

Homosexuality between Europe and Africa / Trajectories of Homophobia and Freemasonry in Cameroon: 'The PDs de la Republique'

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The last decade brought a sudden intensification of homophobia in many parts of the African continent. Also in countries where homosexuality had hardly been an issue until lately, fierce witch-hunts against 'homosexuals' erupted, often encouraged by the government. A recurrent trope in most of these situations was the idea of homosexuality as a foreign element - imposed on Africa by a decadent West. In this paper I will focus on developments in Cameroon. Striking is the central role in people's perceptions of homosexuality in this country of Freemasonry and Rosecrucianism - powerful secret associations among the political elite. This is not new: since colonial times *franc-macon* is in Cameroon a common word of abuse for someone who is supposed to indulge in same-sex relations. Yet, recently, this articulation became highly explosive. Protests from the Catholic clergy about the political role of Freemasonry and Rosecrucianism; but also a furious backlash against International Human Right Committees who insisted on the decriminalization of homosexuality (in Cameroon still a criminal offense - a relict from French colonial rule); and the increasing visibility of a global gay identity on the Internet triggered violent reactions against supposed 'gays' throughout the country. The political elite - *les PD's de la Republique* (to borrow from Basile Ndjio's analysis of a popular stereotype) - sought to defend themselves against shocking suspicions by launching a determined judicial offensive against 'homosexuals.' Denouncing homosexuality as un-Cameroonian has become an important element in emphasizing one's belonging. Especially young men from less wealthy backgrounds, who feel tempted to relate to a new gay identity, risk to become the victim of relentless persecutions triggered by a complex global articulation.