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Dossier

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Kwaku Adomako

An Overwhelming Consensus? How Moral Panics about Sexual and Gender Diversity Help Reshape Local Traditions in Ghana

In June 2021, the Ghanaian parliament introduced a bill to criminalise LGBT* people and their advocates. The bill's supporters are working to create a movement that equates belonging to the nation with heterosexual culture. Local peoples, identities, expressions and desires that fall outside heteronormativity are thus seen as alien and existential threats to the nation. This paper shows how the desire to repress these social categories makes them visible through the public debates that actors provoke. The stated impetus to moblise is the anti-colonial pursuit to protect "Ghanaian family values". Yet, these are evidently shaped by Christian ideologies, historically disseminated through colonisation. The bill's supporters attempt to secure a monopoly on truth in debates by producing new discourses on targeted minorities, while (re)defining "tradition," "culture" and "values".

The links between[1] the global "anti-gender" and anti-LGBT*[2] movements have been discussed by many authors[3]. Doris Buss, for example, shows how western "pro-family" activists may link the "homosexual" and "feminist" movements to "an undermining of the 'natural family[4]'". In a similar vein, when it comes to Africa, Haley McEwen explains how leaders discursively use the protection of

1. The author would like to express a heartfelt thank you to Dr Awondo and Prof. Chauvin for their support in writing this article, to Laila Yahaya and Adisa (AD) Musah for verifying the translations, Rightify Ghana for personally providing regular updates of events in country, and to Prof. Drzewiecka, Mr Akagbor and Prof. Adomako Ampofo for assisting with the conceptual framing. This research was funded by the Swiss National Science Foundation.

2. The "*" represents all possible variations of the LGBT acronym (e.g., LGBTTQQIAAP to refer to lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, transsexual, queer, questioning, intersex, asexual, ally and pansexual).

3. H. McEwen, « Inventing Family: Colonial Knowledge Politics of "Family" and the Coloniality of "Pro-Family" Activism in Africa », *Africa Today*, vol. 67, n° 4, 2021, p. 31-49 ; P. Awondo, *Le sexe et ses doubles. Homosexualités en postcolonie*, Lyon, ENS éditions, 2019 ; K. Kaoma, « Globalizing the Culture Wars: U.S. Conservatives, African Churches, and Homophobia » [online], Political Research Associates, 1er décembre 2009, <https://politicalresearch.org/2009/12/01/globalizing-culture-wars#The_African_Context>, consulted on 10 January 2022 ; D. E. Buss and D. Herman, *Globalizing Family Values: The Christian Right in International Politics*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 2003.

4. D. E. Buss, « Finding the Homosexual in Women's Rights: The Christian Right in International Politics », *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, vol. 6, n° 2, 2004, p. 257-284.

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the gender binary and the nuclear family (previously ushered in by missionaries and colonial administrators to maintain racial hierarchies) as a pretext for making anti-colonial political claims to secure national sovereignty. A principal tactic that is deployed is to repudiate homosexuality, qualifying it as an alien, "non-African" phenomenon[5]. As this paper will show, Ghana's case exhibits similar moves to instrumentalise LGBT*-related controversies as "sexual moral panics[6]" to achieve political ends in ways comparable to what many authors have described for homosexuality in Africa for decades[7].

The increasingly global debates surrounding gender advocacy, feminism and LGBT* rights are provoking a rise in polarisation globally, but there are few places where these subjects have been more topical than Ghana. The country criminalises "unnatural sexual intercourse[8]" and is no stranger to media firestorms about homosexuality. For example, in 2006, the public imagination was incensed by reports of a supposed "homoconference" which later reports suggested was a hoax[9]. In September 2019, the Ghana Education Service's guidelines[10] on teaching comprehensive sexuality education were leaked prior to the beginning of the school semester. Meant for students between the ages of 4 and 24, its objective was to explore topics such as "gender roles", "sexual rights" and "reproductive health[11]". Political and religious leaders alleged that the guidelines were a covert attempt to indoctrinate Ghanaian children into homosexuality[12]. The controversy dovetailed with the African Regional Conference[13] of the World Congress of Families, which was scheduled to be held in Accra between 31 October and 1 November 2019, in part by the National Coalition for Proper Human

5. H. McEwen, « Inventing Family… », art. cité.
6. A. S. Burke, « 4.2. The Myth of Moral Panics » [online], Openoregon, 2019, <https://openoregon.pressbooks.pub/ccj230/chapter/3-2-moral-panics>, consulted on 17 January 2023.
7. P. Awondo, « Médias, politique et homosexualité au Cameroun. Retour sur la construction d'une controverse », *Politique africaine*, n° 126, 2012, p. 69 ; S. Wieringa, « Postcolonial Amnesia: Sexual Moral Panics, Memory, and Imperial Power », *in* G. Herdt (dir.), *Moral Panics, Sex Panics: Fear and the Fight over Sexual Rights*, New York, New York University Press, 2009, p. 205-233.
8. Republic of Ghana, Criminal Code, 1960 (Act 29), 1960. Section 104.
9. S. O. Dankwa, *Knowing Women: Same-Sex Intimacy, Gender, and Identity in Postcolonial Ghana*, New York, Cambridge University Press, 2021.
10. Ministry of Education, *Guidelines for Comprehensive Sexuality Education in Ghana*, Accra, Ministry of Education, 2019.
11. *Ibid*.
12. J. K. Bimpeh, « Charismatic Council Threatens to Vote out any Gov't who Implements Comprehensive Sexuality Programme », *Prime News Ghana*, 30 September 2019 ; M. Kahiu, « Proposed Comprehensive Sexuality Education Way to Introduce Homosexuality: Ghana Bishops » [online], Association for Catholic Information in Africa, 2019, <https://www.aciafrica.org/news/200/proposed-comprehensive-sexuality-education-way-to-introduce-homosexuality-ghana-bishops>, consulted on 1 November, 2020.
13. R. Nketiah, « "God Has A New Africa": Undercover in a US-Led Anti-LGBT "Hate Movement" » [online], *OpenDemocracy*, 2019, <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/5050/god-has-a-new-africa-undercover-in-a-us-led-anti-lgbt-hate-movement>, consulted on 2 November 2021. An archive of the official conference page can be found at <https://web.archive.org/web/20191031023118/https://wcfaccraghana.org/>, consulted on 23 July 2020.

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Sexual Rights and Family Values (in short, the "National Coalition"). The National Coalition is a prominent anti-LGBT* advocacy organisation in Ghana that describes itself as "an amalgamation of Christian and Para-Christian bodies, Muslim Organisations, Traditional Rulers and Opinion Leaders[14]".

On 29 June 2021, Ghana followed in the footsteps of several African countries that had introduced laws prohibiting sex or marriage between persons of the same sex (including Egypt, Gambia, Liberia, Nigeria and Uganda). However, Ghana's "Promotion of Proper Human Sexual Rights and Ghanaian Family Values Bill" (in short, the "Family Values Bill") is distinct from the preceding laws proposed in Africa in that on top of prohibiting same-sex intimacy and marriage, it also attempts to curtail cultural production, speech, identities, "practices", "rights" and affinities attached to sexual and gender diversity. This makes Ghana the first country in Africa to propose legislation that imposes restrictions based on sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, sex characteristics and even related solidarities. Legislators had proposed amendments to the bill which were announced 17 November 2022[15] and the amendments were leaked on social media in March 2023. Nonetheless, this paper examines the content of the first draft bill, and the public debates surrounding it, between June 2021 and December 2022. The approach this research uses to understand both the bill's contents and the ensuing discussions relating to it is a discursive analysis that draws from ethnographic data collected during events attended in person and online (box 1).

The Family Values Bill was the second bill to be introduced to Parliament under the newly-established *private member* regime, which allows any parliamentarian to introduce bills. Private members' bills can also be written in consultation with civil society[16]. Representative Sam George and seven other parliamentarians were also listed as co-authors, and they ultimately signed and submitted the

14. M. Foh-Amoaning and O. Acheaw, « Institutional Profile », in Parliament of Ghana, National Coalition of Proper Human Sexual Rights and Family Values, 18 October 2021. No memoranda regarding the "Family Values Bill" that have been submitted to Parliament had been published as of 1 March, 20223.

15. U. S. Amadu, « Eyewitness News - Thursday, 17th November, 2022 » [online], Eyewitness News, Citi 97.3 FM, 2022, <https://www.facebook.com/citi973/videos/eyewitness-news-thursday-17th-november-2022/586030069961683/>, consulted on18 January 2023.

16. In effect, a memorandum that members of the National Coalition later presented to Parliament stated that they had co-authored the bill. Seven of the 8 MPs who signed the bill in question belong to the New Democratic Congress, the main opposition to the ruling New Patriotic Party. Some have suggested ulterior motives behind the bill's introduction. See N. K. Agyeman, « Parliament Adopts Proposal for Enactment of Private Members' Bill » [online], Graphic Online, 2020, <https://www.graphic.com.gh/news/general-news/parliament-adopts-proposal-for-enactment-of-private-members-bill.html>, consulted on 19 January 2022 ; Ghanaian Times, « Parliament Adopts Proposal for Enactment of Private Members' Bills » [online], *GhanaWeb*, 17 July 2020, <https://www.ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/NewsArchive/Parliament-adopts-proposal-for-enactment-of-Private-Members-Bills-1010062>, consulted on 14 January 2022 ; Gabby Otchere-Darko [@GabbyDarko], 9 October 2021, <https://twitter.com/GabbyDarko/status/1446720909444792325>, consulted

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bill to Parliament. Its passage into law would put the current government in a negative light in the eyes of wealthy pro-LGBT* governments and institutions that provide significant aid to Ghana[17]. On the other hand, its rejection would make the present administration seem weak in the eyes of Ghanaian voters.

One of the bill's most important elements is that it defines "Ghanaian Family Values" as "the recognition […] of the nuclear and extended family as the basic unit for all Ghanaian ethnic communities[18]". Furthermore, its preamble refers to an "overwhelming consensus" among the "multi-religious faiths and various traditional and customary values across the country" who stand "in utter rejection of the practices of and advocacy for the LGBTTQQIAAP+ group[19]". Indeed, the former General Secretary of Ghana's Church of Pentecost[20], Apostle Dr. Alfred Koduah insisted, with urgency, that "there will be chaos in the country if the bill is not passed" and told the media that "there is unanimity" among the Ghanaian people in the appetite to pass it[21]. However, by writing this private members' bill, its sponsors have implicitly conceded that there are already homegrown manifestations of what they are attempting to legislate against, which calls this supposed national unanimity into question. Following the introduction of the private members' bill to Parliament, the Committee of Parliamentary, Legal and Constitutional Affairs invited interest groups (regardless of their residency or citizenship) to submit "memoranda" by 30 September 2021. The authors were asked to specify what elements of the bill were compatible or incompatible with Ghana's Constitution[22], and to inform parliamentarians who wished to promote, reject or amend the bill. Though far

on 15 February 2023 ; K. A. Darko, « Anti-LGBTQ Bill: If Politics is all about Populism, Sam George Could be NDC's Presidential Candidate – Gabby Otchere-Darko » [online], MyJoyOnline.com, 10 October 2021, <https://www.myjoyonline.com/anti-lgbtq-bill-if-politics-is-all-about-populism-sam-george-could-be-ndcs-presidential-candidate-gabby-otchere-darko>, consulted on 15 February 2023 ; « Takyiwaa Manuh Fights "Double-Faced" NDC over Anti-Gay Bill » [online], *The Custodian Newspaper Online*, 18 October 2021 <https://thecustodianghonline.com/takyiwaa-manuh-fights-double-faced-ndc-over-anti-gay-bill> consulted on 15 February 2023 ; « NPP, NDC MPs Clash Over LGBTQI Bill » [online], *The Custodian*, 9 June 2022 <https://thecustodianghonline.com/npp-ndc-mps-clash-over-lgbtqi-bill>, consulted on 15 February 2023.

17. E. K. Amoh, « NPP MP Suspects Minority's Push for Anti-LGBTQ+ Bill » [online], 3News, 26 July 2021, <https://3news.com/npp-mp-suspects-minoritys-push-for-anti-lgbtq-bill>, consulted on 15 February 2023.

18. S. N. George, D. A. Sowah, E. Bedzrah, J. N. Forjour, A. S. Suhuyini, R. N. O. Sowah, H. A. Ntoso and R.-N. Dafeamekpor, *Promotion of Proper Human Sexual Rights and Ghanaian Family Values Bill*, 2021.

19. *Ibid*., p. 3.

20. Church of Pentecost is among the most influential member organisations of the National Coalition.

21. E. Arhinful and P. N. Lartey, « Ghana Will Be a Confused State if Anti-LGBTQ+ Bill is not Passed – Apostle Koduah » [online], *Citi Newsroom*, 12 October 2021, <https://citinewsroom.com/2021/10/ghana-will-be-a-confused-state-if-anti-lgbtq-bill-is-not-passed-apostle-koduah/>, consulted on 15 January 2023.

22. Parliament of Ghana, « How Laws are Made » [online], Parliament of Ghana, 2020, <https://www.parliament.gh/laws>, consulted on 15 February 2023.

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from a representative sample, of the 127 memoranda submitted, 63 presented arguments in favour of passing the bill, 61 presented arguments against it, and three others were unclear. All things considered, this paper asks what the interest groups who are attempting to repress LGBT* identity and political formations are *doing* to mend the apparent gap in the consensus they claim to have already achieved. How are they addressing the contradictions that emerge from deployed strategies?

As will be demonstrated, interest groups have framed the repression of "LGBT*" discursive production, and the promotion of heteronormativity, as a requisite for protecting so-called "traditions", "cultures", "customs" and "values". The poursuit of this presents two problems, however: on the one hand, it deploys a nativist discourse of "cultural preservation" steeped in ideologies that wed Christianity to "modernity[23]". On the other hand, generating an appetite to repress LGBT* subjectivities and advocacy (re)produces LGBT*-related knowledge among the general population where it may not have existed previously. While interest groups may attempt to juridically produce a new heterosexual nation to discursively preserve so-called norms with borrowed tactics informed by colonial ideologies, what strategies are used to close this circle?

This article shows how "sexual moral panics" are generated in Ghana to frame heterosexual ideals as inextricably linked to nationhood. It will show how actors attempt to remedy discursive contradictions by seeking support in the hope of reaching a national consensus on the incompatibility of sexual and gender diversity with Ghanaian life. They do so by securing a monopoly on the definitions of this diversity and misrepresenting opposing discourses as they translate them while transforming local institutions that undergird Ghanaian "traditions", "cultures", "customs" and "values". As a whole, this strategy produces what might be called a "new indigeneity", a nod to what a corpus of authors described as "the invention of tradition[24]" over two decades ago. Interest groups then inherit the civilisational project to both Christianise and heterosexualise the Ghanaian nation-state, a colonial double process that has been outlined, at least in part, in other African contexts[25] as well as Ghana's[26].

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23. A. Adjepong, *Afropolitan Projects: Redefining Blackness, Sexualities, and Culture from Houston to Accra*, Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 2021 ; K. E. Otu, *Amphibious Subjects: Sasso and the Contested Politics of Queer Self-Making in Neoliberal Ghana*, Oakland, University of California Press, 2022.

24. E. Hobsbawm and T. O. Ranger (dir.), *The Invention of Tradition*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2000.

25. K. J. Kaoma, *Ubuntu, Jesus, and Earth: Integrating African religion and Christianity in Ecological Ethics*, Boston, Boston University, 2010 ; K. Kaoma, *Colonizing African Values: How the U.S. Christian Right is Transforming Sexual Politics in Africa*, Somerville, Political Research Associates, 2012 ; H. McEwen, « Inventing Family… », art. cité ; M. Epprecht, *Heterosexual Africa? The History of an Idea from the Age of Exploration to the Age of Aids*, Athens/Scottsville, Ohio University Press/University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2008 ; M. Epprecht, « The Making of "African Sexuality": Early Sources, Current Debates », *History Compass*, vol. 8, n° 8, 2010, p. 768-779.

26. K. E. Otu, *Amphibious Subjects…*, *op. cit*.

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Box 1: A discursive analysis of event ethnographies on-site and on sites

This article is the fruit of field research conducted in the broader context of a PhD on the implications of the transnationalisation of sexual categories and political strategies in Ghana. The field research for this article was conducted between 1 October and 30 November 2021, and included volunteering at the Parliament. Participant observation aided in gaining an understanding of the inner workings of the new private members' bill process, which was only enacted on 18 July 2020. This was done while also ensuring anonymity in notetaking and assisting with generating meeting minutes while digitising and harmonising the 127 memoranda submitted. "Multi-event ethnography" was used to investigate both field and online sites. At times, events attended in person were streamed on to social media platforms, which helped with filling in any gaps in notetaking. Four televised public hearings on the presentation of memoranda in Parliament, at two of which the author was personally present during this ethnographic period, are also included in this research.

The arguments are grounded in the version of discourse theory developed by Ernesto Laclau, as well as by his students, colleagues, and co-authors[27]. It investigates how practices "articulate", reproduce and resist speech and practices that attempt to produce and shape reality. It consists of the following elements: the first is that discursively produced realities "are always vulnerable to political forces excluded in their production[28]" as well as to events that transpire outside of the control of social agents. The second is that competitors constantly threaten to "dislocate" or "unfix" discursive meanings that their opponents otherwise fight to frame as permanent or timeless. Finally, elements (unarticulated signs, the building blocks of comprehension) become "unstuck" from their understood meanings and "float" in times of crisis. "Sexual moral panics" can work as an inflection point, provoking interest groups to mobilise around (re)articulating meanings attached to elements in order to (re)fix them in place.

Considering the above framing, this research positions itself as a discursive analysis that draws from ethnographic data of events attended both on-site and on sites. In what follows, this article attempts to elucidate how actors make sense of the "unstuck" nature of social categories used to describe sexual and gender diversity in a highly volatile discursive playing field.

27 . E. Laclau and C. Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics*, London, Verso Books, 1985 ; E. Laclau, *New Reflections on the Revolution of our Time*, London, Verso Books, 1990 ; G. Xia, « Emancipation(s) by Ernesto Laclau », *Canadian Journal of Sociology / Cahiers canadiens de sociologie*, vol. 24, n° 1, 1999, p. 154 ; E. Laclau, *Emancipation(s)*, London, Verso Books, 2007, p. 19 ; D. R. Howarth and Y. Stavrakakis, « Introducing Discourse Theory and Political Analysis », *in* D. R. Howarth, A. J. Norval and Y. Stavrakakis (dir.), *Discourse Theory and Political Analysis: Identities, Hegemonies and Social Change*, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2000, p. 10-11 ; J. A. Drzewiecka and M. Steyn, « Discourses of Exoneration in Intercultural Translation: Polish Immigrants in South Africa », *Communication Theory*, vol. 19, n° 2, 2009, p. 188-218.

28. D. R. Howarth and Y. Stavrakakis, « Introducing Discourse Theory… », art. cité, p. 14.

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It unpacks how political actors utilise moral panics to define national identity while delimiting what practices and identities are (im)possible on the register of sexual and gender relations.

Heteronationalism in action: enforcing heteronormativity to fend off an alleged "recolonisation"

The National Coalition is generous with its textbook examples of heteronationalism. First theorised by Gosine[29], heteronationalism provides an analytical framework that describes a political majority's attempt to resist perceived shifts in sexual and gender-based norms while using the rhetoric of "nationhood". Gosine describes how actors often use heteronationalist discourses to foment "moral panics" about an externalised homosexual menace[30], which is framed as "posing a threat to social stability[31]". Heteronationalism is similar to "political (or politicised) homophobia[32]" or "homophobic nationalism[33]" in that they all describe attempts to turn public opinion against sexual minorities as well as the individuals and NGOs that advocate on behalf of them. What distinguishes heteronationalism is that it also identifies the discursive pursuit to refashion a nation as entirely heterosexual, which would make the promotion of binary gender relations, heterosexuality and "heterosexual culture[34]" a prerequisite to be a member of such a nation. Furthermore, heteronationalists may argue for restricting not only the expressive liberties of women in general, but also (and especially) sexual and gender minorities, in the service of stabilising the heterosexual (nuclear) family[35]. To do otherwise would spell doom for "the nation". In this way, heteronationalism aligns with "anti-gender" movements more broadly.

29. A. Gosine, « Speaking Sexuality: The Heteronationalism of MSM », *in* C. Barrow, M. de Bruin and R. Carr (dir.), *Sexuality, Social Exclusion and Human Rights: Vulnerability in the Caribbean Context of HIV*, Kingston/Miami, Ian Randle Publishers, 2009, p. 95-115.
30. *Ibid*., p. 100.
31. S. Wieringa, « Postcolonial Amnesia… », art. cité.
32. M. Epprecht, *Hungochani: The History of a Dissident Sexuality in Southern Africa*, Montréal/Ithaca, McGill-Queen's University Press, 2004 ; M. Epprecht, *Sexuality and Social Justice in Africa: Rethinking Homophobia and Forging Resistance*, London, Zed Books, 2013 ; M. J. Bosia and M. L. Weiss, « Political Homophobia in Comparative Perspective », *in* M. L. Weiss and M. J. Bosia (dir.), *Global Homophobia: States, Movements, and the Politics of Oppression*, Champaign, University of Illinois Press, 2013, p. 1-29 ; W. J. Tettey, « Homosexuality, Moral Panic, and Politicized Homophobia in Ghana: Interrogating Discourses of Moral Entrepreneurship in Ghanaian Media », *Communication, Culture & Critique*, vol. 9, n° 1, 2016, p. 86-106.
33. S. M. Rodriguez, *The Economies of Queer Inclusion: Transnational Organizing for LGTBI Rights in Uganda*, Lanham, Lexington Books, 2019 ; A. Gosine, « Rescue and Love: Same-Sex Desire in International Development », *in* C. L. Mason (dir.), *Routledge Handbook of Queer…*, *op. cit*., p. 193-208.
34. L.-G. Tin, *The Invention of Heterosexual Culture*, Cambridge, The MIT Press, 2012.
35. A. Gosine, « Speaking Sexuality… », art. cité, in particular p. 98.

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In its "About" section on Facebook, the National Coalition states that its "sole purpose" has been to provide an "Afro-Centric […] focused and researched intellectual response […] to the degenerate Western European and American driven views on Homosexuality [and] the growing menace of […] LGBT Rights activities in the world[36]". Its executive secretary and national spokesperson Moses Foh-Amoaning was featured in a filmed interview by GhanaWeb in March 2021. The tagline of the segment read: "Don't be fooled by initiators of LGBTQ+", which is what Foh-Amoaning accused Alex Kofi Donkor (the executive director of LGBT+ Rights Ghana) and "his acolytes" the US and Australian Ambassadors of being.

> "These are the same Europeans who enslaved Africa [*sic*]. They are the same Europeans who partitioned Africa [*sic*]. They are the same Europeans who colonised us [*sic*]. Don't you see what is happening? [W]hen we say we […] don't like your same sex, you say […] it's human rights. By force (he makes a fist for emphasis), you want to force it down our necks[37]."

Foh-Amoaning discursively uses the sexual moral panic surrounding LGBT* issues to tie the allegiance of Donkor to the United States and Australia. This is considered to be a betrayal of Ghana. Even though the United States and Australia have an immense contemporary influence grounded in imperial legacies that still endure today[38], he erroneously recasts them as being the "same Europeans who colonised us". These "colonisers" and Donkor are now trying to "force 'it' down our necks". Heterosexualising Ghana by repressing Donkor, his colleagues and community is thereby framed as a necessary step towards securing Ghanaian national sovereignty (and security)[39] against the identified (neo)colonial forces.

The destabilising effects of sexual moral panics in Ghana convert formerly fixed understandings or frames of reference into floating elements. In this example, Foh-Amoaning attempts to use Donkor to stabilise unfixed understandings, while imbuing them with new meanings. What makes this heteronationalist stems from the association of Donkor, an openly gay Ghanaian activist, with

36. NCPHSRFV (National Coalition for Proper Human Sexual Rights and Family Values), « About » [online], Facebook, n.d., <https://www.facebook.com/groups/390179361460683>, consulted on 28 January 2021.
37. « Don't Be Fooled by the Initiators of LGBTQ+ - Foh-Amoaning Urges the Youth » [online], GhanaWeb TV, 21 March 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m30FnGBow3I>, consulted on 5 September 2022.
38. D. Immerwahr, *How to Hide an Empire: A History of the Greater United States*, New York, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2019 ; E. Paul, *Australian Imperialism: The Geopolitical State*, Singapore, Palgrave Macmillan, 2021.
39. The Church of Pentecost, « LGBTQI+ Is a Threat to National Security » [online], The Church of Pentecost, 26 March 2021 <https://thecophq.org/lgbtqi-is-a-threat-to-national-security>, consulted on 16 February 2022.

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foreign colonising forces on the basis of his sexual identity. This in turn discursively de-indigenises Donkor, transforming him into a colonial agent in black skin. In the process, Ghanaian nationalism synonymises *heterosexuality* with *anti-colonialism*.

With the operation of heteronationalism unpacked, this article will now analyse how the bill's proponents address the inconsistencies that arise in their heteronationalist pursuits: that is, raising public awareness of LGBT* identities in order to eradicate them on the one hand, while preserving so-called Ghanaian "traditions", "cultures", "customs" and "values" through Christian pro-family' political strategies on the other.

Monopolising truth claims about the (im)possible configuration of local tradition, sexual and gender diversity

Ghana's case illustrates how the LGBT* lexicon can be an ambivalent placeholder mobilised to achieve political ends. When it drafted the bill, The National Coalition predicated the preservation of national identity, security and sovereignty on the repression of certain forms of sexual and gender diversity, which they present as foreign. What is noteworthy is that the 36-page document devotes pages 21-25 to defining the identity categories and related concepts captured in "LGBTTQQIAAP+" before meting out specific punishments. As this section will demonstrate, following the bill's introduction in Parliament, its authors and proponents have devoted many hours of airtime in the national media to breaking down, vernacularising and translating these terms for public comprehension and condemnation. Curiously, they end up circulating ideas and identities that they wish to make illegal to discuss and adopt. Nonetheless, this section will show how they attempt to transform those they have designated as adversaries of the nation (and the very nation *itself*) as a means of remedying the glaring contradictions in their political action. In what follows, proponents transform the LGBT* moniker, and once it has been transformed, they conceptually contract and expand its meanings while also reinventing local culture to secure a monopoly over truth claims about Ghanaian identity and the threats to it.

Reducing the spectre of "LGBTTQQIAAP+" to the discourse of homosexuality

What might "LGBTTTQQIAAP+" really signify in the private members' bill and the debates surrounding it? Exhausted by its content and form, vocal proponents of the bill often use the acronym "LGBT++", in the media, adding an extra "+" to emphasise the exaggerated length and alleged absurdity of the

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acronym[40]. "In southern Ghanaian languages, including Ghanaian English", writes Serena Owusua Dankwa, "words can be intensified and turned into quasi-plurals through their reduplication[41]". This reduplication is also used to "denote intensity[42]", thereby transforming the meaning of the original word.

Professor Henry Kwasi Prempeh, the executive director of Ghana's flagship human rights organisation, the Center for Democratic Development made a scathing intervention at the first Parliamentary hearing of the private members' bill on 11 November 2021, which was attended by the author. Arguing in favour of revoking the bill, he accused its authors and proponents of inventing "LGBT++". "All the alphabets that you see are the bill's proponent's own alphabets, that they brought before this house", he accused. "LGBTQ+++, trying to mock and create this sense of futuristic danger. It is part of the scaremongering that they have these +++ things there." He then turned to the members of Parliament in the audience and rhetorically asked them: "When you were putting the +++ things there, what were you thinking? What futuristic mischief were you trying to solve?" This provoked heckling from the audience. Tensions rose, culminating in the presentation being interrupted, as it deteriorated into a shouting match between Prempeh and Sam George and his co-author Rep. Emmanuel Bedzrah, who sat in the audience jeering.

In a similar vein to the Euro-American "pro-family" counterparts, the absence of a qualifier to "LGBT++" such as "LGBT++ identities", "activism" or "people" is noteworthy. Additionally, "LGBT++" is often seen by proponents of the bill as a sum of "variants", or sometimes equivalent to "homosexuality[43]", at least as indicated in the bill[44]. Indeed, Mohamed Marzuq Abubakar, the deputy spokesperson for the National Chief Imam, who has come out in support of the proposed legislation, also said, "I want to use a general term for 'the LGBTQ+', because, on the next day, there may be GBTQ up to Z. So, I want to use the general term homosexuality", he told the host plainly[45]. The conflation is nonetheless significant. Authors and proponents of the bill generate public outrage and disgust over a reductive understanding of "homosexuality" tied exclusively to anal sex. They then conflate this with everything that is captured in the acronym *LGBTTTQQIAAP+*. This is even if, for example, "allies" might only

40. This is why this article uses quotation marks for "LGBT++" to signify pro-bill usage that is outside the usage by the larger LGBT* community.
41. S. O. Dankwa, *Knowing Women…*, *op. cit.*, p. 93.
42. E. B. Boakye, *Reduplication in Akan*, Master's Thesis in Linguistics, Trondheim, Norwegian University of Science and Technology, 2015.
43. T. A. Nasir, «Unpacking the LGBT Debate» [online], Breakfast Live, TV3 Ghana, 1 March 2021. <https://web.facebook.com/100001272920376/videos/pcb.3948250835227308/3948231411895917>, consulted on 2 May 2021.
44. The preamble to the private members' bill states "Indeed the traditions, culture and religions of Ghanaians disavow homosexuality and all its variants".
45. T. A. Nasir « Unpacking the LGBT Debate », art. cité.

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be exclusively attracted to the opposite sex or "asexuals" may be interested in abstaining from sex. Despite this, the sexual moral panic it generates fuels an appetite to act in opposition to those captured by these categories based on the charge of homosexuality.

Foreclosing recognition of LGBT* identities and conflating them with homosexuality are two of the strategies deployed by authors and proponents of the private members' bill in order to cultivate public support for its passage. This sexual moral panic relies on appropriating and translating LGBT* terminology in ways that modify meanings, and leads to the discursive production of the category "LGBT++". Though similar in form, this article maintains that "LGBT++" is a localised rendering and depiction. It is distinct from various manifestations of LGBT* that, though Western and at odds with many local manifestations of sexual and gender diversity[46], espouse a global impact. The use of "LGBT++" in this article should therefore not be confused with LGBT*.

Raising the spectre: fomenting "++phobia" by exaggerating and misrepresenting the infinite possibilities of the "+"

The previous section demonstrates how proponents of the bill in question are attempting to eclipse generally recognised configurations of LGBT* with the nearly identical invention of "LGBT++". It shows how actors have imbued this new social category with new reductive meanings that have foreclosed the possibilities of identity formation by associating it with anal sex. This section shows how protagonists of the same coalition are also repurposing "LGBT++" as a dangerous placeholder for infinity.

"What is that + for?" Foh-Amoaning emphatically asked *Good Evening Ghana* host Paul Adom-Otchere on 12 October 2021. He continued:

> "The + means we don't know! You can add anything to it, so it is an amalgamation of deviant human behaviour! The + is indeterminant. Where in this world (could we) […] have a court of law and enforce rights that are not known? Laws are supposed to be known! They are supposed to be written! […] So how can you say all this […] plus a +? And look at the series of things that they put together for all of this degenerate behaviour. [T]his is not funny! This is how […] the whole Western European culture has descended into a moral morass. […] Do we want to copy all these things?"

46. S. O. Dankwa, *Knowing Women…*, *op. cit.*; W. D. Banks, *Queering Ghana: Sexuality, Community, and the Struggle for Cultural Belonging in an African Nation*, PhD Thesis, Detroit, Wayne State University, 2013; H. Tucker, *Supi and the NGO: An Ethnography of Identity and Intimacy amongst "Women" and LGBT Spaces in Accra, Ghana*, PhD Thesis, Budapest, Central European University, 2018; K. E. Otu, *Amphibious Subjects…*, *op. cit.*; M. Blasius, « Theorizing the Politics of (Homo)Sexualities across Cultures », *in* M. L. Weiss and M. J. Bosia (dir.), *Global Homophobia..., op. cit.*, p. 218-244.

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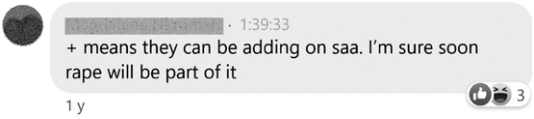
Foh-Amoaning invited Adom-Otchere to read out all of the definitions of *LGBTTQQIAAP+* on the air. Adom-Otchere eventually arrived at the letter "P" for "pansexual". "Pansexual" he begins reading, "is a person who experiences sexual romantic, physical and or spiritual attraction to members of all gender identities". This is a nearly verbatim definition that is reproduced in the glossary leaflets and websites of Western NGOs and in the diversity wing of higher learning institutions[47].

In mid-sentence, Foh-Amoaning interrupted: "There is [*sic*] even animate and inanimate objects as well." He continued. "So, you can have someone open bread, have sex in it, release into it and that's his gratification[48]."

On a Twi language radio station, he raised similar points on "what 'LGBT++' people do":

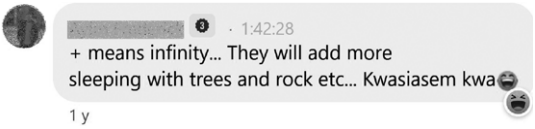
> "What do queers do? They're the ones who sleep with animals! And even homosexual males, on average, get 20,000 partners in their lifetime! The (health) consequences of what they do, you cannot imagine it! [It] has nothing to do with human rights! [Translated by the author and cross-referenced by interlocutors][49]."

Figure 1. Posted in the comments section of the livestreamed episode of Good Evening Ghana, aired on 10/12/2021



"Saa" may translate to "nonstop" or "continually".
Otchere-Adom, 2021.

Figure 2. Posted in the comment section of the live-streamed episode of Good Evening Ghana, aired on 10/12/2021.



"Kwasiasem kwa" may translate to "stupidity".
Otchere-Adom, 2021.

47. S. Brown-Ajayi, « LGBTQ+ 101: Terminology » [online], Illinois Wesleyan University, 2018, <https://www.iwu.edu/gender-sexuality/101.html>, consulted on 16 February 2022 ; C. A. Ferrando, « Overview of Gender Identity and Sexuality » [online], Foundation for Female Health Awareness, 2019, <https://femalehealthawareness.org/en/overview-of-gender-identity-and-sexuality/>, consulted on 16 February 2022.
48. P. Adom-Otchere, « A New Angle… », art. cité.
49 . « Lawyer Foh Amoaning Explains Activities and Behavior of Person's Practicing LGBTQI » [online], The Platform Show, 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w_7_WsYtKu4>, consulted on 16 February 2022.

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The infinity, with regard to which Foh-Amoaning suggests that the + is a placeholder, triggers the imagination of people who watched the TV show live on Facebook. Figures 1 and 2 show comments posted, that are timestamped just after Adom-Ochere read the definitions on air. These suggest that the viewers are receptive to the warnings about the supposed dangers raised by the spectre of the « + ». These definitions and exaggerations exemplify Foh-Amoaning's topics of discussion from as early as August 2021, as reported by the Ghana Celebrities. com newspaper[50]. They are naturalised by journalists in Ghana. The next section captures how the bill's proponents work with journalists to both reduce and raise the spectre of « LGBT++ in the service of heteronationalism.

Blending the spectre as a discursive technique to monopolise the narrative

On 5 October, the journalist and TV host Umaru Sanda Amadu pressed his guest Professor Audrey Gadzekpo on her vocal criticism of the private members' bill. A week earlier, she and seventeen other seasoned and renowned scholars and human rights advocates had published a joint memorandum about the Family Values Bill's flagrant unconstitutionality. They held a heavily mediatised press conference several days later. During his interview with Prof. Gadzekpo, Amadu had difficulty keeping his composure. He asked he questions in rapid succession, flustered by her perspective on the bill. Sharing Foh-Amoaning's alarm about the proliferation of new identity categories, Amadu informed the professor that pansexuals indeed have sex "with inanimate objects including a loaf of bread[51]". While crediting Foh-Amoaning with this insight, he was steadfast in spreading new truths about "LGBT++". This is significant because the network station that hosts Amadu's show boasts over 1.6 million and 219, 000 followers on Facebook and YouTube respectively[52]. In turn, LGBT* activists launched a #paanosexuals hashtag Twitter campaign to mock Foh-Amoaning and the award-winning journalist, but the mockery and satire were lost on some people. At a stakeholders' meeting I attended personally on shaping discussions about the LGBT* controversy, one media personality piped up and

50. A. Dziedzom, « LGBT People Sleep with Animals and Bread - Foh Amoaning Continues to Spew Ignorance in Support of Anti-LGBTQ+ Bill » [online], GhanaCelebrities.Com, 16 August 2021, <https://www.ghanacelebrities.com/2021/08/16/lgbt-people-sleep-with-animals-and-bread-foh-amoaning-continues-to-spew-ignorance-in-support-of-anti-lgbtq-bill/>, consulted on 29 March 2023.
51. « FacetoFace with Professor Audrey Gadzekpo », Citi TV, 18 October 2021.
52. Observable on the Facebook landing page of Citi 97.3 FM (<https://www.facebook.com/citi973>) and on the CitiTube YouTube channel (<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCUTeE-as508hixQrNVHO7vQ>) as of 2 February 2023.

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raised concerns about the proliferation of new terms, stating with horror and amusement that "tomorrow I may want to marry bread[53]".

> "[T]he church is huge; the mosque is hugue", Amadu said to Prof. Gadzekpo in the October 5 news segment. "These two are supporting […] this bill. Who do you have backing you that is *so* big, that is worthy of celebrating? [Y]ou don't worry that people will say Professor Gadzekpo […] support(s) […] trumu-trumu[54]? Don't you worry about a headline like that?"

In Ghana, "who is supporting you" can be understood as "why are you speaking alone? Why are you exposing yourself to disgrace?" Professor Gadzekpo restated the talking points that had been raised during the (in)famous press conference, criticising the bill's content and merit and touting the beauty of living in a democracy where she is free to be among the only dissenting voices. "We hope that the church can see (the) wisdom in our arguments […] showing why the bill is unconstitutional, in many of its provisions and why it's also a very inhumane bill."

Days later, Twi language radio stations translated what Professor Gadzekpo and her seventeen other friends and colleagues had to say. Reducing "LGBT++" back to anal sex, these radio stations boiled the arguments they made down to new essences. Accra FM hosts Odiasempa Kwame Apomasu Mensah and Nana Ansah Sasraku played an excerpt from televangelist Prophet Dr. Kofi Oduro's Sunday sermon.

> "Why don't they legalise armed robbery?" Oduro's voice sprang through the speakers, hoarse with outrage.
> "Why don't they legalise prostitution? Why don't you make *murder* legal? This thing you are advocating, I want to tell you before I close… Gay! To be a lesbian! It's a choice, it is not a right. When it's a right, we will all support it, but it's a choice. If you want to be fucked in your anus, it's your choice. If you want to open your anus, it's your choice[55]."

The audience reactions are barely audible in the recording but they provoke his following additional comment: "You don't want me to say it, but I'm going to say it! They are saying it on TV! They want anus to fuck! Professors! Even dogs and goats do not engage in it. Professors! You want to have anal sex[56]!"

Mensah then parroted Oduro's refrain on-air, affirming that indeed the group of eighteen "want anus to fuck". Then his co-host Nana Ansah Sasraku proposed that the eighteen elder human rights advocates, lawyers and

53. Field notes taken at the headquarters of an allied advocacy organisation in Accra, Ghana on 4 November, 2021.
54. This is among the most vulgar ways of saying anal sex in Akan, Ghana's lingua franca. Much like the "++", duplicating the concept from "trumu" (the anus) to "trumu-trumu" (anal sex) adds an element of exaggeration.
55. Translation verified by interlocutors.
56. Translation verified by interlocutors.

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academics be taken to Independence Square. "[T]hey should lay them down, let's put Vaseline on them and penetrate their asses. That's when they will shout out in the name of Jesus[57]." They did not address the contradiction of "fighting anal sex with anal sex", and it might have been lost on the audience that they chose Independence Square as the proposed place for hosting this graphic scene. The 30,000-seat stadium was commissioned by Ghana's first president Kwame Nkrumah to commemorate independence from the British. Using this nationalistic symbol, Mensah proposed that the "group of eighteen" be a symbolic effigy through which to imbue the empty signifier "Ghanaian" with meanings that are both heteronationalist and anti-colonial.

So far, this article has shown that "LGBT++" acts as a pretence in order to reshape the national juridical and political field. However, naming and attributing new (albeit contradictory) meanings to a phenomenon that actors are seeking to legally restrict presents a key trade-off: it makes the phenomenon topical for Ghanaians who otherwise would have never heard of it. Ironically, the highly public attempts to build a heteronormative status quo actually draws attention to its scaffolding. Raising awareness about the "dangers" of a pandora's box, they inform the heteronationalist body politic they are working to create that there is a box to be opened in the first place, thereby undermining their nativist project. This in turn stirs an unease and suspicion that may provoke the opposite of the intended effects.

"I think we need to investigate Sam George and the other seven MPs. I think they are being funded by LGBTQ people", speculates Nana Yaw Wiredu, one of the talking heads on GhanaWeb's Blogger's forum.

> "They are up to something. […] They are the ones creating the awareness now! Once you put together a piece of paper and say it's called a bill, it generates conversation and explains (it) in detail. […] It's like they are educating the masses[58]!"

Though indicative of how this intensified mediatisation may provoke a certain ambivalence, and even suspicion, towards its propagators, such reversals are rarely expressed openly. In truth, the role of the media in mainstreaming these radically different (but increasingly undisputable) accounts of reality illustrates what Godfried Asante has identified as the "house style" in the Ghanaian media. Media outlets centre religious leaders and politicians as experts and "news-makers[59]". This renders the perspective of people who may advocate for LGBT*

57. « Watch ((((Live)))) Accra News @ 6 pm on Accra 100.5FM », Accra 100.5 FM, 14 October 2021, <https://web.facebook.com/Accra100.5fm/videos/393450745766384>, consulted on 15 October 2021.
58. « Controversy over LGBTQI+ Bill » [online], GhanaWeb TV, 31 July 2021 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NAv2ZCyRJ1Y>, consulted on 16 February 2022.
59. G. A. Asante, « Anti-LGBT Violence and the Ambivalent (Colonial) Discourses of Ghanaian Pentecostalist-Charismatic Church Leaders », *Howard Journal of Communications*, vol. 31, n° 1, 2020, p. 27.

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rights or attempt to counter "LGBT++" discursive productions, imperceptible. As a result, political leaders can secure a monopoly on truths about the topic and maintain the upper hand in corollary debates.

Producing "new indigeneity" by Christianising Ghanaian Chieftaincy and nuclearising the Ghanaian family

In Ghana, a family does not necessarily entail a joint living arrangement between the birth mother and father. Children are often raised by their grandparents and/or a parent's siblings, and can grow up knowing them as their primary parental figures. It is therefore also common to have two or more mothers, for example. However, the histories that saw the imposition of family planning initiatives to buttress the model of the nuclear family in the colonies, including in contemporary Ghana[60], place many inhabitants in an ambivalent space. The elevation of the status of the nuclear family was further ushered in by laws that were crafted by the British. These laws were written as far back as 1884, when they referred to present-day Ghana as the "Gold Coast[61]". These included, for example, laws on property inheritance that privileged the members of the nuclear family, when for numerous ethnic groups it is the extended family that is traditionally entitled to property after an individual passes away[62]. Though cosmetically modified over time by local lawmakers well after Ghana's independence in 1957, the laws were (and remain) emblematic of the European civilisational projects carried out by Christian missionaries and colonial administrators[63]. Gedzi has written about how the contemporary application of these laws is in direct conflict with many customs. This disjuncture between the juridical and the traditional culminates in the majority of the Ghanaians he studied either being ignorant of the succession laws or downright rejecting them[64]. He documented how following the laws often results in family disputes that are sometimes irreconcilable[65].

60. A. A. Ampofo, *Structural Inequalities or Gender Orientation, which Matters more in Reproductive Decision Making? A Study among Urban Ghanaian Couples*, PhD Thesis, Nashville, Vanderbilt University, 2000 ; K. E. Otu, *Amphibious Subjects…*, *op. cit.*

61. V. S. Gedzi, *Principles and Practices of Dispute Resolution in Ghana: Ewe and Akan Procedures on Females' Inheritance and Property Rights*, PhD Thesis, The Hague, Erasmus University Rotterdam, 2009.

62. *Ibid.* ; V. S. Gedzi, « The Limits of Legal Intervention in Customary Practices: Understanding the Unpopularity of Ghana's PNDC Law 111 on Intestate Succession among the Anlo and Asante », *Journal of Poverty Alleviation and International Development*, vol. 5, n° 1, 2014, p. 99-125 ; V. S. Gedzi, « Cultural Norms and Dispute on Women's Property Relations in Ghana », *International Journal of African Society, Cultures and Traditions*, vol. 1, n° 1, 2014, p. 1-32.

63. K. E. Otu, *Amphibious Subjects…*, *op. cit.*

64. V. S. Gedzi, « The Limits of Legal Intervention in Customary Practices… », art. cité.

65. V. S. Gedzi, « Cultural Norms and Dispute… », art. cité.

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The private members' bill defines "Ghanaian family values" as "the recognition of the nuclear and extended family as the basic unit for all Ghanaian ethnic communities[66]", although for many, the significance of the former has traditionally been dwarfed by the latter. Equating the two is instructive of an ongoing process that is gradually redefining Ghanaian families on the terms historically defined by British colonialists. Ironically, political leaders are unfurling this redefinition while also claiming to protect "Ghanaian traditions". As will be argued, this redefinition may be played out in an effort to Christianise the majority of Ghanaians in the bill's proponents' own image. This effort would in turn indigenise a type of Christianity that accommodates heteronationalist discourses, which then helps naturalise a shifted juridical playing field that is hostile to people who are now tagged with the invented moniker "LGBT++".

The following vignette starts with Prof. Opoku Onyinah, who is the chairperson of the National Coalition. Up until 2018, he also doubled as the executive secretary of the Church of Pentecost. Originally the Christ Apostolic Church, the Church of Pentecost is a Ghanaian evangelical church that was established in 1937 by Scottish missionary James McKeown. According to Onyinah's dissertatin, it is a church that McKeown wanted "to be indigenous with Ghanaian culture, ministry and finance[67]". Operating in 136 countries as of 31 December 2021[68], it is viewed as an incredibly successful Ghanaian church. With 3,333,654 out of 30,832,019 Ghanaians being members[69], the Church of Pentecost is among the largest denominational slices of Ghana's Christian community. This helps make it one of the most powerful institutions in the country, positioning it perfectly to help produce a cohesive heteronationalist Ghanaian identity.

As the chairperson of the National Coalition, the passage of the private members' bill was only one of Onyinah's prerogatives. Another is the Christianisation of chiefs and queen mothers. Chiefs and queen mothers are empowered by the constitution to reign using customary law, with minimal interference from Parliament[70]. The private members' bill attempts to pass into law language that places the chiefs and queen mothers as the "ultimate source of traditional political authority and leadership" and as the "custodians of the customs, traditions and customary laws, […] that underpin Ghanaian ethnic groups and

66. S. N. George *et al*., *Promotion of Proper Human Sexual Rights…*, *op. cit*., clause 2.
67. O. Onyinah, *Akan Witchcraft and the Concept of Exorcism in the Church of Pentecost*, PhD Thesis, Birmingham, University of Birmingham, 2002, p. 172.
68. The Church of Pentecost, « Statistics » [online], The Church of Pentecost, 2022, <https://thecophq.org/statistics>, consulted on 29 August 2022.
69. *Ibid*.
70. Republic of Ghana, The Constitution of the Republic of Ghana (Amendment) Act, 1996, §270-2(a-b).

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communities[71]". It is a remarkable coincidence that the bill's introduction took place weeks before the Church of Pentecost held its inaugural ceremony of the National Executive Committee of the Chieftaincy Ministry.

In its 2018-2023 five-year working plan ambitiously entitled "Possessing the Nations", "Objective 4" has a similar tone as it reads "transform society[72]". A subsection devotes two pages to "extending ministry to the chieftaincy". Part of it states:

> "Chieftaincy is a major cultural heritage and institution in Africa. It provides a scope [*sic*] for leadership and exercise[ing] of authority, and it is supposed to be the most respected institution in the community. The culture, tradition and governance system of the community revolves around the chieftaincy institution and the church's ability to influence this all-important institution will give us some inroads into the community. Vision 2023 will therefore continue with the efforts made by Apostle Professor Opoku Onyinah (Rtd.) to recognise the critical role the [of the] chieftaincy institution in Africa plays[73]."

Dozens of chiefs took to the stage to gleefully accept their roles on the executive committee of the first-ever Chieftaincy Ministry in Ghana. Near the end, an impassioned Dr. Kwabena Opuni-Frimpong concluded the ceremony by listing several instances of chiefs begging various church institutions to extend ministry to them in Ghana. Having written a book that explored this topic[74], he claimed that this desire had been expressed by Chiefs as far back as 1940. Despite their wishes, ministry was seen by settler missions to be incompatible with Christianity. He continued:

> "The heart of the Ghanaian culture is in the Palace. The centre of culture of this country is not politics, it's not any institution, it's traditional leadership. And therefore, if we convert the legs of the country, the hands of the country and we leave the heart of the country, mission and ministry in this country is still lacking. The church in this country must focus on the heart of our identity, that is the palace, which we have neglected all these years!"

When describing Ghanaian social and political leaders, Godfried Asante shares that "by delineating African culture as exclusively connected to normative heterosexuality, African nationalists build on the civilising mission of other colonialists, reinforcing heterosexuality as the natural order without contestation[75]". Despite the fact that this contradiction in Ghana is rarely openly acknowledged, it is clearly still present. The National Coalition, through the

71. S. N. George *et al.*, *Promotion of Proper Human Sexual Rights…*, *op. cit.*, p. 23.
72. The Church of Pentecost, *Vision 2023: Five-Year Vision Document for The Church of Pentecost Covering the Period 2018-2023. Theme: Possessing the Nation (Equipping the Church to Transform every Sphere of Society with Values and Principles of the Kingdom of God)*, Accra, Pentecost Press Limited, 2019.
73. The Church of Pentecost, *Vision 2023…*, *op. cit.*
74. K. Opuni-Frimpong, *Indigenous Knowledge and Christian Missions: Perspectives of Akan Leadership Formation on Christian Leadership Development*, Accra, SonLife Press, 2012.
75. G. A. Asante, « Anti-LGBT Violence… », art. cité, p. 9.

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Church of Pentecost, attempts to alleviate this contradiction by Christianising "Ghanaian family values" *through* the traditional rulers of Ghana. As members of the National Coalition secure a monopoly over the means of discursive production, this *new indigeneity* that attempts to frame Ghana as traditionally heterosexual and traditionally Christian helps erase the violent histories that helped cement heteronormativity and Abrahamic belief systems in the country. In this way, it may therefore make it difficult in the future to refute claims that there ever was a contradiction.

This article suggests that Ghana may be "ground zero" of a new and transformative form of anti-gender activism. It does so highlighting the way in which "pro-family" actors attempt to produce a country whose body politic is united by heteronationalism. This effort allows political leaders to rearrange present constellations of power, tradition and culture[76]. However, the strategies being deployed present fundamental inconsistencies.

The authors and principal backers of the private members' bill are seeking to stimulate a national appetite for a new juridical plane through which to excise sexual and gender minorities. This is done by fomenting a sexual moral panic to alert the public to a supposedly budding external "threat" to local "tradition", "culture", "customs" and "values". However, sounding the alarm about this "threat" brings the demonised identities, behaviours, and social relations that they are attempting to expunge into focus for people who otherwise may never have been exposed to them.

This article has identified four strategies that "pro-family" actors deploy to help secure a monopoly over truth claims about the nation and the gender/sexual relations and identities that are allegedly incompatible with it. First, by inventing "LGBT++", and reducing generally recognised language that describes a range of meanings to anal sex, they trivialise identity categories while negating potential claims to rights that could be attached to them. Secondly, they exaggerate the spectre of the infinite possibilities of identities and sexualities that stem from the "+". Thirdly, interest groups mobilise the first and second tactics, while also deliberately misrepresenting the perspectives of their opponents. This helps produce alternative realities that are made "true" by generating a consensus about them. Lastly, "pro-family" actors are Christianising the chiefs, who are understood to be the custodians of Ghanaian culture and tradition. Christianising them allows heteronationalist actors to indigenise Christianity while casting already present forms of sexual and gender diversity as foreign. It also helps erase the colonial histories of the ideologies on which heteronationalism relies. This article therefore shows how sexual moral panics

76. S. Wieringa, « Postcolonial Amnesia… », art. cité.

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can help spark the transformation of notions of tradition and indigeneity, in ways that are similar to other African contexts[77], but also in ways that are distinctly Ghanaian[78]. Ghana, after all, is the first country to attempt to explicitly produce an exhaustive list of LGBT* identity categories in legislation aimed at criminalising them. If criminalising this list while also indigenising Christian "pro-family" discourses, political strategies and *identities* proves successful, Ghana may pioneer an anti-gender project on the continent. This is a project that reshapes past and present sexual histories, while constraining what future truths about them can be told ■

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Résumé

Un consensus unanime ? Comment les paniques morales sur la diversité sexuelle et de genre contribuent à remodeler les traditions locales au Ghana

En juin 2021, le parlement ghanéen a présenté un projet de loi criminalisant les personnes LGBT+ et leurs défenseur·e·s. Les partisans du texte œuvrent à créer un mouvement assimilant l'appartenance à la nation à la culture hétérosexuelle. Peuples, identités, expressions et désirs locaux échappant à l'hétéronormativité sont considérés comme des menaces étrangères et existentielles pour la nation. L'article montre comment la volonté de réprimer ces catégories sociales les rend visibles tout en suscitant un débat public. La mobilisation d'idéologies religieuses à prédominance chrétienne, historiquement diffusées par la colonisation, sert la cause d'une prétendue protection des « traditions » et des « valeurs » ghanéennes. Les partisans de la loi tentent de s'assurer le monopole de la vérité à travers la création de nouveaux discours sur ces minorités et sur les « valeurs familiales ghanéennes ».

77. K. J. Kaoma, *Ubuntu, Jesus, and Earth…, op. cit.* ; K. Kaoma, *Colonizing African Values…, op. cit.* ; H. McEwen, « Inventing Family… », art. cité.
78. K. E. Otu, *Amphibious Subjects…, op. cit.* ; A. A. Ampofo, *Structural Inequalities or Gender Orientation…, op. cit.* ; V. S. Gedzi, *Principles and Practices of Dispute Resolution…, op. cit.* ; P. A. Owiredu, « The Akan System of Inheritance… », art. cité.