Literature in the Law: The Legal *Clando* in Cameroon

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Upon independence, almost all former European colonies in Africa retained the colonially imposed European legal systems despite their history of oppression and their sharp conflict with traditional legal philosophies.[1] There were and are, however, those who resist this continued legal colonialism. This article investigates such resistance in the Cameroonian setting as demonstrated in legal narrative — storytelling done in a legal setting and/or language. It encompasses both traditionally defined fictional narrative as well as narrative found within legal cases. The article will begin with an exposition of the difficulties of resisting a dominant legal order in any narrative situation, touch on a particular characteristic of African legal traditions that affects this attempt, and then proceed to a more specific investigation of attempts at legal narrative resistance in the Cameroonian setting.

The Hidden Narrative: Literature in the Law

As already stated, this article will consider both Cameroonian law cases and fictional writing as "legal literature." While the former might be an unfamiliar site for narrative, legal cases do provide a fruitful arena for narrative investigation similar to fictional writing. To better situate how such usually disparate forms of writing are performing the same narrative function, the general subject matter of the article can be reductively described as simply being about telling stories through legal writing, or perhaps even more succinctly, "telling legal stories." Still, although this choice of an essential description is reasonable, it is not wholly satisfactory since such essentialism is too limiting. The use of the word "limiting" here, however, does not simply indicate that the one-line description employed is too reductionist. While such brief synopses are

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1 Of the currently recognized thirty-eight sub-Saharan African countries, only two, Sudan and Lesotho, have a dominant non-European legal system (Islamic Sharia law and a reconstituted indigenous law respectively).

always somewhat misleading and inadequate, this article is, in fact, about telling stories that are legal in nature. But the qualification of being too limiting remains more than just a stock apologist's line on the dangers of reductionism in theoretical writing. The qualification is, in fact, a crucial characteristic of the subject matter. The reason for such (apologetic) denial of a simple apologetic function is that when I employ the caveat "limiting," I am referring not to my own writing about legal stories, but rather to the very nature of telling legal stories, a nature which is problematic and requires consideration from positions other than the central(ized) position of legal writing.

The reason for this need to read beyond the boundaries of strictly legal writing is that the process of telling legal stories is always an ideological process of failing to tell the whole story. Of course, one can point out that such a "failure" is common to any storytelling process, whether it be written, oral, and/or visual. What is somewhat uncommon about legal writing, however, is that it specifically requests the telling of a variety of competing narratives, and then selects only certain ones (and even then only certain parts of them) for presentation as the "whole story," all under a cover of objectivity and all-encompassing Truth.[2] As one Cameroonian lawyer has said, "La vérité juridique n'est pas la vérité vécue" (Bugue). In other words, rather than being simply a process that fails to tell the whole story, it represents more specifically an attempt to fail to tell very particular stories. It is this written form of storytelling — the legally true and singular description of events transpired — which is always overly reductionist, and thus limiting. This singular authoritative voice of legal discourse exists to describe the (often authoritarian) control of society, and thereby succeeds in being one of the most powerful tools in perpetuating such control.

The reason then that the initial introductory description — "telling legal stories" — was not completely accurate is that this article is not so much about that control as it is about the means of deforming that control so as to alter its effects on society, and therefore society in general. When one is not in a position to establish or control the rules of production (in this case, writing) one can nonetheless play within those rules so as to attempt to get written what "ought not to be" and to read what is written in ways that it "ought not to be" read. While both of these means of playing within the rules are important, it is this latter practice, particularly within the confines of legal discourse, which offers the best opportunity for the decentralization and pluralization of the authoritative

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[2] Consider, for example, what most people are familiar with as the "swearing-in moment" of an American trial — "Do you swear to tell the truth, the *whole truth* and nothing but the truth, so help you God?" (emphasis mine).

legal storyteller. With this opportunity comes also the opportunity to fracture the illusion of a monolithic, authoritarian control of society. So while the telling of legal stories is indeed crucial to this article, it will be the (mis)reading of these stories that ultimately constitutes the real essence of this written story. Therefore, the brief introductory description would be better read (as opposed to just rewritten) as follows: it is about (the reading of) the telling of stories through legal writing. With that description in mind, let us now consider some brief illustrative and introductory examples.

In a 1998 issue of *Arizona Attorney*, Robert Van Wyck writes a short piece about his experiences with a kindergarten class performing a play based on Goldilocks and the Three Bears. This play was a bit different from the usual Goldilocks story, however, as it was a mock trial of Goldilocks, accused of burglary. After the children had prepared and performed the play, Mr. Van Wyck asked them several questions about the judicial process, such as what a lawyer does. He quotes one five-year-old's response to this question as, "Lawyers help you tell your story to the judge" (p. 12). In response to this charmingly simple answer Mr. Van Wyck's stated, "from the mouths of babes. It's so simple. We help people tell their story to the judge. That's it. We do no more and we do no less" (p. 12). Leaving aside the rhetorical move of self-aggrandizing modesty, there is an issue here that troubles me, and which should trouble someone so concerned with people being able to "tell their story." Even if one grants that lawyers are doing no more and no less than helping people tell their story to the judge, can one then expect that the judge is doing the same thing? In other words, is the judge helping people tell their story (no more and no less)?

The response to this question, regardless of what any five-year-olds or judges may claim, is no. A judge's job is to apply and/or interpret the law, assign punishment to wrongdoers and redress the compromised rights of the innocent, etc., or in short, to maintain a particular dominant social order. But it is never to be the ghostwriter for someone's story, regardless of the fact that this is exactly what a judge does. The first set of express responsibilities completely overshadows the second, arguably concomitant one. To be even more direct, an individual's story is rather irrelevant when compared with the Law's story since the latter has its own ideological concerns that not only always supersede those of any individual, but are often in direct conflict with them. By Law's own definitions, it must respect itself before it can respect others.

It is important to note, however, that such cynicism is not generally shared by those within the legal profession. Mr. Van Wyck quotes the boy's response as an example of how the children possess "a remarkable understanding of the judicial process" (p. 12). I would wholeheartedly agree, but only with the following qualifier. The children show a

remarkable understanding of the judicial process *from the judicial point of view*. It is almost self-evident that judges (and lawyers for that matter) do not wish to claim authorship to a person's story. Such an admission instantly compromises one of the theoretical cornerstones of almost every legal system in the world today — the belief in the complete objectivity of the court. Whatever myths of objectivity still exist (and plenty do in legal discourse) authors are in the least tenable position to argue for objectivity towards their own creations. And yet the "objective" judge is ultimately the one writing the litigants' definitive story, thus calling into question her objective position and the stories' continued relatedness to those who ostensibly experienced them.

But this question is not really a difficult one to answer. The stories judges (help to?) tell are, in fact, *always* not the people's stories. Consider, for example, the following Cameroonian "real-life" judicial (re)presentation of one of Albert Ondobo's stories:

> Attendu qu'il résulte des pièces du dossier et des débats publics à l'audience, preuve suffisante contre Messi Joseph et Ondobo Albert de s'être ensemble et de concert, courant 1975–1976 [...]
> 1. Dans les conditions susceptibles de troubler la paix publique, pénétr[er] dans les terres paisiblement occupées par Manga Symphorien.
> 2. Dans les mêmes circonstances de temps et de lieu, détrui[re] tout bien appartenant en tout ou en partie à autrui, notamment des bornes au préjudice de la même victime.
>
> Attendu que par les constatations précédentes l'arrêt confirmatif attaqué a suffisamment motivé sa décision . [3]
>
> (*RCD/CLR* 21-22: 23)

It is readily apparent that the opportunity for Mr. Ondobo to tell his story here within the judge's written presentation of that story is extremely limited. First of all, whatever chance Mr. Ondobo had to influence the "pièces du dossier" and the "débats publics" is entirely glossed over by a simple reference to their (here) unwritten existence. The stories told there are lost or, at best, completely distilled into the presentation of the facts, a presentation that comprises essentially two (rather confusingly worded) sentences. Note additionally that this presentation is then labeled as "suffisamment motivé," putting to rest (legally at least) any questions of whether there is anything else that needs to be recounted. *Even if* Mr. Ondobo cannot deny that the basic

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[3] This quotation is from a Cameroonian Supreme Court decision (Arrêt du 23 juillet 1981) concerning Mr. Ondobo's appeal of his conviction in La Cour d'Appel de Yaoundé. The quote is the only description in either decision of the events that transpired. The remaining page and a half of text in the decision concerns establishing which laws are applicable, and declaring that the lower court ruling stands.

facts are true, it is apparent that he has no voice in the telling of his own story. It is the judge (and the Law) that have co-opted his voice and written his story for him. As far as Mr. Ondobo is concerned, it appears that not only is the case closed, but (the writing of) the story as well.

The problem in evidence here is even better summed up by a different sort of concrete, "real-life" example. In this case, the example takes the form of a man making an appearance in the Tribunal de Première Instance de Bertoua on charges of driving an illegal, unlicensed taxi (*un clando*). The man offered the defense that he was simply driving one of his friend's children to school as a favor. Referring to the police report he had read prior to the trial, the judge asked the accused why the report stated unequivocally that the car was being driven as *un clando*, with no mention of the accused's proffered defense. The accused, in a moment of either clarity or frustration, responded simply, "comme c'est eux [la police] qui sont écrivains, je ne peux pas écrire à leur place" (Bertoua). Indeed, the facts of an event exist solely in the words of those who have the power to recount them. As a Cameroonian prosecutor said, "il n'y a pas question de ce qui s'est passé, mais de ce qui est dit" (Mpomang). If there is only one story presented as reliable evidence, and that document is written by those in power, the likelihood of any other stories even making an appearance in the final decision is very remote. The layperson before a court of law is never the *écrivain*, and thus has no way to insure his story being told.

The judge, of course, was not swayed by this response. He could not be. To admit the importance of this crucial fact would be to admit the privileged, non-neutral position of justice, and more specifically, of himself. As the statement remained a powerful one, however, the judge did feel compelled at least to offer some diversion to the implicit accusation by asking then why the accused had signed the police report. While a seemingly perfectly legitimate question in theory, it shamelessly avoids certain realities involving the police in Cameroon and serves only to mask the underlying issue of authorship. Whether the driver signed the report or not, willingly or not, he still did not write it. Nor will he be able to write the story (the judicial decision) that describes his actions and his fate. In the end, it is the lawyer (perhaps) who tells the story in court, the judge who writes it, and the law that shapes and surveys the whole process. When production is complete, the driver is a voiceless actor on the judicial page,[4] having neither written his part nor directed his actions.

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[4] Note that this could just as easily, and certainly more commonly does read "judicial stage." But the "staged" event is over after the performance. It is the record left behind which interests me most. While the legal drama is indeed a theatrical one, it is one that is ultimately retold or represented in narrative form. What is most widely read is the final script, not the actual performance. Note too that this second

The possibility of any actor's personal story influencing the public's reviews of such a performance seems nonexistent, and leaves one wondering whether an individual's own story can ever seriously challenge the dominant social discourse when it has to pass through the lexicon, formatting, and editing of its close relative, the dominant legal discourse.

A large part of the conundrum here is the apparent predominance of the official "legal storytellers" — judges, and to a lesser degree the lawyers, *procureurs*, and law professors who support their work - compared to the relative effacement of those of whom the stories ostensibly speak. As the Directeur Général of a prominent Cameroonian legal publication stated,

> Le principal acteur est le juge, l'homme de la loi. On ne s'intéresse pas à ce qu'ont dit les partis ou les avocats. C'est une question de bon droit, pas de bonne histoire. (Dontchueng Kouam)

The primary question this article seeks to address then is as follows — how can one tell one's story in the legal setting when that story has to pass through lawyers, judges, and the Law itself? How can one be critical of the dominant social discourse when one must speak in and through the dominant legal discourse? How does a taxi man from Bertoua criticize a social order which will not permit him to give his friend's children a ride or to make an "honest" living (whichever the case may be) through the system run by his accusers without simply becoming another illegal *clando* and having his story reduced to that simple conclusion?

Despite (or, as we will see, because of) the privileged judicial writing position, the complex language, and the restrictive "prose" of legal discourse, there is a way of being the "illegal *clando*" and still becoming able to tell a story critical of the dominant discourse. Even if one cannot physically write the story, one can succeed in influencing the way that story is read. What is produced from the pens of judges, like what is uttered from the mouths of babes, can be interpreted in many ways, and its effects influenced accordingly. While, as I have already indicated, the individual can make no absolute claim to telling his or her legal story, the judge is equally incapable of making such a claim on that story. If anyone has a claim on that story it is the legal discourse itself within which the story must be told. So, instead of fighting directly against the legal discourse from the outside, it is more productive to work indirectly against it from within. In other words, the answer for the

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representation only further weakens the actor's character, depersonalizing and distancing his "role" as an actual human being and eliminating his ability to actually voice his lines, and thereby lay claim to them.

clando, and for all other lay people, is to become legal *clandos* — operating within the legal discourse under a cover of legality.

With this starting point in mind, we will be able to discover how this tactic can be employed in both literary legal texts and legal literary texts within the Cameroonian setting. But before arriving at an investigation of some specific examples of legal texts that demonstrate various styles of narrative resistance to a dominant legal order, we must first consider the obstacles and advantages that exist in this taking place in an African (Cameroonian) setting.

Revealing Legal Plurality and Decentering Authority: Orality and the Law

Since its progressive independence in 1960–1961, Cameroon has maintained a dual legal system based almost entirely on the imported English and French legal systems. Since that time (and before as well), there has been a resistance to these foreign principles of law and order that regulate Cameroonian society. The goal has been to increase the jurisdiction and power of so-called traditional law and legal principles to the detriment of the dual European-based legal system. While much of this resistance has been very overt, antagonistic, and at times even violent, another, very different form of resistance has been put forth. Some have advocated a method that, although much more conciliatory and even passive, is ultimately more forceful and successful. This method seeks to emphasize the presence of traditional legal principles in European-based legal systems. Instead of pursuing separation or conquest, the jurist Stanislas Meloné suggests combining the two traditions in a way that would allow customary law to "tempérer la rigueur de celui-ci [le droit du Code]" (p. 19). In his philosophy, resistance should begin first by accepting and learning the dominant legal order, and then using that knowledge and insider position to work positive changes within that discourse.

But there are difficulties and limitations to this approach. The legal "narrator" is forced to borrow heavily from the dominant discourse's stylistic and linguistic rules and practices in order to be able to blend in and even "have one's day in court." Additionally, the narrator still cannot even accomplish the narration herself, but must instead rely on the judge as filter and ultimate writer of the desired narrative message. At the same time, though, such problems can offer an extremely powerful means of opposing dominant legal philosophies by challenging the European (post)colonialist discourse on its own terms and in its own language.

One indigenous African custom that helps is the oral nature of traditional law. While in Western legal traditions the written, "objective" decision serves as the medium, in African legal traditions it is most often the oral story, or narrative. Therefore, not only is the traditional African "judge's" resolution of a matter expressed in an oral manner, but, more importantly, the diffusion of that resolution within a society is necessarily oral as well. For our present purposes this practice is important because it helps break down the illusion that separates law and narrative. Since this is a separation the law wishes to maintain, the connection with narrative is routinely refused. Narrative implies a certain degree of weakness within the Western legal tradition as it admits the very un-legal quality of plural voice or authorship, and therefore of decentered or fallible authority

This diffusion of power is unacceptable since an elemental strategy of legal discourse, as Thomas Beebee explains, is to efface the Law's constructed relationships of power and authority by locating their origin in a distant past (p. 150). As this distant (mythological) past can never be fully reconstructed in the present, this singular "origin" of authority can never be conclusively de-constructed so as to demonstrate its plural origins (p. 158). In a sort of tautological reverse teleology, Law both explains and reinforces its authoritative discourse by tracing it to a hallowed ancestral singular discourse which itself is untraceable and, in fact, unexplainable. The process is similar to divine rulers who were once able to claim power by basing their authority upon the ultimate "unconstructable" entity — God. Such immaculate inception of authority has been and remains a very powerful and successful strategy in Western society, in legal discourse as well as in other discursive arenas, but it is susceptible to narrative tactics.

But susceptible does not equal powerless. While a complete discussion of all the arguments against this marriage of discourses is beyond the scope of this article, I can present one argument that succinctly captures the bulk of the complaint. Alan Dershowitz, in his "Life is not a Dramatic Narrative," argues that literature not only has nothing to do with legal discourse, but is actually dangerous to it (p. 104). He presents the "Chekov principle" as his proof. The "Chekov principle," to paraphrase, is that if you introduce a gun in act 1, it must be discharged by act 3 (p. 100). In other words, narratives are built backwards from the end, with elements presented beforehand to lead up to this always already chosen conclusion. Mr. Dershowitz is quite right in his observation. But this is precisely why he is also wrong. Narrative has everything to do with the law precisely because it is dangerous to it — it reveals what legal discourse does — write stories that justify predetermined conclusions, or messages. Attempts at revealing this cover-up of narrative plurality are what we will be looking for, and the underlying African oral legal tradition helps in that quest.

Negotiating a Difficult Course: The Legal Clando

Revealing and ultimately disturbing the dominant legal discourse through storytelling is neither easy nor common. Most attempts result in failure — either by producing no significant disturbance or by actually reinforcing the dominant discourse. There are, in fact, many more narrative examples of failed attempts at legal resistance in Cameroon than there are of successful ones. These failures are just as important as the successes, especially considering that a certain form of failure is ironically essential to success. We will therefore begin by considering several of these unsuccessful attempts before concluding with a couple "successful" ones.

One controversial aspect of these examples will be a seeming philosophy to admit defeat, cease active resistance, and work passively for change. While I do not want to advocate submission to legal oppression and injustice, I do, in fact, want to propose that there are ways precisely in which a *seeming* philosophy of working with(in) the dominant legal discourse rather than against it — being a legal *clando* — can be effective. The reason for this clandestine approach is that those accused of social transgression who resist vigorously are often great allies of the dominant social order. Any legal system, as well as the society it ostensibly protects, needs a certain "criminal other" element in order to better define its status as moral and legal authority. As one of the characters in the Cameroonian novel *A Legend of the Dead* observes, "Stealing is good for society as it helps cops, lawyers, and judges distinguish themselves" (Asong, pp. 14–15). Note that the statement is not simply that stealing is good for cops, lawyers, and judges (although it is), but rather that stealing is *good for society* because it helps legal professionals distinguish themselves. In this sense, legal professionals, and society, are more allied with than opposed to lawbreakers. Realizing this can save a lot of trouble as it indicates the futility of trying to tell one's story on one's own within the dominant legal discourse and demonstrates instead the opportunity to get one's story willingly presented by playing (with/in) their game.

The first literary example from Cameroon of a futile strategy is that of attempting simply to avoid the dominant legal discourse and return to a so-called traditional legal discourse. The anglophone writer Linus Asong has this as one of the principle themes of his trilogy.[5] In it, those who resist the modern state's increasing incursions into traditional life in Nkokonoko Small Monje are automatically typed and treated as outlaws as the state government essentially makes no distinction between those

5 *A Stranger in His Homeland*, *The Crown of Thorns*, and *A Legend of the Dead*.

who preach armed revolution and those who only seek a reinforcement of internal tribal legal traditions. What is most important here is that even a return to traditional legal structures as both remedy to and escape from the humiliation, oppression, and misunderstanding of modern Cameroonian law is doomed because such open defiance is always already outlawed. Attempts at choosing traditional legal systems over modern ones in Cameroon are at best successful only at avoiding any contact with state legal structures. They never disrupt or seriously challenge the dominant legal paradigm. It is a strategy of pure flight. And when this flight has insufficient space in which to isolate itself completely from the legal structure of the modern state (place itself literally outside the law), the law will label such attempts as figuratively out(side the) law. Avoidance, as peaceful or non-confrontational as it may seek to be, thus automatically achieves the status of outlaw.

In *Crown of Thorns*, it is, in fact, the Elders' attempts to apply traditional principles of justice to members of the tribe that leads to a status of outlaw for themselves and for traditional justice. When they discover that the Chief and several Elders are implicated in the theft and attempted sale as "indigenous art" of the most sacred of their religious statues, the remaining Elders proclaim that justice is possible only through traditional methods of judgment and punishment. It is at this moment, however, that they learn that traditional justice on traditional subject matter, is no longer necessarily within the purvey of traditional jurisdiction. When they declare to the District Officer that they have deposed their Chief, his reply, is simply that, "The law forbids it" (p. 155). What the Elders failed to realize is there is no legislative power outside the dominant legal discourse. Their attempt at peaceful resistance in the form of following traditional law rather than modern law is therefore refused by the dominant legal order

A seemingly different approach, which ultimately produces equally unsuccessful results, is portrayed in the novels *Le miroir bleu* by Victor Beti Benanga and the aforementioned *A Legend of the Dead*. In these novels, characters attempt to avoid the dominant legal discourse by refusing to speak or engage with it. This strategy is one of silence, with the hope that such silence (lack of personal story) will prevent the dominant legal discourse from telling any story.

Upon being thrown in prison, the two main characters, Azombo Mama and KB, are introduced to the judicial process and offered advice by the other prisoners in the form of mock trials. The essence of this help and guidance is to offer the accused counsel - whether this means simply advice on how to speak or a sort of facsimile of a lawyer to speak for him. Consider, for example, the following strategy, offered to KB. Aside from the Pidgin English, it could serve as an official Lawyer's Creed on witness preparation. "Tell we what you tink and we sha tell you wha they

will ass you, and how you wi hanswer them" (p. 69). Azombo Mama, on the other hand, receives more than just lawyerly advice as he does in fact choose a "lawyer" who tries to speak for him (pp. 113–114). In the end, though, there is no difference between these two forms of judicial counsel; in both cases they only lead to a position of discursive powerlessness.

The reason for this discursive failure is that the counsel received by these two men proves to be nothing more than a strategy of silence. They learn the importance of saying nothing, of resisting the dominant legal discourse by resisting telling their stories. Consider the essence of the counsel KB receives:

> If you know something they don know, keep it unti they press it out of you [...]. What if they prove that I knew more than I have told them? They cannot proof. Ya head is not cupboard they wi open to see what you refused to remove. Anytime they say someting true whish you did not want to say, say you had said it. If they argue, tell them you tought you have said so. Tell them you forgot. Who does not forget? But member, don't over hanswer. Sometimes people go to prison jus because they hanswer questions whish they no ass them. (pp. 69–70)

The rather express advice here for KB is to say absolutely nothing unless asked (and then only if forcibly asked), and then not to offer anything more than exactly what is asked. Azombo Mama receives much the same lesson, although in somewhat less explicit and less verbal terms. He is asked to recount his entire story to the "legal audience," which he proceeds to do (p. 114). The mock court then pronounces a mock judgment — placement in a sort of job skills boot camp. The mock court explains that this rather light punishment is a result of Azombo Mama's age (and not his convincingly eloquent story). On the other hand, the price Azombo Mama must pay for telling his story is a brutal one — costing him 50 baton blows from the "guards" (p. 114). Although less explicit than for KB, the lesson is nonetheless apparent — that Azombo Mama should not bother trying to tell his story as his real punishment comes as a result of his doing so.

The problem in these initial examples of people trying to tell their own stories within the dominant legal discourse is that they do not recognize that there is no overt room for alternative voices in the legal narrative. Their discursive resistance, however peaceful or officially legal it might be, will not be tolerated since it represents a challenge to the established singular authority of legal discourse. Instead, these people should be playing the role of the *clando* — recognizing the discursive power of the legal system and trying to work with(in) it rather than against it.

An example of this successful *clando* critical voice exists in the two-act play, "Dans le pétrin" by Joseph Kengni. Here, a young student,

Noutsa, discovers that his prospects for entering *la première* are severely compromised because the man he thought was his father is really his grandfather, and that the latter has decided that he can no longer pay for his education. Upon learning from his mother that his biological father has been in jail since before he was born for the corruption of a minor (Noutsa's mother), Noutsa decides to go talk with the judge about his predicament. Noutsa's reasoning is that the legal system has punished him for the misdeeds of his parents by denying him the education a father can provide, and therefore should be financially responsible for his education.

It is this argument that Noutsa presents to the Tribunal during the second act. The court's reaction is, not surprisingly, hostile, with the Président initially assuming that Noutsa is playing a joke and making fun of the court. Noutsa is nonetheless able to hold the court's attention by speaking the court's language and by referring to legal documents and concepts as supporting the basic facts of his condition. He presents his story as consistent with the legal discourse. Nonetheless, the play ends on a pessimistic air — the court will consider his argument and make a decision later. Noutsa himself declares, "Je demeure donc dans le pétrin" (p. 59). But this is not the case that *Kengni* is trying to write. His concern is the increasing social abandonment of children as Cameroonian society goes from communal to individual living philosophies. This change is one that has been assisted and even required by the imposed precepts of European concepts of family law and economic responsibility. Therefore, through Noutsa's legal failure a story critical of this "foreign" legal order is successfully told. It is *clando* writing — disguised in a losing speech that (ironically) properly and respectfully employs the dominant legal discourse.

Finally, I would like to present a famous Cameroonian legal case that demonstrates much the same *clando* phenomenon. The presence of this case in an article is problematic because there is no citable source for it.[6] This "problem" is precisely illustrative, however, of the potential narrative characteristics of legal cases as a surprising number of judges, lawyers, and even laypersons mentioned the case during interviews. The related story of the case always involved the following facts. The case concerned a Cameroonian law against "excessive" dowry, enacted to

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6 Published case law is notoriously rare in Cameroon. There is currently no official governmental source for any published caselaw. Supreme Court decisions were the last to be published by the government, but even those have gone unpublished since the late 1980s. Judges, lawyers, and other legal professionals rely on legal journals that publish a few of the most important recent cases and on personally obtaining photocopies of original decisions that they have heard about and feel are of importance to them.

"modernize" (*i.e.*, Europeanize) Cameroonian culture. A very rich Northern Cameroonian had agreed to give his daughter in marriage to a man who had given him a very large dowry consisting of several types of animals, foodstuffs, and other valuables. When the local governmental representative heard of the large dowry, he brought a suit against the father for "excessive" dowry. The father lost the case and had to return the dowry.

This legal story appears rather mundane and unremarkable, but the reason why so many people recalled and spoke of it was the way in which the losing party was able to write his story into the legal decision. Despite being in a no-win situation, the father accepted the authority of the court, practically admitting that he had indeed received an "excessive dowry." But, in doing so, he nonetheless required that the court enumerate the proof of this excessiveness. In other words, the court, by its own rules, needed to recount what he had received (*i.e.*, how many cows, how many sacks of rice, how many bolts of cloth, etc.) in order to demonstrate its accusation of excessiveness was founded. This was the precise story that the father wanted told all along — to demonstrate both his power and the desirability and honor of such traditional practices. In other words, the perception of people who read and retold this legal story was both that he was indeed an important and rich man to have received so much for his daughter's dowry and that dowries were a means of achieving not only wealth but also such attendant prestige. Therefore, by accepting the discursive authority of the court, he was able to tell the story that mattered to him — one of his own prestige and renown —as well as implicitly tell the story of the state's inability to suppress traditional social practices. He was a successful legal *clando* even while losing his case.

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