
H-France Review Vol. 21 (March 2021), No. 37

Patrick Awondo, *Le sexe et ses doubles: (Homo)sexualités en postcolonie*. Lyon: ENS Editions, 2019. 243 pp. Bibliography, list of acronyms and abbreviations, and glossary. €25.00. (pb). ISBN 979-10-362-0097-7; €14.99. (eb). ISBN 979-10-362-0098-4.

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In his preface, Patrick Awondo draws on Aimé Césaire's analogy in *Le Discours sur le colonialisme* [1] between Nazism and colonialism illustrating how Europeans who were on the receiving end of violence from Germany during WWII had also inflicted their own savagery (*ensauvagement*) via colonization and the *exclusion ethnique* that occurred on the African continent. Inspired also by Achille Mbembe's *De la postcolonie* and *Sortir de la grande nuit*, [2] Awondo uses Césaire's long-established analogy to point to the *ensauvagement* in contemporary Sub-Saharan Africa among institutions such as the Catholic Church, the national government, and the private press who inflict their own savagery and exclusion--also termed "apartheid" by Awondo--on sexual and gender minorities, and homosexuals in particular, viewing them as a "*perversion*" (p. 8). Awondo astutely points out that that the two forms of hatred are part of the same racist genealogy: "Dans ces contextes, s'établit au quotidien une filiation réelle entre les processus d'exclusion ethnique et ceux d'exclusion des minorités sexuelles" (p. 11).

In this excellent monograph, Awondo undertook fieldwork in Cameroon--in Yaoundé and Douala--and in the Paris region among Cameroonians in the diaspora between 2007 and 2012. He conducted semi-structured interviews with men having sex with men (MSM) and attended meetings of various associations, such as Aides and Afrique arc-en-ciel. He also conducted digital ethnography through the internet by monitoring the Human Rights Watch site for Cameroon and a number of other online communities such as Facebook. In his introduction, "L'homosexualité et ses doubles en Afrique postcoloniale," Awondo opens by outlining several useful concepts that helped him to analyze the *surpolitisation* (over-politicization) of homosexuality, gender, and sexual identity in Cameroon. He defines homosexuality's *doubles* as the forces within postcolonial African society that mask homosexuality under the guises of power, the occult, imperialism, heterosexism, moral order, as well as health and illness, which will all fuel its *surpolitisation* and attract violence to the LGBTI community. It is worth noting here that Awondo does not use the term "queer" in his study nor the acronym LGBTQI.

Awondo shows that, while homophobia is not unique to Cameroon, certain specificities about the local context remain noteworthy. These include the fact that local LGBTI organizations and HIV activism have grown only since 2000 in Cameroon and many local opponents to homosexuality view this growth as an import from the West. Awondo also draws attention to

the semantic slippage that has occurred in Cameroon whereby homosexuality now finds itself often grouped together with and as a subcategory of gender. He explores other issues, including the resistance to homosexuality through anti-gender movements in Africa, as well as the demonization of African countries through a homo-nationalism in the Global North because these African countries are not seen as following international human right laws for sexual minorities.^[3] For better or worse, then, the association between homosexuality and HIV was not well established in Africa until after 2000, with the arrival of HIV activism, which provoked a widespread health crisis in the country. Awondo also notes that the academic study of homosexuality in Africa was not systematic until the 2000s and was even less developed in the francophone African countries and especially central African countries like Cameroon. Finally, he draws attention to the growing role of the Catholic Church and the private press in policing homosexuality in Cameroon since 2005, which he explores at further length in other chapters.

In chapter one, “Panique homosexuelle et figures du procès postcolonial,” Awondo examines a corpus of articles in the private press beginning in 2006. He illustrates how Cameroonian journalists often describe homosexuality as an import from the West and the former empires and the empires' continued pretentious neocolonialism, neoliberal values, and *modernité sexuelle*. He opens with a discussion of the *affaire des listes* in 2016 that arose when publications like *La Météo*, *L'Anecdote* and *La Nouvelle Afrique* released a series of lists of names of male and female public figures from the political, artistic, cultural, religious, and sports-related worlds. These figures were presumed to be homosexual and this event set the tone for a wider discussion on a public scale, signaling a local “*panique morale*” (p. 63) in reaction to a global Western movement often associated with a certain elite. He also sketches a picture of the other groups involved in this moral crusade or “*cabale antihomosexuelle*” (p. 11), including the Catholic Church. One example of this is a denunciation of homosexuality by the Catholic archbishop of metropolitan Yaoundé, who called it an elitist attack on the country's youth. Awondo also includes the “*Memorandum des jeunes contre l'homosexualité*” in its entirety in which some of the country's youth took a stand in defense of “l'exception culturelle africaine” against “le péril l'homogénéisation culturelle orchestrée de l'Occident” (p. 89). In all of these discussions, homosexuality was viewed as a vice and perversion, as well as a contamination or corruption of the body, leading to the economic, political, and moral corruption of the social body (i.e., the state) or what Achille Mbembe refers to as “*autodestruction*” (p. 71). The debate sparked by the *affaire des listes* allowed a discussion of homosexuality on a broader scale in *Mutations*, in which journalists framed the debate in such a way as to support sexual freedom. The international media and the French media in particular, however, tended to generalize the debates and discourses in the private press in Cameroon by referring to the homophobic nature of the press and the people of Cameroon. In order to round out his discussion of the semantic field of homosexuality in Cameroon, Awondo ends with an interesting, yet brief lesson on local linguistic expressions that code homosexuality in Cameroon, including *être bilingue*, *jouer de deux pieds*, and *être de/dans l'affaire*.

In chapter two, “Occulte, pouvoir et homosexualité,” Awondo examines the link between sexuality, power, and the *occulte*, or what he defines as “secret, cercle ésotérique, sorcellerie” (p. 103). He outlines the historicity of a homosexuality associated with mystical power among the Bété, a dominant group in the country, both linguistically, in terms of number of speakers and historically, in terms of their role as major actors in the country's colonial and post-colonial periods. During colonial times, the Bété and other groups often came to understand homosexuality as a conspiracy or secret practice among the powerful elite of the empire—described as a “*sorcellerie de la richesse*” and “*fétichisme de la richesse*” (p. 111)—that preyed upon

weak colonial subjects. Awondo also provides a brief review of the ethnographic scholarship on the Béti and an example of feminine ritual—*mevungu*—to illustrate a focus on woman-on-woman touching in their community. At the same time, he stresses the heteronormative tradition of ethnography in the African context and how it has shed much less light on male homosexuality. Ultimately, Awondo illustrates how discourses on homosexuality in the private press help us understand the traditional discourse on the prohibition of "the secret" or of witchcraft, its shift to conversations about sin regulated by Christian colonial rule—priests and preachers—in partnership with the marabouts, and finally, yet another shift to a language of illegality under the postcolonial regime where homosexuality has been outlawed since the penal code of 1965 and remains a crime punishable with up to six months in prison.

In chapter three, "Naissance d'une cause et lutte pour la reconnaissance," Awondo analyzes the birth of the *cause homosexuelle* through an examination of various associations in Cameroon in tandem with international human rights organizations and their role in monitoring and fighting for the decriminalization of homosexuality. The author presents a picture of the Association pour la défense des droits des homosexuels (ADEFHO) led by Madame Alice Nkom and of the homosexual youth who helped her to create this organization. ADEFHO was the most mediatized human rights crusade in Cameroon since 2003. Relying on transnational movements and their discourses of human rights, Nkom and other activists continue to fight against the arrest of homosexuals and argue for their particular rights, using universalist terms based on the notion of equal rights for all citizens. Moreover, Nkom argues the illegality of article 347 of the 1965 penal code, both because it was not adopted as part of Cameroon's constitution amendment of 1996 and because of other international conventions protecting all minorities signed by Cameroon. Awondo explores similar themes in his discussion of the creation in 2006 of Alternatives-Cameroon under the direction of Steve Nemade (its first president), Charles Gueboguo, and Joël Nana. This organization has focused on the rights of sexual and gender minorities. However, as it has turned to a more transnational focus and an emphasis on public health, it has lost media coverage, as well as effectiveness at the local level in terms of AIDS activism. Awondo also draws attention to some of the infighting and tensions between these organizations, but more importantly, how they have worked to demobilize local homophobic organizations like the Catholic Church, which has continued to attack individuals and LGBTI rights in Cameroon with marches against abortion and homosexuality. Awondo also considers the role of the American NGO, Human Rights Watch (HRW), as well as those of Amnesty International France, the International Lesbian and Gay Association (ILGA), the Inter-LGBT in France, and Behind the Mask in South Africa—and examines their ties to and support of the Cameroon-based organizations.

In chapter four, "Mobiliser les *men who have sex with men* africains," Awondo uses his volunteer work with the association Alternatives-Cameroon and other international militancy networks to focus on men who have sex with men (MSM). He examines these national and international groups in order to determine which ones have had the most impact on the rights of MSM and on LGBTI activism in the African context, with particular focus on both the francophone network Africagay, inspired largely by the French organization Aides, and the wider pan-African group, African Men for Sexual Health and Rights (AMSHER), based in South Africa. He illustrates the level of transnational militancy and solidarity among activist groups while also tracing the local impasses and postcolonial tensions that keep these organizations from working together productively at times. Awondo adeptly outlines how international (French and Anglo-American) organizations who implemented a postcolonial agenda focused on the visibility of LGBTI citizens

were seen by activist circles in Cameroon as “*actions trop voyantes*” (p. 183), overlooking the safety and anonymity of individuals on the ground. He also demonstrates how the local organizations decided to mobilize in ways that were more specific to their local contexts—“*une solution à l’africainé*”—with the example of Africagay, which changed its name to “Africagay contre le sida” in order to underscore its focus on the public health crisis. He ends the chapter with a brief discussion of AMSHER as an organization that emerged in reaction to Africagay in order to bring a pan-African voice back to the conversation. At the same time however, this reignited an old ideological conflict between francophones and anglophones on the continent, which the third organization, Alternative-Cameroon, helped at times to mitigate.

In chapter five, “*Quête identitaire et internationalisation du marché homosexuel*,” Awondo examines questions of identity construction associated with male homosexuality and also the “internationalisation d’un marché homosexuel via Internet” (p. 191). He adopts an intersectional approach to conduct an ethnography of binational, French Cameroon male-male couples who met online in order to show how their identities are a product both of the influences of various times-space organizations and worlds to which they belong. Awondo illustrates how Cameroonian men in particular capitalize on the internet in order to embark on a “*quête affective*” in a time when it is difficult to find a partner on the “*marché national*” (p. 192). In 2015, only 11 percent of Cameroonians had access to the internet in comparison to 78 percent of French citizens. As the former has gained increasing access to the web, they have also begun to imagine a conjugal life for themselves elsewhere. Cameroonian men will often have two different accounts, on Facebook for example, in order to “save face” from their friends and their families, who are often relieved when their sons depart for Europe to form couples.

These same men shifted from speaking about their sexual practices, often linked to the effeminate images of male homosexuality, to framing their conversations in terms of a gay identity influenced by the discursive spaces of local activism, conspicuous consumption of bar culture, the commercialization of homosexuality on the Internet through discussion forums and online French publications like *Têtu* and *Yagg*, and their intercultural partnerships with European men. In France, where the the Marais district in Paris is viewed as largely a space for young LGBTI individuals, older gay men turn instead to the internet in order to find sexual or affective partners in Cameroon and other African countries. Although a homonormative couple may be formed in this process, it does not eliminate issues of inequality between the two partners due to differences of age, race, and social class. The migratory regulations imposed by the French state result in numerous constraints on the Cameroonian partner because of the way in which they give control over the Cameroonian to the more affluent French partner. One example is that the terms of both visa sponsorship and the regime of the PaCS (civil union) require the international partner to go to the prefecture each year to offer proof of their life together. Awondo effectively summarizes the import of this situation when he writes: “Une fois en couple en France, les jeunes hommes africains se confrontent à une inégalité économique, social et sexuelle face à des partenaires mieux dotés, d’une part, et confrontés dans des positions de dominants par les dispositifs de contrôles migratoires, d’autre part” (p. 214).

In conclusion, Awondo is a pioneer in the field and he has written an excellent and meticulously detailed monograph on the emergence of LGBTI identities in Cameroon, which is the first, to my knowledge. The author clearly sets himself up for criticism by calling out Africans as part of a world-wide discriminatory process against homosexuality and homophobia. The author also has put himself at risk of discrimination, having been called an “un homo africain idéologue de

l'homosexualité à la solde des Blancs" (p. 45) and having faced real physical violence as he conducted fieldwork in Cameroon--in Yaoundé and Douala--and in the Paris region between 2007 and 2012, where he witnessed the murder of LGBTI individuals. Nevertheless, Awondo speaks bravely throughout this study and, while he does not want to add to the indignation of African countries and their problematic reputation regarding universal human rights, he does provide a rigorous analysis of the ways in which homosexuality has become politicized and demonized in Cameroon. At the same time however, these endeavors--a condemnation and a rigorous analysis--are not mutually exclusive and I believe the author successfully balances his objectives in this volume. Awondo completed his doctoral work in Paris and his academic preparation shines through this study as he draws simultaneously on a rich series of theoretical readings from Europe and North America related to gender, sexuality, and ethnography and adeptly combines them with another rich set sources, which are more specific to sub-Saharan Africa, but perhaps much less familiar to those of us working in the U.S. or Europe. This book will be of interest to scholars and students in many fields including history, anthropology, African and Black studies, French and francophone studies, as well as gender and sexuality studies.

NOTES

[1] Aimé Césaire, *Le Discours sur le colonialisme* (Paris: Réclame, 1950).

[2] Achille Mbembe, *De la postcolonie: essai sur l'imagination politique dans l'Afrique contemporaine*. 2nd ed. (Paris: Karthala, 2005); Achille Mbembe, *Sortir de la grande nuit: essai sur l'Afrique décolonisée* (Paris: Éditions La Découverte, 2010).

[3] Anti-gender movements are conservative movements that oppose women's rights, including women's right to make decisions about their own bodies, including reproductive rights, and their access to abortion.

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ISSN 1553-9172

