

# Invisible power, visible dispossession: The witchcraft of a subterranean pipeline

Amber Murrey

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There has been a lack of attention to the role of *la sorcellerie* (witchcraft) and the occult in geographical work on extraction, power and resistance, despite the ways in which these epistemologies inform conceptions of power, wealth and violence. In two towns along the Chad-Cameroon Oil Pipeline, epistemologies of *la sorcellerie* frame understandings and critiques of the invisible actors and processes that effect the pipeline's uneven distributions of violence, wealth and risk. Far from expunging the experience(s) of extraction by erasing the pipeline's visible traces on the landscape, the oil consortium's infrastructural and discursive erasures serve to situate the pipeline within a knowledge system that associates invisible actors and materials with evil, wrongdoing, suspicion and distrust. This article addresses (i) how the production of dispersed extractive landscapes reinforce epistemologies of witchcraft by alienating the people who live within them from networks of power in ways that provoke a mistrust and jealousy that is absorbed within families and communities and (ii) the socio-political significance of this epistemological structuring of the pipeline as a logic of resistance against hydrocarbon capitalism.

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## Introduction

Although there have been calls for more nuanced understandings of the interactions between 'local' knowledges and 'local' socio-political relationships within development geographies (Agrawal, 1995; Briggs, 2005; Briggs & Sharp, 2004; Routledge, 1996), witchcraft, sorcery and occult epistemologies have remained almost completely unexplored, with the examination of mining, albino murders and magic in Tanzania by Deborah Bryceson, Jönsson, and Sherrington (2014) a noted exception. By and large, political geographers have yet to systematically consider witchcraft in the complex spatial relationships made and unmade through the uneven distributions of power and wealth within extractive landscapes. Yet the significance of such knowledges in shaping the meanings, interpretations and constructions of space, power and violence on the African continent and elsewhere make this a ripe area of study for human geographers. At the same time, the recent intervention from Garth Andrew Myers (2014: 125) identifies on-going omissions in the subfield of political geography as a whole where Africa is concerned, arguing that 'geography has a geography to it'.

Political geography has a geographic orientation in which ‘African topics are still marginal’ (Myers, 2014: 125).

This article contributes to the on-going project of opening political geography to non-Euro-American epistemological orderings of place and power by asserting the centrality of Cameroonian epistemologies of *la sorcellerie* (witchcraft)<sup>1</sup> in considerations of resource extraction, power and resistance in two communities Nanga-Eboko (hereinafter Nanga) and Kribi along the Chad-Cameroon Oil Pipeline. What does a rigorous theorising of witchcraft, power and resistance in dispersed extractive landscapes reveal about the potentials for non-Euro-American, non-capitalist or ‘local’ knowledge to open up new avenues of capitalist critique and resistance? This article approaches this central enquiry through two points of analysis.

The first is to demonstrate how the particularities of the dispersed geographies of extraction (including the ways in which pipeline infrastructure, oil wealth and consortium employees and representatives fluctuate between invisibility and visibility) are understood by people in Nanga and Kribi, Cameroon, through epistemologies of witchcraft. Geographies of extraction are comprised of diverse visibilities and obscurities that provoke distinctive modes of resistance. As they struggle to make sense of visible dispossessions and ecological destructions effected by mostly invisible actors, people in Kribi and Nanga have positioned the subterranean and diffuse spatial and temporal qualities of the extractive processes of the Chad Cameroon Oil Pipeline within frameworks of *la sorcellerie*. Engaging with epistemologies of *la sorcellerie* illustrates the complexity of understandings, negotiations and contestations of power and resistance within these situated landscapes. Rather than pointing out what actor(s) or structure(s) are *not* apparent to people along the pipeline, the analysis focuses on how people, in place, understand invisible features of reality, power and politics. This political geography necessarily attends to the visible as well as the invisible, without privileging the visible: while the pipeline, as a dispersed incursion on the landscape, is infrastructurally subterranean (and thus below the view of the human eye), the structural processes and actors of the pipeline's socio-political infrastructure are knowable to people in their invisibility (and not despite it). Importantly, the way(s) that power and empowerment are conceived informs people's responses and shapes attempts to assert power along the pipeline. The particular socio-spatial operations of the pipeline lend themselves to an accounting for their (political) materials and maledictions through witchcraft epistemologies. These socio-political operations are detailed below and include: the pipeline as (i) dispersed across the landscape, (ii) implemented by shadowy figures and (iii) effecting an uneven and exclusionary accumulation of wealth (Fig. 1).

The second is to recognise the paradoxical nature of witchcraft in Cameroon as both (i) an epistemology that is highly critical of the uneven distribution of wealth and risk along the pipeline and (ii) a mode of social control in which social and economic tensions are propelled into micro-level conflict. Although human geographers have been relatively slow to study the complex relationships between socio-politics in the extractive landscapes of capitalist frontiers and witchcraft, cultural anthropologists have made important inroads in expanding our understanding of the heterogeneous ways in which variegated witchcraft epistemologies, far from being representative of ‘traditional’ or pre-colonial cultures, can assert powerful counter-epistemes to extractive capitalism (Ekholm Friedman, 2011; Nash, 1979; Reyna, 2011; Taussig, 1980). June Nash (1979) argues that in miners in Bolivia are fortified against the harsh and dangerous mining conditions by sacrifices and gestures to *Tío Lucas* (the devil), who is believed to spiritually own and operate the (deadly) tin mines. Michael Taussig (1980) similarly contends that Bolivian miners elucidate a complex critique of the mythical illusions

of capitalism (as a wealth generating panacea) through a changing symbolisation and understanding of the devil and capitalism an ascription that connects the impoverishment, illness and disease of capitalism with *Tío Lucas*. This literature suggests that witchcraft epistemologies provide powerful frameworks of critique against capitalist extraction. This analysis explores the potential for epistemologies of Cameroonian *la sorcellerie* to provide a logic of resistance that conceptualises and critiques the large-scale disposessions effected by the pipeline.

In answering the article's central question, a paradox of the socio-political relationships bound up within the practices of Cameroonian *sorcellerie*, on the one hand, and their epistemological potential, on the other, is confronted. Epistemologies of *la sorcellerie* engender understandings of the invisible networks and exchanges of power that produce petroleum infrastructures; in so doing, these epistemologies create space for what might be a powerful metacritique of the invisible actors of hydrocarbon capitalism. However, *la sorcellerie* does not seem to advance a mode of resistance against the social and environmental violence caused by the pipeline in Nanga and Kribi. Instead, the particular and situated practices of *la sorcellerie* in these two communities relegate action to the intimate scale of the family in some cases accelerating the rupturing of the community began by the pipeline (Fig. 2).

Recognizing the ambivalent nature of *la sorcellerie* (as both an expression of social control and epistemology that describes and critiques violence) bridges conversations between two strands of witchcraft analysis: that literature that addresses *la sorcellerie* as an epistemology or world view (Comaroff & Comaroff, 1993; Nyamnjoh, 2001) and that literature which addresses *la sorcellerie* as social practice (Fisiy & Geschiere, 2001; Geschiere, 1997, 2013): *la sorcellerie* is/does both. This is an important recognition within the burgeoning scholarship that stresses the importance of 'local' knowledges within complex socio-political landscapes on the African continent. The article concludes with reflections on calls for transparency and visibility in both policy and scholarly debates around 'slow' or 'structural' forms of violence.

## The Chad-Cameroon Oil Pipeline

At the time of its construction, the Chad-Cameroon Oil Pipeline was the largest onshore private investment on the African continent (Grovgui & Leonard, 2007). The 4.1 billion\$US pipeline came to fruition through the engineering, implementation and funding of an oil consortium made up of ExxonMobil (the world's third highest grossing corporation), Petroliaam Nasional Berhad (i.e., Petronas, a Malaysian gas company), Chevron-Texaco (a US oil corporation), the World Bank (the world's largest and most influential 'development' institution) and the governments of Chad and Cameroon<sup>2</sup> The pipeline is 1070 km long, originates in Chad's Doba Basin and terminates in Cameroon's port city of Kribi. With the construction of the pipeline in 2000, existing places, including forests, vegetation, farmlands, ancestral lands and human habitats, were destroyed along a 30 to 50 m-wide corridor. A material land space as large as the Benelux (Belgium, the Netherlands and Luxembourg) was appropriated in Cameroon and southwest Chad for the initial 30-year operational period of the pipeline. This period has since been prolonged, following the announcement in July 2014 that the pipeline will be extended 600 km to access Niger's Agadem block (Fig. 3).

The World Bank Press Release announcing its approval to fund the project on 6 June 2000 ambitiously describes the pipeline as ‘an unprecedented frame-work to transform oil wealth into direct benefits for the poor’. The 2004 ExxonMobil Corporate Citizenship Report positions the key for project success as ‘the creation of a strong partnership with the World Bank, which viewed the project as an opportunity to help promote economic development in Chad’ (38). Through a number of spending requirements imposed on the government of Chad through the project's financial structuring, the pipeline was crafted to be the project that would alter the paradox of the so-called ‘oil curse’, or the propensity for oil exporting economies to experience declines in economic growth rates and productivity expressed through increases of poverty (Carmody, 2009). Alongside a number of novel approaches introduced by the consortium (which were designed to link social development with oil extraction) was the incorporation of some ‘local’ knowledges within the otherwise institutionalized and top-down infra- structural implementation. The oil consortium, for example, sponsored animal sacrifices along the pipeline corridor as a means to honour those sacred areas that were destroyed to make way for the pipe. So many animal sacrifices were conducted that the anthropologist hired by the World Bank to oversee community outreach in southern Chad, Ellen Brown, was dubbed ‘Madame Sacrifice’ (Smith, 2010). These ceremonies pacified a measure of the public outrage over the destructive and dispossessing components of development projects. Moreover, they provided a veneer of ‘authenticity’ to an otherwise unaltered extractive framework. Indeed, despite contentions from the World Bank and the oil consortium that poverty alleviation and development ventures would be coupled with commercial and capitalist interests in a manner beneficial for all parties involved, the pipeline not only failed to bring development to the towns and villages affected by the project, it aggravated and exacerbated poverty through the destruction of local livelihoods and ecologies. In January 2007, Ron Royal, the President of Esso Chad (ExxonMobil's chief manager in Chad) told a parliamentary delegation from the German Bundestag that, ‘We should never have called [the Chad-Cameroon Oil Pipeline] a development project’ (qtd. in Horta, Nguiffo, & Djiraibe, 2007: 5) and on 9 September 2008, the World Bank issued a press statement indicating that it was unable to continue its support for the project due to noncompliance (World Bank, 2008). The Press Release reads,

Chad failed to comply with key requirements of this agreement. A new agreement was signed in 2006, but once again the government did not allocate adequate resources critical for poverty reduction in education, health, infrastructure, rural development and governance. Regrettably, it became evident that the arrangements that had underpinned the Bank's involvement in the Chad/Cameroon pipeline project were not working. (World Bank, 2008: n.p.)

This article is part of a doctoral project on structural violence and resistance along the pipeline. Ethnographic research was carried out in Kribi on Cameroon's Southern coastline and Nanga in the central region areas that are tied together by their proximity to an oil pipeline. This political geography considers people's re- flections of the project after a decade of struggle for reimbursement and compensation. The encroachments and dispossessions effected by the pipeline are situated within the long histories of structural violence. In this context, ‘local’ epistemologies are reworked to grasp changing political, territorial and socioecultural relations. People's stories of the pipeline capture a sense of longitudinal frustration. Perceptions of time and history become suspended and elongated within landscapes characterised by structural violence, so that people's narrative accounts describe one genre of structural violence as seeming to bleed into another into

another violence and into another across time and space (Murrey, 2015b). These historically saturated narratives provide important insights into the diverse epistemologies drawn upon to narrate longitudinal experiences of life within extractive landscapes.

### Epistemologies of *la sorcellerie* along the pipeline

The ontological pluralism of Cameroonian *la sorcellerie* defies any monolithic designation or delimitation. Francis Nyamnjoh (2001) explains that instead of being a belief, *la sorcellerie* is an inescapable component of life and one's being in the world in Cameroon: it is a shared popular epistemology of witchcraft that is 'both self-evident and solemnly real'. People might not be able to explain why witches target one person and not another, but they know when a person has been targeted (Geschiere, 1997). In Nanga and Kribi, the invisible forces of violence, evil and malediction permeate everyday life. Epistemologies of *la sorcellerie* are drawn upon to explain sudden death, mysterious illness, financial insecurity, nightmare, natural disaster, climate change and failed harvest, which are often understood as signs of spiritual foul play. The forest is conceived of as a mysterious place where spirits abide and witches meet. There are moments in one's life, particularly during sleep, when one becomes susceptible to infiltration by the spirit of a witch. These spiritual attacks might manifest themselves in recurring sexual dreams or nightmares, which steal the body's power. Such spirits are not visible to the untrained eye but only to 'seers' or *les marabouts*. People can be physically present at the same time that their spirit has left the body to travel or hunt in invisible realms—the latter referring to the night-time hunting of human souls to sacrifice, sell or eat (Nyamnjoh, 2001). These invisible realms intersect with the visible world to evoke a modern globalised topography characterised by time-space compression (Kearney, 1995: 549; Shaw, 1997: 857). Time is fluid, with the contemporary moment rooted in a lived past and in an abiding respect for ancestors.

In such epistemologies, malevolent actors and their acts are hidden from view at the same time that they are understood, sensed and known in the visible world through their material consequences. Visible and invisible forces, energies and agents are inseparable to one's being in the world. The vaporous qualities of the material of the Chad Cameroon Oil Pipeline—the 1.5 m of dirt and soil atop it, the partial presence of pipeline actors and the enigmatic processes of construction—lead to different interpretations by people in Nanga and Kribi, including direct and indirect accusations of witchcraft or *la sorcellerie* from community members to Cameroon Oil Transportation Company (COTCO) employees.

Cameroonian epistemologies of *la sorcellerie* are dynamic and have shifted and continue to shift throughout and across space and time (Geschiere, 1997, 2013; Nyamnjoh, 2001). Contemporary epistemologies of Cameroonian *sorcellerie* have been influenced and altered through complex historical-political processes; among them has been the barrage of loss, domination and violence experienced through slavery, imperialism, colonialism and the re-trenchments of poverty following the 1980s economic crisis and attendant Structural Adjustment Programmes, or SAPs (Fisiy & Geschiere, 2001).<sup>3</sup>

Cyprian F. Fisiy and Peter Geschiere (2001) traces what he calls the 'increasing ambiguity' of witchcraft during the mid-1980s, when Cameroon experienced a perfect storm of economic catastrophe: the collapse of global market prices for cocoa, coffee and cotton devastated agricultural sectors. The price for a barrel of crude fell from 29\$US in 1984 to 26\$US in 1985, descending even more to 10\$US in 1986 (Takougang, 2004: 112). As part of IMF and World Bank comprehensive reform, Cameroon's monetary unit, the franc CFA (Central African Franc), was depreciated by 40 per cent in 1986 and then 50 per cent in 1994 (Mentan, 2003: 120). As a consequence, Cameroon received remarkably less for its exports than it had



in previous years. The loss was enormous, as [Joseph Takougang \(2004: 113\)](#) observes: Cameroon's total exports, which 'had exceeded 1000 billion francs CFA in 1984/85, dropped to 575 billion francs CFA in 1986/87'. At the same time, civil employee salaries were reduced by 60 per cent under SAP restrictions. One consequence of this reduction was an increase in small-level corruption: as civil servants (from court clerks to teachers) scrambled to make ends meet, some began to require a *gumbo* or *choko* (an unofficial fee) on previously uncharged state services. The generation born in the 1980s became known as *la génération perdue* (the lost generation), signifying the desperation and the disappointment of the decades between 1980 and 2000. Alongside the economic changes of the 1980s, [Fisiy and Geschiere \(2001\)](#) note, 'witchcraft discourses' in Cameroon produced 'ever-new meanings', including 'secret ways to get rich [through] access to global, occult networks' ([Fisiy & Geschiere, 2001: 241](#)). Witchcraft epistemologies are, as [Nyamnjoh \(2001: 43\)](#) observes, 'widely shared and invoked, particularly in times of stress, misfortune and uncertainty'. Rumours emerged in Cameroon around a 'new witchcraft of wealth' that took nation-wide interest and fascination, associating concentrations of wealth with magical practices. At approximately the same time, negotiations were underway for the implementation of the Chad-Cameroon Oil Pipeline.

#### Dispersed oil infrastructures & witchcraft

The geographies of oil pipelines are distinct from the point-based geographies of extraction within oil-producing regions, in this case the Doba Basin of southern Chad. The concept of 'petro-violence' ([Watts, 1999](#)) has been developed by political geographers to note the particular violence that emerges within regions of point-based extraction. Petro-violence is characterised by ecological violence, social deprivation, criminality and violent resistance in a context of political corruption, rent-seeking and state violence with multinational support ([Le Billon, 2004; Obi, 1997; Okonta, 2008; Watts, 1999](#)). Petro-violence manifests in physical violence, often armed conflict, and is highly visible.

In the case of the Chad-Cameroon Oil Pipeline, the conceptualisation of a petro-specific violence does not sufficiently account for the dispersed geography of the 1070-m-long underground pipeline. The dispersed nature of the oil pipeline, unlike a spatially confined production and extraction zone, means that hundreds of different villages in this case, the pipeline passes beneath 238 villages and is within 2 km of 794 additional villages ([Lo, 2010: 155](#)) are drawn unevenly into the project, in heterogeneous ways according to their spatial proximity to the pipeline.

This spatial diffusion is one factor that has contributed to the lack of unified, collective or organised opposition movements against the pipeline between villages in Cameroon ([Murrey, 2015b](#)). Instead, engaging with the pipeline through the lens of structural violence illustrates that the pipeline both participates in a context of pre-existing structural violence and perpetuates new forms of political violence ([Carmody, 2009](#)) and social and ecological destruction ([Murrey, 2015a](#)). At the same time that wealth is unevenly distributed through the project, dispossession and risk are also unevenly distributed. This uneven distribution of dispossession and risk alongside an *inversely* uneven distribution of wealth and profits fits the pipeline project within the body of academic literature on forms of structural or slow violence ([Galtung, 1969; Nixon, 2011](#)), so named for their spatial and temporal dispersion(s) within networks of globalised capitalism.

On consortium maps, the pipeline runs straight and flat across territories that appear as clean voids; only a handful of villages are named in the pure, flat topographical space. [Andrew Barry \(2009: 69\)](#) employs the concept of ‘visible invisibility’ to capture the over-abundance of documents surrounding the otherwise ‘unseen’ underground Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan oil pipeline, designed as it was to be ‘safe, secure, unseen’. The uneven disposessions effected by oil pipelines in these landscapes where discursive and infra-structural erasures unite through processes that are similarly visibly invisibled are enacted through large-scale, complex bureaucratic structures. These structures are characterised by concentrations of private and political power that delegitimise the invisible spaces where the maximisation of profit shapes policy negotiations (see [Thorne & Kouzmin's, 2013](#) analysis of the ‘mutual interplay between visibility and invisibility’ in the operations of power and hegemony). Structural violence is perpetuated exactly through these intentional discursive and material erasures, which obscure the relationships between cause and effect, actors and actions, intangible infrastructures and tangible disposessions and bureaucratic procedures and consequent ecological and social destructions ([Murrey, 2015b](#)). Unseen phenomena are intrinsically hard to measure and document and, therefore, to contest. For some in Nanga and Kribi, epistemologies of *la sorcellerie* lay bare these uneven socio-political infrastructures ([Fig. 4](#)).

The construction of the Chad-Cameroon Oil Pipeline was sub-contracted to France's Spie-Capag group and the United States' Fluor and Willbros between 2000 and 2003. People in Nanga and Kribi describe pipeline work crews arriving on their land with little or no notice. They recall that bulldozers first destroyed crops and then labour crews arrived to lay the pipe. There was little sense among people who or what had taken control of the place. As quickly as the construction crews arrived, they were gone again. The construction process took approximately two weeks in each village, although places where labour camps were erected, like Nanga and Kribi, experienced longer integration and construction periods, of up to three months. When the crews departed, they left behind a barren terminal in the otherwise forested landscape of the equatorial Congo Basin, which stretches as far as the eye can see in both directions.

In Mpango, a village nearby Kribi, the mystery of the pipeline project was captured best by those living in the shadows cast by the communications tower of the pipeline's pressure-reducing regulator station near the Atlantic coast. The sub-sea pipeline extends 11 km into the Gulf of Guinea to the Floating Storage and Offloading (FSO) vessel, where crude is exported on tankers for refining and eventually for exchange on the global market. From Kribi's beaches, the FSO flare is just visible on the ocean's skyline. One resident of Mpango, Sewa, told me, ‘COTCO operates like a religious sect. It is a total mystery what goes on over there’.<sup>4</sup> He indicated with a wave of his hand towards the workstation tower that was a couple hundred yards from where he was seated near the *gendarmerie* checkpoint at Mpango's entrance. Sewa continued, ‘All we know is that new uniforms and new trucks go in but they never come out. We have the impression that they do magic in there’ (Sewa D., in Mpango, 02/01/13). COTCO security personnel strictly monitor the regulator station, which occupies 5 ha of land between Kribi and Mpango. Cameroonians are not allowed onto the site and barricades (made with organic debris) are set-up at intervals to hinder movement off the road (Sewa D., in Mpango, 02/01/13).

The destruction of much of the physical proof of the pipeline rendered the pipeline invisible to those who had not experienced it first-hand. At the same time that the object cannot be seen, the social and ecological violence(s) of the pipeline (including the destruction of water sources, aggravated hunger following the destruction of plantations along the pipeline right-of-way, increased distances to walk to new plantations, which tended to be farther distances from peoples' homes, to name a few) are materially and visibly acute (Murrey, 2015a). In Nanga, community members witnessed the effacing of the pipeline's infrastructure through the destruction of the temporary work camp located outside the town. A group of temporary labourers who had been employed during the pipeline's construction phase revealed that the heavy machinery used during construction was dismantled and buried upon completion. The roofless, half-demolished buildings of the former labourer work camp are testimony of the attempted erasing or concealment of the pipeline's passage. The destruction of these 'surplus' materials, which could very well have been used by nearby villages, echoes the stories of abandonment and disregard that people describe experiencing at the hands of the shadowy figures of COTCO employees and politicians who profited through the project.

### Invisible power & unseen actors

Indeed, some of the most heated debates in Kribi and Nanga are those in which people struggled to identify the culprits or actors responsible for the mismanagement of the pipeline project. When pressed to explain the processes of crop destruction or the actions and actors involved in the pipeline's implementation, construction and decision-making network, people sometimes used frameworks of *la sorcellerie* to refer to shadowy figures compelled by greed with no apparent care for the wellbeing of other humans. Pipeline processes were described as or likened to acts of poisoning, a favoured mechanism of destruction used by *les sorciers*. So that while invisible powers came together to produce the pipeline, *la sorcellerie* confronts the epistemic challenge of knowing unseen infra-structural and technical systems that cannot be sensed in their entirety because they are deliberately hidden (either underground or behind highly securitised boundaries). In epistemologies of *la sorcellerie*, the material and immaterial are not dichotomous. The visible material of the world is understood as emerging out of a profusion of invisible forces that come in and out of visible realms.

In narratives of the pipeline in Nanga and Kribi, consortium employees were variously associated with or described as *les sorcières/sorciers*, as evildoers or as greedy, bad neighbours. People sometimes understood the employees of the Cameroonian national oil oversight body (COTCO) as embodiments of a dangerous and hurtful threat: operating in unseen boardrooms, zooming past in gleaming new vehicles and disappearing behind the barbed wire-topped fences of the COTCO stations but always just beyond the reach of local people.

In Mpango, Frankie said, 'We see them enter, [but] they never exit. We can never go in ourselves. Maybe we need to go to Douala [the financial capital] to ask permission or to apply to work ... they don't even make purchases at local markets! They never come down to our village and we have no contact with them ... Look first at all the battalion of security that keeps us out of the worksite. Their security is like a military base' (Frankie N., Mpango, 30/01/ 2013). Frankie emphasised that COTCO employees, despite their close proximity to the village, fail to engage with the people of Mpango except through exclusion: power and wealth exists all



around, making the exclusion all the more acute. Similarly, during a discussion with Sandra in Bilolo, she said:

Sometimes you see COTCO people; they don't even say hello; they just get directions to the pipeline and go into the brush to do whatever they do in there. Not even a thank you ... [Before] they came for [village] reunions [meetings] to educate us about what to do if we see a little bit of black liquid ... they [would] bring a little envelope with 3000 CFA and tell the chief to sign that he is okay with it. (Sandra B., Bilolo, 07/02/2013)

These stories allude to the COTCO employees as misbehaving and disrespectful foreign visitors. COTCO employees and representatives fail to observe basic salutations. Sandra describes COTCO employees as *chiche* (unreasonably ungenerous) with villagers, meaning they do not fulfil the neighbourly norms of reciprocity and deference. Similarly, in Bisiong, Christiane said,

they [COTCO] told their workers to never purchase food from the villages. They got their food and water from town [either Kribi or Douala] and brought it with them ... The local boys went to the bush to work ... [and found that] when you kill a serpent they take you off the job! They [COTCO employees] did not eat meat. They do mysterious things! (Christiane L., Bisiong, 07/03/ 2013)

Christiane associates COTCO with magical materials, for example pointing out their access to seemingly self-generating or exclusionary wealth, their affinity for visiting the bush or uncultivated forests and their lack of fear for dangerous animals, such as snakes. People remarked, for example, with confusion and exasperation that COTCO employees would walk into instead of around remote sections of bush. This propensity for walking into the forest for unknown reasons likens them to *les sorciers*, who practice magic in these areas of dark, mystical forest. In Nanga, Gisele explained in passing, 'you know, the forest is mystical' (*mystique*) to refer to why people in Nanga are hesitant to work trimming and slashing in the bi-annual clearing of the pipeline's right-of-way. The suspected affinity of COTCO employees for the forest and for the magic that resides there snakes, for example, are dangerous to non-*sorcières/sorciers* but their skin is a source of empowerment for *les sorciers* and reinforces their connections to *les choses mystérieuses* (Fig. 5).

The invisible domains of power, the demolition of pipeline buildings and the underground, liquid properties of petroleum give credence to understandings of oil as mysterious, dangerous and socially and environmentally poisoning. Watts (2001: 205-6) describes the magical qualities surrounding oil as 'petro-fetishism' or as a sort of 'petro-magic'. This petro-magic is likened to the 'El Dorado Effect', where wealth is 'ephemeral, here today gone tomorrow ... in the popular imagination, oil produces all manner of extraordinary magical events and mythic properties' (Watts, 2001: 206). Similarly, Fernando Coronil (1997: 370) explains the magic of Venezuela's exceptional petro-wealth: 'politicians [were trans-figured] into magicians who embodied the myth of progress and gave it specific form.' This petro-magic mirrored, he explains, in particular ways the colonisation of the Americas by Spanish conquerors, particularly the system 'which treated wealth less as the result of productive labor than as the reward for activities not directly connected with production, including conquest, plunder, or pure chance' (Coronil, 1997: 390). Similarly, Mandana E. Limbert (2010) writes of the abrupt socio-political, economic and infra-structural transformations brought about by an influx of oil wealth in Bahla, Oman. She recounts the mixed feelings of joy and fear: 'Or is it a dream? Will all the apparent wealth and infrastructural

glamour disappear ... as mysteriously and suddenly as it appeared?’ (Limbert, 2010: 3). Not only is oil wealth seemingly magical in its effortlessness and dearth of labouring, but also in its material invisibility (as explained above). The subterranean aspect of the crude reaffirms the surreal or even supernatural origins of the wealth. In Cameroon, petroleum is not associated with the super-natural for its self-generating wealth but, instead, for the enchantments needed to access the networks of power through which that wealth can be acquired.

### An uneven distribution of petro-wealth

At the same time that the oil consortium engineered infra-structural erasures designed to render invisible the pipeline and its effects (underground pipelines also restrict possibilities for syphoning and sabotage), the influx of oil wealth has remained acutely visible. During the immediate construction period, reimbursement and compensation funds combined with the salaries of male migrant labourers flooded rural areas (which were previously dominated by subsistence agriculture) with cash. In the temporary boom between 2000 and 2003, the cost of food staples increased significantly. The juxtaposition of the influx of this wealth particularly the ostentatious wealth of the foreign and migrant labourers with the lived poverty of the majority of those along the pipeline inspired jealousy, anger and suspicion. The widespread distrust is reflected in speculative *kongossa* (rumours) around *la sorcellerie*.

This *kongossa* was employed at both the scale of the nation and the scale of the family. It was suspected, for example, that politicians and government officials benefited from keeping people in the dark about the project. These apprehensions fit the pipeline within a larger socio-political narrative, as politicians were accused of partaking in sorcery as a mode of amassing power and wealth. This includes popularised stories of politicians feeding off the energies of political opponents or sexual partners. President Paul Biya, infamously a member of the Rosicrucian Order (a secret society), is rumoured to have come to power through a secret occult initiation with the country's first President, Ahmadou Ahidjo. While he named himself the ‘*l'homme lion*’ (the lion-man) as an indication of his status as the ‘king of the jungle’, political opponents liken Biya to a snake in the grass because of his propensity to stay out of the national and international limelight, rarely appear in public and consistently avoid interviews (Emvana, 2005).<sup>5</sup> Michel Roger Emvana (2005: 27) describes his rule as, ‘*le biyaïsme*’: a complex, undulating and mythical (‘*mythique*’) power of ‘*l'apathie, à l'absentéisme, à la fainéantise*’ (apathy, absenteeism and inaction). Popular idioms connect widespread political corruption with forms of *la sorcellerie*. For example, the notion that a political post is ‘*une mangeoire*’ as in, ‘*il est dans une mangeoire qui n'a pas de nom*’ (he is in a never-ending trough that can't even be named) reveals the sentiment that political power is an opportunity to eat, feed or consume indefinitely, in the same way *les sorciers/sorcières* (witches) feed from the souls and labours of their victims.

Even non-believers (or sceptics) employ epistemologies of *la sorcellerie* to expose illegitimate and dishonest wealth generation, such as the uneven distribution of wealth through the pipeline's reimbursement policies. Along the pipeline a handful of non-believers deployed narratives of *la sorcellerie* in inverse: here *la sorcellerie* is a form of wealth generation practiced by imitator *marabouts* or imitator *sorcières/sorciers* through elaborate and often time-intensive ploys designed to trick *les mougous* (naïve folk) into believing the

‘fake *marabout*’ possesses magical powers. By convincing the victim (usually targeted for their pre-existing access to wealth) that the ‘fake *marabout*’ possess magical powers, a sum of money is requested to *désensorceler* (disenchant) a curse placed on the person that threatens to end their privilege or power.

The association with politics and wealth is more than speculation. Michael Rose (2012: 59) describes this propensity for petro-wealth to disappear as ‘the slippery nature of oil revenue- s’ dlikening the fluid and liquid material properties of oil to its similarly ‘slick’ and vanishing profits. The governments of both Cameroon and Chad are distinctively opaque, with each publishing ‘virtually no information’ on their annual budgets (Rose, 2012: 81). Between 1977 and 2006, for example, 54 per cent of Cameroonian oil revenues were unaccounted for, i.e., they slipped silently out of public view (Rose, 2012: 59). Shortly after the pipeline began pumping oil in 2003, a Cameroonian newspaper, *Le Messenger*, reported that between November 1982 and September 2011, approximately 2000 million CFA Francs (4,138,000\$US) had been misappropriated by high-ranking government officials and transferred to personal bank accounts in Switzerland, France, the United States and the West Indies (Takougang, 2004: 111; see also Mentan, 2003: 112). The report sparked widespread suspicion of this underbelly of wealth creation that was evident in people's characterisations of COTCO and government officials in relation to the Chad-Cameroon Oil Pipeline. Through epistemologies of *la sorcellerie*, the buried materialities of the pipeline, the unseen actors of the oil consortium and the uneven distribution of wealth are likened to the invisible malevolent forces of power within witchcraft epistemologies. These epistemologies, in this way, reflect a sophisticated articulation of invisible social, political and material infrastructures.

### Resistance & *la sorcellerie*

Embedded within the connections between petro-wealth, petro-infrastructure and witchcraft are possibilities of a witchcraft epistemology that critiques capitalist extraction and ‘speaks back’ to its violence(s). On the Chadian side of the Chad-Cameroon Oil Pipeline, for example, Steven Reyna (2011) looks at the potential for witchcraft practices to open up space for direct opposition within local contexts through his analysis of the lionmen combatants in southern Chad who targeted employees of TOTCO [Chad Oil Transportation Company]. Orange-clad construction flagmen (who were migrant labour-epistemology people are ‘allowed to pursue his or her own needs, but not greed’. Agency in this paradigm is much different from that stressed in Euro-American and capitalist ideologies, where the focus is on the principality of the individual. In Cameroon, agency is one of interconnectedness and ‘harmony between individual interests and group expectations’ as people are expected to pursue their own diverse avenue towards individual self-worth while maintaining a faithful and respectful eye on collective wellbeing (Nyamnjoh, 2001). These epistemologies inform the social realities along the pipeline and reveal seemingly irreconcilable differences in the epistemologies of Cameroonians and the teleology of individualism and profit that are at the core of corporate practices. As Ngoulo Ngali emphasised:

[COTCO] needs to look at their relationship with the public. No one in this village has ever touched anyone in COTCO. But it is like they are not human. How can you install yourself in a village and the first thing you do is turn your back on the village? And they say they are well educated! You would think that we were chez-COTCO [in their house] instead of the contrary. (Ngoulo Ngali, Mpango, 2013)

By associating COTCO with sorcerers, people conduct an important censoring of the individualistic procedures and practices of the pipeline. These censoring narratives demand respect for life in a context where the oil consortium is characterised as being a 'bad neighbour' and as having a 'bad heart' (Marceline N. near the speed of passing cars, astounding locals with precise readings of vehicle speed. People interpreted the radar guns to be an indication of witchcraft practices, as they mysteriously allowed the flagmen to know a car's speed. These rumours incited fear and anger and, Reyna argues, 'creat[ed] a desire to oppose' the TOTCO flagmen. This 'desire to oppose' manifested through subsequent rumours that shape shifting lionmen (powerful witchdoctors who transform into lions to hunt and consume the witches that endanger their communities) were attacking the flagmen. These rumours, Reyna argues, functioned as powerful resisting forces within the Doba Basin, challenging the authority of TOTCO and the oil consortium and creating a narrative of local empowerment.

Although there were no similar narratives of lionmen in Nanga and Kribi, Cameroonian epistemologies of *la sorcellerie* provide a situated framework through which people understand the structural violence of the pipeline and, moreover, they establish a narrative of how the world *should* be arranged and how people *should* self-comport in ways that everyone's needs and wellbeing are met (Nyamnjoh, 2001). Emphatically, epistemologies of witchcraft castigate COTCO and the oil consortium as 'bad neighbours', dispossessing local people and failing to observe even the most rudimentary courtesies. In Bipindi, a village between Mpango and Ebomé near Kribi, Blanche told me,

We have a memory of the pipeline. In our tradition, when an event occurs, there should be a task [or a ceremony] that shows that [it] has happened. But in fact, no, we have no [such] good memory of the pipeline. There was no good act to show that it happened ... the moment that our plantations were destroyed, we arrived one day to find it so [and] we started to cry, but no one wanted to listen, no one wanted to take our hands ... (Blanche, Bipindi, 10/02/2013)

Epistemologies of *la sorcellerie* provide a powerful language against selfishness, greed, individualism and domination. They provide commentary on forms of social violence and domination and rebuke them. Nyamnjoh (2001: 31) explains that in such an Kribi, 16/09/12). According to epistemologies of *la sorcellerie*, violence occurs naturally and all humans have the potential for violence and greed; but violence is emphatically negative for the wellbeing of the community and is curtailed by a framework of social and familial responsibility and expectation (Nyamnjoh, 2001).

Epistemologies of *sorcellerie* might provide a metacritique of those uneven violence(s) that arise from unseen networks of power in a global financial context marked by enchantments, shadow players and the magical production of wealth through financialisation. Global financial 'enchantments' are bound up within the pernicious greed of the 'economic underworld' (Akerlof & Romer, 1993) and include, for example, speculative bubbles, derivative swapping, shadow banking, financial 'hidden hands', the swift devaluation of currencies, volatile exchange rates, insolvent institutions and the

mystifications of central banking. The obscure financial and policy transactions and transfers of hydrocarbon- dependent economies are likewise a form of financial enchant- ment. It should be reassuring that there are epistemologies that account for these invisible forces compelled by greed, particularly as a significant body of work on structural and slow violence is precipitated by the notion that scholar-activists should be compelled to ‘render visible’ this otherwise ‘unseen’ violence (this is a central theme, for example, of Rob [Nixon's 2011](#) powerful appraisal of ‘slow violence’).

Might, then, Cameroonian popular epistemologies provide a framework for an imaginary capable of resisting ‘the economic and cybernetic “babble” of the “neoliberal project”’ and its individual- istic nature ([Thorne & Kouzmin, 2013](#): 125)? Might these episte- mologies open up space for a metacritique of the imperceptible global financial flows that constitute the ‘oil ontology’ ([Szeman, 2007](#)) of hydrocarbon capitalism? Epistemologies of *la sorcellerie* are well suited to *name* and *condemn* the violence(s) of hydrocar- bon extraction in Cameroon; however, we must first come to terms with the intra-communal violence(s) embedded within *practices* of witchcraft, particularly in extractive landscapes where social tensions are exacerbated by the uneven distribution of petro- wealth.<sup>6</sup>

### Jealousy & conflict when ‘La Sorcellerie Ne Vient Jamais De Loin’

The construction of the pipeline brought with it a certain temporary euphoria in the lives of people along its course. Alongside a widespread local campaign by the oil consortium to promote the pipeline as a development vehicle, people thought that the pipeline would translate into permanent wealth for their communities. Families that customarily made less than 200\$US a year suddenly had access to reimbursement and compensation lump sums of several thousand dollars, with, they said, little sense of the temporality of this wealth and the long-term ramifications of the destruction of their plantations. Much like the financial *escroquerie* (scams) of the fake *marabout*, people were ‘tricked’ out of their land through promises of wealth (Theo O., Kribi, 02/15/ 13).

In Kribi and Nanga, people's access to the pipeline project's wealth was limited and, on many occasions, people reported their reimbursement and compensation monies being appropriated by those with access to networks of power. COTCO employees as well as political leaders and bureaucrats with local power and regional power were suspected of having alternately ‘sacrificed’ local people to ensure their own profit (by not ensuring proper environmental oversight, for example) or as having ‘eaten’ the reimbursement and compensation monies rightfully belonging to villagers. The despotic underbelly of wealth and power creation is understood as existing (albeit necessarily out-of-sight). Power is understood indirectly and with an awareness of its invisible components. At the same time, the uneven distribution of wealth, dispossession and risk affected by the pipeline caused jealousy, unease and distrust among community members, resulting in rupture and conflict because frustrations were directed at family members and neigh- bours. In this sense, the pipeline intensified friction within the community based on wealth inequality and jealousy. Indeed, peo- ple's accounts reveal anger, jealousy and tension over the re- imbursements allocated from pipeline damages. Theo said,



The pipeline created huge discord between families. The forest was touched [i.e. farmed] by me, [so] if I do not give millions of CFA [to my family members] that creates jealousy. Even my brothers think my papers of reimbursement were fake and that I lied, that I was keeping money from them. I even heard stories of assassination like that in Lolodorf [a nearby town]. That project was poison! (Theo O., Kribi, 02/15/13)

People report being uninformed, poorly informed or misled about the financial benefits of the project. As such, most people report spending all of their reimbursement monies within the first year. These were monies calculated by the World Bank and oil consortium to last the six to seven years that it takes the fruit bearing trees cultivated in the area to produce. In Mpango outside of Kribi, André said it best: ‘The pipeline was like a mirage: at the beginning we saw it like a beautiful thing, but it was corrupt inside’ (N. André, 30/01/2013).

The exacerbation of poverty that accompanied the pipeline and the simultaneous creation of new economic inequalities tore families apart and set people against each other. Because reimbursement was issued individually in spite of the wide-spread local practice of collectively managing land under the custody of the head of the family, families report being caught up in disputes over the allocation and use of reimbursement funds due to speculation that family members were not properly sharing. Reimbursements were often not spent, as the consortium deemed necessary, on reinvesting in seeds, land and labour for the destroyed crops. Reimbursements issued to an individual were generally split up between extended families (including uncles, aunts, cousins and in-laws), so as to give to each family member what was considered their share. These shares were subsequently divided into smaller sums and spent on immediate material needs: school fees, medications, doctor's visits, food and sometimes to ‘*faire la coq*’ (or to ‘strut like a rooster’) and impress others through *le farrotage* or excessive spending and giving (for more on visible displays of wealth, power and *le farrotage* in Cameroon see [Malaquais, 2001](#); [Mbembe, 2002](#); [Rowlands, 2011](#)).

In cases where people were properly reimbursed, the valorisation of visible displays of power and wealth undermined the process of reconstructing plantations after their destruction during pipeline construction. The politics of power in Cameroon are such that sizeable social pressure is exerted to ensure that people share power and wealth among family and community members. Adding to this is a culture that venerates visible displays of conspicuous consumption. In many instances reimbursement for the destruction of plantations was the first occasion for rural and peri-urban people nearby Kribi and Nanga to enter into the privileged spaces of wealth spectacle. Of course, those with institutional power are first and foremost to engage in rituals of extravagance and wealth; this includes the president, who is renown for his multi-month European vacations. However, when practiced at the lowest socio-economic levels, by people living in the rural villages and peri-urban neighbourhoods of Cameroon, these practices are drawn upon to dismiss people as unthinking, irresponsible and wasteful. This was evident during my conversations with figures in positions of power, including COTCO employees, who dismissed people's claims that the pipeline brought about new poverties and disposessions by arguing that poverty is a reflection of people's propensity for irresponsible spending and partying. According to a former COTCO programmer, people ‘drank’ and ‘partied’ away reimbursements only to ‘cry’ and ‘complain’ when their plantations were not replaced ([Steven Coll's 2012](#) discussion of the project's reimbursement likewise reflects this notion that people were irresponsible in their money managing). Consortium and government officials blamed villagers for ‘improperly investing reimbursements’, implying that the failure of the project was a result of local mismanagement of reimbursement funds. The consortium's disregard for existing

tenants of social interdependence in Cameroon, alongside peoples' misunderstandings of the brevity of reimbursement in a context where petro-wealth is distributed unevenly across class, gender, time and space, created a context for intra-communal violence and an ideal space for witchcraft accusations, further rupturing the communities. [Omolade Abundi \(2011: 106e107\)](#) observes a similar connection between the illusions of wealth within extractive communities and localised violence in the Niger Delta, elucidating the relationship between the material infrastructures of extraction (as 'platforms of possibilities' for material wealth generation) and macro-level conflict that accompanies oil extraction (what he terms 'pipelines of violence').

In one case, a woman told me that the pipeline destroyed her family's plantation and that her brother, Roger, was 'driven mad with jealousy' under the impression that his father had become enormously wealthy through the reimbursement process. According to his sister, who lives in a village outside Nanga, Roger and his father, Crispin, argued for several years over the family's reimbursement, which was issued to Crispin. Roger was not satisfied with his father's assertions that the money had been spent and felt betrayed by his father, eventually growing to hate him. Believing that his father was selfishly keeping the money to himself, Roger shot his father in the chest and then sought out his father's second wife, Afana, and shot her several times, killing both. A stray bullet grazed the torso of a neighbour's ten year-old child. Roger's half-sister, sick inside the house, died a few hours after the shooting. A neighbour told me that the sister's tongue turned black just before her death and rumours started soon after that the third death was the result of witchcraft and that Roger was possessed. For Roger's sister and two neighbours, this is a case of greed-induced witchery: the social ruptures caused by the pipeline exasperated pre-existing dissatisfactions and triggered homicide. A young man living near Kribi succinctly described the impasse, 'It is lamentable. It hurts so much. We hate to even speak of [the pipeline]. Not only did they not bring us development or good things, they are in the middle of creating a big conflict in the community. We need to create structures that live' (Frankie, Mpango, 03/03/ 2013).

Epistemologies of *la sorcellerie* engage with issues of personal ambition, inequality and power. The work of [Peter Geschiere \(1997, 2013\)](#) is insightful in highlighting the relationship between witchcraft, accumulation and family relationships in Cameroon. Witchcraft accusations and violence unfold within what Geschiere describes as a 'triad of uncertainty' (comprised of witchcraft, intimacy and trust) that reveals deep anxieties regarding intimacy and trust ([Geschiere, 2013: 22](#)). This triad is conceived of as 'constantly shifting' in relation to a 'continuous and uncertain struggle [to] establish ... or maintain ... trust' ([Geschiere, 2013: 23](#)). This particular sociality of power, as intimate relationships are entangled with jealousies and anxieties ([Geschiere, 2013](#)), can have violently destructive consequences within extractive landscapes. Geschiere asks, 'If witchcraft is the unsettling realization that intimacy can be terribly dangerous, how is it possible to build nonetheless the degree of trust necessary to live and work with one's intimates?' (2013: ix). This characteristic of *la sorcellerie* the association of *la sorcellerie* with intimate distrust and jealousy means that instead of expressing frustrations and anger towards pipeline employees or government officials, people accuse family members or close acquaintances of mistreatment, malice and greed. These accusations, in turn, fracture families and weaken community solidarity. Importantly, the problem should not be likened to one of 'traditional' culture; it is, instead, an inability to cope with the complex, structural forms of violence that (re)shape everyday

experience, transform landscapes and aggravate social tensions within extractive landscapes. The macro-level socio-political transformations in contexts of structural violence sometimes manifest in emotional and psychological violence(s) at the micro-level (Moyo, 2008: 425). Not only does this contribute to the dispossessions of the pipeline project, but also such community fracturing risks expediting future exploitative projects by pitting people against each other (Fig. 6).

## Final thoughts

The exploitation of fossil fuels is a crucial component of *la mangeoire* the magical promise of unlimited profit and never-ending consumption of hydrocarbon capitalism. Imre Szeman (2007, 2012) identifies the capitalist epistemology as one deeply and complexly entrenched within oil. Humanity, Szeman argues in reference to Euro-America, has an 'oil epistemology': knowledge of the world and senses of the world arise within and because of the particular properties and relationships of 'hydrocarbon capitalism', or capitalism since the twentieth century (Watts, 1999: 1). Oil is at the heart of modern capitalism and without it the trajectory of capitalism, since its emerging development in 1765, would have been irrevocably dissimilar. We would be without cars, air travel, plastic consumer goods, and the communication revolution. Contemporary senses of being in the world and one's relations to others are imbedded within ideas of what exists and what is possible according to a history, present and future *with oil* (Szeman, 2007). Might an epistemology of witchcraft resist the epistemology of oil?

Cameroonian epistemologies of *la sorcellerie* offer situated illustrations that total knowledge or total transparency may not be obligatory for emancipatory activist-intellectual projects precisely because people in Nanga and Kribi have a vocabulary and an epistemology for describing the relationship between illicit power, invisible processes of economic domination and violence. For the last fifteen years or so, a dominant policy concern has centred upon the drive for ever-increasing transparency, total exposure, total knowledge and/or total accountability as a means to navigate or reduce the economic forms of exploitation and oppression imbedded within the standard operating procedures of hydrocarbon capitalism and this has particularly been the case in transnational petroleum regimes, which have historically operated without transparency. Yet in a global media and publicity context where transnational corporations and politicians deftly 'flux' between the visible and invisible to transfix the public and continue personal and corporate enrichment (Thorne & Kouzmin, 2013), there is an inherent risk embedded within an over-emphasis on the importance of 'the visible' or exposing 'the invisible' in extractive projects.

In answering this question on the Cameroonian side of the pipeline, we realize that an inquiry into epistemologies of *la sorcellerie* vis-à-vis hydrocarbon capitalism must deal with a central contradiction: the dual longing for a powerful anti-capitalist worldview and the angers, pains and resentments that unfold in communities dispossessed by modernity's oil ontology. Within some post-development and poststructuralist literature, there is an implicit and important turn towards non-Euro-American epistemologies to resist capitalist violence and to provide alternate 'world imaginings' (Escobar, 2001; Mignolo, 2000). Cameroonian epistemologies of witchcraft, as this article has shown, are capable of capturing and explaining the ways that people move in and out of unseen spaces, through unseen processes, which result

in hyper- visible structural forms of violence. However, on-the-ground practices of *la sorcellerie* sometimes reify or aggravate the violence of extraction. This double role of witchcraft in Cameroondas both (i) an epistemological framework to criticise illicit accumulation, inequality and dispossession as well as (ii) a provoker of intimate or intra-communal violence must be taken into account in an analysis of the complex intersections between ‘local’ epistemologies, trans- national politics and extractive geographies.

This article has emphasised the paradoxical and ambivalent roles of witchcraft epistemologies in Kribi and Nanga without providing ‘solutions’ precisely because there are no easy or tidy resolutions. Although articulations of *la sorcellerie* in Nanga and Kribi are empowering in their critique of the violence(s) of extraction and their ability to expose the concealed practices and rhetoric of extractive capital, this article has exposed the limitations of such articulations within complex socio-political landscapes that aggravate jealousy and mistrust amongst family and community. This paradox of witchcraft is suggestive of the difficulty of putting emancipatory epistemologies *into practice*. The sub-field of political geography is well placed to continue the intellectual project of attending to the complexities of understandings of power in place (always concrete, actual, on-the-ground) where both domination and resistance come into being through complex visible and invisible networks of power.

## Note

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## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> The terms *witchcraft*, the *occult*, *magic*, *sorcery* and *enchantment* are used to refer to a wide range of activities and beliefs. Each of these terms is rooted in western European early modern period (from the sixteenth to seventeenth century) belief-systems and, as such, perpetrate a discursive violence when applied to African contexts. The term *witchcraft* in the Christian Eurocentric imagination holds non-theistic, polytheistic, animist and/or ancestor-centric cosmologies as evil and/or primitive (Hutton, 1999). While the terms have European origins, Cameroonian *la*

*sorcellerie* did not come into being through colonial encounters. The terms *la sorcellerie* and witchcraft are used interchangeably here although preference is given for the French form (as that most commonly used in Cameroon).

<sup>2</sup> Chevron-Texaco later changed its name to Chevron Corp. and in June 2014 Chevron Corp. sold its 25 per cent stake to the Republic of Chad for 1.3 billion\$US. <sup>3</sup> A wide scholarship reveals that witchcraft epistemologies have played significant historical and contemporary roles in informing the ways that diverse peoples across Africa, the Caribbean and Asia situate themselves amidst changing social and economic conditions (Ashforth, 1996; Ekholm Friedman, 2011; Eves, 2000; Fisiy & Geschiere, 2001; Geschiere, 1997; Moore & Sanders, 2001; Rajah, 2005; Schmoll, 1993; Shaw, 1997).

<sup>4</sup> The interviews discussed herein occurred near Nanga-Eboko and Kribi, Cameroon between August 2012 and April 2013. All names are pseudonyms except when the respondent has explicitly indicated a preference to be named (see Murrey, 2015a: 17, for a more detailed discussion of this technique).

<sup>5</sup> Biya is also sometimes called *le sphinx d'Etoudi* in reference to his immovable power at *Le Palais d'Etoudi* in Yaoundé.

<sup>6</sup> ‘Witchcraft never comes from far’ (i.e., *la sorcellerie* is practiced within the family or within the community).

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