

UCLA

Ufahamu: A Journal of African Studies

Title

A Return

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/7sm8589j>

Journal

Ufahamu: A Journal of African Studies, 42(2)

ISSN

0041-5715

Authors

Lieber, Talia

Wolff, Rebecca

Publication Date

2021

DOI

10.5070/F742253946

Copyright Information

Copyright 2021 by the author(s). All rights reserved unless otherwise indicated. Contact the author(s) for any necessary permissions. Learn more at <https://escholarship.org/terms>

Peer reviewed

EDITORIAL

A Return

The image on this issue's cover features a photograph of a single building peering out from behind a wall that is lined with a layer of loose bricks at its base and meets the flattened earth of a construction site in the foreground. Photographed by François-Xavier Gbré in 2013, *Cité Espérance #2, Route de Bingerville* signals hope, as its title notes. The building, with its multistoried roof, stands tall amidst a space where destruction and transformation are concurrent. Where there is demolition, there is also the promise of reconstruction.

As we write this editorial, we find ourselves one year later still within the interior spaces that have safeguarded us during this year marked by the ravages of the pandemic. Millions of lives have been lost throughout the U.S., in Africa, and across the world. Thousands have received a vaccine promising a reunion between places and people. It is this stable structure within an emptied landscape in Gbré's photograph to which we are drawn. We are looking forward to returning to the physical spaces that house us as academics, students, and researchers: the classrooms, archives, libraries, museums, places of worship, concert halls, and homes that continue to inspire inquiry and conversations.

At the same time, the digital platforms to which we have turned during this time of the pandemic has enabled transcontinental dialogues on the need to return objects taken from Africa with a renewed sense of commitment. Throughout the African continent, spaces are being built and conceptualized for objects to be returned to after having been extracted from their contexts of origin. The Edo Museum of West African Art in Benin City, its design by Ghanaian-British architect David Adjaye unveiled late last year, is one such monumental site. Although the violent processes by which these objects were taken and withheld cannot be erased, their restitution promises a new proximity to the cultures and people who created them and with it a regeneration of access and engagement. We look forward to continuing to participate in these international discussions and initiatives on the pages of this journal. As we think about the meaning of return after a year of loss and distance, we also advocate for the return of artworks.

With these new horizons in mind, we are also thrilled to announce the introduction of our Translation section “France Through Race: Beyond Color Blindness.” Organized by ethnomusicologist Samuel Lamontagne, this section introduces our readers to leading voices of post-colonial thought in France. As Editors-in-Chief, we have long hoped to expand the journal’s contributions from scholars writing in languages other than English. We welcome Lamontagne’s contribution to *Ufahamu*’s mission of creating an international forum for critical debate by launching this initiative. Each writer in our inaugural edition of this section offers an important critique of race, policy, and diasporic belonging. In his introduction, Lamontagne makes his own intervention into the current debate. With the postcolonial, ethnic, racial, and intersectional studies targeted for removal in French curricula by the French government, Lamontagne offers an impassioned and convincing argument of their necessity for understanding both France and the Francophone African diaspora. In Rokhaya Diallo’s essay, she examines the history of systemic racism in France and how academic critiques of this history have been suppressed. Seloua Luste Boulbina addresses how France’s attempt to erase its colonial past feeds into the racial undercurrents of France’s conceptualization of Republican universalism. To end, Kaoutar Harchi uses the idea of “femonationalism” to expose how the French government exploits feminist rhetoric to criminalize men and immigrants of color. These articles have been previously published in widely read French media sites and journals. Their inclusion in *Ufahamu* represents the first time they have been translated into English. We look forward to building upon Diallo, Luste Boulbina, and Harchi’s articles to continue critical engagement with these urgent topics through future editions of this section.

Many of the articles in this issue build on the debates initiated above with their scholarly examinations of repressive policies facing African people on and off the continent. Mikano Emmanuel Kiye critically assesses Cameroonian courts’ over-application of the repugnancy doctrine in cases of customary law. Kiye analyzes a wide range of cases to find that while the repugnancy doctrine is often used in cases to rule in favor of human rights protections, it only irregularly allows for the language of human rights to be used in the courtroom. Instead, Kiye argues, the Cameroonian courts should repeal the doctrine and rely on what is

stipulated in the 1966 Cameroonian Constitution, which unambiguously provides a standard for human rights jurisprudence.

Next, Samson Kaunga Ndanyi contextualizes the more recent banning of films in Kenya in the last decade by examining the British colonial government's inspection and censorship of stage performances and cinematic films in the early 20th century. By historicizing the restrictive policies that kept African audiences from viewing particular types of content, including those deemed dangerous by colonial officials, Ndanyi warns readers of the risks inherent in policies and processes limiting freedoms of expression that continue in the present.

These examinations of customary laws and censorship are followed by studies of resistance in the article that follows. Mychal Matsemela-Ali Odom analyzes the protests of African students against segregation and racial liberal ideology in 1964. Odom points to how the struggles of African liberation in Southern Africa were linked to the Black liberation struggles in Southern California by centering the radical efforts of UCLA graduate students of the South African Freedom Action Committee (SAFAC).

Continuing the theme of resistance, Philip U. Effiong calls for a re-examination of Fela Kuti's "Zombie" (1976). While the popular song has been broadly interpreted as a critique of the Nigerian military, Effiong argues that its denunciation of blindly following orders also voices dissatisfaction with the broader populace's resignation in the face of subjugation. Situating "Zombie" in relation to other tracks included on the *Zombie* album, Effiong shows how a deeper understanding of Fela's sociopolitical critique can emerge through comparative analysis.

Lastly, Otobong Enefiok Akpan calls for increased archaeological attention in Nigeria's Akwa Ibom State, citing the beneficial effects that archaeological research can have in the realms of education, economic growth, and community self-worth and belonging. Charting the factors that have led to the absence of archaeological research in Akwa Ibom State, Akpan offers tangible solutions to this problem, including the revitalization of the state's existing museum.

Our Arts Section this issue focuses on how a sense of place can be conveyed through photography. To open, Faridah Folawiyo's essay argues that the study of photography in relation to representation and identity needs to move beyond portraiture. Folawiyo examines the non-figurative photography of Edson Chagas,

Francois-Xavier Gbré and Mame-Diarra Niang, who all live in the diaspora. Folawiyo explores how these three artists' use of the photographic medium and fragmented imagery in their series that return to the capital cities of Luanda, Dakar, and Abidjan reveal their diasporic subjectivity. François Xavier Gbré's series *Émergence, Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire, 2013-2020* documents the rapid changes that Abidjan's urban fabric has undergone over the past seven years. The artist's photographs capture expansive landscapes and intimate details to provide a fragmented map of a city in flux.

The final section of this issue features reviews of four 2018 publications. First, Aditi Paul writes of the intersection between spirituality and sexuality via Melissa Hackman's book on conceptions of masculinity within Pentecostal ministries in South Africa. Next, Alexandra M. Thomas examines essays on aesthetics and anti-aesthetics in *Deformity Masks and Their Role in African Cultures: The Ann Goerdt Collection*, a book that accompanied an exhibition mounted at the QCC Art Gallery of the City University of New York. Although Thomas questions the problematic tropes provoked by the book's cover design, she points to how the authors' examinations of African cultural contexts and philosophies of aesthetics and anti-aesthetics move beyond epidemiological frameworks specifying diseases associated with deformity masks. Third, Fouad Mami examines essays published in the volume *The Postcolonial Subject in Transit: Migration, Borders, and Subjectivity in Contemporary African Diaspora Literature*, edited by Delphine Fongang. Mami's review focuses on three chapters in the volume that offer scholarly assessments of fiction texts narrativizing migrations of people from the African continent. Finally, Michael Cserkits commends Crystal Biruk's critique of the practices of demographers on the African continent in *Cooking Data: Culture & Politics in an African Research World* for bringing to the fore questions regarding research ethics and statistical data.

As you read and consider these wide-ranging contributions that both document and call for change, we hope that you, our readers, are also looking toward the future with a renewed sense of hope and optimism.

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