Chapter One

Introduction: Identities and (Mis)Representations

William H. Worger

This book grew organically. Rather than start with a list of conventional "trios" – social/economic/political, precolonial/colonial/postcolonial, chronological/regional/thematic – we began by asking a talented group of scholars researching, writing, and teaching African history to contribute chapters on topics that they considered most relevant, most intriguing, and most exciting for themselves for the state of the field today and for the future, at least for the next 10 years or so. The depth and breadth of work contained in these chapters captures those enthusiasms.

The title of this introduction, "Identities and (Mis)Representations," reflects a common theme that emerged individually and organically in each of the chapters. A focus on Africans as ordinary people, actors in their own lives, and full of the same complicated sets of motives, responses, desires, and emotions that affect all of us in our own lives becomes clear throughout the collection. But with this focus comes a caution – that often we know too little about Africa and Africans because we still fail to use many sources readily available in vernacular languages, that often we fail to include the speakers of those languages as our colleagues and not just as our sources, and that often we still fail to write for audiences composed of the people that we study.

And, in particular, we still have to struggle with countless misrepresentations of Africa and Africans. Listening to an National Public Radio commentator reporting from Nairobi on the 2017 Kenyan elections and the "need to understand" that

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democratic elections dated back only 10 years in a country that had won its independence more than half a century before, and that all political conflict was based in fundamental "tribal differences," is a reminder that our scholarly work far too often has had little wider impact beyond academia. Why else do we need a website ironically named "Africa is a Country" to remind us that Africa is made up of 54 different countries with myriad cultures, especially when we have thousands of troops positioned in secret US military bases throughout the African continent, unknown even to members of the US administration? The chapters in this book demonstrate the energy with which scholars in their everyday lives combat stereotypes, often with little success, but with relentless determination all the same.

The book is divided into six sections, with boundaries that are not hard and fast but that often overlap and are porous. There is a movement from the most individual to wider connections, to community, nation, and the world, but this is not assumed to be a one-way process, and that sense of the cross-cutting nature of history will become clear in reading the chapters individually and collectively. Some of the chapters offer detailed case studies restricted in time and/or place, and most reflect on issues continent-wide, though with illustrative examples provided so that the analyses are always well founded in a body of studies.

Part I: The personal

In Part I the authors of the four chapters examine the ways in which Africans see themselves as individuals, in relationship to each other and to society at large. Overcoming the stereotypes engendered under colonialism, Africans now weigh the meanings of sexuality, masculinity, and race on their own terms.

The most intimate identities through sexuality and sexual practices is the subject of Marc Epprecht's chapter, both in a historical context and as it relates to fundamental contemporary issues of sexual rights, sexual health, and human rights (Chapter 2). Epprecht provides an overview of European accounts written primarily in the nineteenth century that sought to identify African sexual practices, often perceived at the time as differing from those of Europeans and as representing the backwardness and "savagery" of societies conceived as being in need of European control and improvement. He then moves on to consider the ways in which Africans sought to counter, by arguing against in writing and by acting out in practice, the heritage of colonial norms of heterosexuality carried over into the era of independence by state actors within Africa as well as by international organizations such as the World Health Organization and the World Bank.

In Chapter 3 Stephan F. Miescher takes the topic of sexuality a step further through his examination of African men's understanding of themselves as masculine. He provides a close reading of studies written since the 1990s that examine the issue of men and masculinity: What do these terms mean? How have they been applied? How has being a man changed in Africa over the past 100 years?

His chapter discusses conceptual issues, focusing especially on the differences articulated by recent scholars between terms such as "masculine," "masculinity," and "manhood" and on the multitude of ways in which colonialists and colonialism sought to remake men, especially through missionary-controlled education and wage labor, and the ways in which Africans responded to their changing social and economic situations.

Turning to African views of themselves as subjects of colonial rule, Nimi Wariboko examines how self-perceptions changed through encounters with Christianity and with colonialism in Chapter 4. Wariboko focuses in particular on three issues he identifies as most important in the literature he surveys: the "weight of blackness" and the development of "'rationalistic' competitive individualism," both formed especially during the colonial era, and "how precolonial African personhood shapes the postcolonial Christian world after enduring the weight of blackness under colonialism and after passing through the dogged efforts of colonial mission to make it Western." He concludes by arguing that, as a result of these encounters, psychological duality has been "enforced" in many "individuals whose personhood is both African and not African … There is now an other within the African self."

In Chapter 5, Nicola Ginsburgh and Will Jackson examine the mirror situation of the white colonists who identify as both European and African. These "white Africans" have the conviction that they can become "truly African" as well as "remain apart," echoing the phenomenon of dual identity discussed in Wariboko's chapter. Looking especially at Algeria, Portuguese Africa, South Africa, Southern Rhodesia, and Kenya, the authors argue that there was a distinct attitude toward Africanness under white rule in the settler colonies that aimed to erase the indigenous presence through a cult of separation. Yet it is now commonplace for one settler group, white South Africans, to refer to themselves as African, as a way of appropriating what during the apartheid era they had repudiated as the "Third World" and yet now embrace as part of their newly found identity in the Global South. The chapter raises questions of what it means to be a settler, a migrant, and indeed an African, especially in continuing struggles over environmental resources in these countries.

Part II: Women's roles in institutions of power

In Part II, the three authors re-examine the ways in which African women have been seen historically through institutions of power, and they overturn many preconceptions of the subordination of women. In two chapters, by Nwando Achebe and Sifiso Mxolisi Ndlovu, analysis of work in African languages that has not previously been consulted, provides an important key to understanding women's ability to wield considerable power.

Ndlovu's examination of "Women, Authority, and Power in Precolonial Southeast Africa" (Chapter 6) provides a fascinating example of the use of indigenous

language sources to shed completely new light on an area and period in South African history that has previously made very little use of such sources. Ndlovu uses a case study, that of Queen Mother Ntombazi of the Ndwandwe people who, like other women in the Zulu and other southern African kingdoms, were full participants in power and politics. He argues that knowledge of Ntombazi, oral and written, was deliberately scrubbed from the historical record by nineteenth-century cultural brokers, and that this erasure, this intentional forgetting, was perpetuated in twentieth-century historical novels written in the vernacular, which identified Ntombazi as a cruel witch and instead celebrated Shaka as a national icon in an era when Africans were subjected to white racism and oppression. Readers of this chapter too will have different experiences of comprehension, because Ndlovu leaves all his quotes from isiZulu (which include versions of the language from the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries) in the vernacular, believing that the closest understanding can come only if we appreciate the languages of expression. But, as an aid to comprehension for all, he ensures that the paragraphs in which the isiZulu quotes are embedded themselves explain the material quoted.

Nwando Achebe in her chapter on "Love, Courtship and Marriage in Africa" (Chapter 7) investigates the history of an emotion – love – and a relationship – marriage – which are often written about in transactional terms by scholars of Africa, both in the past and in the present. Achebe sketches out a new path, starting with analysis of the vocabulary of love, loving, sexual attraction, and courtship, the words themselves used in indigenous languages throughout Africa. And she discusses the various practices by which people courted one another, how they developed their relationships, and how they married in various ways, including woman-to-woman marriages. Her chapter concludes with an extensive discussion of sources, what she refers to as the Love, Courtship, and Marriage Archive, including examples of Nigerian love literature, poems, songs, and academic studies.

Claire Robertson's chapter on "Slavery and Women in Africa" starts by showing how more recent studies of women and slavery in Africa have overturned many stereotypes about women and about slavery (Chapter 8). Such studies have shown that the predominance of men in the Atlantic slave trade had more to do with the value of women in production in Africa and less with European assumptions about men's supposed higher capacity for agricultural labor, and also demonstrate that slavery was more a continuum of various statuses of being unfree and not just a single immutable status defined by chattel slavery. Robertson also examines the ways in which slaveholding changed during colonialism – ending in some societies, continuing in others, taking on new forms in yet others – and concludes with a discussion of the problem of contemporary slavery in a world in which women often lack access to key resources and are particularly vulnerable to the downsides of the world market

economy. She finishes with the comment that in the world today there are millions of slaves, nearly all of them women. In other words, while African women had negotiated their terms of slavery in the past, today slavery has become gendered more than ever.

Part III: Family and community

African communities were organized according to many different principles, whether through kinship, ethnicity, race, religion, or, in the recent past, nation. The chapters in Part III demonstrate that these categories were flexible rather than fixed, and that Africans defined themselves and others in ways that protected and enhanced their communities. Rather than existing in static formations, communities were fluid and adaptable.

James Giblin begins his chapter on kinship in a modest way, suggesting that you may be tempted to skip it, as with most book chapters on kinship, and then shows us exactly why and how central kinship is to understanding African relationships from historic times to the contemporary world of WhatsApp (Chapter 9). For historians in particular, Giblin makes the case that understanding kinship – as relationships, as discourse, and as a cultural construction rather than simply as a matter of biological descent – provides a way to understand the creative ways in which people define themselves and others. The key contribution of Giblin's examples of his own research, and his discussion of the work of others, is to separate kinship from the arid discussions of older anthropological texts and "background" chapters in history dissertations, and to show it as a living, breathing, and vital part of daily life, full of rich information for social historians.

In Chapter 10 Michael Mahoney, like Giblin, tackles what might seem a well-worn concept in African studies – ethnicity – but with his focus on southern Africa he also breathes new life into the term. In particular, he demonstrates the ways in which Africans themselves used ethnicity as a source of pride and a feeling of belonging, rather than to label and divide. His examination of the scholarship brings into focus especially work done in sociolinguistics and archaeology as well as in history, and also emphasizes the importance of language as source material – narratives, figures of speech, and much else – in explaining how and why people identify themselves and others. But Mahoney's discussion of ethnicity is not limited to Africans; he extends his examination of South Africa to include discussion of the development of ethnic identities by whites, Indians, and "coloureds" in that country's fraught history, especially during the apartheid years. He concludes with a discussion of ethnicity in the rest of southern Africa – Botswana, Lesotho, Swaziland, Namibia, Mozambique, and Zimbabwe – and warns that in the future ethnicity may play a significant role in social discontent, signaled already by the rise of xenophobia in South Africa.

Jonathan Glassman moves the discussion of ethnicity into the recent past in Chapter 11, examining the development of ethnicity and race in African thought since the late 1950s. He focuses on modern differences created by Africans as well as Europeans: "Ethnicity, race, and nationalism are cognate phenomena, difficult if not impossible to distinguish in analytically coherent ways; their protean forms often morph into one another in processes that it is the historian's task to trace." He argues that racial entanglements, especially in Rwanda and Zanzibar, produced cases where locals wrote their own narratives of superiority. For example, the Tutsi produced narratives of superiority over Hutu bumpkins, and Arab narratives assumed a superiority over blacks with the legacy of slavery central to discourses of difference in Islamic societies. In other words, there were widespread discourses of civilization and barbarity not just between Europeans and Africans but also within African societies.

Looking more closely at Islamic societies, Sean Hanretta and Shobana Shankar in Chapter 12 trace how European authors identified Islam in Africa as a specific branch of a religion and one that for them carried connotations of backwardness and insularity, disconnected from the wider world of Islam and its believers. These authors sought to "know, name, and control African religions," particularly with the assistance of Christian missionaries. Hanretta and Shankar also show the ways in which African Muslim scholars, in their writing and especially in their vocabulary and terminology, reflected a much more cosmopolitan view of Islam which reached well beyond Africa and influenced the naming of things and places by Europeans. Recent scholarly work has included social history as distinct from history written self-consciously as part of religious studies or colonial management. Some of the work discussed relates to the intellectual history of Islam as distinct from a transactional approach, but most of it focuses on attempts to write social histories of African Muslims and to connect the study of Islam with other interpretive categories such as class, gender, and, most recently, race and sexuality. Islam framed not only religious beliefs but also a community.

Finally, Brett Shadle draws our attention to the sad emergence of another significant community: refugees. In Chapter 13, "Refugees in African History," Shadle raises questions about a new community formed through instability and necessity. By the end of 2015, there were 4.4 million refugees in Africa, yet we know little about their history. How can we define refugees as a field of study? Can we accept a strict legal category of refugee while also accepting that there are many ways in which people experience being a refugee. There are many questions about the social relationships that people maintained even while crossing borders, and about how people make choices about where to go. Rather than being seen as people who are driven by currents of violence and misfortune like a flow of water, refugees should be viewed as agents of their own change. How do they shape their own identity? How do they tell their stories? Who listens to them? And, relating to the other chapters in this section, how do refugee communities define themselves?

Part IV: Africans and their environment

In Part IV, all the authors argue strongly for a multidisciplinary approach to African history to examine the ways in which Africans used sophisticated technologies to bring innovation, production, and health to their societies. Utilizing the work of archaeologists, linguists, and scientists, we can now understand the material as well as the intellectual wealth of the continent.

Peter Schmidt's chapter on African iron technology presents a fascinating case of ancient African scientific innovation and recent European scholarly forgetting through a very personal gaze. He describes himself as an archeologist who writes African history, and who believes that "archeology is one of the few ways in which we can write the ancient history of Africa." He argues that scholars such as Philip D. Curtin and others mistook scale for complexity, and failed to notice how small producers could attain much greater levels of sophistication in their production techniques than the larger blast furnaces of the West. What is particularly engrossing about his work are the details about how exactly, as an archeologist, he investigated the material evidence for East African iron smelting, and how he enlisted the assistance of other scholars in scientific fields to recreate the small furnaces of 100 years ago and more and to reproduce the techniques used. Nevertheless, he argues that the failure of nonspecialist scholars to get involved with untangling the complicated details of historical arguments, who instead use bland generalizations, results in a "denial of African scientific accomplishment, [which] warns us that the postcolonial era in Africa is also a time when the attitudes and prejudices of colonial representation are alive and well."

In Chapter 15, "Africa and Environmental History," Greg Maddox likewise supports a multidisciplinary approach, arguing that scholars who have drawn from fields such as historical linguistics and archaeology can demonstrate the ways in which Africans, living in a continent often described as having a difficult and frequently changing environment, domesticated crops and introduced new production techniques in agriculture well before similar practices elsewhere in the world. The work he discusses counters the image of a disease-ridden and harsh land in which people are largely victims of their environment, a view still too prevalent in popular and scholarly studies of the continent. Maddox concludes his chapter by pointing to two areas that will take on increasing significance in future study: the use of evidence resulting from human genome mapping to read back into the history of human and environmental change in Africa; and the impact of rapid climate change upon the future of African environments.

In Chapter 16 Karen Flint looks at "Health and Medicine in African History" by using the Ebola outbreak of 2014–2015 as a lens on the role of health and medicine in Africa. Flint argues that the earlier historiography, which focused on the triumphal role of Western medicine and the hero figures of European medicine in Africa, has been supplanted by an examination of how European intervention instead had a detrimental impact on African health and demography.

In fact, Africans had worked successfully with the environment for centuries to control, or at least moderate, the impact of diseases such as sleeping sickness. Flint's chapter is wide ranging, including sections on the political economy of health, the sociocultural history of medicine, African therapeutics, biomedicine, as well as discussion of medical discourses on Africa and Africans as the "other."

Concluding this section, Morten Jerven in Chapter 17, "Wealth and Poverty in African History," poses the common question that dominates recent literature: "Why is Africa poor?" Using "a wealth of new historical data [that] has been unearthed, collated, and organized" since the first decade of the twenty-first century, much of it from colonial archives and especially from military files, Jerven argues that scholars now understand that "the boundary of investigation is pushed backwards to allow the evaluation of trajectories of economic development across the colonial and postcolonial period." These longer time perspectives enable us to see that growth has been recurring in African economies (i.e., it is not all downhill), and that periods of economic growth are not new in Africa. Looking at history through a broad perspective, and incorporating scientific and quantitative sources, we can see that the wealth or poverty of the continent was not intrinsic or irrefutable.

Part V: Africans and the world

Africa has often been characterized as isolated from the rest of the world other than through the slave trade. In Part V, the authors demonstrate quite the opposite, for Africans influenced the worlds of the Atlantic as well as of the Indian Ocean, and still play a significant role in geopolitical tensions over security and resources.

In Chapter 18 Walter Hawthorne focuses on the development of an Africanist perspective – that is, one stressing African agency – in the development of the concept of an Atlantic world made by black people and incorporating all sides of the Atlantic: Europe, North America, South America, and Africa. He notes that the work done by the first generation of Atlantic scholars, W. E. B. Du Bois and others, established African history as a scholarly discipline in the United States (albeit limited to the historically black colleges and universities), well before the emergence of African history as a field of study distinct from imperial or colonial history in 1950s Britain. He discusses at some length the significance of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade Database (Voyages) (www.slavevoyages.org), begun in 2006, which continues to grow and, as of 2016, holds detailed information about at least 36,000 slaving voyages. The information contained in this database, Hawthorne explains, illuminates not just the numbers of slaves traded, but their origins, gender, age, and much more right down to the individual level. Scholars' use of such a database, combined with research in other archives, especially those found in more local collections throughout the Atlantic world, has enabled them to, as Hawthorne demonstrates, breathe new life into analyses of African agency.

On the other side of the African continent, Africans were also part of the culture of the Indian Ocean, as noted by Ann Biersteker in Chapter 19, "Swahili Literature and the Writing of African History." Her very comprehensive chapter discusses works in Swahili ranging from the chronicles of coastal city states to contemporary poetry and prose. All forms of written and spoken expression in Swahili are included – narrative poetry, sung poetry, histories, ethnographies, autobiographies, biographies, and travelogues – many of them produced in the mid- to late nineteenth century and solicited and collected by German colonial officials and missionaries. Considering the rarity of written African-language sources available in the precolonial period, Biersteker's work is important for providing us with a wide-ranging account of what has been written, and what scholars have written about the texts. And she also addresses the contemporary development of the ways in which Swahili has become a language used internationally by a worldwide scholarly community, although, as she points out, there has been no study as yet of the Kiswahili texts written by such leading figures of twentieth-century Kenyan politics as Harry Thuku and Jomo Kenyatta.

Bringing us into the complexity of the twentieth century, Timothy Scarnecchia approaches study of the Cold War from the point of view of Africans and the African continent in Chapter 20, "Africa and the Cold War." He argues that, in some ways, the Cold War provided Africans with strategic advantages and flexibility. "The availability of an alternative to Western colonialism and capitalism gave African nationalists and intellectuals a new way to reorganize their tenuous connections to the masses of peasants and urban workers in the colonies they had promised to liberate from colonialism." Socialism and international communism offered ways to cover up class and ethnic divisions between elites and masses and they could develop a shared identity against a common enemy – Western imperialism. The Cold War also gave African states some leverage at the United Nations. Yet Scarnecchia sees the continuing impact of the Cold War on African states as worrisome, especially in Liberia, Sierra Leona, Congo, and Cote d'Ivoire. He sees the legacy of the Cold War continuing and growing, with secret US military bases and soldiers throughout Africa fighting a new "war" on terrorism, whereby the United States sees Islam as a threat.

Continuing the examination of Cold War tensions, Awet Weldemichael takes Scarnecchia's conclusions further in a case study, "The Horn of Africa from the Cold War to the War on Terror." Following the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, the United States, in the name of a "war on terror," established various military outposts in the Horn of Africa, while France, Germany, Japan and China have been "trying to position themselves for the upcoming global rivalry over a region of rising geopolitical significance and resources." At the same time, regional actors have been pursuing their own agendas in Somalia, Ethiopia, and Eritrea, as during the Cold War era, escalating tensions in the area. Two centuries after piracy in North Africa led to the first US military intervention on the African continent, piracy has again become a concern for American commerce.

Part VI: African self-representations

Finally, in Part VI we examine ways in which Africans have represented themselves, through writing documents, creating a choral tradition of resistance, or publishing their own life stories. As expressed through social activities or formal documentation, these sources provide historians with their most valuable keys – literal and aural – to understand the history of the continent.

In Chapter 22 Jay Spaulding provides us with a case study of the "art of memory" in seventeenth-century Sinnar, part of what is the modern state of the Sudan, posing the question of how state scribes in the Muslim kingdom of Sinnar in the late 1700s developed an elaborate system of royal documents when there was no apparent history of writing in the kingdom. His chapter examines the way in which complicated documents meticulously committed to memory could be recalled orally for centuries after their initial preparation, and also how their structural elements provided the basis for the development of written documentation later on, at a time when the rulers of Sinnar chose that form of documentation.

In Chapter 23 Neo Lekgotla *laga* Ramoupi likewise focuses on a case study – of songs sung by political prisoners on Robben Island, especially in the 1960s. For Ramoupi song is embedded in African culture and is an essential element of the prisoner experience. Again and again on the island, prisoners subjected to all sorts of controls and privations, expressed themselves individually and as a community through song. And they used these songs to express shared beliefs about key events in all their lives: land, the wider physical and social environment, social justice, and history. In these songs too can be found the histories of people (like Robert Sobukwe) and organizations (like the Pan Africanist Congress) that have been forgotten, erased, or simply overlooked because they were not the "winners" in politics. And, above all, the history of struggle fought continent-wide against white colonialism:

iZwe Lethu!	The land belongs to us!
Thina abantwana be Afrika	We, the children of Africa
Sikhalela ilizwe, ilizwe Lethu	We are crying for the land, our own land
Lathathwa ngabamhlophe	That was taken by the Boers/whites
Umkhokheli wethu, Sobukwe!	Our leader, Sobukwe!
Sobukwe! Bua le APLA	Sobukwe! talk to APLA
Sifuna iAPLA engene eSouth Afrika	We want APLA to enter South Africa
Ukulwa namabhunu!	To fight the Boers!
iAPLA ezo khulula South Africa	APLA is going to liberate South Africa
iAPLA ezo khulula umhlaba	APLA is going to liberate the land
we amaAfrika!	Of the African People!

In Chapter 23, "Apartheid Forgotten and Remembered," Nancy Clark and William Worger discuss the limits of South African academic scholarship written during the past half century, and the potential for new work that relies primarily

on stories told by ordinary people about their experiences under apartheid, and on utilizing the vast amounts of information that exist for those scholars who have expertise in vernaculars. What is striking about academia in South Africa post-apartheid is that, rather than experiencing the growth of new scholarship as it occurred, for example, at such universities as Makerere and Dar es Salaam in the 1960s and 1970s, historical work has largely reverted to the Afrikaner/English divide of the early years of apartheid. The advances of social history in the 1970s and 1980s have largely been forgotten. If history as an academic discipline is not to be forever irrelevant to the majority of the population, its future in South Africa has to be the responsibility of a new generation of authors whose work has found publication primarily in the autobiographies discussed in the second half of the chapter. The issues of relevancy and responsibility can also be seen in the questions asked and the materials used by Ndlovu and Ramoupi, themselves among the leaders of this new generation.

Moving from the perspective of a case study to a continental gaze, Charles Ambler concludes the volume with an examination of popular culture writ large from the study of sport to that of concert parties, from clothing and fashion to Nollywood and YouTube (Chapter 25). Ambler reminds of what has not been written – why, for example, there has been so little written on the extraordinary volume of titles known collectively as Onitsha Market Literature? Is this why Nwando Achebe has to remind us to write a history of emotion in Africa? Is this where study of WhatsApp and of lineage, as James Giblin tells us, will provide opportunities for examining the history of individual and community relationships in the future? Though Ambler suggests that a focus on popular culture has been one way to balance the male focus of most studies of political history, there is still a bias toward studies of activities in which primarily males engage, especially the sports literature. But, with the range of activities outlined in his chapter and the insights provided by the contributors to this book, perhaps we can envisage a future range of studies that are not limited to transactional relationships but that engage fully with evidence about and discussion of the ways in which individuals and communities love and play as well as the ways in which they hate and kill.

As noted at the beginning of this introduction, *A Companion to African History* aims to capture the enthusiasms of practicing historians, and to encourage similar enthusiasms in a new generation of scholars. The plural case is intentional. There is no one way to write history. Imagination is key. And it is up to historians to capture and reflect in their work the imaginations of their subjects.