

# **The Role Played by Transnational Mobility in the Renegotiation of African Scholarship at the University of KwaZulu-Natal**

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## **Abstract**

At the dusk of the twentieth and the dawn of the twenty-first centuries transnational mobility is increasingly becoming an important space through which many of our human activities are defined. Virtually all aspects of our modern world—our jobs, culture, educational systems, ideologies, identities and even our relationships with one another are highly negotiated and inadvertently transformed by the profound forces of mobility. Through in-depth interviews conducted with transnational academics of African origin in the Faculty of Humanities, Development and Social Sciences (FHDSS) at the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN) this paper posits to critically provide an understanding on the role that transnational mobility has played in challenging the current thinking of foreign African academics pertaining to the issue of African scholarship. Given that UKZN is branded the ‘Premier University of African Scholarship’ the paper demonstrates how foreign African migrants are taking advantage of their mobility into this space to interrogate and scrutinise the core substance of African scholarship in this institution. Highlighting the role played by these academics as possible conduits in the expansion of African scholarship within the knowledge production circuit, this study discusses how these migrants are galvanising their transnational experiences in an attempt to amplify and drive this concept beyond the confines of UKZN.

**Keywords:** African scholarship, transnational mobility, foreign African migrants

## **Introduction**

The dusk of the twentieth and the dawn of the twenty-first centuries have witnessed unprecedented flows of transnational mobility of global proportions. We live in a globalised world of transnational interconnectedness and competitiveness marked by the rapid flows of practices and people, ideas and institutions, visions, and capital (Inda & Rosaldo 2002; Meyer & Geschiere 2003) which have continued to impact on the ways in which we relate to our socio-cultural and political institutions. The knowledge economy is one major area which has been affected by the profound forces of transnational activities. Institutions of higher learning in Africa because of their increased international stature are becoming repositories of global transformation which is accentuated by the increased mobility of human, information and material resources around the globe. In this era of rapid globalisation and skyrocketed flows of transnational mobility, it has become imperative for one to investigate the positionality of African scholarship at the interface of transnationalism.

With the view that African scholarship is ‘work in progress’ this paper provides critical insights into the trajectory of transforming knowledge(s) located within the African context and shows how transnational African scholars are at the same time preoccupied with the need to utilise models that can more readily take advantage of the challenges and opportunities offered by their transnational experiences. Using the University of KwaZulu-Natal as the locus, this study set out to investigate the positionality of foreign African academics in response to the ongoing efforts towards establishing UKZN as the ‘premier university of African scholarship’. The paper demonstrates how some of these foreign scholars are striving to galvanise their transnational experiences in the renegotiation of African scholarship within and beyond UKZN. The article focuses on the different perspectives held by this group of scholars in their articulation of this concept as they interact with the structures and mechanisms that could propel the vision beyond the confines of UKZN.

## **Methodology**

The study is drawn from a sample of twenty participants in the Faculty of Humanities, Development and Social Sciences (FHDSS). Qualitative in-

depth interviews guided the methodology of this study. The snowball referral method was used in which participants linked me to others they knew would be suitable for this study.

This paper discusses how foreign African academics at UKZN are utilising the transnational South African space of UKZN for the (re)negotiation of African scholarship in the institution. With UKZN being the ‘the premier university of African scholarship’, foreign African academics in the institution believe that their role as transnationals is crucial in the expansion of the vision beyond the confines of UKZN and South Africa. The concept of transnational academics here is inclusive of those who have taken permanent residency in South Africa either as permanent residents or citizens through naturalisation and those who are on temporary residence permits. As I interviewed participants, I found that migrants regardless of their status, whether permanent or non permanent do not completely sever links with their home countries. It is for this reason that I use the concepts of ‘transnational mobility’ and ‘transnational academics’ to denote anyone who is not originally South African.

The paper is positioned within the debate of understanding what African scholarship is. It scrutinises the perceptions held by foreign African academics concerning the application of African scholarship at UKZN and highlights various possibilities that this concept could be expanded to other universities in Africa.

## **Defining African Scholarship – A Theoretical Framework**

The concept of African scholarship is divergent and increasingly becoming complex in ways that it has become difficult to establish a cross-cutting articulation of what the African experience really is. African scholarship has been defined in multiple ways using a multiplicity of interpretations experimented on in various contextual experiences.

These multivocal interpretations of what constitute the African experience are promoted by what could be seen as a hybridised continent. The African continent has passed through marked transitions that have had tremendous repercussions on the construction of social reality by nation-states. From the historical epoch of colonialism to postcolonialism and to these modern times of globalisation and increased transnational activities

### *Transnational Mobility in the Renegotiation of African Scholarship*

Africa has developed a hybrid identity which has perpetually subjected the continent to a position of negotiation and renegotiation in trying to grapple with the dynamics that constitute African identity.

The transnational mobility of African scholars is among the different contexts through which this paper attempts to scrutinise the concept of African scholarship as applied in UKZN. Some scholars such as Zeleza (2005) and Thiong'o (2005) have strongly argued for the instrumental role that the African diaspora and pan-Africanists could play in advancing the agenda of African scholarship. As pertinent as these roles may appear to be, these writers however have failed to provide empirical data that could validate this truism by practically engaging with particular pockets that demonstrate an interest in partaking in this conversation of African scholarship. African scholarship is an elusive category with multiple voices that have not yet been able to engage with practical issues that may in a way try to address the elusiveness of this concept. Although Zeleza (2008: 6) attempts a classification of the diasporic intelligentsia from Africa into three categories of Pan-Africanists, Northernists and the globalists he has done that on a less problematised manner. This is because he does not provide the national and social backgrounds which could be instrumental in providing more nuanced understandings about these different approaches.

In this era of accelerated growth in globalisation and increased transnational activities, western paradigms have continued to dominate the knowledge economy. Africa is one continent which has been much more affected by these processes of globalisation and transnationalism as cultural heterogeneity is fast being eclipsed by one civilisation trying to enforce cultural homogeneity across the world (Moore 1996; Quinlan 2000). However not everything about the west is dismissive. Some African transnational scholars at UKZN who migrated from some western countries are ready to utilise models from those countries that could be useful for the generation of African scholarship.

### **Perspectives of African Scholarship as Defined by Foreign African Academics**

The University of KwaZulu-Natal is a multicultural university with African academics and students constituting a significant part of the international

membership of the institution. As far as the vision of the institution is concerned, some transnational African academics are striving towards making the concept of African scholarship meaningfully engaged within their different areas of expertise. In trying to bring about meaningful transformation in respect to this vision, foreign African academics are in the first place preoccupied with the very debates of trying to provide some understanding as to what the term ‘African scholarship’ really means. Their different views in themselves have further rendered the concept of African scholarship even more complex.

Some of the participants have defined African scholarship in relation to experiences of Africa – that is the material, existential, and experiential circumstances of people living in the continent of Africa. Others have defined it in terms of its relationship with other forms of scholarship based on a competitive approach – that is in respect to its being recognised as a legitimate space where scientific knowledge can be verified and given credence. Yet some others have seen it as a means of educating upcoming scholars of African origin and to radically instil in them the values and ways that the African reality could be foregrounded and eventually establish itself as an authoritative knowledge space within the globe of knowledge production. The knowledge economy plays a quintessential role in providing intellectual capacities that in the first place attempt to position higher education institutions as formative centres necessary to develop critical thinking and reflective inquiry (Ntshoe 2010). Some foreign African scholars are taking advantage of their presence at UKZN to extend the mandate of critical thinking to their respective countries through the recommendation of relevant pedagogic structures that could advance African philosophies and development.

This study reveals that for UKZN and the African university in general to pursue this vision of African scholarship to the point of making it an authoritative voice among other forms of scholarship, there is a need for African scholars to develop an African cosmology that would override the notion that the African situation can only be studied as an object. An African cosmology supposes that knowledge about Africa should not only be limited to experiential and empirical ways of producing knowledge but rather that such knowledge should also be accompanied with African subjectivities to their belief systems. In other words over and above the experiential and

### *Transnational Mobility in the Renegotiation of African Scholarship*

existential things that you see defining African scholarship, one would need to add the fact that there is in African scholarship the respect for permeability of space between the subjective and the objective, such that there is belief in the broader ontology or cosmology of knowledge. As one of the research participants put it, *'what you see with scholarship from elsewhere is this fundamental belief of objective reality of tangible things as if it is religion and to itself that they actually believe that nothing else exists other than what you see'*. What is implied here is that in trying to establish 'the objective', the subjective should be understood as playing a fundamental role in establishing a natural and holistic picture of what is being studied as objective knowledge.

Africa is a heterogeneous continent replete with diverse socio-cultural and linguistic experiences. Some of the foreign African academics interviewed for this study have expressed a strong desire to take advantage of this vision at UKZN to expose students to scholarship from their home countries and other parts of Africa they have knowledge about. A diversity of transnational experiences it is believed would expose students to a wealth of information about the variables and dichotomies that are embedded in socio-cultural practices that may appear to be the same everywhere in Africa. As one participant put it:

What is viewed as African traditional religion for example is a way of undermining our religious diversities .... I think African religions are many even within the same state, region, ethnic group .... the world must start to understand that there is a sense of uniqueness for each of the so-called African religions as African scholars we should be able to give meaning to such uniqueness.

### **Concerns Over the Utility Value of the Vision of the University**

The new changes following the collapse of the apartheid regime have ushered in a myriad of reforms in which professionals from other parts of the African continent are increasingly taking advantage of by looking for employment in the different institutions of South Africa. The influx of foreign African skilled professionals into South Africa is promoted by the

issues of brain drain and shortage of skills. The brain drain issue is accentuated firstly by the fact that many white South Africans are not ready to subject themselves under the bureaucratic scrutiny laid down by the policies of affirmative action and the law of equity relating to job application and acquisition. Secondly, because of South Africa's reconnection to the global economy, it has become relatively easy for South Africans with skills to access meaningful and better paying jobs in the industrialised nations of the West (Matte *et al.* 2000).

Although UKZN as a government entity adheres to the policies of affirmative action and law of equity, these policies do not 'run counter to the overall motive of breeding excellence in the institution' (Otu 2011:136). The employment of foreign African academics at UKZN is par excellence with a good number of them occupying headship and strategic offices at various levels including departments, schools, the deanery and the chancellery. Most of these academics have had previous working experiences in other institutions in their home countries and other parts of the world. Their prior working experiences bring them to a level where they strongly believe they can make significant contributions to the transformations that are taking place in the University of KwaZulu-Natal. With the recent reconfiguration plan that has been birthed in the university, foreign African academics feel this is a moment where they need to showcase their transnational experiences and contribute meaningfully to curriculum development and research in the institution.

The reconfiguration that is about to take root in 2012 is a significant moment in the history of the University of KwaZulu-Natal. Some foreign African academics view this reconfiguration as a meaningful period which they believe the university could take advantage of to make significant inroads in its attempt to have the vision streamlined. In this regard they strongly suggest that the agenda of African scholarship be incorporated not only in research, but also in the teaching and learning segments of producing and disseminating knowledge in the institution. This is a historic moment in which some of these foreign scholars believe the multicultural diversity of the institution should be illuminated so that students may interact with other cultures from across Africa.

Most of the academics interviewed for this study from across the different national backgrounds, expressed their worries about the limited

*Transnational Mobility in the Renegotiation of African Scholarship*

exposure of South African students to other African socio-political landscapes. They bemoan the fact that it is easier for a local South African student to relate much more with Euro-American history than the history of their continent. Moreover, participants were unanimous in their opinion that the local South African students both at the undergraduate and postgraduate levels present the South African experience to mean the African experience. As much as a local South African student may be able to correctly identify, interpret and articulate a specific social problem, their examples are mostly located within the South African context. This is elucidated by the following observation made by one of the research participants who has been a student since 2005 and is now currently doing her post-doctoral research in the faculty:

For me much of what I see here as African scholarship is actually South African scholarship. I find a lot of emphasis made on South African examples as one attempts to interrogate social issues for the purpose of scholarship. When this happens one would begin to question what African scholarship really is. Again the term is complex – I don't understand the branding slogan – premier university of African scholarship. So engaging with that slogan it becomes somehow problematic for me because I don't know if it encapsulates all of the African experience or the university has its own kind of knowledge it wants to produce which we are not told. So it is basically like left up to you to define what should constitute African scholarship. It is like a 'free for all' so long as you are African. For me at this point the concept becomes more complex to promote. To me in this particular context then, African scholarship actually becomes South African scholarship, for the purposes of this context – because this is South Africans wanting to tell their own story – which is also part of Africa. This therefore brings to mind that African scholarship is context-specific. It depends on which part of Africa you are talking about.

This kind of understanding came up as I interviewed the various participants on the question of how much Africaness is reflected in the teaching and learning environment of the institution. According to this participant and

many others, students at UKZN are not adequately exposed to the socio-cultural diversities that exist in other parts of the African continent. For UKZN to be mandated as the premier university of African scholarship, it is imperative that the curricular and pedagogic structures be realigned in such a way that ‘the African experience’ takes lead in informing the production of scholarship across disciplines in the university. Some of the participants reported that they are making some efforts to integrate their *home-groomed* orientations with the South African ones to equip students with more fortified approaches to cultural diversity.

For some participants, the reconfiguration which is about to take stage come 2012 is viewed as a benign opportunity that these participants anticipate should be able to ignite new flames of academic performativity re-oriented and focused towards patronising and promoting the vision of the institution. A culture of interdisciplinarity and transdisciplinarity is one major way that some foreign African scholars believe could help (re)enforce or (re)align the vision of engineering and pioneering the African scholarship agenda in research and curriculum. According to Kotter and Balsiger (1999: 102) an interdisciplinary approach is,

only used for those forms of supradisciplinary collaboration where various disciplines, keeping their own autonomy (i.e. without becoming a serving discipline), solve a given problem which cannot be solved by one discipline alone, in a joint way.

A transdisciplinary approach arises as soon as a problem is raised outside the scientific context and has to be unravelled in the form of a joint collaboration between scientists and practitioners (ibid.). Through an interdisciplinary approach these scholars appear to have the conviction that an atmosphere of collaborative research and curriculum development among disciplines within the faculty of humanities and social science not only at UKZN (to begin with) would help translate the vision of African scholarship into a veritable scientific knowledge matrix with the view of exporting this scholarship to other universities in Africa.

The supradisciplinary approaches of interdisciplinarity and transdisciplinarity could become useful tools through which the African academe could provide intellectual spaces for systemic intervention for

### *Transnational Mobility in the Renegotiation of African Scholarship*

development and a meaningful advancement of the African philosophy in the global knowledge economy. The university is not just a breeding place for intellectual growth, but is also a significant space where developmental agendas of nation-states are being nurtured. It is the university that equips people with different specialised skills such as medical doctors, state nurses, environmental practitioners, historians, political analysts, lecturers, archaeologists, journalists etc working in various departments. With the new reconfiguration programme, some of the foreign African academics are readily looking forward to how best they could utilise some of the new pedagogic units introduced by UKZN. The newly created multidisciplinary Centre for African Studies for example is an area where some of the participants are gearing a vested interest in creating synergies with other colleagues on the continent. For many of them such a centre is a potential force towards the expansion of African scholarship across the continent. Using their multiple backgrounds these transnational scholars are engaged with curriculum transformation at UKZN and some of them are actively liaising with colleagues in the promotion of afrocentric approaches to research and curriculum across the continent.

South African institutions of higher learning such as UKZN are appreciated by many foreign African scholars as innovative and illustrative of democratic principles. South Africa is a vibrant and buoyant economy with relatively stronger economic muscles that could empower and have certain developmental agendas meaningfully engaged with. The agenda of African scholarship at UKZN is a force provocateur that is creating a tremendous effect on the minds of various scholars in the faculty of humanities and social sciences to indulge in the intellectual game of 'playing Africa' in the area of knowledge production. Pockets of think tanks are being imagined and earmarked for scholarship among foreign African scholars at UKZN in collaboration with some local South African colleagues in an effort to promoting the vision of African scholarship for global competitiveness.

UKZN could be viewed as a pan-African institution hosting scholars from different nations of the African continent. Evidence of pan-Africanism in this study is based on the fact that interviews were conducted on people from over ten nationalities including; Cameroon, Nigeria, Ghana, Zimbabwe, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Zambia, Eritrea, Malawi, Kenya and Uganda. For some of these scholars the advancement of an African course

*Monica Njanjokuma Otu*

has been their long awaited dream. Their mobility to this space is therefore a *fait accompli* to what has been their burning desire of forging collaborative links that would forage the terrain of African knowledge(s) with the idea that such knowledge(s) would be able to promote Africa as a place, home and idea.

## **Creating Networks**

For an international institution such as UKZN, networking becomes one of the crucial ways through which policies are advanced and standards of scholarship sustained. The University of KwaZulu-Natal is anchored on a knowledge-driven culture that attempts to position the institution at competitive levels of research and innovations with other higher education institutions in South Africa, Africa and the world at large. Over and above this, UKZN seeks to prioritise and reposition the African experience at the centre of global scholarship. The slogan ‘premier university of African scholarship’ puts UKZN on spotlight as a referral space where the advancement of an African course in terms of scholarship and development could be negotiated. For UKZN to forge her way ahead as a premier university of African scholarship there is a need for the university to create collaborative links with other universities and agencies on the African continent in line with its vision. As earlier mentioned UKZN harbours African academics from different regions of Africa with diverse social, professional and cultural experiences. These diversities provide a stage upon which the various African experiences could be articulated to encapsulate an all-encompassing sense of dissecting African identities in knowledge seeking approaches.

As an institution that has a long tradition of aligning itself with international standards, it has become the prerogative of UKZN to focus on agenda that could set it apart from other universities in the world by developing models that uniquely speak to its vision of being the premier university of African scholarship. In this regard if the focus is about African scholarship then the emphasis has to change to embrace new epistemological, theoretical and methodological dimensions that would bring the whole of the African experience to the forefront of knowledge production in the institution. As members of the humanities and social science faculty, foreign

### *Transnational Mobility in the Renegotiation of African Scholarship*

African academics claim that for the purpose of advancing an agency it is important that these new paradigms should in the first place attempt to present Africa as a borderless space. For UKZN to move beyond borders does not however ignore the fact that the African experience is heterogeneous and that its complexities can only be understood through a nuanced outlook of what constitutes the African experience.

Scholarship beyond borders at UKZN in respect to its vision means a display of totalising the inconsistencies that demarcate the African experience into different pockets of social progression in ways that such inconsistencies and demarcations would collapse into an overall agenda of promoting afrocentric approaches to the production and dissemination of knowledge within and beyond the institution. As already mentioned, African scholarship has been involved in a long struggle of trying to unyoke itself from imperial domination and is striving to authenticate itself as a legitimate space of scientific inquiry. Some transnational African academics at UKZN in their individual capacities are striving to re-orientate their students to start viewing reality through afrocentric lenses.

Considering the instrumentality of the university as a key player in the nation-building process, the university in Africa has become a pivotal area of response to the external forces such as globalisation and transnationalism whose agendas continue to be part of the discourses that inform the developmental concerns of national institutions. The University of KwaZulu-Natal being an international institution and coupled with the fact that it functions within certain parameters predicated on the designs of the South African state is also affected by these global forces. This paper however is not out to delve into the 'blame game' politics of globalisation, but it rather seeks to provide a sense of proactive understanding on how the concept of transnationalism could be meaningfully utilised in producing networks of mutual benefit between UKZN and other universities in Africa.

Transnational movements provide an enabling environment for emerging diasporas whose members are ever trying to create links with people back in their home countries (Kearney 1995). Foreign African academics in the faculty of humanities and social sciences at UKZN are agents of transnationalism who are forever processing their thoughts and forging links of collaborative scholarship with colleagues in what they consider as their homelands. As transnational academics, the idea of

*Monica Njanjokuma Otu*

advancing collaborative links with colleagues does not necessarily limit these scholars to home as a place of origin, but such collaboration is also extended to other universities in the world that they have previously worked in. With respect to promoting the vision of African scholarship, foreign African migrants believe that their transnational mobilities expose them to a position where they believe they are better placed to assist UKZN in embarking on a crusade of spreading the gospel of African scholarship to the different parts of the continent. The following commentary by a senior academic in the faculty illustrates how the transnational experiences of African academics at UKZN could contribute to the expansion of African scholarship to other African universities:

I believe that as Africans from other countries, our presence here is significant. I think we've got a contribution to make... and indeed if one has to look at the overarching agenda of the institution – the premier university of African scholarship, I think our role as brothers from other parts cannot be ignored. I say this because coming from different backgrounds, there is something that we have to learn from one another. UKZN is representative of what I should call a pan-African institution. So if we claim to be the premier university of African scholarship, it is important to give voice to the experiences of people from other African countries. I believe it is a blessing that we are here, so we can be used as crusaders to carry this vision to our respective home universities. Wherever in Africa that UKZN has established memoranda of understanding, academics from those countries and others should be used. For the purpose of agency, I strongly support this vision and I would recommend that it doesn't just stay here at UKZN, but be taken to other African universities – after all it is the premier university of African scholarship.

Due to the heterogeneous backgrounds (in terms of nationalities) of African academics UKZN can be seen as a pan-African institution as highlighted in the above excerpt. As a pan-African institution it is imperative that the experiences of other African countries should be highlighted in the transformations that are taking place in the institution. The curricular and

*Transnational Mobility in the Renegotiation of African Scholarship*

pedagogic activities should not only focus on the South African experience but as some foreigners say they should be able to incorporate a global African experience with multiple voices. This however does not mean that scholars do not make use of other African identities in problematising social issues. The problem is that even though African issues are evoked in what these scholars teach, it is almost left at their discretion to decide what they teach. If UKZN has to live up its dream of becoming the premier university of African scholarship, it has to up its game by creating compelling schemes that would allow lecturers to develop curriculum and research projects that would give room for Africa centeredness. The vision of African scholarship is a lofty and laudable venture which should be taken seriously. While UKZN has a multiplicity of partnership with different African universities in the areas of research and student exchange programmes, the various people who participated in this study doubted if the vision is emphasised in these programmes. Foreign African scholars believe that their presence in this institution should facilitate the forging of collaborative links with various African universities illuminated by the burning mantle of African scholarship.

While the vision of African scholarship is a salutary one the cloud is still hanging as much that is desired is yet to be done. Interviews with various participants revealed that while UKZN brands itself as the premier university of African scholarship it lacks formal structures that could enhance the marketability of this brand in ways that it would make it appear as truly ‘The Premier University of African Scholarship’. In wanting to know how engaging UKZN is with its vision one of the participants a lecturer and an academic coordinator, commented:

I would not make a meal of that. I think at policies level it is engaging enough in the sense that we’ve branded ourselves as that kind of institution. I don’t know... the implementation of such policies could be questioned. You would find that they could be questioned to different extent across disciplines. There are people who are taking to heart African scholarship and they are dealing with African issues in particular disciplines, while there are people who couldn’t be bothered so that the overarching policy statement is about African scholarship the practice of it could, may be strengthened.

Most of the people interviewed resonated with such a commentary. As evident in the above excerpt, if there are any endeavours made in line with the vision it is actually individual efforts. Some participants reported that their engagements in collaborative research with colleagues within and outside the university are not necessarily guided by the maxim motto of the university. Even though these partnerships focus on African issues, their articulations of these issues are done rather in an ad hoc manner. If individuals happen to produce something that aligns with the vision, it is not because they are compelled to do so, but rather they are driven by their own curiosities to provide some understanding to certain social phenomena while using paradigms that show evidence of afrocentricism.

Engaging with the vision of UKZN is becoming a mechanism through which some foreign Africans are attempting to create research agendas with colleagues within and outside the institution. Think tank communities of afrocentric research based initiatives are being imagined and formulated here and there across the faculty as a way forward in valorising this concept of African scholarship. While the concept has not yet taken significant roots in the institution, various scholars are mobilising in their individual capacities by starting to look into issues that are African-centred and by producing scholarship that is free of Eurocentric influence. While many of these initiatives have not yet left the drawing board, some have already been put into action; even though they are still at an infancy stage. Better still the various forms of research partnerships in the faculty have not been able to come to a position of pronouncement as afrocentric knowledge sites, because, at the moment, there exist no official structures at the university that specifically reward such knowledge orientations.

The preceding statement however does not attempt to dismiss the fact that those whose research outputs are remarkable are rewarded. Those whose research articles are published in the reputable SAPSE accredited journals are given substantial incentives that enable them to carry on with further research. One of the major challenges that African scholars face in the knowledge economy lies with the publication enterprise. Most people who have succeeded in establishing themselves as scholars from Africa are those who have been able to find spaces in the already orthodox spaces which are indeed western dominated. The idea of African relevance which some may attempt to highlight in such spaces is often suffocated by broader

*Transnational Mobility in the Renegotiation of African Scholarship*

circumstances. For African scholars to avoid this tragedy of suffocation, it is important that African institutions and governments should embark on the creation and standardisation of publishing houses in the continent. The academic space at UKZN is one which is spurring anticipated growth in afrocentric scholarship. Some of the participants did acknowledge that their taking up employment at UKZN has tremendously shifted their perspectives as they go about generating knowledge to the point that they are able to form scholarly dockets that are meant to streamline the African experience in their research and what they ought to teach. Many of these endeavours are however at a perennial stage hoping to take off as soon as the university makes provision for that. Some have already started to act, for example, the introduction of a journal named Afrika – Journal of Politics, Economics and Society – a biannual publication of the newly formed Forum for Constructive African Scholarship (FCSA) (Otu 2011:180) which focuses on investigating African problems using an African knowledge lens in dissecting those problems.

Engaging with an African perspective in the production of knowledge however does mean ignoring other forms of knowledge. Generally many would agree that in the present world of advanced technology, rapid globalisation and transnational fluxes, attention to local practices and discourses on knowledge production are situated within paradigms of interrelated knowledges all of which are simultaneously viewed as local and global. Theories such as post-modernism and post-structuralism have provided alternative accounts by others through an acknowledgement of diversity and plurality in knowledge seeking approaches (Moore 1996). African scholarship is existing in competition with other forms of scholarship (particularly western scholarship) which has continued to undermine the mainstreaming of an African perspective in the scientific space (Moore 1996; Makgoba & Seepe 2004; Thiong'o 2005).

This form of discrimination against the intellectual integrity and propriety of African scholars has been a longstanding battle which most scholars in Africa are striving to get rid of. With the view that African scholarship is marginalised, foreign African academics are not saying that models from elsewhere should not be employed. In fact some of these scholars believe that because they have been to several places in the world their transnational experiences from those places could be utilised for the

advancement of the discourse of African scholarship at UKZN. Having studied and taught in Euro-American and Asian universities, these transnational migrants believe that some models from these countries could be relevant and therefore there is a need to appropriate and indigenise them to the extent that they would be constructed to suit our realities as Africans.

## **Conclusion**

The term African scholarship has been defined in various contexts. This paper has been able to do a literature review of theoretical and philosophical frameworks that have attempted to provide some understanding of the concept African scholarship. I have shown the different perspectives held by foreign African migrants at UKZN in their response to the vision of the institution which is branded ‘the premier university of African scholarship.’ Findings of this study revealed that while the vision is a salutary effort, there is still much desired for UKZN to earn the mandate of being truly the premier university of African scholarship. The fact that there exist elements of African scholarship reflected in the kind of research and curriculum developed by individuals, for the moment there are no tangible structures in the university with a compelling agenda that should be highlighting issues to do with this vision. For an institution with a continental vision it takes more than individual capacities to have such a vision actualised. In this regard a culture of supra-disciplinary collaborations in research and curriculum is not just a need for UKZN but a need for other African universities.

In a rapidly changing world of today, scholars have become interested in showing the extent to which various social issues have been affected by the forces of transnationalism and globalisation. Transnational African academics at UKZN believe that their presence could advantage the institution to facilitate the forging of collaborative links between UKZN and other African universities in connection with expanding the vision.

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*Transnational Mobility in the Renegotiation of African Scholarship*

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*Monica Njanjokuma Otu*

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