

Gujarati Asians in East Africa, 1880-2000: Colonisation, de-colonisation and complex citizenship issues

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(to be published at: *Diaspora Studies* (Tandon))

Key words: History, Citizenship, India, Africa, colonisation, South Asia

Summary

In this paper, I argue that despite the general belief to the contrary, there is a great deal of continuity in the history of the colonial and post-colonial practice of citizenship in the Indian Ocean region. This debate is usually described from the perspective of the state and its representatives. Indeed, more often than not, the position of the migrants themselves is not discussed. This paper aims to fill this gap. In the case of the South Asians in East Africa, I will demonstrate that migrants were able to negotiate their own space for identity formation and accepting and changing formal citizenship options. Indeed, they were also able to negotiate with colonial officials and, after the 1960s, Britain, Canada, India and even the United Nations about defending their rights as citizens or agreeing new regulations for international migration and citizenship. The debate on citizenship and belonging has become the centre of academic and public debate since the 1990s in Europe and the US. However, historical cases in colonial contexts might shed some light on long-term continuity in such discussions.

The South Asian Gujarati Muslim Abdulla Karimjee married Kianga Ranniger, the daughter of German settlers, in Tanganyika (East Africa) on 5th October 1933. Abdulla Karimjee was born in 1899 in Zanzibar, like his father and grandfather before him, while Kianga was born in 1910 in Handeni, in the Tanga region. The Rannigers were German settlers who were convinced that they would never return to Germany, as demonstrated by the fact that they named their daughter Kianga, which means

‘rainbow’ in Kiswahili. Nevertheless, in 1919, Kianga and her family were deported as German nationals, but returned and resettled in the area in 1926 where, as planters, they rented a farm owned by the Karimjees.¹

The marriage between Abdulla and Kianga raises interesting questions about migration, citizenship and belonging in a colonial, British-dominated context. Accordingly, in this paper, I would like to focus on the issue of citizenship, particularly that of the South Asian migrants and their descendants in East Africa. Citizenship here refers to the condition or status of an individual, with all of its incumbent rights and responsibilities. It is clear that the conventional model of the nation-state, in which it is believed that subjects share, more or the less, the same history, language, culture and identity, does not apply to colonial societies. This is firstly because colonial societies more often than not consist of multiple ethnic (natives; in this instance, various African groups) migrant groups, including in the case of East Africa South Asians, Arabs and the dominant whites. In other words, there is no ‘nation.’ Secondly, colonial societies were not equal societies; it was the white outsiders who imposed colonial rule, colonial legislation and new ideas of ‘state’ in the territory.² Finally, in the end, the nation is always contested with the appearance of outsiders, in this case Europeans and South Asians.

¹The research was made possible by the Netherlands Foundation for the Advancement of Tropical Research (WOTRO) in collaboration with the History Department of Erasmus University Rotterdam. I interviewed 132 Hindu businessmen, 89 Muslim businessmen, eight Sikhs, four Goans and two Parsis in the period from 1999 to 2004, which included a year in the field between July 2002 and July 2003. In the last few years (2004-2010), I have increasingly interviewed friends and relatives of the Asian African business families living ‘overseas’, mostly in the United Kingdom, Mauritius and India. However, I continued to visit my contacts in East Africa during return trips, weddings and holidays. Moreover, from 2006-2009, the well-known Karimjee Jivenjee family sponsored the research into and writing of the story of their family business (see below).

Correspondence between Abdulla M.A Karimjee and the Governor of Tanganyika Territory, Dar es Salaam 1939-1940, which is in the family archive in Dar es Salaam, has been invaluable. A copy of this correspondence is in the author’s possession. See also G. Oonk: *The Karimjee Jivanjee Family. Merchant Princes of East Africa, 1800-2000, Amsterdam: Pallas 2009, 90-104*. In addition, some parts of the debate relating to citizenship have been published earlier in: G. Oonk, *Settled Strangers. Asian Business Elites in East Africa 1800-2000*, Sage, Delhi 2013. The argument that there is great continuity in the rhetoric around citizenship in the colonial and postcolonial era is new.

² See, among others, Frederique Cooper, *Colonialism in Question: theory, knowledge, history*, Berkeley CA: University of California Press, 2005; Mahmood Mamdani, *Citizen and Subject. Contemporary Africa and the Legacy of Late Colonialism*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1996.

In the case of Abdulla and Kianga, we will see that the British were reluctant to grant the latter a passport and enable her to travel with her husband throughout the British Commonwealth and Great Britain. Ultimately, they also came to question the status of Abdulla. Most South Asian migrants in East Africa were 'British subjects', because at least one of their parents or grandparents was born in the Colonial-India that was a part of British territory. However, Abdulla was a third generation migrant, whose father and grandfather were born in Zanzibar at a time when it was not part of the British Empire. Accordingly, some colonial officials felt that he was not a British subject. At the same time, it was clear that Abdulla was not a 'native' in East Africa. As a consequence, the question arises: how do we define a migrant who is not a native, is of South Asian descent, but has lived in East Africa for three generations?

In this paper, I argue that despite the general belief to the contrary, there is a great deal of continuity in the history of the colonial and post-colonial practice of citizenship in the Indian Ocean region.³ Moreover, the debates in the area that took place during the transition to independence greatly resemble many of the current discussions on dual citizenship and/or nationality that are going on in Europe, and, to a lesser extent, North America and Australia. Randall Hansen and Patrick Weil have examined various arguments against the notion of dual citizenship, such as: (1) it can produce competing loyalties; (2) it creates a security threat; (3) it impedes immigrant integration; and (4) it provides a wider range of opportunities to those who enjoy dual nationality and is therefore a threat to the idea of equality.⁴ These arguments are usually defined from the perspective of the state and its representatives. Indeed, more often than not, the position of the migrants themselves is not discussed. This paper aims to fill this gap. In the case of the South Asians in East Africa, I will demonstrate that they were able to keep many options open. Moreover, they were also able to negotiate with

³ The growing interest in the history of the Indian Ocean region is highlighted in recent publications by Blyth, R. J. (2003) *The Empire of the Raj: India, Eastern Africa and the Middle East 1858–1947*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan; Bose, S. (2006) *A Hundred Horizons: the Indian Ocean in the age of global empire*, Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press; and Metcalf, T. C. (2007) *Imperial Connections: India in the Indian Ocean Area, 1860–1920*, Berkeley CA: University of California Press.

⁴ Randall Hansen and Patrick Weil (eds) *Dual Nationality, Social Rights and Federal Citizenship in the U.S. and Europe*, Oxford 2002: Bergham; especially their introduction, pp 1-15.

colonial officials and, after the 1960s, Britain, Canada, India and even the United Nations about defending their rights as citizens or agreeing new regulations for international migration and citizenship.

This paper is comprised of four chronologically organised sections. As with this introduction, the first section will focus on the debate on ‘citizenship’ and ‘imperial citizenship’ in colonial East Africa between 1900 and 1947. Initially, the colonial government encouraged Indian immigration and envisaged the development of East Africa into “the America of the Hindu.”⁵ At the same time, it facilitated and protected white investments and entrepreneurs, often at the cost of South Asians and Africans, which will be considered in the second section. In the third section, the consequences of the emergence of an independent India and Pakistan are discussed. Some elements of the South Asian community had hoped that their interests would be protected by these newly born states. However, it soon became clear that they were instead encouraging overseas South Asians to integrate into local societies, as well as making it clear that they should not expect any protection or shelter. In this period between 1947 and 1960, the independence of new East African states was foreseeable. As a result, the South Asians in the region had to make up their minds about what to do given that they were allowed to take up local citizenship, remain as a British subject (but not always, as in the case of Abdulla Karimjee), or continue to be undefined. Whatever the decision, it soon came to have far-reaching consequences. The new East African states (Tanzania, Uganda and Kenya) were unstable, and local politicians increasingly played the South Asian scapegoating card. Nevertheless, I will demonstrate here that many South Asians in East Africa took a ‘family perspective’ on the issue of citizenship; some family members opted for local citizenship, giving them – among other things - access to local trading licences, whereas others took on Canadian, American or British passports, depending on their availability and the individual’s personal circumstances. Finally, in the fourth

⁵ Harry H. Johnston argued in 1901: “On account of our British Empire we are compelled to reserve to British control a large portion of East Africa. Indian trade and enterprise and emigration require a suitable outlet. East Africa is, and should be, from every point of view, the America of the Hindu.” Cited in Robert Gregory, *India and East Africa. A History of Race Relations within the British Empire 1890-1939*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971.

section, I will discuss the consequences and outcomes of the choices that were made, one of which was that, from the 1970s onwards, South Asian Africans emerged as a transnational elite among whom multiple citizenship was commonplace.

Citizenship in a colonial context

The case of East Africa

The East African colonial project started from the presumption that the subjects of the colonial state were unequal by definition.⁶ In fact, the colonial state acknowledged three types of people: (1) the white settlers who were its creators. This group was economically and militarily superior and believed that it was the 'white man's burden' to uplift the natives (note, not the South Asian migrants). There was a strong link between the white settlers, the colonial state and the British centre. The settlers shared the civic rights of the 'civilised' people in the country. They were, for example, allowed (appointed or chosen) onto the legislative council, which was important because this body created the laws and rules relating to the rights and duties of the different people and various businesses in the colony.

(2) The natives. The colonial rulers saw the black Africans as a simple and pleasant people. Nevertheless, they were also regarded as unhygienic, uncivilised and having low moral standards. It was therefore thought that they had to be disciplined either to work for the whites or to produce exports in order to make a small profit and thus be able to pay taxes. There was no direct link between the natives and the British centre. They were thus not seen as civilians with civic rights, but as people who had to be governed under the so-called 'customary law'. In practice, the British appointed a District Officer (DO) who was responsible for law and order and the collection of taxes in his area. In cases of crime, unrest and general social disorder, he was advised by local chiefs and acted (as far as possible) according to local customs. In short, it was described

⁶ See, for a subtle analysis of the relationship between 'citizen and subject', Mahmood Mamdani, *Citizen and Subject. Contemporary Africa and the Legacy of Late Colonialism*, Princeton, Princeton University Press: 1996.

as: “a system of justice that should conform as much to their own law as is compatible within the principles of ours.”⁷

(3) In general, the South Asians in East Africa were seen as British subjects. Most of them were already part of the British colonial system when they arrived in the region. From a legal point of view, this placed them somewhere between having civic rights and being subject to customary law. Over the years, South Asians were appointed to the legislative council and would turn to civic law when they felt that it suited their interests best. Sometimes, they used the legal and political connections with London to find support, and were thus able to bypass local colonial officials. In other cases, it was the colonial government in India that took up their case and provided them with assistance. In other words, they were less powerful than the colonial rulers, but often successfully used a wide range of connections and options to persuade colonial officials to support them.

However, we have to recognise that ‘natives’ and ‘settlers’ belong together. The native is a native only in the context of settlers, while settlers are settlers only in the context of natives. In the US, the natives (Indians) became natives only after the arrival of the white settlers. In East Africa, meanwhile, the issue of the settler and the native is very complex, because of its particular historical legacy. The prototype of the settler in East Africa was, of course, the white man. The hegemony of the white man was based on his technological, military and economic dominance. However, it was reinforced by law in the constitution of the colonial state. The East African colonial states recognised two types of political identity: civic and ethnic. The former was protected by civic rights, which were written into civil law and upheld by the state. These rights were predominantly intended to protect those who were considered to be ‘civilised’, in essence, the white settlers.

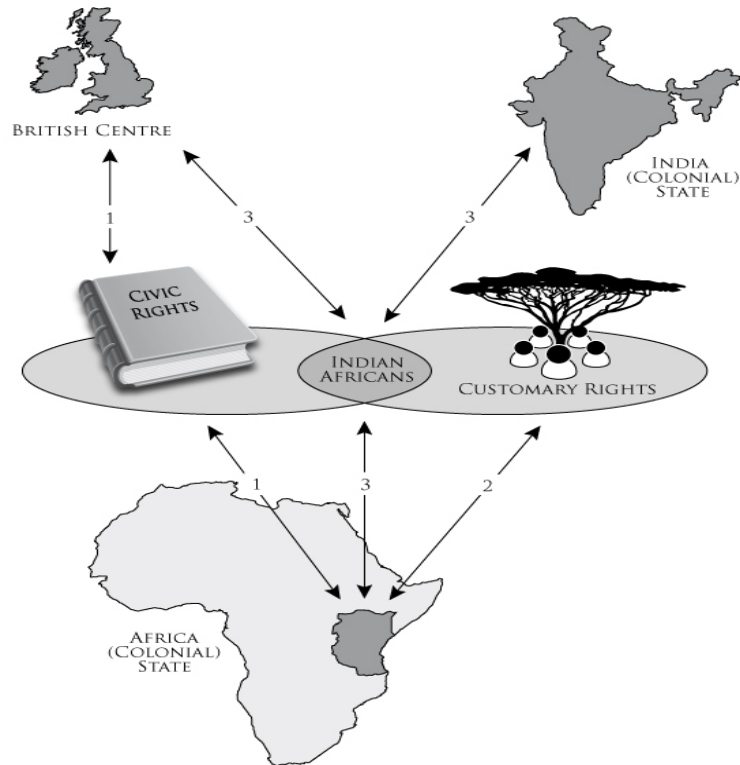
The natives, meanwhile, were defined as ‘subjects’ not ‘civics’, and were therefore not covered by civic rights and the civic identity. Instead, the colonial states created a different identity for them: the ethnic identity. This was defined by the customs of the

⁷ Mamdani, *Citizen and Subject*, 63.

ethnic groups, including the sense of belonging to an ancestral area. These customs were recognised by the state and reinforced by so-called customary law. The introduction of 'Native Authorities' facilitated the regulation, and often the enforcement, of customary laws. So, at the local level, the state spoke the language of culture and customs and not that of rights.⁸

⁸ The importance of the distinction between citizen and subject and the legacy of colonial rule is discussed in M. Mamdani, *Citizen and Subject. Contemporary Africa and the Legacy of Late Colonialism*, Princeton 1996, Princeton University Press. See also his inaugural lecture: *When does the Settler become a Native? Reflections of the Colonial Roots in Equatorial and South Africa*, Cape Town 1998.

RIGHTS AND POWER: EUROPEANS, SOUTH ASIANS AND AFRICANS



What is important here is that the non-white settlers like Arabs and, in particular, Asians, did not accept this distinction. Moreover, some of them were economically well-off and well-educated (often in the heart of the empire, e.g. London, Oxford or Cambridge). They were therefore able to criticise the often discriminatory colonial practices. Sometimes, they used their background as *British* subjects, as well as their 'Britishness' in terms of language, education and knowledge of the law and jurisdiction, to strike back from within the system. Yet, on other occasions, they made their point by showing off their moral integrity. This was the case, for example, when the extremely rich Asian African businessman Abdulla Karimjee opened his private swimming club in

Tanga for all races and creeds after he was refused entry to the 'white man's club' in the 1950s.

Nevertheless, the increasing quest for equality by the natives and non-European migrants (especially South Asians and Arabs in the case of East Africa) gained ground on the historical path to independence. An important part of the struggle for civic rights and the emancipation of the Asians was strikingly realised in a discourse about the natives. Often, the Asians would argue for equal opportunities with whites, e.g. in cases where they wished to have access to the same fertile land as the white settlers. The whites, however, argued that these rights could not be granted, because the Asians would almost certainly use them to exploit the natives, and it was the Europeans' responsibility to prevent this. This argument was often used to protect colonial interests against those of the Asians. Nevertheless, the latter were quick to remind the colonisers of their importance as both middlemen between the African producers and the Europeans, and agents in the civil service.⁹

Returning briefly to the marriage between Abdulla Karimjee and Kianga Ranniger, at first sight this was a union between a daughter of German white settlers and a British subject. Indeed, if Hitler had not come to power in Germany, the young married couple would probably have left it at that. Nevertheless, after Hitler became Reichskansler in 1933, the couple eventually decided that it was in their interests for Kianga to become a British subject, as they were experiencing increasing difficulties in their travels within East Africa, to India and, especially, to the UK.

Usually, a married women was able obtain the citizenship status of her husband. As a consequence, it was initially thought by the couple that this request would be a straightforward matter; if the marriage was legal, and if Abdulla Karimjee was a British subject, his wife would, on the basis of the marriage, also become a British subject and

⁹ For an excellent summary of this long but interesting debate, see Robert G. Gregory, *Quest for Equality. Asian Politics in East Africa, 1900-1967* (Oriental Blackswan, 1993). Recently, Sana Aiyar has emphasized, taken up and pushed this argument on a little further by claiming that the African spokesmen of independence, like Harry Thuku, mirrored the South Asian rhetoric for equal rights and, ultimately, independence. See, S. Aiyar, 'Empire, Race and the Indians in Colonial Kenya's Contested Public Political Sphere, *Africa* 81 (1) 2011, 132-154.

be eligible for a British passport. However, this was Abdulla's second marriage, and his first wife (Sukan Y, Karimjee, who was his uncle's daughter) was still alive. Marriage, according to English law, had the requirement that it must be the voluntary union of "one man and one woman" for life, "to the exclusion of all others."¹⁰ This issue was eventually resolved, because the couple declared that Kianga was a Muslim convert and married according to the rites of Islam. The British colonial perspective was that polygamous marriages were recognised as valid if they were also recognised by the law of the country where the parties were domiciled, in this case Zanzibar. The marriage was therefore accepted as being legal after Abdulla and Kianga produced the necessary evidence of her conversion and proof that the wedding actually took place.¹¹

After overcoming this hurdle, Abdulla and Kianga faced more problems. An unknown, active advisor of Lord Lloyd of Dolobran (Secretary of State for the Colonies, based in London) reminded his employer in a letter that the "most difficult question appears to be whether Mr. Karimjee is himself a British subject." The advisor argued that it was necessary – according to the British Subjects Acts of 1730 and 1772 - to identify a male ancestor with indisputable British nationality and the unbroken transmission thereof. If the birth took place when a country was British territory, it was stated by law that those living there were British subjects. However, the father and grandfather of Abdulla Karimjee were both born in Zanzibar. Moreover, although the British had signed several treaties with the Sultan of Zanzibar, most notably in 1839 and 1886, it remained unclear what the position of the South Asian migrants was at that time.

The advisor to Lord Lloyd was ultimately sympathetic to Abdulla and Kianga. Furthermore, in the letter referred to above, he repeatedly mentioned a personal recommendation by the chairman of the Sisal Growers Association in Tanganyika, E.F.

¹⁰ Correspondence between Abdulla M.A Karimjee and the Governor of Tanganyika Territory, Dar es Salaam 1939-1940, family archive, Dar es Salaam.

¹¹ The main evidence was a letter to Kianga confirming that she voluntarily converted to Islam and that she was married to Abdulla. Furthermore, Kianga argued that she had many British friends, had been refused membership of the German club in Tanga and was ostracized by the Nazis, who she defied. In addition, the Mulla of the Bohra sect produced a letter stating that he was in charge of the marriage ceremony in 1933. Note that this history could be read as acceptance of customary law by the British.

Hitchcock. Hitchcock regarded Karimjee as “the outstanding figure in the Sisal industry in East Africa”, and was most anxious that his activities in furthering this industry should “not be in any way hindered by difficulties about his or his wife’s legal status.”¹² This was an important statement, because sisal production in the colony was indispensable for the packing industry, which became essential to the war economy.¹³ It is probable that the Second World War interfered with the legal debate. Nevertheless, on an earlier occasion, other colonial officials had issued Abdulla with a British passport, probably on the grounds that he was of South Asian descent. It was thus difficult to withdraw such a privilege once given. The exchange of legal letters in the late 1930s does not provide details of the outcome, but the fact that Kianga was able to travel freely during, as well as after, the war suggests that she did obtain a British passport. Moreover, both Abdulla and Kianga gained full British citizenship after the war.¹⁴

Cases such as the one described here were exceptional, but they nevertheless provide us with a fascinating insight into the complexity of the rules relating to an individual’s status in a changing geopolitical landscape. Indeed, if we return to Hansen’s notion of the complexities of dual citizenship, we will find that the rhetoric in the letter held by Abdulla and Kianga reflects a few of these sentiments, despite the fact that they were not applying for dual citizenship at this stage, but for a change of citizenship. Kianga and Abdulla were aware that the former’s German background might be interpreted by officials as a security threat, and the couple therefore highlighted the fact that she had been refused membership of the German club (they did not, however, emphasise that she had applied to become a member in the first place). In addition, they also mentioned a long list of British friends, including a few officials like Sir William Lead and Colonel Boscawen.

The couple must have been aware that this information would increase their chances of getting the passport they desired. The issues around integration and the

¹² Correspondence between Abdulla M.A Karimjee and the Governor of Tanganyika Territory, Dar es Salaam 1939-1940, family archive, Dar es Salaam

¹³ It is worth noting here that the Karimjees also supplied sisal to the Germans. See, Oonk *The Karimjee Jivanjee Family*, 93–95.

¹⁴ This example is taken from G. Oonk, *The Karimjee Jivanjee Family*, 93–95.

wider range of opportunities would come to the fore after India and Pakistan gained their independence, as we will see in the following sections.

Partition of India¹⁵

There is a striking contrast between the attitude of the Indian government to the overseas Indian community before and then after independence (1947). Prior to independence, both the Indian government and the nationalist movement were very concerned about the position of South Asian (indentured) labourers overseas, as well as the interests of Indian businessmen in the diaspora. Gandhi had set the example in his pledge for South Asians in South Africa, but this was a rule rather than an exception in the country's foreign policy. After independence, however, a new foreign policy in line with India's new status in the world was introduced. The first prime minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, argued that if India wanted to make a stand against imperialism, it could only do so by not being imperialistic itself. He therefore advised the Indians overseas to integrate and warned them not to expect any help from India.¹⁶

The partitioning of India complicated the issue of the nationality of the South Asians in East Africa. Before 1947, everyone born in the British dominions was a British subject, meaning that one simply had to be born in any territory under the sovereignty of the British Crown. In general, British subjects had the right to travel within and to other dominions, as well as to the UK. British citizens, meanwhile, had the same right, but were either living in the UK or were allowed to both live and vote there. In order to clarify the status of its existing and former subjects, the British parliament passed the British Nationality Act in 1948. This legislation was part of the decolonisation process, and its aim was to guarantee the status of those who were still British subjects in its remaining colonies.

¹⁵ In this article, we use the terms South Asians and Indians synonymously. It would be more correct to use South Asians throughout, because South Asia was split into India and West and East Pakistan in 1947. Nevertheless, colonial sources refer to India and Indians, while many South Asians in East Africa refer to themselves as Indians, or recall that they went to 'Indian' schools.

¹⁶ M.C. Lall, *India's Missed Opportunity. India's relationship with the Non Resident Indians*, Ashgate 2001, especially pp40-76.

The Act provided that:

- (1) All British subjects who had links (business, family or otherwise) with the UK would become “citizens of the UK and Colonies.”
- (2) British subjects who had links with other self-governing countries of the Commonwealth would be regarded as potential citizens of their respective countries, while others would become “British Subjects without Citizenship.”
- (3) Former British subjects and British protected persons who became citizens of any country of the Commonwealth would be called “British Subjects” or “Commonwealth Citizens.”
- (4) Categories (2) and (3) could become “Citizens of the UK and Colonies” by registration after residing for one year in a British territory.¹⁷

With the partitioning of India into the separate states of India and Pakistan, the South Asians in East Africa did not automatically become Indian or Pakistani citizens (note the term “potential citizens” in option 2). Nevertheless, under the Indian constitution, they could easily obtain Indian citizenship and were not required to surrender existing citizenship rights. In his groundbreaking book *The Banyan Tree*, Hugh Tinker argues that most “East African Indians were intensely proud of the new status of an independent India” and did not want to remain British subjects.¹⁸ However, this was only a temporary option, because India changed the regulations in 1955, ruling out dual citizenship. Accordingly, from this point on, people remained as either British subjects or British protected persons. In my research, I found that very few were given the dual citizenship option. Indeed, according to Pascal Herzig, less than 10% acquired Indian citizenship.¹⁹

¹⁷ M.C. Lall, *India's Missed Opportunity. India's Relationship with the Non Resident Indians*, Ashgate Singapore, 97. I have rephrased these points a little.

¹⁸ Hugh Tinker, *The Banyan Tree. Overseas Emigrants from India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977, 124.

¹⁹ Herzig, P., *South Asians in Kenya. Gender, Generation and Changing Identities in Diaspora*, Munster 2006.

At this stage, the Colonial Office wished to grant British subject status to the overseas Asians, fearing that if this group acquired Indian citizenship, Indian expatriates could serve as a “fifth column” in the British colonies.²⁰ This is, of course, a direct reference to the loyalty threat mentioned by Hansen. For the South Asians in East Africa, the question of alignment was even more complicated; they were caught between the new nation states already in existence (India and Pakistan) and those that were yet to be formed (Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania). Moreover, part of the Indian Muslim community in East Africa felt more aligned with India than with Pakistan. They were thus put in a difficult position, because it was felt that as long as the problem of Kashmir was not resolved, they might be ineligible for registration as an Indian citizen.²¹

Many South Asians in East Africa, like Abdulla Karimjee and his family, were not particularly concerned with new nation states on the Indian subcontinent. Indeed, many of my elderly informants told me that they were proud to raise the Indian and/or Pakistani flag in their Indian schools. Nevertheless, at the same time, they did not expect that this would change their lives. Most of them had settled in East Africa from the second generation onwards or even longer ago. They therefore saw the emergence of new nation states as an example of what could soon also happen in Africa.

Indeed, Nehru pushed his policy in this direction; in the early 1950s, he told the first Indian High Commissioner for East Africa, Apa B. Pant, that the South Asians in the region should identify themselves with East Africa. Pant’s advice was that they should become citizens of the UK and its colonies in order to integrate with the colonial territory.²² In addition, in 1952, the Aga Khan, the spiritual leader of the Ismailis, promoted local integration by directing his followers to sacrifice an education in Gujarati in favour of classes given in English and Swahili. He also encouraged both men and women to adopt Western-style dress and to regard East Africa as their permanent

²⁰ Michael Twaddle (ed), *Expulsion of a Minority. Essays on Ugandan Asians*, Athlone Press for the Institute of Commonwealth Studies, 1975, 24

²¹ Deborah Sutton, Sutton D., 'Divided and uncertain loyalties: partition, Indian sovereignty and contested citizenship in East Africa, 1948-1955', *Interventions: International Journal of Postcolonial Studies*, 9 (2007), 276-88.

²² *Hindu*, 24 March 1952.

home. His reasoning echoed the policies of Prime Minister Nehru, who supported the East African independence movement, but also made it clear that Asian Africans should not rely on the Indian state, but should instead integrate into their locality. Nehru ultimately hoped that the overseas Indian community would not be dealt with as an “unwanted import”, because India was treating Africans as “brothers and comrades.”²³ Nehru’s argument can be easily linked to the suggestion of Randall Hansen and Patrick Weil that not accepting local citizenship impeded immigrant integration. Nevertheless, as we will see in the following section, the South Asian migrants themselves did not use the integration rhetoric; they were instead concerned with the life and businesses of their family.

Independent East African states

From the 1950s onwards, many Asians started to support the local independence movement. They were aware that their fate would not be in the hands of the British or Indian governments, but in the lap of Africans and African nationalism. At this stage, however, the issue of citizenship became even more complicated, because it was also related to African perceptions of the South Asians’ level of integration in, identification with, and loyalty to the new African nations.

During the negotiations on East African independence, the British government succeeded in securing fairly generous citizenship rights for the South Asians. Those born in East Africa (or when one of their parents had been born there) had an automatic right to become a citizen of their respective African state. However, if they so chose, they could also retain the status of a British subject or a British protected person. Those born in the United Kingdom, or in the British colonies, were British subjects. Indians born in the Indian Princely states or East Africa (while under British Rule), meanwhile, were British protected persons. British subjects had full rights throughout British territory, whereas the status of British protected persons was at times unclear. With either status,

²³ H. Tinker, *The Banyan Tree. Overseas Emigrants from India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 124. M.C. Lall, *India’s Missed Opportunity. India’s Relation with the Non Resident Indians*, Ashgate Singapore, 76–110.

however, the South Asians could use British and international law to demand the protection of the British government in foreign countries. At times, although not always, the protected status included the right to travel to the UK (on a visa basis) and with this came the right to enter and live there.²⁴

The constitutions of the new East African states gave those South Asians who were not automatically citizens by virtue of their birth or parentage an option to register as such within a period of up to two years after the state had gained independence. Most South Asians preferred to keep their options open until the last few months of this period of grace. Legally, they had the right to do so, but the governments and African citizens of Tanzania, Kenya and Uganda perceived this inaction as an expression of a lack of faith in them and their nations. As a result, they introduced periodic administrative embargoes.²⁵ Nevertheless, the South Asians in Africa ultimately had to make a decision.

They had three options. First, they could become Kenyan, Tanzanian or Ugandan and accept local citizenship. Second, depending on their status, they could become a British citizen, a British subject or a British protected person. Third, they could remain undefined. All of these options included different rights and duties (see Table 1). Nevertheless, whatever the decision made by the different South Asian families, it had serious consequences for their future.

²⁴ Hugh Tinker, *The Banyan Tree. Overseas Emigrants from India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 134. However, because of the steady influx of migrants from the Caribbean, the British government decided to restrict entry into the UK by announcing an annual quota of 1,500 men and their families per year. This proved to be far too small in the eyes of Asian Africans, especially after 1967 when the Kenyan and Tanzanian governments started to 'Africanise' their economies and more and more South Asians wanted to leave.

²⁵ Hugh Tinker, *Separate and Unequal: India and the Indians in the British Commonwealth 1920–1950* (St. Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1976). Hugh Tinker, *The Banyan Tree. Overseas Emigrants from India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977). M.C. Lall, *India's Missed Opportunity. India's Relation with the Non Resident Indians* (Singapore: Ashgate).

Table 1: Citizenship and passport options for South Asians in East Africa circa 1950-1963

Ugandan/Kenyan/ Tanzanian passport.	Access to trading licences. Voting rights. A problematic international travel document.
British passport [British subjects or British protected persons].	Access to education in the UK. Access to medical care in the UK. Access to the developed world (Europe, USA, Canada, Australia). Right to travel to and in the UK.
Remain undefined.	Particularly for lower-class South Asians who were active in the informal sector.

It is noteworthy that Indian and Pakistani passports were hardly ever obtained, except in a few cases where elderly family members chose to retire to one of those countries. This option ended in 1955, and neither country proposed new opportunities for citizenship. Meanwhile, India and Pakistan became less important as a business partner of the Indian settlers in East Africa.²⁶ Some researchers maintain that families employed strategic management in the way that they distributed the citizenship options within the family. They also argue that because South Asian women generally stayed at home, it was reasoned that they did not need a passport from one of the East African states, as the main benefit thereof was the acquisition of a trading licence. On the other hand, having a British passport was advantageous because it would mean that the

²⁶ For this argument, see G. Oonk, 'After shaking his hand, start counting your fingers. Trust and images in Indian business networks, East Africa 1900–2000', *Itinerario* 18 (3) 2004, 70–88. For the role of Indians in the industrialisation process in East Africa, see M. Honey, 'Asian Industrial Activities in Tanganyika,' *Tanzania Notes and Records* 74 (1974), 55–69. See also Himbara, *Kenyan Capitalists*.

family could easily move to the UK or elsewhere.²⁷ However, none of the families that I interviewed recalled having a particularly conscious policy about these issues; there were no family meetings where the allocation of citizenships to family members was discussed. In practice, it was pretty clear that some would apply for local citizenship, especially those who were active in East African-based businesses or had professional jobs, whereas others who were, for example, working or studying abroad would obtain other passports.²⁸

Many South Asian families in East Africa eventually adopted this mixed approach; some of the men took up local citizenship, while many women and younger male relatives decided to remain British subjects. In this way, families could maintain their local businesses and, at the same time, access UK medical care and education for their children. Moreover, a British passport gave Asian African women the freedom to travel to the UK and, if they gave birth there, the baby would automatically be a full British citizen. This would not necessarily have been a calculated move, although it might well have been.

In the 1960s and early 1970s, it became clear that taking up local citizenship did not guarantee protection by the state. Indeed, the property rights and physical security of South Asians were attacked to varying degrees during this period, regardless of their civic status. The governments of Tanzania, Kenya and Uganda slowly took control of the economy and nationalised the majority of the principal economic sectors, including foreign banks, insurance companies, important industries such as textiles, and import/export firms. The governments also launched intensive programmes in the fields of business, trade, and government, replacing Europeans and South Asians with Africans wherever possible. Although the state was very dominant in the economy, there was always some scope for private ventures to shine, especially on a small and medium scale. While the nationalisation of these economic sectors, as well as schools and

²⁷ Nicholas van Hear, *New Diasporas. The Mass Exodus, Dispersal and Regrouping of Migrant Communities* (London: 1998), 243. In my sample of 76 Asian African families who settled in East Africa before the 1920s, more than 90% have multiple passports in their families.

²⁸ This is also supported by Herzig (2006) 137, 138.

buildings, was not directed against the South Asians specifically, they were nevertheless hit extremely hard, particularly the small traders and those with menial clerical and semi-skilled jobs. Accordingly, as a consequence of government policies, the mass exodus of Indians began.

In Tanzania, the Arusha Declaration of 1967 legitimised the nationalisation of the main economic institutions, such as the banks and insurance companies, as well as certain industries. Most of this legislation had a negative effect on the importance of the South Asian community to the economy.²⁹ The Acquisition of Buildings Act of April 1971 in Tanzania was another piece of legislation that had a detrimental effect on South Asians, again whether they were citizens or not. The experience of the Karimjee Jivanjee family is but one example. Although the family's sisal estates were not nationalised, numerous family-owned buildings in Dar es Salaam and Tanga were. Almost overnight, the family lost more than 35 buildings and houses in Dar es Salaam. This figure does not include the buildings in Tanga, Moshi, Arusha, Mwanza, Mtwara and Lindi, or those in many other locations (probably more than 15) that were also lost. In many cases, the Karimjees became tenants of the Registrar of Buildings or the National Housing Corporation and had to rent what they had previously owned. Moreover, the new landlords were unable to maintain the buildings to even the most basic standard and some fell into disrepair within months. The administrative procedures with which to manage the nationalised properties were complex and multifaceted. Ironically, in some cases, the Office of the Registrar of Buildings asked the Karimjee Jivanjee family to assist in specifying the appropriate administrative processes, for example by providing contracts regarding the responsibilities of tenants and owners.

In Kenya, the overall approach taken by the government focused on the need to build a strong indigenous class of traders, bankers and industrialists. However, the promotion of indigenous businesses was often at the expense of the development of those of the South Asians, and it became increasingly difficult for them to renew their

²⁹ Kjell J. Havnevik, *Tanzania. The Limits to Development from Above*, Nordiska Afrikainstitutet, Motola 1993.

trading licences, get permits for new ventures or obtain government loans.³⁰ The Uganda Africanisation programme initially followed the Kenyan approach, but then changed in the early 1970s to something closer to the Tanzanian model. The 1969 Immigration and Trade Licensing Acts were modelled after Kenyan legislation of the same name and had the same objective: all non-citizens were required to obtain work permits. Moreover, certain trades could not be undertaken by non-citizens, including those involving beer, cigarettes, soft drinks, motor vehicles and essential foodstuffs. In the last official count of 1969, the South Asian population in Uganda totalled 74,308. Their legal status was as follows: more than 35,000 were holders of British passports (mainly British protected persons with the right to travel to, but not live in, the UK); 8,890 were Indian citizens; 253 Pakistani citizens; 1,768 (Indian) citizens of Kenya; and 26,657 Ugandan citizens.³¹

The new African states and their local societies expected the South Asians to become part of African society and to demonstrate their loyalty by accepting their new citizenship status, but only about a third did so, as set out in Table 2.

Table 2: Number of South Asians registered as citizens in East Africa, 1969.

	Number of South Asians	Number of South Asians with local citizenship
Tanzania	85,000	25,000
Kenya	139,000	60,000
Uganda	74,000	25,000

Sources: The Minority Rights Group, *The New Position of East Africa's Asians*, London 1984 (first edition 1973); And for Kenya, Pascal Herzig, p137.

³⁰ David Himbara, *Kenyan Capitalists, the State and Development*, East African Education Publishers, Nairobi 1994. Hugh Tinker, *The Banyan Tree. Overseas Emigrants from India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977, 130.

³¹ Census of August 1969, published in *Statistical Abstract* 1971, Republic of Uganda 1972.

In January 1971, General Idi Amin staged a successful coup against President Milton Obote. Most people in Uganda, including the South Asians, Africans and Europeans, initially welcomed the transition. The South Asians in particular did so because they believed that Amin would limit the extent of the anti-Asian campaign. Those Asians who belonged to the Ismaili religion were also pleased to see a Muslim replace a Christian as president, and had given generous support to the building of mosques and schools to promote Islam among Africans. However, their hopes were shortlived. Little more than a year later, on 5th August 1972, Amin, who was now president, gave his infamous 'Asian Farewell Speech' in which he gave Asians 90 days to pack up and leave, making no distinction between citizens and non-citizens. His main argument was that British Asians had come to Uganda to build the country's railway, but this had now been completed. In this speech, as well as in earlier ones, Amin accused the Asians of the "economic sabotage" of the country; they were – in his view - not only unwilling to invest, but were also removing resources. The problem with these kinds of accusation is, of course, that they cannot be proved to be true or untrue. Moreover, the situation was more complex than Amin suggested. The railway was indeed finished, but many of those who had come to help to construct it had later found a living as traders and artisans. Meanwhile, others had arrived not to build the railway, but to work as colonial civil servants. This is not to say that South Asians were not involved in the economic sabotage of the country, especially in the latter stages of uncertain political rule. However, evidence for such allegations should have been brought before an independent Ugandan court.

All South Asians now knew that they had to leave the country, whether they were citizens or not. Their houses, shops and other properties were in danger of being seized, and their physical and emotional wellbeing was at risk, not least because of Amin's control of the military. In the last few weeks of the ultimatum period, some 50,000 Asians left with just hand luggage and no more than £55 in cash. By 1973, no more than 1,000 South Asians remained in Uganda.

To most of the South Asians in the country, their expulsion came as a complete surprise. Initially, many who had heard the Asian farewell speech or read about it in the newspapers simply did not believe that it would ever become a reality. Yet even those whose Ugandan citizenship had appeared to be fully established found that they were required to produce fresh evidence, which was ultimately rejected. Even the Ismaili community and the Madhvani and Mehta families, who owned famous business houses and had a long history in Uganda, were deprived of their citizenship.

When the first groups of South Asians who had been resident in or citizens of Uganda took flight to the UK, USA, Canada and elsewhere, those in Kenya and Tanzania started to believe that their businesses and lives could also be at risk. Despite the fact that neither Kenya nor Tanzania adopted the Ugandan approach, the political and economic insecurity in these countries also caused massive emigration, with about half of their total South Asian populations leaving. Some South Asian business families in Kenya and Tanzania did however decide to keep one or two family members in the newly independent states to look after their (nationalised) properties and businesses. In some exceptional cases, the people left behind became the managers (state employees) of their former properties.³² Others were traumatised. Amir Karimjee, for instance, who was in charge of the family's Tanzanian properties at that time, was shocked at the nationalisation and left the country three days after the announcement of the Acquisition of Buildings Act of April 1971. Other members of the Karimjee family left the country for different reasons, for example because they had young children to educate. In short, most family members left, leaving behind only one or two die hards.³³ Those who departed would endeavour to build a new life in the UK, the USA, Canada and elsewhere.

³² See, for example, the biography of Andy Chande at www.andychande.com (accessed 15-06-2010).

³³ G. Oonk, *The Karimjee Jivanjee Family*, 2009.

Afterthoughts: the current situation

Fourth generation South Asians in East Africa, as well as their descendants, are at times still regarded as being somewhere between citizens and refugees. Indeed, each time the rivalries between South Asians and Africans are raised in political terms, the former continue to fear for their life and property. In Kenya's 1997 and 2007 elections, for instance, African leaders talked openly of expelling South Asians, while South Asian shops are occasionally the target of looting during riots. However, from research undertaken in these countries over recent years, there appears to be an increasing awareness among East African citizens that most South Asian Africans are there to stay. In 1995, there were about 5,000 South Asians living in Uganda. Around 1,000 of these were returnees, but the rest had come from India as new migrants to 'try their luck.'³⁴ Fifteen years later, in 2010, it was estimated that of the 20,000 South Asians in Uganda, only 5,000 were returnees.³⁵ In addition, there are around 100,000 South Asians in Kenya and 90,000 in Tanzania. Meanwhile, Kenya's 1990 census states that 59% of the Asian population were Kenyan citizens, while the remainder were Indian, British or classified as "others."³⁶

An interesting picture emerges from a small survey conducted in Nairobi in 2000 (n=399). In general, 71% of the South Asians in Kenya were local citizens, while 18% were British and 9% Indian citizens. Divided by generation, the picture is even more interesting. Members of the well-established South Asian families are more likely to be Kenyans; more than 90% of the fourth generation South Asian Kenyans were Kenyan citizens, whereas only 30% of the first generation migrants were.³⁷ Not surprisingly, most of them were citizens by birth.

Nevertheless, the members of this group remain visible only as 'outsiders' or 'strangers.' Frequently, the suggestion is made that strangers are not committed to the

³⁴ *Economist*, 8 July 1995. The same issue stated that only 4,200 properties were returned. Most of these were in bad shape and there would be no further compensation. Most former Ugandan Asians returned to Uganda to recover their property and then left.

³⁵ Informal conversations with representatives from the Indian Embassies in Kampala and Nairobi.

³⁶ Republic of Kenya Bureau of the Census International Data Base 1999.

³⁷ Pascal Herzig, *South Asians in Kenya. Gender, Generation and Changing Identities in Diaspora*, Münster 2006, 136-140.

local economy or local politics because settled strangers always have an 'escape route'. Moreover, if they do take up local citizenship or become politically active, they are said to be doing so for personal gain and not to serve the country. I argue that these strangers still have to navigate between being an insider and an outsider at different places and times. Even after three or four generations of running a local business, paying taxes, and spending money on charities, hospitals, dispensaries and the like, they find that this is never enough to be accepted as locally loyal. In his inaugural lecture at the University of Cape Town, Mahmood Mamdani rhetorically asks: When does a settler become a native? And his short answer is: from the point of view of ethnic citizenship, NEVER.

In this paper, I argue that there was a great deal of continuity in the rhetoric of 'longing and belonging' of the South Asians in East Africa. Despite 100 years of debates and change, the rhetoric is still remarkably similar. In order to understand the ambivalent relations between strangers and local society through the generations, I have focussed on the descendants of migrants who eventually settled in their new environments for at least three generations. They are often referred to as 'third or fourth or more' generation migrants, despite the fact that they did not migrate themselves; they (and their parents) were born and raised in the new countries, which they have made their own. This means that they enjoyed their education, know the local language and will probably get married locally (although frequently within their own ethnic group). Often, but not always, they carry local passports or have obtained local citizenship. Despite this, their loyalty towards local society is at stake in the discourses on migration and citizenship. The debate on citizenship and belonging has become the centre of academic and public debate since the 1990s in Europe and the US. However, historical cases in colonial contexts might shed some light on long-term continuity in such discussions.

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