



**FROM PREACHING THE CHRISTIAN GOSPEL TO AFRICANS,
TO PREACHING AFRICAN SOCIAL WISDOM TO EUROPE:
REVEALING SUPPRESSED TRUTHS IN THE
COLONIAL ARCHIVE IN CAMEROON**

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Abstract:

When it comes to stories (even fabrications) that reveal Africa as a dark continent, a continent of emptiness and of primitivism, one is likely to find millions of documents proliferated by Europeans to continuously justify their overrule over the continent and its people. But when it comes to literature especially written by Europeans who have experienced Africa objectively that confesses the potential of its people and their knowledge base and how this knowledge base can inform European social existence, such hardly exists. In this paper my aim is to reveal some studies carried out by European missionaries in Cameroon which went out of the way to recommend that amidst the social crisis that plagued Europe, and the human values of traditional society in Africa, there was need for a paradigm shift from preaching the Christian gospel to Africans to preaching African social wisdom to the Europeans. I contend that this position was contrary to Coloniality of power, being and knowledge which have guided Euro-African relations from the time of their early contact. That is why it has been consciously suppressed by the colonial archive.

Keywords: African social wisdom, Christian gospel, colonial archive, Coloniality

1. Introduction

The encounter between Africa and Europe became imperial and colonial in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (Suleiman, 2012:84). This contact and the

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subsequent subjugation of Africa to colonial rule was fuelled by the developments in the Age of Enlightenment; a term which captures a shift from a God-centred society to a Man-centred society, inaugurating what became known as Euro-North American-centric modernity (Noble, Straus et al, 1994:775). Beginning with a renewed confidence in the human capacity to discern the intelligibility of world and natural laws, it quickly shifted to the application of political and socio-economic thought in solving daily life problems. It was believed to be a period of "Mankind's final coming of age" (Childs, 2000:38) in which people sought to understand the world in a rational, logical and scientific way (Kitchin and Tate, 2000:16).

If there is one way that Africa came to be entangled with these developments in Europe, it is principally for the fact that, the 19th century which brought with it a shift in European consciousness about the outside world signalled great currents of change that were exported: Commerce, Christianity and Colonization. Popularly known as the three Cs, they remained the main 'firestones' of imperialism. Apart from officialising the European invasion of foreign territories, enlightenment intimated that colonialism was not for Europe's self-aggrandizement, but a humanitarian challenge to give out a taste of western civilization to all other people (Brockway 1979:187) who were not part of Modern Europe and who, they believed did not possess such developmental prowess.

Such an attitude has historically provided a strong foundation on which to erect—both in Europe and outside—critiques of socially unjust practices. According to Decolonial Theorists (Maldonado-Torres, 2007; Grosfoguel, 2007; Mignolo; 2011; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013) there is need for more critical ways of understanding colonization and decolonization other than from the face value that school books have taught us that 'Europeans came to Africa for a humanitarian and civilizing mission' (Ndille,2016:7). This has opened the intellectual canvas towards the analysis of colonial activities in Africa as '*crucial structuring processes that have been actively operative in the modern world system in which Africa has been permanently entrapped*' (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013:331-353). When this is done one would realize that the Europeans who came to Africa as missionaries, colonial administrators, traders and explorers and the many sedentary speculators about Africa who never left Europe but were motivated by their own biases (racism not excluded) to write about Africa were never neutral research workers or writers. They were representatives of a tradition: of the West.

This tradition is embedded in Eurocentrism and Coloniality which have been defined by Samir Amin as '*bundles of western prejudices about other peoples; a banal form of ethnocentrism informed by a discursive terrain of racism, chauvinism and xenophobia*' (Amin 2009, 177-178). This conception was certainly not only underpinned by ignorance and a

mistrust of others, but was also fuelled by a desire to suppress and dominate other people for their own sake. This desire ensured that the information circulated about the suppressed and dominated proved that the place (Africa) and its people were of no epistemological value to the rest of the world and that their survival depended on imbibing the cultural heritages of the West. This ideology contributed in disseminating knowledge which proved that Africa was a place of darkness and in concealing indigenous knowledge which would have given Africa an alternative perception.

Enlightenment and the 'Emptiness' of Africa: Justifying why Africa Needed Europe

It was the responsibility of enlightenment writers to demonstrate that Africa needed European intervention. GWF Hegel for example described Africa 'as a truncated monstrosity', a 'land of childhood', 'enveloped in the dark mantle of night' because its inhabitants, 'the negro exhibited the natural man in his completely wild and untamed state (Zezeza 2006 quoted in Awasom 2009:3). To Hegel Africans had no wisdom of their own which could contribute to the development of humanity. They had no movement and no development to exhibit. If there was any evidence of development in Africa, it could not have possibly been due to the efforts of Africans themselves but from outside forces such as Hamites who were light-skinned peoples of non-negro origin. This Hamitic theory exaggerated the role of the external forces in the history and development of sub-Saharan Africa. The theory was to show the developmental advances of African peoples as being dependent on external stimuli arising from contact with one of the branches of the Caucasian race who were the fountains of civilization (Awasom 2009:4). Rudyard Kipling on his part called Africans 'half-devil; half child' (Kipling 1962).

Particularly for Cameroon and about the coastal people of Duala whom the Portuguese met in 1471 and with whom most of the European nations established trade contacts after that, a London Baptist Missionary to the area, Alfred Saker wrote in 1844; close to four centuries after that;

I cannot describe the condition in which I found the whole people. A book they had not seen; the commonest implements of husbandry and tools of all kinds were unknown to them... I was clothed but they were not.

(Underhill, 1958:40)

Writing to sponsors, friends and families, the early missionaries to Cameroon reported that they were alarmed by the level of 'primitivity' of the Cameroonian

societies; that the people practiced a religion which varied from monotheism to polytheism and ancestor worship; that the structure of most Cameroonian societies was very simple; with very few undifferentiated institutions for handling social needs and group functions; that there was generalization rather than specialization in the arts as it is found in more advanced cultures; that there was limited social contact thus limiting the sharing of ideas and experiences; that the social organization of 'tribes' was characterized by the existence of traditional practices and rites which (they; the missionaries) regarded as taboos; that there was a complete absence of science in its modern form which therefore led people to folkways, beliefs and attitudes which though useful to the needs of the traditional Cameroonian society at that time could not survive in a larger environment with conflicting experiences; that the traditional Cameroonian found by Europeans had no writing and consequently had not learnt to read; and that conservatism was a general characteristic of the Cameroonian. This made them resist change (in Mac Ojong, 2008).

While Alfred Saker and his missionary colleagues were speaking subjectively of people they had encountered, the writings of Hegel and many of the other modernist writers about Africa were in the majority based on guesswork and hearsay. Such works unfortunately remained quite influential and informed European perception of Africans south of the Sahara for a very long time. These writings not only guided European politico-economic activities in Africa but most especially, occasioned a pseudo socio-humanitarian policy of civilization, modernization and development on the continent. For all the colonial administrations and missionary bodies, the fact remained that European cultures reflected the unique and progressive manifestation of the metaphysical order of history (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013:10). It was strongly upheld in Europe that non-western societies were static and traditional, and for them to be able to move towards modernity (development), their traditional 'primitive' values had to be displaced by modern (Western) ones such as Western Education and Christianity.

In the words of Thomas Macaulay, Christianity and Western Education were intended 'to set out a new career of improvement' ensuring that, '*a new character is imprinted on the colonized*' (Hall 2008:785). As a colonial administrator, Macaulay is said to have been shocked by his encounter of what he termed 'the extremes of India' and quickly concluded that 'it was the duty of Britain to offer their intellectual cultivation to benighted others' (ibid). This perspective is perfectly captured in the poem, *The White Man's Burden* which tells Europeans that it is their responsibility '*to seek another's profit and work another's gain.*' (Kipling 1962). In Cameroon, after over three centuries of pillage occasioned by the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade, the 'selflessness' of enlightenment Europe led to the determination that;

Following what we apprehend to be the clear indications of providence and in compliance with the representations of our brethren in Jamaica, we (The London Baptist Mission) determine, in reliance on the divine helping, to commence a Mission to Western Africa.

(Quoted in Ngwei, 1975:27)

To ensure the success of the mission, the Missionaries who were to engage in this arduous task were instructed that;

In your field of labour, you will be probably called to engage in the establishment of schools and churches. This work is highly important... but while general knowledge is beneficial and much of it exceedingly valuable, you will remember that it is the diffusion of knowledge, as direct means of advancing western civilization, which is your proper subject. Let your plans therefore; provide the communication of the spiritual wisdom, with western secular instruction.

(Quoted in Venon-Jackson 1967:18)

The unquestioning believe in the 'positional superiority' of Western Civilization backed by the pseudo-humanitarianism of the time is said to have informed the understanding that the men who were engaged in the building of European colonial empires were doing so with the conviction that they were doing those they conquered a favour; of ultimately leading them to a higher standard of living and quality of government than that provided by their 'primitive' institutions. To successfully do this, significant proportions of energy and resources were put in place to spread Christianity and western knowledge and to conceal the rich knowledge heritage of the African people.

What Europeans knew but permanently concealed: The 'fullness' of African Epistemology

Some of the Europeans who initially visited Africa with a prejudicial mindset and who actually lived within African communities became humbled by the wealth of indigenous knowledge and wisdom which the people possessed. They marveled at the well-established nature of traditional society. A couple of them sought to study them. As early as the 1903, Missionaries H. Dorsch and (later) J. Ittmann (1936) became involved in studying some traditional Cameroonian societies either because they came to love them or because of their religious zeal. Dorsch's involvement is epitomized by the fact that he was involved in education and even more so in the study of *Akose*, the

Bakossi language. His grammar of the Bakossi language was published in 1911 after many years of hard research. Ittman, on the other hand was interested in every aspect of Bakossi life and his writings constitute one of the earliest and an unbeatable source of Bakossi tradition in written form. Others like those of Rene Bureau came up later (1962). What is clear is that these sources reveal the richness of traditional African values which to them would make Europe a better place to live in if Europeans were to borrow them.

Amongst the Bakossi of Cameroon for example, the sources (Dorch 1911; Arthur, 1931; Vaux, 1932; Ittmann, 1939 and Balz 1984) found that traditional governance and social regulation were built on three principal societies; the *Ahon*, *The Muankum* and the *Ngwe*. All these societies still exist and continue to play their roles in traditional Bakossi society. The studies described the *Ahon* as an aristocratic secret society made up of people who, in the past, had acquired wealth in cows and goats, and other economic, political and social fame. It was therefore, a symbol of social stratification. It performed a specific religious function at funerals. In Bakossi, death is a rite of passage to the world beyond and the *Ahon* was charged with preparing and effecting this passage especially for notables. Members of the *Ahon* through their initiation were seen as the custodians of traditional authority. At individual levels, their counsel was often sought where necessary in the village. They therefore assisted in peace building and in the maintenance of law and order. The *Ahon* also served as a higher judicial council or traditional senate where important matters regarding some senior personalities were handled and verdicts pronounced (Vaux 1932:13).

The studies also revealed that of significance to the *Ahon* were the immense spiritual powers that come with membership, the importance attached to symbolic objects, initiation rights and the rigour and pomp with which their public appearances are associated (Arthur 1931:2; Ittman 1936:16). Each *Ahon* society had a reserved area in the village called *mbuog* whose installation as recounted by missionary Balz (1984), went with the sacrifice of a slave in pre-colonial times (although this view is not shared by all informants) and whose attachment to artistic objects, absolute secrecy, and alleged use of medicines gave them the erroneous connotation of idol/demon worshippers—hence the *Duala* appellation *losango* and from where the desire to exterminate it emanated.

The *Muankum* on its part was found to be a mysterious spirit which appeared to Ngoe the founder of Bakossi in a loud voice in the forest. The spirit instructed that every Bakossi born male must “see him” (be initiated into *Mwankum*). Initiation involved some rituals and the swearing of oaths of secrecy. It also included some elderly counsel on manhood and courageousness, honesty and discipline (Dorsch 1911). *Mwankum* had both executive and religious powers in the community. As the executive power, it served as an instrument to discipline misbehaviour. What *Mwankum* spoke

was ultimately the law of the community. It maintained order within the family and beyond it. It was far from what Gutekunst (year) considers “*maintaining the women in fear and to make them submissive, as it was also very active against men’s antisocial behaviour such as theft, adultery and the practice of witchcraft*” (Balz, 1984).

In less grievous crimes *Mwankum* extracted a fine from the defaulter condemned as such by the community and in more serious atrocities, *Mwankum* had power to ban, exile or inflict capital punishment in consonance with members of the defaulter’s family. As a religious power, it was found that all the laws and customs came from the ancestors through *Mwankum*. The fear of the ancestors was sufficient to uphold the law as they could supernaturally punish those who went against it. The loud voice of *Mwankum*, served as the interpreter and amplifier of what the ancestors had to tell or give the community. In this respect, the moral authority of *Mwankum* was found to be more than human; being a messenger and intermediary between the living and the ancestors. It was also seen to be a harbinger of blessings, bringing “*food, children and all good things from the ancestors. By fulfilling these functions, Mwankum acquired holiness*” (Ittman 1936).

The *Ngwe* was described as an arm of traditional government; a meeting of the elderly and experienced men of the different families of the village or clan called the *Bengwe* (plural). It had legislative, judicial and the administrative powers. The *Bengwe* doubly served as the traditional legislative and executive councils making laws to regulate community existence, taking decisions regarding going to war and organizing public events such as community labour and feasts (Vaux, 1932:10-11). Vaux explained that while the *Ngwe* served as the community’s decision maker, the executing function was carried out by the *Mwankum*. Both *Ngwe* and the *Mwankum* therefore represented the double activity of government in Bakossiland. Membership into *Ngwe* was also through an initiation process; an entire period of formal traditional education lasting for over three weeks and ending in a graduation and an “admission-into-the-society” feast for which the entire village takes part.

It was an opportunity for the *Ngwe* initiate to gain spiritual powers from the ancestors and be introduced into adult life and community service (Ittman 1936). Balz, revealed (rather derogatorily) that in the past, naked dancing was part of the initiation process into *Ngwe*. This made the missionaries see them as ‘*a very obscene association of fetish people*’ (Balz, 1984:84). However, it is strongly held that if that was the case, naked dancing was more an expression of humility, truthfulness, and openness—qualities which were necessary for making peace and administering justice (Ndille and Ngome 2016:29). Other essences of *Ngwe* were seen in its objects: the broom, the bag, the stick, camwood, and the *Ngwe*-seat called *ebale*. Each member was expected to possess these

as a mark of honour and recognition in society. Medicines usually made from leaves were also a very original aspect of *Ngwe* with only a symbolic rather than magical end.

It could be seen that a few missionary and independent research appraisals of the Bakossi and other Cameroonian traditional societies revealed a picture contrary to the Eurocentric accounts about African lifestyles and values. Bakossi people, to use the above example, exhibited the dual religious and sociopolitical qualities mentioned in any definition of spirituality. These values were unique and accounted for the stability, harmony, peace and social cohesion which characterized pre-European Cameroonian societies but which also still influence village life today. Few of the studies by Europeans about traditional Cameroonian societies (Arthur 1931; Vaux, 1932; Ittmann 1936; 1943 and Bureau 1962; 1978) have revealed that contrary to the Eurocentric interpretations, carved objects were a significant aspect of traditional spirituality and constituted part of the religious paraphernalia but were not worshipped.

Particularly for the Bakossi, some of the European sources (Ittmann, 1943; Balz 1984) confirm that the people had no material or physical representations of God or his intermediaries' *benyame* and that the term idol worship or *losango* which was brought by the missionaries from the coastal *Duala* and *Bakweri* people was a misrepresentation of traditional Cameroonian spirituality. The sources also revealed that the laid down structures of traditional Bakossi society were complemented by official prayer days *Ndie* and other social regulations which went a long way to make the society an intricately woven-together traditional African society. In times of prosperity and good harvests, as well as in every kind of crisis such as war, epidemic, disease, poor yield etc, they prayed and offered sacrifices. This is to say that the traditional society had everything in place to ensure a harmonious living together. They had an understanding of sickness and how to go about treating any- scientifically or spiritually. They had laid down principles of going to war and making peace; and handling criminals. In this way, the morality of traditional society was strongly upheld. Sin was seen amongst them as a breach of, or failure to adhere to the sanctions recognized as the approved standards of social and religious conduct on the part of the individual and of society as a whole (Bureau,1962).

Hospitality to strangers was deeply enshrined in traditional social existence. Doors were only shut at night but never closed. Food was often prepared keeping in mind that one or two strangers would show up deep into the night. Hospitality was seen as planting crops in foreign lands which the planter or his/her children would evidently reap in this world or the one beyond (Balz, 1984). Chastity before marriage was compulsory. It was a disgrace for parents if their daughter 'knew a man' before marriage. Couples were also compelled to stay faithful. Truth was a moral virtue and

oath taking was a matter of principle (Ittmann, 1936). Social vices like stealing, fornication, adultery and dishonesty were seriously dealt with by traditional law and there were laid down penalties for every atrocity. It was also possible to make a man or his child fall ill suddenly (*echog*) if he was reluctant to follow or observe the laws of the land. In this case, the man was expected to offer a sacrifice locally called *nkanag* of a goat or sheep to make good the situation.

By presenting the above analysis of a traditional Cameroonian society, the point I am making is that almost from the beginning of their work in Cameroon, some European missionaries and administrators wrote about the institutions of traditional society, and the longer they stayed, the more they became concerned precisely about society, about the people's ways of living together. The reasons for this growing interest are not only to be found in what was going on in Cameroon, but also in the historical changes which at the same time affected missionaries' own societies in Europe, and through them, the general relationship between Africa and the West. These researchers therefore looked at the adverse effects of social change in Europe and how such changes were being transported to coastal Africa (what Ittmann terms; involuntary westernization). They began to recommend that the threatened traditional social institutions should be protected and preserved alongside the new religion of Christianity. They had become so impressed with the human values of traditional African societies that they gradually began moving away from the idea of Europeans preaching the Christian gospel to the Africans, and indeed began to recommend that Africans should rather preach African social wisdom to their countrymen at home. The works of the German Basel Missionary Johannes Ittman, who stayed in coastal Cameroon for many years up to 1940; and the French Catholic priest Rene Bureau, who worked there as a missionary in the 1950s are very categorical in making such a recommendation.

Johannes Ittman was a Basel Missionary to Cameroon who lived in Mangamba from 1911 until 1914, in Nyasoso from 1927 until 1929 and then in Buea and Victoria for another ten years. Confronted with the social changes then taking place in the late 1930s due to plantation economy and modern urban life amongst the Bakweri, Duala and other coastal towns and villages in Cameroon, he became more and more convinced that serious missionary work in Cameroon could not continue without the study of the Cameroonians' 'original ties and social orders' (Ittmann, 1936). His book entitled *Geistiger Volksbesitz der Kameruner im Blickfeld des Missionars* "Cameroonian cultural Heritage, or living traditions, as seen by the missionary (Ittmann, 1943) was developed out of these insights during the Second World War, when he lived for six years in an internment camp in Jamaica. Apart from revealing the values of the traditional

Cameroonian societies which he studied, the main stress of this book was not on the artistic heritage but on the traditional society. That is, man's various ties with his fellow man: social regulations, marriage and the family, the village and the ethnic group.

The new missionary view expounded by him, with influence from earlier studies of other East African societies (Gutmann, 1925; 1928; Johansen, 1931) was that, in the religious life of Cameroon, the old traditional systems of worship have been both fulfilled and replaced by the new (Christianity). However, the growing decadence of the society (which was evident in the rise of crime, social disorder, sexual immorality etc; which had been contained when traditional social regulations had their place) could be strictly linked to the replacement of such traditional values by Christianity in society. In his book, (Ittmann, 1943) he recommended that such religious change (from traditional to Christianity) should be prevented as much as possible; that whatever was good in traditional society should be actively protected by the missionaries, rather than being left to the destructive economic and social influences of westernization. He recognized the fact that secret societies; a topic on which he wrote many articles, (with the last one written in 1957) were 'forerunners of the state and in most respects, valuable instruments of peace making' and that membership into such societies should be encouraged and their role in social regulation and traditional administration should instead be re-enforced (Ittmann, 1957: 48-49).

Since in Ittman's days his fellow missionaries were far from accepting that so much thought and time should be spent on Cameroonian society- apart from learning the Duala and Mungaka languages, which they did- he was obliged also to formulate his theological stand in straight forward terms. The unpublished book written during the Second World War contains the brilliant and enigmatic remark that missionary work should have as its objective 'Christian Africans' rather than 'African Christians' (Ittmann, 1943:iv). From his understanding of the Cameroonian society, he had argued in his 1936 article that, in Cameroon 'the church has to grow out of the soil of the people, germinating from the seed of the divine word...' *the renewed old orders were not to be abolished but to be fulfilled*' (Ittmann, 1936:16). True missionary work has 'two bases of equal importance: the gospel of Christ and the peoples' living traditions' (Ibid).

It is not surprising that, on seeing how the peoples' tradition was not only taken seriously by Ittmann, but actually given an importance 'equal' to that of the gospel, the Basel mission became more and more reserved about Ittmann's views (Balz, 1976) and his writings hardly reached those for whom they were primarily intended; the next generation of Basel missionaries in Cameroon after him (why) probably because his contemporaries did everything to make his thoughts unpopular. In the 1950s, however, Ittman found some attentive readers amongst the French catholic priests in the college

Libermann in Douala-Cameroon. One of them, Rene Bureau, with a wide background in the social sciences, devoted his first book in 1962 titled the *Ethno-Sociology of Duala and related Coastal Tribes*, dealing with all the main aspects of their traditional setup: family, economy, social organization and religion (Bureau, 1962).

Bureau, in his work shows, in particular, the 'vacuums' which exist in African society and the unconscious 'transfers' of European social decadence which have taken place both as a result of the colonial missionary destruction of such institutions as dowry, anti-witchcraft rituals and secret societies such as Djengu. His functional description of these institutions largely followed Ittman's research (Ittmann, 1962: 105-138). He further analyses, according to the strict sociological method of the French School, the conversion of the Duala to Christianity and to Catholicism in particular. He evaluates to what extent this conversion was only superficial since the 'cultural substratum' on the whole remained unconverted and traditional.

Bureau's main intention in his book was to lay open the weaknesses of the catholic approach to Duala society and to overcome them by deeper sociological insights. This is where he began his study of African society; but not where he ended. Sixteen years later, he had become a professor of Anthropology in Paris, and he published a largely autobiographical book *Peril Blanc: Propos d'un Ethnologue sur l'Occident* in which he gave an account of how, already during his years in Duala, things had begun to take a different turn (Bureau, 1978). The inconsiderate destruction of Djengu (a traditional system of worship of the Duala people) by joint colonial and missionary power gradually became a symbol to him, not of the side effect of errors, but of the very essence of what the west has done and continues to do in Africa (Bureau, 1978:18-37). In *Peril Blanc*, Bureau explained that whatever promoted social integration, harmony and discipline in traditional society was destroyed without any valid substitute by the radical conversion of the people to Catholicism and that even the Christian churches provide no valid substitute for traditional norms of regulating social existence (1978:23). To him, social disorder, resignation, and the demographic decrease of coastal tribes most directly affected, through disruption of families, alcoholism, prostitution and venereal diseases, were the direct consequences of European missionary attempts to implant Christianity over traditional systems of worship, going together with colonial economic exploitation and cultural alienation (Ibid).

Other studies made on independent religious movements in the Ivory Coast and Gabon further convinced Bureau that the whole sum of western influence on African societies was only destructive and in no way beneficial. Instead of bringing anything better, the Europeans only exported their own internal crisis and unsolved conflicts in economics as well as in religion to Africa. Bureau described European missionaries and

colonialists as dangerous, deplorable and egoistic wizards, which Africa by mobilizing its archaic traditions of human solidarity and equality must exorcise and prevent from going on with their destruction. He also believed that to a great extent the 'postcolonial' African elite itself is already infected by the same 'white danger' and therefore, unfit for either political or social leadership out of the new social and cultural crisis (Bureau, 1978: 182-3).

Ittman in his time (1930s and 40s) had still felt that Christian Mission and colonial rule in Cameroon must go together, and that, in spite of their shortcomings, they were beneficial to the Africans. Bureau, forty years after, felt that whether they want it or not, the two actually worked together and worked for one and the same purpose of alienation of the Africans from what they were before. To him no improvement in missionary methods could ever remedy this evil. Although Bureau was not really turning himself against the gospel of Christ- he still believed in Jesus promise to the poor but saw no use in exporting Western Christianity to Africa. He became very bitter with Catholicism, got married and holds celibacy and monasticism in very low esteem (Bureau, 1978:183). This is because, the acute and modern world-wide problems of destroyed human solidarity, the failure of harmonious living together, had over the years gained the upper hand over the need for religious change.

With Ittman, the African ways of living together in society had become of 'equal importance' with the gospel of Christ. With Bureau the African wisdom had, as of that time, acquired greater importance for the needs of today's world. He strongly believed that in the face of fallen social/human values occasioned by modernity, only the archaic agricultural societies can show a way out of the hopeless crisis of western urban, military and industrial societies. Consequently, instead of the west teaching Africa religion, Africa should now teach the west about a humane society, and better living together (Bureau, 1978:19). Bureau teaches a lesson of sympathy and admiration for African wisdom in keeping the community in peace. He even initiated himself into the Bwiti religion in Gabon (Ibid: 161). He follows up the lines previously indicated by Ittmann, and he finds some deeper meaning even in what Africans call 'witchcraft': not just a pre-scientific superstition, but all that is antisocial in man's heart, envy and the will of power over others against which Western society has yet found no general and effective remedy. Commenting on Ittmann and Bureau another missionary observed that 'we too agree that something can be learnt from it (African spirituality) for a better self-understanding of the West (Balz 1984:13).

Why Europe concealed the truth: Coloniality of power, knowledge and being

The above 'selfless' studies carried out by European Missionaries, (to make a difference with those often tagged Eurocentric) corroborate very well with the indigenous researches of Ejedepang-Koge (1970, 1976), Atabe, (1979) Ndille and Ngome (2016) etc. However, the question which many have posed and found their own answer has been that, why did these studies receive little interest and publicity despite the fact that they had so much to teach the world about the African societies. An easy guess is that they were destroyed/concealed by colonial administrations And European Missionaries' radical approach to evangelization. That is why although Ittmann and Bureau had dwelled on such a thesis which ordinarily would have attracted a lot of attention in the west, the writings were hardly even heard of. They remained at best archival manuscripts. That is why the works and probably their authors have hardly featured in the historiography of African religion.

Generally, writings of such a calibre which kind of watered-down European efforts in the periphery or which never represented the popular trend of Euro-North American-centric literature of downplaying African epistemology hardly had a headway to fame. It is indeed an uncomfortable subject to Europeans to talk about Africa teaching Europe. Europe is only interested in the exploitation of Africa. To do this they would encourage the dissemination of knowledge which tells that Africa is helpless and like a lamp under a table avoid any situation where African values are showcased. According to Koutonin (2013:1), *'Europe prefers Africa laying down permanently. It's easier for them to suck it.'* The implication of such an analogy is that knowledge about Africa which kind of 'puffs up the African shoulder in the presence of Europe has always been concealed in a bid to continuously keep the power of agency. That is why in the colonial archive, one would hardly find colonial or European research data carried out before 1960 and even beyond that promotes the positive values of African societies such as those of Ittmann and Bureau.

Because of this trend, literature about Africa in the colonial archive has hardly evolved from that of an uncivilized barbaric society to something better. As Chakrabarty has explained, *"the European colonizer of the nineteenth century both preached Enlightenment humanism at the colonized and at the same time denied it in practice when it emanated from the colonized"* (Chakrabarty, 2008:4). This is what Lezra has termed the *Colonial Art of Demonizing Others*. According to Lezra, the Europe imagined and documented in the archives of colonial powers and in the expressive cultures created in its metropolitan centres, contains a repository of subdued stories or silenced narratives about the influence and the embedded presence of black people inside what we might

call the European imagination. Where they are not subdued or silenced, they become misrepresentations and mistranslations of black freedom, dreams and self-activity as monstrous especially in the period of imperial consolidation (Lezra, 2014:7).

By presenting the examples of Ittmann and Bureau who have contributed enormously in the Historiography and Sociology of Cameroon, but who are almost unknown authors my aim is to add to the available pieces of erstwhile silenced narratives and in this effort, advance a larger understanding of the traces of silencing, and obfuscation in the dominant archive; traces that make it possible to read the colonial archive as a constitutive part of colonial domination. It is also part of the reconstructive work of the method of reading developed in Decolonial studies which upholds 'a refusal to be bound by the disciplinary conventions that generally dictate how we must read Euro-African relations' to upholding what has been termed 'reading for what is not available' in the archive. This is with the understanding that the colonial archive (in the guise of enlightenment humanism) has generally occluded the central and violent role played by colonial administrations and their accolades in the creation of a mindset of supreme European culture in the Africans and a state of self-denial and worthlessness in African values. That is why evangelization in Africa was carried out without any consideration of the intrinsic traditional nature of the people and their land, their points of power as well as those of weakness (Ejegang-Koge, 1976:15).

Decolonial theorists believe that the tactful suppression of 'pro-african' literature has since been part of Coloniality of power, knowledge and being; an interpretive ideological valorisation of Euro-American society as superior, progressive and universal which originates from the Cartesian *cogito ergo sum* (I think, therefore I am) which stood as the foundation of modern Western sciences and which allowed philosophers like Rene Descartes to claim a "non-situated universal view of knowledge" for Europe (Escobar, 2007:179). This view is what the Colombian philosopher Santiago Castro-Gomez has called "an epistemology of *Punto Cero*" "the point zero" which is the point of view that assumes no point of view (Castro-Gomez, 2007:427); or that hides and conceals itself as being beyond a particular point of view; hiding its local and particular perspective under an abstract Euro/Western-centric universalism (Grosfoguel, 2007:5).

In fact since the time of the European Renaissance and Enlightenment, Westerners have worked tirelessly to make their knowledge become the only truthful and universal knowledge and have ceaselessly spread it through Christianity, Western education and other means across the world. By assuming that the West is all and represents us all (universalism), Coloniality of knowledge not only denied any possibility of coevalness and engendered the impossibility of a simultaneous African

epistemology but completely dismissed non-Western knowledge as the “*unrewarding gyration of barbarous tribes in picturesque but irrelevant corners of the globe*” (Awasom, 2009:6). The colonized world was only made visible to the reality of metropolitan societies (not as objectively as they experienced it, but as they wanted the world to see it) as *terra nullius* and the people, *anima nullius* (Santos, 2006:4); as the space of misery, savagery, ignorance, disease where help was needed; and where everything was subject to experiment (Grosfoguel, 2011:6). This positioning by coloniality of knowledge, justified the civilizing mission and was thus of extreme importance for the consolidation and survival of colonialism. Studies such as those of Ittman and Bureau were betraying the European mission to Africa and so had to be kept away from public view.

Conclusion

The paper contends that European research about Africa is two sided. On the one hand are studies (sometimes imaginative writings) about African societies which give no credit to African ingenuity and creativity. This school is propagated by Coloniality of power, Eurocentrism and the Hamitic theory and justifies the helplessness of Africa and the need for European activity in Africa. This strand of literature has been widely popularised in the world. However, there is yet another set of European writers who took time to study particular African societies and cultures and have come out with evidence which shows that there was much more than Coloniality of power and other associate ideologies posited about. Such studies have received little attention. If a majority of these writings remain buried in colonial archives, the well-researched ‘authentic knowledge about African traditional societies which were carried out in the colonial period would remain unknown and the Eurocentric ideologies and Hamitic hypothesis would continue to prevail over the truth about Africa. There is therefore a need for African scholars working within these fields of research to engage with the colonial archive and intensify the dissemination of this rich knowledge about Africa. This need is indeed urgent in the current global dispensation. In Cameroon, a majority of these manuscripts are in German, as most of the studies were undertaken by the Swiss-German Basel missionaries who were the most popular in the present English Speaking portion of Cameroon. There is therefore an urgent need for them to be translated into English. Then and only then can they be useful to the average Cameroonian academia.

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TO EUROPE: REVEALING SURPRESSED TRUTHS IN THE COLONIAL ARCHIVE IN CAMEROON

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