UFAHAMU
JOURNAL OF THE AFRICAN ACTIVIST ASSOCIATION
JAMES S. COLEMAN AFRICAN STUDIES CENTER
UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA
LOS ANGELES, CA 90095-1310

CONTRIBUTIONS
UFAHAMU accepts contributions from anyone interested in Africa and related subject areas. Contributions may include scholarly articles, commentaries, review articles, film and book reviews, poetry, prose fiction, and artwork. Manuscripts must be no more than 30 pages, clearly typed, double spaced, formatted following the most recent *Chicago Manual of Style*. Please include a brief abstract and a brief biographical note, including position, academic or organizational affiliation and recent significant publications, etc. We request that, when possible, articles be submitted on a diskette or as an e-mail attachment to the Editor-in-Chief.

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Articles appearing in this journal are abstracted and indexed in the *International Bibliography of the Social Sciences.*

Partial funding for the publication of *UFAHAMU* is provided by the Graduate Students Association of UCLA and the James S. Coleman African Studies Center.

Cover: Color photograph of the entrance to a group of churches in Lalibela, Ethiopia. Photograph taken by Lahra Smith, May 1998.

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VOLUME XXVI NUMBERS II-III

CONTENTS

REVIEWS

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Editorial

This issue is a distinct collection of scholarly articles about aspects of development in Africa, on the one hand, and literary works of Africanist interest on the other. The themes presented here appear to concern separate spheres of intellectual endeavor; however, we propose, that African development and creativity are not only linked, but should be considered together more often.

This proposition aims especially to counter the image of "Hopeless Africa," emblazoned on the cover of a recent issue of *The Economist* (May 13th 2000), and to avert the assertion in its pages that "since the difficulties of helping Sierra Leone seemed so intractable, and since Sierra Leone seemed to epitomise so much of the rest of Africa, it began to look as though the world might just give up on the entire continent." (17) "Hopeless Africa" puts forward nothing new; brute political understanding holds together unimaginative language, hackneyed complaints about African leaders, and basic misinformation about the history of African civilizations.

If we are to take something, anything, from "Hopeless Africa," it should be the knowledge that the continent continues to be seen in relation to the failure (or success) of its nation-states. Those who bemoan the fate of the African continent and seek to help the people in the management of natural disasters and disease are not excluded from the nation-states; they imply that African states are unable and ineffectual. The symbiosis of international political policies towards African states and development schemes meant for the African people suggest how neatly the various issues of the continent are bound together to present the 'hopelessness' of solutions for Africa.

Let's consider each piece of this Gordian knot. While African countries have produced capable and just leaders at the local level and beyond, many of the national leaders have either been ineffective or corrupt. What many observers do not recognize is the many sides to the problems of these African leaders. Their ineffectuality stems in part from personal failing, but also from their misinterpretations and misuse of Western formulations of the nation-state and democracy—the very political issues to which many African countries must pay lip service in order to receive recognition and aid. Many African countries have experimented with various egalitarian exercises—universal elections, *ujamaa*, affirmative

action-type programs, and only rarely have they been met with success. Others opted for solutions that fall afoul of a narrow vision of democracy that has been the received model since the Cold War.

Yet, for the same commentators who see Africa's failed democratic traditions as the major cause of instability, they completely miss African peoples as agents of change in proposals for solutions. Democracy for the heralders of African doom is now a state affair, not a basis for popular action. At this point in the argument come suggestions to the effect that pandemics like HIV/AIDS and disasters like floods and droughts reduce the capacity of African masses. To complete the circle, if a competent state with commitment to its people were present, then disease and natural disaster could be managed without foreign aid.

Certainly, the realities of African political and social life reflect a time of great hardship, stemming from a combination of the factors discussed above. The assemblage of these "indicators" of African failure limit the possibilities of reform. Measures of development revolve around gross domestic product, life expectancy, and literacy rates—assessments that deal with how many people have access to a specific set of "improvements": education, basic services, long life/health. But what about non-quantifiable aspects of African society that reveal something about lived experiences?

Africans, likes people anywhere else, face intellectual, philosophical, and creative dilemmas. Moreover, the knowledge and solutions with which they meet daily struggles are deep and complex. These daily struggles are direct confrontations of the "pressing" problems upon which the international community focuses. Therefore, it is imperative that we focus on the dynamic and creative solutions of grassroots Africa. Here, clearly, Africans are finding success, however challenging and meager life may seem at times.

Success of African creativity and intellectualism often remain only among the internationally recognized writers, musicians, and visual artists, past and present. Popular African responses to a paucity of material possessions and infrastructure deficits are quite often "artistic" and almost always productive. The genius of popular solutions lies in the incredible pragmatism that informs individuals' decisions on the ground; these decisions marry the realism of daily life and the idealism that comes from the desire to succeed in and better one's experience as befitting local culture and society.

Daniel Kendie and John Luiz explicate the political

economic developments of recent African history to the present. They lay the groundwork to begin thinking about African societies; Paul Musau adds to this by discussing the means through which people and politics are connected: the media. Isidore Diala and others elaborate on African expressive culture. Ideas about communication and public culture crisscross and connect these pieces.

These kinds of connections across boundaries of academic disciplines should be fostered in other Africanist endeavors; namely, problems and especially solutions should be thought of as crossing national and regional borders, differences of languages, and varieties in local culture and custom. Why not encourage networks that are built on commonalities of food production, say, to develop pan-African dialogue and technology of maize or rice cultivation? And why not connect such an organization concerned with food production to a collective of peoples or areas living in similar environmental circumstances in order to devise ecologically practical and sound solutions to food shortages and unproductive soil preservation or irrigation? We know that people on the ground have such solutions and have to a certain extent such networks. Rather than featuring the hopelessness of Africa, why not publicize and promote these practitioners and their efforts?

Shobana Shankar