Transforming Sub-Saharan African Universities—Transnational Collaborations at the Intersections of Gender as a Viable Pathway?

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Introduction

I present this commentary, bearing in mind, two crucial realities among others that Sub-Saharan Africa's (henceforth referred to as Africa) universities wrestle with, as they strive to respond to twenty-first-century development challenges. First, public funding will neither lend itself to nor be sufficient for, the bold moves needed to fully support academic endeavors revamp and transform academic institutions (Amin & Ntembe, 2021; Oketch, 2016; Swartz, 2006). It is therefore important to explore avenues for diversify their institutional funding base—with the understanding that meaningful structural transformations at the macro level will require new support strategies to muster the level of independence necessary to enable them to assert system-wide radical agendas. Second, the world of teaching and research in the academy is increasingly becoming an internationalized and communal endeavor, connecting local and global networks of actors (Adanu et al., 2015; Cherney et al., 2015; Woolley et al., 2014). It is equally pertinent that African institutions give more serious thought than before to building relevant and meaningful institutional linkages to expand capacity in research and student training, and in turn, contribute to the local as well as the global knowledge bank. The need for transnational collaboration is also vividly expressed by the continent's poor representation among other higher education systems, despite an overall

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rapidly rising enrolments in the post-independence era. As Zeleza (2021) noted,

> In 1959, on the verge of Africa's 'year of independence' in 1960, when seventeen countries achieved their freedom from colonial rule, there were only seventy-six universities across Africa mostly concentrated in South Africa, Egypt, and parts of West Africa. The number rose to 170 in 1970, 294 in 1980, 446 in 1990, 784 in 2000, 1,431 in 2010, and 1,682 in 2018. Enrolments rose from 0.74 million in 1970 to 1.7 million in 1980, 2.8 million in 1990, 6.1 million in 2000, 11.4 million in 2010, and 14.7 million in 2017…[Yet] Africa remained with the lowest levels of higher education institutions and tertiary enrolments. (p. 2)

It is therefore safe to say that African universities stand to gain substantially from transnational collaborations that are geared toward addressing key structural challenges that could propel the continent on a faster, stable and steady growth path. In this regard, scholars and other professionals within the new African diaspora—who are well equipped and strategically placed to participate in this project of assistance could make a huge difference. Senior scholars, in particular, are usually well positioned to pursue initiatives on the continent, given their professional expertise and experience, considerable independence within Western institutional bases, as well as broad networks and linkages with relevant agents of tertiary education (Akalu, 2016; Teferra, 2021; Foulds & Zeleza, 2014). Where and how gender is situated in this project matter. The centrality of gender to this project, I argue, would be evident if positioned as a set of critical lenses for much needed scrutiny: our investigations into the social statuses, identities and structures that mediate how men and women are treated in society as well as the multiple social intersections (class, race, ethnicity, religion, language, etc.) that mediate this treatment (Crenshaw, 1991, p. 2) Women's role and statuses as knowers and actors that are often neglected in how the academy is constituted as institutions with diversely situated persons and collectives. A feminist perspective compels that we capture, as much as possible, how the reproduction of power and power relations across gender and its multiple social intersections mediate academic cultures and practices for various groups (Johnson, 2015; Okeke-Ihejirika et al., 2019).

I wish to state, however, that this commentary is by no means a comprehensive response to discourses that decry the marginalization of feminist scholarship in Africa's universities. It is also not designed to confront the full barrage of practices of exclusion in Africa's universities that marginalize women's role as agents of change (Mama, 2003; Odejidi et al., 2006; Okeke-Ihejirika, 2017), trivialize gender and its intersectionalities as a crucial entry point to social research and continually sideline the production of feminist knowledge as a scholarly endeavor that could significantly transform academia and society (Ampofo, 2016; Feminist Africa, 2007). I also do not intend to take on the controversies fueled by an apparent division between

discourses that are considered *feminist scholarship* and those perceived as simply discourses on *gender* or *gender and development* (Cornwall et al., 2007). On the contrary, my commentary is meant to spur more debates and, in particular, enlarge the existing pockets of conversations in order to make room for graduate students and emerging scholars across Africa, male and female alike, who, from the little they have been exposed to, are excited about scholarship that originated from gender, but have little or no access to explore its ever-broadening contours, dynamics and dimensions. For many of them, the beginning point is gaining an understanding of gender (including its embedded social intersections) as a useful category of analysis. Most importantly, I wish to state that my analysis explores the building of meaningful collaborations with this entry point rather than its comprehensive interrogation—which remains an unfinished project well beyond the scope of my work.

Context

The neglect suffered by Africa's universities since the 1980s along with the need to diversify knowledge sources in an increasingly globalizing world provide a strong impetus for building collaborative research networks. Many scholars in the field deplore the dismal state of research and teaching in Africa, insufficient infrastructural facilities, poor staffing and inadequate funding (Tafida et al., 2015). Budget limitations, others argue, hamper the building of research communities, by dampening the potential and motivation for capacity building (Illing, 2012). Indeed, over the past two decades, a good number of international funding agencies have made sizable investments, human and material, all in a bid to revamp Africa's universities, particularly the various research traditions within its diverse intellectual communities. Among these entities is Fulbright, one of the most prominent exchange programs, which has provided scholars in six global regions, including Sub-African Africa, for over seven decades. Named after one of the United States' highly esteemed political figures, William J. Fulbright, the program supports scholarly exchanges for teaching and research to and from African countries (Fulbright Scholar Program, n.d.). Similarly, the Carnegie African Diaspora Fellowship Program (CADFP, 2013), launched in 2013, deploys the expertise of African-borne scholars who reside in the United States and Canada to enhance research collaboration, curriculum co-development and graduate training in universities located in Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria, South Africa, Tanzania and Uganda.

Similarly, several promising bilateral educational initiatives have emerged such as the Sweden-Uganda 5-year agreement (OpenAid, n.d.) and the Academic Model Providing Access to Healthcare (AMPATH), which began as a modest partnership between Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis (IUPUI) and Kenya's Moi University. AMPATH now flourishes as a robust "North–South, US-Kenya medical partnership that provides opportunities for faculty members from both institutions in education, research, and

clinical service health and social services to a wide swath of residents in western Kenya" (Tobenkin, 2016, p. 18).

South African universities have benefited tremendously from a large number of international research collaborations and capacity-building programs funded by agencies like The Ford, Carnegie and Mellon Foundation, and Erasmus Mundus Programs. These new interventions have played a major role in expanding graduate student enrolment, and research and supervision support structures (Luescher-Mamashela et al., 2015). Undoubtedly, the resulting linkages for international collaboration and funding complemented broader strategic measures that moved forward a minimum of five South African universities in global university rankings (CWUR, 2017).

These emerging collaborations underscore the increasing interest and differing agendas of stakeholders, who make decisions about, fund or manage universities in Africa. Nonetheless, there appears to be an acute dearth of literature on scholarly collaborations in Africa, even though the handful of studies on the experiences and outcomes of research collaborations in Africa do suggest a positive outlook. International research collaboration, a recent study notes, facilitates "intra- and inter-disciplinary partnerships that resulted in maximizing the capacity-building efforts. The exposure to this collaboration improved both individual and institutional research capacity in the south" (Frantz et al., 2014, p. 1228). Ronel Callaghan's evaluation of collaborative initiatives in South Africa equally highlighted the importance of interdisciplinary approaches for transforming teaching challenges into learning opportunities (Callaghan, 2015).

Although the importance of these partnerships has long been recognized and the positive outcomes celebrated, the potential that gender holds—as an entry point in terms of transforming, expanding and sustaining the visions that propel these collaborations—has remained largely under-explored. This brief commentary seeks to provoke more discussion into what could be, at least, one viable pathway to re-invigorating the African academy. My contextual exploration of research collaboration at the intersections of gender is based on two decades of experience as a transnational feminist scholar who has been actively engaged in various academic ventures both in Africa and across several Western countries. Below, I will explore the potential that gender holds as (a) a strategic point of entry into collaborative research initiatives that might engender meaningful interdisciplinary interactions, (b) to open up critical sites for the production of feminist knowledge and (c) to enhance graduate training. I pay particular attention to contemporary social problems that could lend themselves to new forms of research collaborations that might be better informed by feminist scholarship on gender, and its intersections. Most importantly, my conclusive commentary draws attention to the various ways that women, as a significant but largely marginalized constituency in Africa's university systems, can be strategically situated in such collabo-

rations as scholars, subjects of study and stakeholders. Through these roles they will become actively involved in the transformation of Africa'sExploring Transnational Collaborations at universities.

Review of Literature

A number of scholars have emphasized the importance of scholarly collaborations for graduate training in an era of diminishing public funding. The funding crises, another recent study notes, have "serious implications…not only for research output in the form of publications but also for the training of graduate students in the country" (Illing, 2012, p. 5). International networks and partnerships that support local institutions, students and faculty, and value and account for local imperatives and contexts, can create platforms for knowledge building and sharing that serve transformational ends in the global South, in particular (Klopp et al., 2014). This study also notes that such initiatives should aim to "both stimulate trans-cultural, multi-directional global knowledge flows and strengthen local institutions, research, and pedagogy …[to effect] more equitable participation in constructing and leveraging global, as well as local, urban knowledge" (Klopp et al., 2014, p. 207).

Similarly, a 2015 study of doctoral nursing programs in South Africa emphasized the need to develop sustainable strategies that could reinforce supportive frameworks of multi-tier collaborations of stakeholders, funders, institutions and student cohorts. In the face of the acute decline of institutional funding, the study argues, such collaborations, "would need to be supported systemically, administratively and academically though the remit of the educational trust and/or other like-minded organizations" (Comiskey et al., 2015, p. 651). Many scholars, policymakers and funding partners view these emerging collaborative initiatives for graduate training among a number of universities in Sweden, South Africa and Uganda as potential models for North–South collaboration, given the creative forms of blended learning and digital pedagogy embedded (Protsiv et al., 2016). This model, however, may not thrive given the paucity of high-level local research capacity.

The literature also suggests that collaborative research could help improve student writing skills and competencies: It could be employed to create intellectual communities where students, their peers, and their tutors share constructive feedback (Dowse & Howie, 2013). Other scholars and stakeholders in tertiary education have also discussed the significance of research collaborations across national and international borders. Some examine how a common teaching platform acts as a collaborative model, one that is aimed at enhancing undergraduate nursing education in South Africa's universities (Daniels & Khanyile, 2013). Other scholars consider the collaborative capacity building that is targeted to graduate health science students between low-and middle-income countries (LMICs) in Africa, Asia and Europe (Atkins et al., 2016). As well, researchers have investigated partnerships between US-based

Nigerian physicians and their local partners, particularly in developing and boosting modern healthcare systems in Nigeria (Nwadiuko et al., 2016).

Some researchers look at scientific co-authorship among African scholars as a mode of research collaboration; they consider the ways in which over-emphasis on collaborations in natural and applied sciences excluded other knowledge disciplines (Pouris & Ho, 2014). The expectations and challenges of multi-institutional partnerships between universities in Africa and the United States aimed at facilitating necessary educational reforms and transformation have been explored (Semali et al., 2013). Finally, intra-continental collaborations between the Mauritian and South African university system, as they seek to develop human resources capacity for Ph.D. education and programs have also been studied (Samuel & Mariaye, 2014).

All these studies unearth crucial insights into potential pitfalls and important considerations for building viable collaborative initiatives. However, they do not provide a comprehensive critical assessment of the scope, quality and outcomes of these collaborations. Much of the literature focuses on South African universities, and mainly on collaborative initiatives in the natural and applied science disciplines, often among local universities. More importantly, what are largely absent as objects of study are gender and its intersections, both as constitutive social categories that define the agents and nature of inquiry, as well as being critical entry points to epistemologies that could disrupt systemic inequities in society.

TRANSFORMING THE AFRICAN ACADEMY: GENDER AS SUBJECT AND AS A CONSTITUTIVE CATEGORY

From a general feminist standpoint, gender is a crucial basis for constituting and transforming social relations of power (Acker, 1992; Budgeon, 2013; Metcalfe & Rees, 2010). Gender relations refer to "a complex system of personal and social relations of domination and power through which women and men are socially created and maintained and through which they gain access to power and material resources or are allocated status within society" (IFAD, 2000, p. 4; Johnson, 2015; Okeke-Ihejirika, 2017). From a general feminist standpoint, gender is a crucial basis for constituting and transforming social relations of power (Berger & Guidroz, 2010; Laube, 2021).

The experiences of Western colonization have "gendered" and "racialized" African women and men in different ways, but it is safe to say that the transition into postcolonial societies has, for the most part, benefited men (Chadya, 2003). Africa's universities reflect the resultant systemic gender inequities, which are replicated in a diversity of administrative structures as well as institutional cultures (Mama, 2003; Okeke-Ihejirika, 2004). It is, however, important to note that women within and outside the academy are not entirely vulnerable to these postcolonial circumstances. Overtly and covertly, they do resist their subordinate status in various social arrangements, including the university, thereby creating a diversity of resilient platforms to negotiate or

navigate the "concrete constraints" that contemporary social arrangements have thrown in their path (Kandioti, 2010, p. 81).

In making a case for gender inclusivity in academic structures, relations and processes within African universities, it is also important to clearly differentiate between (a) the conventional line of advocacy that emphasizes the need to make room for women and (b) a viable argument for placing gender issues at the center of deliberations for transforming African universities. Arguing for research at the intersections of gender should be premised on existing evidence that strongly supports the position that diversity and social inclusiveness of any sort ultimately serve the society well. The current state of knowledge in the field recognizes that men and women are equal partners in nation building and social progress. Existing literature clearly shows that, on average, societies and economies that attend to gender inequalities have better prospects for growth and robustness (GGGR, 2014; Mercer Report, 2014).

In light of this knowledge, questions regarding the feminization of poverty, intimate partner violence and participation in public decisions cannot be removed from the development challenges of contemporary Africa (Bami-wuye & Odimegwu, 2014; Idoko et al., 2015; Uthman et al., 2010). In the African context, women's strategic position in the family, their role in food production, and their grip on the informal economy, among other instances, certainly suggest that empowering them is not a matter of charity but, rather, of self-preservation. Women's role in development becomes even more critical and inevitable, particularly in an era in which the supply of human capital in Africa is highly deficient. The diversity and depth of gender inequality on the continent thus compels the African academy to forge the necessary multidisciplinary linkages to probe the socio-cultural, economic and political histories that undergird contemporary life. This stance is both intellectual and political; it is also strongly linked to fundamental questions about voice, power and responsibility in the content and management of African universities (Mama, 2003, 2011; Morley, 2006; Okeke-Ihejirika, 2004).

Exploring Transnational Collaborations at the Intersections of Gender: A Viable Pathway to Transforming the African Academy

Local and global actors who pursue development initiatives increasingly recognize the importance of integrating gender and its intersections into the analysis of complex social problems. Over the past two decades, many Western humanitarian organizations, research funding agencies (Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, 2016) and governments (The Government of Canada, 2017; USAID, 2012) have made significant policy changes that respond to documented evidence and emerging social trends about the many ways gender is implicated in persistent social inequalities, especially in developing regions like Africa. This wind of change is also evident in the rising profile that gender

has gained in major development organizations in Africa—at least in principle. Still, the search for viable pathways to social progress continues to present problematic complexities at every turn (African Development Forum, 2008; UNECA, 2017). Indeed, the scant available data with which to address Africa's social problems is succinctly expressed in a 2013 publication by the United Nation's Economic Commission for Africa:

> Over the last decade, the centrality of gender equality in the achievement of socio-economic and cultural development in society has been widely documented and proven….Considering this situation, there is a need for improving national capacity of African countries to collect, compile and disseminate gender statistics, by strengthening ongoing initiatives and activities in the region and by undertaking new initiatives that might invigorate the availability and improvement of gender indicators. (UNECA, 2016)

The urgency to cast a "gender lens" on existing measures that are aimed at addressing social problems also resonates in emerging trends that are increasingly changing social expectations of the ivory tower. African governments, universities and scholars cannot afford to ignore these trends. Such trends include the following, although this is merely a selection:

1. A shift away from what I refer to as "scholarship for its own sake," to research that recognizes that social problems are complex and may call for a team approach rather than individual isolated inquiries (Carr et al., 2018).
2. A push toward what I call the 5th space, which encourages meaningful, multidisciplinary interactions among global intellectuals who nurture academic networks that significantly undercut the challenges of collaboration across various geophysical location (Grand Challenges n.d.; Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation n.d.).
3. Recent directives from global decision makers, particularly the United Nations as well funding agencies that operate in Africa, which suggest substantive social transformation cannot occur without a robust infusion of gender considerations into university culture, decision making, curriculum, research and graduate training (Unmillennium Project n.d.; Sustainable Development n.d.; UNIDO n.d.). These entities increasingly demand research collaboration among scholars, decision makers and community stakeholders, and closer ties between academia and industry—with gender considerations as a central component.

The quest for a collaborative network of knowledge production and sharing among scholars from the sciences, humanities, social sciences, law and so forth creates a web of cross-disciplinary spaces for broadening knowledge production. These spaces are not confined to the conventional interdisciplinary intersections in the social science and humanities that feminist scholarship has

so far gained entry into. Academic knowledge can be "gendered" through the intersecting activities of multiple agents from a multiplicity of knowledge bases as they negotiate and transform transnational and postcolonial contexts of mobility and development (Bailey, 2010). Gendering research spaces also entails tapping into the network of transnational African female feminist scholars; their research, knowledge production and continual scrutiny of the policies and practices of Africa's universities have propelled many of the interventions made by Western stakeholders.

Integrating understandings of gender and its intersections into scholarly collaborations also has crucial implications for graduate student training. At this level, students should wrestle with the "whys" and "hows" of critical inquiry. Furthermore, their training should be rooted in an intellectual tradition that exposes them to the complexity of social problems. It is also crucial to guide students toward innovative research approaches that embed multidisciplinary lenses into their research methods. Institutional collaborations, driven by diaspora engagement, may not only enhance graduate training but could also hasten the building of Indigenous communities of scholars and researchers. Such a development is likely to foster viable platforms for nurturing broader research agendas that could respond to today's complex social problems. As noted earlier, research and scholarship in the twenty-first century are increasingly collaborative endeavors, requiring the mobilization of teams, resources and infrastructure across disciplines, institutions and global regions.[1]

Working as a multidisciplinary team improves the quality of proposals, viability of research projects and the learning experiences of scholars, students, practitioners and policymakers. Collaborating in the 5th space not only increases the potential for acquiring more research funding, it also provides diverse sets of expertise and methodologies for robust graduate training in research skills. The vision is to equip emerging scholars with the relevant skills to align research programs to real-life problems. As their expertise grows, these emerging scholars become what may be referred to as global intellectuals. It will not matter where they are located; they will be sought after because they have what it takes to compete and contribute significantly to the world community. Moreover, they can easily be identified as important players in a knowledge economy where information, rather than money, is the major currency.

It is also important to stress that the process of building Africa's knowledge economy calls for culturally located agents well attuned to local conditions and well aware of the stakes involved in protecting a people's knowledge base and civilization. These agents must be located in a research tradition that not only challenges them to take on social problems but also rewards them with appropriate incentives. International collaboration, if properly situated, may not only facilitate the training of a new generation of scholars, it could also provide the framework for setting up a broader research agenda for the continent. Moving in this direction requires the expertise of African scholars at

home and in diaspora who could assist in rebuilding organizational structures as well as managing process and performance. As resource persons with institutional networks locally, internationally and transnationally, senior scholars in diaspora could assist new universities to set up centers and programs that respond to local knowledge demand, engage in capacity building with respect to co-curricular development and expand research and funding bases through collaboration with African-based scholars. Such an arrangement could nurture stronger networks of stakeholders working toward desired goals and a greater sense of community that gives ownership and direction to Africans (Zeleza, 2013; Foulds & Zeleza, 2014).

The envisioned transformation in Africa's universities will also hinge on the reach of transnational partnerships that these universities are able to forge and leverage. Moreover, the success of collaborative research depends on what robust frameworks the policymakers and academia are willing to put in place. Knowledge synthesis rarely happens in a vacuum; it requires structures that will evolve according to local demands and dynamics. The goal is not to adopt a provisional approach, but to create frameworks of stakeholders, funders, institutions and student cohorts that will sustain these multi-tiered international linkages over time—until they become not only self-sustaining, but also institutionalized. In this twenty-first century, the impact of successful research collaborations on graduate training and human capacity development will depend largely on an aggregation of teams, resources and infrastructure across disciplines, cultures, institutions and global regions. These factors certainly cannot be over-emphasized.

While transnational research collaborations have great potential for Africa's universities, they also currently have their drawbacks, which must not be overlooked. It is safe to say that most ongoing collaborations are largely organized and executed according to the dictates of Western funding agencies. Hence, their sustainability also depends more on the flow of funding, rather than on the capacity of African diaspora scholars and their partners on the continent, to mobilize time and expertise toward significant structural change. The ongoing unstable funding climate could undermine the current seeds of transformation planted by strategically placed global scholars who have invested tremendously in Africa's universities (Mbeiki, 2003).

The quest for research collaborations at the intersections of gender, especially the transnational dimension, must also consider the possible impacts of the migration of human expertise. The largest proportion of poorest countries in the world today is found in Africa. This condition has led to the flight of human capital, otherwise known as "the brain-drain." This entails knowledge loss, whereby highly skilled professionals, including doctors, engineers and university lecturers, immigrate abroad for greener pastures. Africa migrants voluntarily take advantage of various immigration policies in Europe, Australia, and North American countries that aim to attract qualified international students and skilled workers from across the globe to boost their economic growth and development.[2] This brain drain, an emerging discourse

explores (Olutayo, 2016), could in some respects, translate into a brain gain in the long run (Geber, 2013).

Conclusion

The need for African universities to collaborate with their counterparts in the global North to address development challenges of the twenty-first century and beyond remains a recurring concern among academics, university administrators, government officials and funding organizations. I have argued in this paper that much literature discusses research collaboration and its benefits to graduate students. However, a good deal of this work has focused on South African universities, looking at collaborations in the natural and applied science disciplines. It has also targeted collaborations between universities in the same regions or localities. All this literature suggests that experiences and outcomes of research collaborations in Africa are positive. Nevertheless, I have shown that the recommendations so far articulated scholars have not significantly addressed the gaps in these collaborations; nor have they translated to lasting transformation-driven outcomes. If anything, research collaborations are still patchy and poorly executed. I have also shown that the existing literature has not paid much attention to work that emphasizes what I call "transnational scholarly collaborations at the intersections of gender." Indeed, one cannot help but notice that there has been very little attention paid to gender as both a central and strategic entry point in research collaborations.

Despite the contributions of women to various aspects of human endeavors in Africa, gender still remains largely absent from many conversations about transforming Africa's universities, as if to suggest that the female contribution can be only marginal at best. It is in this context that I argued for the importance of gender and its intersections—if we, as scholars and stakeholders, hope to contribute toward the transformation of our universities. It is a fact that bridging gender disparities will boost the productive capacities of not only the education sector but also the economy on the whole.

Although I am extremely concerned about the poor state of research collaboration and the seeming apathy of the authorities in some of the African universities, one of the most reassuring findings of my study is that research collaboration has great potential to transform Africa's universities and position our continent on a path of transformational development. Certainly, more research collaborations and partnerships across the globe are urgently needed. This study thus envisages that the establishment of such frameworks will facilitate four key developments, which are critical to sustaining a viable research collaboration across transnational borders:

- mutual understanding among all the stakeholders
- collective commitment to achieving prioritized developmental goals
- creative strategies directed at capacity-building outcomes

- measurable feedback via monitoring, evaluation and reassessments of results.

These seemingly giant steps are possible. Unfortunately, they will remain simply visions yet to be acted upon, unless the political will can be generated to infuse gender concerns into the policy and practice of education in Africa, particularly in universities. Beyond making gender central to academic endeavors on the continent, it is also crucial to center feminist scholarship as a site for institutional transformation. This is not simply in terms of knowledge produced but also through institutional policies and practices. Part of this political resolve, embedded in institutional structures, will depend on administrators and faculties that create spaces where women's voices are recognized and appreciated. Further, it will require that transparency and ethical imperatives underscore practices and processes, and that commitments to knowledge production, synthesis and dissemination inform graduate training and research collaboration policies.

Research has continued to underscore that gender inequality serves as a major barrier to the transformation of African universities and the economic growth of Africa more generally (UNECA, 2011). As I highlighted earlier, including gender and its intersections as constitutive social categories and as critical entry points to epistemologies is essential in African universities; this strategy has great potential to transform African society. Any contemporary discourse on Africa's future must factor in the role of women because they are also primary stakeholders in the transformation and development we all envisage; moreover, they can readily mobilize individual and collective resources toward the realization of a future that is both inclusive and empowering for everyone on the continent. Therefore, the government, university administrators and scholars must work together to create a gender-affirming space in academia, one that is conducive to the inclusion and participation of women. Such a space would acknowledge that women, intrinsically, are formidable agents of change.

I conclude this commentary with an emphatic note on the need to explore all avenues possible in order to attract new voices into our discourses on feminist or gender scholarship. As I mentioned earlier, forums for feminist debates remain an elusive space for many graduate students and emerging scholars in Africa. These debates, regardless of their level of sophistication, are not likely to achieve much if they remain little enclaves for scholars who are privileged in one way or the other to participate. We also run a risk of marginalizing feminist scholarship further in the future if the simple notion of gender as a useful category of analysis does not inform the worldview of a sizeable proportion of emerging cohorts of scholars in the continent.

Notes

1. In addition to Foulds and Zeleza (2014), analyses of exchange programs offered by western universities provide a critical lens here. See, for instance, Shayo, R. 2014. Prospects and challenges of international academic exchange programmes between universities in northern and southern countries: reflections from a visiting scholar from an African university. *Nokoko* (4)109–144.
2. For instance, the United States, Germany, France, Australia and Canada Immigration system seeks to attract competent individuals who have distinguished themselves in their field.

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