

# Between Municipal Management and Sorcery Uses of Waste Cameroonian Institutions Faced with "Sorcerers Covered with Refuse" (Garoua and Maroua)

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## Between Municipal Management and Sorcery Uses of Waste

Cameroonian Institutions Faced with “Sorcerers Covered with Refuse”  
(Garoua and Maroua)

*Entre gestion municipale et usages sorcellaires des déchets : les institutions camerounaises face aux « sorciers couverts d'ordures » (Garoua et Maroua)*

Émilie Guitard

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# Between Municipal Management and Sorcery Uses of Waste

## Cameroonian Institutions Faced with “Sorcerers Covered with Refuse” (Garoua and Maroua)

In December 2014, just after defending my doctoral dissertation, I was taking part in a conference in Yaounde in memory of the late Jesuit priest Éric de Rosny, well known for his research among the *nganga* “disbewitchers” in Douala.<sup>1</sup> At the end of my presentation on the “uses of waste in bewitchment in Northern Cameroon,” I received with my co-conveners a certain number of questions written by the audience on little pieces of paper. Among those, one particularly struck me: “is the filthy state of somebody enough to say whether or not he or she is a sorcerer?”<sup>2</sup> Somewhat disturbed by this query, I mumbled an answer on the inability of anthropologists to give objective criteria to identify sorcerers and witchcraft practices, citing the “axiological neutrality” (Weber 2013 [1917]) one usually learns in the first years of studying the social sciences, which is required to do research.

Today, however, it seems that this question summarizes quite well one of the recurrent traits of the “sorcerer” as an archetypal figure, and this, not only in many African contexts, but also in European ones (see for instance, Darroux 2016: 486). L. de Heusch (2001: 17), in his preface to the French edition of Mary Douglas’ famous book, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of the Concepts of Pollution and Taboo*, managed to capture it in several evocative lines: “The evil magic is immersed in filth, pollution and transgression. [...]

1. International conference “Le pluralisme (médical, religieux, anthropologique, juridique...) en Afrique. Le regard d’Éric de Rosny,” Université catholique d’Afrique centrale (UCAC), Campus de Nkolbisson, Yaoundé, Cameroun, December 9-10, 2014 (<[https://www.aislf.org/IMG/pdf/programme\\_colloque\\_eric\\_de\\_rosny.pdf](https://www.aislf.org/IMG/pdf/programme_colloque_eric_de_rosny.pdf)>, consulted on May 10, 2017). See also the conference proceedings (SÉRAPHIN 2016).
2. All the translations in English, from French or Fulfulde, have been done by the author, with the help of Rufus Ayanbode. The author also thanks the editors for their work on the English version of this paper.

as a murderer and incestuous, the sorcerer is metaphorically covered with refuse. As seen as a total relapse below, witchcraft is both the negation of the fundamental taboos and invasion of refuse.”

Thus, attention will be given here to the “sorcerers covered with refuse” apprehended through the analysis of numerous narratives on this topic and “traces” identified as remains of sorcery practices, by my interlocutors from the secondary cities of Garoua, Maroua and its surroundings, in the North, and Extreme North regions of Cameroon. These data have been collected between 2007 and 2011, during ethnographic fieldwork on links between waste management and power relations (Guitard 2014). In this context, the “evil magic” seems indeed to be “immersed in filth [and] pollution,” as it represents a transgressive and antisocial deed (together with murder and incest). “The invasion of refuse” which characterises it is also defined by a classical logic of inversion, notably within a predominantly Fulani Muslim context, where cleanliness and purity are established as fundamental values. However, the sorcerers, as they are described in Garoua and Maroua, are not only metaphorically covered with refuse, but also very literally so, as they are indeed frequently accused of operating remotely on their victims through their bodily waste (nails, hair, blood, placenta, sometimes excrement) and intimate possessions (like clothes), following a process also mentioned in many African and Europeans contexts. Where the narratives, and potentially the practices, regarding sorcery in Northern Cameroon are more specific is when they also identify waste accumulations as the medium of bewitchment, and garbage dumps as privileged places to practice varied magical manipulations for harmful purposes. Following this logic that sorcery can be seen as an “invasion of refuse,” when waste accumulates in the cities’ public spaces and heaps of refuse abound on every street corner (as was the case in Garoua and Maroua from the early 1980s through the beginning of the 2000s), insalubrity is also experienced as an invasion of sorcery.

On one hand, I will detail herein these North-Cameroonian conceptions about sorcery usage of waste and analyse how the anxieties regarding its recuperation for this evil purpose have led city-dwellers to manage their waste in highly specific ways, so as to shield themselves from those with evil intentions. On the other hand, we will also see how the political and religious authorities of the two cities, and also, more recently, those specifically in charge of public waste management have, since their foundation in the eighteenth century, acknowledged the existence of sorcery practices involving waste and its accumulation. These institutions have demonstrated attitudes and adopted strategies to address sorcery practices linked to refuse although some of these, and the political elites heading them, have not always

radically opposed these practices. Some may have even more or less openly resorted to waste for magical purposes, sometimes malevolent, to serve the community and/or establish their leadership.

*Kuugal junngo*, the “work of the hand”:  
Intimate Waste Instrumentalized by Sorcery

Examples of measures preventing the misuses of bodily substances and of some discarded intimate items are numerous throughout the African continent; in Sudan (Evans-Pritchard 1976), in Cameroon (de Rosny 1981; Ndonko 1993; Baeke 1999), in Madagascar (Harpet & Lelin 2001: 166-170), in Burkina-Faso (Bouju & Ouattara 2002: 123, 132) but also in European contexts (in the Bocage region of Normandy, for instance, see Favret-Saada 1980). É. de Rosny (1974: 299) also reports, while describing a healing ritual in Douala against *ekong* sorcery, an explanation given by a *nganga* healer about resorting to bodily waste not only to bewitch, but also to lift a spell or disbewitch: “This ritual draws on the conviction that the capture of the slightest parts of the body, like nails and hair, is identical to the abduction of the whole person. The healer fights the sorcerer with equal weapons and symbols.” The healing ritual in this context indeed involves the victim’s nails and hair to “protect him/her in a magical way,” in the same way, or rather with the same elements, that had been used to attack him/her.

In Garoua and Maroua, the inhabitants interviewed frequently mention bodily waste and intimate items, like clothing, as components of *siiriji*<sup>3</sup> (in Fulfulde, vehicular language) or evil spells cast by marabouts (*buude'en*). These *siiriji* may take various shapes (amulets, decoctions, composite collations contained in calabashes and/or placed in specific places, that have sometimes to be activated with incantations) and involve numerous other elements (fabric, thread, fragments of glass or mirror, animal shells, horn, hair, feathers, teeth—or vegetal parts—wood, seeds, leaves, etc.).<sup>4</sup>

This activity represents the dark side of these specialists of magical-religious work, often mixing Muslim esotericism and borrowings from local cults.<sup>5</sup> Cherif, a young Muslim Kanuri, and Usseina, a Muslim Kanuri housewife in her mid-fifties, both living in Kollere, a neighbourhood well-known in Garoua for its numerous marabouts, describe precisely how these

3. Sing. “*siiri*” from Arabic “*sīhr*”, “magic” (TOURNEUX 2007: 471-473).

4. See the excellent collection of A. Epelboin, gathered in Senegal (EPELBOIN & HAMÈS 2013).

5. See also DILLEY (2004: 131-159) concerning the Haalpulaar'en of Fuuta Toro.

FIG. 1. — MAGICAL PARAPHERNALIA OF A MARABOUT FROM GAROUA  
USED TO MAKE AMULETS AND DECOCTIONS BOTH FOR BENEFICIAL AND EVIL PURPOSES



Photo: E. Guitard, Kollere, Garoua, January 2010.

people use the cover of darkness to demonstrate their powers by throwing at each other many *siiriiji*, like dangerous “missiles” cutting through the night, above the compounds, and fuelling a violent, but nonetheless (for the uninitiated) invisible night war:

There are many battles of marabouts in the neighborhood, at night they throw *siiriiji* at each other, bad spells to see who is the strongest. The *Kolle'en* [Kanuri] don't attack, but they react to defend themselves really fast, that's why there is no robber in the neighbourhood. It's *habre jemma*, the night war, it has decreased recently, because most of the elders who were doing that have died (Garoua, September 2009, in Fulfulde — henceforth, *fllfde*).

This type of sorcery is named after the euphemistic expression *kuugal junngo*, literally the “work of the hand,” a term which actually underscores its instrumental and acquired characteristics. It is opposed thus to hereditary and organic *mistiraaku* or *kaaramaku*, anthropophagous witchcraft, that operates without any support. This “work of the hand” comprises a vast series of magical manipulations, carried out by the marabout himself and/or under his precise indications, by his client, most of the time for payment. They

aim at provoking illness, craziness, misfortune, *masiibo*,<sup>6</sup> loss of affection and rejection by the community, or even death. Bodily waste and excretions such as nails, strands of hair, menstrual blood or the placenta of the parturient woman, sometimes sweat, more rarely urine and excrement, but also objects having been in close and prolonged contact with the body, until they have been “incorporated” by it and integrated into the “bodily synthesis” (Warnier 1999: 10), like clothes, play in these bewitchment practices a role of support and vectors, helping to touch the victim remotely. All of these types of waste are actually conceived of as in an irreducible continuity with the body of the persons who have emitted or used them, even if they have been detached and are no longer physically connected to the body. In this consubstantial or synecdochic logic, they represent their emitter’s body in miniature, they are the part for the whole of it and give access to the latter, to hurt it. This evil magic operates thus through “sympathy,” to use Frazer’s classic terminology and, more precisely, in accordance with a “contagious” logic, based on “the principle of contiguity, where things having been in contact continue to have an effect on each other” (Bonhomme 2010: 681). There is a tendency, according to my respondents, to use for instance somebody’s hair to make him/her crazy, a woman’s menstrual blood to cause her a haemorrhage, or the placenta of the parturient woman to make her infertile.

This continuity, seen as irreducible between the body and its excretions or discarded items that have been in prolonged contact with it, lead the urban-dwellers of Garoua and Maroua to adopt numerous precautions to prevent these discarded things from being recovered by the evil-minded: destroying them (by burning them, such as clothes) or hiding them, by burying them in the ground or, more frequently, by throwing them in the household latrines.<sup>7</sup> It is not unusual, for instance, to throw sanitary pads in the latrines, or even to wash them to retrieve the menstrual blood and pour it into the latrines, while the pads will be dried, then burnt. However, this is possible

6. From the Arabic (NOYE 1989: 241), misfortune provoked by bewitchment, to be distinguished according to some of my interlocutors with *hersum* (*hersun*) (NOYE 1987: 157) or *hersumku* (TOURNEUX 2007: 187), referring to a bad luck contracted by accident, for instance, while stepping on a calabash used by someone to wash oneself of a *siri* and disposed for this purpose in the middle of a crossroad, or by omitting to perform ablutions after having been polluted by bodily substances, notably during sexual intercourse (*Moodibbo* Boubakary, Muslim Fulani theologian, Garoua [November 2008, flfide], Dahirou B., Muslim Fulani head of family, Maroua [December 2009, French, henceforth, fr.]).

7. Note that in the rural areas, for instance in the Guiziga Bui Marva villages close to Maroua, bodily excretions can also be hidden in the bush, in the large rock piles scattered on the Mandara mountains piemonts (where the old villagers have the habit of going to relieve themselves), or in rocks and tree trunk crevices.



only if other, potentially ill-intentioned, visitors are not using the latrines. This danger sometimes leads the heads of family who can afford it to build several latrines in their compound, latrines for visitors and others for household members but also, in the polygamous households, separate facilities for the different co-wives. Penene, an approximately 35-year-old Fulani Muslim housewife, echoes the recurrent conflicts opposing the wives of the same man, where waste can also be a reason to start a fight and a tool for aggression:

There are many scabbles about this in the houses between co-wives, on the matter of sweeping, who has to sweep where, it can disturb too much! Here we [Penene and her co-wife] sweep everything together, when one is cooking the other is cleaning, or when one is sick the other can clean her bedroom. We eat together, we share everything, even soap, we can share the same *gada suudu* [latrines]. But it is not like that in every house! Many wives can't share the same *gada suudu* for fear of *siiriji*. [...] Your co-wife can also pretend to sweep for you with her broom when you are passing by, to insult you. And she can leave trash in front of your bedroom (November 2010, flfide).

Finally, in this matter, the golden rule has long been for city-dwellers of Garoua and Maroua, starting with those claiming to be of high-ranking Fulani origins, to avoid evacuating any kind of waste outside of the private sphere, within the potential reach of evil-minded people. This logic of concealment within the compound was also reinforced by Muslim dogma, advising a strict control over bodily excretions, above all uro-ano-genital, to limit the risks of pollution, and by the Fulani code of conduct, *pulaaku*, imposing modesty, *semteenDe*, as a cardinal value and as a sign of distinction (Bocquené 1981: 311; Dupire 1981: 169; Riesman 1992; Virtanen 2003: 28). These ethics of concealment and restraint thus strongly reprove the public expression of any physiological manifestation (namely, feeding and excretion) and of one's way of life, which could be betrayed by the display outside the home, in the public space, of one's waste and that of one's household. Due to their claim as leaders of Muslim believers and since they have to show their exemplary *pulaaku*, given their high rank, plus having the most to lose, the Muslim Fulani political elites of Garoua and Maroua, especially their traditional rulers, the *Laamibe*, continue to be the most scrupulous in the management of their intimate waste and even conceal it in their large palace-compounds' backyards:

The chiefs themselves don't take their garbage out. It is mostly because they wouldn't want people to see what they have eaten, this kind of thing. There is also perhaps a threat, that someone recovers some things to do harm to the chief [...]. For instance clothes, the chief can't throw them out. Wait! [He goes to his bedroom, then comes back with an embroidered cap and shows it to me.] Myself I have this cap, we have been keeping it for more



than a hundred years, it belonged to my parents, it is an instruction, we have to repair it each time. I still wear it today. Coming to clothes, I can give them just to my brother, or somebody really close, and still, we have to wash them before [...]. The *Laamiido* can't also allow his clothes to be washed by just anybody, and it is not just anybody that can enter his compound. It is like hair and nails, normally a chief can't cut his hair outside, he has to stay inside, and it is the guy who comes to give him a cut, and then his hair is buried [...]. When you are a chief, you have to take extra care, it is not necessarily the chief who is after someone, but many people who are after the chief (*Lawan Jeka*, head of the historical neighbourhood Fulbere 1 in Garoua and notable of the *Laamiido*, December 2010, fr.).

In contrast, the ordinary citizens find themselves progressively forced, after the two cities were taken over by German and then, French settlers, in the first half of the twentieth century, to evacuate their domestic waste outside of their homes to meet the new hygienist and urban planning standards introduced by the Westerners. This trend will continue after Cameroon's independence, in 1960, with the growth of population in Garoua and Maroua and the densification of their urban fabric, especially in administrative and historical centres. However, the city-dwellers continue to remain prudent, as reported by Colette, a Mundang and Christian mother living in a working-class neighbourhood of Garoua, by avoiding to dispose any intimate waste in the closest "*voirie*" (local French), dump:

In the "*voirie*" I throw out only things like sweepings or sweet potatoes peelings, I don't throw out bodily waste, it can be dangerous. Anything like hair or nails, I throw in the WC, because if somebody wants to hurt you, he can even go and rummage about the "*voirie*" to find such things. I also burn old clothes and I throw the ashes out in the latrines, because otherwise, somebody can use the sweat on the clothes to hurt you. One can also take the footprint in the sand if one walks barefoot. For instance, somebody can take your dirty underpants to ensure that you won't have any children, you won't give birth anymore. One can even eliminate you. It's different from the *famla* [another type of sorcery] where one makes you work in a field, or when one eats you, in the pot like some piece of meat. The Southerners [people living in the South of Cameroon] also have their own sorcery, but it's different. Sorcery's not only a rumor, it does exist! (November 2009, fr.).

After the independence of the country, as refuse was accumulating and dumping grounds were developing in the public spaces of Garoua and Maroua, other anxieties regarding sorcery and waste emerged among urban-dwellers. They related not only to intimate waste, but also to the heaps of refuse that appeared in this context and which had long been considered as powerful mediums of the same instrumental sorcery. With the obligation to evacuate

one's domestic waste outside of the compounds, but without any efficient system of trash collection serving all the neighborhoods, especially from the 1980s onward, the invasion of the urban public spaces by waste was then experienced as an invasion of sorcery; indeed a double invasion which the public authorities had difficulty addressing. A detour through the history of institutional waste management by successive rulers in Garoua and Maroua, since their founding, is necessary in order to understand how responsible institutions could actually have been involved in this “work of the hand” involving waste accumulations—not only to address the problem, but also, at times, to serve their own interests. In any case, it has been a perennial double-edged sword to wield.

### A Great Sacred Waste Heap for a “King-Sorcerer”

Between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries, the northern part of Cameroon sheltered a mosaic of populations in a perpetual state of rearrangement. South of the Lake Chad basin, the Diamaré plain was the crossroad for intense migrations that created many successive principalities, chieftaincies, kingdoms or empires (Boutrais 1984: 115; Seignobos & Nassourou 2004: 44). Among these, there was the small Guiziga Bui Marva kingdom, whose head-village named Marva, was located on the current site of Maroua. At the centre of this village, opposite the palace of the Guiziga chief, referred to as the *Bui*, there lay a great heap of waste, *kitiki*<sup>8</sup>. According to the narrations of the descendants of the Guiziga Bui Marva kingdom, this great heap of waste was erected in front of the royal palace, with the waste of successive *Bui* and that of their numerous slaves, spouses and children, as well as that of their notables and vassals and finally, with waste from their subjects who, once in a year, were called upon from the nooks and crannies of the kingdom to come and drop their domestic waste on the *kitiki a Bui*, “heap of waste of the king,” as a sign of allegiance.

The establishment of this big waste heap had three objectives.<sup>9</sup> First, it was about expressing how long ago the Guiziga Bui Marva group had been established on its territory, hence its right to govern it within this crossroad

8. If no trace of it can be found today in Maroua, similar big dumping grounds still exist towards the eastern part of the Diamaré plain, in Zumaya Lamoorde, former capital of the small kingdom of Zumaya, in Dulo, first capital of the Wandala kingdom, a satellite of the Borno empire, or in Kaliao, second capital of the Guiziga Bui Marva kingdom after it was conquered by Fulani groups at the end of the eighteenth century. Data presented here were collected from this latter village between 2008 and 2010.

9. For a more detailed presentation of this phenomenon, see GUITARD (2017).

region where the anteriority of settlement, much more than the autochthony, was a key factor for a group to justify its domination of the others. Erecting a great heap of waste in front of the *Bui* palace was then meant to showcase his material wealth in goods (through the food waste coming out of his compound, as well as from his prestigious possessions, like horses, given the manure piles) and “in men” (through waste gathered from his numerous spouses, children, slaves, notables, vassals, subjects). Finally, patiently gathering a great quantity of waste at the centre of the Guiziga kingdom, in the middle of the main village, was a way to assemble and develop a certain force, called the *kuli*.<sup>10</sup> Regarded as inherent to a great quantity of waste gathered over time, this force was also reinforced by adding many other specific elements to the great heap of waste: discarded objects or excretions carrying various types of pollution, the skull of an individual who died of small pox, the iron of a hoe or the heads of many animals also considered as *kuli*, for example, the panther (*Felix pardus*). It was ultimately about attracting to this great heap of waste supernatural entities such as “spirits of the place,” referred to as *setene* and coming out from the wild world of the neighbouring bush.

The *kuli* strength and the *setene* entities gathered in the king’s heap of waste were considered as intrinsically ambivalent and versatile, as well as endowed with a mighty destructive power. These forces of the *kitikil a Bui* could, however, be domesticated by the *Bui* himself, in order to serve the kingdom and mainly protect it against external and internal attacks, witchcraft attacks among others. On this basis, trials by ordeal, “*huduma vo*,” literally meaning “judgment of the body,” were regularly organized on the king’s great heap of waste to adjudicate accusations of witchcraft, hence conceived of as organic and anthropophagous, to follow Evans-Pritchard’s (1976) well know typology. The accused, summoned by the *Bui* himself, would be led by his guards at the break of the day to the base of the great heap of waste, wearing only a wrapper made of *Vitex donania* leaves as clothing. The accused was to prostrate himself facing the ground before the *kitikil*, as before the *Bui*, and then was given the skull of a person who died of smallpox and the iron of a hoe, both extracted from the heap of waste, and which he had to take to his mouth with some dirt from the heap of waste mixed with water to swallow it. If the accused was guilty, the *kuli* force of the heap of waste would mix with the witch principle inscribed in his innards, causing a swollen abdomen and

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10. The concept of *kuli*, largely polysemous, refers to both a force (like the West-African *nyama* or the Melanesian *mana* according to JAOUEN [1995: 15] and SEIGNOBOS & TOURNEUX [2002: 159]) and the “specialisations” of this force, which inhabit various objects and places in the kingdom (*kuli* of the village or of certain trees, rocks, waterways or mountains), as well as the worship given to it, mainly through sacrifices (PONTIÉ 1973: 176).

leading to death, following an operative procedure proper to many African trials by ordeal (Retel-Laurentin 1974: 146). According to my old Guiziga interlocutors, the king's great heap of waste, which is "very fair," was never wrong.

The subjugation of the "forces" of this great accumulation of waste by successive Guiziga kings was the result of a double procedure of identification and incorporation of each new recipient of the power with the great heap of waste in front of the palace, which took place during the enthronement and through various ritual gestures meant to establish a connection between them (Guitard 2017). Thus, with such a tool for justice, to the point of becoming his metaphorical and physical twin, the Guiziga Bui Marva king appears as the "impossible figure" of the "king-sorcerer," as described by A. Adler (2006: 20). As in numerous procedures of "fabricating" anti-witches specialists, including some sovereigns, the connection between the successive Guiziga kings and the great heap of waste was based on the idea that "there is more power on the side of evil (Frazer 1890) and it is by taking away some of the power that first belongs to it that people can defend themselves against it and act in such a way that social life is liveable" (Adler 2006: 179).

Finally, as the main tool for the *Bui* to protect his kingdom and to ensure its harmony and reproduction, the great heap of waste appears as the foundation of the sacredness of Guiziga Bui Marva kingship. This type of classical socio-politico-religious organisation for Africanist anthropology (Feeley-Harnick 1985) takes on, in this context, an original configuration. As a last resort, it is not the body of the sovereign which is considered as sacred, but rather the great heap of waste which is the ultimate repository of the kingship principle, beyond the carnal and perishable envelope of each *Bui*.

### Secret "Magical" Waste Heaps in the "Great" Fulani Muslim Compounds

If the forces of the great waste heap possibly helped the *Bui* Guiziga to protect the kingdom against internal attacks from witches, it obviously failed to guard against external attacks, if we consider how they were unable to fend off Fulani conquerors. By the end of the eighteenth century, many pastoral groups who had progressively come down from the Northwest (current Nigeria), united themselves under the Jihad banner of Usman Dan Fodio, and defeated small kingdoms in the Diamaré plain, establishing many *lamidats*, Fulani Muslim city-states, among which Maroua and Garoua. In this context, the great waste heaps of the Guiziga and Zumaya chieftaincies were branded "*labbi*," or "idols

or fetishes,” and their powers and the rituals linked to them (such as the trial by ordeal) called “*kaado*” or “pagans.” In the end, the new Muslim rulers of the region fought against their “forces” by reciting suras on the great waste heaps belonging to the fallen chieftaincies and by erecting mosques beside or directly on top of them. An example, as reported by many of my Guiziga and Fulani respondents, was the central mosque in the former Guiziga village-capital of Marva, which became Maroua following the Fulani conquest.

It was also during the establishment of Garoua and Maroua, in the eighteenth century, that Fulani Muslim elites (represented at the top by the *Laamiido* and his entourage of notables), gradually imposed on city-dwellers and their living environment, be it private or public, the Muslim ethics of cleanliness and purity of bodies and places. This is supported by the Fulani’s code of conduct, *pulaaku*, which celebrates modesty and restraint, through concealing one’s course of life and bodily expressions. This period gave rise to the tendency, still obvious today in some old city families of the Fulani Muslim elite, to keep all body and domestic waste within the compound, away from the eyes of strangers.

Nevertheless, under the guise of following an exemplary life according to both Muslim orthodoxy and Fulani conduct code, accumulating waste in secret or hidden pits in compounds equally helped to develop maraboutic practices involving them. Probably influenced by the so-called “pagan” rituals of the local chieftaincies, they also belonged to an esoteric Muslim register, which is highly influenced by Sufi brotherhoods, in particular, the *tijaaniya* and the *kadiriya* in addition to, on a lesser scale, the *mahdiya* (Seignobos & Nassourou 2004: 145). Great and old waste accumulations are regarded as being a part of the “*sirriji*,” “magical secrets”<sup>11</sup>, just like the big termite mounds and anthills, burial grounds, water courses and plants or some trees. According to the *moddiɓɓe*, theologians and marabouts, interviewed, all these objects have the peculiar capacity to develop specific “forces” (“*baawde*”) and attract a great number of “*génies*” (local French) or genies, *ginnaaji*.<sup>12</sup> Many of my respondents did not hesitate to compare great and old waste heaps to “neighborhoods” or “cities,” as small estates populated with numerous types of invisible entities within the big human city. A Fulani proverb notably states: “the waste heap does not see, nor understand and does not speak but what is inside sees, understands and speaks.”

These same theologians and marabouts, as well as most of the city-dwellers coming from old city Fulani families, generally admit that the “greats” of

11. Also from the Arabic word “*sahr*,” “magic,” but not to be mistaken with the “*sirriji*” or “evil spells,” mentioned above.

12. From the Arabic word *jinn* (TOURNEUX 2007: 161).

Garoua and Maroua were able, until recently, to take advantage of the domestic waste accumulation in the secrecy of their compounds to practice various manipulations mobilising the “forces” that dwell therein, in order to acquire wealth and power. Contrary to the central role played by the great waste heap in the Guiziga kingdom, these “magical” practices performed in secret by the Fulani city-dweller elites, on their private waste heaps, are intended for individual usage alone. Referred to as *lugguji*, they also differ from the other magical practices that involve waste and, as explained below, the entities that dwell therein, referred to as *siirriji* and considered as evil.

With the progressive densification of the urban fabric coupled with the population growth during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, then with the implementation of new hygiene norms by the colonial administrators during the first half of the twentieth century, the city-dwellers of Garoua and Maroua gradually find themselves obliged to evacuate their domestic waste outside their habitations. Keeping waste within the habitations, inside pits, rapidly became a possibility only available to the elites, such as members of the chieftaincy, who still had enough space to accommodate such hiding places in their spacious compounds. The practice remained tolerated by the colonial administrators, and later by the new municipal authorities after independence, but only for the *Laamibe*. It was only in 2008, with the arrival of a new waste disposal company, that the *Laamiido* of Garoua allowed two selected garbage collectors to enter into his palace to evacuate the waste. When I visited last in 2011, the *Laamiido* of Maroua had not yet accepted the removal of the waste from his big compound. Beyond this privilege, extended to them because of prestige, these “traditional” chiefs justify once again their reticence to evacuate their waste into the public space by expressing their fear of being “*maraboutés*” (local French), or “maraboutised.”

As for the city-dwellers of Garoua and Maroua, from 1985 through 2008, they experience the accumulation of their waste in various public places, due to the lack of an efficient waste collection infrastructure and system. In this context of “*poubellisation*”<sup>13</sup> (Deverin-Kouanda 1993: 126) or “dustbinisation” of the two cities, new anxieties regarding magical uses of these numerous dumping grounds arise, leading to a frightening feeling of having been subjected to a double invasion, by waste and sorcery.

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13. French expression forged to express the invasion of a space or city by waste and turned into a dustbin.



When the “Sorcerers Covered with Refuse”  
Invade Public Space and Divide the City-Dwellers

As early as 1985, against the backdrop of a national economic crisis, in a context of structural adjustments, municipal waste collection services suffered a setback in the two cities, to the point of becoming non operational, especially in Garoua. Refuse piled up throughout the public space in cities as many heaps were appearing along roads and waterways (on the River Bénoué in Garoua and especially the *maayo* Kaliao in Maroua), and in all vacant spaces directly within the reach of the inhabitants, alongside public buildings (headquarters of the Bank for Central African States or of the RDPC, the ruling party), schools, health centres, recreation centres (bars, restaurants), places of worship or in front of the neighbourhood chiefdoms. City-dwellers interpreted this “*pou-bellisation*” of their living spaces as a mark of failure on the part of national and local—“administrative” and “traditional”—institutions in managing their cities and their inhabitants.

FIG. 2. — ONE OF THE NUMEROUS WASTE HEAPS IN THE CENTRE OF GAROUA,  
IN BACK OF THE HEADQUARTERS OF THE RULING PARTY



Photo: E. Guitard, January 2008, Kollere, Garoua.



The invasion of public spaces by waste and the multiplication of indiscriminate dumping grounds are also seen as the sign of distress in the urban sociability and communal life in the city. This is visible especially in the rise of conflicts related to waste evacuation between neighbours (Guitard 2015). During this period of confusion, any dumping of waste within the reach of the neighbour's door was perceived as an act of aggression, provoking disgust, shame (especially in the framework of the Fulani code of conduct) and pollution, when the person is a Muslim. Waking up in the morning to discover a small heap of refuse in front of one's door is equally interpreted as an attempted act of "*maraboutage*" (local French), or bewitchment. People that think of themselves as being the target of this dumping generally identify items that justify the evil magical intentions (broken calabash, feathers, fragments of black or red fabric, bottle filled with an identified substance, etc.). They are indeed afraid that this garbage dumped carelessly in front of their doors, in particular at night in the dark, carries a bad spell, *siiri*, that could affect the occupants of the house where it was dumped, especially if one accidentally steps on it.

This fear is based on the same "sympathetic" conceptions of instrumental sorcery, *kuugal junngo*, practiced by the marabouts and their clients by collecting the intimate waste of their victims. However, contrary to this first type of magical recourse to waste, the use of household waste as a medium of bewitchment operates not only by "contagion," but also through "homeopathy" or "imitation" (Frazer 1890; Bonhomme 2010: 680-681). A marabout can then resort to it in the preparation of a bad spell so as to make his victim like "trash," that is, literally despised, rejected and abandoned by all. Waste mixed with the blood of a ram can then be used to protect ("*blinder*," local French) a football pitch, so that the opposing team could be regarded as refuse (Cherif, professional soccer player, Garoua, November 2008, fr.). It is also possible to take some old pieces of fabric from a refuse heap to "make some manipulations on it with the name and horoscope of somebody, to make him like a *jiddere*, dumping ground" (Malla Umaru, marabout, Hausa, Garoua, November 2008, flfde). Some plants which grow abundantly on big waste heaps can also be used in making a *siiri*, depending on the desired effect, for instance *jadamhi* or *zatamhi* (botanically unidentified), "which grows where there is waste, if a leaf is placed in somebody's shoe, he will get lost or behave like a drunkard" (*ibid.*, November 2008 and October 2009, flfde).

Finally, aside from these two types of instrumental and contagious sorceries involving waste and operating through sympathy or homeopathy, the city-dwellers interviewed declare fearing a third type of bewitchment, using this time big and ancient accumulations of waste. This is still based on the

assumption that waste accumulated in great quantity for a long time develops some ambivalent “forces” and attracts some versatile “genies” that can be called upon to obtain wealth or acquire power for one’s own use, but also to harm another person. Thus, in 2008, while the waste in some big dumping grounds had not been regularly removed since the mid-1980s, especially in Garoua, many city-dwellers were particularly worried about the number of spells that could have been buried there to do evil. A certain type of spell called *karfa* (from the Arabic “*harf*” or “edge of the sword” [Tourneux 2007: 220]) is particularly mentioned. It is meant to separate people that are united by marriage, blood-relations, love or friendship, like spouses, brothers and sisters, parents and their children, a boss and his employee, friends, etc. Marabouts particularly recommend very old waste heaps to bury this type of *siiri*, because separation is believed to be the work of the “genies” on one hand, and on the other hand “because in the *jiddere*, there are many foreign bodies that gather. It is not only the *ginnaaji*, it is also the place that is evil, therefore to perpetrate evil, it is a good location” (Malla Umaru, October 2009, Garoua, fflde). Here is one of the multiple ways to operate a *karfa* on an old waste heap according to this same marabout, in order to separate two individuals:

As for the *jiddere*, inside it one can make the *karfa* to separate two persons. In this case, one will take a red lizard, *kuyadere* [unidentified], the type that spits fire and dwells on walls at night, it will be killed, burnt and the ashes will be poured on the *jiddere* at night while thinking about the individuals we want to separate (October 2009, Garoua, fflde).

With the multiplication of large, longstanding dumping grounds in public spaces within the two cities, the idea spread then that “forces” residing there were accessible henceforth to anyone who could contract the services of a good marabout, whereas this assistance was “restricted” in the past to the elites who gathered their waste in the secrecy of their compounds. In a circular logic, some of my respondents did not hesitate to identify the invasion of waste and the multiplication of apprentices “sorcerers covered with refuse,” as being responsible for the rise in the number of conflicts among city-dwellers, separated by many *karfa* buried in the dumping grounds of Garoua and Maroua. The fear of a rise in the number of “waste heap mad people,” homeless people who frequently visit dumping grounds, also supports this widespread theory. Most are indeed considered to be the victims of the “genies” of the waste heaps whom they tried to invoke through maraboutic manipulations, but were taken advantage of and possessed, and then brought back by the “genies” to their place of predilection, the dumping grounds (Guitard 2012). No one can disturb recklessly the forces of accumulated waste, without being sufficiently protected or “armored” (“*blindé*” in local French).

FIG. 3. — CALABASH, PIECES OF FABRIC, FEATHERS FOUND ON A DUMPING GROUND, IDENTIFIED BY PASSERS-BY AS REMNANTS OF MARABOUTIC MANIPULATIONS



Photo: E. Guitard, January 2008, Fulbere 1, Garoua.

In August 2008, the relief of Garoua and Maroua’s inhabitants is therefore manifest as they witness the arrival of brand-new trucks and officers dressed in vivid orange from Hysacam, a private Cameroonian company, appointed by the State, under contract with the municipalities, to dispose of the big dumping grounds and take over the public waste management. The company will however have to, in turn, face the “sorcerers covered with refuse” and the forces they call upon.

#### Hysacam: “Modern and Scientific” Waste Management?

Since 2008, while the sanitation situation of the Northern cities is particularly worrisome, the Cameroonian government signed a contract with a private company in order to delegate public waste management to Hysacam,<sup>14</sup> in partnership with the Urban Communities, to take up the collection and disposal of solid waste in many cities of the country, including in Garoua and Maroua. The forty-year-old Cameroonian company had already been operating

14. Hygiène et salubrité du Cameroun (Hysacam), <<https://www.hysacam-proprete.com/node/2>>, consulted on May 17, 2017.

in eighteen African cities (including Yaoundé and Douala) and signed an agreement with the French company Véolia in 2006. Providing brand new equipment in Garoua and Maroua, including their workers' sparkling uniforms and numerous dump trucks called "Ville de Paris," Hysacam claims, through the voice of its branch managers, to subscribe to the "modern and scientific" management of waste. In actual facts, the system put in place in the North and Extreme North capitals, is based on collection by dumpsters distributed in many neighbourhoods of the two cities, gradually replaced, notably in historical and administrative centres, by a system of door-to-door collection. Waste collected by Hysacam trucks is then taken to a new "controlled" municipal dumpsite, established on the outskirts of each city.

This new public waste management system allowed the municipal institutions to win back a semblance of authority over both cities and their inhabitants by restoring their control over waste and limiting its invasion, especially in the main central public spaces. However, although this system is purported to be "modern and scientific," it does not seem to change either representations and, to some extent, the practices resorting to waste for sorcery purposes. Quite the opposite occurs: in an astonishing demonstration of their great plasticity, these practices continue and persist by adapting to the technical changes introduced by Hysacam.

FIG. 4. — HYSACAM GARBAGE COLLECTORS CLEANING A DUMPING GROUND



Photo: E. Guitard, November 2009, Rumde Ajia, Garoua.

When, in September 2008, I was visiting Usseina, a fifty-year-old mother living in the historical centre of Garoua, she started narrating the merits of Hysacam's new system with this enigmatic sentence: "Since Hysacam removed the waste heaps, there have been many weddings." My assistant, Cherif, who lives in the same neighborhood, had to patiently explain to me that she meant that when the old waste heaps were cleaned up, many bad spells (*karfa*) had been removed by the waste disposal company, bringing freedom to the victims of their harmful influence and allowing them to get married to those from whom they had been separated. In the same vein, when I asked Cherif about the fate of the many "genies" living in the old waste heaps of the city, once removed by Hysacam, he spontaneously answered me by saying:

Concerning the *voirie* [the waste heap located beside his house], since it is not totally removed yet, they [the genies] must be still there, in the alley, but not in the dumpster. But once everything is removed, they will relocate but their [human] neighbours will have nothing to fear. Hysacam on the contrary... [...] They will face some problems, it can't be avoided. The truck will fall over or the chain [to load the dumpster] will break. For now, nothing is happening, but the *jinn* are clever, they are waiting to see where their *voirie* will be taken to. Maybe they will go along to the dumping site of Gaschiga, and that will be the refugee camp of the *jinn*! But they will no longer live with human beings, they will live over there gathered together (November 2008, fr.).

Even if this young man bets on the intelligence of the "genies" to play along and join their cohorts in the new municipal dumping site of Garoua, turned hence into the "refugee camp of the *jinn*," he also expresses a certain level of preoccupation, especially as it concerns the dangers awaiting the Hysacam garbage collectors. Cherif thus echoes many of the rumors circulating in the two cities about the setbacks of the young garbage men recruited by the company with the "forces" living in the refuse—one fell sick, another was "slapped" by a "genie" disturbed in its place of residence. Hysacam's workers themselves talk less about these risks related to their status as "waste workers," even if they hesitantly confess to "taking their precautions" (Head of Hygiene Department Maroua, February 2011, fr.), including "going back to the village from time to time" (dump truck driver, Garoua, November 2009, fr.) to get good protection, or even "sharing their techniques, if one protection appears more profitable for example" (municipal officer, Maroua, February 2011, fr.). These precautions taken by the garbage men remind us of the correlation made by some employees of the national Central-African electricity company, ENERCA, between workplace accidents or recurrent illnesses affecting them and the magical "armors" ("*blindages*," local French) applied by some



individuals to their electrical household appliances, which could harm the workers (Ngouflo 2015: 192). Many of the illnesses have been developed by Hysacam workers, incidentally labouring under difficult conditions, doing exhausting work in sometimes extreme weather. Some have suffered injuries due to heavy loads or sharp waste and respiratory infections caused by the dust inhaled all day long, nausea caused by the stench coming from some accumulations of waste, sunstroke and heatstroke, especially caused by some of their ill-adapted equipment, like rubber boots, etc. These afflictions could thus be interpreted in the light of local conceptions of dangers coming from the dumping grounds and the “forces” they host. And contrary to electrical power which, in the central African context is not considered as a source of magical danger as such, waste accumulations are still considered in Garoua and Maroua as concentration points, within the urban fabric, of both forces and versatile entities, as well as numerous amulets and maraboutic preparations regarded as intrinsically harmful. Finally, even removing the big and ancient waste heaps from the two cities did not seem to put an end to these conceptions or the practices that accompany them. City-dwellers regularly continue to identify remnants of nocturnal maraboutic practices, positive (for wealth and power) or negative (to harm others), near the new dumpsters brought by Hysacam to the old dumping grounds.

On the part of Hysacam and its local executives, the “modern and scientific” waste management proclaimed during many public speeches, leaves room, in practical terms, for wavering between a willingness to maintain this “Cartesian” posture, the recognition of the importance of the “cultural context” and “beliefs” associated to it, and the assumed adherence to these same “beliefs,” to the point of adapting the activities of the company to these.

Two examples particularly showcase this complex balancing act as practiced by the Garoua and Maroua’s branch managers. The Maroua branch manager confessed to having been confronted with some “little problems of sorcery practices” a short time after Hysacam began operations: a worker accused his colleague of bewitching him. “Well, as for me, being Cartesian... Well, you know, it is sometimes expedient to try to understand the meaning without trying to just push it aside, because they live with it, they believe in it,” he narrates, seeming to look for an excuse by positioning himself, as a good “Cartesian” coming from the Southern part of the country, as a stranger to this reasoning (November 2008, fr.). In the end, he instructed his workers to “stop this farce,” while simultaneously threatening them with being taken to the *Laamido* (authorized within the customary legal framework to pronounce judgment, through trial by ordeal, on sorcery and witchcraft accusations). He had at the end “to almost call for a sitting on the matter,” to put an end to this case “which disturbs work!”

In Garoua, I found myself involved in an informal conversation on this theme in the offices of the Urban Community, between the Head of the Technical Department, a Fulani Muslim born in Adamaoua, and the Hysacam branch manager, of Hausa origin but born and raised in Yaoundé, newly arrived in town:

Me [reporting some discussions with city-dwellers]: Then, there were some more occult representations, it was dangerous to get close to the heaps at certain hours...

UC Director: Yes around 6 p.m.-7 p.m...

Branch manager: And at noon when the sun is up in the sky...

UC Director: Yes, these are beliefs...

Me: But is it necessary to take them into consideration?

Branch Manager: Exactly, since there are cosmic forces that are present, they are active within waste... because it is a mixture of everything.

UC Director [turning to the branch manager, astonished]: And you believe in these forces?

Branch Manager: Yes, yes, of course... I studied African communication, you know!

UC Director: Really? Me, I don't believe in such things... I go on the waste heaps and I don't have any issues...

Branch Manager: I personally know of a man who had issues, stiff neck...

UC Director: Because he visited a dumping ground?

Branch Manager: Yes, yes, he was sorting out things, he was collecting around 1 p.m., he didn't know what happened to him, he came out with a torticollis, his neck was stiff...

Branch Manager [to the UC Director, pointing at me]: She is innocent, you see, as she is carrying out her research, she has no bad intention... [To me] here in Africa, you cannot sweep after 6 p.m....

UC Director: But how about around 12, 1 p.m.?

Me: So, I happened to finish at noon, and that's it...

Branch Manager: Normal [...]. Since there is some other information about this. In a house, they say it is not good to finish the whole meal... because you are not alone! There are some invisible forces that must share the same meal as yours. So if you are a good glutton, you finish everything, you can be sanctioned! Your sleep can be troubled, you must always leave a bit... always leave some for the invisible forces.

UC Director: Really?! In our place, they say "when you bring a plate, you serve yourself, you eat everything on your plate and lick your fingers"!

Branch Manager: No, but this is dangerous [smile]. I saw all of this in African communication...

UC Director: Where I come from, that's what we believe. And I know some tribes where, after a certain time, you don't throw trash away. Even if it is in the house, you don't do it.

Branch Manager: You don't sweep, you don't take the garbage out. Even if some women are pregnant, you don't take the waste outside because it can have some consequences...

Me: Here in the North?

UC Director: Yes, yes! Even where I come from, we believe that after 4 p.m., you don't sweep your house, even in Fulani households! If you do, you are also sweeping out the spirit, the blessing.



Branch Manager: You are sweeping all your good luck away.

UC Director: You sweep away good luck and you welcome bad luck [laughter]!

Branch Manager: They say, once the sun has set, after 4 p.m., leave everything alone, all your good luck will remain intact in the house.

UC Director: And you sweep very early in the morning.

Branch Manager: When the sun comes up, then everything is OK (October 2008, fr.).

This conversation illustrates particularly well the tense situation in which the executives and technicians of waste management find themselves, stuck as they are between their display of adhering to a “modern and scientific” doctrine and, hardly admitting but nonetheless quite obviously giving credence to an ancient magico-religious register in the process of perpetual reconfiguration. Thus, the same Garoua UC Director, who was playing the “firm Cartesian” role, later confided how particularly well-versed he was in esoteric sciences, allowing him to contact *jinn*, and that “despite his certificates and the eight years spent in France, with many trips around Europe,” he could not help but to “think that such things are found in refuse heaps” (November 2009, fr.). Also wavering between two positions, the Hysacam branch manager, during this conversation, repeatedly hid himself behind his training in African communication yet also mentioned the “centrifugal forces” sheltered in waste heaps and their mischievous deeds, thus inferring his genuine fear of these “forces.” Just as the local representations, the institutions’ narratives and attitudes faced with the “sorcerers covered with trash” and the dumping grounds’ “forces” demonstrate a great deal of plasticity, adjusting to their audience and the context in which they are delivered.



In Garoua and Maroua, the conceptions and practices of city-dwellers and magico-religious specialists regarding the recourse to bodily excretions, discarded intimate items and great waste accumulations, in the framework of this magical and evil “work of the hand,” perfectly illustrating the words of L. de Heusch (2001: 17) on the “sorcerer metaphorically covered with refuse” and the “evil magic [as rooted] in filth, pollution and transgression.” Collecting the waste of others, as well as carrying out a certain number of maraboutic manipulations on a big trash pile is, in this context, regarded as one of the ultimate acts of transgression. They lead to physical contact with disgusting and polluting materials and substances from which one should preferably be detached and avoid touching. These sorcery uses of waste also take advantage

of the inability to break away completely from what comes out of one's body, so as to jeopardize the physical integrity and social personality remotely. In this regard, the sorcerer appears truly, and not only metaphorically, as being "covered in refuse." Sorcery is then truly an "invasion of waste," as it takes advantage especially between 1985 and 2008, of the invasion of waste in Garoua and Maroua to proliferate, at least in the minds of their inhabitants.

Faced with this "detritic" sorcery, successive institutions that headed the two cities, while presenting themselves as the guarantors of political, moral and sanitary order, find themselves time after time immersed "in filth." It was first done openly, even to present this recourse to refuse as a prerogative of power, by the sacred "kings-sorcerers" Guiziga Bui Marva of the Diamaré plain, in order to fight witches on equal terms, and on a larger scale to protect their kingdom and see to its reproduction. Fulani Muslim elites who took over from them distanced themselves from these "pagan" practices, in order to better resort to the "forces" of waste in secrecy and to their sole advantage. Colonial administrators followed by Cameroonian municipal institutions, starting from the second half of the twentieth century, found themselves gradually overpowered by these "forces," that invade public domain through the waste hosting them and accumulating there, creating a feeling that "sorcerers covered with refuse" are on rampage. Recently at last, as part of the initiative to manage garbage collection and street cleaning in both cities with the help of a private company, municipal institutions pretended to do away with these "beliefs" in the name of "modernity" and "science," while confronting these in the concrete management of waste and coping with them when in physical contact with waste and, in some cases, adhering to them. This brief perspective on the evolution of the attitudes of Garoua and Maroua institutions when confronted with "sorcerers covered with refuse" thus reveals how much, as M. Douglas (2001: 95) puts it when speaking about pollution, they were able to understand early enough how waste is "destructive to existing patterns [and] has potentiality". This context reveals finally how disorder "symbolises both danger and power" (*ibid.*).

Resorting to waste for magical and evil purposes in Garoua and Maroua, be it by lay city-dwellers or by the elites, stresses furthermore an analysis already made by many witchcraft specialists: "As Evans-Pritchard reminds us, witchcraft is a daily thing; these representations, these actions are the core of ordinary life [...]" (Fancello 2015: 26). What could be more common and more ordinary indeed than bodily and household waste, which are produced and manipulated daily? But how dangerous a weapon can this be when one believes that it can be used to touch individuals in their physical and domestic intimacy, getting as close as possible to their bodies and affecting their most

vital functions? The fact that waste accumulates in public places in Garoua and Maroua is as much worrisome for the city-dwellers as it fosters the shift of “detritic” sorcery from the intimate sphere to the public domain, characterized by anomy or “polynomy” (Bonhomme 2012: 9) and anonymity. Henceforth, it adds to the long list of “new” sorcery phenomena that grow on the fertile ground of worries caused by the density and intensity of interactions in the African continent’s cities. For this reason, the sorcery of waste and refuse heaps described in Garoua and Maroua can truly be considered as an urban phenomenon *par excellence*. Even if the underlying causes can be traced to the rural origin of Maroua, today, it is embedded on one of the biggest current urban problems in Africa: the efficient and fair management of city-dwellers’ waste by municipal authorities.

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## ABSTRACT

Many city-dwellers from Garoua and Maroua, northern part of Cameroon, identify bodily excretions and discarded intimate items as tools for an instrumental sorcery, based on a continuity seen as irreducible with the body and what is rejected from it. Facing with these sorcery uses of waste, the public authorities' position inherits from older conceptions of great accumulations of waste, seen as gathering ambivalent and versatile "forces" that can be harnessed by powerful individuals for purposes of domination and increase in wealth. Far from questioning these conceptions, the initiatives taken in 2008 by the authorities to manage garbage collection and street cleaning in both cities, with the help of a private company, induces rather a renewal of this sorcery of refuse.

Keywords: Cameroon, body, chieftaincy, city-state, excretions, public hygiene, refuse, remains, sacred kingship, sorcery, urban governance.

## RÉSUMÉ

*Entre gestion municipale et usages sorcellaires des déchets : les institutions camerounaises face aux « sorciers couverts d'ordures » (Garoua et Maroua).*— Nombre de citoyens de Garoua et Maroua, au nord du Cameroun, identifient les excréments corporels et les objets intimes jetés comme les instruments d'une sorcellerie instrumentale, reposant sur une continuité pensée comme irréductible entre le corps des individus et ce qui en est rejeté. Face à ces usages sorcellaires des déchets, la posture des pouvoirs publics est héritière de conceptions anciennes considérant les grandes accumulations d'ordures comme rassemblant des « forces » ambivalentes et versatiles, pouvant être instrumentalisées par des individus puissants, à des fins de domination et d'enrichissement. Loin de les remettre en cause, la reprise en main en 2008 de la gestion municipale des déchets dans ces deux villes par une société privée induit un renouvellement de cette sorcellerie des déchets.

Mots-clés : Cameroun, chefferie, cité-État, corps, déchets, excréments, gouvernance urbaine, hygiène publique, restes, royauté sacrée, sorcellerie.