11   *Iterations of transformative leadership for higher education in Africa*

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Overview

Over the last three decades, a number of higher education leaders have made claims of being transformative leaders. At the same time, emerging literature on higher education in Africa continues to cite the lack of transformative leadership as part of what is ailing higher education institutions. Based on a review of published literature and theoretical reflections, this chapter discusses the different iterations of what has constituted claims to transformative leadership in African universities, and how disconnected the claims have been from reality. The chapter is organised in three parts. The first part is a historical reflection on the evolution of transformative institutions and leadership in Africa. The second part delves into the emergence of various descriptors of transformative leaders for higher education institutions in Africa from the 1990s. The third part discusses what real transformative leadership and transformative institutions for higher education in Africa would entail.

Introduction

Leadership has been defined variously in the literature. Some definitions focus on individual personality traits, perceiving leadership as a set of characteristics that some individuals possess, while other literature focuses on group processes, where the leader who has power and vision is at the centre of inspiring action for a common goal (Bass, 1990). The emphasis on a person's capacity and skill in creating a vision of what might be and fostering a culture that supports the achievement of a vision within organisations is more prevalent in the literature, irrespective of the taxonomies of leadership (Fairholm, 2002; Kets de Vries, Sexton, & Ellen, 2016). Personal influence, group processes, and attention to common organisational goals are core to a broad conceptualisation of good and desirable leadership (Rost, 1991).

In higher education, studies have analysed leadership from two fronts. The first is how institutions are or would be organised to facilitate the production of different types of leaders (intellectual, thought, educational, academic leaders) (Žydžiūnaitė, 2018). The institutional context is seen as a key determinant in the emergence of desired leadership qualities in individuals, aside from the professional skills that are the direct focus of formal higher education. At the

other front, there is literature that focuses on the impact that the leadership of higher education institutions – whether from the perspective of the individual leader or of a broad management team – has on students' lives, beyond individual outcomes such as learning capabilities, employment, and earnings, to include collective outcomes such as citizenship, tolerance, cross-cultural values, and global citizenship competencies (Bennett, Richardson, & MacKinnon, 2016; Hill, Walkington, & France, 2016; Marginson & Yang, 2021). The recent adoption of neoliberal values in justifying the role of higher education across the world has focused leadership research on the skills, qualities, characteristics, and capabilities of individuals to create visions and manage institutions, as opposed to seeing leadership as an institution-wide process requiring input from diverse groups (Bolden, Jones, Davis, & Gentle, 2015). Within the African context, the focus on individual traits as the nexus to drive institutional leadership has resulted in the setting up of leadership training interventions that are intended to socialise institutional leaders' skills in pursuing defined strategic ends for higher education.

The view of leadership as a process, as opposed to individual characteristics, provides a broad framework from which to analyse the imprint of leadership beyond the individual to include collective outcomes from the higher education system. This broad view also enables researchers to discern the range of levels within an institution through which leadership is exercised. In the African context, much focus has been on institutional leaders – vice chancellors or management boards – as pivots for the kind of leadership that is meant to trigger transformation of the institutions. However, transformative intellectuals and academic leadership at the lower levels could potentially contribute to individual and collective higher education outcomes even when institutional leadership is exercised in ways that limit these possibilities (Macfarlane & Chan, 2012). Academic leadership is exercised at lower levels of the institution by deans and heads of departments and by professors in terms of their teaching and research roles, while intellectual leadership goes beyond the teaching and research responsibilities to encompass forms of public engagement, as happens with public intellectuals. Academics offer intellectual leadership that contributes to building social and intellectual capital for the institution and society (Žydžiūnaitė, 2018). The literature identifies four characteristics expected of academics as intellectual leaders in higher education. These are a passion for transformation, possessing a balance of personal virtues, a commitment to service, and overcoming adversity (Macfarlane & Chan, 2012). Academic and intellectual leadership, when exercised optimally, therefore offers institutions possibilities for creating transformative institutions in instances where the top tier of institutional leadership falls short of these traits.

In the African context, the post–1990 higher education landscape has been dominated by discussions of transformative leadership as the missing link between higher education institutions and their roles in society. What

transformative leadership for higher education in Africa would entail, however, is not clear from existing literature. Leadership practices that have worked elsewhere have been adopted by a number of higher education leaders and applied to institutions in Africa with little regard to context. The drivers for this borrowing have been the desire by higher education leaders in Africa to address the crisis of funding that institutions on the continent have faced post–1990. A reading of the theoretical literature suggests that transformative leadership look beyond short-term palliative measures to a leadership that is fixated with the idea of social justice and democracy in the broader sense, thus creating conditions for the realisation of physical and epistemic inclusion and connecting education processes with the wider social context within which it is embedded (Shields, 2010). Certainly, this is not what has happened in Africa in the last two decades. The persistence of voices such as 'fees must fall', curriculum decolonisation, and graduate unemployment, among other shortcomings within higher education institutions, indicates a worsening of the disconnect between higher education and society. Beyond transformative leadership building the institutional capacity for physical and epistemic inclusion, such a leadership should create spaces for re-skilling, re-tooling, and continuous learning, adjusting the output of graduates and research to better match the demands of society. This responsibility for change goes beyond the state, the capacity of an individual institutional leader, or the private sector. The responsibility for real transformation requires continuous dialogue *between* governments, university leadership, core constituencies, and the private sector. It is not something that can miraculously be achieved by a single entity.

The following section discusses how expectations of transformative leadership and institutions have evolved with the institutional dynamism of higher education in Africa.

The developmental state and the transformative role of higher education

The contribution of higher education to realising positive individual and collective outcomes for society features prominently in the founding instruments and political rhetoric that occurred with the establishment of national universities in Africa in the 1960s and 1970s (Block, 1984; Kaunda, 1968; Nkrumah, 1973; Nyerere, 1968). Whether seen in Nkrumah's expectations of the African university as the leader for conscientisation philosophy and intellectual decolonisation; or in Nyerere's call for the university as a conveyor belt for self-reliance (development through mobilisation of domestic human and capital resources), social equity (disbursing benefits to the entire society to inhibit disparities), and cooperative effort (encouraging economic activities undertaken through collectivism); or in Kaunda's humanism in Zambia, the nationalist political leadership were

committed to using public higher education as a means to national development. The nationalist political leadership tasked the new institutions with the attainment of national goals of development and nation-building, the ideological emancipation of Africans in what was conceived as a process of decolonisation of the curriculum, the role of instruments of innovation to spur growth and prosperity through human resource development, and the creation of African identities.

The political leadership took a steering role in most aspects of public higher education as a mechanism to ensure accountability of public resources invested in its development. Between 1970 and 1990, during the era of the 'developmental university in Africa' (Ajayi, Goma, & Johnson, 1996; Coleman, 1986), the political leadership determined how higher education leadership was constituted to drive the vision of transformation as articulated by politicians. In some countries, such as Tanzania, immediately after the inauguration of the university, those appointed to senior administrative positions in 1970 also served as officials of the only political party at that time (Douglas, 2007), because it was thought that they would better drive the development vision of the country through the university. Political steering of higher education was accompanied by the indigenisation of academic and institutional leadership as a strategy to better integrate universities with the needs of society under the tutelage of a developmental state (Mkandawire, 2001). The political elite determined the direction of institutional leadership, and those appointed implemented the transformative vision of higher education for society as articulated by the political class. This situation did cause tension from time to time when the politicians and academics could not agree on what constituted transformation, or how higher education institutions needed to relate to the state in pursuance of this transformation. Nevertheless, the largely publicly funded institutions considered themselves critical pillars for the radical transformation of the continent in the social, political, and economic sense (Lebeau, 2008). The search for democracy, equity, and development by the leadership of the independent countries, coupled with their belief that education was a key to unlocking these potentials, influenced perceptions of the kinds of leadership that were required of the institutions and of their relationship with the state and society (Mkandawire, 2001). The steering role of the state for higher education institutions was, however, unpopular with some stakeholders. A situation where the political leadership determined the leadership of the institutions and the content of academic programmes became a source of tension between the state and the higher education leadership on the one hand, and academics and students who didn't subscribe to this notion on the other hand (Mkandawire, 2001).

The literature examining the imprint that the higher education institutions in Africa had on society during this period does suggest they made a positive

contribution to forging national identities and economic development across the continent (Oketch, McCowan, & Schendel, 2014). The literature does document evidence of greater political socialisation and development of approaches to research and training that linked the higher education institutions to communities, and high rates of return by graduates. The institutions also transformed the curriculum, especially in the humanities and social sciences; established intellectual communities that contributed to intellectual decolonisation; and championed the inclusion of marginal groups and voices in development policy, as attested by the prevalence of research and debates on the African peasantry that took place in universities across the continent in the 1970s (Aina, 2010; Ake, 1981).

Doubts arose about the transformative role of higher education in Africa from the 1990s. Studies, mostly funded by external constituencies, emerged, arguing against continued publicly funded higher education, as this was seen as catering for a small elite. This was a contradiction. The small number of students who accessed the institutions was because of the low capacity of the institutions, themselves a colonial construction, and not as a result of any policy design by the postcolonial governments. Besides, no evidence was generated to suggest that the skills that were gained by the small number of those who accessed higher education institutions did not have a multiplier effect downstream. The arguments, however, were used as a basis for implementing Structural Adjustment Programmes in the higher education sector in Africa in the 1980s and 1990s. Structural Adjustment Programmes led to a reconceptualised notion of transformative leadership, both at the institutional and individual levels, and a redefinition of relations between higher education and society. This redefinition was manifested by a continued crisis narrative of the state of higher education in Africa post–1980, and doubts about its transformative potential for society (Atteh, 1996). When the doubts were not focused on the perceived irrelevance of the curricula of the institutions, they were trained on the leadership capacities of individuals that managed the institutions. In both cases, multiple reforms were suggested and implemented in ways that occasioned financial crisis, leading to a disruption of the contract that had been sustained up to that point (Assié-Lumumba, 2006). The situation affected the quality of graduates and the capacity of the economies to create jobs for all the graduates. While the problem was funding, popular policy discourse defined it as lack of leadership, especially the kind of leadership that would reorganise higher education institutions as business entities. Innovative leadership within higher education, especially from the 1990s (see, for example, Ng'ethe, Assié-Lumumba, Subotzky, & Sutherland-Addy, 2003), limited the conceptualisation of innovation to leaders who designed alternative funding sources for the institutions outside public provision. Such university leaders would also, henceforth, claim the tag 'transformative leaders'.

Hughes' (1987) *Revisiting the Fortunate Few* study cast doubt on the efficacy of the workforce development model as the basis for the transformative potential of higher education in Africa (Abagi, 1999; Saint, 1992).The study argued that across Africa, the increasing supply of a highly educated workforce had exceeded the demand for university-level jobs, making graduates face a highly competitive labour market (Al-Samarrai & Bennell, 2003), and that the public investment in higher education was not benefitting society. What was needed, some studies argued, was a leadership that would limit higher education dependence on public resources, while at the same time reorganising academic programmes in ways that graduates would look less at the public service as the source of jobs, and more to the private sector or individual entrepreneurial skills (Association of African Universities, 2017). The conception of transformative leaders that emerged from the study was of individuals that would steer the institutions to achieve the transition to forms of academic entrepreneurship, especially regarding increasing the capacity of higher education institutions to generate resources and produce students less dependent on public service jobs. The problem, though, was that while this transition envisaged a declining public sector and an expanding private sector, the private sector has remained relatively small and has not grown to replace the public sector, either in terms of funding higher education or generating relevant jobs for higher education graduates.

The overall conclusion from this literature is that the approach to higher education–society linkages that was based on a strong developmental state determining leadership had produced an inefficient mix. Higher education leadership was not innovating to prepare graduates for changing social circumstances, while the graduates developed a sense of entitlement from society instead of developing attitudes and skills of service to society. Because of this, higher education institutions on the continent entered into a crisis phase, especially at the levels of institutional and academic leadership (Lindow, 2009; Mamdani, 1993). Dependency on state patronage and public funding had resulted in internal institutional deficits in innovating and generating private resources, and in preparing graduates for the kind of society that was evolving (Court, 1999; Kinyanjui, 1994).

Overall, the transformative potential of 'developmental' higher education in Africa had to contend with two contradictions. First was the extent to which higher education, through its leadership, was to be the basis for deconstructing the logics of the colonial state in the organisation of society. The literature does point out that higher education contributed to skills development, thereby allowing replacement of the colonial workforce with Africans, and that it contributed to the constitution of African intellectual leadership that championed curricular reform in the institutions. Access, though, has remained limited, and concerns that higher education remains accessible only to a privileged elite, as it was during the colonial period, persist. Interventions designed by higher education

leaders who claimed the tag 'transformative leaders' between 2000 and 2020 have accentuated physical and epistemological exclusion (Lebeau & Oanda, 2020).

The second contradiction is the opposite of the first, and concerns the extent to which higher education continues to reproduce the logics of the colonial state in terms of the relationships between higher education and society. As has been discussed, policy and rhetoric in the 1970s across Africa did focus on indigenisation of the curriculum, but not on the foundational logic of higher education. The calls for alternative leadership for the institutions from the 1990s were couched in the language of relevance and efficiency. It was argued that, for higher education to fully decolonise, the sector needed a transformative leadership, expressed variously as entrepreneurial, corporate, and thought leadership (engagement) with the public, especially with the private sector. Transformation has, however, been conceptualised in a limited manner to refer to leadership that would reorganise the institutions, including academic life, to generate money by making higher education a commodity, sell what could be sold, privatise what could be privatised, increase access of students, and engage more with the private sector (Mamdani, 2007, 2018). The embracing of this limited conception by university leaders of what it entails to be transformative has contributed to breaking the pact between higher education and society, as if society was not supposed to be the main beneficiary from a transformative higher education leadership.

Training interventions for higher education transformative leadership in Africa

Policy discourses on higher education in Africa post–1990 have been dominated by discussions on how best transformative leaders would be produced for higher education institutions within a neoliberal context and conception of higher education (Fredua-Kwarteng, 2018; Watson, Motala, & Koetcha, 2009). Notably, governance reforms were undertaken across Africa, beginning in the 1990s, that replaced government involvement in the governance of higher education with independent higher education councils and created more operational autonomy for individual university leaders.

Four leadership models that capture the kind of individual characteristics that were being sought in leaders for the institutions within the context of the changed governance structures have dominated the literature. These are the innovative, entrepreneurship, servant, and transformative leadership models (Bell, 2001; Clay, 2016; Fredua-Kwarteng, 2018; MacGregor, 2015; Ng'ethe et al., 2003; Okalany & Adipala, 2016; Shattock, 2018). The policy focus has been on how best these kinds of leaders could be produced for institutions. There is literature suggesting that innovative or transformative leadership is a trait that individuals are born with and that they only need an opportunity for these traits to manifest.

It has been argued that one of the throwbacks of the period of greater political steering of higher education in Africa was that since greater consideration was given to political affiliation in appointing higher education leaders, academics who did not agree with the political establishment, but who may have had better leadership qualities, were never given an opportunity.

Literature that conceptualises transformative leadership as an inborn individual trait has argued that there are institutional and academic leaders across the continent who, notwithstanding the crisis of the 1990s, and despite not having any formal training in leadership, engineered reforms that kept their institutions running (Ng'ethe et al., 2003). The literature has focused on individual institutional leaders, their capacity, and their skills to innovate and manage the institutions in ways that made a positive imprint on the quality of academic programmes, the quality of graduates, and the contribution of the institutions to society (Cloete, Bailey, & Maassen, 2011; Ng'ethe et al., 2003). An edited volume of interviews from 11 higher education leaders in Africa, who served between 2000 and 2015, reports that each of the leaders interviewed laid claim to having transformed their institutions, despite lacking formal training in leadership (MacGregor, 2015). The indicators of transformation the leaders pointed out include expanding student enrolments and physical space, increasing the percentage of private funding to the institutions, privatising student services like accommodation, introducing 'marketable' academic programmes, and enhancing graduate employability. However, these claims to transformation exist alongside studies documenting increased graduate unemployment and declining quality of graduate skills from the continent's universities (Inter-University Council of East Africa/East African Business Council, 2014; Oanda & Sifuna, 2016).

Central to these claims to innovative or transformative leadership has been assertions that despite decreased funding, the leaders engaged in reforms that led to the institutions obtaining a higher percentage of private resources, making investments in expanding institutional capacities and academic programmes, developing organic linkages with industry to boost graduate employability, and enhancing institutional reputations which boosted the employability of graduates compared to when the institutions were under greater government influence (Ng'ethe et al., 2003). The literature does also suggest that understanding how some leadership prevailed during a time of crisis creates the possibility of replicating the interventions across the continent, or at least establishing interventions through which new leaders with such skills could be nurtured. The literature also suggests that institutional governance mechanisms, such as staff/student unions, elected vice chancellors and university presidents, non-statutory committees or normal ad hoc university committees, contribute to guiding the direction of institutional innovations and transformation.

The literature is, however, silent on why some of the innovations were not sustained, or why the interventions by leaders only realised gains in one aspect of higher education while creating adverse outcomes for others. While, for example, the business acumen of the leaders contributed to institutional revenues that contributed to institutional expansion and enrolments, the quality of academic programmes declined, inequalities in student access and completion worsened, and graduate unemployment is increasing across the continent (Lebeau & Oanda, 2020). The rising influence of the business enterprise model in managing universities thus became the single yardstick for claiming 'transformative traits' by most university leaders post–1990 (Bleiklie & Byrkjeflot, 2002; Mamdani, 2007). The idea that universities ought to be organised and managed as businesses and become entrepreneurial universities (Clark, 1998) continues to influence debates on transformative leadership for higher education in Africa. The roles of new governance councils that were set up for higher education institutions across Africa was largely articulated in terms of the councils helping the institutions transition to embrace entrepreneurship in all aspects of their operations.

The surge for entrepreneurial practices in higher education institutions across Africa has resulted in a preference for business strategic planning as a driver of academic programmes and the missions of the institutions (Mamdani, 2007). Entrepreneurship in its different facets has been the singular benchmark that higher education leaders have used to make claims of transformative leadership. Despite the claims, literature evaluating outcomes of entrepreneurial leaders and universities as a basis for transformative leadership suggests that entrepreneurship in African universities has generally led to a decline in academic standards and the quality of graduates, and may have contributed to increasing trends in graduate unemployment (Association of African Universities, 2013; IUCEA/EABC, 2014).

The second strand of the literature argues that transformative leadership skills are not inborn traits. Rather, individuals can be trained to master transformative leadership skills. The literature has contributed to the design of formal leadership training programmes for higher education leaders, especially in Africa. The focus is to identify and train leaders who can promote educational entrepreneurship, defined as a strategic focus on creating short- and long-term opportunities for learning that will make a significant difference for individuals and their societies (Clark, 1998). Such leadership has the capacity to design academic programmes geared towards society's grand challenges, such as poverty, climate change, social inequalities, and political instability.

In Africa, a number of training interventions have been conducted to help higher education leaders master skills in strategic planning. Among the oldest interventions are those that have been undertaken by the Association

of African Universities. The Senior University Management Association organised a programme from 1991 to 2002 focused on leadership development and management training. This, together with the Leadership Development Workshops, organised from 2003 to 2010, remains among the oldest pan-African attempts at higher education leadership training under the auspices of 10 members of the Association of African Universities (Mouton, Effah, & Sibuga, 2015). The impact of these interventions on improving higher education leadership in Africa remains inconclusive, and the subsequent mushrooming of regional and national interventions does suggest that these pan-African programmes have not achieved the intended impact.

In terms of regional training interventions, in francophone African countries recent emphasis in developing educational leaders has focused on designing tripartite educational administration and leadership development schemes (Toulassi, 2017). In eastern and central Africa, the Regional Universities Forum for Capacity Building in Agriculture provides support for middle university managers and administrators to build the skills and competencies required to transform universities to operate in the new era of development relevance and quality outputs (Okalany & Adipala, 2016). In southern Africa, training is provided under the auspices of the Southern African Regional Universities Association (Watson et al., 2009), and in West Africa, there was the Senior Academic Leadership Training programme, sponsored by the Carnegie Corporation of New York from 2010 to 2017, which focused on best leadership practices for African universities (Effah, 2018). The training interventions have also focused on sharpening leadership skills in strategic planning, the capacity to make responsible but timely decisions, business acumen, faculty development, and strategic alliances. The increasing establishment of university-based incubators that offer mentorship, technical assistance, or help to refine students' business ideas is part of this innovative drive in universities (Kelly & Firestone, 2016). This strategy is aimed at preparing students for careers as entrepreneurs and at incubating startups.

Although they are diverse and their effectiveness has not been documented, the various interventions do underscore the fact that clear pipelines to produce transformative leaders for higher education remain underdeveloped. This gap partly explains the failure of higher education institutions to contribute towards societal transformation.

Individual identities and transformative leadership

Despite the growing interest in leadership training, and evidence of leaders who have exhibited transformative leadership traits irrespective of formal training, some literature does suggest that within African higher education,

the transformative capacity of leaders and institutions is often attenuated by intersectional identities and interests. Individual identities and affinities also continue to determine who gets appointed to higher education leadership positions, irrespective of their potential for transformative leadership (Mabokela & Mawila, 2004; Mama, 2006; Moodly & Toni, 2015; Morley, 2015; Odhiambo, 2011). Gender, ethnicity, region, religion, race, and individual socioeconomic profiles appear in the literature as frequently influencing the choice of leaders, and such considerations often outweigh academic or leadership skills merit. In terms of gender, the literature does suggest that despite efforts to increase access to universities as students and academics, fewer females make it to senior academic and administrative ranks of most institutions (Mama, 2003; Mastercard Foundation, 2014; Phakeng, 2015). Data from studies undertaken by the Forum for Women Vice-Chancellors in Africa indicate that out of about 1 500 universities across the continent, only 40 (2.6 per cent) were headed by women in 2019 (Lirri, 2019). The literature does suggest that higher education leadership remains gendered across the continent; there are more women as part of the teaching force, but few are critically engaged in senior leadership positions. The literature does also indicate that while women have to overcome multiple hurdles to get to leadership positions at all levels, the leadership performance of the few who get to these positions is undermined by deeply rooted gendered institutional cultures, both within the institutions and in society (Mama, 2003; Mastercard Foundation, 2014). Women's success in leadership is often not attributed to their intellectual skills, but to their other identities and social networks in ways that demean their intellectual contribution. Mentoring interventions and role modelling are needed as interventions to career paths that lead towards leadership positions (Morley, 2015).

Ethnic and regional identities also undermine the integrity of higher education leadership in Africa. Across the continent, access to higher education often manifests deep ethnic inequalities in the composition of the students, academics, and administrators. This goes back to the ways in which colonial capital and education developed during the colonial period, and how it has been maintained (Franck & Rainer, 2012). Ethnic identities and political affiliation also determine who gets appointed to leadership positions, meaning that merit is sacrificed. Higher education leadership is captured by ties of kinship, locality, ethnicity, and clientele, which exert pressure to serve ends other than those that promote the academic and research mission of the universities (Munene, 2016; Sifuna, 1998).

The interface between ethnicity and politics in determining university leadership in Africa continues to be sustained by political interests in using higher education institutions as avenues for distributing political and economic largesse and patronage (Mazrui, 2004; Oanda, 2016). Politicians in Africa see

universities as critical outposts for building political clients, and therefore become interested in who is appointed to university leadership, who ascends the academic ranks, who serves in student leadership, and which academics can be conscripted to offer positive political commentary in popular media about certain political leaders (Sadiq, Barnes, Price, Gumedze, & Morrell, 2019). Where there is concurrence between the political leadership and higher education leaders, claims of transformative leadership are made even when this is not manifest in the work of higher education institutions and their connections to society. Emergent entrepreneurial cultures over the last two decades have attracted new interests bent on conceptualising transformation away from the core academic mandates of the universities. Conversely, politicians have encouraged university leaders to employ service providers from their own networks, thus turning some vice chancellor's offices into bureaucracies that are more interested in business than academic advancement (Mazrui, 2004). The affinity of higher education leaders with external political entities has been documented in the literature as contributing to the failure of universities to meet their commitments to society (Bell, 2001; Kirya, 2019; Oanda, 2016). The concern with these trends is that where consideration of other interests besides merit is used to appoint academic and institutional leaders, the capacity for the exercise of transformative leadership is compromised, even for leaders with the best transformation credentials.

Overall, the extent to which higher education leadership can be characterised as transformative before and after 1990 provides mixed results. While studies document strides in institutional and enrolment growth, equity, diversity, and inclusion across all the basic indicators have remained elusive (Darvas, Gao, Shen, & Bawany, 2017; Zeleza, 2021). Certainly, the conditions that obtained in the 1970s and 1980s that triggered policy changes from a state-controlled higher education model to autonomous leadership structures in search of transformative potentials still prevail, and in some cases, have deteriorated. Access to the institutions continues to favour students from better socioeconomic backgrounds; leadership and governance systems remain captured, either by private interests or politicians; and perceptions that graduates have poor skills, thus compromising their capacity for innovation and transformation, abound (Zeleza, 2021). What has been claimed in the literature as transformative leadership in the post–1990 period has, therefore, largely hollowed out the capacity for transformation at the universities as initially conceived, and instead forced the leadership to engage in inappropriate business practices. This has reduced students to consumers instead of learners, vocationalised academic programmes, devalued academic effort, and commodified knowledge in ways inimical to transformation (Zeleza, 2021) – hardly indicators of transformative leadership.

Reconceptualising transformative higher education leadership in Africa

What should the shape of transformative leadership be for and in African higher education? And can such leadership be realised in isolation of the state and more through private interests? This section does not delve into a detailed conceptual discussion of what transformative leadership should entail; Chapter 1 (Swartz) and Chapter 2 (De Kock & Swartz) in this volume have dealt with that extensively. Suffice it to note that what the literature documents as transformative leadership in African universities in the pre–1990 and post–1990 periods aligns more with transactional and transformational leadership, as variously discussed in the literature. In the absence of public funding and government control of management, institutional leaders emerged who used carrots and sticks and focused on single issues to keep the institutions running, but without fundamentally changing the ideological foundations of the institutions that occasioned dysfunctions in the first place (Farnsworth et al., 2020). The persistence of challenges in the higher education sector point to how unsuitable transactional and transformational interventions have been.

The other question to pose is whether higher education institutions in Africa, as presently constituted, have the capacity to trigger transformation irrespective of the nature of leadership. The call for decolonisation points to some kind of ideological capture that university leadership has to contend with, despite their transformative credentials. Some literature on leadership has also tended to focus on the idea of transformation broadly as the capacity of universities to have positive impacts on their communities through various forms of engagement. But first, this transformation needs to take place at the level of the institution through a leadership that contributes to reimagining what it means to be a university in Africa; how this should shape institutional culture(s), curricula, and scholarship more broadly; and how universities and students should be funded.

Often, transformation has been used to push for the broad idea of decolonisation, including both leadership and curriculum transformation (Chimakonam, 2019). This is part of the complex terrain within which university leaders are expected to lead and manage (Mamdani, 2018; Nabudere, 2003). Transformative leadership in this sense means the potential for higher education institutions to serve as levers of social transformation (Ngcamu, 2017). However, while higher education leaders confront similar challenges across the continent, their conception of transformation, leadership, and social change differ in ways that make it difficult to frame an African notion of transformative leadership in higher education (Bell, 2001). The idea of transformative leadership relevant to the African context therefore remains fragmented. Studies do suggest that true transformation for universities and university leaders in Africa needs to

entail practical and epistemological ruptures with previous ways of doing things and a reconstruction of structures, relations, cultures, and institutions (Aina, 2010; Bell, 2001; Clay, 2016). Besides, because of the reluctance or inability of higher education leadership to embrace transformation in the manner desired by governments, strong sentiments supporting the return of the state and the notion of a 'developmental' university to provide accountability on the operations of higher education institutions abound (Fredua-Kwarteng, 2018; Mzangwa, 2019). The focus of this sentiment is on reimagining creatively the role of higher education and its relationship to society within the African context (Fredua-Kwarteng, 2018).

In South Africa, the perceived resistance by some higher education leaders to implementing 'transformation' as understood by government has led to calls for more government regulation and stewardship of higher education institutions (Hornsby, 2015; Ngcamu, 2017). In Kenya, the 2013 Universities Act, that provided for more autonomy of higher education governance bodies, was repealed in 2018 and, powers for appointing university leaders were moved to the public service commission, and, indirectly, the president of the country was given more power to decide who was appointed to the top leadership of the universities (Republic of Kenya, 2019). It is instructive that in Kenya, the new regulations for hiring top public university leaders were developed without evident input from university councils. In Ghana, the National Assembly sought to grant the country's president the power to appoint the chancellors and chairs of university councils (Appiagyei-Atua, 2020). This literature questions the possibility of realising transformative leadership in Africa within a higher education context that has minimally changed from its colonial mission and orientation. Alongside the literature on transformative leadership is that of academic leadership, signalling the importance of quality and progressive academic leadership as a basis for the emergence of transformative leadership (Appiagyei-Atua, 2020).

Conclusion

Transformative leadership for higher education in Africa, whether conceptualised at the level of individual traits of institutional leaders or the impact of institutions on society, remains problematic. A broad conceptualisation of transformative leadership to encompass equity, diversity, inclusion, and social justice is a tall order and beyond what most individuals can achieve, irrespective of their skills and commitment to transformative leadership. The enormity of the task of achieving equity and inclusion in the context of higher education that has minimally transformed from its colonial origins remains contested. The continued demands for decolonising various aspects of higher education in Africa point to the reality that despite claims of transformative leadership, more

is required to make higher education institutions on the continent spaces for the ethical transformation of institutions and individuals. How does one resource mass higher education in ways that address diversity while committing to differentiation? Who gets what, and how is this to be determined in a context where the scramble for physical access remains largely unaddressed? Should achieving equity, diversity, and inclusion to higher education be gradual and incremental, and who should get in first? These are the issues that higher education transformative leadership will need to encompass.

#TransformativeLeadershipFromBelow

Transformation in higher education should not just be a top-down process. A transformative institutional vision can be driven from below even if management remains uninvolved.

Questions for discussion

1. What needs to be transformed in higher education, and in which directions?

2. What happens when leadership is exercised in ways that address one challenge, but hollow out institutional capacity to regenerate in other areas?

3. How can we create contexts and cultures in higher education institutions that encourage transformative leaders to emerge?

4. What are the challenges of 'transformative leadership from below'?

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