

Editor's Introduction

"If one day People want to live, Destiny must surely respond

Darkness must disappear, Chains must certainly break"

Abu-Al Kacem Chebbi

(The Tunisian Poet of All Times)

As this issue of *Ufahamu* is published, historical events are still unfolding in the North African region and the wind of change is strongly blowing, bringing an unprecedented air of freedom, democracy, and dignity to the people of North Africa. What happened in Tunisia and Egypt marks a virtually unprecedented episode in modern Arab history. These revolutions are not only changing the lives of the people in these countries, but also rewriting another narrative of geopolitics, another history, another discourse of human rights, and a new political imaginary. Over the past few decades, millions of Tunisians suffered from unspeakable feelings of despair and helplessness under the authoritarian despotic regime of their ruler until they decided to rise up and break the twenty-three years of silence and oppression. An entire population took to the streets and participated in widespread peaceful demonstrations denouncing the corruption and the despotism of the Tunisian dictator and his large family. These massive populist uprisings showed that grassroots power was capable of ousting the sclerotic and autocratic Tunisian tyrant who clung to power for over two decades.

The biggest dream of the Tunisian youth now is to have a say in the decision-making of their future government and to commit themselves to making a transition to democracy by being the major actors in the rebuilding and restructuring of the political, economic, and social institutions of their country. This is the ultimate goal of all the pro-democracy revolutions that are still taking place today not only in North Africa, but in many other parts of the Middle East. Without ignoring the fact that any process of transition to democracy remains difficult, uneven, and slow, the peoples of North Africa seem to be more than determined to take the journey of democratization; it is their only alternative to achieve political equality and to make sure that their fundamental rights and human dignity are not only protected, but also treated as sacred.

What is happening today in the North African region has shattered widespread preconceptions that the Arab world was not yet ready for freedom and democracy. The educated youth in

North Africa have demonstrated that massive political awareness and participation, as well as a greater and promising democratic opening, are taking place across many countries of North Africa and the Arab world. As a colleague recently commented “You Tunisians gave us a lesson about the power of the people...You have offered the world something to talk about for the next 200 years!”

In the midst of these historical events Kirk and I are delighted and honored to have been asked by the previous editors to serve as Editors-in-Chief of *Ufahamu*. We are happy to announce that one of our major goals as new Editors is to undertake a larger agenda oriented toward broadening not only the geographical dimension of the journal such as to bring North Africa to the continent, but also the overall intellectual scope of its publications. The Editorial Board as a whole is now enthusiastically committed to encouraging publications that represent all of Africa, with no exceptions. We also recognize the importance of including contributions in languages other than English so that the journal becomes accessible to those who are marginalized by the dominant English-speaking academic press.

As Sondra Hale has written about *Ufahamu*, “When I am in Africa I can find many people who know the name of the journal, even if they have never had a copy in their hands. This is what the founders claimed we wanted, to reach Africa and Africans.” And let me say that to reach Africa and Africans, the journal has to keep expanding its reach and breadth by searching for new theoretical paradigms and scholarship that is expressed in the multiple tongues of the African continent.

Following in the footsteps of the previous Editors, we will strive to meet the critical challenges facing Africa and the world by encouraging submissions from a wide range of theoretical and methodological perspectives. We are encountering a steady increase in the number and quality of submissions, which demonstrates the growing reputation of *Ufahamu* as an alternative space for interdisciplinary scholarship that blends empirical research with theoretical paradigms concerned with the African continent.

It is also a pleasure to recall that *Ufahamu* has now transitioned to the digital world, with its first appearance on the Web through volume 35, Fall 2008. The free-of-charge online version will open up new opportunities for a whole community of African and Africanist scholars, poets, artists, and pilgrims of life to engage in dialogue on the pressing issues of our times. The *Ufahamu* website remains www.ufahamu.org, and our online archives and submission process are still hosted by the University of California’s scholarship repository at <http://cdldemo.bepress.com/international/asc/ufahamu> beginning with Volume 35, *Ufahamu* will publish two issues per year. The electronic system for submitting and reviewing manuscripts is not only ecologically sound and economical, but it also saves significant time at

the level of the submission and review processes. Finally, to allow our readers to enjoy the richness of *Ufahamu's* past, the journal will start digitizing all of its previous print editions to make them available online.

Kirk and I have been impressed by the range and quality of articles that have been submitted for review, and we have to admit that the process of selection and decision-making has been very challenging. However, this has been made easy thanks to the *Ufahamu* Editorial Board that has always been very active, reviewing a large number of articles and providing the authors with valuable feedback. We take this opportunity to thank everyone on our editorial team for the commitment and the hard work they have devoted to reviewing these manuscripts.

All eyes have been on Africa over the past six months, as we have watched the sparks of resistance grow into the flame of revolution and spread across northern Africa and into the Middle East. From its beginnings in Tunisia, we still wait to witness how far this spirit will be carried. We've watched the horror of governments turning against their people, as well as the miracle of an army refusing to do so. As Egyptians refused to go home, reclaiming Tahrir Square as the new dwelling of the people and exposing the inadequacies of government control, it also became painfully clear that this revolution would not be brokered solely by those who refused government curfews. This revolution in North Africa would, it seemed, have much to do with other geopolitical situations; world leaders asked what an overthrow of the Egyptian government would mean for Palestine, or for Israel. It seemed that what was happening in the North African region would be the ground for developing new geopolitical paradigms power, its relationship to the people it governs and, perhaps most importantly, the ways in which the power dynamics of a particular region can so fundamentally affect the course of global politics. Indeed, we will be "talking about this for the next 200 years"; history will write the ways in which various places on the African continent have been integral to exposing the global entanglement of political and cultural exchange.

As we watched these events unfold, we were reminded of the global significance of Africa, of the complex way in which the dynamics on this continent were intimately entangled with various geopolitical forces across the globe. Perhaps what became most obvious was the unique nature of these revolutionary movements. We asked ourselves when we had we seen such a dynamic explosion of revolutionary spirit, transcending national borders, and so globally resonant. Decidedly, it had been some time. With its long history of popular, socialist revolutions, we once again witnessed the ways in which spaces on the African continent became the vanguards for changing the way the world thinks about revolution, about the lifespan of democracies, and about the very nature of power.

As Editors of *Ufahamu*, it is our goal to foster all of the positive benefits this revolutionary spirit has left us. We hope to see the journal cultivate articles that not only engage with Africa through global paradigms, but do so in ways which read African cultural forms outside of traditional modes of exoticism and authenticity. Rather, we wish to see contributions to *Ufahamu* which deal with a wide range of topics and from an equally broad disciplinary spectrum, but which engage with the journal's view that studies of Africa can no longer rest in the easy intellectual provincialisms of traditional scholarship. We hope to be a space for intellectual contribution to the study of "Africa in the world," embracing and engaged with all its globalized manifestations. In line with this revolutionary spirit, we hope to continue the journal's commitment to greater democratization of the academy and academic materials. We are dedicated to cultivating a larger readership through free online dissemination not just in the United States, but also and especially in Africa. This democratization will also be seen in *Ufahamu's* move away from the dominance of Anglophone articles and topics. As Editors we are actively committed to cultivating a multilingual as well as a multidisciplinary Editorial Board, in the hopes that the journal can publish as widely as linguistically possible, thereby accounting for the diverse cultural trajectories that crisscross the African continent and the Diaspora. On this last point, we hope to contribute to the journal by taking on more perspectives on the African Diaspora, as an integral part of understanding the multiplicity of issues on the continent traditionally covered in African Studies.

In this edition of *Ufahamu*, Ezeanyika S. Ezeanyika offers a timely and poignant critique of democratic systems across Africa. Beginning with the early moment of postcolonial independence, Ezeanyika traces a history of democracy's entangled relationship with the development of nation-states and national identity in Africa. Revisiting Julius Nyerere's 1973 shifting of the Tanzanian capital from Dar es Salaam to Dodoma, as part of a plan of collectivization, or *ujamaa*, Duncan Yoon's article critiques the spatial and temporal implications of socialist visions of African modernity. Yoon's piece is a productive counterpoint to Ezeanyika's, as it offers an historical insight into the ways in which socialism was involved in structuring the architectural and urban modernities of post-independence African nations. Collectively, these two pieces provide a timely and pertinent cross-section of the post-independence political spectrum, and the ways in which various political and cultural ideologies have been operationalized across the African continent. The final article by Amber Reed is a critical engagement with the limits or capacity of post-Apartheid South African democracy. Based on fieldwork done outside of Cape Town, Reed's argument is that the democracy of South Africa is maintained by the cultivation of a youth activism culture. She reveals how, despite being part of a democratic society, these youth activists locate their engagement at the crucible of the celebrated post-Apartheid present and the residues of a racially oppressive past. Reed's piece offers a point of departure for thinking about the legacies

of oppression, as well as the potential limits of democracy. Our final piece for this edition is Andre Wellington's review of Harry G. West's *Ethnographic Sorcery*. West uses the language of sorcery as an index for thinking about the negotiation of power relations among the Makonde peoples of northeastern Mozambique. Wellington reads West's work as an important intervention into the field of ethnography, moving it beyond the purviews of traditional Structural Marxist and symbolic anthropological approaches.

As incoming Editors, we are proud to continue the legacies of *Ufahamu*. Our positions come with the responsibility of a long tradition of commitment to social change, revolutionary ideas, and a ceaselessly critical awareness of issues pertaining to Africa. As this edition of the journal came into being during the tumultuous days of revolution across Northern Africa, Rayed and I communicated from opposite ends of the African continent, Rayed caught up in the currents of this revolutionary wave in Tunisia, and myself watching and waiting to see what the reverberations would be across South and Southern Africa. Though we watched the same events unfold across the same media channels, we experienced very different versions of these revolutions; we asked ourselves how to make sense of one revolution in light of all the others. Perhaps we can do so by committing ourselves to the nearly impossible task of taking account of the myriad lifeworlds of Africa in relation to each other, and each in terms of its own specificity. It is this multiplicity of perspectives that we as Editors must continue to bring to the journal. We are looking forward to seeing *Ufahamu* grow, expanding its purview as well as its audience, and never forgetting its commitment to a spirit of revolution and intellectual democracy.

Rayed Khedher and Kirk Sides