

A Look Back: *Ufahamu* Online

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Being invited to participate in *Ufahamu*'s 45th anniversary commemorative issue has provided an opportunity to engage what Sondra Hale calls in her piece in this issue "the politics of memory."² *Ufahamu*'s long history is certainly a political one and in engaging in the politics of memory in reconstructing the journal's transition from print to an online publication reveals also how significantly the politics of identity have played out in the journal's recent histories.

In 2009, *Ufahamu* transitioned from its position as a subscription-based paper journal to an open-access, online publication. This transformation heralded far more than a change in format in that it signaled a change in the dynamics of the relationship between *Ufahamu* and the African Studies Center, as well as a change in how scholars interact with the journal.

In 2006, UCLA's African Studies Center (ASC), long regarded as one of the country's most distinguished research and outreach centers, lost its federal Title VI funding. Through Title VI, the Department of Education supports foreign language and area studies programs "to ensure a steady supply of graduates with expertise in less commonly taught languages, world areas, and transnational trends."³ The understanding behind the loss of this funding is complex and complicated, in part due to the macro around the global war on terror post-9/11. These complexities are also linked to the micro of leadership management at the ASC. Why the ASC lost its funding is far beyond the scope of this look back, and even further beyond my knowledge of events that transpired. The impact of this loss in funding, however, was that *Ufahamu* also lost its funding, since the ASC supported the journal.

Earlier that year, in the summer of 2006, after speaking with the then-co-editors-in-chief, Kim Dionne and Zachariah Mampilly, I agreed to follow in their editorial footsteps and serve as co-editor-in-chief of *Ufahamu* as they transitioned out of their role. I had worked with the journal as a reviewer while a student in

the MA in African Studies program, so I was thrilled to continue working in an increased capacity. I felt connected to the Africanist community at UCLA, and though I was transitioning to a doctoral program in the School of Education, my home and heart were in African studies.

When the ASC lost its funding, Kim and Zachariah, demonstrating a handful of the many qualities that made them such successful editors, quickly came together to put out an issue and to form an editorial collective. Kim called on her colleagues across all departments to put together an issue highlighting the field experiences of the small, but dynamic Africanist community at UCLA.⁴ Zachariah, continuing the tradition of *Ufahamu's* spirit of collective action, oversaw the development of an editorial collective, comprised of seven members of UCLA's Africanist community, which would support Kim and Zachariah with both editorial and strategic guidance during this uncertain time.

While *Ufahamu* was subscription-based, the journal depended on the ASC for the majority of its operating budget. Once funding was stripped from the ASC, *Ufahamu's* future was largely unknown. One leading option centered on moving the journal to another institution within the University of California system, with UC Irvine or Berkeley discussed as the most likely choices, or another center around the country with funding and an Africanist community to support such a historic publication. With two of the founding members, Teshome Gabriel and Hale, serving as advisors, combined with the UCLA-specific history of the journal, this option seemed inapt. Yet, we were not getting support or guidance from the ASC so we felt little institutional commitment at UCLA.

Another front-running option was to close the journal entirely since housing it elsewhere was incongruent with its history, and operating the journal on subscriptions alone was not possible. Not once during this period of collective planning did the ASC offer support, financial or otherwise, despite the importance of *Ufahamu* to the legacy of African studies at UCLA. We continued to use the office space the ASC provided, though even this was a contentious issue. The silence of the ASC underscores Hale's point in her *Ufahamu* retrospective when she diplomatically writes that the "relationship of the journal to the African Studies Center has sometimes been a troubled one."⁵

Once my fellow editor-in-chief, Cody Haight, and I transitioned fully into our positions, we continued operating with the few remaining funds we had, along with some financial support from the UCLA Graduate Students Association (GSA), though this funding was certainly finite. In meeting with the leaders of the GSA, who were well aware the challenges we were facing, the GSA suggested open-access, adopting a similar framework used by other graduate-student publications across the UC system known as eScholarship. We were encouraged by the opportunity to explore other avenues of institutional support at UCLA. Through this framework, our entire system would be available online—from manuscript submission, review, and acceptance, all the way through to publication.

This option was exciting, though we, Amy Pojar (who had then replaced Cody Haight as co-editor-in-chief) and I, had our concerns. What of our colleagues without Internet access? Are open-access publications respected? Would this jeopardize the legacy of the journal?

To the first point, unless an institution had a subscription to the journal, a scholar based at an African institution would not be able to access the journal. At the time, we had approximately 150 paying subscribers, including American and European institutions. Ungated journal articles would provide access to scholars at formal institutions as well as lifelong scholars in Africa and across the world.

Open-access publications are increasingly regarded along the same vein as print, though it bears remembering that the journal's first priority is to provide space for marginalized scholars. Our first priority was never to the Western academies' hierarchy of whose knowledge is valued and through which media. In becoming open-access, *Ufahamu* would now be available to marginalized readers as well. This is *Ufahamu*'s legacy and we felt confident in this move, so much so that it was communicated to all previous editors-in-chief prior to implementation. *Ufahamu* is a community and we were committed to serving those founding ideals.

Ufahamu now is not the same *Ufahamu* from 1970. The environment, the students, the needs, and the scholarship are different. Hale writes that she was not sure the journal would come into existence because of complexity of the struggles and required political energy.⁶ Though the necessary energy and struggles were

different during my time as co-editor, we were not sure *Ufahamu* would continue to exist beyond our decreased funding and the absence of the ASC support. Yet, after many trials and tribulations, and a steep learning curve, and with much guidance and support from the GSA, *Ufahamu*'s first online issue was published in 2009, hosted by eScholarship.

While open-access serves the democratic mission of the founding members of the journal, it also reduces the journal's dependency on the ASC and its fluctuating position as a respected site of African studies. Regardless of where UCLA's ASC sits in the eyes of federal funding and/or the broader Africanist community, *Ufahamu* can continue to provide space for the scholarly communities it has always committed itself to serving.

Notes

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² Sondra Hale, "Where Have We Been and Where Are We Goin? The Birth and Early Years of *Ufahamu*." *Ufahamu: A Journal of African Studies* 38, no. 3 (2015): 85.

³ "Archived: International Education Programs Service - Title VI Programs: Building a US International Education Infrastructure," U.S. Department of Education-Office of Post Secondary Education, last updated January 21, 2011, <http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ope/iegps/title-six.html>.

⁴ *Ufahamu* vol. 33, no. 1, available online at http://escholarship.org/uc/search?entity=international_asc_ufahamu;volume=33;issue=1

⁵ Hale, "Where Have We Been and Where Are We Goin?": 85.

⁶ Ibid.