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To: Friends:

Re: Old Ties and New Connections

It was the year I got betrothed to Nigeria--and got divorced from Molly! That is certainly one way of describing 1982!

But I am going too fast. The first thing should indeed be to wish you and your loved ones all the best for the festive season and all the best for 1983. We shall be thinking of you all as we welcome the New Year. Bless you all!

As this is going to be a long Mazrui Annual Newsletter you will be forgiven if you stopped right now and looked for other bedtime reading material. No hard feelings. Just keep in touch later on.

If you are still with me, let me confirm that the deed is done. I filed for divorce about a year ago and, barring the paperwork, the divorce is nearly through. But you thought Molly and I had lived separately for more than a year? Yes, you are quite right. Sorry for the confusion. Molly filed for separation (not divorce) in 1980 in the hope we would get together again on her terms. As I was unable to accept her terms, I filed for divorce instead. Now each is about to become single again, though of course still sharing the bond of our three children. It has been a momentous twenty years for both of us. Molly and I first witnessed the disintegration of Uganda before we experienced the disintegration of our own relationship. We suffered the tragedy of physical blindness in two of our children before we capitulated to moral blindness in ourselves.

We left Uganda in the wake of the country's political disintegration. I remain convinced of a causal link between Uganda's disintegration and the breakup of our marriage. The tragedy of Uganda resulted in a life of semi-exile for us elsewhere, in a new cultural environment notorious for its "divorces" and "legal separations"! In ten years on the faculty of Makerere University in Uganda I remember only two marriages on the campus breaking up. In the last three years only here in Ann Arbor, Michigan, some six marriages in the Department of Political Science alone have already collapsed. Is it any wonder that I believe that one cause of the breakup of my own marriage is the cultural environment of the United States? From 1971 onwards Uganda became a graveyard in a literal sense, but Makerere was less of a graveyard for marriages than American campuses seem to have become.

But all was not agony for me in 1982. There was also a lot of ecstasy and excitement as I attempted to re-create an African world around me. Sam Sebina and Brenda Kiberu, wards from Uganda, were particularly exciting members of my new world. They lived with me for part of the year, and were wonderful companions to me and to my children. Brenda celebrated her twenty-second birthday in Ann Arbor. She goes to school here in Michigan--majoring in business administration. She has an aunt in London whom I have met and with whom I have had a number of conversations. Brenda's mother is in

Kampala. The mother and I use Kiswahili when we talk on the telephone.

Sam accompanied me when I left for Nigeria in February. My new Nigerian connection (or "betrothal") was another major aspect of my effort to recreate for me an African world. Until 1982 my two African homes were Kenya (where I was born) and Uganda (the cradle of my academic career). This year I have added Nigeria as my third African home. I have accepted an appointment as Research Professor at the University of Jos in Plateau State, combining the position with my Professorship at the University of Michigan. For half of 1982 I was based in Jos and for the other half in Michigan. I am repeating the agreement this coming year. And so from January until June 1983 please use the following address:

Department of Political Science
University of Jos
Private Mail Bag 2084
Jos, Plateau State, Nigeria

After June 15, 1983, it may be safer to resume using my Michigan address, though my stay in Nigeria may be affected by the 1983 general and presidential elections there.

Al'Amin and Kim, my two younger children, joined me in Jos in 1982 for part of my stay there. I thought that in the absence of the new video games which were the craze in the U.S.A., the two boys would be in danger of getting bored in Jos! Not a bit of it! They found alternative pastimes, ranging from catching colourful insects to observing the Fast of Ramadhan, from swimming in the pool of the local luxury hotel to negotiating taxi fares with local cab-drivers! I insisted to the boys: "But please do not pat any stray hyena!"

For Kim a particularly memorable experience was taking part in Nuruddin Farah's play, Yusuf and His Brothers. Nuruddin was having difficulty with the 13-year-old Nigerian boy who was supposed to play the part of Raageh, Yusuf's step-son. The young Nigerian actor was good when he came for rehearsals--but he did not always turn up. The playwright, Nuruddin, came to our home to investigate if Kim could and would take Raageh's part instead of the Nigerian boy. Nuruddin gave the script to Kim to look at (with Al'Amin's help). Nuruddin was not asking Kim to memorize the lines. Yet in less than half-an-hour Kim recited to Nuruddin from memory a whole passage from one of Raageh's speeches. The playwright--somewhat taken aback--exclaimed: "You are hired, Raageh!" A new theatrical colleague was promptly recruited. But it was not only Kim who had his debut on the live stage. Kim's father was also hired as the Narrator in the same play. However, Kim managed to outshine his Daddy quite convincingly. A star was born on that dimly lit stage at the University of Jos in 1982.

Fifteen-year-old Al'Amin was very supportive throughout the theatrical experience. He helped Kim read his lines in preparation for each rehearsal. And he helped his father memorize some of the Narrator's lines, though the father was given poetic licence by the playwright to improvise if and when necessary. Al'Amin also helped with back-stage arrangements.

Meanwhile, eighteen-year-old Jamal was doing his own thing thousands of

miles away on another campus. Jamal completed his first year as an undergraduate in engineering at Princeton University. His academic performance in his first year was most impressive but he still had reservations about social life at Princeton. However, he says he is enjoying Princeton a little more in his second year than he did as a freshman--by no means a rare experience for sophomores "recollecting in tranquility" the morning after the night before!

It was while Al'Amin, Kim and I were at the University of Jos that we heard about the detention by the Kenyan Government of the other Al-Amin in the family, my sister's son, Al-Amin Muhammad Mazrui. (Both young men were named after my father--but my sister's son spells his name with a hyphen while my son spells his with an apostrophe after the "Al".) We were all absolutely shattered by Al-Amin's detention. What conceivable threat could he possibly have posed to the Kenyan Government? One theory was that the Kenyan authorities had been offended by a play Al-Amin (a young lecturer at Kenyatta University College) had written, entitled A Cry for Justice. Another theory refers to Al-Amin's reported popularity among students at Kenyatta University College. Since the Kenyan Government was apparently unpopular with the students, did Al-Amin's popularity arouse the suspicions of the authorities as to his role in class? Was he suspected of being a "comrade" in the ideological sense?

I have met thousands of young Africans of Al-Amin's generation all over Africa and in the Western world. Most of them are indeed a bit to the left of their elders. Al-Amin is the same, but only moderately so. I would not include him among the passionate firebrands of Africa's emerging generation. He shares the anger and disenchantment of his generation--but purely as an intellectual and not, repeat not, as a political activist. That is why we are all totally mystified by the actions of the Kenyan authorities. This young man is no danger to anybody. I hope our Government will reconsider its actions. Al-Amin's health poses a further risk to him--he has asthma, high blood pressure and a heart condition. Conditions in captivity could endanger his life, or expose him to the peril of paralysis. If you share our concern for Al-Amin, you may like to make a plea on his behalf to our President, His Excellency President Daniel arap Moi, State House, Nairobi, Kenya.

Al-Amin's father, Sheikh Muhammad Kassim Mazrui (a cousin of mine), died a couple of months before Al-Amin was detained. Sheikh Muhammad was probably the most learned Mazrui of his generation, and one of the leading Islamic jurists in Africa south of the Sahara. Like my father before him, he served for a while as the Chief Kadhi (Chief Islamic Judge) of Kenya. Also like my father before him (of whom Sheikh Muhammad was a disciple) Sheikh Muhammad was a prolific writer and a very active editor. Most of the two men's work was in Kiswahili, though the two Mazrui jurists also wrote in classical Arabic. In addition, they translated parts of the Qur'an into Kiswahili. Sheikh Muhammad survived my father by thirty-five years almost to the day, but the two scholars constituted a strong scholarly continuity in Islamic jurisprudence. Islam in Africa as a whole mourns the passing of its great scholars. And we in the family feel the anguish and emptiness left behind by Sheikh Muhammad, just as we once mourned my father's departure thirty-five years ago.

Professionally, the saddest thing that happened to me during the year was the retirement of my friend and secretary, Valerie Ward. Valerie had

worked for me for most of my period at the University of Michigan, including the three years when I was Director of the Center for Afroamerican and African Studies at Michigan. She has retired for health reasons. I still do not know how I am going to manage without her. I had come to rely so overwhelmingly on her skills and sense of organization. Still, we all wish her a happy and restful retirement. She deserves a more relaxed life after the pressures of working for me!

I visited Zimbabwe three times this year. At this rate, Zimbabwe will soon become my fourth African home! During two of the visits Vice-Chancellor Walter Kamba and his wife Mrs. Angeline Kamba were very gracious--as were some old Makerere mates like Hasu Patel, Yash and Mary Tandon, and other friends.

My involvement with the UNESCO General History of Africa has continued. The project aspires to bring out eight volumes of Africa's history (I am editor of Volume 8). So far two volumes have appeared in English and French, and a third volume is about to be published. My own Volume 8 is just beginning to be drafted by multiple scholars.

Will there be translations into indigenous African languages of these volumes? This is what took me to the Institute for Swahili Research at the University of Dar es Salaam in August. We had an excellent planning meeting with Director Temu of the Institute, his Institute colleagues, and representatives of the UNESCO Project. Yes, there will be translations in Kiswahili, as well as Hausa and Arabic, but in the case of Kiswahili and Hausa the volumes will be abridged.

Dar es Salaam this year is also memorable because of the lectures I was unexpectedly asked to give at the Institute of Diplomacy for Mozambique and Tanzania and at the University of Dar es Salaam. I also greatly enjoyed my subsequent conversation with Foreign Minister Salim A. Salim. I still think he would have made an excellent Secretary-General of the United Nations.

And now some television news! In 1982 I made my first television documentary--a 50-minute programme for BBC Panorama evaluating two years of Zimbabwe's independence. Was Zimbabwe another Mozambique, committed to revolution and a state-controlled economy? Or was it another Kenya, committed to racial reconciliation and private enterprise? After the first two years of independence, Zimbabwe seemed to me at that stage closer to being another Kenya than to being another Mozambique. But Prime Minister Robert Mugabe disagreed with my conclusion--he saw the new Zimbabwe simply as another Zimbabwe. I raised other issues in my conversation with Joshua Nkomo, who insisted he was not "Mugabe's chicken" but had a "big neck" (presumably not easily wringable!). These two Africans are both remarkable personalities, yet so startlingly different in style and demeanor. It was a privilege to chat with them.

I was also privileged to meet a number of Prime Minister Mugabe's Ministers--including such old friends from pre-independence days as Dr. Nathan Shamuyarira (in charge of Information), Dr. Bernard Chidzero (in charge of Economic Development), and Dr. Edison Zvobgo (in charge of Constitutional Affairs).

This entire experience of doing a documentary for television has opened

up a whole new medium for me. The BBC has expressed an interest in my doing further documentaries for them. My Zimbabwe documentary was shown twice in London and was also televised in the USA on the MacNeil/Lehrer Report. My BBC producer, David Harrison, was a tower of strength in the production. If all goes well, I shall look forward to working with him on other television projects in the future.

Meanwhile, I am getting ready to return to Nigeria in January. I was privileged this August to meet and chat in Lagos with the Head of State, President Shehu Shagari. We discussed mainly two subjects--the crisis within the Organization of African Unity and problems of stability in East Africa. I shall be watching keenly Al-Haji Shagari's election campaign this coming year. Will he have another term of office as President? His chances are good--but 1983 has the secret definitive answer hidden in its temporal bosom.

Our guest-house at Jos in 1982 was called the White House! Less grand than its name-sake but it was fun! We had great company there. I look forward to a re-union with our White House friends in Jos. I have also missed Isawa and Margaret Elaigwu, Nuruddin Farah and his theatrical group, colleagues in the Department of Political Science, the Vice-Chancellor and his wife, the students of Jos, Bolaji Akinyemi of the Nigerian Institute of International Affairs and Gerald Moore, who once taught Molly in a graduate course at Makerere University in Uganda. Gerald is now professor of English at the University of Jos. It is a small world!

Yes, enjoy this festive season while it lasts. And best wishes for this coming year to you--and to your mates and colleagues of all descriptions!

Yours warmly,

Ali A. Mazrui