

further draws attention to the role of labelling in same-sex relations. While many of her working-class participants engaged in same-sex relations, they hesitated about being identified as lesbians. Some therefore were involved in heterosexual practices to cover up their same-sex relations, while others enacted 'joking relations' to distance themselves from such relationships. This resonates with the challenge of labelling that has framed most same-sex relations in many parts of Africa. It confirms Murray and Roscoe's work in *Boy-Wives and Female-Husbands: studies in African homosexuality*,¹ where they argued that such practices existed among Lesotho women but that they never labelled it in the same way as in the West. What is Dankwa's position on the labelling of same-sex relations in Ghana? And how does the author reconcile 'supi' as used among Asafo groups in the coastal areas of Ghana with *supi* in reference to same-sex relations among women in Ghana?

The findings from Dankwa's exploratory ethnographic work, which uncovers challenging experiences encountered by lesbians in Ghana, have the potential to influence Ghanaians with regard to redefining the labelling of lesbians and appreciating the sexualities of other minority groups. The first chapter of the book, for example, reveals some indirectness in the Ghanaian language, religion, politics and laws relating to the subject of homosexuality. Policy engagement with Dankwa's conceptualization of the terminologies of sexuality in this book could provide precise definitions for hazy legal terms in the Criminal Code. This would also help clarify matters relating to criminality within the context of social justice and a person's sexuality as a social construct.

Overall, I found this book very timely and relevant to sexuality research design techniques and policy formulation. It contributes immensely to global discourses on sexual identities. *Knowing Women* is a must-read for scholars of African sexuality, social scientists, researchers, cultural studies scholars, sexuality and gender policy formulators and implementers and all those who have a stake in advancing and protecting the identities of African women.

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This book adds to a small but increasing scholarship on same-sex intimacy and desire in Africa. Serena Owusua Dankwa's ethnography brings alive the everyday lives and intimate discursive practices of *supi* – defined by the author as working-class women who love women in postcolonial Ghana. Dankwa does an excellent job of showing how the lives and the narratives of erotic subjectivities thrive.

Dankwa promises a (decolonial) interruption of the hegemonic ways in which 'queer' others' experiences are perceived in juxtaposition to the 'modern' homosexuals, and she delivers on this. Even though Dankwa keeps reminding us that *supi* don't self-identify as – nor make much reference to – lesbian or the 'modern' homosexual, there is a constant dance between erotic subjectivities of *supi* and the globalized Western identity of lesbians that travels through all the chapters. For instance, even though *supi* female masculinity is framed as relational, there is referencing of Western notions of butch/femme. Eurocentric framings of the modern homosexual seep through each chapter, appearing as a point of reference. Indeed, decolonial feminism usefully offers us 'a lens to understand the

¹S. O. Murray and W. Roscoe (1998) *Boy-Wives and Female-Husbands: studies in African homosexuality*. Albany NY: State University of New York Press.

hidden-from-view interconnections between race and gender and the relation of each to normative heterosexuality'.² The *gender* aspect is generously offered in this book, showing how erotic subjectivities produce democratized knowledge on gender and sexuality. Less is provided about its entanglement with *race* in a postcolony like Ghana. One is left wondering: in what shape or form does race manifest through sexuality and knowledge production? Could the juxtaposition of the *supi* (queer other) with the modern homosexual in a postcolony such as Ghana fall within the traps of positioning and further privileging Eurocentric modes of knowledge production, as a lens through which African sexuality is perceived? There is a racialized distinction in the binary between the erotic subjectivity of *supi* and the modern homosexual framed within Eurocentric notions, a binary that decolonial scholarship could unpick.

The notion of secrecy as central to this ethnography is entangled in female same-sex eroticism. It meanders and appears in various forms, implicitly or explicitly, at times given centrality such as in Chapter 2. For instance, one representation of it is around the 'coming out narrative' versus secrecy. One of the central aspects is the play and passion growing out of erotic promises of giving, receiving and reciprocity that have to be disguised and handled as secret. Secrecy is entangled with keeping the same-sex intimacies flourishing. Moreover, there is a tension between secrecy and silence, where Dankwa makes reference to Signe Arnfred's question of the conceptual usefulness of a 'culture of silence' that is said to mark African societies.³ However, one is left wondering in what ways meaning is assigned to secrecy by *supi*. The book makes strong connections between secrecy and hiding, but perhaps there could be more to it than just that. Indeed, the 'cultural turn' foregrounds the 'production and circulation of meaning through language' in different areas of social practice.⁴ This begs the question: for *supi*, what sort of meaning or currency was attached to secrecy? Narratives of freedom are vast but are central to social justice. When the notion of freedom is evoked, do *supi* exploit secrecy as freedom to exist outside the confines of the everyday heterosexism that is heavily encoded in Ghanaian society? Perhaps the proposition here is of engaging with secrecy as a lens. Given that the concept is so central to the ethnography, one is left wanting to know more.

Dankwa particularly centres gender in this book through the analytical lens of sexuality. The system of sex/gender/sexuality is troubled in the way Oyèrónké Oyèwùmí⁵ and Ifi Amadiume⁶ engage with it as situational gender. The male and female in the book are understood and articulated as relational and situational categories, especially so in the chapter on female masculinities. The expressions of *supi* whose gender expression is masculine include playing football as a sanctuary for female masculinities or not doing 'women's work' such as sewing. The meaning-making around football and not being able to give birth or the surprise that came with Janet Aidoo (whose gender is a masculine expression) getting

²S. Tamale (2020) *Decolonization and Afro-feminism*. Nairobi: Daraja Press, p. 7.

³S. Arnfred (2004) "'African sexuality'/sexuality in Africa: tales and silences' in S. Arnfred (ed.), *Re-thinking Sexualities in Africa*. Uppsala: Nordiska Afrikainstitutet.

⁴S. Hall (2010) *Representation: cultural representations and signifying practices*. London: Sage and Open University, p. 1.

⁵O. Oyèwùmí (1997) *The Invention of Women: making an African sense of Western gender discourses*. Minneapolis MN: University of Minnesota Press.

⁶I. Amadiume (1987) *Male Daughters, Female Husbands: gender and sex in an African society*. London: Zed Books; I. Amadiume (1997) *Re-inventing Africa: patriarchy, religion and culture*. London: Zed Books.

pregnant all speak to the complexities and interruptions of masculinities and femininities being ‘housed’ in one body. In the South African context, violence is deployed as the main mode of surveillance of female masculinities.⁷ One is left to wonder how they are surveilled in a postcolonial context such as Ghana that is heavily encoded in heterosexuality.

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Serena Dankwa’s *Knowing Women*, a fascinating exploration of African women’s same-sex intimacies in Ghana, starts off by reminding us to “‘free our imaginations” in order to “make new exciting things””. These were the late Binyavanga Wainaina’s words, and, in the true spirit of his premonitions, the ‘knowing women’ Dankwa describes in Ghana do exactly that. Dankwa captures these women’s lives in a multitude of spaces, public and private, and invites the reader to enter a world where the space for ‘new exciting things’ is created. In this world, friendship is open to all interpretations. There are what might be called ‘friends with benefits’ in other settings – and these benefits are endless. At the same time, the deep sense of sharing and ‘doing everything together’ tips the friendship scale to other limits – veering towards siblinghood, mother and daughter relations and other precarious relationships that demand no other words. Dankwa is right to ‘mobilize friendship as a conceptual tool’ (p. 43) as the potentials of friendship allow for all possibilities. However, while a useful and significant device, there are obvious challenges with friendship even in the context of Ghana and in Africa generally.

In the first instance, friendships exist also within the frame of LGBT issues and queer existence in Ghana. While Dankwa does not rely too much on LGBT identities and language, these same-sex intimacies and desires cannot completely escape the Western frame of same-sex sexuality and gender identity. As Dankwa asserts: ‘global LGBT initiatives have prioritized male homosexuality and activism in a way that renders illegible tacit forms of queer resistance, including Ghanaian women’s culture of indirection’ (p. 48). This form of activism, and the silence in women’s voices, is a result of a workshop from a European donor, an international intervention not uncommon in many African countries.⁸ The ‘noise’ that comes with this version of activism requires certain declarations and ‘privacy’ to be made public through ‘the performance of the lesbian self’ (p. 74). This goes against the value and inventiveness of ‘knowing women’ who create contextually relevant expressions of their existence. How is friendship a useful tool in engaging with the demands of LGBT activism and the need for naming and labelling? Can friendship and LGBT activism seamlessly coexist or is a tug of war inevitable?

The second aspect of friendship pertains to its locatedness and queerness, particularly in relation to spaces and love. The bathhouse, as an erotic space for women, offers theoretical potentials. Practices of caring, touching, kindness, assistance and sharing water form part of everyday expressions of love in this space. Dankwa suggests that these practices queer this space ‘through repetitions and resignification’ (p. 111). In this space, however, only two women are generally

⁷A. L. Swarr (2012) ‘Paradoxes of butchness: lesbian masculinities and sexual violence in contemporary South Africa’, *Signs* 37 (4): 961–86.

⁸G. Reid (2013) *How to Be a Real Gay: gay identities in small-town South Africa*. Scottsville: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press.