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UFAHAMU
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***ufhamu-n.* [Swahili] understanding**

Ufhamu, UCLA's multidisciplinary Africanist student journal, seeks contributions that challenge broadly accepted conceptualizations of African studies. Since 1970, Ufhamu has maintained its original vision of creating a forum for protest against the increasingly western-dominated and exclusionary African Studies establishment. The journal continues to publish the work of those marginalized by the academic press—Africans, people of African descent, students, and non-academics. Together with our readers and contributors, we reaffirm our commitment to create intellectual linkages and feature current critical views.

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CONTRIBUTORS

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Carol Sicherman is Professor Emerita of English at Lehman College, City University of New York. She has published on Ngugi wa Thiong'o and other African writers, as well as articles on higher education in East Africa. Professor Sicherman is currently working on a book about Makerere University in Uganda.

Editor's Introduction

African Studies at UCLA has such a long and venerable history that one cannot escape the sense of being part of something much larger than one's own work. Having completed my undergraduate work at a state university on the East Coast, a school with few African or Africanist scholars and even fewer African resources, coming to UCLA was a momentous event for me. During my first year in the Master's in African Studies program, I heard about the life and passing of Dr. Boniface I. Obichere. This Nigerian scholar had, at various times over the years, taught some of my friends and had helped guide the James S. Coleman African Studies Center to prominence. Like other graduate students, I was particularly proud to join the great tradition of Dr. Obichere.

Dr. Obichere was a significant force in building and strengthening African studies at UCLA. To honor his legacy, *Ufahamu's* Editorial Board, and particularly his former students, suggested a memorial issue dedicated to his work and in recognition of his contributions. It was in this spirit that the editors approached the task of collecting materials for a tribute issue of our journal. Our goal was to pull together works by Dr. Obichere's former colleagues, students and friends, along with his own words, to celebrate the life and work of one of our own great teachers. These would reflect the scholarly interests of Dr. Obichere and the influence that he had on the larger field of African studies. In addition, the editors hoped to collect personal reminiscences of friends and students to pay tribute to the many ways in which Dr. Obichere influenced the world around him beyond his scholarly pursuits.

I am pleased that this issue includes such a diverse selection of scholarly and creative contributions. While it has been several years in the making, the patience and persistence of all those involved is a tribute to their desire to see Dr. Obichere memorialized in UCLA's graduate student journal of African studies. Even in Dr. Obichere's passing, his legacy continues to make a contribution to the strength of African studies at UCLA and the larger African studies community. For this we are grateful.

Lahra Smith

The first part of the report deals with the general situation of the country, and the progress of the war. It is a very interesting and valuable document, and one which should be read by every citizen of the United States. The author, Mr. [Name], is a well-known and respected statesman, and his views are of great weight. He speaks of the progress of the war, and of the efforts of the Government to bring it to a speedy and honorable conclusion. He also speaks of the condition of the country, and of the needs of the people. The report is a model of clear and concise writing, and it is a pleasure to read it.

The second part of the report deals with the financial condition of the country, and the progress of the war. It is a very interesting and valuable document, and one which should be read by every citizen of the United States. The author, Mr. [Name], is a well-known and respected statesman, and his views are of great weight. He speaks of the progress of the war, and of the efforts of the Government to bring it to a speedy and honorable conclusion. He also speaks of the condition of the country, and of the needs of the people. The report is a model of clear and concise writing, and it is a pleasure to read it.

The third part of the report deals with the military condition of the country, and the progress of the war. It is a very interesting and valuable document, and one which should be read by every citizen of the United States. The author, Mr. [Name], is a well-known and respected statesman, and his views are of great weight. He speaks of the progress of the war, and of the efforts of the Government to bring it to a speedy and honorable conclusion. He also speaks of the condition of the country, and of the needs of the people. The report is a model of clear and concise writing, and it is a pleasure to read it.

The fourth part of the report deals with the political condition of the country, and the progress of the war. It is a very interesting and valuable document, and one which should be read by every citizen of the United States. The author, Mr. [Name], is a well-known and respected statesman, and his views are of great weight. He speaks of the progress of the war, and of the efforts of the Government to bring it to a speedy and honorable conclusion. He also speaks of the condition of the country, and of the needs of the people. The report is a model of clear and concise writing, and it is a pleasure to read it.

The fifth part of the report deals with the social condition of the country, and the progress of the war. It is a very interesting and valuable document, and one which should be read by every citizen of the United States. The author, Mr. [Name], is a well-known and respected statesman, and his views are of great weight. He speaks of the progress of the war, and of the efforts of the Government to bring it to a speedy and honorable conclusion. He also speaks of the condition of the country, and of the needs of the people. The report is a model of clear and concise writing, and it is a pleasure to read it.

Boniface I. Obichere, Pan-Africanism, and African History

Dennis Laumann

Guest Editor

The contributors to this issue of *Ufahamu* each answered a call for articles, essays, and reviews in memory of Boniface I. Obichere. A professor of African history at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) for three decades before his death in 1997, Dr. Obichere was one of my advisors in graduate school. He was a remarkable man who has had a lasting influence on my teaching style and research skills. As a junior faculty member now, I regularly invoke his name in my lectures, sharing stories and ideas I picked up in his classes; and his presence, in a spiritual sense, remains with me when I conduct research and write about African history. This introduction will offer a brief review of Obichere's significance as a Pan-Africanist and an historian of Africa, but first I will continue on this more personal note.

Obichere and Me

The last time I saw Professor Obichere was in May 1996 at my comprehensive doctoral examinations at the UCLA Department of History. In fact, the final question of my orals was posed by Obichere, who asked me what the significance of the term "Benin" was in West Africa. After rattling off a series of responses—the historic city in Nigeria, the bight bordering the former "Slave Coast," Togo's national university—Obichere finally revealed the answer he was actually seeking: Benin is the name of a popular beer in Togo. It was a lighthearted and very much appreciated way to end the stress of a comprehensive exam, but it was also a moment characteristic of Obichere. While we all had a good laugh, his inquiry was meant to remind me to go beyond the obvious historical associations to think *culturally* and link what I had learned at the university to what I had *experienced* in West Africa. When I revealed to my committee members that I do not drink alcohol, Obichere chastised me for neglecting a pastime associated with my German heritage and the country in which I was increasingly spending my time, Ghana.

Roughly one year later, as I was leaving the office I shared at the Department of History at the University of Ghana, I had an unanticipated reunion with one of my UCLA colleagues, Brian Thompson, who had recently arrived in Ghana to carry out his doctoral research, too. The meeting was bittersweet, however, as Brian informed me that he had just learned from his mother that our professor, Obichere, had passed away in March.

The depth of our loss did not strike me as intensely as when I returned to the United States later that summer. I had missed the memorial service held in Los Angeles and, as Brian and I parted ways in Ghana, I had no one to share my feelings with, at least nobody who had had the privilege of studying under Obichere. Back in Los Angeles, I realized that many of my friends, especially those who worked closest with him, were (fortunately, only temporarily) unable to continue with their scholarship—saddened and shocked by our professor's death.

At UCLA, we were blessed with numerous distinguished historians and other specialists of Africa and the African Diaspora, all grouped together through the James S. Coleman African Studies Center. But, it was Obichere, above others, who turned on so many students to the study of Africa. He had a reputation as a dynamic lecturer, a trusted guide, and a champion of Pan-Africanism.

I frequently sat in on Obichere's undergraduate lecture courses, riveted by his teaching style, thrilled to share in the vibe of a multiracial group of students hungry for African history. After class, I would join the throng of students who followed the professor back to his Bunche Hall office, the room crammed with books and the framed photo of Osagyefo Dr. Kwame Nkrumah, eager for a few minutes to solicit Obichere's knowledge, often waiting in the hallway for what seemed like hours for my turn. Obichere and I developed a rapport, in which he challenged my Marxist views and I tried to defend my turf. This dynamic carried over into the lecture room, where Obichere would suddenly make a side remark directed at me, confirmed with a glance and a mischievous smile my way in the sea of students.

In 1995, I joined two dozen of my fellow graduate students in Obichere's advanced historiography seminar. That class was one of the highlights of my graduate career, as once a week we gathered for Obichere to issue forth arduous questions, a ritual always balanced by cherished moments of often witty, but always instructive,

storytelling. He was strict and demanding in the work he expected from us, yet Obichere consistently reminded us (non-Africans in particular) that learning African history entailed much more than simply reading, writing, and talking, but actually living and working in Africa. His wisdom and guidance prepared all of us for the joys and challenges of studying African history, and his enthusiasm and humor kept us going when we felt overwhelmed with the demands of graduate school. We students emerged from that seminar as colleagues and friends.

Then, one year later, my comprehensive exams; then, on March 14, 1997, our loss. Now, a tribute to our professor.

Obichere and Pan-Africanism

Obichere's life mirrored his primary passion, Pan-Africanism, as his professional and personal paths crisscrossed the Atlantic world. Born in eastern Nigeria in 1932, he traversed the Atlantic to earn his undergraduate and Master's degrees in the United States. It was as a graduate student at Berkeley, in the early 1960s, that Obichere met his African-American wife, Armer, and where he abandoned his focus on European history and embarked on his formal training in African history, a path sparked by encouragement from his friend, Malcolm X. After obtaining his D.Phil. in African History at Oxford in 1967, he returned that same year to California to begin his long association with UCLA.

In the late 1960s, students of color at UCLA and institutions across the nation were demanding that their histories and cultures be taught. Obichere joined the faculty at a time when so-called ethnic studies programs were being created in response to that student movement. He was part of a group of energetic, dedicated, and (mostly) radical scholars of Africa who turned UCLA into one of the preeminent institutions for African studies. He took the lead as Director of the African Studies Center from 1972 to 1978 and as a founder and editor of the *Journal of African Studies*. During his tenure as director, he attracted other renowned specialists to UCLA, including my mentor, the archaeologist and historian Merrick Posnansky.

Through his teaching, Obichere introduced the history of Africa to countless undergraduate students, and trained hundreds of graduate students who continued on to careers inside and outside academia. Obichere was a resolute voice for Africa, championing its

causes, celebrating its history, and infecting others with his passion for the continent and its peoples around the world. One important example of Obichere's advocacy was his consistent support of the work and careers of fellow Africans in a field dominated by historians of European ancestry.¹ Another case in point, one outside the academy, was Obichere's engagement in his writing, teaching, and lecturing with the liberation movements of southern Africa.²

Obichere was not content with just teaching courses and publishing work on African history, but had a larger mission to bring together Africans from the continent and the Diaspora, along with concerned non-Africans, to foster dialogue, activism, and scholarship. His home, office, and classrooms were meeting places for scholars, students, and those outside academia. Whether intentional or accidental, Obichere brought like-minded people together, who came to hear, meet, and visit him at UCLA, resulting in myriad collaborations and relationships. And, Obichere himself always maintained strong personal and professional links with colleagues and institutions across the continent and in the Diaspora, and often preferred to publish in journals and newsletters based in Africa. His life and work were rooted in a personal Pan-African journey, one through which he was able to link Africans and non-Africans across the Atlantic, in order to further the causes and scholarship of Africa.

Obichere and African History

Obichere's research and publications were as varied as his teaching interests, and also reflected his commitment to Pan-Africanism. Whether writing about the history of Dahomey (his primary area of specialization)³ or politics in Haiti⁴ or educational policies in contemporary African states⁵—to name only a few of the topics on which Obichere published—he applied the same general principles which distinguished all his work: a thoroughness in consulting sources, a respect for his subject matter, and an enthusiasm evident in the final product.

Obichere's seminal work, *West African States and European Expansion 1885-1904*, is a classic study typical of scholarship produced during the period of his graduate studies at Oxford. In the 1960s, many historians of Africa, Obichere included, sought to focus on African participation in the coastal trade and African diplomacy with Europeans as a break with earlier Eurocentric works on these topics. This book was grounded in a careful and systematic reading

of the archival sources, but Obichere's primary interest was in presenting African perspectives on the subject. Indeed, in his writing and teaching, he always emphasized collecting oral traditions and oral history as a means of understanding African interpretations of their own history, while simultaneously reminding his students of the value of learning European languages in order to study the relevant written documents.

While not beholden to ideological trends and fashionable topics, Obichere was often at the forefront in advancing new ideas about and approaches to African history. In our classes at UCLA, he argued that Africans had crossed the Atlantic well before the first Europeans sailed to the Americas. Of course, this theory was proposed in an early work by Ivan Van Sertima,⁶ but Obichere exposed legions of students to this (at the time) controversial hypothesis, which since has been corroborated with significant archaeological evidence. Obichere's preoccupation with more recent connections between Africa and the Diaspora, in the form of cooperation in the struggle against colonialism in Africa and racism in the United States, is another illustration of his ability to be ahead of the trend, as a cursory glance through leading journals or a review of job openings in the field will reveal the current preference for scholars working on both Africa and the African Diaspora. As a final example, Obichere always considered issues of gender and sexuality in his research and teaching, and trained his students to actively solicit oral history from women in our own fieldwork, well before the subfield of African women's history was recognized by mainstream scholars.

At the time of his death, Obichere was in the process of completing two long-term projects, one a biography of King Ghezo, the mid-nineteenth century ruler of Dahomey, and the second a study of Malcolm X's relations with African leaders.⁷ Both of these projects would have been significant contributions to the field of African history. Relatively few biographies of African leaders, especially those from the precolonial era, have been produced, a situation Obichere sought to rectify with his work on King Ghezo. Likewise, Obichere's project on Malcolm X not only would have shed more light on the life of a heroic leader, but would have been an important addition to the literature on political links between Africans and African-Americans. In the last years of his life, Obichere was fully engaged in his research and writing, working towards producing two new volumes which would advance his goals of promoting the study of African history and furthering the Pan-Africanist agenda.

Postscript: Obichere and African Liberation

This special issue was born during an editorial board meeting held during the 1997-1998 academic year, when it was suggested that we honor Obichere by dedicating an issue of *Ufahamu* to his legacy. This idea immediately was embraced by all the students gathered that evening, and I later volunteered to serve as guest editor. It is a most fitting way to remember Obichere since he was a steadfast advocate of and three-time contributor to our journal, as well.⁸ Indeed, *Ufahamu*, which was founded by the African Activists Association at UCLA in 1970, thrived during Obichere's term as Director of the African Studies Center, and the journal is indebted to his leadership and support.

Our primary intention was to invite submissions from Obichere's friends, colleagues, and students, in the form of short tributes or longer articles dealing with topics which were the focus of his own scholarship. I believe the result you have before you is the successful realization of our goal. Included are pieces by friends and colleagues (Chinua Achebe, Felix K. Ekechi, and Posnansky) and students (Nwando Achebe, Leland Conley Barrows, and myself). The subjects covered in this issue all relate to vital aspects of Obichere's research and teaching: the African Diaspora (Posnansky and Frederick Knight), education in Africa and teaching about Africa (Carol Sicherman and Nwando Achebe), and colonialism (Barrows). In addition to the present introduction, the issue includes three personal tributes to Obichere (Nwando Achebe, Ekechi, and Posnansky). And, fortunately, with the kind permission of the UCLA International Studies and Overseas Programs (ISOP), we have reprinted an interview conducted with Obichere himself, and originally published in ISOP's newsletter in 1994, about the research projects on King Ghezo and Malcolm X. We are particularly excited about being able to share this last piece with you.

I would like to thank a number of individuals whose work, contributions, advice, and support for this special issue deserve special mention. Susanna D. Wing, the former Managing Editor of the journal, was a source of stability as she guided me and other members of the editorial collective for several years of this issue's development. Lahra Smith, one of the two current Co-Editors-in-Chief, eagerly embraced this project and worked closely with me to see it to fruition. Two of Obichere's colleagues at the UCLA Department of

History, professors Posnansky and Ned Alpers, helped me identify and locate many of Obichere's former students to notify them of our special issue. And, I am especially appreciative of Nwando Achebe's assistance in arranging for the publication of her father's poem.

Finally, as a way of ending this introduction, let me share this thought with you. If there is any consolation in Obichere's death for me it is that he lived long enough to see the entire African continent liberated from European colonial occupation. Obichere's unwavering commitment to the struggle for the return to independence in southern Africa was apparent to anyone who spent any considerable amount of time in his presence. Roughly a decade before his passing, Obichere had written:

When I hear the singing of "Nkosi Sikelela I' Afrika" (God Bless Africa), the acknowledged anthem of Black African nationalism and Black nationalists, the emotions and the sentiments it evokes in me are powerful, stirring, hopeful, and tremendously encouraging.⁹

Dr. Obichere's life and work, and his example as a scholar and an activist, evoke the same emotions and sentiments in those of us who had the fortune to be touched by his wisdom, humor, and generosity. It is with this mostly personal and, I hope, informative introduction that I dedicate this special issue of *Ufahamu* in honor of our late professor and mentor, a great historian and Pan-Africanist, Dr. Boniface I. Obichere. We miss you.

Notes

¹ See, for example, his article "The Contribution of African Scholars and Teachers to African Studies, 1955-1975," *Issue VI:2/3* (Summer/Fall 1976), 27-32.

² For examples of Obichere's scholarship on this topic, see "Apartheid in Zimbabwe (Rhodesia)," *Legon Observer* 6:1 (1-14 January 1971), 69-75 and "African States and the South African Problem," *Ufahamu*, XV:1-2 (1986), 84-99.

³ *West African States and European Expansion: The Dahomey-Niger Hinterland 1885-1889* (Yale University Press, 1971);

"Change and Innovation in the Administration of the Kingdom of Dahomey," *Journal of African Studies*, 1:3 (1974), 235-51; and "Slavery and Women in the Kingdom of Dahomey," *Revue Française d'Histoire d'Outre-Mer*, XV: 238 (1978), 5-20.

⁴ "Dr. Francois Duvalier, High Priest and President of Haiti, 1957-1971," *Black Academy Review*, 2:3 (Fall 1971), 42-64 and "Black Power and Magic in Haitian Politics," *Pan African Journal*, 6:1 (1973).

⁵ See, for example, "Politicians and Education Reform in French-Speaking West Africa: A Comparative Study of Mali and Ivory Coast," *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria*, 8:3 (December 1976).

⁶ Ivan Van Sertima, *They Came Before Columbus: The African Presence in Ancient America* (New York, 1976).

⁷ An excellent overview of these two projects is provided in the interview with Obichere republished in this issue on pp. 151-159.

⁸ "African States and the South African Problem"; "The Social Character of Slavery in Asante and Dahomey," *Ufahamu*, XII:3 (1983), 191-205; and "Eduardo Mondlane," *Ufahamu*, IV:2 (Fall 1973), 166-70.

⁹ Obichere, "African States and the South African Problem," 98.

THE HISTORY OF THE
CITY OF BOSTON

BY
JOHN H. COOPER

THE HISTORY OF THE CITY OF BOSTON, FROM THE FIRST SETTLEMENT TO THE PRESENT TIME, AS FAR AS THE RECORDS OF THE CITY AND STATE CAN BE MADE TO ILLUSTRATE THE HISTORY OF THE CITY AND STATE. BY JOHN H. COOPER, ESQ., ATTORNEY AT LAW.

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