
1 Introduction

Uncle Theo ... fingered the mauve and white pebbles on the beach. These stones, which brought such pleasure to the twins, were a nightmare to Theo. Their multiplicity and randomness appalled him ... The pebbles gave a general impression of being either white or mauve, but looked at closely they exhibited almost every intermediate colour and also varied considerably in size and shape. All were rounded, but some were flattish, some oblong, some spherical; some were almost transparent, others more or less conspicuously speckled, others close-textured and nearly black, a few of a brownish red, some of pale grey, others of a purple which was almost blue.¹

In *Inessential woman* Elizabeth Spelman begins her path-breaking critique of feminist theory by using Theo, a character from Iris Murdoch's novel – *The nice and the good*, as a case study.² The aspect of Theo that interests Spelman is his fear of multiplicities: a fear which can be situated in an ontology of reductive sameness. Theo's disposition towards reductive sameness allows Spelman to draw a parallel with a dominant philosophical strand in Western feminist theory constructed on the 'generic woman'.³ The 'generic woman' is flawed, she argues, because her genericness is a product of an incomplete gaze: a way of seeing women as if they are all white and middle-class. Genericness is ineluctably homogenising. It can serve to obscure heterogeneities among women, preempting the need to explore the implications of differences among women in feminist theory and praxis.⁴ Theo's predilection towards a

1 I Murdoch *The nice and the good* (1969) 158-159.

2 EV Spelman *Inessential woman: The problem of exclusion in feminist thought* (1988) 1-4; Murdoch (n 1 above).

3 Spelman (n 2 above) ix.

4 Spelman (n 2 above) ix.

monochromatic vision is a metaphor for feminism's 'generic woman'. It provides Spelman with a pivot around which to develop a discourse on anti-essentialism.

In *The nice and the good* we see Theo, an elderly man, sitting on the beach in the company of his twin nephew and niece. The nine-year-old twins are full of exuberance but Uncle Theo is a man 'preoccupied with perceptual and conceptual tidiness'.⁵ He is quite unable to comprehend multiplicities in the colours, shapes and sizes of the pebbles that line the seashore. Whereas variety and unpredictability in the form of the pebbles excite pleasure in the zestful twins, they have an alienating effect on Uncle Theo. He can identify only with seeing things in black and white. He has a 'plethoraphobic distaste for and a discomfort with manyness'.⁶ To reconcile his monochromatic telos with the otherwise endless and unpredictable variety in the colours, shapes and sizes of the pebbles, he constructs his own reassuring imagery. It is an imagery organised around compliant, regimented uniformity: a thoroughly homogenising and crushing sameness. With this difference-erasing visual adjustment Uncle Theo is able to see 'pebblehood' not in its multiplicities, changeability and particularities but in its static singularity.⁷ It is as if all pebbles are of the same colour, shape and size, and always will be the same.

As does Spelman, I begin this book with an epigraph from Murdoch's novel and its portrayal of Uncle Theo. What is instructive for my own discourse is Uncle Theo's visual disposition and, in particular, what he *cannot* see. Even more instructive is what he does not want to see in the infinite variety of the pebbles. Ultimately, I am deeply interested in Uncle Theo's capacity to reorganise images in ways that obscure diversity and conflate one pebble with another in order to comport with a homogenising visual centre.

The epigraph and its evocation of reductive sameness is a compelling depiction of a rationalising, normative gaze constructed upon a *prior* discursive centre that excludes, invalidates or incorporates in order to align.⁸ *What is Africanness* is a discourse that seeks to contest a discourse of reductive sameness – a sameness I call *nativism* – in the naming of Africans mainly by others, but also by themselves. When thinking about how Africans historically have been named, how they continue to be named,

5 Spelman (n 2 above) 1.

6 Spelman (n 2 above) 2.

7 As above.

8 M Foucault *Discipline and punish: The birth of a prison* trans A Sheridan (1977) 182-183; IM Young *Justice and the politics of difference* (1990) 125-126.

and in many respects how they continue to name themselves, a parallel can be drawn between Uncle Theo's visual centre, especially its purposeful monochromatism, and the discourse of nativism.

The term 'discourse' can mean many things but I use it mainly in a Foucauldian sense to imply speech acts and 'practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak'.⁹ For the most part in *What is Africanness* I implicitly accept Foucault's premise that a discourse is not simply a sign for designating objects but a sign for something 'more'.¹⁰ Revealing, describing and interrogating the 'more' in nativism, therefore, is the recurring thesis of this book – its deconstructive motif. A discourse necessarily comes imbricated in an ideology tethered to power and knowledge which produce an *effect*. It is a site of constant struggle precisely because it does not exist in isolation but always in juxtaposition with competing discourses and regimes of truth.¹¹

What is Africanness has two main objectives: first, to implicate nativism in the naming of Africans and reveal its teleology and effects and second, to offer an alternative understanding of how Africans can be named or can name themselves. In implicating nativism I am interested in revealing a discursive structure in the ideas, opinions and concepts that historically have been assembled and continue to be assembled when naming Africans, so that even in their multiplicities they can be understood as a system – 'a discursive formation' – which is not ideologically neutral, but directional.¹² Moreover, I am equally interested in revealing the effects, especially status subordinating and identitarian effects, of nativising discursive structures.

In constructing an alternative epistemology of how Africans can be named or can name themselves my goal is to advance a discourse of *disidentification*.¹³ By this I do not mean treating the notion of identity in a postmodern sense as a dispensable fiction; instead, I mean engaging in discursive *re-presentation* in order to map new terrains and articulate new possibilities for renaming ourselves and developing a competing discourse – a counter-discourse – to contest nativism. My aim is to rethink inclusive ways in which Africans can be named. Ultimately, I explore more liberating and affirmative ways for Africans to name themselves, not least

9 M Foucault *The archaeology of knowledge* trans A Sheridan (1972) 49. On different meanings of 'discourse', see S Mills *Discourse* (1997) 1-28.

10 Foucault (n 9 above) 49.

11 Mills (n 9 above) 11-16.

12 Foucault (n 9 above) 38; Mills (n 9 above) 17.

13 Mills (n 9 above) 15.

because discourses have a history – a genealogy – and discursive practices are neither permanent nor immune to shifts in history, but are subject to radical change. As a counter-discourse, *What is Africanness* develops a hermeneutics of Africanness as its theoretical contribution to discursive representation and to debates on how normatively to address the question: Who/what is African? I have made this question a shorthand notation for the book's discursive inquiry into Africanness.

2 Nativism

In this section I introduce the concept of nativism. I appropriate the notions of a 'theocratic vision' and 'logic of identity' as conceptual resources for implicating the type of nativism that is the object of my critique.

2.1 Theocratic vision

Uncle Theo's vision inclines towards producing essences by repressing rather than recognising difference in the pebbles. He starts off with a plural and heterogeneous world of pebbles but soon transforms it, creating his own homogeneous universe.¹⁴ He reorganises pebbles on the seashore so that their imagery can be interpreted from a *seepoint* aligned to a particular visual template – a theocratic template. Whatever he sees in the end must comport with this template. Inscribed in the theocratic template is a proclivity towards seeing things as if they were the same and in ways that erase their differences and particularity. The imagery of pebbles conveyed to us by Uncle Theo is an imagery in which pebbles already are *interpellated* by a visual discourse of pebblehood in which pebbles are *summoned into place* to appear in a certain form.¹⁵ Pebbles are subsumed under a category of pebblehood in ways that abstract pebbles and ignore difference. Clearly, Uncle Theo is not someone who can reassure us that, if tasked with deciding on the aesthetic status of different pebbles, he can do so in a

14 Young (n 8 above) 98.

15 I use the term 'interpellation' in a general Althusserian sense to imply the 'hailing or summoning into place' of a subject by discourse. Louis Althusser, in an essay titled 'Ideological state apparatuses', first used the term in this sense to implicate and explicate a causal connection between ideology in major social and political institutions and the production of subjects. The essay is published as a part of a book, L Althusser *Lenin and philosophy and other essays* (1971); S Hall 'Who needs "identity"?' in J Evans & P Redman (eds) *Identity: A reader* (2000) 15 at 19-21. I say 'a general Althusserian sense' because I consider the term to be useful, but only to the extent that it does not efface individual agency and reduce human beings to ideological automatons.

manner that is not blinded by an abstract universality in which pebbles appear as either mauve or white with conforming shapes and sizes such that what is out of alignment with this vision loses its visibility and pebble status.

In a phenomenological sense, what matters to Uncle Theo when deciphering the colours, shapes and sizes of the pebbles is not the variety of images that the pebbles are capable of projecting but, instead, his visual starting point: his 'zero-point of orientation'.¹⁶ The orientation represents a *maximum* field of vision from a determinate point.¹⁷ Thus Uncle Theo has a visual *habitus* or positionality.¹⁸ His visual telos is 'at home' when all pebbles look the same.¹⁹ What is outside the visual horizon is eliminated and invisibilised from his 'knowledge and interest, care and concern'.²⁰ In its subjective construction of the images, a *theocratic* vision speaks resonantly to the main thesis of this book – nativism.

2.2 Logic of identity

What is Africanness is concerned with implicating and contesting discursive constructions of African identities which have succeeded in producing generic Africanness – a nativised Africanness – within discourses that are hostage to the 'logic of identity' in which identity represents saturated and oppositional natural essences. I am using the term 'logic of identity' in the sense meant by Iris Young in order to implicate historical currents that have dominated the discursive construction of African identity, conceiving it as made up of substantive essences which are a stable half of a self-generating, assimilative, binary category of human identity.²¹ Inexorably drawn towards certainty and predictability, the logic of identity, like

16 E Husserl *Ideas pertaining to a pure phenomenology and to a phenomenological philosophy* trans R Rojcewicz & A Schuwer (1989) 165-166; S Ahmed 'A phenomenology of whiteness' (2007) 8 *Feminist Theory* 149 at 151. On applying phenomenology to Africanness, see the discussion in ch 6, sec 5.

17 MS Copeland *Enfleshing freedom: Body, race and being* (2010) 13, citing B Lonergan 'Metaphysics as horizon' in FE Crowe & RM Doran (eds) *Collected works of Bernard Lonergan* (1998) 188 at 198.

18 Copeland (n 17 above) 13, citing P Bourdieu *Outline of a theory of practice*, trans RNice (1972) 72-78; S Ahmed 'Orientations: Towards a queer phenomenology' (2006) 12 *GLQ: A Journal of Gay and Lesbian Studies* 543 at 552-553.

19 Ahmed (n 16 above) 153.

20 Copeland (n 17 above) 13.

21 Young (n 8 above) 98-99 125. I elaborate on the nativising effect of the logic of identity in ch 4, sec 3.1.

theocratic vision, is disturbed by the particularity of experience and by ambiguities.²²

In this book I implicate two main historical currents of the logic of identity – one spawned by European imperialism and colonialism and the other by black/African emancipatory discourses. The currents stand in opposition to each other but paradoxically share the same episteme. They share an ahistorical understanding of identity which inclines towards producing stereotypes. Although they oppose each other, they unite in recognising ‘Africans’ under totalising systems in which Africans have an originary identity and are moulded from the same clay – racially, culturally and sexually, and in other identitarian ways. Both currents are fictive constructions that hypostatise African identity, seeking to erase uncertainty and unpredictability and thus bring everything under a stable identitarian control.

Under the current engendered by European imperialist and colonial discourses African identity appears as merely descriptive but, in fact, is ascribed racial and cultural identity. It is a normatively saturated identity which is dependent on and assimilated to a prior, privileged white, European identity that is assumed to be *the* authoritative view of self, truth and reality.²³ The European-spawned identity is a harmful stereotype which comes fully loaded with stigma. It is the product of a white normative gaze and imperialist discourses that were developed as part of giving Africa and Africans a single and simple ahistorical genealogy that, in turn, would invest the institutions of transatlantic slavery and colonisation with purposeful intelligibility for the protagonists. The discourses have employed a European-centred subsumption of race and culture – but race in particular – historically to codify and produce a prototype, fetishised and commodified African biological identity through a hegemonic classificatory system constructed around binaries that give legitimacy to a stable hierarchy among ‘races’.

The genus of African identity spawned by the logic of identity in discourses of race, imperialism and colonialism has institutionalised a classificatory system which works through an assimilative logic of epidermal identity and determinism. The identity is powered by a racial caste system. It reduces the plurality and particularity of different embodiments to unity by using whiteness as the gold standard of intelligibility so as to bring everything under a directional epidermal

22 Young (n 8 above) 98-99 125.

23 R Wiss ‘Lipreading: Remembering Saartjie Baartman’ (1994) 1 & 2 *Australian Journal of Anthropology* 11 at 34.

control that maintains hierarchical relationships.²⁴ Under this system, Africa is really sub-Saharan Africa as the continent of origin of people with a Negroid physiognomy – the Negro motherland.²⁵ It is an Africa biocentrically coded black to mark a prehistoric zone of pathological racial difference and to excise North Africa or 'Arab Africa' from a classification which stands not so much for a geographical territory as for a racialised biology.²⁶ It is a classificatory system in which race is social and political capital or the lack of it. This system has bequeathed an enduring legacy of hegemonic racial thinking which dichotomously categorises humanity as a predominantly white half at the apex of a racial pyramid, and a predominantly black other half, as its nadir. Interspersing the apex and the nadir are varieties of in-betweens – races not as superior as white but not as lowly as black.

The other historically dominant current in the discursive formation of African identity which, likewise, is informed by the logic of identity, comes from black/African emancipatory discourses that seek to correct through the recovery and affirmation of an African identity that, historically, has been spoiled.²⁷ This current is a reaction to slavery, European imperialism and colonialism, and apartheid.²⁸ It is principally concerned with countering negations of blackness through articulating an ontology of blackness.²⁹ Discourses that sustain this current do so through the recovery of an originary, foundational identity to articulate African identity as a transcendental and radical alternative.³⁰ Though reactive, self-defining and intended to contest European ideologies of racial supremacy and affirm the equality and human dignity of black people, it is nonetheless a historical current built centrally around a phenotype and a pre-constituted self – a closed identity – which rules out the possibility of an identity that is continuously unfolding, proliferating or is the outcome of multiple ancestries.³¹ This current represents a quest for an authentic African

24 Young (n 8 above) 99. See the discussion in ch 4 of this book.

25 S Wynter 'Unsettling the coloniality of being/power/truth/freedom: Towards the human, after man, its overrepresentation – An argument' (2003) 3 *CR: The New Centennial Review* 257 at 267-325.

26 PT Zeleza 'The inventions of African identities and languages: The discursive and developmental implications' in OF Arasanyin & MA Pemberton (eds) *Selected proceedings of the 36th Annual Conference on African Linguistics* (2006) 14 at 15-16; A McClintock *Imperial leather: Race, gender and sexuality in the colonial context* (1995) 30.

27 A Mafeje 'Africanity: A combative ontology' (2000) 2 *CODESRIA Bulletin* 66.

28 JA Mbembe 'African modes of self-writing' (2002) 14 *Public Culture* 239.

29 A Quayson 'Obverse denominations: Africa?' (2002) 14 *Public Culture* 585 at 586.

30 SJ Ndlovu-Gatsheni *Coloniality of power in postcolonial Africa and the myths of decolonisation* (2013) 99.

31 SB Diagne 'Keeping Africanity open' (2002) 14 *Public Culture* 621 at 621-622.

identity built around a civilisational and cultural ontology of blackness that finds its apotheosis in autochthonous determinations. Discourses of *négritude*, pan-Africanism, Afrocentricism or Afro-radicalism, anti-colonialism and African nationalism that incline towards orthodoxy or fundamentalism in their imagination of a collective, unified, foundational African identity, whether racial, cultural, sexual or otherwise, exemplify this current.³²

Notwithstanding that the two historical currents have followed trajectories powered by radically different teleologies, I argue that they are instances of reductive sameness which obscure multiple ancestries and proliferating heterogeneities among Africans. My thesis is that even if the two identitarian currents are polar opposites, they nonetheless coalesce in the construction of Africans as Cartesian subjects with a primordial identity built around the metaphysics of difference. Africans emerge from both currents as pure, transcendent, homogenised subjects, frozen in time and shorn of any historical radicalisation or transformative movement. These currents, which have normative implications for the lived equality of Africans and their capacity for self-reflexivity, provide this book with its springboard to an anti-nativist discourse of Africanness in which identifications are organised around overcoming status subordination and recognising existential heterogeneities when addressing the question: Who/what is African?

The arguments in this book frame historical and existential tendencies towards reductive sameness when constructing African identity as *nativism*. Such framing serves to discursively implicate the gravitational pull towards a fundamentally static notion of African identity that is dependent on prior essences inscribed by a template peculiar to the identity. In this framing the imperialistic and colonial current is *nativism from without*. It represents the institutionalisation of a rapacious racism. Its historical modus operandi has been to nativise in order to racially pathologise, conquer and colonise Africa, appropriate African land, recolonise Africa after its moment of independence from colonial rule, and to keep Africans in positions of status subordination. The other historical current is *nativism from within*. This current has nativised in order to react to the nativising discourses of imperialism, colonialism and neo-colonialism and follows a trajectory of contesting status subordination.

Whereas nativism from within laudably has sought to contest racialising and racist ideology, to affirm the equal humanity of Africans and to assert African identity in order to reclaim African territories and

32 For an overview of these discourses, see generally Mbembe (n 28 above).

rehabilitate a spoiled cultural and racial identity, in its quest for an integral identity it has been as much a dogma as nativism from without.³³ More to the point, in its attempt to anchor Africanness within a pre-set of characteristics it has been vulnerable to chauvinistic and exclusionary tendencies of its own. Just as colonial discourses have been historically nativising in an orientalising sense, counter-discourses from time to time have been appropriated to give legitimacy to occidentalising discourses in which identities and identifications that lie outside dominant 'African' cultural frameworks are treated as being not authentically African and belonging elsewhere. My aim is not to construct some sort of relational moral parity between the two nativisms, but to reveal their discursive connections as well as their status-subordinating effects and ultimately, to suggest a way forward in reformulating African identity by theorising identity rather than reiterating dogmas. Above all, the aim is to theorise African identity in ways that are responsive to affirmative subjectivities and ongoing proliferations.

3 Reformulating African identity: Overcoming status subordination and achieving inclusive equality

Over and above implicating nativism, as a linking thesis this book develops a remedial theoretical framework for rethinking African identity in ways that are dialogic and, above all, inclusive so as to be responsive to the recognition needs of all Africans. At the same time it critically interrogates hegemonic discourses that, at different historical times, were essentialising or exclusionary. Underpinning this critique is the general proposition that identity is being and becoming, something that is always in the making, and that Africans are diverse peoples who cannot be abstracted from identitarian frameworks that reckon with identity only when it is conceived as an 'integral, originary unified' and, ultimately, closed category.³⁴

Chapter 2 establishes the book's methodology. It highlights that whereas the book draws its arguments from a syncretic archive of knowledge and theory, in conceptualising how we think about African identity and in the construction of a hermeneutics of Africanness, the work of Stuart Hall, the cultural theorist and sociologist, has been the main

33 JA Mbembe 'On the power of the false' (2002) 14 *Public Culture* 629.

34 Hall 'Who needs "identity"?' (n 15 above)15.

influence.³⁵ In his cultural work, Hall, who died in 2014, did not directly address Africans or Africa, save for a few sporadic remarks. Nonetheless, his conceptualisation of diasporic blackness and ethnicities as discursive formations and, in particular – as Handel Wright highlights – Hall’s emphasis on rethinking identity, not as singular, essential and ahistorical but as multiple, conjunctural identifications that are always becoming, is a productive mediation for thinking about African identity.³⁶ More than any other theorist, Hall provides this book with its directional conceptual resources for constructing a normative template that will be useful in rethinking African identity.

The book thus draws on anti-foundational discourses to frame one of its central arguments about identity: that Cartesian and dichotomous foundational categories do not serve us well in our thinking about Africanness. It contributes to contemporary theory about Africanness by proposing instead, a hermeneutic template for the cognition of heterogeneous Africanness. The template draws on an Africanness that is situated in a multiplicity of histories, cultures and subjectivities that speak less to African identity as espoused in colonial discourses and by ideologues of identity and more to African identifications in the sense intended by Hall: as an ongoing and unfinished process in contrast to the naturalism and completeness implied in the concept of identity.³⁷

However, in order to contest nativism an undergirding sub-text is necessary, a philosophical resource or grammar that justifies the ethical imperatives of recognising pluralistic identitarian articulations. To this end, the sub-text of the arguments in this book is the ethic of overcoming status subordination and achieving inclusive equality within a heterogeneous public sphere. It is a given that in a pluralistic universe consensus on how we comprehend equality cannot be guaranteed, nor can there be the last word on equality. Nonetheless, the book proceeds on the premise that in order to respond to nativising impulses equality is a normative ethic needed to secure inclusive citizenship so that we all count.

- 35 Hall was Jamaican-born. He lived and worked in Britain for all his adult life as an important interdisciplinary voice on the British Left and a leading name among pioneers in British Cultural Studies. Hall did not produce a sole-authored monograph, but he was a widely published and highly influential essayist and public intellectual. His work is contained in essays, edited books, public lectures and journalism. An overview of Hall’s scholarship can be gleaned from H Bhabha ‘The beginnings of their own enunciations: Stuart Hall and the work of culture’ (2015) 42 *Critical Inquiry* 1.
- 36 HK Wright ‘Stuart Hall’s relevance for the study of African blackness’ (2016) 19 *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 85 at 86.
- 37 Hall (n 15 above) 16.

More specifically, the arguments in this book are committed to participatory democracy as an ethical approach to thinking about identity.

Clearly, the arguments in this book lean heavily in favour of admitting a plurality of interactive voices, each reflecting imaginary, equal power relations so as to erase patterns of dominance and subordination and create space for fields of egalitarian identifications. Ultimately, the book is about overcoming historical status subordination in the normative naming of Africans and promoting parity in participation in the sense meant by Nancy Fraser.³⁸ Overcoming status subordination and achieving status parity serve as the overarching discursive antidote to Uncle Theo's arresting and panoptic gaze in a context in which 'pebbles' are transposed onto Africanness.

Much as the book is concerned with seeing what has not been seen or has been invisibilised, as a corollary of recognising identity as always in the making, and in the quest for inclusiveness, it does not seek to promote identity politics save as incidental to overcoming status subordination. The idea of identity politics premised on a Hegelian model, important as it is in a context where its denial is a source of inequality, can become, as Fraser argues ironically, a source for misrecognising other identities as not falling within a given historically marginalised group culture.³⁹ Identity politics tends to draw sustenance from a notion of identity as an 'authentic, self-affirming and self-generating collective identity'.⁴⁰ This book, on the contrary, is precisely about problematising notions of identity as singular and about implicating their nativising effects.

In her essay 'Rethinking recognition', Fraser does not dismiss the efficacy of identity politics but, rather, highlights its emancipatory limitations. More specifically, she sounds a word of caution about the vulnerability of identity politics to criticism based on the problems of 'displacement' and 'reification'.⁴¹ In its problematisation of identity, the argument in this book is intensely interested in the problem of reification and its capacity to explain as well as to implicate an identity-politics model of recognition that serves to impose (whether by external imposition or internal appropriation) a single, drastically simplified group-identity which denies the complexity of peoples' lives and the multiplicity of their

38 N Fraser 'Rethinking recognition' (2000) 3 *New Left Review* 107; see also N Fraser *Justice interruptus: Critical reflections on 'post-socialist' condition* (1997) 11-39.

39 Fraser 'Rethinking recognition' (n 38 above).

40 Fraser 'Rethinking recognition' (n 38 above) 112.

41 Fraser 'Rethinking recognition' (n 38 above) 108.

identifications.⁴² Fraser is concerned about hypostatisation of culture in ways that seek to render other cultures invisible.⁴³ She implicates a politics of recognition in practice at a time of increasing transcultural interaction, accelerated migration and global communication that nonetheless, amidst a welter of hybridising and pluralising cultural forms, still manages to lay claim to an 'authentic' collective identity.⁴⁴ It is not the collective identity per se that is the bane of identity politics but its proclivity to speak not so much to the recognition of cultural distinctiveness and diversity, but to the misrecognition of others through a valorised, non-reflexive, separate, collective identity that is prone to chauvinism, patriarchalism and authoritarianism.⁴⁵

4 Scope and structure of the book: A broad triangulation of race, culture and sexualities

Books rarely end in the tidy way they are first conceived and mine is no exception. I began this book with the intention of focusing only on African sexualities in order to explicate their multiplicities as a way of contributing towards a human rights debate about African sexual citizenship. The original idea was to write a book that contests, from a human rights perspective, the privileged hegemony of heterosexuality as the sole culturally, politically and juridically acceptable sexuality. However, in the process of reflecting on how the book's discursive inquiry might look, I became more and more convinced that I needed first to step back and construct a 'philosophical' foundation for my inquiry before focusing on African sexualities and human rights.⁴⁶ It became increasingly important to first attempt to excavate the historical and cultural contexts in which people who are the repositories of sexualities are located. Sexualities are not distinct realms of experience or mere biology, removed from history and culture.⁴⁷ Once I accepted these propositions, a question that kept coming up as being the logical starting point in my inquiry was: *Who/what is African?* In the end, a question which at first appeared to be a preliminary issue – something to be disposed of quickly before addressing African sexualities – became *the* question which shaped my thinking and gave overall discursive direction to the book. This is the context that gives the

42 Fraser 'Rethinking recognition' (n 38 above) 112.

43 Fraser 'Rethinking recognition' (n 38 above) 119.

44 Fraser 'Rethinking recognition' (n 38 above) 108 112.

45 Fraser 'Rethinking recognition' (n 38 above) 108.

46 I place 'philosophical' in quotation marks to suggest my use of philosophy in the broad rather than in the discipline or professional sense.

47 See ch 7 for an elaboration of this proposition.

book its broad triangulation of race, culture and sexualities in developing a discourse on nativism.

Whilst remaining interested in contesting the hegemony of heterosexuality, the book has a wider purview. It is a broader discursive inquiry into the construction of Africanness. I am interested in exploring from a broad identitarian perspective how African peoples have been discursively produced and named. Furthermore, although I am still interested in human rights, now I am more interested in laying down a foundation for a future discussion about human rights in which we take an ethic of inclusive Africanness and, by implication, inclusive equality as the starting point.

The epilogue aside, the book is divided into three main parts.

4.1 Part 1: Background to the hermeneutics of heterogeneous Africanness

Part 1 comprises two chapters – the present introductory chapter and Chapter 2. Both chapters are foundational in that they provide a theoretical background to how I conceive Africanness. This introductory chapter implicates the historical mischief – nativism – whilst Chapter 2 seeks to provide the remedy, as it were, by constructing the building blocks for an epistemology of heterogeneous Africanness. In Chapter 2 I construct, mainly using the work of Stuart Hall, an identitarian conceptual template for the cognition of heterogeneous Africanness. I use the template as hermeneutics in subsequent chapters to advance the thesis that notwithstanding the nativisation of Africans in colonial, anti-colonial and post-African independence discourses, Africans are an extraordinarily diverse peoples situated in a multiplicity of histories, cultures – including sexual cultures – and subjectivities.

4.2 Part 2: Africanness, race and culture

Part 2 has three chapters which focus on interrogating the racial and cultural naming of Africans in ways that implicate but ultimately seek to remedy nativism. In Chapter 3 the focus is on deconstructing the naming of African cultural identity in colonial discourses, where it is an exercise in discrepant power that produces Africanness as excess and an Africa that is normatively dependent on Europe for its recognition. I use Hall's concept of knowledge/power, a couplet borrowed from Foucault, to explain the historical and contemporary constructions of African identities in the light of the continent's colonial history where the naming of Africans served the

prerogative of those in power to disempower the 'Other'.⁴⁸ I highlight the importance of understanding the naming as an integral part of the construction of a pliable grid of intelligibility for dominating and instructing colonised peoples, rendering them porous to governmentality.

The focus in Chapter 4 is on revealing the construction and sedimentation of African identity as racial alterity. I continue the discussion I began in Chapter 3, seeking to extend to race the foundational or initial naming of Africans at the time of the colonisation of the continent. I use the term 'foundational' here in order to capture and consolidate the idea of epochal naming that is introduced in Chapter 3. At the same time I remain mindful that though the naming of social groups by others or for themselves has had its intense moments historically it is, Hall tells us, an ever-evolving process with no fixed or completed cut-off point.

Chapter 5 on decentring race is an effort at racial disidentification. It completes the first part of the book. In a sense this chapter can be read as a reinforcement of the critique of a colonially-ascribed racial identity of black Africans. In another sense it offers a remedial framework: it argues for an inclusive Africanness so that Africanness can be imagined less in terms of the biology of race and more in terms of belonging to Africa. It consolidates the deconstruction of African racial identities and at the same time acknowledges the continuing social and rhetorical power of 'race'. The arguments in the chapter provide a basis for treating 'race' throughout the book in the Heideggerian and Derridean sense as *racce*: 'race' as a 'concept under erasure', so as to acknowledge the concept's existential reality at the same time as decentring it.⁴⁹

4.3 Part 3: Heterogeneous sexualities

Part 3 comprises three chapters organised around interrogating representations of African sexualities and ultimately suggesting a philosophical way forward in the manner sexual citizenship is contested.

Chapter 6 speaks to nativism from without. It highlights that narratives which represent African sexualities should always be understood as being culturally and historically situated. They are representations constructed within the knowledge and power system(s) of a given polity at a particular

48 S Hall 'Cultural identity and diaspora' in J Rutherford (ed) *Identity: Community, culture, difference* (1990) 222 at 224.

49 On Martin Heidegger's 'concept under erasure' and its popularisation by Jacques Derrida, see J Derrida *Of grammatology* trans GC Spivak (1976) xiv, originally published in 1967.

historical time and location, together with a social and political dynamics for social stratification, domination and status subordination. The chapter uses the representation of African sexualities in colonial discourses to make this point. I do not argue that colonial discourses tell us everything we need to know about African sexualities or that, historically, they are the single most important archive on the representation of African sexualities. Rather, the value of colonial discourses lies in their stubbornly persistent power, which continues to summon 'Africans' into place. In many ways, the construction of stereotypical representations of African sexualities is anchored in the nativisation of African cultures by colonial discourses. The argument in this chapter draws in part on Edward Said's 'orientalism',⁵⁰ and Mahmood Mamdani's 'nativism'.⁵¹ The works of Said and Mamdani serve as important resources in implicating 'surface regularities' in colonial discourses and their effects in typologising Africans as 'natives'.⁵² I argue in this chapter for the importance of understanding the representation of Africanness in colonial discourses as an *effect* of the construction of colonial whiteness.

The backdrop to Chapter 7 is that, from time to time, 'African values' are invoked by political and cultural authorities to continentalise sexuality and to prescribe a regimented and homogenised African sexuality that specifically excludes sexualities outside heterosexuality and, more specifically, delegitimises non-heteronormative and same-sex sexualities. I advance counter-arguments to the legitimacy of claims that heterosexuality is the only culturally acceptable sexuality for Africans. The chapter develops a framework for recognising diversities of sexuality in ways that are informed by a transformative understanding of sexuality and, ultimately, of an inclusive equality. The framework seeks to deconstruct scripted knowledge about sexuality in order to build an understanding that reveals the complexity, diversity and ultimately political nature of sexuality. I argue that recognising difference in the realm of sexuality requires a radical epistemology that is capable of moving beyond the raw physicality of the body, the genitalia, biological impulse and a capacity for language in order to take cognisance of how sexuality is

50 EW Said *Orientalism* (1979). *Orientalism* was first published in 1978. In this chapter and throughout, I use an edition published in 1979 which was revised and has a preface written in 2003 and an 'Afterword' written in 1994.

51 Mamdani's discourse on nativism is articulated most concisely in M Mamdani *Define and rule: Native and political identity* (2013). Nativism provides a discursive framework in Mamdani's other works, including *Citizen and subject: Contemporary Africa and the legacy of late colonialism* (1996) and *When victims become killers: Colonialism, nativism, and the genocide in Rwanda* (2001).

52 Mills (n 9 above) 106-108.

socially constructed in historical time and place.⁵³ Necessarily, representations of African sexualities ought to acknowledge that norms and frameworks which give coherence to heterosexuality and its congruent gender binaries are but one cultural variant that exists in juxtaposition with pluralistic articulations of sexualities.

Chapter 8 concludes Part 3 with a discussion of how we might mediate conflicting sexuality identifications through first promoting an understanding of the politics and ethics of pluralism. The discussion is predicated on an assumption, regardless of contradictory praxis, that African states in their independence as well as post-independence constitutions formally commit themselves to political pluralism. Against this backdrop the overarching premise is that in political communities committed to liberal democracy, differences are an ordinary part of our political lives. Even if we agree as to how we should be governed and share political space, it is not necessary or warranted that we should also reach agreement on *all* moral issues, including conceptions of our sexual and reproductive selves.

Chapter 8 builds its arguments partly by appropriating to the concept of 'equality' two political notions: the notion of an 'overlapping consensus' as advocated by John Rawls⁵⁴ and the notion of 'dissensus' as advocated by Nicholas Rescher.⁵⁵ In part the chapter builds its arguments by linking equality with participatory democracy using mainly Iris Young's argument for recognising difference in a heterogeneous public in which there is mutual recognition between different sexuality identifications,⁵⁶ and Hannah Arendt's concept of citizenship in a plural political community.⁵⁷ The main thesis in Chapter 8 is that overcoming an impasse which arises where there is strong communitarian opposition to a given sexuality does not lie in dismissing such opposition as without a rational political foundation. Rather, it lies in accepting the legitimacy of the opposition through a democratic polity that is committed to non-hierarchical

53 GS Rubin 'Thinking sex: Notes for a radical theory of the politics of sexuality' in CS Vance (ed) *Pleasure and danger: Exploring female sexuality* (1984) 143 at 149.

54 J Rawls *Political liberalism* (2005) 131-172; J Rawls 'The idea of an overlapping consensus' (1987) 7 *Oxford Journal of Legal Studies* 1.

55 N Rescher *Pluralism: Against the demand for consensus* (1993).

56 Young (n 8 above), especially ch 4 on 'The ideal of impartiality and the civic republic'.

57 In drawing on Arendt, I have relied mostly on an interpretation of Arendt's vast body of work by Maurizio D'Entreves: MP D'Entreves *The political philosophy of Hannah Arendt* (1994) 139-166. D'Entreves's interpretation draws from Arendt's wide span of work, including *The human condition* (1998) originally published in 1958; *Origins of totalitarianism* (1962) originally published in 1951; *Between past and future* (1961); *On revolution* (1963); *Men in dark times* (1968); and *Crises of the republic* (1972).

inclusiveness and relations of cooperation in matters of moral and religious controversy.

The intention of this book is not to present a conclusive theory of ways to answer the question of Who/what is African? Rather, it is to offer a discourse on how Africans can name themselves in the present and in the future without succumbing to nativist impulses requiring a homogeneous past and establishing a transcendental ontology as essential elements of Africanness. The book seeks to develop a plausible account of African identifications, but ultimately leaves the question Who/what is African? open to debate. I therefore end the book with an epilogue, rather than a conclusion.