

**African(a) Queer Presence: Ethics and Politics of Negotiation.**

S. N. Nyeck.

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S. N. Nyeck's *African(a) Queer Presence: Ethics and Politics of Negotiation* interrogates African queer identity politics and theorizing from an interdisciplinary perspective that is, at once, enlightening, and challenging. The book proposes that queer scholarship can no longer lurk at the margins of African studies and that, instead of queering Africa, there is need to Africanize queerness in inclusive ways that nullify gendered and geo-political boundaries. In this regard, Nyeck suggests ways of re-imagining queerness, Africanness, and postcoloniality beyond the binary logics of Western dialectics that have shaped the consciousness of both colonial and post-colonial societies.

In the introductory chapter of the book, Nyeck mentions that she partly draws on her personal experience, as a black queer immigrant teaching in an American college, to challenge queer negation and the homophobia often targeted at black bodies. She then delves deeper to engage with intersecting theoretical positions in her scrutiny of queer presences in African locales where she argues that queer agency and unthreatened futures can only be attained through negotiation and social integration. Nyeck further contends that the African queer discourse must not only concentrate on the origins and indigeneity of these identities but should adopt holistic approaches that consider the present and the future, since such perspectives tend to be agentic. Much of her analysis is contained in the third and fourth chapters of the book where she discusses two films: *Proteus* (2003) by Jack Lewis and John Greyson, and *Karmen Gei* (2001), directed by Joseph Gaï Ramaka. Both films are set in prisons (the former in South Africa and the latter in Senegal), which perhaps ably communicates one of the central messages in the book—queerness as a “captured identity” in the postcolony.

It is in chapter two where Nyeck sets forth her agenda and expounds on the theoretical leanings of her analysis. Among others, she draws on ideas from Theodor W. Adorno's *Negative Dialectics* (1973), Jean Baudrillard's *Simulacra and Simulation* (1994), Michael

Chwe's *Jane Austen, Game Theorist* (2013), Nnaemeka Obioma's nego-feminism, and Leopold Senghor's formulation of politics as *présence virtuelle*. Interestingly, Nyeck settles for Senghor's negritude as her central analytical tool in dismantling and rethinking authoritative narratives that negate queer presence in African spaces. She capitalises on negritude's affirmation of the humanity of black people in her endeavour to expand the paradigms of the human to queer identities whose Africanness and humanity is often challenged by homophobic publics. Her argument is that queer negation in Africa generally emanates from regarding the self as “being in-self” (124) rather than adopting the Ubuntu philosophy, core to negritude, which proposes the ethics of “being for another”. In this way, she abandons Cartesian binary logic for an Africana ethics of inclusivity and concludes that the sensibilities of Senghorian negritude “offer ethical responses to queer negation in postcolonial contexts” (21).

Nyeck dismisses the misleading homophobic claim of an exclusionary African imagination by establishing that the existence of alternative worlds and forms of being present in Voodoo practices, for example, testifies to the fact that indigenous African cosmologies are fecund with inclusive imagination, which give room to multiplicities of identity. She attributes the challenge to Africana queer presence to what she terms “the two problems of evil”, which are (i) queer negation and (ii) the temptation to invent the self by assigning evil and/or immorality to others. Both are products of compulsory heterosexuality and lead to queer marginalization. This is what ought to be negotiated in an ethical encounter for peaceful and progressive co-existence.

In chapter three, the discussion dwells on *Proteus*, focusing on the film's representation of the conflicting presence of queerness alongside Christian/colonial establishments and traditional (Nativist) African(a) ideals of culture and essentialized values. In the film, one encounters different strategies adopted by colonial authorities in their effort to subdue both people of colour and queer sexualities in South Africa. Religion and the law become central to this project. Nyeck concludes that, in its deconstructive stance, the film presents queerness as “a larger project in the

imagination of Africana subjectivities that cannot be understood outside the systemic and institutionalized contingencies that it must confront” (50). In this regard, she redefines queerness as being “out of order” in that it cannot be normatively comprehended, nor can it be ordered around. It is a rejection of tradition, oppression, and commandment as seen in the persona of Claas Blank, one of the protagonists in *Proteus*.

Chapter four discusses *Karmen Gei*, which evokes religious tensions on ideal and non-ideal sexualities in Senegal. It fuses the queer subject together with their postcolonial counterpart as sites of political resistance in their struggle to affirm their contested subjectivities. In her analysis of the church sermon that takes place at the burial of one of the film’s protagonists, Angelique, Nyeck asserts that “postcolonial rigid binaries, single stories/visions, and self-images must be examined if meaningful inclusion of all is to take place” (109). Essentially, she establishes that queer negation in Africa is a post/colonial problem of exclusion that needs to be addressed as such.

Chapter five concludes the book, and in it, Nyeck contends with positions that challenge her thesis that Africa’s interiority is fertile with queer and inclusive imagination. Here, her arguments heavily rely on Eboussi Boulaga’s *Muntu in Crisis: African Authenticity and Philosophy* (2014). In the end, the book is basically an exposition of some of the central debates on queerness in Africa and it forges the trajectory for new perspectives in queer theorizing. However, it should be mentioned that one of the challenges one encounters going through the monograph is that it proves to be a heavy read due to Nyeck’s overreliance on multiple theoretical and philosophical positions that have not been adequately watered-down to speak to uncomplicated subjects and audiences. Nevertheless, I would recommend this book to advanced readers eager to explore new ground in African queer theory.

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