

The Ancestors

A Triple Heritage

Beloved Uncle [Mjomba Ali]

Prof. Ali A. Mazrui

By
Khyrul
&
Muhammad bin Yusuf

“The ancestors of all *three* persuasions are claiming victory!” A loud voice uttered! The voice was reverberating in every corner of *‘After-Africa.’*

“Victory?! Victory?! Victory for what?!” *Christopher Okigbo*¹ asked, astonishingly!

The ancestors responded, “Victory for having convinced our son, Prof. Ali Al’Amin Mazrui, who is known as *The Walking Triple Heritage* in the *‘Herebefore’*, to finally re-unite with us.”

The ancestors of *Indigenous, Islamic, and Western* persuasion fought for the soul of *Mwalimu*, whom they have been courting for the past eleven months since he got sick.

Those of Indigenous persuasion were claiming him as one of their own. Those of Islamic persuasion were equally claiming him as one of their own. And those of Western persuasion were partly claiming him as one of their own.

While Mwalimu was humbled and flattered to see what the farce from these ancestors in *‘After-Africa’* was all about, *Christopher Okigbo* was observing all of this and waving to Mwalimu from a distance. He had a big smile on his face!

Prof. Mazrui autographed our copy of his novel,

To Khyrul and Muhammad

With affectionate regards.

Can my image of the Hereafter in this novel be reconciled with the traditional Islamic image of Aakhiraa?

Mjomba Ali

June 1998

¹ The Trial of Christopher Okigbo published in 1971 is the only novel that Prof. Mazrui ever wrote. “The provocative novel of ideas centres on the tragedy of Christopher Okigbo – a real person and a great poet who was killed fighting for Biafra in the Nigerian war. The ‘trial’ takes place in ‘After-Africa’ [which is the Hereafter. Because they are in the Hereafter, they would normally refer to where they came from as, ‘Herebefore’].

On a more serious note here on earth, in 2014 Khyrul and I made the 580 km journey countless number of times to visit and spend time with Mjomba Ali, Lady Pauline, and the rest of the family in Binghamton, New York. On a few occasions we made the trip to Philadelphia, Pennsylvania when my uncle was in a hospital there. During the visits to Binghamton, sometimes Mjomba Ali was in the hospital and some times he was at home.

There were occasions, e.g., in the month of May, we visited him three times. *Alhamdulillah.*

Also, there were times when we did not have enough time to allow us to spend a night. So we would make the 6 hour trip, spend 3 hours with our uncle at the hospital or home, and then make the 6 hour drive back home. But let me tell you, seeing the aura that would emanate from Mjomba's face when he saw us, it made the trip worth every kilometer!

The last time we visited him at his home was the last weekend in September (just two weeks before he passed away).

Little did we know that it was our last good-bye. That weekend he was actually in good spirit. My cousin, Dr. Alamin Mazrui, his wife (Dr. Ousseina Alidou), their daughter (Salma), Khyrul, and I were lucky to spend that weekend with him when he was very alert. It was an atmosphere filled with laughter, smiles, love, giving us thumbs up and briefing him on various global political issues, and family greetings (including personal salaams from my brother, Ghalib, and other family members that I conveyed to Mjomba).

Ousseina and Alamin briefed him on the visit by the Tanzanian President to Rutgers University a few days earlier, when heads of states had come to New York for the annual UN General Assembly. And I shared with him the other global news, e.g., what was happening in Syria, Iraq, and Palestine.

Just like I, Khyrul loved Professor so much! That day (Sunday, 28th September, 2014), Khyrul kept pushing Mjomba to give us one big Salaam! Initially he was in the mood of just listening, but just before we said our good-byes he said loud and absolutely clearly, and I mean loud, "Salaam!" accompanied by his big smile! We were ecstatic! We had a big smile too. We thanked him, shook hands, kissed him on his forehead, and said our goodbyes! It was our last goodbye. *Alhamdulillah.*

And that was our last encounter with Mjomba Ali. A good-bye that we were both pleased with.

May Allah rest him in peace in the beautiful gardens of heaven under which rivers of honey flow! *Ameen.*

It was always a pleasure to spend those brief moments with Alamin when both of us were visiting Mjomba Ali at the same time. And apart from that, we spoke countless number of times on the phone throughout Mjomba's illness.

Similarly, we had spent the previous weekend with Zeid, Maryam, Zamzam, and Aisha, speaking about Mjomba Ali. At the time, he had been admitted, again, to the hospital, i.e., one week before he passed away. He was of course discharged and that enabled him to pass away at his home surrounded by relatives and friends, including Mahir and Swafiya. *Alhamdulillah.*

Also, throughout his illness, I always updated Ghalib, Farouk, Abdulatif, Ali, my nieces and nephews, and the rest of the family, about Mjomba Ali's condition.

To be honest, the place that Mjomba had in my heart is more than what many would have for their own biological parents. My mother (Aisha) and father (Yusuf) were sick for sometime before they died but I do not remember crying until after we buried them. And trust me when I tell you that my mother was my best friend. Not a single day passed without speaking with her. Even when I was out of town for months I would phone her every day. Not when she was just sick, but throughout my adult life. And I was beside them both when they took their last breath in 1983 and 1988, respectively. May Allah rest both of them and all our loved ones, in peace, in the beautiful gardens of heaven under which rivers of honey flow! *Ameen.*

But with Mjomba Ali, I do not remember the number of times I would be sitting alone at home, or driving, or speaking with Khyrul about him, or speaking with Pauline or with our beloved Auntie Alya, on the phone, and I would just cry!

The bond that I had with Mjomba Ali, only the two of us knew it. It was as deep as it gets!

It was very humbling to hear Lady Pauline at her husband's memorial (at the Agakhan Academy in Mombasa, Kenya), narrating the last visit Khyrul and I made to see Mjomba Ali two weeks before his death, and my telephone conversation with her at the very moment when Mwalimu was taking his last breath! *Alhamdulillah.*

It was partly a conscious decision on my part not to physically go and see him in the final weekend when he was suffering and dying. I truly wanted the last great visit we made two weeks prior to be our last memory of him.

However, as fate would have it, it turned out that I was there, spiritually, when he was taking his last breath (as I was with Pauline on the phone) at 8:30PM on Sunday, 12th October, 2014. That phone call would remain the most important phone call, and I will always cherish it!

Because I was not there physically, I truly believe and so does Khyrul, that Allah wanted me to say goodbye to Mjomba Ali - Telepathically! The reason I am saying this is because at the time I was on a work related conference call. I excused myself by saying to my colleagues that I needed to make a very important phone call.

It was nice for Pauline to answer the phone at that time (a time when others may have been too pre-occupied to do so). Indeed, it was an opportunity for me to say, *Kwaheri Mjomba Ali* (goodbye Uncle Ali)! *Alhamdulillah.*

About ten minutes after it was officially confirmed that Mjomba had truly re-united with the ancestors, Alamin phoned me to break the news. We cried together on the phone. In turn, I immediately phoned Auntie Alya, Ghalib, and Abdul S. Bemath to share the sad news! All the phone calls were filled with tears! Abdul is Prof. Mazrui's friend and his official Bibliographer. He is based in South Africa. He is by profession a Library Consultant and Bibliographer. He is the Editor of Mjomba Ali's 426 page bibliography.

The Mazruiana Collection Revisited
Ali A. Mazrui debating the African Condition
An Annotated and Select Thematic Bibliography 1962 - 2003

Prof. Mazrui autographed our copy in 2005.

For Muhammad and Khyrul:

*Here is a guide to forty years of my political, literary and electronic output!
The editor has dedicated it to Muhammad's grandfather!
With love,
Mjomba Ali
August 2005*

That morning, just hours before Mjomba passed away, Ghalib sent us the last fourteen verses of Surat Al-Wāqī`ah (The Inevitable) and urged us to recite them. I phoned Alamin, who was at Mjomba's bedside, to do so.

*Then why, when the soul at death reaches the throat.
And you are at that time looking on.
And Our angels are nearer to him than you, but you do not see.
Then why do you not, if you are not to be recompensed,
Bring it back, if you should be truthful?
And if the deceased was of those brought near to Allah,
Then [for him is] rest and bounty and a garden of pleasure.
And if he was of the companions of the right,
Then [the angels will say], "Peace for you; [you are] from the companions of the right."
But if he was of the deniers [who were] astray,
Then [for him is] accommodation of scalding water.
And burning in Hellfire.
Indeed, this is the true certainty,
So exalt the name of your Lord, the Most Great.*

Over the years, Mjomba Ali and I have communicated on countless occasions, before even the advent of e-mail. Below is an example of some of our e-mail communication when he was being harassed on campus for his point of view.

March 31, 2005

Assalamu Alaikum Mjomba Ali:

It's a wonderful paper with great lessons. I hope and pray that those young people and those who influence and use them, will all draw some lessons from the many advises you shared with them and all of us. Advises that I have no doubt come from the bottom of your heart.

Of course I am particularly disturbed by all the false and baseless allegations that have been targeted against yourself and Sheikh Ahmed Deedat who have done nothing in this world but good to humanity of all creed and colours. Also disturbing is similar false and baseless allegations against many other innocent Muslims. Some of the goodness that you and Sh. Deedat have exactly been your attempts to close the gap of differences between Muslims and people of other faiths. So obviously these allegations and accusations are a slap on your face!

May Allah bless you for standing up for the Muslims, and also for the principle of having an open society in which no one ethnic or religious group is targeted unjustly. Amen. And may Allah protect you from the evil that resides in the hearts of some of your accusers. We hope Allah will bring them to some realization that there is a better way in dealing with one's critics than using falsehood in tarnishing the image of people that their only crime is having a different point of view.

You have always tried to be on the side of truth and justice, and so you will prevail. Insha'Allah.

Mwanayo, Muhammad

I had my disagreements with my uncle. One of them was in 2005 regarding Dr. Amina Wadud, who was the first woman to lead a mixed Friday prayer.

The following was Prof. Ali Mazrui's point of view.

March 22, 2005

To Whom It May Concern

Dear All:

Is Amina Wadud the Rosa Parks of modern Islam? On the bus of Islamic destiny, is Amina refusing to take a back seat as a female passenger? Rosa Parks' defiance helped to ignite the Montgomery bus boycott and the civil rights movement in the United States! Is Amina Wadud's defiance the first shot in a Muslim Reformation on the gender question?

It is too early to assess the historical significance of a Jum'a prayer led by a single Muslim woman in a Christian Protestant Church. But we know this is not the first time that Amina Wadud has shaken a Friday Muslim congregation.

Not long after Nelson Mandela's release in South Africa Amina Wadud and I were both in South Africa as guests of different Muslim groups in South Africa. The liberals in the mosque in Cape Town were prepared to let Amina give the Friday Sermon. The conservatives did not want her in the mosque at all. In the end Amina was permitted to give a "pre-sermon sermon" - a talk before the official Khutba. But even that compromise ignited passionate debates among South African Muslims for weeks afterwards.

Far less significant but nevertheless illustrative of the divide between conservative and liberal Islam was what happened to me in post apartheid South Africa. The Muslim liberals wanted me to address men and women in the same room at a cultural center. The conservatives insisted on the women being in a separate room, hearing my lecture relayed on a loud-speaker. The conservatives won in the first round by having the audience segregated in separate gender rooms. The liberal won in the second round by taking me physically to the women's room after my formal lecture so that I could meet with some of them face to face.

In post apartheid South Africa, Amina Wadud and I witnessed the historic dialectic of Islam between the veiled face and the vision of openness.

It is true the ancient Islam had examples of women in leadership positions like Aisha and women as inspired advisors to men, like the Consort to Caliph Umar Ibn Khatab. But what went wrong in Islam after the first flowering of gender-dignity? How can we reverse the forces of

sexism which escalated in the course of the Muslim dynasties of the Umayyads (based in Damascus) and the Abbasides (based in Baghdad) in the early centuries of Islamic history?

Until this twenty first century of the Christian era, Muslims have not been unique in denying ultimate religious leadership to women. Female priests in Christianity and female rabbis in Judaism are phenomena of recent times, and are still hotly debated. A female Pope in the Vatican is for the foreseeable future inconceivable. The whole vocabulary of the papacy is rooted in patriarchy (Pope, Papa, Father, Pontiff). The Catholic Church has not yet even accepted the ordination of women for ordinary priestly roles.

The Anglican Church has made more progress on the issue of ordaining women. But we are still waiting for the first female Archbishop of Canterbury in Lambeth Palace in London.

In all three Abrahamic religions there is a crisis of gender. Is it a sin to think of God as a Queen instead of a King? Why does the Trinity consist of two males (the father and the son) and one neuter (the Holy Ghost)? Why are Jewish prophets overwhelmingly male?

Perhaps Amina Wadud is initiating a revolution not merely in Islam but in all three Abrahamic religions - Judaism, Christianity and Islam. After all, Abraham himself was a Patriarch. Is it time to dis-Abrahamize the Abrahamic legacy? Perhaps we are seeking the *modernization* of the Abrahamic heritage. Amen.

Yours sincerely,
Ali A. Mazrui, D.Phil., (Oxon), C.B.S.
Director
AAM/amp

Institute of Global Cultural Studies
Binghamton University, SUNY

The following was my point of view (at least the introduction; it was a five page paper). This was an open paper and not a response to Prof. Mazrui's position. At the time a lot of people, especially in the West, were talking about Dr. Wadud's "bold and audacious" act!

A Muslim Woman Leading a Friday Prayer

The Case of Amina Wadud

By

Muhammad bin Yusuf

On Friday, 18th March, 2005, a number of local and international media outlets reported,

"A professor in the US is thought to have become the first Muslim woman to lead mixed Friday prayers. More than 100 men and women attended the service and sermon given by Amina Wadud, professor of Islamic studies at Virginia Commonwealth University. The location was moved to an Anglican Church building in New York after mosques refused to host the event."

To some this was “progress” and a “move forward”, while to many this was a clear violation of the *Shariah*. Let us attempt to put the issue in context within the parameters of Islam. I believe that we do not have “Liberal Islam”, “Progressive Islam”, “Modern Islam” or “Ancient Islam.” We only have ONE Islam, within which there does exist some room in some aspects of the religion for more than one interpretation, understanding, or point of view - as long as those interpretations have their basis in the Qur’an and/or the *Sunnah* of the Prophet Muhammad (SAW). And at the same time, provided that there is nothing in those interpretations that goes against the Qur’an and/or the *Sunnah*. On the other hand, there is room within Islam for scholars to make *Ijtihaad* (legal deduction) by using not just the Qur’an and *Sunnah*, but also *Ijmaa’* (scholarly consensus) and *Qiyaas* (Analogy) for any new issue that may arise.

To start with, I think it is critical to mention the following verses from the Glorious Qur’an:

“This day, I have perfected your religion for you, completed My Favour upon you, and have chosen for you Islam as your religion.” [5:3]

“Indeed in the Messenger of Allah, you have a good example to follow.” [33:21]

“It is not for a believer, man or woman, when Allah and His Messenger have decreed a matter that they should have any option in their decision. And whoever disobeys Allah and His Messenger, he has indeed strayed in a plain error.” [33:36]

“And whatsoever the Messenger gives you, take it, and whatsoever he forbids you, abstain (from it), and fear Allah. Verily, Allah is Severe in punishment.” [59:7]

This is a religion that Allah “perfected” and “chosen” for us. How can we even think of changing something which has been divinely “perfected”, be it in the name of "equality" or any other reason or excuse? Citizens of a country tend to be up in arms when the government attempts to amend laws which may have been in place for many years. On the other hand we also tend to be up in arms when the government wants to put in place laws that may “interfere” in our domestic regulations, e.g., how we raise our children. Yet we do not think twice and in fact have the audacity to change regulations and laws that Allah put in place! Today it is almost impossible or one of the hardest things to do, to change anything (even a syllable) in the U.S. Constitution - you literally have to get about two-thirds of the 50 States to agree on a simple change. You would not even get one-third of the states to agree to ban something as harmful as alcohol, or firearms. Yet one woman or a few individuals want to change Allah's Constitution, and some of us applaud that and say "way to go!" or "it's a high time we modernize such archaic or ancient laws!" Think for a moment! Think how easy it is to change the laws of Allah, and so difficult to change the laws of one nation! Think and Reflect! Something is definitely wrong! Such people are basically saying that Allah was incapable in the 7th century to come up with a Divine Constitution that could guide mankind forever because Allah could not foresee the trend in "modernization", “Progress”, and "liberalization" that lay ahead!

The following was my uncle’s response upon reading my paper, “A Muslim Woman Leading a Friday Prayer: The Case of Amina Wadud.” Even though he and I had opposite views on this issue, look at the humility and civility of this unique and rare intellectual giant! At the time he was fighting his own battle of being maligned. Some right-wing anti-Muslim individuals were using students to “spy on their professors and construct accusations of national disloyalty. This is a form of ideological witch-hunt.” So Prof. Mazrui had just finished writing a paper, “The Younger Face of Bigotry: An Open Letter the new McCarthites.” Below are his comments regarding my Wadud paper and my comments on his paper on the McCarthites. May Allah rest his good soul in *Jannah-tul-Firdaus*, the highest part of Heaven. *Ameen*.

April 4, 2005

Mr. Muhammad Yusuf
Toronto, Canada

My Dear Muhammad:

Wa-alaikumu Salaam!

It is always nice to hear from you. Probably before you were born I defined an intellectual as "a person who has the capacity to be fascinated by ideas and has acquired the skills to handle some of them effectively."

The definition has been widely quoted over the years.

By that definition you qualify as an "intellectual" -- whether you like it or not! I have read your recent discourse with great interest.

Many thanks for your gracious response to my "Open Letter to the New McCarthites". I will always appreciate your encouragement and support.

With best wishes.

Yours warmly,

Ali A. Mazrui, D.Phil. (Oxon), C.B.S.
Director
Institute of Global Cultural Studies
Binghamton University, SUNY

Over the last quarter of a century that I have lived in Canada, Prof. Mazrui visited Toronto four times. He first visited Toronto in 1990. He was the guest of the Royal Ontario Museum. At the time his schedule was tight so we only met for breakfast at his hotel. Subsequent visits were when he came to a Friends of Makerere University function. A Muslim organization called Salam also invited him. And to appear on a TV show to defend his position on nuclear proliferation. On two of these occasions we invited him to our home for dinner, and on one we were at a dinner organized by Salam. The Makerere event had a dinner too, and Pauline also came with him.

At the Salam dinner we were sitting with I think a Bangladeshi couple. When Prof. Mazrui was introduced, the man whispered to his wife, "*This man is like a prophet!*" After Mjomba Ali finished his lecture, he came to say hello to Khyrul and I at our table. Khyrul said to Mjomba, "these are our friends" (referring to the Bangladeshi couple that we had just met). The man's eyes popped out when he shook Mwalimu's hand. He was, to say the least, in a state of bewilderment! Obviously the whole episode about "prophet" was amusing and flattering! I am not sure if we ever told Mjomba Ali that story.

On the occasions when we visited Binghamton, Mjomba Ali and I would always end up in long discussions and debates. Pauline and Khyrul would go to sleep, and Mjomba and I will be talking

sometimes until 2 or 3AM! Unfortunately, we always spent only one night. On rare occasions we would spend a couple of nights.

Recently I read in one of the many newspaper articles on Prof. Mazrui, someone saying, “Prof Mazrui was a world-class rhetorician and polemicist. I have never heard him use a word that wasn’t perfect for the occasion. It didn’t matter whether he was writing, or speaking.”

I will always remember Mwalimu correcting me over two decades ago when I used the term Kenyan Ambassador in Ottawa. He wrote back and corrected me by saying, it’s High Commissioner!

At the time I took it as a very trivial matter. But as years passed by I realized how that correction played a significant role in me paying more attention to details. And in reality many a times when you use an incorrect word, some readers immediately think of you as ignorant. For example, calling Angela Merkel, the “President” of Germany, instead of “Chancellor” would raise a red flag of ignorance!

So I will always thank Mjomba Ali for that minor correction which has played a major role in my life. Not that I have improved that much between then and now, but at least I try.

It was nice when we were getting married in 1994 to receive an autographed paper, “Islam and the End of History.” He put a note that said,

*“To Muhammad and his loved one.
Happy nikaha!
Yours Mjomba Ali and Maryam”*

Maryam is of course Pauline’s Muslim name which she rarely uses.

This paper was in response to a paper by the American, Dr. Francis Fukuyama entitled, The End of History? Fukuyama who is also a Political Scientist, had written his provocative essay at the end of the Cold War in 1989. He had a revised version in 1991 or so.

And basically these are the kinds of gifts that we always received from Prof. Mazrui – articles and books. Absolutely perfect!

The last gift that we got from Dr. Ali A. Mazrui, apart from his hospitality and the ever generous big smile and great conversation, was a book that he co-authored with Dr. Lindah L. Mhando, Julius Nyerere: Africa’s Titan on a Global Stage. Mjomba Ali autographed it.

*For Muhammad and Khyrul:
With high esteem, and with best wishes for 2014
From: Mjomba Ali and Pauline
December, 2013*

One of the biggest honours in my relationship with Mjomba Ali was to give me an opportunity to do some research for him while he was preparing for a major lecture, Oxford Amnesty Lecture, to be delivered at University of Oxford in February 2004. The lecture was entitled, Strangers in our Midst: In Search of Seven Pillars of Wisdom.

It was a labour of love. And in the end, as a true scholar he never short-changed anybody. Rather, he gave everyone their due. In the endnotes, he said,

“I am indebted to Thomas Uthup and Muhammad Yusuf for research and bibliographical assistance.”

He modified the lecture three months later when he gave a summarized version of it at the Center for the Study of Islam and Democracy held in Washington, D.C. This one was entitled, Pax Islamica and Seven Pillars of Wisdom. He mentioned again how he was indebted to Dr. Thomas Uthup and Muhammad Yusuf for research and bibliographical assistance.

Another honour was to attend one of his classes at Binghamton University in 2003. He was teaching a course on Africa in World Politics. It was beneficial and fascinating for my wife and I to see Mjomba Ali in a university lecture room, how he taught and interacted with his students. Being an Academic or teaching undergraduate and graduate students was probably one of his many callings which he did so beautifully for half a century. Hence the name Mwalimu (Teacher in Kiswahili). He was indeed a Teacher, first and foremost – both inside and outside the lecture room; and both inside and outside the boundaries of universities.

Some of his other callings are Writer, Public Speaker, and Political Thinker. Of course his books, recorded public lectures, and television/radio programs will out-live the students that he produced. *Insha'Allah*.

The greatest honour was to engage Mjomba Ali in theological debates. The ones that were super special were in 2003/2004. They went on for several months.

In his Annual Mazrui Newsletter No. 28 which came out in early 2004, Prof. Mazrui said,

“My three adult sons and I have had many debates over the years, on topics which have ranged from female circumcision to capital punishment. But the most elaborate family debate in 2003 was between my nephew, Muhammad Yusuf in Canada, and my cousin, Rafii Abdulla Shikely in Mombasa, and myself. The topics included the following:

- (a) Can one be against death penalty and still be a good Muslim?
- (b) Does God reveal Himself in installments?
- (c) Can the Qur'an be re-interpreted in the light of changing historical realities?

The debate was conducted through e-mail (each e-mail consisting of several pages). There were moments when passions were high. But on the whole, good manners were observed and personal acrimony averted.”

Eventually these debates were included in one of Prof. Ali A. Mazrui's book ten years later. Of course none of us thought that these personal e-mail discussions will end up in a book. Towards the end there was a suggestion from Mjomba Ali but I do not think that I was that hopeful. But a decade later, it was exciting to know that they did. The book was edited by Dr. Alamin M. Mazrui, Dr. Willy M. Mutunga, and Dr. Seifudein Adem.

The following is the title of the book, published in 2013 by Africa World Press.

Black Orientalism and Pan-African Thought Debating the African Condition: Ali A. Mazrui and His Critics, Volume III

Our debates are featured in tens of pages under two sections:

Section VII: Theological Debates: Between History and Revelation (pages 245-287)

Section VIII: Three Schools of Contemporary Islam (Pages 289-330)

The following is an excerpt from the book in Prof. Mazrui's paper, Islam Between Culture and Ritual, on Page 284.

I was excited by Muhammad Yusuf's example of the incident about Banu Kuraidha. It is a wonderful illustration of the Prophet's acceptance of divergent interpretations of the same command. I would appreciate it if Muhammad Yusuf would give me the full documentary confirmation so that I may refer to it in my own future discussion of doctrinal pluralism in Islam.

There is an old saying that Karl Marx was not a "Marxist". Was the Prophet Muhammad an "Orthodox Muslim"?

With regard to "Orthodox Islam" as a concept, I do not believe it would apply to the Prophet's understanding of Islam fourteen centuries ago. That interpretation had not been tested by the march of science and the cumulative revelations of history. What madhhab did the Prophet belong to? Do you think the Prophet and the Sahaba regarded themselves as "ancient Muslims? Were they Shafii or Hambali? "Ancient" presupposes the historic march into "modernity". My use of the term "Orthodox" presupposed sticking to tradition in spite of the march of history. The first Muslims were not following a tradition. They were creating it.

With regard to whether Orthodox Muslim today regards the five prayers to God as more important than spousal abuse, the Muslim world is full of such examples. Muhammad Yusuf may not himself accept that scale of priority, but I would be interested in hearing a clear-cut fatwa from Rafii. Is a Muslim who prays five times a day and does not treat his wife as an equal a better Muslim than a Muslim who is "Khamsa salawat" and dominates his wife? This time I am interested in a "yes or no" answer from Rafii for a change. Is a male Muslim who does not pray a worse Muslim than a Muslim who treats his wife as inferior? *Yes or No?* We need a firm unambiguous fatwa!

And the following is an excerpt from Muhammad bin Yusuf's paper, Response to Islamic Legal Schools: Gender Relations, on Page 314.

Let me not spare non-Muslim Liberals. About 15 years ago I read a novel by Danielle Steel. The moral of the story was about a woman who was a house-wife. Her husband loved her so much, and they were blessed with kids. All appeared okay, until the day their last child left for college. That day, she told her husband, I have put up with these domestic routines for 20 years, I am fed up now, I am divorcing you and I am going back to college myself and after that take care of my own destiny. Good-bye! And she was gone! By the way, she was *not* beaten once by her husband. So if we really want to talk about gender relations, let's get to the bottom of it. And those of us who participate in domestic work like cooking, cleaning, washing and scraping toilets, Mjomba would say we are actually "more Liberal than we either realize or would admit." The Prophet (SAW) helped at home and he never asked his wives to stitch his torn clothes. He did it himself. His only ever employer was a woman. Was he also partly a Liberal? I think it is unfair to dump every bad behavior of a Muslim to the "Orthodox" and every good behavior on the "Liberal" and "Modernists." I believe that there are millions of evil "Liberal" and "Modernist" Muslims." It's a mixed bag. We all have an obligation to make this world a better place. And I know you are trying to do your part, and I am trying mine. May we all succeed? Amin.

And let's remind ourselves what two of the "best" and most admired American "Liberals" of the twentieth century did to their wives. John F. Kennedy and William (Bill) J. Clinton never beat Jackie or Hillary respectively, but what they did to them is unforgettable. The whole world knew about their sexual scandals. Is this part of liberalism? I thought it was only "orthodox" who are guilty of such. And what about French and Italian Liberals; isn't having a mistress part of liberalism? It's your turn now Mjomba to respond - Which is a bigger wrong that a husband could do to his wife – is it beating her or sleeping with another woman?

Prof. Mazrui autographed our copy of the book in 2013,

*For Muhammad and Khyrul:
In friendship and with love
Ali A. Mazrui
April 7, 2013*

It was also autographed by Dr. Alamin Mazrui,

*Kwa ndugu yangu Muhammad,
Kwa heshima na mapenzi.
Alamin
April 7, 2013*

Alamin did a great job in collecting from me all the e-mails that the three of us exchanged, i.e., Mjomba Ali, Uncle Rafii, and I. The first two volumes were edited by Dr. Alamin M. Mazrui and Dr. Willy M. Mutunga in 2003 and 2004.

To be considered a critic of Prof. Mazrui is like a badge of honour! Prof. Mazrui knew how to engage the intellect of his opponents. And it is just so rewarding to be featured in one of these three volumes. Among Mazrui's top critics are people like Wole Soyinka, Dr. Henry Louis Gates, and of course, a fellow academic giant, Dr. Walter Rodney. One major event that brought Mazrui and Rodney together was their famous debate in 1967. At the time, Rodney was teaching at the University of Dar es Salaam and Mazrui at Makerere University. The debate has been a subject of discussion for everyone in East Africa who was a university student or faculty during that era. I truly love both of these two giants. It's unfortunate that Walter's life was cut short when he was assassinated in 1980 at the prime age of 38 in his native Guyana. Because he had moved from being a Professor to a Political Activist, may be it was feared by some powerful forces that Guyana may become another Cuba in the midst of the Americas.

One of the best things was to be featured in the Annual Mazrui Newsletter. This was meant mainly for family, relatives, and colleagues. He would discuss his previous year from a personal and academic point of view.

The following are the ones that I, or my wife and I were featured.

"My first visit to Toronto in Canada was in 1966 – the year after my appointment as professor. I was one of the speakers in a major public rally on "Revolution and Response." Other speakers included Cheddi Jagan, the distinguished Marxist opposition leader from Guyana

My assignment in Toronto in 1990 was not about re-designing the future. It was about re-interpreting the past. The Royal Ontario Museum in Toronto invited me to give a special public lecture on “Africa’s Contributions to World Civilization.” ...

Not to be outdone by the Museum, the East Africans of Toronto got me to give a separate lecture for them. The topic we agreed on was Migration, Asylum and Exile – a condition affecting most of us at the meeting. Vianney Bukyana (of Rwanda and Uganda) and Muhammad Yusuf (of Kenya) were the main organizers of the East African re-union. Also present were Africans from other parts of the continent, as well as Canadian friends of Africa.

Toronto was a kind of family re-union in a more literal sense as well. I met for the first time in North America my sister’s son, Muhammad Yusuf.

[Annual Mazrui Newsletter No. 15 - 1991]

“When I was in Toronto, Canada, in November, one of the highlights was meeting at last my nephew Muhammad [Yusuf’s] bride from Guyana, Khyrul. Incredible as it may sound the first Guyanese I ever met was Cheddi Jagan, who is now President of the country. I first met him in the same city of Toronto as far back as 1966! We were both major speakers at a symposium on the theme “Revolution and Response”.

But while the 1966 event was loud and public, the 1994 event was quiet and private. I was a guest at dinner at the [Yusufs]. Excellent Caribbean cuisine and great company.

On the next day I met more East Africans at a Toronto mosque and later at a Halal Indian restaurant. The whole experience added immensely to my visit to Canada in 1994.

[Annual Mazrui Newsletter No. 19 - 1995]

“There was also a separate family reunion in Canada – a pleasant time with my nephew Muhammad Yusuf and his wife Khyrul. Khyrul’s cooking was another marvel - the Caribbean wonders! My evening with them was also highly intellectual and theological - for Muhammad is constantly challenging me about my interpretation of Islamic precepts and doctrine. Normally in the Muslim world older people are more traditional in their interpretations than younger ones. So usually when young people challenge older people, it is the older people who are defenders of tradition. In my relationship with Muhammad these roles are reversed. I am the less orthodox of the two - and I am being challenged from the side of tradition. But it is all in good family spirit.”

“One more point about Guyana. Did you know that all Guyanese are now symbolically my in-laws? My son Al’Amin is now married to a Guyanese - American, the daughter of Mr. I. Barrington Perry of Afro-Guyanese descent. My nephew Muhammad Yusuf - my sister’s son - is married to Khyrul, a Muslim of Indo-Guyanese descent. And I have been Walter Rodney Professor, honoured to have served all Guyanese in 1998.”

“Earlier in the year another wind from Canada had brought my nephew Muhammad Yusuf, and his wife, Khyrul, to visit us in Binghamton. Believe it or not, I have exactly three nephews in all in North America - of whom Muhammed was the second to visit our new house in the Vestal-Binghamton area. The first was Alamin M. Mazrui from the Ohio State University in Columbus, who came with his friend Dr. Ousseina Alidou from the Republic of Niger.

The three nephews in North America are children of three different siblings of mine. Muhammad Yusuf and Alamin Mazrui are children of my sisters Aisha and Salma respectively. The third nephew is Zeid. He is the son of my brother Harith. Here we are confronted with a triad within a triad in family relationships. We are still waiting for Zeid to visit us in Vestal-Binghamton.”

[Annual Mazrui Newsletter No. 23 - 1999]

“In a year when there was so much international debate about weapons of mass destruction, some Canadian researchers discovered what I said about nuclear weapons proliferation in my BBC Reith Lectures (world services) in 1979. I had recommended to the Third World that they should acquire a military nuclear capability as soon as they could. Audiences of the British Broadcasting Corporation were stunned in 1979.

The Canadian Broadcasting Corporation [CBC] in 2003 telephoned me in Binghamton to inquire if I would be prepared to defend my 1979 recommendation on television in Toronto in 2003. The CBC had a programme specializing on controversial issue. The programme was called, “Test of Faith.” The format put the main character in what they called “the hot seat,” facing a panel of three challengers. For my sins I picked up a gauntlet from CBC and traveled to Toronto (at CBC’s expense, of course).

The three challengers in the studio consisted of a military man, a university professor (another man) and a woman anti-nuclear activist. There was also a live audience in the studio to listen and react to the debate and later ask questions. My nephew, Muhammad Yusuf, and his wife, Khyrul Nisha, were seated among the studio audience. The Chief Programme Moderator was Valerie Pringle.

“Muhammad Yusuf and his wife, Khyrul Nisha, visited us in Binghamton after their highly eventful sightseeing trip to the Grand Canyon of Arizona. Since they needed to rest after their long trip in their own car, Muhammad and I avoided heated theological debates during their stay.

Muhammad and Khyrul had an opportunity to meet us again in Canada when Pauline and I, accompanied by our children, Farid and Harith, were guests of the Friends of Makerere in Canada. I had been invited to lead a fundraising banquet. My after-dinner speech was on the subject: “African Universities Between Globalization and Counterterrorism: A Case-Study.” Afterwards Pauline stayed with Muhammad and Khyrul at their home; the children stayed with a Ugandan family with kids their age. I stayed at the hotel where Friends of Makerere had booked me.

[Annual Mazrui Newsletter No. 28 - 2004]

“But just as civilizations can move from dialogue to partial synthesis, so can races. In 2004 my grandson, who was named after me, [Little Ali], moved to Binghamton to live with Grandpa, with my wife Pauline, and with my two youngest children, Farid and Harith. There was nothing unusual about a grandchild spending a year with grandparents.

What was unusual was the racial synthesis. Little Ali looks totally white [or Caucasian]. His Caucasian features are so striking that we cannot risk crossing the border into Canada without the possibility of being suspected of kidnapping a four-year-old white child! Indeed, Pauline was going to visit my relatives in Toronto, Muhammad Yusuf and his wife Khyrul, with all the children – and then Pauline cancelled the entire trip precisely because our papers proving Ali was my grandson were not yet complete. Can you imagine? [In American English “Caucasian” means of White European ancestry].

But why did Little Ali look Caucasian? Partly because my son, Al’Amin (Ali’s father), was half English. And partly because Ali’s mother, Jill Mazrui, was also half Caucasian (Black Guyanese married to a white North American lady).”

[Annual Mazrui Newsletter No. 29 - 2005]

“The banquet at a local hotel [for the 75th birthday celebration] was attended by about one hundred and fifty guests, mainly from the state of New York, including my colleagues from the State University of New York at Binghamton and Cornell University in Ithaca. I was overwhelmed by the tributes paid to me in speeches and in poems, some of which were specially composed for the occasion. The poems were both in English and in Kiswahili. Absent poets included Muhammad Yusuf, who sent in his composition from Toronto, Canada. Mwalimu Abdul Nanji recited the Swahili poetry beautifully at the Binghamton banquet.

Jamal, Al’Amin and Kim spoke movingly, and sometimes hilariously, about their Dad. They had witty anecdotes to share with the banquet audience.”

[Annual Mazrui Newsletter No. 32 - 2008]

Here are a few comments from Mjomba Ali after we had shared our travelogue with him and Pauline - Discovering Southeast Asia (Far East): From Singapore to Indonesia - Malaysia to Thailand in 2001 and A Trip to Nature’s Masterpiece: The Grand Canyon following our 11,000km road trip to Arizona and back in 2003.

20 February 2002

Mr. Muhammad bin Yusuf
Ontario, Canada

My dear Muhammad:

Assalamu alaikum.

I am about to take off for Uganda to lecture on "THE AVIATION INDUSTRY SINCE SEPTEMBER 11". Can you imagine? I will then make a quick trip to Nairobi and Mombasa before returning to the United States.

Thank you so much for your report about travelling in South East Asia. Your report is much more relaxing to read than your Uncle's annual newsletter! Pauline and I enjoyed reading about your Oriental adventures.

One of these days I should find the time to travel for pleasure, rather than on business, as I seem to be always doing. You have the right attitude about seeing the world for its own sake.

All our love.

Yours ever,

Mjomba Ali

February 6, 2004

Muhammad Yusuf
Toronto, Canada

My dear Muhammad and Khyrul:

Many thanks indeed for your "Travelogue" about the Grand Canyon and your grand tour. Pauline is reading your document first with great interest. I am in the queue as the next reader! God bless you both.

I know the two of you are fans of my annual newsletter. Unfortunately I am way behind this year. I have so many academic papers and chapters to write that I am not sure when I will complete my annual newsletter!

I think I will accept Ghalib's date for the birthday of his grand-dad. I have to write to Hamza Yusuf accordingly. If you have second thoughts about the date, please let me know.

With love.

Yours ever,
Mjomba Ali

In 2013 it was nice to attend Prof. Mazrui's 80th anniversary. Both Khyrul and I enjoyed the various presentations on various issues and the dinner in the evening. Among the guests was Mwalimu's very good friend, General Dr. Yakubu Gowon, the former Nigerian President.

In 2008, my wife and I were invited to his 75th Anniversary. Unfortunately we could not make it. Below was my contribution of a short paper and a Kiswahili poem that was read at the event by Mwalimu Abdul Nanji as mentioned above in the Annual Mazrui Newsletter.

A Great Thinker - A Great Uncle

Prof. Ali A. Mazrui

By

Muhammad bin Yusuf

Assalamu Alaikum – Peace be Upon You.

I am deeply sorry that Khyrul and I were unable to make it to this momentous 75th Anniversary. At 75 you look fantastic and I look forward to celebrating your 80th Anniversary in 2013, right here - God willing.

I feel proud that you are my maternal uncle, but I am more proud of you as a great thinker. You are truly an inspiration to many, both within the African continent and beyond its shores. You are admired and respected globally by both Africans and non-Africans, by both Muslims and non-Muslims. You are a true son of the mother continent, a patriot, a truly remarkable hero.

I am in my forties now, but since I can remember, I have always looked at you as a Scholar first (as opposed to just an uncle). But the first time that I truly appreciated your scholarship was when I was watching your television series, The Africans: A Triple Heritage, around 1986. It was your friend, Shariff Kimwinyi, who brought the video tapes to our home and I watched them with him in the course of about three weekends, together with my brothers and my mother, Aisha (who

is your sister). While still in my very early twenties then, I appreciated the depth of your knowledge so much and from then on I knew I was going to get hooked in what later I would come to know as the Mazruiana collection. And as fate would have in store for me, in less than three years I moved to North America where I immediately got exposed to your books, your scholarly papers, magazine and newspaper articles, television interviews, public lectures, etc. And now after having followed your career for over 20 years, read hundreds of your papers and most of your books, I can safely say that I am a Mazrui disciple.

And over the years, you and I have discussed and debated religious, social, and political issues. Most of the time, we have agreed, and on a few occasions we have agreed to disagree. But even on those rare occasions when we have disagreed, I have always (and I mean always) benefited and my knowledge of the subject matter increased. It is highly unusual for anybody to spend time with you and not benefit from such an interaction. And on a personal level with people, I have observed you on how you respect others with great humility - whether it is a fellow scholar, a student, a janitor, or a total stranger. It is your humble nature when dealing with fellow human beings that truly make you a remarkable human being and a great thinker.

You are truly a role model, as a father, as a thinker, as an intellectual, as a scholar, as an African, and as a human being. And my grandfather, Sheikh Al-Amin, if he were alive today he would probably admit that although you did not go to study at Al-Azhar University in Cairo as he would have preferred, you nevertheless made him proud that you went to Oxford and became a renowned global scholar and eventually made Islam one of your disciplines in which you lecture and write about (at least in the last two decades since the days when you started shooting *The Africans: A Triple Heritage*). All praises are due to Allah.

My late mother, Aisha, adored you so much. She always looked forward to seeing you whenever she heard that you were on your way to visiting Mombasa, either from Uganda or from the United States, after you had moved here. She was very proud of you, as was my late father, Yusuf. And in turn, I saw how much you adored your older sister Aisha in kind. Similarly, your other sisters would have loved this day – the late aunt Salma, and the remaining aunts Nafisa and Alya, and last but not least your late brother, uncle Harith.

And Allah, the Creator has blessed you with a wonderful wife and partner, Pauline Uti Mazrui. And it is a great privilege for me to have known her, and for Khyrul and I to have spent time with her, your two children, Farid and Harith, your grandson, little Ali, and the rest of the family.

In conclusion, it is your great mind and originality of your ideas and thoughts that make a lot of people gravitate towards you and your work. Today, some words that you may have coined decades ago still sound so exotic and sometimes romantic – Swahilization, Afrabia, Herebefore,

After-Africa, etc. And today as you celebrate your 75th year on this planet, in far away Kenya, the only political solution that may truly get Kenyans out of the current impasse is what you proposed just three days after the recent rigged presidential election. You suggested mediation in which both leaders will get into a power-sharing form of governance by amending the constitution and create the position of Prime Minister answerable to Parliament. And Mr. Kofi Annan *appears* to be getting close to getting the two leaders to agree to such an agreement in the on-going negotiations. It is such originality, thoughts and solutions that make you a great thinker and a true Pan-Africanist.

I love you Mjomba! I salute you Mwalimu!

23rd February, 2008

Ewe Mjomba Ali, Ewe Mjomba Kipenzi

*Ni mimi mwanayo, Muhamadi wa Yusufu
Natukuwa furusa hii, mimi na mke wangu
Pokeya salamu zetu, salamu za dhati mno
Ewe Mjomba Ali, Ewe Mjomba Kipenzi*

*Hakika watambulika, kote ulimwenguni
Jina lako latajika, kwa mapana na marefu
Magharibi na mashariki, kaskazini na kusini
Ewe Mjomba Ali, Ewe Mjomba Kipenzi*

*Bwana Mola amekupa, kipawa cha akili
Umekitumia vilivyo, kuelimisha ulimwengu
Twakuomba uendelee, kufanya jambo hilo
Ewe Mjomba Ali, Ewe Mjomba Kipenzi*

*Khutuba zako hakika, husisimua watu mno
Na maandishi yako wewe, hayana mfano wake
Lugha ya Kiingereza, ni kama ulozaliwa nayo
Ewe Mjomba Ali, Ewe Mjomba Kipenzi*

*Twakutakia kila kheri, katika siku hii
Hakika umetimia, sabiini na tano miaka
Mngu akuzidishie, miaka mingi zaidi
Ewe Mjomba Ali, Ewe Mjomba kipenzi*

*Ewe Mjomba wangu, Ewe Muafrika
Ewe Mjomba wangu, Ewe Muisilamu
Ewe Mjomba wangu, Ewe Mzalendo
Ewe Mjomba Ali, Ewe Mjomba Kipenzi*

Muhammad bin Yusuf
23 Februari, 2008

In one of the visits we made in 2014 when Mjomba was sick, I asked him to share with Khyrul and I any incident of when he and my mother were little. He told us of an incident where my mother, Aisha, who is of course Mwalimu's sister, had gone to buy an Indian snack called *Chauro*. When she brought it home Mjomba Ali asked for some. My mother gave him a little bit. But Mjomba wanted more. So they started arguing and fighting but that did not result in him getting more of the snack. Mjomba knowing his special place in their mother's heart went to lodge a complaint!

Yes, Mwalimu had the audacity to complain that my mother did not share enough *chauro* with him! It was a smart move. Mwalimu knew exactly what he was doing in using such a strategy. And guess what? My grandmother ordered my mother to give all the remaining *chauro* to Mjomba Ali! Mjomba, Khyrul, and I had a good laugh. Basically Mjomba was not only the *youngest* among his siblings but he was the only *male* (among the siblings who shared the same mother and the same father). So you can imagine the love and tender care that he received from their mother. And he played on that whenever he was at odds with his sisters. I am sure his sisters thought of him then as a "little spoiled brat!"

On a separate occasion, we were talking to Mjomba Ali about movies, and I am not sure how but we ended up talking Indian movies. At that point, Mjomba told us that when he was young he liked going to a theatre in Mombasa to watch Indian movies. This was obviously in the 1940s. He told us of one of his favorite actors and one of his favorite movies that he would like to see it again. Talk about nostalgia! I guess it was yearning for those good old days. He really wanted to see a movie called *Kismet* (fate) whose hero and main actor was Ashok Kumar (1911 – 2001). He also remembered the name of the actress that Kumar fell in love with in the movie, Mumtaz Shanti. We promised to try and find the movie in Toronto.

We tried so hard to find *Kismet* (1943 movie) without success. However, we were able to find a couple of other old movies that featured his favorite actor, Ashok Kumar. We took them with us the next time we went to see him. We also took our laptop with us because he was at the hospital in Pennsylvania at the time. We put the movie on, but he was really sleepy and could not watch much. The next day we tried again but he was sleepy again. We came back with the DVDs to Toronto. And for the next few trips to Binghamton, every time we took them with us, but he was never able to watch either one of them for longer than half an hour.

It is said that *Kismet* was such a wonderful movie that not only did it set a new box office record but it ran in one theatre in Calcutta for 3 years! This record stood until the 1970s when it was broken by another popular film, *Sholay*.

Mwalimu was certainly a big fan of Indian movies when he was growing up in Mombasa before "*fate*" took him to England in the 1950s, to study and later live in the West. He may have been attracted not just to the love stories but also to the Urdu romantic songs which are a major signature to Bollywood movies. Urdu just like Kiswahili, is extremely rich in poetry (certainly both are richer than English and many other languages). Their richness in poetry results from the great influence that Arabic has in both languages.

These were great moments during the last few months of his life that we shall always cherish, i.e., when Mjomba Ali opened up to us and spoke about his youth and his relationship with his sisters

and mother while growing up, etc. It was a good break from discussing matters related to International politics, Islamic jurisprudence, and his health.

On 6th December, 2014, Khyrul and I drove down to Binghamton as we did on numerous times throughout the year. This time it was to attend a memorial service – “*Mwalimu Ali A. Mazrui (1933 – 2014) - Celebration of Life*” at Binghamton University. There were a number of speakers - all of Mjomba’s children (Jamal, Alamin, Kim, Farid, and Harith), his grandson (Little Ali), Academics from various universities (including Dr. Ousseina Alidou, Dr. Seifudein Adem, and Dr. Micere Mugo). Lady Pauline and Dr. Alamin Mazrui did not make any presentations; they took a quiet and low profile role in the audience just like us.

Three speakers in particular made me cry – the opening presentation by Dr. Alidou, the very personal and emotional presentation by Prof. Kim Abubakar Ali Forde-Mazrui, and the closing remarks of Dr. Ricardo R. Laremont. For both of us, this was a form of closure to our long relationship with Mjomba Ali. Having said that, we will always have a sort of emptiness in us for the special place in our hearts that Mwalimu occupied, especially in the last quarter of a century!

In conclusion, Christopher Okigbo was curious to see which ancestors Prof. Ali A. Mazrui was going to re-unite with. In the end, Mjomba Ali joined the Muslim ancestors because he had left instructions, in the ‘Herebefore’, to be buried Islamically next to his parents (Sheikh Al-Amin Mazrui and *Bibi Swafia Mazrui*) at their ancestral *Mazrui Cemetery* at Kibokoni, in Mombasa’s Old Town. This is also where his brother - Harith A. Mazrui, and his sisters - Salma A. Mazrui and Aisha A. Mazrui (my mother) were laid to rest. The other sister, Nafisa A. Mazrui, was buried at the Mandhry Cemetery where her late husband had been laid to rest earlier.

May Allah rest them and all our loved ones in *Jannah-tul-Firdaus*. *Ameen*.

Okigbo gave Mwalimu Ali A. Mazrui a big smile and a “thumbs up!”

Prof. Mazrui was truly a special gift to the East, the West, and the Rest. A great thinker, indeed! His academic and intellectual contributions will benefit the world for decades to come.
Insha’Allah!

*We love you Mjomba Ali!
We shall always cherish you!
And we will always miss you!
Rest in peace Mwalimu!
Rest in peace Professor!
Kwaheri Mjomba Ali!*

From Allah we all come, and to Him is our Ultimate Return!