

AMINA MAMA
«Feminist Africa»:
*A Pan-African Feminist Publication for the 21st Century*¹

«Feminist Africa» («FA») was established in the rush of post-apartheid vision and energy with which Africa greeted the dawn of the 21st century, during which even Africa's flagship universities were struggling to regenerate intellectual life and higher education systems after the so-called "Lost Decade" of the 1980's. During the 1980's African research life had suffered with the imposition of so-called structural "adjustment" packages that compounded the long-term structural dependency and decapitated higher education institutions, undermining and suppressing independent knowledge production within a few years of political independence. African knowledge came to rely on independent scholarly networks and small research institutes established in multiple efforts to attend to the vast research needs that confront all developing nations.²

Although we did not know it at the time, «FA» was the very first open-access digital scholarly publications specifically dedicated to promoting the feminist knowledge production and circulation of the

1 «Feminist Africa»'s existing archive of 22 Issues is available at the website <http://www.agi.ac.za/agi/feminist-africa>.

2 The Council for the Development of Social Research in Africa (CODESRIA, formed in 1975), the Association of African Women for Research and Development (AAWORD AFARD, formed in 1977). Later national examples include the Centre for Basic Research established by Mahmood Mamdani at Makerere, Uganda; the Centre for Advanced Social Studies (CASS) established by the late Claude Ake in Port Harcourt, Nigeria; the Centre for Research and Documentation (CRD) established in Kano, Nigeria, not to mention the ill-fated Centre for Feminist Studies established by Patricia MacFadden in Harare, Zimbabwe (all of which were set up to counter Africa's Higher Education crisis in the 1990's).

continent. Africa's parlous public research infrastructure and capacity were divested by neoliberal policies and its autonomy exploited by external private interests during the 1980's-1990's. World Bank/IMF policies looked set to deplete the capabilities of the public sector of a continent that was already the site of the greatest development failures. African perspectives would thus remain marginalized, those of African women even more so, compounding the hegemonic world view of African people (especially women, and the allegedly "ignorant" majorities of us) as intellectually and politically underdeveloped. «FA» set out to demonstrate otherwise by its very existence, as a scholarly and activist, digital, open-access. publication.

The founding cadre of «FA» were well-versed in what it meant to pursue intellectual freedom in underdeveloped and male-dominated institutions and scholarly networks that had the same difficulty with the idea of "feminism" and "feminist theory" as academics everywhere else. However, African academics articulate their resistance within African philosophical and cultural discourses, which they invoke to reject notions feminism as "un-African", a point of view reflecting the essentialist gender politics rooted in a heavily masculine nativism. However, a growing global movement among women of African descent embraces and defines feminism for themselves. The "African" in «FA» draws on the radical African intellectual discourses that emerged within leftist-leaning liberation movements that embraced women's emancipation.

From a political perspective, the question of who "discovered" or "invented" feminism is far less relevant than pursuing political and ideological engagements that allow us to define and pursue freedom and rights for African women. The title «Feminist Africa» does not declare so much as celebrate the present and herald the future of a feminism that is an integral aspect of African liberation, democratization and people-centred development. The chosen title «FA» centres the historical experience of the African continent, while referring to the collective articulation of feminism among African women. As an intellectual discourse, its first point of departure is the critical responses of women scholars to the ongoing androcentrism of African intellectual and political discourses. African feminism is critical of the ways in which African male academics mimic the gender order of a globalizing cultural system that privileges masculinity and defines "science", "rigor" and "mastery", and "method" in ways that alienate women. Feminists in Africa represent women's struggle for *intellectual* as well as political and cultural respect.

The second philosophical point of departure is rooted in an anti-imperialist response that challenges the continued global construction of feminism as the exclusive preserve of Western women, despite the emergence of transnational feminism networks that articulate Southern feminist discourses across in the formerly colonized world. This did not prevent North American and Western European feminists from dominating the global knowledge circuits that opened up to women during the United Nations (UN) Decade for Women (1975-1985). The UN Decade came late in the era that Western feminists define as a “second-wave” women’s movement, the first being earlier emancipation movements. It is still necessary to point out that the “first and second waves” discourse is so Eurocentric that it completely erases the much longer struggles of black Western women since the days of mass enslavement, including their huge contributions to both the suffrage and civil rights movements. African women on their own continent earned suffrage through anti-colonial movements, so that by the 1970’s African women were either finding their way into global governance and representing their nations, or in the still occupied zones, fighting liberation wars against colonialism and apartheid. Either way, very few were able to attend the first UN conferences in Mexico and Copenhagen.

Nairobi 1985 changed all that. Since the 1980’s, as economic crises and conflicts continued to disrupt millions of lives, feminism has found multiple expressions in African nations, as well as in international fora. At the end of the 20th century, Africa’s post-colonial condition of long-term structural underdevelopment and marginalization was being intensified by the global imposition of neoliberal doctrine, with particularly dire effects on women’s lives, and on African intellectual capacities. These conditions motivated women all over the region to re-mobilize and muster new political energies for continued struggle. Africa’s numerous women’s movements, were increasingly defining themselves as “feminist”.³

3 See Amina Mama, *African Feminist Thought*, in Oxford Research Encyclopedia, 2019, and Simidele Dosekun, *African Feminism*, in Olajumoke Yacob-Haliso, Toyin Falola (eds), *Palgrave Handbook of African Women’s Studies*, London, Palgrave Macmillan, 2020. Prior to these entries, “African Feminism” was more likely to be accredited to African American scholar Gwendolyn Mikell, *African Feminism. The Politics of Survival in Sub-Saharan Africa*, Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997, than to anyone from Africa. This ignores all the early work by African feminists, notably the widely acclaimed book by Awa Thiam, who describes herself as a revolutionary and a feminist, *Les Paroles des Negresses*, (1978), had never existed.

«FA» therefore set out to publish, develop and catalyse the ongoing work of “feminist knowledge production”, a term we now use to frame all the cultural and teaching, training, research and political engagements that feminist scholars, cultural workers and activists were generating, as we made inroads into the institutions and scholarly networks of independent African states.⁴ Hosted at the University of Cape Town (UCT) for the first phase of its existence (2002-2016), «FA» was transferred to the University of Ghana’s Institute of African Studies in 2018. It is in my capacity as one of the founding Editors that I continue to lead «FA». At the time of writing, I work in collaboration with a new Editor Collective that includes four other experienced «FA» editors drawn from the different sub-regions: Dzodzi Tsikata (Ghana), Charmaine Pereira (Nigeria), Sylvia Tamale (Uganda), and Hope Chigudu (Zimbabwe and Uganda).

The Editors are working with a team of colleagues and staff at the Institute of African Studies, planning, mobilizing resources, and working to populate and embed «FA» within the Institute. «FA» was established in South Africa during the early post-apartheid years, located in an institutional context where apartheid education had ensured that ‘professors’ had always been white. Recruited to fill a newly-created position as the first Chair in Gender Studies, I was one of the first handful of African academics to be hired by an institution that had already achieved notoriety for its shocking treatment of leading African scholars, Archie Mafeje and Mahmood Mamdani.⁵ The Chair in Gender Studies was tasked with leading the African Gender Institute (AGI), established by Mamphela Ramphele in 1996 under a mandate from the pan-African Forum of African Women Educationalists (FAWE). The stated objective was to pursue “knowledges for gender equality” at the University of Cape Town, and reflected a profound commitment to engagement with the POLITICS of feminist knowledge production.

4 “African knowledge” is defined as knowledge produced by the intellectual labor of African scholars on and from the continent.

5 The creation of professorial level Chairs was a top-down strategy of Mamphela Ramphele, South Africa’s first Black woman Vice Chancellor (then at UCT). I was hired not long after UCT provoked national scandal by suspending eminent Ugandan-Asian Professor, Mahmood Mamdani, from his (also newly created) position, as the first A.C. Jordan Chair in African Studies. At issue were his early efforts to Africanize the curriculum offered by a Centre for African Studies that had become accustomed to providing the colonial curriculum he described as “Bantu Education”.

In this short article I present a brief personal account of the history of «FA»'s first phase, drawing on my experience as one of two founding editors (Jane Bennett and myself).⁶ During its first decade, the African Gender Institute was able to mobilize resources to carry out a unique series of research, training and curriculum transformation collaborations that galvanized a resurgent sense of feminist intellectual community and energy. We hosted several hundred African feminist scholars and activists through a visiting scholars program, and developed pan-African methodologies for teaching and research. These research methodology and curriculum workshops, and multiple research projects generated exciting new findings, ideas and writing. The global publishing industry was not suited to the circulation of knowledge on the continent, no matter how much research was carried out. Because the African Gender Institute was cultivating a pan-African epistemological framing that centred the continent, rather than the interests of academic tourists, international development agencies or their Africa-experts.

A Journal of Our Own: Feminist and African

«FA» is not merely an identity-based publication that offers a new space for those who define themselves as African feminists to publish writing that appeals neither to androcentric African nor Western feminist publications. It also deliberately set out to make a radical, decolonial and feminist epistemological intervention in African knowledge production, and defines the continental epistemological community as its primary interlocutor. This community is rooted in a longer more global pan-African tradition that has multiple genealogies, but which regards the continent (not Western universities, and not the more scattered African diaspora) as the rightful home of African knowledge.

The global publication landscapes manifest new, neoliberal modes of coloniality and capture by digitalized academic corporations, but these are not attuned or competent to gatekeep African knowledge about Africa. In 2017 Africans were reported to contribute approximately 1.2% of the world's international scientific publications, despite being 20% of the world's people. However, while

6 Desiree Lewis played the key role in *Changing Cultures*, «FA», 2003, Issue 2, during her stint on the AGI's programme staff, back in 2003.

we must acknowledge the resource and capacity constraints facing African universities, we must treat such conservative figures with caution, because international publications are notoriously poor at including African writers. Yet all manner of research and writing have been copiously produced since flag independence, including by women. We do not even need to expand the definition of ‘research’ to observe that Africans –including African women, and many of their organizations– engage in abundant research activity, both within and beyond the universities. However, the internal circulation and access to this vast knowledge resource has been constrained by the limitations of African publishing, which affect those on the continent most severely.

«FA» joined the existing pool of African publications for African purposes, most of which are published by the Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa, or in post-apartheid South Africa. Like most of these, «FA» treats the continent, and not the wealthier Western institutions as the premier site for the production knowledge about Africa. Location matters perhaps all the more so in the context of digitalization, and the neoliberal modes of capture commodification.

The global reach and impact that accrues from «FA»’s digital circulation has generated a global audience that was not sought, but which we regard as a collateral benefit, insofar as it offers a decolonial corrective to our ongoing intellectual marginality manifest in the pay-walls that alienate African scholars not just from the colonial archives, but also from the products of our own present-day knowledge production. These do not offer us spaces that allow us to exercise imagination and develop the particular ingenuity and perspectives on the world that arise from African historical and material conditions. These give Africans a particularly, critical vantage point on the world, and the ongoing globalization processes.

Over the years «FA»’s readership grew exponentially, with no deliberate promotion, affirming our sense of its importance as the first dedicated global platform for the independent feminist thought and activism that has proliferated across the continent and within national institutions over the last half a century. «FA» has succeeded because the founding cadre grew to number several hundred users and contributors across the continent. This now extends to a global network that includes collaborating colleagues in the Caribbean, European and North American diaspora.

Founding Mission: Feminism for African Liberation

«FA» was established with a view to strengthening, connecting, and promoting the feminist research and activism on the African continent. It brings critical anti-imperialist and pan-African (regional, continental) feminist perspectives to bear on the oppressive manifestations of gender and sexuality on the African continent. The founding vision has been pursued slowly but steadily for over 15 years. Twenty-two issues have been published and put into global circulation using digital technology using an open access strategy that made it possible to publish and freely circulate locally-grounded feminist knowledge across the continent for the first time. We described the initiative as follows:

Feminist Africa is a continental gender studies journal produced by the community of feminist scholars. It provides a platform for intellectual and activist research, dialogue and strategy. *Feminist Africa* attends to the complex and diverse dynamics of creativity and resistance that have emerged in postcolonial Africa, and the manner in which these are shaped by the shifting global geopolitical configurations of power. It provides a forum for progressive, cutting-edge gender research and feminist dialogue focused on the continent.⁷

«FA» arose out of the mandate of a continental workshop ‘Gender Studies for Africa’s Transformation’ hosted by the African Gender Institute at Breakwater Lodge in Cape Town, January 2002. We reported that this event:

brought forty women from over a dozen African nations together to begin the work of sharing diverse experiences of initiating and institutionalizing GWS in Africa, and to develop an intellectual agenda that reflected the bringing together of our various pan-African and feminist perspectives (AGI, 2002). We envisioned a rich and vibrant intellectual community of feminist scholars empowered to advance feminist scholarship and activism regardless of the often unfavourable (if not hostile) institutional and political environments.⁸

7 «FA», 2002, Issue 1: *Intellectual Politics*, African Gender Institute, University of Cape Town.

8 Amina Mama, *What Does It Mean to Do Feminist Research in African Contexts?* «FA», 2011, Issue 1, p. 7.

It was a remarkable event, the first a convening of unanimously African and feminist thinkers and scholars in a long time. Once convened we shared and reflected on a wealth of experience that dated back to the first regional organization, the Association of African Women for Research and Development (AAWORD/AFARD), founded in Dakar in 1977. Participants included Zenebwerke Tadesse, formerly AAWORD's first Executive Secretary, and long-serving Director of Publications at the Headquarters of the major social science network, CODESRIA, and AAWORD's second Executive Secretary; Patricia MacFadden, an early vegan feminist from Swaziland (whose food politics caused hotel caterers some despair back then) who, in the 1990's had bravely founded the Centre for Feminist Studies in Harare, from which she also launched the *Southern African Feminist Review*. Sylvia Tamale, who later become a leading sexual rights activist and opponent of the Anti-Homosexuality Bill in Uganda, was also in attendance, along with colleagues from Universities and movements in Ghana, Nigeria, Uganda, Botswana, Namibia, Tanzania, Ethiopia, Kenya, Cameroon Republic, Zimbabwe and other nations, places that our own online survey (the first of its kind) identified as places where feminists were driving the establishment of small spaces for gender and women's studies.

By the time the AGI was set up, other gender studies faculty on the African continent had already trained a second generation of post-independence feminists in other African universities and scholarly networks. However, the situation in 2000 was that the 40 or so sites allowed to establish gender and women's studies courses and degrees in African universities were not given the necessary resources, and had to add the writing of proposals to external agencies to their teaching overload. For many of the South African colleagues in attendance, it was a first exposure to an existing feminist intellectual community that was not white or expatriate, but African. By this time there was already an established presence of gender and women's studies researchers in other African universities, women's networks and movements were fiercely debating and shaping feminism as a praxis for African liberation in the context of neocolonial patriarchy.

The participants reviewed the state of the field and concluded that there was a pressing need to support and strengthen and re-radicalize feminist capacities to power the gender equality agendas and institutional changes that women's movements were demanding in African parliaments, legal and policy-making institutions, education systems, and in their societies. In this respect, South Africa dur-

ing the first decade of the new millennium proved to be a highly strategic location.

The workshop served its intended purposes, and set out an agenda for re-radicalization of the thirty or so sites offering gender and women's studies on the continent, largely through the simple strategy of re-connecting feminist academics with the importance of movements. Feminist organizations in civil societies and communities had continued to proliferate, and gender and women's studies centres were continuing to form. The workshop developed a short-medium term agenda that amounted to an intellectual strengthening strategy that sought to take full advantage of the fact that feminists –all of whom were involved in women's movements and feminist advocacy– were located not just in universities, but also in national policy-making institutions, NGO settings, in the international development industry, and working independently as researchers, poets, playwrights and activists busy in multiple settings.

At the African Gender Institute, we followed up the 2002 workshop by raising funding to host a substantive pan-African and feminist knowledge initiative that would last for over a decade. Under the title "Strengthening Gender and Women's Studies for Africa's Transformation" we proceeded to bring feminists across the continent into a series of transformative projects over the next decade (2002-2016). Jane Bennett and I were both able to do this under the auspices of the then African Gender Institute, where we were able to take advantage of my position as the first Chair in Gender Studies in Africa.

To take advantage of this the African Gender Institute profile drew on connections with feminists in the former liberation movement. The founding board of the African Gender Institute (which the University later abolished) included Pregs Govender, a revolutionary feminist Member of Parliament who would later resign in protest over HIV/AIDS and the arms deal, and write the book *Love and Courage. A Tale of Insubordination*.⁹ It also included Naledi Pandor, who became Minister of Education, Baleka Mbete, who succeeded Frene Ginwala as Speaker in the House of Parliament, and Nozipho January-Bardill, who would lead the transformation of a Parliament that initially had no toilets for women!

By the end of the 2002 workshop, we had defined a strategic, self-determining feminist vision for re-radicalizing gender and wom-

9 Pregs Govender, *Love and Courage. A Tale of Insubordination*, Auckland Park, South Africa, Jacana Media, 2007.

en's studies. «FA» thus began as a publication designed to nurture, inform and strengthen feminism as an independent political and intellectual movement towards African liberation. Our key methodology involved intellectual networking that primarily convened feminist thinkers across institutions, nations and disciplines into a series of research, curriculum and intellectual strengthening projects that connected campuses and movements.

A Journal of Our Own: Methodology

«FA» was set up as an independent, peer-reviewed, community-owned platform, with a pan-African editorial policy that would counter the international gatekeeping practices that marginalize African research production in global knowledge arenas. The digital revolution provided us with the open access technology that allowed us to by-pass the ongoing capture and commodification of knowledge (academic capitalism), to communicate and circulate ideas in a non-monetized space that stayed outside the pay walls of corporate publishers. «FA» was not directly funded, so the entire production was driven by the unrelenting intellectual energy and labour of its primary users and contributors, who are themselves constituting the community of feminist scholars, researchers, political activists and movement-makers that «FA» primarily serves.

Why did Africa's feminists (most of whom, unlike the young Virginia Woolf, had by this time found rooms to write in, and become quite accomplished) consider so vital to create "a journal of our own" at this particular historical moment? The conditions that gave rise to this are briefly elaborated below. As I write this, the University of Nairobi's Vice-Chancellor, Kiama Stephen Gitahi has had to make a public apology for a victim-blaming memo issued by the campus Director of Security after three women were raped, but he was later removed from his post.

The global context was (and still is) one in which African knowledge production continues to be marginalized, while our own public education systems remain male-dominated, often difficult places for women. It has never been easy to gather feminist thinkers on their own terms in African contexts, although there have been numerous efforts since the 1970's. My personal experience of convening a National Network for Women's Studies in Nigeria at the end of the 1990's had been arduous, road travel was hazardous, overpriced courier services often went astray; telephone lines often failed, and

mail services could not be relied upon. Digital technology was in its infancy at that time, and most of us had poor connectivity that relied on personalized dial-up modems.

The historically white, colonial South African University of Cape Town was enjoying immense global favour after apartheid, and this included better facilities for research and communication. Coming to Cape Town from a town in northern Nigeria, it was my colleague Jane Bennett who opened my eyes to the radical possibilities that new information and communication technologies (ICTS) were presenting. Finally, we had tools that would allow us to address the limited the circulation of knowledge and ideas between scholars, policy makers and activists on the continent, in a manner that would open new epistemological, political and intellectual possibilities.

Despite this excitement, we took the precaution of conducting a survey of feminist uses of ICT's in 2002, in collaboration with the Gender in African Information Network (GAIN). Carried out by the AGI's first cyber-feminist activist Jennifer Radloff, the results showed that most of the founding community were still inadequately connected to the internet to download pdfs. It was for this reason that we took on the additional work and cost of publishing a limited hard copy print run alongside the digital edition (initially using a basic html format), at least for the founding phase. This proved expensive, more so to mail out, so we limited the print run to our continental community of users and contributors. Had we not done so, «FA»'s founding community would not have been able to access their own journal, while the rest of the world could, and our publication would have become as externalized, as every other fail in its core purpose. We kept the digital version simple by using the "lightest" possible technology, and minimal graphics. For the first few years we published online using an early html package that differed from the printed layout. Later, as digital technology advanced, and access improved on the continent, we were able to move to the more professional-looking pdf format that has prevailed.

Structure and Mode of Production

In keeping with both scholarly and activist conventions, editors, contributors and peer reviewers have not generally been paid to work on «FA». Contributors all hold own their own copyright, and are encouraged to respond positively to ensuing requests to republish or translate their contributions, requesting only that «FA»

be acknowledged as the first publisher. To date «FA» exercises full editorial autonomy and serves as an independent community publication, working to connect and decolonize thinking, rather than to perpetuate the alienation of intellectual labour.

While many of the international feminist journals we admire have found sustainability in this manner, «FA» has declined invitations from corporate academic publishing houses, because this would sabotage our mission. Quite simply it would have meant our users and contributors would lose access to their own work, the work of their peers, as well as their access to intellectual community. The journal opened up an epistemological space that does not fragment our thinking because of the intellectual integrity it offers to thinkers who are at once feminist and African. African feminists living in independent nations are no longer have to accept being passed over by Western feminist journals one day, and androcentric African or Africanist journals the next.

«FA» has succeeded in becoming an open-access platform that communicates ideas, research, reports and developments in critical gender research and women's movements for change within the region. Designed as a resource to support and strengthen locally-relevant and informed teaching, research and movements, on the continent «FA» rapidly became a globally-used publication. To resist the structural forces that would otherwise externalize and capture African knowledge, we exercise our editorial power, to privilege continental knowledge production. This protects our continentally-focused mission to enhance and advance the changes that increasingly strident feminist movements are creating in regional and national political, social and cultural (educational) institutions.¹⁰ The structure of «FA» has remained minimal, comprised of the Editors, an International Editorial Advisory Group, and an in-house editorial team.¹¹

10 Two field reviews confirm the marginalization of women in African knowledge production, as well as the broader global marginalization of Africans in the production of knowledge about Africa. This occurs in all spheres, including the global (Western dominated) feminist academia. The first review is Amina Mama, *Women's Studies and Studies of Women in Africa during the 1990s*, Dakar, Senegal, Codesria, 1996, and the second was conducted by Desiree Lewis in 2003 («FA», 2003, Issue 2, *Changing Cultures*), commissioned by the African Gender Institute. In 1996 women constituted only 4% of Africa's professoriate, but the numbers continue to rise.

11 «FA», 2003, Issue 2, *Changing Cultures*, edited by South African feminist Desiree Lewis; «FA», 2006, Issue 6, *Subaltern Sexualities* edited by Elaine Salo and

Institutional Conditions

With hindsight it is clear to us that «FA» might well have suffered the “one issue wonder” fate of numerous other African journals, had it not been hosted at a Gender Institute that was for a time able to serve a hub for feminist intellectual activity on the continent. We located our work in longer continental histories of feminist intellectual intervention. While we witnessed the South African-led African Renaissance, we also positioned feminism within the older African philosophical and political discourses that are referenced in the our self-description of «FA» as a “pan-African and feminist” project.

In concrete terms, «FA» was being conceptualized while the African Gender Institute was defining its own priorities and possibilities using a pan-African, rather than a national rubric. This allowed us to use a small institutional space on an elite campus to host hundreds of African women scholars and activists over the years, and to involve many of them in ongoing research and curriculum intervention that were free to express their feminist epistemology and pursue a commitment to developing feminist knowledge that embraced and collaborated with African women’s movements. This work was made possible by the fact that somehow we were able to make the African Gender Institute into a profoundly different kind of space within the historically white university, despite its location in a town where anti-black racism was so bad that our African women professors were turned away from shopping malls, and local laundrettes greeted them with the uninvited information that there was no job for them there.¹² These challenges were partially mitigated when the first Black Vice Chancellor (also a woman) ensured that a special accommodation facility was built. All Africa House as it was named, was securely located on the middle campus, and included a suite of offices, and accommodation. There is not the space to explore how it was that the conversations that took place under various project rubrics (the Visiting Associates programme, the workshops for the Network of Higher Education Against Sexual Harassment (NETSH), and the methodology workshops that we included in every project, were so rich and animated that the geographical borders

Pumla Dineo Gqola, and «FA», 2009, Issue 13, *Body Politics and Citizenship* edited by Elaine Salo with Sophie Oldfield and Anne Schlyter.

¹² Before I left UCT, in a single year (2006), 53 non-South Africans (mostly Somalis) were murdered in the local townships areas of the Cape Flats, Khayelitsha and Langa.

between nations seemed to melt away. In this sense we were able to experiment and develop transnational feminist methodologies that responded directly to local interests and questions.

We were able to share the histories of continental feminisms and African Gender and Women's Studies with South Africans. The continental feminist community has developed practices that acknowledge, excavate and build on previous feminist initiatives that reach back into pre-independence histories of anti-colonial and nationalist feminisms that are still being recovered, even now. In the post-independence era, the most important reference points for pan-African feminist scholarship have been the Association of African Women in Research and Development (AAWORD/AFARD) which still exists in Dakar, and the short-lived but historic Centre for Feminist Studies in Harare. Many others have succeeded in setting up gender and women's studies courses on campuses that would not entertain the word "feminism".¹³

Interventions in the male dominated social science community have yielded limited success, remaining fraught with sexual politics, but nonetheless persuading some male colleagues to accept the scientific validity of "women's studies" and "gender analysis". However the same fraternity still react negatively to any reference to "feminism," as foreign (even prefer the term emancipation, and at least through the 1990's, considered gender questions to be "diversionary" and regularly opposed any special policy measures or legal language, insisting that "man" was an inclusive 'neutral and objective' term.¹⁴ In contrast, the African Gender Institute makes no apology for supporting more self-defining expressions of feminist scholarship that are reflected in the Feminist African archive.¹⁵

We (myself, Jane Bennett and a gradually increasing number of guest editors and users) were able to carry the vision articulated in

13 It is important to note that the AGI followed on from AAWORD (1977), and a number of national sites: the Women's Research and Documentation Centre at University of Ibadan in 1980's, the Department of Women and Gender Studies at Makerere (1991 -) and by 2002, when the AGI carried out its survey, over 30 such structures responded (AGI unpublished survey).

14 See for example the Kampala Declaration 1990, where all night discussions only succeeded in creating inconsistent inclusions of 'he or she' and 'him or her', while 'he' and 'him' were left in others, even after further contestations over the text in the final Plenary that ratified it.

15 I came to Cape Town with a perspective informed by the preceding years of insider-struggle as a member of CODESRIA, and as the Founding Convenor of the National Network for Women's Studies in Nigeria, as well as a familiarity with the multi-campus University of West Indies feminist movement to establish gender and development studies during the 1980's-1990's.

2002 forward for 15 years. At the same time we were fully engaged in institutionalizing our own degree programmes for the UCT, and implementing the pan-African programme to strengthen and re-radicalise gender and women's studies. This drew colleagues from East and West as well as across Southern Africa into closer collaborations. As previously reported:

The research initiatives pursued under the 'Strengthening Gender Studies for Africa's Transformation' project brought feminist scholars and activists from different countries together to carry out research, often for the first time, on topics generated at the 2002 agenda setting workshop and the ensuing curriculum strengthening meetings. They addressed women's activism («FA» 4, 2005), higher educational institutional cultures («FA» 8 and 9, 2007), sexual harassment and abuse in higher educational institutions (Jane Bennett, «FA» 2002, 2005), sexual cultures («FA» 5, 2005), militarism, conflict and peace-building («FA» 10, 2008) and gender-based violence («FA» 14, 2011). They shared a commitment to defining and developing feminist methodologies for African contexts, as reflected in all the editorials, and specifically in «FA» 1 (2002) on *Intellectual Politics*, «FA» 8 and 9 (2007) on *Rethinking Universities* and «FA» 11 (2008) on *Researching for Life: Paradigms and Power*. All the research projects were collaborative, and carried out by self-identified feminist researchers based in research locales where they also lived, worked, and were active in women's movements.¹⁶

AGI graduate students and project staff made up an in-house production team, and maintained a feminist e-list serve (the GWS Africa-list) that was expanded by nominations of others who were both feminist and African, or whose work and critical orientation commended them as supporters of feminism in African contexts. Over time, through extensive outreach, collaboration, and direct soliciting, this network grew, contributing to realization of a stronger sense of "feminist African community" on the continent. The GWS Africa e-list supported all the African Gender Institute's projects, but «FA» made regular use of it to call for contributions and announce forthcoming issues.

These highly favorable institutional conditions and the degree of autonomy that we exercised at the University of Cape Town saw us

16 Amina Mama, *Feminist Studies in African Contexts: The Challenge of Transformative Teaching in African Universities*, in Paul Tiyambe Zeleza (Ed.), *The Study of Africa, I, Disciplinary and Interdisciplinary Encounters*, Dakar, Senegal, CODESRIA, 2006, pp. 297-312.

pull the first few issues together largely in-house, but the community response to «FA» was so energetic that we soon found ourselves at risk of drowning in a deluge of unsolicited submissions that ranged very widely in their quality. To manage this massive interest, we adopted a thematic issue strategy, and worked to recruit additional editors who could expand expertise, grow the network, and share in the work of pulling issues together.

Critical Reflections

The «FA» archive masks the challenging and serendipitous nature of the editorial and production processes that kept «FA» running. There were also shortcomings that haunted our efforts. The matter of language is illustrative, because despite our pan-African intention, we relied on English. We knew from AAWORD and CODESRIA that this was terribly expensive, and given the global anglophone domination, opted to publish in English. We therefore maximised both African and global readership, but used a colonial language that excluded French, Portuguese and Arabic speaking colleagues. Yet to be pan-African requires a more inclusive linguistic approach, that we never attempted while based in South Africa.

Twenty-three issues were published online by the African Gender Institute between 2002 and 2017, all but two in hard copy editions. During this time FA community grew and successfully pursued its primary goal of providing a unique platform that published and put the intellectual work of African scholars, women's movement activists, researchers, writers and theorists who are pursuing feminist agendas for change into wide circulation. While we had fallen short of the intended 2 Issues per annum, this is still a substantial and unique digital archive of contemporary African feminist writings over a 15-year period. Most of the contents are continentally-authored, and «FA» can be proud of the fact that it has published many writers for the first time. At the same time its transatlantic profile has been augmented by substantive editorial contributions and articles from some of our most highly respected colleagues in the diaspora, among them Trinidadian feminists Rhoda Reddock and Carole Boyce-Davies, and African-American feminist literary scholar Anne Adams.

Between 2009 and 2016 it became increasingly difficult to sustain two issues per annum. I had left the Chair in Gender Studies at the University of Cape Town, but continued to work as Editor from

my location in California, a feat that was only possible because Jane Bennett remained at the AGI, struggling to retain the intellectual autonomy and integrity that we had established. We worked across the Atlantic on email, skype, WhatsApp, to sustain what was, after all a digital publication, but without the day-to-day relational and existential support of the community that inspired and energized us. Matters became even harder when the University of Cape Town finally had its way, and re-structured the African Gender Institute, to divide up the already small structure that had allowed «FA» to deliver research, curriculum, communications programs, alongside undergraduate and graduate degree programs. However, by this time these creative synergies had already connected scholarly activism and research to the ongoing work of women's movements, giving rise to a much deeper understanding of the importance of "feminist knowledge" as an epistemological enunciation that affirms the status of the this particular intellectual community of women as knowers and producers of knowledge by, for and about Africa.¹⁷

As the Editors, it fell to Jane Bennett and I to continue to keep «FA» running, sometimes alternating between issues to relieve each other across the distance. Issue 9 (2007) for example, grew out of the last workshop I was able to convene before leaving the University of Cape Town. It was an event designed with the intention of initiating a continental network of feminists working against the encroachments of US militarism, and in response to the US announcement of its intention to move the US High Command for its escalating African operations from Germany to the African continent. We invited US Black feminist Margo Okazawa-Rey¹⁸ to participate in a workshop that included then South African Deputy Minister of Defense, Nozizwe Madlala-Routledge and former Chair of the Women's National Commission and MP Pregs Govender, Bea Gallimore (from Rwanda), Yasmin-Jusu-Sheriff from Sierra Leone, and

17 My description of the AGI as "feminist studies institute" marks the extent to which we stretched the original mission of the AGI. This used the former Vice Chancellor Mamphela Ramphele's more mainstream language which stated the mission in terms of 'Building knowledges for Gender Equity.' Most AGI programmes, like malestream social science network CODESRIA used "gender" for tactical reasons, given the fact that "feminism" is considered not just political, but provocative. I have encountered the same reluctance among colleagues in the US academy, including in the US African Studies community.

18 Margo Okazawa-Rey was invited in because she and Gwyn Kirk had previously founded the International Women's Network of Women Against Militarism that linked anti-militarist feminists across Asia and the Pacific.

Ruth Odhiambo-Ochieng from ISIS-WICCE, the leading transnational education and peace-building network based in Uganda. All of them later contributed articles to «FA», 2008, Issue 10: *Militarism, Conflict and Women's Activism*.¹⁹

During «FA»'s lifetime feminist academics working on our partner campuses continued to establish centres and feminist projects in their own institutions. Takyiwaa Manuh worked with Akosua Adomako Ampofo, Dzodzi Tsikata and other colleagues to establish the Centre for Gender Studies and Advocacy (CEGENSA). Sylvia Tamale, author of *When Hens Begin to Crow*,²⁰ the first major study of Ugandan Women's parliamentary participation, became the first woman Dean of Law, but she also established a project on the Law and Sexuality at Makerere.

«FA» 2007, Issues 8 and 9: *Rethinking Universities* were the outcome of a collaboration with the Association of African Universities, which was co-directed with Teresa Barnes. The last two issues were pulled together by guest editors. «FA» 2016, Issue 21: *The Politics of Fashion and Beauty in Africa*, was edited by Simidele Dosekun. She activated a whole new network of African feminist scholars, bloggers, cultural theorists and activists, shining a light on future possibilities. «FA» 2017 only exists because in 2016 the Fifth African Feminist Forum was held in Harare, and the organizers invited «FA» to publish a Special Issue based on the proceedings, and ultimately gave rise to Issue 22 (2017): *Feminist Organizing: Strategy, Voice, Power*, guest edited by Charmaine Pereira, and published in collaboration with the African Women's Development Fund.

By this time it had become evident that for «FA» to continue, would require a significant investment of political energy, time and resources to actively recruit from the large pool of women that have emerged as feminists during the recent decades. Gender and women's studies have gained ground on African campuses, and pan-African feminist organizations, notably and the African Women's Leadership Institute run by Akina Mama wa Afrika have delivered movement-building information and training strategies to multiple cohorts over the same period. The possibilities are illustrated by the intellectual productivity of the successor generation of African

19 The anti-violence Strengthening Women Against Conflict and Militarism (SWACM) Network existed for 3 years across Ghana, Sierra Leone, Liberia and the Niger Delta.

20 Sylvia Tamale, *When Hens Begin to Crow: Gender and Parliamentary Politics in Uganda*, Boulder (Colorado), Westview Press, 1999.

feminist academics, researchers, and those they are teaching on African campuses.

The prospects for feminist publishing out of Africa are better than they have ever been, given the growth in feminist research globally including Africa, and the upsurge in feminist organizing that we have witnessed since 2002. The significant gender policy advances that women's movements have accomplished in national and continental governance are currently threatened by the continuing erosion of the state itself under the global neoliberal regime, opening up more intense contradictions between globalization of liberal political and policy discourses and the realities of economic injustice facing the next generation, and the impoverished majority peoples.

Re-location, Re-mobilizing, and Re-building

Following up on long term partnership with colleagues at the University of Ghana, and with the support of the African Women's Development Fund in Accra, we convened a strategic Editorial meeting in summer of 2017. «FA» editors came from Cape Town, Ghana, Cape Coast, Makerere, London, Nigeria and California. Two days of debate were held at Yiri Lodge in Legon, and the outcome was unequivocally positive. The Yiri Consensus (2017, unpublished), records the fact the meetings unanimously committed to re-establishing «FA». It was agreed that «FA» needed to locate to a favorable intellectual and institutional home, at which it could be regenerated and re-launched into a second phase, a process which I was tasked with leading, and which those present were eager to support.

In recent months a number of important steps have been taken to re-establish and renew «FA»'s editorial community, and establish a new governance structure for «FA» at its new location. Within the IAS we are collaborating with the staff of the existing publications program, to design a new website, complete with data bases and a journal management system.

The Future of «Feminist Africa»: Phase II

The new governance structure is headed up by the afore mentioned Editors Collective of five. This is responsible for editorial policies, decision-making, overall direction, ethics, projects, proposal writing, resource mobilization, financial oversight. The Edi-

tors collective is the decision-making body, responsible for financial and administrative oversight. The international editorial advisory group is being re-constituted and expanded to share custody of the pan-African vision, and to widen the fields of expertise that «FA» is competent in. The editorial advisory group role will be enhanced to better engage and nurture new and younger members with editorial succession in mind. An editorial production team²¹ has also been convened by the institutionally based Editorial Coordinator, Dzifa Torvikey.

The Women's Movement context has also changed, with different movements experiencing advances and setbacks, and very few of us in positions that are able to reach across the continent and catalyze others. We are daily reminded of the importance of the inclusive, feminist and pan-African collaborations. Evidence of their effectiveness can be seen in the ongoing successes of African women's high-level gender equality advocacy both within the regional governance structures of the African Union, where numerous policy commitment to gender equality are now in place. Even more auspicious is the rise of the independent African Feminist Forum from 2006 onward, illustrated in the popular T-Shirt that marched on the streets of Accra in 2006 informing the world that African women were "Feminist No Ifs Buts or Maybes".²²

I suspect that the most important aspect of the Feminist Africa experience has been our discovery that it is possible to recover and re-activate the unique cultural competencies and intellectual capabilities of hundreds of already highly educated-women living on the continent. What is more, we have the methodologies, pedagogies and relational networks to carry this work forward, and to sustain it far beyond any single institution or individual. The key capacity acquired over the last 15 years has been «FA» Editors expertise at convening and activating this particular community of practice. «FA» has lasted as long as it has without much infrastructural or institutional support because we were able to build the initially thin, older network of activist intellectuals that existed in 2002, into a

21 This is currently coordinated by Dzifa Torvikey, and includes the IAS Director, Dzodzi Tsikata, the Chair of the IAS publications committee, Akosua Adomako Ampofo.

22 The inaugural 2006 Forum generated the African Feminist Charter. In addition to regular pan-African convenings, the African Feminist Forum sponsors national level Feminist Forums that engage local women's movements on feminism means for African women, including regular events in Uganda, Liberia, Zimbabwe, Senegal, Ghana, and other nations.

much deeper self-defining community, and to *consolidate* this core through a series of independent research, training, methodological and pedagogic collaborations, in a relatively short period of time.

I attribute this success to our shared epistemological/ethical premises (feminist, anti-colonial, and African, united across different nations) and the unleashing of cultural-political-intellectual energy and ideas that characterized every gathering. The mood was dominated by feelings of mutual appreciation, relational caring, generosity, the emergence of non-conventional styles and modes of adornment, including an identifiable radically-traditional feminist-but-African fashion sense; music featuring powerful African women vocalists (exemplified into a “Feminist African mixtape” by popular Afropolitan feminist blogger Minna Salami); African cinema and video culture; healthy vegetable-eating habits and the open exchange around sexuality and pleasure²³. In other words, the spaces we convened somehow unlocked the vibrant transgenerational cultural and political repertoires that facilitated the expression of a collective will to freedom that declares and defines itself as feminist and African. This core energy made it possible to sustain «FA» as the open access, online publication that is available, not just within the founding community, but to the world. The Editors hold open a space that has become influential as an area in which African feminists become the authors of feminism for Africans in a world that has until recently, defined feminists as “un-African”.

Closing Note

In these brief reflections lie the germ-seeds of a long-term future for «FA». As I have indicated, this is currently being pursued through our relocation to a willing and capacitated institutional host, one where there is a feminist academic community in-residence. At this site, «FA» is already pursuing the core strategy of re-mobilizing a core cadre of Editors, and expanding its user and contributor community, re-populating its tested and tried governance structure. Resources are being mobilized to support staff positions to support and coordinate editorial and production processes at the Institute of African Studies. The digital communication and publishing infrastructure is being redesigned and updated, to include digital subscriptions, online data base and journal management systems,

23 See Nana Darkoa’s blog *Adventures from the Bedrooms of African Women*.

digital archiving. With younger generation of technologically adept feminists on board, we look forward to more pro-active use of new social media mobilization tools.

On a continent that is distinguished by prevailing conditions of long-term systemic economic, educational, socio-cultural, and political, underdevelopment and precariousness that dates back to the 1980's,²⁴ this necessarily demands the enormous behind the scenes work that lay behind the success of Phase I. In 2002, «FA» drew on previously relied on pre-existing networks, and grew these. However, its own success, and the changes in the institutional landscapes that existed then, now demand the further development and expansion that is underway. We are making a priority of reaching and recruiting feminist Africans from across several generations of feminist thinkers, to include additional areas of scholarly expertise, as well as to reach to the generations of feminists we now know to be living in African nations that we have not yet reached.²⁵ Until now, «FA» has not been able to transcend the major structural and historical obstacle to pan-African communication and knowledge transfer. To explore the possibilities of translation, and the editorial and community-building implications that come with moving into multilingualism, «FA» is currently running a partnership project that allows us to explore what it will take for «FA» to reach beyond the anglophone zone to engage Arabic, French and Portuguese-speaking thinkers, and to bring a feminist perspective to bear on the divisive question of African languages, in keeping with the continental, feminist, and pan-African vision that «Feminist Africa» represents.

Abstract: Questo articolo costituisce un racconto personale dell'esperienza di «Feminist Africa», la più importante rivista africana nel campo dei Gender & Women's Studies e dell'attivismo femminista. Vi si analizza la motivazione filosofica di tale pubblicazione africana e si ripercorrono dettagliatamente le condizioni in cui nacque all'inizio del secolo, come proprietà collettiva della comunità di femministe che la fondarono sul fronte avanzato del cambiamento in atto all'interno delle istituzioni educative, politiche e culturali del continente. Nata come pubblicazione digitale ad accesso libero, «Feminist Africa» mantiene gelosamente la propria libertà editoriale attivando e utilizzando il libero lavoro intellettuale della comunità di

24 See Silvia Federici, George Caffentzis, Ousseina Aidou, *A Thousand Flowers: Structural Adjustment and the Struggle for Education in Africa*, Trenton (NJ), Africa World Press, 2000.

25 «FA» is developing partnerships with other transnational feminist publications, and has a new partnership with Friedrich Ebert Stiftung to support selected translation (of «FA» most popular existing articles) into French, Arabic and Portuguese. These will be included on the new website.

femministe del continente. Ospite dell'African Gender Institute presso l'Università di Cape Town in Sudafrica per i primi quindici anni (2002-2017), «Feminist Africa» si è trasferita presso l'Institute of African Studies dell'Università del Ghana, con l'intenzione di lanciare una seconda fase della propria storia nel 2020.

This article presents a personal account of the experience of «Feminist Africa», the continent's leading journal of gender and women's studies scholarship and feminist activism. The philosophical rationale for an African publication is explained, and the conditions under which it was established detailed. «Feminist Africa» was founded at the turn of the century, to become the collective property of the founding community of feminists working on the frontlines of change across African educational, political, cultural institutions. As an open-access digital publication, «Feminist Africa» preserves its editorial freedom closely, by activating and utilizing the free intellectual labour of the community of feminists on the continent. Hosted at the University of Cape Town's African Gender Institute for the first fifteen years (2002-2017), «Feminist Africa» has moved to the Institute of African Studies at the University of Ghana, with a view of launching a second phase in 2020.

Keywords: Feminist Africa, femminismo, studi di genere, studi sulle donne, politiche di genere, Africa, African Gender Institute (AGI), colonialismo, neoliberalismo, *African knowledge*; Feminist Africa, feminism, gender and women's studies, gender politics, Africa, Africa Gender Institute (AGI), colonialism, neoliberalism, African knowledge.

Biodata: Amina Mama è una femminista nigeriana/britannica; ha istituito la cattedra di *Gender Studies* all'African Gender Institute, University of Cape Town, Sudafrica; ha inaugurato la cattedra Barbara Lee in *Women's Leadership* al Mills College, e la cattedra Prince Claus in *Equità e sviluppo*. Nel 2009 è stata incaricata di ristrutturare il programma di Women's Studies dell'Università di California, Davis, e dal 2016 vi dirige il Feminist Research Institute, da lei fondato. Amina Mama ha rivolto le proprie risorse intellettuali e politiche al fine di creare e facilitare spazi per la ricerca e la riflessione critica africana, ed ha insegnato, scritto, prodotto film e lavorato in pubbliche istituzioni. Con Jane Bennett e Desirée Lewis, nel 2002 ha fondato «Feminist Africa», prima rivista africana di Women's Studies, open access, interamente costruita da studiosi del continente africano (amama@ucdavis.edu).

Amina Mama is a Nigerian/British feminist. Her academic appointments have included inaugurating the Chair in *Gender Studies* at the University of Cape Town's African Gender Institute; inaugurating the Barbara Lee Distinguished Chair in *Women's Leadership* at Mills College, and the Prince Claus Chair in Development and Equity. She was recruited to direct the Women's Studies programme at the University of California, Davis (now the Department of Gender, Sexuality and Women's Studies), and subsequently served as founding director of the Feminist Research Institute. She is founding editor (with Jane Bennett and Desiree Lewis) of the continent's first open access gender and women's studies journal, «Feminist Africa». Amina Mama has directed much of her intellectual and political resources to creating and facilitating spaces for critical and reflexive African research, teaching, writing, film production and publications. Her research expertise is in politics and policy, critical higher education studies, intellectual decolonization, militarism, conflict, pacification, and movements (amama@ucdavis.edu).