TRIBUTE
Ali A Mazrui: a great man, a great scholar
Seifudein Adem*

Institute of Global Cultural Studies, Binghamton University, USA

In 2013, Ali A Mazrui gave a lecture in Muscat (Oman) about Barack Obama, the 44th president of the USA, in which he suggested that Obama was a great man but not yet a great president. Mazrui said we would have to wait and see if Obama would become a great president. I think Mazrui was right. But we would not have to wait any longer to say: ‘Ali A Mazrui: a great man, a great scholar’. On 12 October 2014, Ali Mazrui passed away at the age of 81. He was indeed a great man and an extraordinary scholar. This essay is a special tribute to him.

Keywords: Ali A Mazrui; power; scholarship; Africa’s triple heritage; media; post-colonialism

Introduction

I first met Professor Ali A Mazrui on 13 June 2002, in Binghamton, New York, when my family and I arrived in the USA after I was appointed as a research associate at the Institute of Global Cultural Studies (IGCS) at Binghamton University. I was at the time teaching political science in Japan. We had barely finished unpacking our baggage in our hotel room when the phone rang. It was Professor Mazrui himself! I was pleasantly surprised when I heard the charismatic voice on the phone, a voice that I had heard before only on TV and radio. I knew we would eventually speak with him in a day or two, but I never expected he would call minutes after our arrival. In any case Mazrui warmly greeted us, welcoming us to Binghamton, and suggested that we could come over to his office if we were not too tired. It did not take us long to accept the offer. Minutes later there we were, at IGCS, in the Office of the Albert Schweitzer Chair, as Mazrui was also known, a great scholar whom I admired a lot. It was an incredible experience.

How I felt when I met Mazrui for the first time probably came close to what he said he had felt when he met one of his intellectual heroes, American political scientist James Coleman. Mazrui met Coleman in 1964 at the University of Ibadan, Nigeria. Mazrui was intimately familiar with Coleman’s scholarship before he met him. I had also known quite a bit about Mazrui’s scholarship.
before I met him, as I had just completed the manuscript for a book on him. The book, *Paradigm Lost, Paradigm Regained: The Worldview of Ali A Mazrui*, was published under my authorship in 2002. Mazrui said there was an element of hero-worship in his response when he met Coleman. So also was my own experience when I met Mazrui.

**Imaginary dialogues**

Let me begin with two imaginary dialogues about and with Mazrui. I suppose, first, a social scientist approaches me and says: since I have never heard of Ali Mazrui, describe him for me in one or two sentences. I will be tempted to retort: can there be a social scientist who has not heard of Ali Mazrui? I allow for the possibility that this social scientist is from another planet before I concede that the question has nevertheless an immediate relevance: how can we describe Ali Mazrui in one sentence? I decide to summon up the judgments made by South Africa’s Nelson Mandela and Ghana’s Kofi Annan. In 1995 Mandela wrote: Ali Mazrui is ‘an outstanding educationist and a freedom fighter’. In 2000 Kofi Annan described Mazrui as ‘Africa’s gift to the world’. I say to myself, I have found the answer to the intriguing question. Ali Mazrui is ‘an outstanding educationist and freedom fighter, and Africa’s gift to the world’.

The other imaginary dialogue is with Mazrui himself. In his *The Trial of Christopher Okigbo*, we recall that Mazrui let his fictional characters, all dead, speak to each other. But, on this occasion, I wish to speak directly to Mazrui in my imagination. I ask him: what do you think of the description of you by Mandela and Kofi Annan? His answer from *After-Africa* would be something like this. First and foremost, let us bear in mind that Mandela’s description of me is mission-oriented; and Annan’s description is mission-neutral. If Mandela and Annan were massively exaggerating my place in the ‘Herebefore’, Mazrui would add, their exaggeration was intellectually respectable. Indeed, there are important elements of truth in their description of me. The fact that one is in the ‘After-Africa’ and the other still in the ‘Herebefore’ is also only of marginal relevance from the point of view of the matter under consideration.

**On obituaries and testimonials**

The *New York Times* published Ali Mazrui’s obituary by Douglas Martin on 20 October 2014: ‘Ali Mazrui, Scholar of Africa Who Divided US Audiences, Dies at 81’. If Mazrui were to read this obituary, I thought, he would probably say that Martin had committed the two sins of the media in the age of globalisation: the sin of commission and the sin of omission. First, a factual error was committed in Martin’s piece, the sin of commission. The error concerned the individual who sent Ali Mazrui to Britain for his secondary education. Martin wrote that it was the governor of a school in Mombasa, Kenya; in fact, it was the then Governor of Kenya, Sir Philip Mitchell, who did so. There was also a sin of omission pertaining to Mazrui’s 1986 TV series, *The Africans*. Martin mentioned in his piece what Lynne Cheney, who was at the time the Head of the National Endowment for the Humanities, had said in opposition to the ‘anti-Western tone’ of the TV series. But, advertently or inadvertently, Martin
‘omitted’ a relevant statement made by the then Senator John Kerry of Massachusetts. In the US Senate, Kerry had also spoken in favour of showing the TV series to the American audience.

I concurred with Mazrui’s imaginary stance, but I did not wish to stop there. I wanted to do what I thought Mazrui would have done (more eloquently) under the circumstances. I decided to point out this sin of omission and set the record straight. Shortly after we had laid Mazrui’s body to rest in Mombasa, Kenya, I wrote the following letter to the New York Times:

Dear Editor,

Douglas Martin’s ‘Ali Mazrui, Scholar of Africa Who Divided US Audiences, Dies at 81’ (Oct. 20) appears to minimize Mazrui’s legacy, however inadvertently. Martin suggests that Mazrui’s 1986 TV series, The Africans, was about Africa and nuclear weapons. It was much more than that. If Mazrui had said in the 1980s that Africa should go nuclear, it was an idea which he quickly abandoned, and since then, he has written extensively on a wide range of topics. Martin mentions Lynne Cheney’s strong reservations about the series which her institution partially funded. For ‘balance,’ Martin should probably have also referred to what the then Senator John Kerry said about Mazrui’s TV series: ‘While I cannot endorse all of the conclusions [of the TV series]…its showing has provided the American people with an all-too-rare look at Africa from an African perspective.’ Additionally, such a quote could have reinforced what the title implied.

Seifudein Adem
Associate Director, Institute of Global Cultural Studies
Binghamton University
Oct 24, 2014

Unfortunately, the letter I wrote was not published. But, separately, I drew the editors’ attention to the aforementioned sin of commission (more politely, of course). Even if the New York Times was entitled to its own opinion, I reasoned, it was not entitled to its own facts. The editors quickly added the following at the bottom of the online obituary: ‘An earlier version of this obituary referred incorrectly to the person who was impressed by a speech Mr Mazrui gave on the Prophet Muhammad’s birthday, leading to new educational opportunities. It was the governor of Kenya, not the governor of the technical school where he was working as a clerk.’ The newspaper also sent me a standard ‘thank you’ note. Sometimes I wonder whether committing a factual error in journalism, as in some other vocations, is viewed as a more deadly sin than omitting a ‘relevant’ fact. Or would it be the case that a ‘relevant’ fact – like beauty – is itself in the eye of the beholder? In any case I was gratified to know that in cyberspace ‘my’ correction will remain attached to Ali Mazrui’s obituary. It is a lasting expression of gratitude and appreciation. As Mazrui’s intellectual biographer, it is also a good way for me to be remembered, if I am.
As I saw him
Let me now speak briefly to Mazrui’s love of writing, his commitment to scholarship, his view of power and himself, and our relationship. We all knew Mazrui as a prolific writer but perhaps few of us knew why he loved to write. The reasons, as he put it, included the following:

this tremendous urge to communicate...This is why I write at all, why I write so much, why I write on such varied subjects. I have a constant urge to try and share with others what I think are glimpses I have had...When I want to communicate any particular thought that has occurred to me, a) I want to work it out and b) I want to communicate it to others. I have to work it out. I work it out in the writing. Having worked it out, I want somebody else to know what occurs to my mind, to my being.8

It is also widely known that Mazrui travelled a lot. What is perhaps less known is that he never came to campus, even when he was in town, unless he had a class, a meeting or a special appointment. In addition to my weekly conversations with him in his beautiful house in Vestal, New York, where we discussed current affairs and official business, Mazrui often communicated with me and our other staff through the fax machine. The more than 5000 pages of handwritten correspondence with him which is currently at my disposal is, I think, another testimony to Mazrui’s love of writing.

Ali Mazrui had a solid commitment to scholarship. When we were preparing a manuscript for the third volume of the ‘Mazrui and His Critics’ book series, a suggestion was made by our editorial assistant that we should consider excluding those critiques of him which were ‘rude and unpleasant’. When he learned about the idea, his reaction was quick and unequivocal. He said: ‘Excluding unpleasant material is good manners, but is not good scholarship!’ And we obliged, of course.

Mazrui’s favourite quotation was from a book by his mentor at Oxford, John Plamenatz: ‘The vices of the strong acquire some of the prestige of strength’.9 He used different variations of this quote more frequently than any other in his writings. In my view the fact that this was his favourite quote meant at least three things. It meant that he understood well the nature of power. It meant that he had become skilful in navigating comfortably through the corridors of power. And it meant that he did not have to distort facts for political purpose. It was perhaps such awareness about the nature of power which enabled him to be both a confidant and critic of some of Africa’s postcolonial leaders. Mazrui met many prominent individuals of our time, including some who are or were regarded as pariahs by the mainstream thinkers from whom they deviated (see Appendix 1).

Did Mazrui have a clear idea about what he sought to achieve or whether he had achieved it? Did he know that someday he would be so influential as to be named one of the top 100 public intellectuals in the world, as he was by Foreign Policy magazine in 2005?10 Mazrui also made it to the list in David Horowitz’s 2006 book, The Professors: The 101 Most Dangerous Academics in America11 – further proof of his wider influence. In 2007, I thus asked Mazrui if he knew he would one day become such a great man. He said:
You are asking me if I ever realized that I was an African genius!! My answer is that I am convinced I fall short of a genius, although I have had fans who have so regarded me as a genius, from my days at Makerere in Uganda...I am flattered that there are people in the world who value me so highly, but let me pray that at least one of my children or grandchildren rises to the real ranks of which I have been so prematurely elevated.12

In a letter addressed to Mazrui on 6 October 2013, about one month before he was hospitalised (on 10 November 2013), I sought to reflect on the shared benefits of our scholarly bond. The letter, which was also copied to some academic departments at Binghamton University, included the following passage:

In the past seven years, you have given me the opportunity to work with you closely, allowing me to explore different areas of inquiry. The topics range from Africa’s experience to Japan’s predicament and from the end of the Cold War to the rise of China. But your vast scholarship, too, has been a stimulating research project for me. In this context consider, for example, my two books which were published in 2013, and the other two, which are forthcoming before end of the year. These books are either about you, or are co-authored with you, or have in them a chapter by you – also a clear evidence of the fruitfulness and maturity of our intellectual partnership.

I was trying above to draw up the balance sheet of my association with Mazrui.

**As he saw me**

Many people knew Mazrui longer than I had known him. But I was perhaps closer to him in many ways. From January 2006, when I arrived at Binghamton University as an assistant research professor, until he died in Vestal, New York, at around 8:12 pm on 12 October 2014, I was always with him. Since 2006, I have been the Associate Director of IGCS, which he created in 1991. I also travelled with him extensively, either as his driver or his health escort. Sometimes we also jointly presented papers at conferences. So, was I Mazrui’s ‘right-hand man’, as one of his sons used to say? An intriguing question! But Mazrui himself seemed genuinely appreciative of my contribution to the Institute. He wrote in 2012: ‘I can say categorically that one of the most valuable things which have happened to the Institute of Global Cultural Studies in the last two decades has been the appointment of Seifudein Adem’. But why should I believe what he said about me? The answer is simple – he didn’t have to say it. Furthermore, since I was in charge of the affairs of the Institute when Mazrui was on his extended lecture tours in the USA and abroad, including the teaching of his classes (and my own), what he said does sound true.

Mazrui also gave me the opportunity to develop intellectually. He allowed me to learn more about him and his scholarship in various settings. As I said above, sometimes I escorted him during his lecture tours. I was, therefore, eager to know what Mazrui thought about my familiarity with his scholarship. The answer came on 12 February 2012, when I received from him an email message entitled ‘Mazruiana for Heirs’, accompanied by a list and copies of virtually all Mazrui’s books, articles, lectures, reports, tapes, and so forth. He wrote: ‘When I am gone you may find this “guide to Mazruiana” very helpful for the record’.
The email was also copied to some of Mazrui’s sons and relatives. The gist of the message was this: ‘you are the primary heirs – though Seifudein may know more about my work than most of any family members!!’ I was delighted because I understood what he meant. I also felt flattered. This was how Mazrui saw me in the evening hours of his life.

Mazrui had made other observations, too, about me. On one occasion he told me I was often successful in disguising my originality. At first I did not know whether he was suggesting that this was a good or a bad thing. On another occasion he wondered why I was often too deferential. In response, I said that was perhaps a result of my Ethiopian upbringing and my extended stay in Japan (for 13 years).

I cherish the time I spent with Mazrui. It afforded me the opportunity to study him and his ideas closely, which stimulated the growth of my own intellect. I have come to know what I had not known before, including some things about myself, and I have learned many things from him. Most of all what I learned from him, I hope, was learning how to learn.

Mazrui’s words of wisdom
Mazrui came from a great family. But, I think, he achieved greatness rather than being born with it. In any case, in 2008, I asked him if he had any advice for his younger followers. His answer was short: ‘I had vindicated the old English adage: “If at first you don’t succeed, try and try again”.’

He was alluding above to a 1949 incident in Mombasa. He nearly failed the Cambridge High School Certificate Examination. The result he obtained – a third class grade – proved not to be good enough for his admission to Makerere College in Uganda. Mazrui became, in his own words, ‘a “school leaver” – someone who had failed to get beyond secondary education’. The Kenyan government nevertheless had a different idea. It suspected Mazrui had more potential than the result of the exam showed and gave him a second chance in 1955, sending him to England to complete his secondary education. Mazrui did not disappoint. He went on to earn his first degree with distinction from the University of Manchester, UK, in 1960. His second and third degrees were, respectively, from Columbia University, USA, in 1961 and from Oxford University, UK, in 1966. Mazrui taught at Makerere University College, Kampala, Uganda, from 1963 to 1973, at the University of Michigan from, USA, 1974 to 1991, and at Binghamton University, USA, from 1991 to 2014.

An appeal to Pan-Africanists
Ali Mazrui had observed:

The absence of the written word in large numbers of African societies was… bound to create a sense of isolation to some extent in a temporal sense, keeping one African century from another in terms of stimulation and interaction, suppressing innovative heresies, burying genius under the oblivion of the dominant consensus of a particular age.
Mazrui was explaining above the factors which might have contributed to Africa’s scientific marginality. The good news is that literacy is now spreading across the continent.

Another piece of good news is that Mazrui left behind 39 books and hundreds of essays (published and unpublished), with which he mesmerised his readers. When the New York Times announced the death of Ali Mazrui, describing him as the ‘Scholar of Africa who divided US Audiences’, it was testimony to his unique ability to mesmerise and stimulate. But how well-known are Mazrui’s ideas in Africa itself? Not very. Luckily, however, an annotated bibliography of Mazrui’s most significant works from 1963 to 2003 was published in 2005 by the South African Librarian Abdul Samed Bemath. Mazrui’s intellectual output from 2004 to 2014 has been similarly compiled by Bemath for inclusion in a book that is to be edited by this author and published in 2016.

The appeal, therefore, is to pan-Africanist individuals and organisations worldwide with the financial wherewithal to make the two books available more widely in all languages all over Africa by all means. The books will help track down Mazrui’s extensive publications, in which he treated wide-ranging issues with uncommon verve and flair. There is little doubt that the issues will continue to be relevant to postcolonial Africa. And the easy availability of these books could go some way towards ensuring the intergenerational transmission of an eloquent African voice, Ali Mazrui’s voice, which is a voice not only of consensus but also of dissidence. The New York Times portrayed Mazrui as a scholar who ‘divided US audiences’. Mazrui should be allowed to stimulate African audiences, too.

**Conclusion**

In his only work of fiction, *The Trial of Christopher Okigbo*, Mazrui wrote:

> Death is one more ceremonial transition. It constitutes a passing in some ways no more fundamental, and certainly no less fundamental, than the transition from pre-adulthood to the full status of the adult. Death is not an interruption but a continuation.17

This means that Ali Mazrui is not dead after all – he has only changed his address! I wish to hope so in any case.

I knew Mazrui was a great scholar even before I met him in 2002. After working with and for him for many years, I can now say he was a great man, too.

**Notes on contributor**

Seifudein Adem is Associate Director of the Institute of Global Cultural Studies and Associate Research Professor at Binghamton University, USA. He is a political scientist by training with a focus on Africa and Asia. He is also Professor Ali A. Mazrui’s intellectual biographer. He is a member of the Executive Board of the International Studies Association (ISA) – Global South Caucus, and was president of the New York African Studies Association, 2010–11. His most recent publications include *Afrasia: A Tale of Two Continents* (2013) and *China’s Diplomacy in Eastern and Southern Africa* (2013).
Notes
1. Mazrui, “The Makerere Conspiracy.” 59.
2. Adem, Paradigm Lost, Paradigm Regained.
3. Quoted in Mazrui, “A Destiny in Five Dimensions.” 16.
4. See Mazrui, “On Boundaries and Bloodline,” Appendix 4.
5. Mazrui, The Trial of Christopher Okigbo.
6. Mazrui, “Africa’s Role in Globalization.”
7. Congressional Record No. 144. [Part III], October 17, 1986.
8. Mazrui, “The Trial of Christopher Okigbo,” 100.
9. Mazrui, “Islam and the West,” 2.
10. Foreign Policy (online), October 14, 2005. http://foreignpolicy.com/.
11. Horowitz, The Professors.
12. Adem, “Ali A. Mazrui.”
13. Ibid.
14. Mazrui, “Growing up in a Shrinking World.” 474.
15. Mazrui, Africa’s International Relations, 100.
16. Bemath, The Mazruiana Collection Revisited.
17. Mazrui, The Trial of Christopher Okigbo, 37.

Bibliography
Adem, Seifudein. “Ali A. Mazrui: Witness to History? An Interview.” Institute of Global Cultural Studies: Binghamton University, November 2007.
Adem, Seifudein. Paradigm Lost, Paradigm Regained: The Worldview of Ali A. Mazrui. Provo, UT: Global Humanities Press, 2002.
Bemath, Abdul Samed. The Mazruiana Collection Revisited: An Annotated and Select Thematic Bibliography 1962–2003. Pretoria: Africa Institute of South Africa, 2005.
Horowitz, David. The Professors: The 101 most dangerous Academics in America. Washington, DC: Regnery, 2006.
Mazrui, Ali A. “The Multiple Uniqueness of Barack Obama: A Great Man but not yet a Great President.” Paper presented at Sultan Qabous University, Muscat, Sultanate of Oman, February 9, 2013.
Mazrui, Ali A. “Africa’s Role in Globalization: Subject or Object?” Address to the National Symposium to mark the 30th Anniversary celebration of Black Studies at Ohio State University, Department of African American and African Studies, Columbus, OH, May 3–5, 2001.
Mazrui, Ali A. “On Boundaries and Bloodline.” Annual Mazrui Newsletter, no. 25. Institute of Global Cultural Studies, Binghamton University, 2001.
Mazrui, Ali A. “A Destiny in Five Dimensions.” Annual Mazrui Newsletter, no. 20. Institute of Global Cultural Studies, Binghamton University, 1996.
Mazrui, Ali A. “Islam and the West: The Tensions of Cultural Globalization.” Keynote Address at the international conference on ‘The Globalization of Culture: Implications for the Islamic World and the West.” Oxford University, September 29–October 1, 1995.
Mazrui, Ali A. “Growing up in a Shrinking World: A Private Vantage Point.” In Journeys through World Politics: Autobiographical Reflections of thirty-four academic Travelers, edited by Joseph K. Kruzel and James N. Rosenau, 469–487. Lexington, MA: Lexington Books, 1989.
Mazrui, Ali A. “The Makerere Conspiracy: A View from ‘Within’.” Africa Events, May 1987.
Mazrui, Ali A. Africa’s International Relations: The Diplomacy of Dependency and Change. Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1977.
Mazrui, Ali A. “The Trial of Christopher Okigbo.” In Writers in East Africa: Papers from a Colloquium held at the University of Nairobi, edited by Andrew Gurr and Angus Calder, 97–101. Nairobi: East African Literature Bureau, 1974.
Mazrui, Ali A. The Trial of Christopher Okigbo. London: Heinemann, 1971.

Appendix 1. List of leaders whom Ali A Mazrui met, interviewed or extensively interacted with

I. Founder heads of state of postcolonial Africa
Jomo Kenyatta, first president, Kenya
Julius K Nyerere, first president, Tanzania
*Milton Obote, first president, Uganda
Leopold S Senghor, first president, Senegal
Nnamdi Azikiwe, first president, Nigeria
II. Other heads of state of postcolonial Africa and the Caribbean

Jaafar Numery, president, Sudan
Umar Hassan al-Bashir, president, Sudan
Sadiq el Mahdi, prime minister, Sudan
*Muammar Gaddafi, leader of Libya
Shehu Shagari, president, Nigeria
*Yakubu Gowon, president, Nigeria
Olusegun Obasanjo, president, Nigeria
Ibrahim Babangida, president, Nigeria
Sani Abacha, president, Nigeria
Abdulsalami Alhaji Abubakar, president, Nigeria
Chedi Jagan and Janet Jagan, successive presidents, Guyana, South America
Ali Hassan Mwinyi, president, Tanzania
*Benjamin Mkapa, president, Tanzania
*Thabo Mbeki, president, South Africa
Mobutu Sese Seko, president, Congo (Zaire)
*Mwai Kibaki, president, Kenya
*Idi Amin, president, Uganda
*Yusufu Lule, president, Uganda
*Yoweri Museveni, president, Uganda
Mutesa II, first president, Uganda
*Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf, president, Liberia (first elected woman president in Africa)
Hu Jintao, president, People’s Republic of China
Hugh Desmond Hoyt, president, Guyana, South America

III. 20th-century and contemporary monarchs

*Haile Selassie I, last emperor, Ethiopia
Queen Elizabeth II, UK
King Mutesa II, first post-colonial king, Buganda
King Mutebi II, second post-colonial king, Buganda
Sultan Khalifa bin Harub, last colonial sultan, Zanzibar
Aga Khan, leader, Ismaili Community
Princess Elizabeth Bagaya of Toro, first woman foreign minister, Uganda
Emir Sheikh Sultan bin Mohamed Al-Qasimi, Sharjah, UAE
Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh, UK
Otumfuo Nana Osei Tutu II, born Nana Kwaku Dua, Asantehene of Ashanti, Ghana
Ado Bayero, Emir of Kano, Nigeria
Prince Aly Khan, heir presumptive to the Aga Khan
Traditional rulers of the Hausa and the Yoruba

IV. Prime ministers and heads of government (African and Non-African)

*Sadiq el Mahdi, prime minister, Sudan
Harold Wilson, prime minister, UK
*Mannoharan Singh, prime minister, India
*Mahathir Muhammad, former prime minister, Malaysia
*Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak, current prime minister, Malaysia
Salim Ahmed Salim, prime minister, Tanzania
*Apolo Nsibambi, prime minister, Uganda
Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, prime minister, Turkey
Al Gore, former vice president, USA
George Herbert Bush, former vice-president, USA (later president)
*Archbishop Makarios, leader of Cyprus
Raila Odinga, prime minister, Kenya
V. Heads of international organisations

Boutros Boutros-Ghali, secretary-general, United Nations
*Kofi Annan, secretary-general, United Nations
Amadou-Mahtar M’Bow, director-general, UNESCO
Salim A Salim, secretary-general, Organization of African Unity
Emeka Anyaoku, secretary-general, the Commonwealth
Yassir Arafat, president, Palestinian Liberation Organization
Sonny Ramphal, secretary general, Commonwealth
Adebayo Adedeji, executive director, UN Economic Commission for Africa

VI. Other historic personalities (select list)

Martin Luther King Jr., US civil rights leader and Nobel Peace Laureate
Archbishop Desmond Tutu, religious leader and Nobel Peace Laureate
Willy Mutunga, chief justice and president of the Supreme Court, Kenya
Anwar Ibrahim, political leader and former deputy prime minister, Malaysia
Malcolm X (alias Malik Al-Shabaz), Black civil rights political activist
Wangari Maathai, Kenyan environmentalist, scholar and Nobel Peace Laureate
*Wole Soyinka, Nigerian playwright and Nobel Laureate in Literature
Salman Rushdie, Indo-British author of *The Satanic Verses* and other novels
*Chinua Achebe, Nigerian novelist, social commentator and author of the world famous *Things Fall Apart*

Nadine Gordimer, South African novelist and Nobel Laureate in Literature
Hassan Abdalla al-Turabi, former president of the General Assembly, Sudan, religious reformer and political activist
Paul Simon, former US senator from the state of Illinois
George Leonard Carey, Archbishop of Canterbury, UK
*Susan Rice, former assistant secretary of state, later US national security advisor in the second Obama administration
Oginga Odinga, first vice president, Kenya
Pope Paul VI, original name Giovanni Baptista Moutini, Italian pontiff (1963–78), first pope to visit Uganda (July 1969)
Paul Theroux, Anglo-American novelist and travel writer
Ngugi wa Thiong’o, Kenyan scholar, novelist and literary theorist
*Sonia Gandhi, Indo-Italian leader of India’s Congress Party and widow of late prime minister Rajiv Gandhi
*Robert McNamara, former president of the World Bank and former secretary of defense of the USA.
Jesse Jackson, civil rights leader in the USA and former aspirant to the presidency of the country
Ali Muhsin Barwani, first postcolonial leader, Zanzibar
Obafemi Awolowo, postcolonial Yoruba leader, Nigeria

Note: The list is incomplete. Photographs of encounters marked with an asterisk (*) are available at the Institute of Global Cultural Studies, Binghamton University, USA.