

Spring 2010

# **MAZRUI NEWSLETTER No. 33**

**General Theme: Golden Jubilee**

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Spring 2010

# ANNUAL MAZRUI NEWSLETTER NO. 33

by

**Ali A. Mazrui**

General Theme: Golden Jubilee

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This Newsletter is partly a product of the Albert Schweitzer Chair of the Humanities, Binghamton University, State University of New York. The Newsletter is intended for colleagues, friends, relatives, and family of the Schweitzer Professor, Ali A. Mazrui.

## MAZRUI IN NEW YORK STATE

ANNIVERSARIES FOR MAZRUI NEWSLETTER. The year 2010 marks multiple anniversaries relevant to my career in the United States. This year marks the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of my first arrival in this country as a graduate student at Columbia University. I spent the academic year pursuing a Masters' degree in political science at Columbia.

Upon completion I had to choose between going to Princeton University and going to Oxford University for my doctoral degree. Partly because I had a girl-friend in England (Molly Vickerman) I chose Oxford. Quite reluctantly I turned down the fellowship to Princeton. Molly subsequently became my wife and we went to Makerere in Uganda together for the start of my professional career.

After ten years we had to leave Makerere because of the threat posed by Idi Amin's regime. I joined the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, as a tenured professor and spent fifteen years there.

This brings me to the second anniversary presented by the year 2010. It marks the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary since I actually started teaching at State University of New York at Binghamton in 1990. (I had arrived at Binghamton the previous Fall, but did not start my SUNY duties until 1990).

The University of Michigan had given me two years to decide between remaining at Binghamton and moving more definitively to Ann Arbor, Michigan.

After very careful consideration of the pros and cons of going back to Michigan, I decided to remain at SUNY-Binghamton. What were the factors which made me choose SUNY Binghamton inspite of the fact that it was a much younger university than Michigan, smaller in size, less influential nationally and internationally, and Michigan was still the base of my second son (Al'Amin) and my third (Kim Abubakar) who were students at Michigan?

Indeed, the print media in Binghamton had been quite hostile to the offer which SUNY-Binghamton had made to me in 1989. The offer was regarded as exorbitant, and I was attacked in the local Press as an "African Potentate demanding a chauffeur driven car" from the university.

During my second year at Binghamton an anonymous obscene circular attacking me was distributed on the SUNY campus. I was denounced as a "pampered nigger, grossly over-rated." Fortunately the faculty of SUNY-Binghamton rallied to my defense in public demonstrations against racism on campus.

A number of senior faculty also came personally to my office to express solidarity with me. These factors were important in my evaluation of SUNY-Binghamton as I was considering my options for the future. The new questions I asked myself included the following:

Would my departure from SUNY-Binghamton be interpreted as a capitulation to either the hostility of the print media or the racism of the anonymous critic? By the end of my second year at Binghamton I was ready to believe that the *Press and Sun Bulletin* – while still strongly inclined to SUNY-bashing – had stopped personalizing it through attacking Ali Mazrui.

I also asked myself if my departure from SUNY would be inconsistent with my recommendation to the Regents of the State of New York that education in the State should be multicultural and diverse? I had been asking the State to go multicultural – but was I prepared to help it at the college level with my own availability as a SUNY teacher?

I also agonized with myself, asking if my departure from SUNY-Binghamton would be a let-down to those on this campus who were fighting for multiculturalism and diversity?

There were those who might not have been champions of multiculturalism but were they champions of academic freedom? Would my departure from SUNY-Binghamton let down those believers of academic freedom who felt that we should all close ranks against various forms of intimidation – including anti-intellectualism in the mass-media.

I also decided to pay tribute to two professionally relevant individuals who had died violently since I departed from Michigan to Binghamton, New York.

One of them tried his best to prevent me from coming to SUNY-Binghamton. Not because he loved SUNY less but because he loved Michigan more. That was Professor Jack Walker, then chairman of Political Science at the University of Michigan, who struggled hard to work out a competitive offer to keep SUNY's counter offer at bay! Jack Walker lost. Alas, we in turn lost Jack Walker. Jack Walker was killed in a road crash a few weeks after my departure. He was a great colleague at Michigan and a distinguished political scientist. I salute his memory.

The other professionally violent death has been that of Rajiv Gandhi, former Prime Minister of India. He wrote to me soon after I arrived at SUNY-Binghamton. Rajiv Gandhi invited me to a meeting in India in February 1991. Because of the first Gulf War, Rajiv Gandhi later wrote to say the meeting had to be postponed. New dates were chosen in November 1991. The former Indian Prime Minister was going to be my first high-profile host since coming to Binghamton.

However, there was a clash between dates for India and two particular weeks I was supposed to spend at Cornell as Andrew D. White Professor-at-Large. Fortunately Cornell was flexible, I was able to write to Rajiv Gandhi to confirm my prospective participation in India.

Within weeks Mr. Gandhi was assassinated in a bomb explosion. I saluted him and his family for their distinguished contribution to the Third World.

By the time I got to India it was Rajiv Gandhi's widow – Sonia Gandhi – who hosted me and other world intellectuals at a special Indira Gandhi Symposium on World Affairs in New Delhi.

In 1991 I had started negotiations with SUNY-Binghamton to help me launch an Institute of Global Cultural Studies. Among the projects we hoped to launch was one called “AFRASIA” [ASIA AND THE BLACK WORLD] – from Mahatma Gandhi's influence on Martin Luther King Jr to China's prospects as a great power.

I had also opened discussions with the Centre for Islamic Studies at Oxford University about areas of collaboration. I was soon unanimously elected to the Board of Trustees of the Oxford Centre.

Another reason which influenced me to remain at SUNY-Binghamton instead of returning to Michigan concerned the future of Omari H. Kokole, the Ugandan colleague who had accompanied me to Binghamton from Michigan. At Binghamton he seemed to have a solid future as an Assistant Professor of Political Science. Indeed, he was subsequently appointed Associate Director of our new Institute of Global Cultural Studies when it was finally established. Kokole's professional prospects if I had returned to Michigan would have been less promising.

He completed his PhD at a Canadian University and succeeded in publishing his doctoral dissertation. His longer-term project was to be my official biographer in two stages. Firstly, he was to invite other scholars to evaluate my work in a series of essays to be published as a single volume. Secondly, he himself was to play “Boswell” to my “Samuel Johnson” – accumulating information about me over several years, which would finally become an ambitious professional biography of Ali A. Mazrui.

Omari accomplished the first stage of getting multiple scholars to write chapters for an edited volume entitled *The Global African: A Professional Portrait of Ali A. Mazrui*.

Unfortunately, by the time Africa World Press in New Jersey published the volume, Omari Kokole was dead. He passed away in 1996 at the young age of 44 after a short illness. It was a devastating shock to us all.

Another factor which influenced me to remain at SUNY-Binghamton was the role which Governor Mario Cuomo had played in persuading me to come to New York for the Albert Schweitzer Chair in the Humanities. The governor telephoned me personally at my home in Michigan. The governor was very persuasive. Indeed, he was an eloquent praise singer for the State of New York as a whole. I greatly appreciated Governor Cuomo's initiative. The national press heard about the governor's phone call, and several newspapers and magazine carried the story.

Not long after I had settled down at SUNY-Binghamton, Education Commissioner Sobal invited me to serve on a School Syllabus Review Committee for the State of New York as a whole.

The invitation was confirmed by the Board of Regents of New York State. I served on that Committee, which made wide-ranging recommendations for changes in high school curricula in the State. I coined the subtitle of our Report: *A Declaration of Cultural Interdependence*.

An additional reinforcing factor behind my choice of SUNY-Binghamton was my relationship with Cornell University in Ithaca, New York. When the State of New York appointed me Albert Schweitzer Professor, Cornell had already appointed me to another Distinguished Professorship – the Andrew D. White Professor-at-Large. It was an unusual concept. I was expected to retain the Cornell title for six years, with periodic visits to Cornell to give public lectures, present seminars, and meet with students. Although the Andrew D. White appointment was a university-wide affiliation, the hosting department was Africana Studies and Research Center (AS&RC) at Cornell. Professor Locksley Edmonson went beyond the call of duty as a gracious host and a long-standing friend.

As my six years as Andrew D. White Professor-at-Large was coming to an end, the Africana Studies Center negotiated with me a longer term affiliation. From 1992 onwards I became Senior Scholar in Africana Studies and Andrew D. White Emeritus Professor-at-Large. In order to combine the Cornell deal with my Albert Schweitzer Professorship at Binghamton, the Provosts of the two universities worked out a special formula for a joint appointment at the two universities. I shall discuss more fully this unusual dual appointment elsewhere in this Newsletter.

Lastly, but perhaps most importantly this year of 2010 is also the twentieth anniversary of Pauline Uti's first arrival in the United States. Pauline and I became friends when I was a Research Professor at the University of Jos in Nigeria, and she was a student in a sister institution in close proximity. When I returned to the United States I discovered how much I missed her. I encouraged her to apply to SUNY-Binghamton for a Master's degree in the Faculty of Education. She was admitted to SUNY, and arrived in Binghamton in 1990. We subsequently got married, produced two sons (Farid and Harith) – and the rest is history!! She also successfully completed her Master degree.

#### **SUB-THEME TITLE**

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## **APPENDIX I**

### **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

*In my career, I am, of course, indebted to dozens of colleagues, friends, relatives, and other personal and professional benefactors. But in this Newsletter I will only mention those colleagues who have helped me in the last twelve months in Administrative, Secretarial, and managerial roles:*

**I. Binghamton University, Binghamton, New York:**

Amy Chin

Perna Lele

Jemimah Mwakisha

Ravenna Narizzano

Snehal Patel

Helen Perrault

Barbara Tierno

Yogesh Upadhyay

**II. Cornell University, Ithaca, New York:**

Judy Holley

Rebecca Snyder

Cynthia Telage

Sheila Tower

Update Cornell Staff

**III. Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture and Technology, Thika and Nairobi, Kenya.**

Michael Hindzano Ngonyo

Peter Njiraini

**IV. Supportive Team in South Africa:**

James N. Karioki

Abdul S. Bemath

Esther Githinji

**V. Supportive Team in Uganda:**

Sam Max Sebina

Idd Mukalazi

Muhammad Ddungu

Where do I put Senthil Mehalingam?

For my mobility between SUNY-Binghamton and Cornell-Ithaca, I am particularly indebted to my colleagues Seifudein Adem, Patrick Dikirr, and their comfortable cars! Patrick, Seifudein and my wife Pauline have been the wheels of my existence in the State of New York!

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For editing of my new books in preparation for publication I am particularly indebted to Seifudein Adem, Lindah Mhando, Jayantha Jayman, Abdul S. Bemath, Thomas Uthup, Etin Anwar, Willy Mutunga, Patrick Dikirr, Shalahudin Kafrawi and Alamin M. Mazrui.

I am, of course, also greatly indebted to my immediate family and to my extended family across three continents. My gratitude also to my esteemed colleagues in the universities to which I am affiliated, to my students, and to my graduate assistants from semester to semester.

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## **APPENDIX II**

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