

## EDITORIAL

### On Transitions

#### *In Memoriam: Prof. Mary (Polly) Nooter Roberts*

When we received the news in the early morning of Sept 12, 2018 as to the passing of UCLA's beloved Professor Mary (Polly) Nooter Roberts, we immediately knew we wanted to dedicate our next issue to her. It was only fitting as much of the ink spilt in this issue covers the creative arts. Professor Roberts served as Curator for African Art at the Los Angeles County Museum of Arts (LACMA) since 2011. And, at UCLA's Fowler Museum, she curated numerous exhibitions, with her contributions to the permanent collection "Intersections: World Arts, Local Lives" ever evident as you pass by the impressive percentage of African arts in the exhibit while listening to audio commentaries she narrates. This space, which sat just opposite her office in UCLA's Kaufman Hall, has for many of us inevitably become synonymous with thoughts of Dr. Roberts, who often led us on tours there. Beyond her influence at UCLA, Polly was a remarkable scholar, who authored multiple works and received many accolades for her curatorial contributions.<sup>1</sup> In this, *The New York Times* hailed her a "Champion of African Art" for her dedication to a more accurate representation of Africa in museum exhibitions, effectively changing the curatorial culture around her. She acknowledged the responsibility of representation by Western museums, institutions that historically have often acquired these materials through colonial or economic violence, to contextualize these holdings without ethnocentric and imperialistic overtones.

The *Ufahamu* editorial team often considers memoriams and dedications to many admired scholars and activists. We acknowledge, with some bias, that we have dedicated many pages to the workings here at UCLA, the institution that has housed our production for 48 years. But, in this memoriam, we are unapologetic. Although Dr. Roberts' scholastic and curatorial achievements alone merit a dedication, it is our tremendous and inexpressible appreciation for Polly that has culminated in this decision. Many

on our editorial team have taken classes with her, and received instrumental advising from her that has galvanized our own projects and facilitated our own transitions into our scholarly identities. In these conversations with Polly, we simultaneously received intellectual support and inspiration; and, more often than not, we were concurrently supported and inspired on a personal level (perhaps due to her concern that we were fed well, or at least able to indulge in cookies and sweet treats while in her classroom). Polly's demeanor and approach to her students, regardless of undergraduate or graduate status, was always encouraging and lacked any air of elitism. She had an unfailing dedication to her students, and exhibited a code of integrity, imbued with a humanity and warmth that will be sorely missed on our campus. And so, as a small token of the appreciation of Polly's work here at UCLA, the *Ufahamu* editors (past and present) dedicate this issue to Prof. Mary (Polly) Nooter Roberts accompanied with a heartfelt acknowledgement of her contributions, which are many. We also offer our deepest condolences to her family, friends, colleagues, students, and community who although celebrate her life, are also coping with her absence. In memory of Polly and her interests, this issue reflects the humanities in a broad sense, including both visual and literary arts, along with scholarly essays.

This issue begins with an important and timely opinion editorial from Brazil by Paulo Mileno, who lays out how Brazil's political apparatus, both on the Left and Right, has either failed to address, or outright exacerbated, state violence against Black Brazilians. *Ufahamu* will continue to monitor and listen for voices from Brazil, and other countries that have been exhibiting similar fascist and racist tendencies. We encourage academics writing on Diaspora in the Americas and the Caribbean to continue contributing to *Ufahamu* so that we may gain a better understanding of the dynamics and legacies feeding into what is presently being witnessed.

Part One of this issue includes a collection of six essays beginning with Eyiwumi Bolutito Olayinka's analysis of Calixthe Beyala's novels, highlighting the thematic of women challenging and resisting inherently patriarchal societies. Candice Taylor Stratford addresses some of the arguments Olayinka raises when examining the literature produced by FEMRITE, a female writing collective in Uganda, alongside their activism via social programs. Toni Pressley-Sanon analyzes the usage and derivatives of terms that mark racial

differences and African origins in Haiti. These terms can exclude, as much as they can be co-opted and recontextualized by the community they refer to. Akubor Emmanuel Osewe and Gerald M. Musa study how difference, in this case religious traditions, is also used to exclude the Maguzawa community from the greater Hausa ethnic group, and Nigeria broadly. The realities of these boundaries within community and lack of access to the collective, is scrutinized in practical terms in Gloria Sauti and Mamadou Lo Thiam's article, in which they compare land grabbing in South Africa and Senegal — a consequence of not only the lack of belonging ideologically but also physically, with citizens being denied the very right of homestead. Tying up the essays in Part One is the co-authored work of Adeniyi S. Basiru, Mashud L. A. Salawu, and Adewale Adepoju, which analyzes the challenges of implementing a Pan-Africanist ideology by African leaders and governments. Adeniyi, Salawu, and Adepoju argue that the Pan-Africanist ideology sought to create a continental and even global community, via integration; yet, failed due to the deep fractures and competing tensions left by colonialism.

Part Two consists of a diverse variety of submissions from the creative arts. To start, *Ufahamu's* Arts & Exhibitions Review Editor Rebecca Wolff, who has been our A&E Review Editor the past year and a half, provides an overview and commentary of two Nigerian artists whose work has been included, herein. Following Wolff's synthesis is an excerpt of Chuu Krydz Ikwuemesi's essay "A Romance with Vultures." The imagery of vultures and themes from Ikwuemesi's essay are made visible through seven of his artworks, which are reproduced in print in the subsequent pages. Second is Walter Frederick Oghenerobor Okpogor's contribution. Okpogor provided, in his own words, an analysis of his art along with permission to reproduce in print a few of his creations, all of which are embedded within his essay. Talia Lieber, *Ufahamu's* second Arts & Exhibitions Review Editor on this issue, reviews a recent and temporary exhibit at UCLA's Fowler Museum by Botswanan artist Meleko Mokgosi. Part Two continues with the publication of original poetry. Meditations on national identity, via scent and language (respectively), are captured in the first two poems: Oluwatomisin Oredein's "black soap" and Tomma Bambara's "ELLE." Halima Idriss Amali's "Faces of Shame" addresses the perception of corruption juxtaposed with notions of integrity that arguably challenge leadership in a number of African nations.

This section concludes with a poet spotlight— an interview with South African poet Thato Magano and a selection of six poems inspired by recent travels to Senegal, specifically Gorée Island, from Magano’s greater collection, *The Complicated Lives of Islands*. Of course, this editorial synthesis fails to capture the intricacies and nuances in meaning that the creative arts embody. Our readers are encouraged to derive their own interpretations and conclusions by viewing and reading these artistic contributions.

The issue is made complete with informative book reviews. D. Dmitri Hurlbut reviews Stephen Pierce’s *Moral Economies of Corruption: State Formation and Political Culture in Nigeria* and Samuel Oyewole examines Adam Mayer’s *Naija Marxisms: Revolutionary Thought in Nigeria*, both 2016 publications.

### **On Editorial Transition**

To end, we, Janice Levi and Madina Thiam, are stepping down as Editors in Chief (EIC) after an approximate two and a half year tenure. We have both dedicated many hours to the pages of this journal during our doctoral exams, which often required priority to the volunteer labor that this endeavor requires. In our first year as EICs, we struggled with identifying key resources needed for the fruition of a journal: a dedicated team to analyze submissions and provide edits, an administrative staff including an advisor at the Graduate Students Association Publications division, and a copy editor. At almost one academic year in, David Pederson was given a position at GSA Publications and we were able to hire Adrienne Lynette for our copy editing needs. These two persons have been vital in our production, and we offer sincere gratitude for their jumping right into production processes once identified. We are also excited to welcome our new copy editor, on this issue, Jessica Ruthven, who herself has a background in African Studies (PhD Anthropology, Washington University in St. Louis) and currently lives in Johannesburg, South Africa. Additional and a mountain of thanks are extended to William Morosi, who amazes us every issue with layout design: always efficient and supernaturally fast. He also is to thank for the beautiful covers that *Ufahamu* boasts each issue, and it is this galley we always wait in anticipation to be revealed! Bill, we simply could not do it without you, and we want to spill a

bit of ink in thanking you more than a mention in our front matter. And last, but certainly not least (as the adage goes and certainly applicable here), is to express our gratitude for our faculty adviser Prof. William Worger whose encouragement and enthusiasm about the history, activism, and work of *Ufahamu* keeps us attentive in our mission. We thank him for continually being one of *Ufahamu*'s most ardent supporters!

Additionally, we are grateful to those on our editorial board who have stayed on, year after year and for those, after taking a recess to focus on research, have returned for the 2018-19 academic year. They will serve as knowledgeable veterans to the team. We, having served 3 to 4.5 academic years to *Ufahamu*'s production, are now focusing on our dissertation research, with hopes to return to the team in the near future; yet, will maintain communication to be of help where we are able from our research sites. In the past weeks, we have been thrilled to see such interest by UCLA students across campus in joining the editorial team, representing over ten disciplines. We are especially excited that both of *Ufahamu*'s two Arts and Exhibits editors, Rebecca Wolff and Talia Lieber, boldly stepped forward to take the lead as Editors in Chief. Since doing so, they have been attentive to the making of this issue, to ensure they are familiar with every step of the production process, in addition to recruiting a robust team. It is not easy to find overworked and exhausted graduate students to volunteer the hours and dedication it takes to field this project. And so, we sincerely thank Rebecca and Talia for seeing the importance of this journal, and taking the baton. Rebecca and Talia: we believe you have exhibited the commitment to successfully continue this work, and wish you every success!

During our tenure, we were reminded of the purpose and mission of this journal. It can be found on our webpage and in various issues that have dedicated space to explain the activist origins and mission. Important voices have occupied these pages: Amílcar Cabral, Walter Rodney, Ali A. Mazrui, Mahmood Mamdani, Boniface I. Obichere, and Nwando Achebe to name a few. Echoing our focus in the last issue, we also acknowledge *Ufahamu*'s legacy in raising awareness on knowledge production politics that have for too long, and continue to, marginalize African scholars who are trained and working on the continent we study. Voices that should, at the very least, hold equal space at the center, are

continually being moved to the periphery. Even this graduate student journal, is an extension of that periphery as compared to top journals in the field. From the 1970s on, articles and classrooms have bemoaned this exclusion. And yet, 50 years later, the same complaint arises out of the pages and halls of our institutions. Thus, we have in our tenure, and those before us, truly worked to safeguard a balanced representation with the needle pointing in favor of the African voice as often as possible. Scholars around the world, and especially in Africa, have relied on its production and reputation to get their work seen and recognized. We have been flooded by messages of encouragement and appreciation for its continual efforts to stay alive. To those individuals, thank you for your dedicated readership and for reminding us that the work we do here is important. We hope that *Ufahamu* continues to engage in this struggle and stand in solidarity with our colleagues.

And so, in our last act as EICs, we offer this diverse collection of arts and manuscripts. Rebecca Wolff and Talia Lieber have already taken the lead on all other administrative and planning processes at the beginning of our academic year, and we have worked alongside them on this issue in hopes that we have provided a smooth transition into their tenure. We encourage them to continue to lean into our activist origins, and question how institutions stagnate even our own growth and inclusion. We wish them the very best and look forward to the next *Ufahamu* issues.

Janice Levi and Madina Thiam

*from Sefwi Wiawso, Ghana and Bamako, Mali respectively.*

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> For a list of Dr. Roberts many contributions to the Arts, scholarly publications, and work with the Susan G. Komen Foundation, please visit her UCLA's World Arts and Culture faculty page. In addition, *The New York Times* hailed her a "Champion of African Art" for her dedication to the representation of African arts and culture in museum exhibitions, effectively acknowledging the responsibility of representation by Western museums, who have acquired these materials, to contextualize these holdings without ethnocentric and imperialistic overtones. See, UCLA World Arts and Culture Department, "Mary (Polly) Nooter Roberts," Retrieved from <http://www2.wacd.ucla.edu>; Holland Cotter, "Mary Nooter Roberts, Champion of African Art" *New York Times*, Sept 21, 2018, B14.