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## Introductions

Pamoja Editors  
*Kennesaw State University*

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# INTRODUCTIONS

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Jesse Benjamin and Aajay Murphy

*Editors*

This issue of *Pamoja* marks an entirely new chapter in its history, a reworking of its mission and audience in a way that reflects organic growth and development among the students who have been and will continue to be central to its direction. *Pamoja's* roots go back to Fall 2010, when African and African Diaspora Studies (AADS) launched its own newsletter for the first time, and was at first called the Interchange. By 2012, the newsletter name had changed to *Pamoja*, the Swahili word for 'unity,' 'togetherness,' or 'pulling together,' even: 'strength in numbers.' The use of a Swahili title signified a non-Western epistemology and orientation, an East African cosmopolitan view from one of the world's great African cultures and civilizations. It also symbolized the growing collaboration among student leaders and their organizations in the education and social justice work they were converging to address in their own lives, on campus and also mediated out to the society as a whole. An unprecedented degree of student collaboration and coalition and organizing around pressing social issues, and even a few Civil Rights style protests have emerged in the past few years on our campus, as reflects a wider phenomenon across the country.

In this context, and also in the context of a transition in AADS leadership and the continuing growth of Interdisciplinary Studies (ISD) as a whole, including its own newsletter, students continued to express a desire for an additional media forum at KSU in which to address the links between their studies and the pressing social justice issues of our times. Specific ideas and plans were debated last year, and again this year when Fall classes started up, especially in light of the returning to what was not only now a fully consolidated KSU, but also a serious and persistent stream of sexual assault notifications on our campus email. KSU is a part of this national trend, in which awareness of the problem of sexual assault on college campus is finally growing a little, but solutions are not always keeping pace. Thus, faster than we ever would have planned, and at the very same time as we were forming the Editorial Board and general organizational structure of the relaunched *Pamoja*, we also managed to put together our first issue, which we think, under the circumstances, is pretty amazing.

We still have a lot to figure out about the exact mechanics of producing issues for our new publication, but we are already figuring it out on the fly, so we expect it to get better, and bigger, as we move forward. One of the things we have managed to conceptualize and bring into fruition is an innovative Editorial Board structure in which a Student Editorial Collective is central to all aspects of producing *Pamoja*. This is why we have two introductions for this special relaunch issue, one by us, the Editors, explaining our new concept, and one by the new Student Editorial Collective, explaining the details of this special issue, where it came from, and what its purpose is.

As you will see, this issue of *Pamoja* addresses the difficult and critical issues of sexual assault, consent, and related societal norms, practices and potentialities. This is a very difficult and fraught terrain, and therefore one that requires far more attention, discussion, delineation, and deliberation. We are awed by the seriousness and honesty with which our contributors address these most difficult and important contemporary challenges. We have interspersed poetry with short essays, both of which make strong points in the ongoing and heightening debates around our societal understandings, definitions and negotiations of sexual assault, consent, campus climate initiatives, legal rulings and precedents, and a host of related dynamics. This collection of essays makes contributions to the debates now raging across the country, and clearly shows how inadequate many of our understandings of even key terms and concepts may be, and how complex some of this discussion needs to be, but somehow rarely finds space to do so in most of contemporary culture and its media.

Moving forward, we hope and expect to see issues like this one, addressing whatever topics are on the minds and hearts of our students, whatever social justice matters might need some illumination or discussion. We are open to almost any direction this takes, and we hope you will join us with your ideas and energy, as we seek to build this space with and for our community.

## Student Editorial Collective

During the first weeks of class, students should be worried about buying textbooks and reading syllabi. Typically the first week is spent waiting in line at the financial aid office, figuring out where their classes are, and attempting to navigate the overcrowded parking decks. However, the first weeks of Fall semester 2015 were instead spent worrying about our safety on campus and participating in uncomfortable conversations about two reported sexual assaults that took place the first weekend. Students were forced to confront important but trigger-inducing public notices about a flurry of reported instances in a short span of time. With the start of this dreaded conversation, we realized that thirteen instances of sexual or interpersonal violence had been reported on campus in the span of just five months. These reports consisted of incidents of stalking, sexual assault, groping, gender-based violence, and rape. So, despite the usual stresses of a new semester, student activists scrambled to create a safe and healthy way to add to the conversation regarding what changes needed to be made to make our campus a safer place for all.

Over the next few weeks, many conversations and meetings took place between student activists and non-affiliated students who were concerned by the number of reported sexual assaults. Student activists created a hashtag called #HowSafeAreWe in order to provide a space for students to speak out, as well as to ask for a response from the campus administration on the issue. Although the response from the university administration was not what activists had hoped for, the conversations must continue. As the editors of *Pamoja*, and as some of the writers in this issue, we wanted to contribute to the conversation regarding sexual assault, because we feel that students' voices, especially those of victims of sexual assault and of student activists are underrepresented on our campus. This coincided fortuitously with the relaunch of *Pamoja*, as a broader voice of engaged student leadership at KSU, which had been underway for a few months at that point. So we set to work, and soon we were producing this inaugural issue of the new publication.

Trying to develop an innovative organizational model, and bringing a politically engaged style with us, we decided to form a Student Editorial Collective that would work

closely on all aspects of running our new publication. This issue of *Pamoja* is dedicated to the issues of interpersonal violence – when one person uses power and control over another through physical, sexual, mental or emotional threats or actions – and serves as a platform for the devoted students who deserve to be heard. This issue was an intensive labor of love, a call for student voices to be added to the conversation about safety on campuses, and provides unique perspective from student activists who want to effect definite change.

Interpersonal violence affects everyone on campus, both directly and indirectly, and we believe that student voices on this issue are just as important as administrative ones. The “culture” of your typical college campus can be hostile in many ways. It can be particularly hostile when we enter the muddy waters of sexual misconduct. These conversations are not normalized in modern university environments – everything from rape jokes to slut shaming to victim blaming can be seen on Yik Yak and other social media right here in the 30144 – and the “culture” of your average college campus is not welcoming to overt discussions about interpersonal violence, especially when discussed from an intersectional perspective.

The courage, honesty, and groundbreaking resistance found in this issue is not to be taken lightly. In this issue of *Pamoja*, you will witness poets sharing their personal stories with profound detail and writers tactfully informing the campus community about how to comprehensively discuss interpersonal violence. The poetry in this issue illustrates lived experiences of sexual assault and interpersonal violence. It is advisable to take caution before reading them, as they may be trigger inducing for some readers. The articles in this issue cover specific controversies that may be encountered while addressing interpersonal violence and provide suggestions for how to improve the way we discuss relationships and sex, as well as how to prevent sexual assault and interpersonal violence. It is nothing short of spectacular to have so many voices uniting on this important topic. We wish to add these voices, and we know that there is much more conversation to be had, here and well beyond.

This issue of *Pamoja* formed itself through students united with a common dedication to resistance. Enjoy.