

Editorial

To trace the fifty-plus years of *Ufahamu*'s publication reveals a glimpse into the trajectory of a movement for African sovereignty, self-determination and emancipation from a global structure of exploitation that has seen the African continent and its peoples dispersed across the world often at the heart of that exploitation. *Ufahamu* was born out of the mission to fundamentally challenge and upend that global structure, serving as an intellectual arm of a wider movement. *Ufahamu* was born in a moment where that global structure - capitalism - was in one of its most unstable periods to this day, and where Africa and its diaspora was at the spear's tip of revolutionary change. Liberation movements waged war against patriarchy, racism, colonialism and capitalism. The socialist character of this movement, whether in its intellectual or political element, was rarely a question, as pieces featured in this issue by Sondra Hale and Robin D.G. Kelley highlight. They reflect on the presence of Black Panthers, Black nationalists, and Black communists in the formation and development of *Ufahamu* throughout the 1970s and 80s, as well as their own writings in the journal.

From Guinea to Guyana, the ideological hegemony of capitalism had been cracked wider than it had been since the Bolshevik Revolution: now Africa and the Third World were at the tip of the spear. However, like the reaction and ascent of fascism in the 1920s—which led to disaster not only in Europe, but all Africa under its colonial thumb—counter-revolution began to take the offensive in the mid-1970s. Although intellectual and political challenges to global capitalism remained for some time, neoliberal reform and the overthrow of most of the socialist camp put anti-imperial forces on the defensive by the end of the Cold War. This history can be traced in the evolution of *Ufahamu* from its inception to the early 1990s. The words of Amilcar Cabral and Walter Rodney, to name just two of the journal's inspirational figures over its first two decades of publication, became less frequent as our journal became enmeshed in academic debates which sought to merely understand the world, rather than change it.

This is not to throw aspersions on the intellectuals. Neo-liberalization and the rise of unipolar capitalist hegemony in the

political field narrowed the scope of academic inquiry regarding Africa. Largely gone were the debates over the development of an African or scientific socialism, entirely gone was the debate over (non-)alignment with the US or USSR, and grossly desaturated were challenges to heteropatriarchy. The challenge that *Ufahamu* originally offered to the imperial origins of African studies, in its anti-colonialism, its Marxism, even its embrace of African nationalism born out of the 1969 protest of the Montreal African Studies Association Conference, withered away. It did so as the transnational ruling class it challenged—and their neocolonial allies—regained strength and retrenched its hegemony in the battle of ideas. There remained fascinating intellectual inquiries and academic endeavors—in *Ufahamu*, the writing of Ali Mazrui is just one example—but in retreat was the specter of the guerrilla intellectual.

As the 21st century developed, hopes of a rising Africa rose and fell. The radical potential held by the South African African National Congress underwhelmed, the 2011 Arab Spring led to little genuine democratization, the unilateral military intervention in Libya of that same year still leads to untold suffering and a rise in fundamentalist terrorism, and much of the continent remained mired in war and underdevelopment, despite a short boom fueled by an influx of petrodollars.

Recently, and unlike in Europe and the Americas, the deadly COVID-19 pandemic did not devastate the African continent—as “afro-pessimists” in the 1980s and into the 21st century believed an easily spreading deadly contagion would (although its diaspora was disproportionately afflicted in the negative). The “post”-pandemic adjustment has instead seen a break in unipolar domination, a rise in multipolarity and a renewed crack in the ideological and geo-political hegemony of the West on the African continent. The material growth of the BRICS grouping and its recent addition of Egypt and Ethiopia, rapprochement and the rise of a potentially powerful bloc in the Horn, the rise of Chinese and Russian influence (to the widely broadcasted chagrin of Western observers and officials), and militant anti-imperialist (or at minimum, anti-Francophone) sentiment in a socially explosive West Africa.

The latter has, as of this writing, made increasingly possible the outbreak of regional war, as a series of coups in Burkina Faso,

Mali and Niger overthrowing French-allied governments with pan-Africanist posturing military regimes have all joined an alliance against a potential invasion from the member-states of ECOWAS, backed by the US and France. Nonetheless, opportunities and challenges abound regarding the prospects of an independent, anti-imperialist and pan-African realignment on the continent. As the editors of *Ufahamu*, and in honor of its roots, we cannot claim to be non-partisan observers. As scholars who are committed to the study of Africa not just for intellectual pleasure, but in the interests of all humanity, we readily welcome the possibility of an Africa free from centuries of imperialist domination. At the same time, we do not cast illusions. We know that the arrival of a multipolarity led by BRICS is a challenge to unipolar domination, but that it is not an explicit challenge to the foundations of global capitalism. We know that popular and military anti-French sentiment is a challenge to centuries of neocolonialism, but it does not necessarily translate into genuine people's government. Africa is in an era between eras. Could neo-colonial and capitalist domination give way to a movement for sovereignty and an end to centuries of exploitation? Only time, and the movement of the African people, will tell.

This range of options Africa faces in 2023 reflects the range of writings published in this issue of *Ufahamu*, both new and re-published which do not revolve around a central ideological approach to the establishment of African sovereignty and defeat of imperialist domination. However, the writings in this issue represent a re-orientation and a re-commitment, after fifty years of reflection, to the principles upon which *Ufahamu* was founded. This re-orientation is made possible not by the singular will of our editors, but the new geo-political conjecture we—and Africa—find ourselves in. Before Africa and Africans can on their own address the impending catastrophe of climate change, and the ongoing crises of migration and poverty, they must achieve their sovereignty. From these challenges and for these aims, Africa must find its own organic intellectuals and its own revolutionary theories without which, according to Cabral, it can have no revolution.

We at *Ufahamu* do not divorce ourselves from this problematic. In fact, fifty years of neoliberal privatization has had great impact on the university of which we grad students find ourselves increasingly alienated from and proletarianized within. That

reality contributed to the delay of this very publication, interrupted by the two-month-long 2022 academic worker strike at the University of California for living wages, the largest in the history of US higher education. The world, of which Africa is central, is increasingly split in two. Which way forward for the intellectual? And which way forward for the study of Africa?