

## Editors' Introduction

Three years ago, in our 1999 editorial, the *Ufahamu* editors bemoaned the political and economic conditions that had caused *Ufahamu* to falter. We acknowledged the problems faced by the volunteer nature of our graduate student editorial staff, and sympathized with increasing financial and academic pressures. We noted how we were saddened by the faltering of the historic *African Activist Association*, a crucial organization in the history of not only *Ufahamu*, but one that had supported many calls for activism on behalf of African peoples throughout the world. We also lamented the diffuse and somewhat less politically charged environments on university campuses during the 1990s, especially at UCLA. We acknowledged our need for a new energy to animate our journal, and hoped our call would be heard for the revitalization of *Ufahamu*.

Today, in 2003, we find ourselves in a different mindset. With the advent of the tragedy of September 11, 2001, there has been a resurgence in political consciousness and activity, not only here at UCLA, but around the world. In this historic moment, hundreds of thousands of people have taken to the streets and demonstrated for those marginalized and neglected by international socioeconomic forces. People from all walks of life have called for upholding the vision of the United Nations in claiming international universal human rights and establishing world peace for all. Never in the history of the world has a movement been so large, and encompassed so many people from so many nations.

Within this global context, we are heartened by the rejuvenated political activism of the UCLA

community, and most especially by the revival of the *African Activist Association*, our intellectual birthplace. We, as editors, feel this issue is particularly timely, in that each piece upholds the *African Activist Association's* and *Ufahamu's* vision of creating a forum for protest against domination, whether intellectual, economic, social or cultural. *Ufahamu* has a strong history of publishing original works by prominent African activist scholars, including Amilcar Cabral, Chinua Achebe, Steve Biko, Walter Rodney, Boniface I. Obichere, and Ruth First. Equally important, however, is that we provide a space for African scholars oftentimes not heard, those marginalized by the establishment press who dare to challenge broadly accepted conceptualizations of African studies. Part of the uniqueness of *Ufahamu* lies in its commitment to all voices, big and small, close and far away. In this tradition, the authors in this issue, whether they are academic or artistic, emphasize how the role of resistance and conflict resolution are ongoing projects in today's increasingly unstable world.

Godwin Murunga's discussion of ethnicity in Kenya and its relationship to civil society underscores the point that social and cultural identity is often a driving force in how people strategize conflict resolution. Likewise, with the current situation in the Middle East becoming more volatile with the renewed threat of Western imperialism, Jennifer Labella's piece considers the role of the United Nations in intervening in political and social conflict. She calls into question the current effectiveness of the UN in its peacekeeping mission and urges its international members to insist upon upholding the vision for world peace. Robert Dowd's paper points out the economic power of authoritarian regimes and how, contrary to conventional wisdom, economic crisis can enforce the power of autocrats and/or ruling parties, rather than break it down. This is especially true when government controls the majority of wages and salaries. His discussion illustrates well the position of civil society

and the insidious nature of state economic power. Frederick Byaruhanga discusses the steady decline in resources in sub-Saharan Africa's higher education resources and performance. Although much of the immediate cause of this crisis is financial, Byaruhanga argues that the dependency of sub-Saharan universities on government, along with the legacy of the colonial project on intellectual life, have disabled universities, curbing their rightful autonomy and self-determination. John Lutz's discussion analyzes how imperial socio-economic processes can prevent individual subjects from forming the vision that change is possible, and that there is indeed a way to achieve a just society. Invoking Fanon and Marx, Lutz critiques novelist Ngugi wa Theong'o's *A Grain of Wheat* and its role in reconstructing history in order to address the struggles and contradictions of the present. Axel Addy's review of Berdal's and Malone's *Greed and Grievance: Economic Agendas in Civil Wars*, highlights the economic dimension of civil war centered around greed and grievances rather than eco-political costs. He highlights the importance of their argument, in that it moves away from conventional political debates about the role of ethnic hatred in civil war, as well as civil war in reaction to the oppressive nation-state. The gentle humor and irony in the short story by Janet Hunter, *Netalixi Fau*, is a reminder of our humanness and how resistance can operate on many levels, from the mundane of the everyday life to the sweep of larger social movements. And finally, Kwabena Akurang-Parry's epic poem, *The African Cusp: 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, chronicles Africa's history and celebrates the enduring dignity and strength of African people through the tragedy of colonialism, and pays homage to the spirit of African peoples in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

As we honor the renewed political and intellectual vigor at UCLA and around the world, we would like to thank out-going editor Lahra Smith for her many years of hard work and careful guidance of *Ufahamu*. Under

her excellent hand, *Ufahamu* has revived its energy and commitment to its mission of written activism from the voices of Africa. We will all miss her, and strive to pattern upcoming issues of *Ufahamu* after her model of excellence.

**Judith Stevenson**  
**Zachariah Mampilly**