

# BOOK REVIEW

**S.N. Nyeck. *African(a) Queer Presence: Ethics and Politics of Negotiation*.** Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021. ix + 132 pp. Bibliography. Index. \$69.99. Hardcover. ISBN: 978-3-319-61224-9.

*African(a) Queer Presence: Ethics and Politics of Negotiation* by S.N. Nyeck is an in-depth analytical journey into the intellectual and political discourse of queerness in Africa. Nyeck critically de-emphasizes state-centered approaches to the promotion of queer rights, and calls attention to practices of agency, negotiation, vulnerability, and resilience as central to creating and shaping the everyday lives of the queered. She intricately builds and connects theoretical arguments that “Africanize queerness” (2) as contemporary modes of being that laboriously navigate identities, ethics, hope, love, and acceptance. Nyeck’s arguments seek to contribute to African queer studies a strategic and ethical perspective of belonging and negotiation and to theorize the strategic behavior of queer characters in selected African films as a means of exploring “possibilities of (queer) being and becoming” (5).

The book is divided into five chapters, starting with the introduction which presents Nyeck’s motives and purposes for embarking on this intellectual interrogation of queering Africa. Chapter Two is dedicated to the theoretical and conceptual framework of her arguments, while Chapter Three and Four focus on her analysis of two selected films to delineate the fine points of her argument. Chapter Five concludes the book by theoretically engaging the author’s envisaged negation of the arguments in the previous chapters.

Nyeck builds her argument through three chapters, starting with her theoretical discussion and conceptual framework in Chapter Two. That chapter stands out for the intricate interaction with the works of diverse African diaspora authors—ethicists, theologians, artists, and scholars. She engages and draws from Léopold S. Senghor’s seminal theorization (*Négritude et Humanisme* [Éditions de Seuil 1964]), as well as the writings of Achille Mbembe (*Critique of Black Reason* [Duke University Press 2017]), Chwe Michael (*Jane Austen: A Game Theorist* [Princeton University Press 2013]), and Obioma Nnaemeke (*Nego-Feminism: Theorizing, Practicing, and Pruning Africa’s Way* [University of Chicago Press 2004]), among others. The chapter


is rich in theoretical discussions, utilized by Nyeck to posit queerness as “relational possibilities” (12), and expounded as a non-dialectical understanding of identities (26) and a social exposition of negotiations (41–45). Although Nyeck’s artistry in highlighting and connecting strands and swaths of theoretical concepts and arguments is insightful and at times innovative, the denseness of this chapter sometimes distracts from the main points.

Chapters Three and Four present Nyeck’s analysis of the films *Proteus* and *Karmen Gei*. In *Proteus*, she calls attention to the entanglements of queerness, colonialism, and colonial Christianity. She deconstructs the ideals embedded in the colonial dialectics of religion, knowledge, and reason to highlight the ethics and techniques of queer negotiation. Her analysis contributes an important perspective in the understanding of the life of a queer outside the focus of political rights. Nyeck’s use of multidimensional and multifocal lenses to expound spiritualized and material violence—which is often deemphasized in discussions of living with and surviving as a non-identity—stands out as a strength in her analysis.

The next chapter, an analysis of *Karmen Gei*, follows with an examination of the post-colonial context of homophobia and specific modes of queer presentation. Her argument in this chapter is relevant for the emerging discourse of queerness that seeks to look beyond libidinal desires in the examination of a queer life. Nyeck explores queerness from the perspective of a “permission to feel” (92), a soulful presentation of the queer that is self-discerning, reflexive (96), and vulnerable to dreams of possibilities. Hers is a rendition of queerness that is humane, uniting and “speak[ing] from the perspective of the depth of things” (106). For instance, Angelique’s unrequited love is explored as vulnerability, while her libidinal fixation on Karmen is conceptualized as “channeled toward higher humanist ends” (96). However, the chapter leaves one wondering whether Nyeck’s conception of the “depth of things” is not overly romanticized in the face of Angelique’s inflicting self-harm as her response to amorous rejection. Similarly, Nyeck’s positive conceptualization of Angelique’s rejection of other lovers as a form of commitment recalls notions of colonial theological ideals that exult monogamous love as the highest form of love.

In conclusion, Nyeck’s book presents interesting analytical arguments from an interdisciplinary perspective. It is rich in theoretical discussions, and it succeeds in analyzing queerness with minimal attention to libidinal desire, homing in on the shared humanity, the struggles, capitulations, dreams, and ethical negotiations that better represents the context and possibilities inherent in African(a) queer presence. For “...change that matters is encounter-bound and the very idea of its possibility predicated upon... negotiation with people, cultures and institutions” (2). The book is suitable for middle to advanced readers interested in queerness in Africa. I will recommend the book for its theoretical insights, analytical strength, and expressed possibilities for the future of queer studies in Africa. The book is also relevant for

scholars who seek to replace a state-centered approach with a more people-centered analytical approach to the broad topic of queerness.

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- Geschiere, Peter. 2017. "A 'Vortex of Identities': Freemasonry, Witchcraft, and Post-colonial Homophobia." *African Studies Review* 60 (2): 7–35. doi:10.1017/asr.2017.52.