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Editorial

As *Ufahamu: A Journal of African Studies*' new co-editors-in-chief, we are extremely excited and delighted to take this opportunity to welcome all our old and new friends and readers back to *Ufahamu*'s pages. Taking over the reins at *Ufahamu* has opened our eyes to how widely popular, and dear *Ufahamu* has been to many peoples' hearts and minds over the last forty-four years. We hope to sincerely continue that sentiment of goodwill and tradition and produce Editions that will instill pride in our present and future readers and that we will continue to be a platform for African and africanist scholars to showcase their scholarship to the US academic circle.

Sadly, Professor Sondra Hale, one of *Ufahamu*'s founding editors, who has served the Journal for so long, is fully retiring and so has stepped down as *Ufahamu*'s faculty advisor. We would like to give our extremely heartfelt thanks to her for all her contributions to the Journal's history and present functioning. We are deeply indebted to all the work and advice she has provided us during this transition period. We would like to let her know that she will always have a home in *Ufahamu*. With this, we are also delighted to welcome Professor Jemima Pierre to UCLA and to *Ufahamu* as our new faculty advisor. We are so very grateful to be under her guidance and are extremely confident that under her knowledge and leadership *Ufahamu* will return to its former heights.

We would also like to take this opportunity to acknowledge the previous co-editors-in-chief: Kirk Sides, Rayed Khedher, and Duncan Yoon, and all the editors during this period, for their work over the last few years. A thanks to the African Studies Center is also in order for their support in helping to resurrect the Journal. But a very special thanks and recognition is necessary for Stacey Meeker, Director of Publications for UCLA's Graduate Student Association. Stacey has spent countless hours with us revealing the intricate steps and processes involved in this undertaking, and how to navigate the political and technological pitfalls that online journals frequently encounter in this ever-changing publishing world. She has also provided strong financial support from Graduate Student Publications, which has allowed us to fund this Special

Edition. With this, we would also like to thank Sharon Farb and the generous UCLA Library for fully bankrolling our transition from a hard-copy journal to one which is online and open access. However, if individuals would like hard-copies, for an inexpensive cost, they are also available through our website.

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Ebola & The Racist Undertones

While many of the de-colonization and anti-apartheid struggles *Ufahamu* actively engaged in and supported throughout the years have largely subsided or taken on new forms, we, as an editorial board and Journal, are still strongly committed to promoting Africa, its peoples, and its diaspora through these pages. With this, we felt that it was our moral imperative to discuss Ebola and the racist elements underlying its representation in popular media and related political responses.

The world's reaction to the devastating impact Ebola has had upon three African countries has highlighted the persistent underlying racism and ignorance that remains prevalent surrounding Africa and its people. One of the many problems is an ongoing failure to grasp the fact that Africa is not a country, but one large and diverse continent, whose land mass could encompass the United States' mainland, China, India, eastern and western Europe, and Iberian peninsula, and still have room within it.

While watching MSNBC, which is generally considered a liberal American news-station, one recent evening, a debate about Ebola occurred. A guest on the show lambasted the Republican Party for using Ebola as a scare-tactic and political tool. After her comments, one of the hosts asked her if she would allow her child to go to West Africa. And the guest replied, "No," emphatically. She then went on to reveal that her youngest daughter wanted to go to Ghana in December, but that she was having none of it. I watched the show puzzled, did she not realize or comprehend the fact that Ghana did not have Ebola? Did she think that Ghana bordered Liberia, Sierra Leone, or Guinea, the areas most ravaged by the virus? But, this is not just the United States' media. Institutions, and local and state governments, are establishing new procedures and policies directly reflecting these irrational and

often blatantly racist fears perpetuated through media responses to the epidemic.

A few universities, supposed centers of learning and knowledge, have pulled their summer programs away from countries such as Ghana because of irrational Ebola fears. Yet, again, it must be noted that Ghana, and more than forty other African countries do not have Ebola cases. It would be as absurd as withdrawing a program from California because there is Ebola in Texas, where there have been three reported cases. Thus, it is extremely problematic and unfair when Nigerian students were informed by a Texas college that they were no longer accepting applicants from countries with “confirmed Ebola cases,” was this college also not accepting Texans onto their campus?

When African American high school football players are tormented by opposing fans with chants of “Ebola,” it clearly highlights underlying and overt racism. But, this is not just a west African or US problem. A three year old girl, who resides in Fiumicino, near Rome, Italy, went with her family to Uganda for vacation. Upon her return to Italy, she was banned from her kindergarten school in Italy because her classmates’ parents feared that she had Ebola. Consequently, the girl stayed at home for an entire week. Uganda is “nearly 5,000km (almost 3,000 miles) from Liberia, Sierra Leone and Guinea.” In the Czech Republic, a Ghanaian student, coming from Ghana, was wrapped in a black plastic bag in the subway station after he was suspected of having Ebola. Jean-Marie Le Pen, founder and honorary president of France’s far-Right Front National, argued that Ebola would solve France’s African immigration problem “within three months.” We have to confront, head-on, the lingering racist and ignorant feelings, thoughts, and policies within media and communities which Ebola has only brought to the fore. Ebola is a very serious and dangerous disease, which is causing extreme emotional, economic, and physical hardship, not only for those afflicted with the virus, but those associated with them. This is not the time to revert back to racism, or to abandon those people most in need, but a time to rise above this prejudice and tackle Ebola both as a disease and as a form of racism.

We would also like to honor the memory of our late and great Professor Ali A. Mazrui, who sadly passed away on October 13th, 2014. Within *Ufahamu*, Mazrui reminded us in “The Historical Imperative in African Activist Literature” that “there is a need for historical reconstruction directed towards freeing the minds of the oppressed.” His numerous intellectual contributions that were geared towards freeing the minds of the oppressed cannot be forgotten, and it is from his tremendous works that we are all ever the wiser and eternally grateful. We hope that *Ufahamus’* works continue to free and open peoples’ minds.

With this, we are extremely excited to bring you our South African Special Edition. Throughout our forty-four year history, *Ufahamu* repeatedly spoke out against the vile apartheid state and pushed for the political, social, and economic liberation of the non-white South African population and the financially divestment from apartheid-South Africa. It has been twenty years since the end of that apartheid and a year since Nelson Mandela, South Africa’s first democratically elected president, passed away. Due to the temporal circumstances, we felt that this was a wonderful opportunity to better appreciate and understand the dilemmas and challenges the post-apartheid South African society continues to face. We hope and are certain that readers will find all the essays intellectually stimulating and engaging.

Keeping with its tradition of publishing three editions each academic year. This edition will be one of three *Ufahamu* issues set for release this academic year. The other two shall be in March and June of 2015.

Welcome back.

Nana Osei-Opare & Jeremy Jacob Peretz

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