

is freeing to find terms to identify with, the actual labels matter less than the connections and friendships forged while extending the alphabet.

Last but not least, southern Ghana, with its historical emphasis on (matri-)lineages and female autonomy rather than marriages and nuclear families, is not only ‘heavily encoded in heterosexuality’. As the newly established initiative *Silent Majority, Ghana* insists, the violence and hateful rhetoric against ‘gayism’ are also a proxy war and a distraction that increasing numbers of Ghanaians in Ghana and abroad are starting to oppose. Perhaps the possibility of doing so without mastering the LGBT+ lexicon but by queering notions of friendships might inspire ever more of us to do so – and, in so doing, to stand up for the sexualized scapegoats of neo-colonial, racial capitalism.

Serena Owusua Dankwa

Interdisciplinary Centre for Gender Studies, University of Bern

serena.dankwa@anthro.unibe.ch

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Adriaan van Klinken, *Kenyan, Christian, Queer: religion, LGBT activism, and arts of resistance in Africa*. University Park PA: Pennsylvania State University Press (hb US\$89.95 – 978 0 271 08380 3; pb US\$29.95 – 978 0 271 08381 0). 2019, 232 pp.

I enter *Kenyan, Christian, Queer*, first, as a self-identified queer Ghanaian man who continues to wrestle with Christianity, the religion into which I was socialized. And, second, as a scholar invested in the emerging field of critical queer African studies, to which Adriaan van Klinken’s book makes a vital contribution. The book’s emphasis on the vexatious intersections between Africanness, religion and queerness couldn’t be timelier. Intellectually, theologically and ethnographically valuable, the book assembles an array of narratives and experiences contiguous with my own experience of what it means to be Christian, queer and Ghanaian.

In that respect, I engage with the book as an intellectual who embraces, unapologetically, the zeal of the personal. Van Klinken glaringly makes his personal presence palpably felt by embedding himself in the project, albeit with a great sense of unease. The book has many strengths, one of which is the author’s reinforcement of how the personal is political in the lives of Kenyan queers who are coterminously Christian. Undeniably, the author translates this African Atlantic feminist dictum into a bodily principle, refusing to leave it in the realm of abstraction. I am drawn to Van Klinken’s engagement with the situated knowledges of his interlocutors. These knowledges are indubitably vital and vibrant sites of creativity for queer subjects, and in ways that resist the temptation to see being African, Christian and queer as bereft of contiguity. Poignantly, too, the methodological canvass that stimulates the work illuminates how methodologies are situated. In that spirit, if knowledges are situated, then the author, in a nourishing fashion, reveals that methodologies are, too.

Early on in the book, Van Klinken makes it clear where the book’s allegiances lie. ‘This book is particularly interested in the role of religious belief and practice in what I call Kenyan Queer “arts of resistance” and it presents four case studies that analyze how religion, specifically Christianity, is drawn upon in lgbt activism in contemporary Kenya’ (p. 4). What can be gleaned from the author’s provocation here is how Kenyan queers engage in the ‘arts of resistance’ in a nation that panoptically disciplines queer bodies. The ‘arts of resistance’ unreservedly make being

Kenyan, Christian, and Queer possible. The portrait we get, throughout the book, is how non-heteronormative subjects reinterpret the official lexicon of oppression to legitimate their presence within the nation state. The Kenyan queer subjects animating the text innovatively politicize the aesthetic through literary, visual, sonic and spiritual registers to articulate notions of citizenship often adamantly rejected by the homonegative apparatuses of the nation state and Christianity.

One of the central elements of the book is its ability to bristle against the antithetical juxtaposition of Christianity and queer Africanness. Van Klinken achieves this by inviting us to explore the strange dalliances these formations share, using the queer Kenyan body as a critical medium. Not only are we given ethnoglimpses of the cast of queer characters whose lives distress the heteronormative terms set out by the Kenyan nation state, but these very characters, through the richness of their lives and existence, undermine official narratives of African homophobia parroted in LGBT human rights discourses by Western LGBT organizations and their African auxiliaries. Through queer Kenyan Christian lives, the book jettisons binaries of the secular and religious by revealing how these terms get turned upside down when trafficked to Africa.

From the late award-winning Kenyan literary artist Binyavanga Wainaina, to collectives of queer Kenyans, who, unlike Wainaina, remain hidden from the script of celebritydom and live uncertain lives that imbricate with Christian formations, we are given a panoply of queer life that yields what the author provocatively describes as an *African queer theology*. Embracing strands that are often imagined as opposed, much like the ones evoked by the title *Kenyan, Christian, Queer*, the sense of the creativity emanating from the buffet of contradictions and messiness in queer life is made apparent in the book. Queer politics in Africa is a thorny, undulating project, the author reveals, when posing the following question: ‘Beyond simple opposition, how are religious beliefs and practices negotiated, appropriated, and transformed?’ (p. 13).

What reprieve can be afforded by the author’s instructive gesture towards an African queer theology? African. Queer. Theology. An interesting twist – these three analytics, never construed as entangled, share such productive affinity. The queer Kenyan Christian body appears to have some answers to why this relationship is plausible through time. In other words, an Afroqueer futurity is underlined by the author, a future that mobilizes the frictions between Kenyan, Christian and queer to engender an African queer theology.

My question for the author is twofold. If the arts of resistance are sites where an African queer theology is made possible, do they perform what Keguro Macharia, the Kenyan queer literary theorist, captures as ‘frottage’ in his recent book?¹ Second, how are the arts of resistance deployed by Kenyan queers reminiscent of what the queer of colour theorist José Esteban Muñoz calls *disidentification*?²

To conclude, the book persuasively invokes how queer Kenyans engage in a ‘double re-reading’ by exploiting the paradoxes generated by the contexts in which they are embedded. This double re-reading is arguably a critical decolonizing strategy; whether that entails re-reading Christian theological precepts through HIV and AIDS; re-reading Africa as anti-homosexual; and re-reading the Pavlovian idea that being queer is un-African, decolonial praxis is present in

¹K. Macharia (2019) *Frottage: frictions of intimacy across the black diaspora*. New York NY: New York University Press.

²J. E. Muñoz (1999) *Disidentifications: queers of color and the performance of politics*. Minneapolis MN: University of Minnesota Press.

the arts of resistance. The arts of resistance are synonymous with the refusal to be evacuated from being Kenyan, Christian and queer at the same time.

Kwame Edwin Otu

Carter G. Woodson Institute for African-American and African Studies,
University of Virginia

eko3q@virginia.edu

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Adriaan van Klinken's *Kenyan, Christian, Queer* makes a timely and compelling contribution to scholarship and activism within and across queer, religious and African studies. Situated at these theoretical intersections, the work sets out a case for how those on the sexual margins in Kenya are recrafting religious and political narratives in ways that upend the oppressive world views of Christian orthodoxies and their violent and exclusionary effects on queer life. Challenging the singular and homogenizing view of homophobia in Africa, Van Klinken approaches queerness in Kenya as a place of activism and resistance where queer and Christian identities, cultures and theologies are productively constituted. Using four case studies, the book draws on the embodied experiences of Kenyan LGBTI people as active *subjects* in Christian worldmaking. This is a significant scholarly intervention in the face of Christianity-inspired homophobia and transphobia that seek to render LGBTI persons as repudiated *objects*.

Theology – as a site of sexual politics – is dealt with in the book as a critical antidote to religious practices and identifications that are premised on the denial of sexual and gendered others. Given the pernicious role of organized religion in the propagation of politicized homophobia in Africa, Van Klinken details how narratives of Christianity are (re)deployed by queers to advance more inclusive expressions of religious identity and belonging.

Considering the myriad ways in which LGBT individuals and communities navigate violence, discrimination and stigmatization – in which Christianity is deeply implicated – the book provokes critical questions. Is an adherence to religious belief a prerequisite for mobilizing Christian discourses in liberatory ways? And how might queer theology enable a productive contestation around the terms of queer Christian identification itself? Such questions concern the normative practices through which both church and faith are defined, in queer and non-queer forms, while recognizing the disciplining impulse of religion, even when it is LGBTI affirming. The challenge is thus to interrogate the assumption that, when in the hands of queers, religiosity will necessarily transform the intersecting inequalities that underpin the denial of rights and justice for LGBTI persons. This is particularly the case for gender power relations within the queer community where the mutually reinforcing dynamics of patriarchal heteronormativity and neoliberalism are given succour through queer and Christian imaginaries. Van Klinken powerfully applies the notion of the prophetic voice to queer figures. At the same time, the discussion on the gender politics of the queer prophet is a reminder that singular (frequently male) prophets remain contradictory figures: neither all good nor all bad, as the doctrines might have it. These contradictions expose the conflicting experiences that make up LGBTI communities at the intersections of patriarchy, heteronormativity, racism and political economies of exclusion.

By situating himself directly in the hot mess of queer life 'in the field', Van Klinken exposes the interconnections of power and vulnerability in the ethnographic encounter. This is a fresh and commendable approach. In writing himself into and through the text, the author seeks to counter the extractive and dominating gaze of the ethnographer. This serves as a productive prompt for queer scholars to further reflection on whether the over- (or under-)presence