

Re-imagining African Identity in the Twenty- First Century

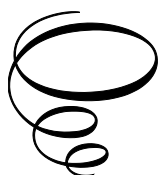
Re-imagining African Identity in the Twenty- First Century:

The Force of Intermediality

By

Fetson Anderson Kalua

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I dedicate this book to my mother and to the memory of my father, both of whom, although functionally illiterate themselves, sacrificed all their meagre resources in order to give me a good education which has given me an immensely liberating way of life. Thus, this book is a homage to my parents.

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PREFACE

Two kinds of sentiments prompted me to embark on this project of thinking about and putting together this book. The one is that, as a young man growing up in a rural backwater of a Central African country, I typically lived through and was witness to various, insidious forms of bias and discrimination which were based on uncalled-for ethnic tensions, as well as manifestations of various forms of tribalism displayed by political leaders. Since the idea of Otherness (in the form of ethnic difference) often led to some citizens having sentiments of suspicion and unwarranted hatred for one another, I began to experience the shattering of the landmarks in my thinking about identity, with the result that I began to have vague yearnings to leave my country for, hopefully, more cultured and tolerant societies. For instance, one day a brief instance of ethnic strife and intolerance—a feud which had been invoked by politicians who were incapable of running the country with some measure of tact and finesse—snowballed into a problem of critical proportions which resulted in ethnic outcries over the issue of identity in general, and national (or regional) identity in particular. At the time, with exceptions, it was practically impossible for anyone who hailed from any ethnic group or tribe from my region of origin to ever dream of reaching for the stars, particularly in the domains of politics, civil service and academia. At the same time, in the name of culture and tradition, I used to see women in our country being treated by their men like typically second-class citizens, as well as being terribly abused by the ruling elites who used them as objects of entertainment or something to look at. On a regular basis, I saw most women decked out in traditional garments and made to participate in dance steps and routines in order to please and entertain the ruling elites.

What I also found astonishing and horrendous was to learn about a similar picture of ethnic tensions being replicated in a number of African countries where, as far as the issues of ethnicity and nationality were concerned, the common expression which was used to refer to somebody of a different ethnic tribe or nationality was: “s/he is not one of us”, the bane of existence in most black African societies. So, the book came out of my experience of being treated by people of my own country with open hostility, thus giving me a stirring of the idea of difference, or Otherness, at

an early age. In the end, owing to the fact that I had been caught up in a situation which marked the hard reality of ethnicity and tribalism in my country where the idea of respect for difference, or Otherness, did not count, I left the country of my birth for some other African country. Thus, for years, as a product of displacement, my total absorption in the issue of identity would become a stimulus for writing this book which introduces and deals with the importance of acknowledgement and consideration for the notion of difference, or Otherness, of identity. With time, it became clear to me that there is a need for people of all races and ethnicities to give consideration to the concept of Otherness which is likely to deepen our insights into the reality of the ideas of culture and identity. Captured in, or built into the kaleidoscopic notion of intermediality, is the concept of Otherness which is about contesting the notion that culture is an autonomous and self-regulating entity. Thus, thinking about the idea of Otherness helps us to understand the hard reality of borderlands of cultures which largely define human existence.

The other sentiment which gave me the stimulus for working on this book is that, in the current twenty-first century, what has become something of great concern in Africa, as well as in some other parts of the world (which have been described in the past as “Third World” countries), are high levels of misperceptions about the idea of truth. Since most people, particularly of the black race, are either naïve or conflicted about the nature of truth, there is a disconnect between reality, or demonstrable facts, and perceptions of reality. In Africa, in particular, largely owing to low levels of education amongst mostly black people, as well as some politicians, levels of naivety and misperceptions are infinitely high, with the result that in political, social-cultural, academic and other debates, as well as other forms of decision-making, emotions tend to trump evidence and logic. This is because, rather than following rational, logical, practical, and sound ways of looking at the idea of truth, most people in various careers, or otherwise, are often driven by emotional and irrational feelings. For instance, the growth of national populism in many African countries masks the very reality of who (black) Africans think they are, as they do not regard people of other races who have been shaped by the African experience—people such as whites, Indians, the Malay and Arabs—as Africans. In some instances, experience shows that, owing to the history of demographic shifts, or because of belonging to a minority tribe, some ethnic groups from the same nation are practically denied the right to full citizenship which was defined by colonialism in 1884 during the partition of Africa. In other instances, instead of humanising relations between people of different races and ethnic groups, many black African politicians are notorious for coming

up with nefarious schemes which benefit either people of their ethnic groups, or just a clique. This makes Africa a continent of largely ethnic apartheid where, rather than using a pragmatic approach to dealing with issues of identity, most black African politicians are simply hard-line conservative thinkers whose major interest in politics is power. Further, not only is the idea of patriarchy (or male domination) alive and well in many countries in Africa, but also people of other sexualities, who are seen as being at odds with compulsory heterosexuality, are portrayed as perverse and freaks of nature. Hence, it is not surprising that what has happened to the rest of the African continent in the last fifty years, notably through wars, genocides, economic stagnation (in many countries), and the failure of the nation-state, to mention a few examples, presents a withering judgement on the nature of most black African leaders since the end of colonialism. Thus, owing to the ways in which black people deal with the idea of difference, or Otherness, of categorisations such as ethnicity, nationality, gender, race and other classifications, as well as many people's naivety and misperceptions about the nature of truth, I have always felt completely conflicted about the idea of the identity of both my country and that of Africa as a whole.

This book was close to ten years in gestation, only crystallising after wild and extensive reading around the subject of identity in general and African identity in particular. It is also a product of many intellectually stimulating discussions with colleagues, scholars and friends, as well as going into deep reflection on the immensely problematic issue of what it means to be African, in general terms, in the twenty-first century. As a distillation of years of reflections on the idea of identity—be it personal, communal, cultural, national or African identity—it dawned on me that there was a need to question and subvert what are seen as established narratives about identity by introducing and pinpointing a new angle for looking at identity in general, and African identity in particular. Hence, this book is an attempt to disarticulate the idea of African identity based on the black race, and what it means to be African, by showing that the notions of blackness and being African are mutually exclusive. To that end, drawing on history and various scholarly works, Chapter 2 of this book is about cracking, defamiliarising and disambiguating the idea of African identity based on the black race. I do so by setting the notion of “Africa” in the context of colonial history in order to call into question the current oversimplistic use and embrace of the term whose meaning is predicated on the fixity of identity. Hence, my argument is that to use the narrative of (black) “Africanness” as the paradigm for what is known as African identity is to introduce invidious discourses of exclusion, as the notion of African identity is not, and has never been, just about blackness. Since I am less than

enamoured of perceiving the idea of identity based on race, any notions of seeing the African continent as being equivalent to blackness equate to a misplaced approach to thinking about the idea of African identity. This is because, as I demonstrate in Chapter 2, historically, there is a tenuous link between the idea of Africa and the black race. Thus, I consider and present a broad sweep of history and show that the discourse on the issue of the African story is one in which the entire human race is implicated. Granted, the debate is not new and may rage on because the thinking amongst mostly black peoples of sub-Saharan Africa, as well as in the diaspora, suggests that their identities are anchored in the very idea of Africanness, which entails blackness. But then, this kind of thinking about identity, which is seen as normative, is actually exclusionary. Ironically, the African continent has been home to various races going back many centuries. For instance, currently, the continent has over fifty countries, some of which are Arab-speaking, while others, such as South Africa and Namibia, have huge populations of white people. Owing to the reality of complex and sensitive historical issues such as slavery and colonialism, the notion of African identity (at least for most black people) will continue to be located in the grey area of a dialectic between Afrocentrism and Eurocentrism—a binary according to which notions of identities are situated in the polarisation, or oppositional category, of “us” and “them”. According to this kind of thinking in binary polarity, a tension obtains and prompts misplaced sentiments of African identity to rear their ugly heads by way of gesturing towards exclusively (black) African identity across societies which are presumed to be sutured by seemingly similar cultural traditions—a logic which I call into question considering that Africa is not a monoculture. While sometimes traditions do matter, my position is that Africa is such a diversity that the idea of African identity predicated on the idea of blackness merely introduces adversarial politics of “them and us” with regard to the idea of race. Further, in the twenty-first century, rather than the existence and persistence of traditions, it is the expansion of technological progress and global capital which pervades and enhances people’s lives and, hence, has a profound and lasting impact on their identities. As I argue in this book, African identity in the twenty-first century will continue to be influenced by developments in technology, as well as the impact of various forms of transmuting modernities, including African societies’ embrace of democratic values, and also the high uptake of technology in the form of the Internet and social media. This has made the entire planet so globally interconnected that identities will continue to depend less on determinants such as race, ethnicity, gender, and sexuality—factors which tend to essentialise identity and divide people—than current dynamics, notably

technology, which connect them, proving what it means to be human. I argue that it is important to wake up to the fact that the idea of African identity is apt to remain a fluid and shifting reality, and much of it will have to be understood in terms of humanistic ideals rather than any appeals to romantic and essentialised notions of subjectivity. I argue for the idea of African identity which takes into account various mobile trajectories which the continent has gone through down the centuries, notably colonialism, demographic shifts and technological progress—trajectories according to which, instead of being based on the black race, the idea of African identity cuts across the various racial and ethnic boundaries throughout the African continent.

To that end, I postulate and propound the notion of intermediality—a philosophical idea which is about the concept of *in-betweenness*—as a state of affairs which emphasises the need to embrace difference, or Otherness, of categories such as race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, religion and other categorisations. As I make clear in Chapter 1, as posited by Henk Oosterling and Ewa Plonowska Ziarek, the idea of intermediality is about sensitivity to, cognisance and appreciation of other people’s beliefs, cultures, ideals and, hence, identities. The idea of intermediality challenges any notions of identity which are predicated on binary oppositions in which the Other (of categories such as race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, religion and other classifications) is seen as irredeemably and irreducibly different from the self and hence treated with aversion and exclusion. In their postulations, Oosterling and Ziarek call for the need to accept and recognise difference, or Otherness, of identity because of the reality that while, as a people, our differences may be seen as being irreducible, the ideas of Self and Other are implicated in each other. In other words, depending on the standpoint from which one finds oneself, built into the identity of each one of us are the ideas of both Self and Otherness. Hence, the main reason why, after Oosterling and Ziarek, I advance the concept of intermediality is because it provides the kind of rationality, or logic, which points to the need for the promotion and embrace of the non-partisan, intermedial affiliation of what it means to be African and human in the changing world of the twenty-first century. Since located in the idea of the Self is the notion of Otherness, the idea of intermediality points to a floating definition, or signifier, of what it means to be African through the promotion of a knowledge of and sensitivity to Otherness. It is about making every effort to weld together a clearly turbulent and divided continent and introduce and implement radical transformations in societies with regard to issues such as race, ethnicity, gender, and sexuality, as well as democracy and human rights. I posit the idea of intermediality because I perceive the idea of an African identity

based on blackness as being a farce, if a grandiose illusion, which smacks of radicalism on a continent where the majority of black people hardly ever live in harmony with one another. As I demonstrate in this book, the idea of intermediality provides space for human beings to overhaul many categorisations of identity which are largely fuzzy and ill-defined because they are based on the idea of difference, or Otherness. Of course, the attitudes and sentiments of the idea of African identity based on the black race are deeply embedded amongst most black people in Africa and the diaspora, particularly black politicians. Such people seem to be oblivious of the hard reality that the word “Africa” is a product of colonialism, and that people of various races who have been shaped by the African experience also deserve to be called Africans. Thus, in this book, I try to expose the chinks in many black people’s armour of certainty according to which African identity is based on blackness and cultural purity. My argument is that the idea of intermediality should become a byword for thinking about the issue of African identity in the twenty-first century because it introduces a rethink of the idea of such an identity. Thus, I argue that any notions of African identity which point to a return to the past of black African cultures and traditions hardly make sense in an age of innovation and technological change.

Contextualising the concept of intermediality in my life

To contextualise what the notion of intermediality is about, it is worth reflecting on the state of flux people of my generation have undergone. Those of us whose lives straddle the twentieth and twenty-first centuries have had the privilege of having gone through various forms of transitions. In the first instance, my generation was witness to a significant moment of changeover, or transition, between what was unmistakably an old and a new Africa. On the one hand, after the end of colonialism, the idea of Africa and, hence, African identity, was seen in terms of black people’s local cultures and traditions. On the other hand, interesting eddies of change in the form of modernity, notably Christianity, made for another way of thinking about identity. I was born on the cusp of the old and the new. Having been born and bred in a village in a rural area after my country had attained its independence from Britain, there were times when some friends used to jokingly tell me that I still bore certain marks and manners of that country’s upbringing. What they meant was that, sometimes, I behaved in a somewhat traditional fashion, notably by getting down on my knees when greeting particularly elderly people. For some people of my generation, this was an arduous, if troubling, transition to navigate, precisely because it often

entailed a gradual process of casting off certain aspects of our tradition which were seen to be clashing with modernity—particular forms of modernity which had begun to gain traction and manifest themselves in the form of realities such as Christianity. Talking about modernity, there are some people in the twenty-first century who continue to grumble about the kind of harm which colonialism unleashed upon the colonised peoples such as (black) Africans. Such people who just focus on negative aspects of colonialism are either misinformed or ignorant, particularly considering that some forms of modernity such as various forms of knowledge, technological progress, and Christianity were positive facets of the process of colonisation. For instance, apart from embracing some aspects of modernity such as Christianity, through a good education, colonialism gave some people of my generation a way of life which we could never have lived had we remained in our villages all our lives. This was the first instance of transition some of us went through in the closing stages of the twentieth century. Thus, a good number of people of my generation are not dinosaurs of so-called black African cultures and traditions.

In stark contrast to my generation, most of our children, particularly those who were born in the decade which preceded the dawn of the new millennium (of the twenty-first century), do not bear those marks which some people might identify in some persons of my generation. Also known as millennials, for most of our children, there is no painful transition to modernity which some of us underwent. As far as our generation is concerned, while our transition enabled us to perceive Africa's past in palimpsest beneath its present, our children either cannot or have not experienced such a transition, as many of them find themselves inhabiting particular spaces of identity which are clearly borderlands of cultures. For instance, the way in which most millennials have embraced the English language suggests that they belong to a different era as black Africans in that they comport themselves like global citizens, perceiving the idea of culture as simply a way of life which includes transcending the idea of Otherness, particularly in terms of the language they use. It is the second type of transition which makes the African continent a completely different place to the second half of the twentieth century when instrumental rationalism of valorising blackness and so-called black African cultures was commonplace. In the second and current transition, which our children are part of, it is very difficult to equate the ideas of culture and identity with place. This is because, as cultural forms, technologies such as Sky TV, the Internet and social media are the most meaningful ways to disseminate and bestow cultural signs, hence identity. In this case, rather than seeing culture as a pure and fixed commodity, it has to be read in the practice and context

of its enunciation in response to changes in such technologies. Hence, since the idea of identity is almost always in a state of transition, cultural identity is something which is now located in the liminal, intermedial state of enunciation. In short, for both our generation and that of the millennials, the idea of intermediality is an interesting one in that it introduces a radical rethink about the idea of African identity in the twenty-first century. Basically, rather than being based on the black race and the romantic return to the pre-colonial past (of cultures and traditions), the idea of intermediality gives different angles and inflections of the idea of African identity.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Considering that it is largely motivated by my deep, ethical convictions, this book is the culmination of the quest for what I have always considered to be a fitting paradigm for a truly liberating notion of an African identity in the twenty-first century. This is a model of identity which has the potential to deliver, for all the inhabitants and citizens of the African continent (irrespective of race, class, gender, sexuality, religion and other categorisations), shared values and goals such as liberty, democracy, equality, and common and shared identity as part of humankind. Thus, on this long and scholarly journey of writing this book, I would like to mention the influence of great people, friends, and colleagues. Firstly, I thank my former colleagues and mentors—Pamela Ryan, Ivan Rabinowitz, David Levey, and Leon de Kock—for their willingness to be my sounding board in those formative years when I was trying to find my feet in academia. These colleagues were always prepared to give me useful suggestions and constructive criticism about the idea of culture, one which is exemplified by the spirit and principle of intermediality. For instance, during my studies in graduate school, I was able to examine the works of British scholars such as Raymond Williams and Stewart Hall according to which, rather than perceiving the idea of culture as a coherent and self-regulating category, we should see it as a mobile and shifting entity which is always subject to transition and transformation. Secondly, I thank Deirdre Byrne, yet another colleague and friend, for introducing me to the International Association for Philosophy and Literature (IAPL)—an association through which I first encountered the idea of intermediality while attending an IAPL international conference in Canada in 2010. I later realised that the philosophical concept of intermediality either subsumes or interlinks with related ideas which I had encountered and used early on in my academic studies. Crucially, the idea of intermediality interlaces with that of *liminality* or the idea of *in-betweenness*—a notion I embraced early on in my academic life and career as a true paradigm of perceiving the idea of identity in our time, particularly of the twenty-first century. For that reason, one particular section of this book, namely Chapter 2, is a virtual elaboration of two of my published journal articles. The first is a 2009 paper called *Homi Bhabha's Third Space and African Identity*, and the second is a 2017 publication entitled *Intermediality, A Paradigm for African Identity in the Twenty-First Century*. Thirdly, I also thank fiction writers and scholars such as Wole

Soyinka (from Nigeria) and Njabulo Ndebele (from South Africa) whose articulations of the idea of African identity mirror the notion of intermediality. Fourthly, my thanks are also due to all the anonymous readers of my book while it was in manuscript form. The comments I received from the reviewers were invaluable and I am indebted to the critics. Fifthly, I owe particular thanks to an old friend, the late David Hughes, for the immensely cultured conversations about culture and identity we used to have and share over the years, going back to the time we worked together in Botswana in the late 1990s. Finally, I thank my daughters who always smiled and gave me the reason to work flat out in life in order to achieve success.

INTRODUCTION

The idea of fixity and purity of identity

It seems unquestionable that, as human beings, we all have a sense of attachment or affiliation to various identities—embodied, personal, racial, ethnic, gender, sexual, cultural, religious and national identities. Even though, on the face of it, such identities may seem logical and stable, history and experience point to the fact that such perceptions and articulations of seemingly fixed and pure identities also tend to wreak havoc in the form of ethnic, religious or interracial tensions and hostilities which spawn all manner of tribulations, including genocides and wars. This is because such expressions of identity tend to pass over and discount the presence of those human beings who are different from us. This book is an attempt to rescue the African continent from the clichés of identity, notably the unquestioned assumption of seeing the notion of Africanness, hence African identity, as being synonymous with the idea of blackness. I show the extent to which such thinking (which is based on the idea of fixity and purity of identity) is flawed and illogical because, through the history of the idea of “Africa”, ideas of blackness and Africanness are incommensurable and mutually exclusive. In short, I challenge what are seen as hegemonic and foundational fixities of identity because the African continent abounds with all forms of exclusions in the form of categories such as race, ethnicity, religion and other categorisations. Thus, all through the chapters, each topic mediates the depiction of the reality of Otherness (of identity) as a centrally significant concept to embrace because it contributes to the idea of social justice in society.

The idea of “Africanness”

Throughout this book, I use the notions of *Africa*, *African*, and *Africanness* advisedly and guardedly. This is because, as I demonstrate in this book, the fact that the idea of “Africa” was conceived in the crucible of colonialism points to the fact that the designations of the words “Africa” and “Africanness” are often used to refer to black people who either reside on the African continent, or in the diaspora. All this happens without taking into account the layers of meaning which are built into the concept of the

word “Africa”. In other words, as I show in Chapter 2, the meaning of the word “Africa” is not tethered to the single notion of a continent of exclusively black people. This is why I consider and present a broad sweep of the African continent’s history in order to show the deictic and polysemous nature of the word “Africa”. However, as a product of the colonial imaginary during the European exploration of the African continent, particularly at a time when the term Africa was a reference to the entire continent, the notion of Africa was thought of as a mysterious place of exotic appeal, particularly for European explorers and visitors to the continent. At the time, the cartographic reality of the continent of Africa and its predominantly black peoples may have been seen as not mutually exclusive, as the African continent was seen as the most uncivilised part of the world. In other words, colonialists of all shades and hues saw the ideas of “Africa” and “blackness” as interlocking categories in such a way that, to this day and age, a great many black people who live either on the African continent, or in the diaspora, have internalised this somewhat flawed logic of seeing “Africa” as a geographical locality for exclusively black people, with the concomitant idea of referring to an “African” as a person of the black race. Unfortunately, conceived in this way during colonialism, Africa was implicated in stereotyped discourses of Self and Otherness according to which the continent and its people were seen and portrayed in invasive and denigrating terms. At the end of colonialism, the idea of a pure (black) African identity was taken up by groups such as black politicians, black African philosophers, as well as black African writers of fiction, in order to consolidate the notion that black Africanness was indeed the Other of Europe, or the West. The idea of Africa which sentimentalises blackness has also created apologists (mainly black African politicians) for a pure African identity only because such individuals have a vested interest in the debate which gives them access to power.

In the context of the African continent, notions of identity have tended to be spaces of potential entanglement or polarisation. In other words, the painful reality is that of a continent which, long after the end of colonialism, is still riddled with all manner of marginalisation on the basis of categories such as gender, race, ethnicity, class, sexuality, religious affiliation and other forms of classifications. As I demonstrate throughout this book, what gives the idea of intermediality a wide appeal is the hard reality that, more than ever before, we live in times when possibilities do exist for conversations and interactive encounters, not just within but also across cultural traditions. The intellectual seam of the humanities in which the idea of intermediality is situated remains a rich layer of experiential knowledge

to tap and draw on when it comes to re-imagining notions of identity, particularly African identity, in the twenty-first century.

In this book, my use of the words “Africa”, “African”, and “Africanness” is such that the cartographic, or geographical, reality of the continent does not necessarily entail “Africanness”, or the native homeland of the exclusively black race. Granted, through colonial discourse, the words “African” and “blackness” (or black people) came to be seen as not being mutually exclusive, meaning to be African meant to be a black person. Hence, it is not surprising that, in common parlance, or usage, the word “African” is used to name, specify, and pinpoint the black race, the majority of whom live on the African continent, particularly the sub-Saharan part of the continent. However, my use of the idea of intermediality points to a philosophical refraction of the idea of African identity based on exclusively the black race. Thus, I read the labels “Africa” and “African” against the grain, presenting the ideas of “Africa” and “blackness” as being mutually exclusive precisely because the link between the continent and black people is located in the colonial imaginary, an imaginary in which, initially, the idea of blackness was not at the core of the discourse. To that end, using the etymology of the word “Africa”, I disarticulate the mode of seeing and presenting the concept of “Africa” as being linked to the idea of blackness. My argument is that the idea of “Africa” should be seen in ways which show that once the continent is uncoupled from its strict ideological and essentialised meaning, it is self-evident that it is and always has been multiple. For me, because of the history and etymology of the term, as well as bearing in mind the fact that the earlier contexts by which the word “Africa” was understood had shifted, to be an African has always meant to be a denizen of the African continent. Thus, as I have shown in Chapter 2, the word “Africa” is about the arbitrariness of language, making the idea a floating signifier, almost a social construct. My position is that, because the horizons of the meaning of the word “Africa” have always shifted, people of various races who find themselves living on this continent, and have been shaped by the African experience are, ipso facto, Africans. As used in this book, where I use “African” to refer specifically to black people, the word is preceded, parenthetically, by the word “black”, as in *a black African*. This is to differentiate between being black from being African of some other race which is the Other of blackness. Otherwise, on the whole, my use of the word *African* generally suggests a reference to any person, irrespective of race, who lives on the African continent, and has come to call Africa home. I have done this in order to differentiate between being black, on the one hand, and being African, on the other, in the shifting world of the twenty-first century.

African identity in the twenty-first century: the force of the idea of intermediality

Owing to the history of colonialism, which presented the idea of Africa as an imagined community, I posit and propose a way of looking at African identity in the twenty-first century which is premised on the notion of *intermediality*—an overarching descriptor and idea which is borrowed from the domain of multimedia to describe the hybrid nature of films and other cultural texts. I use this concept as a model for thinking about and reflecting on borderlands of cultures which are rendered visible when we think about Otherness in the changing world of the twenty-first century. As I demonstrate in Chapter 1, because various media are often used in order to make a film, any film's identity cannot be said to be fixed or pure. Then, adapted and used within poststructuralist and postmodernist discourses, the idea of intermediality is a philosophical notion for a diverse mix of concepts which imply and point to the philosophical idea of liminality, or *in-betweenness*—a notion which refers to a disembodied space, or zone (of identity), which points to one's feeling of being at ease with one's nomadic identity, as well as being accommodating as far as the idea of Otherness is concerned. The idea of *in-betweenness* challenges notions of Manichean dualities which colonisers often used as the defining characteristics of identities during colonialism. Since at the core of the idea is the need to embrace non-partisan and intermedial affiliations of what it means to be human, the concept of intermediality interrogates and challenges notions of identity which are presented and seen as normative, conventional and exclusionary. As I make clear in Chapter 1, the rationale for postulating the concept of *intermediality* is that, as an *in-between* space of enunciation, it probes and calls into question evidently hegemonic positions and foundational fixities of identity. In other words, the idea of the intermedial space, or interval, rejects outright invidious accounts, or narratives, of history and identity which emphasise and play up ideas of centre and margins, Self and Other, them and us, black and white, and other related forms of classifications which point to binarisms, or oppositional categories. To that end, I posit the notion of *intermediality* as a framework, or paradigm, for thinking about African identity as it is reflected and rendered visible in issues such as African history and philosophy, African literature, literary theory, gender and sexuality, postcolonial feminism, and the English language, to mention all the domains which I deal with in the book. In short, every topic I deal with in this book is presented in a way which makes me see if it reflects the idea of intermediality, thus demonstrating the pervasive nature and importance

of the notion of the intermedial, liminal, space and idea as woven into the concept and identity of the African continent.

As I argue throughout the book, as a poststructuralist/postmodern concept, the idea of *intermediality* allows for a deep reflection on, as well as calling into question, any smug and utopian notions of cultural Otherness, supremacy, or purity, in favour of the value of and tolerance for difference, or Otherness, of identity. As an approach to clarifying key ideas in various disciplines such as history, philosophy, literature, and other related fields, intermediality rejects any totalising and simplistic ideas about history and identity. One interesting feature of intermediality is that it promotes the idea of cosmopolitanism because of the underlying assumption that we are all citizens of the cosmos, and thus we are cosmopolitans. According to intermediality, a cosmopolitan is less provincial and more accepting of the idea of the wider world. A cosmopolitan learns to tolerate and celebrate the differences of other people.

The major reason why I argue for the idea of intermediality is because, as an epistemological, ethical and political idea, it reminds us of the competing and conflicting claims about identity and difference, placing an emphasis on tolerance and respect for difference. I make a case for the fact that the name “Africa” is a product of the colonial imaginary and, hence, we should not betray the truth of what it means to be African through an uncritical linking of the idea with the notion of racial blackness. Rather, we should think of identity in terms of intermediality—a formulation which promotes a non-foundational, non-partisan notion of African identity in the context of power relations, common histories, and shared memories. Based on the fact that we are all human, the concept of intermediality draws attention to the need for intercultural dialogues between people of different races and traditions.

Granted, differences between and amongst human beings tend to be insuperable. For instance, one can think of the various ways in which the universal institution of patriarchy was able to create and maintain gender differences between men and women for centuries. Then, there is the idea of racial differences which led to the abhorrent systems of slavery and colonialism. Further, and closer to home, one thinks of the reality of ethnic differences in Africa and the kind of havoc such differences have wrecked on African societies through ethnic and religious wars, as well as genocides. Finally, there is the notion of national differences whereby some people are prepared to display extreme and misplaced levels of nationalism which lead to all manner of xenophobic confrontations and attacks in African societies.

However, the concept of intermediality is a call, or appeal, for each one of us to learn the value of nurturing a tolerance for those people who are different from us in terms of gender, race, class, nationality, and other classifications, including marginalised groups such as foreigners and refugees.

Throughout the book, I present the idea of intermediality as one which exposes the fluidity and hybridity of social, cultural and personal identities, as well as terms or expressions which are associated with the ideas of “Africa” and African culture, African philosophy, African literature, ethnicity, gender and sexuality, race, class, religion, and related categorisations. The rationale for presenting the idea of culture and, hence, identity, through the idea of intermediality is in order to contest narrow separatisms and “false universalisms” which have pretences to particular kinds of identities which tend to be exclusionary. Thus, I posit and argue for notions of identity as reflected by African history, African philosophy, African literature, to mention a few examples, which are already interwoven with the notion of intermediality. Put another way, the idea of intermediality tempers what are seen as occult notions of epistemology, and hence identity, about a continent which, following the end of colonialism, is seen by some in terms of ethnic holism, or purity. Thus, among other things, I pinpoint Africa’s referential fluidity, if exhaustion, by proposing a reading of an African cultural identity against the grain so as to make a case for intermediality. For instance, I demonstrate the extent to which African philosophy is largely a product of Greek, Roman, Semitic and Western philosophy, just as the appellation of so-called “African” literature—referring to works of fiction by only black African writers—is a misnomer considering that, irrespective of race, any great writer who has been shaped by the African experience ought to be called an African writer.

On the whole, owing to the hard reality and pervasiveness of modernity and technological advances around the world, including Africa, I postulate an African identity in the twenty-first century which should be predicated on the idea of intermediality. As the reader will notice, even though each chapter can be read in its own right as a free-standing entity, the underlying theme in each one of them is the need to ensure that the notion of intermediality is built into the ideas of knowledge production and identity formation. Since the idea of intermediality threads through each of the chapters, I argue that there is a need to cultivate habits of thought and behaviour which do not foreclose on any encounters with alterity, or Otherness, of identity. Such a need to retain a tolerance for other people who are different from us is about establishing more humane, compassionate and

understanding societies. Thus, from the various chapters in this book, I present the notion of an African identity which is based on the black race as nothing but a utopian proposition. In other words, such thinking is more about polemics than historicity, logic and rationality. I show the extent to which any thinking of African identity which is based on solely the black race simply amounts to navel-gazing. This explains why, as opposed to a teleological approach to history and identity, I posit a dialectical one in order to pinpoint the need to break free of theories and schools of thought which effectively constitute essentialising and exclusionary discourses of identity. Hence, given the history of postcolonial Africa, not only do I present the idea of a pure African identity (based on blackness) as unthinkable and impractical, but also laughable. This becomes evident when one considers that most of those who largely use the idea of blackness to refer to African identity are backward-looking politicians on ego trips. Such politicians overreach themselves with extremist views about history and identity by proving visions of “unitary squares”—the kind of unity which is simply a cosmetic exercise in the way they perceive African politics and, hence, identity. Thus, once I have theorised the idea of intermediality in Chapter 1, I ensure that, in the rest of the chapters, I show the extent to which this vital notion is infused with values of social justice, shared values, and equal citizenship in society. In other words, I contextualise the idea of intermediality in every chapter in order to determine how it is adduced and borne out in the discourses which are raised in each topic, or subject matter. Thus, I specify whether or not the idea of intermediality is built into each subject matter I examine, as well as providing the rationale for recommending the application of the idea to those spheres of knowledge, notably gender and sexuality in Africa, which are determined by the straitjacket of so-called black African culture and tradition. I argue that it is through the idea of intermediality that people of various identities, in the form of race, ethnicity, religion, gender, and sexuality, to mention a few categorisations, can overcome their subservience and disempowerment in our societies.

Throughout the book, I delimit the use of the concept of intermediality to historical, philosophical, literary and cultural studies and practices. In particular, I pinpoint the discernible relevance, application and materiality of the concept of intermediality in spheres such as African history, African philosophy, African literature, literary theory, postcolonial theory, and related fields in identity politics which concern the African continent. The idea is to determine the extent to which these domains of knowledge are located in and mirror the intermedial space of enunciation. By presenting the idea of intermediality in such a philosophical and directed way—outside

of its application in film and media—my aim is to examine and deconstruct traditional and received notions of African identity, notions which find expression in spheres of knowledge such as so-called African literature and philosophy, as well as other categorisations such as gender, sexuality and suchlike classifications. I then replace such notions with more nuanced and refined approaches to perceiving various identities in the changing world of the twenty-first century.

Chapter 1 focuses on theorising the concept of intermediality, presenting it as the thrust which runs throughout the book. Since the idea of intermediality is about acceptance and tolerance of difference, or Otherness (of identity), I posit it because it remains a broad-based notion when it comes to thinking about the identity of various categorisations, or classifications, of identity in the twenty-first century. This is because the idea of intermediality is about the core values which revolve around the indispensability of the idea of Otherness (of identity) which is part of our lives. As I make clear in this chapter, I appropriate the idea from the media and contextualise it in the light of poststructuralist and postmodernist discourses in which it has gained currency, showing the extent to which it is a philosophical, political and ethical idea. I argue that, even among people of supposedly the same race and culture, issues such as gender, class or religious affiliation could be causes of binary divisions, and so could be major sticking points in people's relationships. As far as the idea of African identity is concerned, my informed and enlightened use of the concept of intermediality is one which is predicated on the dialectical thinking, reflection, and philosophising about the idea of "Africa", hence African identity. For instance, Africa abounds with instances whereby the truth about gender blindness is so prevalent and common among men and women of supposedly similar cultures and traditions. While the idea of alterity, or Otherness, often induces untold sentiments of antipathy, revulsion and resentment, my position is one about invoking the force of intermediality in our lives—an idea which challenges the Manichean ideology which is an expression of the binary divisions of centre-margins, Self-Other, good-evil, and so forth, which are often foregrounded in issues of identity. I make a compelling case for the notion of intermediality because it obliterates the idea of difference, or Otherness, and focuses on the quotidian experience of what it means to be human by exposing the fluidity and hybridity of social identities of categorisations such as race, ethnicity, gender, class, and other classifications. In the course of the chapter, I make a link between the notion of intermediality and the feminist notion of intersectionality which is also about promoting notions of Otherness of gender and social justice. Further, I also show the nexus between the concept of intermediality and

postcolonial ideas such as Homi Bhabha's notion of liminality, or hybridity, and Rosi Braidotti's postmodern notion of transpositions. What all these ideas have in common is the fact that they call into question the idea of binary oppositions as they relate to identity formation and articulation.

Chapter 2 looks at the perennial conundrum of what the African continent is and what it means to be an inhabitant of this vast expanse of land. For a long time, the idea of Africa has been a persistently difficult one to define for several reasons. For instance, partly because of colonialism, as well as owing to black people's reductive conflation of the idea of African identity with blackness or the black race, the term "Africa" has come to be understood in black and white, meaning black people think of themselves cosily as the only Africans. This kind of thinking is common among black people despite the fact that Africa is an unmistakably multiracial, multi-ethnic and multilingual continent. In this chapter, I test out the validity of the meaning of the concept of "Africa" in various contexts in the light of what historians and other social scientists have hinted at as being its essential logic. The basic premise of my argument is that, even though the landmass called "Africa" indeed exists, when one thinks of factors such as race, ethnicity, and religion which largely define the melting pot of African societies, then the concepts of Africa and blackness are mutually exclusive realities. I argue that, even though the word "Africa" has an immediate geographical and racial appeal of being linked to black people, there is a deeper resonance to the idea of "Africa", making the notion a culturally complex and a politically intractable entity. As I show in this chapter, the word "Africa" was a completely deictic one in that it used to refer to some parts of North Africa which used to be part of the Roman Empire. In short, the word "Africa" still remains a deictic, or context-sensitive term, whose meaning is not as self-evident as most people imagine or think it to be. This is because there are various racial and ethnic groups which inhabit the African continent. Thus, in this chapter, I elucidate the problems of competing ideas and visions of who an African is, or what it means to be an African. For instance, black people in America (most of whom are the progeny of black African slaves) have been variously described as black Americans and African Americans. But, fundamentally, they are Americans. By extrapolation, in Africa, the autochthonous people such as the Khoisan and Pygmies have always struggled with the sense of belonging to Southern and Central African countries, respectively, because black people have always treated them in terms of Otherness. Historian, James Ramsay, has stated that, in Botswana, for example, the official government language for describing the Khoisan is Rural Area Dwellers (RADs), meaning they are seen as constituting a primitive and uncivilised group of

people who are not part of the black African societies. In the meantime, a great number of whites and Indians whose forebears came centuries ago are hardly described as Africans. Interestingly, these are racial groups which have been shaped by the African experience. Finally, North Africa is comprised of Arab-speaking people and populations. This is interesting because it shows that the idea of African identity requires a radical rethink and revision, instead of using the word “African” generically to refer to predominantly black people who live on the African continent, as well as those who live in the diaspora. As a blanket term, most black people take the word Africa as a normative approach to managing issues of identity on the continent. In other words, the idea of African identity is often expressed in exclusive and essentialist terms—the idea of identity seen as a given and a form of particularism which, by ignoring minorities, borders on radicalism and induces notions of racialism—the kind of extremism which breeds not only reverse racism but also dangerous levels of ethnocentrism. In this chapter, I use the word “Africa” (hence “African”) within the limits of reason, cognisant of the word’s situatedness and implication in the discourse of colonialism when it meant various sections of the North African regions when they were, at different times, part of the Roman Empire. By drawing on the works of scholars, I argue that Africa remains a web of profoundly intertwined histories and memories, notably those of the Khoisan (or Bushmen), as well as other first nations groups on the continent, the majority being black people, and whites, Indians, Arabs, Malays, and many others. Even the history of black people on the continent suggests that there are various shades of blackness. In the end, I show that in terms of history, Africa is the home of the human race. Thus, rather than seen as being a totality based on only the black race, the continent is a contingency where people of various races have lived for centuries, with some races having endured all forms of marginalisation of identity.

Chapter 3 examines the complexity of so-called African philosophy, an evidently entangled discourse whose logic is caught fatalistically in the debate about essential blackness as the defining feature of African identity, hence African philosophy. As far as the idea of black African philosophy is concerned, the privileging of the black race leads to all kinds of generalisations about what black African philosophy is all about. Thus, in this chapter, I explore assumptions, debates and schools of thought which link the origins of so-called African philosophy to only black people. This is because, to all intents and purposes, the idea of an African philosophy presupposes a search and longing for an exclusive discourse about so-called black African philosophy which is based on Africa’s unique black identity. This is despite the fact that there are variations in the delineation of what

African philosophy is. So, while the Greeks and other individuals of Western stock are often credited with the origin of philosophy, there are some scholars who have pinpointed the existence of a distinctively African philosophy. Thus, I show that a particular kind of hostility characterises so-called African philosophy, particularly when compared to what is regarded by many as substantive, Western philosophy. Therefore, I ask some penetrating questions such as the following ones: Does genuine critical philosophy exist in Africa? What are the major characteristics of such a philosophy? In what way is it uniquely black African philosophy? Is it not the case that scholars are confusing what are evidently intercultural presuppositions with so-called African philosophy? While some scholars have demonstrated that so-called African philosophy does not exist, precisely because most of its premises and presumptions are grounded in black people's cultures and traditions, I try to show whether or not the so-called philosophy is really epistemological or has gnostic validity, follows rational procedures, or is reflective enough to be called philosophy. On the whole, I argue that any attempt to articulate a self-reflexive and critical continental African philosophy must lie in the idea of intermediality. This is because what is called African philosophy is merely a contraposition in that, rather than being about black African philosophy per se, it is some kind of reactive rejoinder to European philosophy—a kind of rejoinder which is intended to offset the effects of colonialism on knowledge production. This explains why so-called African philosophy is notorious for its exclusionary, discriminatory and oppositional modes of thought. For instance, even the philosophy of the first nations of Southern Africa, also known as the Khoisan—people who were already living in the region before the arrival of the black people from Central Africa—is left aside and not dealt with in so-called African philosophy. Further, those scholars who posit the notion of exclusively black philosophy often fail to acknowledge the fact that they obliquely draw on Greek and Western philosophy, especially the kind of philosophy which relates to modernity. The reality is that the notion of intercultural dialogue between Africa and the West is at the core of so-called African philosophy—a dialogue which, I maintain, places African philosophy squarely at the interface between African traditions, or folk wisdom, and Western modernity. Such an interface, or borderland, in which African philosophy is located remains in the realm of intermediality because neither are so-called black people homogeneous, nor is the idea of their folk wisdom and related traditions which they call African philosophy. My argument is that, rather than merely folklore, which largely characterises so-called African philosophy, good, reflective philosophy should resonate with the idea of intermediality.

In Chapter 4, I look at and discuss the vexed question or idea of what is, or constitutes, so-called African literature. In the years leading up to the end of colonialism in Africa, particularly with the publication of *Things Fall Apart* (what has come to be known as Chinua Achebe's prototypical "African novel"), the concept of African literature emerged and was perceived as a counter-discourse to what was, at the time, the colonial narrative about Africa. Thus, in its heyday, the hallmark of African literature was a "writing back to the empire" kind of paradigm, a model which meant celebrating so-called African traditions and cultures which had been "Otherised" during colonialism. However, this theme about African literature gradually transmuted into an amalgam of other themes which render visible not only the pervasiveness of neo-colonialism but also other realities in postcolonial African societies which show the incongruity of the "writing back to the empire" paradigm. In this chapter, I redefine the idea of African literature given the fact that a strong sense of irresolution has characterised this kind of literature since its inception. Although some readers, particularly those who are followers and admirers of so-called African literature, tend to see the idea of African literature as the kind of fiction which is written by exclusively black African people and deals with the idea of black African identity in the wake of the history of the colonisation of the African continent by the Western world. My position is at odds with what I see as an evidently flawed positionality about the idea of so-called African literature which is written by only black people.

In any case, when one examines so-called African literature, it is so difficult to unearth what may be described as a black African aesthetics which defines and characterises such literature. Thus, in redefining African literature, I make a case for the kind of fiction which has been written by those individuals, irrespective of race, who have been shaped and moved by the African experience of colonialism and race, as well as being inhabitants of the African continent. This points to the idea of African literature as works of fiction which have been written by individuals of various races who were born, influenced, and inspired by the African experience. Thus, over and above black African writers whose perceptions of African identity are ones which are based on blackness, there have always been writers of other races, notably white, Indian and Arabs, whose birth and upbringing in Africa gave them the dynamism and new horizons of thinking and writing about African identity in a rational, reflective and humanising way. In other words, what happened to the continent during colonialism, as well as what continues to happen to it in the globalised and globalising world, form the basis of the topical issues and themes which must touch such writers so deeply that they render visible how such experiences impact on notions of