

Ali A. Mazrui
1517 Wells Street
Ann Arbor, Michigan 48104
U.S.A.

Eve of 1982

Dear friends and relatives,

Redesigning Life

1. Perhaps I should begin by warning you - this is another Mazrui newsletter! You are about to be bombarded with varied bits of Mazruiana! If you are only a friend - and not a fan - let us limit ourselves to greetings of the season! We wish you and your loved ones a happy and rewarding 1982. And if, in anticipation of such rewards, there are seasonal festivities around, please enjoy them moderately! We shall of course think of you in our own festivities. Bless you!

2. The theme of this seasonal letter is "REDESIGNING LIFE" - a kind of leit-motif. Molly and I did not live together this last year, though we kept in constant touch about the children. She and the children continue to live in our house, but I have taken a separate apartment on campus. Those of you who are close to Molly will no doubt be getting further news about her directly from her.

3. Perhaps not surprisingly, living alone has increased my nostalgia for Africa. Partly to compensate for my not being in Africa, I have tried to create an African world around me right here in Ann Arbor. Two of my Ugandan wards (people whose education I have supported) have come to visit me. Sam and Brenda are helping to give me a sense of family again. I also have a network of other African friends and students around. But as part of my new design I have also wanted a link with an African university. It now seems fairly certain that, at least for a while, I will have a link with the University of Jos in Nigeria, which is extending its professional hospitality to me with effect from early 1982. I will still retain a base at the University of Michigan but I hope to spend several months in Jos both in 1982 and 1983. It is an experiment to see if I can survive trans-Atlantic commuting of this order! I am deeply grateful to both universities (Jos and Michigan).

4. But if I feel so nostalgic for Africa, why not move back to the ancestral continent on a full-time basis? Cannot my new design be a "Return of the Prodigal Son"? I have not ruled out that possibility. But a new problem I have to face concerns the wellbeing of my two blind children. Can I in fairness invite them to join me in Africa for their education when African schools and universities are so poorly equipped to deal with blind

children and students? Molly and I have been truly impressed by the facilities for the visually handicapped available at schools in the United States, and from State authorities and local organizations of the blind themselves.

5. As an alternative design I have considered going to Africa and just leaving the children at American schools until they finish. But who will pay for them if I have an African salary and have to face African foreign exchange regulations? [Fees and maintenance for Jamal alone at Princeton University cost nearly \$12,000 (U.S.) a year!].

6. All in all, this has been a year of considerable agonizing on my part about redesigning my future and the future of the children. Please wish us wisdom when it comes to making decisions!

7. It seems like ages ago, but 1981 dawned on me when I was in Uganda. It was my first New Year's Day in Uganda since I scrambled for safety from Idi Amin, seven years previously. (I celebrated New Year's Eve last year with President Milton Obote at the presidential suite at the Nile Mansions in Kampala). Now 1981 is coming to an end. We continue to wish that dazzling but unhappy country a speedy recovery from its varied torments.

8. Some of you may know that my lecture at Makerere University a year ago was on the theme "CAN UGANDA BE RE-DESIGNED"? This was given in December 1980 in the Main Hall at Makerere. You may be interested to know that I repeated the lecture at Howard University in Washington, D.C. in 1981. The central argument was that a devastated society presented not merely a calamity but also an opportunity. Because so much had been destroyed, it was possible to be selective about what was to be rebuilt. It was possible to pick and choose about redesigning a new order - instead of trying to go back to the situation before an Idi Amin abolished the old order. Instead of reconstruction, a society could restructure itself.

9. Meanwhile, Jamal, our oldest boy, has been busy redesigning his own life and career. Indeed, the biggest booster in 1981 for the family was our oldest boy's remarkable academic adjustment. Jamal's last year in secondary school was his first complete year as a blind person. In academic performance it turned out to be his best year at school, complete with school prizes. He did so well that major universities in the United States were falling over each other trying to attract him - Harvard, Michigan, Princeton, M.I.T., Northwestern, Stanford. After a good deal of agonizing Jamal made up his mind and accepted the Princeton offer. He thought that Princeton was best for the kind of undergraduate training in engineering he had in mind. His mother and I were also reassured by Princeton's credentials as a place for a blind student. The town was small enough and the university was sensitive enough to help Jamal settle down quickly. Jamal has no regrets so far! Neither have we!

10. Kim became a teenager in November 1981 - Big Thirteen. Perhaps longing for a new design of his own life, he was somewhat rebellious and difficult earlier in his twelfth year. But he rallied back into a more sociable frame of mind after the summer holidays. I took Kim and his brother Al'Amin to the Michigania family summer camp. I also took the Uzoigwe children with us.

(Godfrey Uzoigwe was away at the University of Calabar in Nigeria, and Pat Uzoigwe and my wife Molly were taking a break from the children on a separate expedition in rural Michigan). The Michigania camp was, as always, wonderful for the kids. They swam, rode horses, canoed - and dragged poor Daddy around! It was wonderful to see Kim in complete command of his visual handicap. It was not easy to tell that the child was legally blind. (Kim has in any case significantly more vision left than Jamal has. But they are both adept at making the most of what they have).

11. There are signs that Al'Amin, our fourteen year old, is developing renewed interest in sports. This would be a return to an older design. He was in some ways the best sportsman in the family before his two brothers went blind. Jamal especially had been Al'Amin's regular tennis partner, and had also been a role model in other activities. Jamal's blindness drastically reduced Al'Amin's interest in lawn tennis and other outdoor sports. But there are signs that Al'Amin is rediscovering the sportsman in himself. His mother and I are watching the change with excited interest.

12. Professional news from us includes Molly's dual career - teaching English as a second language at Eastern Michigan University and teaching French at the prestigious private school in Ann Arbor, Greenhills. Molly has also increased her participation in the world of academic conferences - her latest was attending a conference of teachers of the French language which was held at Cincinnati during the Thanksgiving university break in November.

13. Academic life here in the United States has had other memorable moments for us. I was appointed University Distinguished Visiting Professor of Ohio State University - and gave a major lecture there on "Nationalism, Sexism and Race in the Nuclear Age." It was about redesigning the world system. I also gave seminars and served as consultant to the Department of Black Studies at Ohio. I was well looked after at Ohio State - in spite of my association with a rival institution in college football, the University of Michigan! Isaac and Bobby Mowoe especially went beyond the call of duty in looking after me in Columbus.

14. Jamal and I attended a special meeting in New York to honor Raúl Prebisch. This Latin American economic architect has sought to produce a design for a new world economic order. Dr. Prebisch received the 1981 Third World Award from The Third World Foundation (which is based in London). I managed to introduce Jamal at the ceremony to some of the dignitaries on the platform - including the Secretary-General of the United Nations, Kurt Waldheim, and the Secretary-General of the Commonwealth, Shridath Ramphal. Jamal seemed to be enjoying the evening immensely.

15. In the course of the year I continued to serve as Chairman of the special committee appointed to help the Secretary-General of the United Nations in drafting a report for the General Assembly about Israel's nuclear program and its implications for the Middle East. I presided over a group of experts consisting of one American scholar, one Soviet scholar, one Indian scholar and one Lebanese. We met a number of times in New York and Geneva. Some of the sessions were quite heated - but on the whole the group acted as a team entrusted with a special assignment, discharging its responsibilities with a sense of professional commitment.

Our report, which included recommendations for a new nuclear order in the Middle East, was presented to the General Assembly by the Secretary-General in the autumn of 1981. (Our report also confirmed the widespread impression that if Israel is not already a nuclear power militarily, she can put together a military capability at short notice).

16. Al'Amin and Kim decided half-way through the year that they no longer wanted to have a newspaper route each. So they dropped one route - and started sharing the other route between them. The two children now have less money - but more time! (The extra time does not seem to have speeded up their homework in any way whatsoever - as Molly will confirm with some feeling!!).

17. The African country I visited most these last twelve months was Nigeria. I went to Nigeria three times during the period - with academic assignments at Ibadan, Calabar, Jos and the Nigerian Institute of International Affairs in Lagos. These visits were a useful preparation for my projected design of future links with the University of Jos.

18. I referred earlier to a lecture on Uganda that I gave at Howard University. I was invited to Howard again to give the 1981 Rayford W. Logan Lecture. My lecture was about redesigning the Black World as a whole - against the background of the Nuclear Age. It was an attempt to look at the future of the Black World, but in a historical perspective.

19. Incidentally, my earlier lecture on Uganda at Howard was tape-recorded professionally, and subsequently broadcast on Voice of America and Voice of Kenya. I later received a letter from a senior civil servant in Zimbabwe - who commented that what I had said about devastated Uganda could be said about war-ravaged Zimbabwe; the devastation was an opportunity to redesign Zimbabwe also!

20. In another part of the world more than half a century earlier a society had been re-designed. The country was Turkey. The designer was Mustafa Kemal [Ataturk]. 1981 was the hundredth anniversary of Ataturk's birth. I was forced to become an instant authority on this great man - and his significance for Africa! I was asked to write two papers on the subject, and attended a fascinating symposium on Ataturk in Istanbul organized by Professor Suna Kili and her colleagues.

21. I learnt a lot about Turkey and Ataturk both in the course of the symposium and in researching for the two papers I wrote for the Ataturk centenary. I hazarded a number of comparative (and controversial!) propositions before Turkish audiences. I suggested that while Mustafa Kemal was indeed a hero of Turkey's political liberation from Western Europe, he might also have been at the same time the architect of Turkey's cultural dependency upon the West. This was partly because he thought the road to economic modernization was through cultural Westernization - in contrast to the Japanese belief after the Meiji restoration that economic modernization could be accomplished without too much cultural Westernization. (Hence the Meiji slogan "Western Technique, Japanese Spirit.").

22. As for Africa, is it not conceivable that post-colonial Africa is drifting toward cultural westernization without solid economic modernization? The debate was sometimes heated in Istanbul.

23. Finally, let me confess that I had mixed feelings about stepping down as Director of the Center for Afroamerican and African Studies (CAAS) at the University of Michigan. But it is great to have Professor Niara Sudarkasa as my successor. She is already putting her own stamp on the identity and orientation of CAAS. Things look really promising for the Center - a new design for a lively institution.

24. Congratulations if you have got to the end of this prolix newsletter! I am greatly flattered if you have persevered! This is a season of goodwill - and you are it!

With best wishes for 1982.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read 'Ali', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Ali A. Mazrui.