Ali A. Mazrui,
38 Front Street, Apt. 3E
Binghamton, New York
13905, U.S.A.

Eve of 1993

To Friends, Colleagues and Relatives:

Mazrui Annual Newsletter No. 17
ON ANCESTRY, DESCENT AND IDENTITY

This year's Mazrui Newsletter is partly a report about ancestry and descent, about identity and authenticity. On one side I have looked more closely at my origins. Where does my Africanity end and my Islamicity begin? What are the dynamics between ethnicity and religion in the African experience? And what are my Omani origins?

Then comes the other side of destiny - not ancestors but descendants, not forebears but one's own children. Let me begin with this other side of destiny. My father was 58 years old when he died in 1947; I was 58 years old when my fourth son was born in January 1992. Was this a miracle of reincarnation from the previous generation to the next? That is one puzzle of the inter-generational equation, one mystery in the Mazrui karma. We shall return to my latest son later. He has been my supreme delight of 1992.

Just about the time when Alex Haley died in 1992, I was planning my own quest for roots - but almost in reverse. I had no doubts about my African roots. They were deep, familiar and truly internalized. It was the Omani side of my ancestry which was in danger of being lost in the mists of antiquity. Although I had visited other parts of the Arab world many times, I kept on missing the one part of the Arab world which had produced some of my forebears. In 1992 this long gap was at last filled. I visited Mazrui villages, - not my usual villages along the Kenya Coast but in the Sultanate of Oman. Many goats and lambs were killed in lavish hospitality in honour of the arrival of the African Mazrui (Some of my Omani hosts thought of me as an African-American Mazrui - which was also "cool"!). We shall return to those issues of ancestry later also.

Three other themes converged in my agenda in 1992 - pro-democracy movements in Africa, Christopher Columbus as "the Black Man's Burden," and Francis Fukuyama's thesis about "the end of history." According to Fukuyama in his seminal essay entitled, "The End of History" published in the summer of 1989, all historical change in human history was not leading to socialism

and a classless society - as Marx had predicted. Historical change had been leading towards capitalism and liberal democracy. The purpose of history was not the final destruction of capitalism. It was the final democratization of capitalism - how to make capitalism the most productive system in human ingenuity, and yet accountable enough and humane enough.

Assassination and World Order

In 1992 I was invited by the news magazine Africa Events in London to reflect on "The Culture of Assassination." Although my article for the magazine was primarily about Africa, the assignment made me reflect on my close encounters with victims of assassinations more widely. I did meet Malcolm X in New York in 1961 - did he know that an assassin's bullet awaited him? I met Martin Luther King Jr. in the same year. I discussed with Dr. King another great Black political figure at the time - Tom Mboya of Kenya. Only the gods knew that both King and Mboya were destined for assassination.

In 1990 I was invited by Rajiv Gandhi to a special meeting in India in February 1991 to examine the special problems of the 21st century, bringing together what the Indira Gandhi Memorial Trust regarded as some of the finest minds of the 20th century. I accepted the invitation.

Subsequently Rajiv Gandhi wrote to me to say that, because of the war in the Arabian/Persian Gulf, the conference in New Delhi had been postponed until November 1991. But before we could reconvene in November, Rajiv Gandhi himself (a former prime minister of India) was the victim of a special kind of assassination. In the West they talk about "the kiss of death." In India since Rajiv Gandhi's death they talk about the "garland of gunpowder." There was a bomb in the flowers surrounding the woman-assassin. The bomb killed her as well as Rajiv Gandhi. Did he belong to the same gallery of martyrs as Malcolm X, Martin Luther King Jr., and Tom Mboya - martyrs to social justice? Personally, I do believe Rajiv Gandhi did so belong. As Prime Minister he would probably have prevented the destruction of the mosque at Ayodhya and saved hundreds of Indian lives. But Rajiv needed more time to mature as a politician. He was cut short.

What do you do when you are invited to pay homage to a Head of State whom you admire but at a time when his government is in a bitter dispute with the entire academic community of his country? That is the dilemma I faced when I was invited to a special ceremony in Abuja, Nigeria, intended to pay tribute to President Ibrahim Babangida in August 1992. I wrote back to say that while I greatly admired many of the tough decisions which President Babangida had had to make since he became Head of State, it would not be appropriate for me to participate in a

special event to pay tribute to him at a time when his Government was virtually at war with the academic community of Nigeria. I did hope that President Babangida would understand. I had met him a couple of months earlier in Dakar, and he had been very gracious (as usual)!

On the other hand, in the course of the 1992 year, I did also hear by mail from one of the rebel military officers who had tried to overthrow Babangida in April 1990. My correspondent is widely regarded as having been the brain behind the attempted coup (the "Godfather"). The officer had once been my graduate student at the University of Jos, in Nigeria. I liked him very much, and I was quite astonished when he was implicated in the attempted coup in 1990. But Nigerians have a record of letting bygones be bygones. I do hope that my former student at Jos (now in exile) buries the hatchet with his former Commander-in-Chief, President Babangida. They are both Nigerians of considerable talent, who should address their skills to the problems of their country in the remaining years of the twentieth century.

I was so pleased that an African - Boutros Boutros-Ghali - was elected Secretary-General of the United Nations. As fellow academic Africanists, Boutros-Ghali and I had known each other since the 1960s. And when I was doing my television series, The Africans, in the 1980s, Boutros-Ghali gave me an extensive interview as Egypt's Minister of State for Foreign Affairs in Cairo.

It was not until the summit meeting in Senegal of the Organization of African Unity in 1992 that I was able to congratulate Boutros-Ghali personally on his election as U.N. Secretary-General. I also congratulated him on looking so young when he was some ten years older than me. He put his finger vertically on his mouth to command that I kept his secret!! We both laughed!

He may turn out to be a stronger Secretary-General than anybody since Dag Hammarskjöld. I am in agreement with him about most issues concerning Somalia. I think he is less tough on Bosnia. I salute him for his courage so far but not always for his judgement. He is wrong on Bosnia. He may also be wrong on Iraq.

In December 1992 I addressed the Second Committee of the United Nations on issues connected with development and economic recovery. I was astonished to learn that I was the first African to address the Second Committee in this new decade. Even more astonishing was the discovery that I was putting Africa more firmly on the agenda of the United Nations' Second Committee.

My address to the Second Committee of the UN provoked responses from delegations as diverse as the People's Republic of

China, Sierra Leone, Australia, and Algeria. The debates were wide-ranging.

The Ontario Institute for Studies in Education invited me to be one of the Keynote speakers at a conference which was originally intended to be an exercise in Sino-Canadian relations. What then was an African scholar doing there? Although Sino-Canadian relations were still central, the concept of the conference expanded to encompass the theme "Knowledge Across Cultures: Universities East and West." This brought in Africa, India, Islam and other intellectual traditions. My own address was on, "The Challenge of Cultural Dependency: An African View."

The most distinguished Chinese speaker had been flown in especially from Beijing for a couple of days - and needed to be back in Beijing soon after for some high-powered consultations on national policy. Her presentation to the conference in Toronto was in impressively fluent English, to the relief of those of us who were ignorant of Chinese! We look forward to a follow-up conference in China itself in 1994. It is a real possibility.

Religion, History and Democracy

At a conference on Post-Marxian thought in Kuala Lumpur in Malaysia, I gave a lecture on, "Islam and the Debate about the End of History." Did Islam constitute the end of religious history? I also lectured at Penang University. The reaction from Muslim Malaysians was more clearly supportive of my thesis than was the reaction of some of the other members of my audience. Particularly memorable in Penang was the gracious time and hospitality extended by the non-Muslim Deputy Vice-Chancellor Dr. Ratnam (equivalent to Provost in the U.S.A.), who personally showed me some of the sights and drove me to the airport at the end of my visit. He was an old friend.

In the capital city Kuala Lumpur I was officially received by the Minister of Finance of the Government of Malaysia - an exceptionally sophisticated intellectual in his own right. The Minister showed familiarity with my TV series, The Africans: A Triple Heritage, and discussed with me the possibility of another TV series on The World of Islam.

The sponsors of my visit to Malaysia were primarily a cultural movement called Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka (committed to language and culture) and centered in Kuala Lumpur.

At Ohio State University (O.S.U.) later in the year I lectured on, "The Black Experience and the Debate about the End of History." Some of the issues had also been touched upon in my address in the Bahamas in August on, "The Black Holocaust: 500 Years of Resistance." Fukuyama and Columbus had converged in our

preoccupations in 1992. Dean Isaac Mowoe's annual conferences on Africa at O.S.U. in Columbus were becoming one of the major Africanist events of the year in the United States as a whole. The O.S.U. conferences have certainly been star-studded. This year the stars included President Niara Sudarkasa of Lincoln University, Pennsylvania, for the whole period of the conference.

My lecture on higher education at the University of Lesotho, in Roma, and my lecture on democratization in Africa at Maseru, Lesotho, made no reference to either Francis Fukuyama or Christopher Columbus. But the issues of capitalism and democracy cast their shadow on our deliberations. We had lively debates.

Lesotho itself was at the time confronted with, "A Tale of Two Kings." King Moshoeshoe II had been deposed by the military and temporarily exiled to Britain. His son had agreed to succeed not because he was against his father but because he wanted to safeguard the institution of the monarchy. By the time I arrived in Lesotho in September 1992 the father had insisted on coming back home - partly to reclaim his throne. I was separately received by both kings - father and son. The issue was still unresolved. I tried my best to be neutral, inspite of the fact that I had known King Moshoeshoe II (the father) when he was in exile in London. I prayed for a happy resolution of this Royal Tale of Two Kings. Both were exceptionally attractive personalities.

I was privileged to be the keynote speaker at the annual convention of the Uganda-America Association of the State of New York. The meeting was held in New Jersey. I thought the convention would be a modest one of less than one hundred Ugandans. To my pleasant astonishment, some six hundred Ugandans from different parts of the United States turned up. The topic assigned to me by the organizers was "Prospects for Democracy and Development in Uganda." There were royalists, republicans and radicals at the conference.

"Democracy and Development" more widely in Africa was my theme at Carleton University in Ottawa, Canada, sponsored by the Ghana Association of Ottawa and the African Students Association. And at the Harvard Center for International Affairs in Cambridge, Massachusetts, my seminar was on "Explaining Patterns of Liberalization in Africa," a subject I was later to address also in a paper commissioned by the Friedrich Naumann Foundation of the Federal Republic of Germany.

Democracy and liberalization followed me to other audiences as well. Mine was the second Copeland Lecture of the Institute of African Affairs, Washington D.C. (The first Copeland Lecture was given by Robert McNamara, former President of the World Bank and former U.S. Secretary of Defense). My own topic in 1992 was "Planning for Democracy and Development: The African

Experience."

At the 1992 summit meeting in Dakar of the Organization of African Unity, two African Foreign Ministers (one from Southern Africa and the other from North Africa) asked me if it was really true that I was going to lead the Islamic Party of Kenya (IPK). The North African Foreign Minister who asked me that question was none other than that of the Republic of Algeria. His President had at that time just been assassinated. My reply to the Foreign Ministers was that there was no foundation to the rumour that I was about to lead the IPK in a bid for political office in Kenya. But how did the rumour arise?

When I was in Tanzania and Kenya in May and early June 1992 I argued publicly that religious parties like the Islamic Party of Kenya had a right to exist in a pluralistic society provided those parties accepted the rules of the democratic process. Since the Kenya Government had refused to register the IPK as a legitimate party, my statement in defense of democratic religious parties made me an instant hero of supporters of IPK. I was due to give a public lecture in Mombasa a few days later on the wider theme of relations between Africa and the Arab world. Public interest in my forthcoming lecture rapidly escalated - not only from mouth to mouth but also from mosque to mosque. Hundreds if not thousands of people were expected to turn up for it. The Kenya government panicked. They banned my lecture. For the second year in succession I was prevented by the Government from giving a lecture in my own hometown.

The executive committee of the Islamic Party of Kenya fuelled speculation further by coming to see me <u>en bloc</u> at my hotel in Mombasa. Had they come to ask me to lead them into the Kenyan national elections? In reality they came for consultation and advice, rather than to ask me to lead them. But the local Press in Kenya and the British Broadcasting Corporation in London started speculating. That is how the rumour found its way into the informal conversations of African Foreign Ministers at the O.A.U. Summit meeting in Dakar.

While the Kenya Government has not permitted me to lecture there in recent times, it has ironically permitted me to hold Press conferences in Nairobi to protest about being silenced. I have reached larger audiences through the Press conferences of protest than I ever would have through the banned lectures.

An additional thing has happened. I have accepted an invitation from <u>The Sunday Nation</u> newspaper in Nairobi to resume a role I once used to play for them - writing feature articles from time to time on issues of interest to East Africans. In 1992 they published an average of one article per month from me.

1992 also witnessed my return to Arusha, Tanzania, to attend

a conference jointly sponsored by the National Chamber of Commerce of Tanzania and Friedrich-Naumann-Stiftung Foundation. My own paper for Arusha was entitled "The Liberal Revival, Privatization and the Market: Africa's Cultural Contradictions." A version of the paper is appearing in the Cornell Journal of International Law. In the course of my stay in Tanzania I was interviewed for both radio and the print media. To Tanzanian audiences my two most controversial statements were, firstly, that the country's policy of ujamaa (African socialism) pursued since 1967 had been a "heroic failure;" and secondly, that religiously-based political parties were legitimate provided they accepted the democratic rules of the game. This second statement of mine from Arusha was also picked up by the Press in Kenya in the middle of a national debate as to whether the Islamic Party of Kenya was to be officially registered.

Black Suffering and Reparations

"The beginning of wisdom is to know who you are. Draw near and listen. Long before slave-days we lived in one huge village called Africa. And then strangers came and took some of us away....Today we are scattered so widely that the sun never sets on the descendants of Africa. The world is our village; and we plan to make it more human between now and the day after tomorrow."

Those were the concluding words of my television series, The Africans: A Triple Heritage (BBC and PBS, 1986). Slavery was the mechanism of the African dispersal. But is Africa owed reparations and compensation for that entire traumatic experience? In June 1992 I and eleven others were officially enpanelled ("sworn in") as members of a Group of Eminent Persons appointed by the Organization of African Unity to explore the modalities and strategies of an African campaign for restitution similar to the compensation paid by the Federal Republic of Germany to the State of Israel and to survivors of the Nazi Holocaust.

The ceremony which enpanelled us took place in Dakar, Senegal, before the Heads of State of Africa at the O.A.U. summit meeting. In the Chair was President Ibrahim Babangida of Nigeria. After the "swearing in" our Group of Eminent Persons (GEP) held its first meeting also in Dakar. Our first visitor (who provided us with a photo opportunity) was veteran liberation fighter, Nelson Mandela from South Africa. Our first witness before our committee was veteran civil rights fighter, Jesse Jackson from the United States. As a reparations committee, our work in Dakar in June 1992 was mainly symbolic and supportive. But we did choose the main officers of our own committee. We elected as our Chairman Chief Bashorun M.K.O. Abiola, the Nigerian publishing magnet and crusader for African reparations.

We elected as Co-Chair Professor Amadou Mahtar M'Bow, former Director-General of UNESCO. And we elected Ambassador Dudley J. Thompson, Jamaica's High Commissioner to Nigeria, as the Rapporteur-General of the GEP.

It was not until the GEP's second official meeting in Abuja, Nigeria, in September 1992 that we began to address more substantive issues of reparations for Africa's enslavement and colonization. We met with the Nigerian Head of State again, and he contributed $500,000 to our preliminary budget as a committee. We have only just begun our work. Who is to pay reparations? Who is to be beneficiary? In what form should it be paid - money, service, debt-forgiveness, or other? Does the crusade stand a real chance of success?

Members of the GEP like myself can so far attempt to answer only the last. We would not be serving on the committee if we were not convinced that it was a viable campaign over a long period. But just as the campaign against slavery and the slave-trade took generations before it prevailed, the new campaign for reparations for that enslavement may take at least a generation. This GEP can only prepare the ground work for the next stage of the campaign.

In the course of the year I included the issue of reparations in a number of public lectures I gave. Particularly appropriate was my lecture in the Bahamas where Christopher Columbus first landed. My hosts were a Pan-African organization in the Western Hemisphere called Caribbean African American Dialogue - describing its membership as "survivors of the middle passage." At the conference I met people of African descent not only from the West Indies and North America, but also from such Latin American countries as Venezuela, Costa Rica, Brazil and Nicaragua. My keynote address was on the theme of the conference - "The Black Holocaust: 500 Years of Resistance."

I also discussed the issue of "Black Holocaust" or "African Reparations" at major presentations at Ohio State University, Cornell University, Old Dominion University, University of Georgia, University of Lesotho in Southern Africa, and on radio interviews and talk shows.

I have sometimes got into trouble in Jewish circles in the United States for using terms like "Black Holocaust." In a lecture in Columbus, Ohio, I tried to put this debate in a wider context. I discussed what I called "the dual plagiarism" in Jewish-Black verbal heritage. The Jews borrowed from the Greek language the word "DIASPORA," meaning dispersion. The Africans have since borrowed from the Jewish experience the word "DIASPORA" to describe a comparable condition of dispersal.

Similarly, the Jews borrowed from the Greek language the

word "HOLOCAUST" - connoting destruction by fire. The Africans have more recently borrowed from Jewish experience the same word "HOLOCAUST" (though not necessarily with a capital H). This borrowing from borrowers without attribution is what I call "the dual plagiarism." But this plagiarism is defensible because the vocabulary of horrors like genocide and enslavement should not be subject to copyright-restrictions.

Yet there are Jews who believe that it is all right for the Jews to borrow from the Greeks such words as "DIASPORA" and "HOLOCAUST," but not all right for Blacks to borrow the same concepts from the Jews. The Jews are particularly possessive about the concept of Holocaust - insisting that it must be uniquely Jewish. Yes, when the concept is from Greek to Jew - but No if it is from Jew to Black.

Some of you may remember that I wrote a short paper entitled "Multiculturalism and Comparative Holocaust" as an appendix to a syllabus review report of the State of New York. The main report of our Syllabus Review and Development Committee was entitled One Nation, Many Peoples: A Declaration of Cultural Interdependence. The subtitle of the full report was proposed by me and accepted by my colleagues.

The full report was bound to be controversial anyhow. But even more controversial in some New York circles was my appendix, pleading that the word "holocaust" should not be reserved for the Jewish experience but should be applicable to such catastrophes as the genocide against Native Americans and the brutal enslavement of Africans.

In 1991 there were demands that I should be dismissed from my job as a professor at the State University of New York at Binghamton. In 1992 there were renewed demands that my appendix on "Comparative Holocaust" should be expunged from the official report of the Syllabus Review Committee. The Weisenthal Centre urged the Board of Regents of the State of New York to "reject" the appendix on the grounds that any denial of Jewish uniqueness was a denial of the very diversity and multiculturalism which our Syllabus Report sought to promote.

To the best of my knowledge, my appendix has not been expunged from the Report. Nor have I been dismissed from my job. The voices of intolerance and censorship have not so far prevailed.

Zionism and I

An Israeli student came into my office at Binghamton in 1992 and asked me to write a reference for submission to graduate programmes and law schools on her behalf. She confessed that

some of her friends had expressed surprise that she wanted the most outspoken campus critic of Israel as one of her referees. Please remember that this was not a pro-Israeli American Jewish student. She was a foreign student from Israel itself. But she had decided that I was the kind of teacher who would not confuse my attitude to Israeli policies with my evaluation of my students, wherever they came from. Of course she was right. She was confident enough about herself to be able to trust a critic of her country.

While the overwhelming majority of Jewish students on campus continue to trust me (as indicated by those who enroll in my courses) there have been Zionist extremists in 1992 who wanted to incite people against me. When Professor Leonard Jeffries came to give a lecture at Binghamton University, many local Jews were alarmed. After all, Jeffries (an African-American scholar) was on record as a major proponent of the thesis that Western Jews were much bigger participants as financiers of the trans-Atlantic slave trade than had been adequately acknowledged. But what had Jeffries' visit to Binghamton campus got to do with me?

The ultra-Zionists on campus held a meeting very close to my office at which I was described as a "cancer in our community....a man who compares Israel's defending its right to exist to the Nazi regime....We fully expect President DeFleur [of Binghamton University] to assist us in having Mazrui removed from his position."

An anonymous caller telephoned my unlisted home number and left a message advising me not to attend Leonard Jeffries' lecture that evening. When I told a concerned graduate student that I had every intention of attending the Jeffries lecture, and refused to call the University Security to protect me, the concerned graduate student took the initiative to assemble several other graduate students to accompany me to the lecture hall. The bodyguard took me completely by surprise! I nearly refused to go to Jeffries' lecture because of the bodyguard! But that would have been a surrender to those who did not want me to go. What a dilemma! In the end I did attend Leonard Jeffries' lecture. He fuelled the suspicions of the ultra-Zionists by making repeated polite acknowledgements to my presence in the audience. Fortunately the Jeffries lecture did not result in the kind of Black/Jewish clash which many people had feared. Indeed, Leonard Jeffries tried to be quite conciliatory to the Jewish members of the audience, without surrendering his intentions to pursue further research into the Jewish role in the trans-Atlantic slave trade.

Later in the year I gave a lecture at Old Dominion University in Virginia. Again the local ultra-Zionist organization tried to arouse the hostility of the local press against me. Material was distributed about what I had said in

the past about Israel. Local Jewish leaders were invited by the president of the university to a special colloquium before my main lecture. Local Jewish leaders were also invited to the Presidential Banquet before my lecture. This Jewish leadership also attended my main lecture on "Race and Religion in the New World Order." Inspite of the efforts of the ultra-Zionists, no major cleavage emerged at Old Dominion either between Jew and Black or between Jew and Muslim.

From a Zionist point of view, my more controversial lecture was given earlier in 1992 at the University of Michigan on the theme "Apartheid is Dying, but Zionism Persists." The thesis was that both Zionism and apartheid had been ideologies of macro-segregation - creating a Jewish state separate from Arabs, and a white state separate from Blacks. The separatist ambition of white South Africans is in the process of collapsing. The separatist ambition of Jews to maintain a distinct "homeland" from Palestinians is still powerful. Both forms of "macro-segregation" have inevitably entailed a degree of what is now called "ethnic cleansing" - sometimes taking the form of outright collective deportation of groups or population transfers. (When I gave the lecture in Michigan I had no idea that the Israeli government would be deporting more than 400 Palestinians before the end of the year in defiance of international law and world opinion).

But how much of my sense of outrage against apartheid is due to my being Black? How much of my anger against Israel comes from my being Muslim or from my Arab blood? Who can ever know about such matters? Is every Jewish critic of Nazism primarily outraged as a Jew first and foremost? Or is there a human sensibility which transcends the feelings of being victim?

The Shadow of Soyinka

Can I have Arab blood and still be an African? One distinguished African who did not seem to think so was Wole Soyinka, the Nigerian Nobel Laureate in Literature. In an article in Transition magazine (Oxford University Press, U.S.A., No. 54, 1991), Soyinka declared that my television series, The Africans: A Triple Heritage "was not a series made by a black African." Elsewhere in print and on the radio he kept on referring to my Arab ancestry.

In my reply in Transition No. 57, I have reminded Soyinka that his own ethnic group, the Yoruba, have a myth of ancestry which traces Yoruba origins to Mecca in Arabia; and that the word Yoruba and the word Arab may be etymologically linked. "The Arab side of Mazrui's ancestry goes back to the Sultanate of Oman hundreds of years ago. Parts of Oman were once ruled by a dynasty called the Yaaruba. Soyinka and Mazrui may yet discover

a level of shared genealogical fraternity that neither of them suspected before they decided to challenge each other to this deadly duel...."

In my reply I went on to argue that Soyinka's standards of racial purity would dis-Africanize or deprive of Black identity the late president of Angola Agostinho Neto, the present president of Ghana Jerry Rawlings, the former Prime Minister of Jamaica Michael Manley, the retired justice of the U.S. Supreme Court Thurgood Marshall, as well as such great Pan-Africanists as W.E.B. DuBois, Malcolm X, Frantz Fanon, Denis Brutus and a host of others. All of these, and millions more, were racially mixed.

Why is Wole Soyinka taking us down this dangerous path of racial quantification and genetic explanation? What happened to the Soyinka who exclaimed in a poem published in 1972 ("Ujamaa") "Earth is all people?"

Alongside my latest reply in Transition No. 57 entitled "The Dual Memory: Genetic and Factual", Soyinka has published what he calls, "A Footnote to a Satanic Trilogy." This time his accusations against me are even more startling! He accuses me of trying to incite Northern Nigerian Muslims against him!! On what evidence does he make these "diabolical" charges? You may have to read Transition No. 57. Needless to say, the charges have no foundation whatsoever. Nor do I regard Nigerian Muslims as fanatics waiting to be incited, though I do recognize that Nigeria as a whole has a sectarian problem.

In case you are concerned about this blood-letting between two African intellectual elders, I have written a letter to Wole offering an olive branch. But that would only work if he stopped making false charges against me in public.

The debate between Soyinka and Mazrui generated sufficient interest (and pain) in the academic profession that The Chronicle of Higher Education in the U.S.A. carried a report about it on December 9, 1992 - describing it as "The Battle of the Titans"!! The Transition phase of the battle is now over. I hope Soyinka and I soon return to the normality which once characterized our relationship. We could be friends and serve our people better.

The Seattle Salute

One opportunity for a reconciliation which was missed was at the 1992 annual meetings of the African Studies Association of the United States. A "conference within a conference" was organized. The mini-conference consisted of four panels (about fifteen papers) on the works of Ali A. Mazrui! The event was an enormous tribute in anticipation of my 60th birthday in February 1993. However, the papers were not intended to be praise-songs.

On the contrary, some of them were highly critical - in some cases generating angry exchanges. Perhaps within this format the Soyinka-Mazrui disagreements could have bee thrashed out with less personalized passion than in the pages of a magazine. Wole Soyinka was originally scheduled to come to the conference - but subsequently decided against it.

Those who did participate in the mini-conference on Mazrui at the A.S.A. annual meetings came from diverse disciplines - literature, history, philosophy, banking, law, television-production, classics, sociology as well as political science. The most explosive issue was on gender. Did Ali Mazrui as a man have a right to discuss women in his academic work? This was the sub-text of one of the critiques. My reply was based on two principles. First, I regarded the empowerment of women as fundamental to the survival of the human species, as I had indicated as far back as The African Condition (1979) and A World Federation of Cultures (1976). Secondly I do regard the study of Africa as incomplete without the study of African women. In any case, if the empowerment of women is relevant to the very survival of the human species, the issue is too important to be entrusted to only one gender. It can certainly not be entrusted to men on their own. We all have a stake in human survival. So I reiterated emphatically in that heated exchange in Seattle between me and the distinguished West African feminist.

After the exchange a number of other women came to lend support to my spirited defense. A number of them agreed with me that the struggle for the empowerment of women did require an alliance between genuinely progressive men and women. On the other hand, one distinguished Ghanaian feminist was very frosty towards me after the gender session. She seemed more offended than was the Nigerian feminist with whom I had directly clashed.

But when all was said and done, both my critics and my supporters at the A.S.A. conference in Seattle paid me a supreme compliment by their participation in those four panels. And my former Makerere student, now at Holy Cross College, Professor Hussein M. Adam, and my colleague at Binghamton, Professor Omari H. Kokole, are to be congratulated on their immense organizational and coordinating efforts, jointly with the African Studies Association (A.S.A.) and its programme officers.

It was purely by coincidence that it was also in 1992 that I was successful in raising $50,000 for the Association. As a former president of the A.S.A., I had been asked to help in their fund-raising campaign. In September 1992 I was in Nigeria, and spent some time with Chief Bashorun M.K.O. Abiola, the owner of the Concord newspapers and publications. He took me to his home and introduced me to both his first wife and his fourth, both exceptionally powerful personalities.

Upon my return to the United States it suddenly occurred to me that Chief Abiola was the type of person who could respond to an appeal from the African Studies Association of the United States. I wrote to him explaining the importance of the Association as a bridge between African scholars and U.S. scholars, and emphasizing how vital it was that Africa be understood in the United States.

I then faxed my plea to Chief Abiola. You can imagine my astonishment when within little more than twenty-four hours I received a phone call at home from Chief Abiola. "What is your bank account number?" he snapped!! I reached for my cheque book and dictated the number to him. Before long my bank account was $50,000 richer. It was an unfamiliar feeling, but it was also a very brief experience. The money was soon transferred to the African Studies Association!

When Chief Abiola's first wife died soon after, he phoned me personally at home to let me know. I was deeply saddened. At the African Studies Presidential Banquet of 1992 in Seattle I proposed a minute of silence in honour of the late Mrs. Abiola. It was in solidarity with a great Nigerian woman and in sympathy with her distinguished family. I remembered my conversation with her in her home when I was a guest of Chief Abiola's in September 1992. May her soul rest in paradise. Amen.

Somalia: Pan-Africanism and Pan-Islam

I was involved during the year with raising money for Somalia in its hour of crisis. At a fund raising banquet in Philadelphia, sponsored mainly by African-American Muslims (Masjidu'Llah, Philadelphia), I was the main speaker and boxer Muhammad Ali ("The Greatest") was the Guest of Honour. My lecture was a mixture of academic explanations of Somalia's crisis and an impassioned appeal for "putting Somali society back on its feet." Thanks to Muhammad Ali's presence, to the efforts of the organizers, to my own impassioned appeal, and to the generous responsiveness of the diners, we managed to raise about $16,000 that night for Somalia. This was a triumph for three forms of solidarity - Pan Africanism, Pan-Islam and human solidarity.

Also exciting for me was simply spending about six or seven hours in the company of the most exciting boxer of all time. Since Muhammad Ali's face is one of instant recognition, we attracted a lot of attention in the streets of Philadelphia and at the railway station. On one occasion, in the hotel lobby, I was standing alone with the great boxer. Other hotel guests assumed that I was either Ali's uncle or secretary, or agent, or bodyguard! They came to me to ask for permission to be photographed with Ali. I consulted Ali - and then I gave

permission with all the authority of Ali's uncle or agent! Hundreds of photographs were taken of Ali and with Ali that evening!

He kept on distributing autographed brochures about Islam to the hotel-guests. Ali has become a missionary for his religion. He did missionary work of distributing autographed Islamic leaflets also at the Philadelphia railway station. Perhaps conscious of the fact that Malcolm X was converted to Islam when he was imprisoned, Muhammad Ali's weekly routine these days includes missionary visits to prisons in different American cities. I was most impressed.

At one o'clock in the morning Muhammad Ali wanted to be taken to a house in which he had lived in the 1960s. The elegant house probably now had white residents. I must say I was less than comfortable with the idea of four Black men turning up in a white neighborhood at one o'clock in the morning, uninvited. I remembered the visiting Japanese student in 1992, who had gone to a house early in the evening to ask if that was where a Halloween party was being held. He was shot dead as a result! That was early evening, the student was Japanese! In our case, the time was 1 a.m., and we were four black men in a white area! I did not like the scenario!

However, we did decide to humour Ali. We took him along memory lane to his house of the 1960s. I held my breath. But Allah was on our side. The white folks slept peacefully while the Black folks examined their home from the outside. Alhamdu li Llah. The white folks did not have to call the police - as they would have been justified in doing in the circumstances.

One other memorable fund-raising event for Somalia was at Cornell University, this time sponsored by an organization called MECA (Muslim Educational and Cultural Association). The leaders in the effort were Muslim students at Cornell. I was their main speaker. I am not sure how much money they managed to raise in the end, but their target was also several thousand dollars for Somalia.

Less direct forms of my support for Somalia came through media interviews (newspapers, television and radio). Perhaps one of the most memorable of these was my being interviewed long-distance by the Australian Broadcasting Commission. I was in Binghamton, New York, and my interviewers were in Sydney, Australia. Two events had triggered off considerable Australian interest in the Black world - one was indeed the crisis in Somalia and the other was Spike Lee's film on Malcolm X. The Australians interviewed me on both Somalia and Malcolm X, whom I happened to have met in 1961 in New York City and with whom I had once discussed religion and race.

In Search of Omani Roots

I still cannot believe that it has taken me until the eve of my 60th year to visit the Sultanate of Oman. This Sultanate constitutes the Arab side of my mixed Afro-Arab ancestry. How could I have delayed for so long my visit to it? I have been trying to psychoanalyze myself. Clearly mine has not been an attempt to suppress the Arab side of my ancestry - otherwise I would not have retained the name Mazrui as my Western-style surname. Since my Swahili culture allows me the option of using my father's name (Al'Amin) as the family name, why did I adopt the clan name (Mazrui) for a surname? (A few other members of the family chose to drop the Mazrui clan name.)

If I had adopted Al'Amin, that would have declared by being Muslim but not my being Arab. But I decided to use the clan name Mazrui - which is a clan which has been of Afro-Arabian significance. Those Mazrui who were in Africa were indeed definitely African, but with Arab relationships.

I still have no adequate answer as to why my visit to the Sultanate of Oman was so late in my life. But I am deeply grateful that it has happened at last. It was absolutely wonderful, and was pre-eminently due to the initiative of my friend Khamis Al-Hashar in 1992. Khamis is an Omani who was partly educated in Kenya in the 1950s. He embraced it as a personal mission to (a) introduce Ali Mazrui to Muscat and Oman and (b) to introduce this African Mazrui to the people of Oman, including the Mazrui of Oman.

In Muscat I gave a lecture on "Afrabia: Africa and the Arabs in the New World Order." There was short-circuit television to accommodate the large audience which had turned up for the lecture. The whole experience was a remarkable example of the political culture and the political economy of Afro-Arab relations from a Gulf perspective.

During my brief stay in Oman I was repeatedly exposed to the interplay between Arab culture and Swahili culture. Shopkeepers could unexpectedly negotiate with a customer in Kiswahili out of the blue. Policemen giving directions would suddenly break out in Kiswahili instead of Arabic. Clearly there had been considerable migration and cultural contact between Oman and East Africa over the centuries. Recent immigrants to Oman include some first cousins and nieces of mine from Mombasa, Kenya. In Muscat my relatives entertained me lavishly.

I met two retired Omani ambassadors who captured the historic interaction between East Africa and Oman. Farid Hinai (alias Hinawy) was born in Mombasa, and was a playmate of mine when we were children. He lived to become, first, Kenya's

ambassador to Zaire and later, Omani's ambassador to the People's Republic of China. I met him both in Kinshasa, Zaire, and in Beijing, China, when he was ambassador of the Republic of Kenya and the Sultanate of Oman respectively. And in 1992 we were briefly reunited in Muscat.

The other retired Omani ambassador I met in Muscat was Ahmed Humud Al-Maamiry who was born in the old Sultanate of Zanzibar (now part of Tanzania), became politically influential in Zanzibar, subsequently migrated to Oman and served as Omani Ambassador to India. He wrote a number of books and pamphlets, including some on Oman's relations with East Africa. He held a lunch in my honour in his home in Muscat. He said he planned to spend more time in Zanzibar and Pemba now that he had retired. Unfortunately he died before the end of the year.

During my visit to Oman I was taken to the Mazrui villages and townships, and introduced as a member of the African branch of the family. Six goats and lambs were killed for lunch in my honour. I was profoundly moved by the local enthusiasm for a returning relative and was deeply impressed by the lavish hospitality of these Omani kindred. Was I Alex Haley in reverse - an African re-discovering the non-African part of his origins? Among my Omani kith and kin I was accepted as a "Mazrui" (pronounced in a more Arabized way). But in dress, speech, manners, looks, and sense of bewilderment, no one was left in any doubt that I was an African Mazrui!

In my ancestry, was I a Muslim before I became an Arab? I am curious to know whether, in my genealogy, my Islamicity is older than my Arabness. Was my first Muslim ancestor an Arab or an African? Was my first Muslim ancestor the first Omani in my genealogy? Or was it an Islamized Mdigo in Kenya or someone from among the Mijikenda of Mombasa? How does one do research about these origins? My African side might have been Islamized before mixing genes with Omanis. After all, there were Africans who were Islamized before they intermarried with the Arabs. All I now realize more clearly than ever is that all Mazrui are a bridge between East Africa and the Arabian Gulf, hopefully a bridge of solidarity between two Third World regions.

My visit to the United Arab Emirates (U.A.E.) next door was less of a pilgrimage since I had been there before. But I got more media coverage in the U.A.E. than in Oman, and was entertained to lunch by the Emir of Sharjah, His Highness Sheikh Sultan bin Mohammed Al-Qasimi, member of the U.A.E. Supreme Council. His Highness has a PhD from a British University and has published scholarly works in English as well as Arabic. Our discussions were scholarly and wide-ranging. Elsewhere in the U.A.E. I gave a seminar to the Cultural Club of Dubai. My U.A.E. patrons included the Cultural Association of Dubai and the distinguished elder, Mr. Seif Al-Ghurair. My deepest gratitude

to them all.

Towards Global Multi-Culturalism

I continued as Director of the Institute of Global Cultural Studies at Binghamton University. But the work of the Institute was still impossible to separate from the work of the Albert Schweitzer Chair in the Humanities, which I occupy. The Schweitzer Professor's global activities still constitute a disproportionate share of the international work of the Institute. Even the joint colloquium with the Braudel Center at Binghamton on "Culture and the World System" began as a Schweitzer Chair joint project.

But thanks to the planning strategies developed, firstly by Dr. Abdalla S. Bujra and Dr. Omari H. Kokole and more recently by Dr. Parviz Morewedge, new Institute activities more independent of the Schweitzer Chair are now being developed. In 1992 these included the publication of the Institute's first Research Papers, and the sponsoring of an ambitious conference on "Multicultural Intellectual Traditions in Africa, the Middle East and Ancient Greece" which we decided to hold in New York City with the help of the Middle East Institute of Columbia University.

From 1992 the Binghamton Institute of Global Cultural Studies also started co-sponsoring The Journal of Neoplatonic Studies. Dr. Diana Frank continued to explore the possibility of a new TV series involving the Institute. The theme of the new series could be either "The World of Islam" or "The African Diaspora" or a synthesis of the two concepts.

With regard to the TV project about Islam, we have been in touch with Muslims and Islamicists in such diverse countries as Malaysia, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, United Arab Emirates, Sultanate of Oman, Turkey, Nigeria, the People's Republic of China, as well as Islamic scholars in the Western world. But obviously this is just the beginning. These are still ideas on the drawing board.

My own contacts in the African Diaspora are the most immediate in Black America and in the English-speaking Caribbean. But I have also had some exposure to the African Diaspora in parts of the Arab world. Again this is a project in formation - still very tentative indeed. If you have ideas about funding, please help us.

Even in our brief life-span our Institute of Global Cultural Studies at Binghamton has already produced one alumnus who nearly became President of a country! Dr. A. Adu Boahen was a visiting professor at our Institute, then went back to Ghana to agitate for the restoration of multiparty democracy, helped to form a

political movement, and was then promoted as his party's presidential candidate. In the hotly contested electoral campaign in Ghana in 1992, Adu Boahen lost to the incumbent Head of State, Jerry Rawlings. (However, not everybody agrees that Rawlings won fairly. Many Ghanaians believe that the real winner was indeed Adu Boahen).

One alumnus of our Institute continues to shy away from a high-profile political appointment in his own country. Dr. Jonah Isawa Elaigwu is still a professor at the University of Jos in Nigeria. However, his scholarly expertise on federalism has found a very practical application in his additional job as official peace-maker in intergovernmental disputes within Nigeria (disputes between local, state and federal levels of authority). He was appointed to this crucial role by the President of Nigeria. It was wonderful to catch up with Jonah Elaigwu and his family when I was in Nigeria in September.

In 1992 we sent to the publishers at last Volume VIII of the UNESCO General History of Africa. The help of A. Adu Boahen, President of the International Scientific Committee of the project, was indeed crucial. We hope to see this final volume published in 1993 at long last.

But as my work as editor of this immense Africa volume came to an end, I have been asked to edit another volume in a series on the history of Islam, commissioned by the Oxford Centre for Islamic Studies, University of Oxford, England. While the eight volumes of the UNESCO General History of Africa took well over twenty years to complete, the volumes of the Oxford History of Islam will no doubt be completed in less than half that time. The Oxford editorial machinery and bureaucracy is far less cumbersome than was that of the UNESCO General History of Africa.

Although I was no longer a member of the World Bank's Council of African Advisors, I continued to be involved in some of the Bank's new concerns about governance and culture. I was invited by the magazine Finance and Development (World Bank and IMF publication) to contribute an article. I submitted a piece on, "The Economic Woman in Africa." Since the magazine is published in a dozen languages, this piece of Mazruiana is already available in languages which range from Japanese to Spanish! (Alas, no Swahili edition yet!). In addition, I maintained working relationships with such old friends at the World Bank as Dunstan Wai and Ismail Serageldin.

In the course of 1992 I was involved with a number of events connected with syllabus review, diversity and multiculturalism. In the United States I am a member of two minorities - racial (I am Black) and religious (I am a Muslim). Are Blacks and Muslims fairly portrayed in syllabi and curricula in the United States? The Council on Muslim Education in California invited me to join

them in discussions with American publishers about how Islam and Muslim history are portrayed in U.S. text books. The idea was to help the publishers and U.S. education towards a more accurate and less stereotypical presentation of the Islamic experience and the World of Islam. It was the beginning of what we hope would be a continuing dialogue with publishers. Earlier I also participated in a fund-raising event sponsored by the San Francisco Muslim Community, partly with Muslim education in mind.

Friends of the Broome County Public Library, who are themselves lovers of books, were curious to know why some books were hated. So they invited me to address them on Salman Rushdie's novel, The Satanic Verses. I described the novel as the most divisive book in world affairs since Adolf Hitler's Mein Kampf. When a report about my speech appeared in the local Binghamton newspaper, The Press and Sun-Bulletin, it provoked a sustained public debate in the correspondence columns, in the leader column, and with special features on the subject.

Earlier in the year the Canadian newspaper, The Toronto Star, commissioned me to write a feature article as part of a debate in the newspaper under the heading Salman Rushdie: The Last Hostage. My article for the Toronto newspaper coincided with the debate in Israel about whether there should be a public performance of Richard Wagner's opera Tannhäuser (1845) by the Israeli Philharmonic. Since 1948 the works of Wagner had been effectively banned off the stage in Israel because of Wagner's anti-Semitic views. Wagner died in 1883. Salman Rushdie is still alive, and yet many Westerners claim they do not know what all the Muslim fuss is about.

At the University of Wisconsin in Madison in June I addressed teachers at almost all levels of education on, "Afrocentricity and Multiculturalism: Are They Rival Paradigms of Education?" There was a conference at the University which involved teachers from other levels of education. My lecture was recorded.

I do not remember signing away the rights of the lecture, but a few months later I happened to hear the whole lecture on National Public Radio! At the end of the lecture the audio-cassette and transcript of the lecture were offered for sale! Although I will not have any share of that money, I am glad to know that my views on Afrocentricity and multiculturalism are reaching a wider audience.

At Binghamton later in the year I gave a lecture on a comparable theme to a gathering of Upstate New York regional network of faculty and staff of colour. And at the Smithsonian Institution's international conference in Washington D.C. to mark the Columbia Quincentenary, I spoke on "Global Africa in Flux: The Dialectic of Diversity in the Black World." My lecture was

sponsored by the National Museum of American History.

The Broome County Martin Luther King Jr. Commission hosted its second annual Martin Luther King Jr. dinner. I was the keynote speaker. My topic was, "Martin Luther King's Dream: Is it Approaching or Receding?" The evening was adequate rather than outstanding - but I was honoured by the central role given to me. The real drama happened a couple of weeks later when the main organizer of the evening MLK celebration just collapsed and died. Although not assassinated, Dorothy B. Garner died as suddenly as Martin Luther King Jr. had done a decade and a half earlier. May their souls rest peacefully in Africa's bosom. Amen.

At the University of Georgia, in Athens, my advice was sought on precisely the issues of multiculturalism and Afrocentricity. For a Friday evening, when there was a football game, I got a surprisingly large audience for a lecture by an African speaker. However, the subject was indeed "The World after the Cold War: An Afrocentric Perspective." We did so well that some faculty at the University of Georgia have expressed interest in a longer Mazrui visit. On the other hand, I have a lot to learn about Georgia and the South generally. Mutual need? Let us wait and see. I was so well received in October 1992 that a poem in my mother-tongue (Kiswahili) was specially composed in my honour. I was deeply moved.

Sentimental journeys of the year included my visit to my British alma mater, the University of Manchester where I got my Bachelor's degree in 1960. In May 1992 I participated in a special international symposium at Manchester on "Rethinking National and Collective Security after the Cold War." My friend and contemporary as an undergraduate, Burjor Avari, is still in the city of Manchester - but now as a senior lecturer at the Manchester Metropolitan University. He invited me to give two lectures at his own institution in the city. My reunion with Avari and his family, and the entire setting of the University of Manchester, unlocked the floodgates of undergraduate memories from the late 1950s. Burjor Avari's dedication to multicultural education in Britain had earned him the recognition of the British Queen, who awarded him the MBE (Member of the British Empire) in the 1980s at a special ceremony at Buckingham Palace.

My other British trip of 1992 was to the University of Bristol where I presented a paper at the Colston Research Society Research Symposium. The theme of the conference was "Language, Culture and Education." My own paper was on "Language in a Multicultural Context: The African Experience" (co-author Alamin M. Mazrui).

In 1992 I concluded my tenure as Andrew D. White Professor-at-Large of Cornell University - a six-year appointment which

began in 1986. My final week in residence at Cornell in that capacity included public lectures, discussions of The Africans: A Triple Heritage, informal interactions with students and faculty, and a star-studded farewell dinner. I am told that I was the first Black person to serve as Andrew D. White Professor-at-Large. If that is correct, it is more a criticism of Cornell than a compliment to me. I hope Cornell will now respond more actively to all that Black talent available in the wider world.

Nevertheless, I remain deeply indebted to Cornell University for the tribute it paid me with this particular appointment. More over, it would not have happened without the support and solidarity of the Africana Studies and Research Center and without the support of my old and dear friend, Locksley Edmondson (who later became Director of the Africana Center). Salute to you all!

Although I have now ceased to be Andrew D. White Professor-at-Large, my link with Cornell continues in another form. I am a Senior Scholar in the Africana Studies and Research Center, and can now teach regular courses at Cornell. I have already taught one undergraduate course on "Government and Politics in Africa" and one graduate course on "Global Africa: Comparative Black Experience."

When the former Head of State of Nigeria, General Olusegun Obasanjo, was a "distinguished statesman-in-residence" at Cornell, I was given an hour of tête-à-tête with him. We discussed a wide range of issues, from pro-democracy movements in Africa to the future of Africa Leadership Forum. In passing, General Obasanjo and I also discussed our shared critic, Wole Soyinka!! (The General and I are kindred victims of Soyinka-ese!!).

Return to Parenting

Rumour has it that in the 1980s I issued an ultimatum to my first three sons (Jamal, Al'Amin and Kim). They were in their twenties. I declared:

> "You had better give me grandchild
> by 1990, or I will proceed
> to make my own grandchild!"

This story is probably apocryphal! But I did indeed make what is, in age, my own "grandson" (alias my fourth son). Of course, I had "incidental" help from Pauline (Maryam) Uti, the mother!! If I had once made such a threat to my previous sons about making a grandchild, the baby's arrival has been a supreme

pleasure!!

A number of coincidences surrounded Farid's birth. He was born on the 14th of a particular month. So was Jamal, his eldest brother and my first born. So was Albert Schweitzer, after whom my professorship is named. So was Brenda Kiberu, an important background factor in our previous lives. And Molly, my first wife and mother of my first three sons was born on the 15th. Will numerology meet with karma and affect young Farid's fortunes? Indeed, Farid Mazrui and Albert Schweitzer were both born on January 14th. So was Schweitzer's daughter, Rhena.

At any rate, the full name of my fourth son is Farid Chinedu Mazrui. I was present at his birth, and was even allowed to cut the umbilical cord myself. I personally gave him his first bath in the hospital. He has been a joy ever since.

But there was something else which remains memorable about Farid's birth. His mother did not scream even once during the entire process. She pushed, shoved and grunted - but she never screamed! It was a remarkable demonstration of courage, stamina and endurance. And this was Pauline's first baby. I was proud of her (and indeed of her gender)!

The first of the relatives to come and see the new-born were Alamin M. Mazrui and his wife, Elizabeth (Naila) Orchardson. They stuck around for a couple of weeks to help us adjust to the new household routines. (Alamin is normally based at Ohio State University as a professor of Linguistics and Black Studies).

My son, Kim, and his wife, Kay Forde Mazrui, soon followed with the same mission. They arrived with their little boy, Will. It was wonderful having all of them here at Binghamton. Kim and Kay had once offered to bring up Farid for us as his additional parents (not alternative parents). This kind of offer is not uncommon between relatives in Swahili culture, but it is almost unknown in mainstream American culture. (Western parenting generally tends to be monopolistic. A child is normally allowed only one set of parents. Not so in Swahili culture - where my brother could offer to rear my child without my renouncing my own parenthood.)

Anyhow, Kim and Kay made the offer in the Swahili tradition. But since Farid was Pauline's first child, Pauline wanted to bring him up herself (with my help)! Nevertheless, Pauline and I were deeply moved by the offer from Kay and Kim.

We did consider having Farid brought up by my family in Mombasa, Kenya. But the purpose there would have been to ensure that Farid grew up as a real Swahili-speaking person, steeped in Afro-Islamic culture. But in the end Pauline and I decided to bring up the child ourselves - even at the risk of producing

another Westerner.

As some of you know, I have two Al'Amins in my life - my nephew, the professor at Ohio State University, and my son in Ann Arbor, Michigan. Should the younger Al'Amin do graduate work at an African university - such as the University of Nairobi in Kenya or the University of Jos in Nigeria? Or should he join a graduate programme within the United States? My son Al'Amin knows the cities of Nairobi and Jos already. He has lived in each briefly. Should he now go to study in one of those African cities? Al'Amin's dilemmas are yet unresolved.

My oldest son, Jamal Mazrui came to Binghamton for the Thanksgiving holiday in November. He was accompanied by his lady-friend, Bonnie O'Day. During their stay in Binghamton they beat us to Spike Lee's film Malcolm X, which they both enjoyed enormously. How do blind people like Jamal and Bonnie "see" a film? I asked that question. They answered that, after the first few minutes, two skills come into play - sensitivity to the logic of the plot and heightened sensitivity to voice and sound.

Jamal wanted to know why Spike Lee's version of the Honourable Elijah Muhammad spoke with such a strong foreign accent. I was surprised to hear that, since I knew that Elijah Muhammad was born in Georgia, U.S.A.. I transmitted Jamal's question to one of Elijah Muhammad's own children - my colleague Akbar Muhammad, a professor of history at Binghamton. Professor Akbar Muhammad was impressed by Jamal's sensitivity. Akbar explained that his father's accent was regionally mixed rather than foreign. Spike Lee exaggerated the unusual features of the accent in the film, Malcolm X.

Whatever happens, we wish you and your loved ones a truly satisfying 1993, a truly rewarding new phase in your lives.