

# THE JOURNAL OF OROMO STUDIES

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In Recognition of Ali Mazrui

*Ezekiel Gebissa*

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Lyda Favalt and Roy Pareman, *Land, Blood, and Sex: Legal and Political Pluralism in Eritrea*. Reviewer *Fikru Gebrehidan*



*A Publication of the Oromo Studies Association*

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## MAZRUIANA AND THE OROMO: IN RECOGNITION OF ALI MAZRUI

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Ezekiel Gebissa

With more than twenty books, scores of chapters and hundreds of peer-reviewed articles to his credit, Ali Mazrui is one of the world's most prolific writers on Africa. Through a lifetime of writing and speaking to a global audience on a variety of issues, he has profoundly shaped scholarly and popular thinking about Africa and influenced political practitioners in Africa and the West. We are currently witnessing a spate of publications documenting and assessing the impact of Ali Mazrui's voluminous writings. The titles for the anthologies of his work—*The Mazruiana Collection* (Johannesburg, South Africa: Foundation for Global Dialogue, 1998), *The Mazruiana Collection Revisited: Ali A. Mazrui debating the African condition* (Pretoria, South Africa: Africa Institute of South Africa and New Dawn Press Group, 2005), *The Global African: A Portrait of Ali A. Mazrui* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 1998), *Africanity Redefined* (Trenton, NJ:

Africa World Press 1998), *The Scholar Between Thought and Experience* (Binghamton, NY: Institute of Global Cultural Studies, 2001)—all speak pointedly to the fact that Mazrui's intellectual tour de force has become a school of thought in its own right. This in turn has made Mazrui a public figure whose ideas are sought out by governments and international organizations. Among many, he has served in an advisory role to several of the United Nations' specialized organizations and to the Organization of African Unity during its transition to the Africa Union. Mazrui's impact is both intellectual and practical.

That nexus between Mazrui's intellectual commitment and determination to influence policies is precisely the tension point that has often tended to provoke heated debates and controversies. Mazrui's effort to coax policy makers into seeking solutions to real human problems and nudge academics into debating sensitive and complex issues that many would prefer to avoid, has earned him the reputation of being one of the most—if not the most—controversial academics in African studies. In many respects, his style of using provocative language to force a debate has achieved its objectives, but may have also allowed his detractors to focus on style rather than substance. For instance, Mazrui was criticized for proposing re-colonization or self-colonization of weaker African states by stronger African states. The intent is to reduce the human suffering that emanates from the inherent lack of capacity of the weaker to implement and then to police arrangements to ensure peace. When President Bill Clinton championed the idea of “African solutions to African problems,” his was not a new concept of

Africa's newfound capability, but a presentation of what was deemed a 'radical' idea when Ali Mazrui proposed it some time before Clinton adopted it. However, when this concept was put forward by Clinton, far from provoking a controversy, it was welcomed by the public at large as a positive, "revolutionary" concept. Ironically, Mazrui devoted his career to setting the record straight about Africa, Islam, and the global South in general without demeaning the West, Christianity, or the North. Yet, these generous ideas did not sit well with many in the academy and in government.

Controversy may be in the eye of the beholder or in the background of the person proposing a new idea for consideration. Mazrui's most controversial pronouncements in the eyes of his Western audiences may appear to African audiences as straightforward statements of fact about the African condition. Mazrui watched the hope of the African independence era give way to a second superpower scramble for influence in the continent leading to the propping up and sustenance of dictators in Africa. In light of this development, it should surprise no one that he began to advocate a Pan-Africanist vision. Africa was overtly colonized by Europeans claiming to carry out a 'civilizing mission' in the late nineteenth century and then continued external influence carried the burdens of colonial legacy over into the post-independence period in what is widely known as neo-colonialism. Opposing neocolonial solutions to African problems and proposing an "African solution to African problems" was a logical rather than a radical proposition. In fact, it comports well with Mazrui's Pan-Africanist vision. Mazrui's far-sighted solutions to the myriad problems



of the world clashed with enough vested interests over the years that his prophetic message became inseparably identified with his personality. It is likely that many of his positions would not be regarded as controversial if someone other than Mazrui himself proposed them. The Clinton pronouncements on Africa are a case in point. Repeated controversy associated with Mazrui emanates from deliberate misreading and misunderstanding of his positions. There is indeed nothing anti-Western in his television series, *The Africans: A Triple Heritage*, that should have provoked the outrage of American conservatives, such as Lynne Cheney (*The Wall Street Journal*, January 24, 1995). Yet despite attempts to construe Mazrui's work in such a way as to provoke the worst fears and to incur the wrath of a small section of the American electorate, the series *The Africans* was nevertheless widely acclaimed and very influential as a landmark work.

Oromo studies scholars understand Mazrui's predicaments. Their protests against the scholarship of domination have consistently been misconstrued and distorted for political reasons. Oromo studies is situated to refute prominent falsehoods presented as fact about the Oromo in Ethiopian studies, to rectify the substantial distortions of Oromo history, and to present Oromo society to the world from an Oromo perspective and in a way the Oromo and those who specialize in the Oromo consider appropriate. Critics within the established "Ethiopianist" perspective on the Horn of Africa have tended to dismiss Oromo-centered scholarship, asserting that it carries a hidden political agenda, while these same critics fail to acknowledge a hidden political agenda in defending the rationale of

dominance that is presumed when Oromo studies are subsumed under Ethiopian studies.

The very fact that Ali Mazrui was able to produce his well-researched film on the continent (*The Africans*) in the mid-1980s without mentioning the Oromo attests to the invisibility of the Oromo within mainstream Ethiopian studies of the time. Oromo-centered scholarship, as envisioned by the framers of the Oromo Studies Association, directly challenges the notion that mainstream Ethiopian studies can adequately address issues related to the Oromo—whether history, culture, language, economy, philosophy, geography, medicine, religion, politics, etc. Indeed the Oromo have been relegated to the margins politically, economically, and culturally by those who identify themselves as “Ethiopianists.” However, there is no justifiable reason for them to remain in this position when, in fact, the ancient term ‘Ethiopia’ actually refers to the Kushitic peoples of long ago who once inhabited the area south of Egypt and are very likely the ancestors of the Oromo people, who still today constitute the majority population in the Horn of Africa (*Journal of Oromo Studies*, Vol. 14:1).

Imagine African history without Africans before Basil Davidson and others, Indian history without Indians before the subaltern studies or American history without Africans and their descendents in the New World before W.E.B. Dubois. The rationale for Oromo studies is similar to the one that guided, among others, the emergence of African American studies. Carter Godwin Woodson, the founder of African American history, once said: “We work to refute the lie that the Negro has no past, that he has made no con-

tribution to American history, and that he has no past worth respecting.” Oromo studies accomplishes for the Oromo precisely what Carter Woodson envisioned for African American history.

Mazrui dedicated his life to correcting for Africa in world history what Woodson proposed for Africans in American history. Mazrui devoted his work to highlighting and articulating the plight of the oppressed in the continent. His scholarship has focused on elucidating the condition of colonial subjects under the legacy of colonial domination; the poor under the domination of imperialism, Soviet communism and neocolonialism in its many forms; women under patriarchy; and, more recently, Muslims besieged by the distortions produced during an indiscriminate war on terror. The thread that connects the disparate elements of Mazrui’s globe-spanning work is concern for the powerless that are surrounded by an array of powerful forces in the world. The Oromo as a group did not figure in Mazrui’s work, but the experience of the Oromo is consistent with Mazrui’s insights about the forces at work in Africa. Mazrui has acknowledged the Oromo deserved better attention than he has given them, albeit inadvertently, due to his commitment to the ideal of Pan-Africanism and his failure to recognize the exclusivist and predatory nature of the Ethiopian state. Yet, his intellectual life is devoted to the same causes as those of Oromo scholars and his success against heavier odds offers young Oromo studies scholars a model of scholarship to emulate.

Throughout his career, Mazrui kept his focus on the big picture issues on the African continent, such as Pan-Africanism, the forest, rather than the individual trees. Because of this type of commitment to Africa,

and because of how he pitched his argument, Mazrui has overlooked the plights of the subjugated majority who lived within the Ethiopian Empire: the Eritrean, the Somali and the Oromo. He has recently turned his attention to the individual trees—something he can do without jeopardizing his commitment to explaining the forest. His Keynote Address to the 2008 Oromo Studies Conference in Minneapolis is the beginning of this process of mutual understanding, that is, the beginning of an ongoing conversation with the Oromo. We have published his remarks in this issue of the *Journal of Oromo Studies* as he delivered it at the conference in recognition of his announced commitment to learn more about the Oromo and to engage in active discussion with the members of OSA and the readers of the *Journal of Oromo Studies*. We appreciate this meaningful offer from an intellectual giant of our day and eagerly anticipate further groundbreaking discussion that may ensue on these pages.



# TOWARDS SOCIO-POLITICAL REFORM IN THE GREATER HORN OF AFRICA: ETHNICITY, RELIGION, LANGUAGE, GENDER AND CULTURAL CONVERGENCE

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Ali A. Mazrui

## WHAT IS UNIQUE ABOUT THE HORN?

**F**or the purposes of this article<sup>1</sup> we define the Greater Horn of Africa as consisting of Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, Somalia (including the separatist Somaliland), Sudan and Uganda. A number of characteristics have made this sub-region of Africa unique. We are going to consider how sub-regional exceptionalism has related to the conflict-proneness of the area. We shall also explore how the diverse forms

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**Ali A. Mazrui** is Albert Schweitzer Professor in the Humanities and Director of the Institute of Global Cultural Studies at Binghamton University, State University of New York. He is the author of over 30 books and numerous publications on African politics, international political culture, political Islam, and North-South relations. In 2007, he was nominated among the top 100 public intellectuals alive in the world as a whole. This paper is a revised version of the keynote address at the annual meeting of the Oromo Studies Association, Minneapolis, Minnesota, August 1, 2008.

of exceptional experiences may provide lessons for the present and possible solutions for the future.

Of course, every country in Africa is distinctive and unique in its own way. For example, the small Republic of Djibouti (known as French Somaliland before independence) is the only one in this sub-region which has been significantly influenced by the French language and French culture. Djibouti is widely regarded as an island of stability in a sub-region of turmoil. Yet paradoxically it appears an oasis of peace in the shadow of the military might of the United States and France. Both those Western powers have established significant military facilities in Djibouti out of all proportion to the size of this former French colony.

Ethnically there is the exceptionalism of the Oromo, the largest ethnic nation in Eastern Africa and one of the most ancient. We shall return to the Oromo later. The collective exceptionalism of the Greater Horn includes the sub-region's coup-proneness. Indeed, the Greater Horn of Africa has replaced Southern Africa as the most conflict-ridden sub-region of the continent. Yet there are important differences between the conflicts which used to tear Southern Africa asunder and the nature of the bloodletting in the Greater Horn of Africa. A crucial element in the tensions of Southern Africa until the collapse of political apartheid was white minority rule in several countries, and the long-term consequences of white-versus-black racial tensions. This kind of skin-color trigger is almost totally absent from the conflicts of the Greater Horn of Africa. Ironically, the conflicts are sometimes Muslim against Muslim, as in Darfur; sometimes Christian against Christian as in Kenya after

the 2007 general election; sometimes Semites versus Semites, like the Amhara versus Tigrayans, and sometimes Somali against Somali in Mogadishu.

There is a sense in which every country in Africa is distinctive and unique in its own way. But in this presentation we are focusing especially on the multiple ways in which the Horn of Africa has had unique experiences. We are going to demonstrate the multiple exceptionalism of this particular sub-region of Africa.

A persistent theme in the politics of the Horn is religious tension, either overt or implicit. It is true that some Christian forces have Muslim allies, while some Muslim militias have Christian allies. It is therefore true that there is no neat, crusade-like confrontation in the Horn between Christians on one side and Muslims on the other. But there is no doubt that the Horn of Africa has a level of religious tension which was almost totally absent in the politics of Southern Africa. While the politics of the Southern sub-region of the continent were truly spared the explosive tensions of religious differences, the tensions of the Horn have been spared the catastrophes of skin color racism.

One irony is that Southern Africa was settled by Europeans at least two centuries before any other part of the continent witnessed white settlement on any significant scale. Similarly the Horn of Africa witnessed the arrival of both Christianity and Islam long before any other part of sub-Saharan Africa.

Islam's first arrival in Africa was as a refugee in Christianized Ethiopia. The Prophet Muhammad was still alive, and he encouraged some of his persecuted followers to cross the Red Sea into the Horn of Africa for asylum. The Islamized refugees discovered the Oromo,



as well as the Amhara. This was before Islam's arrival in what is now Arab Africa—the Muslim conquest of Egypt after the Prophet Muhammad's death. We might therefore say that just as the first colonial European settlers established themselves in Southern Africa centuries before white people colonized any other part of Africa, the first Muslims arrived in the Horn of Africa long before the Arabs Islamized Egypt.

Similarly, Christianity came to the Horn of Africa earlier than to other parts of Black Africa—but not before Egyptians were Christianized as part of the Byzantine Empire. Egyptians embraced the Gospel of Jesus at least three centuries before Ethiopians did—but most Egyptians later withdrew from Christianity, while half the population of Ethiopia continued to walk with Jesus. The earliest Black Christians were the Abyssinian ancestors of the current Amhara and Tigrayan people. Ironically these were Semitic people long before Egyptians became Semitic through subsequent Arabization. Egyptians were Semiticized.

There are also exceptional *contrasts* in the history of the Horn. Ethiopia has the longest tradition of a relatively centralized government in sub-Saharan Africa. Semitic Ethiopians believe their monarchy lasted at least three thousand years. We know for certain that relatively centralized monarchical government in Ethiopia and relatively decentralized republican government among the Oromo lasted for centuries.

In contrast, the Somali people were for centuries a people with rules but not rulers, principles but not princes. Anthropologists described the pre-colonial Somali nation as a case of ordered anarchy. Side by side, the Horn of Africa accommodated an elaborate

monarchical and aristocratic Ethiopian feudal order, on the one hand, and a totally decentralized system of consensus and compromise among Somali clans on the other. Governance among the Oromo was intermediate between the monarchical centrism of the Abyssinians and the statelessness of the Somali.

Another exceptional *contrast* within the Horn of Africa is between ancient statehood and new nationhood. Once again ancient statehood is best illustrated by Ethiopia—while newer forms of nationhood include Eritrea, and the Oromo nation bereft of statehood.

Also exceptional in the Horn of Africa is the historic cultural symbiosis and tension between the Oromo and the Amhara across the centuries. If the Amhara are like the English in the United Kingdom, are the Oromo as historically abused by the Amhara as the Irish were by the English, or are the Oromo as historically respected by the Amhara as the Scots were by the English?

Another great contrast in the Horn is between a country which was not colonized by a single European power—Ethiopia<sup>2</sup>—and in contrast to the Somali people who were colonized by three European powers and semi-colonized by two African neighbors. Ethiopia was of course the country which escaped modern European colonialism, though it was briefly formally occupied by Italy. The Somali people, on the other hand, were colonized by more foreigners than any other African people. There was British, Italian and French Somaliland—and the Somali of the Ogaden and of North East Kenya have been denied self-determination by the rulers of Ethiopia and Kenya. In Kenya

the rulers were once colonial and are now postcolonial. In Ethiopia the rulers were once Ethio-imperial and are now post-Ethio-imperial. There is no other African people that has been split five ways by the colonial experience and its aftermath as have the Somali.

On the other hand, a reunited former Italian and British Somaliland did not last even on its own after colonization. The Somali people once miraculously combined anarchy with order. In the postcolonial period, on the other hand, the majority of the Somali have experienced more anarchy than order.

This brings us to another area of the exceptionalism of the Horn. This is the only sub-region of Africa where territorial separatism has been accomplished and new distinct states were created. Ethiopia and Eritrea experienced a forced marriage in the early 1960s, but achieved an “amicable divorce” in 1992, after a thirty-year war. Former Italian and British Somaliland had a euphoric and amicable wedding in 1960—only to suffer a violent divorce thirty years later.

Unfortunately, the Ethiopia-Eritrea divorce had a fragile foundation, and has now collapsed into violence both within each country and between them. On the other hand, there seems to be a *de facto* truce between Somalia (Mogadishu) and Somaliland (Hargeisa)—with Somaliland much more stable and peaceful than Somalia.

If we include the Sudan into the Greater Horn of Africa, there is a possibility that the South would secede from the North by the end of this decade or soon after, depending upon a referendum. What used to be regarded as a war between a Muslim North and

Christian-led South has—at least for the time being—come to an end.

On the other hand, the latest Sudanese civil war in Darfur is between Muslim and Muslim. Whatever Israel and the Bush Administration may say, Darfur in Western Sudan is not a case of genocide. But it is a case of ethnic cleansing, which is the next worst inter-group atrocity after genocide. Genocide seeks to *destroy* a people; ethnic cleansing seeks to *displace* a people. But both are crimes against humanity, and both unleash much violence.

## **THE SCENARIO OF LEARNING FROM ASIA'S EXPERIENCE**

In a society like both Somalia and Somaliland there continues the struggle to make political institutions compatible with cultural traditions and historical continuities. Among the Somali people, the *clan* is often preeminent. Somali politics seem to be subject not to *ethnicity* (in the sense of “tribe”), but to *sub-ethnicity* (in the sense of clan).

Constitution making must, therefore, take those clan forces into account. It is fortunate that the Somali people in Hargeisa have been experimenting with a second chamber of Parliament consisting of a House of Elders sensitive to cultural continuities in Somaliland.

The Somali more generally may be debating whether having two chambers is too expensive for such a small country. I would suggest that they consider keeping a second chamber or find other ways of accommodating clan loyalties effectively.

Like individuals, societies can get married and divorced. In the case of societies, we sometimes call

them mergers and dissolution of mergers. Different factions of the Oromo have sometimes merged, and sometimes separated even territorially, sometimes by force, sometimes voluntarily.

Perhaps the most enduring societal merger in post-colonial Africa was between Tanganyika and Zanzibar to create the United Republic of Tanzania. It was an *arranged marriage* involving the two Presidents (Julius Nyerere of Tanzania and Abeid Karume of Zanzibar) in 1964. An arranged marriage is often a forced marriage. But the *mahr* or bride-wealth for little Zanzibar was truly generous. The representation of Zanzibar was out of proportion to the comparative sizes of the two countries.

On the other hand, the more a disadvantaged spouse in a societal marriage is abused by the senior partner, the less and less can the marriage be sustained. In the post-colonial history of the Muslim world the two worst cases of such spousal abuse concerned the marriage between former British and former Italian Somaliland, and the marriage between the old East Pakistan (of Bengalis) and the old West Pakistan (partly led by Urdu and Punjabi speakers).

Citizens of the Greater Pakistan created by the 1947 partition of British India believed that Bengalis, Punjabis, Sindhs, Baluchis could all be united under the banner of a shared religion—Islam.

Citizens of former Italian and former British Somaliland believed that the different clans of the greater Somali nation could all be united under the banner of the shared Somali language, identity and culture.

But in time there was rising discrimination against the Bengalis of East Pakistan. And in post-colonial

unified Somalia there was rising discrimination against the former British Somaliland.

Both in the old Greater Pakistan and in the Greater Somalia, discrimination escalated into abuse of the weaker partners and finally exploded into violence and brutality.

Near the old Pakistan there was a big neighbor called India. India could not resist the opportunity to fish in troubled waters. India intervened on the side of the brutalized Bengali people—and before long Bangladesh was born as a separate country.

Near the old greater Somalia there was also a big neighbor—but this one was called Ethiopia. Unlike India in 1971-72, Ethiopia in the early 1990s avoided overt military backing of Somaliland. Ethiopia extended sympathy, rather than attempting military intervention on the side of Somaliland. Today's Somaliland should study how Bangladesh got international recognition faster than Somaliland seems to be getting.

Islamabad in West Pakistan (like Mogadishu today) was strongly opposed to international recognition of the separatist region as an independent sovereign country. And when Great Britain recognized Bangladesh and proposed its admission into the Commonwealth, the new Pakistan withdrew from the Commonwealth altogether. It took some time before Pakistan recognized the reality of Bangladesh and rejoined the Commonwealth.

It may be worth the effort of Somaliland scholars to research what strategies were used by Bangladesh and its allies. If it would be hard for Somaliland to be admitted to the African Union, why not lobby and struggle for admission into the Commonwealth of

Nations? If full membership of the Commonwealth is not initially possible, why not lobby for admission as an Associate Member?

Two Muslim countries—the old Greater Pakistan and the old Greater Somalia—experimented with historical political marriages, which finally resulted in total collapse. Bangladesh rose from the ashes as a total separate country from Pakistan. Can Somaliland rise from marginality as a totally separate country from Somalia? Can membership in the Commonwealth help the process?

### **THE SCENARIO OF FRIENDSHIP AFTER DIVORCE**

What about the longer-term relationship between Somalia and Somaliland? Can “the twain” meet again? In Africa’s ethical code, tolerance is partly captured in Africa’s short memory of hate. While Islam recommends compensation and forgiveness as a better response than retaliation, Africanity recommends a return to normality without hate after each conflict.<sup>3</sup> The Nigerian civil war of 1967-1970 ended without reprisals and without an African equivalent of the Nuremberg trials.<sup>4</sup> Ian Smith unleashed a racial war on Zimbabwe and lived to sit in Zimbabwe’s parliament and criticize the successor Black regime.<sup>5</sup> Nelson Mandela lost twenty-seven of the best years of his life under a white racist regime, and emerged ready to have afternoon tea with the unrepentant widow of the architect of apartheid, Mrs. Verwoerd.<sup>6</sup> Jomo Kenyatta was imprisoned by the British and denounced by a British Governor as a “leader unto darkness and death.” He emerged from detention and turned Kenya towards a pro-Western orientation in which it has obstinately

persisted. Kenyatta even published a book entitled *Suffering Without Bitterness*.<sup>7</sup>

Africans fight deeply and passionately, sometimes ruthlessly, in defense of either their identities or their values. But when the fighting is over, African cultures have a low level of hate-retention. Potentially this could be part of Africa's contribution to the principle of tolerance in the Global Ethic. It is remarkable that modern nationalism among the Oromo took so long to develop. In spite of many abuses to which the Abyssinians subjected the Oromo, militant protest waited until the second half of the twentieth century to be truly articulated.

What about Somalia and Somaliland? How short will the memory of hate be? If we can forgive imperial powers like Britain, Italy and France, should we not learn to forgive each other?

Perhaps the most successful marriage and divorce in post-colonial history was the union and later divorce between Malaya and Singapore in the 1960s. For a brief period after self-rule, Malaya united with Singapore to form Malaysia. Before long, the Singapore leaders decided to pull out of the union in a flood of public fears and tears.

Today both Singapore and Malaysia are among the economic tigers of Asia—perhaps greater success stories in divorce than they might have been in a tense marriage of periodic recrimination. Perhaps one day Somaliland will become the prosperous Singapore of the Horn of Africa—and let Somalia evolve separately into a future Malaysia of Africa.

If Sudan miraculously survives intact as one country, and is counted as part of the Greater Horn,



it will retain its exceptionalism as the largest African country in territory and the only one which shares borders with almost ten other countries.

In the cultural field, the Horn boasts an African country which has had its own indigenous alphabet for hundreds of years—Ethiopia. The Horn also boasts an African country which invented a modern alphabet of its own and never adopted it in Somalia. Ethiopia has had a national alphabet for a millennium. Somalia adopted the Latin alphabet for the Somali language only after a decade of independence from European rule. On the other hand, the Somali language is widely credited with the most brilliant tradition of oral poetry in the whole of Africa, and not merely in the Horn, as the Oromo also have developed a remarkable astronomical calendar.

Sudan's cultural credentials include being a fragile but very important bridge between Arab Africa and Black Africa, between Anglophone and Arabophone Africa, between Christian and Muslim Africa, between the Blue Nile and the White Nile, and now between agro-Africa and petro-Africa.

Southern Sudan may also be the only part of Africa where the Arabic language is spreading faster than the Islamic religion. Everywhere else in sub-Saharan Africa where both Arabic and Islam have a presence, it is the religion which is expanding faster than the language. In Southern Sudan the reverse is the case.

If the Arabic language is eventually consolidated in Southern Sudan, it may help establish a future friendship between North and South Sudanese even when they are territorially divorced. The Arabic language may

even transcend the religious divide between Northern Muslims and Christian-led Southerners.

## **THE FUTURE SCENARIO OF THE ECUMENICAL STATE**

On the politicization of religion, the Horn of Africa has its contradictions. Ethiopia had a theocratic tradition for more than a thousand years—with the Orthodox Church as an established church, and the Emperor as both allied to the church and revered as the anointed of God.

Yet today the Ethiopian authorities do not want the Somali people to experiment with a theocratic solution to their problem of anarchy even for a single decade, let alone for a thousand years. Ethiopian troops intervened in Mogadishu to snuff out the stabilizing experiment of the Union of Islamic Courts.

The theocratic Sharia experiment in General Bashir's Sudan has also experienced less tolerance from the international community than what was enjoyed by Ethiopia's Christian theocracy from the romance of Prester John to the years of Haile Selassie I.

In reality the democratic credentials of both General Bashir and Haile Selassie were much poorer than those of the Union of Islamic Courts in Somalia, who had more popular support and were trying to neutralize more corrupt and more ruthless warlords.

But on religious tolerance and interfaith dialogue the Horn of Africa has less to teach the rest of Africa than the rest of Africa may have to teach the Horn. Most of Africa is still obsessed with the limited choice between having a *secular-state* (like the United States) and having a *state with an established religion* (like the Islamic

Republic of Iran). In reality there is a third scenario—a state with *ecumenical* institutions. The most thoroughgoing *ecumenical* state in the world is probably Lebanon, with its elaborate constitutional sharing of political positions in government and the legislature among rival Christian and Muslim denominations. Should the Horn of Africa examine the scenario of an ecumenical state among its options of reform?

### **INDIGENOUS ECUMENICALISM AND ABRAHAMIC COMPETITIVENESS**

Of the three principal religious legacies of Africa (indigenous, Islamic and Christian) perhaps the most inherently ecumenical is the *indigenous* tradition. This is true of Oromo traditional beliefs. It is even arguable that Africa did not have religious wars before Christianity and Islam arrived. Precisely because these two latter faiths were *universalist* in aspiration (seeking to convert the whole of human kind), they were inherently *competitive*. In Africa Christianity and Islam have often been in competition for the soul of the continent. Rivalry has resulted in conflict.

Indigenous African religions, on the other hand, are basically communal rather than universalist. Again, this also applies to Oromo religion. Like Hinduism and modern Judaism—and unlike Christianity and Islam—indigenous African traditions have not sought to convert the whole of human kind. By not being universalist in that sense, the African traditions have not been in competition with each other for the souls of other people. The Yoruba do not seek to convert the Ibo to Yoruba religion—or vice versa. Nor do either the Yoruba or the Ibo compete with each other for

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the souls of a third group like the Hausa. The Oromo

To summarize the argument so far, predominantly Muslim countries south of the Sahara and outside the Horn of Africa have been above average in religious toleration. The capacity to accommodate other faiths may to some extent be part of the historical Islamic tradition in multi-religious empires. But far more religiously tolerant than either Islam or Christianity have been indigenous African traditions, including those of the Oromo—especially since these do not aspire to universalism and are not inherently competitive. In West Africa this indigenous tolerance has often moderated the competitive propensities of Christianity and Islam.

As President of Uganda in his first administration, Milton Obote (a Protestant) used to boast that his extended family in Lango consisted of Muslims, Catholics and Protestants “at peace with each other”. Obote’s successor—Idi Amin Dada (a Muslim)—also had a similarly multi-religious extended family, and once declared that he planned to have at least one of his sons trained for the Christian priesthood. Amin may have reconsidered the matter when—upon losing office—he found political refuge in Saudi Arabia as a guest of the custodians of the Islamic holy cities of Mecca and Medina.

In Côte d’Ivoire there is a similar North-South divide which coincides with religious differences. Under the Presidency of Felix Houphouët-Boigny the North-South divide was softened by a wise policy of power-sharing. Côte d’Ivoire has more Muslims than Christians—but Christians dominated both the economy and the political system. From 1990 to 1993, Felix Houphouët-Boigny made Allassane Dramane Quattara, a Northern Muslim, Prime Minister.

Quattara had a break in his political career to serve at the International Monetary Fund as Deputy Managing Director from 1994 to 1999. He returned to the Cotê d'Ivoire to bid for Presidency. Liberalization, however, did not translate into real democratization. The Muslim plurality in the Cotê d'Ivoire is at last reasserting its claim to its fair share of power within the context of a peaceful Ivory Coast.<sup>11</sup>

Within the proximity of the Greater Horn of Africa there is the case of Tanzania. The number of Muslims and Christians in Tanzania is almost equal. Without changing their Constitution, Tanzanians have *de facto* adopted a religiously rotating presidency. As we mentioned elsewhere, the first President, Julius K. Nyerere, was a Christian, followed by Ali Hassan Mwinyi, a Muslim, who was in turn followed by Benjamin Mkapa, another Christian. And now Tanzania has once again a Muslim Head of State, Jakaya Kikwete. Again, where else but in Africa can one find the ecumenical spirit so high on the pinnacle of power?

Should Ethiopia follow the example of Tanzania and have a religiously rotating Head of State (Christian-Muslim-Christian etc.)? Or should Eritrea regularize a rotation at the Vice-Presidential level—as Sudan has been doing? Or should Kenya experiment with a Christian Foreign Minister, as Egypt did with Christian Boutros Boutros-Ghali and Saddam Hussein did with Christian Tareq Aziz? On the issue of sharing power between religions, the Horn is not exceptional. It needs to learn from other parts of Africa and from elsewhere in the world. The same maybe said about ethnic and regional rotation of political power in the Horn of

Africa. Of course, one also has to draw a distinction between “symbolic” power and “real” power.

## **THE SCENARIO OF POLITICAL ANDROGYNY**

What about sharing power between men and women? The Nile Valley can go back to Hatshepsut, the great female Pharaoh of ancient Egypt. Although Egypt is not part of the Horn of Africa, Hatshepsut is partly famous for attempting to strengthen links between Egypt and the Horn of Africa, including Somalia.

Ethiopia’s legends have bequeathed to African and Black culture the mythology of Solomon and the Queen of Sheba. Ethiopians themselves associated their entire Solomonic Dynasties to the greatness of what they regard as their founding First Lady, Sheba.

Much more recently Kenya has had a woman candidate for the Presidency. She lost in the contest, but she established a precedent of an inter-gender contest in a presidential election in Kenya.

Indigenous cultures in Africa gave more roles to women than Islam did, while Islam gave more *rights* to women than indigenous culture had. This paradox applies to the Horn of Africa, as well as elsewhere on the continent. Until the year 2005 Muslim countries outside Africa have had women as heads of state or heads of government. Indonesia, the largest Muslim country in population, has had a woman as President—Megawati Sukarnoputri. In Bangladesh both the Head of Government and the leader of the Opposition have been women—Sheikh Hasina Wajed and Begum Khaleda Zia have alternated in political power for more than a decade.

Two other Muslim countries outside Africa have had a woman chief executive at the top of the political process. Benazir Bhutto was Prime Minister of Pakistan twice. She was killed as she campaigned for a third term. And Ms. Tansu Ciller was Prime Minister of Turkey, a far cry from the political culture of the Ottoman Empire.

All these cases of Muslim women at the top had occurred long before the United States has had a woman president, or Germany a woman chancellor before 2005, or France a woman president at all, or Italy a woman prime minister, or Russia a woman president. But Asian Muslims have also been ahead of Africans in this political empowerment.

While serving as heads of government such Muslim women in those countries have been *de facto* Commanders-in-Chief. Were they continuing in the tradition of the Prophet's widow Ayesha in the middle of the Battle of the Camel way back in the first century of the Hijrah calendar, the seventh century of the Christian era?

Have any of these Muslim women in power had to contend with terrorism by fellow Muslims? Bangladesh has had conflicts, coups and assassinations over the years, but neither Sheikh Hasina Wajed in power nor Begum Khaleda Zia had to fight terrorism. On the other hand, Megawati Sukarnoputri in Indonesia had been under enormous pressure to act against Islamic militants, especially since the devastating terrorist bombs in the resort town of Bali.<sup>12</sup>

Now Liberia has produced Africa's first woman President—Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf—effective from 2005-2006. She was elected by both Muslims and non-Muslims



in Liberia. Is Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf a reincarnation of Hatshepsut or a reincarnation of the Queen of Sheba?

Is Uganda part of the Greater Horn of Africa? In Eastern Africa Uganda has led the way in the political empowerment of women. It was a controversial President of Uganda, *Field Marshall Idi Amin*, who appointed the first woman Foreign Minister in Eastern Africa. This was two decades before Bill Clinton appointed Madeleine K. Albright, the first woman Secretary of State in American history.

But although appointed by a Muslim Head of State, *Foreign Minister Elizabeth Bagaya of Uganda* was not herself a Muslim. President Yoweri Museveni has since carried female empowerment in Uganda even further. Uganda under Museveni has known a woman Vice-President long before the United States has had one. In Africa as a whole the political empowerment of women still has a long way to go, though military regimes have sometimes opened more doors to women than have civilian governments.<sup>13</sup>

In the experience of both Muslim and non-Muslim Africans the gender question is still problematic. This includes gender problems among the Oromo. But there are plusses as well as minuses in what these different civilizations can demonstrate to a human race still struggling to achieve gender equity.

In the Horn of Africa have the Somali people been leading the way in female empowerment? Somali women serving in the armed forces goes back several decades. And Her Excellency Edna Adan Ismail of the Republic of Somaliland had been blazing a trail as one of the most active Foreign Ministers on the African

continent. She had been the voice of the separated Republic of Somaliland in many international capitals.

In future African parliaments we need to reserve gender seats for women—just as we once reserved seats for racial minorities in colonial Kenya and independent Zimbabwe. For example, one could have a three-stage gender reform in the constitution. Under stage I the candidates for parliamentary seats would be women and the voters for them would also be women.

Under stage II the candidates would still be women, but in their campaigns they would now be expected to address the concerns of men, as well as of fellow women. The voters would be both male and female, though the legislative candidates would still be women.

Stage III would arrive when it is no longer necessary to reserve gender seats in order to get adequate female representation in Parliament.

Let us say the legislature consisted of one hundred seats. Under Stage I, ten seats would be reserved for women, but the remaining ninety seats would be open for competition by both men and women. Under Stage II ten seats would still be for women but subject to a common electoral roll consisting of both men and women. The remaining ninety seats would also be open for competition by both genders.

When Stage III is finally reached all the one hundred seats would be subject to a common electoral roll, and the candidates could be of either gender.

Such ideas of quotas for women in politics have influenced policy in countries like Uganda under Yoweri Museveni and post-apartheid South Africa. Sometimes the reservation of positions for women has had to begin at the level of political-party roles and offices, rather

than actual parliamentary seats. One way or another, the scenario of politically empowering women needs to be more systematically institutionalized.

### **THE SCENARIO OF CULTURAL CONVERGENCE: OROMO-AMHARA SYMBIOSIS**

Two processes have fluctuated in relations between the Oromo and the Amhara across the centuries. The two processes are *homogenization* (trend towards becoming homogeneous) and *hegemonization* (trend towards becoming dominant or hegemonic). This has created the special *exceptionalism* of the Oromo people.

In terms of numerical ascendancy, the Oromo have led the way in hegemonization. If the whole of Ethiopia had been governed in terms of so-called “one man, one vote”, the Oromo would have had an edge in at least some of the elections. Most independent estimates place the Oromo at about 40% of the population, while the Amhara may be just about 30% of the national number of people.<sup>14</sup>

With regard to cultural homogenization between the Oromo and the Amhara, earlier centuries left the rivalry unsettled. From the seventeenth century sedentary Oromo started integrating with their Amharic-speaking neighbors. Some Oromo chiefs acquired some political power in the wider monarchy. Emperor Iyasu II (1730-55) was half Oromo and promoted a network of Oromo allies. Indeed, this was the period when the Oromo language became the language of the court at Gondar. Homogenization in this era favored the spread of Oromo culture.

In late eighteenth century the central government of Ethiopia weakened considerably. Local princes

and governors carved out greater power and asserted autonomy for themselves. This period was known as the *Zamana Amana Mesafint*, and was characterized by *dis-homogenization*, in the sense of decentralization of power. The Oromo dynasty of Yejju chiefs produced a string of war lords who exercised disproportionate influence on the weakened titular emperors of Ethiopia. Some Oromo chieftains became virtual Regents of the Empire. Power transfer through marriage was another method of *hegemonization*. Ras Ali of Yejju ascended to pre-eminence in 1779. As the Emperor of Ethiopia lost hegemony during *Zamana Mesafint*, the Yejju Oromo became de facto custodians of the Empire.

In 1855 Ras Ali II of Yejju was defeated by Kassa Hailu. Almost out of the blue Kassa Hailu became Emperor Tewodros II. From then on the Oromo not only declined politically; they also became gradually marginalized culturally. The Oromo language was even banned from official institutions very much like the Kurdish language was later discouraged in the Republic of Turkey under the legacy of Mustapha Kemal Atatürk. The Amharization of the urban Oromo elites accelerated the process of cultural homogenization from the nineteenth century onwards. The treatment of the Oromo by the Amhara was almost a dress rehearsal of the treatment of the Kurds by the Turks a century later.

The major sub-processes of the Amharization of the Oromo were linguistic (the spread of Amharic among the Oromo), *religious* (the Christianization of the Oromo, especially via Orthodox Christianity), *bureaucratization* (the cooptation of the Oromo into the

civil service and the armed forces of the Empire), and *intermarriage* (cross-ethnic matrimony and raising children of mixed ethnicity).

Lady Menen of Wollo became Empress in the nineteenth century; Muhammad Ali of Wollo became Ras Mikael and subsequently Negus of Siyon. He fathered Emperor Iyasu II. In the twentieth century Lady Menen of Ambassel became Empress Consort of Haile Selassie I. These were forms of homogenization in more than one sense. They were the mixing of biological genes, as well as the erosion of cultural differences (heterogeneity) among the elite.

Was there counterpenetration of Amhara culture by the Oromo? In reality Oromo counterpenetration into Amhara society did not include language. The Amharic language was bound to absorb some words and phrases from the Oromo linguistic heritage, but very few Ethiopians of Amhara descent embraced the Oromo language instead of Amharic. A lot more Oromo adopted Amharic instead of the Oromo tongue [Oromiffa or Afaan Oromoo].

In the transmission of religion there was some exchange. Millions of Oromo were Christianized as a result of conquest by and contact with the Amhara. Emperor Yohannes IV even forced Christianity upon large numbers of the Oromo in the late 1800s on pain of the Oromo losing their properties. These were trends towards religious homogenization.

A major issue to be resolved is whether the Oromo played a role to Islamize thousands of Amhara. One method of Islamization was bound to be through intermarriage, especially when Oromo men married and converted Amhara women, and if the children

who followed were in turn regarded as Muslims. But, in fact, the reverse happened. Conversion to Islam also often resulted in dis-Amharization, just as conversion to Orthodox Christianity led to Amharization. Islam among the Oromo is the oldest in Black Africa. Oromo Islam has often been traced as far back as the arrival of the first persecuted Arab Muslims on the run from pre-Islamic Arabia during the Prophet Muhammad's own lifetime. There is little doubt that the first Oromo Muslims were converted by the immigrant Arabs. But is it not also likely that the first non-Oromo Muslims in Ethiopia, including Amhara Muslims, were Islamized by the Oromo? There is room for further historical investigation. In Buganda, Islamization resulted in loss of Ganda ethnic recognition. Similarly in Ethiopia, Islamization generally if not always resulted in loss of Amhara ethnic recognition.

If intermarriage and Islamization have been two methods by which the Oromo counterpenetrated the Amhara, the third method was political counterpenetration. While the indigenous *Gadaa* system of governance did not influence the imperial monarchical system, the indigenous *warrior* tradition of the Oromo did result in a disproportionate military role for the Oromo within the Empire. Menelik II allied with *Ras* Gobana's militia to expand his empire eastward and southward. Haile Selassie's father, governor of Harar, was a top-general in the Battle of Adwa when Menelik's forces defeated the Italians. Emperor Haile Selassie I was in part of Oromo descent, as well as of Amhara ancestry. Haile Selassie symbolized Oromo counterpenetration of the Amhara at the highest political level. But he was in denial about his Oromo genes. Haile Selassie was the

*de jure* Emperor of Ethiopia from 1930 to 1974. Iyasu II, another Oromo-Amhara, had been the *de facto* but uncrowned ruler of the Empire from 1913 to 1916.

The exceptionalism of the role of the Oromo in Ethiopia has continued to be this symbiotic interplay between *hegemonization* (as the Oromo have ascended to ultimate power-sharing) and *homogenization* (as the Oromo have shared culture and mixed blood with the Amhara).

Have the Oromo been an internalized colony of the Amhara? Yes, but there are degrees of colonial status. A closer look at another imperial power would clarify these degrees of subordination. Before Great Britain became a global empire, it consisted of internal colonization. The English people were the equivalent of the Amhara. Linguistically the whole of the United Kingdom was homogenized and became English-speaking. But the status of the component parts varied. The most deeply colonized and dominated was Ireland. Indeed, for centuries, the Irish were treated by the English as an inferior “race” right into the earlier years of the twentieth century.

Next in status within the United Kingdom was Wales, which was also treated as an inferior partner to the English for centuries, but was not as humiliated as the Irish.

The most respected partner in the United Kingdom to the English was Scotland. Its union with England under the Scottish Stuart kings in the seventeenth century (James I and Charles I and their post-Cromwellian successors) was *voluntary*. The union put a Scottish king on the throne of England. Scotland developed its own Church of Scotland (partially distinct from the

Church of England) and retained its own parallel currency into the twenty-first century. In spite of the rise of the Scottish nationalist movement in the second half of the twentieth century, the Scots were essentially almost the equals of the English for most of the time since the formal union of England and Scotland under the Stuarts in the 1600s.

The big comparative question is whether the Oromo in the history of Ethiopia were more like the Irish in the history of the United Kingdom—totally dominated and despised by the English for centuries? Or were the Oromo more like the Scots—not quite the equals of the English, but often sharing power, and at times even occupying the English throne?

There were times in Ethiopian history when the Oromo elite and the Amhara elite were more like the English aristocracy alongside the Scottish aristocracy—not quite equal, but retaining substantial mutual respect. There have been other periods of Ethiopian history when the Amhara treated the Oromo in the way the English once treated the Irish—as a lower breed of people, and an internalized colony.

But what about the *Oromia* of the future? Will it be more like Scotland—autonomous and dignified but not totally equal to England politically? Or will it be more like Ireland before the first half of the twentieth century—a de facto colony in subjection to the English? Or is there a chance that Oromia would one day become the equivalent of the Irish Republic—sovereign, free and increasingly prosperous? The answer may lie in the final outcome of the symbiotic relationship between the forces of *hegemonization* (a power-play)



and the forces of *homogenization* (a process of integration). The struggle continues.

## **CONCLUSION**

This paper has addressed the general issue of what is unique and exceptional about the Greater Horn of Africa. The sub-region has replaced Southern Africa as the most conflict-ridden part of the African continent. The sharpest conflicts are now Black against Black and no longer involve the politics of skin-color, but there are the border-line issues of Arab against non-Arab, Semite against non-Semite, and clan versus clan.

Ethiopia witnessed centuries ago the first landing of both Christianity and Islam on the soil of Black Africa. But the Horn of Africa as a whole has witnessed the more recent radicalization of both Christianity and Islam, including large-scale civil conflict and religiously inspired terrorism.

Systems of governance in this sub-region have included monarchies which endured for centuries, and pastoralist traditions among the Somali and among the rural Oromo which have amounted to stateless societies in certain epochs of history. The Oromo transitional principle established eight years as the prescribed term of service for a generational unit (*gadaa*) of allegiance and of operation. This eight-year span has been increasingly adopted as a term limit for two terms of presidential incumbency in the United States. More and more countries in the world, influenced by the American example, have opted for two maximum terms of presidential incumbency, adding up to eight years (or an outer limit of ten years).

The reasons which made the Oromo choose the unit of eight years as a guiding ancestral principle of democracy were entirely distinct from what made the United States after World War II opt for a maximum of eight years for all future presidents after Franklin D. Roosevelt and Harry S. Truman. Nevertheless, the term limit of eight years for presidential power is gaining ascendancy in modern democracies centuries after the ancient Oromo founding fathers were guided by the mystique of eight years as a temporal unit for service by the generational grades.

The Greater Horn of Africa has experimented with language policy as an instrument of national integration (*homogenization*) and language as an instrument of political control (*hegemonization*). One fascinating area of fluctuation has been the cultural symbiosis between the Oromo and the Amhara across the centuries.

The sub-region has also witnessed democratic experiments like the fragile one in Kenya which worked for a while, and then encountered a violent setback following the general election of December 2007.

Uganda has also experimented with the political empowerment of women partly through a quota system of party offices and government ministries. Ethiopia had earlier experiences of powerful Empresses. More controversial has been the occasional rise of Warrior Priestesses like Alice Lakwena in Uganda who tried to mobilize the Acholi against the government of Yoweri Museveni.

The Greater Horn of Africa can be regarded as Africa's grand laboratory of social continuities, constitutional experiments, cultural innovations, and dangerous political gambles pregnant with risks of conflict.

The rest of Africa needs to pay attention to the sub region—learn from its errors, benefit from its achievements, and help the march of social progress in the continent as a whole.

## NOTES

1. I am indebted to Thomas Uthup, Seifudein Adem, and Muhammad Yusuf Tamim for research and bibliographical assistance.
2. There is also a view that the arrangement between Ethiopia and European powers created what amounted to internal, indirect, dependent or domestic colonialism. Consult, for instance, Bonnie K. Holcomb and Sisai Ibssa, *The Invention of Ethiopia: The Making of Dependent Colonial State in Northeast Africa* (Trenton, NJ: Red Sea Press, 1990).
3. Mark Mathabene has recommended the African experience for the Middle East in an op-ed piece, “The Cycle of Revenge Can be Broken,” *New York Times* (July 5, 2002), 21.
4. For further reading on the Biafra war, consult Zdenek Cervenka, *The Nigerian War, 1967-70: History of The War, Selected Bibliography and Documents* (Frankfurt Am Main: Bernard & Graef, 1971).
5. For an overview of the transition from white rule to black rule in Zimbabwe, see Anthony Parsons, “From Southern Rhodesia to Zimbabwe, 1965-1985,” *International Affairs* Volume 9, Number 4, (November 1988), pp. 353-361; also see Victor De Waal, *The Politics of Reconciliation: Zimbabwe’s First Decade* (London and Cape Town: Hurst and David Philip, 1981).
6. Reported in the *New York Times* (March 23, 1999), 6.
7. Jomo Kenyatta, *Suffering Without Bitterness* (Nairobi and Chicago: East African Publishing House and Northwestern University Press, 1968).

8. The population of Senegal is 94% Muslim, and about 5 % Christian, according to *The World Guide 1999/2000* (Oxford: New Internationalist Publications Ltd., 2000), 497.
9. Relatedly, see Leonardo A. Villalón, *Islamic Society and State Power in Senegal: Disciples and Citizens in Fatick* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995).
10. Consult Susan MacDonald, “Senegal: Islam on the March”, *West Africa*, (London), No. 3494 (August 6, 1984), 1570.
11. For an early report on the violence, consult Norimitsu Onishi, “Dictator Gone: Ivory Coast Splits into Ethnic and Political Violence,” *The New York Times* (Oct 27, 2000). Peace today is fragile; see Michael Deibert , “In Ivory Coast, a Fragile Peace Is Framed by Promises Unfulfilled,” *The Washington Post* (November 16, 2007).
12. Consult Anthony L. Smith, “Reluctant Partner: Indonesia,” *Asian Affairs: An American Review* (Summer 2003), Volume 30, Issue 2, 142-150.
13. Even in Iraq, for all of Saddam Hussein’s abuses, his regime was relatively progressive on legislation relating to women. Women were not allowed to marry prior to the age of 18, and there was no favoritism toward men in inheritance, divorce and child custody. See “Iraqi Women Are in Danger Of Losing Rights, Democrats Say,” *The Washington Post* (February 3, 2004), 2.
14. According to most recent official census the Oromos are 25.5 million or 33.5 %, the Amhara about 19.8 million or 26%, Somali 4.5 million or 6.2%, Tigre 4.4 million or 6 % of Ethiopia’s population. <http://www.jimmatimes.com/article.cfm?articleId=31559> (accessed March 16, 2009).



# ALI A. MAZRUI AND THE OROMO: NATIONALISM, PAN-AFRICANISM AND HUMAN RIGHTS

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Seifudein Adem

## INTRODUCTION

Ali Mazrui has bequeathed to us a number of useful concepts and theories that are critical for understanding a wide range of socio-political forces and relevant for sharpening our insight about the major issues affecting the Oromo. In this essay we sift through Professor Mazrui's scholarship with a view to highlighting them and assessing what they mean in the context of the Oromo of the Horn of Africa.

It should be admitted at once that writing about the relevance of the scholarship of Ali Mazrui, known affectionately among Mazruphiles as Mazruiana, to the Oromo and Oromo studies is no easy task. This is partly so because Mazrui has not written much

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**Seifudein Adem** is Associate Director of Institute of Global Cultural Studies, State University of New York at Binghamton

about the Oromo; he neither aspired to nor claimed to be Oromo studies expert. But precisely because the task of applying and interpreting Mazruiana in this context is challenging, it is also exciting for me both as Mazru's student and, possibly, the first Oromo to try to do so. Oromo obscurity in Mazru's corpus of intellectual outputs offer a rare opportunity for interpreting his theories, for examining the relevance of his concepts to Oromo studies and for formulating broad hypotheses, if only tentative, as to why the Oromo escaped his attention. It is a rare opportunity because there are not many issues which were left unexamined in Mazruiana. Another reason why it is challenging to write about Mazru is his being a "living legend," as one of the most recent awards he received has dubbed him.<sup>1</sup> Legend or not, it is sometimes not easy to write critically about a person who is still alive. But Mazru generally welcomes constructive criticism about his scholarship—a situation which made my task relatively easier. Ali Mazru has written quite a bit about Ethiopia. We can therefore enrich our understanding about a Mazruiana perspective on the Oromo partly by interrogating what Mazru has and has not said and written about Ethiopia.

In general Ali Mazru uses three intellectual strategies in much of his historical writings: unmasking, challenging and deconstructing master-narratives. These strategies can be separable from each other analytically; in practice, however, they are closely intertwined.

Mazru's analysis often begins from a critical appreciation of a historical reality for what it is rather than for what it was or for what it should have been. This process requires laying the phenomenon bare or

unmasking its ideological and political camouflage. Mazrui accomplishes this task sometimes simply by giving a historical account of how the phenomenon of interest came into being and how it evolved over time.

Once the master-narrative is unmasked, the next step is to challenge it by identifying the internal logical contradictions in the narrative and revealing its incoherence, and demonstrating how the historical reality would have been different, had it been conceptualized differently. Both of these approaches are aimed at undermining the dominant discourse.

Ultimately the purpose of unmasking and challenging a dominant discourse is to contribute to its deconstruction by reforming or transforming it. The strategy focuses at this stage not only on constructing alternative scenarios but also on underscoring why the social reality which was created as a result of that particular discourse is undesirable from the perspectives of its objects, and why it is therefore unacceptable, and what could be done to bring about the necessary change.

We will lay down below the essential elements of Mazrui's approach under the rubric of "the triple heritage." We will scrutinize Mazruiana from inside out to seek possible answers for Oromo obscurity in it partly by examining *The Africans*, the widely acclaimed 1986 TV series. We will then link his discussion to Mazrui's Africanist and Pan-Africanist scholarship broadly. The third part applies a couple of Mazrui's concepts to the discourse about Oromo. The last section relates the position Mazrui has taken in recent years on the issue of human rights and its abuse in the Horn of Africa.



## **THE TRIPLE HERITAGE AS AN APPROACH<sup>2</sup>**

Triple heritage as a concept, as defined by Ali Mazrui, its most articulate champion, denotes the cultural forces which have given post-colonial Africa its present characteristics. These forces are indigenous values, Islam and Western culture. Whereas Africa's triple heritage is primarily cultural, it has engendered wide-ranging consequences in the social, economic, and political spheres of contemporary African societies. But the extent and nature of influence of these forces have varied depending on the time, place, and issue area.

As an approach and method of inquiry, the triple heritage emphasizes balance rather than extremities; pluralism rather than singularism; hybridity rather than uniformity; inclusivity rather than exclusivity; triple heritage also relishes the homogeneous and the heterogeneous; the local and the universal; the top and the bottom. Ali Mazrui does not give a comprehensive, explicit, and one-installment definition of the triple heritage approach. Perhaps this is partly so because he is always less eager to engage "meta-theoretical" issues of this nature than "real-world" issues. One can only deduce the meaning of triple heritage approach from Mazrui's intellectual output via interpretation. Another reason why Mazrui had not preoccupied himself with these issues perhaps stem from his acute awareness of the implications of intense focus on "meta-theory:" it will be hard to remain open-minded about diverse perspectives under the circumstances since the relevance of one theory or method is likely to loom larger. In a sense it was therefore right and safe for a scholar of eclectic orientation not to dwell on questions of what social theories are, how they should be formulated, and

how they should be tested. Triple heritage is problem-driven rather than method-driven approach.

To the extent we can rely upon the clues provided by Ali Mazrui's extensive intellectual output, a few generalizations can be made about the triple heritage approach.

As a mode of analysis, the triple heritage approach combines clarity of ideas with depth of analysis, broad perspective with sharp insight; it also merges the ideational with the material, the empirical with the normative, the personalized narrative with dispassionate observation, and the local with the universal. Triple heritage pursues disciplined inquiry but eschews disciplinary restrictions; it expresses unity of opposites without a hint of analytical contradictions and fuses historical method with empiricism. Triple heritage approach celebrates the achievements of African societies and chastises post-colonial governments for their failure. In Mazrui's own words, his scholarship "presents Africa as victor (triumphant in its historic achievements), as victim (humiliated by enslavement and colonialism) and as villain (home of postcolonial corruption, greed and military coups)."<sup>3</sup>

It embraces unity of opposites, celebrates contradictions, and permits, and even encourages, their articulation. The *dialectical method* forms the lynchpin of this analysis, the most important aspects of which accommodate and interpret oppositions in social reality and explains simultaneously divergent issues and even conflicting claims.<sup>4</sup> The triple heritage approach thus enables Ali Mazrui to analyze, for instance, the issue of too much government (tyranny) and too little government (anarchy) at the same time.

In his *The African State as a Political Refugee*<sup>5</sup> Mazrui sheds light on the African state not just as weak or strong, not just as authoritarian or neo-patrimonial, but as a very complex entity which embodies many of the contradictions of a political refugee. The entirety of Ali Mazrui's Reith Lectures, later published as *The African Condition* were structured around what he called "the six paradoxes of the African condition;" namely, the paradox of habitation; the paradox of humiliation; the paradox of acculturation; the paradox of fragmentation; the paradox of retardation, and the paradox of location.<sup>6</sup> In the book, Mazrui systematically exploits paradoxes and makes, in effect, a strong case for contrasting observations about Africa. Triple heritage approach attests that one can integrate contradictions into a narrative and still tell a coherent story. Because of too much emphasis on, or even bias in favor of, coherence, deviations are sometimes systematically weeded out and paradoxes are concealed in the rationalist discourses about Africa.

How does triple heritage analysis successfully relate contradictions in social reality without introducing incoherence to its narratives? The approach accomplishes this feat in two ways. One is the dialectical method already indicated above. Another component is *classification*. Mazrui loves classifying things; for him nothing is unclassifiable. Classification makes Mazrui's analysis immune to the need to suppress deviant cases and opens the door wide open to accommodate seemingly conflicting observations. But what is the role of classification in social inquiry? Rationalist methods are premised on classification and categorization. As the French poststructuralist scholar Michel Foucault

observed, sciences always carry with themselves the project, however remote it may be, of an exhaustive ordering of the world.<sup>7</sup>

If classification occupies such a central place in the rationalist project, and if triple heritage approach is anti-rationalist in this respect, then how can we describe Mazrui's triple heritage approach, given the centrality of classification in it, as distinct from rationalism? The crucial difference here is that rationalism employs classification as a tool for explanation, which is ultimately bound up, in turn, with prediction. On the other hand, Mazrui employs classification as a tool for understanding and as a means for reflecting on the contradictions which make up social reality. Explanation and prediction assume the determinacy of human behavior. The triple heritage approach does not.<sup>8</sup>

However, classification also has its own flip side. Some people are not thrilled, for instance, by a typology of racism<sup>9</sup> or slavery.<sup>10</sup> It should not come as surprise therefore that Mazrui has been challenged on occasions on this very issue.

Is classification value-free? Mazrui has consistently rejected the notion that a value-free social science is desirable or even possible. At the same time he goes to great lengths to point out that to classify something is not necessarily to rank it. But, of course, he also understands that it is natural to create a hierarchy of different classes of things. It is all too easy to see ranking in classification even when it is not there, especially when vested interest is involved. It was not at all surprising, for instance, when he provoked uproar mainly from Africans of Arab descent at Cornell University in 2007 after classifying "Africanness" or an "African" into the

“African of blood” and the “African of soil.”<sup>11</sup> The Afro-Arabs in question were displeased about the very idea of classifying “Africanness.”

In the same vein Mazrui incurred earlier the wrath of his old friend, the Nigerian Nobel laureate Wole Soyinka, on the very issue of triple heritage, and particularly in relation to the relative place of the three elements of triple heritage. Wole Soyinka was not sure if he could accept the form of hierarchy which, in his view, was suggested in Mazrui’s classification of Africa’s triple heritage.

The silver lining of the war of the titans, as the debate between Mazrui and Soyinka was called by younger Africans and Africanists, was that it gave Mazrui the opportunity to spell out more fully and with concrete examples the dialectical approach which guided the production of his TV series. Even without Mazrui’s rejoinder in response to Soyinka’s sharp critique, it becomes evident after watching *The Africans* that a dialectical mind was at work in that documentary, a mind which was unafraid of highlighting contradictions. But it is perhaps as much to the credit of Mazrui’s intellectual adversary that we now know much more about the underpinnings of the triple heritage approach than we would have known without the public debate he launched.

The third methodological orientation, which makes the triple heritage approach receptive to diversity and contradictions, stems from its reliance on *eclecticism*. It is widely recognized that Mazrui is eclectic in his disciplinary orientation, in the methodologies he uses, and in the role he plays. Such eclecticism has enabled him to approach social reality from a variety of angles

and to have room in his scholarship for a great degree of pluralism. If the triple heritage worldview, as originally formulated, was about *cultural eclecticism*, the triple heritage approach is partly about *methodological eclecticism*. Finally the triple heritage approach is also buttressed in this regard by its *macro-historical* perspective which is more sensitive to contrasts in social reality than is a micro-historical perspective. What is more, a macro-historian possesses wider knowledge and does not easily fall prey to absolutist positions or universalist claims and aspirations.

### **OROMO OBSCURITY IN MAZRUIANA**

A clue about why Ali Mazrui's powerful pen eluded the Oromo may be found in his disciplinary specialization. It must be admitted at once that Mazrui is one of the few intellectuals who have successfully challenged and liberated himself from the bondage of disciplinary boundaries. His wide-ranging intellectual output stands testimony to this. Yet it is also true that Mazrui was trained as a political scientist. If his field of training had been, for instance, anthropology, or African history, rather than political science, the Oromo, as one of the largest groups in Africa, could have caught Mazrui's academic attention more readily.

It is also worth noting that Oromo nationalism does not feature prominently in Africanist scholarship in general. Why? Part of the explanation lies in the fact that, in important ways, Oromo nationalism is different from or more complex than the nationalist movements which proliferated in the parts of Africa which were under European colonialism. The influential view among the Oromo is that we were colonized not by

Europeans but by fellow Africans—the Abyssinians. For sure some have expressed doubts about the validity of conceptualizing the Oromo question in these terms.<sup>12</sup> On balance, however, the evidence seems to support the view that Menelik had indeed taken part in the “scramble for Africa.” In a letter he sent to European powers, Menelik makes this clear. He said: “I have not the least intention of remaining a disinterested onlooker if powers from a distance come with a notion of dividing Africa between themselves.”<sup>13</sup>

There is also a school of thought which claims that Emperor Menelik did not colonize the Oromo but he merely unified the country. The counter-argument to the “unification” theory is that one could not unify territories whose people were so distinct from one another in cultural and historical terms. When Emperor Haile Selassie annexed Eritrea in 1962, he had also said that his aim was to “re-unite” the “lost” territory with its motherland.<sup>14</sup> If, despite the obvious cultural and historical links between Eritrea and the Christian kingdom of Ethiopia, the theory of “reunification” was unconvincing even to the Eritreans, how would it be possible to accept the “re-unification” argument with respect to the Oromo?

One reason for the complexity is that Oromo nationalism was relatively slow to emerge, born as it was only after the rest of Africa had thrown off the yoke of colonialism, partly because of the unique impediments created by the dynamics of Ethiopian colonialism.<sup>15</sup> Secondly, the obscurity of the Oromo in the discourse about Africa has also to do with the image of Ethiopia as “the ancient Christian Kingdom,” an image which has been systematically produced and reproduced by

the Ethiopia's political class, some members of its academic elite and other Ethiopianist scholars, an image which is barely modified to-date in the mainstream discourse about Ethiopia in spite of the changed realities.<sup>16</sup> Disregarding the new face of the Empire, even such great a historian as Arnold Toynbee records his simple fascination with modern Abyssinia's "survival of her political independence in the midst of an Africa under European dominion; the survival of her Monophy-site Christianity in the borderland between Islam and paganism; the survival of her Semitic language between the Hamitic and Nilotic language areas."<sup>17</sup>

Ali Mazrui and Michael Tidy's observation is also consistent with the aforementioned Oromo perspective about Ethiopia's self-portrayal during the heydays of African nationalism. Mazrui and Tidy thus write in their *Nationalism and New States in Africa*: "Haile Selassie's conservatism was more in sympathy with European colonialism than the radicalism of the new-style African nationalists."<sup>18</sup> Paradoxically, Haile Selassie has also contributed to "pan-Africanism of liberation."<sup>19</sup>

But the overwhelming evidence still supports the view that Haile Selassie pursued a conservative foreign policy and diplomacy. Under Haile Selassie, Ethiopia was the only non-NATO country to send its own troops to fight along with the Americans in Korea. Even more astounding, Ethiopia was the only country to offer to send its own military contingent to Vietnam to fight along Americans against the Vietnamese.<sup>20</sup> The offer was declined.

The same reasons, which prevented Oromo nationalism from featuring prominently in the discourses about African nationalism, also undercut its relevance



for Mazruiana. But Ali Mazrui would have stumbled onto Oromo issues if the principal ideology which informs his scholarship was not Pan-Africanism. His first major book was titled *Towards Pax-Africana*, and Pan-Africanism has continued to inform his scholarship to this day.<sup>21</sup> Nationalism and Pan-Africanism should not of course always be antithetical. And yet for someone whose preoccupation has been African unity, the Oromo issue, however weighty in a regional context, could have barely sustained his intellectual interest for a long while.

Recently Ali Mazrui has begun to show more than a passing interest in Oromo issues. As for the question why, one can only speculate. Did the regional developments in the last several years keenly sensitize him to the political excesses in the Horn of Africa, especially those taking place in the context of the so-called war on terror? Many Oromo have been caught in the cross-fire of the “war on terror” in the Horn of Africa. Or, was he more sensitized about the Oromo as a result of having an Oromo working under him at his Institute? The answer of course could be both of the above.

It must be also added that the obscurity of the Oromo in Mazruiana did not nevertheless preclude encounters between Mazrui and some Oromo. One indirect contact between Ali Mazrui and Oromo intellectuals was naturally through his writings. I, for one, had already begun to familiarize myself with his writings in the late eighties (when I was undergraduate student), more than fifteen years before I was able to meet him in person. Likewise it is fair to assume, given the fact that Mazrui attained prominence in the world of scholarship quite early on, that at least some of the

Oromo who were sent to study abroad were familiar with Mazrui's writings.

Ali Mazrui's other contact with Oromo took place on the eve of the Ethiopian Revolution in 1973 when he was invited to deliver a public lecture at Addis Ababa University, then known as Haile Selassie I University. The students who had gathered to listen to Mazrui's lecture on campus were not primarily Oromo. In fact, there were not many Oromo at the time who could make it through the gates of higher education in the country. However, the gathering included some vocal Oromo who were later to become leading members of the Oromo nationalist movement.<sup>22</sup> In his book, *Political Values and the Educated Class in Africa*, Mazrui describes the crowd who had come to listen to his lecture as "the most radical students I had ever addressed."<sup>23</sup>

However coincidental, another encounter of symbolic significance took place between Oromo and Ali Mazrui in 2004. In that year, Mazrui received an honorary degree from Addis Ababa University for, as the citation put it, his "seminal contributions to the study of Africa and [his] valiant struggles as citizen to promote Pan-African ideals."<sup>24</sup> Addis Ababa, or Finfine as it is called in the Oromo language, is regarded by many as the quintessential Oromo city. Not only does Finfine lie in an Oromo heartland but it is also an Oromo city demographically—the majority of its population being either ethnic Oromo or Oromo language speakers. The fact that the Ethiopian head of government, Meles Zenawi, was a no-show for the degree convocation ceremony also in a sense added more significance to the event, turning it into an all-Oromo affair. The event was presided over by the head of state, Girma

Wolde Giorges—an ethnic Oromo. Of course none of these Oromo connections may have been apparent to Ali Mazrui at the time.

Perhaps a more enduring encounter between Professor Mazrui and an Oromo took place in 2006 when he appointed a Japanese-trained Oromo intellectual as associate director to work for him at the Institute of Global Cultural Studies at the State University of New York-Binghamton.<sup>25</sup> The institute was created by Ali Mazrui about two decades ago. Another encounter, or non-encounter encounter—for lack of a better phrase, between Mazrui and the Oromo was occasioned by *The Africans*, the television series. This encounter and issues related to it are treated below.

## **THE OROMO AND *THE AFRICANS***

*The Africans* will here refer to Ali Mazrui's internationally acclaimed 1986 TV series produced by the BBC and PBS, and the Africans (without italics) will refer to the African people. *The Africans* has segments about Ethiopia, about the Obelisk in Axum and the Castle in Gondar—both of which, at least in the eyes of many Oromo, are symbols of the Abyssinian Empire. But nowhere in the documentary does Ali Mazrui have Ali Mazrui systematically engaged the Oromo, Oromo culture or Oromo history. In the book version of *The Africans*, Mazrui does credit the Oromo with having imported horses into Ethiopia and convinced Ethiopians of the military value of horses. As he put it to me recently, “the Oromo put Ethiopia on horseback!”<sup>26</sup>

It is also true that in *The Africans*, Mazrui does, in his own words, defend “those African societies that are criticized for living in huts or wearing limited cloth-

ing.”<sup>27</sup> In episode 2 of the documentary, he says: “in Africa you don’t have to build castles to be civilized.”<sup>28</sup> Elsewhere he even goes further: “The Tiv of Nigeria are a living example of a village democracy, part of Africa’s unique range of social organization. Tiv society is based on oral tradition. Morality and manners, legends and lessons are transmitted through the spoken word, such as in the parable about how the sparrow brought beans to the earth. When the Chief wouldn’t share the harvest, the sparrow played the music of punishment on his flute.”<sup>29</sup>

And yet omission of the Oromo appeared to some observers as unjustified, and especially so in a documentary that was hailed as “the most comprehensive television study of Africa ever compiled.”<sup>30</sup> The Oromo constitute the largest lingo-cultural group in Ethiopia, the second most widespread indigenous linguistic group in Africa and the third largest Afro-Asiatic linguistic group in the world.<sup>31</sup> Why was Mazrui silent about the Oromo or, even more importantly, what was the meaning of his silence?

An Oromo intellectual once lamented about the “traveling scholar” who comes all the way from abroad to Ethiopia and, once he/she was there, does not venture outside the capital.<sup>32</sup> The traveling scholar then returns with an incomplete picture at best, or, at worst, misconceptions, which bear little or no resemblance to reality. The “traveling scholar” is sometimes prevented from “seeing” what he/she was supposed to see due to objective barriers such as, not coincidentally, the underdeveloped infrastructure in the “other” parts of the country. At other times, the “traveling scholar” falls victim of the manipulation of the ruling elite so that

what he/she could see is only what they wanted to be seen. What, then, happened in the case of the filming of *The Africans*?

After Ali Mazrui landed to film in Ethiopia, he was prevented from traveling to certain parts of the country, ostensibly for security reasons. Mazrui was told in Ethiopia that certain parts of the country including Eritrea, which was then part of Ethiopia, were off limits. Mazrui agreed to comply, not just because of the alleged security factors but also for fear of the repeat of the fate of the British historian Basil Davidson, who was prevented from filming in Ethiopia for his 1984 documentary, *Africa*, because he had openly supported the Eritreans who were fighting for independence.<sup>33</sup>

Even as he was prevented from setting foot in the Oromo heartland, Ali Mazrui was given the green light, or was even perhaps encouraged, to travel to and film in the “cradle” of Ethiopian civilization: Axum, Lalibela and Gondar. Mazrui might not have been fully aware at the time that in suggesting to him where to go and where not to go, the Ethiopian officials were also trying to sell to him a certain point of view about who is civilized and who is not and, no less important, how civilization was to be defined.

Secondly, Mazrui’s Pan-Africanist approach in *The Africans*, whose major target audience was Western viewers, sought to highlight unity rather than division in Africa. Edward Said captured Mazrui’s preoccupation well when he wrote about *The Africans*: “for the first time in a history dominated by Western representations of Africa, an African was representing himself and Africa before a Western audience, precisely that

audience whose society for several hundred years had pillaged, colonized, enslaved Africa.”<sup>34</sup> In short, Mazrui’s Pan-Africanist radar was unable to pick up the Oromo in Ethiopia.

Due to the subordinate position of the Oromo within Ethiopia and the time-lag between the birth of African nationalism and the beginning of Oromo nationalist movements, the interaction between the Oromo, as individuals and groups, and the rest of Africa was also either non-existent or minimal. There is a growing awareness now, however, that a broad alliance is emerging between other Africans and the Oromo. But it is solidarity by *default* rather than by *design*. An Oromo scholar has argued that the self-perception of Ethiopia’s political class is one of racial and cultural superiority to other Africans and the African Diaspora.<sup>35</sup> This dynamic of “self” and the “other” brings together the Oromo with Africans and peoples of African descent on the one hand and Ethiopia’s political class on the other.

By his own admission, Menelik was a direct participant in the “scramble for Africa.”<sup>36</sup> The cultural chauvinism of Ethiopia’s rulers has also highlighted the idea that Oromo and Africans do indeed have a shared identity. It was considerations such as these which prompted Mazrui to assert that Ethiopia is not a natural-born pan-Africanist state despite the prevailing view about its symbolism in regard to pan-African unity and black freedom.<sup>37</sup>

As much as he does not seek to expunge the inconvenient truth about Ethiopia’s history, Mazrui does not also dwell upon the problematic aspect of Ethiopia’s link to Africa. He portrays Ethiopia’s contempo-

rary Pan-Africanism in positive light.<sup>38</sup> He observed: “Ethiopia was once a Black imperialist power, annexing neighboring communities. Does the future hold a more benign, and even more humane, imperial role for Ethiopia?”<sup>39</sup> What is remarkable here is that Mazrui carves a greater role for Ethiopia in East and North East Africa than for its giant neighbor, the Sudan, or even his own country of birth, Kenya.

### **MAZRUIANA IN APPLICATION**

In his *Pretender to Universalism*,<sup>40</sup> Ali Mazrui develops a conceptual framework for dealing with macro-trends in world politics. In the same work, Mazrui also critiques the West’s claim to universalism. Approaching the task from what he called the perspectives of cultural relativism, moral relativism and comparative empirical performance, he identifies three angles from which to debunk the notions that the West was more civilized than the non-West (self-glorifying myth), that the West brought enlightenment to the non-Western world (self-whitewashing myth) and that the history of the non-Western world, with few exceptions, was a history of backwardness and barbarism (other-maligning myth).<sup>41</sup> The same framework of analysis can be adapted for deconstructing self-serving ideologies and master-narratives in Ethiopia’s historiography. Moreover the framework could be put to use for contextualizing and gaining more insight about the direction of Oromo nationalist discourse over the years.

*Self-glorification* takes the form of assertion of historical achievement of “self.” The Axum Obelisk, the Castles of Gondar and the rock-hewn churches of Lalibela have been used in this way as symbols of

Abyssinia's glorious past. Self-glorification has also sometimes invoked the allegedly unbroken link of "modern" Ethiopia's rulers to the Solomonic dynasty which boasts three-thousand years of history.

Whatever truth there is to the story of King Solomon and Queen Sheba and other myths, the narrative provided the ideological basis for what has been called an Amharization policy, but also for, to borrow a useful concept from one Oromo scholar, "de-Oromization,"<sup>42</sup> a process of dismantling Oromo culture and institutions. The Oromo, it seems to me, would have no problem with the representation of Axum and Lalibela as significant historical achievements of the ancient kingdom any more than the portrayal of pyramids of Egypt as great achievement of human brilliance. But these symbols become problematic when they are used for more sinister purposes.

The second strategy is *self-whitewashing*. This is the claim of special virtues and competence for oneself. Conquest is depicted as civilizing mission, arrogance as enlightenment and Amharization as Ethiopianization. The goal of such discursive practice is to give a human or even humane face to the inhuman behaviors of the dominant group.

The third strategy is *other-maligning*, which brings to focus the "other" side rather than "self." The object here is the vice of the "other" rather than the virtue of "self" even though the two are interrelated. The attempts to dehumanize the Oromo fall into this category.

The Oromo nationalist discourse has responded to the rhetoric of superiority and the assault on "Oromumma"<sup>43</sup> in at least three ways: regional relativism, historical relativism and comparative empirical per-



formance. *Regional relativism* points out that Abyssinian architectural glory was not evenly spread across Abyssinian regions. Whereas the Axumites have built obelisk, and rock-hewn churches and Ganders their castles, what architectural glory could the other regions of the ancient Christian kingdom point to? Were not the Shawan Amhara and the Gojames, among others, in the same state as or even worse than other hitherto sovereign territories which the Amharas had set out to “civilize?”

*Historical relativism* questions the implicit assumption in the dominant discourse that there was institutional continuity in the history of Abyssinian kingdom. While some parts of ancient Abyssinia had indeed seen periods of small scale innovation and relative tranquility, much of the kingdom’s history had been one of endless fighting among regional lords.

The doctrine of *comparative empirical performance* interrogates the alleged higher moral values of the Abyssinians. It also highlights the barbaric acts of the so-called civilized, particularly under Menelik. In the same line of reasoning, it is also suggests that the victims of the “civilizing mission” may be nearer to fulfilling the lofty ideals of civilization. Shouldn’t it count, for instance, that the Oromo had created and used for centuries a social institution, the gada system, regarded by some experts as “republican” or “democratic”?<sup>44</sup> So goes the argument.

## **MAZRUIANA AND HUMAN RIGHTS IN THE HORN OF AFRICA**

Ali Mazrui has expressed his concern about so-called the war on terror and particularly the role played in it by some governments in the region.<sup>45</sup> Mazrui was straightforward in his opposition to the connivance,

complicity or active involvement of the governments of Meles Zenawi (Ethiopia) and Mwai Kibaki (Kenya) in the torturing of individuals who were allegedly suspected of being “terrorists” or “terrorist sympathizers.”

Mazrui is not a critic convert who adjusted his position to suit the mood of the moment. His opposition to the US policy in the Horn of Africa under President George W. Bush dates back to the period when the war on terror itself was in vogue and when much of the world was saying “we are all Americans”. As early as November 2001, merely about two months after 9-11, Mazrui warned Ethiopia not to play Pakistan in the Horn of Africa.<sup>46</sup> In doing so, Mazrui went against the wind, but it is also clear now that he had foreseen what lay ahead. Almost exactly five years after Mazrui issued that warning, the Ethiopian government intervened militarily in Somalia with direct military and intelligence support from the United States. Ethiopia’s intervention affirmed the idea that the country was playing Pakistan and was even keen to out-Pakistan Pakistan in the region. Pakistan, of course, never invaded Afghanistan. Ethiopia invaded Somalia, overthrew the Islamic government and installed a government with a view to bringing about stability to the war-torn country. The Ethiopian military pulled out of Somalia in January 2009, leaving behind a country which, after huge loss of lives and wealth, was no more stable than when they entered Mogadishu.

The Ethiopian government also became one of the sought-after destinations for extraordinary renditions, or extra rendition as it is known in short. In extra rendition arrangement, one country recognizes another country’s experience in the art of torturing and sends

it political opponents to that country for the treatment. But Ethiopia's role in this respect was not limited to doing America's "dirty work."<sup>47</sup>

Ali Mazrui has also been critical of the Mwai Kibaki government in Kenya for sending the opponents of the Ethiopian government to Addis Ababa. It was Mwai Kibaki, it should be noted, who appointed Mazrui Chancellor of JKUAT—Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture and Technology. The post was previously held by President Daniel Arap Moi.

## CONCLUSION

To the extent Ali Mazrui's scholarship is relevant to Oromo and Oromo Studies, it has been thus far articulated entirely in the context of Ethiopia. We can therefore gain further insight about Ali A. Mazrui's approach to the Oromo by paying attention to his attitude towards the entity called Ethiopia. One definition separates biblical Ethiopia from historical Ethiopia, the fairly homogenous Ethiopia from the heterogeneous Ethiopia which was created a little more than a century ago.<sup>48</sup> Perhaps because Ethiopia's "domestic" affairs were never his major intellectual concern and because of his pan-Africanist ideology, Mazrui does not make the distinction between the two Ethiopias and, perhaps for the same reasons, he rarely highlights the contested dimensions of the very concept of "Ethiopia."

Another definition of Ethiopia disaggregates the peoples of Ethiopia from their government. One can loathe the government but show affection for the peoples subject to its administration, their cultures and histories. It is fair to say, therefore, Ali Mazrui is a *critical* admirer of Ethiopia, critical in both senses of

that term.<sup>49</sup> In addition to the wider relevance of his concepts and theories, Mazrui's critical treatment of Ethiopia's history can contribute to the contextualization of the position of the Oromo.

## NOTES

1. "The Living Legend Award" was given to Ali A. Mazrui by the Organization of West African States (ECOWAS) and African Communication Agency in February 2007. Other awardees include Boxer Muhammad Ali. The plaque itself was presented to Dr. Mazrui in Accra, Ghana in August 2007.
2. This section heavily relies on Seifudein Adem, "Africinity, African Intellectuals and the Study of Ethiopia: Thoughts on the Relevance of Ali A. Mazrui," Paper Presented at the 16<sup>th</sup> International Conference of Ethiopian Studies July 2-6, 2007, Trondheim, Norway.
3. Ali A. Mazrui, "Wole Soyinka as A Television Critic: A Parable of Deception," *Transition*, Issue 54, 1991, 167.
4. See for instance Ali A. Mazrui, "The African State as a Political Refugee," in David R. Smock and Chester A. Crocker (eds.) *African Conflict Resolution: The US Role in Peacemaking* (Washington, D. C.: United States Institute of Peace Press, 1995), 9-25.
5. Ibid.
6. Ali A. Mazrui, *The African Condition* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1980). For a more concise discussion of how dialectical method is used in *The Africans: A Triple Heritage*, see Mazrui's rebuttal to an accusation by Wole Soyinka: Mazrui, "Wole Soyinka as A Television Critic," 164-177.
7. Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things. An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994), 74.

8. For a useful discussion of the distinction between explanation and understanding see David Dessler, "Constructivism within a Positivist Social science," *Review of International Studies*, 25: 1, 1999, 123-137.
9. Ali A. Mazrui, *Euro-Jews and Afro-Arabs: The Great Semitic Divergence in World History* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2008), Chapter 14.
10. Mazrui, *Euro-Jews and Afro-Arabs*, Chapter 13.
11. Ali A. Mazrui "Nationalism, Power and Africa at War," Paper presented at a symposium on "Power and Nationalism in Modern Africa" at the African Studies and Research Center, Cornell University, September 24-25, 2006.
12. For a different perspective on whether the Oromo question is a "colonial" question, see Merera Gudina, *Ethiopia: Competing Ethnic Nationalisms and the Quest for Democracy 1960-2000* (Addis Ababa: Chamber Printing, 2003; first printed in the Netherlands by Shaker Publishers, n.d.), 100-108.
13. See David D. Laitin and Said S. Samatar, *Somalia: Nation in Search of a State* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1987), 53.
14. Emperor Haile Selassie's Address to a Joint Session of the Senate and the House of Representatives on May 28, 1954, *Department of State Bulletin*, vol. 30, no. 7779, May 31, 1954, 868.
15. Mohammed Hassen, "The History of Oromo Nationalism: 1960s-1990s," in Seyoum Hameso and Mohammed Hassen, *Arrested Development in Ethiopia: Essays on Underdevelopment, Democracy and Self-Determination* (Trenton, NJ and Asmara, Eritrea: Red Sea Press, 2006), 241.
16. Leenco Lata, "Oromo Nationalism and the Ethiopian Discourse," in Asafa Jalata (ed.), *Oromo Nationalism and the Ethiopian Discourse: The Search for Freedom & Democracy* (Trenton, NJ and Asmara, Eritrea: The Red Sea Press, 1998), 127.

17. Quoted in J. Spencer Trimingham, *Islam in Ethiopia* (London: Fran Cass1952), 143.
18. Ali A. Mazrui and Michael Tidy, *Nationalism and New States in Africa* (Nairobi: Heinemann, 1984), 29. When this paper was presented at the 2008 annual meeting of Oromo Studies Association in Minneapolis, Minnesota, we were surprised to learn that, there were among the attendees, Oromo intellectuals who had been present at the 1973 public lecture Ali Mazrui was referring to. We also learned that Gelassa Dilbo, who later became the Chairman of Oromo Liberation Front as well as the current Prime Minister had attended the Mazrui lecture on the university campus. This author interprets this to mean that Ali Mazrui's description of the group of students he had addressed at what was then the Haile Selassie University was accurate.
19. This issue is discussed in Seifudein Adem, "Comparative pan-Africanism: Nkrumah and Haile Selassie," Paper Presented at the 50<sup>th</sup> Annual Convention of International Studies Association on the Panel "Kwame Nkrumah and the Birth of African Diplomacy" on the occasion of Nkrumah's Centenary, New York, New York February 14, 2009.
20. L. C. Napper, "The Ogaden War: Some Implications for Crisis Prevention," in Alexander George (ed.) *Managing US-Soviet Rivalry* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1979), 249.
21. Ali A. Mazrui, *Towards A Pax Africana: A Study of Ideology and Ambition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967)
22. I was astonished to meet some of them in person at the Oromo Studies Association annual meeting in Minneapolis, Minnesota in August 2008 at which Ali Mazrui was the featured keynote speaker.

23. Ali A. Mazrui, *Political Values and the Educated Class in Africa* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1978), 262.
24. Addis Ababa University, *Convocation to Confer Honorary Degrees*, 24 July 2004, 6.
25. The associate director in question is the author of this essay.
26. Author's Personal Correspondence with Ali Mazrui, March 9, 2009, Binghamton, New York. In the book, Mazrui put it as follows: "Horses may have been imported into Ethiopia by the Oromo. The Oromo successes eventually convinced Ethiopians of the military value of horses so in time horses in Ethiopia were used mainly for battle and more rarely as beasts of burden. Donkeys and mules served the latter purpose." See Ali A. Mazrui, *The Africans: A Triple Heritage* (Boston & Toronto: Little, Brown & Co, 1986), 115.
27. Ali A. Mazrui, "Wole Soyinka as a Television Critic: A Parable of Deception," *Transition*, Issue 54, 1991, 171.
28. Ali A. Mazrui, *The Africans: A Commentary* (Episode 2: Legacy of Lifestyles) PBS/BBC. 1986.
29. Mazrui, "Wole Soyinka as a Television Critic," 170.
30. Senator Jackie Vaughn III, Associate President Pro Tempore "The Senate of the State of Michigan: Special Tribute," *The Eighty Third Legislature at Lansing*, September 26, 1986.
31. Mentioned in Mekuria Bulcha, "Onesimos Nasib's Pioneering Contributions to Oromo Writing," *Nordic Journal of African Studies*, vol. 4, no. 1, 1995, 36.
32. Mohammed Hassen, *The Oromo of Ethiopia: A History 1570-1860* (Trenton, NJ: The Red Sea Press, 1994); Originally Published, London: Cambridge University Press, 1990, 2.
33. Personal interview with Ali A. Mazrui. July 1, 2008, Binghamton, New York.

34. Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994), 38.
35. Asafa Jalata, "Being In and Out of Africa: The Impact of Duality of Ethiopianism" *Journal of Black Studies*, Jan 2008; vol. 0: 0021934707307833v19. Forthcoming.
36. Marco Bassi writes: "The link between the expansion of Abyssinian rule of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the "scramble for Africa" by European powers is now recognized. The fact that in Ethiopia military conquest and political domination were done by a local political entity, a Christian Amharic monarchy, has caused some authors to use the concept of domestic colonialism. See Marco Bassi, *Decisions in the Shade: Political and Juridical Processes among the Oromo-Borana* Translated by Cynthia Salvadori. (Trenton, NJ, and Asmara, Eritrea: Africa World Press, 2005), 19.
37. Ali A. Mazrui, "Pan-Africanism between Globalization and the American Empire," Address to the Institute of Ethiopian Studies, Addis Ababa University, Ethiopia, July 25, 2004. But Ali Mazrui has also discussed the subject even earlier in Ali A. Mazrui, *The Africans: A Triple Heritage* (Boston & Toronto: Little Brown, 1986), 37-38. Also see, Ali A. Mazrui: "Liberia and Ethiopia as Pan-African Symbols," *Liberian Studies Journal*, vol. 32, no. 2, 1997, especially 192-193. Mazrui revisited the issue in 2007. For a news report about Mazrui's controversial statement regarding Ethiopia's cultural achievement and racial self-denial see, Amanda Wheat, "Experts Weigh-In on Ethiopia," *The Cornell Daily Sun*, April 23, 2007. Source: <http://cornellsun.com/node/23087/> Accessed April 23, 2007.
38. Mazrui, "The Bondage of Boundaries: Towards Redefining Africa," in Ricardo Laremont and Tracia Seghatolislami (eds.) *Africanity Redefined: Collected Essays of Ali A. Mazrui, Vol. 1* (Trenton, NJ, Asmara, Eritrea: Africa World Press, 2002), 69.



39. Mazrui, "The Bondage of Boundaries," 69.
40. Ali A. Mazrui, "Pretender to Universalism: Western Culture in a Globalizing Age," *Global Dialogue*, vol. 3, no. 1, Winter, 2001, 33-45.
41. The phrasings for the categories of myth are borrowed from a broader study by Stephen Van Evera. See his, "Hypotheses on Nationalism and the Causes of War," in Charles A. Kupchan (ed.) *Nationalism and Nationalities in New Europe* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1995).
42. Mohammed Hassen, "The History of Oromo Nationalism," 242.
43. Asafa Jalata, *Oromummaa: Oromo Culture, Identity and Nationalism*, (Atlanta, GA: Oromia Publishing Company, 2007).
44. Asmarom Legesse describes the system as "one of those remarkable creations of the human mind that evolved into a full-fledged system of government, as a result of five centuries of evolution and deliberate, rational, legislative transformation." Asmarom Legesse, *Oromo Democracy: An Indigenous Africa Political System* (Trenton, NJ and Asmara, Eritrea: The Red Sea Press, 2000), 195.
45. For an concise historical analysis of the human rights situation in Ethiopia, particularly as it concerns the Oromo, see Mohammed Hassen, "Conquest, Tyranny and Ethnocide against the Oromo: A Historical Assessment of Human Rights Conditions in Ethiopia, ca. 1880s-2002," *Northeast African Studies*, 9, 3, 2002, 15-50.
46. Ali A. Mazrui Interview with *Addis Reporter*, Addis Ababa, November 2001.
47. For brief reference to this issue see Ali A. Mazrui, "From the Old Politics of Race to the New Politics of Culture," paper presented at a Symposium on "Culture

- and Conflict,” Binghamton University, April 11-12, 2008.
48. Asafa Jalata makes the useful distinction between “ancient Ethiopia” and “contemporary Ethiopia (former Abyssinia)”. See Asafa Jalata, “Being In and Out of Africa”.
  49. This issue is discussed more fully in Seifudein Adem, “Africanity, African Intellectuals and the Study of Ethiopia: Thoughts on the Relevance of *Mazruiana*,” Paper Presented at the 16<sup>th</sup> International Conference of Ethiopian Studies, July 2-7, 2007, Trondheim, Norway.



# AFRICANS AND THE AUDACITY OF ISLAMIC HOPE: REFLECTIONS ON THE ISLAMIC ASPECT OF MAZRUIANA<sup>1</sup>

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Thomas Uthup

**W**hen Professor Ali Mazrui came to Binghamton in 1988/89, for interview as a candidate for the position of the Albert Schweitzer Professor in the Humanities, I had a chance to talk with him. It was an occasion for me to meet someone who was a giant in political science and who shared many of my intellectual convictions about the necessity of incorporating the study of culture into political science. In 1989, I joined him in the office of the Albert Schweitzer Professor in the Humanities and later, the Institute of Global Cultural Studies. Over the next two decades, I was transported into the fascinating sub-field of Mazruiana which covered the diverse interaction of culture in all its manifestations, but with a special focus on Africa, Islam and politics. With my

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**Thomas Uthup** is the Research Manager for the UN Alliance of Civilizations.

own interest in the interaction of Islam and politics, we enjoyed written collaborations, we co-taught classes on Islam and politics, and we carried on many discussions on the influence of Islam on politics. We also share some commonalities such as, multiple intellectual and personal influences, backgrounds in journalism prior to academia, and a propensity to think in broader terms than the disciplinary boundaries of our political science training. The last-mentioned item has contributed to our joint interest in the influence of culture on politics and society, with special reference to Islam.

In this paper, I will try to distill some thoughts on Mazrui's work on Islam. The working thesis here is that his writings and lectures on Islam reflect an African sensibility by providing an audacious reinterpretation of Islam in some key areas that can lead to a more nuanced and hopeful perspective. I will do this by analyzing some of the major themes that recur in his writing and lectures on Islam and politics. Following a favorite Mazrui number, we can look at these recurring themes in seven areas. In each of these areas, I also offer some suggestions—presumptuous though they may be—for future directions on research, whether by Professor Mazrui or his intellectual disciples.

## **THE SEVEN AREAS OF AUDACIOUS HOPE FOR ISLAM**

### ***Islam, Conflict, and Peace***

In several articles and speeches analyzing the relationship of Islam, conflict, and peace,<sup>2</sup> Mazrui has pointed out that Muslims have been “more sinned against than sinning.” This is a valuable corrective to the common Western view of Islam as a violent reli-

gion that is intent on spreading the religion through the sword.<sup>3</sup> A look at conflicts over the last few decades reveals that Muslims, as a religious group, have suffered greatly in terms of deaths and injuries. In the last few years, due to the lack of peace and prevalence of conflict in areas with large numbers of Muslims, Muslim populations in places like Iraq, Afghanistan, Palestine, Chechnya, Kosovo, and Kashmir have had to get used to the wailing of widows and mothers. Whether at the hands of non-Muslims or Muslims, Muslims have been the disproportionate victims of violence. For instance, thousands more Iraqis have been killed than members of coalition forces.<sup>4</sup> This pattern is recurrent in other conflicts too. It is a testimony to the power of the media that this reality is not only obscured but turned around to make Islam as a religion—rather than particular adherents—appear as a monolithic structure that promotes violence.

Mazrui, on the other hand, by drawing on the Qur'an, as well as Islamic jurisprudence and history, offers a more sophisticated and hopeful analysis. For instance, he has pointed to the Qur'anic verse 2: 256: "*La Ikrabu Fi Din*" ("There is no compulsion in religion"<sup>5</sup>) as providing the justification and the counterpoint to the view that Islam was a religion that was only spread by the sword. Indeed, in analyzing the spread of Islam to Africa, Mazrui has often described the vital role that trade and missionaries played in the spread of Islam in Africa. Another Qur'anic verse cited by him is 2: 263: "*Saying a word that is kind, and forgiving is better than charity that hurt*" as part of the Qur'anic propensity toward peace rather than violence. Turning to the Prophet Muhammad's life as a guide, Mazrui has

also pointed out that when Muhammad conquered Mecca from the ruling Quraysh, he did not take savage revenge or imprison thousands—common in that era for victors. Indeed, on the other hand, Muhammad granted amnesty to all Quraysh who entered the sacred mosque for asylum, stayed peacefully in their homes, or found their way to the home of the paramount Quraysh leader, Abu Sufyan—Muhammad’s former enemy.<sup>6</sup>

Turning to the medieval distinction in Islamic jurisprudence between *Dar el Harb* (the Abode of War) and *Dar el Islam* (the Abode of Islam), Mazrui has also pointed to another concept that is often overlooked—*Dar el Sulh* (the Abode of Contractual Peace or Peaceful coexistence).<sup>7</sup> This again reflects the actual historical experience of Muslims who did not feel that someone who was not Muslim was necessarily considered an enemy—a fact that has also been pointed to by Zachary Karabell in his excellent history of Abrahamic religions’ followers.<sup>8</sup>

Islam is often associated with the violence of *jihad* and martyrdom. Mazrui has played a signal role in reminding us repeatedly of the complex nature of the concept of *jihad*, and the commonalities of martyrdom across religions and other ideologies.<sup>9</sup> Another significant question related to war and peace that Mazrui has begun to consider is the meaning of the “democratic peace”<sup>10</sup> thesis for Muslims.

Mazrui’s treatment of the relationship of Islam with war and peace lead to some potentially intriguing lines of future inquiry. For instance, do Muslim extremists like Osama Bin Laden and right-wing politico-religious extremists in Europe, India, Israel, and the United States (all democratic countries) have more in common with

each other than differences? Can global Islam adapt to large populations of people who are not of *Ahl Al Kitab* or People of the Book (whether the secular populations in the West, Hindus in India, or the Buddhists/Confucians in East Asia) and therefore treat these regions as “*Dar el Sulb*”? And what does the “democratic peace” thesis mean if democracies are able to legitimize oppressing and killing people in non-democratic areas? Looking at the casualties of the Iraq war, one is reminded of the line, “We’re going to create a democracy here, even if we have to kill everyone to do so.”<sup>11</sup>

### ***Islam and Democracy***

It is clear from Mazrui’s writings and lectures that he is acutely aware of the lack of democracy in the Muslim world—and yet, instead of merely bemoaning the lack of democracy, he has turned his attention to those scholars and factors that could bring about a politically liberal Islam, and those conditions that could promote a more modern and liberal Muslim society

First, Mazrui has highlighted the positive factor in the contemporary era that even within Muslim societies that are traditionally patriarchal like Bangladesh, Pakistan, Indonesia, and Turkey, female leaders have been accepted. Second, in the historical era, he has highlighted the pivotal role played by two of the Prophet Muhammad’s wives—Khadija and Ayesha—in the establishment and development of Islam. Thus, there are both historical and current examples of women—half of most societies—who have played a prominent role in establishing politically liberal societies.

Thirdly, Mazrui has alluded to the fact that some democratic principles have been part of Islam from the



beginning—concepts like *ijma* (consensus) and the *shura* (consultative councils). According to Sunni Muslims, the earliest Caliphs after the Prophet Muhammad were chosen through such councils. Fourth, another key feature of early Muslim societies, which would probably be relevant for multicultural societies with Muslim majorities, are the systems of pluralism, like the millet system under the Ottoman Empire, guaranteeing autonomy for minorities.

But perhaps key to Mazrui's interpretation of the modernization and political liberalization of Islam is the key concept of *ijtihad* (reinterpretation). Mazrui believes that the conditions for the reinterpretation of the Qur'an to fit the modern era require intellectual freedom for modernist Muslim theologians and liberal thinkers. Moreover, these interpretations should be made available to the *ummah* (community) through the Internet. Mazrui invokes the analogy of the US Constitution and its dramatic reinterpretation in a little more than two centuries to question the static interpretations of the Qur'an made by fallible human beings.<sup>12</sup>

Mazrui has referred to Africans who have played prominent roles in leading Islamic innovation and doctrinal review. Two examples of this are Muhammad Abduh from Egypt, and Mahmoud Muhammad Taha from the Sudan. Muhammad Abduh (1849-1905) is still widely acclaimed as the chief architect of the modernization and reform of Islam. His democratically influential reforms included freedom of will in Islam, the harmony of reason with revelation, the primacy of ethics over ritual and dogma in religion, and the legitimacy of interest on loans under Islamic law.<sup>13</sup> The Sudanese theologian Taha argued that the Sharia was

an evolving “body,”<sup>14</sup> and had to be updated to modern times.<sup>15</sup> Further, he said:

The good society ... is based on three equalities: economic equality, today known as socialism, or the sharing of wealth; political equality or democracy, or sharing in political decisions which affect daily life; and social equality which, to some extent, results from socialism and democracy, and is characterized by a lack of social class and discrimination based on color, faith, race, or sex.<sup>16</sup>

Taha’s own version of Islamic modernism in Sudan earned him a severe punishment. Mahmoud Muhammad Taha was executed in his old age in January 1985 on charges of apostasy and heresy.<sup>17</sup>

Taha’s treatment of the relationship between democracy and development has been echoed, to some degree, in a shorter Mazrui piece, “Islam between Democracy and Underdevelopment in the Era of Globalization.” Here, Mazrui has begun some preliminary analyses on the relationship between development and democracy in the Muslim world but this work needs further development. Is there perhaps a simplistic acceptance of the fusion of “mosque and state” in Muslim societies? What are some of the experiences of Islamic parties in power? Can Islamic theocracies become democratic societies the way the Church-state fusion in Britain evolved into a democratic society? In addition, there needs to be more work on the relationship between Islamic education and Islamic political liberalism. Finally, there needs to be more discussion on which models of democracy—and capitalism—are more appropriate for the Islamic world: an Ameri-

can model, a British model, or a Northern European model, or any other model.

### ***Islam and inter-faith relations***

Ali Mazrui has been one of many scholars to compare and contrast the positive record of the tolerance of Muslim rulers towards other faiths—particularly prior to the colonial period—versus the intolerance of Christianity in Europe, with specific examples such as the Holocaust by Nazi Germany and the pogroms in Eastern Europe. Mazrui has also gone on to bring up the concrete examples of the practical impact of the tolerance of Muslim regimes even in the modern era.<sup>18</sup> Three of his examples are recurring in these and many of his other essays dealing with this theme. First is the rise of Coptic Christian Boutros-Boutros Ghali, former UN Secretary-General who first became an Egyptian minister of state of foreign affairs. The second is the case of Tariq Aziz, the former Foreign Minister and then Deputy Prime Minister of the Saddam Hussein regime in Iraq. The third is the case of Senegal, which had a Muslim majority (94 %) and yet had a Roman Catholic President (Leopold Senghor) for over two decades, and then a Muslim president with a Christian wife. Mazrui rightly asks whether inter-faith relations in Western countries have reached a point where counter-examples of the preceding instances could be found in the Western world.

Mazrui reminds us that while the number and sizes of such inter-faith dialogues in the last years of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first have been beyond anything that has gone on before,<sup>19</sup> it is wise to ask whether these dialogues have resulted in practical outcomes in relations between civilizations.

He has also taken on a far-reaching critique of the “clash of civilizations” thesis, pointing to its “conceptual, factual and temporal fallacies”<sup>20</sup> in his lectures that frequently allude to Huntington’s theory of the “clash of civilizations.”<sup>21</sup>

Of course, the “clash of civilizations” theory relies overly on emphasizing the differences between Islam on one side and its Abrahamic cousins, Christianity and Judaism, on the other. On the other hand, Mazrui has alluded in several lectures to the similarities between these three Abrahamic faiths, ranging from their common geographical origin, their cultural influence on the world, and their common belief in monotheism, among others. All followers of the three faiths after all, are considered “People of the Book.” From monotheism to martyrdom, there may be more commonalities between the three faiths than commonly realized.<sup>22</sup>

At a time when there is so much tension between Muslims and followers of other religions in places ranging from the Middle East to South Asia to Europe and North America, one of the most fruitful areas for future research may be the exploration of relatively peaceful interfaith relations in many sub-Saharan African societies. These societies include relatively multicultural societies like South Africa, societies with Muslim majorities like Senegal, and societies with Muslims and Christians like Tanzania. Part of living peacefully together is the ability to surmount past conflicts and commit to living together in harmony. Africans have often been part of many intercultural conflicts (including interreligious ones)—and then managed to live together peacefully. Examples of such conflicts and a peaceful aftermath include: the

anti-colonial struggle in Kenya against the British led by Jomo Kenyatta but who became a staunch pro-Western African leader in the post-Independence period and even published a book entitled *Suffering Without Bitterness*;<sup>23</sup> the Nigerian civil war of 1967-1970, during which a million Nigerians or more died;<sup>24</sup> the racial conflicts of Zimbabwe<sup>25</sup> and South Africa; and the more recent genocide in the nineties in Rwanda. But is there something uniquely African that permits this “Short Memory of Hate” in Mazrui’s words.<sup>26</sup> He has argued that Africanity recommends a return to normality without hate after each conflict. Is there a lesson to be learned from this experience for other societies—including Muslim societies?<sup>27</sup> Clearly, the “Short Memory of Hate” thesis needs a more detailed analysis and description—including its possibilities and limitations in multi-religious societies as well as societies and groups that have been influenced by scholars like Sayyid Qutb and movements like Wahhabism.

### ***Islam and Economy***

Mazrui’s treatment of Islam’s relationship to the economy is grounded in Islamic teachings, history, and current geopolitical realities. Mazrui makes it clear that the Qur’an emphasizes that charity is part of piety. The importance of charity in Islam is well expressed in these lines from the Qur’an:

*Piety does not lie in turning your face  
to East or West:  
Piety lies in believing in God ...  
And disbursing your wealth out of love for God  
Among your kin and the orphans,  
The wayfarers and mendicants.*<sup>28</sup>

Further, part of the source of *sadaqah* (charity) and wealth redistribution is the Islamically-mandated *Zakat* (a wealth tax) which the Islamic state is obliged to collect and distribute. *Zakat* is one of the five basic tenets of Islam, and is required of Muslims who have possessions higher than a minimum value (called *Nisba*). The Qur'an categorically mentions this tax in several places, for example Sura II: 43 "give zakat (the due share of your wealth) for the welfare of others;" and Sura II: 110, "Fulfil your devotional obligations and pay the zakat." Sometimes the distribution of *Zakat* is accomplished through *awqaf* (charitable endowments)—a variety of charitable bequests whose civil society beneficiaries ranged from schools and clinics to de facto chambers of commerce, from social clubs for young people to graveyards for the poor.<sup>29</sup> Mazrui also alludes to the role of the mosque as a major player in providing shelter and/or food for the poor and the homeless. According to Mazrui, all of these religiously-based projects and processes need to be updated to conform to modern realities and situations.

Part of this updating is provided by the booming field of "Islamic economics." Perhaps the most significant feature of "Islamic economics" is its moral prescriptions and proscriptions regulating economic activities in the areas of consumption, production, distribution, and exchange. These negative and positive values within which economic activity may be conducted include *halal* (good) and *haram* (bad); *adl* (social justice) versus *zulm* (tyranny); and *istislah* (public interest) versus *dhija* (waste).<sup>30</sup> There are several others enunciated by analysts of Islamic thought on economics. Rent had to be a fixed payment, agreed before-

hand, only on land on which the owner had worked to improve its utility and economic desirability.<sup>31</sup> Islam approves of the right of private ownership but not absolute ownership by humans, for ultimately all things belong to God. Islam condemns hoarding, lack of use of property, and excessive wealth.<sup>32</sup>

From a historical-theological point of view, Mazrui refers to the emphasis on profit-making, trade, and its important role in propagating Islam.<sup>33</sup> Mazrui reminds us in his lectures that the Prophet Muhammad spent much of his early life as a trader, and his first wife—Khadija—was a merchant. Therefore, unlike other religions, Islam had less of an issue with profits and trade. However, Muslims had to carry on these economic activities without relying on the traditional mechanism for such trade—money-lending with interest—because the latter was prohibited by Islam.<sup>34</sup> In the practice of the modern economy, this prohibition may appear to be quite impractical. However, the rise of Islamic banking in the last few decades of the twentieth century may be a hopeful trend. A recent report estimated that 300 Islamic financial institutions hold at least \$500 billion in assets, an amount that is increasing more than 10 percent a year. Also, Islamic bonds, Islamic credit cards and even Islamic derivatives are available all over the world.<sup>35</sup> These banks maintain their economic practicality, most often by working on the principle of *Shirakah* or partnership, whereby finance and industry work as partners. Shareholders, depositors, investors, and borrowers share in the profits and losses of the enterprises.<sup>36</sup>

Another way in which modern Islamic states—especially Arab states—have contributed to globalization of finance is their investments from oil revenues

in many areas of the world—including the West.<sup>37</sup> In Mazrui's treatment of the geopolitical realities of today's Muslim world, he notes that Muslim countries have been privileged with a disproportionate share of oil resources. For instance, Saudi Arabia is not only the home of the holiest sites of Islam (Mecca and Medina), but it is also the country which has the world's greatest oil reserves.<sup>38</sup> Iraq, which accommodates some of the holiest sites of Shia Islam, also accommodates the second largest oil reserves in the world. And the Organization of Oil Exporting Countries (OPEC) is at least two-thirds Muslim in composition.<sup>39</sup>

While Mazrui recognizes that there are some positive benefits to this blessing, he notes that these oil resources may not be used in the most optimal way for the worldwide Muslim community or *Ummah*. This is an area that could use some more sustained treatment, for the *Ummah* is characterized by paradoxes that cry out for Islamically-oriented economic development. For example, one paradox is that millions of Muslims live in pernicious poverty while a few thousands wallow in pools of wealth—what has been termed by Karl Henry as the “paradox of plenty.”<sup>40</sup> Why not have micro-credit for small businesses in the poorer parts of the Muslim world, with profits instead of interest being shared by the investors from the richer Muslim countries? Another paradox is the wealth of oil-resources and the scarcity of water in Arab countries while many of the Muslim African countries have an abundance of water and a shortage of, or lack of affordability of, oil and other energy resources. How can the oil-rich and water-poor Arab countries work on swapping resources with their energy-poor and water-



rich African neighbors? These are but two paradoxes that could lead to some useful policy prescriptions for cooperation between oil-rich Muslim states and the poorer, water-rich Muslim countries.

### ***Islam and Race***

In November 2008, Ayman Al-Zawahiri, Al-Qaeda's number two leader, used a racial slur of "House Negro" to label President-elect Barack Obama. As analysts noted, Al-Qaeda is no model of racial harmony, since its leadership is Arab-dominated and followers with darker skin have found themselves playing the role of foot-soldiers.<sup>41</sup> It is a sharp contrast to the traditionally Islamic attitude—strikingly egalitarian—towards race that Mazrui highlights often.

Mazrui has noted three factors contributing to the traditionally egalitarian attitude toward race in Islam.<sup>42</sup> The first of these factors is the pronouncements of the Qur'an and statements attributed to the Prophet Muhammad. In a strong nod toward the virtues of cultural diversity, the Qur'an tells Muslims that they have been created into nations and tribes mainly so that they could know each other.

O men, we created you from a male and female  
And formed you into nations and tribes  
That you may recognize each other (49: 13)<sup>43</sup>

And the Prophet Muhammad is reported to have said to his followers, more explicitly:

An Arab is not superior to a  
non-Arab, nor a red man  
to a black man except  
through piety and virtue<sup>44</sup>

A second factor influencing this strong emphasis on the egalitarian treatment of different races was the early history of Islam. It must be remembered, for instance, that the Prophet Muhammad's disciples—the Sahaba—were multicultural in composition, including the famous Black Sahaba, Bilal son of Rabah. Bilal was the first to call believers to prayer at the great Kaaba in Mecca when Muslims re-conquered it from the Quraysh. Bilal was a companion of the Prophet Muhammad and is widely revered today as the first Black man to embrace Islam.<sup>45</sup> Further, Ethiopia is believed to be the first site of refuge for early Muslims. A few believers—persecuted in Mecca—finally crossed the Red Sea and found their way to the “Habash” or Abyssinia in search of asylum.<sup>46</sup>

A third factor identified by Mazrui as contributing to a more egalitarian attitude toward race was the lineage system among the Arabs. A child was regarded as Arab if the father was Arab, regardless of whom the mother was. Mazrui cites three examples from the contemporary era: Sheikh Saad Abdallah Salim al-Sabah, Prime Minister of Kuwait, descended from a black mother; Anwar Sadat, the late President of Egypt with a black mother and was not faulted for having a black mother; and the influential Prince Bandar bin Sultan, a long-lasting distinguished Saudi Ambassador in Washington DC, who is genealogically half African. There are millions of people of ‘mixed blood’ in the Arab world who are classified as Arabs. This is vastly a different system from the United States where a child is black if either parent is black, even if the father is a White Anglo-Saxon Protestant (a WASP). Thus Barack Obama, whose mother is

white, and Earth Kitt, whose father was white, are both regarded as African-American.

The fourth factor affecting this attitude toward race in Islam that Mazrui has frequently brought up is its actual contemporary experience. While all three monotheistic religions—Christianity, Islam, and Judaism—arose in the Middle East/West Asia, the one which is the most Afro-Asian is indeed Islam. The oldest surviving Islamic academies are actually located on the African continent—including Al-Azhar University in Cairo, over a thousand years old. The Muslim Academy of Timbuktoo in what is today Mali is remembered by Pan-Africanists with pride. The largest countries in Africa in population are Nigeria, Egypt, Ethiopia, and Democratic Republic of Congo (Zaire). Among them, these four countries account for substantial number of Muslims. Islam elsewhere in Africa has spread—however unevenly—all the way down to the Cape of Good Hope. Islam in South Africa is three hundred years old. There are more Muslims in Indonesia, India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh than in any Arab country. There are also significant Muslim populations in Western countries—not just immigrants but also natives. For many who were strongly affected by the racial segregation of Christianity, a remarkable sight is that of the sea of diverse pilgrims in Mecca. One example of the effect of this view was Malcolm X. Malcolm went to Mecca in April 1964 and became El Hajj Malik El-Shabbaz. Embracing orthodox Islam, Malcolm also began to link the Afro-Asian struggle for independence to the African American civil rights revolution.<sup>47</sup>

These struggles of the 1950s and 1960s have now been replaced by struggles over competitive globalization which has had an impact on economies and societies all over the world. Less investigated in Mazrui's writings is the current state of race relations between Muslim Arabs on the one hand and Muslim Africans and South Asians. Discriminatory and exploitative practices against Muslim Africans and South Asians in housing, employment, and marriage can be seen, particularly in the oil-rich Middle Eastern states. An interesting question to ponder and investigate is whether this discrimination is based on disparate economic power or is it because the Arab Muslims have been affected by the intellectual hegemony of the West?

### ***Islam and gender***

Mazrui has consciously chosen to highlight the potential within Islam of changing gender roles, based on the Qur'an and the contemporary political environment. He has approached this issue with a balanced perspective. He has rightly underlined the fact that in a general sense, Islam has had more of a negative impact on the roles of women in black Africa.

Part of the reason for the malignant sexism is that there are several verses in the Qur'an that subjugate women to men. Mazrui frequently notes that these verses are to be viewed in the context of the situation of women, not only in Arabia but also in the world at that time. He highlights the fact that new interpretations and the light of history suggest that even the limited freedoms and equity available to women were revolutionary for Muhammad's Arabia.<sup>48</sup> Even in the Qur'an, there are verses that suggest that women were considered to be equal in the eyes of God. Thus Surah 3: 195

says, “I [The Lord] suffer not the good deeds of any to go waste, be he a man or a woman: The one of you is of the other.” And Surah 33: 35 is a veritable litany of “men and women” being accorded grace and salvation if they were believers, devout, truthful, modest, and gave alms, among other requirements; there was no separate requirements for the two genders. Mazrui has also highlighted the need to interpret Surah 4: 3—part of which is frequently cited by both Muslims and non-Muslims to permit the marrying of four wives—in its full context, while also reading Surah 4: 129. This more comprehensive reading emphasizes that the marriage to multiple wives is only permitted if one can treat the four wives equally—which is humanly impossible. Further, it was a definite improvement over the situation existing in pre-Islamic Arabia, where a man could have more than four wives. In other ways too, Islam raised the status of women from that of pre-Islamic Arabia, where female infanticide prevailed and women were often left destitute after the death of male relatives.

Mazrui points out that Islam did give more rights to women than indigenous cultures in Africa—especially in the area of inheritance. Contrary to popular conceptions that Muslim women are not supposed to be involved in economic activity or partake of economic resources under Islam, daughters of the deceased received property. Further, this was her own personal property, not that of her husband’s or brothers. The Qur’an says in Surah 4:7:

Men have a share in what the parents and relatives  
leave behind at death

## Africans and the Audacity of Islamic Hope

And women have a share  
In what the parents and relatives leave behind.  
Be it large or small  
A legal share is fixed

The Prophet condemned the Arabian practice of female infanticide, was himself the husband of a wealthy tradeswoman, and accorded women a place in society where they were “at long last recognized, respected and honored.”<sup>49</sup> Yet another feminist reading of the Qur’an and Hadith points to the full role of Muhammad’s wives in public affairs—including strategic concerns. Of course, there are not many Islamic societies today where women have such prominent roles.<sup>50</sup>

On the other hand, there is a paradox described by Mazrui: the paradox of less female liberation and more female empowerment in some Muslim countries,<sup>51</sup> while there is more female liberation and less female empowerment in the West. We have alluded earlier to his noting of the female leaders of traditional Muslim countries like Pakistan, Indonesia, Bangladesh and Turkey. In the first three cases, women have succeeded to power after their male relatives—but in Pakistan today, we have a case where a man has come to power after his wife has been killed by assassins.

Part of female liberation and empowerment comes

### ***Islam and Education***

In looking at the future of Islam and education, Mazrui has raised two important issues.<sup>53</sup> The first is the paradox of the glorious past of Islamic knowledge and the present sad state of knowledge in Muslim societies. The second is the necessity of two dimensions of Islamic education in the future—in non-Muslim and Muslim societies.

Examining the first paradox of the state of knowledge in the past and the present, Mazrui cites Qur'anic and other early sources of Islam, and the history of Islamic societies, to argue that Islam prizes education and knowledge. For instance, the first of God's commands to Muslims was about the pursuit of knowledge and the imperative to read.

1. Read in the name of your Lord who created--
2. Created man from an embryo;
3. Read, for your Lord is most beneficent;
4. Who taught by the pen;
5. Taught man what he did not know.
6. And yet man is rebellious.
7. For he thinks he is sufficient in himself.
8. Surely your returning is to your Lord.<sup>54</sup>

These lines also underline, according to Mazrui, that the source of knowledge is God, and that God taught by the pen, and that human beings had to be cautioned against the arrogance of knowledge. Another saying cited by Mazrui is the statement attributed to the Prophet Muhammad that he called upon his followers to pursue knowledge “even as far as China.”

Mazrui argues that early Islamic society did pursue knowledge from all over—mathematics from India, philosophy from ancient Greece, architecture from Persia, science from the Jews, and jurisprudence from the Roman legacy. The results of this knowledge included the production, at the apogee of Islamic civilization, of brilliant individuals like Ibn Khaldun and Ibn Battutah, both of whom were products of North Africa. Ibn Khaldun's magnum opus, *Al-Muqaddimah* was described by the twentieth century English historian, Arnold Toynbee, as a "philosophy of history which is undoubtedly the greatest work that has ever been created by any mind in any time or place."<sup>55</sup> Noted Arab historian Philip Hitti has said of Ibn Khaldun: "No Arab writer, indeed no European, had ever taken a view of history at once so comprehensive and philosophic."<sup>56</sup>

Ibn Battutah was one of the great observers of societies by traveling not only to the Muslim world (that covered Muslim Spain to Africa), but also to India, China, the Byzantine Empire, and South East Asia. All of his adventures are gathered together in his book, *Rihla*, (Travels).<sup>57</sup>

This kind of knowledge spreading led to not only the accumulation of knowledge in Muslim societies, but also the opportunity to distribute the accumulated knowledge to other areas—and bequeath a legacy that has influenced modern learning. Examples of this legacy include the transmission of "Arabic numerals" to mathematics;<sup>58</sup> Greek wisdom to Western Europe through Muslim scholars like Ibn Sina and Ibn Rushd;<sup>59</sup> and possibly the foundations of today's Information Revolution—"algorithm" and "algebra"—may have come from the ninth-century Muslim mathematician



al-Khwarizmi and his work *Al-Jabr wa al-Muqabalah*.<sup>60</sup> The impact of this legacy on Western sciences and culture has been pointed out by Eugene A. Myers: “from the late ninth century until the twelfth, Islamic influence on Western science and culture was very great.”<sup>61</sup> In his conclusion, Myers said: “The cultural importance of the work of Islamic scholars and translators for the development of science and humanities can hardly be overestimated ... Thus, the roots of Western thought are a mixture of Greco–Arabic and Hebrew thought.”<sup>62</sup>

Today, Western thought has been freed from its early ties to the Church, but knowledge in Islam has been hamstrung by cultural, economic, and financial obstacles. Mazrui has particularly noted that the *The Arab Human Development Report 2003* criticized “the alliance between some oppressive regimes and certain types of conservative scholars”—an alliance which seemed to lead to “interpretations of Islam which ... are inimical to human development particularly with regard to freedom of thought, the accountability of the regimes to the people and women’s participation in public life.”<sup>63</sup> Statistics presented in the report reveal the “knowledge gap” in the Arab world. Even in Muslim countries outside the Arab world, the “knowledge gap” is of deep concern.

In treating the second issue, that of the necessity of two dimensions of Islamic education in the future, Mazrui has emphasized that two dimensions need to be addressed. The first dimension is the necessity to educate **about** Islam from a broad perspective to Muslims in Muslim societies and non-Muslim societies. Related to this is the dimension of educating

non-Muslims to remove stereotypes about Islam and Muslims. The first dimension involves learning about the complete and contextual learning concerning Islamic doctrine, ethics and rituals; integrating Muslim history into world history; understanding the linkages between the Abrahamic religions and the inter-civilizational knowledge; and providing the intellectual tools for Muslims to learn to live together with each other and with followers of other religions.

Mazrui is hopeful that the second dimension—that of educating non-Muslims about Islam—will lead to the appreciation of some of Islam’s teachings about issues like its stance against racial or national superiority and its strictures against addiction and promiscuity. More important, however, is the necessity to remove the biases against Muslims and Islam in non-Muslim societies through education. For instance, witness the rush to label any violent act by a Muslim as “Islamic Terrorism,” in the media, while those acts committed by followers of Buddhism, Christianity, Judaism, and Hinduism are seldom, if ever, termed “Buddhist,” “Christian,” “Jewish” or “Hindu” terrorism. While the media is particularly to blame in this regard,<sup>64</sup> what is needed is more education about Islam in the classrooms beginning at an early age. This education needs to challenge the “Islamic terrorist” stereotype, and move beyond associating Islam and Muslims with violence. It needs to teach people that Arabs and Muslims are not one and the same and overcome the assumption that the Muslim world is uniform in its repressive treatment of women and that female circumcision is an Islamic practice. Education needs to help people critically analyze news reports that conclude that all Muslim

countries practice “cruel punishment” and help them move beyond the stereotype that all Muslims are anti-Semites.

## **SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS**

Any analysis of Mazruiana is necessarily incomplete because his vast corpus of work stretching over almost half a century makes it very implausible that one analyst could adequately cover all of his writings. My own familiarity with his writings on Islam has been influenced more by his academic writings on Islam over the last few decades rather than over his entire academic and journalistic life. In addition, my own familiarity with Islam has been that primarily of South Asian Islam and to a lesser extent, Middle Eastern Islam, while Mazrui’s work concentrates, for the most part, on African Islam. The preceding analysis then is subject to these limitations.

When I speak of the audacity of African hope on Islam through Mazrui’s writings, I refer to his courage, as an African Muslim himself, in advocating a more hopeful vision of Islam in several areas. We have witnessed that those Muslims who brave the prevailing wisdom on Islam subject themselves to challenges—sometimes physically dangerous—on the grounds that they are not theologians or are biased or unrealistic. Mazrui’s debating skills; deep and wide knowledge of Islamic basic doctrine, history, and contemporary politics; and the intellectual ability to make insightful comparisons have all been critical to his ability to interrogate the theology and practice of Islam. Of course, his position as a tenured professor in an American university, with relative academic freedom, has also been

helpful. Familiarity with Islamic doctrine passed on to him by his father, as well as exposure to the “triple heritage” of his African Islamic experience, has also enabled him to offer this more hopeful vision of Islam.

This more hopeful vision of Islam, as we have seen in the seven areas that we have described above, is grounded in some basic convictions that may be summarized as follows.

1. Any reform of Islam must be Islamically-grounded on the basis of the Qur’an, Hadith, and early Islamic history.
2. One of the most important obstacles to a more hopeful Islam is the closing of the door of *ijtihad*, but modern scholars—sometimes from Africa—can offer intellectual and theological arguments to reopen the door.
3. From issues of war and peace to the role of women, reinterpretations of Islam can offer Muslims a chance to be full members of the global community with concomitant opportunities to explore, and participate in, politically modern systems.
4. Islamic contributions to modern knowledge must be acknowledged, and people all over the world—without necessarily converting to Islam—must be educated about the diversity of Islam.
5. Islam is not a monolithic religion, but is a complex system of beliefs and practices that vary by region.

6. Africa—as a laboratory of inter-religious competition and cooperation among traditional African religion, Christianity, and Islam—offers lessons that are both negative and positive for interfaith relations.

The seven areas examined in this paper as well as other areas not covered, thus offer Professor Mazrui and his intellectual disciples fecund ground to contribute a uniquely African perspective leading to an Islam that is more hopeful. On the occasion of his 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary, one looks forward to more work in this area over the next quarter century or more!

## NOTES

1. This is a revised and extended version of a talk delivered at the New York State African Studies Association special panel honoring Professor Mazrui on March 29, 2008. Views expressed in this paper are those of the author and do not represent the views of the UN Alliance of Civilizations.
2. For instance, Ali A. Mazrui, “Pax Islamica: Muslim Values Between War and Peace” in *Ali A. Mazrui: Islam between Globalization and Counter-Terrorism*, Shalahuddin Kafrawi, Alamin M. Mazrui, and Ruzima Sebuharara, Editors, (Trenton, NJ and Asmara, Eritrea: Africa World Press, 2006), 81-93. “Pax Islamica: Muslim Values Between War And Peace,” a revised version of a lecture delivered at the American University on November 12, 2003.
3. Some extreme versions of this kind of perspective were offered by the September 2006 quotation by Pope Benedict of a Byzantine emperor on Islam, and the Dutch Parliamentarian Geert Wilder’s film called

*Fitna*, both of which caused widespread outrage in the Muslim world.

4. According to one source (<http://www.iraqbodycount.org/>, accessed November 30, 2008), the number of civilian deaths from violence in Iraq ranges from 89,544-97,762 in the five years since the war began.
5. Quran 2: 256. All quotations from the Qur'an, unless otherwise mentioned, are from the translation by Ahmed Ali, *Al-Qur'an: A Contemporary Translation* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1988).
6. Consult Adil Salahi, *Muhammad: Man and Prophet* (Shaftesbury, UK, and Boston, MA: Element, 1998), 575.
7. For discussions on *Dar el Harb*, *Dar el Islam*, and *Dar el Sullb*, see, for example, M. Raquibuz Zaman, "Islamic Perspectives on Territorial Boundaries and Autonomy," in Sohail H. Hashmi, ed., *Islamic Political Ethics: Civil Society, Pluralism and Conflict* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2002), pp. 92-94, and Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *The Heart of Islam: Enduring Values for Humanity* (San Francisco, CA: Harper San Francisco, 2002), 163-165.
8. The essential fact that in fact followers of all three religions have more often than not lived in peace is detailed in Zachary Karabell, *Peace Be Upon You: The Story of Muslim, Christian and Jewish Coexistence* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2007).
9. Mazrui, "Pax Islamica: Muslim Values Between War and Peace."
10. On this thesis, see Bruce Russett, *Grasping the Democratic Peace: Principles for a Post-Cold War* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993), and for differing views, see, for example, Michael E. Brown, Sean M. Lynn-Jones, and Steven Miller, eds., *Debating the Democratic Peace* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1996).

11. From John Patrick's play "The Teahouse of the August Moon," cited in Marlon Brando with Robert Lindsey, in *Brando: Songs My Mother Taught Me*, with Robert Lindsey (New York: Random House, 1994), 386.
12. See Ali A. Mazrui, "A Cultural Betrothal? Euro-American Norms and Islamic Values," in *Ali A. Mazrui: Islam between Globalization and Counter-Terrorism*, Shalahuddin Kafrawi, Alamin M. Mazrui and Ruzima Sebuharara, Editors, (Trenton, NJ and Asmara, Eritrea: Africa World Press, 2006), 304-306.
13. For a discussion of this important figure in modern Islamic intellectual history, consult Mahmudul Haq, Muhammad Abduh : a study of a modern thinker of Egypt (Aligarh, India: Institute of Islamic Studies, Aligarh Muslim University, 1970).
14. See Mahmud Muhammad Taha's book, *The Second Message of Islam* (Evanston, IL.: Northwestern University Press, 1987), 39.
15. Taha, *The Second Message of Islam*, 39.
16. Taha, *The Second Message of Islam*, 153.
17. Taha, *The Second Message of Islam*.
18. See Mazrui's keynote lecture entitled, "Civilizations Between Dominance And Dialogue: In Search of a Balance," at the 7<sup>th</sup> Congress of the International Association of Middle Eastern Studies (IAMES) on the theme "Clash of Civilizations or Dialogue between Cultures?: State of the Art and New Perspectives in Middle Eastern Studies" co-sponsored by the Free University of Berlin, Berlin, Germany, October 4-8, 2000.
19. For an overview of the trends and issues ahead, see Marcus Braybrooke, *Pilgrimage Of Hope: One Hundred Years Of Global Interfaith Dialogue* (New York : Crossroad, 1992) and Wesley S. Ariarajah, "Not Without My Neighbor: Issues in Interfaith Relations," *Risq* no 85 (1999), 1-130.

20. See, for an elaboration on these fallacies, Ali A. Mazrui, "Concluding Remarks: In Search of A Global Agenda," in Ali A. Mazrui, Patrick M. Dikirr, Shalahudin Kafrawi, *Globalization and Civilization: Are They Forces in Conflict* (New York: Global Scholarly Publications, 2008), 395-398.
21. Samuel P. Huntington, "A Clash of Civilizations," *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 72, No. 3 (Summer 1993), 22-49.
22. See John Kearney, "My God is Your God," *The New York Times* (January 28, 2004).
23. Jomo Kenyatta, *Suffering Without Bitterness* (Nairobi and Chicago: East African Publishing House and Northwestern University Press, 1968).
24. For further reading on the Nigerian civil war, consult Zdenek Cervenka, *The Nigerian War, 1967-70: History of The War, Selected Bibliography and Documents* (Frankfurt Am Main: Bernard & Graef, 1971).
25. For an overview of the transition from white rule to black rule in Zimbabwe, see Anthony Parsons, "From Southern Rhodesia to Zimbabwe, 1965-1985," *International Affairs* Volume 9, Number 4, (November 1988), pp. 353-361; also see Victor De Waal, *The Politics of Reconciliation: Zimbabwe's First Decade* (London and Cape Town: Hurst and David Philip, 1981).
26. See Mazrui's Oxford Lecture of 2004, "Strangers In our Midst: In Search of Seven Pillars of Wisdom." A version of this was published in Kate E. Tunstall (ed.), *Displacement, Asylum, Migration* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press), 92-126.
27. Mark Mathabene has recommended the African experience for the Middle East in an op-ed piece, "The Cycle of Revenge Can be Broken," *New York Times* (July 5, 2002), 21.
28. Surah 2: 177, in Ali, *Al-Qur'an*.



29. See Janine A. Clark, *Islam, Charity, and Activism: Middle-Class Networks and Social Welfare in Egypt, Jordan, and Yemen* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2004); Michael Bonner, Mine Ener, Amy Singer, Eds., *Poverty and Charity in Middle Eastern Contexts* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2003) and F. E. Peters, *A Reader on Classical Islam* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994), 153.
30. Consult Ziauddin Sardar, *Islamic Future : The Shape Of Ideas To Come* (London and New York: Mansell, 1985), 199-200, and 25-28.
31. See K. S. Jomo, *Islamic Economic Alternatives: Critical Perspectives and New Directions*. (Basingstoke, Hampshire: Macmillan Academic and Professional, 1992), 88.
32. Consult John L. Esposito, *Islam and Development* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press), 34-37.
33. Relatedly, consult Patricia Crone, *Meccan Trade and The Rise of Islam* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1987) and Maxime Rodinson, (Brian Pearce, Trans.), *Islam and Capitalism* (London: Allen Lane, 1974).
34. Various verses of the Qur'an prohibits this practice (III: 130, II: 275, IV: 161, XXX: 39, for example). It is to be noted that medieval Christianity had strictures against interest too. See John Noonan, Jr., "Usury: The Amendment of Papal Teaching by Theologians," in Charles E. Curran, Ed. *Change in Official Catholic Moral Teachings* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2003), 81.
35. See Wayne Arnold, "Adapting Finance to Islam," *The New York Times* (November 22, 2007).
36. M. A. Mannan, *Islamic Economics: Theory and Practice* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1987), 161-165.
37. See Paul Blustein, "Mideast Investment Up in U.S.: Proposed Ports Deal Is Just Part of Flood of Oil Wealth Spilling Ashore," *Washington Post* (Tuesday, March 7, 2006).

38. The Saudi reserves are under great stress due to the increasing demand of the world for energy; a detailed report may be found in Jeff Gerth, "Forecast of Rising Oil Demand Challenges Tired Saudi Fields," *The New York Times* (February 24, 2004), 1. and C2.
39. The members of OPEC are Angola, Algeria, Ecuador, Iraq, Iran, Libya, Kuwait, Indonesia, Nigeria, Saudi Arabia, Venezuela, Qatar, and the UAE; see the web-site [www.opec.org](http://www.opec.org) for reserves and other data.
40. Cited in Tina Rosenberg, "The Perils of Petrocracy," *The New York Times* (November 4, 2007). For another analysis of the dangers of petrowealth and examples of non-productive investments, see Kenneth M. Pollack, "Drowning in Riches," *The New York Times* (July 13, 2008).
41. See Craig Whitlock, "Al-Qaeda Leader Uses Slur Against Obama in Web Video: Zawahiri Says Next President Has Proved to Be 'House Negro,'" *Washington Post* (November 20, 2008).
42. Consult Mazrui, "Strangers in our Midst," and a revised version of the essay "Muslims between the Jewish Example and the Black Experience," in Zahid Hussain Bukhari, Sulayman S. Nyang, Mumtaz Ahmad, *Muslims' Place in the American Public Square: Hope, Fears, and Aspirations*, (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2004), 117-144.
43. Surah 49: 13, in Ali, *Al-Qur'an*.
44. These lines are taken from the last sermon of the Prophet Muhammad; for one rendering of the complete text, see <http://www.islamicity.com/mosque/Lastserm.HTM>
45. An accessible and readable biography of this remarkable man may be found in H. A. L. Craig, *Bilal* (London and New York: Quartet Books, 1977).
46. For a discussion of this journey, see W. Montgomery Watt, *Muhammad at Mecca* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1953), 101-117.

47. For more on the links between Malcolm X and his efforts to establish a linkage between the civil rights struggle and decolonization in Africa and Asia, see Richard B. Turner, *Islam in the African-American Experience* (Bloomington and Indianapolis, IN: Indiana University Press, 1997), 215-223.
48. See Barbara Stowasser, *Women in the Qur'an, Traditions, and Interpretation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994) for an extended discussion on this subject.
49. See Stowasser, *Women in the Qur'an*, 121.
50. Generally republican/socialist Islamic countries, such as Iraq and Libya, provide greater opportunities for progressiveness on matters of public access for women.
51. How much of this state of affairs is due to oil wealth? According to one study, when a nation's oil profits soar, the number of women in the workforce invariably declines the next year. In turn, this leads to reduced political clout. For every \$1,280 increase in per capita oil profits, Ross shows there is a 2 percent decrease in the number of elected female leaders, an effect that is powerful because it grows cumulatively over time. See Shankar Vedantam, "Petroleum Feeds Patriarchy" *Washington Post* (Monday, March 10, 2008).
52. Ali A. Mazrui and Alamin Mazrui, "The Digital Revolution and the New Reformation: Doctrine and Gender in Islam," (Unpublished paper, Institute of Global Cultural Studies, Binghamton University, New York, June 2001).
53. This analysis is based on the following pieces by Mazrui: "Strangers in our Midst," "Islam and the End of History, Revisited," (draft chapter for a forthcoming book entitled Ali A. Mazrui's *Resurgent Islam And Modern Pillars Of Wisdom: Afro-Arab Perspectives*, edited by Thomas Uthup), and "Islam Between Afrocentricity And Multiculturalism: Some Educational Implications" revised version of a keynote lecture delivered at a conference

on the theme “Islamic Education in America—Facing the 21st Century” held in Sacramento, California, and sponsored by the Universal Institute for Islamic Education on April 14-17, 1995.

54. Sura *Iqra* or *Alaq*/Sura 96, Verses 1-8.
55. Arnold Toynbee, *A Study of History, Volume III* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1934), 322.
56. Philip Hitti, *History of the Arabs: From the Earliest Times to the Present* (London: Macmillan, 1953), 568.
57. For samples, see Said Hamdun & Noël King, Editors and Translators, *Ibn Battuta in Black Africa* (Princeton, NJ: Markus Wiener, 2005).
58. Consult Duncan Towson, *Muslim Spain*, (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1973), 41.
59. See *ibid*, p. 42. Also see Hichem Djait, *Europe and Islam*, (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1985) and W. Montgomery Watt, *The influence of Islam on Medieval Europe* (Edinburgh: University Press, 1972).
60. See Amartya Sen, “Chili and Liberty: The Uses and Abuses of Multiculturalism,” *The New Republic* (February 27, 2006), 28.
61. See Eugene A. Myers, *Arabic Thought and the Western World in the Golden Age of Islam*, (New York: Frederick Ungar, 1964), 10.
62. See *ibid*, 133–134.
63. A copy of this report may be found at the web site of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) at <http://www.undp.org/rbas/ahdr/>. Accessed June 14, 2004.
64. A brilliant and cogent treatment of these stereotypes may be found in Edward Said’s *Covering Islam: How the Media and the Experts Determine How We See the Rest of the World* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1981).



# THE PARADOX OF GENDER IN MAZRUI'S TRIPLE HERITAGE

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Etin Anwar

The origins of male dominance do not lie in economic specialization but in military specialization. Women till the land; the means of production. Women control the womb; the means of reproduction. But women do not control the means of physical coercion: the spear, the bow and arrow, and later, the gun. (Mazrui, 2009: 226)

**A**li Mazrui's works on gender examines the trajectory of a gender culture in the historical and contextual encounters of the Western and Muslim worlds. It offers a common pattern and common trait of how rules, roles, and rights are constructed and deconstructed within each locality and how the defined gender-cultures entail systemic values

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**Etin Anwar** is Assistant Professor of Religious Studies, Hobart and William Smith Colleges, New York.

that are relevant beyond the geographical, cultural, and civilizational contexts. As each gender culture emphasizes its unique superior ideology, Mazrui argues that gender values of Westerners and Muslims become less compatible compared to the political relations between the two. Within these multilayered nuances of gender systemic divergence and political compatibility, Mazrui's works on gender examines the trajectory of three civilizational dialogues among Western, Islamic, and African values of gender cultures and the cultures of sexuality across the boundaries of civilizations, religions, race, ethnicities, and languages.

Central to Mazrui's concept of the gender culture is the confluence of indigenous, Islamic, and Western civilizations<sup>1</sup> that lent him a myriad of titles ranging from Africanist, political/social scientist, Islamist, and culturalist. However, he is labeled as neither a feminist nor a gender theorist. Writing from the perspectives of feminist and gender studies, scholars like Sudarkasa,<sup>2</sup> Ogundipe-Leslie<sup>3</sup> and Vakil<sup>4</sup> perceive Mazrui's works on gender as less grounded in the feminist literacy traditions, the lived experience of women, and the rhetoric common to feminist consciousness-raising movements. Although I have some reservation about labeling Mazrui as a feminist, I believe that Mazrui's writings on gender unfold that which shapes the seamless paradox of gender and its effect in the production of the body politic that is patriarchal and masculine in nature.

In this paper, I will explore the ways in which Mazrui's paradoxical theory of gender cultures in the triple heritage converge and diverge with feminism. I will first discuss how Mazrui's theory of the paradox of gender demonstrates the convergent sexual reciprocity among

men and women regardless of racial, cultural, religious, and civilizational boundaries. Male and female partnership not only centers on biological reciprocity, but also generates the body politic peculiar to the longevity of such partnership, such as state policy on family planning, sexual division of labor, and familial institution. I will then examine how the male and female partnership across religions, states, and civilizations produces a convergent world cultures and politics.

### **THE PARADOX OF GENDER AND SEXUAL RECIPROCITY**

Mazrui formulates the intricacy of gender relationship in the following propositions: “(i) among humans, the senior partner in the creation of new life is the female of the species (woman as mother); (ii) among humans, the senior partner in the destruction of life is the male of the species (man as warrior); and (iii) it is the power of destruction which has given the male of the species dominion over the female (man as ruler).” These propositions are the product of the intellectual, historical and cultural specificity that cannot be removed from its contexts; yet, they transcend the boundaries of civilizations, religions and geo-political locality. Mazrui's compelling proposition of gender is indeed paradoxical in that even though men and women need each other, they will never collaborate to capture the state because women are interested in balance and equality, whereas men capture the state for themselves and monopolize its legitimacy by means of coercion, physical force and violence.<sup>5</sup>

The first aspect of Mazrui's theory of gender offers a glimpse of how men and women in sexual



reciprocity generate rules, roles, and rights governing their relationship. Although the sexual discourses and constructs are a common theme to feminists and gender activists, Mazrui looks at a comparative rule that regulates sexual relationality within each culture and its impact on sexual and civilizational politics. Sexual reciprocity between men and women converges the racial, religious, cultural, and civilizational factors that shape the genealogical relationality and superiority. The cross-sexual relationality is often seen as polluting the purity of the lineage that causes the descending and ascending miscegenation of the offspring. Barack Hussain Obama would not be such a controversial president, had not he been racially black, biologically linked to a Muslim father, and religiously connected to his pastor Rev. Jeremiah A. Wright Jr.<sup>6</sup>

As a comparative theorist, Mazrui analyzes gender construct of men and women within the hegemonic masculinity and patriarchy common to African, Islamic and Western civilizations. Like feminists, Mazrui argues that gender construct is cultural and its underlying principle is embedded in each local culture. He defines a multilayered function of culture as providing lenses of perception and cognition, motives for human behavior, sources of evaluation, a basis of identity, a mode of communication, a basis of stratification, and the system of production and consumption.<sup>7</sup> Within the enmeshed rules that culture produces, the roles for which men and women are expected to behave, and the rights that are conferred on men and women, both men and women have undergone some sort of gender appropriation within their own cultures and adjustments to the changing roles of gender coming from global cultures.

The primary underlying gendered construct common to Islamic, Christian and Indigenous African traditions is the compatibility of men and women in procreation. The male and female partnership within African culture takes into account both Islamic and western influences. Although Islam and Western Christianity support the culture of procreation, each shapes Africa quite differently. Islam in Africa is more relevant to the culture of lineage and procreation than the culture of combat.<sup>8</sup> Islam spread to Northern Africa by conquest, whereas the bulk of the African continent was Islamized through migration, trade, missionary work (*da'wa*), and revivalist movements. The affinity of indigenous Africans and Muslims lies in the importance of fertility rather than in rivalries among ethnic groups. Islam has been assimilated into local cultures through intermarriage, a process that subsequently produced the hybridization of African and Arab cultures. Christianity, on the other hand, has had a marginal impact on the level of fertility because African cultures consider children as the form of assurance and insurance for parents in their old age.

Islam endorses marriage and begets children. Marriage, as the Prophet Muhammad says, is part of one's religion. The culture of procreation encourages fertility, early arranged marriage, and motherhood. It also engenders a set of mechanisms that nurture the underpinning norms instituted for men and women. Embedded in the culture of procreation is the institution of marriage as a way to maintain the lineage of the family and to bestow on the family members honor and dignity. Although honor and dignity are theoretically the mechanism entrenched in marriage in order to

protect the lineage, they are practically useful in maintaining the production of lineage and tribal coalition. The construction of lineage not only starts when the selection of a spouse begins either by religion, beauty, wealth, piety or other merits, but it is also available as an avenue to improve one's dignity and class. An Arab who is married to a slave would ascend the status of the newborn to the lineage of the father. This ascending miscegenation is completely different within American slavery system in which the faith (fate?) of the newborn belongs completely to the mother.

The Arabs never completely Islamized Africa since the coming of Western Christianity, along with capitalism, religious missionary, modern slavery and colonization, changed the landscape of African lands forever. The existence of white settlers in many parts of Africa and the creation of artificial boundaries on the African map escalated the ethnic conflicts and rivalries among Africans. Added to the intricacy of Africanity of such ethnic dominance as the Kikuyu in Kenya and the Ganda in Uganda is the role of westernized elites who controlled the destiny of Africa through the imperial policies without necessarily centering, liberating, and empowering African men and women. Mazrui, however, argues that the Arabization of Africa does not produce bloodshed in and of itself; violence and warfare on African soil, like Hutu and Tutsi in Rwanda, the Kikuyu and the Luo in Kenya, the Ibo, Hausa and Yoruba in Nigeria and others, are caused by ethnic rivalries, demographic ethnic imbalance, rigged votes, and an unequal share of power among diverse ethnicities.

Although the Islamic and Western impacts on Africa can clearly be seen in the multifaceted resilience

of the local and global forces in shaping the politicization of Africa and its cultural and geographical divides, Mazrui insists that the affinity of the roles of men and women in procreation remains the mark of human partnership. I argue that male and female partnership in Africa and the Muslim world in general is gendered. Male and female biological partnership assumes the enactment of male dominance that feeds what Mazrui characterizes as the paradox of gender. Whenever men and women want to copulate, both perceive the propensity for sexual behavior differently.<sup>9</sup> The difference lies in the male aggression and the female receptivity from which the construction of masculinity and femininity is derived. Even in the very intimate moment, men never fail to insert their dominance, as Oackley state that<sup>10</sup>

Along with the male's greater aggression in other fields, goes his aggression in the sphere of sexuality: males initiate sexual contact, and take the symbolically, if not actually, aggressive step of vaginal penetration—a feat which is possible even with a frigid mate. They assume the dominant position in intercourse. Males ask females to go to bed with them, or marry them, or both: not vice versa.

Male dominance and female receptivity in mutual sexual activity come with no surprise since men define the accepted norms and practices of what is culturally and socially appropriated for men and women.

The female passivity and receptivity to male sexual advance and leadership are often religiously encouraged. In Islamic heritage, the Qur'anic verses 4:34<sup>11</sup> and 2:228<sup>12</sup> are understood to infer “a biological differ-

ence between men and women in intelligence, capacity, and piety;”<sup>13</sup> therefore, men and women are not equal because the former are religiously determined to be superior to the latter. They control women, provide maintenance, and have the right to beat disobedient wives (*Qur’an*, 4:34). Quite different from a traditional understanding of the term (*d}arb*, wife-beating), Barlas (2002) interprets *d}arb*, as a restriction and a prevention of violence toward women.<sup>14</sup> This is to say that God does not warrant violence toward women as universal, but it was confined to the particularity of the case and context in which the *Qur’an* was revealed. In our historical context, *d}arb* may well mean *‘tabarru* (to leave or move). When any disagreements occur in a marital relationship, both parties need to take time and resolve the problems accordingly. When both parties are tempted to burst into violence, they need to chill out by giving each other some space.

Although the reproductive function of sexuality unites men and women in partnership, the rules, roles and the rights of men and women in marriage is not equal by far. Mazrui comparatively examines the compatibility of men and women in creation, yet the differentiating roles and rights of men and women—imposed by the religious, social and political imperatives that often marginalize and oppress women—cannot transcend the boundary of the utilitarian union between a husband and a wife. He demonstrates the commonality of cultural foundation that underlies it in the confluence of Islamic, Western and African traditions. He sees the gender gap between men and women in private and public spheres globally. This gap is even wider in the Muslim world in particular

and the third world in general since women are often subjected to the rules, roles and rights imposed by the state, religion, and society. As a series of states' policies on women emphasizes the control of female sexuality through family planning with fewer rights to safe abortion and reproduction, the appropriation of the role of motherhood as the backbone of the culture is parallel to the way the sexual division of labor is instituted. Women are continuously expected to maintain both the religious and state appropriation of the duality of the public and the private.

The return of religion in many groups of Muslims—especially among religious fundamentalists who strive to win the hearts and the minds of Muslims through the control of women—brings Islam closer to the center of family and the state. In the process, women as the carriers of the tradition are subjected to membership and sometimes religious violence (as in female suicide bomber cases). The institutionalization of traditionalism—a belief in the traditional role of women—emphasizes the unchanging roles and rights of women that generate a gap between the modern and traditional portrayal of woman. Mazrui calls for the closure of the gender gap by way of cultural readjustment of the rules, roles and rights of women at the personal, political, and social levels.

### **GENDER POLITICS AND THE POLITICS OF MASCULINITY AND ITS VINDICATION**

Mazrui's second aspect of the paradox of gender denotes the politics of gender difference and its appropriation by men and women in Islamic, Western, and African traditions. He postulates that senior partner-

ship in the destruction of life and war is immanent among men, rather than among the females and/or the male and female partnership. Within a Mazruiana framework, the exclusion of women from warring and killing is a form of benevolent sexism in that kindness to women is for their own dignity and protection. Feminists would certainly object to the exclusion of women from public responsibility, like war and patriotism on the basis of sexual differentiation that is underlain by the biological difference of men and women. Women in many developed and developing countries have been part of the warrior tradition. Parallel to benevolent sexism is benign sexism that neither harms nor bestows advantage, yet it advances women's interest and need. Only malignant sexism does harm women, since it subjects women to "economic manipulation, sexual exploitation, and political marginalization."<sup>15</sup>

I will argue that the senior partnership between men and women in the politics of war and peace is a culturally constructed system as a direct consequence of the convergent or divergent power relations. Within this enmeshed social, political and cultural power relation lies women's subjectivity that is ineluctable from the masculine and patriarchal world that produces rules, roles, and rights for both men and women. Men cross-culturally create the rules and the language of how to live by the rules; define the roles that are appropriated on the basis of sexual and gender difference; and confer the rights that are constructed on the basis of economic and sexual merit. In other words, men not only define what rules, roles, and rights are available to women, but also produce the measure and discipline for cases where ruling ideologies do not function. This

gender thinking operates at the epistemological level and its application functions in the personal, familial, social, and political apparatus. Within this trajectory of gender cultures, Mazrui concedes that the categories of sexism: benevolent, benign and malevolent are intrinsic within gender relationship and male alliances in power and war.

Here is wherein Mazrui and feminists diverge. For Mazrui, any preferential concept and attitude in the treatment of women is not fully sexist; since it is the meta-language of sexism that entails its true meaning, as is the case with the malignant sexism. As for feminists, any rules, roles, and rights that are bestowed on women on the basis of sexual difference and that are constructed to enhance the masculine interest are at odds with the feminist critique of patriarchy and masculinity. Is Mazrui to be blamed for centering the discourse of gender operating on “a feminist frame of reference”<sup>16</sup> while lacking feminist nuances and epistemology? Mazrui writes his theory of gender culture within African contexts that explore themes of the role of men and women at the personal, familial and social levels, gender relationships, their oppression, and empowerment. He combines factual and theoretical constructs of how the human condition in its geopolitical locality produces, reproduces, and nurtures power and knowledge. The masculine codification of power and knowledge develops out of an accumulated male prowess of domination not only the body politic, but also in the politics of masculinity that maintains the ruler and ruled, the self and the other, and the dominant and the weak. This dual assumption governs not only gender relationship, but also human



relationality within its own culture and human encounter with the other.

For many feminists who accentuate the personal as the political, Mazrui's approach falls as an "essentialist," "reductive," and "simplistic" paradigm.<sup>17</sup> Mazrui painstakingly argues that the fundamental issue in gender discourse is not about men speaking about women or vice versa, but is about the survival of human species that depends on the symbiotic relationship between men and women and the empowerment of women at all levels.<sup>18</sup> Like feminists, Mazrui focuses on the feminist critique of masculinity and patriarchy that goes beyond the products of "male-centered discourses" and what Wittig calls the "straight mind."<sup>19</sup> De Lauretis argues that<sup>20</sup>

[i]f the goal of feminist theory is to define sexual difference for women, to understand how one becomes a woman, what gives femaleness (rather than femininity) its meaning as the experience of a female subject, then the starting point can be neither "man" nor "woman": neither the Man with the capital M of humanism, or the lower case M of modernism; nor, on the other hand, women as the opposite or the complement of man: Woman as Nature, Mother, Body, and Matter, or woman as style, figure, or metaphor of man's femininity.

Because the "all-purpose feminist frame of reference" is an emerging field, it has to be inclusive of multiple identities, heterogeneities within women, and a multi-layered trajectory of race, gender, sexuality, and ethnicity.<sup>21</sup> In the process of making the feminist subjects, both male and female voices that enhance the feminist

epistemology and politics should be welcomed. After all, feminist studies continue to engage rigorously with diverging voices, paradigms, and categories and to engage in interdisciplinary dialogues.

Mazrui's theory of gender complements the feminist rhetoric of how the politics of masculinity that centers on the treatment of power affects women.<sup>22</sup> Feminist theories focus on men's "sexual exploitation and violence," "unrelieved villainy" and "agents of the patriarchy" as a means to enhance and maintain the patriarchal and masculine domination.<sup>23</sup> Mazrui attends the feminist issue by looking at the causes of women's oppression, empowerment, and policies recommendation across civilizations as many feminists concede that

Liberal feminists...believe that women are oppressed insofar as they suffer unjust discrimination; traditional Marxists believe that women are oppressed in their exclusion from public production; radical feminists women's oppression as consisting primarily in the universal male control of women's sexual and procreative capacities; while socialist feminists characterize women's oppression in terms of a revised version of the Marxist theory of alienation.<sup>24</sup>

As the eradication of oppression from women's everyday life is a daunting task, it takes the unity of individuals, the state, women's organizations, and legal practitioners to execute the appropriated ideas and programs. With women's lack of education, property, economy, technology, finance, and opportunity, women's rules, roles and rights will continue to be marginal. In the

indigenous African traditions, women as the custodians of earth, water and fire hardly move beyond its predicament, since the wake of technological machineries for farming, irrigation and electricity are often managed and controlled by men.<sup>25</sup> Even if women were to enter the economy and politics, the majority of women would not have enough skills to plug into the male dominated markets and political system.

Why are women continuously marginalized? Is hegemonic masculinity too powerful to be defeated? I think that the resilience of the hegemonization and homogenization of masculinity that have existed since the origin of human existence is a dynamic process. Hegemonic masculinity is not a condition, but “a question of how particular groups of men inhabit positions of power and wealth, and how they legitimate and reproduce the social relationships that generate their dominance.”<sup>26</sup> The answer to this question includes women’s subordination that benefits men, their connection to the institution of male dominance over women, heterosexual regimes,<sup>27</sup> and the patriarchal system that upholds the underpinning of societal institutions produced and protected by men. Hegemony refers not only to “a historical situation, a set of circumstances in which power is won and held,” but also a constant contestation of power and the reproduction of power operating at a new level. Although the feminist contestation of the masculine hegemony shifts the dynamic of gender relations, on a larger scale, it has not slipped off the grip of male domination and power in the private and public spheres especially in the third world countries.

Mazrui points to examples of women who reached leadership excellence in Muslim dominated countries,

such as Benazir Bhutto (1988-1990 and 1993-1996.) Megawati Sukarno Putri (2001-2004), and Khaleda Zia (1991-1996) and Sheikh Hasina (1996-2001) , all of whom were elected to the office due to the kinship relationship to the male leaders. They earned the jobs by virtue of blood relatives and male connection; hence, their leadership is male-derived. In fact, if the recent US election took place in the Muslim world, Hillary Clinton would very likely be the elected president. Female leadership in the Muslim world is, despite the claim of democracy, granted by men to women. All these female leaders, though they resumed the leadership inherited from the male relatives, they did not survive the masculine politics of corruption like husband's, relatives' or associates' or the enemy's coalitions that occurred during their services.

Bhutto's tragic assassination is an example of how a woman's interruption to the masculine politics and authority cost her life and dream for democracy. She stood not only against the authoritarian and dictatorial leadership, but also chauvinist radical religious leaders who perceived anyone standing in their way as their enemies. Is Bhutto considered an enemy because she is female? She is not an ordinary female. She is a Western educated female and twice prime minister. Her mistakes were to step into the male world from which she had been granted as prime minister twice. This time, however, she came with the masculine 'foreign' rhetoric of a war on terror to crack Muslim radicals in the heart of Pakistan. Violence of any religious, racial, and civilizational backgrounds is genderless and merciless to men, women, children, and civilians. In war and conflict zones, women are often targeted with violence

as a means to defeat the enemy by way of rape, trafficking, intimidation, and slavery.

The exclusion of women from warfare, while it is benevolent, is about the inequality of power in public domain. War is about policy decision making toward the enemy. This political decision has been historically made by men to conquer the other's mainland and has been led by men. A historical diachronic look into the masculine politics has been largely authoritarian, chauvinist, and dictatorial in nature. In this sense, Mazrui's point of senior partnership in the destruction of life and violence is correct in that warfare is initiated by and occurs between men. By saying this, it would be expected that women's involvement in warfare is not compatible not only with the reproductive compatibility of men and women, but also with benevolent, benign, and even malevolent sexism. Is Mazrui's view of women's rules, rights and roles, underlying the partnership between men and women gendered? Does he voice men's view of gender appropriation? It would be misleading to perceive Mazrui's work on gender as an apologetic masculine view since Mazrui attends women's issues, interests and needs attentively.

Mazrui captures the virtue of masculinity in politics as common to any civilization. The term masculinity entails strength, virility and nobility. Although the virtue of masculinity is exercised in the battle ground, it infiltrates all aspect of life. Islamic, Western, and African cultures are interacting with each other with an overlay of masculine dominance. The Negro symbolizes masculinity; Africa confers the notion of femininity. Africa is discussed in feminine term because it is feminized by the intrusion of other masculine

cultures, like Islam and Western Christianity. The use of the beard symbolizes manliness and dignity in the time of peace and war. However, as the beard post-September 11<sup>th</sup> is perceived as the emblem of terrorists and terrorism, it has now become repellent to have it. Although the imposition of beardlessness is political, it also feminizes Muslim men by stripping them of their right to have a beard. Similarly, polygamous marriage is common to indigenous African and Islamic cultures. This practice becomes perceived as repugnant as the homogenization of monogamous marriage becomes the accepted ruling ideology. The colorful African and Islamic dress is homogenized with masculine Western suits. If men exercise masculine virtues over women by way of the imposition of masculine rules on the feminine roles and rights, the masculine civilization imposes the feminization of the less powerful civilizations.

Even though the supposed haughty-masculine-civilization endorses the masculine premises of power and dominance over the less powerful civilizations, the political alliances between the masculine and the emasculated regimes tend to converge. The Western incontestable supports for authoritarian and despotic countries in the Muslim world led by men is a living proof of what Mazrui insightfully presents as the collaboration in destructive power. Although the Western backed regimes envisage the coming of democracy, they utilize various juggernaut machinery to silence indigenous democratic voices and justice along with unchanging perception of the foundational and institutional structure for democracy to flourish. In this sense, the political converge between world civilizations is masculine oriented rhetoric since they serve

each other's purpose of the multilayered hegemony that allows the injustice to gender equality and humanity to exist.

## **CONCLUDING REMARKS**

Mazrui's assessment of the divergent gender culture in the world civilizations correlates with the feminist epistemology in examining the cross-cultural roles of women. Certainly, his theory of gender culture is less founded in what Narayan calls the feminist epistemology<sup>28</sup> that is rooted in the premise of how women's individual and social position in the world affect the way of thinking and producing knowledge. Does sexual and biological ownership matter in defining what feminism is and what is not? What defines feminism is not biological commonalities, but the commitment to eradicate "sexism, sexist exploitation, and oppression."<sup>29</sup> In the case of Mazrui, his works should be seen within "broad, generalizing categories for ordering, analyzing, or explaining human behavior, particularly recurrent behavior, characteristic of societies and cultures around the world."<sup>30</sup> With this in mind, the paradox of gender is about the human behavior in a reproductive and political partnership that is ultimately gendered.

The civilizational encounters on gender issues remain oppressive and burdensome. Women are seen as sexed bodies that are subjected to a series of gendered cultures and as sexual objects whose sexuality is of interest for reproduction, sexual trafficking, mail bride, and prostitution. The global victimization of women prevails in the third world counties; Western feminists are mostly interested in the empowerment

of women when the perceived oppression is presumably linked to radical Islam. The liberation of Afghani women that became important to feminists was imbued by the masculine dialectics of preemptive war on terror for democracy and women's liberation. Yet, women in conflict zones continue to have a hard time meeting the basic rights and security needs of everyday life. These women are the victims of double masculine politics. The intricacy of the Western masculine politics and its appropriation over the masculine gendered system in the Muslim world strengthens their political alliances and the production of rules for operative gender system, yet continues to divide women's rights and roles significantly.

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6. Editorial, "Mr. Obama's Profile in Courage," *New York Times*, March 19, 2008.
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8. Ali A. Mazrui, "Africa's Islamic Experience: Expansion, Revival and Radicalization," a paper was delivered at the World Affairs Council, San Francisco, California (April 10, 2002).
9. Ann Oacley, "Sexuality," in *Feminism and Sexuality: A Reader*, eds. Stevi Jackson and Sue Scott (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 36.
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11. Men are the protectors and maintainers of women, because Allah has given the one more (strength) than the other, and because they support them from their means. Therefore the righteous women are devoutly obedient, and guard in (the husband's) absence what Allah would have them guard. As to those women on whose part ye fear disloyalty and ill-conduct, admonish them (first), (Next), refuse to share their beds, (And last) beat them (lightly); but if they return to obedience, seek not against them Means (of annoyance): For Allah is Most High, great (above you all)." See Yusuf Ali's translation of 4: 34 in his work, *The Qur'an* (New York: Tahrike Tarsile, 1987), 190.
12. "Divorced women shall wait concerning themselves for three monthly periods. Nor is it lawful for them to hide what Allah Hath created in their wombs, if they have

faith in Allah and the Last Day. And their husbands have the better right to take them back in that period, if they wish for reconciliation. And women shall have rights similar to the rights against them, according to what is equitable; but men have a degree (of advantage) over them. And Allah is Exalted in Power, Wise." See Ali's translation of 2: 228 in his work, *The Qur'an*, 90.

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26. Carrigan et el., "Toward a New Sociology of Masculinity," 92.
27. *Ibid*, 93-94.
28. Uma Narayan, "The Project of Feminist Epistemology: Perspectives from a Nonwestern Feminist," Alison M. Jaggar and Susan R. Bordo, eds., *Gender/Body/Knowledge/Feminist Reconstructions of Being and Knowing* (New Brunswick and London: Rutgers, 1989), 256.
29. Bell Hooks, *Feminism is for Everybody* (Cambridge: South End Press, 2000), 1.
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# BLACK ACHIEVEMENT IN POLITICS AND LETTERS: ALI MAZRUI AND BARACK OBAMA IN A NORTH-SOUTH PERSPECTIVE

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Seifudein Adem

## INTRODUCTION

**T**he most obvious areas of comparison between Barack Obama<sup>1</sup> and Ali Mazrui<sup>2</sup> are that they are both sons of Kenyan fathers, that they are both products of three civilizations in their upbringing (Africanity, Islam, and Western culture), that they are both products of at least two ethnicities (Afro-Caucasian Obama and Afro-Arab Mazrui), that they have both been educated in some of the most outstanding educational centers of the Western world (Columbia and Harvard for Obama and Columbia and Oxford for Mazrui).

The most striking differences between Barack Obama and Ali Mazrui include the fact that Obama is

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**Seifudein Adem** is Associate Director of Institute of Global Cultural Studies, State University of New York at Binghamton.

a citizen of the mightiest power in the world (following the nationality of his Kansas mother), while Mazrui is a citizen of a developing country (following the nationality of his Kenyan parents). This geopolitical difference provides the setting of a North-South contrast. Another striking difference is that Obama has chosen a political career as his driving ambition, while Mazrui has chosen intellectual pursuits as a lifelong preoccupation. However, both have demonstrated spectacular successes in their chosen fields—within the constraints of North-South variations of scale.

Although in his childhood he was exposed to Africinity, Islam, and Westernism, Obama is now identified completely as Christian except for his middle name [Hussein]. Ali Mazrui has not only remained a child of three civilizations; Mazrui has now contributed more than anybody else towards interpreting Africa as itself also a product of what he has called “the triple heritage—Africinity, Islam, and the Western legacy.”<sup>3</sup>

It is also worth noting the historical linkage between Obama’s second name (Hussein) and Mazrui’s first name (Ali). The original Ali in the history of Islam was the father of the original Hussein in that history. In Shia Islam, Ali (600-661 C.E.) was the first great Imam. His second son, Hussein (626-280 C.E.) became the third Imam. But although both names are highly revered in Muslim culture, neither Mazrui nor Obama is a Shiite. For those less familiar with Islam, Ali was a cousin and son-in-law of the Prophet Muhammad (570-632 C.E.), while Hussein was the prophet’s most famous grandson. (Hussein’s less famous older brother was Hassan).

Both the Federal Government of the United States and many supporters of Barack Obama today fear for

Obama's life as the first black President of the United States. Shiite observers have publicly expressed that any such tragic martyrdom of Barack Hussein Obama would be shockingly reminiscent of the martyrdom of Hussein, son of Ali in 680 C.E. on the eve of his becoming a full-scale Caliph. Ironically, the original Hussein in Muslim history was butchered in Iraq in the city of Karbala. This city is now newly reactivated as a magnet of violence in the wake of the current American occupation. Obama has repeatedly criticized the U.S. decision to invade Iraq.

Barack Obama's education included classes in the country with the largest Muslim population (Indonesia) and subsequent classes and training in the country with the largest Christian population (the United States of America).

Apart from his early education in Kenya, Ali Mazrui was educated at the centre of what used to be the largest colonial empire in human history—the British Empire. Mazrui's own country and most of Africa were still colonized when Mazrui first went to England in the 1950s both to finish high school and later to attend the University of Manchester for his first degree.

For his second degree Mazrui proceeded to what he did not realize at the time was also a country on its way towards becoming a different kind of empire unprecedented in historical scale. Like Obama later in the twentieth century, Mazrui went to Columbia University. Over the years Mazrui witnessed the United States develop into an empire of control rather than an empire of settlement and flag-flying occupation. The United States militarily already occupies at least two Muslim countries (Iraq and Afghanistan) and has other



forms of military presence in at least one hundred other countries.

If Obama's education traversed from the most populous Muslim country (Indonesia) to the most populous Christian country (the United States), Mazrui's training traversed from the largest empire of colonization in history (*Pax Britannica*) to the largest imperium of control (*Pax Americana*).

Against that geopolitical background how did Obama and Mazrui do in their actual educational pursuits? Mazrui shares with Obama a Columbia experience in New York. Ali Mazrui went to Oxford when colonial Kenyans were not eligible for Rhodes Scholarships.

But since Obama's graduation from Columbia University was with his first degree, the appropriate comparison would be with Mazrui's own first degree from the University of Manchester in Britain. Both first degrees were brilliant. Ali Mazrui's bachelor's degree was obtained with Distinction. Both Obama and Mazrui were Political Science majors.

## **OBAMA'S HARVARD AND MAZRUI'S OXFORD**

A more difficult comparison to make is between Obama at Harvard in the 1980s-1990s and Mazrui at Oxford in the 1960s. At Harvard Law School Barack Obama became the first African American President of the Harvard Law Review. Among the students in his period, Obama was to all intents and purposes the top law graduate from Harvard in 1991.

At Oxford University in the 1960s Ali Mazrui was pursuing a higher degree than Barack was at Harvard. Ali Mazrui was pursuing the doctorate in philosophy [D. Phil. (OXON)]. Technically it is a higher degree than

a J.D. Though there is evidence that Barack Obama outperformed his peers in the actual class work and examinations at Harvard, there is no comparable evidence of Ali Mazrui's rank among doctoral graduates from Oxford in his own year.

While Barack Obama became the president of a journal which (however prestigious) was run and managed by Harvard Law students, Ali Mazrui published during his years at Oxford in top professional journals of political science which were managed and run by professional social scientists, often of long experience and high distinction.

During his Oxford years as a student (1961-1963) Ali Mazrui published an article in the *American Political Science Review*, the most prestigious and most competitive political science journal in the United States.<sup>4</sup> In the same period, Mazrui published an award-winning essay in *International Organization*, another highly acclaimed journal of international relations in the English-speaking world,<sup>5</sup> published an article in *Political Studies*, which was at the time the most prestigious political science journal in Britain and in the British Commonwealth,<sup>6</sup> and published in *International Affairs*, the prestigious foreign policy journal of the Royal Institute of International Affairs (Chatham House) in London.<sup>7</sup> As a graduate student at Oxford, Mazrui also published an article in a journal based at the time at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor—*Comparative Studies in Society and History*.<sup>8</sup>

It is not clear if Barack Obama during his Harvard years published much beyond the *Harvard Law Review*, which he edited with distinction. It is unlikely that Obama at Harvard published on the same scale as Mazrui as a student at Oxford. But clearly both Barack

and Ali Mazrui outperformed all their student peers in their respective schools in these particular areas of endeavor.

Mazrui added two further areas of accomplishment during his brief years as a student at Oxford. *The Times* of London was in the 1960s one of the most prestigious and influential newspapers in the entire English-speaking world. Getting a full-scale op-ed article published in *The Times* was the dream of many members of the British cultural, political and intellectual elites. Yet in 1963, Ali Mazrui succeeded in getting an op-ed article published in *The Times* of London.<sup>9</sup> There was speculation at the time as to whether it was unprecedented for *The Times* to publish with such prominence an article by a graduate student, let alone an African student.

The British Broadcasting Corporation [BBC] in 1960s had a high prestige, elite radio program called *The Third Programme*. It was the sort of program, which broadcast Shakespearean plays, discussions about Beethoven and Mozart, and intellectual debates about public policy or philosophical issues. *The Third Programme* invited Oxford student Ali Mazrui to deliver two radio lectures about whether or not the emerging independence of Africa constituted “the end of Africa’s innocence.” Those two lectures had long-term positive consequences for Mazrui’s relationship with the BBC. In the 1970s this relationship culminated in Mazrui, a professor at this time, being invited to deliver the BBC’s Reith Lectures, truly the pinnacle at the time of the BBC’s intellectual honors. The Reith Lectures were named after Lord Reith, the founder Director General of the BBC. He was invited to give six radio lectures in all, each half-an-hour, for broadcast not only in Britain

but also worldwide on the BBC. It was the first time Mazrui's oral lectures reached an international audience of millions of people.<sup>10</sup> The lectures were published the following year by Cambridge University Press in New York and by Heinemann Educational Books in London (1980).

Mazrui may be the first African in history to do a global television series, shown in dozens of countries, translated into several languages, and seen by millions of people across the world. The television series was *The Africans: A Triple Heritage* (BBC/PBS, 1986 in collaboration with the Nigerian Television Authority). In video and DVD forms the series has since been shown in thousands of classrooms at different colleges, universities, research centers and other types of institutions.

Barack Obama's exposure to radio and television, by comparison, reached new heights when he became one of the United States' five African American Senators. His exposure to world media escalated much further once he announced a bid for nomination as the 2008 Democratic candidate for the U.S. presidency. Obama was on his way towards becoming internationally the most familiar African American face since the fighting days of boxer Muhammad Ali.

Both Mazrui and Obama have attracted media attention, which may be attributed to the fact that they are photogenic, articulate, and independent thinkers. In the case of Mazrui the two things that contributed enormously to his worldwide fame were the Reith Lectures and *The Africans*.<sup>11</sup> Ali Mazrui had also himself once worked for BBC and the Yomiuri Shimbun, the largest daily newspaper in Japan. These experiences might also have educated him about the trade and how

to effectively use both electronic and print media. In the last few decades alone Ali Mazrui has either given interviews to or reports have appeared about him in the following major media outlets: *The Times* (London), *The New York Times*, *The Sunday Nation* (Nairobi), *Transition* (Kampala and Cambridge, Mass., USA), *Al-Abram* (Cairo), *The Guardian* (London) and (Lagos), *The Economist* (London) and *The Cumhuriyet* (Istanbul and Ankara), *Yomiuri Shimbun* (Tokyo and Osaka), *The Standard* (Nairobi), *International Herald Tribune* (Paris), *Elsevier* (Amsterdam), *Los Angeles Times Syndicate* (USA) and *Afrique 2000* (Brussels and Paris), *City Press* (Johannesburg), and *The Monitor* (Kampala).

As far as Barack Obama is concerned, the media's fascination with him of course predates his decision to run for the presidency. Since he gave the electrifying keynote address at the July 2004 National Democratic Convention in Boston, he continued to receive considerable attention from America's "Fourth Estate." It is also safe to assume that Obama, like Mazrui, is adept at exploiting the media for his purposes.

Nevertheless, in comparison with the global exposure which awaits Barack Obama, particularly now that he has won the 2008 US presidential election, Mazrui's electronic achievements are important as a precedent set by a continental African from a small country.

### **OBAMA, MAZRUI AND THE LEGACY OF CHICAGO**

In different ways Chicago has served as a cradle of the careers of both Barack Obama and Ali Mazrui. When Mazrui was completing his first degree at the University of Manchester, and contemplating pursuing further studies in the United States, he applied to two

American institutions—Columbia University and the University of Chicago. The year of Mazrui's applications was 1959. Mazrui did not realize at the time that in the same year there was another Kenyan student in Nairobi trying to get to the United States. His name was Barack Obama, son of Hussein Onyango Obama. But Barack was not aiming for either Chicago or Columbia University. He was to become the first African student at the University of Hawaii. This new African student in Hawaii fathered one of the only five African Americans to be elected to the United States Senate in two hundred years of American history.

Ali Mazrui was offered admission to both the University of Chicago and Columbia University in 1960. Both offers included full financial support. The Columbia offer was more generous because of the involvement of the Rockefeller Foundation in Mazrui's support. But what influenced Mazrui the most to turn down Chicago in favor of Columbia was the proximity of the United Nations to Columbia at a time when more and more African countries were becoming UN members for the first time.

Mazrui discovered much later that Professor David Apter at the University of Chicago had been particularly keen to attract Mazrui there. Although Apter (a distinguished American political scientist) was disappointed that the young Mazrui chose Columbia instead of Chicago, the two scholars became great professional friends in subsequent years.

The next opportunity Mazrui had at the University of Chicago was not as a student but as a visiting professor. This was in 1965 when Mazrui had just been appointed full professor at Makerere University in

Uganda, and given a year and a half leave, partly to be spent in the Chicago Department of Political Science, teaching a joint course with Professor Aristide Zolberg. This was Mazrui's first appointment as a professor at an American University. Among the political science stars who were at the University of Chicago at the time was Hans Morgenthau, author of the highly influential book *Politics among Nations* and David Easton, a towering empirical political theorist at the time. Mazrui spent many hours with these colleagues. While Mazrui's deep interest in world politics might have been partially influenced by Hans Morgenthau's works, his 'realism' shares more in common with another great scholar of world politics, the Englishman E. H. Carr.

Ali Mazrui's scholarship exhibits more of an ethical intersection with the works of the famed Palestinian scholar-activist Edward Said than with those of E. H. Carr. In their disciplined challenge of dominant narratives, particularly those which are Eurocentric at the expense of the non-Western "other", Ali Mazrui and Edward Said followed a similar approach. Aside from normative and methodological orientations, there is also a good deal of overlap between the terrains of inquiry traversed by the two minds. It might not be far from the truth to say that Mazrui has done for Africa what Edward Said had done for the *Orient*—even though the impact of the two intellectuals and their respective interests are much more far-reaching.

Mazrui and Said seem to have discovered each other relatively later in their lives. In fact it appears Mazrui's *The Africans* was what occasioned Edward Said's discovery of Ali A. Mazrui 'as a first-rank academic authority.'<sup>12</sup> On the other hand, it can be assumed that

it was *Orientalism*, one of the most influential academic books of the second half of the twentieth century, which familiarized Mazrui more fully with the ideas of Edward Said.

In the first week of October 2008, three to four weeks before the historic November presidential election, Obama's political opponent brought up the issue of Bill Ayers, the Chicago radical who violently opposed the Vietnam War in the 1960s. In the eyes of the Republican political machine it made no difference that the event took place when Obama was only 8 years old. It was claimed that Obama's ideological link to Ayers was confirmed by their membership in the Chicago School Reform Council, which was funded by the philanthropist Walter Annenberg. Obama's detractors chose to ignore that Annenberg was himself a Republican. This episode brings back to memory the controversies which surrounded Ali Mazrui's 1986 PBS series, which was attacked by the political right ostensibly for being anti-American. This was, again, in spite of the fact that the TV series was funded in part by the Annenberg Foundation named after the same American philanthropist Walter Annenberg.

Many years after Mazrui left the University of Chicago, Barack Obama Jr. taught constitutional law at the same university. After his own spectacular graduation from Harvard Law School, it is possible that Barack himself might have known some of the Chicago professors who were there during Mazrui's own time, including Aristide Zolberg.

In the mid-1960s Mazrui (with his first wife Molly) moved from a teaching visiting professorship at Chicago to a research visiting appointment at Harvard



University for a year. Barack Obama's transition was in the reverse direction—he moved from Harvard Law School as a student to the University of Chicago as a lecturer. But the City of Chicago soon developed into a much bigger learning experience for Obama than the University of Chicago. He ran a voter registration drive in the 1992 election cycle, and initiated a civil rights law practice, as well as taught at the University of Chicago. By 1996 Barack Obama was ready to run for a seat in the Illinois state legislature. Obama won. Eight years later the Democratic Party nominated him for a seat in the United States Senate. Many of his friends, as well as critics, thought that a bid for the U.S. Senate was premature. To everybody's astonishment Obama prevailed. His rise to prominence was a spectacular case of upward political mobility.

On a smaller scale and in a smaller country Ali Mazrui had earlier experienced similar skepticism from friends and critics when he sought to become a full professor at Makerere University in Uganda less than two years after he was appointed lecturer, and before he had completed his doctorate at Oxford. Such a rate of promotion had never before happened at Makerere, but in 1965 Ali Mazrui had already published in some of the most competitive and most prestigious peer-reviewed journals in the demanding field of political science.

By a committee headed by the Chief Executive of Makerere University (Y.K. Lule who later became Uganda's Head of State) Ali Mazrui was indeed made full professor in 1965 without ever becoming Senior Lecturer, Reader or Associate Professor. It was also a year before he defended his doctoral thesis/dissertation at Oxford.

It was after his professorial promotion that Mazrui was given leave to go to the University of Chicago on a visiting professorship. He defended his doctoral thesis at Oxford the next year in 1966. And as destiny would have it, Mazrui established yet another professional link with Chicago when his doctoral work was published by University of Chicago Press in 1967 under the title *Towards a Pax Africana: A Study of Ideology and Ambition*. Just as his first foreign professorship was at the University of Chicago, his first book was published by the University of Chicago Press. Some thirty years later the same Chicago Press published Mazrui's *Power of Babel: Language and Governance in the African Experience* (1998) (Co-author Alamin M. Mazrui).

Another Chicago matter shared between Obama and Mazrui was contact with the Nation of Islam under the leadership of Minister Louis Farrakhan. For Obama, Farrakhan was one of the towering Black residents of Chicago whom Obama was bound to encounter at major African American events from time to time. Mazrui's own fascination with Louis Farrakhan and the Nation of Islam was more directly linked to Mazrui's wider professional interest in "Islam and the Black Experience." Mazrui has tried to follow Farrakhan's career for some years now. In the 1990s Mazrui visited Farrakhan at his home in Chicago, and spent about five hours there discussing Islam in America and in world affairs. Mazrui went to Farrakhan's home, accompanied by a number of other immigrant Muslims. They were trying to build bridges between mainstream Muslims and the Nation of Islam.

More than a decade later in 2008, when Barack Obama was running for the Democratic presidential

nomination, Louis Farrakhan offered him his endorsement. As a presidential aspirant in the United States, however, Obama could not entertain building bridges with the Nation of Islam. On the contrary, Hillary Clinton on television compelled Obama not only to denounce Farrakhan but also to explicitly reject his endorsement. Barack Obama complied, to the applause of the racially mixed television audience.

In an interesting coincidence, both Mazrui and Obama had positive encounters with Senator John Kerry, the 2004 US presidential candidate who narrowly lost the bid for the White House to George W. Bush. Senator Kerry has been not only one of the most prominent supporters of Obama's campaign for the democratic presidential nomination, Kerry was also a most visible surrogate for the Senator from Illinois. After Obama won the presidency, it was briefly rumored that Senator Kerry was "on track" to be the US Secretary of State in the new administration. That did not happen. When Mazrui's *The Africans* set off sharp reactions from different political circles<sup>13</sup> strong support for the documentary came from Senator Kerry who summed up his view as follows: "It is a series that has sparked a great deal of discussion and controversy. While I cannot endorse all of the conclusions...its showing has provided the American people with an all-too-rare look at Africa from an African perspective."<sup>14</sup>

A complicated Chicago relationship of Barack Obama was with his pastor at Trinity United Church of Christ, the Reverend Jeremiah Wright. Reverend Wright's fiery sermons were intensely critical of the United States as an imperial power and as a racist society. The pastor's condemnation of America's

actions ranged from the historic Tuskegee experiment of using African Americans as guinea pigs for syphilis to Truman's decision to launch a nuclear attack not on just one Japanese city (Hiroshima) but on a second one (Nagasaki). Jeremiah Wright proclaimed that such "evil acts" by the United States did not invite the prayer "God bless America" but called for the curse "God damn America." Jeremiah Wright was even more provocative when he suggested that HIV-AIDS was deliberately allowed to spread among people of color in the United States as a form of genocide against black people.

Of course, none of these statements were uttered by Barack Obama, nor was there the slightest evidence that Obama was in the congregation when the most controversial of these sermons were delivered. Barack Obama also explicitly rejected such incendiary views and condemned them.

However, Obama had a more difficult problem. Jeremiah Wright had been his pastor for many years, had performed the marriage ceremony for Barack and his wife Michelle, had baptized their children, and had been regarded by the Obamas as a friend and avuncular member of the family for more than a decade. Even the title of Obama's most recent book, *The Audacity of Hope*, was borrowed by Barack from his pastor.

Obama's campaign was in serious trouble by the middle of March 2008 because of the repeated extracts from his pastor's sermons which were endlessly broadcast on television—especially on Fox News.

In a daring move Barack Obama caught the bull by the horns and gave a historic speech on Tuesday, March 18, 2008, in Philadelphia about the obstinate legacy of race in the American experience. He tried to portray

Jeremiah Wright as a product of the 1960s—an angry generation who had changed America for the better, but was underestimating its own achievements against racism.

Barack Obama’s speech on race in America on March 18 stemmed the danger of a rapid decline of support for him, but the shadow of Reverend Wright’s brimstone remained over Barack Obama’s campaign until Obama completely distanced himself from the Reverend on April 29, 2008.

Has there been a comparable shadow of religio-political militancy on the career of Ali Mazrui? Does Ali Mazrui’s academic career have the equivalent of a Jeremiah Wright? Let us now turn to Mazrui’s side of the equation.

### **IS MAZRUI HIS OWN REVEREND WRIGHT?**

Although Ali Mazrui has had cordial relationships with a number of radicalized religious figures over the years, including Louis Farrakhan, Mazrui has been targeted more for his own religio-political views than for an association with a pastor.

In the year 2003, Ali Mazrui was detained at Miami airport in Florida for seven hours.<sup>15</sup> He was interrogated by three different sets of U.S. officers, some of them explicitly part of the Anti-Terrorism Task Force. He was asked of what religious organizations he was a member, what he understood by the word “jihad”, why he was a Sunni instead of a Shi’a Muslim, and other startling interrogation questions.

But to have attracted such a reception at Miami airport, from what part of the world was Ali Mazrui coming? Was he arriving from the Middle East, or

Pakistan, or Somalia or some other Islamic part of the world considered to be ominous?

In fact, Ali Mazrui was arriving from Trinidad and Tobago on a mission which had nothing to do with religion. He had been received by the Prime Minister of Trinidad as one of the keynote speakers on a special anniversary of the abolition of slavery in the British West Indies.

When he was being interrogated at Miami airport upon his return Mazrui was asked if in Trinidad he had met Yaseen Abubakar, a very radical black Trinidadian Muslim whose group had held the entire Cabinet of the government of Trinidad hostage in parliament buildings more than ten years earlier. Ali Mazrui responded to the anti-terrorist interrogators “No, I did not meet Yaseen Abubakar on this trip—but I tried to!”

The interrogators demanded to know what interest he had had in the radical Trinidadian Muslim. Mazrui explained that at Cornell and Binghamton he taught about Islam in the experience of black people. “It is my business to research the Yaseen Abubakars of this world!”

When he had arrived at Miami airport there had been hundreds of passengers of all ages. He was among the oldest. By the time the interrogators let Mazrui go, he had missed all his connections back to New York. In fairness to the interrogators, they were helpful and courteous at the end of the “inquisition.” They booked him a hotel room at Miami airport, paid for it, helped him with his luggage to the hotel, made flight reservations for the next day, and gave him \$25 in cash as a parting gift!! The money was for dinner.

If, at the beginning, the interrogators had been regarding him as a Muslim equivalent of Pastor Jer-

emiah Wright, the officials seemed reassured by the end of the “inquisition.”<sup>16</sup>

But such a cordial conclusion was not shared by everybody else in the country. Although Ali Mazrui’s university lectures about Islam are not in the tradition of “fire and brimstone.”, some of his views critical of the state of Israel have from time-to-time provoked reactions comparable to those triggered by Jeremiah Wright’s sermons.

Mazrui’s name was among the names of the first eight professors across the United States who were posted on “CAMPUS WATCH” for scrutiny by their own students with a view to harassment or exposure. “CAMPUS WATCH” was created by militant defenders of Israel who are widely regarded to be anti-Muslim.

Ali Mazrui’s name has also been included in David Horowitz’s large volume *The Professors: The 101 Most Dangerous Academics in America* (Washington, D.C.: Regnery Publishing Inc., 2006). Since the Reverend Jeremiah Wright was not an academic but a pastor, he did not make Horowitz’s list of 101.

Ali Mazrui says that criticisms of the United States have been more tolerated than his criticisms of the state of Israel. Defenders of Israel have been known to write letters of complaint against Ali Mazrui not only to the President of Binghamton University, but occasionally even to the Governor of the State of New York. Whether any Governor of the State of Illinois had ever received political complaints about Reverend Jeremiah Wright’s fiery sermons against Uncle Sam and white racism remains to be ascertained.

In the case of Ali Mazrui’s courses at the State University of New York, the classes have almost always

included a substantial number of intellectually enthusiastic Jewish students eager to learn from Ali Mazrui, and to engage in civilized debate as occasion arises. Many such students have reached the conclusion that “this professor is an admirer of the Jews and a critic of Israel.” Ali Mazrui’s latest book bears out that paradox. Much in the book is a salute to Jewish contributions to world culture and civilization, though there are also such questions in the book as “Is Israel a Threat to American Democracy?” The book is also about Arabs in world history.<sup>17</sup>

Ali Mazrui is not of course a pastor; nor is Jeremiah Wright an academic. Ideologically, they are both to the left of Barack Obama. Mazrui and Wright are tougher critics of the United States and Israel than any national figure in American politics would dare to be. But although Reverend Wright and Professor Mazrui are to the far left of Senator Barack Obama, there is evidence to suggest that the pastor and the professor are nevertheless great admirers of the Senator. The three of them are kindred spirits not only for reasons of shared ethnicity, but much more for a core area of shared public ethics.

One of the most controversial positions Ali Mazrui is known for is his advocacy of the spread of nuclear weapons. He reasoned that the situation will shock the great powers and free them to work for a total nuclear disarmament. Obama has not gone to the extent of arguing for the spread of nuclear weapons, but it is the opinion of this author and others that if he were to have his way, he, too, would probably be for a total nuclear disarmament.<sup>18</sup> If so, it can be argued that both Obama and Mazrui agree on the goal of nuclear disarmament—but they differ on the means of achieving



it. We do not know the details of Obama's position on this issue but he has apparently spelled it out in the M.A. thesis which he wrote at Columbia University reportedly on the topic relating to the Soviet Union and Nuclear Disarmament. This M.A. thesis is not now available to the public.

### **MAZRUI ON OBAMA**

Culture, for Ali Mazrui, is an approach; culture is also subject-matter for him. It was not surprising therefore that Barack Obama, as one of the only five black persons to reach the United States Senate, has been a point of reference in Mazrui's lectures in the classroom, in conference presentations, as well as in his recent writings. This was also so even before Barack Obama became a Democratic presidential candidate. Obama captured Mazrui's intellectual attention long before the former captivated the attention of millions of people in the US and around the world upon becoming a Democratic presidential candidate, the party's nominee and, finally, the first black president of the country.

After Obama announced his candidacy for president of the United States and started to do well in the campaign trail, Ali Mazrui's intellectual interest in Obama naturally acquired a sharper focus.<sup>19</sup> Mazrui began to write about Obama at length; he started to give interviews to major newspapers, radio and TV stations. In addition he began to incorporate discussion of Obama into his syllabi both at Binghamton and Cornell universities, especially in those courses dealing with cultural forces in world politics as well as Africa and the African Diaspora.

After Obama was elected the 44<sup>th</sup> President of the US, Mazrui continued to expand his analysis about the cultural and political meaning of Obama's election.<sup>20</sup> Mazrui's sharp and fresh insight about the issues began to receive renewed attention not just from his audience at lecture halls and in the media. Prominent individuals from around the world echoed Mazrui's interpretation of what he called the shift from "Black power" to "Barack power."<sup>21</sup>

In the early stages of his presidential campaign, Barack Obama faced enormous challenges not only from white America but also from Black America. And it is the latter challenge which was all the more astounding since Barack Obama considers himself to be a black man. Some prominent African-Americans questioned Obama's blackness; they raised the question: "Is he black enough?"<sup>22</sup> Such a question, however it is interpreted, was less serious from the outset for two reasons. Obama is black man not by definition he concocted for political purposes, but he is so by a definition accepted in America today. Secondly it can be argued that to vote for a public official on the basis of color of his skin alone, black or white does not show political sophistication.

As indicated earlier, Mazrui had faced a similar criticism in his own academic world. Because Mazrui is partly a descendant from an Arab family, some have questioned his Africanness. They said he is not "black" African, and therefore he cannot authoritatively speak for and about Africa. It is not what Mazrui says or writes but, in truth, it is his ancestry which is held against him. Such a posture was the more troubling especially coming from some of those regarded as

the most enlightened Africans. Ultimately, however, both Obama and Mazrui were able to win the hearts and minds of the people they spoke for—in spite of the *ad hominem* attacks by their detractors. Mazrui was elected as member of the group of eminent persons by Africa's heads of states and governments in 1992—a group which was entrusted, among other things, with overseeing the transition from the Organization of African Unity (OAU) to the African Union (AU). Incidentally another individual who was also chosen for the same distinction was Dudley Thompson, a friend and long-term acquaintance of Ali Mazrui. Ambassador Thomson, who can easily be dismissed as not being a 'black' African in pigmentation, had also served as a lawyer for Jomo Kenyatta during the Mau Mau trials and was present along with the likes of pan-Africanist icons such as Kenyatta himself, Kwame Nkrumah and W. E. B. Du Bois in 1945 at the 5<sup>th</sup> Pan-African Congress in Manchester, England.

In some of his teachings, Ali Mazrui draws a distinction between *African Americans* and *American Africans*. Most African Americans are survivors of the Middle Passage and have been Americans for centuries. Most American Africans are more recent immigrants into the United States—first, second or third generation at the most.<sup>23</sup>

According to Ali Mazrui's original definition of American Africans, they still know of their own relatives in Africa and may be in touch with them. American Africans also tend to be still familiar with an African language, and are often comfortable with African cuisines, as well as with American food culture.

There is no doubt that members of Ali Mazrui's family in the United States qualify as American Africans. There is no doubt either that Barack Obama's wife, Michelle, is an African American. Barack Obama himself is in reality somewhere in between. He is first generation American (though native born). He is still familiar with relatives in Western Kenya, and has resumed contact with them. However, Obama speaks neither Luo nor Kiswahili, and may be less comfortable with African cuisines. Barack Obama is a remarkable case of transition from Americanized Africanity to the Africanized American.

Just before the last week of December 2007 Ali Mazrui had raised the question in the Kenya Press "Which country will be the first to elect a Luo President—Kenya or the United States?" By October 2007 both countries had one major Luo presidential candidate—Raila Odinga in Kenya and Barack Obama in the United States. Until December 27, 2007, it still appeared possible for either country to elect an ethnic Luo Head of State.

We shall never know for certain if Raila Odinga won the 2007 Kenya election. Unfortunately, the election fraud obscured who the real victor was, though most people regarded Raila as the more probable victor. Kenya exploded into violence, more than a thousand people were killed, and hundreds of thousands were displaced. Barack Obama addressed Kenyans by radio and called for reconciliation. He also spoke to Raila Odinga to urge restraint and compromise. Ali Mazrui contributed ideas about a new constitutional dispensation, and urged the creation of the new post of Prime Minister answerable to Parliament rather than

to President Kibaki. Some of Mazrui's ideas were pushed on the rival parties by Kofi Annan, former Secretary General of the United Nations. We now know that Kenya failed to be first in having a Luo Head of State—at least this time around.

But Barack Obama became the first Luo President in modern history. In the United States Obama is not of course viewed as a Luo President. However, in Kenya a triumphant Obama was viewed both as a son of Kenya and a child of Lake Victoria, on the shores of which is Luoland.

At Columbia University in New York where both Ali Mazrui and Barack Obama were once students, Mazrui recently had a more startling characterization of what an Obama presidential victory would mean. Mazrui was addressing a symposium of educators at Columbia Teachers College on the day before Barack Obama was due to give his historic speech about the legacy of race on March 18, 2008. To a startled audience Ali Mazrui said:

“If elected President of the United States, Barack Obama will become the most powerful black man in the history of civilization!”

Quite briefly, some members of the audience were skeptically thinking about great monarchs in Africa's history, or Emperor Menelik II of Ethiopia, or Pharaoh Ramses II of Egypt, or Shaka Zulu of South Africa. Would Barack Obama be more powerful than those? Ali Mazrui's response was as follows:

When was the last time a black leader presided over a population of 300 million people, was

equipped with the largest military hardware in human history, had a capacity to save or destroy civilization, and was answerable to the largest national economy in human experience?

Was that what was at stake in Obama's race to the Oval Office? Fortunately this candidate is committed to bringing people together, he is aspiring to restore stability to world politics, and is convinced that progressive change is possible.

### **ANOTHER NATURAL COMPARISON**

In a sense Ali Mazrui shares at least as much in common with the African-American public intellectual activist W. E. B. Du Bois as with the American-African politician Barack Obama. And both Du Bois and Obama received their highest academic degrees from Harvard. In terms of scholarly contribution by men of color, it can be argued that Mazrui's achievements in the second-half of the twentieth century parallel those made by Du Bois in the first-half.<sup>24</sup> The lives and works of the two intellectuals also exhibit many similarities despite the generational gap which separates them.

Comparatively less significant as it seems, the proclivity to pose for the camera maybe another trait which Du Bois and Mazrui share in common. They are both photogenic individuals who are also media-savvy. Du Bois has left behind many pictures of his own and those taken with some of eminent personalities of his time, ranging from Nikita Khrushchev, Mao Tse-tung to Azikiwe and Kwame Nkrumah. These people are not only notable figures in their times but also some of them were regarded as pariahs by the mainstream thought from which they conspicuously deviated.

Mazrui has posed for pictures with eminent personalities of his time. A related parallel is Mazrui, like Du Bois, was able to meet some of the central political figures of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The list of these individuals is rather long in the case of Mazrui, reflecting also that his time offered greater opportunity for mobility of not only ideas but also of people like himself.<sup>25</sup>

Famous (and infamous) individuals whom Mazrui had met and with whom he interacted and, in some cases, forged enduring friendship include Jomo Kenyatta, Muamar Ghadafi, Rev. Louis Farrakhan, Kwame Nkrumah, Muhammad Ali, Sonia Ghandhi, John Kufour, Salim Ahmed Salim, Mwai Kibaki, Raila Odinga, Nelson Mandela, Queen Elizabeth II, Manmohan Singh, Julius K. Nyerere, Robert Mugabe, Jerry Rawlings, Yakubu Gowon, Idi Amin. Looking at the list we can easily note that some of these individuals, too, were regarded as pariahs in the last third of the twentieth century almost in the same sense as Mao and Khrushchev were viewed in these terms around the middle of the century.

One of the distinguished contemporary African personalities whom Du Bois met was Kwame Nkrumah. Ali A. Mazrui also met Kwame Nkrumah. When Du Bois met Nkrumah, the latter was a shining star of political pan-Africanism. When Mazrui met Nkrumah, the former was a rising star of academic pan-Africanism.

Not only had Du Bois and Mazrui shown the courage to meet some of the most controversial political figures of their times but, even more daring, they were unafraid to openly criticize the policies of their leaders. Du Bois was outspoken in his critique of

President Woodrow Wilson. When President Wilson announced his now famous idea of ‘self-determination’ and was about to leave in 1918 for the Congress of Versailles, Du Bois wrote him a letter reminding him the following: “The International Peace Congress that is to decide whether or not peoples shall have the right to dispose of themselves will find in its midst delegates from a nation which champions the principle of the ‘consent of the governed’ and ‘government by representation.’ That nation is our own, and includes in itself more than twelve million souls whose consent to be governed is never asked. They have no members in the legislatures of states where they are in the majority and not a single representative in the national congress.”<sup>26</sup>

Neither was Mazrui silent about the policies of Idi Amin or Milton Obote or Julius Nyerere or Daniel Arap Moi—he was very forthcoming with his scathing critique when he thought doing so was appropriate.<sup>27</sup> Another comparison may be drawn between Du Bois and Mazrui with regard to their positions on some of the policies of presidents of the United States. As indicated above Du Bois was bitter about the domestic policies of the US under President Wilson.

Likewise Mazrui was critical particularly of the foreign policies of the US President George W. Bush. In a letter directly addressed to President Bush, Mazrui wrote on April 7, 2003: “Your historic administration keeps on emphasizing that it is not against Islam or the Muslim world. But we have had wars against two Muslim countries so far (Afghanistan and Iraq) and two other Muslim countries have been threatened by members of your administration (Syria and Iran).”



How about comparative ambitions in Du Bois and Mazrui? Du Bois had a certain specific ambition right from his youth, which he laid out on the occasion of his 25<sup>th</sup> birthday: “my plans: to make a name in science, to make a name in literature and thus to raise my race. Or perhaps to raise a visible empire in Africa thro’ England, France or Germany. I wonder what will be the outcome? Who knows? I will go unto the king—which is not according to the law and if I perish—I perish.”<sup>28</sup>

Did Mazrui also have clear vision about what he sought to accomplish in his life? Did he know that someday he would be so influential as to be named one of the top one hundred public intellectuals alive today, as the *Foreign Policy* magazine ranked him in 2005, or as one of the top one hundred great Africans ever lived, as the *New African* magazine dubbed him in the same year? Mazrui has yet to answer these questions.

In the late 1990s an electronic war of words broke out between Ali Mazrui and Wole Soyinka. The battle of the Titans, as some dubbed the exchange between the two intellectual giants from Africa, was triggered by *The Wonders of the African World*—a controversial TV documentary created by Henry Louis Gates. But the debate between Mazrui and Soyinka went far beyond the issues raised in the documentary. Most crucially, the discussion was also animated by such questions as to who can speak for Africa, who is African and what is the measure of Africanness. What is significant about the debate was that it paralleled the many ways in which the battle of the Titans took place between W. E. B. Du Bois and Marcus Garvey nearly one hundred years earlier.

Ali Mazrui tends to associate discrete events and processes to numbers in general and number three in particular. Those who have sat in his classes know that even the themes of his lectures come in 'triads.' Mazrui's flagship concept is, of course, *Triple Heritage*. Du Bois seems not to have fallen in love with number three, or any other number, as much, but he too had occasionally used this mysterious number three to 'unpack' his observations and philosophies. For instance he wrote in 1896: "Three things in life beckon the human soul: the Good, the True, and the Beautiful."<sup>29</sup>

## CONCLUSION

If Barack Obama is the most famous politician in the world today, who is also of Kenyan ancestry, Ali Mazrui was—and still is—arguably the most famous Kenyan in the academic world. Mazrui achieved global prominence decades before Barack Obama came onto the political scene in the opening years of the twenty first century. Ironically, by the time Barack Obama was sworn into office, he had met fewer world leaders than Ali Mazrui has in his long career.

Another interesting element of comparison is the extraordinary speed with which both Obama and Mazrui climbed up their respective professional careers. Mazrui was appointed professor of political science, at Makerere University in Uganda, directly from the rank of lecturer, bypassing the intermediate ranks of senior lecturer, assistant professor and associate professor. This is of course a testament to his academic versatility and remarkable brilliance. Obama was, of course, a junior senator from Illinois when he ran for the highest office in the US and won the presidency,

beating opponents who were senior to him both in age and experience.

If Ali Mazrui has in the last century to put Kenya (and Africa) on the world map academically, the credit goes to Barack Obama for doing so politically in this century. Both Mazrui's and Obama's achievements of course resounded far beyond Africa. No doubt, both individuals have made Africans and peoples of African descent truly proud. But the achievements of the two sons of two Muslim Kenyans are not reducible to the issues of cultural heritage. In a sense both iconoclastic individuals made their colleagues across socio-logical boundaries proud symbolizing the place of excellence in a post-racial global society.

## NOTES

1. Since he was elected US Senator from the state of Illinois in 1996, but particularly after he entered the campaign as Democratic presidential candidate in 2007, a number of books have been published about Barack Obama. Mr. Obama himself has also authored at least three books.
2. Intellectual-biographical books about Ali Mazrui include Omari Kokole (ed.) *The Global African: A Portrait of Ali A. Mazrui* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 1998); Parviz Morewedge (ed.) *The Scholar between Thought and Experience* (Binghamton: Global Publications, 1998); Seifudein Adem, *Paradigm Lost, Paradigm Regained: The Worldview of Ali A. Mazrui* (Provo, Utah: Global Humanities Press, 2002). Also Bemath, Abdul Samed. *The Mazruiana Collection. A Comprehensive Annotated Bibliography of the Published Works of Ali A. Mazrui*. 1st Edition (New Delhi: New Dawn Press, 1998), 2nd

- Edition (2005) as well as Alamin Mazrui and Willy Mutunga, *Mazrui and His Critics* Vol. I (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 1998) Alamin Mazrui and Willy Mutunga, *Mazrui and His Critics* Vol. II (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2003). In addition to his own thick annual newsletters, Mazrui has also signaled his professional trajectory in such works as “Growing Up in a Shrinking World: A Private Vantage Point” in Joseph K. Kruzel and James N. Rosenau (eds.) *Journeys Through World Politics: Autobiographical Reflections of Thirty-four Academic Travelers* (Lexington, MA and Toronto: Lexington Books, 1989), pp. 469-487; “The Making of African Political Scientist”, *International Social Science Journal*, 1973, 25, 1-2, pp. 101-116.
3. See Ali A. Mazrui, *The Africans* (Boston and Toronto: Little Brown & Co., 1986).
  4. What is also worth noting is that not only was Mazrui able to publish in the most prestigious journal of political science in the US, but also he did so on the theme of collective identity formation, a theme which was to capture the interest of mainstream political scientists only decades later. See, for instance, Ali A. Mazrui, “On the Concept of ‘We are All Africans’”, *American Political Science Review*, 57, 1, 1963, pp. 88-97.
  5. Ali A. Mazrui, “The United Nations and Some African Political Attitudes”, *International Organization*, 18, 3, 1964, 499-520.
  6. Ali A. Mazrui, “Consent, Colonialism and Sovereignty”, *Political Studies*, 11, 1, 1963, pp. 36-55.
  7. Ali A. Mazrui, “African Attitudes toward the European Economic Community”, *International Affairs*, 38, 1, 1963, pp. 24-36.
  8. Ali A. Mazrui, “Islam, Political Leadership and Economic Radicalism in Africa”, *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 9, 3, 1967, pp. 274-291.

9. Ali A. Mazrui, "Why Does an African Feel an African?" *The Times* (London), 1962.
10. Ali A. Mazrui, *The African Condition: A Political Diagnosis* (London: Heinemann Educational Books, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1979).
11. The lasting impact of the BBC Reith lectures on Mazrui's place in the public sphere is less obvious than the impact of *The Africans: A Triple Heritage*. But the impact of the former, too, was quite pronounced since the BBC would have been less eager to sponsor the production of *The Africans* had the Reith Lectures not been a complete success.
12. Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, New York: Vintage Books, 1994, p. 38.
13. See Irvin Molotsky, "US Aide Assails TV Series on Africa," *Washington Post*, September 4, 1986.
14. US Congressional Record no. 1444 (Part III), October 17, 1986. [From Ali A. Mazrui, Extracts from Review of Writings, n.d.].
15. See Caryle Murphy, "Intense Airport Scrutiny Angers Muslim Travelers", *Washington Post*, September 14, 2003 [online edition] Accessed online July 2008 <http://www.washingtonpost.com/ac2/wp-dyn/A6308-2003Sep13?language=printer>.
16. Caryle Murphy, "Intense Airport Scrutiny Angers Muslim Travelers", *Washington Post*, September 14, 2003. Accessed online July 2008 <http://www.washingtonpost.com/ac2/wp-dyn/A6308-2003Sep13?language=printer>.
17. Ali A. Mazrui, *Euro-Jews and Afro-Arabs: The Great Semitic Divergence in World History* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2008).
18. See James N. Kariuki, "Obama, Nuclear Weapons and the Race Factor," *Sunday Standard* (Kenya), August 3, 2008.

19. Most recently some of Dr. Mazrui's activities see [http://igcs.binghamton.edu/igcs\\_site/igcsdirrecentactv.htm](http://igcs.binghamton.edu/igcs_site/igcsdirrecentactv.htm) accessed March 12, 2009.
20. More recent works of Ali Mazrui in this regard include: "Barack Obama: Brain Drain or Brain Gain?" Luncheon lecture, KARA , Kenya Alliance of Resident Associations, Nairobi, Kenya, July 2008; "The Black Atlantic from Othello to Obama" paper presented at symposium on "EURAFRICA" held at Stalinbach, South Africa, sponsored by Centre on Conflict Resolution, Cape Town, September 2008; "Towards a Post-racial Society: From Othello to Obama," public lecture at Ohio State University, Columbus, sponsored by the Center for African Studies and the Center for Middle Eastern Studies, O.S.U., Columbus, OH; "Studying Africa through the Diaspora: The Prism of Barack Obama," Panel to mark Mazrui's 75<sup>th</sup> birthday on the theme "Rival Paradigms for Studying Africa", annual meeting of the African Studies Association of the United States, Chicago, Illinois, November 2008; "Afro-Optimism from Mahatma Gandhi to Barack Obama: A Tale of Two Prophecies", Keynote address at symposium on "Engaging with a Resurgent Africa", sponsored by the Observer Research Foundation, New Delhi, India, November 2008; "Who Gets a Luo President First?: Kenya or the United States?" part of Oral Presentation at Conference, University of Vaxjo, Sweden, October 2008.
21. For instance see Desmond Tutu, "The Man of Tomorrow: His Election Has Turned America's Global Image on Its Head," *The Washington Post*, November 9, 2008, B01. (Online). In this op-ed article the South African Nobel Laureate Tutu writes: "The renowned African scholar Ali Mazrui has pointed out that Obama could never have gotten as far as he has without an exceptional level of trust on the part of white Americans. In

- this, his achievement is similar to what Nelson Mandela had achieved by the end of his presidency; Mandela's party may never have drawn a majority of white votes, but he has come to be revered by white as well as black South Africans as the founding father of our democracy. Mazrui likens Obama to Mandela in other ways, saying that both men share a readiness to forgive and show "a remarkable capacity to transcend historical racial divides." Both, Mazrui says, are "potential icons of a post-racial age which is unfolding before our eyes." <http://www.washingtonpost.com> Accessed November 12, 2008.
22. See for instance Ta-Nehisi Paul Coates, "Is Obama Black Enough?" *Time*, February 1, 2007, <http://www.time.com/time/nation/article/0,8599,1584736,00.html> (accessed December 2, 2008). Also see Lois Hatton, "Obama's Heritage a Boon to Blackness" <http://blogs.usatoday.com/oped/2007> Accessed December 6, 2008.
  23. In the concept of African Americans the noun is American. The adjective is "African." To the question "What kind of American?" one answers, "an African American." This would of course apply indisputably to figures ranging from Jesse Jackson to Condeleeza Rice. As regards the concept of American African, the noun is African, the adjective is "American." To the question "What kind of African?" one would answer "an American African." Here the range is from Kunta Kinte (Alex Haley's grandfather) to Ali Mazrui himself. What kind of African? These are American Africans.
  24. A blurb in *The Global African* reads in part: "Ali A. Mazrui is perhaps global Africa's most prolific and accomplished writer of the second half of the twentieth century. W. E. B. Du Bois cast a similarly long shadow in the first half. See Omari Kokole (ed.) *The*

*Global African: A Portrait of Ali A. Mazrui* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 1998).

25. The latest addition to the list is India's current prime minister Manmohan Singh who received Ali Mazrui at his home in New Delhi while the later was on a business trip to India in November 2008.
26. W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Autobiography of W. E. B. Du Bois* (New York: International Publishers, 1997), p. 271.
27. A relative of Mazrui has reminisced: "As far back as his Uganda days, Ali Mazrui was asked by his President Milton Obote 'Are you sure you know the difference between being a political scientist and being a politician?' President Obote was getting fed up with Mazrui's criticism of Obote's policies, disguised as political science!" See Alamin Mazrui, "The African Impact on American Higher Education: Ali A. Mazrui's Contribution" in Parviz Morewedge (ed.) *The Scholar between Thought and Experience* (Binghamton: Global Publications, 1998), p. 8.
28. Aptheker, *Against Racism*, p. 29.
29. Herbert Aptheker ed. *Against Racism: Unpublished Essays, Papers, Addresses, 1887-1961 W. E. B. Du Bois* (Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1985), p. 34.





## BOOK REVIEW

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### **Land, Blood, and Sex: Legal and Political Pluralism in Eritrea**

by Lyda Favali and Roy Pateman. Bloomington: Indiana University Press: 2003. Pp. xvi, 352. Glossary, notes, bibliography, index. \$54.95 (cloth), \$24.95 (paper).

**T**his book is a study of legal pluralism and its role in conflict resolution. One has to pay attention to the sub-title, Legal and Political Pluralism in Eritrea, to get a sense of what this work is about. The first four chapters address conceptual, historical, and political frameworks. The remaining six chapters deal with self-contained topics such as blood feuds, land disputes, and culture war over female circumcision. Legal pluralism becomes the theme that holds the book together; in almost each case study Lyda Favali and Roy Pateman identify at least four legal actors in conflict resolution: some contradictory, some overlapping.

Chapter 1 introduces the authors' concept of legal pluralism, by which they mean "the multiplicity of legal actors concurrent with the state." In the Eritrean

context, these multiple legal players include ethnic communities with traditional law; Islamic communities with *sarika* law; the state, which includes colonial and postcolonial actors; and international actors such as NGOs and the United Nations.

Chapter 2 identifies a corpus of traditional legal texts in Eritrea. Access to legal texts by Christian highlanders and coastal Muslims may not come as much of a surprise given Northeast Africa's rich literary tradition. However, the inclusion of less known texts as found among the smaller and more peripheral groups makes this chapter quite fascinating from a historiographical point of view.

Chapter 3 discusses the superimposition of colonial legal systems on Eritrea: Italian, British, and Ethiopian. Chapter 4 discusses the transitional period: the period between 1991 (the year of Eritrea's *de facto* independence from Ethiopia) and 1997 (the year in which Eritrea adopted a constitution). While crediting the Eritrean government for drafting a new constitution, the authors hasten to emphasize Eritrea's reliance on inherited penal and criminal codes that continue to favor state and international actors over traditional and religious legal institutions.

Chapters 5 through 7 deal with the complex issues of blood feud and land dispute. Here is where the authors' years of fieldwork and interdisciplinary methodology become evident. In Chapter 5, Favali and Pateman demonstrate the intricate rules that govern blood feud. The rules varied widely from community to community, of particular relevance being circumstances of the crime and the status of the victim. Such complex rules ensured that blood feud, far from

being a random act of violence, served collective self-interest. Extremely poor communities might find it easier to settle murder crimes through vengeance than through blood money. Closely related lineages, by contrast, would encourage blood money, or material compensation, so as to preempt a cycle in intra-clan violence (p.75). A practice known as *menketzem*, where the offending side offered a girl for marriage to a man from the victim family, provided another alternative for ending blood feud, although the authors fail to explain why such a peaceful solution was not preferred to vendetta in the first place (pp. 94, 168-169).

As Favali and Pateman reveal, time-honored traditions die hard. The state may prosecute cases of murder as a crime against the state. But in a tradition where the spilling of blood calls for retaliation in kind, such legal reforms appear irrelevant, if not invasive. Other than the short-lived Italian experimentation with what the authors refer to as “synergy between state law and traditional law (p. 102),” so far there has been little attempt to come up with a pluralistic legal system where modern penal codes leave some leeway for the accommodation of traditional institutions. The result is that Eritrea, as a nation, has to deal with multiple and, at times, contradictory legal systems.

Just as in blood feuds, land disputes could be intricate and protracted. Multiple systems of land ownership and lack of a recognizable law across the region contributed to this. In land litigations between members of the same lineage, mechanisms of traditional conflict resolution generally proved quite effective. The state, on the other hand, showed better results in handling inter-ethnic land disputes, at least in the short term. In

the long term, acceptance of state arbitration might mean the loss of traditional autonomy, including nationalization of disputed land. Moreover, if a party to the dispute found the state's position against its interest, it could choose to side with anti-government forces, the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF) or the Eritrean Liberation Front (ELF), so as to remain outside government jurisdiction. This was the case with the long-running land dispute between the Tsenadegale and the Tor'a, the former siding with the government and the latter with the ELF (pp.147-148).

Classic works on Ethiopian land tenure would have enriched the discussion in Chapter 6, especially in tracing the peculiar coexistence of *irist* and *gult* systems with communal land ownership, or *shebena*, in places like Akaleguzai. Despite the authors' conscious effort to treat Eritrea as a distinct analytical unit, this chapter on land tenure reveals impressive similarities between present-day northern Ethiopia and the Eritrean plateau. After all, as the authors themselves explain, Ethiopian kings had been granting *gult* to vassals in highland Eritrea since the thirteenth century (p. 109).

Gender analysis is subtly present in each of the aforementioned chapters. As charge to her father or husband, an Eritrean woman could not own land, which almost put her in the same class as serfs and slaves (p. 109). Yet, unlike peripheral serfs or slaves, gender received delicate attention in blood feud codes, rape and kidnapping being additional considerations in the woman's case (pp. 83-84, 185-188). Gender relations are discussed in more depth in the last chapters of the book. Chapter 8 examines family and marriage, two areas where religious and traditional codes continue to

dominate. Chapter 9 addresses the controversial topic of female circumcision, where international advocates of human rights collide directly with the custodians of culture: the traditional elite. The argument in this chapter, while hardly new, reminds us the dilemma that the African state faces when caught between powerfully opposing forces, the result being a compromise in the state's role as an independent legal actor.

Richly documented and highly informative, *Land, Blood, and Sex* is indeed the making of many years of painstaking research. In synthesizing ideas from various disciplines and a wide array of documents written in half a dozen languages, Favali and Pateman provide an excellent example where collaborative research and integrative methodology can be put to effective use. Their book is an important contribution to Eritrean studies, students of jurisprudence and rural development experts being particular beneficiaries.

The book has minor flaws. First, the book lacks a balanced and sober treatment of the recent Ethiopian-Eritrean border war. Second, the authors try to minimize the extent of precolonial ties between what constitutes present-day Eritrea and the provinces of northern Ethiopia. For instance, with regards to the special clause in the nineteenth-century Akeleguzai legal text, Mehen Mahaza, that granted equal landholding privileges to immigrants from Gondar and the coast, the authors postulate that such newcomers "were admitted in order to alleviate the burden of the tribute that was assessed on a village by colonizers" (p. 109). Likewise, there are at least over a dozen references to Ethiopian kings throughout the book, yet there is only one mention of the Bahr Negash, the title

given by such kings to their tribute-paying governors in highland Eritrea.

In their concluding chapter, the authors make it clear that “objectivity” is more of an ideal than a reality (p. 212). While their honesty is commendable, their minimalist approach to Ethiopia denies concrete historical ties. In a fervent effort to remain faithful to the Eritrean nationalist struggle of past decades, they have wrongly defined northeast Africa’s historical boundaries in terms of present-day political borders. Unlike political borders, historical boundaries are fluid and permeable. Taking note of this critical distinction would have enabled Favali and Pateman to engage in a less self-conscious and more far-reaching transregional debate on the study of land, violence, and gender relations.

Fikru Gebrekidan  
St. Thomas University  
Fredericton, Canada