

## EDITORIAL

### **A Momentous Year: On Protest and Pandemic Shaping Our Future**

As we finalize our manuscript for our editorial and prepare it for publication, the killing of George Floyd by four Minneapolis policemen sparked a global protest movement and reaffirmed the urgent call that Black Lives Matter in the face of the United States' entrenched systemic racism undergirded by white supremacy. We are committed to the dismantling of these structures through our research, writing, and teaching.

As white Africanists at one of California's premier public universities, we also fully recognize that our campus represents a microcosm of American racial inequity and police violence. Just three days after George Floyd's murder, the Afrikan Student Union reported that the University of California Police Department (UCPD) officers pointed tasers at an unarmed Black man with his hands up in the air.<sup>1</sup> During the protests throughout Los Angeles demanding accountability and structural change, the LAPD used UCLA's Jackie Robinson Stadium, which the university leases out to the city, to hold protesters for hours in direct violation of the city's COVID-19 safety measures.<sup>2</sup> These horrendous actions, for which the university must be held accountable, reflect systemic problems at UCLA, a university in which only 3% of its undergraduate student body identifies as African American.<sup>3</sup> The repeal of Proposition 209 in California promises a potential improvement to Black representation on campus, but not an end-all solution. Our campus faces a lack of diverse faculty across departments, including in the Social Sciences and Humanities, and a graduate student body lacking in students of color. This failure of representation is evident in the makeup of our own editorial board. While we are committed to publishing African voices, we must do more to ensure their voices, and those of our Black colleagues on campus, are ingrained into our leadership.

We stand in solidarity with our friends, colleagues, and students in the Afrikan Student Union and the Black Graduate Students Association. We join them in their demands to

defund UCPD and for UCLA to end its relationship with local law enforcement. We also support the Afrikan Student Union's urgent call for the university to prioritize resources for Black students, including a designated financial aid officer and a Black Resource Center.<sup>4</sup>

Moreover, the protests that have taken place in Lagos, Accra, Nairobi, London, and Paris underscore how the fight for racial equality affects everyone of African descent, both on the continent and in the diaspora. We have seen the monument of a British slave trader toppled in Bristol and the imposing statue of the architect of Belgian colonialism King Leopold II righteously removed in Antwerp. As *Ufahamu's* former Editor-in-Chief Nana Osei-Opare reminds us in a recent *Washington Post* article, these instances "represent only the most recent episode in a long global history of black protest and activism against anti-black violence."<sup>5</sup> The legacies of slavery and colonialism are international and interconnected, which makes the fight to end these legacies international and interconnected as well.

We are dedicated to being historians of African art who study, cite, and expand on the work of African artists and critics who use their practices and writing to speak back to power. Through them, we have learned that if we want to see change truly happen, we must recognize the racist, colonialist, and neo-colonialist structures that shape our lives. And we must also dedicate ourselves to dismantling them.

With this conviction in mind and heart, we usher *Ufahamu* into this momentous year that also marks the fiftieth anniversary since our establishment. In 1970, a group of students from UCLA's African Activist Association gathered together to found *Ufahamu: A Journal of African Studies*, its first issue published in part to counteract European and American control of the direction of African Studies. In its first issue, the editorial team also initiated the cross-disciplinary ethos of the journal and highlighted its mission to generate discussion and debate. In the spirit of continuing to create an inclusive and interactive space for dialogue, we hosted a commemorative virtual symposium in the fall to celebrate *Ufahamu's* past, present, and future. We hope you, our readers, enjoyed joining us in celebrating this milestone.

At the same time, we realize that this important moment for the journal coincides with a moment of global fear and

uncertainty. In addition to the widespread protests and calls to end racial injustice, COVID-19 continues to disrupt life around the world. We are thus thinking of the international community *Ufahamu* has fostered, and especially of our friends and colleagues on the African continent. Since its inception, *Ufahamu* has prioritized building connections between continents and communities. Our current online platform and editorial process continue to promote working across distances. Now, it seems, these modes of communication and collaboration are more important than ever. As we grow our community, we must also be sure to check in with our community. Now is the time to be kind to ourselves and mindful of one another's varying circumstances. We must especially have empathy for each other as we navigate this difficult time.

As an academic journal, we also realize that we have a unique responsibility during this time. Scholarship roots our present predicaments in history to give us perspective and allows us to respond to crises through critical thinking and deep analysis. Likewise, the arts enable creative engagement with—and often critique of—prevalent issues that we face. As filmmaker Josiah Kibira said of his film *Tusamehe* about the global AIDS crisis in a 2008 interview published in *Ufahamu*, he “just had to tell it like it is: it will wipe us all if we will not take personal responsibility and change.”<sup>6</sup> As a journal publishing new work during the current pandemic of COVID-19, we are keenly aware of the importance of our research for collecting and sharing data that hold power structures accountable and instigate change whenever necessary.

In this issue, the essays delve into topics related to health, rehabilitation, and the transformative power of poetry. We hope that the vibrant images included in our arts section will bring light to a dark time, and that the book reviews will remind us all of the many ways we can continue to access and evaluate existing knowledge as we perhaps spend more time at home.

Part One of this issue includes a collection of three essays. Odigwe A. Nwaokocha undertakes an analysis of civic, governmental, and nonprofit rehabilitation efforts in the Anioma region during and after the Nigerian Civil War. Through interviews and examination of wartime documents, Nwaokocha finds that policies by the Nigerian Federal Military Government and the government of the Midwest State led to haphazard rehabilitation results that often reflected political biases. In contrast, community-level

initiatives, at times led by various religious organizations, more successfully enabled the Aniomia to reconstruct their post-war lives. Carolina Nvé Díaz San Francisco's essay investigates contemporary biomedicine in Equatorial Guinea as a mechanism for maintaining political power rather than as a tool for healing. San Francisco's work constitutes an important, but understudied, perspective on public health crises in Central Africa. Through fieldwork and policy analysis, San Francisco presents the dire circumstances that enabled such iniquities to exist and argues for increased social participation to mend them. In "Colonial Modernity: Progress, Development, and Modernism in Nigeria," Chris Hall examines the decolonization of modernism in post-independence Nigeria through the work of the Nigerian poet Christopher Okigbo. Hall's close analysis of lines of Okigbo's poems, particularly his early works, suggest their contribution to a modernist negotiation of colonial history and western art.

Part two features images of works by two artists from eastern Africa: Hassan Kisamo, a photographer from Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, and Innocent Nkurunziza, a multimedia artist who lives and works in Kigali, Rwanda. The artist statements of both artists reveal a commitment to engaging their communities through the work they create. Nkurunziza's manipulation of local material and Kisamo's snapshots of everyday moments provoke more questions about how we view our world than conclusions. The works suggest that visual art serves as a repository not only for optimism, but also for critical commentary on our contemporary moment.

Part three of this issue contains book reviews written by scholars from across academic disciplines. Patrick C. Okpalaeke examines the 1997 volume *Subsaharan Africa in the 1990s: Challenges to Democracy and Development* edited by Rukhsana A. Siddiqui, highlighting its contributions to postcolonial studies. This section also includes Kerry L. Goldmann's analysis of E. Patrick Johnson and Ramón H. Rivera-Servera's 2016 volume *Blacktino Queer Performance*, which notes the importance of investigating intersectionality in performance studies while bringing together the voices of artists and performance scholars. Finally, Samson Kaunga Ndanyi examines Laura Fair's 2018 *Reel Pleasures: Cinema Audience and Entrepreneurs in Twentieth-Century Urban Tanzania*, suggesting that it is a contribution not only to film and media studies, but also to a variety of disciplines

through an analysis of cinema theaters as built environments and social spaces.

We hope that as you read the works in this issue, you and your loved ones remain safe, healthy, and well taken care of in this difficult time. Perhaps the articles you encounter here point to iniquities that are particularly visible under the present circumstances—or maybe the artwork you see highlights the perseverance of the human spirit during difficult times. We are grateful to have this journal as a space for reflection and reexamination of our world.

Talia Lieber and Rebecca Wolff  
Co-Editors-in-Chief

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Afrikan Student Union at UCLA, Instagram post. @blackbruins. May 29, 2020. <https://www.instagram.com/p/CAzAGkbl-zg/>

<sup>2</sup> Justin Chung and Genesis Qu, “UCLA-leased Jackie Robinson Stadium facilities used by LAPD to detain protestors,” *Daily Bruin*, June 3, 2020: <https://dailybruin.com/2020/06/03/ucla-leased-jackie-robinson-stadium-facilities-used-by-lapd-to-detain-protestors>.

<sup>3</sup> UCLA Undergraduate Admission, <http://www.admission.ucla.edu/campusprofile.htm>.

<sup>4</sup> Afrikan Student Union at UCLA, Instagram post. @blackbruins. May 29, 2020. <https://www.instagram.com/p/CAzAGkbl-zg/>

<sup>5</sup> Nana Osei-Opare, “Around the world, the U.S. has long been a symbol of anti-black racism,” *Washington Post*, June 5, 2020, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/outlook/2020/06/05/around-world-us-has-long-been-symbol-anti-black-racism/>.

<sup>6</sup> Katrina Daly Thompson and Josiah Kibira, “Preserving East African Knowledge Through Swahili Moves: An Interview with Josiah Kibira,” *Ufahamu: A Journal of African Studies* 34, no. 1 (2008): 55.

