

Kill Them before They Grow: Homosexuality and the State Violence in Cameroon

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The idea that Cameroon is drifting towards a ‘homosexual peril’ and thus should be cleansed of sex-mongers and peddlers of the perverse sexualities, has led the state power to launch true administrative and juridical offensives against gays and lesbians generally suspected of plotting to turn the country into the biblical Sodom and Gomorrah. These recent years, these homophobic crusades have taken the form of a real lynch-justice which only offers to homosexuals from underprivileged backgrounds the rights to be arbitrary detained or sentenced to several years of imprisonment.

This study is based on observational work and intensive surveys conducted not only in the gay milieu between August 2008 and May 2010, but also in different state courts of Douala (economic capital) and Yaounde (political capital). Its main purpose is to trace some of the major shifts in the various dominant indigenous discourses on homosexuality, and especially in the way in which holders of political and administrative powers in this country have since 1972 dealt with sexual deviants such as gays and lesbians who individually or collectively subvert the postcolonial genital organizations. Symptomatic of these changes is for instance the slow move from the criminalisation of homosexuals to an exuberant production of moralising and normative discourses that not only mark these people as sexual perverts, but also misrepresent them as dangerous sorcerers or witches. Numerous cases recorded of suspected gays and lesbians charged with witchcraft-related practices show how representatives of the postcolonial state actively draw upon a language of witchcraft or sorcery as part of this new political imaginary of homosexuals in present-day Cameroon. These cases are also illustrative of how the entire legal system in this country becomes engaged in the administrative and juridical invention of the category of witch-gay or lesbian.