

of the embodied researcher/writer can ever be remedied. Perhaps a certain degree of discomfort with how one's own body *does not* fit – regardless of the intimacies it might encounter in the field – is necessary in order to acknowledge the significant limitations of one's perspective. Here, the invitation is perhaps to persist in writing these discomforts beyond the pain and romance of the field.

In claiming Christian queerness from a critical vantage point – and noting its social, political and epistemological force – it is necessary to wage both secular and, as the book reasserts, post-secular struggle. Consequently, the linking of 'Kenyan', 'Christian' and 'Queer' must remain unsettled if we are to keep the prospect of a radical politics in sight. This seems relevant in a time and place where one is at once *with* and *without* African, *with* and *without* queer, and *with* and *without* Christian – each an unstable and contingent signifier that is simultaneously embraced and refused. For it is also in refusing the terms on which belonging is offered that the desire and demand for more equitable and just social relationships can be further articulated.

Importantly and productively, the book showcases faith as a site of transgressive and creative 'artivism' and its emancipatory possibilities at the level of politics, culture and religion. In the same moment, and in the spirit of the queer critical enquiry the book invites, we should heed the caution against seeking and finding all the answers in the dictates of (queer) religion and its prophets: in the words of the ninth-century Zen Buddhist Master Lin Chi, 'If you meet the Buddha on the road, kill him.'

Melanie Judge

University of Cape Town

melanie@justcommunication.co.za

doi:10.1017/S000197202100036X

This book presents a controversial theme in anthropological explorations of queer experience, especially by linking religion and LGBT issues. This is most welcome as this is a fresh area of academic inquiry into sexuality in Kenya. By using case-by-case examples – namely, works by the author Binyavanga Wainaina, the gay gospel artist George Barasa, an anthology of short films documenting the lives of Kenyan individuals identifying as lesbian, gay, transgender, bisexual and intersex, and ethnography conducted in the LGBT-affirming Cosmopolitan Affirming Church in Nairobi – Adriaan van Klinken brings out narratives that present the challenges people face in expressing their sexualities in a patriarchal society. Specifically, the book thus records the experiences of those who refuse to be victims, a people with hope and urgency, who navigate between resistance and conventional growth, creating more space for community and affirmation. It allows its subjects to tell their own stories. In sum, Van Klinken shows how religiosity in Kenya shapes the lived experiences of LGBT people and how sexual orientation forges wider dimensions of faith and spirituality.

Van Klinken draws from rich primary and secondary sources to explore contestations around sexual diversity in the context of Christianity, examining how spiritual paths are transformed in reconciling and expressing faith and sexual orientations. Van Klinken has thus become the first scholar to bring LGBT discussion to the doorstep of the Christian church in Kenya, relating sexuality to theology by focusing on a combination of art, religion and activism. The subject has always been criminalized, taboo, hidden and often feared. This bold exposition complicates normative African religious understanding with a dose of queer theology. I may say that this work is very courageous and confrontational towards the conventional theological practice in Kenya. As such, the study reveals wider social anxieties and tensions. The author weaves together gospel themes of

love and persecution on the one hand, and resistance, vulnerability, acceptance and rejection on the other. He subtly poses the question of liberation and triumph and in my view indirectly equates these concerns with the persecution of the Christian church in the early century.

The book brings together much information often separated by interdisciplinary boundaries. An interesting addition is its ecclesiastical and regional approach. There is much literature on a similar subject in Uganda, South Africa, Zimbabwe and Nigeria, but far less in Kenya, which is considered to have the 'least drama' in LGBT issues. Yet, today, LGBT issues are a central concern of religious leaders, politicians, journalists and academics. Generally, sexuality studies in Kenya are moving quickly from academic to public spheres. Ultimately, most of the decisive research discoveries have been informed by a history of breaking silences through an emphasis on voice and speaking out, and that is what Van Klinken achieves.

In relation to the above, I make a few observations. First, readers could benefit from wider coverage of the historical journey and factors that have made it possible for LGBT issues in Kenya to be a subject of academic and public interest. For instance, how has the internationalization of sexual rights and identities, the rights movement, and increasing demands for basic equality since the end of the Cold War influenced new expressions of sexual orientation in many urban areas of Africa? What about the impact of the global widening of freedom of the media and the widespread use of the internet and social media on the liberalization of sexual rights and identities?

Second, we can observe important trends in Kenyan urban youth deploying music and clothing styles in order to form new subcultural youth identities that are seen as acts of resistance against dominant African cultures. How are these shifts in youth culture related to the religious aspects discussed in the book? Van Klinken demonstrates that religion fuels repression while also becoming a springboard for LGBT activism. Further evidence on the links between Christian theology and community activism would be welcome.

Even though the author denies idolizing the late Binyavanga Wainaina (p. 33), the whole book somehow ends up like an intellectual tribute to this 'legendary' LGBT crusader and 'queer prophet'. The book examines the works of this well-known Kenyan author and journalist in its introductory chapters. It describes his contribution as a secular intervention that creates new windows of opportunity. It inspires discussions by artist George Barasa, the Cosmopolitan Affirming Church and the characters in the *Stories of Our Lives* anthology of short films. Directly or indirectly, the book is replete with references to Wainaina, thus implying the centrality of this author's influence on the changes the book describes. The way in which the author 'baptizes' Wainaina as a prophet to theorize religious experience is not always persuasive; the fact that Wainaina contests Pentecostalism or homophobia does not make him an authority on theology.

This book is a ground-breaking piece and addresses a controversial theme in the history of sexuality studies in Africa. As such, it will certainly provide momentum for local LGBT activists to break the silences surrounding sexuality and to 'claim the ownership and control of their own bodies'.³ It is committed to challenging normative concepts of culture and tradition that impinge on sexual and reproductive rights in Africa. I hope that this useful study will inspire new interest in this much neglected area in African studies. I am not a scholar of theology but I am certain that this book will be met with rage and great controversy. Previously, LGBT issues have been

³S. Heidari (2015) 'Sexual rights and bodily integrity as human rights', *Reproductive Health Matters* 23 (46): 1–6.

discussed outside the church as a secular ‘problem’, where they have often clashed with politicians’ views and agendas. Now, they have been portrayed in this book as an issue in direct confrontation with theology in Kenya.

Babere Kerata Chacha

Centre for Human Rights, Laikipia University

chachaok@yahoo.com

doi:10.1017/S0001972021000371

Response by the author

Queer sexuality has only recently emerged as a topic of interest in African studies, and religion is often thought of as antonymous to queerness. Therefore, the journal *Africa* featuring a book about exactly these two topics in this symposium is an important recognition of their significance for the study of African subjectivities and socio-cultural formations more broadly. I am grateful to the journal editors for their initiative in putting this symposium together, and to the contributors, Babere Kerata Chacha, Melanie Judge and Kwame Edwin Otu, for their generous appraisal of, and meaningful engagement with, my book *Kenyan, Christian, Queer*. The rich responses from my interlocutors offer an abundance of food for thought. Unable to respond to all the issues raised, I will group their comments, and organize my response to them, around three areas: methodology, concepts and politics.

Methodological queerness. Methodologically, *Kenyan, Christian, Queer* is characterized by a commitment to interdisciplinarity – or, better, transdisciplinarity. As Chacha observes, this allowed me to bring together a rather diverse set of data and material – ranging from literary texts, life stories and sermons to music, video and social media. The creative arts of resistance deployed by the Kenyan queer subjects at the heart of the book are complex and manifold, and so are the situated knowledges embedded in them. This required, in Otu’s words, a ‘methodological canvass’ that may appear to some readers as eclectic but that I consider to be fundamentally queer as it combines methods ‘that are often cast as being at odds with each other’ and as it ‘refuses the academic compulsion towards disciplinary coherence’.⁴ Rather than striving for disciplinary coherence, I was committed to foregrounding, in Judge’s words, the ‘embodied experiences of Kenyan LGBTI people as active subjects’ in Christian and queer worldmaking. At the same time, I sought to acknowledge how, in the process of researching and writing this book, the embodied experiences of my participants became intricately enmeshed with my own. Again, this was inspired by a queer spirit of resisting academic traditions of disembodied scholarship and extractive ethnography. Thus, recognizing the situated knowledges of my participants also entailed recognizing the situatedness of my own knowledge of the research subject(s), and embracing this as a key methodological principle by situating myself ‘directly in the hot mess of queer life “in the field”’ (Judge) and making my ‘personal presence palpably felt’ in the book (Otu). My interlocutors welcome this decision, describing it

⁴J. Halberstam (1998) *Female Masculinity*. Durham NC: Duke University Press, p. 13.