

Editor's Introduction

The UCLA campus has been invigorated with student activism concerning Africa recently. In addition to the successful student movement related to the Make Art/Stop AIDS campaign, a new student group has emerged on campus: the Darfur Action Committee (DAC), run entirely by students with the support of UCLA staff and faculty. The DAC has been successful in bringing notable names to Westwood to speak about the current genocide in Darfur, a region in Western Sudan, a country that just recently ended 20 years of civil war between the North and the South.

The speakers invited to UCLA by the DAC include Harvard professor and genocide expert, Samantha Power, actors Don Cheadle and Ryan Gosling, and Ambassador Anwarul K. Chowdhury, United Nations Under-Secretary General and Former President of the United Nations Security Council and UNICEF, among others. In addition to the frequent speakers, the DAC has been raising awareness about Darfur and genocide through e-mail campaigns, film screenings, as well as candlelight vigils and information tabling on campus. The DAC also has sparked a letter-writing campaign to members of Congress and has petitioned the Regents of the University of California to divest University funds from companies that benefit directly the government of Sudan.

The UCLA DAC is not alone in its movement for action in Darfur. The UCLA DAC is a member organization of Students Taking Action Now: Darfur (STAND), "a student initiative in the United States and Canada to create awareness about, take political action on and raise funds

to relieve the genocide in Darfur, Sudan.” Among the many universities with student organizations campaigning for action in Darfur are Yale, Stanford, Harvard, University of Michigan, Howard, and Swarthmore.

We at *Ufahamu* commend the DAC for its commitment to a worthy cause. We too believe that something must be done to stop the atrocities in Darfur and are encouraged to see that students have become informed and are committed to an issue so far from themselves both experientially and geographically. We also are impressed that student activism is still alive at UCLA and other campuses. However, we caution against Afropessimism – a portrayal of Africa only as a place of devastation and destitution. As pleased as we are that the conflict in Darfur has gained international attention, we hope that this renewed focus on Africa’s woes will be balanced with additional coverage of Africa of something besides genocide, civil war, poverty or disease.

At *Ufahamu*, we work to portray many different perspectives of African studies, as can be seen in this issue and the many that predate it. It should be noted that the two editors-in-chief study civil wars and HIV in Africa, respectively. Though these topics may seem negative, we do not study them because we are motivated by tragedy, but rather out of a desire to explore alternative ways to investigate political systems in Africa. Granted, we hope for our research to have positive externalities, but more importantly, we acknowledge that we are fortunate to have the opportunity to investigate questions that interest us in the context of such a rich and diverse continent.

This double issue is an example of the spectrum of both issues and ideas *Ufahamu* seeks to publish. Playwright and Fulbright Scholar at UCLA, Irene Salami writes a feminist critique of the use of proverbs in African dramatic

texts. Gregory Kamwendo discusses language, identity and the trend of the politics of recognition in the northern region of Malawi. Based on his fieldwork in South Africa, Moses Ochonu writes about democracy and the performance of power, based on his observations in Nigeria. Dallas Browne explores the beliefs and practices of the followers of the Shembe religion and their role in the construction of a multi-racial and peaceful nation. We also have included in this double issue reviews of two recently published books relevant to the study of Africa.

Immediately following this introduction, we include a response to our editorial from an executive member of the DAC at UCLA, Adam Sterling. Our intention was to engage the student group most vocal with regard to the genocide in Darfur about the role of student activism in the greater context of the Sudanese situation. We posed the following three questions to the DAC:

1) Are there risks in supporting the Darfur rebels? Legitimate fears have been voiced that violence in Darfur may be a precursor to a power grab by all the regions of Sudan violently competing for a piece of the pie. Are the concerns that the Darfur rebellion may potentially undermine the historic peace agreement between the North and the South, valid? Would supporters of Darfur like to see a dismantled Sudan?

2) Who are the international actors supporting the Darfur rebels and why? Here we are referring to accusations that certain prominent supporters of Darfur are

pursuing their own agenda rather than genuinely concerned about the peace – specifically, religious groups from both the Christian and Jewish communities that seek to demonize Sudan's Arab/Muslim leaders and community.¹

3) Why should we care about the Darfur war, which has received so much attention in the West (producing groups like the DAC), while other conflicts (like the one ongoing in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, or even the Southern war in Sudan) have received little to no media or other attention?

We thank Adam Sterling and the DAC for taking the time to respond to our questions. We would like our readers to know that while *Ufabamu* remains deeply concerned with the situation in Sudan, we feel that it is essential to understand the context and nuance of that terrible conflict.

Kim George
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¹ For a good analysis of this question and others posed here, please refer to Hisham Aidi's, "Slavery, Genocide and the Politics of Outrage: Understanding the New Racial Olympics." *Middle East Report*. No. 234, Spring 2005.