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***ufahamu*-n. [Swahili] understanding**

Ufahamu, UCLA's multidisciplinary Africanist student journal, seeks contributions that challenge broadly accepted conceptualizations of African studies. Since 1970, *Ufahamu* has maintained its original vision of creating a forum for protest against the increasingly western-dominated and exclusionary African Studies establishment. The journal continues to publish the work of those marginalized by the academic press—Africans, people of African descent, students, and non-academics. Together with our readers and contributors, we reaffirm our commitment to create intellectual linkages and feature current critical views.

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Editors' Introduction

Funding for university area studies programs has come under unwanted and unwarranted attacks from conservative forces within academia and policy circles. The International Studies in Higher Education Act (H.R. 3077), a bill working its way through Congress, would create a federal advisory committee to oversee international studies departments, courses and materials, and assess federal aid. The board would include two appointees who represent federal agencies with "national security responsibilities." If H.R. 3077 becomes law, universities that house international studies centers will be forced to decide whether to retain sovereignty over their programs at the price of government funding or release some control over the curriculum to receive federal aid.

The motivating force behind the bill is the presumed anti-American bias present within much of the work of area studies specialists. Conservative scholars like Stanley Kurtz, who served on an advisory committee to the drafters of the bill, argue that post-colonial theory's (which he considers emblematic of area studies' bias) influence on academic thought criticizes the morality of utilizing academia to serve the interests of American power. The bill affects 56 major universities that receive Title VI funding across the country, including the University of California's various campuses. *Ufahamu's* own sponsoring center, the James S. Coleman African Studies Center is a recipient of federal funds that would come under the control of the bill. Needless to say, we at *Ufahamu* unconditionally reject any position that would

condition financial aid to the university on support for American foreign policy goals.

This being said, it is important to assess the relative merit of the bias claim, and to think more specifically about the nature of the arguments against funding for area studies. For conservative activists, area studies often serves as a space within universities for relentless critiques of American foreign policy. Why, they ask, should the federal government provide funding to its own critics? And more powerfully, why should the academic resources for which this funding is provided not be marshaled in support of the American empire?

An easy answer would emphasize the need for academic freedom and the importance of allowing academics to assess all actors objectively, including the government sponsoring their activities. While powerful enough, it does underplay the particular vitriol that can emerge out of area studies centers towards the US. And herein lies the problem with the objectivity claim itself. For if these academics were really assessing the behavior of the US "objectively", then it is fair for conservatives to expect area studies to offer a more balanced perspective.

A more accurate and politically useful interpretation would be to recognize the university as a contested space. While conservatives can argue that universities have become too liberal and point to examples within area studies, we respond with claims to fairness and objectivity. Recognizing the contested nature of the academic environment instead would allow us to strike back at conservative voices and point out that in reality, a conservative wind has largely blown through academic halls serving as a presumed correction for the politically correct tilt universities supposedly made during the Clinton years. For example, here at UCLA, the end of affirmative action has dwindled the minority population on campus to almost unnoticeable, while budget cuts have raised the cost of attending university beyond the reach of the poor. Somehow progressive voices got caught defending silly positions about extreme political

correctness, while the right has radically restructured the academic environment.

Relating back to the controversy at hand, the reality is that area studies has been under attack from conservative forces for some time. Country wide and here at UCLA, area specific programs continue to be consolidated into broader, generic, international studies centers. Furthermore, and relating to Africa, Title VI federal funding is continually shifted from African studies to Asian and Middle Eastern centers.

The problem, we suggest, is that the community responsible for area studies is unflinchingly critical of easy targets such as American foreign policy, but much more unlikely to turn the lens on their own faults. Specifically, we want to highlight the ways in which area studies has become so obscure and esoteric, and so dominated by an international elite content on rendering their analyses in language out of reach of even other academics, that we are rendering ourselves into irrelevance.

The moral position of area studies centers can only be to put the interests of the area first. Here at *Ufahamu*, we strive to give voice to African authors and others willing to shed light on issues of genuine concern in contemporary Africa. If this means taking an antagonistic position to the US, then there is no reason to feel ashamed or even apologetic (though hopefully, this does not always have to be the case). Granted, this is a normative position, but where have our claims to objectivity taken us? As a well-known Swahili proverb reminds us, "*Usigonge nguzo ukasingizia giza.*" (Don't blame the darkness if you bump into a pole.)

In this issue of *Ufahamu*, we again cover a medley of issues of concern to Africa today. Our own Zachariah Mampilly reviews the literature surrounding the nature of the African state and argues that new forms of sovereignty are emerging that have yet to be adequately theorized by scholars concerned with Africa. Christopher Ukhun looks at the metaphysical basis of sexism with rural Esan culture, rejecting claims that sexism in Africa

is a colonial construct. Benedicto Wokomaatani Malunga contributes a hopeful short story about the hardships of a life affected by war. In another short story, Janet Hunter examines the transformation of Southern Sudan through the eyes of an old man. Finally, we have included two poems by Musa Idris Okpanachi.

Zachariah Mampilly
Judith Stevenson

ESSAYS

