

WHAT'S IN A NAME? THE NAMING OF AFRICA AND AFRICANS, AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF RADICAL CULTURAL ALTERITY

The scramble for Africa, and the most active period of colonization, lasted for less than a century. These events, which involved the greater part of the African continent, occurred between the late nineteenth and mid-twentieth centuries. Although in African history the colonial experience represented but a brief moment from the perspective of today, this moment is still charged and controversial, since, to say the least, it signified a new historical form and the possibility of new types of discourses on African traditions and cultures ... Because of the colonizing structure, a dichotomizing system has emerged, and with it a great number of current paradigmatic oppositions have developed.¹

1 Introduction: Representation, truth, knowledge and power

Identities are better understood as 'relational' than as 'true' representations. This proposition forms part of the larger premise upon which Hall's theory of identification is based. In a Foucauldian sense, representations necessarily come tethered to certain kinds of knowledge and power.² When knowledge is linked to power, as Hall points out, it assumes the authority of truth precisely because it has the power to make itself true.³ Representations can be the outcome of social constructions that are deployed in the service of power to assemble a 'regime of truth' which

1 VY Mudimbe *The invention of Africa: Gnosis, philosophy and the order of knowledge* (1988) 14.

2 S Hall 'Cultural identity and diaspora' in J Rutherford (ed) *Identity: Community, culture, difference* (1990) 222 at 225-226; S Hall 'Who needs "identity"?' in J Evans & P Redman (eds) *Identity: A reader* (2000) 15 at 18; M Foucault *The archaeology of knowledge* trans A Sheridan (1972); M Foucault *Discipline and punish: The birth of a prison* trans A Sheridan (1977) 27.

3 S Hall 'The work of representation' in S Hall, J Evans & S Nixon (eds) *Representation* (2013) 1 at 33.

dominates and instructs certain social groups.⁴ In the final analysis the knowledge we use to represent in order to claim what is true or false about Africa and Africans is derived from a socially constructed archive which, like the identity it seeks to name, is always in a state of becoming and being. We never quite finish knowing. By implication, we never quite finish constructing our identities *for our own selves* or having our identities constructed *for us* by those with power over us or who desire to have such power. The knowledge that is deployed in the construction of identities does not exist in a vacuum. It comes from somewhere and is always contextual.

An important edifice in the subtext of inclusive equality in this book is that knowledge about persons and political communities, and their status as human beings and human communities is, itself, a *human science*. Linda Alcoff has underscored that knowledge is not acquired merely through passive observation informed by disinterested neutrality about what is perceived to be reality.⁵ Rather, it is always a product of interaction, conscious or unconscious, between the source of the knowledge – the primary repository – and the individual or political community that appropriates the knowledge to make it their own – the secondary repository.⁶ Analysing social deconstruction, Kenneth Gergen highlights the relativity of truth in how we perceive the world by emphasising that what we take to be knowledge of the world is situated knowledge.⁷ The knowledge we appropriate is not the outcome of a testing of general hypotheses, or knowledge driven by the forces of nature, but the outcome of an interactive process among persons in a relationship.⁸ It follows that the terms on which the world is understood are not empirical truths but instead, ‘social artefacts; products of historically situated exchanges between persons and social groups’.⁹

Social, political and economic institutions play their part in sustaining knowledge and its underpinning assumptions.¹⁰ Echoing Hall, Gergen says that whether knowledge prevails across time depends less on its validity than on the play of history and the vicissitudes of social processes,

4 HK Bhabha ‘The other question ...’ (1983) 24 *Screen* 19.

5 L Alcoff ‘Democracy and rationality: A dialogue with Hilary Putnam’ in M Nussbaum & J Glover (eds) *Women, culture and development: A study of human capabilities* (1995) 225 at 226.

6 Alcoff (n 5 above) 226.

7 KJ Gergen ‘The social constructionist movement in modern psychology’ (1985) 40 *American Psychologist* 266.

8 Gergen (n 7 above) 266-267.

9 Gergen (n 7 above) 267.

10 Gergen (n 7 above) 268.

including negotiation, conflict, communication and rhetorical power.¹¹ These arguments underscore the importance of deconstructing knowledge as a way of explaining how a social group can account for its naming in the world and have equal application to perspectives and descriptions about Africans, whether adopted by Africans themselves or by others.

On its own, therefore, knowledge about Africans gives no clue about the quality of that knowledge. *Prima facie*, it cannot explain the nature of the interaction which produced the knowledge. It cannot tell us anything about the degree of interaction and the quality of cooperation, such as whether it is knowledge that was imposed or whether it was generated through an inclusive process and democratic reciprocity. On its own the naming of Africans cannot tell us anything about the impact of the knowledge on the political community to which it applies, such as whether historically it has served to affirm or to diminish the humanity of Africans.¹² Because knowledge about a given identity represents a relation with power, or lack of it, it is incapable of registering the absolute truth about any identity category, especially when the category is largely the product of status subordination.

Representational knowledge can create *a truth* but only within a particular discursive system and positionality. Part of what scholarship at the intersection between African sexualities and equality should seek to do is to deconstruct knowledge that represents African sexualities and at the same time argue for a responsive equality paradigm. Deconstruction is necessary in order to unmask hierarchies of power and privilege that are organised around associational or identitarian categories such as class, culture, race, ethnicity, ability/disability and religion, together with the cultural and political institutions that sustain the hierarchies and serve as conduits for transmitting and enforcing hegemonic knowledge about African sexualities. Deconstruction serves the heuristic purpose of implicating unwanted labels, stigma, disadvantage, marginalisation and exclusion in the historical misrepresentations of African sexualities.

Thus, the propositional exegesis from Hall's identitarian architecture is that identities come from somewhere and that they are the names we give to the different ways in which we have positioned ourselves or have been positioned, taking into account our power or lack of it and our knowledge or lack of it.¹³ Power and knowledge, which Hall describes as

11 As above; Hall 'Cultural identity and diaspora' (n 2 above) 225; Hall 'Who needs "identity"?' (n 2 above) 17.

12 Alcoff (n 5 above) 226.

13 Hall 'Cultural identity and diaspora' (n 2 above) 226.

a 'fatal couplet', are indispensable to dissecting the construction of the identity of Africans as peoples with interpellated histories that come from a colonial past which is not quite past.¹⁴ As captured in the epigraph, VY Mudimbe observes that whilst the active period of colonisation in African history was a relatively brief one – lasting for less than a century beginning from the late nineteenth century to the middle of the twentieth century – the colonial experience was nonetheless a fully charged one, complete with its polemics, and the possibility of radically transformative discourses on African traditions and cultures.¹⁵

In this chapter I seek to highlight that Hall's couplet of knowledge/power has particular resonance with and explanatory mileage for the historical and contemporary constructions of African identities in the light of the continent's colonial history. More specifically, I deconstruct the naming of Africans in colonial discourses as an exercise in discrepant power to produce Africanness as excess and an Africa that is normatively dependent on Europe for its recognition. The naming of Africans and, more particularly, sub-Saharan Africans by Europe was tethered to a colonial project. The naming sought to reduce a diverse people to a manageable and, of necessity, subordinate unit through homogenisation and by ascribing a unitary, Goffmanian, spoiled cultural and racial identity.¹⁶ Through othering and misrecognition, colonial discourses that were underwritten by discrepant power succeeded in producing not merely *orientalised* and misrecognised African cultural and racial identities:¹⁷ as Hall explains, drawing on Fanon, the othering and misrecognition of African identities also generated in the othered and misrecognised a process of individual and collective self-appropriation of identities that are disabling.¹⁸ The point Hall makes is that understanding the internalisation, in varying degrees, of not just a black racial identity but equally a spoiled racial identity is an essential part of understanding the historical sinews through which the racial identity of people with African ancestry emerged on the continent as well as in the diaspora.

Methodologically, my interrogation of the historical naming of Africans is spread over two chapters – the present chapter and the next chapter. In these two chapters, I explore the naming of Africa – the

14 Hall 'Cultural identity and diaspora' (n 2 above) 224.

15 Mudimbe (n 1 above) 1.

16 E Goffman *Stigma: Notes on the management of a spoiled identity* (1963).

17 Hall 'Cultural identity and diaspora' (n 2 above) 225, citing EW Said *Orientalism* (1979).

18 Hall 'Cultural identity and diaspora' (n 2 above) 224, citing F Fanon *Black skin, white masks* (1967).

continent – and the naming of the cultural and racial identities of the continent’s inhabitants. The objective is not merely to reveal the ideas and power, or lack of it, behind the names or to reveal unities of cultural and racial identities that were constructed mainly *for* rather than *by* Africans in colonial discourses whose force, though now somewhat mitigated, still remains with us. A concomitant objective is to create discursive space for deconstructing or decentring congealed and sedimented discourses about the naming of Africa and Africans.

I posit that when deconstructing Africanness as identity, which is interpellated in the representation of African sexualities, understanding the provenance of the naming of the continent, ‘Africa’, should be part of the discourse, if not a beginning point. The naming of Africa provides us with a necessary historical backdrop and ways of decoding sedimented colonial discourses that had the deliberate intention of homogenising and over-determining Africans simultaneously to secure their alterity and subordination. Studying the origins of the naming of Africa should be an essential part of how we can take cognisance of the complex histories that have made Africa and their explanatory value in registering diversities within Africanness.

For the greater part, I interrogate the making of African cultural and racial identities through exploring the historical construction of African alterity in the colonial founding of the continent and, ultimately, the subsumption of Africanness under race. At this stage I am particularly concerned with highlighting the substantive absence of Africans in the making of the label ‘African’ even if, in the end, Africans came to appropriate it from a variety of positions.

In exploring the historical construction of African cultural alterity, I draw mainly, though not solely, on Mudimbe, a philosopher, and his seminal work – *The invention of Africa*.¹⁹ Mudimbe’s work, as I shall elaborate, is not merely a trenchant critique of colonial anthropological science, it is also an argument for a knowledge system that represents rather than silences or excludes Africans. At the same time, drawing my arguments from Hall’s template of the construction of identity,²⁰ I stop short of attempting to construct an African *Weltanschauung*, as Mudimbe seems to want us to do, because such a project inherently inclines us towards the very outcome we wish to avoid – the essentialisation or even petrification of Africanness.

19 Mudimbe (n 1 above).

20 In ch 2 I provided an exposition of Hall’s template for the construction of an epistemology of identity.

2 Naming of Africa

The name 'Africa', upon which the adjective African rests, is much more than the retrieval of a meaning from its quotidian usage. It is more than the mere evocation of a cartographic entity – the continent we call Africa – on the understanding that its meaning is immediately apparent to everyone. Beneath the name Africa is an idea: a discursive concept that is historically contingent. Underscoring the complexity and multifarious nature of the concept of Africa, the historian, Paul Zeleza, said:

The idea of 'Africa' is a complex one with multiple genealogies and meanings, so that extrapolations of 'African' culture, identity or nationality, in the singular or plural, any explorations of what makes 'Africa' 'African' are quite slippery as these notions tend to swing unsteadily between the poles of essentialism and contingency. Describing and defining 'Africa' and all tropes prefixed by its problematic commandments entails engaging discourses about Africa, the paradigms and politics through which the idea of 'Africa' has been constructed and consumed, and sometimes celebrated and condemned.²¹

Clearly, a geographical entity called Africa exists. Equally, its political cartographic counterpart – the African Union currently comprising 54 states – exists.²² But beyond these two existential facts, namely, geography and a regional political union that is recognised under international law, the question is whether there are genealogies or taxonomies we can use to give Africa and Africans a unifying identity or identities. Asking about the provenance of the naming of the continent may unravel some clues. What we see is a transformation from a neutral naming of Africa and Africans at the time that Greco-Romans first had contact with the continent to a belligerent naming in which imperial Europe was completely invested, desiring to own, exploit and direct the continent and its peoples.

21 PT Zeleza 'The inventions of African identities and languages: The discursive and developmental implications' in OF Arasanyin and MA Pemberton (eds) *Selected proceedings of the 36th Annual Conference on African linguistics* (2006) 14-26 at 14.

22 The Organisation of African Unity (OAU) was established in 1963 under the Organisation of African Unity Charter OAU Doc AHG/Res.16(1) (1964) reprinted in (1964) 3 ILM 1116. It was the first African intergovernmental organisation to serve as the first political union of the then 32 independent African states: F Viljoen *International human rights law in Africa* (2012) 155. The African Union, which was established by the African Constitutive Act of 2000, supplanted the Organisation of African Unity.

2.1 Provenance of the naming

In the African colonial syllabus, the teaching of African history assumed the naming: it began with an already named Africa and its encounter with Europe and, more specifically, the European colonisation of Africa. Nothing significant was said about the history before European colonisation save cursorily to highlight a void, a *tabula rasa* and an excess of 'primitivism' as marking tribal life.²³ Elementary facts, such as how the continent we inhabit came to be called 'Africa' and how its inhabitants, or at least the majority of them, came to be called 'Africans' was never made a learning point, and yet naming has a history. When thinking about identities, naming carries power, or lack of it, through the statements it implicitly makes as a signifier. Naming has explanatory value, not least if the naming at issue has come to be invested with an enduring archive of alterity, as 'Africa' and 'African' have.

We may not know all the facts about the naming of the continent and its people; nonetheless, we can say categorically that Africa has not always been 'Africa', or Africans 'Africans'. In *The idea of Africa*, a book which explores the socio-cultural making of Africa at the beginning, including its naming, Mudimbe starts by observing that the very naming of the continent is not easily explained.²⁴ The origins of the naming of Africa are punctuated by conjectures. It is not clear who did the initial naming and for what reasons. However, there are plausible etymological clues to the naming.

It is possible that 'Africa' might have been first used by ancient Romans but only to refer to parts of North Africa hitherto known to the Greeks as Libya.²⁵ These are parts of current day North Africa which became a province of Rome following the fall of Carthage between 149 and 146 BCE during the Third Punic War.²⁶ This suggestion rests mainly on the archived use of 'Africa' by the Romans to refer to the region and the linguistic affinity between 'Africa' and its Greco-Roman equivalents.²⁷ *African*, as Mudimbe highlights, is the equivalent of *Afer* and *Africanus* that

23 VY Mudimbe *The idea of Africa* (1994) xi-xii.

24 Mudimbe (n 23 above) xi.

25 Mudimbe (n 23 above) 26; AA Mazrui 'The re-invention of Africa: Edward Said, VY Mudimbe and beyond' (2005) 36 *Research in African Literatures* 68 at 69; Zeleza (n 21 above) 15.

26 A Goldsworthy *The Punic Wars* (2000).

27 The Latin word for 'sunny' is *aprica* whilst in Greek *aphrike* means 'without cold': Mazrui (n 25 above) 69. Another linguistic explanation which supports the Latin etymology of 'Africa' is that the word 'Afri' was used by the Romans to refer to people south of the Mediterranean and that 'ca' is the Latin suffix for country or land.

were used to refer to a person from the continent, irrespective of colour.²⁸ This linguistic connection does not mean, however, that 'Africa' could not have been named prior to the annexation of North Africa by Rome such that it is the Greco-Roman language, instead, that borrowed the term. If this is the case it leaves the real possibility is that 'Africa' in fact is an indigenous name, say, from the Berber language.²⁹ Yet another possibility is that the name might have come from the Phoenicians.³⁰

But whatever the provenance of 'Africa', what is clear, as well as significant for explicating the making of African identity that is tied to the continent, is that the current naming of Africa is not the original naming. Initially, Africa as a cartography and a region of the world referred only to North Africa, which at the time (before the expansion of geographical knowledge) was believed to be *tertia orbis terrarum pars* – 'the third part of the world' after Europe and Asia.³¹ The initial naming of Africa was confined to the part of Africa adjacent to the Mediterranean. Peoples outside this region would not have been described by outsiders as Africans or appropriated the description themselves until several centuries later, beginning with the European exploration of the sub-continent in the fifteenth century and leading up to the Berlin conference of 1884 at which 'dark' Africa was carved up and apportioned among European nations.

Indeed, it is interesting to note that by the first century Africa had become known as comprised of three regions – Egypt, Libya (corresponding to the Roman province) and Aethiopia (approximating sub-Saharan Africa).³² With the advent of European exploration of the sub-continent in the fifteenth century, the reference to Aethiopia fell into disuse among geographers, in favour of describing it as *Nigritia* and its inhabitants as *Nigriti*.³³

Thus, the extension of the name Africa to the entire continent, especially its extension to Africa south of Sahara, is something that came out of European mapmaking. It is mapping that came centuries after the original naming not only to delineate geographical terrain but also to give

28 Mudimbe (n 23 above) 26.

29 Mazrui (n 25 above) 69.

30 Mazrui (n 25 above) 69-70.

31 Mudimbe (n 23 above) xi, citing Sallustius *Iug* 17, 3.

32 In Latin the term *Aethiops* (*Aithiops* in Greek) stood as a generic name for a dark-skinned person – one whose face is burnt by the sun. *Aethiopia* is the territory inhabited by *Aethiopians*, and is a name that conjures both heat and colour: Mudimbe (n 23 above) 26-27.

33 *Nigritia*, the territory, and *Nigriti*, the people, derive from *niger*, meaning black colour: Mudimbe (n 23 above) 27.

cognitive meaning to a magnified terrain – a whole continent – in ways that spoke normatively to a European imperial project as well as a racial typology. The naming of the second Africa, so to speak, is a product of imperialistic Europe in its teleological cartography of the terrain that was to be explored and the peoples that were to be colonised. In the process, a new episteme – a racist and racialised one – was imprinted on the continent, to go hand in hand with its naming.

In highlighting the transformation of the meaning of Africa into a culturally and racially inferiorised meaning with the advent of the colonisation of Africa, I do not imply that the inhabitants of Africa had not previously been treated as different by others. Appiah makes the point that if we go back to the earliest writings, including biblical texts, we will find that cultures distinguish between ‘our own kind’ and other cultures.³⁴ Moreover, cultures have always placed emphasis on physical appearance as a distinguishing mark but not invariably as a mark of deep-seated, intrinsic inferiority. Hence, as Kwame Antony Appiah notes, the Hellenes described foreigners whether dark-skinned (the Aethiopians) or blonde (the Scythians) as ‘barbarians’ but without implying sedimented, intrinsic inferiority.³⁵ Mudimbe puts a gloss on this point. He says that in the Greek imagination, the concept of barbarians served as a ‘uniform order of alterity’.³⁶ Asians and Northern Europeans too were barbarians.³⁷ The Romans continued this tradition upon inheriting Hellenic culture. Mudimbe reminds us, it is not the idea of African alterity that was the European invention but a new notion of accentuated alterity that accompanied the colonisation of Africa.³⁸

Colonisation transformed the discourse of African difference into ‘absolute otherness’. It took difference to its extreme and succeeded in generating a sedimented discourse of disparaging African alterity that remains with us. Mbembe aptly captures the sedimentation of African alterity when saying:

[T]he African human experience constantly appears in the discourse of our times as an experience that can only be understood through a *negative interpretation*. Africa is never seen as possessing things and attributes properly part of ‘human nature’. Or, when it is, its things and attributes are generally of lesser value, little importance, and poor quality. It is this elementariness and primitiveness that makes Africa the world par excellence of all that is

34 KA Appiah *In my father's house: Africa in the philosophy of culture* (1992) 10-11.

35 Appiah (n 34 above) 11.

36 Mudimbe (n 23 above) xii.

37 As above.

38 Mudimbe (n 23 above) xi-xii.

incomplete, mutilated, and unfinished, its history reduced to a series of setbacks of nature in its quest for humankind.³⁹

3 Naming of Africans: Epochal re-description⁴⁰

Today, in their mundane use, the concepts of 'Africa' and 'African' come to us already ensconced in sedimented discourses that speak to a constructed homogeneity. Some of the discourses affirm the humanity of Africans. However, others, especially discourses from Africa's exteriority, clearly denigrate it in ways that are directed at 'black' Africa and 'black' Africans. Historically, the part of Africa represented by sub-Saharan Africa and dark-skinned people has been at the receiving end of pejorative discourses. It is the part that was popularised as 'Darkest Africa' in Victorian England.⁴¹ Eminent European philosophers in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries denigrated it to the fullest. To Hegel, for example, 'Africa proper' was a land with no history, lacking development and enveloped in a state of nature.⁴² In his *Philosophy of history*, Hegel carefully excised Northern Africa in his denigration of Africa. Of sub-Saharan Africa, Hegel has this to say:

At this point we leave Africa, not to mention it again. For it is no historical part of the World; it has no movement or development to exhibit. Historical movements in it – that is in its northern part – belong to the Asiatic or European World. Carthage displayed there an important transitory phase of civilization, but, as a Phoenician colony, it belongs to Asia. Egypt will be considered in reference to the passage of the human mind from its Eastern to its Western phase, but it does not belong to the African spirit. What we properly understand by Africa, is the Unhistorical, Undeveloped Spirit, still involved in the conditions of mere nature ...⁴³

The historical identities of the peoples of sub-Saharan Africa have spoken more to identities made for Africans and aligned with the colonial conquest of an Africa inhabited by members of the Negro race in the

39 JA Mbembe *On the postcolony* (2001) 1 (emphasis in original).

40 The term 'epochal re-description', which I use to signify a radical transformation in naming of colonised people by the colonists at different historical periods, is borrowed from its use by Wynter in 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 265.

41 P Brantlinger 'Victorians and Africans: The genealogy of the myth of the Dark Continent' (1985) 12 *Critical Inquiry* 166.

42 GWF Hegel *The philosophy of history* trans J Sibree (1956) 91-98, cited in LR Gordon 'African philosophy's search for identity: Existential considerations of a recent effort' (1997) 5 *CLR James Journal* 98 at 101-102.

43 As above.

European classificatory system of 'races' than to any common cultural identity among the colonised peoples. In common usage, the term 'African' has stood for race. Race has been a salient feature of how African identity has been imagined, not just outside of the continent but also from within it, ever since the colonisation of the region by Europe in the late nineteenth century.

3.1 Africa at the edge of time: The founding of alterity in anachronistic space

The naming of Africa 'proper' and Africans is an outgrowth of the European colonising project and ultimately European racial agency and fantasy.⁴⁴ It emanated from European enunciation and its imperial positionality. This was not primarily about spreading an incandescent European civilisational order but about inscribing its crushing dominance, complete with inveterate cultural and racial scarring, and humiliation of the dominated peoples. It is not without historical significance that the normative naming of Africans as a justly colonisable peoples by European colonial powers and the founding of abiding African cultural and particularly racial alterity took concrete shape at precisely the same time as the transatlantic slave trade was being abolished.⁴⁵ Commentators have not missed the apparent contradiction between the two European efforts – an emancipatory effort juxtaposed with a subjugating one.⁴⁶ The contradiction becomes illusory once the exploitative economic determinism in both is unmasked and, indeed, aligned with a continuing regime of status subordination of the black body. In both efforts, the human *object* remained the same – the Negro. In a deconstructive sense, the naming of Africans can be historically understood as the ontological and juridical reordering of the Negro under a European corporeal gaze. On the one hand, the black body is no longer a chattel, on the other, blackness still bears racial stigmata. It cannot, therefore, be released from continued subordination and exploitation.

The naming of Africans proceeded along the firmly grounded imperialistic axis of exploration, colonisation and appropriation. It succeeded in the invention of alterity as extreme otherness which congealed into catastrophe for the othered. Africa and Africans were for imperial Europe to name in accordance with Europe's desire to find a

44 Appiah (n 34 above) 62.

45 Brantlinger (n 41 above) 167.

46 Brantlinger (n 41 above) 167 citing N Stepan *The idea of race in science: Great Britain 1800-1960* (1982) 1.

single origin for the conquerable and colonisable peoples, pushing aside different histories, languages, cultural products, memory and ethnic identities. Colonial discourses, Homi Bhabha observes, depended heavily on the concept of 'fixity' in the ideological construction of an othered, conquered people to achieve both the representation of the discovery of an unchanging order as well as its disorder and degeneracy.⁴⁷ As in the colonisation of the Americas where Aymaras, Aztecs, Chibchas, Incas and Mayas, for example, were merged into a single identity – Indians – so in Africa, Ashantis, Bacongos, Khoisan, Yorubas and Zulus, for example, were merged into one identity – Africans.⁴⁸

The colonial design behind the moniker 'African' was to find a subsumption of culture and race through which colonial subjects and the land of their habitation could be contrasted with Europeans and, by using a single index that would register a recognisable totality, render them objects of control and exploitation.⁴⁹ Europe supplied its own self-serving answers as Anne McClintock highlights.⁵⁰ The answer lay in linear temporal regression: going back in time to trace evolution using European historical time. Africa would be *terra nullius*, something *discovered* by European explorers in the fifteenth century and represented as a virgin finding in history, the media and other forums. Mudimbe observes this:

Africa was discovered in the fifteenth century. That, at least, is what most history books say. Professors teach it, students accept it as truth. In any case, why doubt? The media propagate the veracity of the fact in the sagas of European explorers. Taken at its first meaning, this discovery (that is, this unveiling, this observation) meant and still means the primary violence signified by the word. The slave trade narrated itself accordingly, and the same movement of reduction progressively guaranteed the gradual invasion of the continent.⁵¹

The *discovery* of Africa, as the discovery of the Americas by European explorers also attests, required Africa to first possess or approximate the qualities of *terra nullius* so that Africa could be normatively and juridically intelligible for colonial state-making and built from 'scratch' as it were. *Terra nullius* was not just a benign descriptor but a term fully invested in the

47 Bhabha (n 4 above) 18.

48 A Quijano 'Coloniality of power, Eurocentrism, and Latin America' (2002) 1 *Nepantla: Views from South* 533 at 551-552.

49 Bhabha (n 4 above) 23.

50 A McClintock *Imperial leather: Race, gender and sexuality in the colonial context* (1995) 30 40-42.

51 Mudimbe (n 23 above) 16-17.

teleology of penetrating ‘virgin lands’ and the ‘doctrine of discovery’.⁵² It was an imperialistic doctrine which spoke through colonial rationality with normative implications. Colonial rationality is what is at play, for example, in the memoir of Ian Smith, Prime Minister of Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) from 1964 to 1979.⁵³ Recalling the founding of Rhodesia, he says:

They [the Pioneer Column] were going into *uncharted country*, the domain of the lion, elephant, the buffalo, the rhinoceros – all deadly killers – the black mamba, the most deadly of all snakes, and the Matebele, with Lobengula’s *impis*, the most deadly of all black warriors guarding their frontiers against any intrusion. *But if the mission was to raise the flag for queen and country, no questions were asked. Moreover, their consciences were clear.* To the west the Matebeles had recently moved in ... The eastern parts of the country were settled by a number of different tribes, nomadic people who had migrated from the north and east, constantly moving to and fro in order to accommodate their needs and wants. To the south were scattered settlements of Shangaans from Mozambique and Northern Transvaal. *Clearly it was no-man’s land, as Cecil Rhodes and the politicians back in London had confirmed, so no one could accuse them of trespassing or taking part in an invasion.*⁵⁴

Smith’s simplistic articulation of the beginnings of white settlement in the territory we now know as Zimbabwe and his tribute to the Pioneer Column is self-serving.⁵⁵ More to the point, his anodyne explanation obscures the reality that the Pioneer Column participated from the beginning in a colonial project of European power and greed that was determined by racial agency. It is a project that culminated in a profound reconfiguration

52 McClintock (n 50 above) 30; ST Newcomb *Pagans in the promised land: Decoding the doctrine Christian discovery* (2008); JH Greenberg ‘The doctrine of discovery as a doctrine of domination’ (2016) 10 *Journal for the Study of Religion, Nature and Culture* 236; R Stott ‘The Dark Continent: Africa as female boy in Haggard’s adventure fiction’ (1989) 32 *Feminist Review* 69 at 77-79.

53 ID Smith *Bitter harvest: The great betrayal and the dreadful aftermath* (1997).

54 Smith (n 53 above) 1-2 (my emphasis).

55 The Pioneer Column comprised 250 men who were contracted in 1890 to discharge an assignment on behalf of Cecil John Rhodes’ company – the British South Africa Company (BSAC). In 1889 the BSAC had been granted a Royal Charter by Queen Victoria to ‘explore and exploit’ land north of the Limpopo river. Extraordinarily, the BSAC, a private enterprise, secured a mandate effectively to colonise the territory that would become Rhodesia on behalf of Britain, including the right to create its own police force, establish commerce, construct infrastructure and control land ‘not in use’ by the inhabitants of the territory. By September of 1890, the BSAC was able to raise the Union Jack in what they named Salisbury (now Harare) proclaiming the territory to be British: SJ Ndlovu-Gatseni ‘Mapping cultural and colonial encounters, 1880s-1930s’ in B Raftopoulos & AS Mlambo (eds) *Becoming Zimbabwe: A history from the pre-colonial period to 2008* (2009) 39 at 46.

of 'space, and bodies, land and identity' in which the indigenes were at the receiving end of the reconfiguration and their consequent displacement.⁵⁶ Smith's narrative is heavily interpellated by a prior discourse – the doctrine of discovery – and its specious universalism, such that he is conceptually incapable of seeing agency in the indigenes. There is a striking coherence in his choice of language – 'uncharted country', 'scattered settlements', 'no-man's land' – which palpably betrays a patterned colonial teleology which insists on an ideal of impartiality, even in the face of its improbability.⁵⁷ Concealing a project of land dispossession (stealing and forcibly acquiring land) seems to be the narrative's main objective.

A racialised optic that is powered by the doctrine of discovery allows Smith, a second generation Rhodesian, to reconstitute the territory and to see it in the same way it was seen by his parents and other colonial settlers: as empty or at least under-populated or underutilised, hence *no-man's land*.⁵⁸ In no-man's land there is no displacement as there are no indigenes in the first place. Of course, what is meant is not that the territory is literally empty, but that it is symbolically empty so as to be available for the colonial project in a way that is intended to pre-empt the indigenes' claims of aboriginal title to land.⁵⁹ Whatever indigenes he sees on the territory prior to the arrival of the Pioneer Column, such as the Matebele who had 'recently moved in' or the 'nomads moving to and fro', are described in language that conjures up an image of virgin territory without permanent settlement. Ultimately, indigenes are transformed into anachronistic beings living outside historical time and, therefore, not in proper occupation of the territory.⁶⁰ Through a white European gaze, the identity of the indigenes is stripped of its spatial identifications with the land and given a racial identity. Indigenes are to be understood purely as a raced embodiment that is placed at the nadir of an 'abiding scale of existence' in order to clear the way for premier white occupation of the land.⁶¹ This fundamental displacement of the indigenes and their relationship with the land – the profoundest of all displacements at the behest of a white racial agency – is not what Smith is narrating or helping us to understand.

56 WJ Jennings *The Christian imagination: Theology and the origins of race* (2010) 24.

57 IM Young *Justice and the politics of difference* (1990) 115-116; see discussion in ch 2, sec 2.

58 Smith was born in 1919 in Selukwe (now Shurugwi) to British immigrants to Southern Rhodesia (later to become Rhodesia and then Zimbabwe). His father had immigrated to Southern Rhodesia in 1898 (approximately eight years after the founding of the colony) and his mother had followed: Smith (n 53 above) 7.

59 McClintock (n 50 above).

60 See discussion in sec 3.2 below.

61 Jennings (n 56 above) 19. On the displacement of indigenes' spatial identities on account of colonial occupation, see Jennings (n 56 above) 38-64.

The memoir of the former Prime Minister of Rhodesia carefully steers clear of any utterance that remotely taints the patriotism of the Pioneer Column with an ulterior motive and yet that patriotism is glaringly anchored in British imperialism. The overarching colonial intent and, more particularly, the mission to conquer African territory, to enserf, dispossess and exploit is not articulated. The fact that the men who made up the Pioneer Column – apart from being agents of Rhodes' company, the BSAC, which was ready to use military force if resisted by the indigenes – were fortune hunters in their own right is not amplified.⁶² Smith renders an account which is at once a eulogy for and an exculpation of the Pioneer Column. Indeed, along with Cecil Rhodes, the men became totemic figures for white Rhodesia. They were later to be immortalised in the Rhodesian calendar so that they could be remembered as the founding fathers of Rhodesia.⁶³

The myth of empty lands went hand in hand with a theological rationale that sanctioned the conquest, colonisation and exploitation of 'pagan', non-Christian lands in Africa, Asia and the Americas.⁶⁴ In this sense the will to colonise and conquer other peoples was a 'manifest destiny'.⁶⁵ It was in obedience to divine will: God had entrusted Europeans with a mandate to civilise the world and to fulfil the Kingdom of God.⁶⁶ Against this self-serving ontology, to borrow from Sylvia Wynter, *terra nullius* meant not just 'lands of no one' but also 'lands of otherness' which were 'justly expropriable' together with the complement of 'justly enslaveable and enserfable' subject peoples.⁶⁷ In colonial political

62 This is not to suggest that the memoir does not mention Cecil Rhodes and the BSAC at all, but to highlight that the project was to conquer for the purpose of colonial exploitation and to use force if resisted and that clearly these are not details of interest to Smith.

63 In the Rhodesian calendar, 12 September was designated Pioneers' Day – a public holiday to commemorate the date the Pioneer Column arrived at the site of what became Fort Salisbury in 1890, raising the Union flag the next day.

64 Mudimbe (n 1 above) 45; Newcomb (n 52 above); Greenberg (n 52 above). The Catholic Church, by the issue of 'Papal Bulls' beginning as early as 1436, contributed significantly towards a conceptualisation of the right of European nations to claim possession of exclusive title to the lands inhabited by non-Christians. Regarding Africa, a Papal Bull of 1454, titled *Romanus Pontifex*, permitted King Alfonso V of Portugal to appropriate all non-Christian African territories. The Bull also permitted the enslavement of the inhabitants: Nicholas V, Pope of the Catholic Church, *Romanus Pontifex*, papal bull released on January 8, 1454, <http://www.doctrineofdiscovery.org/pontifex.htm> (accessed 8 November 2016).

65 AA Akrong 'African traditional religion and Christianity: Continuities and discontinuities' in H Lauer and K Anyidoho (eds) *Reclaiming the human sciences and humanities through African perspectives* (2016) 307-320 at 309.

66 As above.

67 Wynter (n 40 above) 292.

and juridical practice, *terra nullius* was rendered anachronistic space.⁶⁸ It was geographical space with inhabitants lacking in historical time. The inhabitants, being primitive and irrational, lacked human agency. They could not be recognised as having sovereignty over the territory they occupied. At most, they were occupying the space symbolically until the terms of their occupation were defined by the colonisers as amounting at most to a ‘mere right of occupancy’ which did not extend to ‘original free existence’ and ‘territorial integrity’.⁶⁹

Without these ontological premises, the colonisation of lands far from Europe and, in some instances, the extermination of humanity that occupied those lands, could not have proceeded in the sure-footed manner it did complete with juridical ‘authority’. The 1823 decision of the Supreme Court of the United States in *Johnson v M’Intosh* is explicable as an outgrowth of a European doctrine of discovery.⁷⁰ The case was decided on the juridical premise that a European colonial state, which is an extension of a European discovering nation, gains ‘radical title’ (sovereignty) through discovery of new lands and that the title, perforce, is superior and sufficient to extinguish the ‘right of occupancy’ of the indigenous inhabitants.⁷¹ The concept of radical title, as developed by the conquering nations, conferred on the discovering nation and its representative authority at the locale a right to expropriate land without compensating the indigenous inhabitants and to acquire exclusive ownership. It extinguished any claim to sovereignty and independence by the indigenous inhabitants.

In the final analysis, colonisation and the establishment of a colonial state with imaginary state sovereignty were predicated on a sense of the ‘right’ which stood for might. It was the right of European powers to exercise violence, if necessary, in order to dominate and appropriate geographical space.⁷² Use of violence, or the threat thereof, undergirded the concept of ‘right’ precisely because ‘right’ was a self-serving fiction. ‘Right’ stood on a void as a juridical fable, save for the ‘right of conquest’ through use of violence.⁷³ ‘Right’, as Mbembe highlights, was the precise opposite of the liberal model of ‘debate and discussion’ that would otherwise have been required by the discourse of Enlightenment.⁷⁴

68 McClintock (n 50 above) 40-42.

69 Greenberg (n 52 above), citing Newcomb (n 52 above) xxi.

70 *Johnson v M’Intosh* 21 US (8 Wheat) 543 (1823).

71 *Johnson v M’Intosh* (n 70 above) 574.

72 Mbembe (n 39 above) 25.

73 As above.

74 As above.

Enlightenment discourses could be circumvented with equanimity by simply classifying the objects of power and violence as 'natives' or tribespeople.⁷⁵ 'Natives' were those peoples without a history and in a state of nature. Necessarily, they were lacking in rationality or agency such that debate and discussion were quite inappropriate. The coloniser, if so disposed, could be simultaneously a fortune hunter, judge, jury and arbitrary executioner.

'Right' drew its (im)moral resource from a sense of messianic duty – taking up the 'white man's burden',⁷⁶ – to bring civilisation to those who needed it most. In this sense, it would have been folly for the intended beneficiaries to resist civilisational benevolence and modernity. Though not quite war, the civilisational mission mimicked and anticipated war. As Enrique Dussel put it, the killing of persons who were the object of colonisation was from the coloniser's perspective a 'holocaust of a salvific sacrifice' which was entirely justifiable to overcome 'barbarism'.⁷⁷ Those burdened with the duty to bring civilisation would be absolved for killing those standing in the way because they were motivated by a higher purpose – the salvation of the victims. It is the natives who were both the cause and effect of the white man's burden.⁷⁸ The racial hierarchisation and brutishness that was employed in the civilising mission was a necessity. In this sense, 'right' was a normative ideology for ameliorating 'native' backwardness.⁷⁹

Ultimately, 'right' in colonial rationality was *cursus solitus naturae*. It was an adapted truth governed solely by its own laws so as to function autonomously or to acquire the status of constitutional autochthony within colonial jurisprudence. One of its derivative laws was that violence could be summoned as a regular resource for not only establishing the colonial state (founding violence) but also for maintaining it.⁸⁰ Violence

75 M Mamdani 'The social basis of constitutionalism in Africa' (1990) 28 *Journal of Modern African Studies* 359 372-373; M Mamdani *Define and rule: Native as political identity* (2012); Mbembe (n 39 above) 27. See the discussion in ch 6, secs 3 and 4 elaborating on the normative implications of constructing African peoples as 'natives' and tribespeople.

76 R Kipling 'White man's burden', a poem (1899) in *Rudyard Kipling's verse: Definitive edition* (1929).

77 E Dussel *The invention of the Americas: Eclipse of 'the Other' and the myth of modernity* trans MD Barber (1995) 64 136-137, cited in L Lange 'Burnt offerings to rationality: A feminist reading of the construction of indigenous peoples in Dussel's theory of modernity' in LM Alcoff & E Mendieta (eds) *Thinking from the underside of history: Enrique Dussel's philosophy of liberation* (2000) 135 at 140.

78 Bhabha (n 4 above) 35.

79 As above.

80 Mbembe (n 39 above) 25.

became embedded in colonial rationality as part of the ‘order of things’ such that it did not require special authority.⁸¹ Even the most ordinary of colonial situations could be transacted through violence of genocidal proportions.

Though the term ‘genocide’ acquired its juridical recognition under international law with the adoption of the Genocide Convention in the aftermath of the Second World War and the genocide of European Jews,⁸² Australian Aborigines, the Khoisan, Herero, Nama and Native Americans, for example, had long experienced it at the hands of European colonists.⁸³ The epistemological difference, however, is that when practised against ‘barbarous tribes’ and ‘natives’, genocide could be Europeanised, sanitised and localised so that it could be re-described as military action and a proportionate response to the barbarous circumstances colonists were up against in their valiant and benevolent efforts to bring civilisation.⁸⁴

The colonial situation provided ample room for the use of gratuitous or cathartic violence merely to release colonial aggression. Colonial violence as banality can be gleaned, for example, from letters written by Weston Jarvis, a volunteer in Cecil Rhodes’ settler-army, in the course of the founding of Rhodesia. In letters to his family in England between April and May 1896, using the unequivocal parlance of exterminatory violence, Jarvis shares plans for the implementation of what would have been quite ordinary founding violence:

81 M Foucault *The order of things: An archaeology of human sciences* (1994).

82 Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, adopted 9 December 1948, 78 UNTS 276, entered into force 12 January 1951.

83 For commentaries on genocide in respect of Australian Aborigines, the Khoisan, Nama, and Native Americans, see respectively AD Moses (ed) *Genocide and settler society: Frontier violence and stolen indigenous children in Australian history* (2004) (on Australian Aborigines); M Adhikari *The anatomy of a South African genocide: The extermination of the Cape San peoples* (2010); JM de Prada-Samper ‘The forgotten killing fields: “San” genocide and Louis Anthing’s mission to Bushmanland, 1862–1863’ (2012) 57 *Historia* 172-187 (on the Khoisan); D Olusoga & CW Erichsen *The Kaiser’s holocaust: Germany’s forgotten genocide* (2010) (on the Herero and the Nama); D Stannard *American holocaust: The conquest of the New World* (1992) (on Native Americans).

84 AD Moses ‘Conceptual blockages and definitional dilemmas in the “Racial Century”’: Genocides of indigenous peoples and the holocaust’ (2002) 36 *Patterns of Prejudice* 7; DO Pendas ‘“The magical scent of the savage”: Colonial violence, the crisis of civilization, and the origins of the legalist paradigm of war’ (2007) 30 *Boston College International and Comparative Law Review* 29 at 47-48; P Wolfe ‘Settler colonialism and the elimination of the native’ (2006) 8 *Journal of Genocide Research* 387.

I hope the natives will be pretty well exterminated. There are 5500 niggers in this district and ... our plan of campaign will probably be to proceed against this lot and wipe them out, then move towards Bulawayo wiping out every nigger and every kraal we can find ... you can be sure that there will be no quarter and everything black will have to die, for our men's blood is fairly up.⁸⁵

The representations of Africanness in colonial discourses came out of the crucible of colonialism with its linguistic systems, juridical power and unabashed violence that both produced and represented African subjects. In order to colonise Africa because it had colonisable subjects, Europe had first to produce the prospective colonial African subjects. In a Foucauldian sense this double act – representation on the one hand but *prior* production of the subject on the other – means that what was at stake is not representation but purposeful and synergic reproduction of objects of colonial power in a regulatory system.

Thus, the representation of African people in colonial discourses, especially those generated by the colonial state, should be understood largely as *re*production of colonial subjects in ways that inscribed and reinforced sovereign power in the political economy. Representation was extended only to that which could coexist with, rather than call into question, the colonial project. The colonial state could only acknowledge that which it had previously formed and defined and subsequently reproduced to fit its own requirements. It is teleological representation that proceeded along an axis of domination, a representation informed by conscious legitimising and exclusion in order to regulate the life of the colonised and, more crucially, to maximally exploit human and material resources for the benefit of the colonising metropolis in Europe and colonists.⁸⁶

From a temporal perspective, the naming of Africa and Africans took clearer and more lasting shape as part of the colonisation that took place when Europe was establishing a geopolitical order in which it had already defined or was defining itself as modern and the centre of history, not least

85 Quoted in B Kiernan 'From Irish famine to Congo reform: Nineteenth-century roots of international human rights law' in R Provost & P Akhavan (eds) *Confronting genocide* (2011) 13 at 42; also quoted in S Howe *Empire: A very short introduction* (2002) 95-96; P Brendon *Decline and fall of the British Empire* (2010) 571.

86 J Butler *Gender trouble: Feminism and the subversion of identity* (1999) xiv-xv. *Gender trouble* was originally published in 1990.

on account of transitioning from the Renaissance to the Enlightenment.⁸⁷ Africa and Africans became, in the end, sites of Europe's moment of 'triumphant self-definition of modernity'.⁸⁸ Africa and Africans were constructed as recipients of the globalisation of European historical time in which the discourse of European modernity was on a grand unstoppable march, including epochal transformation of notions of differences between human communities that were once seen as geographical but could now be understood as simply differences in arriving at history. To borrow from Walter D. Mignolo, in this transformed discourse there was no longer room for 'coevalness' in the difference between modernity and tradition as to be modern now meant 'to be located in historical time' with Europe, more particularly Western Europe, serving as the temporal centre.⁸⁹ The differences were transformed into differences between the 'rational' and the 'irrational', 'logical' and 'pre-logical', 'reflective' and 'pre-reflective' which, in turn, called for distinctions between what is 'human' and 'sub-human' to mark the great divide between the 'civilised' and 'uncivilised'.⁹⁰

From Hall's identitarian perspective the naming of Africa and Africans can be understood as a site of European historical, cultural, religious, racial and hierarchical enunciation; a site for the suturing of hierarchised European modernity in which the re-articulation of whiteness would ultimately become the more permanent artefact.⁹¹ Therefore, modernity was dialectically constituted in a relationship with the colonial world.⁹² Indeed, Mbembe makes the point that Africa has served as a signifier for the West: as a metaphor through which the West develops its self-image and enunciates what it is not.⁹³

87 W Mignolo 'The enduring enchantment (or the epistemic privilege of modernity and where to go from here)' (2002) 101 *South Atlantic Quarterly* 927 at 933-934; Quijano (n 48 above) 546-547.

88 Mignolo (n 87 above) 939.

89 Mignolo (n 87 above) 933.

90 Mignolo (n 87 above) 936; DA Masolo *African philosophy in search of identity* (1994) 1, who expresses the polarity as logocentrism (for the Europeans) and emotivism (for the Africans); B Hallen *A short history of African philosophy* (2002) 17; B Bujo *The foundations of an African ethic: Beyond the universal claims of Western morality* (2011) 10.

91 On Hall's perspective, see the discussion in ch 2 of this book; Mignolo (n 87 above) 934.

92 Lange (n 77 above) 136.

93 Mbembe (n 39 above) 2.

3.2 Africa as land of cultural otherness: A leaf from Mudimbe's *The invention of Africa*

Mudimbe's book, *The invention of Africa*, is groundbreaking work.⁹⁴ He uses Foucauldian analysis to reveal Africa as a coherent system of knowledge – an archaeology – assembled from a colonising structure ensconced in oppositional knowledges that teleologically codified African normative cultural inferiority and created new social and historical identities for Africans in ways that projected Western desires. The assemblage of knowledges drew upon the European imperial project, Western philosophy and its Eurocentric gaze, colonial discourses, functionalist anthropological taxonomies and Christian missiological praxis, which were underwritten by discrepant power. Collectively, the knowledges produced a self-serving Africa, an Africa and Africans whose Cartesian alterity unpardonably deviated from the Western paradigm of history.⁹⁵

In terms of comprehending the historical architecture of Africanness, Mudimbe's seminal contribution lies, in part, in the discursive mapping of the normative construction of Africanness in colonial discourses. His work can be read as a dialectical discourse of identity in which Mudimbe analyses for us the politics of otherness and its specific relation to the historical category of African.⁹⁶ Of the making of Africanness in colonial discourses, Mudimbe says:

In fact, from a more general historical frame, one can observe three complementary genres of 'speeches' contributing to the invention of a primitive Africa: the exotic text on savages, represented by travelers' reports; the philosophical interpretations about a hierarchy of civilizations; and the anthropological search for primitiveness. The complementarity of these speeches is obvious. It is perceived as a unity in the Western consciousness. The exotic text dominates in the seventeenth century. In the eighteenth century, it complements Enlightenment classifications of peoples and civilization. In the nineteenth century, an ideology of conquest appears in

94 Mudimbe (n 1 above).

95 Mudimbe (n 1 above) 190; A Apter 'Review of VY Mudimbe *The invention of Africa: Gnosis, philosophy, and the order of knowledge*' (1991) 21 *Journal of Religion in Africa* Reviews' 172; E Taylor 'The impact of *The invention of Africa* and *In my father's house* on African studies' (2005) unpublished, www.oocities.org/edgartaylor3/4-Mudimbe_Appiah.doc (accessed 30 November 2015); OP Okechukwu 'Mudimbe on the nature of knowledge of African culture: A review of the self and the other' (2014), <https://philpapers.org/archive/OKEMOT.pdf> (accessed 30 November 2015).

96 DA Masolo 'An archaeology of African knowledge: A discussion of VY Mudimbe' (1991) 14 *Callaloo* 998 at 1000.

explorers' sagas, anthropologists' theories, and the implementation of colonial policy. However, until the beginning of the scramble for Africa, historical distinctions of genres can only be relative.⁹⁷

In this passage Mudimbe is deconstructing the trajectory of the colonial normative gaze on what, ultimately, would be thoroughly raced and inferiorised Africans. The gaze went through a purposeful transformation, eventually congealing in an ideology of otherness which gave imperial licence to colonisation and subjugation. In the transformed gaze the concept of 'primitiveness', as etymologically meaning 'originary', was transformed into a discovery of innately culturally inferior people: a 'savage' people normatively in need of rescue and civilisation.⁹⁸ The colonial gaze, which was built on a colonising, dichotomous structure, represents the first experience of large-scale globalisation on the continent. It was a gaze culturally driven by a notion of 'universal civilisation' whose locus was indisputably Europe as maker of world history.⁹⁹

The colonising structure spoke to an epistemological model then functioning in the West (and in many ways still is), which renounced all that was African even if the model was *external* to Africans. This episteme, which Engelbert Mveng, a theologian, described as epitomising 'anthropological poverty', used inferiorisation and fetishisation to unequivocally condemn *everything* to do with the being of Africans – their identities, physical appearances, histories, cultures, ethnicities, spiritualities, creativity and voice.¹⁰⁰ In *The wretched of the earth*, Fanon wrote:

Colonialism is not simply content to impose its rule upon the present and the future of a dominated country. Colonialism is not satisfied merely with holding a people in its grip and emptying the native's brain of all form and content. By a kind of perverted logic, it turns to the past of the oppressed people, and distorts, disfigures and destroys it.¹⁰¹

97 Mudimbe (n 1 above) 69.

98 Mudimbe (n 1 above) 17.

99 Mudimbe (n 1 above) 4; P Ricoeur *History and truth* (1965) 277.

100 E Mveng 'Third World theology – What theology? What Third World? Evaluation by an African delegate' in V Fabella & S Torres (eds) *Irruption of the Third World: Challenge to theology* (1983) 220; Mudimbe (n 1 above) 41; Mbembe (n 39 above) 1-3; Fanon *Black skin, white masks* (n 18 above) 109-110; F Fanon *The wretched of the earth* (1967) 169.

101 Fanon (n 100 above) 169.

Echoing Mveng and Fanon, Wynter highlights that colonial difference meant much more than merely disregarding 'native' gnosis.¹⁰² It was an epistemological disregard of the human being, of the mode of being of black Africans.¹⁰³ This disregard created space for an epochal *re*-description of Africa as 'primordial chaos' and Africans as the 'acme of the savage'.¹⁰⁴

Whereas prior to colonisation, what was different between European culture and the cultures European explorers and travellers perceived as 'exotic', the colonial project called for a transformed discourse with unmistakable predatory intentions. African difference would no longer be neutral difference but thoroughly debased difference using language and classificatory systems that come with the authority of being part of a dominant discourse.¹⁰⁵ At a cultural level African difference was rendered as not just difference but 'discovery' of peoples exhibiting absolute, wild and oppositional binary difference that had to be tamed and domesticated. African difference called for the unequivocal establishment of a violent hierarchy between European civilisation and African civilisational deficit, as is apparent, for example, in the attempt by missionaries to empty African religions of all pneumatological meaning through a Manichean dualism built around 'African' as a thoroughly 'spoiled' cultural identity.¹⁰⁶

3.2.1 Christianity and the production of African spiritual alterity

In a complicit sense Christianity mimicked the violence of colonial power.¹⁰⁷ It came already interimbriated with and invested in the European colonising structure, functioning as it did within the paradigm of a hierarchised dichotomy between modernity and tradition in which Europe belonged to the former and Africa to the latter.¹⁰⁸ The Christology that colonisers exported to Africa would have been developed, in the first place, to give spiritual meaning to Christians in the West at a time of modernity. It was a Christology intertwined with the cultural influences of

102 Wynter (n 40 above) 265-266, citing J Pandian *Anthropology and the Western tradition: Towards an authentic anthropology* (1985).

103 As above.

104 Mbembe (n 39 above) 3; Wynter (n 40 above) 266.

105 Mbembe (n 39 above) 5; Masolo (n 90 above) 3.

106 Goffman (n 16 above).

107 Mudimbe (n 1 above) 52.

108 Mignolo (n 88 above) 933-935.

the Industrial Revolution and Enlightenment.¹⁰⁹ The missiological effort to Christianise Africans went hand in hand with a subjugating colonial power, serving to facilitate the political effort to establish European sovereignty over ‘newly-discovered’ territories by rendering ‘natives’ pliable to subjugation. As a theology of conversion, Christianity set itself the task of bringing light to ‘dark’ Africa. Ideologically, like the colonial project, Christianity manifested as a nihilistic dogma in its incorrigible intolerance of African difference.¹¹⁰ It arrived on African shores already packaged in a reductionist orthodox form.¹¹¹ Its theology was superiorised. It spoke a condescending language of bourgeois European culture which derided African lifeworlds, promising in their place transformative virtues and ultimately salvation, putting *light* where there was *darkness*. Constanzo Cagnolo, a Catholic missionary in colonial Kenya, spoke more as a colonist and civilisational crusader and less as a cleric when he cast his mission as ‘an obligation on us civilized peoples to put these fantasies to flight and to lighten their darkness with the sun of justice and the stars of civilization’.¹¹²

Fabien Eboussi-Boulaga sums up Christian missiological treatment of African spiritualisms as characterised by the language of derision and systematic refutation, valorisation of the historical coherence and transformative nature of the Christian faith, Christian orthodoxy so that Christianity becomes the only way to the Truth, and the requirement of conformity to Christian dogma. Enyi Udoh, in his Christological discourse, points to the highhandedness of Christian missiology, in which Christ was introduced to African people ‘as a forceful, impatient and

109 A Mekonnen ‘Jesus of Africa: Voices of contemporary African Christology’. A review of DB Stinton *Jesus of Africa: Voices of contemporary African Christology* (2004), <http://www.denverseminary.edu/article/jesus-of-africa-voices-of-contemporary-african-christology> (accessed 30 November 2015).

110 Mudimbe (n 1 above) 44-64. The arguments here extend, by implication, to Islamic conversion on the African continent. The spread of Islam on the African continent was preceded by the Arab slave trade. Islam also operated with a racial optic in which black embodiment was at the nadir: Jennings (n 56 above) 36-37, citing B Lewis *Race and slavery in the Middle East: An historical inquiry* (1990); JH Sweet ‘The Iberian roots of American racist thought’ (1997) *William and Mary Quarterly* 143 at 145-150; Ibn Khaldūn *The Muqaddimah: An introduction to history* trans F Rosenthal (2005) 117.

111 F Eboussi-Boulaga *Christianisme sans fétiche. Révélation et domination* (1981), trans RR Barr as *Christianity without fetishes: Revelation and domination* (1984).

112 C Cagnolo *The Agikuyu: Their customs, traditions and folklore* (1930) 27, cited in N Ndung’u ‘Towards the recovery of African identity’ in MN Getui & EA Obeng (eds) *Theology of reconstruction: Exploratory essays* (2003) 258 at 260.

unfriendly tyrant'.¹¹³ The missiology produced an alienating Christ: a Christ who resolutely invalidated the beliefs, history and institutions of the African people in order to exert Europeanised Christological authority.¹¹⁴

Against this colonising Christian missiological backdrop, African spiritualisms, which were an integral part of the belief systems of Africans, were pushed aside as they could not be packaged into a European epistemology of religion, especially as they were claimed without recourse to any written scriptures.¹¹⁵ In the encounter with a religion that was presented as the inheritor of Greek reason and a sequel to Judaic revelation, the vernacular traditions of African spiritualisms failed to muster the qualities of rational religiosity and written scriptures.¹¹⁶ In consequence, African gods were not merely reduced to the status of mythologies or infinitely pagan gods standing in opposition to an omnipotent Christian God.¹¹⁷ Christian missiology demanded that the gods be re-described as fetishes – the representations of Satan – and African spirits as demonic spirits. More than merely derisive, Christianity was an epistemicidal discourse in its relationship with African spiritualisms.¹¹⁸ Its theology spoke a parsimonious language of systematic and absolute refutation of African pneumatologies.¹¹⁹ In line with the requirement to convert, it demanded absolute renunciation of 'heathen' spiritualisms under European supervision. Christian missiology thus contributed immeasurably to a colonial archive in which Africans were transacted through a Caliban-type syndromic index of 'paganism, nakedness and cannibalism' that corroborated the incommensurability of the equal humanity of Africans.¹²⁰

113 EB Udoh *Guest Christology: An interpretive view of the Christological problem in Africa* (1988) 64, cited in DB Stinton *Jesus of Africa: Voices of contemporary African Christology* (2004) 10.

114 As above.

115 EC Ekeke 'African traditional religion: A philosophical and conceptual analysis' (2011) 22 *Lumina* 1 at 2.

116 Ebousi-Boulaga (n 111 above) 35.

117 Mudimbe (n 1 above) 51. I have used the plural for African deities. However, it is important to note that African spiritual practices were (and still are) diverse, with some exhibiting polytheism and others monotheism depending on location. Furthermore, it is important not to conflate ancestral spirits with deities: IM Zvarevashe 'Shona (Bantu) traditional religion' (1980) 22 *African Ecclesial Review* 294 at 295.

118 B de Sousa Santos *Epistemologies of the South: Justice against epistemicide* (2014).

119 Ekeke (n 115 above) 8; K Gyekye *African cultural values: An introduction* (1996) 7.

120 Mudimbe (n 1 above) 49, citing D Hammond & A Jablow *The myth of Africa* (1977) 36-37; Brantlinger (n 41 above) 184-185.

3.2.2 *Anthropology and the production of African cultural alterity*

In juxtaposition to Christianity, anthropology is a field in which African lifeworlds were emptied of all meaning in the service of the colonising structure. The anthropology practised on sub-Saharan Africans largely aligned itself with a discourse anchored in evolutionary assumptions that posited a radical difference between the ‘West’ and ‘primitives’.¹²¹ This difference, as with the overarching colonial discourses, translated into a grand dichotomy between intellectual, spiritual reasoning and rational (logical), civilised reasoning on the one hand and irrational (pre-logical), uncivilised reasoning on the other.¹²² To the lesser half of the dichotomy European anthropological discourses assigned not just Africans or Negroes, but other peoples including ‘American Indians, Australian Blackfellows, Chinese, Melanesians, and Polynesians’.¹²³ The dichotomy was purposeful. It served the colonial project by giving legitimacy to the notion of the ‘white man’s burden’; the duty of Europeans to civilise Africans and uplift them according to their ‘natural’, meaning racial capabilities.¹²⁴ In civilisational reasoning, as Mudimbe notes, the dichotomy was also influential in producing a colonial library to give authenticity to complementary ‘primitive philosophy’.¹²⁵ It is a genre of philosophy which mimicked Darwinian evolutionary science and the reversal of time in anachronistic space. It purported to express a world in which Africans were incapable of articulating discursive verbal statements – the universal grammar of abstract thought – precisely because their worldview, in essence, was symbolic and ritualistic.¹²⁶

The seminal contribution of Mudimbe’s work in *The invention of Africa* lies in his effort to deconstruct a deliberately constructed dichotomy, laying bare its cultural imperialistic provenance, as well as in his effort to

121 Mudimbe (n 1 above) 135-136, citing the works of French anthropologist, L Lévy-Bruhl, including *Les fonctions mentales dans les sociétés inférieures* (translated as *The mental functions in lower societies*) (1910); *La mentalité primitive* (translated as *The primitive mentality*) (1922).

122 Mignolo (n 87 above) 936; Masolo (n 90 above) 1; Hallen (n 90 above) 17; Bujo (n 90 above) 10.

123 Mudimbe (n 1 above) 136, citing EE Pritchard *Theories of primitive religion* (1980) 88.

124 A Apter ‘Africa, empire and anthropology: A philological exploration of anthropology’s heart of darkness’ (1999) 28 *Annual Review of Anthropology* 577 at 581.

125 Mudimbe (n 1 above) 136. Lévy-Bruhl (n 121 above) contributed considerably to the archive of primitive philosophy. Other examples of literature on primitive philosophy include JA Correia ‘Vocables philosophiques et religieux de peuples Ibo’ (translated as ‘Philosophical and religious word marks of Ibo peoples’) (1925) 1 *Bibliotheca Ethnologica Linguistica Africa*; V Brelsford *Primitive philosophy* (1935); V Brelsford ‘Philosophy of the savage’ (1938) 15 *Nada* 62.

126 Hallen (n 90 above) 14.

construct, however incomplete or contestable, a methodological framework for assembling an African *gnosis* through restructured anthropological methodologies.¹²⁷ Mudimbe's attempt at constructing a universal method for African knowledge systems – an African 'order of things' with its own rationality – is mainly through a critique of Eurocentric anthropology as one of the main archives that was used to acquire knowledge about Africans. In welcoming Mudimbe's contribution, it is also important to highlight at the outset that there are reductionist pitfalls in any attempt to search for an 'authentic' African episteme.¹²⁸

As I argued in Chapter 2, a search for authenticity has its place in building a sense of wholeness for a social group. An ever-present pitfall, however, is that a backward-looking approach might incline us towards recovering a narrated past through an ahistorical approach that forces us to reduce the heterogeneity of African cultures to a common denominator in search of an African *Weltanschauung*. If the search for authentic African rationality requires recovering a past, it would be counterproductive precisely because it takes us back to culturally over-determined Africans. It risks essentialising and homogenising Africanness and thus falling foul of Hall's anti-foundational, transformative approach.¹²⁹

An African *Weltanschauung* requires us to imagine Africanness as disproportionately formed along the axis of similarity and continuity, at the exclusion of the axis of difference and rupture.¹³⁰ Even allowing for the possibility of a homogeneous African country, the fact remains that no two African countries can ever be quite the same. Coming to share the same historical, economic and social histories would remain problematic as

127 I say 'incomplete' because the main criticism of Mudimbe's *The invention of Africa* here is that although he teases out the possibility of an alternative method to the Western paradigm for ordering knowledge about Africa – a new African episteme capable of generating universal knowledge and thus transforming the methods and theories we use for human sciences – in the end Mudimbe falls short of providing its substance save in a very general sense. As Jules-Rosette and other sympathetic critics observe, readers are still left in search of method: B Jules-Rosette 'Speaking about hidden times: The anthropology of VY Mudimbe' (1991) 14 *Callaloo* 944 at 953; Masolo (n 96 above). I say 'contestable' because in critiquing a reductionist Western paradigm of knowledge, as I argue in this chapter, Mudimbe is also in danger of substituting one reductionist discourse with another.

128 Apter (n 95 above) 173-174; Apter (n 124 above) 583; 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 5.

129 On Hall's approach to identity, see ch 2 of this book.

130 Hall 'Cultural identity and diaspora' (n 2 above) 226. See the discussion in ch 2, sec 4.2 of this book.

African countries were impacted by colonialism in similar but also radically different ways. We are best served by a remedial approach which takes into account not just our similarities but also our differences: what Hall calls connectedness through the 'doubleness of similarities and differences'.¹³¹

A difficulty with Mudimbe's thesis is that it appears to assume the possibility of discovering an internally uncontested African episteme. The thesis appears to want us to return to an 'unmarked authentic origin': 'a pre-text', but without the tools for anticipating indeterminacy and conflict.¹³² It is not clear how a Mudimbean search for an authentic African episteme would respond to the discovery of conflict *within* and *between* African cultures and what deliberative resources Mudimbe would use to resolve differences without flattening them out.¹³³ Thus, a methodology for resolving inter- and intracultural difference is needed.¹³⁴ It can be asked whether the search for an African episteme is not perilously located in the politics of retrieval of an old Africa that is no longer there, in the sense meant by Hall.¹³⁵

Like all cultures, African cultures are subject to decentring, reflexivity and pluralisation.¹³⁶ To suggest otherwise would be to give validity to the notion of African culture as 'traditional' as opposed to 'modern' in the sense portrayed in colonial discourses. Barry Hallen reminds us that, when African culture has been described as 'traditional' in Western anthropological and religious studies, it has meant not just a culture that is inherited from the past.¹³⁷ It has meant a culture that is incapable of changing in the present so as to be normatively passed on in the same form to the future.¹³⁸ Kwame Gyekye argues that the time has passed when this dichotomy can be used to produce a typology of an African society or culture.¹³⁹ Like other cultures, African cultures have elements not just of the past and the present but also of other cultures.

131 Hall 'Cultural identity and diaspora' (n 2 above) 227.

132 HK Bhabha 'Culture's in-between' in S Hall & P du Gay (eds) *Questions of cultural identity* (1996) 53 at 56.

133 On conflict within and among cultures I am drawing from Seyla Benhabib's work in a response to a critique of her cultural theoretical work: S Benhabib 'The "claims" of culture properly interpreted: Response to Nikolas Kompridis' (2006) 34 *Political Theory* 383 at 384.

134 In ch 8, focusing on sexuality identifications, I develop a methodology for resolving differences within and between cultures.

135 S Hall 'Cultural identity and diaspora' (n 2 above) 232. See also the discussion in ch 2, sec 4 of this book.

136 Benhabib (n 133 above) 387.

137 Hallen (n 90 above) 17.

138 As above.

My argument, therefore, is that an African episteme should, above all, address the present and be historically situated. If we wish to address the African present in a continent that is radically changed from its past, it is no longer possible to retrieve a pure African episteme or to construct an African episteme at the exclusion of its Western counterpart as the two have become interimbricated. Imagining a pure African epistemology or, for that matter, a pure Western epistemology produces a fallacy. In Seyla Benhabib's words, we have become an 'infinite community of conversation' and a 'community of global interdependence'.¹⁴⁰ An African episteme, 'even in the process of its reconstitution' cannot divest itself of the temporal present with its historical entanglements, ambivalences and cross-cultural hybridity.¹⁴¹

4 Mudimbe's contribution to dialogic Africanness

Leaving aside the risks that come with any attempt at searching for an authentic African episteme, it is possible to argue that the broad methodological path that Mudimbe puts at our disposal, including the accent it places on interrogating Western epistemological ethnocentrism in ways that heuristically excavate Foucauldian knowledge and power relations, is something we ought to appropriate to enhance inclusive equality. Mudimbe's methodology is rooted in the capacity to see equality in difference. For this reason it fits in well with how we should think about inclusive equality as equality democratically situated in Young's 'heterogeneous public sphere'.¹⁴² For Mudimbe, the bourgeois anthropology that came out of the visions of the Enlightenment has the same blind spot as Uncle Theo's lifeworld:¹⁴³ it operated in conditions of epistemological impossibility which assumed that the language of the observer and his/her forms of thought represent how the universe is constituted.¹⁴⁴ This assumption precluded eliciting relational cultural difference. Its methodology could only yield polarities between self and

139 K Gyekye *Tradition and modernity: Philosophical reflections on the African experience* (1997) 279.

140 S Benhabib 'Cultural complexity, moral independence, and global dialogical community' in Nussbaum & Glover (n 5 above) 250-252.

141 Bhabha 'Culture's in-between' (n 132 above) 56.

142 Young (n 57 above) 96-121; see discussion in ch 2, sec 2 and ch 8, sec 4.

143 I Murdoch *The nice and the good* (1969) 158-159, cited in EV Spelman *Inessential woman: The problem of exclusion in feminist thought* (1988) 1-4; see discussion in ch 1, sec 1 of this book.

144 M Jackson *Essays in existential anthropology* (2013) xii; Apter (n 124 above) 579.

other, observer and observed, body and mind, reason and emotion.¹⁴⁵ Consequently, it was incapable of any exploration of the dialectics between these polarities.¹⁴⁶

The discipline of anthropology entered Africa at the height of European imperial domination. Wittingly or unwittingly, it served as an instrument of the colonial project.¹⁴⁷ It could not see 'manyness' and had an assured *theocratic* capacity for misrecognising difference.¹⁴⁸ In a Foucauldian sense, anthropology became a sign which stood for something 'more'.¹⁴⁹ It served less as a medium for fostering respectful understanding of the African world and more as a discursive sign of colonial domination and the nativisation of African peoples.¹⁵⁰ Although Mudimbe does not explicitly use the language of equality, implicitly he is already fully invested in an ethic of inclusive equality in which the particularities of African speeches are deepened and amplified. This is in order to render them audible rather than reified. Mudimbe's ultimate point is that African speeches are part of the universal. They utter a conception of the universal in horizontal, non-hierarchical co-existence with other speeches.

Mudimbe's critique of the discipline of anthropology and his argument that anthropology participated in the colonisation of Africa are not, in themselves, novel.¹⁵¹ The novelty in Mudimbe's work lies in his going much further than merely suggesting complicity by anthropology in the colonial enterprise. His argument rests not so much on anthropology's complicity as a conscious tool of the colonial project, but on its cognitive

145 Jackson (n 144 above) xii.

146 As above.

147 M Herzfeld 'The absent presence: Discourses of crypto-colonialism' (2002) 101 *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 899.

148 See ch 1, sec 2.

149 M Foucault *The archaeology of knowledge* (n 2 above) 49.

150 Apter (n 124 above) 579.

151 Before Mudimbe's work, other scholars had critically appraised the participation of anthropologists in the colonial project. Apter provides an overview of the critical scholarship: Apter (n 124 above) 579-583. Some anthropologists have been described as 'reluctant imperialists' in that they opposed colonial authority and policy: Apter (n 124 above) 579, citing T Asad (ed) *Anthropology and the colonial encounter* (1973). Others have been cast 'willing co-conspirators': Apter (n 124 above) 579, citing a host of commentaries, including JC Faris 'Pax Britannica and the Sudan: SF Nadel' in Asad *Anthropology and the colonial encounter* 153-170; G Leclerc *Anthropologie et colonialisme* (translated as *Anthropology and colonialism*) (1973). The complicity of anthropologists in the colonial project is a contested claim: JW Burton 'Representing Africa: Colonial anthropology revisited' (1992) 27 *Journal of Asian and African Studies* 181.

failure. Mudimbe's focus is on implicating as well as repairing African epistemological disenfranchisement, or what Boaventura de Sousa Santos calls 'cognitive injustice', to denote the failure to recognise different ways of knowing by which people that are different regulate their lives and assign meaning to them.¹⁵²

Anthropology's hand in colonisation was mainly because its methods, touted as scientific, were sufficiently monochromatic to assure the epistemicide of an African gnosis through epistemological determinism.¹⁵³ Archie Mafeje puts it differently when he observes that the intellectual effort of anthropologists was of service to colonialism not because of a naked conspiracy or collusion, but because the ontology of its thought categories was shared by the colonising authorities.¹⁵⁴ Anthropology was a bourgeois enterprise in the colonies.¹⁵⁵ In this sense anthropology was not different from the other prevailing social sciences in the metropolis, which were also products of a functionalist Enlightenment and intrinsically allied with imperialism and its project of investing Africa and Africans with pathological alterity and lack.¹⁵⁶ Mudimbe makes the point that Western anthropological methods did not require anthropologists to make sense of the African world.¹⁵⁷ The methods were founded on 'a series of binary oppositions which contrasted the virtues of European civilisation with their supposed absence from Africa'.¹⁵⁸ The methodological grid of analysis and generalisation depended on a Western historical experience in the same way as that used by missionaries.¹⁵⁹

An important critique in Mudimbe's work is his observation that the crystallisation of a particular historical image of Africa as quintessential civilisational deficit was garnered through a symbiosis between the colonial project and an anthropologically reified definition of *primitive* which justified conquest and subjugation.¹⁶⁰ Anthropological methods were tethered to evolutionary and functionalist paradigms of culture which

152 De Sousa Santos (n 118 above).

153 Mudimbe (n 1 above) 72-73.

154 A Mafeje 'The problem of anthropology in historical perspective: An inquiry into the growth of the social sciences' (1976) 10 *Canadian Journal of African Studies* 307 at 318.

155 Mafeje (n 154 above) 317.

156 Mafeje (n 154 above) 317-318; Zeleza (n 21 above) 16.

157 Mudimbe (n 1 above) 72-73.

158 Mudimbe (n 1 above) 64, quoting W MacGaffey 'African ideology and belief: A survey' (1981) 24 *African Studies Review* 227 at 236.

159 Mudimbe (n 1 above) 66.

160 Mudimbe (n 1 above) 17.

served as surrogates of Darwin's evolution of species.¹⁶¹ The methods used to understand African cultures were already tied to assumptions about the biological and cultural superiority of Europeans. In this paradigm, African speech, which belonged to a different linguistic system, had first to be translated by Europeans (not Africans) in order to render it intelligible to themselves. We can surmise therefore that linguistic inadequacies, on their own, were apt to incline European investigators towards slogans and dogmatic assertions in place of nuance.¹⁶² The outcome would then be not representation but the teleological construction of Africans.

What is missing from colonial anthropology, to borrow from Mafeje, is the presence of 'authentic' interlocutors.¹⁶³ 'Authentic' does not imply that anthropologists need to be indigenes but that in order to represent the peoples they study they need first to develop a capacity and inclination to decode local vernaculars and encode into anthropology local ontologies and modes of comprehension.¹⁶⁴ Colonial anthropology and its *theocratic* disposition did not take local knowledge as a reference point, but instead relied on Enlightenment 'universal' typologies. To use the language of feminism, it produced a colonial library about Africans which was manifestly lacking in 'standpoint epistemology'.¹⁶⁵ Even in its well-intentioned or benevolent moments, colonial anthropology constituted speech that was not uttered *by* Africans. Rather, it was speech uttered *for* Africans, denying their subjectivities. It was inherently incapable of mustering a deeper grammar so as to speak more meaningfully about African lifeworlds. Instead, it 'undid' Africans and saw only one side of them – the side it translated – but not the other side – the side it did not see or could not translate. The failure to see the other side or translate African

161 Mudimbe (n 1 above) 17 69; Apter (n 124 above) 581.

162 Mudimbe (n 1 above) 8-9; Hallen (n 90 above) 22 36-38.

163 A Mafeje *The theory and ethnography of African social formations* (1991) cited in JO Adesina 'Archie Mafeje and the pursuit of endogeny: Against alterity and extroversion' (2008) 33 *Africa Development* 133 at 146.

164 Adesina (n 163 above) 146.

165 A Brooks 'Feminist standpoint epistemology: Building knowledge and empowerment through women's lived experience' in SN Hesse-Biber & P Leavy (eds) *An invitation to feminist method* (2007) 53-82.

cultures in their plenitude and multiplicities evokes the injunction of *Esu-Elegbara (Esu)*, one of the Yoruba deities.¹⁶⁶ *Esu* is a divine linguist who embodies indeterminacy.¹⁶⁷ When a multidimensional occurrence caused sharp disagreement among two close friends because each could see only one dimension from where they were standing, it prompted *Esu* to deliver a triumphant rebuke in the following parable:

Esu, do not undo me,
Do not falsify the words of my mouth,
Do not misguide the movements of my feet,
You who translates yesterday's words into novel utterances,
Do not undo me,
I bear you sacrifice.¹⁶⁸

Mudimbe asks basic questions about how discourses of African gnosis in their multiplicities can avoid the fate of being undone when expressed in dominant discourses and in non-African languages. He asks whether African modalities do not become 'inverted, modified by anthropological and philosophical categories used by specialists of dominant languages'.¹⁶⁹ Ultimately, the argument is that anthropology substituted European speech for African speech. As epistemological redress, Mudimbe calls for a dialectical model for cultural investigation and classification in which there is relational inflection rather than structural opposition so as to be capable of registering change within the spaces created by social, economic and political structures. Mudimbe's point is that the methods that were used by European anthropologists to understand African cultures were organised around an ethnocentric anthropology in which Africans were plotted on an evolutionary path as the ancestors of modern Western civilisation. They were deprived of voice and power and simply studied as objects by subject anthropologists. The monochromatic and emasculating nature of the anthropology assured the production of essential, stereotyped Africans in which sameness and difference were conceived with a European epistemology trapped in panoptic ethnocentrism that causes a conceptual stricture blocking the

166 *Oriki Esu* (a traditional narrative praise poem) reproduced in HL Gates *The signifying monkey: A theory of African-American literary criticism* (1989) 5. In using *Esu* to explicate Africanness, I have drawn on Wright's argument that *Esu* epitomises the 'embodiment of indeterminacy and multiplicity of meaning' which can be used to theorise Africanness: HK Wright 'Editorial: Notes on the (im)possibility of articulating continental African identity' (2002) 16 *Critical Arts* 1 at 11.

167 As above.

168 Wright (n 166 above) 3.

169 Mudimbe (n 1 above) 186.

flow of new ideas, yielding only cultural essentialism, and incapable of revealing non-hierarchical cultural relativism.¹⁷⁰

As part of extrapolating a theory of inclusive equality from Mudimbe's work, I argue that in a Habermasian sense, Mudimbe can be understood as having implicated the absence of participatory parity in an encounter in which Africans became 'objects' as opposed to subjects of anthropological study. The dialectical model of investigation that Mudimbe advocates requires the institution of Habermasian communicative ethics in anthropological methods.¹⁷¹ A communicative ethics would require anthropological inquiries to be dialogic, predicated upon an epistemological plurality rather than ethnocentrism, which fails to recognise equality in speeches.¹⁷² It is well to underline that for each speech to count one would need to be attentive to conditions of entry and redress any imbalances of power. Communicative ethics need to take into account that where there is domination there is asymmetry in the effectiveness of speech.¹⁷³

During the colonial era Africans were renamed under the tutelage of Western Enlightenment which arrogated to itself the status of being the wellspring of universal learning and knowledge and modernity.¹⁷⁴ Africa could only be intelligible as the 'primitive world'; as a place of antiquarian traditions and unprocessed data.¹⁷⁵ Africans were studied by European anthropologists under parity-impeding conditions of discrepant power in which 'primitive' was already a defined term in European science and philosophy. Parity-facilitating communicative ethics require dominance and hegemony to be averted by interactions under conditions of equal power. The essence of communicative ethics as an ethics of justice, and by

170 Jules-Rosette (n 127 above) 948.

171 Young (n 57 above) 101; J Habermas *The theory of communicative competence volume 1: Reason and rationalization of society* (1984); J Habermas *The theory of communicative competence volume 2: Lifeworld and system* (1987).

172 Young (n 57 above) 106.

173 A criticism of Jürgen Habermas's communicative ethics is that they assume symmetrical power positioning of different speeches; Lange (n 77 above) 139. Lange's criticism is, in turn, drawn from Dussel's critique of Habermas' communicative ethics. Dussel has argued that Habermas has yet to develop a theory of the conditions for the possibility of dialogue: Dussel *The invention of the Americas* (n 77 above) 87. Young argues that Habermas relies on a counterfactual that is built into an 'impartial starting point' so as to get to the end point – the universal position. This detracts from the notion of starting with a clean slate and allowing the subjects to reconstruct normative reason without a conceptual priori: Young (n 57 above) 106-107.

174 J Comaroff & JL Comaroff (eds) *Theory from the South: How Euro-America is evolving toward Africa* (2014) 1.

175 As above.

extension Mudimbe's critique of anthropology, is that it is aimed at maximal citizenship through discursive interaction as an indispensable part of democratic political practice. Its vision is that citizens are citizens precisely because they deliberate their interests openly, free of domination and oppression and with reciprocity and mutual tolerance of difference.¹⁷⁶ Needless to say colonial discourses stood for the opposite: they stood for Africans as objects of raced power rather than citizens.

176 Young (n 57 above) 33-34; A Heller *Beyond justice* (1987) 240-241.