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TO: Friends and Relatives

A TRIPLE HERITAGE: PHASE III

Yes, here we are again! Another Mazrui Newsletter - to keep friends and relatives informed about our own twelve months.

But first things first! We wish you and your beloved circle all the very best in this festive season. May 1986 be a prosperous and joyful year for you and your loved ones. Amen.

I am drafting this Newsletter in Jos, Nigeria. Last week I was in the Western world (New Orleans, Ann Arbor and London). The week before that I was in the Muslim world (multiple cities in Algeria). As you can see, my triple heritage (African, Islamic and western traditions) continues to affect my movements profoundly. The fact that the three traditions often overlap only helps to make my triple pilgrimage the more deeply challenging.

If you have read my last two or three Newsletters, you know by now that Africa's Triple Heritage of indigenous, Islamic and western legacies is what my television series The Africans is all about. The TV series is being produced by the British Broadcasting Corporation and the WETA channel in Washington, D.C., (a channel of the Public Broadcasting Service of the United States). The series will be shown late spring and early summer in Britain and in the autumn of 1986 in the United States.

The filming has had its own adventures all over this vast continent of Africa. We have been arrested many times in different countries - usually because of some misunderstanding about our credentials as to where we happened to be. Sometimes we have been arrested by soldiers - fully armed and on the ready. But matters have always been sorted out in the end - and there have been lots of smiles and handshakes to go round at the end of the day.

On the otherhand, we have also been helped and entertained many times - by scholars, administrators, journalists, farmers, and indeed soldiers. In Southern Sudan we had to be accompanied by fifty troops to "protect" us from a possible guerrilla attack. We were never sure whether fifty government troops would invite a guerrilla attack or discourage it. We just hoped for the best.

Nature also has its hazards. Our cameraman in West Africa seemed to be sinking in quick sand! We were not even watching when it happened. The poor man was being sucked in while the rest of us were discussing trivialities, unawares. The victim's first concern was to save the camera. He raised it as high as he could. I then raised the alarm - "Andrew is sinking!" We rushed towards him - first rescuing the camera!! We then pulled him to safety. No, it was not quicksand afterall. It was mud sucking him in on the sea shore. It was certainly alarming enough!

I had my own share of accidents - usually tumbles and falls. A graceful rural African woman crossed a bridge consisting only of a couple of slippery logs. She did it with an elegant sense of balance, while we filmed her. I was following the filming crew behind her. What an African rural woman could accomplish turned out to be well beyond the urban boy from Mombasa. I slipped and took my plunge into the stream - a case of wounded dignity!

What about political accidents? There were those as well. Sudan's Minister of Information at the time introduced me to President Nimeiri after one of Nimeiri's press conferences. The President and I started walking towards his garden, and continued to chat as we walked. The world press - which had been present at the press conference - followed Nimeiri and me as we chatted across the garden. The American television crew on behalf of one of the major networks in the USA used their footage on American television in the week before Nimeiri was overthrown! Being seen in the company of Nimeiri just before he was overthrown was not one of my best planned sequences!

Other political accidents in the TV series also concern the number of coups in Nigeria. This project, this television effort has filmed two Heads of State in Nigeria - neither of them any longer in power! A triple heritage of coups?

An intellectual experience like this television series generates its own triple heritage of thoughts - not all of them incorporated into the television series. These witticisms on location include the following propositions:-

- (a) "If Africa invented man at Olduvai gorge, and the Semites invented God at Jerusalem, Nazareth and Mecca, Europe invented the world at Greenwich."
- (b) "The most successful Semitic religion is Christianity, the most successful Semitic language is Arabic, the most successful Semitic people are the Jews."
- (c) "No culture is an island entire unto itself. And therefore never send to know for whom the muezzin calls; he calls for thee." (with apologies to John Donne)
- (d) "A little modernity is a dangerous thing; Drink deep or taste not the western spring" (with apologies to Alexander Pope).
- (e) "The world is divided into men of inspiration and men of information, men of ideas and men of facts. The men of ideas make history; the men of facts record it."

Two of the great events of the year were Al'Amin's eighteenth birthday and Brenda Kiberu's graduation with a bachelor's degree in economics and business administration. Al'Amin started his undergraduate career at Western Michigan University while Brenda completed hers at Eastern Michigan University. Although I was not present for all the festivities because of my television travelling, I certainly did catch up with some of the fun whenever I breezed through Michigan.

With Al'Amin's departure in search of a college education, Molly Mazrui's home in Ann Arbor had one less member of the family in residence. Only Kim was now at home with his mother - awaiting his own eighteenth birthday in 1986. Both parents miss the older boys very much.

On the other hand, Ali Mazrui's and Brenda Kiberu's shared home had one new member of the family. No, it's not what you think! It is a sister!

Maureen, Brenda's younger sister, has arrived from Uganda to join us. In the conflict of the triple heritage, Maureen has so far moved firmly into the Christian fold. Before I knew what was happening, Christian ladies (white) were calling upon Maureen to take her for special religious events.

Since the United States was founded by "Pilgrim Fathers", it may be appropriate for Maureen to be embraced by these "Pilgrim Mothers." At any rate Maureen seems to be having a fascinating time. She begins her formal college studies in the New Year - decidedly more secular! Meanwhile, Maureen has enriched our family life in Ann Arbor - adding new depths to our triple heritage.

Sam Max Sabina, my Ugandan assistant in Jos, spent the first three quarters of the year in Nigeria in my home there. His Tanzanian girlfriend, Tonia, was with him all the time. But nostalgia for East Africa was growing in them both, in spite of the fascinating challenges in Nigeria. They finally left for East Africa together. They are sorely missed by all their friends in Jos and especially by me.

The East African community in Jos also lost N.D. Koya of Modern Languages and Apollo Rwomire of the Department of Sociology. We wish them all the best in their new careers.

Prince Sadruddin Aga Khan invited me to make a presentation at a conference in Geneva on the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). The conference turned out to be exceptionally star-studded. Among those who addressed the conference were the Swedish Prime Minister, the Vice-President of the United States, the younger Gromyko from the Soviet Union, Senator Edward Kennedy of the USA, Lord Brockway the Veteran British socialist, Dr. David Owen, the leader of the Social Democrats in Britain, and a whole galaxy of international scholars. It was interesting to meet so many famous people in a couple of days. But more to the point was the enormous importance of the theme of the conference - how to prevent a nuclear catastrophe. From that point of view, the conference was, of course, impotent and frustrating.

I went to Denmark in the course of the year, partly to participate in celebrating the hundredth anniversary of the birth of Karen Blixen, the Danish Baroness who lived in Kenya earlier this century and wrote so beautifully (sometimes condescendingly) about Africa. She remains one of Denmark's leading prose-writers of the modern era. I was interviewed by Danish Television and by a Danish magazine, partly about politics and partly about literature.

Even more engrossing in my short stay in Denmark was a special workshop - not on Kenya but on Uganda. From the point of view of experts on Uganda, that was also star-studded. There were Ugandanists there from at least three continents (Africa, Europe and North America) - many of them former Makerere colleagues of mine from the old days. The workshop on "Crises of Development in Uganda" was sponsored by the University of Copenhagen and the Institute of Commonwealth studies at the University of London. The driving forces were Holger Bernt Hansen of Copenhagen and Michael Twaddle from London. The workshop was one of the most successful events of the year in my time-table.

Omari H. Kokole jointly edited with me a special edition of the journal called ISSUE, a publication of the African Studies Association of the USA. Omari was in fact the senior and more active editor. African-Arab relations featured prominently in the issue. Jonah Isawa Elaigwu and I are still struggling to write a joint book which can be used as an introduction to political science in Africa.

As you can see, one cannot disengage entirely from the rest of one's academic career simply because one is making a television series. I have had to give lectures, attend conferences, and complete prior publishing obligations at the same time. Without the overall support of my two universities (University of Jos and University of Michigan), such a heavy professional timetable could not have been sustained for long. I am greatly indebted to my Heads of Department, my Deans and the top authorities at the two universities for their flexibility and support.

Two events (which were both professional and personal) I was very sad to have to miss because of the television pressures. One was the Memorial Service for Jim Coleman, who died of a heart attack in Los Angeles. Jim played a major part in helping to launch my career at Makerere in Uganda in the 1960s. He was a personal friend and a model scholar. He was an outstanding political scientist.

The other sad event I had to miss was the Memorial Service in tribute to Hedley Bull at Oxford. Hedley was one of the towering figures in the study of international relations and world politics. Although our views about the world differed widely, and sometimes we disagreed publicly, there was an unmistakable affection between us which we both felt. Oxford, Australia and the world will miss him.

As I write this Newsletter my book, which is to accompany the television series, is in galley proofs. I am not sure if you realise that the BBC has at least three branches of activity - radio, television and publishing. I have been involved with BBC radio since my student days at Oxford, I have been involved with BBC television much more recently. But this is the first time I am involved with BBC Publications as such (I decided to publish my Reith lectures with Heinemann and Cambridge instead). The speed of BBC publishers can be quite remarkable. These galley proofs were ready within six weeks of my submitting the final manuscript. Can you imagine? In getting the manuscript ready and pruned (I had written 35,000 words too many!). I was greatly aided by Michael Tidy and Valerie Buckingham.

In the United States the book will be published by Little, Brown Publishers in the autumn of 1986 to coincide with the American transmission of the TV series. The title of the book is THE AFRICANS: A TRIPLE HERITAGE. It is dedicated to Valerie Ward, who was my Secretary for so large a part of my career in the United States. I am greatly indebted to her for support at a critical period in my general international career. (See postscript.)

Toby Levine and I edited a collection of essays by distinguished professors, to be published by Praeger in 1986, and to accompany my TV series. This is quite apart from my own book on the subject. Toby bore the brunt of the editorial chores. Bless her!

In Paris I attended my first IPSA triennial conference since 1976 (meetings of the International Political Science Association). It was exciting to see so many old friends, from different lands. I had once served for nearly a decade on the Executive Committee of the Association - including three years as Vice-President. It was good to re-establish contact with IPSA. One of the most memorable incidents at the meeting was a casual remark by Dan Nabudere, who had once served as a Minister in Y.K. Lule's government in Uganda, and was now in exile. Outside a Paris cafe Dan predicted to me that there would be a military coup in Uganda "within days, not weeks". The prediction was made in the second half of July 1985. He was proved right. My opinion of Dan Nabudere as a political meteorologist has shot up!

I was in Nigeria when the Buhari Administration was overthrown and Ibrahim Babangida took over power. Did I have a Nigerian equivalent of Nabudere to alert me about the coming of the Babangida coup? Actually I am not permitted to answer that question. I do know a wide range of Nigerians - and some are better meteorologists than others!

Meanwhile, I have been introduced to the new President and Commander-in-Chief of Nigeria, Major-General Ibrahim Babangida. He was very gracious when we met. I was particularly impressed by the President's taste in political literature - since he confessed to having read some of my works! We wish him wisdom and effectiveness as he confronts Nigeria's formidable problems.

I had to interrupt my participation in the television filming in Nigeria in order to dash to Mombasa. One of my sisters was seriously ill. But she has been making superb recovery since then. I returned to Nigeria to continue the filming. We all wish Aisha all the best.

The triple heritage and its concerns about culture conflict continues to affect other aspects of my family life. In one of my conversations with my son Kim, he wanted to know why I had made it a point to arrive from abroad as late as possible before every Christmas when I lived with the rest of the family. Was I trying to keep the family on tenterhooks? I was not aware of such a grievance when I did live with the rest of the family. The facts did not correspond with the complaint, I suggested to Kim. In any case, did I get any credit for celebrating Christmas at all when my household (including my wife) were supposed to be Muslim? Kim decided to let that challenge pass. Was a Muslim arriving as late as Christmas Eve for Christian festivities guilty? No comment!

Kim's next line of enquiry concerned the Christmas tree. Why had I not permitted a Christmas tree at home when I lived with the family? Afterall, the Christmas tree was pre-Christian. I replied that was precisely the point. As a Muslim I could not be faulted for taking the birth of Jesus Christ seriously - since Islam recognised even the Virgin Birth of Jesus. But why should my household celebrate a symbol of pre-Christian European "paganism" like the Christmas tree? If any form of "paganism" was to be celebrated in my home, it should be African, surely! Since we were not celebrating pre-Christian African rituals, why should we be celebrating European versions? Had I not compromised enough with the heritage of Kim's mother (British) by accepting some degree of Christmas festivity? Kim smiled enigmatically. I was not sure if I had made a genuine convert away from European "paganism" or not! The triple heritage remained ambiguous.

Kim's elder brother, Al'Amin, raised different issues of the triple heritage. It went all the way back. Al'Amin celebrated, as we noted, his eighteenth birthday in the course of 1985. One of the ironies was that at eighteen he was involved in a branch of the food industry. He had become a cook in a flourishing restaurant. He was himself a kind of gourmet - fascinated by a variety of cuisines. But why was Al'Amin's fascination with food at the age of eighteen such an irony? Because of the crisis we had about feeding him when he was born at Mulago hospital in 1967 in Uganda. Al'Amin was so sleepy that his mother could not keep him awake long enough for breast-feeding. He just dozed off. In the end he was literally fed through the nose with pipes which were inserted through the nostrils to his stomach. It was a desperate move to compensate for his lack of interest in being fed. Eighteen years later Al'Amin was the gourmet of the family! Can you imagine? What is more, Al'Amin seemed to enjoy the entire triple heritage of cuisines (African, Islamic and Western) - as well as Indian and Chinese food. A man for all seasons - and for all cuisines!

As I said before, Al'Amin later in the year moved on to Western Michigan University, Kalamazoo, for his undergraduate education. He showed keen interest in aspects of the social sciences. He was particularly intrigued by the human mind.

Jamal, my eldest son, raised a more fundamental issue concerning the triple heritage and its relevance for us. Ours is a family with hundreds of years of recorded history. We know there are Mazrui who are African. We know there are Mazrui in the Gulf who are Arab (an overlapping category). Both the Arab and the African branches of the Mazrui are Muslim. But is it time there were also Mazrui who were Western? Were my sons to be among the pioneers of Mazrui westerners? It has been an uncomfortable dilemma for me. I am used to African and Arab Mazrui. My mind is not yet comfortable with western Mazrui. And yet, why not? It was afterall my career which had made my children so westernized. The whole process is full of bewildered ambivalence.

But Jamal's concerns have not been merely with the triple heritage. He has been very active in the National Federation of the Blind in the United States, including a leading role in his relevant branch near Princeton. And yet the triple heritage is not far away. Jamal cannot visually read, but he can write. The Prophet Muhammed could neither read nor write. And yet Islam's holy book, the Qur'an, is today read more widely in its original language than any other book in human history. (The Bible is read more widely but only in translation).

In some ways the Prophet Muhammed dictated the Qur'an the way John Milton dictated Paradise Lost - blind to the written page. Milton was actually blind; Muhammed was illiterate. Of course, Muhammed is read much more widely than Milton.

But Jamal's concerns were not merely with the blind. Jamal organized at Princeton a conference on AIDS (Acquired Immunity Deficiency Syndrome) as a disease. Jamal was eager to promote wider public education of AIDS as a social concern. So far AIDS has been a dual heritage problem. Its most dramatic homosexual manifestation has been in the western world. The ailment's most dramatic heterosexual manifestation seems to be in central Africa, especially Rwanda, Burundi and Zaire. On the whole, neither the African nor the Western habitat of AIDS so far has been Islamic. To that extent AIDS until the end of 1985 has been a case of a dual heritage - though the disease seems to be spreading relentlessly. Jamal's preoccupation has been with public education about the disease - what has been misleadingly described as "the leprosy of the twentieth century." Ignorance about these diseases has caused untold suffering to its victims. I am proud of Jamal's sense of compassion and active concern. (Incidentally, I lived for two years with a friend who was still taking medication for leprosy. We cooked together, ate together and shared the same bath tub. No harm).

Among the African political events which moved me the most deeply in the course of the year were two very different occurrences - the courageous anger of young people in South Africa and the voluntary retirement of Julius K. Nyerere as Head of State in Tanzania. Both events were pregnant with meaning and hope. The young people of South Africa may not yet know what alternative social order they want to see in their country. But they can certainly recognize a rotten system when they see one. As Yeats put it in response to the anger of the Irish uprising, "A terrible beauty is born"!

As for Nyerere's voluntary retirement from the pinnacle of power, it was probably the most heroic act of a career which was already full of periodic eruptions of heroism. A small step for an individual - a giant stride for Africa! Now Nyerere joins Leopold Senghor among the immortals of humility - the heroes who refused to believe they were indispensable to their own societies.

I wish Nyerere's successor, Ndugu Ali Hassan Mwinyi all the best. It was a privilege to have met him when I was in Zanzibar in 1984. I was doubly flattered when I heard him refer to some of my books. His own wealth of experience is of course a much richer book.

Partly to help promote my television series in the United States, I gave a major lecture at the annual meeting of the African Studies Association (ASA) of the United States. My theme was "Africa's Triple Heritage under Siege: Indigenous, Islamic and Western Tensions". A draft Programme 4 of the television series (on the theme of "Exploitation") was also shown at the ASA meeting in New Orleans (I had to fly to the conference direct from our filming in Algeria). Both the lecture and the television programme seem to have provoked a lot of serious discussion - which is what we hoped for. WETA in Washington and the ASA worked superbly together to give the project a chance at the New Orleans conference.

The Fifth International Congress of African Studies met at the University of Ibadan in December 1985. The first congress was launched by President Kwame Nkrumah in Ghana way back in 1962. That was the only one I missed (I was still a graduate student at Oxford at the time). But I have not missed the subsequent ones in Dakar, Addis Ababa, Kinshasa and now Ibadan. The congresses are supposed to meet once every five years - but sometimes these global events are delayed by a year or two. The theme at Ibadan was "Education and Identity in Africa" under the Presidency of Professor Jacob Ade Ajayi, the distinguished Ibadan historian.

How would you feel if you travelled thousands of miles to attend a conference and on your way back on the plane you suddenly discovered that at that same conference a paper had been presented about your own father without your knowing it? That is what happened to me after attending the New Orleans conference of the African Studies Association. My short stay at the conference had been so hectic (after my arrival from Algeria) that I did not have time to study the comprehensive programme converging the joint meetings of both the ASA and the Middle East Studies Association. It was on the plane back from the meetings that I studied the programme for the first time. Suddenly a familiar name stared at me from the printed page - "Shaykh al-Amin al-Mazrui (1893-1945) and His History of the Mazrui Clan". The author of the paper about my father was Professor Bradford G. Martin of Indiana University, a distinguished Islamist. I must remember to write for a copy of the paper when I get back to the USA. (Incidentally, my father died in 1947 and not 1945, but that was probably a printing error in the programme).

My editing of Volume VIII of the UNESCO general History of Africa is continuing in spurts - partly depending upon the incoming chapters and partly upon my endless filming trips. But we should have the volume with the publishers by the time you get my next Newsletter.

I was in England when Margaret Thatcher's government at last confirmed its decision to withdraw from UNESCO, in spite of appeals from most of Britain's friends (apart from the United States). It was a sad day for Britain's role in the world - and indeed for Britain's independence.

Outside the Government, UNESCO still has a lot of friends in Britain. And the media tried to be even handed. BBC radio confronted me with one of the Editors of The Daily Telegraph (a right-wing newspaper) to debate UNESCO. The gulf between the two panelists was very wide indeed!

BBC television (BBC-2) put me on another panel to discuss "violence: When is it ever Legitimate?" There was a fellow Reith Lecturer on the panel, Edward Norman, whose own Reith Lectures were at least as controversial as mine (but from the other side of the ideological spectrum - whatever that may mean!) I was more sympathetic with wars of liberation than were the other panelists on the television programme.

If I go on like this, I shall soon need Valerie Buckingham of BBC Publications to help me prune this Newsletter - just as she helped me cut out 35,000 words from my latest book! I had better stop before Valerie's services become necessary. (Incidentally, the main reason why we had to get rid of 35,000 words from my book was to make room for more than 200 pictures! Not a bad bargain at all!)



Enjoy yourselves during the festive season. And have a tremendous 1986!

Yours warmly,

Ali

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Postscript:

Since I drafted this letter in Nigeria, Valerie Ward - one of my dearest friends - has died of cancer in Michigan. I feel a great sense of personal loss. My profound condolences to her bereaved husband, John, and to her children. My most sincere condolences also to Ursula Coleman and Mary Bull whose own separate anguish is referred to on page 4 above. It has been a costly year.