

SETTLED  
STRANGERS



# SETTLED STRANGERS

Asian Business Elites in  
East Africa (1800–2000)

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GIJSBERT OONK

 SAGE

Los Angeles | London | New Delhi  
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First published in 2013 by



**SAGE Publications India Pvt Ltd**  
B1/I-1 Mohan Cooperative Industrial Area  
Mathura Road, New Delhi 110 044, India  
[www.sagepub.in](http://www.sagepub.in)

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2455 Teller Road  
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1 Oliver's Yard, 55 City Road  
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**SAGE Publications Asia-Pacific Pte Ltd**  
3 Church Street  
#10-04 Samsung Hub  
Singapore 049483

Published by Vivek Mehra for SAGE Publications India Pvt Ltd, typeset in 11/13.5 pt Minion by RECTO Graphics, Delhi, and printed at Sai Print-o-Pack, New Delhi.

#### **Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data**

Oonk, Gijbert, 1966–

Settled strangers: Asian business elites in East Africa (1800–2000)/Gijbert Oonk.  
pages cm

Includes bibliographical references and index.

1. East Asians—Africa—History. 2. East Asians—Africa—Social conditions. 3. East Asians—Africa—Economic conditions. 4. Businesspeople—Africa—History. 5. India—Emigration and immigration—History. 6. Africa—Emigration and immigration—History. I. Title.

DT16.E17066 305.895'06—dc23 2013 2012050414

**ISBN:** 978-81-321-1054-5 (HB)

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**The SAGE Team:** Rudra Narayan, Dhurjati Sarma, Anju Saxena and Dally Varghese

**Cover Photograph:** 'A boot and a shoemaker in Nairobi around 1914'. Courtesy of the Asian Heritage Exhibition in Nairobi, Dr. S. Somjee (curator) and Akbar Hussein (archivist).

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# PREFACE

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This book grew out of an attempt to gain a better understanding of the causal factors underpinning the long-term processes of two interrelated matters: (a) the integration and assimilation particularly of outsider elite cultures into a larger society and (b) the question of why some migrant communities have economically performed better than others. By using the example of South Asians in East Africa, I was able to study these issues from a long-term perspective, that is, over a period of 150 years. To understand this perspective, I developed the concept of ‘settled strangers’, who are migrants and have been settled for three or more generations in their new locations.

The history of the South Asians in East Africa is important because it is an example of south-to-south migration, whereas most of the academic production on migration is concerned with south-to-north migration or migration within Europe or to the United States and Canada. Moreover, despite the great importance of the South Asians in East Africa in terms of economic development, the building of the Ugandan Railway, the civil service, the military, the press and the independence movement, these people are rarely mentioned in the history textbooks of the area. The South Asians in East Africa are not part of the canon of Indian history or that of East African history. This is surprising, because their numbers and their economic contribution—their political importance during the colonial days and its aftermath—may be more important than the history of the colonisers. Yet, it is the history of the colonisers that dominates the textbooks. What is more, if the South Asians are mentioned, they are seen as exploiters

or collaborators with the colonialists and part of an 'imperial diaspora'. This book is an attempt to provide some balance in the form of a history of the South Asians in East Africa through the lens of the actors themselves. By shifting from the perspective of the migrant communities (as mentioned in secondary literature and archival sources) to that of the migrants themselves (oral history), one uncovers a variety of paths of movement and interaction, and senses of space and belonging, which do not necessarily confirm the collective diasporic notions of migration. When I began this project, I assumed that the South Asians in East Africa had developed some kind of positive notion (myth or not) of the 'homeland'. Yet, as I was to find, surprisingly, this was often not the case in reality.

In attempting to understand the settled strangers, migration, South Asian history, East African history, archival sources and anthropological techniques, I benefitted from my MA and PhD studies that I so enjoyed at the Erasmus School of History, Culture and Communication. Indeed, in this work, explicit emphasis was placed on the importance of the lessons learnt from the social sciences (economy, anthropology, sociology and political sciences) for the study of history, and my training in these disciplines is reflected in this book, which combines historical and social scientific modes of analysis. On the one hand, the book aspires to do justice to historical particularities and processes. Indeed, it argues that they are the key to understanding distinct outcomes and developments in seemingly identical situations. On the other hand, however, the book recognises that purely historical narratives run a risk of being ad hoc and devoid of general insight. My hope is that this study will demonstrate that historical and social scientific analyses serve to complement, rather than act as substitutes for, each other. In addition, a long-term perspective on entrepreneurship, cultural change, political loyalties and citizenship may improve the current public debates on these matters. In general, I regard most of these debates as historical presentations

of short-term perspectives that adopt simple mono-causal explanations to describe complex issues like integration and assimilation. A more historical and multi-causal standpoint is thus needed if we are to get a better grip of these issues.



# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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I am forever grateful to have studied under the supervision of Professor Willem van Schendel, a specialist on South Asian history, in particular Bangladesh. He encouraged me to write a history from below or, more specifically, a history of ‘people without history’, as it was phrased by the late Eric Wolf. In my PhD thesis, I had focused on the history of Indian entrepreneurs and businessmen in the cotton textile industry in West India, some of whom happened to have long-term relationships with relatives in East Africa. I did not elaborate on these relationships then, because this was beyond the scope of that project. However, after completing my PhD, I decided to examine the history of the South Asians in East Africa for my next venture. My knowledge of East African history was advanced through the studies of Professor Frederique Cooper, Professor Abdul Sheriff and Professor Mahmood Mamdani, whose work set the standard as to how to write a history of Africa that is of value to the rest of the world. Moreover, Professor Ned Alpers has now become a close ‘distant’ friend who has supported me at various important stages in my career. Professor Henk Schulte Nordholt encouraged me to organise a conference in 2005 on the Indian diasporas, which inspired me to continue to adopt a comparative perspective. This conference also made me aware of how close ‘the middleman minority perspective’ from the social sciences and the approaches in the now fashionable diaspora studies are (see Chapter 1). During this conference, and in the years thereafter, Professor Mario Rutten became instrumental in encouraging more South Asian diaspora projects. Over the years, numerous colleagues have inspired me. Among them are Ned Alpers, Gareth Austen, Ned Bertz, James Brennan, Ajay Dubey,

Geoffrey Jones, Claude Markovits, Renu Modi, Irene van Staveren, Sultan H. Somjee, Zarina Patel, Veerle Vanden Daelen and Bruce Whitehouse. I was fortunate to become the Alfred Chandler Jr Fellow at Harvard in 2011–2012, and during my stay at Harvard Business School, Geoffrey Jones and Walter Friedman inspired me to bring Indian Ocean business history into the mainstream of the field. Finally, it would be remiss of me not to mention those in the Erasmus School of History, Culture and Communication (ESHCC); Maarten van Dijck, Dick Douwes, Bregje van Eekelen, Ferry de Goey, Maria Grever, Hein Klemann, Alex van Stipriaan, Karin Willemse and Ben Wubs have all engaged with me in numerous, relevant conversations and discussions over the years.

My research was made possible by the Netherlands Foundation for the Advancement of Tropical Research (WOTRO), in collaboration with the History Department of ESHCC. In 2001, the WOTRO Science for Global Development awarded me a post-doctoral fellowship, while the ESHCC allowed me to spend a year in East Africa for fieldwork. The research is based on archival as well as oral histories, and was mainly conducted in the period from 1999 to 2003, which included a year in the field between July 2002 and July 2003. In the initial stages of this project, I received invaluable support from various South Asian families, including first and foremost Bharat and Raksha Ruparelia, who have been a priceless source of information, hospitality and friendship. In addition, I was happy to meet (the now late) Manilal Dewani, the former mayor of Dar es Salaam, who was a great fount of knowledge and was known for historical detail and accuracy. Other key informants include Andy Chande, K.L. Javeri, Jasmin and Nowroch, Haider Kimjee, Bihari Tanna and Noorali Velji, along with many, many others whom I am sadly unable to name without making this list unduly long. I also often visited the Tanzania National Archives and the Zanzibar Archives. In addition, quite a few references are made to the Kenyan National Archives and the Public Record Office in London, where I saw documents from the Colonial and Foreign Offices. I was also able to obtain the publications of both



European and South Asian travellers in East Africa. I would like to thank the staff of these libraries and archives for their help and support.

In the spring of 2006, the board of directors of the Tanzanian holding company Karimjee Jivanjee & Co. decided that a business history of the firm and the family should be written. The research for this project finally began in 2007. The directors made available their business correspondence and the annual reports of various companies, and they also shared with me their invaluable business insights and experiences. In this context, I would particularly like to mention Hatim Karimjee, Latif Karimjee and Mahmood Karimjee, who all sat through a series of long and searching interviews. These are the current champions of the Karimjee Jivanjee family business, and it is very likely that some of their offspring will continue to further the family's excellent reputation. Meanwhile, Carrim A. Carrimjee shared his insights from the 'Mauritius' perspective. The Karimjee biography was published in 2009 and I was fortunate that the Netherlands Organization for Scientific Research (NWO) supported a six-month sabbatical to enable me to finalise the manuscript for the book.<sup>1</sup>

Apart from the bulk of original material, the chapters in this book include reworked, interwoven and updated versions of several published articles and conference papers. Most of these articles focus on a particular aspect of the integration and assimilation of elite cultures into wider society, for example, cultural habits, dress and religion. Others emphasise the question of why some migrant communities have economically performed better than others. By bringing these articles and arguments together, I believe that we are able to see the interrelation of the cultural, political and economic aspects of the successes and failures of settled strangers. I would like to thank the publishers of these articles for granting me permission to use the material in this book. These papers include 'Clothing Matters: Asian–African Businessmen in European Suits, 1880–1980' which is reproduced almost in its entirety in Chapter 3, 'Settling as a Cultural Process'.<sup>2</sup> Along with the changing modes

of dress and food and drink, changes in marriage patterns were important cultural aspects of how South Asians adapted in East Africa. These arguments are extracted and extensively extended from the paper 'The Changing Culture of the Hindu Lohana Community in East Africa'.<sup>3</sup> This fits in with another article 'Negotiating Hinduism in East Africa, 1860–1960' which I had written about the early days of settlement and cultural adaptation.<sup>4</sup> This has now become part of the argument about circular migration and the process of settlement. My theoretical insights greatly improved during a conference in 2005, after which we published the most important contributions in a now-renowned volume *Global Indian Diasporas: Exploring Trajectories of Migration and Theory* (2007). Two chapters, namely, the 'Introduction' and 'We Lost Our Gift of Expression: Loss of the Mother Tongue among Indians in East Africa, 1880–2000' from this publication are reproduced in this book, and build on the basic theoretical insights from that conference. Two earlier articles had set the standard for my thinking and are still useful for the debate. The first is 'South Asians in East Africa (1880–1920) with a Particular Focus on Zanzibar: Toward a Historical Explanation of Economic Success of a Middlemen Minority' and the second is 'After Shaking His Hand, Start Counting Your Fingers: Trust and Images in Indian Business Networks, East Africa 1900–2000'.<sup>5</sup> These articles have become part of a wider argument that demonstrates that the economic ties between Africa and South Asia were not self-evident, but had to be reconfirmed daily. As a consequence, some of these arguments are reproduced in Chapter 2, 'Settling as an Economic Process'. I am confident that the arguments in the context of this book will achieve even more meaning and a better understanding of the changing role (economically and culturally) of South Asians in East Africa.

In the last few lines here, I would like to thank some friends and family members who have become so important in my daily life that it is impossible for me to truly highlight how valuable they are. They have been a mirror, an example, supportive and a source of energy and love and affection. I simply do not know where to start

or end. To Gabriel Jansen, for being the white Negro in Tanzania and the best music mate I can possibly think of and Marc Gijzen for being a friend for so long and for sharing and supporting my passion for soccer, and Feyenoord in particular. I would also like to thank my children: Merlijn for asking questions, Alexander for your sense of humanity and Merel for sharing your passion (soccer) and feelings while growing up. Finally, Karin, my wife, lover and the mother of my children, I thank you for the love we live.

## Notes and References

1. Gijsbert Oonk, *The Karimjee Jivanjee Family: Merchant Princes of East Africa, 1800–2000* (Amsterdam: Pallas Publication, 2009).
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5. 'South Asians in East Africa (1880–1920) with a Particular Focus on Zanzibar: Toward a Historical Explanation of Economic Success of a Middlemen Minority', *Journal of African and Asian Studies* 5, no. 1 (2006): 57–89; 'After Shaking His Hand, Start Counting Your Fingers: Trust and Images in Indian Business Networks, East Africa 1900–2000', *Itinerario* 18, no. 3 (2004), 70–88.



# INTRODUCTION

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*Every year I receive updates of the family directories of various South Asian families. They contain a renewed list of the latest telephone numbers, email addresses and home addresses. More often than not, each family has family members that live at various places in three different continents and eight to ten different countries, including Tanzania, Kenya, Uganda, Mauritius, the United Kingdom, Canada, the United States, Australia, India, Pakistan, Dubai and others. Some family members own residencies in more than two countries, whereas others stay at only one place. Most family members are citizens of the countries where they live. Needless to say, these families are—despite internal differences—extremely well off. They are used to business class travel and their business cards show their cell phone numbers of which only the country code varies. What these families have in common is that their ancestors migrated from north-west India to East Africa in the late nineteenth century. They became successful traders and businessmen in one or two generations and eventually settled in East Africa. In due course, they left Africa as a result of the Africanisation policies, nationalisation of their assets and the expulsion of Asians by Idi Amin in 1972. Despite these backlashes, or may be because of them, they are now global players in a globalised economy.*

This book weaves around two interrelated basic and, at first sight, simple questions. The first one is: Why are some communities rich, whereas others remain poor? Of course, there are rich and poor countries, but within these countries there are huge differences between various (ethnic) communities. Examples of well-known successful business communities include Chinese traders and businessmen throughout South East Asia who dominate

various local economies in, for example, Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore. The South Asians in Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda dominate most of the wholesale trade and finance in East Africa and the Lebanese are the prevailing business community in West Africa. What these communities have in common is that have become economically dominant, while they were politically weak. Equally important are the white settlers and farmers in Zimbabwe and South Africa. But these communities were economically as well as politically important. More often than not, these 'outsider business communities' share a long social and economic history in their localities. They are major tax players and employers and they create wealth and prosperity, yet they continue to be seen as outsiders and at times even exploiters of the local economies. These groups are well-known examples of ethnic minorities that have become economically dominant. Especially within East Africa, we see that South Asian business communities have dominated the economy for decades. In trying to answer this question, I have developed a great interest in the concept of ethnic entrepreneurship and 'middleman minorities'. As it happens in an academic career, one may become the greatest criticaster of the concept one once embraced. It happened to me.<sup>1</sup>

The second question is: How, why and in what direction does the culture of a migrant community change? In the last decades, the economic, cultural and political potential and constraints of a multi-cultural society has been highly debated. Often comparisons are made between debates in Europe and North America, relating to processes of integration and assimilation. Surprisingly, the experiences of the non-Western world are mostly left out in these discussions. Surprisingly? Yes, because many colonial societies and developing countries like Brazil, India, Indonesia, East Africa and many others share a long tradition in debates about 'plural society', dual society, integration, assimilation, creolisation and cultural adaptation. They were 'multi-cultural' long before the first waves of non-Western migrants arrived in the United Kingdom, France, Netherlands and Germany and also before the debate in

the United States shifted from the notion of the 'melting pot' to a 'salad bowl'. In the 'melting pot' everyone freely (economically, politically, sociologically and sexually) mixes with each other. In the end, the importance of ethnic and racial differences disappears, while class differences and difference of preference and taste may create new social boundaries. In the 'salad bowl' we live together, but stay apart. Ethnic and racial differences produce the major differences between groups. Not only in the cultural arena (language, theatre, writings, music), but also in the economic and political areas. Intercultural marriages remain rare and economic and ethnic differences are often defined along the same line. In fact, the dichotomy 'melting pot vs salad bowl' resembles the much older dichotomy 'assimilation vs pluralism'.<sup>2</sup>

In addition, most of the debates on multi-cultural societies are framed around the perspectives of the states. They welcome specific migrants and refuse others, they define the rules of integration and they develop the legal options and constraints. However, in this book, I argue that there is a need to study 'cultural change' as a local 'bottom-up' process. Local in the sense of a well-defined geographical and historical area and 'bottom-up' in the sense that we choose to take the perspective of the 'agent', the one who changes, adapts, mixes, integrates or assimilates. By taking this perspective, we may gather a view of how the range of choices is defined by the actors of change themselves. This may provide us with insights into the 'economic', 'cultural' and 'political' agenda of individuals as well as groups in a fast-changing economic, cultural and political setting. By taking the perspective of agents, we are encouraged to describe the constraints, limits, options and ideals of living together or living apart between groups as defined by them. We are also able to highlight differences in attitudes within groups and even families.

To study these two questions more narrowly and empirically, I decided to focus on the history of the South Asians in East Africa. This is an interesting example for five diverse reasons:

1. South Asians in East Africa are written out of history. They do not play an important part in the textbooks on Tanzanian, Kenyan and Ugandan history. In fact, if they are mentioned at all, they are seen as a part of people who were expelled and did not play an important part in the national histories. Furthermore, they are not part of the Indian national history as they migrated before India became independent. Finally, they are not part of the European colonial history, except for being 'middlemen' who could be employed for the colonial projects. However, they are not pictured as people who had their own agenda and their own strategies. In fact, the concept of middleman is Eurocentric in this context. In the eyes of many South Asian traders, the European colonisers were the ideal middleman between them and the European markets. Needless to say, I do not agree with these views.
2. The migration of South Asians to East Africa is a transcontinental migration, that is between the South Asian subcontinent and Africa. A migration between continents often emphasises stronger cultural contrasts between migrants and local societies than that within a continent. Differences in language, writing, religion, food habits, marriage patterns, and so on, are less easy to bridge. There may be a stronger tendency to reproduce the original culture in a 'strange' society, instead of slowly assimilating into a culturally 'more similar' society. The history of the South Asians in East Africa provides us with an interesting contrast with the more popular migration pattern within a continent.
3. The history of the migration of South Asians includes migration patterns within the colonial era as well as the post colonial era. In the colonial area, the migrants came as free migrants and indentured labourers to Trinidad, Fiji, Malaysia, Mauritius and East Africa. In the post-colonial period, the migrants from East Africa were forced



to migrate to Europe and North America and became 'twice migrants'.<sup>3</sup> This research focuses on South–South migration (from India to East Africa) as well as South–North migration (from East Africa to the United Kingdom, Canada, the United States and other places). In general, the bulk of migration studies focuses on the migration within continents, such as the migration of Mexicans to the United States or the Polish migrants in Europe.<sup>4</sup> A second stream of literature focuses on the South–North migrations, from non-Western countries to Western countries, albeit including the problems and prospects of a multi-cultural society.<sup>5</sup>

4. The focus is on families whose predecessors migrated more than a century ago. This implies that we include experiences of fourth, fifth, or further generation migrants. Are they still considered to be migrants? Have they become 'locals' or not? And why? This generational perspective shows us how the original culture changes in a new environment and why. Which cultural identity markers are tough and sturdy and which are more fluid and flexible? From this long-term perception, we get insights into the stubbornness of trans-generational cultural change. This includes the processes of acculturation, assimilation and integration.<sup>6</sup>
5. Depending upon how twice, thrice and further migrants negotiate their community and family networks and their local embeddedness, they may develop into transnational families and communities. They live in two or more different countries. Different family members have different passports and/or national identities. This may offer a suitable escape if local policies towards minorities deteriorate or economic opportunities decline. Moreover, it provides these families with access to education, health care and jobs in various parts of the world. This is a real economic and professional advantage for those who have access to these global networks. They have become world citizens.<sup>7</sup>

A significant part of the Asians in East Africa have settled for more than three generations—or even longer—in their new countries. Therefore, they are an ideal group to study the balance between the processes of integration and assimilation. In this book, I have labelled them ‘settled strangers’. Settled strangers are migrants who have settled for three or more generations in their new locations. They did not migrate themselves, but their (great or great-great) grandparents did. Many of them see themselves not as migrants, but as ‘settlers’. Often they have acquired local citizenships; however, in the eyes of the locals or ‘natives’ they often remain ‘strangers’. They are ‘insiders’ and ‘outsiders’ in one and the same time. They are insiders, because they know the local language, the local cultural and political habits and the local peculiarities. They are aware of the dos and don’ts and over the generations they have made a living in an initially unfamiliar environment. This is the place where they were born and raised and dream to raise their children and grandchildren. They are born in an environment which, for them, is not strange, but they are perceived as ‘strangers’.

At the same time, however, the ‘natives’, the state or they themselves see them as outsiders. Settled strangers may have different coloured skin, they may speak a different language at home and they may be reluctant to intermarry with ‘native’ population. They are often excluded from specific rights, such as voting rights; they are not allowed to hold certain jobs (the higher ranks in the government or military service) and they often have no rights to own land. States and ‘natives’, at times, question whether the political and economic loyalty of settled strangers is ‘local’ or ‘overseas’. Recurring issues are the question of taking up local citizenship, the question of whether they reinvest profits in local industries or ‘abroad’ and the question of ‘local assimilation’, often defined along marriage patterns (within their own group or with outsiders). Often the suggestion is, to say the least, that ‘strangers’ will not take up local citizenship, because they want to have an ‘escape’. And if they take up local citizenship, they will do so because they

'profit' from it; they use it for their 'personal gains' and not to 'serve the country'. The question of reinvesting profits locally is mostly disputed along the lines of 'exploitation' and selfishness and not along the lines of 'rational entrepreneurship and objective choices'.

The settled strangers constantly have to deal with these notions of the (colonial) state and local citizens. Even after three or four generations of running local trading companies and spending money on charities, temples, mosques, local education, hospitals, dispensaries and what not, they find that it is never enough to be accepted as locally loyal. They will always be seen as outsiders. 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.<sup>8</sup>

The ambivalence of natives and the state eventually explains why settled strangers themselves remain ambivalent towards their local habitat as well. Because of the sometimes-hostile political and economic atmosphere, it is often very rational to keep business and family ties with other countries open. In fact, these transnational ties (which are much broader than the ties with the 'motherland') often become a vital factor in the historical development of the settled strangers. This book will focus on one such group of 'settled strangers', the South Asians in East Africa. These settled strangers settled voluntarily in East Africa but were forced to migrate and became 'twice migrants'.<sup>9</sup> They eventually settled in the United Kingdom, United States, Canada and a few in India. They became transnational migrants and eventually developed into transnational Asian African elite.

The general argument of the book is based on two interrelated basic principles. The first principle is that history is not the 'outcome' of a process, but it is 'the process'. In other words, migration, for example, is not seen as the result of 'push and pull' factors.<sup>10</sup> But, it is the consequence of series of decisions taken during the migration process. These series of decisions included various

options that were considered, but did not materialise. These options include questions such as: Do we really have to migrate? If so, where and when? Are we taking parents and/or children as well or do they come later? Do we sell our properties back home or do we keep them? These questions and other options are discussed in this book as well. This includes, for example, the processes of circular migration, temporary migration and the decision not to settle, but to go back or further.

Most of us are aware that many difficult decisions are a matter of 'coin flip'. That is why they are difficult! As we cannot know the future, we do not know what to expect. Nevertheless, later on, we may argue why we had to migrate (or not). In general, archives and primary data deal with the outcome (facts and figures) of the migration process. Therefore, in historical records and interviews, the process of decision-making—the variety of other options—is not uncovered. In this book, I try to reveal the decision-making process rather than the outcome of the process. I emphasise that many South Asian migrants came to Zanzibar between 1880 and 1920, but only a few were able to make a living and fewer became part of the international elite. Later on, the successful migrants became the elite and started to accentuate their business skills, hard work and the way they used to make calculated risks. However, I emphasise that they are part of the 'natural' outcome of a 'trial and error' process.

The second principle is that of 'trial and error'. The course of decision making is dynamic and changing all the time, but even after the choice is made, for example, to migrate and settle in a particular area, the social and historical process does not stop. If migrants have decided to settle and start their own business, this does not mean that they eventually succeed in doing so. Some do, others don't. Again, even if you are well prepared, setting up a business abroad is a process of 'trial and error'. And again, many decisions are of 'coin flip' type. In the end, some succeed, while others fail. Policy makers, sociologists and historians always look at those who are successful and ask themselves why this is so. But

the answers are often seen without the process of trial and error being taken into account, especially the failures. In other words, they fall into the trap of 'teleological' explanations.

The outstanding business success of South Asians in East Africa, for example, is sometimes contrasted with the poor economic performance of Africans. A main argument used to explain the performance of Asians in East Africa is that 'outsiders' are in a better position to enact their business context. They use their ethnic resources, such as kinship, business skills, networks and educational experiences to raise capital and management capacity in a far more profitable way than their African counterparts. Therefore, it is suggested that Africans should improve their networking capabilities, level of education and indigenous information flows.<sup>11</sup> Development through education may be an important and useful recommendation for the progress of the local African business capacity. Nevertheless, it is my argument that explaining the economic success of the Asians and Africans in East Africa 'without history' and without emphasising Asian 'failures' is, unfortunately, a common inaccuracy of economists, sociologists and anthropologists. In other words, the recommendation may be right, but the analysis is not.

In short, we may see the development of successful Asian business families as the outcome of a 'trickling down' process. This book aims at describing the 'trickle down' process from its broad start to its narrow outcome. But contrary to most of the other research, we do not start with the outcome, but with the dynamics from the beginning, including a long process of trial and error (see Chapter 2 for further information).

However, it is not enough to explain economic and cultural changes as the outcome of a value-free process of 'trial and error' without boundaries of power and influence. Therefore, it is useful to determine the 'structure' of 'trial and error'. In other words, within the process of 'trial and error', which factors determine the chances of becoming a 'failure' or a 'winner'? Let us look at the various phases of the 'trickle down' process.

In the first phase, South Asians in Gujarat are informed about the economic prospects in East Africa, somewhere in the late nineteenth century. Many must have heard about Africa, but for others Africa was literally not heard of. The latter group would never decide to travel to Africa, whereas from the first group only a tiny percentage may discuss the option of visiting Africa. Even a smaller percentage may decide to go. Depending on the local situation (business opportunities, the number of sons, marriage scenarios), the eldest member of a South Asian family may send one of his sons to East Africa to explore the options and possibilities there (second phase). In the third phase, these sons arrive in East Africa, work there for while in an uncle's shop and/or come back, after some time, with some cargo to trade with East Africa. In other cases, they may work for an Indian firm in Zanzibar or the East African Coast. This phase may repeat itself several times (circular migration). During the process of circular migration, some sons (or families) may decide to continue the process because it is profitable, while others may stop for various reasons (economy, marriage, continuation in India, etc.). In the fourth phase, some of the Asians who took part in the process of circular migration may decide to settle in East Africa and build a business there. The firms that remain well settled and profitable (not necessarily the largest or richest ones) for the 'longue duree' continue to stay in Africa. However, this is not the end of the process of migration and settlement. In fact, a whole new area begins. In this book, I argue that a significant number of businesses failed within the first two years. Only a small number of Asians who started a business in East Africa survived for more than 10 years. Most of them would return to India, others moved on to South Africa and some would remain in East Africa working for other South Asian firms. More often than not, the process of settlement is affirmed when they decide to bring their wives and other family members to East Africa. Last but not least, a small selection of these settlers would remain in East Africa for more than one generation.

This process—described as the trickle down process of five phases—has repeated itself over and over. There was a growing number of Asians in East Africa that eventually settled in East Africa, especially between 1880 and 1920. They were supplemented with a growing number of civil servants, clerks, teachers and other white collar professionals. In addition, a number of indentured labourers were recruited to build the Ugandan Railway. Here again, many South Asian arrived as temporary migrants and a few had eventually settled with their families in East Africa. (See appendix for numbers.)

Most research on Asians in East Africa in the last two decades has focused on this small selection of settlers. They will start with the story of ‘the founding’ father, the first person in the family who sailed the Indian Ocean from India to East Africa and eventually settled in the black continent. *We Came in Dhows* is the title of the famous trilogy of the Italian settler and anthropologist Cynthia Salvadori. This book has become an important identity marker of the South Asian community in East Africa. The South Asian settlers are described as men with courage and the will to survive. They came in dhows (a wooden sailing ship) with nothing more than their names, very little money and their will to make it. It was the first written record for a larger non-academic audience. The title refers to the beginning of the migrant’s story of many South Asians in East Africa. By focusing, however, on those families who survived the process of circular migration, those who survived in business and those who did not leave the country (or returned) after the expulsion of Asians in the early 1970s, this type of research is biased with successful settled strangers.<sup>12</sup>

The little research that has been done on Asians in East Africa habitually starts with the ‘survivors’, those who are still there and did not leave the country. These survivors shared a long history in East Africa. They are, by definition, successful migrants. Therefore, the economic ‘success stories’ of Asians became predominant, especially in research that was based on oral history. They were—in their own words—self-made business families

whose success stories started with the arrival of the 'founding father' of the family. As a result of their hard work, integrity and community networks and by using their instinct and entrepreneurial business skills, he and his descendants moved from poor migrants to self-employed businessmen and some even to high-class business tycoons. This book is an attempt to put these success stories in perspective.

I started this introduction with two basic questions. The first question is: Why are some communities rich, whereas others remain poor? The second question is: How, why and in what direction does the culture of a migrant community change? In the following five chapters, I will try to answer these questions by focusing on the history of South Asians in East Africa from 1800 to 2000. Nevertheless, I assume that there is some relevance in this story for other small migrant business communities in world history, especially the Chinese in South East Asia, the Lebanese in West Africa and the Armenian diaspora as well as the Indian trading diaspora outside East Africa.

In Chapter 1, the concept of the 'settled stranger' is introduced. This concept is an important tool in describing and explaining the range of choices, options and constraints the Asian migrants faced in the process of settling in East Africa. In addition, as we will see, the term refers to migrants that had stayed for three or more generations in East Africa. Therefore, the concept is useful to describe a process of social and cultural change through three or more generations, in terms of changing food habits, dress habits, marriage patterns, and so on. The concept refers to several 'ancestors' in the historiography of the migrant communities, most notably the concept of the 'stranger' of the German sociologist George Simmel. In addition, it refers to the concept of the 'middleman minority' as described by Edna Bonacich. And, last but not least, it focuses on the notion of social and cultural capital as put forward by Pierre Bourdieu and others. These concepts do have some striking similarities with the currently highly popular concept of diaspora, despite having been emerged in different historiographies. In the



last paragraph of this chapter, the focus is on sources and methods of studying the history of settled strangers, who eventually emerge as global elite.

In Chapters 2, 3 and 4, three categories of settling as a process are emphasised: economic factors, cultural factors and political factors. However, I realise that these factors cannot be separated from each other. More often than not, these factors are interrelated. For example, we may accept the position that South Asian families migrated from South Asia to East Africa for mainly economic reasons. Nevertheless, for many Hindu families in South Asia, the fact that many other Hindus families had migrated earlier than them was encouraging, especially when they heard that some had opened vegetarian restaurants in East Africa. Another example: In Chapter 4, I emphasise the political emancipation of South Asians in East Africa and how they tried to convince the colonial government of their economic contributions to the continent. Here again, the categories of settling are combined and cannot be seen as fully separated. Nevertheless, for the sake of clarity and presentation it seems to be useful to present them in separate chapters, as far as possible.

Chapter 2 focuses on the migration process related to 'economic' factors. Nevertheless, it starts with a common misleading notion in the construction of the founding father. The starting point of most migration research is the migrant or his or her successors. They will provide oral narratives of the struggles, push and pull factors and setbacks, but overall they present stories of migration, settling and staying. Therefore, we tend to neglect the stories of the migrants who did not make it, and moved on to other places or went back to their areas of origin. In the case of Asian migrants in East Africa, this fallacy has evolved into a popular myth in many Asian families, that of the 'founding father', that is the forefather who came in a dhow, worked hard, was successful and eventually settled in East Africa. In this chapter, we complement these success stories with narratives of failures and bankruptcies and a process of 'trial and error' in which some families survived and did well,

whereas others were not so fortunate and went back to South Asia. To some extent, South Asia remained a safety net for those who did not make it. Therefore, it is not surprising that those who settled in East Africa were doing well by definition. In this chapter, the emergence of the myth of the founding father is supplemented by not very much known failure stories, South Asian families who left East Africa almost empty handed, who failed to set up a trading business or who went bankrupt after being successful for a while.

Chapter 3 highlights the process of 'cultural' change and adaptation of settled strangers. In this chapter, I focus on the changing South Asian culture in an East African (colonial) context from the perspective of the settlers themselves. Therefore the process of and, at times, struggle for cultural change is not seen as part of a national or colonial debate on the emergence of a multi-cultural society, but rather from the perspective of the migrants. Moreover, we focus on the change and adaptation of culture from a long-term perspective through three or more generations. The chapter emphasises four areas of cultural change and adaptation: (a) First, we look at the changing food and drinking habits, most notably the growing acceptance of eating meat and drinking liquor (especially relevant for Hindus). (b) In addition, we focus on the changing marriage pattern, specifically the transition from importing the brides from India to the emphasis on South Asian women raised in East Africa. (c) Furthermore, this chapter highlights the changing dress habits, especially the emergence and acceptance of the European business suit. The acceptance of European clothes is often an indicator of 'progressive' or 'Western ideas', but I will argue that they also have to be seen as a critique of their own culture. (d) Finally, this chapter underlines the emergence of English as the second language of Asian Africans, and, in the last generation, even as the first language. All these factors have paved the way for Asian Africans to become transnational business elite.

Chapter 4 emphasises the political process of settling and, paradoxically, unsettling. Here, I argue that the physical and economic security of Asians in East Africa depended largely on their relation

with the state and its rulers. Often they were invited by Arab rulers to settle in East Africa. Nevertheless, Asians in East Africa always realised that rulers may change their ideas and loyalties. Especially the colonial rulers as well as a part of the rulers and officials of the independent African states could be very ambivalent towards the role of Asian traders and financiers. Therefore, South Asian businessmen were quick to organise themselves and plead their wishes, grievances and ideas in pamphlets and formal political proposals. At the same time, they focused on markets and business options outside East Africa, partly because this could be profitable, but also to diversify their income and not having to rely only on East African assets. Most Asians in East Africa were aware that they were seen as outsiders by the state as well as a large part of the society; therefore—for those who could afford it—it was reasonable to keep an option for escape because their properties and physical safety could not be guaranteed anymore. Earlier, the Indian government had made it clear that the Indians in diaspora should rely on the local government and not on India. Later on, we are aware that the worst-case scenario did indeed happen when Idi Amin expelled all the Asians from Uganda. The Kenyan and Tanzanian governments responded in a less-aggressive manner. Nevertheless, both nationalised an important part of industries and buildings that belonged to the Asian business community in East Africa. Many Asians did not need further messages from the state and they left East Africa. Others, however, stayed and were confident that one day their luck would turn. In the 1980s and 1990s, the situation eased. However, only a few South Asians returned and resettled, because by then most of them had made their fortunes in the United Kingdom, Canada and the United States. They had become part of a transnational South Asian African trading community.

Chapter 5, which is the last chapter, is more than a summary and conclusion. It is foremost a quest for interdisciplinary research from below. As has been made clear in this introduction, I firmly believe in the interweaving of economic, cultural and political aspects of migrants. In addition, I emphasise the importance of a

history from below, that is from the perspective of the migrants themselves. This presents us with a broader and more complete picture of migration, next to the perspective of the state. More importantly, however, this book narrates the story of a group of people who are not presented in the national histories of the school books in East Africa. They are also not part of the national history of India and, last but not least, they do not tend to write their own history. They belong not to any nation, but to many nations, but they are not recorded in the national histories of these countries. Therefore, it is a history of a group of people that have emerged in a globalised world and a globalised economy with their feet in three different continents, South Asia, Africa and Europe. They share a triple heritage that made their adaption to the globalised world successful. For them, it is not a big deal whether the world economy turns towards the East or the West. They can deal with it.

## Notes and References

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3. The term 'twice migrants' is coined by Parminder Bhachu, *Twice Migrants: East African Sikh Settlers in Britain* (London and New York: Tavistock Publication, 1985).
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5. Pnina Werbner and Tariq Modood, *Debating Cultural Hybridity: Multi-cultural Identities and the Politics of Anti-racism* (London: Zed Books, 1997); Tariq Modood, *Multicultural Politics: Racism, Ethnicity and Muslims in Britain* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007).

6. For some recent debates related to these issues, see Nikos Papastergiadis, *The Turbulence of Migration: Globalization, Deterritorialization and Hybridity* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2000); Jan Nederveen Pieterse, *Ethnicities and Global Multiculture: Pants for an Octopus* (London: Rowman & Littlefield, 2007).
7. Steven Vertovec, *Transnationalism* (New York: Routledge, 2009).
8. Mahmood Mamdani in his inaugural lecture 'When does a Settler become a Native? Reflections on the Colonial Roots of Citizenship in Equatorial and South Africa' on 13 May 1998 at the University of Cape Town, South Africa.
9. Bhachu, *Twice Migrants*.
10. For a detailed case study on the process of migration, see Michiel Baas, 'Imagined Mobility: Migration and Transnationalism among Indian Students in Australia' (PhD Thesis, University of Amsterdam, 2009). On the macro level, neo-Marxists developed a centre-periphery model of the global development of capitalism. Here, the focus is on the changing push and pull factors, which determined the causes of South Asian migration. The emergence of an imbalanced regional economic development may have hampered, hindered or promoted migration. G. Frank, *Capitalism and Underdevelopment in Latin America: Historical Studies of Chile and Brazil* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1967); I. Wallerstein, 'The Rise and Future Demise of World Capitalist System: Concepts for Comparative Analysis', *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 16, no. 4 (1974): 387-415; S. Amin, *Unequal Development: An Essay on the Social Formations of Peripheral Capitalism* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1976).
11. Stein Kristiansen and Anne Ryen, 'Enacting their Business Environments: Asian Entrepreneurs in East Africa', *African and Asian Studies* 1, no. 3 (2002): 165-86.
12. Cynthia Salvadori, *We Came in Dhows* (Nairobi: Paperchase Kenya Limited, 1996). Needless to say that despite my critical remarks, this book is still an important hallmark in the historiography of Asians in East Africa and it plays, until now, an important role in the emancipation of Asians in East Africa.



## CHAPTER ONE

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# SETTLED STRANGERS: FROM MIDDLEMEN MINORITIES TO WORLD CITIZENS

*In 2007, I spent some time in London visiting the trading office of a South Asian family that had settled there. I visited the trading office in the financial district once a week. Usually, I sat next to the director watching him making phone calls, writing emails and instructing his secretaries. He was born in East Africa but had joined the London office in the 1960s. His son was born and raised in London. In fact, I was sitting at the desk of his son, who had just opened an office in Dubai. The father happened to phone his son at least once a day to enquire about the daily affairs and coach him in running the Dubai business. In this case, they ship vegetables from various places in the Indian Ocean region to destinations in East Asia, East Africa and western Europe. They never own the cargo, but they finance the shipment. The bulk of the trade is agricultural products.*

What we see here is very interesting, because it includes 200 years of history and experience: (a) They still trade in agricultural products in which they have more than 120 years of experience. They know how to discuss the varieties and their quality and also the various names of the products in various languages. (b) The family still uses its own sons to open new trading branches in emerging markets or profitable places, such as Dubai. Their

forefather migrated from north-west India to East Africa in 1820. Eventually, he and his family settled in East Africa and had lived there for more than five generations. During the expulsion of Asians from East Africa in the late 1960s and early 1970s, the majority of the family members left the African continent and built new homes in Canada, the United States, the United Kingdom, France, Belgium, Germany, Mauritius, Sri Lanka, and Pakistan, but some members are still active in East Africa. In fact, the mother company is still based in Dar es Salaam. Some family members hold dual citizenship and the family always has someone who bears a passport of one of these countries. Interestingly, none of them have settled in Gujarat, the area where they came from, but one part of the family settled in Karachi, albeit before partition. This raises questions about the reasons and results of the migration from the South Asian subcontinent to East Africa. They migrated a second time from East Africa to the rest of the world and became part of the South Asian diaspora. At present, they own businesses in various parts of the world and they act like a 'family multinational'. They have evolved from migrants (strangers) to settled strangers, and during the process they became part of the South Asian diaspora. Now, they are world citizens. That is, they are settled and strangers almost everywhere they go. They now belong to the jet set of business class travellers, owning second and third homes in two or three continents and having family members in at least three continents. The business card of some of the family members shows us the name and three identical mobile phone numbers, with only the country code being different.

In this chapter, I emphasise the emerging interest in the concept of the stranger, the middlemen minority and diaspora studies from a historical and sociological perspective. Interestingly, most of the literature is ahistorical, that is, it does not explain 'change over time', but it tends to discuss its notions and definitions from 'essentialist' point of view.



## The Stranger

This sociological concept of the 'stranger' has its origins in the nineteenth century German sociology, notably that of Simmel and Sombart.<sup>1</sup> Simmel argued that migrant traders who decided to settle in their host societies remain 'strangers'. In his work, the stranger is contrasted with a wanderer, who comes today and goes tomorrow. The stranger, however, comes today and stays tomorrow. He is locally known, but remains an outsider. This might help him in developing his business. On the one hand, strangers may fill economic niches that local business communities were not allowed to, like selling liquor. On the other hand, they develop a more detached attitude towards the local markets, which may help them to set prices at a more profitable rate.<sup>2</sup> Last, but not least, the stranger was aware of the prices elsewhere and he was able to exploit this knowledge profitably. In other words, Simmel stressed the advantage the 'stranger' had in commercial transactions in terms of 'objectivity'.<sup>3</sup>

Some scholars, most notably Edna Bonacich, noticed that some of these 'outsider communities' or 'strangers' were economically very successful in contrast with most migrant communities or ethnic minorities. She especially refers to, among others, Jews in Europe, Chinese in South East Asia, Lebanese in West Africa and South Asians in East Africa. Bonacich seeks to explain the success of these groups as a result of the orientation of the immigrants towards their place of residence, with sojourning at first, and later a 'stranger' orientation affecting the solidarity and economic activity of the ethnic group. The 'sojourner orientation' refers to a temporary settlement of the strangers, in order to trade. What is significant here is that the trader returns often enough to get along locally, while remaining an outsider. The 'stranger orientation' differs in the sense that the sojourner has become a settler, most notably by inviting his family to stay with him. Nevertheless, he remains an outsider because he does not intermarry locally and

keeps his associations with his family and community members back home. These in turn arouse the hostility of the host society, which perpetuates a reluctance to assimilate completely and therefore reinforces the 'stranger' status.<sup>4</sup>

Christine Dobbin and others build upon the work of Bonacich and Simmel by arguing that stranger minorities were successful entrepreneurs especially because of their minority status. Their minority status induces major social suffering as they face all kinds of discrimination, such as not being allowed to own land or to hold certain jobs. Hence, they develop a strong motivation to show that they can become successful.<sup>5</sup> At the same time, they are free to trade or deal with anyone, whereas the local elite groups may feel that they will lose their status by dealing with masses. In some societies, they act as a buffer for the elites, bearing the brunt of mass hostility, because they directly deal with the latter.

In addition, Gallagher and Robinson argue that because of their minority status, some local business communities were suitable middlemen to support the colonial empires abroad. Because of the fact that these businessmen belong to non-majority groups, many colonial governments supported these groups as their local suppliers, translators, informants and so forth. In this way, these groups are often seen as 'collaborators' in the Marxist as well as nationalist historiographies.<sup>6</sup> The business success of South Asians in East Africa has elements in common with the achievement of aliens elsewhere in the world. Factors highlighted in this literature include access to capital, knowledge of markets, community support and a superior (as compared with local groups) 'business mind'.<sup>7</sup>

Here, it may be important to highlight the fact that the concept of middleman minorities in this literature tends to be Eurocentric. The Asians are seen as the intermediary between the Europeans and the Africans. Yes, Asians depended on the European rulers for their trading licences, tax exemptions and the building of educational institutions. At the same time, however, the Europeans depended on the Asians to carry out the functions of the civil

services, pay taxes and explore trading opportunities that were difficult to exploit for the Europeans, such as inland trade and agricultural products. For the Europeans, Asians were the middlemen partners between the local producers and themselves. For the Asians, Europeans were the middlemen between themselves and the European markets.

Some strangers maintain close ties with their region of origin. They may still trade with the region or return for family occasions (marriage, childbirth and funerals). These reunions reinforce the links with the so-called roots. If trading families are spread over two or more distant regions, we may speak of a trading diaspora. Though the concept of diaspora has become increasingly popular since the 1990s, here I would like to confine myself to two inter-related issues: (a) the early definitions of the concept of a trading diaspora and (b) the striking similarities with the notion of middlemen minorities.

Abner Cohen may be the first one to coin the term 'trading diaspora'. He refers to 'a type of social grouping':

Its members are culturally distinct from both their society of origin and from the societies among which they live. Its organisation combines stability of structure, but allows a high degree of mobility of personnel. It has an informal political organisation of its own which takes care of stability of order within the one community, and the coordination of activities of its various member communities in their perpetual struggle against external pressure. (...) It also has its own institutions of general welfare and social security. In short a diaspora is a nation of socially interdependent, but spatially dispersed communities.<sup>8</sup>

As Cohen stresses the importance of the political organisation of the overseas community, the world historian Phillip Curtin emphasised the relation of cross-cultural traders with their hosts and with each other, and the way they organised cross-cultural trade.<sup>9</sup> In the 1990s, the concept of 'diaspora' expanded beyond trade and its primary focus was on the Jewish diaspora. Part of

the discussion was related to the question 'what is a diaspora' and another angle focused on the issue 'who is a diaspora'. The field broadened almost to the extent that every migrant became part of a diaspora.<sup>10</sup> Here, it is important to focus on the 'checklist' of Robin Cohen on the problem of 'what is a diaspora'. We will see that the two paradigms 'middlemen minority' and 'trade diaspora' come together in the work of the earlier-mentioned Edna Bonacich.

Robin Cohen has produced the most comprehensive definition (or checklist) related to the question of what a diaspora is. He argues that a diaspora refers to a particular kind of migration. Most scientists agree that at least a few of the following characteristics are crucial to describing a diaspora: (a) Dispersal from the original homeland to two or more countries. The causes for the dispersal may vary from traumatic experiences, as was the case with the Jews, or the African slaves, to search for work, pursuit of trade or other ambitions. (b) There must be a collective—often-idealised—memory/myth of the homeland. In some cases there is a commitment to create and/or maintain this homeland, as in the case with some Sikhs and their efforts to create an independent Khalistan, or the Jews and their relation with Israel. (c) A myth of return to the homeland (be it now or in the future, temporary or permanent). This myth is grounded in a strong ethnic group consciousness of migrants abroad and therefore may have prevented them from assimilating in the local society. (d) There is a sense of empathy and solidarity with similar groups elsewhere in the world and/or with events and groups in the homeland.<sup>11</sup> Diaspora is a term used today to describe practically any population that is considered 'de-territorialised' or 'transnational', whose cultural origins are said to have arisen in a land other than the one in which they currently reside and whose social, economic and political networks cross the borders of nation states and, indeed, span the globe.<sup>12</sup>

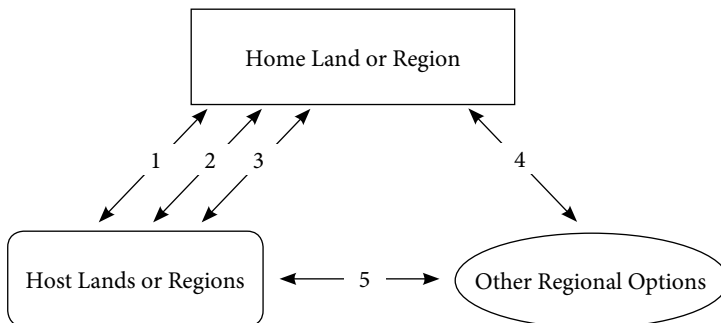
The ideas of Bonacich are related to relations 'between ethnic groups', with a special focus on minorities who occupy an intermediate rather than a low status. Her model includes some variables

that became highly debated in the more recent discussion about the concept of diaspora. As her work became a standard footnote, the importance of some of her ideas may have been faded or even disappeared. Here, I would like to reintroduce and alter her model a little in order to bring ‘business history’, the history of middlemen minorities, and the ‘diaspora discourse’ together. The most striking feature is definitively the ‘triadic relationship’ between—in the words of Steven Vertovec: “(a) globally dispersed people, yet collectively self-identified ethnic groups; (b) the territorial states and contexts where such groups resides; and (c) the homeland states and context whence they or their forebears came.”<sup>13</sup>

The triadic relationships of the people in diaspora, denoted by arrows 1 to 5 in Figure 1.1, are explained as follows:

1. Many middlemen minorities start as ‘unsettled settlers’ or sojourners, who do not plan to settle permanently. This is in contrast with those who are forced to migrate (for example, African slaves in the New World). These sojourners show a strong tendency towards thrift and concentration, that is, the willingness to suffer ‘short-term’ deprivation to improve in the ‘long term’. This is shown in the readiness

**FIGURE 1.1 Triadic Relationships of Peoples in Diaspora**



Source: Gijsbert Oonk and Lot to Design.

to put in long hours, work hard and save money. They are there to make money, not to spend it. They do invest in 'liquid' ventures that may be sold easily, but not in long-term projects such as factories and machines, which may be written off in more than 10 years. This orientation is often contrasted with that of settlers and natives who are more interested in long-term investments and generally wish to spend more on their local environment and consumption. Therefore, there is a strong tendency to retain cultural values and pillars of the homeland as much as possible. They will marry within their own groups, preferably back home. Finding a marriage partner in the homeland is often one of the key factors to re-establish contact with the homeland.

2. However, if the socio-economic situation in the homeland changes for worse, they may opt to settle more permanently in their host country and region. This will change some of the attitudes mentioned above. Settlement increases the interest in local development. This may include basic themes like schooling for children, the quality and attractiveness of houses they live in, and the hours of labour and the rate of return. If the stay is not temporary anymore (whether imagined or not), one may opt for holidays or a day off, or work less hours a week. For marriages and cultural orientation the homeland may still be important, but there is a growing tendency to orient to local 'reproductions' of that homeland culture.
3. By the same token, if the socio-economic situation in the host country or region is favourable compared to that of the homeland, the tendency to settle permanently is higher. However, the cultural factor is important as well. The way sojourners and settlers are received by the host region may have some impact on their 'settlement decision'. The friendlier the host region is, the easier is the decision. Despite this, many migrants do not wish to return home

easily as a result of cultural traits or racism. They often form highly organised communities, which resist assimilation; they opt for residential self-segregation and the establishment of community schools, where they are taught in their own language. They develop a strong resistance to intermarriage.

4 and 5. These arrows indicate the option of another host land or region. In the nineteenth century, most migrants did not 'choose' between very different options. As mentioned earlier, they were part of a 'culture of sojourning' that eventually evolved in settling or returning. This process of settling is often seen as a part of chain-migration where someone sends his first or second son to a family or community member abroad to explore business opportunities (for the range of push and pull factors included in this process, see Chapter 3). If this is successful, he may invite his family (father, brothers and others) to come over and settle down there. In some cases, they decide to settle only a part of the family, either to keep the options more open or to facilitate business and trade in two continents within one family.

Some communities settled only temporarily (this may vary from some decades to several generations) in their new host lands. In course of time they may decide (or be forced) to move on. Again, some may decide to go back to their original homeland, but this is not always an option (for political or economic reasons). Others decide to find their luck elsewhere. They become the so-called 'twice migrants' (or, in case this continues, thrice migrants, etc.).<sup>14</sup> In this model, three geographical locations (homeland, host land and other regions) are options for migration and settlement. It includes decisive variables that are important in the debate about diaspora, in particular, the importance of the myth of the homeland, the reproduction of the original culture abroad and the ambivalent relation with the members of the host land.

## The Settled Stranger

Simmel's construction of the 'stranger' may be appreciated for its sensibility and predicament of the stranger. Nevertheless, his work shows arguable dichotomies, such as 'modern traditional', 'insider outsider' and 'us and them'. The description of Simmel that contrasted the stranger with a wanderer, who comes today and goes tomorrow, leaves us with a far-reaching question: How long does the wanderer have to stay to become a stranger? Obviously long enough to be locally known and, more or less, be accepted as a trader. But how long does this take? A year? Ten years? A generation? Three or more generations? In the examples given by Simmel, Sombart and Bonacich, there is hardly any room for historical explanations for the economic performance of strangers. Despite this, the minority groups they describe, the Jews in Europe, Chinese in South East Asia and South Asians in East Africa, share a long history in their region of settlement. From an economic perspective, therefore, it is important to define the conversion from 'wanderer to stranger'.

The conversion from 'wanderer to stranger', that is, from temporary outsider salesman to permanent migrant trader and finally to 'settled stranger' (even more permanent trader) can be seen from three different perspectives: the perspective of the state, the perspective of the society and the perspective of the settled strangers themselves. In this section, I focus on the perspectives of the state and the society. Most parts of the primary results of this book (from Chapter 3 onwards) can be seen as the perspective of the settled strangers.

In this book, by 'settled strangers' I refer to the migrant traders who have stayed for at least three generations in their new environment. Members of the second generation are born, raised and buried (Muslims) or cremated (Hindus) in East Africa. By the third generation, the grandparents have only vague memories of the 'old homeland'. These settled strangers have run their businesses, had jobs and paid taxes and were economically bound to the place



of settlement. They tended to reinvest in the region and spend time and money on local charities and organisations. Often, they acquired local citizenship. All this would make them 'settled' as any other 'local'. Nevertheless, they remain 'strangers' in the view of local Africans, Europeans and many other observers. Often, they barely speak the local language. Like any other group, they tend to reproduce their own culture (religion, marriage, food, dress habits and language) as much as possible, albeit adapting to a changing African environment.<sup>15</sup> In the Western world, the 'stranger' has become 'modern' in the sense that he negotiates between cultures and bridges cultural differences. The stranger has become an important factor in negotiating differences—a key character of multi-cultural societies.

From a state's perspective, it is important to define the rights and duties of the settled stranger and whether it is applicable to define the stranger as a full citizen. But even if strangers have become local citizens, society may not accept the strangers (with a local passport). In other words, how long does it take before the settled strangers become natives? From the perspective of ethnic citizenship, the answer is 'never'.<sup>16</sup> They will always remain outsiders. They will become 'hyphenated' strangers, like 'Afro-American' in the context of blacks of the United States or 'Asian African' in the context of South Asians in East Africa. In many Western societies, especially in the United States, the discussion about the future of the multi-cultural society is whether we live in a 'melting pot' or a 'fruit bowl'. In the 'melting pot', everyone freely (economically, politically, sociologically and sexually) mixes with one another. In the end, the importance of ethnic and racial differences disappears, while class differences and difference of preference and taste may create new social boundaries. In the 'fruit bowl', we live together, but stay apart. Ethnic and racial differences produce the major differences between groups. This was the case in the cultural arena (language, theatre, writings and music) as well as in the economic and political areas. Intercultural marriages remain rare, and economic and ethnic differences are often defined along

the same line. In fact, the dichotomy 'melting pot vs fruit bowl' resembles the much older dichotomy 'assimilation vs pluralism'.<sup>17</sup>

In my view, it is important to describe the closeness and the distantness of the settled stranger citizens in political, economic and cultural terms. They are settled but they remain strangers as well. However, we have to recognise that 'natives' and 'settlers' belong together. The native is a native only in the context of settlers. Settlers are settlers only in the context of natives. In the United States, the natives (Indians) became natives only after the arrival of the white settlers. In East Africa, the question 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. But it was reinforced by law in the constitution of the colonial state. The East African colonial states recognised two types of political identities: civic and ethnic. The civic identity was protected by the civic rights, which were developed into civil law and protected by the state. These rights were predominantly meant to protect those who were considered to be 'civilised', basically the 'white settlers'.

The natives were defined as 'subjects', not as 'civics'. They were excluded from civic rights and, therefore, the civic identity. The colonial states created a different identity for them: the ethnic identity, which was defined by the customs of the ethnic groups, including the sense of belonging to an ancestral area. The customs were recognised by the state and reinforced by the so-called customary law. The introduction of 'native authorities' facilitated the regulation and often the enforcement of customary laws. Thus, on the local level, the state spoke the language of culture and custom and not that of rights.<sup>18</sup>

What is important here is that non-white settlers such as Arabs and especially Asians did not accept this distinction. Moreover, some of them were economically well off and well educated (often in the heart of the empire, London, Oxford or Cambridge).

Therefore, they were able to criticise the often-discriminating colonial practices. Sometimes, they used their background as *British* subjects and use their 'Britishness' in terms of language, education, knowledge of the law and jurisdiction to 'strike back' from within the system. But on other occasions they made their point differently 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 in the 'white men's club' in the 1950s.

In fact, the colonial state created three types of peoples:

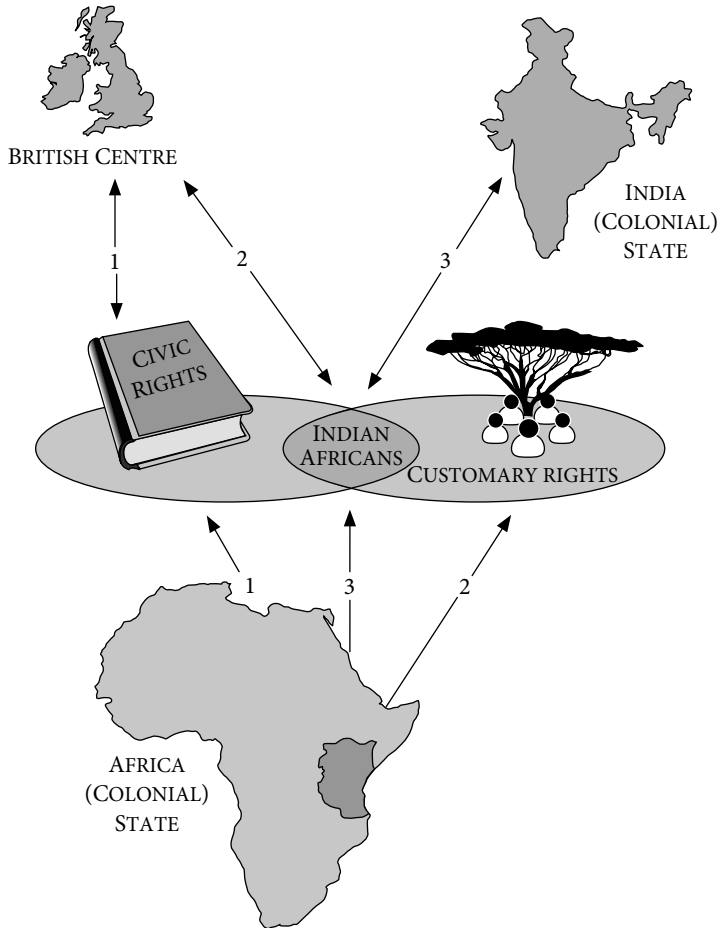
1. The white settlers. They were the creators of the colonial state. They were economically and militarily superior and they felt the 'white men's burden' to uplift the 'natives' (note, not the strangers).<sup>19</sup> There was a strong link between the white settlers, the colonial state and the British centre. The white settlers shared the civic rights of the civilised people. They were, for example, allowed (appointed or chosen) into the legislative council. This was of importance, because the legislative council created the laws and the rules relating to the rights and duties for different people and businesses in the colony.
2. The natives. The colonial rulers saw the black Africans as 'simple and pleasant' people. Nevertheless, the Africans were also seen as morally of a low standard, unhygienic and uncivilised. They had to be disciplined, either to work for the whites or to produce for exports in order to make small profits to be able to pay taxes. There was no direct link between the natives and the British centre. They were not seen as civilians with civic rights, but they had to be governed under the so-called 'customary law'. In practice, the British appointed a district officer (DO) who was responsible for the law and order and the collection of taxes in his district. In cases of crime, unrest and general social

disorder, he was informed by local chiefs and acted (as far as possible) according to the local 'customs'. In short, it was 'a system of justice that should conform as much to their own law as is compatible within the principles of ours'.<sup>20</sup>

3. The settled strangers. 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 East Africa. From a legal point of view, this would place them somewhat between 'civic rights' and 'customary law'. South Asians were appointed and chosen in the legislative council; they would apply to civic law whenever they felt that it suited their interest best. Sometimes, they used their legal and political connection in London to find support and thereby were able to bypass the local colonial officials in East Africa. In other cases, it was the colonial government in India itself that took up their case and gave support. In other words, they were less powerful than the colonial rulers, but they often successfully used a wide range of connections and options to persuade colonial officials to support them.

An important part of the struggle for civic rights and emancipation of the Asians was strikingly realised in a discourse about the natives. Often the Asians would argue for 'equal opportunities' with respect to the whites, for example, in cases where they wished to have access to the same fertile lands as the white settlers. The whites, however, would argue that these rights could not be granted because the Asians certainly would use their rights to exploit the natives. And it was the responsibility of the Europeans to protect the natives against exploitation by the Asians. This argument was often used to protect the colonial interests against that of the Asians. Nevertheless, the South Asians were quick to remember the importance of the colonisers as the middlemen between the African producers and the Europeans and as agents in the civil service.

FIGURE 1.2 Rights and Power: Europeans, South Asians and Africans



Source: Gijsbert Oonk and Lot to Design.

On the eve of the independence of the East African countries, many Asians started to support the local independence movement. They were aware that their fate would not be henceforth in the hands of the Europeans, but will be in that of the Africans. At the same time, they were marginalised as a result of the ‘Africanisation’ programmes of the colonial government. In these programmes, local Africans were granted jobs in the civil service, often at the

expense of Asians. These positive affirmation and emancipation rules and legislations would continue after the independence, when, for example, it became compulsory for businesses to have a local partner. The acquaintance of local citizenship was often not enough. It had to be a 'black' local partner. This type of rules in the context of emancipation of Africans was no doubt a reproduction of colonial legislation, albeit not through white minority rule, but now as a consequence of a black majority rule. Settled strangers who obtained local passports were not seen as equal citizens. Again, they had to organise themselves to claim equal rights.

## The Social Capital of the Settled Stranger

*While I was sitting in the London office of the South Asian African businessman, various cases of disagreements, conflicts and issues around 'trust' and contract came into view. In one instance, there was a contract disagreement between an important Indian business partner in Maldives and the family. They were dealing with partners on profitable terms for decades, so it was important to solve the issue. Therefore, they set up a meeting between various parties in Delhi. As it was difficult for family members with United Kingdom or Pakistani passports (and Muslim names) to arrange visas for India at very short notice, they decided that a family member from Tanzania should join the meeting. They were aware (from informal exchanges with family and community members) that it was easier to obtain an Indian visa for South Asians in Tanzania (with Muslim names) than for those in the United Kingdom or Pakistan. In other words, they were able to exploit their access to different passports within the family.*

A few observations can be made. (a) Despite modern media, email, fax and video conferencing, face-to-face contact is still a key issue in establishing trust in business relations. (b) They use their family contacts for their direct trading relations to obtain information about the reliability of another family or trading office.

(c) They use their access to various passports whenever they need it. The fact that they own various passports in the family is (at times) the unplanned consequence of the political affairs in East Africa in the 1960s and 1970s. But now that it is there, it is used.

There are two sets of literature that emphasise the importance of social capital, trust and the 'internal factors' that explain the success of a business elite. One is the concept of 'social capital' and the other is that of a 'trading diaspora'. The three founding fathers of the concept of 'social capital', Pierre Bourdieu, James Coleman and Robert Putnam, all refer to examples in the First World, without denying that the concept may suit the non-Western world as well.<sup>21</sup> In his article, Coleman uses a classic example of wholesale diamond market to describe the benefits of 'social capital'. In this market, a diamond dealer frequently hands over bags with diamonds, often worth thousands of dollars, to other merchants to examine at their leisure. There is no insurance; there are no contracts and no witnesses. This may be seen as an extremely risky venture, but in fact it is very successful, cheap and efficient. Actually, it would become highly bureaucratic, time consuming and expensive if exchange contracts were to be made, pictures of the trade were to be produced and witnesses were to be arranged. There is an unwritten agreement that information flows freely and exchanges can be made without expensive contracts and legal formalities; in short, it reduces transaction costs considerably.<sup>22</sup>

The second set of literature emphasises long-distant trade, especially related to trading diasporas. This literature includes a strong emphasis on non-Western minority groups. It tries to explain the economic success of Chinese, Indian or Jewish businessmen in terms of 'trust' based on ethnic background and trading networks. The major aim of a 'network' is the cheap circulation of capital, credit, information, goods and produce, as in the case of Coleman's diamond traders.<sup>23</sup> This notion of 'trust' is especially relevant in long-distant trade in times and areas where information is scarce. A merchant often did not travel to distant markets with his goods, but delegated this task to an agent (such as a family member, his

neighbour or an ethnic community member). As in the case of Coleman's diamond dealers, trust was of utmost importance. Because the agent could simply disappear with the trade, or more subtly, he could tell the merchant that the prices were low overseas and he could not sell at a better price, while keeping 'the change' in his pocket.<sup>24</sup>

On the whole, we assume that notions of same religion, language and regional background reinforce concepts of 'trust', mutual aid and shared values among migrant traders and businessmen. In migrant communities, this is often reinforced by the fact that they arrive in specific neighbourhoods where they also reproduce the culture, through community centres, mosques and temples. In most literature, the system itself is not questioned, but reservations are expressed about *how* the members of a business community take advantage of it.<sup>25</sup>

As a rule, this type of literature tends to emphasise the 'success stories' in migrant business communities. More often than not, networks are seen as a rather static informally organised system, which is used as a tool by its various members.<sup>26</sup> Most of these explanations, one way or the other, emphasise socio-economic advantages of outsider minorities as explanation for their economic virtue. What these explanations have in common is that they do not include the point of departure of migrants, the class background, their educational background, former experiences and—with some exception—the way they were received by the local rulers. These explanations only gain significance in a particular historical setting. They cannot explain why some members of the same group were not successful at all and were not gifted with a 'superior' business mind. In this book (Chapter 2), I show that community support has its price and is no guarantee for success. Credit and trust is not unconditionally given. It has to be earned and lost in a social setting. Contrary to the general belief, I show that often family members are among the first to file a bankruptcy case. In other words, obtaining the benefits of a community membership depended upon proper conduct in the past, while the



short-term gain from cheating today was less than the long-term benefit an honest coalition member could obtain.<sup>27</sup> Nevertheless, in other cases, we see that family members take over the debts caused by other members of their family, even when they are not legally obliged to do so. The main reason for taking over the debt and losses within the family is to 'keep up the good name' and thereby secure business relations in the future. Consequently, detailed empirical historical studies are needed to deconstruct the myths along superior business groups and, at the same time, show how and why these networks function the way they do.

In a recent article, I had already argued that these networks should be seen as the outcome of a process of trial and error. Trust within the network is constantly contested and it has a price. Capital and knowledge of markets were not free within the network. They could be earned if one holds a 'good name'. More often than not, the main function of the ethnic networks was to earn a place or lose a 'good name'. In Coleman's example of the diamond traders, it is possible to accept the diamonds as gift and fly away with them. However, you can be pretty sure that it was the last time you (and probably your family) were trading within this network. In the case of many bankruptcies of Asian family businesses in East Africa, I show that members of the network were often the first creditors, but they were also the first ones to file a bankruptcy.<sup>28</sup> In other words, ethnicity or group belonging is both a resource and a constraint. Even when it is a resource, it is not for free. Thus, the 'social capital' thesis within trading networks only functions because a 'good name' and reputation are easily gained or lost within these business networks. There is a Dutch saying that might be relevant for the rest of the world: Trust arrives on foot and leaves on a horse, which means that trust is built over a long time, but it can be lost in a second.

In his recent study, Claude Markovits makes a strong argument against these 'ethnic' notions of trust. In the case of migrant traders, 'the inside ethnic network' may be as important as local networks, whether ethnic or not. In other words, trading groups can

never solely rely on 'inside' sources, but are dependent on information, power and knowledge from other groups as well. In fact, their ability to trade 'outside' the ethnic group plays a crucial role in determining the 'success' or 'failure' of business communities/groups.<sup>29</sup>

In other words, in order to explain the 'success and failure' of the settled stranger, social capital should refer to dynamics not only 'within' a group, but also 'between' groups. In relation to the 'ethnic economy', Jan Nederveen Pieterse emphasises the important of three forms of social capital among migrant traders: bonding social capital (strong ties among close relations), bridging social capital (weak ties among people from different backgrounds) and linking social capital (friends in 'high places').<sup>30</sup> Especially the last factor may have been important in explaining how settled strangers evolved to local elites, and eventually transnational elites.

What happens to 'social capital' after the migration? Especially in long-distant trade, the number of visits of family and community members 'back home' decreases. Nevertheless, they can be an important source of trustful agents. At the same time, new relations in new environments are built. Bonding social capital of the stranger includes family and community members 'back home' and in the new environment. To a certain extent, they play an important role in the process of migration and form an important safety net in case the migration fails. But even after the migration has evolved more definitively, the family members back home are an important source for recruitment of new employees or a useful source to extract new capital. The same holds for the family and community members who already have experience in the new environment, or have indeed settled there. Most migration is often chain-migration through family and community members exactly for this reason.

The strength of the family and community ties of migrant settlers is reinforced by sharing the intense experiences of long-distant migration. These include insecurity, new food and dress habits, facing discrimination and other forms of shared histories,

varying from suffering and lack of money to first profits, shifting to new areas and reuniting with caste and family members. Often, the bonding social capital of strangers evolves beyond the direct family and community. Friends of the family or other community members (for example, Hindu Lohanas who share ideas with Hindu Patels from more or the less the same region) are considered to be 'close' as well. Being a small minority in a new environment stretches the idea of who belongs to the community and who does not. This stretching may be seen as the transition from 'bonding' to 'bridging' social capital. Bonding capital refers to strong ties among close relations, whereas bridging capital refers to weak ties among people from a diverse background but similar socio-economic status. In addition, the role of linking capital is of prime importance to explain the emergence of the Asian settlers in East Africa. Linking capital refers to 'friends in higher places'. As we will see in Chapter 2, some of the most successful families enjoyed early alliances with Arabic and European rulers. They were allowed to harvest the customs, they were granted seats in the Legislative Council and they were invited to important socio-political meetings that helped them to defend their interests as well as that of their family and community members.

## The Social Capital of the Transnational Settled Stranger

*My grandparents were born in India. I was born and raised in East Africa. I have enjoyed my primary and secondary education here. For further studies I went to the United Kingdom and the United States. I have worked there for a while and now I am back. I do not belong to India anymore; I am not an African nor am I a European. However, my bag is packed with the heritage of three continents. I speak Gujarati, English and Swahili.*

There are two contrasting ways to portray the heritage of South Asians in East Africa. The first one is to highlight the triple heritage

of Asians in Africa. Herewith I focus on the 'global' connection and global embeddedness. Many fourth and further generation Asian Africans could make the above statement, albeit with variations. The second one is to focus on the 'local' connection without denying the South Asian heritage. In general, some migrants identify more with one society than with the other. The majority, however, maintain several identities and heritages that may link them to more than one nation, region or language.

It is now time to go beyond Simmel's distinction between 'wanderer' and 'stranger'. Simmel's stranger settled in a new environment and relates to his original habitus. The transnational settled strangers, however, have family members not only in their original habitus, but in many other parts of the world as well. In this research, the histories of the families reveal that their members are scattered around in more than two different places. They regularly visit each other in these different regions and they use these contacts for business opportunities and as a source of information related to exchange rates, exports regulations and visa requirements. In addition, these international contacts are also used in the search for the best higher education for their children. The offspring of many Asian Africans were and are educated in the United Kingdom and the United States. Furthermore, securing health care for reasonable prices is of utmost importance and it often plays a role in daily conversations. Many Asian Africans doubt between having their heart surgeries in Mumbai or London. In short, transnational contacts are, at times, literally a matter of survival.

The recent debate on transnationalism focuses on the social, political and economic issues. Social issues often refer to cheap calls, using internet and social media, everyday life in a transnational arena and the issue of integration. Often, the idea is that a community tends to integrate less locally as long as the transnational contacts are close. The political debates around transnationalism often refer to dual citizenship and nationality and issues related to homeland politics. The economic debate focuses on the role of remittances and transnational trade relations through

migrant communities.<sup>31</sup> But these debates have their origin in a larger set of literature related to diaspora studies.

It was in the period from the late 1980s to the early 1990s that the term 'diaspora' became fashionable. Its connotations were no longer monopolised by the Jewish diaspora. It was asked whether other groups of migrants could be labelled as a diaspora. Politicians and representatives of overseas communities started using the term 'diaspora'. Africans, Armenians and also Indians and Chinese migrants began to refer to themselves as being part of a 'diaspora'. Moreover, the academic field began wondering how the word 'diaspora' could be useful in understanding migration and migrants and the relation between the motherland and the host societies. The establishment of the *Journal of Diaspora Studies* in 1991 highlighted this in particular.<sup>32</sup>

The point of departure of the *Journal of Diaspora Studies* is well formulated by its general editor Khachig Tölölyan, who notes that the concept has been related to a growing field of meanings, including processes of transnationalism, deterritorialisation and cultural hybridity. These meanings are opposed to more 'rooted forms' of identifications such as 'regions' and 'nations'. This implies a growing interest in the discourse of 'rootedness' and changing identities and the relation between the local and the global. Some articles in the journal use broad 'checklists' of factors that define the groups in diaspora, including the dispersal to two or more locations, collective mythology of one's homeland and alienation from the host nation, among others.<sup>33</sup> These checklists facilitated a debate that arose in the early 1990s on the question of whether the Jewish diaspora was unique or whether it could be complemented with an African, Chinese, Indian, Armenian, Greek or indeed any other transnational migrant group.

This question obviously could be answered only by making a comparison between the different ethnic diasporas. One of the outcomes was that it might be fruitful to compare these diasporas not based on their ethnic origin but based on the 'causes' of migration such as being victimised (Jews, slaves) and looking for employment

(indentured labour and the migration of semiskilled workers).<sup>34</sup> At the same time, by broadening the field of diaspora studies beyond the Jewish diaspora, the question, ultimately, is: what is the usefulness of a concept that can hardly exclude transnational migrants? In other words, who in today's United States cannot be defined as being part of a diaspora according to the available checklists and definitions? Indeed, contemporary studies include titles related to the Irish diaspora, the Caribbean diaspora, and so on. In other words, the question here is: what do we as social scientists gain from the concept of diaspora? How does it help us, if at all, to better understand particular aspects of migration?

As the diaspora concept has matured, alternative definitions, different approaches and new suggestions for more research are emerging. Steven Vertovec (2000) proposes three meanings of diaspora: as a 'social form', as a 'type of consciousness' and as a 'mode of cultural production'. The diaspora as a 'social form' may be characterised as a 'triangular relationship' between (a) the globally dispersed, yet strongly transnational organised group, (b) the territorial states where groups reside and (c) the Indian state or imagined homeland.

The diaspora as a 'type of consciousness' emphasises the variety of experiences, a state of mind and a sense of identity. This is described as 'dual' or 'paradoxical' nature. This nature has various connotations. First, it refers to the experience of discrimination and exclusion and, at the same time, the positive identification with the highly praised historical heritage of the Indian civilisation. Second, the awareness of multi-locality, the notion of belonging 'here and there' and sharing the same 'roots' and 'routes'.<sup>35</sup> It refers to the awareness of the ability to bridge between the local and the global. Third, double consciousness creates a 'triple consciousness', that is, the awareness of the double consciousness and being able to use it instrumentally. This refers to the identification with the host society, and the homeland, but at the same time being aware of the identification with the locality, especially in the discourse of multiculturalism. Thus, Indians in Southall, London, have the

awareness of being 'Southallian' as well as British Asian (and Muslim), within the discourse of the multi-cultural character of their local environment.<sup>36</sup>

The diaspora as a 'mode of cultural production' emphasises the currents of cultural objects, images and meanings back and forth, and the way these transcend, 'creolise' and change according to the wishes of the customers and artists. It refers to the production and reproduction of transnational social and cultural phenomena. Here, the position of youth in diaspora is highlighted. They are socialised in cross currents of different cultural fields and form an interesting market for 'diasporic cultural goods', especially related to arts, music and dress. Moreover, they are the ones who receive and transform these new ideas and developments. Furthermore, it is clear that modern media are used to reformulate and translate the cultural traditions of the Indian diaspora. The popularity of episodes from the *Ramayana* or the *Mahabharata* among the migrants has led to new ideas regarding 'Indian' culture. The Indian diaspora has also found its way into the virtual existence of the Internet, and with its numerous discussion lists 'find one another through school pictures sites' and transnational marriage agents.

The Indian government itself has recently become a factor in the diaspora debate. It generally tends to overestimate the importance of Indian 'diasporic feelings'. In its recently published report of a high level commission, it states:

Since India achieved Independence, overseas Indians have been returning to seek their roots and explore new avenues and sectors for mutual beneficial interaction from investment to the transfer of economic skills and technology, to outright philanthropy and charitable work. This trend has become more marked in the last decade, as the Indian economy has opened up, giving rise to a new range of opportunities for emerging generations.<sup>37</sup>

But this is, in fact, far from true and more the consequence of wishful thinking. The main aim of the commission is to explore

the possibilities of improving the relationship between India and 'persons of Indian origin' (PIOs) and 'non-resident Indians overseas' (NRIs). This is, of course, a result of the Indian government's disappointment felt in the role that PIOs and NRIs have played until now.

Before the independence of India and Pakistan (1947), South Asians in East Africa were legally British subjects, which gave them access to education, health care and business opportunities in the British Empire. The creation of India and Pakistan placed many Asian Muslims in East Africa in an ambivalent position towards India. India (Gujarat) often was their 'country' of origin, but they expected more sympathy and protection from Pakistan. Only 15 years later, Uganda, Kenya and Tanzania were created. East Africa had been a legal unity between 1919 and 1961 and now it was divided into three nation states. The creation of three East African nation states and two different South Asian states created a lot of confusion, insecurities and options and constrains for Asian families in East Africa. Some family members were living in the United Kingdom. Often these families had family members and or businesses in two or three of these countries. In their perspective, this was a unity that was now divided by the emergence of new states. They had to make up their minds and choose for citizenship in one of the countries.

Being a British subject (as most of them were) was not sufficient any more. The creation of the nation states created a loyalty conflict between the local habitus and the region of origin. Often, keeping a strong foot in the new nations was a wise thing to do from a business and family perspective. For many families, it was not a good option to go for citizenship of one nation for all family members. This would cut them of a part of their businesses and access to licences. The creation of nation states also created families with multiple citizenships. Often, we see that in a nuclear family the men have a local African citizenship, while the women remain British. This would help them on one hand to get access to local trading licences and on the other hand to keep the options



open for sending their children to educational institutions in the United Kingdom.

In this process of the emergence of new states, the social capital of 'transnational' business families was born. Being there before the nation was established created options and constraints to remain active in a new world where nation states became more and more important. Having access to higher education in the United Kingdom and India for their children as well as health care for the elderly people was of utmost importance for the Asians in Africa. At the same time, an important part of the Asian African community was aware that their role and position would always be at stake, despite taking up local citizenship. They were right. Eventually, Asian Ugandans had to leave Uganda following the orders of its General, President Idi Amin, in 1972. Many followed from Kenya and Tanzania as well assuming that 'Africanisation' projects in their respective countries would eventually force them to migrate as well. Most of these migrants found their new homes not in India or Pakistan but in the United Kingdom, the United States and Canada and eventually took up local citizenships there. This raises interesting questions about the identity and the use of triple heritage in a globalising world. How were the options and constraints in these events perceived by the actors themselves? This will be dealt with in Chapter 5.

Recently, there is a growing critique towards the concept of diaspora. Some authors, including me, argue that many migrants do not share a positive relation with their former homeland. They—like the Indian government—use this historical relation in an instrumental way. Many Gujarati Muslims, for example, are in favour of the Pakistani policies towards the United States and support the Pakistan cricket team, though their grandfathers came from what is now India. They reproduce South Asian culture in their new homelands, not to live in the past, but to create a new life in a new world. Therefore, many migrants simply do not fit in the diaspora concept and its checklist's definition.<sup>38</sup>

In this book, I will elaborate on that critique and expand it. Studies of socio-cultural aspects of diasporas focus on the aspects of identification and belonging that are identified with particular nation states. Diaspora studies and also the literature on transnational migration have helped to generate an awareness of new areas of research in migration studies. However, it has offered a rather narrow conceptualisation of these ideas by defining them ‘transnational’, rather than ‘transcontinental’ or ‘transregional’.<sup>39</sup> Here, we will take up the position of Karen Fog Olwig who shows that the migrant’s trajectories and fields of interpersonal ties, as well as national and transnational structures, are embedded in their life stories. For the actors, states are a vehicle—for good or for bad—they have to deal with. Their sites of belonging do not refer to nation states, but to physical homes, stories of shared migration and shared experiences in relation to new nation states.<sup>40</sup>

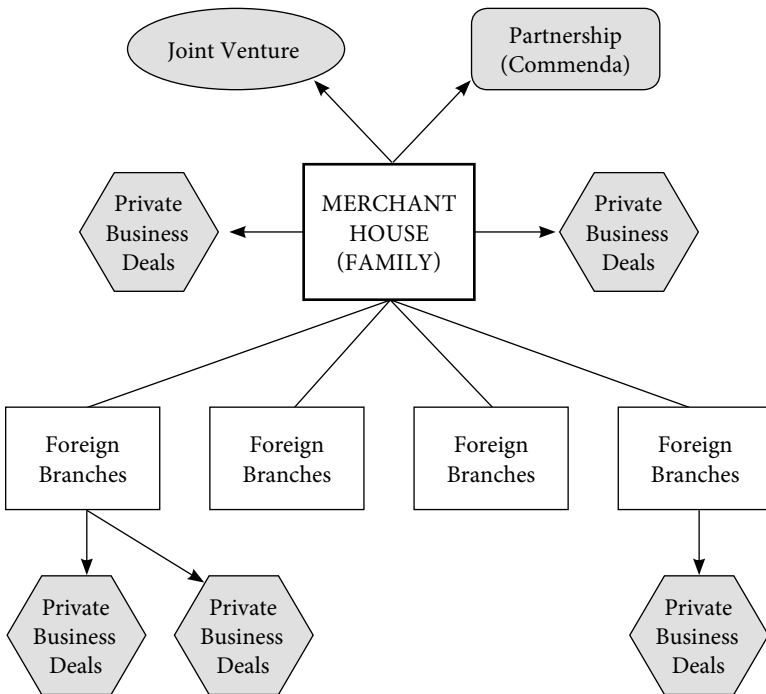
By taking the perspective of the migrants, we have to acknowledge that transnational relations become ‘national’ only in the context of the emergence of states. South Asia and East Africa were largely part of the British Empire before 1947, when there were no ‘state boundaries’. Travelling from India to Africa and the United Kingdom was not legally restricted. The British Empire and the Indian government tried to defend the legal rights of ‘overseas Indians’. This does not mean that local ‘overseas’ Indians had the same rights everywhere. Local colonial officials created their own local solutions for their problems. Nevertheless, local South Asians in diaspora would—in the end—appeal to either the Government of India or the Colonial Office in London whenever they felt their rights were surpassed.

Nowadays, the family directories of these families include telephone numbers and addresses of family members in the United States, Canada, Australia, India and/or Pakistan, Uganda, Kenya, Tanzania, South Africa, Mauritius, Dubai and many more countries. Often they retain local citizenship or divide various citizenships among family members from the nuclear families. These

types of families are ‘world citizens’ in the true meaning of the world. For them, their passport is a travel document, a document that gives you rights and duties to do business and to pay tax in a certain nation. But it is not an ‘identity card’—in terms of ‘national identity’—nor a sign of loyalty towards a nation. It has become a form of transnational social capital.

These various forms of social capital come together in the fascinating organisational structure of the family merchant house as produced by Avner Greif.<sup>41</sup> Here, regional embedness is as important as national embedness. The mother company, often directed by the eldest of the family, is the centre of the family business.

**FIGURE 1.3 Organisational Structure of the Transnational Family Merchant Houses**



Source: Ferry de Goeij, Gijsbert Oonk and Lot to Design.

Each associate (often, but not always, the sons) has to submit their monthly or annual business reports to the mother company. The associates may open branches in different areas in the name of the mother company. However, they are often allowed to make their private business deals outside the branch and the mother company. In addition, the mother company or its branches may develop partnerships or formal joint ventures with other companies (families). It is striking that these pre-industrial family business structure is still dominant in the modern world.

In this book, I argue that with the emergence of national states and the independence of the former colonies, the family merchant house has become a 'transnational' or 'transregional' business association. The (grand) children of the founding father of the firm are born and raised in different countries, they have acquired local citizenship and they have access to local commercial institutions. These families share more than two nationalities in their families (sometimes up to twelve), which are instrumentally used for business purposes, such as acquiring trading licences, travelling documents and tax exemptions. But they are also important for personal purposes, such as getting access to educational institutions and health care. These families are locally well embedded, but their primary loyalty is to the family and the mother company.

These family companies have developed a great deal of flexibility. This has to be mainly attributed to the 'flexible family system' itself, which is well known from other literature as well.<sup>42</sup>

### *Areas of Flexibility*

The following are the areas of flexibility:

1. The greater the number of male descendants, the higher the chance that some of them may become suitable managers, innovators or otherwise 'money spinners' for the company. These are—without exception—male members

of the family. Nevertheless, in case of difficulties in finding suitable managers/owners within the family, a professional may be hired from outside, mostly from the same community. The spouses of the daughters are often welcomed as managers. In other cases, this may be done by the people from outside the direct family circle. Interestingly, as in the case of the Karimjees, European managers were hired to run the day-to-day work on the plantations, but the employees for finance and the accounts were hired from within the members of the community. In other cases, managers were hired from India, not necessarily from their own community or background. This shows the flexible nature of the ethnic family members, that is, hiring suitable experienced outsiders to do the job. At the same time, they were the owners of the firm. In addition, when it came to financial matters there was a tendency to recruit professionals from within the community.

2. In bigger families, some of the numerous descendants do not take an active part in the family business, but they become professionals. They start working in other companies; they become doctors or teachers or take up some other occupation. They may as well retain a small (inherited) share in the family business. Some return to work for the company after they have gained experience elsewhere. Others may be employed by the company, but are not part of the board of directors. They often do not own shares, being sons or daughters of the company owners. In large families, it is not uncommon to find that quite a few family members work for the company as an employee. This makes the company exceptionally flexible when it comes to labouring the middle cadre. This also means that there may be a huge difference in wealth among the family members. Some of them lived in very luxurious houses and owned more than one expensive car, whereas others lived in a

simple and more modest house. If I did not bring this up, it was not discussed.

3. Bigger families with diversified businesses in more countries were often able to manage that knowledge in a profitable way. For example, if you have a trading business in Mauritius as well as in London, you have direct access to market information (prices, supply and demand), handling fees, tax legislation and others. But on the socio-economic level, having businesses outside East Africa was even more important. Having access to secondary education is of primary importance. Sometimes even to the extent that pregnant women visit their family members abroad to deliver their babies there, in order to obtain citizenship and, therefore, access to education and medical health care.
4. Some families manage a part of their wealth through marriages with members of other business families who have their main business either in a different area or in a different branch. In one exceptional family, I found that there were more than six or seven marriages with members of other families. Here, companies are literally 'married' together. Concentrating knowledge and trust proved to be an important source of strength. In especially some of the Muslim families, we see a few first- and second-grade cousin marriages, mostly as a part of concentrating shares in some fractions of the family.
5. Many successful sons start running their own businesses on their own account. This may be promoted by one of the mother companies in terms of short-term loans or management assistance. In other cases, the shares of the sub-company may be sold to one of the brothers in order to enable him to carry that company on his own. In other words, there is a high degree of flexibility within these family companies.

## The Anthropology of a Global Elite: Research Set-up

This research is based on the history of South Asian business families who have lived in East Africa for three generations or more. In general, they belonged to the higher middle classes up to the national elite of East Africa. Research among the elites is a rather neglected pursuit. This is partly a product of the anthropological tradition of fieldwork emphasising ‘authentic’ occasions and partly the result of a romantic drive among students to go ‘native’; therefore, rich and powerful people are still a little-studied group. Nevertheless, anthropology appears to be shifting from the familiar research sites in villages to geographically less-defined areas such as ‘the middle class’, a shift to people who do not necessarily share the same territory but are engaged in networks that link them with each other. My focus is not on the emerging middle class, but on the transformation towards a globalised elite. By this, I mean the extremely rich and influential people: those who freely interact with the Members of Parliament, ambassadors and other political representatives; those who run their own charity funds, spending huge amounts of money arising from profits made in their business and those who buy properties and estates in Africa, Europe, India and the United States; in short, the happy—very, very—few.<sup>43</sup>

Nevertheless, an elite is an interest group, and its culture develops as a means for the coordination of its corporate activities to enhance and maintain power. Therefore, an historical approach to the emergence of an elite is appropriate. For the Asians in East Africa this is a complex phenomenon. They did not arrive as elite, and it is difficult to see them as a ‘local elite’. In the colonial era, they leant on the white colonial powers that, in return, leant on them. In this context, a part of the cultural change towards the Western hegemonic sphere (see, for example, Chapter 3 on changing dress habits). Nevertheless, after independence, the new political elite are African. But the Asian Africans did not

adopt the African elite culture. By taking the example of Asians in East Africa, I explain that South–South interaction mirrored in a North–South (colonial) context confuses the whole idea of subordination, especially in relation to the African Asian business elite that was not subordinated in all contexts. Asian Africans, in general, can be described as a typical middleman minority elite. They were economically dominant, but numerically (politically) insignificant. In addition, we need to refer to the debate on globalisation that seems to praise the post-modern global interaction process in which cultures ‘are more globalised, cosmopolitan and creolised or hybrid than ever’.<sup>44</sup> Nevertheless, while the processes of creolisation (mixing of cultures) may take place within a global continuum of relations, they nonetheless attain their significance in concrete contexts of interpersonal relations.<sup>45</sup> Therefore, my aim is to describe these patterns in concrete historical contexts.

A rule of thumb was that the founding father of the family arrived and settled somewhere between 1880 and 1920 in East Africa (often Zanzibar). I interviewed 132 Hindu businessmen, 89 Muslim businessmen, 8 Sikhs, 4 Goans and 2 Parsis in the period between 1999 and 2004, including a year of fieldwork between July 2002 and July 2003. Most of the interviews were conducted in Dar es Salaam and Zanzibar. A few were carried out in Mombasa and Nairobi. Most of the interviews were taped. Usually, the younger family members would guide me to the family’s eldest, who could tell me ‘everything about their history’. Some of them were retired from business, but others ‘kept their office in the business’ for social and advisory reasons. Interviews with women were hardly ever in a one-to-one setting but were held in the company of other family members as well. Nevertheless, at the end of the fieldwork period, I managed to do 16 interviews with often elderly women. In the last few years (2004–2010), I have increasingly interviewed friends and relatives of the Asian African business families ‘overseas’, mostly in the United Kingdom, Mauritius and India. But I also kept visiting my contacts in East Africa during return trips, wedding parties and holidays.



As a rule, the first time I always met my informants at the office or business premises after we fix an appointment over phone. After this first meeting, most members agreed to have a formal interview that was taped. Usually, my main credits were my knowledge of India and that I had written a PhD thesis on the history of the cotton textile industry in Mumbai and Ahmedabad.<sup>46</sup> Therefore, I could show off my little knowledge of Gujarati and a lot of facts about and insights into the South Asian history, Gandhi and Nehru and my knowledge of South Asian business tycoons, such as Tata, Birla, Mittal and many others. About one-third of the persons I interviewed, I met several times. This was very important to obtain clarifications, fill in gaps and highlight discrepancies and paradoxes that occurred during the interviews.

Moreover, I spent a considerable amount of time with the businessmen in the offices as well as in their homes. I watched them making business calls and meeting business associates and people from the government. In addition, I attended several birthday and wedding parties, where I enjoyed numerous informal exchanges with relatives and friends. During my fieldwork, I repeatedly asked to see the family's photo album, old passports and other documents. This often gave me a chance to visit the homes of the businessmen I interviewed. Most of the time, the women would know where to find the photo albums. Usually, they took over the interview as they had much more to tell about the pictures. I often helped them to draw a family tree, which in return helped me to get family relations straight (including cousin marriages, intercultural marriages, and so on; later, it also helped to resolve inheritance issues). Frequently, they allowed me to scan parts of the family albums. This made it possible for me to write a chapter on changing dress habits.

I was able to create a fair degree of trust, especially after I had published a small coffee table book *Asian in East Africa: Images, Histories and Portraits*, published in 2004. The book was meant to be a gift for those who helped me during my stay in Africa in 2002–2003 and most probably would not read my academic material.

This book was widely distributed among my informants. It was clear right after the publication that I was 'one of them'; I became 'a friend of the family', who wrote a book about the history of the Asians. This, indeed, improved the quality of the interviews and the themes I was able to discuss with them in great detail, including business failure, inheritance disputes, mixed marriages and degrees of corruption. Some of the families became close friends over the years.

One of the dreams of business historians is to get access to family papers, business correspondence and unpublished personal sources. In this research, I got more than I had dreamt of. In 2006, the Karimjee Jivanjee family assigned me the task of writing their family's business history. Private businesses are not renowned for their willingness to lay bare their insights to researchers. However, for the purpose of that research, I was given free access to all the available sources, records and correspondence related to the business history of the Karimjee Jivanjee family. In addition, it was agreed that I could use all the information for academic use in other publications as well. The directors of the company made available their business correspondence and the annual reports of various companies, and they shared their invaluable business insights and experience with me.<sup>47</sup>

Over the years, I also visited their family members in other parts of the world. The 'United Kingdom branches' were close to The Netherlands, and whenever I went to London for research or an academic seminar, I made sure that I visited some of them. Moreover, I spent six weeks in London in 2007 to interview the sections of the branches in the United Kingdom. In the same year, I stayed for two weeks in Mauritius. By then, I needed no more introduction. People 'knew me from my books'. It was the best introduction I could have dreamt of. This also shows that the notion of trust is important not only between traders but also between the researchers and their informants. And here as well, trust comes on foot and leaves by horse.

In the following years, interviews were generally conducted in a loosely structured way, in which I gathered 'facts and figures' as well as opinions and expressions. At a general level, I followed the method of 'life story interviews' that became fashionable in the late 1980s and the 1990s. A life story entails an accounting of an individual's movement through life, geographical as well as social, economic as well as cultural. Taking the agent's point of view, life stories are constructed along a fine line between movement and change, continuity and identification. Often, I tried to mirror the experiences of the informants (related to success and failure of the business, changing food and dress habits, etc.) with those of their (grand) parents. This made them aware of changes over the generations. This helped me to construct personal information, data and perspectives on the changes described in this book.<sup>48</sup> In addition to the 'oral history', I visited various archives and libraries in the United Kingdom, most notably the British Library, especially the African and Asian sections, and the National Archives (London). In addition, I visited the Tanganyika National Archives, the National Library of Tanzania and the Zanzibar Archives. In Kenya, I visited the Kenyan National Archives.

In short, I did what many anthropologists and historians have done before me. I read the existing literature in detail. And I am sure I missed a few ethnographies. I started to conduct interviews, using all kinds of field and observation techniques. Some of the interviews were planned, but many pieces of valuable information were obtained occasionally on the sideline or during a more informal event. In addition, I have seen literally thousands of records, photos and news items broadly related to this project. I am still in the process of analysing them. In the end, I failed to meet the deadlines of the funding organisations, but in return, I am confident that I have produced a better book. At the same time I, of course, realise that this will not be the final word. At best, it is a new beginning.

## Conclusion

If we go back to the office of the Indian trader in London, we will notice that many issues discussed in this chapter refer to the small encounter between the father and his son. First, the London business used to belong to the mother company in East Africa. But the father has bought all the shares and runs his own trading company from London. Nevertheless, he is still a shareholder and is one of the directors of the mother company in Dar es Salaam. In other words, he is doing business on his own account and at the same time he is active in the mother company. His son is setting up an office in Dubai and it looks like he is following his father's footsteps. He does have a very small share in the mother company, but one day he will inherit his father's shares. Probably, his future position as a director of the mother company depends on the success of his own office in Dubai. Their family business is highly flexible and they both have developed experience in setting up companies and offices abroad.

Second, their forefathers came from north-west India, an area that is now called Kutch. One of these forefathers decided to send his son to East Africa, who eventually settled there and invited his family to settle there as well in the late nineteenth century. Some of the ancestors of these pioneers still live in East Africa, often directing the mother company. Nevertheless, many early Asian businesses in East Africa failed, as we will see in Chapter 2. In this book, the image of the successful and far-sighted business Indian is put in perspective with the many failures that happened in the early days. In my perspective, the successful Asian businesses were the outcome of a historical process of 'trial and error'. Therefore, Chapter 2 will present a balanced perspective of the success stories and the failures.

Third, those who were successful eventually settled in East Africa. They had evolved from strangers to settled strangers in East Africa. At times, this process would be repeated in other parts

of the world as well, as in the case presented where the father had settled in the United Kingdom. Meanwhile, other family members had settled in Mauritius, Australia and the United States. In this arena, they remained visible as 'outsiders'. Nevertheless, they have learnt the local language, they are often educated in the west and they have a lifelong working and business relation with these countries. Therefore, since the late nineteenth century, they have evolved from strangers to settled strangers in several countries across three continents. In this process, most Asian Africans have culturally changed and adapted to their new environment. This could be a slow and painful process of changing marriage patterns, food habits and dress habits. An increasing number of Hindus started to eat meat, Muslims started to drink liquor and the intermarriages between subcastes became more apparent in Africa than in India. Cultural change and adaption was not forced—in fact, the range of choices has increased over the generations—but it was often felt as a burden by the parents and the communities. They often insisted on keeping their communities 'pure'. Despite this, it was never completely clear what 'purity' meant. Again, this only obtains meaning in concrete historical examples. These will be provided in Chapter 3.

Fourth, the father in London and the son in Dubai both carry British passports. Most family members in East Africa would carry British passports as well; however, some will proudly show their Tanzanian or Kenyan passports. Others carry their United States, Mauritian or Australian passports. The distribution of various passports in the family is mainly the result of the critical history in the 1960s, when East African countries started to nationalise houses, industries and banks. In addition, the Ugandan General Idi Amin expelled all the Asians in 1972. At that moment, many South Asians in Tanzania and Kenya did not wait for further instructions and left East Africa as well. Nevertheless, and to some extent surprisingly, around 50 per cent of the Asian Africans in Kenya and Tanzania remained. Some were even proud to play a

part in the building of the new African nations, despite the fact that their assets were frozen or nationalised. The issue of settling and unsettling has an important political component, as we will see in Chapter 4.

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46. Gijsbert Oonk, *Ondernemers in Ontwikkeling: Fabrieken en Fabrikanten in de Indiase Katoenindustrie, 1850–1930* (Verloren: Hilversum, 1998) [*Entrepreneurs in Development. Mills and Mill Owners in the Indian Cotton Textile Industry, 1850–1930* (Verloren: Hilversum, 1998)]. One chapter is translated and published in G. Oonk, 'Motor or Millstone?: The Managing Agency System in Bombay and Ahmedabad, 1850–1930', *The Indian Economic Social History Review* 38, no. 4 (2001): 419–52.
47. Gijsbert Oonk, *The Karimjee Jivanjee Family: Merchant Princes of East Africa, 1800–2000* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2009).
48. For life story interviews, see L. Langness and G. Frank, *Lives: An Anthropological Approach to Biography* (Novato: Chandler and Sharp, 1981); J. Bruner, 'Life as Narrative', *Social Research* 54, no. 1 (1987): 11–32; C. Linde, *Life Stories: The Creation of Coherence* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993).



## CHAPTER TWO

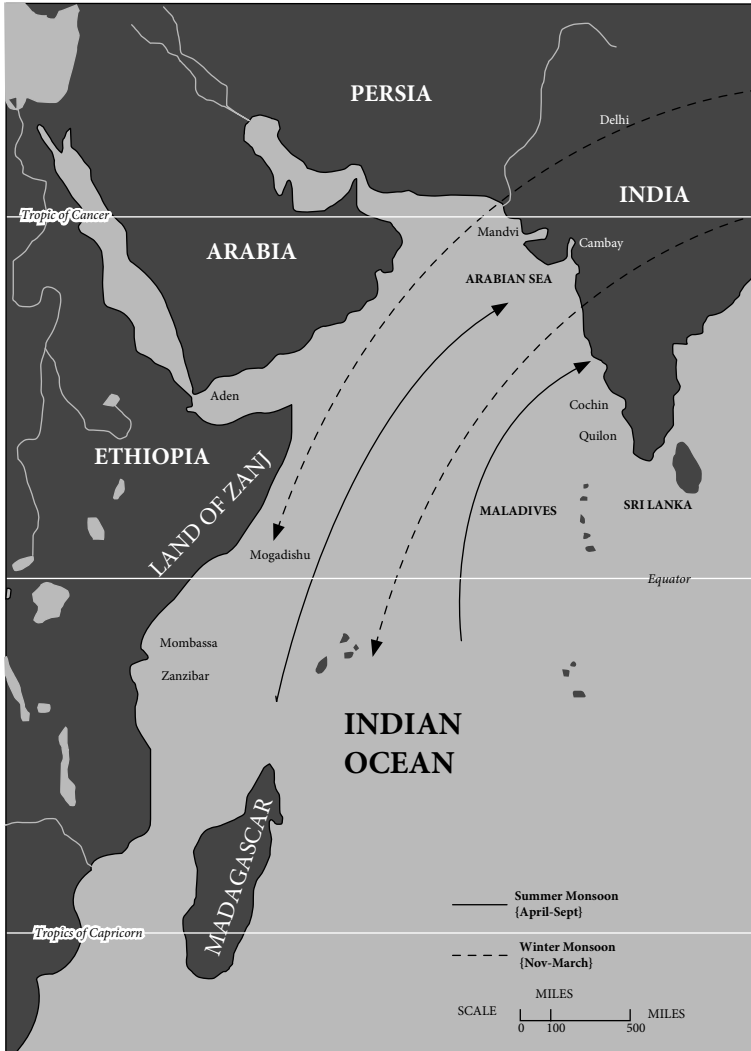
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# ASIANS IN AFRICA 1880–1920: SETTLING AS AN ECONOMIC PROCESS

If we look at the map of the Indian Ocean, it is not surprising that there is a long history of exchange of trades, ideas, crafts and human beings between West India, the Arab countries and East Africa. Direct trade between these regions was maintained by the rhythm of the monsoons. From November to March the beautiful dhows sailed from West India to East Africa, and from April to October they made their return journey. The trade in slaves, ivory and spices was profitable, but dangerous. Many traders did not return home safely. The rough sea, pirates and various diseases claimed the lives of many traders and early adventurers. These early contacts between the Indians and East Africans go back to at least 2000 years. The first undisputed written evidence of these early contacts is the *Periplus of the Erythraean Sea*, written by a Greek navigator in the first century AD. When Vasco da Gama arrived in Mozambique, Mombasa and Lindi in 1497, he was surprised at the number of Arabs and Indians he found there.<sup>1</sup>

South Asians share a long history of interaction with Arab and Swahili traders. Because of the nature of the monsoon trade, we realise that these Indian traders had to stay around for two to three months before they could return with their cargo. They presumably used this time to negotiate with the local rulers and traders about the quality, prices and terms of trade. Meanwhile, they

FIGURE 2.1 Monsoons in the Indian Ocean Region



Source: Gijsbert Oonk, *The Karimjee Jivanjee Family: Merchant Princess of East Africa, 1800–2000* (Amsterdam: Pallas, 2009), 22.

occasionally may have run into sexual affairs with local women, which would explain the presence of some mixed offspring in these areas. Apart from some exceptions, South Asians would not settle in East Africa; they came as traders and left as traders. They were an extreme example of Simmel's strangers, who would come and go and would maintain some distance from the local society for cultural and economic reasons.

Despite this century-long interaction, it would take until the second half of the nineteenth century before South Asians started to settle in small numbers at various places on the East African coast, such as in Zanzibar, Lamu, Kilwa, Malindi and Mombasa. During this period, the image of the successful, hard-working trader emerged among the Arab rulers who invited them to settle in larger numbers. In the late nineteenth century, the European colonist depended heavily on the services of Asians in the area. The European accounts varied between admiration and jealousy and at times very nasty images of South Asians in East Africa. At the same time, however, some sections of the local population developed rather negative images of Asian traders.

In this chapter, I explain the economic success stories of South Asians in East Africa (and indeed elsewhere in the diaspora). Moreover, I attempt to de-mythicise the argument that their economic prosperity was the result of a superior business mind and entrepreneurial skills, hard work, taking calculated risk, reinvesting profits, living sober and saving money, using their family and ethnic business networks, and so on. Some of these arguments are repeated in the theoretical literature as well, as we have seen in Chapter 1. Nevertheless, in this chapter, I will balance these success stories and their explanations with documented histories of South Asian families who went bankrupt in East Africa and returned to India or moved elsewhere. Therefore, the question is: Within the South Asian trading networks, who was doing well, who was just surviving and who went bankrupt and why?

In a short pilot study regarding the history of Asians in East Africa in 1999, I was given a list of 'people who could tell all

the histories'. I was told that the names referred to 'reliable and responsible' members of South Asian families in East Africa. This list was the starting point of my research. During the pilot study, I was able to learn the margins of oral history and the typical historical anecdotes that would come up in almost every interview. Two interrelating guiding issues were prevalent in the first interviews with most of my elderly—mostly male—informants. The first was the history of the 'founding father'. The founding father—in their stories—was the 'grand old man' of the family who guided the family to East Africa. He was the guiding pioneer in their migration histories. He was the one who came to East Africa, worked for a while for some uncle and then started his own business.

The second issue was the narrative about their ancestors' travels by dhows. In this narrative, the 'grand old man' sailed in a small and vulnerable wooden ship (a dhow) from north-west India to East Africa. The monsoons were explained to me, and it was made clear that if one had survived a journey by the dhow in the late nineteenth century, one would survive almost anything. In fact, the dhow story was presented as a 'rite of passage' before the final settlement in East Africa. Years later, I realised that I had failed to notice the most fundamental issue of the founding father and the dhow story. I had completely missed the story that was 'not' told by my Asian African informants. This was the story of the father/parents of the 'pioneer' in the family. Who was he? Why did he send his son to East Africa? What happened to him? Did he settle with his son in East Africa? Why or why not? Despite the fact that I was unable to answer all these questions in my research, I started to realise that my research was biased in two ways. First, this narrative was the first economic, cultural and political 'cut off' from the Indian subcontinent. The story showed that returning to India was not an option anymore. They—the interviewees—had decided to stay; they were settled and economically and culturally focused on Africa and not on India. Second, I was guided to people who had settled and were successful in East Africa. Therefore, my research question became a self-fulfilling prophecy.

The main aim of the first section of this chapter is to show how the self-fulfilling prophecy worked and how, eventually, this could be overcome. Most sociological, anthropological and historical research on the Asians in East Africa since the 1970s depends at least partly on oral history. In this type of research, almost by definition, Asians who are still in East Africa were interviewed. Those who failed and returned to India could not be interviewed—at least not in East Africa. All the people who were interviewed, including in my own sample as we will see, emphasised the strength and importance of the ‘founding father’ of the family, the first in the family to come to East Africa. But the interviewees hardly mention the ‘trial and error’ process before they or their ancestors settled; they do not mention the uncle, or any other family member, who went back to India. Therefore, the impression emerged that all those who came from India to Africa were superior traders and businessmen and eventually settled in East Africa and became rich. This is a myth.

In the second section, we unravel this myth by emphasising that migration is a process. Migration may be seen as a scheme of smaller and bigger questions, uncertainties, assumptions and good and bad experiences. Many times, ‘migration’ started at the kitchen table by just ‘thinking and fantasising about migration’. Then, it may or may not evolve into a short—or longer—visit and temporary migration. Finally, after some time it may evolve in permanent settlement. In this research, I did not come across a single family that sold its entire possession in West India and came with the family (including women) to East Africa immediately. Thinking about the process of circular migrations informs us about many people who did not make it in East Africa, those who could not be interviewed in East Africa. In India, many families would have even forgotten that their ancestors had tried, because it became an unimportant event in their family history. At the same time, they would remember other families who had left and did not return to India.

As migration was a slow process of trial and error, so was starting a business. In the third section, I present many instances of bankruptcies in Asian family businesses in East Africa. Contrary to the general belief, I show that many Asians initially failed in East Africa, despite their hard work, skills and ethnic networks. Capital and knowledge of markets were not free within the community network. They could be earned if one maintained a 'good name', but they also could be lost, for example, if one cheated with the quality of the goods or happened to be known as someone who would not pay his bills. More often than not, the ethnic networks mainly functioned as a place to earn or lose a 'good name'. In this research, I show that members of the network were often the first creditors, the ones who helped community members to set up new business and finance extraordinary projects. Nevertheless, the same community and family members (!) were also the first ones to file a bankruptcy case.<sup>2</sup> In other words, ethnicity or group belonging is both a resource and a constraint. Even when it is a resource, it is not for free. The bankruptcy and failure stories are often lost in the memory of most informants, but they are preserved in the records of the Zanzibar Archives.

Trust and honesty were very important within the network, but it does not explain why Arab and European rulers in East Africa attracted especially South Asians to settle in East Africa. For the ruling elites, it was important to collaborate with small business communities who would never be able to compete with them for political power. In addition, the South Asian's ability to read, write and keep account books was a great advantage for these rulers, because this made it easy to tax them. In addition, knowledge of money and money economy including the concept of interest gave them a huge advantage above most Swahili traders and producers. These instrumental arguments explain—at least partly—why Asians and, for example, not Africans or Arabs were attracted as ideal middlemen by Arab and European rulers.



## Construction of the Founding Father

Most South Asians in East Africa were delighted to hear that I was interested in their history. They felt honoured and curious that an outsider from a Dutch University was willing to write their history. They were honoured because they often emphasised that their story was never told. In their perspective, the history and contribution of Asians was hardly mentioned in the East African press, it was denied by the politicians and it was no part of the regular East African history textbooks that their children learnt at school.<sup>3</sup> Most of my respondents were looking for recognition regarding the ‘Asian contribution’ to Africa. The ‘Asian contribution’ referred to their charitable donations, their pains, their efforts in the independence movement, including setting up a free press and, last but not least, their economic contribution to East Africa. Many felt that their importance was taken for granted and sometimes even denied.

The first or second interview with the eldest member of an Asian African family always included a ‘dhow story’. After the usual informal exchanges about the weather, tea and coffee and when I had arrived in Dar (Is this your first visit?), informants usually took their time to enlighten me about their ‘real history’. More often than not, the story started with: “You know what: my father (or in some cases grandfather or great-grandfather) came in a dhow.” Then, after some meaningful silence: “Do you know what a dhow is?” At that time I had seen dhows only in pictures and drawings. These were beautiful wooden sailing ships used along the East African coast, but also to cross the Indian Ocean.<sup>4</sup> Some were very small and meant to sail only cargo, but others were bigger and were able to transport passengers as well. Nevertheless, being a trained interviewer, I almost always answered ‘no’ and let my informants explain. This would enable me to listen to their history in their own words without my interference. In this way, I have heard many, many ‘dhow stories’.<sup>5</sup>

A typical 'dhow story' includes four major steps, which could be narrated in various progressions and details. Most informants would plainly explain 'what a dhow is'. Above all, I was informed that it was a wooden sailing ship. The ships were built along the coasts of the Indian Ocean, especially in Mandvi and Oman. The dhows in the stories of my informants were usually built in the range of 70 to 100 tons and they would carry 40 to 60 passengers. The number of passengers was restricted not so much by space, but by the amount of drinking water they could carry for the passengers and the crew. The dhows were especially designed to cross the Indian Ocean using the monsoon winds. The ships left north-west India (Mumbai (then Bombay), Surat, Porbander and Mandvi) in November and January and returned from Zanzibar around May. Usually, a single trip would take about 4–6 weeks, depending on the winds, the design of the ship and the quality of the navigator. According to the informants, many navigators did not yet travel with a compass, but travelled just by the sun and the stars.<sup>6</sup>

In the second step, various informants recalled (or recalled what their (grand)father had told them) the number of passengers and the main cargo that was shipped (coconuts, rice, spices, ivory, but never slaves). Occasionally, they remembered the name of the ship (for example, Fatal Kher, Wulat Ganjo or Gurbo) or the ship owner (for example, Tharia Topan). Sometimes, they revealed that the passengers were Hindus and Muslims. But the most recurring and most important aspect of the 'dhow story' was that their ancestors had crossed the Indian Ocean on a simple wooden ship. Many informants recalled stories of ships that did not make it. Storms would take their toll, cargo had to be jettisoned and there were often shortages of water and firewood (to cook food). Therefore, crossing the Indian Ocean was very insecure and dangerous. But—of course—their (fore)father had managed to make it.

Indeed, we have to admire the young South Asian adventurers that crossed the Indian Ocean at the end of the nineteenth century. The Indian Ocean can be very rough and each coastal town or fishing village has its own dramatic story to tell about

shipwrecks, crews that did not return home safely and many others. Still, the young and adventurous men decided to cross the ocean. Their desire to explore new opportunities in another continent must have been greater than their fears. They left their South Asian homes, their parents and brothers and sisters, to an often-unknown continent. They knew that they had to be on their own at least for months, but more likely for years. Only occasionally they came with a father, a brother or a relative. Most Indian pioneers arrived in East Africa on their own, I was told.

The third step in the 'dhow story' was the arrival in Zanzibar (or sometimes Mombasa, Malindi or Bagamoyo or any other small place at the East African coast). Most arrivals knew where they would go to after they arrived in the harbour. Often, this was a relative or community member who already had some experience in doing business in East Africa. The informants would generally emphasise that they came with nothing but their family's name.<sup>7</sup> Sometimes, they came to continue a relative's business, but more often they started to work for that relation for a few years, before they started their own business. Others had no idea where they were going. They had no friends or relatives in East Africa. Often, they were already informed on the ship or at the day of arrival that they should visit this or that family that runs a 'community home for fresh arrivals' (belonging to the same religion, community, sub-caste) and ask for work. They were allowed to stay for a few weeks or months and the family would arrange work and permits and sometimes they would even be provided credit by the family. Last but not least, the big patrons of the South Asian community in East Africa, such as Tharia Topan, Allidina Visram and Sewji Hadji, were active in recruiting South Asians. Sometimes, they had already approached them in India, but more often they were connected to the families that were running the 'community homes for fresh arrivals'.

The last step in the 'dhow story' was related to the 'spirit of the pioneers'. Most informants emphasised the 'entrepreneurial

spirit' of their forefathers. They must have had a 'far-sighted business view'. Who would invest time, money and skills in Africa at the end of the nineteenth century? This rhetorical question was often answered by their impression that South Asian pioneers were similar to the early European settlers and colonisers in North America. South Asians in East Africa traded, saved money, invested, reinvested, became politically active and supported the African independence movement. They worked hard, they spent every minute in their shop and eventually they became 'well off'. The 'dhow stories' highlighted how the pioneering ancestors who crossed the Indian Ocean were remembered. They were portrayed as the heroes of the family. In fact, in their perspective, the family history started with these men.

I often asked my informants to draw their family tree with me, because I was frequently confused about the many names of brothers, sisters and relatives they mentioned. A family tree would clarify the family relations. Sometimes, it would include evidence about relations between families or first cousin marriages that affected the division of inheritance within families. The drawing of every single tree started with the forefather who first came to East Africa and settled there: the founding father. His father, mother, brother, sister, uncle or any other relatives who had stayed in India and did not come to East Africa were left out of the tree. The 'dhow story' was a clear-cut linear history from 'the first arrival to the present generation'. Some informants would refer to the well-known book among Asian Africans *We Came in Dhows* of Cynthia Salvadori (1996) that became a strong hallmark for the migrants, because it reckoned the history of their forefathers that was not written down yet.<sup>8</sup>

What is important here is that all informants could pinpoint to a male member who was often named 'the founding father' of the family. He set the example to the family. He came with nothing, worked hard and was able to build up a business that had survived for three generations or more. It is the classical from 'rags' to

‘riches’ tale.<sup>9</sup> Many currently running Asian African businesses are still named after the founding father. These tales of ‘from rags to riches’ were often confirmed by ‘day-to-day’ explanations for the wealth of South Asians in East Africa. When I asked African as well as Asian businessmen why so few African entrepreneurs became successful, both sides would reconfirm the above analyses, implicitly arguing that Africans did not have the ‘entrepreneurial spirit’ in their genes or did not work hard. Typical statements in day-to-day interactions with Africans as well as Asians include:

When an African makes \$20, he lives like he owns \$40. When an Indian makes \$20, he reinvests \$15 in his business. When an African makes \$20, his brother asks for support, whereas when an Asian African runs his business, his brother would support him.

It might be tempting to believe this statement, and there might be more than a ring of truth to it. Unfortunately, however, we do not have any hard evidence that support these day-to-day notions regarding the origins of wealth of the South Asians and of poverty among many Africans.

Despite this, some academic literature explains the performance of Asians in East Africa by the insight that ‘outsiders’ are in a better position to enact their business context. According to this literature, Asians used their ethnic resources, such as kinship, business skills, networks and educational experiences to raise capital and management capacity in a far more profitable way than their African counterparts. Therefore, it is suggested that Africans should improve their networking capabilities, level of education and indigenous information flows.<sup>10</sup> Development through education may be an important and useful recommendation for the progress of the local African business capacity. Nevertheless, it is my argument that explaining the economic success of Asians and Africans in East Africa ‘without history’ and without emphasising ‘failures’ is—unfortunately—a common inaccuracy of economists, sociologists and anthropologists. In other words, the recommendation may be right, but the analysis is not.

Historical evidence shows that migration is just one of the side steps families may take to prosper elsewhere. East Africa was just a new opportunity for the West Indian farmers and traders in the late nineteenth century.<sup>11</sup> They often did not have the intention to settle permanently. Around 1875, Sir Barte Frere (1887) emphasised:

They (the Indians, G.O.) never take their families to Africa; the head of the house of business always remains in India, and their books are balanced periodically in India. The house in Africa is merely a branch house, though many of those people will assure you, and they give very good evidence of the fact, that they have had branches in Africa for 300 years, and possibly for much more.<sup>12</sup>

In other words, it was often not the head of the family who made the first exploration in East Africa. Neither was it the eldest son. Even after they had made several profitable journeys to and from India, many South Asians—especially Hindus as we will see later—did not settle in East Africa. A process of circular migration and slow settlement indicates that only those who were successful remained in East Africa and eventually settled with their wives and families. Despite the economic attractions and the cautious process of settlement, many South Asians did not find what they were looking for or failed in East Africa and went back to India.<sup>13</sup> From the perspective of the business in Gujarat, East Africa was just a side step to explore, an option, a new opportunity that arose in the late nineteenth century. For today's 'self-made' Asian African business tycoons, the founding father was the root of a new entrepreneurial area.

The 'dhow stories' were a logical starting point from an anthropological perspective. Oral history as narrated by the subjects themselves is a powerful instrument for a 'history from below'. Nevertheless, in the case of migration history and the history of family businesses, it provides a biased perspective on migration and business, because the starting point is those who are still there,

those who survived economic crises, political turmoil and other important events. But we know very little about those who did not migrate, those who migrated but went back after some time or those whose businesses may have flourished for some time, but then went bankrupt. In the next section, I argue that those who settled, survived and remained in East Africa were successful. Those are the ones who are now seen as the big South Asian pioneers within the family histories. However, I argue that they often started as second sons. That is, they were sent by the head of the family to explore the possibilities in East Africa. Only when they had managed to secure their economic and social position would they invite the other family members to join them. If not, they would return to India. India remained a safety net for those who did not make it as well as a source for new recruitment of clerks. In other words, those who remained in East Africa were, by definition, successful. The ‘dhow stories’ were just a starting point, not the whole picture.

We know very little about the temporary settlement. The main reason for this is that studies on migration rely almost exclusively on sources from the colonial states, in which the numbers of departures (from India) and the numbers of arrivals (in East Africa) are mentioned. In addition, census material reveals the often-growing number of South Asians at a certain time in a certain town or city. This supports the impression of ‘being there’ or living there. These statistics, however, do not show how many members of the same family left West India, arrived in East Africa and returned again to India. In fact, until the late nineteenth century, I would assume that the majority of South Asian traders in Zanzibar and the East Coast were sojourners or temporary migrants. The neglect of circular migration is often the consequence of a teleological view based on the growing numbers of settlers mentioned in the sources. These numbers, however, fail to show the real reasons for leaving Mother India. They wanted to improve the situation of the family back home and not leave their domiciles permanently as we will see in the next section.

## The Process of Settlement and Circular Migration

The general migration history of Asian East Africans is well documented. Long before East Africa was 'discovered' by Europeans, Zanzibar and the East African coast were well-known trading destinations for Arabs and South Asians. The Indian Ocean served as a connection between the continents not as their boundary. These existing trading relations were strengthened after the establishment of the British Empire in East Africa. In the period between 1880 and 1920, the number of South Asians in East Africa grew from about 6,000 to 54,000. These included Hindus (among them well-known business castes such as the Bhatias, Patels, Lohanas and Shahs), Muslims (especially Ithnasheries, Bohras and Ismailis), Sikhs, Goans and others.<sup>14</sup> This process of permanent settlement, however, was the outcome of a process of semi-permanent settlement and circular migration.

South Asian traders and businessmen had to settle semi-permanently while trading with East Africa. They often had to stay for three to six months in East Africa before they could go back to Oman or the north-west Indian coast. This was a direct consequence of the constraint of the monsoon trade in which they had to wait for the right winds to return. Therefore, it is likely that they had made arrangements for 'temporary' settlements along with fellow Asians, mainly in Zanzibar and along the coast. We have very little information about these temporary settlements, but we may assume that these settlements were informally organised, consisting of mainly male traders and businessmen. They had a lot of time to discuss and exchange information and develop relations with the very few settled Asians and trading offices. In addition, some of the men would interact with local African and Arab women.<sup>15</sup>

In the nineteenth century, two interrelated developments took place that gradually evolved into a more permanent settlement of Asians in East Africa. The first development is related to the home region, Gujarat. Gujarat faced a few famines, especially in the late nineteenth century. This must have encouraged the local traders



to explore markets, possibilities and options elsewhere, including in Africa. Others would leave India because of family disputes, famines, diseases and many other reasons. Sources and direct evidence are scarce, but we may assume that in these periods of poverty and scarcity some families—not necessarily the poorest—would explore the economic potential of East Africa, and indeed elsewhere.

The second development was the fact that the Omani ruler Seyyid Said had moved his capital from Oman to Zanzibar in 1832. He brought with him South Asian traders from the Persian Gulf to run his commercial and financial affairs. He encouraged them through a variety of incentives including guarantees of religious tolerance, a minimum of five per cent duty on imports and removal of restrictions on South Asian land ownership. The earlier policy in Zanzibar of treating South Asians as foreign traders was reversed and they were granted equal privileges with Arab traders, including permission to trade on the Mrima Coast. This area stretching from Tangata to Kilwa experienced an economic reverse under the control of the Sultan of Zanzibar. By the 1840s, South Asians were also allowed to acquire property and own clove plantations in Zanzibar.<sup>16</sup> In addition, the Sultan himself approved a commercial treaty with Britain in 1839 that guaranteed British subjects the freedom to enter Zanzibar and to reside and trade within the Sultan's dominion. The establishment of a British consulate in Zanzibar further encouraged South Asians to settle because of the sense of security and the expectation of protection in their dealings with the Arabic aristocracy.

Moreover, Seyyid Said appointed as the chief collector of customs in Zanzibar the Hindu Bhatia Jairam Sewji, who served—with the exception of some brief periods—in this position for almost 70 years. Jairam Sewji used to travel from Zanzibar to Aden and West India every two or three years. He obviously talked to interested traders and financiers about the economic potential of East Africa and the business opportunities in Zanzibar. As a result, some

decided to send their sons to Zanzibar to explore the economic options for their families.<sup>17</sup> The customs helped recruit hundreds of other Bhatias from India and set them up in business within the Zanzibar commercial empire. Besides acting frequently as customs collectors along the coast, the Bhatias were also moneylenders and traders.<sup>18</sup> As noted by the British explorer Richard Burton, most customs collectors along the East African Coast were Hindu Bhatias:

Ladha Dama [*sic*] farms the customs at Zanzibar, at Pemba Island his nephew Pisu has the same charge: Mombasah [*sic*] is in the hands of Lahmidas, and some 40 of his co-religionists; Pangani is directed by Trikandas and contains twenty Bhatias, including those of Mbweni; even the pauper Sa'adani had its Banyan; Ramji, an active and intelligent trader, presides at Bagamoyo, and the customs of Kilwa are collected by Kishnidas. I need hardly say that almost all of them are connected by blood as well as trade.<sup>19</sup>

Most South Asian migrants arrived in East Africa with little or no money.<sup>20</sup> However, they had access to capital through community networks. Only a few families arrived with significant amounts of capital. But family and community connections and the association with Jairam Sewji might suggest that they were at least morally supported and looked after. The British representative in Zanzibar, Sir Bartle Frere, observed in 1873:

Arriving at his future scene of business with little beyond credentials of his fellow caste men, after perhaps a brief apprenticeship in some older firms, he starts a shop of his own with goods advanced on credit by some large house, and after a few years, when he has made a little money, generally returns home to marry, to make fresh business connections, and then comes back to Africa to repeat, on a large scale.<sup>21</sup>

This may have been the pattern followed by many South Asians in East Africa. In the second half of the nineteenth century,

European traders and officials realised that most of the trade in Zanzibar and along the East African coast was in the hands of South Asians. The Arabic elite in Oman and Muscat, more particular Sultan Seyyid Said, believed that Hindus—and South Asian merchants in general—were more enterprising than his own fellow Arabic subjects. In the words of the British traveller, W.G. Palgrave:

Saeed knew that, whatever might be the energy and enterprise of his own born subjects, their commercial transactions would never attain real importance except by the co-operation and under the lead of Indian merchants, and accordingly used every means in his power to allure the Banians of Cutch, Guzerat [*sic*], and the Concan to Muscat, and by absolute toleration, special immunities, and constant patronage rendered the port a half-Hindoo [*sic*] colony. Nor had ever a government more useful, more steady-working, and more inoffensive protégés than the Banians proved themselves to Oman: interfering with no one, seeking nothing beyond their direct line of business, unobtrusive, courteous, and above all far more skilled in the mysteries of the ledger and the counter than ever Arab was or will be, they made the good fortune of Muscat and were its favorable genius.<sup>22</sup>

But the Bhatias' fortunes were very closely tied to the Sultan. In 1879, the new Sultan, Sayyid Bargash, became dissatisfied with Sewji's firm and, for several years, gave control of the customs to another South Asian, Ismaili Tharia Topan. After the partition in 1890 when the British and Germans seized control over the customs, the Bhatias' economic power declined and the proportion of Bhatias compared with the other communities decreased.

Hindu merchants rarely took their wives out of India, while Muslim merchants generally travelled with their families, especially to Muslim countries. The British doctor in Zanzibar, James Christie, wrote in 1876: "They [the Hindus] never, even now, settle permanently, as it is not lawful, or according to their customs, for their women to cross the sea."<sup>23</sup> Along the same lines, but more

specifically about Hindu Bhatias, Richard Burton writes in his work on Zanzibar:

Not a Hindu woman is found upon the Island; all the banians leave their wives at home, and the consequences are certain peccadilloes, for which they must pay liberally. Arab women prefer them, because they have light complexions, they are generous in giving, and they do not indulge in four wives. Most of them, however, especially those settled on the coast, keep handsome slave girls, and as might be expected where illegitimates cannot be acknowledged, they labour under the imputation of habitual infanticide.<sup>24</sup>

Upper caste Hindu men considered Africa to be 'alien' and 'unsafe' for women, and believed that women would be better cared for if they stayed behind in their own extended households in India. Owing to the economic and social uncertainty in East Africa, most Hindu women remained behind in India to look after their parents-in-law, children and property, and to supervise their children's education. In addition, this helped to ensure that the man would come back. It may have been a way to legitimise travelling overseas.<sup>25</sup>

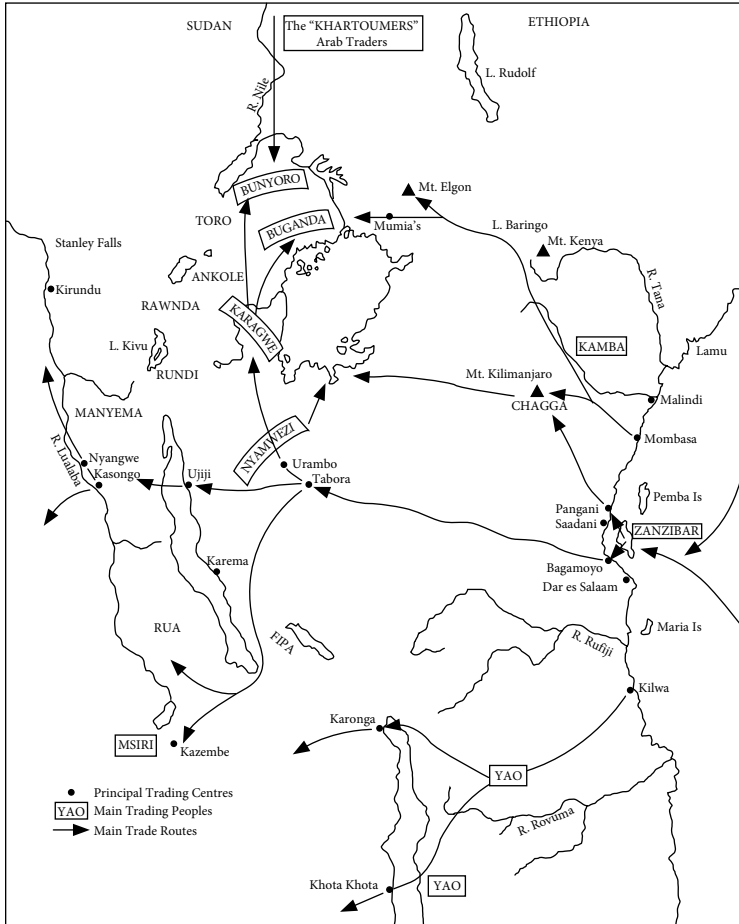
The Sultan of Zanzibar, Seyyid Bargash, must have been aware of this as he encouraged Hindus to bring their wives to his realm. Again, this is an example of elite Arabs encouraging Hindus to settle in Zanzibar, to overcome cultural barriers and to avoid interaction with the local, lower class people. In the early 1880s, he is reported to have sent his private vessel to welcome the first Hindu Bhatia woman in Zanzibar and gave her a reward of Shs 250. As a pledge of his good intentions, he promised to turn Zanzibar's Old Fort into a residence for the wives of merchants and offered to equip it with water pipes fitted with silver taps to ensure that Hindu women need never appear in public. This occurred precisely at the time the Hindu community in Gujarat revolted successfully against Brahmin priests and religious customs that were cramping their mercantile activities and making overseas commerce difficult.

It was reasoned that they were justly pursuing their *dharma* by trading.<sup>26</sup> The unmarried Hindu men generally went back to India to marry, and their wives stayed behind from the beginning, with the men making frequent trips back and forth. Otherwise, the women came to the East African coast for a few years, returning to India for childbirth. It was the practice of Hindu women to have the delivery of the babies—whenever possible—at their mothers' place. Often this was in Gujarat, India, where they generally remained for 10 to 20 years, until their children had finished their education.<sup>27</sup> The religious struggle for purity among Hindus contributed to all kinds of adjustments and rejections. As the marriage functions ought to be attended by Brahmins, who were often not allowed to travel overseas, the first generation got married in India. Some of the youngsters even went back for years to India in order to find a suitable spouse. Most marriages, however, were arranged, and it was just a matter of sailing the Indian Ocean, getting married and coming back.

Nevertheless, the fact that men travelled alone caused different problems. The food ought to be prepared by family members. Eating 'outside', 'taking food from others', was considered to be impure. This may have caused some 'delay' in the migration of Bhatias and Hindu Lohanas from Gujarat to East Africa. In other words, 'food constraints' were easier to overcome if a small Hindu community was already settled in a certain area. This was also true for Hindu migrants who explored the upcountry trading routes towards what is nowadays Kenya and Uganda. Here again, Hindus were a little behind the Muslims in time and number.

There is very little evidence of Hindu movement to the interior before 1890. In general, the South Asians remained in Zanzibar or the coastal port cities. They left the dangerous travel to the interior to the more experienced Arab and Swahili traders.<sup>28</sup> Among the South Asians, most probably the Muslims were the first to discover the interior. The first South Asian known to have settled upcountry was Musa Msuri, a Khoja from Surat. In 1825, he and his brother Sayyan set out on an expedition from Zanzibar and were probably

FIGURE 2.2 Inland Trade Routes in East Africa



Source: E.S. Atieno Odhiambo et al., *A History of East Africa* (London: Longman, 1977), 92 and Lot to Design.

the first non-Africans to reach Unyamwezi territory in western Tanzania, where they traded cloth and beads for ivory, turning a handsome profit. On the return, Sayyan died. Musa, however, continued conducting caravans for another 30 years, reaching as far inland as Buganda in Uganda and Maragwe.<sup>29</sup>

In those days, there were three main routes to the interior. The first was opposite Zanzibar and with many side routes led to Tabora, then divided into three and passed on to the lakes. The second began on the southern Tanzanian coast, in towns like Kilwa, Lindi and Mkindani, and led to Lake Nyasa and then west. The third started in the north of Tanzania, in Pangani and Tanga, and went west to Mount Kilimanjaro and Lake Victoria. The South Asian Khojas, Tharia Thopan (1823–?), Sewji Haji (1851–1997), Allidina Visram (1851–1916) and Nasser Veerrjee (1865–1942), were among the principal financiers of caravan traders in the late nineteenth century. Most of them managed their businesses from the coast, but they gathered first-hand information on the inland trade routes. Pioneers like Allidina Visram explored the areas themselves. They established extensive upcountry *duka* (small shops) networks throughout East Africa and invested in real estate, plantations, shipping and ginneries. At that time, Hindus remained active mainly in the coastal cities, like Bagamoyo, Mombasa, Lindi, Kilwa and Dar es Salaam. Even then, very few Hindus settled before 1900 (see Table 2.1). They were hardly known to travel into the interior until the Uganda Railway was built.

Table 2.1 shows the number of South Asians in the coastal cities and Zanzibar. It does not include the growing number of indentured Indian labourers that helped to build the Uganda Railway between 1895 and 1914.<sup>30</sup> The table follows the categories of the census. The category ‘Others’ consists of small numbers of Parsis, Sikhs, Goans and Memons. It is clear that the vast concentration of South Asians in East Africa was settled in Zanzibar. Unfortunately, we have very little information about the ratio between men and women. But the analysis above as well as oral history reveals that Muslims tended to settle earlier with their wives and children than Hindus. This may explain the fact that the number of Hindu migrants is numerically behind the number of Muslims. In short, however, settlement was slow and fluid. Circular migration was prevalent, and the head of the family remained in Gujarat. This is

TABLE 2.1 Number of Hindus and South Asian Muslims per Town and Year

TOWN	1870			1887			1901				
	Muslim	Hindu	Total	Muslim	Hindu	Others	Total	Muslim	Hindu	Others	Total
Bagamoyo/Saadani	137	54	191	592	31		623	929	25	5	959
Dar es Salaam	53	52	105	92	15		107	631	301	132	1,064
Kilwa (and Mungano)	197	33	230	212	40		252	293	71	14	373
Lindi/Mikindani				202	90		292	218	117	9	344
Mombasa	142	30	172								
Zanzibar	2,350	200	2,550	2,389	618	79	3,086				
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>2,879</b>	<b>369</b>	<b>3,248</b>	<b>3,487</b>	<b>794</b>	<b>79</b>	<b>4,360</b>	<b>2071</b>	<b>514</b>	<b>160</b>	<b>2,740</b>

Sources: Adm. Report Zanzibar, Annex I1870 (Kirk to Widdenburn, 18 July 1870) FO, confidential print 44/1936, 22-23; Census of British Indian subjects in the Dominions of the Sultan of Zanzibar (Major McDonald to Foreign Office), FO 19 December 1887, FO 84/1854; Annual Report, 1901-1902, GCA Annual Report.



in contrast with the ‘dhow stories’, where the role of the ‘founding father’ is emphasised.

The first Hindus known in Nairobi came after the railway arrived at Nairobi in the 1900s.<sup>31</sup> One of my elderly informants, Sunderjibhai (99 years in 2003), remembers that his father and grandfather faced difficulties in opening new business ventures upcountry because of ‘food problems’. They even decided to close their business in Jinja because the food was cooked by ‘outsiders’ as there were no Hindu women or Brahmins there.

I remember that my father told me about his uncle who opened branches of our company in Mombasa and Jinja in 1905. At that time Jinja must have been a very small place. And he placed a manager there. However, in Jinja there were no Hindu families as such. The foods were cooked by the local people and being vaisnavians they find it very difficult to stay. They eventually had to close the Jinja branch, because of the food problems, because the managers would not accept the food prepared by the locals. Because they were strict vegetarians. But in Nairobi and Mombasa and even in Zanzibar there were no problems at that time.<sup>32</sup>

It is difficult to find out whether the importance of food was the only reason to close down the Jinja business. However, at that time other South Asian communities were on the rise and the town was ‘flourishing’.<sup>33</sup> Members of other communities who had family members in that area supported the fact that Jinja was developing in the early twentieth century. It is, however, plausible that the food habits of Hindu Lohanas hampered their economic development in this area.

These sources show, on one hand, the economic importance of the South Asian community for the Arab rulers in Zanzibar and the coastal areas.<sup>34</sup> They were welcomed by rulers, like Seyyid Said, who favoured them with all kinds of smaller and bigger gestures, such as tax reductions and government protection. On the other hand, this precisely shows that the migrants were reluctant to settle down. The settlement of Asians was slow. Most South Asians

would not settle permanently and the 'head office' of the family remained in South Asia. Some informants told me that in periods of insecurity, for example, during the First World War, they would leave Zanzibar and go back to Gujarat. Most of the other family members were still there. In other words, India remained a safety net for such periods.<sup>35</sup>

All these leave enough room to suggest that the Indian Ocean connection between Gujarat and East Africa was very fluid. The rhythm of the monsoon trade made it fluid in itself. But the process of migration, the travel from and to India for trade, marriage, childbirth, security and many others, sustains the argument of the importance of circular migration, temporary migration and only accidental settlement.

## Making a Living Away from Home: Trust, Traps, and Trial and Error

The main object of this section is to falsify the common historical portrait of South Asians in Zanzibar and East Africa. Most studies, a priori, assume the outstanding business success of the Asian minority in East Africa. They emphasise various theories and common explanation for the economic success of South Asians in East Africa, such as hard work, having a superior business mind, using their ethnic resources for capital accumulation and knowledge of (international) markets.<sup>36</sup> Nevertheless, many South Asian traders who came to Zanzibar in the late nineteenth century and started their own businesses failed within 10 years. Some of them continued to work as an employee in someone else's shop in Zanzibar; most, however, returned to India. Their stories are almost forgotten or lost in the accounts of the successful self-made businessmen from India in East Africa. In general, we know very little about migrant traders and moneylenders 'who did not make it' and why they did not make it. This would be accurate for migrant traders in

European history, but even more for non-Western history, because of the lack of written sources.

In cases where bankruptcies were claimed and registered in the court, a wealth of information is available about the causes of bankruptcy and the reasons for the winding up of the firm. This information is rare, especially for late nineteenth century Africa. In many parts of the continent, such courts did not exist at all. In some other cases, the French or British magistrates acted as informal mediators between the members of local trading communities. In those cases where more formal courts were established, few files were saved from the climate, wars, mismanagement, and so on. An exceptional case is that of the Zanzibar Archives, where the records of many court cases in the period between 1875 and 1912 are preserved.<sup>37</sup> They include 1,627 bankruptcy cases of South Asian and Arab traders and businessmen, the main business communities in those days.<sup>38</sup>

The general pattern of the number of bankruptcy cases per year reveals that there were only a few cases (35) in the first 15 years. This may be due to the fact that earlier records were destroyed. Another reason may be that people started increasingly filing cases against bad debtors only after 1890. All this may be a bit of speculation. The majority of cases were filed after the Anglo-Zanzibar War was fought between the United Kingdom and Zanzibar on 27 August 1896. The conflict lasted approximately 38 minutes and is the shortest war in history. In this war, many houses and businesses near the Sultan's palace were bombarded by the British and were destroyed. Consequently, 79 bankruptcies were filed against businesses in 1898, of which 44 were related to the war.

Between 1890 and 1912, 1,602 bankruptcies were filed, that is more than 70 (72.8) each year. And these are officially registered bankruptcy files—the factual number can only be higher. In 1887, there were 3,086 South Asian inhabitants in Zanzibar (Table 2.1). Again, we get into a bit of speculation by assuming that half of these were women and children and may be a quarter would work for someone else and were not self-employed. This leaves us with

around 750 South Asian firms, of which 70 (at the least) go bankrupt each year. This makes me assume that more than 10 per cent of the South Asian firms would go bankrupt every year.

Let us now look into the causes of these bankruptcies. The court cases of Zanzibar reveal a wealth of information, including the lifespan and nature of a business, the causes of bankruptcy, the relations with business partners, family and community members, creditors and the size of the firm. In most cases, the bankrupt defendant was asked about the reasons for his losses and debts. Therefore, we get an insight into the personal opinions of the affected businessmen. In addition, a so-called 'Trustee' apprised the court of whether he believed the statements of the defendant and also counselled the judge. This makes it possible to verify the defendant's statements, or at least to compare them with more neutral accounts. Many cases include the Arabic, Gujarati and English documents, which show the physical evidence behind the oral statements. These 'failure stories' display a picture that differs greatly from that of the success of South Asian traders in East Africa. It supports a more 'trial and error' scheme of the birth, growth, and fall of businesses. By definition, the successful businesses survived the struggle for life.<sup>39</sup>

A rough estimate indicates that half of the South Asian defendants, that is South Asian business owners, in Zanzibar between 1875 and 1912 claimed to have started their businesses with no money, or 'little money'.<sup>40</sup> This is supported by oral evidence of my own in 2002–2003 and that of Martha Honey in the 1970s.<sup>41</sup> However, they had access to capital through their community networks. The Trustee Report related to the Bankruptcy of Mohammed Rashid Dewraji states: "The Insolvent began business in Sumvant year 1961 [1903 AD, G.O.] without any capital of his own, but having influential relatives and connections he managed to get on and obtained credit."<sup>42</sup>

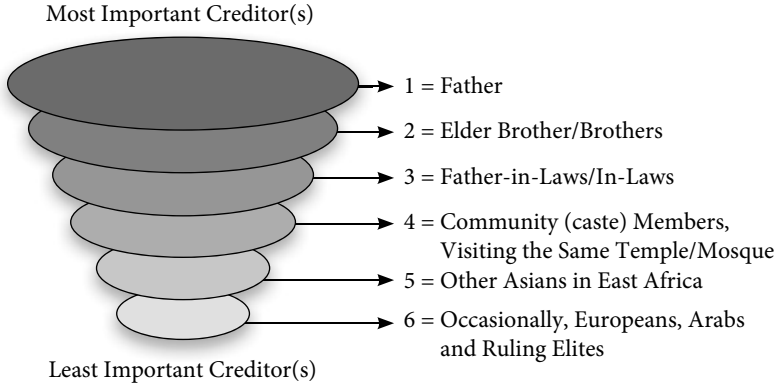
This typical example supports the statements made by Rigby and Kirk. Access to credit from relatives or entrepreneurial wholesalers who were well off seems to have been an important condition

for starting businesses. Fathers, maternal uncles and ‘community members’ were most-mentioned suppliers of credit. Some started with quite substantial loans. Ali Sahoo started his business in 1882 with a loan of ₹8,000 from his father. Most of them were not so well off, and had to start with something between ₹200 and ₹800.<sup>43</sup> Others worked as shopkeepers or clerks for wholesalers (mostly, but not always, within the family or community) and started their own business elsewhere in Zanzibar, or one of the other islands, or in the port cities of the mainland. They usually left with their goods, which they had to repay in 90 days.<sup>44</sup>

Gaining knowledge by working for family and community members as well as receiving credit was the most important asset Asian migrants had. In most examples, houses and land were not mortgaged for credit as it was beyond the means of ordinary small traders. Therefore, the most important ‘security’ was a person’s ‘good name’. A ‘good name’ was gained by repaying debts on time, being known among credit worthy people, and being an honest and trustworthy businessman in general. If a family’s reputation was lost, it would be very difficult to obtain new credits. Therefore, it is not surprising that family members would take the responsibility for the debts of fathers, brothers, or in-laws, even if they were not legally obliged to do so. In these cases, keeping up the family name was of high priority in order to attract new or future investors.

In most cases, members of the family and community of the insolvents were the main creditors. The records of the court cases show appendices with the names of the major creditors. It can be seen that the insolvent’s community members had credited more than 90 per cent of the indebted capital. Outsiders financed less than 10 per cent. The shortcut to ‘credit circles’ can be visualised as concentric circles, as follows (see Figure 2.3): The most important creditor is the father (or the family firm). The elder brother and other family members, including the brother-in-law, follow him. The other ‘community members’ in Zanzibar (and not in India) are the next creditors. Communities would be usually defined

**FIGURE 2.3 Major Creditors: Circles of Significance**



Source: Gijsbert Oonk and Lot to Design.

along *jatis* and sub-castes such as Patels and Lohanas (for Hindus), Bohras, Ithnasheries and Ismailljees (for Muslims) and Parsis and Goans. Finally, local outsiders—but mainly South Asians and not Arabs or Europeans—would pay up less than 10 per cent of the total debts.

Interestingly, however, most of the loans were not paid upon securities, but as a matter of trust, often based on just ‘kinship’. The local outsiders, however, would occasionally request to mortgage land, house or furniture. However, when this deal was made secretly and came to the notice of the other creditors, especially the family members, it would strongly deteriorate relations. Eventually, this could be the main reason for family members filing a case, because they would argue that the given securities may not belong to the individual, but to the family business.

The Hindu trader Rattamsi Remtoola started his trading business in the 1880s. He traded in Zanzibar for 27 years and, according to the Trustee, had built a ‘good name’. In 1911, however, he lost some money in the clove and kanga business. All his creditors, except one, were Hindus.<sup>45</sup> The same is true for the Khoja Hasham Nasser Doongari, who claimed that he lost ₹1,200 in goods after a theft. His 25 creditors, of whom 22 were Khojas, lost confidence in

him and claimed bankruptcy. In other words, community members were among the first to lend goods or money, but they were also the first to claim their money and possessions back.<sup>46</sup> This throws some fresh light on the ethnic business networks where the mutual help of each other seems to be emphasised. The evidence presented here does not dispute it, but stresses the fact that loans were not given for free and had to be repaid. In other words, ethnic credit networks were no charity organisations, but business opportunities.

At the same time, we find evidence that community members were not necessarily more reliable than other people. This is shown in the case of Damji Jagjivan, who dealt in opium and ganja. He was given a good sample of ganja by Virji Samji, from whom he bought 65 bags of ganja. But later he found that the delivered goods contained ganja of a very inferior quality. Ironically, Virji was among his main creditors.<sup>47</sup> Community networks were important, but not perfect. The network's main function may have been the continuous and intense scrutiny of each other's economic position, prosperity, honesty and relations.

The importance of maintaining the reputation of the family, in order to maintain integrity among potential creditors, is clearly seen in the case of Naser Noormohamed. He started his business in 1903. He was involved in importing and exporting with China. He was able to start his business—read to obtain credit—only after he agreed to take over his father's debts, which he did. The trustee report of his case reads as follows: "The business was a paying one, but unfortunately the insolvent had undertaken also to pay his father's debt, which he did to the extent of Rs 2100." Thus, his business was 'a paying one', but not good enough to enable him to pay his own debts and those of his father.<sup>48</sup> The importance of the reputation of the family's name causing him to take responsibility for his father's debt, without being legally obliged to do so, clearly shows the importance of keeping up a 'good family name'.<sup>49</sup>

If an entrepreneur's reputation had not yet spread beyond the direct family network, he could not obtain any credit from

community members, but could get it only from his family. Quite a few insolvents stated that they started their businesses with some capital borrowed from their fathers, brothers or in-laws. But if they were unable to pay them back, bankruptcy was filed. Ali Sahoo, for example, started trading in cloves in the early 1880s with a quite substantial capital of ₹8,000 from his father, but could not pay him back. His father, among other creditors, accused him of losing money because of speculation with dealings in clove. He suggested that his second son had advised Ali to speculate. Ali denied this. According to him, "It was not my fault that I lost. Prices went down."<sup>50</sup> Another example is Hamir Jetha. He started dealing in leaves in 1899. He got his trade on credit. After some misfortune, he borrowed a relatively small amount of ₹700 from his father-in-law to pay his creditors. Unfortunately, he was not able to repay his creditors and his father-in-law on time, and a petition was filed against him in 1908.<sup>51</sup> In these cases, a petition was filed against the insolvents by the creditors in order to ensure that they would get back at least some of their money. The insolvents were forced to sell their properties, including the jewellery of their wives.

Nevertheless, a small minority of the South Asian migrants came with substantial money to Zanzibar and others inherited their wealth from their predecessors in Zanzibar. In 1888, Rahim Lillani along with three brothers started his business in Zanzibar with a capital of ₹20,000. They invested in real estate and land in Zanzibar, Bagamoyo and Dar es Salaam. In 1908, they went bankrupt owing to a lost legal case in Bagamoyo (German East Africa, at that time).<sup>52</sup> Ismaili Gulamhusein Baloo Koorji was born with a silver spoon in his mouth. In 1891, he inherited from his father in Zanzibar a house worth ₹20,000 and also property and cash valued at \$20,000.<sup>53</sup> These cases show that not everyone was a self-made man. In addition, this case exemplifies the fact that even well-established and big trading companies went bankrupt.

Occasionally, an insolvent would admit that his business was financed by a more prosperous brother or father. In these cases, we wonder why a loss-making unskilful trader was supported by



his family at all. Alli Mohammed Shariff openly confessed that he was a failed businessman. He was always in debt. He stated: “My brother was really financing me. When my brother sent money, I paid what money might be due to anyone. (...) I knew I was buying on definite credit from merchants here.”<sup>54</sup> Such cases were exceptions. More often, family members refused to spend extra money on loss-making relatives. In 1908, an insolvent Mehrali Shamji’s father wrote a sarcastic letter in which he made it clear that he would stop providing funds to his son’s business.

You wrote me during Diwali [Indian festival, G.O.] that you had in all Rs 15,000 against which your debt amounted to Rs 5,500, and the balance was to your own credit. But on the contrary, you have now formed a debt of Rs 9,000, so have you lost? Or is it that you have spent so much in your daughter’s marriage that you had to turn in such a debt? People go abroad for business, and you have in five years run up a debt of Rs 9,000, which is equal to Rs 2,000 per year. (...) You write that God has given you and will give and you have God’s favour, then what is the reason you have suffered loss?<sup>55</sup>

In these cases, it is clear that even the family bond was no guarantee for unlimited financial assistance. The assistance of the businessman’s father, brother and father-in-law had to be earned. In exceptional cases, the business owner had to go beyond his direct family and community to obtain credit. In such cases, it was more common for creditors to ask for some kind of security. However, if other creditors (family and community members) became aware of the fact that outsiders had given credit based on a particular security, the path to the court was short. Most of the other creditors would demand securities as well, or they would claim their money back. This would often end in the business owner’s insolvency, because he would not be able to repay immediately to the majority of his creditors.

This happened, for example, to the Parsi hotel owner Dosabhoj Rustomji. In 1902, he had a shortage of cash and he borrowed some money from the Muslim Ally Far, who demanded the hotel

furniture as a security. After the Parsi creditors had heard that the furniture was assigned to Ally Far, they immediately went to court to file Rustomji's bankruptcy. The Trustee in the case stated—after seeing the accounts and hearing the creditors—that Rustomji would not have had any financial problems if one of his fellow community members had given him credit.<sup>56</sup> Such cases reinforced the 'community-oriented' credit system. Most South Asian traders in Zanzibar must have been aware that borrowing money from outsiders in return for securities would damage their reputation within the community. Therefore, they must have been very reluctant to do so.

In some cases of fraud, family and community relations were used to minimise the losses due to bankruptcy. In the case of Husein Khali, the Trustee must have gone through quite a bit of detailed work to find out that his account books were fraudulently kept. Some family members claimed loans, securities and goods in order to get a larger share of the dividend from the insolvent. This included the false claim of his father-in-law that he had given a loan with the house of Husein Khali as the security. It turned out that there was no loan and, moreover, the house did not belong to Husein Khali. Furthermore, his wife had lent her ornaments to Husein Khali to enable him to raise some more money. After some negotiation and pressure by the Trustee, she accepted a much lower price for her ornaments than initially claimed. A shop boy, who was related to Husein Khali, declared that he had not received his monthly wage for four months, but in fact his contract had started only two months before the filing of the bankruptcy. In other words, Husein Khali illegally tried to save his money from his creditors. After weeks of arguments with evidence and counter-evidence, the Trustee managed to save an important part of the insolvent's assets for the legitimate creditors.<sup>57</sup>

### *Trial and Error in Business Undertakings*

Many, if not most, South Asian traders and businessmen who arrived in Zanzibar in the late nineteenth century were people

who were trying to make a living. They were not entrepreneurs with a rational far-sighted business view, or innovators, or people with the gift of a 'business mind'. The inaccuracy of such heroic qualifications, so often attributed to successful business communities, is demonstrated by the bankruptcy court cases of the Zanzibar Archives. Many first worked for family or community members before starting their own business. Others shifted from one business to another and back, and many did not survive in businesses at all. Therefore, the process of a community emerging as a successful business community has to be seen as the outcome of a number of 'trial and error' processes. In these processes, only a few families survived in the long run.

The process of 'trial and error' in business and trade is nicely described in the life history of the shoemaker Hurji Mala. Hurji looked after the family business in India, while his brother explored the possibilities in Zanzibar. The family business was declared bankrupt in Jamnagar, India, in 1898. In his personal statement, Hurji acknowledged that he and his brother owed their creditors in India ₹10,000. They sold their house in Jamnagar and paid less than 25 per cent of their debts. At that time, his brother was doing 'some business' in Zanzibar, and Hurji decided to join him. He stayed for two months in his brother's house and then settled as a shoemaker in Zanzibar. By then, the family business was officially dissolved.

Hurji stated that he started with ₹200, which was in the form of leather, shoemaker's tools, and no liabilities. In the year 1899, his wife was sick, which 'interfered with his work' and he 'lost a small capital'. To continue his business, he borrowed money from his suppliers and continued his trade. He developed a good name and a good many customers. Because of his success, he employed two or three persons. Hurji, unfortunately, was unable to explain what happened between 1899 and 1903, the year in which his bankruptcy was filed. In his bankruptcy case, he made no attempt to explain how he got into difficulties. The Trustee suspiciously

states: “He seems to have made and sold shoes without ascertaining whether he was doing so at a profit or a loss.” Hurji himself alleged that he expected to make a profit of between twelve annas and one rupee on each pair of shoes. Against this profit, his own time and the men’s wages had to be placed. That his shoemaker’s business flourished at some time can easily be seen from the fact that Hurji was able to borrow an amount of ₹1,347 in order to buy leather and a horse and carriage. However, in 1903, his total debt had grown to more than ₹4,500, whereas his liabilities did not amount to more than ₹1,330 (after the deduction of credit due to preferential creditors). In other words, there was a time when creditors stopped lending him money despite his ‘good name’.<sup>58</sup>

Hurji left a considerable debt in India before he went to Zanzibar, where he went bankrupt again, despite some flourishing years. His most remarkable statement—that is from a businessman’s point of view—was the following: “I did not know whether I was making a profit or not.” This clearly shows that it was possible for businesses to flourish or deteriorate without the entrepreneur himself realising it. In most cases, this is a direct consequence of poor administration of the business affairs.

Some people went bankrupt even without making any loss. Pira Khimji, for example, seemed to be a quite successful businessman. He was the partner of Dewji Walji, with whom he successfully did business as an auctioneer. In addition, he acted as a broker to the British firm, Smith McKenzie, and he bought a press in order to print a newspaper. This highly diversified business was eventually brought to court after Khimji had mortgaged his wife’s jewellery in order to buy the printing press. The insolvent’s report suggests that Khimji’s continual expansion has been too speculative. Nevertheless, none of his ventures made any losses. However, his creditors forced him in May 1904 to repay his debts immediately. This made the Trustee to rhetorically ask why the creditors ruined a business that was running good.<sup>59</sup> The sources do not reveal the answer.

Another example of the process of ‘trial and error’ is given in the life history of the South Asian Ladha Mawji. He appeared in court for the third time in 1908. He started his first business in Zanzibar in 1881. He went bankrupt in 1902 and again in 1904. He was able to repay his creditors more than 70 per cent of the total debts. It is not clear how and why he started business again, and who lent him the money. In 1908, he was declared bankrupt again and the Trustee noted that “it is not possible to ascertain with accuracy how he has suffered losses”. However, elsewhere in his report, some hints are given:

The insolvent has, while he was in none too solvent, a position spent after the marriage of his daughter and nephew about Rs 1500 and paid away to the Jamat Khana [the mosque of the Ismailis, G.O.] about Rs 1,000.<sup>60</sup>

The expense of ₹1,000 was quite a substantial amount considering that his total debts were about ₹20,000, of which he was able to repay a little more than ₹5,000. This case is one of the few examples in Zanzibar in which a person managed to become bankrupt more than once.<sup>61</sup> It is plausible that his position within the Jamat Khana organisation or the position of his in-laws and that of his daughter made it possible for him to obtain new loans and start new ventures. Nevertheless, this case shows that he had not learnt much from the past. Moreover, it seems that his status within the family and Jamat Khana was more important to him than reinvesting profits in his business.

Some small traders passed through various stages in a few years. They went from being independent traders, earning a substantial living, to bankrupts who were fed by their mothers or brothers and had to beg for small jobs. Abdalrasal started his postage stamp business in 1905. He supplied important large firms like those of Alladina Visram, Gullamhusein and the Consuls of Austria and Germany. However, his prospects declined after the Austrian Consul left Zanzibar without paying him. At the same time, his

brother, who worked for Visram, was fired. Abdalrasal lost two important customers and could not repay his creditors, and went bankrupt. He stayed for a while at his mother's place where he was fed. After a while, he started a small business in cigarettes. He got goods on credit, but it never really paid. He failed again. In his words, "I attribute my failure to having to buy dear and to sell cheap." He finally ended up in jail for cheating his creditors.<sup>62</sup>

The South Asian bankruptcy cases from the Zanzibar Archives provide a biased view of the emergence of South Asian entrepreneurs in Zanzibar. Because of the nature of the material, we obtained detailed information mainly about 'failures'—those who did not manage to become successful traders and businessmen. Nevertheless, these bankruptcy cases supplement the more well-known success stories of South Asian businessmen in East Africa. Therefore, we are given a more balanced view of the emergence of South Asian businessmen. Taking the 'success' and 'failure' stories together, an image develops of the 'trees in forest' fighting for light and existence.<sup>63</sup> Only a few survive, and even fewer go on to become big trees.

Many descendants of early South Asian migrants claim that they came to East Africa with 'little or no money' and had a 'humble background'. This is confirmed by the sources of the bankruptcy cases in the Zanzibar Archives. Nevertheless, this does not mean that they possessed nothing at all. On the contrary, they had their 'family name', which gave access to small jobs with family and community members who owned shops. They 'learnt on the job' how to handle money, produce account books and calculate rent. Shop owners supported their employees by giving them credit in goods for three months and gave them the opportunity to start businesses elsewhere. In fact, they themselves transited from retailers to wholesalers.

Not all migrants came with almost nothing. Some were fairly rich and closely related to the Arabic rulers of Zanzibar. Both Seyyid Said and Seyyid Bargash appointed South Asians as custom masters, who were responsible to collect the customs in Zanzibar

and some other harbours along the East African coast. These South Asian custom masters invited their family and community members to farm the customs as profitable as possible. Therefore, contacts with rulers as well as close family networks played an important role in the success of South Asian entrepreneurs in East Africa.

It seems plausible, although the evidence is not clear, that the South Asian community was economically hierarchically structured. Patrons like Tharia Topan, Allidina Visram and Ladha Dama provide their family and community members with all kinds of jobs and (credit) services. In addition, they served as leaders who solved small disputes or established formal education. Tharia Topan was one of the first South Asian leaders to establish an 'Indian school' in Zanzibar, where South Asian Hindus and Muslims were educated in their own languages. These high profile Asian tycoons were often very visible in the society. It is fair to assume that they strongly reinforced the image of 'richness'.

Access to credit and informal institutions was not unconditional but was based on a person's reputation rather than physical securities. Because of this, the 'good name' of the family was significant, in some cases to the extent that family members took responsibility for each other's debts to avoid bankruptcy in order to keep up the good name. Credit and debts were an important factor in most businesses. In a number of cases, the huge number of so-called 'bad debts' played an important role in the inability of the insolvent to repay their creditors. This shows a fascinating paradox in communal credit relations. Insolvents most often obtained their credit to start a business because of their reputation within the family and community. While doing business, however, they offered credit to community members as well, who—in the bankruptcy cases—were not able to repay them. This was, among other things, a major reason for their insolvency. Therefore, the ability to judge a person's credibility in the long run and the ability to

acquire loans back in time were important conditions for running a successful business. The fact that most South Asian businesses started with little or no money may explain the small importance given to physical securities. Most of the starting traders had nothing to offer but their families' names.

In general, the most important and first creditors were the father and brother(s) of the insolvent. They were followed by other family members such as in-laws and uncles. Their names were not always listed in the bankruptcy cases, but they were mentioned in the business histories of the Trustees. In addition, 'other' community members were among the most important creditors. Lastly, non-community members represented a very small minority of the creditors in the bankruptcy cases of South Asians in Zanzibar.

This is in line with a study in the 1950s among 100 South Asian households in Kampala, Uganda. The Indian anthropologist H.S. Morris stated that there was a saying among traders in Kampala: "If you want a reliable relative to help you in the business, bring your wife's brother from India. He will not dare to cheat you for a long time."<sup>64</sup>

In this section, I explained the success of South Asians in Zanzibar, East Africa, from a historical point of view. We have already seen in the previous section that many South Asians in East Africa started with a far more favourable socio-economic position as compared to their African counterparts. They had access to the rulers and were able to negotiate profitable terms of trade. In addition, some of them were able to speak and write English, which helped them to communicate with British and German officials and rulers. Nevertheless, many were not successful and went bankrupt. Therefore, the success of South Asians in East Africa may be explained as the outcome of a 'trial and error' process. The successful remained in East Africa, whereas others left. India remained a safety net for those who did not make it as well as a source for new recruitment of traders, shopkeepers and clerks.



## Conclusion

This chapter described the settlement of South Asian traders and businessmen in East Africa in the late nineteenth century. Travel between South Asia and East Africa was constrained by the rhythm of the monsoons. Therefore, South Asian traders were accustomed to stay for a few weeks up to a few months in Zanzibar or the East African coast before returning to India. Until the nineteenth century, they hardly settled in East Africa, despite the fact that small numbers of South Asians were recorded. In the nineteenth century, they were encouraged to settle by the Omani ruler Seyyid Said who moved his capital from Oman to Zanzibar in 1832. Nevertheless, it seems plausible that the South Asians settled only gradually and slowly. The Muslim communities were slightly faster in inviting their families from Gujarat and Kutch to settle on the African continent. This may be because of the fact they did not have any taboos on crossing the ocean and settling down in a predominantly Muslim environment. The Sultan of Zanzibar, Seyyid Bargash, must have been aware of this as he encouraged Hindus to bring their wives to his realm in the late nineteenth century. While the process of settlement was encouraged, circular migration remained important. Nevertheless, the total number of South Asian settlers in East Africa remained small, probably less than 10,000 around 1890.

Migration was a slow process of trial and error. Many fortune seekers tried their best in East Africa, but did not make it. Most of them always had the option of returning to India. Nevertheless, most South Asians started with a far more favourable socio-economic position compared to that of their African counterparts. When they arrived in East Africa, they were already accustomed to a money economy and the concept of interest. Many were able to read and write and freely communicated with local rulers, who placed the South Asians in a superior socio-economic position. In fact, some British and German colonial officials were very much concerned with the socio-economic disadvantages and backwardness of Africans. In this historical arena, three main sources for

the success of Asians in East Africa come together: (a) The South Asians traders—and not Swahili people—were attracted by the Arabic and colonial powers to fulfil the demand for credit and trading facilities in Zanzibar and East Africa. (b) They developed, through trial and error, local trading and business acquaintance and business networks. (c) They developed, partly with money from Asians business families, their own education network in East Africa. The level of education of Asians in East Africa was much higher than that of their African counterparts (see Chapter 3 for more on education).

My research having been started with oral history, the contrast could not be bigger. Most of my South Asian informants would stress on entirely different reasons for their economic success. They emphasised the importance of hard work, living sober, reinvesting profits, taking calculated risks, and so on. Moreover, they highlighted the importance of the ‘founding father’ of the family. He once had shown the courage to travel by a dhow from India to East Africa and then settle in a culturally strange environment. The ‘dhow stories’ show another important aspect as well. Over the generations, the image of the family members, relatives and friends faded. We may assume that the first and second generation migrants might have had clear pictures of the relatives ‘back home’. In the next generations, however, this faded. This might be due to the fact that India was not necessitated anymore as a safety net. They had shown their ability to build up a business in East Africa. Their economic focus was in and on Africa now. From the 1930s onwards, they would develop even more business with Europe, as we will see in Chapter 4.

Both narratives show the two sides of the same medal. The oral narratives are bound to show success and survival stories. People are more at ease to tell you their successes rather than failures and setbacks. Some informants would include major setbacks and failures in their histories, but always in the context of being able to survive these obstacles. Moreover, those who were bankrupt and were not able to revive their businesses generally would have sailed

back to India or moved on to other countries. Therefore, they are not part of the sample of ‘South Asian businesses’ in today’s East Africa. The bankruptcy narratives show a different picture. They show that there was a variety of causes for bankruptcies, ranging from ‘bad luck’, ‘illness’, ‘theft’ and ‘war’ to bad management, poor investment strategies, and so on. They also show that ‘social capital’ and trust is not something that is ‘just there to grab’ if you are born in the right family at the right time. I have presented many examples where fathers, uncles and community members were the first to supply credit to their sons and relatives. Nevertheless, they were the first—if needed—to file a bankruptcy. Last but not least, trust was not self-evident in these family and community networks. Trustworthiness could be easily gained within the network; however, the network’s most effective function is to signal dishonesty and disloyalty. These ‘failure stories’ display a picture that differs greatly from that of the success of South Asian traders in East Africa. It supports a more ‘trial and error’ scheme of the birth, growth and fall of businesses as described by the nineteenth century economist Alfred Marshall. By definition, the successful businesses survived the struggle for life, but we never know for sure who the survivors are in the long run.

But here we may read a lesson from the young trees of the forest as they struggle upwards through the benumbing shade of their older rivals. Many succumb on the way, and a few only survive; those few become stronger with every year, they get a larger share of light and air with every increase of their height, and at last in their turn they tower above their neighbours and seem as though they would grow on for ever, and forever become stronger as they grow. But they do not. One tree will last longer in full vigour and attain a greater size than another; but sooner or later age tells on them all. Though the taller ones have a better access to light and air than their rivals, they gradually lose vitality; and one after another they give place to others, which though of less material strength have on their side the vigour of youth. (...) in almost every trade there is a constant rise and fall of large businesses, at any one moment some firms being in the ascending phase and others in the declining.<sup>65</sup>

## Notes and References

1. See for this early period the notable works of M.N. Pearson, *Port Cities and Intruders: The Swahili Coast, India and Portugal in the Early Modern Area* (Baltimore and London: John Hopkins University Press, 1998); K.N. Chaudhury, *Trade and Civilization in the Indian Ocean: An Economic History from the Rise of Islam to 1750* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985); K.N. Chaudhury, *Asia before Europe: Economy and Civilization of the Indian Ocean from the Rise of Islam to 1750* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990); S. Bose, *A Hundred Horizons: The Indian Ocean Themes in South Asia* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 2006); Abdul Sheriff, *Dhow Cultures of the Indian Ocean: Cosmopolitanism, Commerce and Islam* (London: C. Hurst & Co., 2010).
2. G. Oonk, 'South Asians in East Africa (1880–1920) with a Particular Focus on Zanzibar: Toward a Historical Explanation of Economic Success of a Middlemen Minority', *Journal of African and Asian Studies* 5, no. 1 (2006): 57–89.
3. In the widely used, E.S. Atieno Odhiambo, T.I. Ouso and J.F.M. Williams, *A History of East Africa* (Essex: Longman Group Limited, 1977), there is not a single reference to Asians in East Africa. John Illif, *A Modern History of Tanganyika* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979) contains more than 600 pages, with less than 4 pages referring to South Asians.
4. I was not the first researcher who encountered 'dhow stories'. See Cynthia Salvadori, *We Came in Dhows* (Nairobi: Paperchase Kenya Ltd, 1996). Abdul Sheriff has added a beautiful monograph on dhows and dhow cultures in his *Dhow Cultures and the Indian Ocean: Cosmopolitanism, Commerce, and Islam* (Columbia: Columbia University Press, 2010).
5. When I came back in 2002–2003, many more 'dhow stories' were added. But by then, the format was clear and did not change much.
6. This is hard to believe, as compasses were widely available, relatively cheap (compared to the value of trade, often luxury goods) and reliable.
7. This was always hard to believe, but unexpectedly confirmed by the amount of written evidence from the Zanzibar bankruptcy files; see next section.
8. Salvadori, *We Came in Dhows*. This is a well-written and beautifully designed book. It contains many anecdotes on 'dhow stories', personal insights and histories of South Asians in Africa.
9. It reminded me of the nineteenth century text of Samuel Smiles, *Self Help* (Boston: Ticknor and Fields, 1859), where the idea of 'self-made men' was promoted. This idea was encountered in a number of classical historical studies. The number of successful traders and industrialists who began without capital or connections of any kind was a minute fraction of the whole. See H. Perking, *The Origins of Modern English Society* (London: Routledge, 1969);

- F. Crouzet, *The First Industrialists: The Problems of Origins* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985).
10. Stein Kristiansen and Anne Ryen, 'Enacting their Business Environments: Asian Entrepreneurs in East Africa', *African and Asian Studies* 1, no. 3 (2002): 165–86.
  11. Many of the early settlers had a background in agriculture. However, it is likely that migrants from the Indian rural areas underwent an 'initiation period in the Indian ports', where they—under the guidance of family and community members—learnt something of overseas trade. Sheriff, 'The Rise of a Commercial Empire: An Aspect of the Economic History of Zanzibar, 1770–1873' (London: PhD Thesis, University of London, 1971), 127.
  12. Bartle Frere, *Extracts from the Evidence Taken before the Select Committee of the House of Commons* (CO 1887). See also Richard F. Burton, *Zanzibar: City, Island and Coast* (Honolulu, Hawaii: University Press of the Pacific, 2003; reprinted from the 1872 edition, original 1856), 329–35. The first volume of Cynthia Salvadori's well-known fieldwork account *We Came in Dhows* contains a few oral testimonies of families that kept trading branches in Mumbai (then Bombay) and other places in India as well.
  13. See also the next section for examples of South Asians who went bankrupt within the first 10 years of their arrival in Zanzibar. Earlier, Claude Markovits made a strong case against the idea of permanent settlement. He argues that the majority of Indian migrants in the nineteenth century were not permanent migrants, but temporary migrants. See Claude Markovits, *The Global World of Indian Merchants, 1750–1947: Traders of Sind from Bukhara to Panama* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000). See also Claude Markovits, 'Indian Merchant Networks outside India in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries: A Preliminary Survey', *Modern Asian Studies* 33, no. 4 (October 1999): 883–911.
  14. Robert G. Gregory, *South Asians and East Africa: An Economic and Social History, 1890–1980* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1993), 1–15.
  15. For evidence related to the interaction with local women, see R. Nagar, 'The South Asian Diaspora in Tanzania: A History Retold', *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 16, no. 2 (1996): 62–80; R. Nagar, 'Communal Discourses, Marriage, and the Politics of Gendered Social Boundaries among South Asian Immigrants in Tanzania', *Gender, Place and Culture* 5, no. 2 (1998): 117–39.
  16. Sheriff, *The Rise of a Commercial Empire*, 348–49.
  17. G. Oonk, *The Karimjee Jivanjee Family: Merchant Princes of East Africa, 1800–2000* (Amsterdam: Pallas Publishers, 2009). The connection between Buddhayboy Noormuhammed and Jairam Sewji is via Anverali Hassanali Noorani, who was the great grandson of Jivanjee. He was born in 1901. Interview published in Salvadori, *We Came in Dhows*, 100–01. Information

- related to Jairam Sewji can be found in the Colonial Office (hereafter CO), Memo by Sir Bartle Frere, Correspondence 1856, p. 10.
18. Frere termed Bhatias as “probably the most important by wealth and influence”. See CO, Memo by Sir Bartle Frere, Correspondence 1856, p. 100.
  19. Burton, *Zanzibar: City, Island and Coast*, 328–29.
  20. There is more evidence for this statement than I expected; see next section.
  21. CO, Memo by Sir Bartle Frere, Correspondence 1856, p. 101; Martha Honey, ‘A History of Indian Merchants’ (Unpublished PhD Thesis, Dar es Salaam University, 1982), 63.
  22. W.G. Palgrave, *Narrative of a Year’s Journey through Central and Eastern Arabia* (London: Macmillan, 1865), 2: 369–70.
  23. James Christie, *Cholera Epidemics in East Africa* (London: Macmillan, 1876), 345. Contemporary sources on the position (and absence) of Hindu women in East Africa include Burton, *Zanzibar: City, Island and Coast*, 329–35; F.B. Pearce, *Zanzibar: The Island Metropolis of Eastern Africa* (London: Frank Cass, 1967 [1920]), 257.
  24. Richard Burton, *Zanzibar: City, Island and Coast*, 329–35.
  25. R. Nagar, ‘The South Asian Diaspora in Tanzania: A History Retold’, 62–80; R. Nagar, ‘Communal Discourses, Marriage, and the Politics of Gendered Social Boundaries among South Asian Immigrants in Tanzania’, 117–39.
  26. Sheriff, *The Rise of a Commercial Empire*, 354.
  27. G. Oonk, ‘The Changing Culture of the Hindu Lohana Community in East Africa’, *Contemporary South Asia* 13, no. 1 (2004): 7–23.
  28. As Frere reported: “The Banians generally keep to the forts, or within a short journey of the Coast or navigable parts of large rivers. The trade with the far interior is almost exclusively in the hands of Arabs, or Arab half-castes, and Swahili.” F.O. 84/1391, Frere to Granville, 7 May 1873.
  29. John Gray, *Tanganyika Notes and Records* 49, no. 19 (1957): 226–46. By 1857, Musa Msuri had settled in Tabora where, according to Burton: “He had become at the age of forty-five or so the pre-eminent man of business (...) large investments of wire, beads, and cotton cloths, some of them valuable, are regularly forwarded to him from the coast (...) His gains (...) are principally represented by outlying debts: he could not leave the country without enormous sacrifices.” Richard Burton, *The Lake Regions of Central Africa: A Picture of Exploration* (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1860).
  30. A total of more than 37,000. See R.G. Gregory, *Quest for Equality: Asian Politics in East Africa, 1900–1967* (New York: Oriental Blackswan, 1993), 3.
  31. Salvadori, *Through Open Doors* (Nairobi: Kenway Publications 1983), 97, 99, 106.
  32. Interview with Sunderjibhai on 10 October 2000.
  33. TA (Tanganyika Archives) G 21, 6.
  34. See also the example in the second part of this chapter of Sultan Seyyid Bargash who in the early 1880s encouraged Hindu women to settle in Zanzibar.

35. Various interviews held in 2002–2003.
36. See Chapter 1.
37. The British Consul Hamerton successfully claimed the position of ‘arbitrator’ in the cases of the British Indians in Zanzibar in the second half of the nineteenth century. This eventually developed into a more official role of the British in the legal affairs of their ‘Indian subjects’. See Abdul Waheed Naseem, ‘Nature and Extent of the Indian Enterprise’ (Unpublished PhD Thesis, University of New York, 1970), 43.
38. Individual traders or registered companies became bankrupt if they could not pay their debts after one of their creditors filed a bankruptcy case in the Zanzibar court. The court would rule about the distribution of remaining assets among the creditors.
39. This analogy is taken from A. Marshall in his almost forgotten masterpiece, *Principles Of Economics: An Introductory Volume* (London: Macmillan, 1890), 315–16. See also the conclusion of this chapter. I used this analogy in my PhD to describe the rise and fall of Indian cotton mills in Ahmedabad and Mumbai. See G. Oonk, *Ondernemers in Ontwikkeling: Fabrieken en fabrikanten in de Indiase katoenindustrie, 1850-1930* (Verloren: Hilversum, 1998) [*Entrepreneurs in Development: Mills and Mill Owners in the Indian Cotton Textile Industry, 1850-1930* (Verloren: Hilversum, 1998)].
40. ZA HC 2 files.
41. Honey, *A History of Indian Merchants*, 63–66. Admittedly, initially I did not believe the oral testimonies where the story of the growth from rags to riches is told over and over again. See also Note 9.
42. ZA HC 2/131, No. 15/1908.
43. See, for example, ZA HC 2/69 [Naser Noormohamed]; ZA HC 2/97 [Ali Sachoo]; ZA HC 2/110 [Abdul Dawoodji].
44. ZA HC 2/131 [Framji Cowasji]; ZA HC 2/148 [Hasham Gulamhusein].
45. The Hindus formed a very small community in Zanzibar at that time. The sub-divisions in castes or language groups were not made in the general statistics.
46. Cases found in ZA HC 2/207; ZA HC 2/208.
47. ZA HC 2/218.
48. ZA HC 2/69. In another case, Abdoolhusein Dawoodji claimed that when he started his business in the 1880s he had to work for four years to pay his father’s debts. See HC 2/110. The Khoja Gulam Husein Jamal took over his father’s business, including his debts. See HC 2/190.
49. I have written elsewhere about this phenomenon, especially related to the cotton industry in India. See, G. Oonk, ‘Motor or Millstone. The Managing Agency System in Bombay and Ahmedabad, 1850–1930’, *The Indian Economic and Social History Review* 38, no. 4 (2001): 419–52, especially 443–46.
50. ZA HC 2/97. Unfortunately, in this case, we do not know who filed the petition for bankruptcy.

51. ZA HC 2/110; ZA HC 2/101. Interestingly, he did not borrow money from his in-laws in the first place, but got it only after he could not pay his creditors. Thus, in this case, the direct family members were not the predominant way of access to capital.
52. ZA HC 2/145. It is not clear why they lost the case in Bagamoyo.
53. ZA HC 2/197.
54. ZA HC 2/81. In fact, this case shows that there was an end to this practice of 'free support' for family members. Because of the close credit relations with his brother, other creditors claimed that Shariff was in fact working for his brother or at least in partnership with him. They tried to claim their debts from his brother. This was not proven in court.
55. ZA HC 2/130.
56. ZA HC 2/65.
57. ZA HC 2/136.
58. ZA HC 2/67. It is also interesting to note that Hurji's brother is not mentioned as a creditor. The fact that a 'good name' may be easily lost appears in the case of Gulamhusien Somji & Co. They were well-known traders in cloves from the 1880s onwards. However, they lost substantially in speculation in 1906-07. They were declared bankrupt in 1907. ZA HC 2/101. Another Indian, Remtulla Kachhra, lost the confidence of his creditors after he left Zanzibar for Pemba without informing them. He started his business in selling aerated mineral water in 1905. After business in Zanzibar was not very profitable, he left for Pemba. His creditors were not amused by his search for new markets and filed his bankruptcy immediately. ZA HC 2/163.
59. ZA HC 2/65.
60. ZA HC 2/112. The spending of excessive money on charity was not rare in the Ismaili community. Some rich businessmen tried to raise their religious status by generously giving money to their religious institutions. Gulamhusein Baloo seems to have been more a religious spender than a businessman. He inherited from his father a house worth ₹20,000 and also property worth of \$20,000. The Trustee of his case stated that "the insolvent appears to have been very free with money". Just before his bankruptcy was filed in 1910, he went to Mumbai (then Bombay) to see his spiritual leader H.H. Khan and spent ₹2,000 on him. In addition, he appears to have presented him a chair with gold fittings worth ₹3,000. Gulamhusein was Mukkim (an Ismaili priest) of the local Jamat Khan and spent almost ₹5,000 towards the fund of his Jamat [Mosque of the Ismailis, G.O.]. These irresponsible expenses, from a business point of view, finally led to his deteriorated position. ZA HC 2/197.
61. Unfortunately, we do not know what happened to the other insolvents after their bankruptcy was filed. They may have started to work for a family or community member in Zanzibar or moved to India or South Africa.
62. ZA HC 2/137. Another example is Remtulla Kachhra, who started to sell aerated mineral water in 1905 in Zanzibar town with a capital of ₹300. As



business in Zanzibar proved to be unprofitable, he went to Pemba and some other places. He did not succeed anywhere. After returning to Zanzibar, his creditors claimed his machine, because they were afraid that he would leave Zanzibar again without informing them. ZA HC 2/163.

63. See also G. Oonk, 'Gujarati Business Communities in East Africa: Success and Failure Stories', *Economic and Political Weekly* XL, no. 20 (2005): 2077–82.
64. H. S. Morris, 'The Indian Family in Uganda', *American Anthropologist* 61 (1959): 779–89.
65. A. Marshall, *Principles Of Economics: An Introductory Volume*, 315–16.



## CHAPTER THREE

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# ASIANS IN AFRICA 1880–1960: SETTLING AS A CULTURAL PROCESS

Contacts between Asians, Africans and Europeans in East Africa have a long history and were greatly influenced by the economics and politics of colonisation and the emergence of national states. This long-standing relationship resulted in a particular ‘East African Asian business culture’ in which Gujarati (Indian), Swahili (East-African) and European cultures were adapted, transformed and reinvented. The migration of Asians from South Asia to East Africa, and the consequential minority status in the host society, resulted in the development of mixed strategies of adaptation of new socio-cultural values and/or maintaining others. This was not a natural, harmonious process, but one with conflicts in which painful decisions had to be made in order to survive in a fast-changing economic and social context.

In this chapter, I argue that South Asian culture changed as result of three areas of cultural contact. The first is the interaction with Swahili culture and the adaptation towards a new geographical and cultural environment. This also includes being turned into a minority in East Africa and thus being more inclined to leave internal differences behind. The second is the interaction with the white colonial elite, the growing importance of ‘Western education’ of South Asians in East Africa and the significance of the European market, and the third, the cultural—and in some periods

economic—outlook of Asians in East Africa towards South Asia, the ‘homeland’, the ‘pure and original culture’, whether imagined or not.

Cultural change is inevitable, but even more so for migrants. However the question remains: How and why does culture change and in what direction? This question refers to a long debate in the historical anthropology relating to concepts such as ‘acculturation’, ‘assimilation’, ‘integration’, syncretism and diffusion.<sup>1</sup> More recently, these concepts were overshadowed by notions of subordination, in general a top-down process from the subordinated non-Western culture towards a more ‘Western’ culture.<sup>2</sup> Finally, the debate on globalisation seems to praise the post-modern global interaction process in which cultures ‘are more globalised, cosmopolitan and creolised or hybrid than ever’.<sup>3</sup> Nevertheless, while processes of creolisation (mixing of cultures) may take place within a global continuum of relations,<sup>4</sup> they nonetheless attain their significance in concrete contexts of interpersonal relations.

As most studies of colonialism have tended either to condemn or to celebrate the perspective of the coloniser, little attention has been paid to the actual strategies of the colonised.<sup>5</sup> No doubt, cultural interaction—like economic interaction—is an uneven process in which different groups have different ranges of choice. It is, however, very complex to define the various layers of power. The most obvious example is that most colonised cultures had little control over the ‘coloniser’s culture’; they were not always willing to reproduce a worldview that was alien to them.

In this chapter, I argue that there is a need to study ‘cultural change’ as a local ‘bottom-up’ process. Local in the sense of a well-defined geographical and historical area and ‘bottom-up’ in the sense that we choose to take the perspective of the ‘agent’, the one who changes, adapts, mixes, integrates or assimilates. By taking this perspective, we may gather a view of how the ‘range of choices’ is defined by the actors of change themselves. This may provide us with insights into the economic and cultural agenda

of individuals as well as groups in a fast-changing economic and cultural environment.

Therefore, we take the perspective and experience of the changing culture of three generations of South Asian African business families in East Africa. The ‘generations’ are constructed in three broad periods of time: the pioneers (born between 1880 and 1920) who decided to settle with their families in East Africa, the Asian East Africans (born between 1920 and 1960) who made East Africa their home, and the internationalists (born between 1960 and 1985) who may have ‘roots’ as Asian East Africans, but are economically and culturally oriented towards the West and the East. Though I use the metaphor of generations, it is clear that the constructed periods enclose more than one generation. The first period 1880–1920, for example, is 40 years, which usually refers to two generations. But, as we have seen in Chapter 2, the process of circular migration and finally settlement takes time. In fact, it is in this period that the decision is made to stay in East Africa. Sometimes that takes decades. The second period may be seen as the consequence of settling. If you accept that Africa is your home and you are not planning to go back (not even in your dreams), you adjust differently to your environment than when you keep the door open for a return. In the last period, the Asian Africans were forced to make up their minds. Many were forced to leave the East African countries. By then, they had developed an international outlook, while remaining as Asian Africans.

To describe the routes of cultural change as a part of the migration process, I have selected three cultural areas of interests. These areas represent the important pillars of the South Asian cultural identity. First, I describe the notion of Indian purity as part of the Hindu culture. For Hindus in East Africa, it was difficult to continue some very strict food habits and to remain vegetarians. Another important part of the notion of Hindu purity was their emphasis to marry within their own sub-castes or *jatis*. However, being a small migrant community in East Africa, they had to alter some of the

notions of purity in order to adapt to the (colonial) African environment. This was a slow and sometimes painful process.

In Chapter 2, we have already seen that Hindus tended to settle slower than South Asian Muslims in East Africa. In the first section in this chapter, I argue that this was partly caused by the importance of being vegetarian and not drinking liquor. This also included the belief that one could not accept food from 'outsiders'. Among Hindus in India as well as among its overseas migrants, there is a strong preference to accept food cooked only by their wives, or Brahmins. This, then, must have caused some problems for the early Hindu migrants, who were often young males. Where did they eat? Who was cooking the food and what did they eat? The concept of purity was sustained in their marriage patterns as well. It was of utmost importance to marry within the community, more specifically their own caste. This is described in the second section. Nevertheless, as we will see in this chapter, these notions of purity were flexible and through the generations Hindus in East Africa were well able to overcome the practical inconveniences caused by their culture.<sup>6</sup>

Second, I describe the changing dress habits of Asian Africans, especially related to formal business dress. I argue that cultural notions (showing your identity), changing political environment (from European colonies to African States) and changing economic preferences (from dealing with India to dealing with Europe) are important factors in explaining the changing dress habits of Asian businessmen in East Africa. The growing acceptance of the Western business suits is not to be seen as a simple mimicry of the ruling business class; it is also a message to the local Asian business class that one is able to 'modernise'. In the context of Asians in East Africa, it is emphasised that European clothes are, on the one hand an indication of their 'progressive ideas' and, on the other, this has to be seen as a critique of their own culture. In other words, there was a constant balance between emphasising their 'original roots' and adapting to a new environment.

Third, the growing acceptance of the English language from secondary language to the primary language reflects a growing international outlook as well. However, a careful historical reflection reveals that Asian Africans did not accept the teaching of English in the Indian schools in East Africa before the 1920s. They insisted on their children being taught in Gujarati and about Gujarati culture. This changed, however, on the eve of independence when the choice was between English or Swahili; the Asian Africans preferred English. In other words, South Asians in East Africa were able to resist the wishes of colonial rulers for cultural and economic reasons, but later accepted English for the same reasons.

### Food Habits: Vegetarians in a Meat-eating Society

In Chapter 2, I had already introduced the reader to Sunderjibhai. He came from a South Asian family that migrated via Zanzibar to Mombasa in the early twentieth century. I visited his house in February 2000. The design and exterior of the house reflected the reproduction of Gujarati culture as well as the interior.<sup>7</sup> He was partially blind, had difficulty in walking and his voice was low. Sunderjibhai's house had the atmosphere of a typical Gujarati middleclass house in Gujarat, including a large living room with little colonial furniture and a traditional Gujarati rocking couch. The portraits of his deceased parents have a prominent place and are decorated with fresh flowers. The house of Sunderjibhai is a typical 'one kitchen house'. While three married couples lived in the house (Sunderjibhai and his two married sons with their children), they shared one kitchen. There was no table in the kitchen, which means that the women sit on the floor while cleaning the vegetables, cutting the fruits and preparing the meals. They are assisted by a Gujarati Brahmin (woman) cook.<sup>8</sup> Next to the kitchen is the dining room where there is a big family table on which the meals are shared. We had to take off our shoes before entering the dining room. Men and women eat separately. In this house, there is

neither liquor nor meat. This family has maintained their Gujarati (*Vaishnava*) tradition of being vegetarians and non-drinkers.

The reproduction of Gujarati culture was reflected not just in the houses of the Gujarati migrants in East Africa; it was in fact seen in whole Indian quarters in East Africa. This is confirmed by the early plans of cities in East Africa. If one looks at old geographical maps of Zanzibar, Nairobi, Dar es Salaam and other places in East Africa, there is always a 'Hindu quarter'. These quarters were not necessarily imposed by colonial politics, but may well be self-imposed as we will see later. These quarters contain the typical sites of temples, mosques, local ethnic restaurants and numerous shops that cater for the South Asian migrants as well local visitors. Sometimes, these quarters were called 'little India', a variation of the 'China towns' elsewhere in the world.

This family has maintained its Gujarati (*Vaishnava*) tradition of being vegetarians and non-drinkers. Nevertheless, the maintenance of the vegetarian habits was a major issue in the family. Even after Hindu wives started to join their husbands in East Africa, some of the old taboos were still in effect. Sunderjibhai remembers that his father and grandfather faced difficulties in opening new business ventures upcountry because of 'food problems'. Sunderjibhai recalls the fact that his grandfather had to close the business in Jinja because of the absence of Hindu women or Brahmins.<sup>9</sup> The food was cooked by 'outsiders' and at that time they were unable to bring their family members there.

Especially Hindus tried to avoid day-to-day contacts with Arabs and Muslims. The well-known Arabic princess of Zanzibar and Oman, daughter of Sultan Said the Great, Sayyida Salme, recalls from her childhood how the end of Ramadan was celebrated in Zanzibar in the 1880s. Bullocks and other animals were slaughtered in the yards of many Arab and Muslim houses and Hindus avoided these places for religious reasons. As they were strict vegetarians, they would be shocked by the image of killing animals, especially when this included the killing of holy cows. However, some Arabs provoked the Hindus with these religious sentiments.



On such an evening, our slaughtering yard was changed into a lake of blood; for this reason all the banyans at Zanzibar, who are vegetarians, looked upon our feast with much horror, and took care not to come near any such places at this time. I have already spoken of these banyans as the principal traders and money-lenders in the town, and in the last capacity they are, beyond a doubt, the greatest cut-throats imaginable; they are bitterly hated on this account, and on occasions like these there is a splendid opportunity for their victims to take revenge upon them. Among the lower-class people it is a standing joke to entice the Banyans, who never allowed any chance of business to slip out of their grasp, under the pretence of some important order, into these blood streaming yards, which is the greatest insult that can be offered to the star-worshippers, of whom it can be said, however, in spite of their low moral standing, that they adhere religiously to their code in being strict vegetarians.<sup>10</sup>

In other words, Hindus were not very popular among the Arabs and Swahili. Salme provides us with clear-cut reasons for this: Hindus were well-known moneylenders and traders who advanced money on landed security or credited trade goods. Many lower class Swahili and Arabs, however, felt that they were cheated by them, as they were seen as ‘mugs with money’, ‘the greatest cut-throats imaginable’, with a ‘low moral standing’.<sup>11</sup> Here, I am not arguing whether these allegations are false or true. The point is that if such images and allegations exist, one is more inclined to stick together and find shelter amongst each other. In addition, those who (temporarily) settled in East Africa tended to live in the same areas, as it was almost unthinkable to share food with people from different backgrounds.

The British doctor, James Christie, observed in 1873 that:

Their food must be cooked by themselves, or by those of their own caste, and everything connected with their cooking and meals is according to their unvarying manners and customs. They thus fortunately escape the pollution of Negroes, and the cook of the house, one of their own class, is also water carrier; and as the cooking

is of the simplest nature, the service of Negroes in the culinary department are not only dispensed, but are not allowed by custom. The water used must be drawn from their own wells, and by one of their own caste. No Banyan would touch, or allow himself to be touched by, water drawn by another save of his own caste.<sup>12</sup>

Christie was interested in the customs related to the hygiene of various communities in Zanzibar because of the spread of cholera. His above observations on the cleanliness of Hindus do not include the nature of the caste system, which would make clear that Hindus would not accept not only Swahili in their kitchen, but they would avoid accepting food from Europeans and any caste but their own, as well. Christie himself encountered this. Hindus would not take any medicine in his office, that is they avoided his drinking water and took their own bottles.<sup>13</sup> They simply would not accept food from any 'outsiders'. Because of these strict caste rules and notions of cleanliness, Hindus seem, more than other South Asian, Arab and Swahili communities, to stick together. The British traveller W.G. Palgrave, who spent a year in Central and Eastern Arabia, referred to them in the nineteenth century as "interfering with no one, seeking nothing beyond their direct line of business".<sup>14</sup>

W.J. Simpson followed up Christie's interest in hygiene with an import research on 'sanitary matters'. He visited Zanzibar, Mombasa, Nairobi and several other places in the first decade of the twentieth century.<sup>15</sup> He observed that most South Asians in the Indian quarters in various East African cities lived in extremely poor and unhealthy conditions. In fact, the Indian quarters were seen as the major source of the spread of the plaque. They often lived in overcrowded areas, which were seen as 'an Indian town of the worst kind', with the 'absence of light and ventilation, presence of vermin and un-cleanliness and nauseous smells'.<sup>16</sup>

When asked to compare the food habits of Sunderjis' father and grandfather, he suggests that there was only a slight change between the two.

There was not much change in the eating habits as far as my father is concerned. The only thing I heard from my father is that my grandfather was a man of taste, he was strict to certain items in the food whereas my father followed the same style, but this was more 'free style' than my grandfather. But they were all vegetarians. My father didn't mind going around. Although he was a *vaisnava*, he didn't mind eating out. So, he was not as strict as his father.<sup>17</sup>

The father and the grandfather remained strict vegetarians and would not drink liquor. Nevertheless, 'eating outside' slowly became acceptable, which was a necessary condition to expand business overseas and upcountry.

At the same time, their 'taste' for Gujarati food changed from the Gujarati and Indian food on the Indian continent. Almost all the informants of this generation reveal that they do not like the Gujarati food in Gujarat, India, anymore. This issue came up many times as we discussed my stay in Gujarat in the early 1990s. Those who went back to India for business, holidays, or medical treatment stated that they did not like the food there. It was 'too oily and spicy' and it was believed to be not prepared well. "We like it more mildly, you know. Not that oily," is a remark I frequently encountered.<sup>18</sup>

Simultaneously, however, it is interesting to note that despite the majority of my 'first-generation informants' being very fond of their Gujarati vegetarian lunches and dinners, some of them were quite happy to tell me that they liked to join their grandchildren for a vegetarian pizza and a Coke at one of the fast food stands in Mombasa and Dar es Salaam. They seem to be quite mild about the changing food habits of their children and grandchildren. However, this was, according to the second generation, not so 40 years back. Then, the first generation could become furious about not respecting the tradition of being vegetarian, even to the extent that their children decided to leave the house for that reason (see next section).

Some members of the second-generation South Asians started to eat meat and/or drink liquor.<sup>19</sup> In most of these instances,

however, it was not the first or second son who altered the eating and drinking habits in the family. In most cases, it was only the third or fourth (or next) son who did so. Confronted with this observation, most second-generation informants admitted that it would be more difficult for the first and second sons in the family to become a non-vegetarian than for the others. This often was a two-way affair. The eldest son could not break the tradition 'out of respect' for his father, whereas for first-generation informants it was important that at least the first two or three sons maintained their traditions.

The same applies for the daughters. Most respondents would confirm that rules relating to food and drinking habits would be stricter for women than for men. In most cases, all the daughters in the second generation remained strict vegetarians and non-drinkers. The taboo on drinking was in general more emphasised than on the question of eating meat.

Most second-generation informants who started to drink liquor and/or eat non-vegetarian food remember the first time they did so very well. It was as if they felt their change of lifestyle was being watched by their fathers. They felt ashamed and avoided discussing this with their parents, mainly out of respect. It was always in their teenage or early twenties and always together with Europeans (not with Africans). Kamil recalls:

My father had sent me to a missionary school in Pune, India. The majority of the students there were British. They used to drink beer outside the campus and I felt that I wanted to be a part of that group. After I tasted my first beer, I knew I would continue drinking. Moreover, in our family drinking liquor was associated with diseases, being drunk and dirty and all that. This was not what I encountered with the European students. They were quite decent. However, when I started studying in the United Kingdom in the nineteen sixties, I saw some students getting drunk all week-end. I didn't like it.<sup>20</sup>

The second-generation informants had their first taste of beer or liquor outside their parents' house. Often they were among Europeans with whom they studied in India, East Africa or the United Kingdom. In many cases, informants felt 'confronted' with the 'natural' way that drinks were served and accepted. They slowly started to share the fact that they drank liquor with other South Asian friends. But they would not share this information with their parents.

Eating meat or drinking liquor was never done in the house of the parents. Even in restaurants, or at dinner parties and marriages, no one would drink in front of his father. Here, we come across the word 'respect'. "I would never drink in front of my father," Bharat states, "out of respect." Curiously, the mother is hardly mentioned when we discussed this.<sup>21</sup> At the same time, informants were pretty sure that their father knew that they had changed their food and drinking habits. Bharat recalls:

I never drank in front of my father or my uncle. Out of respect: I think that he suspects, but it is such a thing which you don't like to discuss. But of course they suspect. But they don't want to admit for themselves. But they knew.<sup>22</sup>

And they knew indeed. In two cases, second-generation informants handed over the will of their father. Both of them were addressed to the eldest son, written in Gujarati. One of them stated: "Please encourage your younger brothers to behave properly in the tradition of the community. Ask them to refrain from unhealthy habits." Bharat admitted that the 'unhealthy habits' included his smoking and drinking habits.

In another example, a will stated: "It is my request to renounce all addictive habits [in this example, smoking and drinking, G.O] and to act in accordance with the council and feeling of Motobhai [elder brother, G.O] and the *Kakas* [uncles, brothers of the deceased, G.O]."<sup>23</sup> These wills and the statements of the informants reflect the silencing of the subject. It was not something you

discussed openly with your father. But at the same time it was so important that it was mentioned in the will.

Sometimes the differences in food habits within the family were used purposely. For example, take the case of two brothers who were running their father's family business. One is living with his father in Mombasa, who is more or less retired. The members of the family are strictly vegetarian and no liquor is served in this house. The second brother lives in Dar es Salaam where he runs a trading business. He told me that after the Second World War, there was an unspoken agreement that whenever they had to 'entertain business relations' who were known to be 'drinkers', mostly Europeans, they would do that in his house, and whenever they entertained strict vegetarians they did it in the Mombasa house. The brothers accepted their different food habits, whereas the father just did not talk about this matter.

Nowadays, eating meat or not and drinking beer or not is not an issue in this family. It is something you do, or you don't. It is not discussed. It is known and accepted. Nevertheless, in Nairobi, I came across a group of 'second-generation' businessmen who tried to legitimise their habit of eating red meat, especially beef. They all started to eat beef about 10 years ago when 'it became acceptable'. I asked them whether the cow was not 'holy' anymore in their community. To my surprise, they replied that it was. However, African cows were not holy in their view, only cows in India were. A local Brahmin of the Hindu Lohana temple told me that this justification was not acceptable in his community. Therefore, they invited Brahmins from India to pledge vegetarianism in their community.

Some of the lectures in the Hindu Lohana temple in Dar es Salaam were related to the subject of food. Religious traditions and reasons of health were the main arguments used to convince the audience to eat vegetarian food alone, not without success. One of my third-generation informants recalls how her father, who used to eat meat and drink, has become vegetarian again:

My father used to eat meat and drink, but he stopped two years ago. I am allowed to eat chicken. It is not a big deal. But we don't eat it in the house. He stopped because of this man, you know from India, who comes to the temple and gives a lecture. Basically what happened is that this man said that when you eat meat, you make a graveyard of your stomach.... My father was touched by that.<sup>24</sup>

This example shows that being vegetarian and not drinking liquor is an important part of the Hindu tradition. Nevertheless, it also becomes a part of an individual's choice. The father did not force his children to become vegetarian again. Nowadays, we come across families (sometimes even nuclear families, as in this case) where we see that some members are vegetarian non-drinkers whereas others are non-vegetarian drinkers. People know which family members are vegetarians and which are not. It is accepted and respected.

The old traditions of 'cleanliness' and 'being pure' is reproduced here in a different way. Nowadays, it is known in which house vegetarian food alone and/or no liquor is served. In the above example, the father decided to become vegetarian again. The mother never doubted her faith and never ate meat. So it was the male family member who decided whether 'meat was tolerable' in the house. His children, however, are allowed to eat non-vegetarian food, but not at home. It is accepted by other family members and friends that in this house there is neither meat nor liquor. In houses where meat and liquor are accepted, families will always make sure that vegetarian dishes are readily available during dinner parties and other occasions.

In general, eating non-vegetarian food and drinking liquor has become acceptable in the Hindu community. It is accepted but is not widely discussed. People do know who is a strict vegetarian and who is not. The tradition of 'purity and impurity' is important around the close circles of the temple and the temple organisation. For many of the elite business families, the circles around other big businessmen, expatriates and European business partners have

become more important. It is in these circles that the habits of drinking liquor and eating meat continues.

In the third generation, there is a great variety when it comes to food and drinking habits. A few South Asian teenagers and those who are in their early twenties present themselves as 'world citizens', in the sense that they were born in the United Kingdom or Canada. They are raised in East Africa and they study, or have studied, in the West. In addition, they speak English, Gujarati and Swahili. When it comes to food habits, some of them would state that they 'eat everything'. Others even emphasised that they 'eat everything but Indian food'. This generation has a strong taste for 'world cuisine', especially when it comes to pizza, pasta, fish and chips and steaks. They choose non-Indian restaurants when they eat 'out'; however, many would enjoy their 'Indian dishes' twice a week at home. Some developed a new taste for Indian food while they were in the United Kingdom for studies.<sup>25</sup>

Basically, we are quite tired of English food by now. the [*sic*] canteens offer nothing but junk food, so we try and cook for ourselves (now that we have had two years [*sic*] experience in cooking!) food will range from meat, to vegetables, and sometimes Indian food!! (which [*sic*] my sister cooks, because i don't know how!!!) Its [*sic*] quite ironic that while we were living in Dar, we hated eating Gujarati food, but now we cook it in our own house because we miss it!<sup>26</sup>

This means that the experience of being 'Asian East African' is emphasised in a non-African context. Studying outside East Africa makes youngsters to rediscover the Gujarati kitchen.

At the same time, this generation tends to eat in non-Indian restaurants when they eat 'out'. Pizza, pasta and steaks are among the favourite dishes, especially when they are served in one of the fast food kitchens. Nevertheless, the owners of places where pizzas and other dishes are served are aware of the fact that Asians are an important part of their clientele. They serve 'veg' and 'non-veg'



pizzas and chicken curry pizzas, which are varieties I do not encounter in Rotterdam, Netherlands. Again, an interesting question occurs: Are we describing the process of ‘Westernising food habits’ of Indian youngsters in East Africa, or is this an example of Southernisation the Western pizza?

In the current generation, there is still a strong consciousness of who is vegetarian and who is not.<sup>27</sup> Being vegetarian is not considered conventional or old fashioned. It is something which you are, or are not. It is respected without discussion. People know from each other who eats ‘veg’ or ‘non-veg’ food. Nevertheless, it is hardly discussed, despite the fact that Brahmins in the temple tend to make an issue out of it. “It is not a big deal,” stated one of my informants (see endnote 24), after her father who was a meat-eater became vegetarian again. She was still allowed to eat chicken ‘outside’. This was not discussed in the family. It was accepted.

A small part of this third generation have enjoyed the taste of beer and wine. It may not come as a surprise that this tendency is stronger with the offspring of parents who drink liquor themselves. However, drinking is still not very acceptable, even among those who are in their twenties. The importance of family control and, especially, community control comes up frequently, in particular when it comes to young women drinking liquor. An interesting issue is the environment in which South Asians had started to ‘alter’ the family habits. Where and when did they have their first drink? Some had it with their parents, others at school, among Hindu and/or European friends, and finally a few followed the same pattern as their parents and had their first taste of beer and wine among students in Europe. Shrutti states:

A lot of my Indian friends, boys and girls, their parents don’t allow their children to drink, or go out and lot of other things, whereas we are lucky. My parents are very liberal. In spite of this, in East Africa ‘communities’ are a very big part of your life. Our parents were never involved in the ‘community’ that way. It is very important to go to

your community once in a while, respect the community. It is very narrow, I find, especially with Indian girls, but you have to respect it.

A lot is covered by maintaining reputation, their image in the eyes of the community. Here community is really quite a big factor. So, if I get critical, my parents might have no objection me doing something, but say, 'it is not us, it is the community'. It is people around us.<sup>28</sup>

Here again, a lot of this generation started to drink when they were among Europeans. In addition, even when the parents agreed to it, they often would not drink in front of their parents. Notwithstanding a number of 'liberal' parents who accepted the changing food and drinking habits of their offspring, I came across quite a few who were very proud to state that their children remained vegetarian and non-drinkers, "despite living or having lived in the West".

When it comes to food and drinking habits, the contrast with the first generation could not be more significant. The first generation tended to maintain their Gujarati food habits of being vegetarians and non-drinkers, even when this meant that they had to close down business in areas where the food was cooked by 'outsiders' and therefore was 'unclean'. The third generation, in contrast, is inclined to eat 'outside' non-Indian food cooked by 'outsiders'. This does not mean that they do not have any taste for Indian food anymore. Sunderjibhai's granddaughter Malika (22 years of age) has a nice historical description of the changing taste for Gujarati food in her family.

Although we like traditional food we like it less than our parents. For example my dad when he comes home tonight or every other night, 'he *wants* his Indian food'. Even when there is a western dish, you know, he eats it Indian cooked, you know, and added the papadams, chapattis. And if you go back to my grandparents they will have it with lunch *and* dinner. So, they need it all the time,

my father needs it everyday or every two days, whereas we need it twice a week to be happy. I only need it twice a week, you know, I won't miss it that much.<sup>29</sup>

In addition, even in this youngest generation, there is a growing awareness of their 'Indianness'. What is striking, however, is that the sense of being a Hindu Lohana is lost and is replaced with being 'Indian' or 'Hindu'. Shrutti states:

The difference between us then and now is that while growing up we learn to appreciate our culture now more than at that time. We were very young and in an international environment where culture seems to be pointless. We know now the importance of family values, the importance of tradition. We now can't wait for 'Indian events' to happen, so that we can dress up. You know, go out and celebrate.<sup>30</sup>

In short, in the second generation a major change occurred. There was a growing acceptance of non-vegetarian food and liquor in the Lohana business community. Most Hindu men admitted that they started drinking while they studied with Europeans. The exposure with the European acceptance of liquor made them change their own ways. Nevertheless, most felt it was an individual decision, and they were not emotionally forced to do so. Once drinking had become accepted in certain families, it was used in their strategy to entertain business relations. The notion of 'purity' developed into something that was related to the house, and to a lesser extent to the individual. In some houses drinking liquor and eating meat was accepted, whereas in other houses it was not. In the third generation, the notion of Lohana 'purity' eroded further. In the case of the accepting of drinking liquor and to a lesser extent eating non-vegetarian food, the exposure to European culture seems to be of prime importance. Once drinking and eating meat were accepted, it became instrumental in their entertainment of business relations. In this sense, it broadened the social circles of Hindus.

## Indian Marriages: She Should Be Raised in Africa

In this section, I describe the second notion of purity among Hindus, that is marriage. In India as well as in East Africa, Hindus tended to marry within their own caste and sub-caste (*jatis*) as far as possible. There were hardly any South Asian Hindu women in East Africa during the first period of settlement between 1880 and 1920. Therefore, South Asians remained the primary source for marriages among Hindus in East Africa. Often the single male traders and businessmen went back to India for marriage.<sup>31</sup>

In the second generation, two major changes occurred. First, there was the development of a preference for a Hindu woman raised in East Africa instead of a Lohana women raised in India. However, the demand for (Lohana) Hindu women from India was still strong due to the fact that there were twice as much Hindu men in East Africa as there were Hindu women.<sup>32</sup> Second, the loosening of caste boundaries occurred when it came to finding partners. Hindus allowed themselves to loosen up the constraints of the caste boundaries. These developments show that East Africa had become a home for South Asians.

Bharat is a typical example of a Hindu Lohana who did not marry within the Lohana community. He fell in love with a Patel woman and proposed to her. He is the first male member in his family to break the Lohana chain. Two of his elder sisters had already married outside the community, and that they married within the Hindu community was considered 'good enough'. This again underlines the strength of the patriarchal structure of the Hindu Lohana community but also that the demand for 'locally raised women' was high. Nevertheless, it was not an easy task for a young man to convince his father that he wanted to marry outside the caste.

It took me a year to convince my father. Though, I have to admit that he was pretty cool about it. In the sense that, of course he did tell me that and advised me that I was the first one of the male heritage of

my family to be breaking this particular tradition. I said, but to me an Indian is an Indian. I must say, there was some resistance more from some of my brothers. They are more traditional I would say. My father was pretty open-minded to this, once you talk with him, even to the extent of accepting marrying a non-Indian or a Muslim person. My youngest brother is married to a Muslim person. So he accepted this.<sup>33</sup>

What was the argument that convinced him?

Well basically I said: Give me one reason, besides the argument that I am breaking any particular traditional pattern, that I should not marry this woman. If I was to marry someone from a different religion, then I can understand. But there is no change in the religion, there is no change in the tradition even. We both speak Gujarati. I can understand, I can accept his argument, if it was a different religion, different race, then you have to think about what happens to the offspring. But he was not able to give such an argument. I think he finally saw my point of view without admitting it. But we had various discussions about this thing.<sup>34</sup>

In spite of his reasoning, something happened to his offspring. His two daughters consider themselves not to be Lohanas (born out of a Patel), but to be Hindus. At the same time, the perception of the elder brothers did not change. Some of them still want to see their own children marrying within the same caste. Bharat: “However, I don’t think their children will raise the same resistance as I had. So if they show up with another Hindu, this would be acceptable.” Nevertheless, the consequences of marrying outside the community are not the same for male and female.

In another case, it was not the male Hindu Lohana member who married outside the community, but the female. In the last few years, the marriages of Hindu Lohana woman outside their community have raised some debates in the community. In contrast with the male members, females are not considered Lohanas any more if they marry outside the community. People told me that after some wild discussion by the Hindu Lohana temple executive

committee members, the question of whether these women members should be allowed in various temple ceremonies came down to one vote. It was the Brahmin priest who convinced several community members. The irony of the case was that the daughter of one of the main members of the committee had married outside the community and despite organising various special celebrations with the other women and her mother, she was not allowed to attend these anymore.<sup>35</sup>

Despite the constraints for female Lohanas described above, the male members developed a preference for an East Africa-born Hindu female,<sup>36</sup> even when this sometimes meant marrying outside their own caste. The main reason for this was that they knew 'East African culture'. This included all kinds of general attitudes, like the 'slow pace of life', knowledge of Swahili, how to train African servants and how to cook Gujarati food, which by then had already changed in East Africa. It was less spicy, more mild, sometimes with coconut milk and the use of ghee was declining.<sup>37</sup> In this second generation, it became acceptable for an African servant to cook the food. This would have been unthinkable in the first generation. Nevertheless, many Lohana families emphasise that their wives supervise the process of cooking and in other examples they are very proud to employ a Gujarati cook from India.

In short, there was an increasing demand for Hindu wives who were raised in East Africa. Frequently, Lohana men side stepped the tradition of marrying within the caste/community. This was not only due to a shortage of women within the community, but also due to the growing preference to marry someone who 'knew the African way'. By this, Lohana men refer to the changing food habits, the understanding of how to train African house girls and the differences in culture with India. Despite this, the wife had to be a Hindu. Marriages with South Asian Muslims, Africans and Europeans are still very uncommon.

The loosening of caste and community ties within East Africa enlarged the social relation with other South Asian groups. At the same time, the relation with India, as a potential for marriage

market, faded. This seems to coincide with the declining importance of economic relations with India and the growing importance of Europe and the United States.<sup>38</sup> Interestingly, for the third and ongoing generation of Asian Africans, marrying an South Asian from India is out of the question! The argument is that Asians from South Asia do not know anything about Asians in East Africa. They focus on Europe or the United States: “They (South Asians in India, G.O) think we (South Asians in East Africa, G.O.) live like monkeys, in the bush like Tarzan and Jane....”<sup>39</sup>

Many members in the third generation are not married yet. The theme of potential partners is highly discussed among themselves and within the communities. Most young adults agree that the range of choices is set by their parents. Some will have an arranged marriage within the Lohana community; for others it may be outside the community. In other cases, not only the caste background but also the regional background is important (‘a Gujarati from Tabora’). Others stated that they were free to choose, ‘as long it is a Hindu’. In a few occasions, the father and the mother came up with different opinions. In such cases, the mother was considered to be more ‘liberal’ and the father was more ‘strict’.

My parents believe in an arranged marriage. They have had an arranged marriage as well. They don’t say, you know, this is the guy, I want you to marry. You will meet him, but your parents will arrange the whole thing and then you say whether you get along with him, but otherwise you don’t have much choice really.

Well, the thing is, my parents have grown more liberal than my grandparents have. At the end of the day it will be an arranged marriage, so you know it won’t be so strict that you have to marry the one they choose. You will have a choice basically, but not much.

Well it depends on the parents. You know, my mum is very liberal. She says I don’t mind who you marry as long as you are happy, whereas my dad would say it has to be a Hindu, it’s like that. My father used to insist that I marry a Lohana. Now he is satisfied when it is a Hindu. I might end up with a Hindu as far as I can see.<sup>40</sup>

Marriage is and has been a significant pillar in maintaining the 'purity' within the community. This means that there is still a 'yardstick' of purity, which is discussed, labelled, examined and judged by family and community members. Nevertheless, the general idea within the community is that its importance is fading. Currently, marrying within the 'Hindu community' instead of within the castes of Lohanas, Patels, Shahs, and so on, seem to be 'good enough'. Caste and sub-castes have become less important. Interestingly, another issue was closely related to these debates. This was the question of whether the spouse's family happened to be 'veg' or 'non-veg' and, more particularly, whether eating meat (and drinking liquor) would be allowed or not in the house where the new couple would live. But again, the importance of this is fading as well.

This development may be attributed to three interrelated causes. First and foremost, during the second generation there was a shortage of South Asian (especially Hindu) women in East Africa. This was mainly due to the fact that most traders arrived as single men. In the first generation, they tended to return to India to marry there. After they were married, they would invite their families to settle down in East Africa only after they had successfully established their businesses. In the second and third generation, the number of South Asian men and women that were born and/or raised in East Africa increased. Meanwhile, the Hindu men developed a preference for Hindu women who were raised in East Africa, instead of a bride in India. African-born South Asian women were already accustomed to East Africa and were more able to deal with the local environment. They were able to go to African markets and they knew how to manage African employees were causes frequently mentioned in the interviews. Last, but not least, the South Asian customs had changed in India (and the rest of the world) as well. The developments in East Africa are also witnessed, albeit to a lesser extent, in India. In general, the South Asian African middle class compared itself with developments of marriage patterns in London or sometimes Mumbai, but never with the developments in the rural areas



of India. This reflects their assertion that they now are part of a cosmopolitan world.

## Dress Habits: From Asian Dress to European Costume

Asian businessmen in East Africa supplied goods, services and capital to African, Arabic, Asian and European customers, traders and other businessmen. In this complex cultural environment, they had to choose what to wear at what occasion. Expressing dignity, wealth, trust and reliability are key variables in cross-cultural business contacts and image building. When they arrived in East Africa between 1880 and 1920, Hindus and Muslims alike would wear their own 'traditional' dresses, headwear and (no) shoes. Nevertheless, when they left Africa as a result of the Africanisation programmes after the late 1960s and during the expulsion of Asians by General Idi Amin, they wore a typical European business suit, including a tie and shining black shoes.

Here, I describe how and why the Western business suit became acceptable among South Asians in East Africa. This is an interesting case because it is the outcome of the interaction between Swahili traders and South Asian (Hindus and Muslims) merchants, Arabic dealers and planters and Europeans businessmen and colonial officials in East Africa. During the dealings and trading, these business groups freely interacted with each other. At the same time, however, they lived in different quarters in the small cities and towns. Often there was a Hindu quarter, an Arabic quarter, a native area and a European area. These groups did hardly intermarry, and with only a few exceptions they did not build surviving business partnerships. And, last but not least, they all wore different dresses and outfits while doing business. In others words, this was a highly segregated society. Why and how did so many Asian African businessmen end up in the same 'European' business suit? This is in fact surprising, because one would expect that those who

could afford it would find it easier to remain within the limits of their own 'dress code' than those who were not flourishing. At the same time, we realise that the typical Western business suit with tie and shining shoes is considered 'modern'. In fact, it has become the international uniform of business and politics. Of course, the quality, branch name and colour may differ, but in general the suit looks surprisingly similar in Europe, South Asia, the Americas and Africa.

This section is divided into three parts. In the first part, I describe the segregated society of Zanzibar and the East Coast of Africa. Here, I emphasise the way South Asian businessmen are described by Western observers. This covers the period roughly between 1880 and 1920. In the second part, I show how South Asian businessmen dressed differently according to different occasions. The Western business suit became acceptable, but was still not predominant among Asians in East Africa between 1920 and 1960. This differs, however, after the 1960s. East African countries became independent. The so-called 'Africanisation projects' eventually led to the expulsion of more than 100,000 South Asians from East Africa. By then, many had already accepted the European business suit as part of their daily wear. They had already decided to become 'transnational'. But this was not a reaction on the local political arena alone. It was part of global changes in the South Asian diaspora as well, as we will see. In the third part, I will conclude that the acceptance of the Western business suit was the result of the clever navigation of the South Asian businessmen between local changes and the establishment of colonial and Asian schools and education projects. In addition, it may be seen as a reaction to the Africanisation projects as well as the adaptation towards a more global business environment.

There is a striking contrast between today's study of dress and dress habits and that of a century ago. Nowadays, the research focuses on varying dress habits depending on gender, class, status and cultural background. In addition, we are aware that we dress differently for different occasions such as weddings, workplaces,

schools, public and private spheres, and so on. Moreover, the way we dress changes through generations and varies according to time and place.<sup>41</sup> However, if we read the travelogues of Western traders, diplomats, missionaries and early anthropologists of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the picture differs remarkably. According to these texts, it seems that each ‘tribe’, ‘caste’ or ethnic group wears its own static and unchanging ‘typical’ ethnic dress. These publications were often meant to introduce to the public in Europe the ‘strangeness’ of overseas peoples. The most remarkable distinction made was that of ‘nude tribes’ and ‘dressed cultures’. These observations became part of an ‘evolutionary anthropology’ where other civilisations were seen as stages towards modern—Western—civilisation, the ultimate aim of evolutionary progress.<sup>42</sup> In this reading, ‘being nude’ was considered inappropriate and of ‘low status’, a part of the savagery and barbarian ‘dress’ code.

Most late nineteenth century European travel writings related to ‘peoples and customs’ in East Africa present a highly segregated society. The different religions, marriage patterns and food and dress habits are often presented in static segregated order. There seems to be no room for ‘interaction’ between groups or change. This is confirmed by early plans of cities in East Africa. The old geographical maps of Zanzibar, Nairobi, Dar es Salaam and other places in East Africa show that there is always a ‘Hindu quarter’, a Khoja quarter and a Bohra quarter in town. As mentioned earlier, these quarters were not necessarily imposed by colonial politics, but may well be self-imposed to avoid cultural interaction as much as possible.<sup>43</sup>

This is not to say that cultural interactions did not exist, but they were hardly seen nor mentioned by outsiders. In fact, trading is about interaction. Traders deal constantly with ‘outsiders’ as they visit the shop and introduce themselves as customers. In the case of retailers, they visit suppliers of trade who do not necessarily share the same religion or ethnic, caste or class background. In fact, traders create a culture of interaction where it is accepted to

be different. Often, the informal exchanges start with who you are, what your (religious) background is and other interactions.

The different ways businessmen were dressed was often one message of identity. Each group seemed to wear 'their peculiar dress' and therefore tended to emphasise 'difference' rather than 'communality'. The famous British explorer Richard Burton, for example, often included in his books chapters such as 'Ethnology of Zanzibar', 'the Arabs' or 'the Hindoos' (*sic*). About the dress of 'South Asian Bhatias' in Zanzibar, he writes: "His large-peaked Cutch turban, white cotton coat or shoulder cloth and showery South Asian dhoti around the loins, contrasts favourably with the Arabs' unclean garb."<sup>44</sup> In general, travellers compared the dress outlook of specific 'ethnic' or religious groups. Special attention was attributed to the dress of the (religious) ruler, the King, the Sultan or the Maharaja. But this was seen as an exception.

The British traveller Pearce writes about the Ithnasheries in Zanzibar in 1910:

The dress affected by the young South Asians in Zanzibar is distinctly ugly, and comprises a small black 'polo cap' as head covering, a white or black cotton jack cover reaching to below the knees, similar in shape to the now prehistoric European frock-coat, and a pair of rather tight white trousers.<sup>45</sup>

Differences within or between groups were hardly observed and not systematically studied. Occasionally, some differences between men's and women's dress were noticed.

There is one interesting, but exceptional, example written in 1920, which refers to the different types of dress for different occasions. It mentions that at functions the head of the community would dress in full regalia to show off his importance. In addition, it shows some rare evidence of change or interaction with European dress styles as the garments were 'cut on European lines.'

Except for the hair-covering, which takes the form of a made-up turban cap of gold brocade, the everyday costume of the Khoja men

is not very distinctive. It consists of a coat and trousers and white cotton material, the garments being cut on European lines. At a function however, the heads of the community blossom forth into a handsome kind of uniform, consisting of a richly embroidered cloth of gold turban and a robe composed of a very beautiful material of Persian manufacture, heavily embellished with gold lace.<sup>46</sup>

To a certain extent, this reflects something we all are aware of, but tend to forget. The way we dress expresses various messages. First, it is a message to the family and close community. One dresses according (or not) to the customs of the direct environment. But the same message is also sent to outsiders. Thus, it also shows to outsiders the extent to which one tends to conform to the close-knit community and the extent to which one tries to rebel and be 'different'. The acceptance of 'Western dress' in these communities sends the message of admiration and adaptation, but it also may be seen as protesting against the manners and etiquette of the elite of one's own society.

Despite the 'static and unchanging' image of dress habits mentioned above, we are aware that people interact, change and develop. Anthropologists like Louis Dummont have written about culture in terms of an interrelation between functions and social institutions. In this so-called 'functionalist' school, the Western myths of exoticism and strangeness of 'the other' were dispelled. It was shown that kinship systems, lifestyles and rituals were a function of rational, 'internal' system. One of the aims was to show that Western civilisation was not the necessary outcome of 'cultural' stages of development and that each 'culture' had its own 'rationality'. Dumont's focus was on the 'rationale' of the caste system.<sup>47</sup> But in the 'evolutionist' as well as the functionalist approach, the 'other' was described in isolation and passivity, not in interaction and change. Currently, the emphasis has changed again, from the notion of a 'static other' to the awareness that people migrate, trade and interact with each other.

In fact, 'cultures' are not preserved by protecting them from 'mixing' with other cultures, but can probably continue to exist only as a product of mixing. The question is how and in what direction this is happening. It may not come as a surprise that areas of cultural interaction, such as business dealings, are important venues where change occurs. In addition, 'education and schooling' is another important area of interaction.

There is a famous picture of three of the Karimjee businessmen in front of a huge Swahili-style door in Zanzibar. The picture was taken after finalising the agency agreement with Caltex for the distribution of oil products in East Africa in 1924. On the right we see Tayebali Karimjee (1897–1987), who would become the master of charities in the Karimjee family. On the left we see Yusufali Karimjee (1882–1966) who was the born trader and 'outward bound' manager of the Karimjee businesses. He travelled from Zanzibar to Japan and from South Africa to the United Kingdom to inspect trades, quality of products and prices personally. In the middle we see Mohamedali Karimjee (1877–1940) who was the second son of Alibhai Karimjee Jivanjee. At the time the picture was taken, he was the family eldest and head of the family. He managed the business affairs from the head office in Zanzibar.<sup>48</sup>

At first sight, it is not surprising that the outbound (export) manager was dressed in a suit and tie. He was the one who dealt with Europeans and he changed his dress accordingly. But, at the same time, he is wearing a turban, which clearly shows that he is not a European. In fact, this type of turban was very specific to the Bohra community in East Africa; In other words, it was part of their 'peculiar dress' as mentioned by Pearce earlier. This is not to say that he would dress in suit and tie on all occasions he dealt with Europeans. On the contrary, in 1910, he was invited to a lunch in London in honour of Alibhai Mulla Jeevanjee (not family). At that time, Jeevanjee was promoting 'equal rights' for Asians in East Africa in the heart of the empire. He was talking to representatives of parliament and other public figures. At the lunch, he wore, like any other Asian African, his Asian dress, including a turban.

About half of the group were Europeans, who all wore European suits and ties.

Thus, in economic as well political affairs, there seems to be some evidence that shows that the way groups dress was used ‘instrumentally’. Day-to-day explanations such as people tending to dress towards the economic and political elite, for more dignity and prestige, and so on, are doubtful. Different perspectives on the same occasions play an important role. Let me explain.

First, the Karimjees themselves revealed that it would have been unthinkable to dress up like Europeans during the Jeevanjee lunch. Their grandfathers left as local heroes, dressed up as Bohra princes, to visit London. They were given a farewell party before they left from Zanzibar.<sup>49</sup> Here as well, they would dress up like Bohra princes. They considered themselves to be the local, Zanzibari Asian African elite. They went to London to support Jeevanjee’s claim for equal rights. They felt morally advanced. In their view, the British spoke about equality but were seen as untrustworthy. The Bohras, in general, saw themselves as the living examples of equality. Not just because of their Muslim faith, which was important as well. For them, the ultimate evidence was that they sponsored local schools and health institutions for all. The colonial officials and missionaries were only interested in Africans, but not in Asians and Arabs.<sup>50</sup> Some close friends of the Karimjees once explained to me that the Karimjees in East Africa had invented socialism, referring to their amount of charities on the island and East Africa. The British—in their view—were only interested in patronising the Asians in East Africa and securing their own interest.<sup>51</sup> From this perspective, there was no need to ‘adjust’ to a European standard; it was morally and politically self-evident to show your own dignity and difference.

Second, in the matter of business dealings and adjusting to the European suit, the situation was different. Yusufali Karimjee was not seen as ‘modern’ for his ‘Western’ outlook. He was seen as a rebel in the family. He had travelled the world and adjusted to all kinds of circumstances. His temporary, and occasional, adjustment

is not to be seen as an indicator of his progressive ideas. It just showed that he could be part of different cultures, including the dominant British one.

There is an interesting picture of him, however, in his garden in Mombasaa. Here, he wears a Japanese kimono. Yusufali was born in Zanzibar like his parents and grandparents. But many contemporaries as well as current researchers would see him as a South Asian in East Africa, not as an African. Others may define him as a 'Muslim' or more specifically a Bohra. He is married to a Japanese woman, but he does not speak the language. His first language is Gujarati, but he is fluent in English (reading, writing and speaking) as well. In other words, it is very difficult to indicate his identity (or identities?). The example of Yusufali Karimjee is exceptional; nevertheless, it raises questions about the categorisation of identities and the classification of 'cultural change'.

Third, it is fascinating to see that the Asian traders and businessmen in East Africa are often seen as 'middlemen minorities'. That is, that acted as petty traders between the Europeans and Swahili producers. Nevertheless, the elite businessmen in East Africa often explained to me that this was not the case. They meant that for them the Europeans (!) were the middlemen between East Africa and the European markets. This also shows the strong sense of self-awareness of this emerging Asian African elite. They did not relate themselves to Europeans; they developed their own world, in which they used the Europeans to build their own commercial empire and political space to raise their families. In other words, the partial adaptation to the British society, expressed in their dress habits, was used for practical reasons.

This all may be true for the absolute elite of Asian Africans in East Africa. However, it does not explain why the majority the upper middleclass of Asian African businessmen shifted towards a Western-style business suit. I was struck by this fact when I was given two pictures taken only 30 years after each other. In the first picture, taken in 1954, all the community members wore their own



typical dress of that time, whereas only 30 years later, they all wore European business suits on a similar occasion.

In 1954, the Khoja Shia Ithnasheri community organised its first East African community conference in Mombasa. The picture shows the important organisers and members of the community at that time (Photograph 3.1). All the members are male. Most of the persons portrayed wear the typical Muslim sherwanis (long coats) and black caps. This was, at that time, the most common dress among the male members of the Khoja Shia Ithnasheri community. In addition, two interesting extremes occur in the image. On the one hand, we see that the most important person in the middle of the picture is wearing a turban, reflecting his importance and his ties to tradition. On the other hand, we see that he, as well as some other members, was wearing a tie, a direct adaptation of an important part of the European business suit. In this picture, one person (on the far right) is wearing a Western-style business suit, including a tie.

**PHOTOGRAPH 3.1 Ithnasheri Community in Mombasa, 1954**



Source: Gijsbert Oonk.

**PHOTOGRAPH 3.2 Ithnasheri Community in Mombasa, 1954**



Source: Gijsbert Oonk.

Only 30 years later, the Khoja Ismaili Ithnasheri community organised another gathering at the same place in Mombasa. The group portrait shows a striking contrast with the 1954 event (Photograph 3.2). The turban, the black caps and the sherwanis have disappeared from the image. Most members are wearing a European-style business suit with tie. This change was part of a longer process of adapting, conforming and assimilating the dress habits of Asians in East Africa. How, then, should this be explained?

In my view, three areas of interest were important for the change in dress habits: (a) the emergence of a subsidised Asian African educational institution in which school uniforms were compulsory; (b) the decline of the importance of trade with South and East Asia in favour of Europe, and (c) the role of religious leaders and institutions in guiding cultural processes of change.

1. An elite is an interest group, and its cultures develop as a means for the coordination of its corporate activities to enhance and maintain power. For the Asians in East Africa, this is a complex phenomenon. In the colonial era, they leaned on the white colonial powers, which, in return, relied on them. But they also relied on themselves. Elsewhere I have written more extensively about the emergence of Asian education in East Africa.<sup>52</sup> The Christian missionaries in East Africa had little interest in South Asians. Nevertheless, the Asians could not afford themselves to remain uneducated. They were professional traders, financiers and brokers in East Africa. They had to deal with Europeans, Arabs and Africans; this required at least some education. They, therefore, took a great interest in educating their children and started their own schools from the moment Gujaratis settled in East Africa.<sup>53</sup> During the colonial period, most South Asians in East Africa went to so-called 'Indian schools', where they were taught to read and write their 'own' languages. Though many schools were intended for certain communities or founded by religious institutions, others served a wide range of students of various backgrounds.<sup>54</sup> Most of my respondents remembered that they had attended 'Indian schools' where Hindus and Muslims sat together. The prosperous South Asian business communities (partly) financed many of these schools.

Most of the schools in East Africa were built along British models and rules, some of which the Asians remembered from colonial India. All the teachers were 'imported' from India. But, surprisingly, many of them would wear 'British clothes'. This had become part of many educational institutions in India. Therefore, these teachers may have set an example for the emerging Asian African business community. The change of dress and dress types became acceptable. Here, it is important to note that school uniforms were compulsory and it was often the first time that children would wear cloths (and shoes!) that were more part of a British culture than their own.

In addition, and in course of time, the Asians in Africa lost their ability to read, write and speak the Gujarati language. Initially, the Asians had promoted their own languages in the educational institutions, but over time the colonial officials started to sponsor Indian education under the condition that from 'standard four' onwards the education would be in English. Moreover, on the eve of independence, the local governments started to promote Swahili as the 'educational language'. At that time, the majority of the Asians in East Africa—who could afford it—opted for 'English medium' schools. In other words, the change in educational systems made it slowly acceptable to wear 'Western dress' and speak and write English, not only in the 'playground', but over time at home as well.<sup>55</sup>

At the same time, a growing number of children went to colleges in Britain. The offspring of elite businessmen were sent to private schools in the United Kingdom. Here, they were exposed not only to the British children, their dress and language but also to different food habits, manners of introduction and ways of speaking with each other (looking each other in the eyes if you say you speak the truth, instead of looking down out of respect for authority).

Others were sent to private schools and universities in India. But this was not a historic rendezvous with the 'original culture'. On the contrary, these were colonial institutions that were partly meant to prepare the pupils for further studies abroad. Again, it meant continuous exposure to British dress habits (school uniforms, dressing for Christmas parties, and so on), British history, language, and so on.

2. Over time, South Asian settlers in East Africa developed a gradual economic and social separation from India. This was a consequence of the cutting of social ties evidenced by the growing preference for marrying South Asian women raised in East Africa and—in the words and memory of the informants—the deterioration of economic relations.<sup>56</sup> Another reason was the growing importance of formal banking, which

meant that there was less need to reinforce informal (family) banking networks. The importance of the ‘*Hundi* system’ (an informally organised credit system) declined in favour of formal banks. In other words, those family members who stayed in India and did not move to East Africa grew less and less important as economic and social capital. Nevertheless, statistics reveal no dramatic decline in the figures for imports from and exports to India. But, more importantly, the United Kingdom became the most important export destination.<sup>57</sup> In the perceptions of Asian Africans, India was on the decline and the future was in Europe.

The economic and social separation from India was also reflected in the way the Indian National Congress tried to build the Indian nation. One of the key issues was that they started to promote Indian-made cloth, especially *khadi*. This was the fine and simple way of dressing of the South Asian peasants first adopted by Gandhi and in the early 1930s by almost all leaders of the Congress Party. Its major aim was to eliminate the distinction between the rich and the poor and at the same time to promote India’s dignity and unity.<sup>58</sup> After the independence in 1947, India’s first prime minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, had made it clear to the Asians overseas that they should become local citizens and not wait for India to back up their interests as it had enough problems of its own. This was hard for the Asian businessmen who suffered nationalisation of their houses and businesses. The last thing they wanted was to identify with the Congress leaders, dressing up in *khadi*. Nevertheless, women continued to wear saris. On religious occasions, men would wear ‘traditional’ South Asian dress. And finally, some retired businessmen nowadays like to wear *khadi*, to identify with the South Asian traditions and the spirit of the Mahatma.

3. During the process of cultural change, the various spiritual or religious leaders often guided the identification with India, Africa and Western Europe from ‘above’. This also included the dress habits of Asians. The most outspoken leader was the spiritual leader of the Ismailis, the Aga Khan

III. In 1952, he advised his followers to regard East Africa as their permanent home. In fact, this was in line with the official policy of Nehru regarding overseas Indians. In 1954, Jawaharlal Nehru advised Indians in East Africa to cooperate with Africans, adding that they could not expect protection from the Indian government and that they were guests in the African countries. India had its own problems to solve before thinking about others (see also Chapter 4).

Aga Khan III pushed his followers further than that. He advised them to replace their vernacular language, Gujarati, by English as the medium of instruction at schools. Moreover, he successfully encouraged women to wear Western dress, to continue their education and to seek employment. The Ismailis were well known for their contribution to education (for Ismailis and non-Ismailis), building hospitals and having societies that enabled Ismailis to build their own houses.

As may be expected, not all religious leaders followed the same line and were also successful in their interventions. The Bohra community in East Africa was liberal and open minded. Some of the most important business leaders, such as A.M. Jeevanjee and Yusufali Karimjee, made a strong case for a secular-oriented primary (Bohra) school in India. Initially, this school was tolerated by the *Dai*. However, when the liberals proposed a secular middle school as well, the *Dai* objected and tried to obstruct the development. He felt that a religious school was more important than a secular one. At the same time, the liberal fraction disputed the *Dai's* authority to use communal funds without consulting its members. In 1918, this dispute was eventually fought out in court, where the British judge proclaimed that the *Dai* should be considered as the trustee of the funds, not as their owner. The *Dai* responded by excommunicating his opponents. This history repeated itself in various events in which the Kenyan Bohra, A.M. Jeevanjee, played a leading role. Yusufali Karimjee Jeevanjee succeeded him and organised a conference in Mumbai in 1944. Again, most of the organisers and participants were excommunicated.<sup>59</sup>

In other words, the Ismaili as well as the Bohra elite wished their children to be educated along liberal and not along religious lines. They were open to change the language and dress habits, in order to adjust to the local African culture as well as that of its British rulers. The Ismailis were supported by their leaders, whereas the Bohras successfully used colonial law to back up their ideas. In both cases, the businessmen were very influential. They were the ones who sponsored most projects within the community, often using their knowledge and experience from abroad.

## Language: From Gujarati to English

In this section, I examine the loss of the ability to read, write and speak the Gujarati language among the South Asians in East Africa and the increased importance of the English language across the generations. The findings show that the first generation South Asians in East Africa speak, write and read Gujarati fluently; those belonging to the second generation speak and read Gujarati, while those of the third generation may speak Gujarati at home with the (grand)parents, but are unable to read or write the language. This youngest generation has developed a preference for English. This development is not to be seen as a 'natural' process in which English happened to be the coloniser language that had to be adopted by its subjects. On the contrary, during the colonial days South Asians refused to teach English in the 'Indian schools' in East Africa. They hired teachers from Gujarat to teach Gujarati and the Gujarati history. Colonial officials needed the Asians to read and write in English in order to present their accounting books but the South Asians refused this request. Thus, English was rejected despite massive state intervention.

Nevertheless, they eventually developed the habit of reading and writing English just prior to the independence of the East African nations. At that time, however, the local Swahili language and not English was being promoted. Thus again, the Asians in

East Africa set their own priorities when it came to the adaptation of language. This shows that the Gujaratis had control over their 'identity' creation. This is especially relevant if we realise that 'language', like religion, is a very important 'identity' marker. Thus, if we take, again, the agent's perspective, we realise that this 'identity' creation was neither a desire to 'hold onto tradition' and 'maintain the traditional language' nor a part of an 'assimilation' into the local, that is, Swahili culture. These South Asians businessmen chose to become 'international' and opted for English. Despite the concern of some elderly community members, English replaced Gujarati. One Hindu religious leader had suggested that "we have lost our gift of expression", but many businessmen would reply "but we have gained an international outlook".<sup>60</sup>

The first generation Gujaratis in East Africa knew how to read, write and speak Gujarati, whereas the third-generation migrants may speak Gujarati with their parents but prefer to use English among themselves and they also do not know how to read or write Gujarati. This exchange of Gujarati in favour of English was the result of individual and community-based decisions. It should not be seen as a simplified process of a minority community adapting to 'globalisation', or 'Westernisation' by instrumentally choosing the more 'global' language, the language of the business elite. On the contrary, as we will see, the colonial state promoted English and German education in a period when the Gujaratis successfully supported and sponsored their own Indian schools, using Gujarati as the vernacular language. The Germans in Tanganyika and the British in Uganda and Kenya were not able to implement their education systems because the Gujaratis refused to support the interests of the colonial states. They followed their own cultural and economic agenda. Interestingly, the Gujaratis themselves promoted the English language when the independent East African nations started to promote Swahili, the vernacular East African language. This was the consequence of intended and unintended government policies and the realisation by the Gujaratis that their future lay not in India but in Africa and the West.



This struggle over the ‘teaching language’ is one of the most important variables of ethnic identity. Together with religion, food and dress habits and a shared history (real or imagined), ‘language’ is among the key variables of most definitions and descriptions of ‘ethnicity’. The maintenance of aspects of South Asian culture(s), in the form of the reproduction of language, is seen as a key element in many definitions of diaspora.<sup>61</sup> In the Introduction section, I have shown that there is a tendency to ‘unify’ the South Asian diaspora in the diaspora debate. In this section, I emphasise that migrants make their own adaptations to local circumstances. The consequence may well be that they do not identify with their ancestors’ culture ‘back home’. It is therefore intriguing to see how the shift in identity and the choice of language occurred among the Gujarati businessmen of East Africa. The choice of the ‘teaching language’ was instrumentally made. The Indian/Gujarati community had an active and successful lobby in this matter.

Here, I use the image of ‘three generations’ of South Asians in Tanzania:<sup>62</sup> (a) the pioneers (born 1880–1920), who decided to settle with their families in East Africa; (b) the Asian East Africans (born 1920–1960), who made East Africa their home and (c) the internationalists (born 1960–2000), whose ‘roots’ are as Asian East Africans, but who are economically oriented towards the West and culturally towards both the West and East. This typology reflects the change in identity from one oriented towards the Gujarat region to an ‘international’ orientation. The South Asians lost a part of their primary ‘Gujarati’ identity and gained an ‘international’ identity. This change was, however, not welcomed by all of the community’s members. Some expressed their concern about the loss of ‘the gift of expression’.

The results of this research are particularly accurate for Dar es Salaam and the coastal region, where most of the interviews were conducted.<sup>63</sup> Wherever relevant, I discuss the variation among and within the various families and relate these families to the more ideal type of family. Furthermore, archival material has been added, especially data related to the educational and language policies of

the German (in German Tanganyika) and British colonial governments. In general, the development of Indian education in East Africa is a much-neglected area of research. At best, it is hinted at in general histories on Asians in East Africa. Moreover, the use of sometimes very valuable German sources in the Tanganyika National Archives (TNA) is rare because of the language problems faced by many English- and/or Swahili-speaking scholars. This is the first attempt to fill this gap.

My argumentation is divided into four parts. The first part looks at the life histories of early Lohana migrants who settled in East Africa between 1880 and 1920. Here, the main aim is to emphasise their knowledge of reading and writing Gujarati. The second part highlights the efforts of the second-generation South Asians to establish 'Indian schools' that would teach Indian languages. The third part describes a dramatic shift in the colonial history of East Africa, when the East African colonies became the independent countries of Uganda, Tanzania and Kenya. These countries no longer subsidised Indian schools, so this option was no longer available. South Asians opted for English-language education, and the third generation eventually 'forgot' how to read and write Gujarati. In the fourth and final part, I emphasise the consequences of these findings in relation to the discourses around the diaspora concept.

### *The First Generation: Reading, Writing and Speaking Gujarati*

The first generation South Asians in East Africa were born between 1880 and 1920 in Gujarat, western India. Most of them received at least their primary education in their homeland. They were able to read, write and speak Gujarati and some had a little knowledge of English when they arrived in East Africa. Others travelled as young boys with their fathers and received some primary education in East Africa. An example is Sunderjibhai Damordar, a 99-year-old Hindu Lohana.<sup>64</sup> The migration history of Sunderjibhai follows the

familiar pattern of his community to East Africa. In 1916, at the age of 10, he arrived in Zanzibar together with his father, Nanjibhai Damordar. They were asked to look after the shop of a relative, Kesawji Dewanji, whose sons did not want to settle in East Africa and returned to India.

Formal and informal education played an important role in the lives of the pioneers. Most respondents recalled their primary and secondary schools. As might be expected, some received part of their education in India, whereas others were educated exclusively in East Africa. Sunderjibhai recalls that he had just finished King Readers II when he left school in Mombasa, that is, his English was very poor at that time. However, he already knew how to read and write Gujarati, having learnt it in Gujarat.

One may here record a tribute of appreciation to the voluntary efforts that the Indian community have made throughout the Territory to provide some form of education, however poor, for its children. It is a tribute to their sense of responsibility towards the rising generation. In India people are well accustomed to the principle of providing at their own cost some kind of education for their children....<sup>65</sup>

However, the colonial governments wanted the South Asian communities to be taught in English and/or Swahili (in Kenya and Uganda) or German and/or Swahili (in German East Africa, DOA). In the first place, those who could read, write and speak the language of the ruler might find a job in the colonial civil service. Secondly, the governments wanted to control native trade and produce, especially the account books of South Asian traders, in order to levy taxes and to avoid 'illegal' Indian competition.

It is difficult to judge the accusations of irregularities and illegal business practices, because most of the evidence comes from colonial officials who, generally, supported European interests.

It is the opinion of the Europeans entrusted with Indian business relations that 30 per cent of the Indians of Kilwa and Mohorro

become bankrupt as soon as accounting becomes obligatory (...). They always receive new credit from their fellow believers. Scarcely a month passes when Indians do not come forth to declare themselves bankrupt in one or other city of our colony. They gladly pay 200 rupees of the establishment tax.<sup>66</sup>

Whether this is true or not, these accusations played a major role in the development of colonial policies towards the use of Gujarati account books and the teaching of Gujarati, English and German in primary and secondary schools.

Thus, in 1906, the German colonial government tried to force South Asians to do their accounting in either German or Swahili (in Latin script, and not in Gujarati or Arabic script).<sup>67</sup> This was not backed with any initiative to encourage Swahili or German education for Indians. On the contrary, Indian education was deliberately hindered at first: "The Indians who, by their high intelligence and endeavour, get the most out of education without being useful to the Government will be held back and segregated."<sup>68</sup> Nevertheless, government education for South Asians was introduced after 1912, when the Germans claimed that accounting done in Gujarati made it difficult to levy the profit tax and led to fraudulent bankruptcy claims. They admitted that the 'big Indian firms' were not the targets of the legislation as their books 'were very well kept, even by European standards'.<sup>69</sup> The main aim was to challenge the 'big mob of retailers', and *blutsauger* (cheats or bloodsuckers, G.O.), that is, the small shop owners and so-called *duka wallas*.<sup>70</sup>

However, it was soon realised that it would be impossible to force the 'old men', the Indian family patrons, to learn German or any other European language in a short period of time. The Germans proposed that the South Asians should demand that the young men in their firms learn a European language. The reasoning was twofold. First, the young men would eventually be able to present their accounting in German or English, and second, after one generation the language problem would be

solved. Nevertheless, the Germans themselves were unable to provide the necessary funding for this education.

Meanwhile, the new Indian Association had taken up the 'language matter'. The secretary of the Indian Association reminded the British Chief Secretary in Dar es Salaam, Tanganyika, that

my Association has also taken the trouble of making enquiries in Uganda regarding the matter and we are informed that even there it is permissible to keep such books in Gujarati amongst other languages.<sup>71</sup>

In Kenya and Uganda, it had been accepted since the early 1920s that the account books of Indians could be kept in English, Gujarati, or Urdu.<sup>72</sup> The British colonial government hired South Asians to check the account books of South Asian firms. Except for a minor debate concerning the expenses of these colonial clerks, the language problem never came up. The Indian Association successfully made its point and the proposed language legislation in Tanganyika was never passed; the Tanganyika colonial government appointed South Asian accountants to check the Gujarati books. However, even this was effectively challenged by the South Asians because they did not want their books to be open to 'outsiders', because of the importance of company secrets. Several older informants readily explained to me that they kept their business records in Gujarati even though they were able to read and write in English; the main reason was to keep them secret, and not necessarily to avoid paying taxes either. Interestingly, complaints by South Asians regarding tax rates were written in English in Kenya and Uganda, and in Swahili and German in Tanganyika. In everyday practice, language did not seem to be a problem.<sup>73</sup>

In my view, the South Asian businessmen used the 'language' argument instrumentally in order to minimise colonial government interference. Tax avoidance and the misuse of trading licenses were just a small part of this. More important, I assume, was the desire to keep the 'social distance' between the legislators

and the traders at a level that would allow them to outplay the legislators. Most of my informants in Dar es Salaam do not hesitate to state that they made 'fair deals' with the South Asian clerks regarding taxes without ever showing any of their accounting books. At the same time, raising taxes and checking accounting books were only excuses by the colonial government to defend the interests of European firms in the area. This seems to have been the major reason behind the proposed legislation, particularly during the German colonial period in Tanganyika.

This is not to say that language is unimportant and merely a condition for understanding, exchange and collaboration or competition. On the contrary, language is also an important part of primary identity. Members of the first generation, even those who read, write and speak English fluently, still regard Gujarati as their mother tongue. It is an important part of their cultural background. This is reflected in the fact that I saw various Gujarati newspapers and magazines in the houses of these first-generation people, including special women's magazines. Most first-generation Gujaratis in East Africa would have read Gujarati with more ease than English and thus they subscribed to magazines published in Gujarat.

The preference for Gujarati was also reflected in the fact that whenever a will had to be drawn up, it was written in Gujarati. I also came across English and German translations of wills in the colonial records that were originally written in Gujarati. The will of the well-known South Asian trader Sewji Hadji of Bagamoyo has its own entry in the Archives. It has been translated into German and English as well.<sup>74</sup> This evidently shows that there was a clear preference for Gujarati in personal correspondence.

In short, and as expected, the first generation of Hindu Lohana Gujarati businessmen could already read, write and speak Gujarati when they arrived in East Africa. They kept their business records in Gujarati, except for a few larger firms, which kept them in English. The first-generation South Asians started to build

educational institutions where the vernacular language would be Gujarati. Nevertheless, this was challenged in the following period by the colonial rulers who succeeded in making English the most important subject in the curriculum.

### *The Second Generation: Speaking and Reading Gujarati*

The second-generation South Asians in East Africa were born in East Africa in the period between 1920 and 1960. Manilal Sunderji Damordar is the third son of Sunderjibhai. He speaks fluent Gujarati, is able to read Gujarati but has difficulties in writing it. He was born in Dar es Salaam and had his primary and secondary education there. He went to London in the 1960s to study for his university degree in commerce. He is fluent in English. Most of this generation learnt to read and write Gujarati and English in the colony's 'Indian schools'.

As the British could not provide the education they wished to in the territories, they were happy with South Asian initiatives to build schools throughout the country. In general, the level of Indian education was sufficient and could easily bear comparison with most missionary schools. However, the colonial government was unhappy with the fact that in most Indian schools, the vernacular language remained Gujarati, while English was only treated as a subject. While the government was willing to promote the education of Indians in the colony, one important condition was that the vernacular language be English as well. In the words of R. Smith, the Director of Education in Dar es Salaam,

The medium of elementary education is the language of the country, but as the Indian Communities wish to maintain their identity by continuing to encourage the use of Gujarati for commercial purposes I warned them that it is not improbable that Government will decide to assist only in schools where English is taught.<sup>75</sup>

In 1925, the colonial government was still arguing that the Gujarati language was mainly used for commercial purposes among South Asian traders and that the government therefore should not support Indian education unconditionally. Nevertheless, this reasoning lost out in favour of a new argument. The colonial government started to emphasise that its main interest was the development of the country, especially the Africans. Therefore, the education of Indians was not at the top of its agenda. Nevertheless, it was willing to support other groups as well. A remarkable conflict of interests between the colonial government and the South Asian settlers emerged. The colonial government demanded that the education be either in English or in Swahili (or even in German, in German Tanganyika), whereas the settlers again opted for their own language. This conflict of interests was particularly intense during periods when there was a shortage of funds on both sides.

The Indian Educational Society represented the various sections of the Asian community in East Africa. They used every argument they could think of to convince the colonial government to support more 'Indian schools'. This is clear when we look at the example of the 'Indian Public School' in Dar es Salaam in the period 1925–1940. The Indian Educational Society, for example, pointed out that Dar es Salaam had an Indian Public School in 1917. It was closed during the First World War and reopened in 1921 as the Lok Tilak Memorial Indian School. As the number of pupils (boys and girls) grew faster than its ability to fund them, the Indian Educational Society organised a meeting at which the South Asian business community pledged Shillings 14,000, or about 10 per cent of the total operating costs, for one year. The Society also asked the British government to provide a substantial grant arguing that Indians were "your loyal subjects and taxpayers and are entitled to such concessions".<sup>76</sup> At this point, they were also referring to the Indian contribution, both physical and financial, during the First World War.

However, before this request could be granted, the British colonial officials had to develop their own educational priorities,



conditions for funding and legislation. The following topics and questions appeared in formal and informal correspondence: (a) whether special education for Indians was desirable at all. Were not large numbers of South Asians returning to India anyway? In other words, 'African' tax money should not be wasted on temporary migrants; (b) legislation that accounting should be kept in Roman alphabet with Arabic numbers, in other words, not in Gujarati; (c) whether the quality of the buildings, educational materials and the teachers was adequate and (d) whether the colonial government should support education in the Gujarati language and, if so, up to what level?<sup>77</sup>

The Lok Tilak Indian Memorial School was fortunate to receive some ad hoc funding from the government until the early 1930s. The grants never amounted to more than 50 per cent of the total operating costs, however. The main source of income came from the parents of the children and generous contributions from the South Asian business community. This period of financial uncertainty would not end until a definite education policy was developed in 1937.<sup>78</sup>

It was only during the period 1929–1937 that the foundations for a colonial education system for South Asians in East Africa were laid. In 1929, a grant-in-aid code was promulgated, which provided for the payment of staff grants, block grants and average attendance and capital grants for buildings and maintenance. A primary school syllabus in Gujarati (and Urdu) was also prescribed and schools were under the control of the Board of Indian Education.<sup>79</sup> In addition, a separate tax for non-native education was raised among Indians, which provided a little more than 20 per cent of the total government expenditure on Indian education.<sup>80</sup>

On the question of language, the general feeling among colonial officials was well formulated by the Governor of Tanganyika, Sir Donald Cameron, in a confidential letter to L.C.N.C. Amery (Member of the British Parliament):

I am in favor of grants-in-aid being made to Indian schools under a grant-code when it is prepared, but only in respect of education

imparted in English. The teaching of Gujarati to Indian children is not to the general benefit of Tanganyika and for that reason I consider that assistance to it from public funds is not justified.<sup>81</sup>

The Indian Association and the Indian Educational Society were well aware of the position of the colonial office. Both realised that the provision of instruction in the English language would improve their chances of obtaining a subsidy for the Indian schools. Therefore, they began writing applications for grants in which they guaranteed English education from standard four or five onwards. After the 1930s, it was finally agreed that teaching in Indian public schools would be in Gujarati (or Urdu in Muslim schools) up to the fourth standard and English thereafter.<sup>82</sup> This means that South Asians were first taught Gujarati and studied English only after the fourth year.

Nevertheless, teaching in Gujarati was an important issue for the Gujarati community. The language became an instrumental symbol for Gujarati culture in the case of the Kitui Indian School in Moshi. This school was so small that the Education Officer opted for amalgamation with the Arab School. The South Asians were furious and argued fiercely that the:

Kitui Indian School is a Gujarati Primary School, running up to standard V. Its main language is Gujarati and all the subjects is being taught in Gujarati.... The Indian Community is not willing at all to enrol Arab boys in their Gujarati Primary School and is also unwilling to have a combined school for there is a vast difference in Indians and Arabs culture and behaviour.<sup>83</sup>

From the correspondence it is not clear what is meant by the vast difference in South Asian and Arab culture, though some hints are made that the differences are elsewhere related to the unwillingness of South Asians to have combined classes (South Asians and Arabs), especially with regard to South Asian girls.<sup>84</sup>

Gujarati language and culture played an important role for these second-generation South Asians. The generation of Manilal

Sunderji Damordar, those born and educated in East Africa, learnt basic reading and writing in Gujarati, which—at that time—was still considered their mother tongue. This is confirmed by some figures, however sketchy, from the 1931 census report, which stated that more than one-fifth of the Tanganyika South Asians were able to speak English, whereas more than 75 per cent stated that they could not (the remaining five per cent did not answer the question on language). Furthermore, the report stated that about half of the South Asian population was able to read and write Gujarati, whereas only five per cent could read and write English.<sup>85</sup> However, competency in the English language grew rapidly in the years to come.

From the 1950s onwards, many parents in the upper strata of the Lohana business community were unhappy with the quality of education in the colony, especially at higher levels.<sup>86</sup> Thus, they began sending their sons and daughters to India and—those who could afford it—to the United Kingdom. Most of them were still British subjects, so admission into British universities was relatively easy.<sup>87</sup> Unfortunately, we do not have any figures about the number of South Asians who obtained university degrees abroad. However, more than half of my male informants of this generation, like Manilal Sunderji Damordar, had at least two years of higher education in the United Kingdom (32 out of 59) and thus developed some fluency in writing and speaking English.<sup>88</sup>

In 2000, although Manilal Sunderji Damordar spoke and read Gujarati, he found it difficult to write it. He did not show the same interest in Gujarati newspapers as his father had. He had not subscribed to any of the Gujarati newspapers or magazines. His English was fluent and he kept his business correspondence in English. Sometimes, however, when he wrote his father, he made an effort to formulate at least a few sentences in Gujarati. With other Gujarati businessmen of his generation he spoke Gujarati, sometimes mixing in a few English words. At home, he spoke Gujarati with his wife and children, and while his wife would respond in Gujarati, his children usually responded in English.

PHOTOGRAPH 3.3 East African Currency Board



Source: Gijsbert Oonk.

Note: The struggle for the hegemony of language is 'Work in Progress' for the East African Currency Board. The languages of business were English, Arabic and Gujarati, but not Swahili.

### *The Third Generation: Speaking Gujarati*

Third-generation South Asians were raised in East Africa in the period 1960–2000. One day, I was invited to a Gujarati dinner at the Damordar house. There I noticed that Gujarati was being spoken. Manilal Sunderji Damordar spoke Gujarati with his wife and his son, Jivraj (22 years old), and daughter, Shrutti (20 years old). They responded to their father in Gujarati; however, Jivraj and Shrutti spoke in English with each other and immediately admitted that they could neither read nor write Gujarati. Jivraj even admitted that he was unable to follow Gujarati lectures at the temple. His mother was especially concerned about this.<sup>89</sup>

Jivraj and Shrutti were born after the independence of the East African nations (Uganda, Kenya and Tanganyika in 1961–1962). By this time, there were no longer any 'Indian schools' that could provide the basic knowledge required for writing and reading Gujarati. In Kenya and Uganda, they would have been taught in English, while in Tanzania, Swahili became the language used in schools.

Interestingly, the South Asian business community did not attempt to provide their community with language classes. They must have realised that their economic outlook was ‘international’ and not ‘South Asian’. This was a consequence of their economic reorientation towards the United Kingdom and the West in general, and the political events of the early 1960s (independence) and early 1970s (expulsion of Asians by General Idi Amin).<sup>90</sup> These events made them realise that the English language had become a necessity. However, some religious institutions advocated separate religious classes. In this context, most South Asians chose to send their children to schools in which English was the chief language or, if they could afford it, to the International School in Dar es Salaam.

Jivraj and Shrutti attended the International School in Dar es Salaam. Their English was perfect and their pronunciation was almost ‘Oxford English’, without the typical ‘Indian’ accent. Both of them admitted that they spoke Gujarati only at home with their parents, grandparents, or other elderly relations. Sometimes, they used it as a secret language on school playgrounds when they did not want others to overhear what they were talking about. For them, knowledge of Gujarati was not an important part of their identity, although they did state that they felt ‘Indian’. This feeling of being ‘Indian’ was reflected in their food and dress habits, but not in their language use. It is interesting to note that a part of this ‘Indianness’ was related to the Hindi language, because both of them liked to listen to Hindi Music and watch Hindi movies, which they could actually barely understand.<sup>91</sup>

After interviewing them several times, we started corresponding via email. They were studying in the United Kingdom and I was interested in their choice of food and their dress habits while they were abroad. During this correspondence, they began thinking more about their identities and background. One day, when I asked them about their dress habits in the United Kingdom, Shrutti wrote:

Turning to Indian wear.... i [*sic*] do wear a simple salwaar (*don't know how to spell it!!! how shameful!* [*italics mine*]) around the

house. I find it comfortable and easy to wash and wear. The only time i [*sic*] would wear Indian out of the house in uk [*sic*] is when there is a special Indian occasion or ball (which is about once-twice a year).<sup>92</sup>

Some interviews with various parents revealed a concern for the shrinking knowledge of Gujarati among third-generation South Asians. This was especially true for families who attended lectures at Hindu temples. Lectures were often in Hindi or Gujarati, but the active knowledge of these languages among the third- (but often also second-) generation Asians is so poor that they have difficulty in understanding them. Therefore, some of the local Brahmins have requested their guest lecturers from India to use English.

This has led to an interesting debate within the Lohana community on whether lecturing in English in the Hindu temple should be encouraged or not. For some, the teaching of religion in Gujarati is an essential part of the culture and teaching in English should be discouraged. This is a more strongly held view among some of the visiting Hindu priests from Gujarat (supporters of the BJP [Hindu Nationalist Party in India]) and the Hindi Belt. They have emphasised their language by refusing to lecture in English. There seems to be no debate on the question of whether lecturing should be in Hindi or Gujarati. The question is whether it should be done in an 'Indian' language or not.<sup>93</sup>

Many members of the Lohana community in East Africa realise that knowledge of Gujarati is fading. Therefore, they encourage Gujarati language lessons on temple premises. Some (grand)parents try to teach their (grand)children Gujarati by introducing private tutors and extra language lessons. Nevertheless, I did not come across a single person of this generation who was born and/or lived in East Africa who could read and write in Gujarati. The knowledge of Gujarati is fading fast and is being replaced by English.

Jivraj notes:

My parents are proud of us when we know all the religious functions, despite the fact that we went to the International School.

So we stayed in touch with our culture. They feel sorry that we are not able to read and write our language anymore. Because it would enable us to attend more lectures from the Gurus from India.

Although the community may be divided on the issue of the language to be used to teach the religion, there is agreement that the Hindu faith plays an important role in the community. Even those who did not visit the temples or lectures agreed that their sons and daughters should marry a Hindu, for cultural and religious reasons. “In the end, it is difficult for outsiders to understand our ways”, as one informant put it. In other words, there is a division between those who support religious teaching in English and those who would like to see religion taught in Gujarati. At the same time, both sides agree that English is the most important language in current business affairs and for career opportunities. Therefore, they agree that English should be the language used in school. Despite all this, however, Gujarati is still considered the mother tongue by this third generation, and it plays an important role in the construction of identity. The question remains as to how many more generations it will take before this language is lost and English is accepted as the ‘mother tongue’.

## Conclusion

Hindus tended to settle with their wives later than Muslims. It is difficult to explain these differences. One argument is that because of the importance for Hindus to stay pure (in terms of food habits and marriage patterns), they tended to settle a little after the Muslim families. This is not to state that cultural issues formed a barrier to cross the *kala pani* or the ‘black water’ of the Indian Ocean. On the contrary, we have seen that they did. But the delay in unification with the family in East Africa, including the appearance of Hindu women most probably was a consequence of cultural/religious habits.

In short, two important pillars of Hindu purity were eroded in the first generation. Those who settled with their wives and children surmounted the taboo on sea travel for Lohana women. The Hindu migrant trader, being exposed to economically successful Arab and Indian Muslim communities on the East coast, must have felt at least some inspiration to overcome this constraint. At the same time, the migration of Lohana women would simplify the preservation of the food tradition (being vegetarians and non-drinkers and not accepting food from 'outsiders'). However, here we see that a slight change has occurred in the acceptance, under certain conditions, of eating outside.

It is very difficult to make out to what extent the erosion of Hindu purity was a consequence of the cultural interaction with Europeans, Arabs or Africans. It may be safe to assume that the Lohana traders followed their economic instinct more than their religious one. We cannot determine the number of families who stayed in Gujarat and who did not migrate to East Africa because of the ban on overseas travel. But those who settled in East Africa had to side step traditions by definition.

In the process of settling with their families, elite Indian traders and travellers were exposed to many different cultures and peoples from the world. They had an almost unlimited access to varieties of dresses, fashions and garments. They were economically independent and probably more 'free to choose' what they wanted to wear. At the same time, they were raised in their own culture and this caused constraints on what to wear on what occasion. But, within the constraints, there was always a small matter of choice. And whatever the choice was, it included messages not only for their own community and family, but also for those beyond the direct sphere of interaction.

Within a relatively short period of time, somewhere between 1950 and 1980, an important part of Asian African business elite choose to dress predominantly in a Western business suit. This was not a simple case of blindly accepting and following the West. On the contrary, in fact, when they wanted to make their political



points in official meetings or in the press, they would emphasise their ‘Indianness’ by wearing ‘ethnic dresses’. By this, they would stress the fact that they had a longer history in East Africa than the British did and often emphasising their moral superiority, based on Muslim, Hindu or Gandhian principles. But with the spread of the British educational system, and to some extent its value system, the business suit—including the tie and shining shoes—came to be accepted and indeed became the new conventional business dress of Asians in Africa.

This happens to coincide with two other developments. The first development was the decline in interaction with the South Asian subcontinent. During the early twentieth century, there was decline in the Indian Ocean trade in favour of trade with Europe. The South Asian businessmen in East Africa were quick to realise that dealings with Europeans had become more and more important. Initially, representatives of European and American firms, who visited East Africa and had to be entertained, contacted them. But later, an exceptional part of the South Asian trading elite themselves would visit Europe more often. This growing exposure to European businessmen paved the way in the acceptance of the European business suits. The decline in the trade with India, and therefore less frequent visits to the region of origin, led to the vanishing of Asian dress habits.<sup>94</sup> Of course, this was mainly during business hours and during business gatherings, like those in the pictures. Not during marriages, religious occasions and informal meetings with South Asians.<sup>95</sup>

The second important development was the emergence of independent African nation states, Tanzania, Kenya and Uganda. This contributed to the growing confidence of Africans and the growth of ‘Africanisation projects’. These projects supported the idea that Asians were no longer welcome in East Africa. The Ugandan general Idi Amin made this clear in his Asian farewell speech in which he gave the Asians 30 days to pack up and go (on 5 August 1972). Most Asians left the country, mainly to the United Kingdom, Canada and the United States. If we analyse the pictures

of those who arrived in Europe after the Asian expulsion from East Africa, we find that most women wear saris, but most men would wear European business suits. By then, their dress habits had already changed in favour of the European business suit. In other words, they had already adopted the European business suits even before they arrived in the West.

This section shows that the South Asians in East Africa have toyed with three language options—Gujarati, Swahili and English. Notwithstanding the current emphasis in the mainstream diaspora literature, the outcome of the interplay of the three languages is that they opted for the international outlook. Contrary to what is suggested in the literature, it has not been a linear change from ‘Gujarati to English’; it has to be viewed as a process. This process has not yet been completed—the knowledge of a particular language is subject to change again, may even be in the direction of Gujarati, as Brahmin priests continue to do their utmost to teach in Gujarati or Hindi in the Hindu temples of Dar es Salaam.

After three generations, the South Asian community in East Africa has developed a unique, self-determined combination of Swahili, European and South Asian elements. This community does not identify with the Indian diaspora or with the culture of their ancestors in India.<sup>96</sup> Its home is East Africa and its outlook is ‘international’. In other words, the diaspora concept, with its emphasis on ‘rootedness, the homeland, the reproduction of Indian culture abroad,’ cannot help us to understand the history of the South Asian community in East Africa. Therefore, I again emphasise that there is a further need to study these communities from a ‘local bottom-up’ angle.

## Notes and References

1. In 1935, Redfield, Linton and Herskovits had published their standard work on acculturation, R. Redfield, R. Linton and M. Herskovits, ‘Outline for the Study of Acculturation’, *American Anthropologist* 38, (1935/36): 149–52;

- M.J. Herkovits, *Acculturation: The Study of Cultural Contact* (New York: J.J. Augustin, 1938). They distinguish three types of results of acculturation: (a) acceptance, i.e., adoption of a large part of the other culture without protest or adaption; (b) adaptation, making combination of 'own' cultural elements and some cultural elements of the 'other' culture and (c) reaction, i.e. re-accentuation the 'own' culture as a reaction on cultural interaction. See Herkovits, *Acculturation*, 135–38.
2. "Acculturation: Culture change due to contact between societies; most often used to refer to adaption of subordinate tribal societies to domination by Western societies." (Keesing 1976: 507); "In case of colonization and enslavement, however, acculturation is meant to erase the host culture to the benefit of the dominant." (Lewis 1997: 5).
  3. S. Vertovec, in R. Cohen, *Global Diasporas: An Introduction* (London: Routledge, 1997), 128. See also the well-known article of U. Hannerz, 'The World in Creolisation', *Africa* 57, no. 4 (1993): 546–59.
  4. L. Drummond, 'The Cultural Continuum: A Theory of Intersystems', *Man* 15, no.2 (1980): 352–74; U. Hannerz *Transnational Connections* (London: Routledge, 1996), 67–68.
  5. Good exceptions are: A. Nandy, *The Intimate Enemy* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1983) and Ranajit Guha's series of 'subaltern' studies.
  6. L. Dumont, *Homo Hierachicus* (London: Weidenfield and Nicolson, 1970).
  7. He came with his father to look after a shop of his uncle whose sons did not want to settle in East Africa. They stayed in their uncle's house and worked for him. Eventually, the uncle and his sons went back to India. Sunderji's father settled in Zanzibar. He went back to India to arrange a marriage for his son who eventually settled with his wife in Mombasa a decade later.
  8. This reflects a typical Indian tradition where there used to be a strong notion of purity and impurity in relation to food and the acceptance of food from others. One cannot accept food from everyone. The food restrictions are not so strongly observed in East Africa; but even so, it is Brahmins who operate the many vegetarian restaurants and sweet shops. In the second and third generation, it has become fashionable to have a Brahmin cook in the house.
  9. See Sunderji in Chapter 2.
  10. Emile Ruette, Princess Salme of Zanzibar and Oman, *Memoirs of an Arabian Princess* (Zanzibar: Gallery Publications, 1998 [1886]), 133–34.
  11. *Ibid.*, 134–36.
  12. James Christie, *Cholera Epidemics in East Africa: An Account of the Several Diffusions of the Disease in that Country from 1821 till 1872, with an Outline of the Geography, Ethnology, and Trade Connections of the Regions through which the Epidemics Passed* (London: Macmillan, 1876), 247–48.
  13. *Ibid.*, 349. In addition he was struck by the inconsistency, in the eyes of Christie, of many Hindus who were delighted at having cows around their houses, so that where there was a central court it was filled with cows. Hindus

- were happy to sleep in small bedrooms next to the central court where they must have enjoyed the odour of cow dung. *Ibid.*, 353.
14. Palgrave, *Narrative of a Year's Journey through Central and Eastern Arabia* (London: Macmillan, 1865).
  15. W. J. Simpson, *Report on Sanitary Matters in the East Africa Protectorate, Uganda, and Zanzibar* (London: Colonial Office, 1915).
  16. W. J. Simpson, *Report on Sanitary Matters*, 41.
  17. Interview with Sunderjibhai, 10 October 2000.
  18. The Indian food in East Africa is not cooked in ghee, which is frequently used in Gujarat. Therefore it tastes less oily. The main reason for not using ghee is the fact that there is a strong consciousness that oily food is unhealthy, something I did not encounter in Gujarat that much.
  19. Out of seven 'first generation' informants, only one ate non-vegetarian food and drank liquor. Two had drunk liquor for some years but quit a few years back. In this generation, I gathered information on only three women. Two of them were non-drinkers and vegetarians. One drank regularly on dinner parties and ate meat. All my informants were male. Based on 12 informants, I gathered information of the food habits of 32 people, of which 14 were regular drinkers, and 19 ate meat more than once a week.
  20. Interview with Kamil, 10 February, 2003.
  21. This may reflect the importance of 'keeping up a good name' for outsiders and a notion of emphasising purity in the house is more important than of the person.
  22. Interview.
  23. Will of A. A. Chande, 1959. Copy of translation is available with the author.
  24. Interview with Shrutti Lohana, 12 April, 2003. In addition, I came across several men in their sixties who had a background of eating meat and drinking liquor, but who decided to become vegetarians again and dress in a more 'Indian style' after retirement.
  25. It may be interesting to note that Lohana youngsters frequently reminded me, somewhat proudly, of the fact that 'Indian takeaways' now outnumber fish and chips shops in Britain. A fact that might be based on A. James, 'Cooking the Books: Global or Local Identities in Contemporary Food Cultures?' in *Cross-Cultural Consumption: Global Markets, Local Realities*, ed. D. Howes (London: Routledge, 1996), 77–92. This type of details has found its way in the Indian diaspora and gives some notion of pride and unity. It is not India that is important, but Indian food.
  26. Correspondence through email on 17 October 2002, from the United Kingdom.
  27. I would estimate about half of this generations is vegetarian. May be one-third will eat chicken and fish and the remaining 20 per cent eats red meat regularly.
  28. Interview with Shrutti, 22 October 2002.
  29. Interview with Malika, 10 February 2003.

30. Interview with Shrutti, 22 October, 2002.
31. In this section, I focus on one of the dominant Hindu castes in Dar es Salaam, the Hindu Lohanas. This is due to the fact that they became a predominant part of my research network.
32. The Tanganyika Census of 1931 counted 5162 Hindu men and 2600 Hindu women. *Report on the Non-native Census*, 26 April 1931, p. 38. Note that the issue here is not where the woman was born. On many occasions she might have been born in India as it was the practice of Hindu women to have the delivery of the babies, whenever possible, at their mothers' place. Often this was in Gujarat, India. After delivery, the mother and child would go back to East Africa where the child was raised.
33. Interview with Bharat, 4 June 1999.
34. Interview with Bharat Bengal, 4 June 1999. Please note that changing food habits were not discussed with the father, whereas the topic of choosing a marriage partner could not be avoided.
35. Interview with Bihari Bengal, 12 January 2003.
36. See Note 32.
37. There is an interesting section about Swahili and Oriental influences of Indian/Gujarati cuisine in East Africa in A. Y. Lodhi, *Oriental Influences in Swahili: A Study in Language and Cultural Contacts* (Göteborg: Acta Universitatis Gothoburgensis, 2000), 83–89.
38. See also the second section in Chapter 4.
39. During a focus group discussion at Dar es Salaam, 4 August 2003.
40. During a focus group discussion at Dar es Salaam 4 August 2003.
41. Regarding the dress habits in India, Emma Tarlo has set an excellent standard with *Clothing Matters: Dress and Identity in India* (London: C. Hurst & Co., 1996).
42. Early anthropologists would focus on religion and kinship, rather than dress. See, for example, Lewis Henry Morgan. Morgan was a proponent of social evolution. He proposed a unilinear scheme of evolution from primitive to modern, through which he believed societies progressed. His evolutionary views of the three major stages of social evolution, savagery, barbarism and civilisation, were proposed in Lewis H. Morgan, *Ancient Society* (London MacMillan & Company, 1877). Every good introduction in the field of anthropology has an introduction in this area. I have used Alan Barnard, *History and Theory in Anthropology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 27–41.
43. See Chapter 2.
44. Richard F. Burton, *Zanzibar: City, Island and Coast* (Honolulu: University Press of the Pacific, 2003 [reprint from 1872 edition, original 1856]), 331.
45. F. B. Pearce, *Zanzibar: The Island Metropolis of Eastern Africa* (London: Frank Cass, 1967), 254.
46. Pearce, *Zanzibar*, 254. At the same page: “The attire of the Bohras is plain and unassuming, consisting of a long white coat and loose white cotton trousers.

The usual head-dress is a small round cap, but the more affluent members of the community wear a cloth-of-gold turban cap, somewhat similar to that worn by the Khojas.”

47. Dumont, *Homo Hierachicus*.
48. The picture can be found at the cover of Gijbert Oonk, *The Karimjee Jivanjee Family: Merchant Princes of East Africa, 1800–2000* (Amsterdam: Pallas Publications, 2009).
49. The farewell party was given because of the travel abroad, not because of going to London. When the Karimjees went to India or Karachi, farewell parties were organised as well.
50. This is the way they experienced the ‘truth’. In fact, most of the schools they sponsored were community based. But not all. See G. Oonk, “We Lost our Gift of Expression”; Loss of the Mother Tongue among Indian in East Africa, 1880–2000’, in *Global Indian Diasporas: Exploring Trajectories of Migration and Theory*, ed. G. Oonk (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2007), 31–37.
51. Various interviews with three grandsons of the Karimjees. Interviews taken in April 2006 in London and August 2006 in Dar es Salaam. I met various members of the family several times since 2005. They have become my close friends. Whenever I visit London or Tanzania I make sure to pay a visit. I was invited to their annual family lunch in London in October 2006. The total amount of charities was estimated by Robert G. Gregory to be more than 256.000 pounds, see, Robert G. Gregory, *The Rise and Fall of Philanthropy in East Africa* (London: Transaction Publications, 1992), 50.
52. G. Oonk, ‘We Lost our Gift of Expression’, 31–67.
53. See, for example, Director of Education to Honourable Chief Secretary, 16 March 1925, TNA, AB 1032, 4: “Throughout the Territory, wherever there is an Indian community of any size, Indian parents have taken steps to provide that their children shall, at least, be taught to read and write in Gujarati, and at big centres like Dar es Salaam, Tanga and Tabora and elsewhere English is also taught, and girls as well as boys rightly, attend these schools....” In 1886, John Kirk welcomed the initiative of Tharia Topan to open a school in Zanzibar: “The educational standard of the rising Indian community here is undoubtedly far below the educational standard and business capacity of their fathers who came from Kutch ... a knowledge of English is essential if the rising generation is to hold its own in keen competition with English, Americans, French and Germans. So great, therefore, would be the benefit to be derived from good schools in Zanzibar for the rapidly increasing British Indian population ....” Kirk to Secretary of State, Zanzibar, 1 May 1886, FO 84/1773 PRO London. “Regarding Zanzibar, we discovered from the Foreign Office archives that the leaders of the various Indian communities had for some time been concerned by the absence of any educational facilities for their children, and at a meeting convened by Euan-Smith in the previous July

- [1890] they had agreed to finance a school which they decided to place under the management of a committee elected from members of all Indian communities, both Muslim and Hindu. A sum of 50,000 Rupees was subscribed at this meeting, and other donations quickly followed. When the school opened, two hundred pupils were enrolled with a staff of teachers recruited in India. Gujarati and English were to be the languages taught.” FO 84, Euan-Smith to Salisbury, 30 July 1890; FO 84 Ibid., 1 January 1891.
54. The Ismailis, in particular the followers of the Aga Khan, were quick to build their community-based Ismaili schools, which were nevertheless also accessible to other Indians.
  55. Oonk (2007), Ibid.
  56. See G. Oonk, ‘After Shaking his Hand, Start Counting Your Fingers. Trust and Images in Indian Business Networks, East Africa 1900–2000’, *Itinerario* 18, no. 3 (2004): 70–88.
  57. The annually published ‘bleu books’ on British East Africa include a rich variety on statistical material related to the import and export various products.
  58. Emma Tarlo, *Clothing Matters*, 94–129.
  59. Oonk, *The Karimjee Jivanjee Family*.
  60. Ibid.
  61. See chapter 1.
  62. The literature on this subject includes Robert G. Gregory, *India and East Africa: A History of Race Relations within the British Empire, 1890–1939* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971); M. Mamdani, *From Citizen to Refugee: Uganda Asians Come to Britain* (London: Frances Publishers, 1973); R. R. Ramchandani, *Uganda Asians: The End of an Enterprise* (Bombay: Bombay United Asians Publications, 1976); H. Tinker, *Separate and Unequal: India and the Indians in the British Commonwealth 1920–1950* (St. Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1976); H. Tinker, *The Banyan Tree: Overseas Immigrants from India, Pakistan and Bangladesh* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977).
  63. Indians in Zanzibar may follow a different pattern, as the Swahili language is more accepted among ‘Indians’ there, especially among Ithnasheries and Khojas. Moreover, my interviews with members of Indian Muslim communities, especially the Ithnasheries, revealed that they speak more Swahili, even at home, than their Hindu counterparts. The lower class Indians in Kariakoo, Dar es Salaam, also had developed a preference for Swahili. These results are not included here.
  64. The names of the informants have been changed for reasons of privacy.
  65. See Note 53.
  66. Memorandum Kilwa, 19 May 1903, TNA G 1/29/II. Translation mine.
  67. At that time, Governor Von Goetzen was even attacked for trying to make Swahili the national language and was instead urged to make German the national language; *Die Post*, 23 August 1913.

68. Dar es Salaam report cited in G. Hornsby, 'German Educational Achievement in East Africa', *Tanganyika Notes and Records* 62, (1964): 86.
69. German customs inspector to Government, 22 April 1906, TNA G 1/29/II. Translation mine.
70. *Ibid.*, 13 May 1906, TNA G 1/29/II. In Kenya, the Fire Insurance Company requested that the government make compulsory that accounting and books should be kept in English or Swahili (and not Arabic or Gujarati) in order to be able to check the claims. Kenyan National Archives (hereafter, KNA), AG 30/53, 3–6.
71. The Indian Association to Chief Secretary in Dar es Salaam, 5 April 1933, TNA 11.660 p. 244.
72. Amendment to Trading Licenses 1923 TNA 7092/I.
73. TNA G3 52. In the Zanzibar Archives, we came across examples of books that were kept in Gujarati and English. Zanzibar Archives HC 2/49, Trustee Report 1902.
74. The German Records section of the TNA contains several German as well as English translations of wills. See G3 35, where we find the names of Karim Ladha, Remtulla Meralji and Dayal Trikamdas. The most famous person had his entry under G3 38; this was Sewji Hadji, who left a huge portion of his possessions to the Germans in order to build a hospital and a home for lepers.
75. R. Smith, Director of Education in Dar es Salaam, 24 March 1925, TNA AB 1032, p. 14.
76. The Indian Educational Society to the Chief Secretary in Dar es Salaam, 12 March 1925, TNA AB 1032, p. 9.
77. Educational Office, Dar es Salaam, various correspondences 1925–1930, TNA AB 1032.
78. Educational Office, *Ibid.*
79. It is interesting to note that, in Mauritius, Hindi was promoted. This is despite the fact that the majority of Indians in Mauritius spoke Bhojpuri and not Hindi.
80. See the Annual Reports of the Educational Department, 'Indian Section', 1933–1959.
81. Cameron to Amery, confidential letter, 15 October 1925, TNA AB 1032, p. 54.
82. In some regions, Gujarati was the vernacular language until the fifth or sixth standard. The German colonial history was too short (until 1919) and too scattered for the Germans to develop a common overall colonial education strategy. See, for the formal position on English as the medium of education, Annual Report of the Education Department 1930, TNA 11718.
83. KNA, DC KT, 2/6/1, p. 78. Underlined in original.
84. *Ibid.*, p. 130. This may also refer to the notion of purity, the burden of which was laid on Indian (Hindu) women. See note 12.
85. Report on the Non-Native Census 1931, 50–51.
86. Report of the Special Committee on Indian Education, 1951, Dar es Salaam; Report of the Committee on the Integration of Education, 1959, Dar es Salaam.



87. Several authors reveal that in Britain, Gujaratis from East Africa (who arrived in the 1960s and early 1970s) were more educated than those who had migrated directly from Gujarat. This may be attributed to their class background and their access to better education. See T. Van der Avoird, *Determining Language Vitality: The Language Use of Hindu Communities in the Netherlands and the United Kingdom* (Tilburg: Printing office of Tilburg University, 2001), 39.
88. A. Y. Lodhi, *Oriental Influences in Swahili*, mentions Kassam's (1971) unique survey of language among the Asians of Dar es Salaam in 1970, which showed that the languages used at home included Cutchi 52 per cent, Gujarati 14.5 per cent, Swahili 7.3 per cent, and English 26 per cent. Note that Cutchi was much more popular than Gujarati. However, Cutchi is solely a spoken language. Moreover, those who speak Cutchi are also able to speak Gujarati, which is, in general, considered to be a more 'sophisticated' language. Thirteen per cent of the Asians claimed that they spoke Swahili at home. Nevertheless, it is not clear which communities were meant here. Most likely they were Ithnasheries and Bohras (Muslim communities). Another small survey in Uganda in 1954 showed that 92 per cent of the traders who had applied for a trader's licence spoke Gujarati or Cutchi as their first language. H. S. Morris, *The Indians in Uganda: Caste and Sect in a Plural Society* (London: Weidenfield and Nicolson, 1968), 19.
89. The mother is generally seen as the gatekeeper of the community language at home. The inter-generational language shift in favour of the dominant language is also described in Van der Avoird, *Determining Language Vitality*, 229–31.
90. See G. Oonk, 'After Shaking His Hand, Start Counting Your Fingers', 70–88.
91. Similarly, third-generation Hindus in the Netherlands like and watch Hindi movies, but have established a preference for the Dutch language. Avoird, *Determining Language Vitality*, 162.
92. Personal email correspondence in October 2002.
93. The leaders of the Ithnasheri community have dealt with this since the 1960s. They tried to introduce a religious instruction book in Gujarati with Roman script: *Elements of Islamic Studies*. In 1988, they agreed to use an English religious instruction book. Because of the steady migration of Ithnasheries to the West, they feel that there has been an uncontrolled Anglicisation of the community, in an environment where there is strong anti-Muslim sentiment. In Dar es Salaam, some of the community members emphasised that in losing the language, Ithnasheries would lose their umbilical cord with their roots. See also: R. Nagar, "Making and Breaking Boundaries: Identity Politics Among South Asians in Post-Colonial Dar es Salaam" (unpublished PhD Dissertation, University of Minnesota, 1995), 280–85.
94. G. Oonk, 'After Shaking his Hand, Start Counting Your Fingers', 70–88.
95. But this is also changing now. It seems to be accepted to turn up in a 'formal suit' during marriages and religious occasions.
96. G. Oonk, 'After Shaking his Hand, Start Counting Your Fingers', 70–88.



## CHAPTER FOUR

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# ASIANS IN AFRICA 1880–2000: SETTLING AND UNSETTLING AS A POLITICAL PROCESS

In Chapter 2, I have already shown that Asians increasingly started to settle in East Africa between 1880 and 1920. We have also seen that many South Asian traders did not make it in East Africa. After a process of trial and error, many had returned to South Asia. The pattern of circular migration eventually designated just a small group of successful settlers. Nevertheless, those who had persevered with the initial stages of settlement soon realised that they had to adjust to the East African culture in terms of food habits, stretching caste boundaries and marriage patterns. In fact, this may have been a part of the achievement of settling in East Africa. These cultural factors are described in Chapter 3 of this book. In this chapter, I focus on the political aspects of the process of settlement.

The early settlers soon found themselves in between three domains: Asia, Africa and Europe. In their daily lives they interacted with Africans, Asians and Europeans. On a more official level, it was important that their political and economic interests were safeguarded by law, regulation and organisation. Therefore, they constantly had to navigate between European, African and Asian interests in the public as well as private domains. There were three political arenas in which they had to legitimise their position. First, they had to justify their whereabouts to families and business partners who remained in India. At the same time, they had to

find a narrative that legitimised their choice for Africa. This narrative is seldom revealed, and is often denied, because of the firm persistence to accept the myth of the 'dhow stories' described in Chapter 2. While South Asia was still in their minds, they found that East Africa was more important. This coincided with a growing importance of Asian African's trade with Europe.

Second, while they were settling in East Africa they encountered a familiar coloniser (British) who was most interested in pursuing its own businesses, at times at the cost of South Asian interests. Therefore, the Asian Africans needed to organise themselves politically and contest discriminatory legislation related to settlement procedures, migration, getting access to land, trading licences and others. The Indian National Congress supported the initiatives of the South Asian settlers. At the same time, Asian Africans would contest their interest in the 'heart of the Empire', London. At times, their interests were similar to the interest of the Indian National Congress, but this was not always the case.

Third, in due course, there were various decisive moments at which the issue of 'loyalty' became important. The most striking illustration of this was the choice that the Asian Africans in East Africa had to make in the early 1960s, at the eve of independence of the East African states. The choice was between acquiring African citizenship and remaining British subjects. At this time, the option for Indian citizenship was wiped out as we will see. The umbilical cord with India was cut. A new phase in the identity of Asian Africans emerged. This was soon followed by the expulsion of South Asians from East Africa. Many migrated to the Western world (the United Kingdom, Canada and the United States). About half of the Asian Africans remained in Kenya and Uganda. A transnational trading elite had emerged.

This chapter is divided into three sections. In the first section, I show how and why settled strangers legitimised their decision to not return to India and remained permanent settlers. I argue that South Asian businessmen in East Africa created new, rather negative, images of their counterparts in Gujarat. During the

twentieth century, their overall image of Indians in India was transformed from one of ‘reliable family and community members’ to one of ‘unreliable, corrupt and untrustworthy “others”’. In addition, their economic orientation shifted from India, via East Africa, to Europe. The changes in economic orientation fuelled changes in their attitude towards Gujuratis in India and vice versa. Increasingly, South Asians came to realise that the future for their children was in British education and English medium schools. The exposure to European education and their increasing business interests in the West (including Canada and the United States) shifted the balance of their interests between India, Africa and the West. Although this balance differed from family to family, the general economic and political focus of these families shifted from South Asia to the West.

In the second section, I emphasise that South Asians in East Africa increasingly started to raise their voice to protect their economic and political interests. Their need to establish political organisations was often fuelled by their economic and socio-cultural interests. They lobbied for more political, economic and social equality. The economic incentives for political organisation included the need to redress discriminatory colonial taxation policies, to gain protection of their properties, to be allowed to own land and to be granted wholesale and retail trading licences. In addition, they felt an increasing need to protect their religious rights, the need for education of South Asians in East Africa and migration and settlement issues. Over time, they became progressively more interested in their political and civic positions. In the eyes of the European colonisers, they were neither ‘natives’ nor white settlers. Natives were ruled by ‘customary laws’, whereas white settlers enjoyed protection under civic laws. The long-term objective of the South Asians was to become civics instead of ‘natives’ and thus to enjoy the same rights and protection as the white settlers.

On the eve of the independence of the East African states (Kenya 1963, Uganda 1962 and Tanzania 1961), the future of

Asian Africans was at stake. They were given the option of either taking up local citizenship or continuing to be British subjects. For most of them, becoming 'Indian' was not an option, as we will see. Their decision became the yardstick of local loyalty. If they would take up local citizenship, it would be seen as a sign for their loyalty towards the new nation states. Continuing to be British subjects was often judged as an indication of disloyalty to the newborn nations. Eventually, almost one-third of the South Asian settlers in East Africa took up local citizenship before 1969. In theory, this would grant them the same rights and duties as any other citizen of the new nation states, regardless of colour and religion. But this turned out to be only a theory and was not followed in practice.

The third section describes the practical consequences of the South Asian emigration from Africa for business and families. This emigration was the last step in the emergence of a 'transnational South Asian African trading elite'. Unlike in Uganda, from which the South Asians were expelled regardless of their civic status, during Amin's regime, approximately 160,000 (out of 350,000 in 1962) South Asians in Kenya and Tanzania stayed, albeit in difficult circumstances. The nationalisation of houses, banks and industries took its toll, particularly in the South Asian community. Many lost their houses and their businesses. Those who were able to survive in this political turmoil developed into transnational business elite.

They shared a South Asian, a European and an African heritage. The South Asian heritage was still there, through intermarriages, language, culture and education. But it had changed into an Asian African culture as we have already seen in Chapter 3. The European heritage developed through trading contacts, education in Europe and the fact that family members were living in Europe. Lastly, the African heritage strengthened as those who had stayed in Kenya and Tanzania after the expulsion shared the same histories of turmoil, wars, shortages and nationalisations of assets.

Eventually, however, these families recovered in the late 1980s. This elite happened to be perfectly adapted to a new world in which multiple citizenships, multiple languages and access to multiple

local markets were awarded. These attributes became prime assets during the new phase of modern globalisation. Therefore, this section focuses on the potentials for success and the new constraints that South Asian families in East Africa experienced in becoming a transnational South Asian business community based in Africa. South Asians in Africa used their triple heritage (South Asian, African and European) in the institutional, transnational and civic options negotiated by them. During this process, they had to find new ways of defining themselves—not as Indians or South Asians, not as Africans and not as Europeans. It could be said that it has been easier for them to say who they are not, rather than who they are.

### Settled Strangers Unsettling: De-linking with India while Linking with Europe

The migration from India to East Africa is often seen as the first stage of South Asians becoming transnational. However, contrary to this general belief, I argue in this section that the migrants who settled in East Africa lost their connections with family and business networks in India. The process of settlement in East Africa provoked a negative attitude towards their ‘homeland’. This was strengthened by the fact that the Indian government’s policy towards the expatriate Indians changed from one of ‘protection’ and ‘concern’ to advising them to settle in their new countries and not ask for support from India. South Asians in Africa felt neglected and alone during their expulsion from Africa. However, it was during this period that a part of the elite emerged as a transnational business community, not by (re)connecting with India but with Europe. This coincided with the South Asians in Africa having a growing interest in studying abroad, most notably in the United Kingdom. In addition, the poor health care in Africa led part of the Asian African elite to look for professional health services abroad, again especially the United Kingdom.

In this section, I show how the South Asians in East Africa slowly cut their links with South Asians in the Indian subcontinent in both economic and cultural terms. Contrary to the general belief among diaspora specialists that the motherland remains a 'point of reference' for migrants, I argue, by focusing on the situation of Gujarati migrants in particular, that the so-called 'natural trading networks' between fellow community members in the country of origin and the new host country became weaker. In addition, from a cultural perspective, we will see that the Indian subcontinent did not remain a cultural point of reference. I have already shown, in Chapter 3, how South Asians in Africa adapted culturally to their new environment. This adaptation coincided partly with a decline in economic trade between India and East Africa. Consequently, the South Asians in Africa increasingly focused on Africa and Europe to achieve their economic aims, thereby cutting off their natural economic and business ties with India. Yet, during this process, they also developed a negative image of the Asians living in the subcontinent. The Indian government encouraged this shift in attitude by labelling the South Asians in East Africa 'outsiders' at a time when they themselves were severing their cultural and economic links with India.

Today, many well-off Asian African businessmen in East Africa show little economic interest in India. The once-favoured Indian counterparts in Gujarat have lost their importance in the minds of Asian Africans in East Africa. They had created new, rather negative, images of their former business partners in Gujarat. The overall image of Indians in India has been transformed from one of 'reliable family and community members' to one of 'unreliable, corrupt and untrustworthy "others"'. Simultaneously, the image of India changed from that of 'the beloved motherland' to one of an 'overcrowded, stinky and unorganised and underdeveloped country'. Despite the recent economic transformation of India, very few South Asians in Africa would care to do business with an Indian businessman in India.



India used to be the most important economic business partner for South Asians in East Africa, as well as the supplier of brides for the sons of the South Asian settlers who arrived during the period 1880–1920. However, after India gained independence in 1947, the motherland became both economically and culturally less significant for these families. The picture presented in what follows should be seen as representative of the Asian African ‘business’ community in East Africa, rather than representative of all South Asians of all strata in East Africa.<sup>1</sup>

The transformation of images and notions of trust within the Gujarati business network has to be seen within the broader perspective of social, economic and political change. The growth of the South Asian settlement in East Africa was strongly related to the role and status of the British Empire. Following the independence of India (1947) and the East African countries (1960–1963), South Asians had to choose the country to which they wished to belong (see also the third section). There is evidence that by the time of gaining independence, they had already made up their minds and were focusing on the West, especially the United Kingdom. Most informants told me that by the end of the 1960s, they no longer had any emotional (family) or economic bonds with India (see first section of Chapter 2, fourth section of this chapter and this section), so they tended to focus on the United Kingdom. This may be true for many, but initially they hardly had any more business or family relations with the United Kingdom or other countries in the West than with India. It is thus evident that the change of orientation from India to the West was a conscious choice, which had to be legitimised. The emergence of negative images of India and Indian businessmen in India has to be seen within this context.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, the main goods in which South Asians in East Africa traded included textiles, garments, ivory, gold and foodstuffs such as maize, beans and grains. Textiles and garments were imported from India, whereas ivory and gold were exported to and sold in India. Most foodstuffs were bought and sold locally. In addition, some relatively well-off

families were involved in a form of banking. Most goods sold to (mainly Indian and Arab) traders upcountry were sold on a 90- or 120-day credit basis, with interest of between six to nine per cent per annum. Thus, the profits of these upcountry sales included a profit on the advancement of money as well as a profit on sales. Some elite South Asian families in East Africa exchanged bills of exchange called *hundis* with traders based overseas, for instance in Mumbai (then Bombay), Zanzibar, Muscat and Dar es Salaam.<sup>2</sup> This is often seen as an early, sophisticated form of banking. Keshavji Anandji (99 years, Hindu Lohana), the grand old man of the Anandji family, recalls:

My grandfather had all kinds of connections with Bombay, Porbandar, and Muscat. In Porbandar we had some relatives who looked after the interest of my grandfather. In the same way, he had his brother-in-law in Bombay, who looked after the family business interest at that place. Now, whoever cashed the hundi in say Dar es Salaam, they could travel to Bombay or Porbandar and got the money there and then. Within the family trust, we would arrange the balances. That went on for a long time. In fact, we made a lot of money on the commission of writing and cashing hundis next to our trading activities.<sup>3</sup>

The most important point here is that the family business was represented by family members in various cities in various parts of the world. These networks existed because of thriving and active communal relations and marriage patterns. Some family members had migrated to East Africa, whereas others remained in India and looked after the 'Indian' part of the extended family's business interests, which included real estate and land. Both family and community relations were reinforced by the activities of traders and messengers who often made a trip once a year in the name of the family's eldest son to determine the current state of the family business. However, after setting up home with their wives, many South Asians in Africa were very reluctant to make this annual journey to India.

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, some migrants visited India when they thought it was really necessary, for example, to attend marriages or funerals, or because a family member had serious health problems. Many of my elderly informants in East Africa do not recall their fathers and grandfathers visiting India often and cited the following reasons for occasional visits: to find a suitable bride, to get medical treatment, to retire and to have a peaceful life back home, and to have one's relatives' ashes scattered over the Ganges.<sup>4</sup> Most elderly migrants recalled that they seldom went back, but that they had good business relations with India. This shows that Indian family and business networks emerged, which supported international trade relations between South Asia and East Africa. In this network, the business is centred ideally on the family's eldest son and/or his brothers. Business activities were usually divided geographically and were undertaken separately. The profits of the family were usually distributed among the family members and each got his share.

Obviously, the need to run overseas businesses and maintain business connections in more than one country meant that it was impossible for all the family members to live under one roof. As a result, far from home, the family structure of Indians in East Africa changed from that of an 'extended family' to that of a nuclear family. As a consequence, the traditional business structure in which the family income was divided among all male family members also had to be changed. In the *Mithakshara* school of Hindu law, which applies in Gujarat, all agnatically related males born into the family have an equal undivided share in the family business, which is mostly headed by the family's eldest son. In contrast, in East Africa, the idea of a joint patrilineal family business was not supported by Hindu law. In East Africa, the only legal basis for the division of ownership of a business was by either forming a partnership (which would allow the division of ownership in the proportions stated in the partnership agreement) or forming a limited company (which would allow the division of ownership according to

the percentage of shares that each family member purchased). As a result, the familiar sharing of business profits amongst brothers and father/grandfather remained an Indian sentiment, while it was replaced by more formal types of ownership in East Africa. Besides breaking the old, established pattern of business practices, the Indian family members in East Africa started to do some business on their own account.<sup>5</sup>

Just as the business situation was changing, so was the social situation, though this was forced upon South Asian families by circumstances and the families did what they could to maintain Indian traditions. Family members were spread all over East Africa, due to trading and business diversification, and thus formed nuclear family units, living in separate homes.<sup>6</sup> Yet despite these adverse circumstances, successful South Asian business families in Africa built houses that were typical of the subcontinent, large enough to accommodate extended families, in order to reproduce Indian culture as far as they could. Even in the face of inevitable change, those pioneers who decided to stay in East Africa rather than retire in Gujarat did everything they could to reproduce their 'Gujarati culture' in their homes in East Africa, as we have seen from the description of the house of Sunderjibhai.

During early migration and through the conscious retention of Gujarati culture in East Africa, the idea of the joint family initially remained important. For instance, the Mombasa business of Sunderji and his father flourished as they made use of the advantages of running an informally organised family business. Not only did they use their family network in Zanzibar and India, they also found ways of circumventing the restrictions of colonial law. In the 1920s, one was not allowed to be both a broker and a trader. So, Nanjibhai applied for a broker's licence, while his son Sunderji acquired a trading licence. In this way, the family was able to provide both services to their clients. Yet, by law, these firms were separate.

In short, the first generation South Asian businessmen were born in the Indian subcontinent and maintained strong economic

and social bonds with India. They sought their wives in India, they had property and did business there, and they chose to retire in South Asia or, as in the case of Sunderjibhai Nanji Damordar, they reproduced their 'Indian' lifestyle in East Africa. Although Indians in East Africa did not visit India very often, their homeland was still an important point of reference. Some Indian pioneers in East Africa made generous charity contributions to the Indian villages from which they came. Often, they did so as a means to improve their status because they could not acquire status through being the head of a joint family. For instance, the Anandji family built a hospital, the family of Damordar built a small school and an orphanage, and the well-known Madhvani and Mehta families contributed to similar projects in Gujarat. These examples show that India still had a place in the hearts of these businessmen and their families, even when they were not able to visit India in person.

### *Changing Market Orientation 1920–1960*

As time went on, the South Asian subcontinent became a destination for exports from East Africa, rather than a continent to import goods from. In general, India became less important as the business partner of the South Asian settlers in East Africa. The settlers increasingly tended to focus more on East Africa (home market and place to buy agricultural produce), the United Kingdom (export market and place for education) and Japan (export for raw cotton). From 1900 to 1938, India lost out in the international competition in the textile industry to Japan and, to a lesser extent, to Europe. Her general market share in East Africa fell dramatically and she became less important as a major export destination.<sup>7</sup> This was the result of two major economic developments: (a) India lost her economic momentum towards becoming a major industrial nation and (b) East Africa took initial promising steps towards industrialisation, in which the Indian migrants played an important role,<sup>8</sup> when East Africa tried to produce its own textiles. The ultimate consequence of these economic developments was that

that the need to travel to India decreased. Especially settlers would focus more on their family and family relations in East Africa than South Asia.

In the period 1920–1960, a growing number of Asians in East Africa were educated in so-called ‘Indian schools’ in East Africa, where lessons up to fourth standard were given in Gujarati and thereafter in English.<sup>9</sup> As a result, a number of South Asians in East Africa were fluent in Gujarati as well as in English. For some, the step towards further education in the United Kingdom was relatively small. A number of well-off students attended colleges and universities in England. The evidence is sketchy, but the growing importance of the United Kingdom as an export market increased the interests of South Asian settlers in East Africa to have their children educated in the United Kingdom. This meant that they developed a strong feel for the English language and a strong sense of British (European) culture, while remaining Indian in outlook and religion. Ultimately, this shift towards the West is reflected in the images these businessmen developed about their counterparts in India.

The decline in economic interests in India was also reflected in the fact that India became less and less important as a source for finding marriage partners. This was especially true of those families who migrated before the beginning of the twentieth century. They lost their family ties with India and, therefore, the urge to visit India for family reasons. Bharat is a typical example of a Hindu who did not marry within his own caste or *jati*.<sup>10</sup> He preferred to marry an Indian woman raised in East Africa rather than a woman raised in India. This preference for the former ultimately led to a deterioration in the social and family bonds with India.

Within this context of shifting economic and social relations with India, the settled strangers slowly developed rather negative images of their counterparts in South Asia. In most interviews they would present their evidence for this with ‘facts’. Broadly speaking, most informants agreed that the quality of Indian produce deteriorated, especially after the Second World War. However, this

deterioration started in the 1930s and is particularly well illustrated by the case of the textile industry. Khangas, shirts, saris and cloth were initially imported from India, but from the 1930s, Japanese textile producers took over the East African market. Most of the informants recalled that the Japanese were able to offer better quality textiles at a cheaper price. Their products were better finished, dyed and manufactured than products from India. Another observation was that the Japanese were ‘very ambitious’, whereas the Indian industrialists had become too ‘arrogant and unreliable’.<sup>11</sup>

The earlier-mentioned firm of Keshavji Anandji shut down the part of the family business in Porbandar, India, in 1935. From that moment, the business bond with India was broken. This coincided with the opening of Keshavji Anandji’s trading firm in Japan. In the words of one of his offspring:

In Mombasa we imported textiles from India in the late 1930s. Now, in the late 1930s there was a man who was employed in our firm. This man was very ambitious and very enterprising. He said, “You are a good company and you deal with Japan, why don’t you let me open an office there and buy locally and export to East Africa, because we know exactly what is required here?” So it was in the middle of the 1930s that a company in Japan was opened in the name of Devani & Company. And he bought goods from manufactures and exported them here, to Mombasa and Dar es Salaam. Now again, there was also a partnership firm in the name of Devani brothers in Dar es Salaam. They also dealt with retail business. So there were two main companies importing from Japan. The family company from Mombasa, the family company from Dar es Salaam, and Devani & Co in Japan was exporting from Japan. Japan was prospering during the War, but the office was taken over as ‘enemy property’ in the War.<sup>12</sup>

Indian East African firms went to Japan and the Japanese were ambitious enough to have at least three trading companies in Mombasa and Dar es Salaam: Japan Cotton Trading Company, Washo Kibushik Kaisja and Tokio Kibushik Kaisja.<sup>13</sup>

The reasons for the gradual economic separation from India are as follows: (a) the cutting of social ties evidenced by the growing preference for marrying Indian women raised in East Africa and (b) in the eyes of the informants, the deterioration of economic relations. A further reason was the growth in the importance and use of formal banking, which meant there was less need to reinforce the informal (family) banking networks or the *hundi* system. In sum, those family members who stayed in India grew less and less important to the South Asians in East Africa in terms of both their economic and social capital.

At first sight, the reports of the informants regarding the deterioration of economic relations are not in accord with the facts. The statistics do not reveal a dramatic decline in the figures for imports and exports from and to India. On the contrary, the statistics reveal that India remained East Africa's second largest export destination after the United Kingdom.<sup>14</sup> When I presented this evidence to the informants, many second-generation Indians in East Africa replied that these trade activities with India must have been conducted by 'new Indian migrants', especially those who arrived after the Second World War.<sup>15</sup> It is thus plausible that the 'old migrants' (those families that arrived before the 1920s) needed to legitimise their changing economic focus in the face of the 'new migrants' (those who arrived after the Second World War). One way to do this was to create negative images of India and its inhabitants.

The second-generation Indians, descendants from old migrants in East Africa, started to focus on new economic ventures in the United Kingdom. Pertinently, the Indian government changed its policy towards Indians living overseas after Indian independence. Before independence, overseas Indians had played a crucial role in supporting nationalists whose views were akin to those of Gandhi in their fight against discrimination in colonial societies. After independence, the new policy of Nehru and others can be characterised as 'studied indifference'. As mentioned earlier, overseas Indians were advised to identify with the place in which they resided and not with India.<sup>16</sup> The change in India's policy after its



independence and the new economic focus of Asian Africans in East Africa on the United Kingdom may have fuelled the growing social and economic distance between India and Asian Africans in East Africa.<sup>17</sup>

In my view, it is not surprising that Asian businessmen in East Africa developed a new image of India and businessmen in India in this period. Almost without exception, informants spoke negatively of India, and in one way or another, they sought to provide justification for why South Asians in East Africa are very reluctant to do business with India, why they do not want to retire or settle there, and why they do not trust an Indian from India.<sup>18</sup> Many of these views are the consequence of experiences. For example, as one Hindu informant stated:

There is very little honesty in India. They cheat, they send you excellent samples, and if you buy, they send an inferior quality. Or when a shipment of them arrives, you will find that they have sent less than you had agreed on. At the same time, when we want to export there, there are so many amendments. You get tired. We don't have this with other countries, like South Africa, England, and Canada and America. We stopped trading with India. In life, you have to avoid unnecessary headaches don't you?

In a second interview, he added:

You see, my parents and grandparents had family members in India. So, we knew there was someone to rely on. Someone who took care of the 'Indian' side of the business, but now Bwana, we have no one there. Who can you trust if you have no one there?<sup>19</sup>

The changing social orientation (in terms of family and marriage patterns) towards East Africa during 1920–1960 reinforced the idea that the Gujarati community in East Africa was different from that in India. This is in sharp contrast to the previous period, when Indian imports in East Africa were still important and most Indian families in East Africa had some family members in India

to look after their businesses overseas. Despite the fact that family and community ties with Gujarat were weakening, some South Asians in East Africa continued to deal with businessmen in India. However, over the years, they realised that something had changed. A Gujarati from India was no longer the same as one from East Africa. Eventually, the two groups became as distinct as 'chalk and cheese'. Another informant told me that:

I am more comfortable to do business with a Gujarati from East Africa than a Gujarati in India. Especially when we talk on the phone. As a rule, I would take someone's word for it. Normally eight out of ten times this doesn't go wrong, nevertheless with Gujaratis in India eight out of ten times this goes wrong [*sic*]. (...) For example, we dealt with various business houses in India and also with houses owned by Gujaratis. There was one case in which there were certain deals which could not be documented, and basically we had a verbal agreement. And in the end there was a difference on what we agreed to. This would not happen with most of the Gujaratis from East Africa. There would be an unwritten, unspoken understanding of mutual trust.<sup>20</sup>

Many South Asians in East Africa expressed the opinion that Gujaratis from East Africa were more civilised, more reliable, and more exposed to modern life than those in India. This was often attributed to the higher standard of education that East African Gujaratis enjoyed in East Africa and the United Kingdom. They said that they experienced more transparency among Indians in East Africa than among Gujaratis from India during the various rounds of consultations before finalising a deal. Often they attributed this transparency to a higher standard of education. Of course, there may be other reasons for this experience that have nothing to do with education. However, in the interviews, differences in education were mentioned by many, often in conjunction with 'civilisation', as a main cause of difference. For example:

You see, they don't know how to speak properly. They, in India, are crude, rougher than we are. When our parents arrived in East Africa,

we were with the British; and they educated us. So we learned how to speak, how to dress. This is lacking there, especially in the villages.<sup>21</sup>

In addition to the role of education and the exposure to a more ‘Western lifestyle’, another argument was given:

Our Indian African culture is different. Indians in India are more competitive; they are sharper, better equipped in the negotiation process. They have to be, because of the bigger population. When we do business with them, we get screwed. There is a lot of mistrust in our community against Indian Indians. You know, we have a saying that if you make a deal with an Indian Indian, and shake hands with him, you better start counting your fingers....<sup>22</sup>

This is undeniable evidence that second-generation Indians have developed a remarkably different perception of Gujaratis in India. They have constructed an image of a dissimilar overseas community, which they perceive as no longer part of their own community. Gujaratis in India are seen as ‘untrustworthy’, ‘unreliable’ and ‘uncivilised’, whereas Gujarati East Africans have adjusted to a more ‘Western’ lifestyle. This is reflected in their ‘suit and tie’ Western dress, written business agreements in English, and the discontinuation of the practice of reading Gujarati newspapers and magazines. Bharat, for example, did not subscribe to any of the Gujarati newspapers or magazines. His English was fluent and he kept his business correspondence in English. Sometimes, when he wrote to his father, he did make the effort to formulate at least a few sentences in Gujarati. Yet, although he could speak Gujarati, like other Gujarati businessmen of this second generation Asian Africans (born between 1920 and 1960), he spoke Gujarati that was sometimes peppered with a few English words. At home, he sometimes spoke Gujarati with his wife and children, but whereas his wife would mostly answer him in Gujarati, his children might answer in English. India has become a foreign nation to the children. Indeed, they have visited India only once, as tourists.

### *Some Concluding Observations*

Most literature on diasporas (see Chapter 1) tends to highlight the importance of the motherland. The motherland is seen as the migrants' umbilical cord to their homeland. It would appear to be unthinkable that migrants would throw this relationship away, but this is exactly what happened in the case of the second-generation Asian Africans in East Africa who were born and raised in East Africa between 1920 and 1960. Initially, during the era of migration and settlement between 1880 and 1920, India was primarily important as a source of business connections and served as a pool for new recruits for Indian East African firms. Furthermore, it was an important source for marriage partners, which served as an important marker of purity within the Indian network. Nevertheless, the image of the Indian subcontinent changed, between the 1880s and the 1960s, from that of the beloved 'mother' to that of an alien 'other'.

In this section, I have shown that a part of the current generation of Asian Africans do not trust Gujarati businessmen from Gujarat. They have developed a negative image of Indians in India, and as a result, they have severed ties. Gujaratis in Gujarat are seen as 'unreliable', 'uncivilised' and 'untrustworthy'. This change of perception can be explained as follows. There can be no doubt that Gujaratis in East Africa developed a preference for Indian marriage partners raised in East Africa who knew 'their *African* culture'. Asians in Africa felt that they were more and better educated in East Africa and Europe, principally in the United Kingdom. They had developed an interest in the European lifestyle. As a trading minority, they were exposed more to African and European culture than to that of Gujarat. However, there is no denial of the fact that their cultural roots emerged from Gujarat. Consequent to this shift in social attitude, their interest in doing business with India diminished as Europe became the most important export market.

These conclusions raise questions about the importance of the concept of the 'diaspora', particularly with respect to the

importance that migrants attach to the motherland. In my view, the notion of the motherland loses its importance (whether invented, imagined, or real) if the link is not reinforced by economic or social incentives. By taking a bottom-up approach and understanding the informants' arguments, it becomes clear that migrants, more easily than is thought in the diaspora literature, gradually cease to think about their roots as a source of recognition, identification and appreciation.

This process of detachment from the motherland is shown clearly by the fact that Asian Africans are reluctant to do business with fellow Gujaratis in India, who are not seen as members of the same community. There is no ethnic business network or natural trust in this trading diaspora. Ethnic trading networks are created, but may also fall apart. Within these networks, trust has to be earned and mutual aid has to be developed, over time through experience. Within these networks, a 'good name' is just as easily lost as it is gained. It is thus evident how migrant traders may cut ties with their motherland.<sup>23</sup>

## Making States, Creating Strangers: The Asian Position and the Colonial Response

The acceptance of the Act of Berlin in 1890 was an important step in the partitioning of East Africa between British and German colonial powers.<sup>24</sup> Both powers aimed to abolish the slave trade, to undertake commercial development of the area and to support the missionary enterprise. This was a monumental task, which turned East Africa into both a laboratory for experiments with economic and political development models and an area with racism and ethnic conflicts.<sup>25</sup> It soon became clear that the 'White Man's burden'<sup>26</sup> could not be borne without the help of the 'Brown Man'.

British officials were well aware that South Asians would become important local partners in the apparatus of their East African colonial states. During the early twentieth century,

Winston Churchill (1874–1965) visited South and East Africa on several occasions. He was a correspondent for the *Morning Post* in South Africa during the Boer War in 1899 and he wrote travel stories for *Strand Magazine* in 1901. In 1902, he took an impartial stand regarding the issue of equal rights for South Asians and Europeans in the area, stating:

The Indian was here long before the first British Official. He may point to as many generations of useful industry on the coast and inland as the white settlers, especially the most recently arrived contingents from South Africa (the loudest against him of all) can count the years of residence. It is [*sic*] possible for any Government, with a scrap of respect for honest dealing between men to men, to embark on a policy of deliberately squeezing out the native of India from regions in which he had established himself under every scrutiny of public faith?<sup>27</sup>

During his ‘Africa Tour’, Churchill wrote a series of articles in *Strand Magazine* that were then published in a book *My African Journey* (Churchill 1908). This book was well known among South Asians in Africa and was frequently quoted. In fact, Churchill did not believe that Europeans could settle permanently in Africa because of its climate, the diseases, and its ‘tropical character’. He was, however, in favour of land reservation in areas suitable for Europeans (‘white lands’). Ultimately, however, he stated that: “The Imperial Government should afford in the tropical Protectorate outlet and scope to the enterprise and colonising capacity of Hindustan.”<sup>28</sup>

One other British East Africa official was Harry Hamilton Johnston (1858–1927). He was a botanist, explorer and colonial administrator. He foresaw an active role for South Asians in the development of East Africa. He made two botanical expeditions to the continent (to Angola and the Congo River region (1882–1883) and to Kilimanjaro (1884)), during which he not only collected valuable scientific data, but also strengthened British interests in colonial service. Johnston served as a special commissioner in

Uganda from 1899 until 1901. He believed that the South Asians should be the ‘settlers’ in East Africa because they were in a better position than the Europeans to strengthen the continent:

On account of our Indian Empire we are compelled to reserve to British control a large portion of East Africa. Indian trade, enterprise and emigration require a suitable outlet. East Africa is, and should be, from every point of view, the America of the Hindu.<sup>29</sup>

The conservative and often-blunt racist British settler Lord Delamere (1870–1931) was of a different opinion. He was one of a small group of planters and landowners who came from South Africa to the Kenyan highlands to develop coffee and tea plantations. He eventually became one of the most influential British settlers in Kenya. He declared more than once that Indian migration to the colony should be stopped:

Physically the Indian is not a wholesome influence because of an incurable repugnance to sanitation and hygiene. In this respect, the African is more civilized than the Indian, being naturally clean in his ways, but he [is] prone to follow the examples of those around him.<sup>30</sup>

Delamere claimed to be the guardian of what were widely regarded among white planters as ‘the innocent and gullible natives’. However, he adopted this position in order to claim the most fertile lands of Kenya (the so-called ‘white lands’), from where the South Asians and the natives were eventually pushed out.<sup>31</sup> The struggle between the more liberal minded, such as Johnston and Churchill, and the conservative, such as Delamere, was eventually won by the latter. Some of the latter even believed that they could develop East Africa into a second Rhodesia or South Africa by implementing institutional segregation between the white and black communities.

The South Asians in East Africa were, of course, affected by the emergence of the colonial states, German Tanganyika and British East Africa. Both states were based on the principle of indirect rule,

in which segregation (both institutional and territorial) played a dominant role. In general, the colonies were organised on the basis of the distinction between civics and natives. The civics (the whites) were seen as the civilisers and were protected by civic rights in the courts and by legislation, whereas the natives were ruled on the basis of customary laws, which followed native authority and were administered in the natives' own home areas. To govern in this manner, there was, therefore, a need to construct ethnic groups, which were often allocated to certain areas with their own authorities and laws.<sup>32</sup>

The presence of South Asian settlers forced the emerging colonial states to develop a middle category of 'subjects' or 'non-natives'. In German Tanganyika, they were defined as *einheimisch* or native. Throughout the period of colonial rule, the South Asians were dissatisfied with their legal position: they were neither natives nor civics. Their official status led to their adopting different methods of dealing with conflicts, depending on the status of the protagonists. Conflicts that arose within the South Asian communities were directed towards their own authorities, such as religious or business leaders. Conflicts that arose between native Africans and South Asian settlers or between South Asian settlers and European businesses and officials were often resolved through European mediation, mostly in European favour. Indeed, it was foreseeable that with the growing interest of British settlers whose views were akin to those of Delamere, the British colonial officials and administrators would eventually serve their own rights rather than those of the South Asians. The South Asians were aware that not all the British supported their case in the same manner as Churchill and Johnston. Therefore, the South Asians increasingly started to defend their own interests.<sup>33</sup>

One of the first leaders of the South Asian community in East Africa was Alibhai Mulla Jeevanjee (1856–1936). He was born in 1856 in Karachi (which is now in Pakistan) in a traditional Bohra home where education centred almost entirely on religion. Around the age of 20, he left Karachi, looking for a world of new trade



opportunities. After brief adventures in East Asia and Australia, his entrepreneurial spirit led him to make trade deals with the Imperial British East African Company and the Uganda Railway. In fact, he was one of the major suppliers of indentured labourers for the latter. As a contractor, he had also built substantial parts of early Nairobi. He was also the first non-white to be appointed to represent the interests of the Indians in the Legislative Council, which was established in 1905.<sup>34</sup>

The prime objective of the Legislative Council was to safeguard and champion the interests of people who had left their home countries to settle in Kenya. Those who appointed Jeevanjee to the Council may have expected that a man of his stature would be conservative and a protector of the colonial status quo, within the Council's overall objective. However, Jeevanjee did not perform as expected, due to the social situation in Kenya. The racial discrimination there denied even Jeevanjee the right to live in some parts of the town he had helped to build. This racist treatment stung Jeevanjee to political action. He established the East African Indian National Congress (EAINC) and launched the first non-white newspaper *The African Standard*, with the purpose of giving South Asians a voice throughout East Africa. This voice would eventually reach the British Parliament in London and the Indian Parliament in Delhi.

Around 1900, he stated:

I would go so far as to advocate the annexation of this African territory to the Indian Empire, with provincial Government under the Indian Viceroy, and let it be opened to us, and in a very few years it will be a second India.<sup>35</sup>

This statement clearly shows the confidence of a part of the South Asian elite in East Africa. They were convinced that history was on their side and that they were able—and they were clearly willing—to play an important part in the further colonisation of East Africa.

East Africa would not become a colony of India, but the struggle for equal rights across the region had started. The South Asian settlers demanded the same rights as the white settlers. Over the first decennia, the South Asians' demands focused on three inter-related areas:

1. They demanded civic rights and did not want to be seen as natives or subjects.
2. They demanded equal rights, including the right to live in urban areas that were reserved for whites only and the right to protect themselves by carrying arms.
3. They demanded the same economic rights as whites. Most notably, they wanted access to white lands, which were the most fertile lands in Kenya and were reserved for white planters alone.<sup>36</sup>

### *Civic Rights*

From the perspective of the South Asian settlers, the most important struggle was to gain civic rights and thus be able to defend their economic interests. Civic rights equal to those of whites (not blacks) were demanded. The basic complaint was that South Asians were categorised in German law and British law as subjects or, in the case of Germany, at times, as natives. When conflicts arose between native Africans and South Asian settlers or between South Asian settlers and European businesses and officials, South Asians' concerns were typically resolved by (white) colonial officials. In 1906, the Bagamoyo Indians made formal complaints about their status to the German officials, while in 1914 the Tanga Indians submitted a long memorandum on the subject to the British administrators.<sup>37</sup> These early grievances on the part of the South Asians became the foundation of organised protests and led, eventually, to the establishment of the EAINC in 1914.<sup>38</sup>

The EAINC was modelled on the famous Indian National Congress (INC) and was a response to the growing emphasis on

European interests throughout East Africa. The EAINC believed it would best serve the interests of its members by bringing Indian leaders in East Africa together and presenting their case on both a colonial and a national level. The exchange of ideas and experiences between the INC and the EAINC resulted in shared opinions and a publication related to the Indian question in the empire.<sup>39</sup>

### *Equal Rights*

In 1913, the *Bombay Chronicle* published an analysis and fierce criticism of the discriminatory policies in the British East African Protectorate. The article initially highlights the economic and political contribution of South Asians in East Africa, but then cynically stresses:

And now the Indian cannot acquire property in the uplands, cannot carry weapons, cannot enter the Market House in Nairobi, cannot travel in comfort on the steamers and railways, cannot have a trial by jury, in short cannot be anything else than an *undesirable alien* [emphasis added].<sup>40</sup>

It is clear from the newspaper article that while the Germans and the British were colonising East Africa, they were also alienating the South Asians who lived there. Many South Asian traders and businessmen believed that due to discriminatory regulations, they were unable to compete with Europeans on an equal basis. At the same time, they were not able to defend their properties and protect their families, despite the fact that most of them were British subjects.

This alienation of the South Asians in East Africa was in sharp contrast with their hopes for a better future. Just after the First World War, many South Asians in both India and East Africa anticipated that German East Africa would become an 'Indian colony' as a reward for the Asian contribution to the British cause during the war. Surprisingly, the most influential opposition to

the idea of an Indian mandate in East Africa came from India. In particular, Mahatma Gandhi's advisors on East African affairs, Charles F. Andrews and Henry S.L. Polak, were opposed to any Indian imperialist tendencies and emphasised the paramountcy of African interests, although the Asian request for equal treatment in South Asia was supported.<sup>41</sup>

### *Economic Rights*

In 1914, the Committee of Indians was reorganised and became the Indian National Association of Zanzibar. Yusufali Esmailjee Jivanjee, the president of the Association, presented a *Memorandum on the Report of the Commission on Agriculture* in 1923. He firmly criticised the government's position that Indians were responsible for the indebtedness of agriculturalists (read Arabs and Swahili) in Zanzibar. In addition, he passed judgment on the method of collecting clove duty, which was especially to the disadvantage of Asian clove producers.<sup>42</sup>

Grievances about government legislation and the high taxes—compared to what British and other European traders paid—continued in the 1920s and 1930s. On reading through the newspapers in that period, it becomes clear that Yusufali A. K. Jivanjee was the major spokesman of the Indian business community (Hindus and Muslims) in Zanzibar. He was called 'the leader of the public opinion created in Zanzibar against anti-Indian measures' or 'the Lion of Zanzibar'. The headline of one article in the *Tanganyika Herald* was: 'The Lion of Zanzibar Roars'.<sup>43</sup> And roar he did, but with rational and straightforward rhetoric. Some examples: Often the British argued that they had to take care of the welfare of the Africans, but Yusufali always showed that Indians in Zanzibar were not against any legislation in favour of Arabs and natives, but they were against the policy of the government of protecting one section of the Zanzibari community 'at the cost' of another. When the British argued that they had reduced import duties for fresh butter and milk, ghee and cigarettes, Jivanjee showed that the Europeans

used milk to feed their children, not the natives! In the case of ghee, only the middle and upper classes of the Indian population profited from the reductions, because they used ghee, but not the poorer sections of the community. In the case of cigarettes, Jivanjee showed that it is not the native—who only smokes two or three cigarettes a day—who profits from a tax reduction of ‘eight to nine’ annas after every ‘thousand’ cigarettes, but rather the Europeans who smoke cigarettes by the hundreds and buy in thousands. And then Jivanjee added: “If His Excellency wishes to really benefit the poor natives, we want the duty on rice and kangas to be reduced! These are their real necessities. Then alone can we say that the Government is doing something for the natives.”<sup>44</sup> After a handful of examples where Yusufali showed that the government legislation was to the disadvantage of the Indian trading community in Zanzibar, he concluded: “The policy of the Government underlying this movement is to rob Indian Peter to pay British Paul.”<sup>45</sup>

During the early 1930s, the colonial government policies tended to focus on the major trade and industries of the island, that is cloves. Their major concern was twofold. On the one hand they intended to protect Arabs from mortgaging their land to Indian traders, and on the other hand they wished to increase the tax revenue. The Indian National Association, however, argued that most of the measures taken by the government would crush Indian retailers, deprive the Indians of money legitimately invested in trade and mortgages, and ultimately undermine all commercial activities. They, therefore, compelled the Indians to leave the country. The Government of India appointed K.P.S. Menon, a former agent in Ceylon, to look into the matter. He blankly concluded that most decrees were “calculated to cause irretrievable damage to Indian interests and will practically oust the Indian trader from Zanzibar”. Despite these conclusions, the report did not have the desired effect and the Colonial Office bluntly dismissed it as ‘useless’.<sup>46</sup> The South Asian Tayabali Karimjee in Zanzibar often used the same line of argument. In a speech published in the *Tanganyika Herald*, he posed the often-cited rhetorical question:

One would like to know what would be the duration of residency for members of any particular race to acquire the same rights as those enjoyed by the indigenous population. For, be it remembered, according to historical evidence, Indians have been settled in East Africa for pretty nearly 400 years.<sup>47</sup>

Last, but not least, the issue of the white lands became one of the most controversial in Kenyan history. From the early twentieth century, the British had reserved the most fertile lands of Kenya for white settlers. Despite a long list of formal and informal complaints by the South Asians, this situation was reinforced in 1923 with the publication of the Devonshire Declaration. The declaration legitimated the reservation of the white lands for European settlers by arguing that they were less accustomed to the local climate and diseases. In this view, Asians could own land next to the reserved ones. Needless to say, these lands were less attractive and fertile. For many South Asians in East Africa, this was a final sign that the British would never govern Kenya according to their own principles of equal rights. Rather, they would promote and safeguard their own interests above those of other groups.<sup>48</sup> In response to the British stance, from the late 1930s, the South Asians increasingly started to demand independence.

Shortly after the end of the Second World War, the nationalist movement in Africa increased in intensity. On the whole, the South Asians stayed aloof from the movement. Very few actively supported the movement, but they were divided on the issue of the appropriate time for independence (as were the Europeans). Whereas some South Asians supported the principle of African self-rule, others adopted a more cautious stance, realising that their own economic and political positions were at stake.<sup>49</sup>

The demands for self-rule grew louder in East Africa after India gained independence from Great Britain in 1947. The freedom struggles of India became a role model for other British colonies. During the struggle for independence in East Africa, the South Asians in East Africa had to reposition themselves. Most were

TABLE 4.1 Major Local Asian Political Associations in East Africa, 1900–1948

Place	Date	Name	Major players	Remarks
Mombasa	1900	Mombasa Indian Association	L.M. Savle Allidina Visram Allibhoy Mulla Jeevanjee Tayabali Mulla Jeevanjee	
Nairobi	1906	Nairobi Indian Association	Allidina Visram Abdul Wahid	
Zanzibar	1909/ 1914	Committee of Indians/ Indian National Association		<i>Instrumental in the cloves crises</i>
Tanga	1914	Indian Association		
Dar es Salaam	1918	Indian Association		
Jinja	1918	Indian Association		
Kampala	1919	Indian Association		
East Africa	1914	East African Indian National Congress	Abdul Wahid Manilal Ambalal Desai J.B. Panday	Modeled on the Indian National Congress in India.  Coordinate political action throughout East Africa  <i>Instrumental in the White Paper Crises</i>

Source: Robert G. Gregory, *Quest for Equality: Asian Politics in East Africa, 1900–1967* (New Delhi: Orient Longman, 1993), 31–34.

convinced that East Africa was their home. In addition, the first prime minister of India, Jawaharlal Nehru, stated that the South Asians living in East Africa could not expect protection from the Indian government; he voiced the opinion that they were currently

neither Indians nor Africans, but guests in the African countries and if the Africans did not want them, they should pack their bags and leave. He advised them to settle permanently in Africa and to align themselves with the interests of the Africans and the African independence movement. He was also quick to add that India had to solve its own problems first, before thinking about others.<sup>50</sup>

Some of the South Asians in Africa followed Nehru's advice. In Kenya, Makhan Singh led the first general strike in Nairobi in 1950 and he was alleged to have taken part in the Mau Mau revolt, which lasted from 1952 to 1960.<sup>51</sup> When Jomo Kenyatta, the leader of the independence movement in Kenya, was brought to trial in 1952, he was defended by an Indian lawyer residing in Kenya, P.G. Pinto, who was also placed in detention from 1954 to 1958 on Manda island.<sup>52</sup> The constitutions of the new East African states (Tanzania 1961, Uganda 1962, Kenya 1963) gave those South Asians who were not classified as citizens by birth the option to register as such. Some, however, were concerned that, as 'guests', they could be asked (or forced) to leave at some point in the future. They were uncertain whether registering as citizens would protect them in daily life or whether they would always be viewed as outsiders.

Concerned that accepting citizenship would not necessarily guarantee their rights and protect their properties, the South Asians in East Africa made sure that they set up escape routes. African politicians as well as African society were aware of these routes, and this made them less confident of the loyalty of Asians in East Africa. They wondered whether the South Asians were living in their country to invest or to exploit and worried about it.

### *Concluding Observations*

The stance of the colonial governments towards the South Asian traders is a typical example of how those in power treat immigrants who are also successful in business. Some colonial officials were very satisfied with the entrepreneurial activities of the South



Asians in East Africa. Indeed, as mentioned above, some of them, for example, Johnston, believed that East Africa should rightly be the ‘America of the Hindu’. However, others, especially planters, such as Delamere, characterised the South Asians as untrustworthy exploiters of the local economy. These conservative sections of the colonials tried to alienate the South Asians by denying them civic rights, the right to own the most fertile lands, and the right to bear arms. South Asians were quick to respond and wrote letters to the colonial officials to make their case and claim equal rights with white settlers. When necessary, they used their international networks. They built the EAINC with the help and strong collaboration of the INC. They defended their case in the heart of the British Empire, London. They may not always have obtained the desired results, as in the case of the white lands, but they were seen and could not be ignored.

During the colonial period, South Asians in East Africa were deprived mainly of their main civic and economic rights, but not to the same extent as South Asians in South Africa, where their role was much more restricted. In the colonial era, they did not have to fear for their property: their real estate, shops and small factories. Nevertheless, the ‘Africanisation’ of the economy and the civil service had started in the colonial era. In the post colonial phase, the rights of the Africans came to the forefront of the political agenda. More often than not, the political and economic emancipation of the Africans came at the expense of the South Asians. Thus, the future of South Asians in the independent states of East Africa became increasingly uncertain.<sup>53</sup>

## World Citizens: Settling in the Global while Rooting in the Local(s)

In the previous sections, I have shown that South Asians in East Africa were increasingly focusing on their life and future in the region. Eventually the ‘natural’ umbilical cord with India was cut

off. India was still important as a cultural reference point, but the economic and political focus shifted increasingly towards East Africa. Therefore, Asian Africans increasingly organised themselves to safeguard their economic and political interest in East Africa. While doing this, they always had to navigate between the interests of Africans and Europeans.

The ultimate measuring stick for commitment and loyalty emerged at the eve of African independence. Asians in East Africa had to decide whether they would take up African (Tanzanian, Ugandan or Kenyan) citizenship or not. Accepting local citizenship would be the ultimate proof that Asian Africans were committed to the newborn African nations. Some South Asians, however, doubted whether African citizenship would protect their citizen and property rights in the long run. They feared that continuing Africanisation of the economy would ultimately be at the expense of South Asians in East Africa. Moreover, accepting local citizenship implied that the Asian Africans had to give up their British subject status as we will see in this section. In addition, we will also see that taking up Indian citizenship was not an option. The first prime minister of India, Jawaharlal Nehru, encouraged South Asians in East Africa to settle permanently in Africa and to align with the Africans and the African independence movement. This is in sharp contrast with the current position of the Indian government that actively reconnects with its diaspora.

Currently, many Asian Africans are scattered over the planet. They have taken up citizenship in many different countries. More often than not, Asian African families share at least three different passports within their families, but it might go up to twelve. In order to gain a deeper understanding of the reasons and choices behind the dispersion of such families, it is necessary to examine three important phases in the history of South Asians in East Africa. In each phase, the South Asians enjoyed a different citizenship status, encompassing different rights and duties.

First, the majority of South Asians in East Africa were British subjects or British protected persons in the colonial phase roughly

from 1890 to 1960. Their property rights were acknowledged and they were in a position to set up businesses. This status gave them an almost unrestricted freedom to travel within East Africa and to India and the United Kingdom. However, the partition of India in 1947 led to complications regarding the way in which South Asians in East Africa related to the motherland: Should they relate to their country of birth in Africa or the country of their religion, roots and 'origin' in India or Pakistan?

Second, South Asian British subjects and South Asian British protected persons in East Africa had to decide whether or not to become Tanzanian, Ugandan, or Kenyan citizens. This would grant them voting rights and it would enable them to obtain local trading licences. Nevertheless, it was foreseeable that in the near future, it would be more problematic to travel to the United Kingdom (and Europe) with an African passport than with British passports. In addition, South Asians realised that accepting African citizenship might not be sufficient to enforce citizen rights and protection of their properties. In other words, if they wished to stay and keep their businesses in East Africa, they were inclined to accept local citizenship. Nevertheless, there were enough ambiguities that made them insecure and hesitant. Luckily, the British government had negotiated an option to register as citizens within a grace period of two years.

Third, in the late 1960s and early 1970s, the East African states increasingly took control of the majority of economic sectors, including foreign banks, insurance companies, key industries and import/export firms. Their governments launched intensive programmes in the fields of business, trade and the civil service, aiming wherever possible to replace Europeans and South Asians with Africans. While the nationalisation of important sectors of the economy, as well as that of houses, was not directed against the South Asians specifically, this group was nevertheless hit extremely hard. In this process many decided to migrate to Europe or the United States. Eventually, the forced expulsion under Amin's

regime in 1972 led to a new era of constraints and options in terms of citizenship and issues of longing and belonging.

### *Colonial Phase 1890–1960*

I have already shown that the colonial state created three types of peoples, albeit with different rights and duties: white settlers, natives and settled strangers (see second section of Chapter 1). Most of the Asian Africans were ‘British subjects’ or ‘British protected persons’. These terms had at different times had different meanings. Here, it is sufficient to highlight the situation prior to 1949. British subjects were persons born in any territory under the sovereignty of the Crown. Persons born in native states that were under the *protection* of the British Crown, but not a part of the sovereignty (for example, some of the Princely states in India), were British protected persons. In January 1949, the concept of Citizenship of the United Kingdom and Colonies was introduced. This would include people born before 1949 in India and Pakistan who did not acquire citizenship of their country or any other Dominion. Overall, British subjects and British Protected Persons were eligible to the same rights within the empire.<sup>54</sup>

Here, I present a rare but interesting case of how South Asians were able to negotiate citizenship and travel documents. This example is based on family records from the Karimjee Jivanjee family in Dar es Salaam. Abdulla Karimjee was a third-generation South Asian Muslim in East Africa. His father and grandfather were born in Zanzibar. Abdulla believed that he was a British subject, as most of his fellow Asian Africans were. In fact he had a British passport showing he was a British subject. But he was not. This became evident when he requested a British passport for his second wife, Kianga Ranniger. Kianga was the daughter of a German farmer in Tanga, Tanganyika. She was a German citizen. Most probably, the Rannigers were settlers who were convinced that they would not return to Germany. This is shown by the fact

that they named their daughter Kianga, which means ‘rainbow’ in Kiswahili.

When Abdulla met Kianga Ranniger in 1926, the Karimjees were branching out from Zanzibar and setting up offices in Dar es Salaam and Tanga. Abdulla Karimjee was appointed to develop the sisal, coffee and tea estates in the area. Kianga and Abdulla grew close to each other in Tanga. They shared the hard life of pioneers and estate builders in the bush. They dealt with the same challenges of climate, travel and business. In 1933, they married. The couple decided that it was in their interest that Kianga would become a British subject, especially after Hitler became *Reichskansler* in 1933. Usually, married women could get the citizenship status of her husband, but in this exceptional case it turned out to be different. The need for acquiring a British passport increased significantly when the Second World War started in 1939.

In April 1940, Abdulla wrote a letter to the Governor of Tanganyika protectorate to request a British passport for his wife.<sup>55</sup> This type of request involved overcoming a lot of legal difficulties for the colonial officials concerned. Initially, it was thought that the request was a straightforward one: if the marriage were legal and if Abdulla Karimjee were a British subject, his wife would, on the basis of marriage, become a British subject. Therefore, she would be eligible for a British passport. However, it was disputed whether Abdulla was, in fact, a British subject, despite having lived under that assumption all his life.

As stated before, Abdulla and his father Mohamedali were both born in Zanzibar in 1876 and 1899, respectively. At that time, Zanzibar was not a British colony or protectorate. Therefore, it was not evident that Abdulla was a British subject on the basis of place of birth. In fact, the local authority initially informed Abdulla that he was not a British subject; therefore his wife could not become a British subject. Nevertheless, on an earlier occasion, other colonial officials had issued him with a British passport, probably on

the ground that he was of South Asian descent. It was difficult to withdraw that privilege once given. The exchange of legal letters does not provide details of the outcome, but the fact that Kianga was able to travel freely during the war as well as later suggests that she did obtain a British passport. After the war, both Abdulla and Kianga gained full British citizenship.<sup>56</sup>

Cases such as the one described here were, it has to be said, exceptional, but they provide us with an interesting insight into the complexity of rules relating to an individual's status in a changing geopolitical landscape. Nevertheless, as we all know, travel documents and citizenship are extremely important. Eventually, Abdulla Karimjee could retire in Spain. This would probably not have been possible for him if he had acquired a Tanzanian passport. Moreover, keeping different passports in a business family became an important asset in transnational family businesses.

Following the partition of India, the issue of the nationality or civic status of overseas South Asians became even more complex. In order to clarify the status of its existing and former subjects, the British Parliament passed the 1948 British Nationality Act. This Act was part of the decolonisation process and was passed in order to guarantee the status of those who were still British subjects in the remaining colonies. The Act provided the following:

1. All British subjects who had links (business, family or otherwise) with the United Kingdom would become 'Citizens of the United Kingdom 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 United Kingdom and Colonies’ by registration after residing for one year in a British territory.<sup>57</sup>

With the partition of India into the separate states of India and Pakistan, South Asians in East Africa did not automatically become Indian or Pakistani citizens (note the phrase ‘potential citizens’ in option 2).<sup>58</sup> In fact, South Asians in the East African colonies possessed identities aligned to a nation state that was newly born, India, and nation states that were yet to come.

The first Indian High Commissioner for East Africa, Apa B. Pant, arrived with a strong message from the Indian government. He insisted that South Asians in East Africa should identify themselves with East Africa. His advice was that they should become citizens of the United Kingdom and colonies in order to integrate into the colonial territory.<sup>59</sup> His reasoning followed the policies of the Indian prime minister, Nehru, which supported the East African independence movement and also made it clear that Asian Africans should not rely on the Indian state but integrate into their localities. Deborah Sutton writes:

When questioned by a BBC journalist about Indian policy regarding the Indian community in Kenya, Jawaharlal Nehru responded:

we have told the Indians there year after year ... they must co-operate with the Africans ... we will not support them in their demand for any privilege that goes against the Africans. If you can’t get on with the Africans, you’ll have to get out of Africa ... that’s what we have told our Indians.<sup>60</sup>

Nehru ultimately hoped that the overseas Indian community would not be treated as an ‘unwanted import’, because India was treating Africans as ‘brothers and comrades’.<sup>61</sup> In 1952, Aga Khan, the spiritual leader of the Ismailis, promoted local integration by directing his followers to give up 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 home.<sup>62</sup>

The majority of the South Asians in East Africa followed the advice of Nehru. There was not much debate about it. This also shows that Asian Africans were settling; they were content with their civic status of British subjects or British protected persons. Nevertheless, soon they had to make a more difficult decision, that is, whether or not to accept African citizenship.

### *Independence*

The constitutions of the independent East African states (Tanzania 1961, Uganda 1962 and Kenya 1963) gave those South Asians who were not automatically citizens by virtue of their birth (one of the parents as well as the applicant have to be born locally) an option to register as citizens within a grace period of two years. However, if they so choose, they could retain the status of a British subject or a British protected person. With this status, they could, under British law and international law, demand the protection of the British government in foreign countries. At times, but not always, this status included the right to travel to the United Kingdom (on a visa basis). At the same time, they were given the right to have a British passport, and with it the right to enter and live in the United Kingdom.<sup>63</sup> An important decision was to be made. The basic choice was between three options.

First, they could become East African (Ugandan, Kenya or Tanzanian) citizen. In general they realized that if they wished to stay and keep their businesses in East Africa they needed to accept local citizenship.

The second option was to continue being a British subject. Many Asian Africans may have preferred this possibility. They supported the independence of African states in East Africa. They wished to continue their businesses, pay taxes, raise their families and continue the economic development of the countries they lived in. Therefore, they needed a reliable prospect that they



could continue the life they had lived, including access to trading licences. Continuing to be a British subject, however, would give them some extra advantages that were important to them. It would give them access to education in the United Kingdom. The South Asian higher and middle classes realised that the standard of higher education in East Africa was low. Therefore, many elite Asians had a custom of sending their children to private schools in the United Kingdom. In addition, continuing as a British subject would also give these groups access to medical care in the United Kingdom and medical insurances. This was not yet available at the same standards in East Africa. Last but not least, British subjects could easily travel throughout the Commonwealth and that made them probably the first real 'world citizens'.

The third option was to remain undefined. Often this was not a conscious choice, but it happened to those who did not make up their minds. These people often remained active in the informal sector of East Africa.

The choice between 'British subject' and African citizen was a matter of 'coin flip'. Many South Asians used the grace period of two years, but were still undecided. Eventually, most families decided to take a mixed stand in the citizenship issue. Some male members would take up local citizenship, whereas many women and younger brothers decided to remain British subjects. In that sense, they could acquire trading licences and continue their local business, but at the same time enjoy medical care and education for their children in the United Kingdom.<sup>64</sup> The full consequences associated with these various citizenship options were often fascinating and with large implications. For example, in some families it was decided that the man of the house would take up local citizenship, while the woman would remain a British subject. In due course, this enabled the woman to travel to Britain easily. If the woman was pregnant on a visit to the United Kingdom and her baby was born in the United Kingdom, the child would automatically become a full British citizen. This child would then be raised

in East Africa, but had free access to British education and health care. Therefore, it became very common for a South Asian African family to have members with African citizenship, British subjects and British citizens, all with different sets of rights and duties.<sup>65</sup>

While the South Asian communities in East Africa were discussing and negotiating their options, the new African states were under strong pressure from their societies to Africanise the economy and civil service. This resulted in a number of discriminatory schemes in East African countries, which introduced various systems of work permits and allowed 'non-Africans' to take only those jobs that African citizens could not fulfil. There was especially shortage for managerial and organisational skills. South Asian civil servants (whether they were citizens or not) were pushed out of their jobs to be replaced by Africans. Therefore, most South Asians preferred to keep their options open until the last few months of this grace period. 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, these governments introduced periodic administrative embargoes.<sup>66</sup> In addition, the issuing of trading licences became a matter of concern for the South Asian community in East Africa. The renewal of trading licences for only one or two years caused economic insecurity. Moreover, the process of renewal was not transparent; hence, it was open to corruption, and so led to more uncertainty.<sup>67</sup> Therefore, the South Asians in East Africa made sure that they set up escape routes. As mentioned earlier, African politicians as well as the African societies were aware of these routes, and this made them more critical towards the loyalty of Asians in East Africa. For them, the question was: Were these new citizens investors or exploiters?<sup>68</sup>

### *Mass Migration*

Whatever decision Asian Africans made, taking up local citizenship did not guarantee protection by the state. The property rights

and the physical security of South Asians were attacked to varying degrees during the 1960s and early 1970s, 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. While the nationalisation was not directed against the South Asians specifically, they nevertheless were hit extremely hard.

In Tanzania, the Arusha Declaration of 1967 legitimised the nationalisation of the main economic institutions, such as the banks and insurance companies, and certain industries. Most of the legislation had a negative effect on the economic performance of the South Asian community.<sup>69</sup>

Most Asians questioned the effectiveness of these policies and were concerned about their future as well that of their children. Until 1968, ultimate security had been guaranteed for those in possession of British passports. They were allowed to travel freely into the United Kingdom. This guarantee vanished when the British government announced that they would no longer respect the Asians' (British) passports. This was the result of British anxieties that many migrants from the Caribbean would arrive shortly. The panic among Asian Africans was massive and the first major exodus started in May 1968. Some 200,000 individuals holding only British citizenship were abandoned, effectively stateless, in Africa or India, or elsewhere. Therefore, as a consequence of government policies in East Africa as well in Britain, the major exodus of Indians began.<sup>70</sup>

The Acquisition of Buildings Act of April 1971 in Tanzania was another piece of legislation that had a detrimental effect on the 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, Lindi and in many other places (probably more than 15). In many cases, the Karimjees became tenants of the Registrar of Buildings or the National Housing Corporation. They had to pay rent for buildings that they had previously owned. However, the new landlord was unable to maintain the buildings to even the most basic standard and some buildings fell into disrepair within months. The administrative procedures to manage the nationalised properties were complex and multifaceted. Ironically, in some cases, the Office of the Registrar of Buildings requested the Karimjee Jivanjee family to assist in specifying the administrative procedures, for example, by providing contracts regarding the responsibilities of tenants and owners.<sup>71</sup>

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 South Asians and it became increasingly difficult for them to renew their trading licences, to get permits for new ventures or to get government loans.<sup>72</sup> Uganda's Africanisation programme initially followed the Kenyan approach, and then changed in the early 1970s to an approach closer to the Tanzanian. The 1969 Immigration and Trade Licencing Acts were modelled after the Kenyan Acts of the same name and had the same objective. All non-citizens were required to obtain work permits. Certain trades could not be undertaken by non-citizens, including 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 but not to live in the United Kingdom), 8,890 were Indian citizens, 253 were Pakistani citizens, 1,768 were (Indian) citizens of Kenya and 26,657 were Ugandan citizens.<sup>73</sup> The political and economic developments during the first decades of independence in Uganda,

Kenya and Tanzania illustrate the harsh consequences of being a successful migrant. The new African states and the local societies expected the South Asians to become part of African society and to show their loyalty by accepting their new citizenship, but only about a third did so, as shown in Table 4.2.

**TABLE 4.2** 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	50,000
Uganda	74,000	25,000
		26,657*

*Source:* The Minority Rights Group, *The New Position of East Africa's Asians*, London 1984 (first edition 1973).

*Note:* \*Census of August 1969, published in *Statistical Abstract* 1971, Republic of Uganda 1972.

Then, in January 1971, General Idi Amin staged a successful coup against President Milton Obote. Most people in Uganda, South Asians, Africans and Europeans alike, initially welcomed the transition. The South Asians particular welcomed it because they believed that Amin would reduce the extent of the anti-Asian campaign. However, their hopes were short-lived. Little more than a year later, on 5 August 1972, Amin, now president, gave his 'Asian Farewell Speech'. In this speech, he gave the Asians 90 days to pack up and leave. He made no distinction between citizens and non-citizens. His major argument was that British Asians had come to build the railway, and this had now been completed. In this speech, as well as earlier ones, he accused the Asians of 'economic sabotage' of the country; they were, in his perspective, not willing to invest—they were removing resources. The problem with these kinds of accusations is, of course, that they cannot be proved to be either true or false. However, evidence for

such allegations should have been brought before an independent Ugandan court. Moreover, the situation is more complex than Amin suggested. The railway was finished, but many of those who had come to help construct it had later found a living as traders and artisans. Others had come not to build the railway, but to work as colonial civil servants.

Now, every South Asian knew that they had to leave the country. Their houses, shops and other properties were in danger as well as their physical and emotional well-being, not the least because of Amin's control of the military. Within the last few weeks of the ultimatum period, some 50,000 Asians left with just hand baggage and no more than £55 in cash. In 1973, no more than 1,000 South Asians were left in Uganda. To most South Asians in Uganda, their expulsion came as a complete surprise. Initially, many who had heard the Asian farewell speech or read about it in the papers simply did not believe that it would become a reality. Even those with fully established Ugandan citizenship found that they were required to produce fresh evidence, which was eventually 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 United Kingdom, the United States, Canada and elsewhere, the South Asians in Kenya and Tanzania came to believe that their businesses and lives could also be at risk. Despite the fact that neither Kenya nor Tanzania adopted the Ugandan approach, political and economic insecurity in these countries also caused massive emigration, and about half of their total South Asian populations left. Some South Asian business families in Kenya and Tanzania decided 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.<sup>74</sup> In short, most of the family members left the country, leaving behind only one or two 'die

**TABLE 4.3** Number of South Asians in East Africa Prior and After the Expulsion, 1962–1984

Year/country	Kenya	Uganda	Tanzania
1962	175.000	77.500	112.000
1969	140.000	75.000	85.000
1972	105.000	1.000	52.000
1984	50.000	1.000	30.000

Sources: Annual Reports of Tanzania, Uganda and Kenya. See also R. Gregory, *South Asians in East Africa: An Economic and Social History, 1890–1980*, (Boulder: Westview Press, 1993).

hards'.<sup>75</sup> Those who departed would endeavour to build a new life in the United Kingdom, the United States, Canada and elsewhere. In short, approximately 280,000 Asian Africans migrated from East Africa to other parts of the world.

Currently, many Asian African families have family members in two up to twelve different countries. Individual members may have acquired local citizenship. Each year, I receive a directory with the physical addresses, telephone numbers and email addresses of several transnational Asian African families. In 2010, one such directory contained about 70 main family entries for one family (often not including the names of spouses and children) and 12 entries related to businesses. Of these 28 entries are in the United Kingdom; 23 are in Mauritius; 8 are in India and Pakistan; 7 are in Tanzania, South Africa and Egypt; 7 are in the United States; 6 are in Germany, Belgium and France; and 3 are in Dubai.<sup>76</sup> More often than not, family members have received local citizenship and, in most cases, carry the passport of their country of citizenship.

This type of family directory raises interesting questions, all related to major issues in history, sociology and anthropology, that is dispersion and identity, and international law, that is citizenship and tax liability. First and foremost, how did this family become so widely dispersed, with members living in twelve different countries on three continents? As shown later, their dispersion was partly forced, but also included conscious economic and cultural

choices. The second question is related to the concept of identity and citizenship. Most of these family members were born and/or raised in East Africa. Further, they are aware of their South Asian cultural background, but at the same time they are educated in the West. This triple heritage, including exposure to transnational family relations, makes them what we may term 'world citizens'. At the same time, their activities, their work and their social affairs are rooted in their respective local society.

### *Concluding Observations*

South Asians played an important role in the development of colonial East Africa from the 1880s onwards, but at the same time, they were rising up against colonialism; they demanded civic rights, equal rights and economic rights. Early activists, such as Alibhai Mulla Jeevanjee, argued that East Africa had been built by Indian hands. He himself had been involved in the supply of indentured Indian labourers to build the Uganda Railway and had also helped to build substantial parts of early Nairobi in Kenya. He was also the first non-white to be appointed to represent the interests of the South Asians in the Legislative Council, which was established in 1905. In addition, he and other Indian businessmen were instrumental in the establishment of the EAINC in 1914.

The main objective of the EAINC was to secure the interests of South Asians in East Africa. The fact that they were organising themselves with the intention to improve their civic rights shows that the phase of circular migration had come to an end. They were settlers, not temporary migrants who might go back to India. More and more South Asians intended to settle in East Africa. This was further encouraged by India's aspirations of planting an Indian colony in East Africa for full Indian settlement. At the same time, the South Asians in East Africa used their contacts in India, South Africa (Gandhi) and the United Kingdom to make their appeals and also to gain inspiration to develop effective strategies and tactics to achieve their aims. However, despite their plans and



their optimism, the white settlers were not going to give up their interests. Indeed, some of them, such as Lord Delamere believed that East Africa should become a second Rhodesia or South Africa, that is, a white settler colony.

While some South Asians in East Africa became active in politics, most of them remained traders, financiers and businessmen. The second section of this chapter described the shift in the international economic relationships of South Asians in East Africa, which were first with India (1880–1920) and then predominantly with Europe (1920–1960). In the first phase, India remained an important reservoir for workers, marriage partners and business connections. In the second phase, those who settled in East Africa increasingly started to trade not only within the African continent, but also with Europe. In this process, the image of the Indian subcontinent among the South Asians in East Africa changed from being one of 'beloved mother' to an alien 'other'. This change in perception shows that they were settling in East Africa and cutting the so-called umbilical cord that tied them to their homeland. The South Asians who settled in East Africa were British subjects, but they remained strangers in the eyes of European colonisers and Africans alike, despite the fact that South Asians had become major contributors to the local economy, taxpayers and employers, and that some of them had become active in the African independence movement.

After independence was gained by India and Pakistan (1947) as well as Tanzania, Kenya and Uganda, the South Asians had to choose one of the three options: (a) to become a Ugandan, Kenyan, or Tanzanian citizen; (b) to remain a British subject or acquire a British passport with limited rights or (c) remain undefined. We have seen that, ultimately, about one-third of the South Asians in East Africa opted to become local citizens. It was often the case that some family members took up local and others opted for British citizenship. Between 1947 and 1962, the South Asians in East Africa developed the idea of acquiring multiple, legal citizenships

within the family, rather than achieving this through one person having more than one passport as a dual national, if this was possible at all. More often than not, the decision on who attained citizenship of a particular country was not the result of a preconceived plan but was based on the rational assessment of the circumstances of each individual family at a particular time.

However, it soon became clear that those South Asians in East Africa who had opted for African citizenship were no better off than those who had not. Rapid Africanisation policies harmed the South Asian community in East Africa. In Kenya, it became increasingly difficult to obtain trading licences, wholesale permits and licences to employ Indian managers. In Tanzania, the government nationalised their houses and their businesses, and, in the most extreme case, the Amin regime in Uganda expelled all South Asians regardless of their citizenship status. In Kenya and Tanzania, local citizenship did not protect their properties and businesses. Nevertheless, some of those who remained active in those countries or, in the case of Uganda, returned, after being invited back in the 1990s, were able to build up their fortunes again. For those that remained or returned, their African citizenship has, over time, yielded some rewards. For others, those who were there during this exceptional historical period, there remain only memories of the good lives they once enjoyed and the traumatic experiences they shared.

## Notes and References

1. Those businessmen who are active around Hindu temples, Islamic mosques, and other religious institutions and activities tend to relate more strongly to India. However, they too have reduced their business activities with India.
2. Even now, very little is known about the importance and functions of *hundis*. The most detailed information, which is related to the notion of trust among Chettiars in South India, can be found in David Rudner, 'Banker's Trust and the Culture of Banking', *Modern Asian Studies* 23, (1989): 417–58.
3. Interview in Dar es Salaam, October 2002. This oral evidence is supported by Sommerset Playne's business directory of 1909, in which we find, for

- example, that the family of Lalchund Moolchund had business branches in Zanzibar, Mombasa, Dar es Salaam, Mumbai, and Hyderabad. The father lived in Hyderabad and the son looked after the East African branches. Playne, *East Africa (British): Its History, People, Commerce, Industries, and Resources* (London: Foreign and Colonial Compiling and Publishing, 1909), 113.
4. Martha Honey states: “India was, therefore, primarily important as a source of business connections, rather than a source of capital. India served as a reservoir for new recruits for East African firms and as network of business contacts which could utilized by the East African traders.” ‘A History of Indian Merchant Capital and Class Formation in Tanganyika’ (unpublished PhD Thesis, Dar es Salaam University, 1982), 63.
  5. H. S. Morris, ‘The Indian Family in Uganda’, *American Anthropologist* 61, (1959): 779–89. Interviews with Bharat in October 2002. He stated that the idea of a family trust was still very much alive. They shared family capital and family-managed businesses. However, the sons had a growing interest in doing business on their own account.
  6. One family that I first met in Nairobi in 2002 decided to live under one roof again after being separated in different parts of East Africa for some 20 years. This shows that there is no ‘natural’ tendency towards becoming a nuclear family.
  7. Imports from India into East Africa initially rose from 679 (1901) to 2,313 × £1,000 (in 1921), after which it declined to 658 × £1,000 (in 1938). In the same period, exports from East Africa to India grew from 136 to 3,500 × £1,000 (1900–1938). Thus, for South Asian settlers in East Africa, the Indian subcontinent became a market to sell products, rather than buy products. In addition, they increased their exports to the United Kingdom, which showed the same growth in this period. Imports from Japan were insignificant in the period 1900–1910, rising from 171 to 1,763 × £1,000 in the period 1920–1938. See, Robert G. Gregory, *South Asians and East Africa: An Economic and Social History, 1890–1980* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1993), 51.
  8. The causes of India’s economic decline have long been disputed by Marxist, Nationalist, and European scholars. Studies that cover this issue include Amiya Kumar Bagchi, *Private Investment in India 1900–1939* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972) and, more recently, Debdas Bannerjee, *Colonialism in Action: Trade, Development and Dependence in Late Colonial India* (London: Sangam Books, 2000). 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 David Himbara, *Kenyan Capitalists, the State and Development* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 1994).
  9. G. Oonk, ‘The Changing Culture of the Hindu Lohana Community in East Africa’, *Contemporary South Asia* 13, no. 1 (2004): 7–23.
  10. For changing marriage patterns, see the second section in Chapter 3.

11. The problem of the quality of the Indian products and the growing competition with Japan was also felt in India.
12. Interview with Manilal Devani in Dar es Salaam, October 2002.
13. Interview with Nanji Damordar in Mombasa, June 1999. The issue of Japanese competition is also discussed in the annual reports of the Bombay Mill Owners Association. The Indian mill owners were especially concerned about losing their share to the Japanese in the Chinese market and, to a lesser extent, the East African market. See G. Oonk, *Ondernemers in Ontwikkeling: Fabrieken en Fabrikanten in de Indiase Katoenindustrie, 1850–1930* (Verloren: Hilversum, 1998) [*Entrepreneurs in Development: Mills and Mill Owners in the Indian Cotton Textile Industry, 1850–1930* (Verloren: Hilversum, 1998)].
14. The annually published ‘blue books’ on British East Africa include a rich variety of statistical material related to the import and export of various products.
15. It was not only Hindus who decided to focus on East Africa to a growing extent. From the personal archives of some of my Muslim informants, it is clear that Indian Muslims wrote several requests to the Indian government asking to sell their land and property in India so that they could then transfer huge sums of money from India to East Africa in order to reinvest their capital there. This kind of transfer was often refused or took so long to effect that most informants kept some family member to look after the property overseas. Obviously, for Muslims, the partition of British India into India and Pakistan in 1947 may well have accelerated the process of losing contact with India.
16. M.C. Lall, *India’s Missed Opportunity: India’s Relation with the Non Resident Indians* (Singapore: Ashgate, 2001).
17. In my interviews it was difficult to determine the importance of ‘1947’, because the events at this time seem to have been overshadowed in the memories of my informants by the aftermath of the independence of the East African nations in the early 1960s. After the ‘Africanisation’ projects in the late 1960s, it became clear that Asian Africans could not easily apply for Indian passports. Some present-day Indian Africans still feel that they were ‘left alone by their mother’ and others mention that, by the late 1960s, they were already ‘cut off from India and the Indian Indians.
18. These negative images were repeated with some hesitation. When introducing this research to the informants, I told many of them about my earlier research in Gujarat. Many informants tried to convince me that Indians in East Africa were more ‘modern’ and educated than Gujaratis from Gujarat.
19. Interview in Dar es Salaam, November 2002. This is not to say that family members are, in fact, reliable. This informant was cheated by two of his half-brothers and lost a huge part of his business in the early 1980s. In the late 1950s, Morris noted that the Indian African said: “Do not go into partnership

- with your brother (from India, G.O.). He is sure to cheat you.” H. S. Morris, ‘The Indian Family in Uganda’, *American Anthropologist* 61, (1959): 785.
20. Anonymous informant, December 2003.
  21. Anonymous informant, February 2001.
  22. Anonymous informant, March 2003. Note that this quotation portrays Indian Indians as superior in significant respects, which runs counter to the argument from education.
  23. The bulk of this research was carried out between 1999 and 2003. At that time, the Indian economy was already booming. The Indian government tried to attract Persons of Indian Origin (PIOs) to start investing in India by offering dual citizenship and attractive banking and investment schemes. Initially, the ‘old migrants’ were very reluctant to take up these options. Nevertheless, after 2008, an increasing number of Asian Africans are trying to capitalise on these new possibilities. India may become a new reliable business partner, but from the Asian African family’s perspective, there still has to be a family member present in India to look after the ‘Indian’ part of the business.
  24. See G. H. Mungeam, *British Rule in Kenya, 1895–1912: The Establishment of Administration in the East Africa Protectorate* (London: Clarendon Press, 1966); S. Sian, ‘Patterns of Prejudice: Social Exclusion and Racial Demarcation in Professional Accountancy in Kenya’, *The Accounting Historians Journal* 34, no. 2 (December 2007): 1–42. He states this in footnote 17, p. 10.
  25. E. S. Atieno Odhiambo, T. I. Ouso and J. F. M. Williams, *A History of East Africa* (London: Longman Group Limited, 1999 [1977]); Thomas Pakenham, *The Scramble for Africa, 1876–1912* (New York: Random House, 1991) Avon Books 1992.
  26. *The White Man’s Burden* is a poem by the English poet Rudyard Kipling. It was originally published in the popular magazine *McClure’s* in 1899 with the subtitle ‘The United States and the Philippine Islands’. Kipling’s poem mixed exhortation to the empire with sober warnings of the costs involved. However, imperialists in the United States understood the phrase ‘white man’s burden’ as a characterisation of imperialism that justified the policy as a noble enterprise, which became the mainstream interpretation in Western Europe.
  27. W. Churchill, *My African Journey* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1908), 49–50.
  28. *Ibid.*
  29. Cited in R. G. Gregory, *India and East Africa: A History of Race Relations within the British Empire 1890–1939* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), 96. Lord Lugard himself, chief architect of the ‘indirect rule’ colonial policy, stated: “It is not as coolie labor that I advocate the introduction of the Indian, but as a colonist and settler.” Quoted in J. M. Nazareth, *Brown Man, Black Country: A Peep into Kenya’s Freedom Struggle* (Delhi: Tidings Publications, 1981).
  30. Rasna Warah, *Triple Heritage: A Journey to Self Discovery* (Nairobi: R. Warah, 1998), 22.

31. The fertile white lands were eventually allocated to the Europeans. The colonisers also tried to monopolise the sale of German assets in German East Africa. Nevertheless, here the Indians managed to get access to the auctions and were allowed to bid. Eventually, the Asians would buy several sisal estates. See G. Oonk, *The Karimjee Jivanjee Family: Merchant Princes of East Africa, 1800–2000* (Amsterdam: Pallas Publications, 2009).
32. Mahmood Mamdani, *Citizen and Subject: Contemporary Africa and the Legacy of Late Colonialism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996).
33. S. Aiyar, 'Anticolonial Homelands Across the Indian Ocean: The Politics of the Indian Diaspora in Kenya, ca. 1930–1950', *The American Historical Review* 116, no. 4 (October 2011): 987–1013; James Brennan, *Taija: Making Nation and Race in Urban Tanzania* (Ohio: Ohio University Press, 2012); James Brennan, 'Politics and Business in the Indian Newspapers of Colonial Tanganyika', *Africa: Journal of the International Africa Institute* 81, no. 1 (2011): 42–67; James Brennan, 'Lowering the Sultan's Flag: Sovereignty and Decolonization in Coastal Kenya', *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 50, no. 4 (2008): 831–61.
34. For an interesting account of Alibhai Mulla Jivanjee's life, see the biography written by his granddaughter Zarina Patel, *Challenge to Colonialism: The Struggle of Alibhai Mulla Jeevanjee for Equal Rights in Kenya* (Nairobi: Publishers Distribution Services, 1997).
35. A. M. Jeevanjee in Elspeth Huxley, *White Man's Country: Lord Delamere and the Making of Kenya*, vol II (London: Macmillan, 1935), 121.
36. KNA 305.5, MAS, Masters, The Segregation, 1; KNA 305.5, MAS, Masters, The Segregation, 4.
37. Gregory, *India and East Africa*, 101–04.
38. The South Asian business community played an instrumental role in the organisation of the EAINC, most notably Alibhai Jeevanjee and Allidina Visram. See Gregory, *Ibid.*, 94.
39. Stanley Rice, 'The Indian Question in Kenya', *Foreign Affairs* 2, no. 2 (Dec. 15, 1923): 258–69; Z. K. Michael Twaddle, 'Sentongo and the Indian Question in East Africa', *History in Africa* 24, (1997): 309–36.
40. Bombay Chronicle, 19 December 1913, p. 6.
41. This small but interesting intermezzo in East African history is described well by Gregory, *India and East Africa*, 145–77.
42. Yusufali Esmailjee Jivanjee, *Memorandum on the Report of the Commission on Agriculture, 1923* (Poona Aryabhushan Press, 1924).
43. The Tanganyika Herald, 15 December 1934, p. 12.
44. The Tanganyika Herald, *Ibid.*, 13.
45. *Ibid.*
46. K. P. S. Menon, *Report on the Marketing Legislation in Tanganyika, Uganda and Kenya* (New Delhi: Government of India Press, 1934); Robert G. Gregory, *India and East Africa*, 458–76.

47. The Tanganyika Herald 17 July 1937, p. 10.
48. Zarina Patel, *The Struggle*, 130–38.
49. The extreme violence during the Mau Mau revolution (1952–1960) in Kenya made South Asians aware of the need to create constitutional safeguards for their future. See Daniel Branch, *Defeating Mau Mau, Creating Kenya: Counterinsurgency, Civil War, and Decolonization* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).
50. M.C. Lall, *India's Missed Opportunity*, 96–100.
51. Makhan Singh, *History of Kenya's Trade Union Movement to 1952* (Nairobi: East African Publishing House, 1969); Zarina Patel, *Unquiet: The Life and Times of Makhan Singh* (Nairobi: Awaaz, 2006).
52. H. Tinker, *The Banyan Tree: Overseas Emigrants from India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 124–25.
53. For a detailed examination of these issues, see R.G. Gregory's *India and East Africa*. Recently, Ned Bertz has added to the debate in this field with an article entitled 'Indian Ocean World Cinema: Viewing the History of Race, Diaspora and Nationalism in Urban Tanzania', *Africa* 81, no. 1 (2011): 66–88.
54. South Asians who were active in German Tanganyika were categorised as 'natives'. The South Asians made formal complaints about this categorisation. See the first section of Chapter 4.
55. Correspondence between Abdulla M.A. Karimjee and the Governor of Tanganyika Territory from Karimjee Jivanjee family archive, Dar es Salaam.
56. This example is taken from G. Oonk, *The Karimjee Jivanjee Family: Merchant Princes of East Africa, 1800–2000* (Amsterdam: Pallas Publications, 2009), 93–95.
57. Lall, *India's Missed Opportunity*, 97. I have rephrased Lall's statement. Before 1949, everyone born in the Dominions was a British subject.
58. The first issue was whether South Asian Muslims in East Africa should ally with Pakistan, regardless of the fact that most had ancestry relations with India. See D. Sutton, 'Divided and Uncertain Loyalties: Partition, Indian Sovereignty and Contested Citizenship in East Africa, 1948–1955', *Interventions* 9, no. 2 (2007): 276–88.
59. However, Tinker argues: "Under the Indian constitution they could easily obtain Indian citizenship, and they were not required to surrender existing citizenship rights. Most of them became Indian citizens at the end of 1949 as part of their dual nationality." Hugh Tinker, *The Banyan Tree*, 124. In my research, I found that very few were given this option. In addition, according to Pascal Herzig (2006), less than 10 per cent acquired Indian citizenship.
60. Jawaharlal Nehru in Sutton, 'Divided and Uncertain Loyalties', 285.
61. Tinker, *The Banyan Tree*, 124; Lall, *India's Missed Opportunity*, 76–110.
62. See the third section in Chapter 3.
63. However, because of the steady influx of migrants from the Caribbean, the British government decided to restrict entry into the United Kingdom 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. Hugh Tinker, *The Banyan Tree*, 134.
64. Hugh Tinker, *Separate and Unequal: India and the Indians in the British Commonwealth 1920–1950* (St. Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1976); Tinker, *The Banyan Tree*; Lall, *India's Missed Opportunity*.
  65. In my sample of 76 Asian African families who settled in east Africa before the 1920s, more than 90 per cent have multiple passports in their families. Similar observation can be found with P. Herzig, *South Asians in Kenya: Gender, Generation and Changing Identities in Diaspora* (Munster: LIT Verlag, 2006).
  66. Tinker, *Separate and Unequal*; Tinker, *The Banyan Tree*; Lall, *India's Missed Opportunity*.
  67. James Brennan nicely shows how during the anti-colonial nationalist movement, Indians were frequently targeted as primary obstacles to development and African self-improvement. J. Brennan, 'Blood Enemies: Exploitation and Urban Citizenship in the Nationalist Political Thought of Tanzania, 1958–1975', *Journal of Eastern African Studies* 47, no. 3 (2006): 387–411, 404.
  68. Himbara, *Kenyan Capitalists*, 1994. Contrary to the general belief, Himbara emphasises that South Asians in East Africa reinvested most of their profits in the continent.
  69. Kjell J. Havnevik, *Tanzania: The Limits to Development from Above* (Motola Uppsala: Nordiska Afrikainstitutet, 1993).
  70. R. Hansen, 'The Kenyan Asians, British Politics, and the Commonwealth Immigrants Act', *The Historical Journal* 42, no. 3 (September 1999): 809–34.
  71. G. Oonk, *The Karimjee Jivanjee Family*. For other examples, see the biography of Andy Chande at [www.andychande.com](http://www.andychande.com) (accessed, 15 June 2010).
  72. David Himbara, *Kenyan Capitalists*; Hugh Tinker, *The Banyan Tree*, 130.
  73. Census of August 1969, published in Statistical Abstract 1971, Republic of Uganda 1972.
  74. See, for example, the biography of Andy Chande at [www.andychande.com](http://www.andychande.com) (accessed, 15 June 2010).
  75. G. Oonk, *The Karimjee Jivanjee Family*.
  76. Here I use the same regional headings as used by the family.



## CHAPTER FIVE

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# A QUEST FOR AN INTERDISCIPLINARY HISTORY FROM BELOW IN EXPLAINING SOCIAL CHANGE

This book is written on the basis of three simple and straightforward convictions:

1. History, anthropology, economics, sociology and political sciences are all equally important when it comes to understanding human migration, more particularly the history of settled strangers. Indeed, more often than not, social sciences and history are interwoven and not separate facets, when it comes to understanding history and human life. I have demonstrated in this book that migration and settling elsewhere is much more than the sum of economic 'push and pull' factors. Economic incentives may be important, but they have to be balanced with social and cultural elements as well. While the original process from circular migration to settlement may be due to economic motivations, subsequent activities also encompass social, cultural and political pursuits. Migration grounds the changes that take place in many social aspects of life, such as marriage patterns, as well as cultural factors like adapting to a new language and making changes in eating habits and the clothing worn.

For those readers who feel that an interdisciplinary approach to migration is self-evident, I should remind that in most universities, both in the West and elsewhere, history faculties are part of the 'humanities', whereas anthropology, sociology and economics are seen as belonging to the 'social sciences'. The result is that interdisciplinary approaches are not explicitly taught to students. Indeed, despite the long-standing cry for interdisciplinary studies, good examples of this type of work are still rare.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, in this book, I have shown that an entirely anthropological approach would have overestimated the success stories of South Asian business families in East Africa. The majority of the families that are still active in the region, and have been for three generations or longer, are successful by definition, as we have seen in Chapter 2. As a consequence, the sample of Asians in East Africa is biased, because it does not include those who had become bankrupt, or failed in some other way, and returned to India or moved on to South Africa or the United Kingdom. In this book, I have balanced the success stories with the historical records of South Asian families who were financially ruined and those who moved back to India. The success stories must therefore be seen as the outcome of an historical process of 'trial and error.'

A strict historical analysis would have been almost as unsatisfactory. The written sources and archives relating to colonial history are rich at times, but those dealing with recent history are not. The South Asians in East Africa, like many migrant communities elsewhere, rarely build institutions that produce their own archives. Indeed, there is actually a strong desire to be modest, keep things off the record and maintain a low profile. On this basis, anthropological fieldwork and oral histories greatly enrich us by opening up the front of grassroots knowledge. The combination of archival research and anthropological fieldwork has, thus, permitted me to balance the success and failure stories of these migrants.

2. My second conviction is that historians should study people, not events. It is people and not events that shape history.<sup>2</sup>

Moreover, ordinary people are not just the silent witnesses of events. They are also agents of history as much as politicians, rulers and states are. Indeed, states generally have a tendency to silence or omit particular events, groups and opinions when it comes to their 'national' histories.

Settled strangers are just one example of this. Despite their economic contributions as taxpayers, employers and charities and their active assistance in the independence movement, Asians in East Africa do not play an important role in the history textbooks of Uganda, Kenya and Tanzania. By the same token, they also have a very minor role in the national histories of the United Kingdom and India/Pakistan. Paradoxically, long-distance trade and circular migration preceded the nation. Accordingly, the history of South Asian migrants is longer than that of the African nation, yet they are omitted from it. In other words, these transnational migrants are silenced, probably because they are, allegedly, not a part of the national culture and discourse. In the exceptional cases where they are mentioned, they are part of a conflict, debate or problem, or are placed 'in between two sides of the same story'. For example, settled strangers are often seen as 'agents of imperialism', and the British were clever enough to position this group as a buffer between themselves and the Africans. As the author P. Nazareth informs us in his novel *In a Brown Mantle* (1972):

They (the British, G.O.) placed middlemen of another race between themselves and Africans, so that they could rake in the profits undisturbed. Do you know the story of Cleopatra and Anthony? When the messenger brought the news to Cleopatra that Anthony had been defeated, Cleopatra executed the messenger! It is the one who deals directly with the African who is hated most. The British remain aloof and are neither loved nor hated.<sup>3</sup>

The history of Asians in Africa is an excellent example of an important group that faced a double-edged sword that left it with neither the authority of the oppressor nor the humanity

of the oppressed. In this book, they are presented neither as victims nor as heroes, and nor are they portrayed as exploiters or spoilers of the land where they settle. This form of interdisciplinary history from 'within' gives a voice to the people who are silenced in national histories and textbooks.

3. My third conviction is that human populations construct their own identities, and their cultures interact with others and do not exist in isolation. One of the central questions in this book was: How, why and in what direction does the culture of a migrant community change? My focus was particularly on the way in which South Asian culture changed in an East African context. Drawing from archival records, interviews and pictures and images from family albums, this book examined four areas of change: food and drink, marriage, dress and language. In all these areas, caste and class boundaries were challenged to adapt to a new Asian–African–European environment, as we have seen in Chapter 3. The acceptance of eating meat and drinking alcohol, for example, made it possible for South Asian Hindus and Muslims to interact freely with European business partners. In addition, there was a strong tendency, especially among South Asian businessmen, to adopt the Western business suit in their daily affairs and working environment. The acceptance of this form of clothing was the result of clever navigation by these men between local changes and the establishment of colonial and Asian schools and educational projects. It may also be seen as a reaction to Africanisation schemes as well as an adaptation towards a more global business environment.

My findings reveal that the first-generation South Asians in East Africa dressed according to their Gujarati traditions, and spoke, wrote and read Gujarati fluently. The youngest generation has, however, developed a preference for English and open caste boundaries when it comes to food and drink, marriage and styles of dress. This development is not to be seen as a 'natural' process, in which the European culture had to be adopted by its subjects. On the contrary, during colonial days, for example, South Asians refused to teach English in

the 'Indian schools' in East Africa, even rejecting colonisers' requests to produce accounts in English for taxation purposes. Accordingly, changes by this migrant group came about as a result of movement in their own set of priorities in relation to the local and global changes taking place around them.

The three convictions set out above have been developed into a critique of the historiography on middleman minorities and the currently fashionable area of (trading) diasporas. This historiography often begins with the importance of the 'stranger', namely the trader or the businessman who is both an 'insider' and an 'outsider' at one and the same time. In the literature related to the concept of middleman minorities, the stranger is often portrayed as a successful mediator between two cultural and economic spheres. Indeed, in the case of South Asians in East Africa, this is the relationship between the African producers and the Europeans (world market). The success of South Asians is—among other things—attributed to their willingness to operate in a niche market, as well as their sober lifestyle and business ethics of hard work and reinvestment. These migrants developed a rational distance from the local markets in which they traded, because they were outsiders, while their transnational connections made them aware of prices and markets elsewhere. The literature on the trading diaspora more specifically focuses on the relationship with the homeland, the myth of return and transnational connections. The main focus in these debates seems to be related to two sets of questions: What is a diaspora? And who is a diaspora?

In general, this literature has proved to be very rich, has explanatory strengths and is important to the social, economic and anthropological sciences. Yet, despite this, the concepts and ideas are generally ahistorical. Even cases that are set in a historical context, such as the literature on colonial matters, do not emphasise changes over time. In other words, the alleged hard work, sober lifestyle and objective, distant perceptions of the local market by the South Asians, remain the same over time and through the generations. They continue to be both insiders and outsiders,

remaining 'in between two worlds', but remain the same. So, for example, they continue to be the Chinese in Indonesia in the eighteenth, nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and their Chinese characteristics stay remarkably similar. In general, this literature describes and analyses migrants 'without history'.

In this book, I have introduced the concept of 'settled strangers' in order to historicise the success stories in the middleman minority and diaspora debates. Settled strangers are not migrants, but settlers. Their ancestors were migrants, but the families remained in their new homeland for three generations or more. By taking the example of South Asians in East Africa, I have shown that in their oral tradition this group tends to highlight the importance of the 'founding father' of the family. The founding father is the forefather (always a [great] grandfather) who first guided his family to East Africa. He was the one who came to the region, worked for a while for some uncle or another and then started his own business. He was part of the famous 'dhow stories' that anthropologists and sociologists encounter when conducting interviews among South Asians in East Africa.

As we have seen, the transition from circular migration to settlement embedded economic, cultural and political aspects of life. Some of these aspects helped these families to migrate, settle in a new environment and, eventually, become transnational trading elite, whereas others may have hindered them. Social capital could be an asset as well as a burden in terms of the economic development of family- and ethnic-based trust relationships.

I have demonstrated in this book that settling and unsettling were always two sides of the same coin. Migration is the management of uncertainty and expectation. Families were always conducting a balancing act between settlement and an orientation towards East Africa, as well as focussing on a wider world. An important aspect of the history of settled strangers is that they always seem to have one foot in the land where they have settled and the other somewhere else. They may have settled in East Africa, but they also maintain economic options in India or

elsewhere. They may have settled in East Africa, but they marry within their own community. They may have settled in East Africa, but they nevertheless combine European and South Asian styles of dress and eating habits.

In order to understand this process from within, I have divided the book into three parts: (a) the economic, (b) the cultural and (c) the political aspects of settling and unsettling. This division was created purely for reasons of presentation. Indeed, in line with the general argument of the book, these three aspects of settling could never be entirely separate, since they are interwoven elements of human life. All three parts of the book have focused on a long-term historical process, and the settled strangers I have studied have now acquired a 'triple heritage', as I will demonstrate below.

### *Economic Aspects of Settling and Unsettling*

Economic incentives were the most important reasons for migration from Gujarat to East Africa. In the second half of the nineteenth century, Gujarat faced periods of drought and economic decline, but the stories that Gujarati traders heard about East Africa were promising. It is extremely plausible that pioneering South Asian Indian Ocean traders, like Tharia Topan and Jairam Sewji, recruited traders, financiers and entrepreneurial businessmen from Gujarat. Nevertheless, I have shown that the process of settling in East Africa was slow. Migrants often sent their second or third son to Zanzibar to explore options and opportunities, and these youngsters usually started working for a relative, perhaps travelling back to India after a few years to discuss future plans. Only after these sons had successfully established themselves in the region did they invite their fathers, uncles and other relatives to settle with them. This was by no means a linear process. Indeed, it is highly likely that many went back without ever making it.

In explaining the economic success of the South Asians in East Africa, I argue that concepts such as social capital and family, caste and community networks are only a small part of the story. Equally

important were more instrumental forms of social capital, such as familiarity with money and money management and the concept of rent. In addition, these settlers had often enjoyed either a formal and/or an informal education and knew how to maintain accounts. Moreover, some spoke English and were able to negotiate with European rulers in the colonial days. Nevertheless, many failed and went bankrupt. Indeed, despite having access to family, caste and community networks, and despite the access to instrumental forms of social capital, many failed within the first five years. I have therefore shown in Chapter 2 that economic success should be seen as the outcome of a long process of 'trial and error'. In particular, I follow the simple 'trial and error' nature of the birth, growth and fall of businesses as described by the nineteenth century economist Alfred Marshall. By definition, the successful businesses survived the struggle for life, but we will never know for sure who the survivors are in the long term.

### *Cultural Aspects of Settling and Unsettling*

Chapter 3 describes the emergence of an Asian African identity in respect of the South Asian settlers in East Africa. Like other trans-continental migrants and settlers, the Asian Africans had to adapt to their new African and (colonial) European environment. More often than not, this was a balancing act involving two sides of the same coin. On the one hand is the settlers' interest in reproducing their original South Asian culture as far as possible in terms of religion and marriage, language, food and drink and clothing. On the other, the settlers were required to adapt to their new environment, which meant getting used to new varieties of food, learning other languages, changing how they dressed and becoming accustomed to shifting ideas about marriage and tradition. In describing this changing balance, I have adopted two approaches: presenting these changes over time through three generations and focussing on the perspective of the agents of change themselves.



The first generation of settlers (those who arrived and settled between 1880 and 1920) included Hindus, Muslims and, occasionally, Sikhs, Goans, Jains and Parsis. They primarily spoke, and often read and wrote, Gujarati. They also tended to marry within their own communities and castes. Indeed, in general, they would return to India to get married there according to their respective customs and traditions. They likewise tried to continue to be vegetarians (for Hindus) and rejected alcohol, although some members of certain families did become meat eaters and/or drinkers of liquor.

The second generation of settlers was born and raised in East Africa between 1920 and 1960, and increasingly tended to marry South Asian women who were also raised in the region. This led to the expansion of castes and broadened community boundaries. This generation also often lost its ability to write Gujarati, although many were still able to read and speak the language. Those involved in business, meanwhile, increasingly became fluent in English (speaking as well as writing) and started to wear Western (business) clothes.

The third generation of settlers was born between 1960 and 1990 in East Africa. The majority have lost their ability to read and write Gujarati, although they occasionally speak the language with their parents. The expansion of castes through marriage has continued, but unions between Hindus and Muslims—or any other community—continue to be rare. More than any other, this generation is exposed to international cuisine, including the eating of meat and the consumption of alcohol. The Western business suit has likewise now become a fully accepted form of dress. So, in summary, a unique Asian African culture has emerged within three generations.

It is important to emphasise that this Asian African culture should not be seen as a simple form of ‘Westernisation’. Indeed, the entire concept of ‘Westernisation’ is, in itself, complex. How do we judge the increasing popularity of the chicken curry pizza in Dar es Salaam? The use of chicken curry on such a Western staple

food could in fact be seen as a form of ‘Southernisation’, while the acceptance of this food by former vegetarians cannot be seen as an acceptance of Western food habits or values. This is a much more multifaceted issue and is beyond the scope of this book. From my point of view, however, it is more of a challenge to approach these issues from the perspective of the agents themselves, which is more likely to help us to really understand that changes of diet and dress always contain two messages: firstly, a demonstration that a community is modern and in favour of change and progress and is also willing to adapt to the position of the elite (either European or South Asian) and, secondly, a desire to disengage from this community.

In reality, changes over the generations have been due to the clever navigation by South Asian businessmen between local changes and the establishment of colonial and Asian schools and education projects. In addition, this may be seen as a reaction to Africanisation projects as well as an adaptation towards a more global business environment.

### *Political Aspects of Settling and Unsettling*

The importance of the political organisation of the South Asians in East Africa was fuelled by economic interests and migration and cultural issues. The economic incentives included discriminatory colonial taxation policies, the protection of Asian properties, access to land ownership, trading licences and general business regulations. The migration issues concerned a restriction on immigration, the right of settlement in specific urban areas and the civic rights of migrants within the British Empire. Finally, the cultural issues related to the development of religious areas for mosques and temples and the introduction of a South Asian form of education in the region.

Political action and the defence of minority rights—albeit in combination with improving economic interests—were always local as well as international affairs. The EAINC mirrored the

Indian National Congress in India. South Asian settlers like Jeevanjee would argue the Indian case in Mombasa, Delhi or, when necessary, London. Conversely, London, Delhi and Zanzibar/Nairobi always paid heed to the role and position of the South Asians in East Africa. In addition, many of these South Asian settlers had always been aware that their physical security and economic prosperity depended on the goodwill of their rulers. They, therefore, had to balance their interests between long-term objectives and short-term results.

In 1900, the long-term goal of creating a 'second India' in East Africa looked to be a distant hope. Nevertheless, such a prospect was seriously discussed after the First World War as a form of compensation for the contribution the Indians had made. East Africa, it was believed, could become the America of the Hindus. Nevertheless, others were against the more permanent settlement of South Asians in East Africa, referring to them as 'undesirable aliens'. The EAINC and other interest groups were constantly required to navigate between these contradictory opinions, while also negotiating in respect of their own economic interests, civic rights and quests for equality.

At the political level, all of this can be analysed within the context of the triangle of the United Kingdom, India and East Africa. Nevertheless, most South Asian settlers were de-linking from India, and the cultural and economic ties between Gujarati traders in Gujarat and the Gujaratis in East Africa duly declined over the generations. Indeed, during the first part of the twentieth century, the general image of the Indians in India was transformed from that of a 'reliable family or community member' to that of an 'unreliable, corrupt and untrustworthy "other"'. This was particularly manifested in the decision to follow an English education, with the consequential loss of the ability to read and write Gujarati. The balance between 'India', 'Africa' and the West did, of course, differ from family to family, but the general economic and political response certainly shifted from India to the West during the

settlement in East Africa. Accordingly, the process of settling and unsettling may be seen as two sides of the same coin.

This became particularly evident on the eve of independence of the East African states and during the process of the Africanisation of the African economies. These Africanisation policies were not, in general, directly aimed at the South Asians, but it nevertheless became increasingly difficult for them to obtain trading licences, wholesale permits and licences to employ Indian managers. When the time came to make a decision about their citizenship status, the majority of families took a mixed approach, with some applying for local citizenship, especially those who were active in African businesses or held professional jobs, while others—those working or studying abroad—would obtain other passports. This mixed stance can be seen as the result of a long history of navigating between three continents: Africa, South Asia and Europe.

Eventually, the South Asians in East Africa developed into a transnational Asian African community. Their social capital was firmly based on a ‘triple heritage’: (a) being born into a South Asian family and learning Asian family and business values, the importance of the extended family and the tradition of respect for the eldest therein; (b) being born in East Africa, knowing the African culture, but also being aware of the experience of alienation and expulsion of Asians from Africa; and (c) being educated in the West or in Westernised educational institutions, which enabled the settlers to learn about Western culture and become a part of the ‘Western world’, including through acculturation in Western dress and eating and drinking habits.<sup>4</sup>

This ‘triple heritage’ is deeply rooted in the Asian African community of settled strangers. Indeed, it is part of their unwritten history, part of their undefined identity that is neither ‘Indian’ nor ‘African’ nor ‘British’. Nevertheless, this heritage is part of a strong oral history, and is a fascinating heritage with no reference in national histories, museums or sites of remembrance.<sup>5</sup> This history is talked about with pride and, at times, with reluctance. There is pride when these families tell their stories of their ancestors who

'came in dhows' and when they elaborate on the 'Asian contribution' to East African history in terms of charities, their role in the independence movements and their contributions as major employers and tax payers. There is some hesitation, however, when the impacts of the nationalisation of houses, buildings and industries on them as Asian African families, as well on East African countries as a whole, are highlighted. Indeed, the bitter stories of expulsion and the loss of property and securities are heartbreaking. Nevertheless, these issues were not a central theme in this book.

There is an interesting paradox in the consciousness of a 'triple heritage'. On the one hand it has a strongly binding character, where people share the same histories, ideas and experiences and go through the same process of migration, settlement and orientation towards their new, sometimes hostile, environment. On the other hand, the history of their expulsion, and therefore being spread all over the world, makes it difficult to reconnect with the people sharing these histories. The paradox is that being scattered across the globe has become a 'bonding' part of that history and identity. Eventually, the 'triple heritage' consisted of a unique combination of experiences, habits and tools that became useful in the globalised world. For instance, knowledge of English and Swahili, as well as Gujarati, made it possible to bridge the gap between the Western world and Africa and India. But the issue is not only the 'language'; it also includes awareness of religious and caste differences and food and clothing habits, as well as respect for the nuances and differences. This heritage has facilitated the global trading activities that I witnessed in the trading office in London in 2009 (see Chapter 1). South Asian Africans have become a globalised community in a globalised world.

## Notes and References

1. In my first year as a history student at Erasmus University in Rotterdam, I was taught using Eric Wolf's *Europe and the People Without History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982). Wolf was an anthropologist who took on the task of writing a global history of the last 500 years. This is still an exceptional piece of work, despite the fact that its Marxist approach is outdated these days.
2. Events also shape people. However, we should never forget that most events are shaped by people.
3. The British were, at times, hated as well. Idi Amin in particular made long speeches against British rule. Nevertheless, in day-to-day affairs, it is fair to state that it was the South Asians rather than the British who were disliked. P. Nazareth, *In a Brown Mantle* (Nairobi: Kenya Literature Bureau, 1972), 45–46.
4. The term 'triple heritage' is taken from Rasna Warah, *Triple Heritage: A Journey to Self-Discovery* (Nairobi: R. Warah, 1998).
5. There are a few important exceptions. The Kenyan National Museums held a successful exhibition on the Asian African Heritage: Identity and History in 2000, which lasted for several years. In fact, this was the first time the term 'Asian African' was used by the Asian African community. The curator of the exhibition was Dr Sultan H. Somjee, who should be credited with coining the term 'Asian African'. See also other professional storytellers like V.S. Naipaul, who wrote his famous *A Bend in the River* in 1979, and M.G. Vassanji, whose *The Gunny Sack* was published in 2009.

# APPENDIX

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## Number of South Asians in East Africa

Year	Kenya	Uganda	Tanzania	Zanzibar
1921	25,253	5,200	10,209	13,772
1931	43,623	14,150	25,144	15,247
1939	46,897	17,300	25,000	15,500
1962	175,000	77,500	92,000	20,000
1969	140,000	75,000	85,000	
1972	105,000	1,000	52,000	
1984	50,000	1,000	30,000	
1995/2000	100,000	12,000	90,000	

*Sources:* Annual Reports of each territory, including census reports of 1921 and 1931. The estimates for 1939 are partly based on the early census of 1948. See also R. Gregory, *South Asians in East Africa: An Economic and Social History, 1890–1980* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1993). Figures for 1995/2000 are based on the Indian High Level Commission's report on the Indian diaspora.





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# ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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**Gijsbert Oonk** is Head of Department of History at the Erasmus School of History, Culture and Communication (ESHCC), Rotterdam, the Netherlands. He is the 'South Asian Area/History' editor of the *Journal of Economic and Social History of the Orient (JESHO)* as well as editor of *Geschiedenis Magazine* (History magazine, published in Dutch). He was also the Alfred D. Chandler Jr International Visiting Fellow in Business History at the Harvard Business School (Boston) for the year 2011–2012.

He specialises in business, migration and economic history. He is particularly interested in the role of South Asian (Indian) migrants and settlers in East Africa. His earlier publications include: *The Karimjee Jivanjee Family: Merchant Princes of East Africa, 1800–2000* (2009) and *Global Indian Diasporas: Exploring Trajectories of Migration and Theory* (edited) (2007).