

CHAPTER 2

HERMENEUTICS OF AFRICANNESS: BUILDING ON STUART HALL'S CULTURAL THEORY OF IDENTIFICATIONS

Cultural identities come from somewhere, have histories. But like everything which is historical, they undergo constant transformation. Far from being eternally fixed in some essentialised past, they are subject to the continuous 'play' of history, culture and power. Far from being grounded in a mere 'recovery' of the past, which is waiting to be found, and which when found will secure our sense of ourselves into eternity, identities are the names we give to the different ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves within, the narratives of the past.¹

1 Introduction

In this chapter, I seek to construct the building blocks for an epistemology of heterogeneous Africanness, using, in a broad sense, the concept of 'identity' as a category of analysis. My aim is to establish a method for a discursive inquiry into Africanness. Therefore, I start from the beginning and lay a conceptual foundation for the ethical claim that there is no single or pure Africanness, only heterogeneities that are fluid and militate against any sense of closure. Based on the work of Stuart Hall, from whose work the epigraph is drawn, I construct a conceptual template for the cognition of heterogeneous Africanness.

The chapter begins by linking inclusive equality – the book's connecting thesis – with the importance of reading Africans as a highly diverse social group.² When thinking about a political or juridical framework for overcoming the subordination of historically marginalised cultures, 'races' or sexualities, Africans should not be abstracted. This link highlights the centrality of addressing the question: *Who and what is*

1 S Hall 'Cultural identity and diaspora' in J Rutherford (ed) *Identity: Community, culture, difference* (1990) 222 at 225.

2 On the relevance of inclusive equality, see ch 1, sec 3.

African? as something that should precede a more direct discussion on African cultural, racial and sexual identities. In this chapter I develop a theoretical framework for addressing the question in ways that are historically conscious.

I argue that Hall's work, especially its problematisation of identity, is a particularly useful theoretical archive to deploy when deciphering Africanness as a historically conscious subjectivity.³ Without denying the materiality, symbolism and collective meanings or affiliations accorded to Africanness, I apply the work of Hall and other anti-foundational theorists of identity to argue that Cartesian and dichotomous foundational categories do not serve us well when thinking about Africanness or, for that matter, any identity category.⁴

2 Connecting inclusive equality with a deconstructive hermeneutics of Africanness

The application of inclusive equality in this book is predicated on the premise that identities are constructed within a given historical and cultural context. It is in response to concrete subjectivities rather than to an abstract blueprint of fungible humanity that our equality responses must be forged if they are to be transformative. This is no longer a new approach to thinking about equality and its intersection with lived lives. Rather, it is now a beginning point for any approach seeking to achieve inclusive equality. It is an approach which builds on the work of existing critical social theory, including the work of cultural theorists and feminists.

Theorists, including Hall, who use deconstructionist and/or psychoanalytic paradigms to explicate as well as critique the concept of 'identity', caution us, by implication, not to build our equality approaches around rigid essentialist or naturalistic identitarian approaches.⁵ Whilst identitarian approaches, which seem obvious or natural to us, have an easy claim to legitimacy and veracity when signifying our collective selves as completed constituted unities, in fact, they are partial and situated enunciations. Our collective selves necessarily are constructions of closure

3 On culture and identity, I draw from two of Hall's most widely-cited essays: S Hall 'Cultural identity and diaspora' (n 1 above); S Hall 'Who needs "identity"?' in J Evans & P Redman (eds) *Identity: A reader* (2000) 15-30.

4 J Barton 'The hermeneutics of identity in African philosophical discourse as a framework for understanding ethnicity in post-genocide Rwanda' (2013) 15 *Philosophia Africana* 1 at 3-6; Hall 'Who needs "identity"?' (n 3 above) 15.

5 Hall 'Who needs "identity"?' (n 3 above) 15 17; H Bhabha *Location of culture* (1994) 66-84; J Derrida *Positions* (1981); E Laclau *New reflections on the revolution of our time* (1990).

that exclude others. More to the point, the argument drawn from anti-foundational theorists is that the unities which are proclaimed by any identity assertion, particularly those that are invested with universalised normativity through cultural and legal privilege, are, in the end, unities of exclusion. As Hall and others sought to emphasise, the unities which pronounce us as ‘we’ stand for ‘I’ as unities constructed within the ‘play of power and exclusion’.⁶ The homogeneities and affiliations they proclaim are neither natural nor inevitable. Instead, they are the outcome of positionality and are better understood as solipsistic ‘enunciations’ of naturalised processes of closure which are always situated.⁷ Feminist theory, in its critique of patriarchy and its deconstruction of ‘woman’, underscores this point.

In its founding formulations as well as its own critical self-reflection, feminist theory inflects post-Cartesian discourses on the making of identities.⁸ Especially in its critique of essentialism, feminism has been a discursive tool in resisting concessions to power and privilege built around unities of closure and solipsism. Through self-critique, which seeks to deconstruct the generic ‘woman’ to reveal situated exclusionary tendencies and the tyranny of a single female voice, feminist theory has been in the vanguard of a transformative path that speaks to inclusive equality. It is a heuristic approach that enables feminism to move away from an abstracted ‘woman’ as the staple category of analysis in order to concede the ‘manyness’ of women and intersectionalities when interrogating patriarchy.⁹ Anti-essentialism serves as a counter-discourse to Uncle Theo’s preoccupation with perceptual and conceptual tidiness.¹⁰ It gives us an analytic tool for beginning to see womanhood not as a single genus of the same colour, shape and size but as made up of heterogeneities and multiplicities.¹¹

6 Hall ‘Who needs “identity”?’ (n 3 above) 18; Bhabha (n 5 above); Laclau (n 5 above) 33.

7 Hall ‘Who needs “identity”?’ (n 3 above) 16-18; Bhabha (n 5 above); KA Appiah *In my father’s house: Africa in philosophy of culture* (1992).

8 The reference to ‘feminist theory’ is to expansive and transformative feminist theory. Implicitly excluded is conservative theory such as liberal feminist theory which functions by embracing abstract equality theory so that, for example, women are treated the same as men: EV Spelman *Inessential woman: Problems of exclusion in feminist thought* (1988); AC Scales ‘The emergence of feminist jurisprudence: An essay’ (1986) 95 *Yale Law Journal* 1373 at 1385 1388; IM Young *Justice and the politics of difference* (1990); M Minow ‘Beyond universality’ (1989) 17 *University of Chicago Legal Forum* 115 at 137.

9 Spelman (n 8 above) 1-4.

10 Spelman (n 8 above) 1-4, drawing from I Murdoch *The nice and the good* (1969) 158-159. See the discussion in ch 1, sec 1 of this book.

11 Spelman (n 8 above) 1-4.

The feminist discourse of intersectionalities enriches how we think about the connections between equality and identity. Discursive intersectionalities serve as an analytic method for revealing that individuals and social groups are made up of more than a single subjectivity. In the workings of structural power, they come under multiple axes of subordination simultaneously.¹² Feminist anti-essentialism has been instructive by highlighting that responsiveness to difference requires turning away from prescribing, as universally normative, a unified, totalising abstract equality theory in favour of the concrete and the particular.

Historically, it is abstraction that has served to shield oppressive, institutionalised norms from democratic and egalitarian scrutiny.¹³ Abstraction is an interpretive horizon that effaces particularity because it is inherently reductive. It works by rationalising subordination through denial of difference and immunising juridical equality from democratic and pluralistic iteration. Universalising the subjective experiences of dominant social groups means holding them up as the objective experiences for all people, including the historically excluded and marginalised. Ultimately, abstraction promotes 'false universalism'.¹⁴ Inevitably, such universalism is void of political nuance, ignoring cleavages of difference, including varied histories and imbalances of power. In her critique of the 'impartial civic public' and her argument for a countervailing 'heterogeneous public', Iris Young aptly captures the inherent exclusionary tendencies of abstraction and its false universalism when she says:

Insistence on the ideal of impartiality in the face of its impossibility functions to mask the inevitable impartiality of perspective from which moral deliberation actually takes place. The situated assumptions and commitments that derive from particular histories, experiences, and affiliations rush to fill the vacuum created by counterfactual abstraction; but now they are asserted as 'objective' assumptions about human nature or moral psychology ... The

- 12 KW Crenshaw 'Demarginalizing the intersection of race and sex: A black feminist critique of antidiscrimination doctrine, feminist theory and antiracist politics' (1989) 140 *University of Chicago Legal Forum* 139; KW Crenshaw 'Mapping the margins: Intersectionality, identity politics and violence against women of colour' (1991) 43 *Stanford Law Review* 1241; A Rich 'Compulsory heterosexuality and lesbian existence' (1980) 5 *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 631; S Cho et al 'Toward a field on intersectionality studies: Theory, applications and praxis' (2013) 34 *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 785.
- 13 Scales (n 8 above); Minow (n 8 above).
- 14 F Williams *Social policy: A critical introduction* (1989) 118; R Lister 'Citizenship: Towards a feminist synthesis' (1997) 57 *Feminist Review* 28 38; A McClintock *Imperial leather: Race, gender and sexuality in the colonial context* (1995) 9-14.

standpoint of the privileged, their particular experience and standards, is constructed as normal and neutral ... Not only are the experience and values of the oppressed thereby ignored and silenced, but they become disadvantaged by their situated identities.¹⁵

When particularity is effaced, juridical equality becomes a supreme fiction. The corollary is that in overcoming the historical subordination of social groups whose identities are proscribed or despised because they are different necessarily entails addressing the unmet equality needs of commensurately specific social groups rather than abstract social categories. Put in another way, if we wish to construct an effective remedial response to status subordination in the domains of race, culture and sexuality as one of our substantive equality-informing archives, we need to begin with an inclusive biography of the oppressed groups, including their respective histories and their locations. In a strict sociological sense, contextualising and concretising subjectivities call for a social-group-mapping endeavour. However, this would be an arduous undertaking even for a single country, let alone an entire region, given the multiplicities of social groups and cultures. It is an empirical task well beyond the capacities of this book. Notwithstanding, a way of mitigating this limitation is to acknowledge the existential diversity of Africa and Africans and use it as the ethical point of departure for any framework for regulating African identities, including sexual identities, with a view to achieving inclusive citizenship.

For example, abundant sociological evidence already exists to support the proposition that, notwithstanding its dominant visibility, heterosexuality is not the only sexuality shared by African peoples.¹⁶ If we concede that normative reason is dialogic, then hearing the heterogeneous voices of the dialogists – the social groups and persons with different sexualities – ought to be an unqualified ethical injunction and starting point. Dialogism is an essential part of how we construct our equality paradigms ethically in a participatory democracy.¹⁷ Ineluctably, dialogism inclines us towards accepting, as our operative participatory ethics, the

15 Young (n 8 above) 115-116.

16 My arguments about the fact of the diversity of African sexualities take the anthology on African sexualities edited by Sylvia Tamale as an important, foundational archive containing, as it does, contemporary accounts, including first-person accounts, by Africans attesting to a diverse range of sexualities and sexual identities: S Tamale (ed) *African sexualities: A reader* (2011).

17 Young (n 8 above) 116; N Fraser *Justice interruptus: Critical reflections on the 'post-socialist' condition* (1997) 173.

inclusiveness that is carried in popularised injunctions such as ‘nothing about us without us’.¹⁸ The only deontological and democratic way to affirm the equal humanity of Africans and inclusive citizenship is to rely on a normative pathway that recognises diversities, rather than on assumptions of an exclusive African homogeneity. That way, we can lay down a building block for a hermeneutical framework that will check systemic dominance and assure our overcoming status subordination.

3 Who/what is African?: A central discursive question

Part of laying a discursive foundation for the proposition that African cultures, including sexual cultures, are diverse lies in attempting to address the question: Who/what is African? This question was introduced in Chapter 1. I describe the task of answering the question as an ‘attempt’ partly because I do not approach it with a view to arriving at a *right* answer as such. Instead, I wish to elucidate the complexity of the question, to highlight the discursiveness of Africanness and to sound a caution about the pitfalls, especially exclusionary ones, of an ahistorical, singular, dogmatic, cut-and-dried identitarian, approach. The task of answering the question is also an attempt because it is part of an ongoing effort throughout this book. Asking the question in this chapter opens the discussion and facilitates staking my own perspective on it. Subsequent chapters speak to the question from sub-thematic vantage points. The present chapter serves to introduce a methodology for eliciting Africanness, as a historically situated but evolving identity that is an integral part of how we imagine Africanness including African sexualities.

Contextualising and concretising the subjects in whom African sexualities manifest necessarily comes with its own complex conceptual underbrush. Identifying the constituent African subjects calls for an initial effort at discursive clearing, or at least explication, even if the effort at clearing proves elusive or incomplete. Sylvia Tamale makes a similar point

18 In disability rights advocacy, for example, the slogan ‘Nothing about us without us’ has become an organising principle: JI Charlton *Nothing about us without us: Disability oppression and empowerment* (1998). In human rights jurisprudence the duty to involve affected persons finds its clearest juridical expression in substantive provisions of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), adopted on 13 December 2006, entered into force on 3 May 2008. Art 4(3) of the CRPD obliges states to ‘closely consult with and involve persons with disabilities’, in the development and implementation of disability laws and policies. Art 33(3) requires states to involve persons with disabilities ‘fully’ in the monitoring of the implementation of obligations arising from the CRPD.

when introducing her path-breaking anthology on African sexualities – *African sexualities: A reader*.¹⁹ Alluding to the title of the anthology, an observation she makes is that the subject of ‘African’ sexualities is apt to raise, as one of the preliminary issues, the question: Who/what is African?²⁰ Though an equivalent question may be asked of a cartographic unit that speaks to a common history or to cultural identities or linguistics with an outward appearance of drawing from relative homogeneity, it is a more obvious question to ask in respect of Africa since Africa is much more than a cartographic unit: in VY Mudimbe’s words, it is also an idea.²¹ Africanness, as I shall argue in subsequent chapters, is a product of human effort with no fixed ontological contours.²² It is no less immune to the organisation of collective passion.²³ Ultimately, it is a discursive concept with multiple genealogies and contingent meanings some of which speak to affirmation and inclusion and some of which speak to *othering* and exclusion. The construction of an inclusive equality framework for recognising diverse African sexualities necessarily must be historically and culturally conscious.

An ongoing quest in this book is to address the equality needs of all social groups by developing a responsive equality framework that will transcend legacies of hegemonic discourses of sexualities which, at different historical times, have served to essentialise, stereotype or *other* Africans. Fulsomely acknowledging the heterogeneity of Africans serves to counter normative homogenising impulses that emanate not just from outside the continent but, more importantly, from within the continent, especially from within the nation state. Addressing the question: Who/what is African?, therefore, is a discursive device for opening the door to the panorama of African cultures and historicities that are repositories of a diverse archive of sexualities in their dominant and valorised forms as well as in their marginalised and subordinated existentialities.

19 S Tamale ‘Introduction’ in Tamale (n 16 above) 1; see also D Lewis ‘Representing African sexualities’ in Tamale (n 16 above) 199-216 at 200, citing Appiah (n 7 above) 240.

20 Tamale ‘Introduction’ (n 19 above) 1.

21 VY Mudimbe *The idea of Africa* (1994); VY Mudimbe *The invention of Africa: Gnosis, philosophy and the order of knowledge* (1988); PT Zeleza ‘The inventions of African identities and languages: The discursive and developments implications’ in OF Arasanyi & MA Pemberton (eds) *Selected proceedings of the 36th Annual Conference on African linguistics* (2006) 14; Appiah (n 7 above) 3-27.

22 I draw this insight from Said’s work: EW Said *Orientalism* (1979) xvii.

23 As above.

4 Hall's cultural theory of identity as enunciation

Hall and other deconstructive theorists give us a rich post-Cartesian theoretical template for unmasking identities as complex formations of representations even when we accept, as a point of departure, that identities are real and that it is not their falsity or genuineness that matters. If problematised and deconstructed, identities cease to be neat, atomistic, discrete packages that speak to an 'integral, originary and unified identity'.²⁴ The identities we take for granted, especially those that we ourselves proclaim to mark our identitarian spheres and that we invest with closures of solidarity and allegiance, are best thought of as 'specific enunciations' which are always situated and ensconced in historical contingency.²⁵ In the essay, 'Who needs "identity"?', drawing on the work of Jacques Derrida and other deconstructionists, Hall posited identity, in its de-totalised or deconstructed form, as a concept 'under erasure' – something placed in the interval – because it is subject to radical historicisation and is always in a process of becoming.²⁶

The proposition I draw from Hall and apply as the identity-informing premise in this book is that African identities that were extant, or more accurately, thought to be extant when Africa and Africans were first named, can no longer operate within their originary paradigm for the simple historical reason that the old Africa is no longer.²⁷ Literally, centuries have passed, complete with their historical ruptures, including the advent and sedimentation of European colonialism, anti-colonial struggles, modernity, the hybridisation of cultures, capitalism, Christianity, Islam, African independence, the post-independence eras and globalising processes. Consequently, without equivocation, we ought to concede that framing Africanness in terms of an integral, originary and unified identity, which was never there in the first place, is even less convincing today.²⁸ Rather, as Hall argues, we are better served by a historically conscious concept of Africanness that marks a transformative identification poise; a poise that is not static but fluid and metamorphosing to mark the interval – an 'in-betweenness' – between reversal and the emergence of something that was not there before but is never quite fully completed – as, indeed, is the case with any identity category.²⁹

24 Hall 'Who needs "identity"?' (n 3 above) 15.

25 Hall 'Cultural identity and diaspora' (n 1 above) 222; Hall 'Who needs "identity"?' (n 3 above) 17.

26 Hall 'Who needs "identity"?' (n 3 above) 15-17; Derrida (n 5 above).

27 Hall 'Cultural identity and diaspora' (n 1 above) 232.

28 Appiah (n 7 above) 174.

29 Hall 'Who needs "identity"?' (n 3 above) 16.

Ultimately, our focus should be not on how Africans have been named or have named themselves in the past but on how they name themselves today and in the future. But, as I highlight in the next section, this is not the same as saying that the past is irrelevant or to be discarded.

4.1 Identity as becoming and being

If we read Hall closely we can think of the epistemologies of identity as a dialectic between two perspectives: an *originary* perspective and a *transformative* perspective, which we can call *Position I*, and *Position II*, respectively, for ease of exposition. In *Position I*, we can think of a core, 'authentic' African identity that is transcendent and intrinsically lies in us beyond history. Such an identity summons a 'collective true self': an orthodox African sameness, a haecceity or unsullied purity.³⁰ It is an identity grounded in archaeology, an ahistoricised narration of cultural identity that holds in place the imagined essentials of the African past.

All societies, through social institutions including the family, school, the church and organised politics, indulge in *Position I*, or at least mimic, to a greater or lesser degree, popular interpretations of their identities as originary.³¹ The interpretations, which conceal sectional interests, are transmitted from one generation to the other as part of a collective effort to internalise cultural identity as something with an intrinsic core – an organic centre – that has always been there as witnessed, for example, by invocations of national spirits, of *volksgeist* in Germany and *ubuntu* in post-apartheid South Africa.³² The point Hall makes is, however sincerely we imagine our affiliation to *Position I*, identities do not exist in a pristine and static form and outside of history. Even as we proclaim *Position I* as representing who we are, we are in fact retelling an imaginary past. We are engaged in a teleological production of an identity to restore an imaginary

30 Hall 'Cultural identity and diaspora' (n 1 above) 223.

31 Mudimbe *The idea of Africa* (n 21 above) xiii.

32 The concept of *volksgeist* meaning the 'national character', 'common consciousness' or 'spirit' of the German people was developed and brought into the disciplines first by German philosophers of whom the most frequently credited are Hegel, Herder and Goethe: J Knudson 'The influence of the German concepts of *volksgeist* and *zeitgeist* on the thought and jurisprudence of Oliver Wendell Holmes' (2002) 11 *Journal of Transnational Law and Policy* 407 at 410. The German jurist FK von Savigny is credited with first introducing *volksgeist* to jurisprudence: L Kutner 'Legal philosophers: Savigny: German lawgiver' (1972) 55 *Marquette Law Review* 280; On ubuntu as peculiarly African humanism, especially its emphasis on communalism as a worldview of black Africans, including black South Africans, see, for example, A Shutte *Ubuntu: An ethic for new South Africa* (2001). In ch 5 I engage critically with reductive tendencies in some of the discourses on Africanness.

fullness: a plenitude that we imagine to be eternally and unchangingly present.³³

The alternative to the archaeological and transcendent character of *Position I* is to historicise identity. We can invoke *Position II* and posit African identity not as originary but as something we produce in the interventions of history.³⁴ Far from being an archaeological discovery, identity, according to Hall, is not a complete entity but a state of 'becoming and as well as of being'.³⁵ It is something we have become and are still becoming with the intervention of history. The past and the present are dialectically related, such that an identity is inherently forever subject to change and radical transformation. Identities can be framed along two axes that are juxtaposed – one being the axis of 'similarity and continuity' and the other an axis of 'difference and rupture'.³⁶

Even with the intervention of history and the irruption of transformed identity, we concomitantly summon our past. In this sense, identities belong to the past as much as to the future.³⁷ We construct identities partly through 'memory, fantasy and myth'.³⁸ We create our primal historical moments and even dramatise them so that the primal scene is coeval and reconciled with the plenitudinous representation we seek to enunciate and 'reclaim'.³⁹ In her critique of discourses on identity formation that paradoxically gesture towards essentialist, palimpsestic hybridity, Ella Shohat questions whether it is possible to forge a collective identity, especially one that seeks to overcome status subordination, without falling back on a past in which 'communitarian origins', however fragmented, are inscribed.⁴⁰ Seeking to emancipate ourselves from conditions of racial, cultural or sexual oppression we recall a past when our 'race', cultural group or sexuality was once free or we invent such a past which enables us to imagine freedom, affirm the rightness of our liberatory cause and rehabilitate a spoiled identity. Hall reminds us that the construction of memory serves as a powerful and creative force for emergent forms of representation.⁴¹ For anti-colonial movements, pan-Africanism and the

33 Hall 'Cultural identity and diaspora' (n 1 above) 224.

34 Hall 'Cultural identity and diaspora' (n 1 above) 225.

35 As above.

36 Hall 'Cultural identity and diaspora' (n 1 above) 227.

37 Hall 'Cultural identity and diaspora' (n 1 above) 225.

38 Hall 'Cultural identity and diaspora' (n 1 above) 226.

39 SV Hartman 'The time of slavery' (2002) 101 *South Atlantic Quarterly* 757 at 766.

40 E Shohat 'Notes on the "post-colonial"' (1993) 31/32 *Social Text* 99 at 109.

41 Hall 'Cultural identity and diaspora' (n 1 above) 223.

poetics of *négritude*, for example, memory serves as a resource of resistance, investing the quest for freedom and equality with imaginary coherence.⁴²

Public memory, as well as individual affective memory, feeds into our consciousness in ways that have the capacity to produce social bonds and social identities. Memory allows a historical community to have not just a connection but also an emotional resonance with the past. Collectively, it causes us to look to the historical past that we narrate or that is narrated for us, even as we imagine the present and the future. We see this pattern in the construction of African-American identity, for example.⁴³ Remembrance of the past, more specifically slavery, is not incidental to African-American identity but, instead, is a central part of its fabric and even its key.⁴⁴ Thus, however chronologically removed the person or community doing the remembering might be from the event that is remembered, *Position I* is as much part of how we make and realise identities as *Position II*.

The capacity of *Position I* to create unities of closure that become a powerful force for summoning an imagined coherence of historically marginalised peoples or groups cannot be overemphasised.⁴⁵ Especially where there is a history of unfulfilled promises to remedy an injured past or there are new or continuing injuries, remembrance becomes generative and constitutive of identity in a fuller sense.⁴⁶ Histories are, therefore, an integral part of, rather than irrelevant to, identity. They are important mirrors and sites of possible roadmaps for future direction. Histories give us memory. When they reveal palpable injustices, they give us a foundation for a mission and a sense of remedial orientation. However, on their own histories cannot premise or promise the future. Exploring our historical past allows us to comprehend how Africa has been and continues to be represented, including its continued subjection to dominant and dehumanising regimes of representation by colonising, racialising and nativising discourses. What is ultimately important,

42 Hall 'Cultural identity and diaspora' (n 1 above) 223-224 225. In ch 5, sec 3.2 I examine *négritude* and its historical place in the imagination of African identity.

43 Hartman (n 39 above).

44 Hartman (n 39 above), citing WB Michaels 'Slavery and the new historicism' in H Flanzbaum (ed) *The Americanization of the Holocaust* (1999) 181 at 188. Michaels's commentary originally appeared as a journal article: WB Michaels "'You who never was there": Slavery and the new historicism, deconstruction and the Holocaust' (1996) 4 *Narrative* 1-16.

45 Hall 'Cultural identity and diaspora' (n 1 above) 223. Discourses on indigenous rights, for example, depend, in part, on appealing to *Position I*. See generally R Niezen *The origins of indigenism: Human and the politics of identity* (2003).

46 Hartman (n 39 above) 766.

though, is that we acknowledge the normative limitations of the archaeologies and, above all, recognise that our Africa and our Africanness are ours to make. Hall underscores agency and futurity in the making of identity. He argues that culture is produced with each generation and that we produce our own identities in the *future* rather than merely inherit them from the past.⁴⁷

Whilst highlighting how the past intermingles with the present in the process of forming individual and group identities, a caveat needs to be considered. It is always important to bear in mind that the past is remembrance: a narration. Narrations can fail identities, whether social, racial, sexual, religious or otherwise.⁴⁸ This failure is because narrations are vulnerable to the tendency to search for an ahistorical authenticity and to summon a 'law of origin', a 'certificate of origin' or 'unbroken line' and, in the process, discover an identity that is anachronistic, even if romantic, and promises plenitude.⁴⁹ Anachronism chokes reflexivity. This can happen, for example, when the past is fetishised and traditions become normative such that members of the narrated group are expected to bear a particular identity in certain prescribed ways. The danger with narrations is that when saturated they are apt to be lifted from their moorings in historical time and to veer towards an orthodoxy that produces reified identity which overly stresses the need for authentic, self-affirming and self-generated collective identity.⁵⁰

Through recalling traditions, for example, narrations become more than a symbolic cultural resource and begin to produce normative identities with no exit points for refusal or democratic iteration. When traditions are made to come first, the bearers become secondary. As Simon Appiah reminds us, it is people who should be the bearers of tradition and not the other way around.⁵¹ Narrations should come with the opportunity for reflexivity. Remembrance, Appiah argues, should not merely be *propositional* but also *positional*.⁵² In a plural polity members of the social group should have the opportunity to relate the past to existential social and economic needs. Models of collective identity that fail to recognise the complexity of people's lives or the multiplicity of their identifications, Fraser cautions, incline towards repressive communitarianism and

47 A Paul 'The ironies of history: An interview with Stuart Hall' (2005) 4 *IDEAZ* 30.

48 SK Appiah 'The quest of African identity' (2003) 32 *Exchange* 54 at 56-58; RC Allen 'Where narrative fails' (1993) 21 *Journal of Religious Ethics* 27.

49 Hall 'Cultural identity and diaspora' (n 1 above) 226; JA Mbembe 'On the power of the false' (2002) 14 *Public Culture* 629 at 635.

50 N Fraser 'Rethinking recognition' (2000) 3 *New Left Review* 107 at 112.

51 Appiah (n 48 above) 55.

52 Appiah (n 48 above) 65.

disapproval of cultural dissidence.⁵³ Needless to say, *requiring* an identity is, in the final analysis, oppressive and alienating for individual subjectivities.

For Hall it is not 'identity' as some sort of completed representational essence that is key to understanding identities, rather, it is the *unfinished* discursive process of *identification* that in the end amounts to positioning – the process of enunciation. It is important to understand Hall's discursive use of 'identification'. By identification Hall does not mean constructing identity 'on the back of recognition of some common origin or shared characteristic with another person or group, or with an ideal' in ways that create *closure* of solidarity or allegiance around what is identified with. He expressly wants to depart from the 'naturalistic' connotation of the common sense meaning of identification. For Hall identification is an incomplete, non-determinable process that has no closure: so identity always is conditional and always is lodged in contingency.⁵⁴ Identification is a process of articulation: it operates across difference, marking symbolic boundaries and producing frontier effects but in ways that are discursive.⁵⁵ It is a positional attempt to articulate solidarity and allegiance with another person or group on the back of an interpretive horizon that explains identity and is not a claim to the completeness of identity. Hall says:

Cultural identities are the points of identification, the unstable points of identification or suture, which are made within the discourses of history and culture. Not an essence but a positioning. Hence, there is always a politics of identity, a politics of a position, which has no absolute guarantee in an unproblematic, transcendental 'law or origin'.⁵⁶

According to Hall, therefore, identities do not signal a stable core of the self which unfolds through the vicissitudes of history but remains the same.⁵⁷ In his critique of the singular, bounded nature of *Position I*, Hall particularly stresses that identities are neither singular nor unified.⁵⁸ Indeed, in the times in which we live, identities are more and more fragmented, intersecting, oppositional or contradictory on account of the multiplicity of the discourses and institutional sites in which they are created and the vantage points from which they are articulated.⁵⁹

53 Fraser (n 50 above) 112.

54 Hall 'Who needs "identity"?' (n 3 above) 16-17.

55 Hall 'Who needs "identity"?' (n 3 above) 17.

56 Hall 'Who needs "identity"?' (n 3 above) 16-17.

57 Hall 'Who needs "identity"?' (n 3 above) 17.

58 As above.

59 As above.

4.2 Implications of a Hallian approach for conceptualising Africanness

In this section I highlight the profound discursive implications of Hall's theory of identification for imagining the cultural, racial and sexual identities of Africans.

4.2.1 *Transposing Hall's theory to Africanness as broad cultural and racial identifications*

When transposed onto Africanness, Hall's approach gives us a picture of the 'gathering points' (that is *Position I* and *Position II*) through which identity is enunciated but without prescribing a fixed, Archimedean point.⁶⁰ Hall's approach is anti-foundational, rendering the search for authentic Africanness a conceptual and, more specifically, a sociological and historical impossibility. Hall's thesis inexorably inclines us towards parting company with Cartesian categories and stereotypes. His deconstructive approach does not require the choice between polar opposites that so readily appeals to ideologues of African identity. Like Iris Murdoch's Uncle Theo, ideologues of identity hunger for familiarity.⁶¹ Easily disturbed by multiplicities and instabilities, they are enamoured of tidy categorisation that requires hermetically sealed dichotomous choices, such as between reason and body, tradition and modernity, Afrocentrism and Eurocentrism, and heteronormative sexuality and non-heteronormative sexuality.

Murdoch's 'Uncle Theos' are a genus of patriarchs that take for granted the naturalness of congealed hierarchical difference. They are ideologues of identity par excellence in that they are drawn inexorably towards integral, originary and unified categories that promise stability, fixity and amenability to over-determination in what is named. Such categories render what is named amenable to intuitive calibration and instant recognition and comprehensibility for eternity much like, for example, the stable racial categories that apartheid pined for in its creation of a racial oligarchy made up of lowly 'Africans', not so lowly 'Coloureds' and 'Indians', and supreme 'whites' – the paragons of humanity. This racialised stability is precisely *not* what Africanness is.

60 Barton (n 4 above) 2.

61 On Murdoch's Uncle Theo, see Spelman (n 8 above) 1-4, drawing from Murdoch (n 10 above) 158-159.

The representation of Africanness in this book aligns with Hall when he says:

The concept of identity deployed here is therefore not an essentialist, but a strategic and positional one. That is to say, directly contrary to what appears to be its settled semantic career, this concept of identity does *not* signal that stable core of the self, unfolding from beginning to end through all the vicissitudes of history without change; the bit of the self which remains always-already 'the same', identical to itself across time... It accepts that identities are never unified and, in late modern times, increasingly fragmented and fractured; never singular but multiply constructed across different, often intersecting and antagonistic, discourses, practices and positions.⁶²

The conceptual framework for Africanness espoused in this chapter is a deconstructive tool that should incline us towards detotalised enunciation in order to register radical historicisation and the constant process of change, transformation and positionality. It is identity better understood as *identification*; a situated constellation made up of multiple subjectivities, and an open, as opposed to closed, category. It is a suturing or gathering point of continuity as well as difference and rupture in ways that are within rather than outside of history and discourse. Thus, even when Africanness assumes a determinate existence with its full share of material and symbolic resources, it will always be an identification which is situated in historical contingency.

Using archaeology as our pointer towards identity is a tenable approach, but only if African time is *not* arrested in linear synchronic or diachronic segments and denied its multiplicities and simultaneities, presences and absences.⁶³ To secure this temporal mirror, Achille Mbembe urges us to think of African time as made up of entangled temporalities with contradictory significations to different actors. About African time, he says:

[T]his time of African existence is neither a linear time nor a simple sequence in which each moment effaces, annuls and replaces those that preceded it, to the point where a single age axis exists within society. This time is not a series but an *interlocking* of presents, pasts, and futures that retain their depths of other presents, pasts, and

62 Hall 'Who needs "identity"?' (n 3 above) 17 (emphasis in original).

63 Mbembe has written about African time to argue for the importance of contextualising historical time so that we do not use a universalised and abstracted normative temporal gaze made up of a linear single-age axis to measure African time: JA Mbembe *On the post-colony* (2001) 16-17.

futures, each age bearing, altering, and maintaining the previous ones.⁶⁴

Clearly, archaeology militates against entanglement as it requires us to discover identity by looking at African time through the prism of an interpretive horizon which posits neat and severable divisions between pre-colonial, colonial and 'postcolonial' Africa. Such an approach to comprehending African time uses a simplistic prism which obscures the hybridity of history and a multiplicity of subjectivities, implying that African social formations have always moved toward a single point.⁶⁵ The term 'postcolonial', Anne McClintock argues, is a temporal prism that is singularly shaped by the tenacious trope of colonial discourses.⁶⁶ In this prism, African time is only intelligible through linearly tracing its movement backwards guided by the epic stages of Western historicism and the single axis of European time.⁶⁷ Comprehending African time in this way constitutes a nativist denial of African subjectivities in their similarities and continuities as well differences and rupture.⁶⁸

Thus to insist on linear time stifles new African lifeworlds, including the emergence of new cultural and transcultural forms, or hybridity, in a quest to give substance to a phantasmagoric 'authentic' primordial African identity. I argue in subsequent chapters that insisting on African homogeneity teleologically serves to rationalise status subordination through a denial of pluralistic space for recognising African difference and difference among Africans. Regardless of any individual affiliations we may have with appropriating, for our individual or group selves, categories that are used to define or differentiate human beings – including race, class, gender, sexuality, culture, religion, disability and other associational categories – we should embrace an inclusive rather than an exclusive notion of Africanness. What serves us well in a liberal and humanistic polity is a notion of Africanness that is consistent with reciprocal

64 Mbembe (n 63 above) 16 (emphasis in original).

65 As above.

66 McClintock (n 14 above) 9-17. See also Shohat (n 40 above).

67 McClintock (n 14 above) 9-17. At the same time, there are contexts where the term 'postcolonial' is useful. As Hall argues, 'postcolonial' is an intelligible term when we wish to describe (as opposed to evaluate) historical conjunctures such as transition from the age of Empires to post-independence, the demise of 'direct' colonial occupation and the emergence of new relations of power: S Hall 'When was "the post-colonial"?' Thinking at the limit' in I Chambers & L Curtis (eds) *The post-colonial question: Common skies, divided horizons* (1996) 242 at 246-247. Therefore, it is nuance rather than banishment of the term that we need.

68 Hall 'Cultural identity and diaspora' (n 1 above) 226-227.

enhancement of each other's humanity and mutual recognition of belonging to shared space in Africa, and in the earth community.

Ultimately Africanness is something we produce in the play of history, rather than an archaeological discovery. Subject to change and transformation, Africanness cannot be reduced to a cultural or racial essence such as has been imagined in both colonial discourses and in some anti-colonial, pan-African and nationalistic articulations of Africanness.⁶⁹ I follow Hall in arguing that whatever materiality we might attach to African identities from our different subjectivities, whether they are racial, cultural, sexual or otherwise, continuity is always juxtaposed with change. If we accept this argument, we can think of Africanness as framed along two axes that are dialogically related. One is an axis of similarity and continuity and the other is an axis of difference and rupture.⁷⁰ There will always be entanglement between these two axes. Each is present in our identities but with varying emphasis depending on positionality and the mediation of knowledge and power.

It bears stressing that from Hall's perspective recognising diversity should not mean giving legitimacy to the existence of a multiplicity of *congealed* and *competed* differences as, arguably, might be implied in the cliché 'rainbow nation'. The quotidian usage of 'rainbow' nation in South African post-apartheid discourses, for example, assumes that apartheid races were, in fact, races and the only shortcoming was in the construction of a racial pyramid, which can now be flattened in order to celebrate horizontal parity between 'races'.⁷¹ Post-apartheid discourses, including laws to redress an inequitable racial past, have begun with race as a pre-existing signifier lodged in fixity rather than in contingency. In Hall's paradigm such an approach would nullify identification as enunciation of something that is not pre-given. An enunciative process necessarily comes with the capacity of subjectivity to question race as a stable system of reference, to negate its certitude and fixity, including the possibility of rejecting it altogether as part of its radical historicisation and transformation.⁷² Even where race has materiality, it would not be enough, for example, for the state to summon and regulate race without

69 In subsequent chapters I expound on this assertion.

70 Hall 'Cultural identity and diaspora' (n 1 above) 226.

71 K Pillay 'South African families of Indian descent: Transmission of racial identity' (2015) 46 *Journal of Comparative Family Studies* 121 at 131.

72 Chs 4 and 5 of this book are constructed around 'race' as a historical and political category that has been historically forced into a biological category by dominant discourses, not least colonial discourses.

the complement of a corresponding response from the individual who has the capacity of subjectivity.⁷³

Hall's approach to identity as *identification* has an important transformative implication for the discourse of intersectionalities. Thus far, the intersectionalities discourse has largely taken identity as a point of departure or, at least, has begun with an assumption of the particularity of identity. On the one hand, a Hallian perspective welcomes the feminist discourse of intersectionalities as equality-enriching in that it allows us to imagine overcoming subordination in multiple registers. On the other hand, it is wary of a discourse that seems to first require us to affirm allegiance to *Position I* and treat intersectional identity as if it were a shibboleth.⁷⁴ In *Am I that name?*, Denise Riley argued, even within the same nation state, once historicised so that mutation and shifts are unmasked, an apparently transparent category such as 'women' can become unstable.⁷⁵

We should not treat the multiple identities that intersectionalities articulate as identities that belong to *Position I* as if, in themselves, such identities are unitary, natural and sealed. Instead, the identities to which intersectionalities are tethered, whether they are described as class, race, gender or sexuality, are best understood as provisional attachments or suturing. They are not sacrosanct but remain subject to polemic and debate. Ultimately, they are situated enunciations belonging to *Position II*. Intersectional identities can only ever be identities in the making. Even within an asserted intersectionality, there is inherent heterogeneity. This is not an argument for banishing intersectionalities, but rather for creating space for intersectionalities that shift with the play of history together with any political coalitions upon which they may be based.

Deciphering: Who/what is African? is a discursive question. It entails questioning and ultimately moving away from the assumptions about the cultural and raced essence of African identity which made up the colonial archive on the naming of Africans.⁷⁶ Equally, it also entails repudiating, as no longer useful, appropriation of similar assumptions as manifestly found in early articulations of *négritude* or black personality and in some

73 Hall 'Who needs "identity"?' (n 3 above) 25.

74 A Carastathis 'Identity categories as potential coalitions' (2013) 38 *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 941.

75 D Riley 'Am I that name?' *Feminism and the category of 'women' in history* (1988).

76 More than any author, it is perhaps VY Mudimbe who has led the intellectual inquiry into the normative naming of Africa and Africans in his published works, including *The invention of Africa* (n 21 above); and *The idea of Africa* (n 21 above). In ch 3 of this book especially, Mudimbe's contribution is elaborated upon as well as critiqued.

contemporary nativist, nationalistic articulations of Africanness.⁷⁷ Necessarily, it requires conceding that history ‘contaminates’ existing cultures and in the Africa of today Africanness is also a product of deeply rooted and irrevocable effects of transculturation.⁷⁸

4.2.2 *Transposing Hall’s theory onto African sexuality identifications*

If we transpose Hall’s cultural theory to the cultures of sexualities, we can understand African sexualities as a constituent part of Africanness. We are best served by a historicised notion of African sexuality identifications as enunciations which are also always in the making. Even when such enunciations acquire the materiality of identities and are, therefore, real, they are not hermetically sealed, but of a diverse, dynamic nature rather than a hardened, saturated, and seemingly complete form of African identity. Africanness and African sexualities are not primordial or metaphysical states of being. Instead, these are states of ever-becoming and being and, even more so, as Paulin Hountondji so aptly puts it, states of belonging.⁷⁹ Ultimately, to borrow from Edward Said, Africanness, as any other identity category, is extraordinarily differentiated and so unmonolithic as to be capable of bearing coexisting contrapuntal perspectives.⁸⁰

When transposed onto sexuality, Hall’s theory and praxis of identification tell us that history does not fatefully tie us to a particular present and a particular future for the reason that sexuality in an age gone by is subject to the continuous play of history, culture and power.⁸¹ When representing Africa and Africanness, whether in the sphere of sexualities or otherwise, we are engaged in the ‘production’ of something and not merely retrieval.⁸² In this sense, exploring the past to see whether

77 On early articulations of pan-Africanism, see, for example, Appiah (n 7 above) 3-27. On nativist nationalism and its implications for normative African sexualities, see, for example, B Ndjio ‘Sexuality and nationalist ideologies in post-colonial Cameroon’ in S Wieringa & HF Sivori *The sexuality history of the global south: Sexual politics in Africa, Asia and Latin America* (2013) 120-144. In chs 5 and 7 of this book, the discussion on Africanness intersects with African nationalistic ideologies.

78 F Kalua ‘Homi Bhabha’s Third Space and African identity’ (2009) 21 *Journal of African Cultural Studies* 23 at 25.

79 P Hountondji ‘Que peut la philosophie?’ (translated as ‘What can philosophy do?’) (1981) 119 *Présence Africaine* 47 52, cited in English translation in Mudimbe *The invention of Africa* (n 21 above) 37. Hountondji’s essay is published in English as ‘What can philosophy do?’ (1987) 1 *Quest: Philosophical Discussions* (now *Quest: An African Journal of Philosophy*) 2.

80 EW Said *Culture and imperialism* (1993) xxix 36.

81 Hall ‘Cultural identity and diaspora’ (n 1 above) 224.

82 As above.

sexualities outside of heterosexual values and practices were lived experiences is useful but only to a point. It is useful empiricism that may well provide the evidence to tilt the balance in debates about the 'un-Africanness' of same-sex sexualities by confirming a past where such sexualities existed.⁸³ We see this, for example, in approaches contesting claims that non-heteronormative sexualities are un-African and colonial or neo-colonial impositions by excavating an African past in order to establish an unbroken link between the sexualities and African pneumatologies or age-old cosmologies.⁸⁴ In this way authenticity is claimed through constructing an epistemological foundation that can be traced back to the pre-colonial era.

My argument is that whilst a backward-looking anthropological approach to validating sexualities can be strategically useful, it is nonetheless instrumentalism that implicitly and ultimately appeals to nativism.⁸⁵ In *Gender trouble*, Judith Butler cautions against the futility of feminist approaches that conduct a backwards anthropological approach that goes back to the origin of a time before patriarchy in order to yield an imaginary perspective for the historical contingency of women's oppression.⁸⁶ The risk with the 'postulation of the before' approach, as Butler calls it, is that it can serve to constrain the future by reifying what was found in the 'before' so that a historically situated practice is no longer seen as historically situated but, instead, is pre-social or 'pre-cultural' and invested with a universally true all-determining power.⁸⁷ The focus of social theory that seeks to overcome status subordination, whether in the domain of sexualities or otherwise, should be on addressing contemporary cultural struggles as they concretely manifest in their time rather than on summoning a plenitudinous past.⁸⁸

Reclaiming sexuality through marshalling evidence of past sexualities has the unintended effect of promoting an epistemology of sexuality as primordialism at the expense of affirming existential agency and

83 See the discussion in ch 7 of this book.

84 S Nyanzi 'Dismantling reified African culture through localized homosexualities in Uganda' (2013) 15 *Culture, Health and Sexuality: An International Journal for Research, Intervention and Care* 952 at 961-962; S Nyanzi 'Knowledge is requisite power: Making a case for queer African scholarship' (2015) 126-127, https://hivos.org/sites/default/files/15_knowledge_is_requisite_power_by_stella_nyanzi.pdf 126-135 (accessed 2 May 2017); NZ Nkabinde *Black bull, ancestors and me: My life as a lesbian sangoma* (2009). See ch 7 of this book.

85 J Butler *Gender trouble: Feminism and the subversion of identity* (1999) 45-49. *Gender trouble* was originally published in 1990.

86 Butler (n 86 above) 46-47.

87 Butler (n 86 above) 49.

subjectivity.⁸⁹ By attempting to retrieve a certificate of origin about sexuality expression, a backward-looking approach risks promoting unprincipled discourses of sexualities. More crucially, it risks rendering quite irrelevant any discourse that is tied to the plural politics of a constantly evolving heterogeneous public sphere, as affirmation of sexual diversity-status will perilously depend on whether there is a fortuitous archive, a past history, that supports the status. What we sorely need is not so much corroborating anthropological evidence of sexuality diversity, even if this can be useful, but a political, cultural theory for mutual recognition of a benign variation of sexualities in ways that decentre the hegemony of heterosexuality.

5 Positionality

Positionality is a conceptual resource for recognising not just the constitutive force of discourse but also the place of people and individuals within the discourse, their conversations with it and the positions they adopt as their own.⁹⁰ Yes, discourses produce racial, cultural and sexual subjects but they also leave individuals with the possibility of choice, even if limited, of how they wish to engage with discursive practices. Understood in this sense, positionality is the practice of recognising oneself as having agency – even if notional – to locate oneself in, for example, a particular dichotomous racial, cultural or sexual category and not another. Self-reflection means that individuals are not simply automatons trapped in a position required by a discourse that summons them, requiring their compliance. They are not just hearers but active speakers who can position themselves within a discourse, constructing their own stories even if these are oppositional or contradictory.⁹¹

Positionality, therefore, confounds the idea of individual social identity as merely the passive role playing of a ‘docile body’ that is summoned by a discourse: a dramaturgical model of identity.⁹² Instead, it envisages the possibility of choice in how we engage with discursive practices in ways that create the possibility of negotiating new positions to make the practices our own and to reflect our individual subjectivities, even in the face of external constraining forces. In this way, positionality leaves room for an ‘account of the practices of subjective self-

89 Nyanzi ‘Knowledge is requisite power’ (n 84 above) 127.

90 B Davies & R Harré ‘Positioning: The discursive production of selves’ (1990) 20 *Journal of the Theory of Social Behaviour* 43 at 46.

91 Davies & Harré (n 90 above) 53.

92 Hall ‘Who needs “identity”?’ (n 3 above) 25; Davies & R Harré (n 90 above) 51 58-59.

constitution'.⁹³ Underscoring the place of positionality, in his essay 'Who needs "identity"?' Hall highlights the importance of building into a theory of identification an understanding of how individuals may resist interpellation through 'technologies of the self'.⁹⁴ He says:

The question which remains is whether we require ... a theory of what the mechanisms are by which individuals as subjects identify (or do not identify) with the 'positions' to which they are summoned; as well as how they fashion, stylize, produce and 'perform' these positions, and why they never do so completely, for once and all time, and some never do, or are in a constant, agonistic process of struggling with, resisting, negotiating and accommodating the normative or regulative rules which they confront and regulate themselves.⁹⁵

Thus, multiple subjectivities, contradictory discursive practices, discontinuities in the production of self and rupture can be understood as the effects of positionality. Ultimately, the question Who and what is Africa? is an open question, which elicits responses depending on how each actor is located within their own discursive practices as well as those of others.⁹⁶ As submitted earlier the unities which pronounce 'we' in fact stand for 'I'.⁹⁷

In seeking to articulate Africanness, positionality is indispensable. Articulations of identities and identification are exercises in representation that occur in a given historical context and come with standpoints.⁹⁸ The representor, so to speak, is always a positioned historical subject rather than a nameless, neutral disinterested observer. This recognition is a vital biographical fact, which we are to be cognisant of, especially in the representation of Africa and Africans where, historically, who does the representation and the subject who is represented frequently are not the same.⁹⁹ The core issue is not whether others can or cannot speak for Africans, but from what standpoints and with what knowledges they do so. This is not to silence the voices of 'non-Africans' on the assumption that only African voices are authentic. Rather, it is to ensure, foremost as a matter of participatory democracy and ethical ownership, that African voices take centre stage in matters relating to Africans so that the making

93 Hall 'Who needs "identity"?' (n 3 above) 26.

94 Hall 'Who needs "identity"?' (n 3 above) 27.

95 As above.

96 Davies & Harré (n 90 above) 46.

97 See discussion in sec 2 above; Hall 'Who needs "identity"?' (n 3 above) 18; Bhabha (n 5 above); Laclau (n 5 above) 33.

98 Hall 'Cultural identity and diaspora' (n 1 above) 222.

99 As above.

of equality relating to African aspirations is grounded in their concrete realities rather than in an abstract ideal. It is to ensure that the will and preference of Africans is articulated and not that of proxies, as is the case especially with colonial and neo-colonial discourses.

Thus, positionality also implicates the partisan nature of speaking on behalf of others. I shall argue in Part 3 of this book that proxy articulation of Africanness in the sphere of sexualities becomes problematic when the representational narratives seem indistinguishable from the staple found in Victorian anthropology which served, not as a window to a different world, but as a functionalist tool for advancing the imperial colonial project through giving scientific validity to the reified alterity of Africans.¹⁰⁰ Although some of the narratives have the laudable goal of bringing to the scholarly domain published and accessible commentaries on the sexualities of Africans, they have not been able to overcome condescension and paternalism. It is even more disconcerting that some narratives are heavily compromised by their Eurocentric and racialising overtones which punctuate sympathetic representation with racial stereotyping, even if the 'racial' comes in a cultural accoutrement. The Africa and the Africans that are represented seem over-determined and, in some cases, locked in a 'timeless zone of the primitive, unchanging past' which in self-congratulatory tones is juxtaposed with a progressive and historically dynamic West, the civilisational comparator.¹⁰¹

However, it is not just problematic representation from the outside that we should be concerned about but, equally, representations from within that come as part of dominant cultural narratives. The Africanness that our national authorities, regional institutions, national laws and cultural institutions promote and articulate on our behalf may not be necessarily what we imagine, especially when institutionalised notions of Africanness come tethered to dominant cultural and religious discourses that are essentialising and nativising such that they primarily serve to accentuate the stigmatisation, exclusion and marginalisation of certain social groups on the basis of a normative African identity. In Chapter 7 especially, I highlight how dominant representations of Africanness from within can become powerful exclusionary ideological tools.

100 See ch 6 especially.

101 Hall 'Cultural identity and diaspora' (n 1 above) 231.