

Early 1996

ANNUAL MAZRUI NEWSLETTER NO. 20

General Theme:

A DESTINY IN FIVE DIMENSIONS

* * * *

Subthemes:

- I. On Anniversaries in History
- II. On Islam and Ali Mazrui
- III. On Martyrdom and Politics
- IV. On Jane Austen and the Cold War
- V. Between Profession and Family

This Newsletter is written for friends, relatives and colleagues. Friends will know that the home address is as follows:

Ali A. Mazrui
River House
38 Front Street,
Apartment 3E
Binghamton, New York 13905, USA

First and foremost, a million apologies for keeping you waiting for your friend's annual Newsletter!! So sorry!

It was the Million Man March on Washington D.C. on October 16, 1995, which began to give a numerological meaning to 1995 as a whole. Why a million? Did a million men turn up? As the English poet put it in another context:

And the little more
And how much it is,
And the little less
And what miles away

It was a measure of the racial divide of the United States that most white observers believed that only 400,000 people turned up, and most Black observers believed there were more than a million and a half. The numbers' game had once again been racialized.

When Louis Farrakhan, the author of the concept of the Million Man March, gave his speech at the March, he took numerology even further. He found meaning in the precise height of the Washington monument (the obelisk which the marchers were looking at). He found significance in the precise dimensions of the Jefferson and Lincoln monuments. Number 19 particularly fascinated Farrakhan. And when I and three other colleagues subsequently visited Minister Farrakhan in Chicago and spent five hours with him, he elaborated further on his fascination with numbers and destiny. But more about Farrakhan later.

But first this is supposed to be Ali Mazrui's newsletter. So how did numerology affect Ali Mazrui's 1995? The No. 5 was once again organizing my life. You will remember from a previous Newsletter that I was my mother's fifth child, and that many of the critical calendar years in my life were divisible by five. I now also have five sons, the Lord be praised. In 1995 five children of my father's were in loving contact with each other - my brother, my three sisters and myself. I visited Mombasa in 1995 and saw them all. I also launched while in Kenya two books. One was Swahili, State and Society jointly authored by me and Alamin M. Mazrui. The other was Islam in Kenya edited by Mohamed Bakari and Saad S. Yahya.

I have lived in five countries - Kenya, Uganda, England, Nigeria, and the United States. While in 1994 I visited all five of them (of course I still live in the U.S.), in 1995 I was unable to visit either Uganda or Nigeria. However, I did give a keynote speech at the 7th annual meeting of the Uganda North-American Association held in Chicago. The 1995 convention attracted about a thousand Ugandans from different parts of North America. It was a scintillating reunion. I met many old students and old friends, including Brenda Kiberu and her children. I also made new friends.

I have been on the regular faculty of five universities so far - two of them African (Makerere in Uganda and Jos in Nigeria) and three of them American (Michigan, Binghamton, and Cornell).

Cornell has a new president and a new Provost. I have been to pay my respects to the new Provost. We discussed subjects which ranged from the role of culture in development to the voice and songs of Umm Kulthum, the greatest Arab singer of the 20th century. I was taken to meet Provost Don M. Randel by Locksley Edmondson, the Director of Africana Studies and Research Center at Cornell, and a very old friend of mine.

I return to the shadow of the Number 5 on my destiny. I am glad to report that for the first time ever all my own five children were under the same roof in Binghamton, New York, at Thanksgiving in November 1995. It was a wonderful reunion. In the past one or another of my sons was missing, but this time all the five boys were together at last.

Although my own birthday is not divisible by five, have I been proposing marriage on the basis of divisibility by five? It is true that my first wife, Molly (Muna) was born in May (the fifth month) and on the 15th of that month. Her date of birth (May 15) though intriguing, had very little to do with our decision to get married!!

My present wife, Pauline (Maryam) was born on the 10th of another month. Like her husband, Pauline was born in February - but unlike her husband, Pauline's precise day of birth is divisible by 5. Did I check on that numeral before proposing marriage?! I am more likely to have checked if she could drive a car before proposing marriage (since I cannot)!

On Anniversaries In History

1995 was a year of anniversaries divisible by 5! Binghamton University of the State University of New York celebrated its fiftieth year of academic life. A number of events marked the occasion, but in the shadow of gloomy news about budget-cuts and belt-tightening as a result of the new political mood in the United States.

The United Nations celebrated its fiftieth year, also in the shadow of budgetary problems and a crisis of confidence arising out of its performance in Bosnia and Rwanda. In Vienna, Austria, I took part in a special international seminar to mark the UN's anniversary. Both Boutros-Ghali, the present Secretary-General, and Kurt Waldheim, a former Secretary-General attended the Vienna Seminar. (Waldheim attended only the social events. He did not speak even at the social events, partly because it was thought that his alleged association with the Nazis in the past would have disrupted this 1995 international occasion).

Vienna was only the first of the five cities in which I personally took part in celebrating the UN's 50th anniversary. In 1945 the UN had been launched in San Francisco. In 1995 the celebrations in San Francisco were the most central. I attended some of the San Francisco events, and presented a paper at a conference sponsored by the World Federalists.

In Boston I had earlier given a solo lecture at Tufts

University and the Fletcher School of Diplomacy on "The United Nations at 50: Has it Outlived Its Purpose?" The thrust of the argument was that the UN had found additional purposes since it was formed, some of which were more efficiently fulfilled than was the world body's original peace-keeping role.

Of all my five personal celebrations of the UN, my lecture at the Fletcher School was, relatively speaking, the most quiet and least dramatic. It was just an ordinary campus event.

The biggest celebration of the UN's 50th anniversary in the Southern hemisphere took place in Melbourne, Australia, sponsored by La Trobe University and other Australian institutions. It was a major international event, launched by Australia's Foreign Minister Gareth Evans, who is widely discussed as a potential future Secretary-General of the UN. I was privileged to be co-keynote speaker alongside Evans at the opening ceremony, though the whole event became almost inaudible on one occasion because of very loud students' demonstrations against Evans for his policy towards Indonesia in relation to East Timor. (Indonesia annexed East Timor in 1976 and has denied the people of that territory self-determination. Australia was regarded as being insufficiently critical of Indonesia). At any rate Melbourne was my fourth UN city of 1995. In Australia I was also reunited with my old colleagues of the World Order Models Project.

There were some anniversaries in my own personal life also in 1995. The year marked the 30th anniversary since I was

catapulted from lecturer to a full professor at Makerere University in 1965 - a crazy speed of promotion which Makerere had never done before me, and has never been repeated since. I have never been sure whether to be humbled or shocked that I have never been Senior Lecturer, or Reader, or Associate Professor or without tenure!

In 1995 the African Studies Association of the United States and the National University of Lesotho independently helped me celebrate my thirtieth year of full professorship by voting me Distinguished Africanist for a lifetime of service to African Studies. The Lesotho University honoured me as part of their own anniversary, and I was given the U.S. Distinguished Africanist Award at the U.S. Association's annual meeting in Orlando, Florida.

In my acceptance speech in Orlando, I dedicated that moment to Ken Saro-Wiwa, the Nigerian writer and human rights activist who was at the time on death-row. Within a week Ken Saro-Wiwa was executed by the regime of General Sani Abacha, in defiance of much of world opinion. I had just arrived in Oxford, England, when my wife, Pauline, phoned me to let me know about Saro-Wiwa's execution. I staggered out into the Oxford streets looking for newspapers. All the British papers carried banner headlines about the Saro-Wiwa tragedy. I read the accounts both avidly and in pain.

This brings me to my fifth UN celebration of 1995. What was

I doing in Oxford? I had been invited to Oxford to give the annual Evan Luard lecture by the Oxford United Nations Association. In 1995 the lecture was to mark the 50th anniversary of the United Nations. I was also a guest of the Oxford Centre for Islamic Studies. The combined sponsorship of my Oxford visit required my giving a lecture which was of relevance to both the UN and to Islamicists. So I lectured on "THE UNITED NATIONS AND THE MUSLIM WORLD: ALLIES OR ADVERSARIES?". The turnout was overflowing, and the subsequent discussion lively. In the Chair was my old mwali at Oxford, Professor Kenneth Kirkwood, still active on campus.

Later I gave a seminar at the Oxford Centre for Islamic Studies on the theme of "The Islamic Face of Africa". The Director of the Islamic Center, Dr. Farhan Nizami, had been immensely supportive throughout my Oxford stay.

On Islam and Ali Mazrui

Since 1986 Islamic studies have been demanding more and more of my time and attention. There was a time when people thought of me purely as an Africanist trained in political science. Before the 1980s nobody thought of me as anybody who had anything significant to say about Islam. Since then I now get invited to Islamic conferences from Kuala Lumpur to San Francisco, from Ditchley to Khartoum, from Riyadh to Chicago. What has brought about this semi-Islamization of my professional agenda?

The critical year was 1986, the year of the first telecasting of my BBC television series, The Africans: A Triple Heritage in which I discussed Africa as a convergence of three civilizations - indigenous, Islamic and Western. Because the TV series examined Islam, I was suddenly discovered as an Islamicist by a whole new constituency. The discovery gathered momentum from then on.

But something must have happened to me also when I was filming The Africans: A Triple Heritage over a period of three years. I studied more closely than ever the religion of my birth within my own ancestral continent. Something in me was affected during those three years.

During 1995 ten major presentations of mine stand out concerning Islam, including my Oxford University events. At the University of Hong Kong I had been invited to give the Distinguished Li Ka Shing Lecture. Vice-Chancellor Wang Gungwu himself had proposed that I spoke on "Islam in Africa". It was a memorable event, not least because of the involvement of my old friend and contemporary from our Oxford days as students, Yash Ghai, who is now a distinguished professor of law in Hong Kong.

Although the invitation had been for me to give only one lecture in Hong Kong, I ended up giving five presentations in all on different subjects and to different audiences (linguists, lawyers, political scientists, Hong Kong Muslims as well as the audience of my Li Ka Shing Distinguished lecture).

In San Francisco later in the year I addressed a conference of mainly African American Muslims on the theme "Islam between Afrocentricity and Multiculturalism". I met colleagues who were working on more fascinating multicultural subjects. My own mother tongue (Kiswahili) was once written in the Arabic script, and is now written mainly in the Roman (or Latin) script. But have you thought of writing the English language in the Arabic script instead of its present Roman alphabet? Well, I met a couple of Muslim scholars in San Francisco who were working on such English texts in the Arabic orthography. I also met an African American who was translating into English the works of the nineteenth century Nigerian Muslim crusader, Usman Dan Fodio.

The largest audience on Islam which I addressed was at the annual meeting of the Islamic Society of North America (ISNA) in Columbus, Ohio. These days the ISNA meetings attract some ten thousand people every year. The audience at my own session was nowhere near that large, but since it was a plenary meeting there was a large turnout. I spoke on the special problems of Muslims in North America.

I gave a similar lecture later in the month in Toronto, Canada at a fundraising meeting of Islamic Media Awareness Group. My host managed to raise thousands of dollars at the meeting. The trip to Canada was memorable for two other reasons - my reunion with some former students of mine at the Mombasa Institute of Muslim Education going back to the 1950s. Now these

former students are distinguished engineers, businessmen and men of affairs in their new adopted home of Canada. These former East African Asians have not lost their command of their Swahili language. One or two spoke better Kiswahili than I did. As for the food they served me at a lavish luncheon, the cuisine was a merger of East Africa and South Asia. What a reunion! God bless them all.

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

I do have another nephew in Canada - Zeid. Unfortunately he failed to establish contact with me when I was in Toronto, although he tried. I had better luck with Goretti Mugambwa, a Ugandan Canadian who was once a colleague at the University of Jos in Nigeria. She and I (and her daughter Maria) had plenty of

time in 1995 to talk about our old days in Jos and about new developments in Africa and North America!! Yes, catching up with each other!

I continued to serve on the Board of the American Muslim Council based in Washington, DC. The Council seeks to influence Congress and the U.S. administration on matters of concern to Muslims in the United States. My own activities on behalf of the Council during 1995 included participation in a delegation to meet Anthony Lake, the National Security advisor to President Clinton. Our agenda was the crisis in Bosnia and U.S. policy towards it. By the end of 1995 U.S. policy on Bosnia was closer to the view of American Muslims than the policy had been in the preceding three years of Clinton's indecisiveness.

Incidentally, I was delighted to learn from Anthony Lake that he had seen my television series, The Africans. So had Louis Farrakhan, the leader of the Nation of Islam and Ben Chavis, the former Director of the National Association for the Advancement of Coloured People (NAACP). We met with Ben Chavis in December 1995 and with Farrakhan in January 1996, as I have indicated elsewhere. The TV series has earned me more name-recognition and more face-recognition than anything else I have ever done. We also met with Imam Warithu Deen Mohammed in Chicago, leader of mainstream African American Islam.

I also collaborated with another Muslim body in the United States - the International Institute of Islamic Thought (IIIT),

which publishes books on the Islamization of knowledge and supports Islamic journals in the United States. At one of their conferences I spoke on "Islam in a More Conservative Western World". While many colleges and research institutes of all kinds in the United States are cutting down their activities for budgetary reasons, the IIIT is still expanding its scope of operations, alhamdu li Llah (praise the Lord).

Under entirely different auspices I wrote a paper entitled "The Imperial Culture of North-South Relations: The Case of Islam and the West". It was for a conference on "Disintegration and Reconstitution of Empires: The USSR and Russia in Comparative Perspectives", sponsored by the University of Maryland at College Park and John Hopkins University. Strangely enough the conference was held at the University of California in San Diego!! The choice of venue turned out to be doubly fortunate when the east coast was devastated by a snow storm - including Washington, DC. It was also fascinating that a project about the disintegration of the Russian and Soviet empires should have solicited papers about so many other empires and imperial experiences - the Hapsburgs, the Ottomans, the British, the French and, in the global sense, Pax Americana.

I also gave the keynote address at a conference at Ditchley Park, Oxfordshire, England on the theme "The West and the Muslim World in the Era of Globalization". The conference was sponsored by the Oxford Centre for Islamic Studies in England.

Participants included not only scholars but also diplomats, international civil servants, Arab princes, and other policy makers. Sometimes I found myself in the eye of a debating storm about relations between Islam and the West.

On Martyrdom and Politics

1995 was the year of my five martyrs. Chief M.K.O. Abiola, the Chair of the OAU's Group of Eminent Persons (GEP) on Reparations, was still detained by General Sani Abacha of Nigeria. I happen to be a member of that group. Our task force was to work out the modalities and logistics of campaigning for reparations to compensate for Black enslavement and colonization.

Our group has been deeply frustrated since the arrest of our Chairman Abiola.

At Ditchley Park in Oxfordshire I met Professor Amadou Mahtar M'Bow, former Director General of Unesco, who is also a member of the OAU Group of Eminent Persons on Reparations. He promised to try and get the work reactivated. At the African Studies meeting in Orlando, Florida, I also joined forces with Professor Jacob Ade Ajayi and Ambassador Dudley Thompson, two other members of the GEP group. We are trying to get the mission off the ground. The martyrdom of Abiola has affected the Reparations Movement in Africa.

There has also been the martyrdom of General Olusegun Obasanjo, who is in detention in Nigeria ostensibly because he

plotted to overthrow the military regime. (General Obasanjo is best known in the world as the soldier who plotted to restore democracy in Nigeria in 1979 - and did indeed hand over power to the freely elected government of Shehu Shagari in that year). Is Obasanjo now really supposed to serve a quarter of century in jail for the alleged plot against Abacha?

My third martyr of 1995 was, unfortunately, still a Nigerian. He was Ken Saro-Wiwa, who paid the supreme price of execution for fighting for the Ogoni people against the human and environmental degradation perpetrated by the oil companies and the political elite in Nigeria.

My fourth martyr of 1995 was more controversial. He was O.J. Simpson. Did he kill his former wife, Nicole Brown Simpson?

I have no idea. I do know that the police never seriously entertained any other scenario or pursued any alternative evidence. I also know that the police investigators included a man who not only had used racial epithets but had bragged about cooking and manufacturing evidence to compromise African American suspects, and who had declared his genocidal predisposition against Blacks. Mark Furman, the racist, was also the man who was supposed to have discovered some of the most damning evidence against O.J. Simpson.

Nevertheless, white America never regarded this racism as relevant - and was quite shocked when most of Black America celebrated the "not guilty" verdict of the jury.

I still do not know whether in reality O.J. Simpson did actually kill Nicole or not, but I am convinced that no case against him was proven in a court of law. I regard him as a martyr because the system is so hypocritical. The system claims that a man is innocent until he is proven guilty. But when the system fails to prove O.J. Simpson guilty, he is hounded in other ways. Civil cases are lodged against him to reprove him guilty under standards looser than the original ones. And even if he won these civil cases, I am sure he would be hounded in other ways. What kind of just society is this?

I should mention that my own children have not been united on the O.J. Simpson issue. They range from the son who found O.J. Simpson guilty within the first two weeks of the saga to a son who found the jury's verdict of "not guilty" at least understandable if not justified. I personally found that the jury had reasonable doubt - and the verdict was therefore justified.

Did O.J. actually kill Nicole? I personally have remained an "agnostic" on that issue. There are many factors which suggest strongly that he did it. There are other factors which imply that it was most unlikely. I simply do not know.

Did O.J. Simpson affect my work professionally? He did. My paper at the annual meeting of the African Heritage Studies Association was on the subject of "O.J. Simpson and Shakespeare's Othello: An Afrocentric Perspective". Simpson in 1995

repeatedly forced me back to Shakespeare.

Later in the year I was a guest of the Foundation for Global Dialogue in Johannesburg, South Africa. I was invited to launch the Foundation. My launching address was on the following theme:

"THE EROSION OF THE STATE AND THE DECLINE OF RACE:
BISMARCK TO BOUTROS; OTHELLO TO O.J. SIMPSON"

I presented the comparison of Simpson with Othello at the socially glittering event. Later I received an autographed copy of Nelson Mandela's book, Long Walk to Freedom. Nelson Mandela said the following about me in the inscription:

**To Prof. Ali Mazrui,
Compliments & best wishes to an
outstanding educationist & freedom fighter.**

Mandela had himself been a martyr, but he was not one of my five martyrs for 1995, much as I admire him.

My fifth martyr of 1995 was Rajat Neogy, the founder-president of Transition magazine from its Kampala days. Rajat died in California at the age of 57 in December 1995. My most poignant memory of him was as a martyr to freedom in Uganda more than a quarter of a century ago in Kampala. President Milton Obote had locked up Rajat Neogy in 1968, and subsequently put him on trial. Although Rajat won the trial, yet he was by that time a broken man. He was already a martyr. I attach my obituary of

Rajat to this Newsletter - my last salute to him.

My five Binghamton public presentations included my presentation during Black History month on campus as part of our annual conference of my Institute of Global Cultural Studies and the Department of Africana Studies.

In June I addressed the Broome County Urban League's 27th annual dinner on issues of change, commitment and compassion. The host was Derrick L. Span, then President of the local Urban League.

In October I was one of the keynote speakers at our annual conference on ancient and medieval thought from a modern perspective. We managed to include illustrative material from Europe, Africa, the Middle East, and the Orient.

Earlier in the year I was a guest of the SUNY-Binghamton Graduate African Students. I addressed them on the subject of "African Americans and American Africans". My sons are African Americans. I am still an American African, with roots still firmly placed in the ancestral continent of Africa.

My fifth Binghamton presentation was at the Braudel Center as a discussant in a session on conflict and violence in Africa.

I tried to provide a comparative perspective to the issue of violence.

1995 shocked me back to Jane Austen in English literature who was such a central part of my education as a colonial student some forty years earlier. Where did Jane Austen fit in the grand

equation of North-South relations on the eve of the 21st century?

On Jane Austen and the End of the Cold War

In the Western world after the end of the Cold War Jane Austen symbolizes the aspiration to return to a culture of decorum and civility. In Africa Jane Austen symbolizes the aspiration to escape the culture of dependency. Western hegemony has led to a culture of international rudeness and violence - and seeks release in the civility of Jane Austen's novels. Africa's dependency has led to a culture of imitation and deference - and African nationalism now seeks liberation from Jane Austen.

With Ian McKellen in the lead role, Shakespeare's Richard III has been used to depict the rise of fascism. Can Jane Austen be used to depict the end of the Cold War? (Director: Richard Loncraine?)

In the West there is a new nostalgia for the literary classics and for a bygone age of civility and good manners. Had the Cold War numbed some Western aesthetic sensibilities? Were these now to flourish afresh?

In the 1990s three different films of Jane Austen's novels were shown - Sense and Sensibility and Persuasion for the cinema and Pride and Prejudice for television (PBS).

Shakespeare's Richard III was modernized into a portrait of fascism in the 1930s. And Othello became a new cinema production - more than half a century after the Othellos of Orson Welles,

Laurence Olivier and Paul Robeson. On the U.S. television channel Arts and Entertainment a six-hour television production of Pride and Prejudice by Jane Austen was watched by nearly 4 million viewers. Many more millions are reported to have flocked to see Austen's Sense and Sensibility and Persuasion. What is going on? Is this a post-Cold War yearning for decorum and civility?

In the context of the Cold war, someone ought to modernize the novel Northanger Abbey by Jane Austen in the near future. It is a satirization of false alarms, of the Gothic novel and the haunted house. A modern satirist could score high with analogies of the false alarms of the Cold War and the unfounded fears of ideological haunted camps. Northanger Abbey could be turned into a portion of the Kremlin, cornered and searched by the C.I.A.. The futility would be compelling in the satire.

I was in New York as a graduate student when Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev used his shoe to bash the top a desk for attention at the United Nations in 1960 in the midst of a speech by Harold Macmillan. Something in the sensibilities of Jane Austen was offended. Prime Minister Harold Macmillan, with a remarkable British understatement, said he awaited a linguistic translation of Khrushchev's behaviour. It brought the house down in laughter.

But in reality this seemed to be not merely a confrontation of ideologies. It was also apparently a confrontation of

manners. Time and again the difference was apparently not merely ideological but also fundamentally aesthetic. More recently President Yeltsin was portrayed as being not always sober at public events. And the international media cameras had a field day when he was seen seemingly pinching the bottoms of female state employees. Jane Austen would have had an interesting eye for such behaviour.

In reality U.S. President Lyndon Johnson was very vulgar in behaviour towards his staff behind the scenes. And U.S. President Richard Nixon was very vulgar in speech behind the scenes (expletives deleted). The difference between Russian vulgarity at the highest level and American vulgarity at the highest level was that the Russians were more honest about it to their own people. Russian leaders were often publicly vulgar!

On the other hand, Jane Austen in Africa has a different meaning. Africa in the years since 1986 has won three Nobel prizes for literature - its first Nobel literary prizes ever. The winners were Wole Soyinka of Nigeria, Neguib Mahfuz of Egypt, and Nadine Gordimer of South Africa. Their achievements were influenced by the anti-colonial struggle but were not directly related to the Cold War. On the other hand, pro-democracy movements in many African countries have reduced inhibitions in writers and artists - and these pro-democracy movements have definitely been helped by the end of the Cold War.

Kenya's most distinguished novelist is Ngugi wa Thiong'o who

is also regarded as one of the most neo-Marxist of all the leading African creative writers. His novels got more and more ideological as he moved from Weep not, Child and The River Between to Petals of Blood. A combination of anti-colonialism and the Cold War radicalized Ngugi in a leftist direction.

But it is possible to argue that Ngugi began as a Kikuyu nationalist who evolved into a neo-Marxist nationalist. What the political failure of communism in Europe has done has been to force Ngugi back to Kikuyu nationalism with paradoxical Pan-African connotations.

When New York University (NYU) was trying to attract Ngugi onto the faculty, Ngugi insisted that NYU help him inaugurate a Kikuyu language journal - although the number of readers of the Kikuyu language in the USA is extraordinarily small.

NYU, out of eagerness to recruit Ngugi, accepted his terms about the journal. When he asked me to ask my library to subscribe to the journal, I sent him my own personal subscription - but urged him to make his journal bilingual (Kikuyu and Swahili languages). In the United States I knew that the addition of Swahili articles in the journal stood a chance of quadrupling its subscriptions.

Ngugi was polite but firm. There was a need for more journals in Kiswahili. But the Kikuyu language also needed to demonstrate its own independent literary viability.

In Africa Jane Austen was a symbol of literary colonization rather than a symbol of a return to civility. A Malawi poet, Felix Mnthali wrote a poem about English literature in Africa in which he described it as a stranglehold - and Jane Austen as "the heart of the matter".

Your elegance of deceit,	
Jane Austen,	lulled
the sons and daughters	of
the dispossessed	
into calf-love	
with irony and satire	
around imaginary people.	

When history went on mocking
the victims of branding irons
and sugar plantations
that made Jane Austen's people
wealthy beyond compare!

Eng. Lit, my sister,
was more than a cruel joke -
it was the heart
of alien conquest.ⁱ

Is this a clash of cultures in the class room? Is it racism in disguise? Or is it Cold War incarnate? Or a hopeful beginning of cultural convergence? At the 1995 meeting of the African Literature Association held in Columbus, Ohio, Alamin M. Mazrui had reminded us that three of Shakespeare's plays had been translated into Kiswahili - Julius Caesar, The Merchant of Venice and Macbeth.ⁱⁱ Shakespeare was being "domesticated". The Swahili translation of The Merchant of Venice was influenced by the Cold War: Mabepari wa Vanisi meaning "The Capitalist of Venice"!

But what has not been translated is at least as significant. What has not been translated into Kiswahili is the only play by Shakespeare with a Black hero, albeit a tragic hero. Why has it not been translated? Because in the play a Black man was married to a white woman, Desdemona. What is more, the Black hero killed the white woman in a fit of jealousy. The villain of the play is a white man, Iago, who manipulated Othello's jealousies. The play is, of course, Othello. Are there echoes of allegations against O.J. Simpson and the fair Nicole?

Why did not Julius Nyerere translate the only Shakespearean play with a Black hero into Kiswahili? Why was not Nyerere's compatriot, Samuel Mushi, fascinated by Othello's wife, the fair Desdemona?

We are still in the shadow of colonial dependency. The Malawian writer, Felix Mnthali, would answer that:

You elegance of deceit
 Jane Austen
 Lulled the sons and daughters
 of the dispossessed....
 English Lit., my sister,
 was more than a cruel joke -
 It was the heart
 of alien conquest.

I raised these issues in 1995 at the conference in Columbus of the African Literature Association (ALA). Without realizing it, neither Julius Nyerere nor Samuel Mushi had confronted what colonial education had left out of their Shakespearean agenda -

Othello. This play virtually never featured in the syllabus of Cambridge School Certificate for the coloured British Empire.

Nyerere and Mushi did not translate it mainly because it was not part of the Shakespeare to which they were exposed in their colonial textbooks.

English Lit., my sister
was more than a cruel joke -
It was the heart
of alien conquest.

Yes, I cited all this at the ALA conference in Columbus. Much of Jane Austen is a comedy of manners! Would she have been out of her depth in a real tragedy of manners?

The Jane Austen revival continues in the English-speaking world. In a strange way Africa is involved much more than she would even have expected:

You elegance of deceit
Jane Austen
Lulled the sons and daughters
of the dispossessed....
English Lit., my sister,
was more than a cruel joke -
It was the heart
of alien conquest.

Between Profession and Family

I am sure all mothers will sympathise with this story. My wife, Pauline, had completed her morning chores of getting our children ready for school, dressed them, and got them to go to the car. Before she started fastening their seat-belts, she put

a large envelope on the roof of the car. She got the children secure in the car, got in herself, and drove off without retrieving the big envelope on the roof. The bulky envelope was from me to my Secretary and it contained the only copy of a major reinterpretation of Uganda's post-colonial history that I had just tried out on Ugandans in Chicago. Pauline was supposed to take the draft to my Secretary for typing. The draft was never recovered. Of course, I swallowed hard, kissed my wife and told her that I loved her.

When some weeks later I told the story to a Ugandan ambassador who was a friend of mine, the ambassador said I was lucky that Pauline did what she did. I exclaimed "lucky?". The ambassador said: "Yes, suppose Pauline had been an absent-minded professor. Instead of saving the children and losing the envelope, she had saved the envelope and forgotten one of the children on the car-roof, and driven off!! Where would you be now?"! We both burst out laughing!! Talk of looking at the brighter side of things!

Kim, my third son in order of birth, who is now a lawyer in Washington DC, seems to have decided that he would rather teach law than practice law! I think he is too much of an intellectual to be constrained by the chores of the early years of legal practice. Kim has an excellent offer from the University of Virginia, an institution which has the same creator as the U.S. Declaration of Independence, Thomas Jefferson. The law school is

one of the best in the country. The family is proud.

Jamal, my oldest son, was affected by disruptions caused by the repeated closures of the Federal Government of the United States. Jamal works for the U.S. Federal Government.

Al'Amin, my second son chronologically, is still at the University of California, Berkeley, registered for a Masters' degree in Social Welfare. His ad hoc jobs in the Bay Area have included working in a theatre. No, not as an actor, although I believe he has potential for the stage. In our immediate family only Kim and I have acted on the stage within the last fifteen years. Kim and I featured in a production of Yusuf and His Brothers, a play by the Somali playwright Nuruddin Farah, which was produced in Jos, Nigeria, in the 1980s.

My two youngest sons are Farid (four years old) and Harith (two and a half). They were introduced to Mickey Mouse in person in Disney World, Florida, when we all went to Orlando for the annual meeting of the African Studies Association. Gloria Hopkins accompanied us. Pauline, Gloria and the two children did some sightseeing while I was condemned to ASA-related business!!

My wife Pauline almost never orders me concerning what clothes I should wear! But when I was going to Columbus, Ohio, to honour Isaac James Mowoe at a special ceremony of Ohio State University, Pauline instructed me to wear a special resplendent shirt which her sister had made for me. It was an aristocratic shirt for an aristocratic occasion. It was a salute to a great

brother, Isaac Mowoe, former Associate Dean of Ohio State and founder-Director of the African Studies Center on that campus. Felicitations.

Earlier in the year I had been invited to violence-torn Karachi, Pakistan, for a conference about Islam. My family here was relieved when the Karachi conference was postponed precisely because of the security situation.

The cancellation made it even easier for me to participate in the annual meeting of the American Historical Association in Chicago which had been scheduled close to the Pakistani dates. At the AHA conference in Chicago I was one of the speakers at the opening plenary session on the theme of whether in the 1990s "the Post-World War II era" had come to an end. It was one of the highlights of my year, thanks especially to my colleague Robert Harris at Cornell.

The number Five continues to follow me. It is the five fingers of my hand which help to make me a writer. It is the five pillars of my religion which help to make me a Muslim - Shahada, prayer, fast of Ramadhan, pilgrimage to Mecca, and tax of Zakat.

It is the five regions of my continent which help to make me an African (east, west, north, south and central Africa).

It is the five universities of my academic affiliation which have helped me to become a scholar (Makerere, Michigan, Jos, Binghamton, and Cornell). Before that it was the five

universities which helped to train me into a political scientist (Manchester, Columbia, the University of Mexico, UC-Berkeley, and Oxford).

And then there are the five children who have helped me to learn how to be a good parent. I have been blessed.

There is one five I neither desire nor is permitted by my wife or my religion. Even as an African I do not aspire to the experience of becoming the husband of five wives!! Pauline is my second wife. Shall we leave it at that, please? God bless my beloved Maryam. Amen! I am too old and too much in love for wider adventures anyhow!

NOTES

- i. Mnthali, "The Stranglehold of English Lit." in Modern African Poetry edited by Gerald Moore and Ulli Beier (London: Penguin, 1989 edition) pp. 139-140.
- ii. Alamin M. Mazrui, "Shakespeare in Kenya: Between English and Swahili Literature", paper presented at annual meeting of the African Literature Association of the United States, Columbus, Ohio, March 17, 1995.