

### **Guest Editor's Introduction**

On May 25-26, 2007, the African Activist Association (AAA) organized a two-day conference in cooperation with the James S. Coleman African Studies Center (JSCASC) at UCLA. Continuing a tradition of annual conferences that the AAA initiated last year (2006), the aims of this year's conference, titled "Multi-mediating Africa: Emerging Artistic and Technological Re-presentations," were two-fold: to encourage discourse on how Africa is represented and to collectively recognize the innovative ways that Africans leverage and negotiate locality in a globalized world.

Opening the conference on the night of the 25th, Dr. Jude Akudinobi of the University of California, Santa Barbara gave the keynote address. A professor in the Department of Black Studies, Dr. Akudinobi's address titled "Giving Africa a Bad Name: History, Cultural Production, and Complexities" focused on the problematic ways in which the West tends to view Africa and suggested the use of a more critical lens to see and re-present Africa. Following the keynote address, attendees stayed for a reception and Ghanaian music performed by Sheetal Gandhi, a PhD student in the Department of World Arts and Cultures at UCLA.

The conference continued the following day with the first panel beginning at 9:00am. Depending on the subject of their presentations, panelists were divided into four separate panels: Technological, Musical and Educational, Visual, and Performative Representations. Participants, who had submitted abstracts of their presentations earlier in the Spring, hailed from Northwestern University, California State University, Long Beach, Western Illinois University, UCLA, University

of Southern California, Pasadena City College, and Venice Arts. Topics ranged from ethnographic research and artistic performance to issues of development and historical representation.

The AAA organizers were very pleased with both the turnout at the two-day conference and the well-composed presentations which brought together Africanist scholars from different universities and a variety of development workers. Echoing the words of Andrew Apter, the conference proved that academia can also engage in activism. It is somewhat unfortunate that the virtues of *soi-disant* 'soft activism' have been set aside amid the desire to penetrate, develop and speak for Africa with a 'harder' activism than is sometimes necessary. We would like to think that this conference gave us all a chance to self-reflect and become more aware of the various tropes and traps we often, well-intentioned, get caught up in as we work in, on and with the continent. We also came to know some of the ways in which we can work to change these tendencies within ourselves and, by extension, in the Africanist community. Most importantly, we were able to explore the critical ways Africans are already doing all of this for themselves and various points of potential collaboration were acknowledged and will serve as useful areas of interest and future work. The conference was, in essence, an opportunity to learn from Africa; and for African activists, this is our daily fare.

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