

UFAHAMU
JOURNAL OF THE AFRICAN ACTIVIST ASSOCIATION

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UFAHAMU accepts contributions from anyone interested in Africa and related subject areas. Contributions may include scholarly articles, political-economic analysis, commentaries, review articles, film and book reviews and poetry. Manuscripts must be between 20-30 pages, clearly typed, double spaced, with footnotes on separate page(s). Contributors should keep copies of their manuscripts. The Editorial Board reserves the right to edit any manuscript to meet the objectives of the journal. Authors must submit two copies of their manuscripts and a brief biographical note, including position, academic affiliation and recent significant publications, etc. All correspondence - manuscripts, subscriptions, books for review, inquiries, etc. - should be addressed to the Editor - in- Chief at the above address.

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EDITORIAL

In some ways, this issue of *UFAHAMU* reflects the dilemma of the African intellectual. "By a kind of perverted logic," Frantz Fanon wrote in *The Wretched of the Earth*, "[colonialism] turns to the past of the oppressed people, and distorts, disfigures, and destroys it." As Pierre Clastres has demonstrated, western scholarship describes non-western civilizations in terms of a child in various stages of "development." The child's only hope of proceeding to adulthood (i.e. modernity, westernization) is to happily follow the parent's orders. The oppressor's perverse practice of devaluing his victim's past—and it follows, his present as well—is compounded by a descriptive power, a power so encompassing that it paralyzes the victim's mind.

Although correcting the huge body of disinformation rightly becomes the supreme mission of the African writer, a methodological problem immediately presents itself. On the one hand, the desire to "set the record straight" often results in the romanticization of the African past and present. Conversely, an apparently "critical" approach, by the western definition of the term, leads one to the unavoidable pitfall of using the oppressor's methods, which often, and understandably enough, yield the oppressor's results.

In this issue, two articles attempt to transcend this dichotomy. In his article on the Almohad movement in North Africa, Senén García deconstructs both the Orientalist ascription of Ibn Tumart's success to the Masmuda Berbers' "barbaric opposition to any civilizing entity" and the politically-based biases found in the primary source material. Instead, García charts the socio-economic and political reasons behind the Masmuda's consolidation. Meanwhile, in an indicting polemic against elite Abyssinian/Abyssinianized culture that is sure to ignite controversy, Asamenew Gebeyehu—with few qualifications—strongly implies that authoritarianism and violence are inherent in the dominant culture in Ethiopia. Gebeyehu's call for a new cultural context based on an "original idea" that is nevertheless common to Ethiopian peoples seems quite challenging indeed.

The two articles depart from the problems outlined above, but in very different ways. Whereas García attempts to steer a middle road that eschews either romanticism or stereotype, Gebeyehu, by examining a centuries-old African "elite" culture and returning a guilty verdict, demands an extremely introspective and self-critical approach to the grim realities of today.

Despite the apparent divergence between the two approaches, the two articles have in common a quest, difficult and sometimes fraught with paradox, for an African account of Africa. This is also the aim of the other two articles in this issue. K. E. Agovi's "The African Writer

and the Phenomenon of the Nation State in Africa" reveals contemporary African literature as a dynamic medium of political dissent and links it with the written and oral literary traditions of the past. This call for a re-examination of our history as a tool for empowerment is echoed by Bekhi Langa in "The Language Issue in South African Educational Literature: The Case of Orature" where the author argues that the formation of a systematic African language policy is integral to a truly liberated post-Apartheid South Africa.

As it has been from its inception, one of *UFAHAMU*'s objectives is to provide alternative avenues on the road to the liberation of Africa. It is not our place here to favor one progressive African ideology over another. This, however, does not mean that we fall into the false trap of "objectivity" and "neutrality." Those familiar with the hypocrisies of western "liberalism" will do well not to advocate a facsimile for Africa. One need only observe the virtual absence of literature on African American liberation or any other ideas not approved by capitalist orthodoxy on the shelves of mainstream American bookstores in order to expose the empty claims of free speech in the United States. After all, what is the use of a right to free speech without a medium in which to express it?

* * *

This issue of *UFAHAMU* marks my debut as editor. The outgoing editor, Ali Jimale Ahmed, has headed East to accept a position on the faculty of Queens College, New York. Ali's eloquence, expertise, tirelessness and dedication will be greatly missed by all of us at *UFAHAMU*. We wish him the best in his new position and look forward to maintaining him as friend and contributor.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the outgoing and incoming members of the executive board of the African Activist Association for their assistance and patience.

Special thanks go to the editorial board and, especially, to production editor Yonas Admassu, without whose assistance this issue truly would not have been possible.

Ahmed Nassef