation rite, was a precondition for getting access to the much desired positions in the civil service. Clearly, it was not by accident that this denunciation came from a Catholic clergyman since the Catholic Church, ever since colonial days, had been deeply suspicious of the influence of secret societies and their "depraved" habits among the state elite.²³

The problem with the above, of course, is that we are still at the level of rumor. Yet there are a few points that to a certain extent surpass the level of rumors and imputation. Archbishop Bakot clearly felt certain enough about the existence of these practices to denounce them from the pulpit. Father Mveng was indeed murdered, and the results of the official inquiry were generally seen as highly unsatisfactory. His friend

and colleague, Father Jean-Marc Ela, did indeed go into exile very abruptly. Still, a nagging question for all researchers on the role of secret societies in higher circles and their effects on everyday life is how to base one's analysis on firmer grounds.

It was for this reason that the publication in 2012 of a book under the heavy title *Le Cameroun sous la dictature des loges, des sectes, du magico-anal et des réseaux mafieux* ("Cameroon under the dictatorship of the lodges, the sects, the magico-anal, and the mafia networks") by Charles Ateba Eyene seemed to hold great promise. It was published by Éditions Saint-Paul (Yaoundé), one of the few remaining publishing houses in the country and—probably not accidental in view of the topic—of Catholic signature. The book triggered an excited discussion in the media (newspapers, blogs, etc.). Headlines like "Ateba Eyene: Paul Biya est comptable des crimes rituels" ("Paul Biya is guilty of ritual crimes"; *Cameroun Voice* 2013) suggested that finally someone who was more or less an "insider" was telling the truth about the secrets behind national politics. Two years later—and one year after a second edition of the book was published—the sudden death of the author (at only 42 years old) again triggered all sorts of speculations.

The author, Charles Ateba Eyene, had already built a reputation as a maverick among the national elite. He had been vice-member of the Central Committee of the CPDM and had therefore been at the heart of political power. He also taught at the prestigious IRIC (Institute for International Relations). Moreover, he was from the same ethnic group (the Bulu of South Cameroon) as the president. It was therefore all the more remarkable that four years earlier, in 2008, he had published a book titled *Les paradoxes du pays organisateur: Élités productrices ou prédatrices* ("The paradoxes of the organizing country: productive or predatory elites"). "Pays organisateur" was his term for the president's region of origin (the Bulu area), and the tenor of the book was that the president had not done enough for his own region. Inside the ruling party such criticisms often had severe consequences—especially if they came from someone so close to the president (recall Titus Edzoa's fate). But remarkably, Ateba Eyene was at first left alone—perhaps because the criticisms in this earlier book were quite veiled. But the title of the new book—notably the references to a supposed dictatorship of the lodges—promised a more direct attack on his fellow countryman, and also on a more sensitive spot.

The content of the book was also completely in line with popular rumors. The first chapters on Rosicrucianism and Freemasonry are followed by a chapter titled "L'Homosexualité ou la dimension satanique des loges" ("Homosexuality or the satanic dimension of the lodges"), which in no uncertain terms elaborates upon the somewhat enigmatic term "magico-anal" from the book's title. The author confirms that President Biya was first a member of the Freemasons but later switched to Rosicrucianism and also asserts a link between Freemasonry, Rosicrucianism, and homosexuality (*pédé*), commenting that "the devil has entered the lodges" (2012:73). A recurrent argument is that homosexual practices have become crucial for gaining access to higher positions throughout Cameroon: even in the army "des

militaires non-pédés [sont] marginalisés” (nonhomosexual military men are marginalized) (2012:160).

However, after this clarion opening, the author wraps his claims in a shroud of incoherent details, summing up all sorts of horrible and mysterious events (even Ebola and Boko Haram get a paragraph). Striking in all this is that the author, in the later chapters, seems to downplay Biya’s direct involvement in this quagmire of sects, lodges, and the “magico-anal.” Instead, he targets intermediaries who supposedly abuse Biya’s confidence; he even mentions a cell under the ominous name of Brutus, which is apparently intent on murdering the president. The book thus becomes a striking example of how easy it is for “research” on this topic to drown in a torrent of vague allusions, rumors, and sensational events that are not properly contextualized and researched.²⁴

An article published in 2007 by Lucien Toulou under the equally ominous title “‘Des scènes dignes de Sodome et Ghomorre?’ Occulte, pouvoir et imaginaire du changement politique” (“Scenes worthy of Sodom and Gomorra? The occult, power and imaginary of political change”) makes similar points. However, it appeared in the special issue of *Terroirs*, mentioned above, published by Fabien Eboussi Boulaga in order to articulate a more analytical view on the growing moral panic about homosexuality in Cameroon. And, indeed, the author—a political scientist who taught at the Catholic University of Central Africa—offers a more considered approach. He does emphasize the role homosexual practices—“la souillure du corps” (lit. the defiling of the body)—are supposed to play in the recruiting for these secret societies and the function of such rituals as an “ascenseur contraignant” (an obligatory lift) that ushers one into “la nébuleuse sectaire” (the misty world of sects) (207:88,89). But while repeating these rumors, Toulou also insists on the need for more substantial proof to verify them.²⁵

On one point—the vital question of the international linkages between Cameroon lodges and the “mother” lodges in the former metropolis—Toulou does, indeed, offer some firmer evidence. He quotes Serge Toussaint, grand master of AMORC, the main Rose-Croix organization in France, as insisting (in 1996) that Paul Biya did not figure on the list of the organization’s members. But Toulou confronts this official denial with information from a series of articles in *Le Monde* (1999, 2000) about important transfers of money (millions of francs) into the personal account of the AMORC grand master when Biya was its honorary president for Cameroon. According to other sources, however, a key figure connected to Biya’s involvement with Rosicrucianism was a man named Raymond Bernard, who had to step down as grand master of the French AMORC in 1977. Since then he founded several alternative Rosicrucian lodges, like OSTI (Ordre Souverain du Temple Initiatique), of which he was the grand master, and its “humanitarian branch,” CIRCES (Cercle International de Recherches Culturelles et Spirituelles, later renamed Comité d’Initiatives et de Réalisations Caritatives et Sociales). In 1987–89,

and also subsequently, Bernard spent longer periods of time in Cameroon, and President Biya paid important sums of money to this CIRCES as a reward for Bernard's services. It is therefore probable that Biya joined this minor organization and not AMORC, the main Rosicrucian order, itself.²⁶

The complexities of the whole affair are symptomatic of the difficulty involved in disentangling the links between African lodges and the mother organizations in Europe. Even a hard fact like President Biya's payments to Bernard gets lost in a jumble of data about ephemeral organizations which are constantly splitting up or emerging under new names. In this case, for instance, Serge Toussaint, the grand master of AMORC in France, declared in a 2014 interview with *Cameroon Link* that Raymond Bernard had been expelled from AMORC in 1977, and that AMORC was in no way involved in Bernard's subsequent initiatives (so President Biya's membership of CIRCES would make him a marginal Rosicrucian?). To complicate things further, in 1977 Raymond Bernard had been succeeded as grand master of the French AMORC by his own son, Christian Bernard, who in 1980 even became the "Imperator" of the global AMORC association.²⁷ Small wonder, in view of such inconsistencies and elusiveness, that these organizations are shrouded in mystery, in Africa maybe even more than in other parts of the world.

Moreover, there is a striking distance between, on the one hand, the profile global organizations like Rosicrucian and Freemason lodges show to journalists and other outsiders and, on the other, the rumors that abound in Cameroon and in other African countries. Sometimes—for instance, when members of official REHFRAM conferences feel obliged to deny that Freemasonry is a sect of sorcerers, or when the grand master of the French AMORC has to contradict in an interview that AMORC has a propensity for homosexuality—other views break through. But this is quickly covered up. It is the segmentary structure of these organizations that makes it so difficult to trace their ramifications. Still, when members of French Grand Lodges participate in reconciliation missions (as in Congo Brazzaville during the civil war in the 1990s) or in the rituals for Gabon's President Ali Bongo's initiation, it is hard to believe that these venerable dignitaries from France can really close their eyes to the profile these African lodges—formally still part of the global movement—are taking on in everyday life.

Decolonization: "Homosexuality" Imposed on the Cameroonian Elite?

In Cameroon, the moral panic about homosexuality and its supposed proliferation in the postcolony became condensed in an iconic story of how it was introduced during decolonization. Initially told by *Radio Trottoir*, it was then picked up by newspapers and even became the subject of a book by an academic historian (Nken 2014). Its central figure is Louis-Paul Aujoulat, who in the 1950s supposedly "corrupted" the young politicians of the emerging national elite by introducing them to this "unnatural vice."

Aujoulat, a medical doctor closely involved with the Catholic Church, played a key role in the difficult process of decolonization in Cameroon during the late 1940s and '50s. After 1944 he became an important political figure in the reorganization of the French colonies in Africa, representing Cameroon in the French National Assembly. He was reelected several times, but in the elections of 1956 he was beaten by André Mbida, his own political protégé. Clearly a new elite of young African politicians was emerging who wanted to take over. At this point Aujoulat withdrew from Franco-Cameroonian politics, at least officially, although he continued to hold important positions in the World Health Organization until his death in 1973.

In recent years Aujoulat's role as the mentor of young Cameroonian politicians in the 1950s—not only of Mbida, but also of Ahmadou Ahidjo, whom the French supported in 1958 in order to marginalize Mbida and who became the country's first president—has been examined in a new light. The title of the new book by the historian Simon Nken is telling: *L'empreinte suspecte de Louis-Paul Aujoulat sur le Cameroun d'aujourd'hui* ("The suspect mark of Aujoulat on present-day Cameroon"). The gist of the book is that Aujoulat submitted "his boys" to the same kind of homosexual practices that, according to current radio and newspaper stories, are common among present-day "Big Men" in their dealing with ambitious young men.²⁸

Again, to what extent this particular interpretation can be supported by firm data is unclear. An interesting and detailed study of Aujoulat's role in the decolonization process written by the French historians Guillaume Lachenal and Bertrand Taithe (2009) completely ignores this aspect of Aujoulat's life, even though at the time there were also rumors in Paris about the special hospitality this politician provided for his Cameroonian friends.²⁹ Apparently, the typical French habitus of deep respect for the privacy of public figures is another obstacle to serious research into sexual issues that have clear effects on everyday life in Cameroon now. It seems that in both contexts homosexuality remains an uneasy topic of study—though in quite different ways!

The renewed attention for Aujoulat and the emphasis on the suspect side of his role serves a clear aim, of course: his story must prove that the homosexual practices that now upset so many in Cameroon are a colonial importation. The linking of such practices with Freemasonry and Rosicrucianism serves a similar aim; after all, they were Western implants in the colony. According to such a line of thought, homosexuals in Cameroon automatically become traitors, and stooges of an imperialist plot to corrupt the nation. S. N. Nyeck (2016) calls this "colonial blackmail," an expression that powerfully summarizes the precarious position of people who identify as homosexual—or are denounced as such—in the present-day context.³⁰

Another Line in the Genealogy of "Homosexuality" in Cameroon: Traditional Roots?

However important the colonial intermezzo may have been in the history of same-sex practices in Cameroon, the reality is certainly more complicated

than this simplistic vision of one French official perverting the new Cameroonian elite. So let me briefly pursue a quite different line in the genealogy of this image of “the” homosexual in present-day Cameroon as *un Grand*: a much older perception of same-sex practices as associated with riches, and as an illicit but tempting path to wealth. Indeed, recent suspicions about “les pédés de la République” can also be read as variations on this old theme.

A buzzword in such allusions is the term *biang akuma* (wealth medicine) current in several Beti languages from the central and southern forest area. Ever since independence many members of the politico-administrative elite have come from this region, and under President Biya they further consolidated their hold on the state bureaucracy. To understand the deeper implications of the *biang akuma* notion one has to go back in time to the first ethnographer working in Cameroon (then under German rule), Günther Tessmann (see Awondo 2017; see also Epprecht 2006). His 1913 book, *Die Pangwe*—concerning a group that is now currently called the Fang who are often seen as the arch-representatives of the wider Beti group—is now considered a classic monograph. Tessmann was a fascinating figure. He preferred to work in a not yet “pacified” area on the border with what was then called Spanish Guinea, living with his bodyguard of “Pangwe Jungen” (Fang boys). Tessmann writes in much detail about the many dangers he had to face, thereby taking it for granted that “his boys” would protect him—which apparently they did, nursing him when he was ill, and on several occasions saving his life.

Tessman’s monograph is full of high-flown theoretical reflections. He relates the meaning of heterosexual intercourse for the Fang to feelings of guilt connected to man’s fall from grace—a very original view of heteronormativity. But he intersperses such theoretical gymnastics with very down-to-earth *Märchen* (fairy tales) told to him by his “Jungen.” One of these stories was translated and published by Stephen Murray and Will Roscoe in their pioneering 1998 collection *Boy Wives and Female Husbands: Studies of African Homosexualities* (150–61). It seems to be a simple story:

Four lovers went to the village of a beautiful girl. One of them eloped with her. Thereupon the second lover quarreled with the girl’s mother, killed her and went home. However, the third one went to the girl’s father and told him that he wanted *him* instead of the girl:

“. . . we shall always be together; when you piss, I shall piss as well; when you shit, I will shit as well; when you sleep, I shall sleep with you on one bed.”³¹

And so they did, but both soon died of framboesia. The fourth lover claimed the girl’s brother and similarly slept with him in one bed, but they soon died of leprosy.

When I first read this story, its value as proof that same-sex practices existed among the Pangwe/Fang in olden times seemed dubious to me.

The story, rather, seemed to contain a most severe warning against such practices. However, Tessmann's own comments on this story in a 1921 journal article put it in a different light and give the warning a deeper meaning:

A casual traveler will get the impression that *Homosexualität* does not at all exist among the untouched Negroes. But who stays longer and gets to know *Land und Leute* [the country and the people] knows under which heading *Gleichgeschlechtlichkeit* [homosexuality] can be found. Among the *Pangwe* it is called "wealth medicine". It is through such a "wealth medicine" that same-sex drives (*Triebe*)—next to many mystical drives—can discharge themselves. . . . People believe that through a close relation they transfer mystical forces that make both partners become rich. (1921:133; see also Murray & Roscoe 1988:156)

Thus the old idea of *biang akuma* seems connected to present-day rumors about Freemasons and their same-sex practices as an initiation into getting rich. The interest of Tessmann's ethnography is that it shows that homosexuality as a transgression is doubly tempting: erotically, but also coupled with material wealth—after all, it is associated with *biang akuma*, the wealth medicine that serves as a *Deckmantel* (cover) for same-sex intercourse (Tessmann 1913 [vol.2]:271). It is also interesting that in Tessmann's analysis both partners are supposed to become rich. Again, there is a parallel to present-day Cameroon, where *les Grands* are considered to thus enrich not only themselves, but also their younger partners: the latter's success must be due to their having yielded to the sexual wishes of the Big Men.

Have we stumbled, therefore, on a traditional root for these present-day preoccupations? It might be wise, again, to be prudent here. It is worthwhile, for example, to have a closer look at the figure of Tessmann, the mediator of these old representations. Tessmann was certainly privy to fashionable (but highly contested) views about *Gleichgeschlechtlichkeit* (homosexuality) in Berlin at the beginning of the last century—with Ferdinand Karsch-Haack's ideas about "das gleichgeschlechtliche Leben der Naturvölker" (the homosexual life of natural peoples); and with Magnus Hirschfeld's notion of "das dritte Geschlecht" (the third sex, which is now making a comeback in the West in debates over trans-bodies). Tessmann made few direct references to these theorists, but it seems clear that in his fieldwork he was inspired, for instance, by a determined search for the "pansexual phase" proposed by the Swiss anthropologist Johann Bachofen, which supposedly preceded a matriarchal and a patriarchal phase. Some passages of Tessmann's work reflect his disappointment that "his" Pangwe—the youths with whom he lived together in such harsh circumstances—were apparently already beyond this phase. However, in his later work he is overjoyed when he finds definite signs of such a pansexual phase among the Bafia (a group farther to the west). He notes "eine stark ausgeprägte Gleichgeschlechtlichkeit" (a marked homosexuality) among this group (1934:225), and he adds: "For them is it completely the same for the evaluation of sexual exchange whether one loves a man or a

woman. . . . No one has to dissemble because there are no radical contrasts in sexual exchange” (1934:260–61).³² In commenting on this passage Thomas Klockmann, who wrote a seminal thesis on Tessmann’s work (Klockmann 1988), adds a bit drily that Tessmann mainly got this information from Bafia young men when he interviewed them on the island of Fernando Po (now Malabo) where—as German auxiliaries interned on the island during World War I after Germany surrendered Kamerun to the French and the British—they were forced to live without women.³³

Conceptual Challenges

A general point may stand out from Tessmann’s story and its historical background. It shows graphically how impossible it is to separate inside and outside—or to put it differently, how necessary it is to set aside any temptation to try and distinguish African and Western elements in these complex histories of homosexual practices, secret societies, and witchcraft (as with other topics). This *biang akuma*, the wealth medicine connected to same-sex practices, for example, may seem to be a “traditional” notion, but it comes to us through a source that is deeply marked by Western discussions. So much hybridization has taken place that it is impossible to separate the various elements. Yet despite its tortuous history, this “wealth medicine” and its connection to same-sex intercourse seems to remain strong enough to feed present-day rumors about the secret intimacies of Freemasons, thus triggering one of the fiercest homophobic eruptions on the continent.

In the examples above, the distinction between homosexuality and heterosexuality also loses much of its apparent self-evidence. *Les Grands* who are at the center of the present moral panic cannot be categorized as either one or the other, but neither can they be identified as bisexual. People see as most characteristic their urge to penetrate without distinction. Especially transgressive forms of penetration—like anal penetration of young men—are believed to affirm their power. The phallocracy of Mbembe’s *potentat sexuel* seems to take precedence over heteronormativity: the emphasis is on who penetrates whom, while gender difference appears relegated to the background. Same-sex penetration seems to be particularly empowering—maybe because it is more transgressive?³⁴

Of special interest in the above is the linking of forms of same-sex desire and behavior to illicit forms of wealth—all the more since this assumed connection manifests itself in different forms throughout Africa. It emerges, for instance, in a quite unexpected way in Ndèye Ndiagna Gning’s fascinating work (1913) on “sexualités entre hommes” (sexualities among men) in Senegal, in which she quotes from a handbook by an eighteenth-century scholar, Damsacène Ábd-al-Gamal-Nabulsi-Lusi, who interprets dreams of anally penetrating a rival as a good omen. Nabulsi-Lusi adds that the act must raise feelings of deep disgust but that it promises success in business. Gning continues this theme in her analysis of present-day expectations of

young men that anal penetration can open up access to higher positions. In an article in a 1988 issue of the Nigerian magazine *Quality*, a writer named R. Egbi expresses the same idea more colorfully.

They [homosexuals] are getting more and more aggressive and courageous by the day and are made up of the top brass in the society—successful lawyers, doctors, swanky businessmen, military men, ex-politicians, diplomats, and university graduates—all with a passion for men. . . . One bizarre yet interesting feature of homosexuality in the country is that it is cult-oriented and is making millionaires out of those who belong. . . . After every love session *Quality* learnt, the big shots who normally play the aggressor role, rush home keeping mum. At home they wash with some charms in a bowl and perform a ceremony . . . [whose] success is said to bring about a windfall of money.³⁵

According to rumors, Congolese music stars are ordered by their *nganga* (spiritual healer) to indulge in same-sex contacts as a guarantee for success.³⁶

This is a pattern that is certainly not inspired by Western ideas. On the contrary, there are interesting contrasts. Graeme Reid observes that in small towns in South Africa “the ladies”—the term used by most of his gay informants to identify themselves—are expected to maintain their “gents”—their lovers who often emphasize their masculinity by hinting at their relations with women but depend economically on their gay “ladies.” Martin F. Manalansan IV, in his *Global Divas* (2003), reports on the similar role of *baklas* in the Philippines. But he also writes about the surprise of *baklas* who move to New York City and discover that in America they no longer have to pay their more masculine boyfriends; instead they are now the ones who are showered with presents by their “man” as an expression of his love. Such differences in the perceptions of same-sex partners relating to the matter of who should remunerate whom might be an interesting line to pursue—all the more since gender considerations do play a role here, but often with reversed implications. This might serve to undermine assumptions that are taken for granted in much Western literature.³⁷

The preceding examples also highlight that (homo-)sexuality has become a central issue in broader power struggles in present-day Africa (and certainly not there alone). One of Achille Mbembe’s comments on an earlier version of this text is interesting in this respect. He sees the growing popular preoccupation with homosexuality and Freemasonry in Cameroon as a reflection of the transition from the Ahidjo to the Biya regime. Under Ahidjo there was harsh state violence, but it was at least formally in the service of ideals of nation-building and development. Under Biya state violence seems to serve private enrichment alone. In his view homophobia reflects a denunciation of a kind of politics in which sheer greed seems to prevail.

Of course, this interpretation still leaves unanswered the question of why this moral indignation expresses itself in particular in rumors about

the *Grands'* indulgence in same-sex pleasures. Indeed, the linking of anal penetration with (il)licit access to power and riches asks for a more general interpretation, since this seems to be a recurrent preoccupation—from the older notions of “witchcraft of wealth” to newer suspicions about Freemasons imposing sexual humiliation on ambitious young men. Is it as a supreme form of transgression, extra shocking in societies where biological reproduction is such an overriding concern, that this act is supposed to have this special capacity to empower?

It is such unexpected linkages—unexpected, that is, to those whose views are formed by debates about sexuality in the West—among politics, economics, and experimental sexual forms that can help us go beyond pre-conceived categorizations. To come back to Currier and Migraine’s plea to turn the meeting of queer and African studies into a “creative vortex”—not only “queering” African studies but also Africanizing queerness—we must be prepared to go beyond clear-cut identifications, as suggested by ever longer acronyms like LGBTQ+. These may be indispensable for identity politics. But they can block a research agenda that wants to do justice to the complex ramifications of same-sex practices as a major public issue in present-day Africa. For this field as well, we might still heed Michael Taussig’s call from 1987 (412) that, as academics, we must dare to lose ourselves in “epistemic murk” if we want to understand its power.

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Notes

1. The *African Studies Review* has been quick in making space for the growing interest in this subject: see articles by Pincheon (2000), Awondo, Geschiere, and Reid (2012), and Ratele (2014), and the special ASR Forum titled "Homophobic Africa?" (56 [2], 2013). See also "New Perspectives on Sexualities in Africa" (*Canadian Journal of African Studies* 43 [1], 2009) and "La question homosexuelle et transgenre" (*Politique Africaine* 126, 2012).
2. See Hendriks (2016b) for a more productive "queering" of ontology, based on his Kinshasa fieldwork.
3. See Nyeck and Epprecht (2013) and Ndjio (2012b). Compare also to a project called "The Culturalization of Citizenship" that I supervised together with Jan Duyvendak and Evelien Tonkens (Duyvendak et al. 2016). The project ran from

2008 to 2013, and when it began we had not foreseen that along with gender, (homo)sexuality would become so important in debates over citizenship—and, moreover, with such strikingly different implications. While acceptance of gay rights became a criterion for acceptance as a citizen in the Netherlands and other European countries, it became, around the same time, a basis for excluding people in several African countries.

4. They borrow this notion of a “vortex” from Rosello (2003), and see it as an antidote to the dangers of “an objectifying and voyeuristic Western gaze” (Currier & Migraine 2016:293–94). See also Jeffrey Weeks’s recent concerns (2011:148–49) about the effects of the identity turn in LGBTQ+ studies: “There is an inherent problem with identity politics. The processual, hybrid and fluid nature of contemporary sexual identities . . . are obscured by a politics based on the assumed truth of identities.” See also Hekma (2016).
5. Actually, Deborah Amory and Wolfram Hartmann seem to have been the initiators of the very idea of GLAS. Amory is now working on a more detailed history of GLAS.
6. As mentioned, this was in 2010; nowadays the Illuminati—a recent addition to the number of secret sects people gossip about—would probably have been added to my questioner’s enumeration. Of course, all the notions used by this questioner (and also in this article) are highly problematic, especially “homosexuality” and “witchcraft.” Both are Western terms that distort local notions. Yet Africans have now appropriated both terms on such a wide scale that it would be problematic not to use them. Rather than searching for a better term, I think it is worthwhile to look at how these translations have taken root and affected both Western and local notions. Imaginations about occult forces—and also about sexuality—are subject to constant borrowings and processes of hybridization throughout the world. This makes any search for terminological authenticity highly problematic. It is more useful to follow people’s use of such shifting terms in order to find out what such current translations produce.
7. See also Ndjio (2012a). *Pédé* is still a current term for homosexual in Francophone Africa (and in France) with very negative connotations. A problem is that this French word confuses the distinction between pederasty and homosexuality. In Cameroon this leads sometimes to severe misunderstandings between human rights missions (mostly Anglophone) and Cameroonian authorities.
8. Of interest is that these two different stereotypes of the homosexual imply very dissimilar combinations of sex and gender. In the association with drinking Bailey’s, gender difference is crucial; in the “Big Man” variety it is denied (see also Spronk 2017).
9. However, Awondo (2017) notes that the tendency of many commentators to see the archbishop’s 2005 Christmas sermon as the beginning of the whole affair has to be nuanced. For instance, by June 2005 the police had already invaded a “gay bar” in Yaoundé and arrested thirty young men, eleven of whom remained in prison for almost a year. In Awondo’s view the archbishop, like the journalists of “the lists,” had “surf-ed” on rumors that had already been increasing for some time about a proliferation of same-sex practices in the city.
10. Indeed, it must have been a dramatic moment. Subsequently the editor of *LEffort camerounais*—the journal of the Catholic Church in Cameroon—was pressured by both the regime and colleagues of the archbishop not to publish the full text of the sermon—but he had it printed nonetheless. (Thanks to Rogers Orock for this information).

11. For more on the involvement of the lodges in earlier colonial adventures, see Jansen (2015) on the role of Freemasonry among the French planters in San Domingo and on globalizing trends of the brotherhood right from its beginnings. The first lodge on African soil was founded in 1781 in St. Louis, Senegal (then only for white members).
12. Some claim that the first Freemason lodge was founded in 1688 in Edinburgh. More often the beginning of Freemasonry is dated to 1717, when four small lodges in London fused to form the Grand Lodge of London. These different opinions reflect different views of the essence of Freemasonry. The Scottish origin emphasizes the continuity with the old guilds of masons, their geometrical expertise, and their regional networks cemented by secret passwords and handshakes. With new economic developments these guilds ran into financial difficulties. In order to make ends meet they accepted ever more non-masons as members who gradually came to dominate and transformed older guilds into Freemason lodges. The emphasis on the Grand Lodge of England as the origin reflects, rather, a view of Freemasonry as born from Enlightenment ideas or from a missionary zeal to further develop the modern forms of government that had emerged in England in the seventeenth century (Stevenson 1988; Jacob 2006; La Franc-Maçonnerie 2016). In the course of time these origin stories have been enriched by references to more mythical origins—from the builders of the medieval cathedrals, the Temple of Solomon, or the Egyptian pyramids. Many Masons see themselves as well as successors to the Crusaders, notably the order of the Templars that was so rudely suppressed by the French King Philip IV Le Bel and his puppet, Pope Clemens V, at the beginning of the fourteenth century.
13. Until recently the United Grand Lodge of England recognized the other main lodge in France, the Grande Loge Nationale Française, which did retain the reference to God in its statutes and is often seen as more conservative than the Grand Orient. Indeed, according to Paul Rich (2017), this lodge was created by the British lodges to counter the influence of the Grand Orient. However, the Grand Loge Nationale lost its recognition by the British in 2012 after it ran into judicial difficulties. Another important French lodge, the Grande Loge de France, also maintained a reference to God, but it was still not recognized by the British, supposedly because of its close links with the Grand Orient.
14. Yet Anglophone Freemasons also identify with the Templars as some sort of legendary ancestors. A recurrent myth is that late in the fourteenth century the knights who managed to escape from Philippe le Bel's wrath landed in Scotland, where they were received by the Stuarts (at the time called the Stewards) (La Franc-Maçonnerie 2016).
15. In the trial initiated by King Philipp le Bel against the Templars in 1307, the second of the five main accusations (coming immediately after the accusation of spitting on the cross, clearly the most serious one) concerned "the stripping of a man to be initiated and the kissing of that man by the preceptor on the navel, posteriorities and the mouth" (see Barber 2006).
16. After the Vatican Council of 1963, the church initiated steps to open a dialogue with the Freemasons, but these were apparently more successful in Anglophone countries (where most lodges had retained the service to God in their charters).
17. Bhély-Quenum explores especially the tension between European Freemasonry and the role of secret societies in present-day Benin. Compare, in contrast, the ease with which, for instance, father and son Bongo, and other high officials in

- Gabon, combine membership in Freemasonry with initiation into local societies (like Bwiti or N'jobi). See, e.g., Tonda (2016).
18. See Rich (2017). It is important to stress, though, that this expansion in post-colonial Africa had exceptions. In Ivory Coast, Houphouët-Boigny unleashed a true persecution of Freemasons in the 1960s. In Zaire/RDC, Mobutu refused to join (according to rumor, because his wish to be initiated in a single day was not granted), and the Kabilas—both father and son—followed suit (but see below on tenacious rumors that most of the music stars for which the country is famous are involved with Freemasonry and/or Rosicrucianism). In Liberia, Samuel Doe started a fierce persecution of Freemasons (who were very numerous under the regime of his predecessors, William Tubman and William Tolbert). Also, most Marxist regimes did not tolerate Freemasonry. On the other hand, South African President Mandela was supposedly initiated into Prince Hall, the black Freemason lodge in the U.S.
 19. Over time, Rosecrucianism has taken on so many manifestations that it is even harder to summarize than Freemasonry. Its first historically well-documented appearance was the publication of two manifestos, later followed by a third one, between 1607 and 1614 by German theologians with a Lutheran background (the Tübinger Kreis). The three manifestos celebrated the heritage from a medieval knight, C.R.C.—subsequently also called Christian Rosenkreuz—who was born in 1378 in Germany. Through his travels around the world C.R.C. gathered profound esoteric knowledge, which he passed on to a small brotherhood (only eight people). In the brutal climate of the Thirty Years War in Germany (first half of the 17th century), this valuable knowledge had to be hidden. But toward the end of that century many people started to refer to this secret knowledge, since it offered possibilities for expanding the scope of the emerging scientific method. (Rosicrucian publications are filled with references to Paracelsus and to the alchemists, but also to the experimental scholars who gathered around Emperor Rudolf II at his court in Prague around 1600.) Later Rosicrucians claimed that their “brothers” were involved in the emergence of the first Freemason lodges, and that Rose Cross wisdom was crucial to the further expansion of Freemasonry. However, over time separate Rose Cross societies also emerged, most of which were short lived. One of the most stable is AMORC (the Ancient and Mystical Order Rosae Crucis), founded in 1915 by Hubert Spencer Lewis in the U.S. (after he had been initiated into the Rose Cross in Toulouse). Subsequently AMORC developed a worldwide network, the French wing of which has more recently become quite active in postcolonial Africa. Its present grand master, Serge Toussaint, regularly tours the continent. In a 2014 interview he declared categorically that “AMORC has no link with Freemasonry and I hardly know how it functions” (A.M.O.R.C. Cameroun 2014). One specialty of AMORC is its emphasis on the Egyptian sources of its esoteric knowledge; next to Christian Rosenkreuz, figures like Pharaoh Thutmose III (1479–25 BCE), the great conqueror of Ancient Egypt's Middle Empire, have become iconic figures (see Edighoffer 1998; Rosicrucian Order 2008).
 20. According to various reports, Biya was for some time under the influence of Rabbi Léon Ashkenazi, often called “Manitou.” One of the secrets of Biya's longevity is supposed to be the impenetrability of his security guard, which is controlled—ever since the 1984 coup made him extremely preoccupied with his personal security—by Israeli (former) military personnel (see Glaser 2014).

21. Another effusive source of such rumors is Daniel St. Yves Ebalé Angounou, who claimed as early as 1992 to have been “le petit de Biya” (Biya’s boy) and who blames his terrible experiences in Yaoundé’s Kondengui Prison on his courage to talk about homosexual practices and human sacrifice in the president’s entourage. An excerpt from the book that appears on the web (<http://www.icicemac.com/document/LE-VRAI-VISAGE-DE-PAUL-BIYA.pdf>) is hardly convincing, since the author claims to know the inner thoughts of the main actors of his stories (not only of Biya himself but also, for instance, of Biya’s first wife, Jeanne-Irène, who actually died, or was murdered, in 1992). Moreover, in other publications (e.g., Socpa 2002), the same Angounou appears as a henchman of the regime who infiltrated opposition movements among the students on the campus of Yaoundé I University during the Ville Morte protests (1991), leading to the arrest of the ringleaders. He himself later ended up in Kondengui Prison for his treacherous role in this context. In fact, it is only the government’s strenuous efforts—quite exceptional—to get Angounou’s book out of circulation that gives it a certain degree of credibility (see Pigeaud 2011).
22. This was not really new. Already in the early seventies I was somewhat startled when “les filles libres” (“free girls”) of Yaoundé would hiss “franc-maçon” (Freemason) when I made it clear that I was not interested in their often quite insistent advances. At the time I had no clue what they meant, especially since in those days homosexuality was hardly discussed. I needed some local friends to explain to me that “les filles” apparently suspected me of preferring men to women. In 1991, when I returned to the country for the first time after Biya had been forced to accept democratization—that is, after the restoration of multipartyism but also of freedom of the press—the lead article in the very first of the “free” newspapers that I bought—clearly one of the opposition that now was suddenly very vocal—opened with the headline “Le pays ne peut pas être gouverné par un homosexuel” (“The country cannot be governed by a homosexual”)—a direct reference to President Biya. Unfortunately I did not even keep the paper—a clear indication that no one foresaw at the time how important this issue would become only fifteen years later.
23. However, Radio Trottoir also targets Catholic prelates with rumors about same-sex practices that seem to be “confirmed” by the fact that some of their names appeared in the newspaper list of “prominent homosexuals” (Nyeck 2016). This may have motivated the Catholic clergy—particularly Cardinal Tumi—to further emphasize their distance from such habits.
24. I managed to get hold of a copy of the second edition (2013). Apparently the first edition (2012) contains a list of “supposed Freemasons of Cameroon who are the most in view.” However, in the second edition the author warns the reader, without further explanation, that he decided (together with his lawyer and the publisher) to omit this list. But he adds that this does not mean that in Cameroon the state is now doing well, or that there are now no longer *pédés*, or Freemasons, or Rosicrucians in higher circles.
25. Toulou also adds many more rumors (for instance, regarding the death of Biya’s mother just before the latter’s re-election as president in 1997; in Cameroon such a coincidence is easily understood as a sign that he magically “sacrificed” his own mother in order to assure success). In a similar vein Toulou (2007:86) cites Père Eric de Rosny—a big name in Cameroon, both in the Catholic Church and in academic circles—who claims that in 1996 thirteen ministers and secretaries of state were initiated into the Rosicrucians; but de Rosny added that “rumor is always the revenge of the non-initiated” (2004:143).

26. When interviewed by *Le Monde* in 1999 Bernard confirmed that Biya was the honorary president of CIRCES; he added that other African presidents—Bongo from Gabon, Eyadema from Togo, even Houphouët-Boigny from Ivory Coast—also became CIRCES “présidents d’honneur” for their country. The article in question was part of a series in *Le Monde* on judicial inquiries into the discovery of sixteen charred bodies in 1995 near Vercors (southeastern France) of people who were connected with OTS (Ordre du Temple Solaire). The drama in Vercors was part of a series of similar scenes in France, Québec, and Switzerland—all related to OTS and generally seen as collective ritual suicides inspired by Templar ideas (although there were also indications that some victims had been killed). Bernard was interrogated by the police because of his relations with Joseph di Mambro, formerly a member of Bernard’s OSTI until Di Mambro founded OTS in 1984 as some sort of rival organization. The whole affair attracted a lot of attention because of the close links of both Bernard and Di Mambro to Charles Pasqua, at the time the minister of interior in Balladur’s cabinet, and to his party, the RPR. Like Di Mambro (who died in 1994 in an earlier collective suicide), Bernard was supposed to be involved in important transfers of money inside FrancAfrique (not only from Biya’s close surroundings, but also from the other African presidents he recruited for CIRCES). This was the reason his finances became the object of judicial enquiries. Bernard was acquitted of any involvement in the Vercors affair, but the judge raised critical questions about large sums of money transferred from accounts close to President Biya. It was through this link that Biya’s mysterious payments emerged in *Le Monde*.
27. See Ordre de la Rose-Croix (2014); Ghoche (n.d.) (the official chronology of Raymond Bernard’s life); and A.M.O.R.C. Cameroun (2014).
28. One of the sources of these rumors about Ahidjo having been perverted by Aujoulat in the 1950s seems to be a recent interview by Daniel Abwa (2005) with Woungly Massaga (see also Nyeck 2016). Massaga is one of the few survivors of the UPC leadership from the time of Independence that was so violently suppressed and persecuted by Ahidjo. Is the rebirth of this rumor on the latter’s relationship with Aujoulat to be seen as a belated revenge of the UPC?
29. Similarly, the French historians do not deal with the question as to whether or not Aujoulat was initiated as a Freemason. This is a moot point since he was a staunch Catholic until the end of his life, but it is not implausible and quite important for present debates in Cameroon. Many people take it for granted nowadays that he was—in line with the general association of the lodges with same-sex practices; see Toulou (2007).
30. The one-sided emphasis in this text on same-sex practices between males is related to the focus on the link with Freemasonry and Rosicrucianism, which in most of the continent are still all male. However, in the world of rumors (just as in “the lists”), lesbian practices are targeted as well. Compare, e.g., the increasing rumors about “les maris de nuit” (night husbands) who are supposed to make women unable to reproduce. Tonda (2016) analyzes this imaginary as an expression of lesbian fears/fantasies. In his analysis the appearance of the night husband serves as a screen for an aunt who lusts for the daughter-in-law of the family in the hope of appropriating her beauty.
31. In his monograph Tessmann adds that to his Pangwe this fairly straightforward approach amounted to a “grosse Liebeserklärung” (love declaration), as in the German phrase “wo du hingehst will ich auch hingehen” (Wherever you will go, that’s where I will go) (1913 [vol. 2]:273).

32. “Nach ihnen ist es für die Beurteilung der Sinnlichkeit völlig einerlei ob man einen Mann liebt oder ein weibliches Wesen. . . . Es braucht nämlich niemand zu heucheln, weil es gar keine grundsätzlichen Gegensätze in bezug auf den Geschlechtsverkehr gibt . . .” (my translation).
33. However, Achille Mbembe tells me that in his youth in Cameroon people used to gossip about the Bafia and their readiness for sexual experiments. So maybe Tessmann’s theoretical preoccupations did not stop him from noting real variations in everyday behavior. Indeed, Tessmann’s writings have many layers. Murray and Roscoe took the story of the two same-sex couples who died of framboesia/leprosy from Karsch-Haak (1911). In Tessmann’s *Die Pangwe* (1913 [vol. 2]:271–73) the story is somewhat longer. The most striking thing is that in this longer version Tessmann abbreviates the complicated names of the four lovers as “Schok” (numbering them from I to IV)—which was also the name of his most trusted “boy” who served him the longest during his stay in the forest with the Fang and by whom he felt bitterly betrayed at the end. Deeply angry that all the faith he had put in this youth had been betrayed, he even had him arrested and jailed just before he took off on a steamer along the Ogowe. Still, he uses this name in one of his favorite stories! It seems that Tessmann was playing all sorts of games in his complicated writings.
34. See Spronk (2017). See also Hendriks (2016a) for fascinating parallels in Congo.
35. Tonda (2016:132) speaks about “the emergence, since less than a decade, of the anus as the sexual organ to which the collective imaginary attributes a special role as a tool (*dispositif*) for individual enrichment” (my translation), and he links this to “le devenir homosexuel de ce sexe” (lit. this sexual organ acquiring homosexual meaning). Guébeguo (2009:34), writing about “l’homosexualisation de l’ascension sociale” (the homosexualization of social upward mobility) in Cameroon, says that thus “the behind [*la derrière*] . . . has become a privileged site for the exercise of domination.” Broqua (2009:61) generalizes this insight: “. . . if homosexuality is developing in Sub-Sahara Africa, it is because it allows one to become rich” (my translation). Similarly, Epprecht (2006), commenting on earlier periods, discusses rumors about people in various walks of life who tried to advance themselves via acts of same-sex penetration: chiefs seeking to fortify their power against rivals; mineworkers searching for protection against accidents; or boxers bracing themselves for their matches. This relates to the common contemporary association in many parts of the continent between “homosexuals” and “modernity.” Graeme Reid (2013), for instance, relates the relative wealth of gay hairdressers in small-town South Africa to the aura of modernity they convey to their clients.
36. Thomas Hendriks and Katrien Pype, oral communications.
37. See Besnier (1997) for similar observations from Tonga. See also Broqua (2009) for a fine-grained analysis of who pays whom in same-sex partnerships in Mali—which sometimes follow the same direction as in heterosexual exchanges but which also present striking reversals.