

Reviews of books

Kwame Edwin Otu, *Amphibious Subjects: Sasso and the Contested Politics of Queer Self-Making in Neoliberal Ghana*. Oakland CA: University of California Press (pb US\$34.95/£30 – 978 0 520 38185 8). 2022, 293 pp.

‘Sometimes, one must know when, where, and how to be gay,’ said Hillary (p. 77), one of the principal interlocutors in Kwame Otu’s *Amphibious Subjects*. At a time where harsh new anti-LGBTIQ+ laws are being debated in Uganda and Ghana, Kwame Otu provides a much-needed expansion of the (hi)stories of Ghanaian queer lives. The book presents a rich ethnography of queer subjectivity in Ghana in a context of rising homophobia and growing LGBTIQ+ rights activism. The location of Otu’s research, the historical suburb of Jamestown in Accra, is particularly relevant for the analysis. As a suburb that breathes the history of colonialism and the slave trade, and as a working-class neighbourhood, Jamestown provides a rich background to analyse the intersections between race, class, gender and sexual subjectivities in neoliberal Ghana.

The book is eloquently written and builds on the budding field of queer African studies, drawing on the work of Serena Dankwa (*Knowing Women*, 2021), Adriaan van Klinken (*Kenyan, Christian, Queer*, 2019) and Rudolf Gaudio (*Allah Made Us*, 2009), among others. Taking up Stella Nyanzi’s call for ‘queering queer Africa’ without relying on Euro-American theoretical frameworks, Otu draws on the Ghanaian philosopher Kwame Gyekye and his theory of ‘amphibious personhood’ to understand the self-making practices of *sasso*, a community of self-identified effeminate men, most of whom engage in same-sex relationships. Understanding them as amphibious subjects, or subjects who can move between different terrains, helps Otu illustrate his point about *sasso* navigating a simultaneously queer liberal and heteronationalist context.

Divided into three parts, the book first situates *sasso* subjectivity in Jamestown. Taking the reader through the many spaces and places that *sasso* create and frequent – from popular hangouts including a bar and shop to rites and rituals as sites of gender non-conformity to queer rights organizations – he explores the complex entanglements of heteroerotic and homoerotic intimacies. In the second part, Otu delves into the amphibious nature of *sasso*, describing how *sasso* might make use of the opportunities provided by LGBTIQ+ human rights organizations, without being fully subjected to their logic. It is in this context that Otu’s interlocutor Hillary uttered the comment about having to know when to be gay – i.e. when to strategically draw on the LGBTIQ+ lexicon and take some advantage, hopefully, from being embedded in the world of transnational LGBTIQ+ rights activism. Otu draws attention to the contention that arose around this utterance. Discussing a video produced by the human rights NGO Aidspan, in which Hillary presented himself as a gay man living with HIV, we learn that other *sasso* demanded its removal after they were subjected to verbal attacks. Aidspan did not remove the video, thereby ignoring how such visibility put already vulnerable men at

risk. In the third and last part of the book, Otu goes back to the Missionary Collections archives at SOAS University of London to examine letters exchanged in the post-independence period (1965–75) between the Christian Council of Ghana and Christian Aid, a British Christian humanitarian aid organization. These archives describe the concern with normalizing monogamy. Tracing this concern to the construction of the modern ‘civilized’ and Christian nation, Otu argues that this history is a palimpsest that can help us understand the contemporary fiction that Ghana is a strictly heterosexual nation. In the last chapter, he shows how LGBTIQ+ rights NGOs reproduce this fiction. Taking as an example the screening of the BBC documentary *The World’s Worst Place to be Gay?*, at an activity organized by a local human rights NGO, Otu argues that queer liberal projects are ‘sites of racialization’ that depict Africa as a homophobic continent. This, he argues, creates a ‘homocolonial trope’ in the same way that Christian missionaries created a ‘heterocolonial trope’ in the 1960s.

A significant focus of the book is Otu’s attentiveness to class dynamics. He describes the intimate relationships between *sasso* and other men, whom they call *gentors* (middle-class masculine-presenting men) or *logs* (working-class masculine-presenting men). Otu describes the monetary logic that shapes relationships and desires between *sasso* and *gentors* and *sasso* and *logs*, showing how these men are all related to one another in a political economy of intimacy. I would have liked to read more about the interactions between *sasso* and their *gentors* and *logs*. Embodying gender, class and sexual subjectivity differently, their intimate engagements could elucidate the tensions between the different, often contradictory, ideas and praxes of queer sexualities. Otu’s interlocutors were *sasso* who were familiar with, and often interacted with, LGBTIQ+ rights discourse and organizations. But how do *gentors* and *logs* – whose mostly normatively masculine gender and heterosexual identification make them unfathomable to queer liberal activism – relate to, or are impacted by, the work of LGBTIQ+ human rights interventions, if at all?

All in all, Kwame Otu has written a dense book about the fast-changing conditions of queer life in Ghana. He ends his conclusion with a series of pertinent questions about the futures of *sasso* and other queer lives in Ghana – questions that can only leave us wishing for more research from him and others, as a way to further queer queer Africa.

Loes Oudenhuijsen

PhD candidate, African Studies Centre, Leiden University, Netherlands

Email: l.w.oudenhuijsen@asc.leidenuniv.nl

doi: [10.1017/S0001972023000669](https://doi.org/10.1017/S0001972023000669)

Theodore Trefon, *Bushmeat: Culture, Economy and Conservation in Central Africa*. London: C. Hurst for the International African Institute (pb £20 – 978 1 78738 814 7). 2023, 256 pp.

This is a timely, valuable and highly readable book that comes at a time of heightened public interest in environmental issues. It provides an engaging and immersive description of the (largely unsuccessful) history of wildlife management in Central