Zhengmao Sheng

Prof Muller

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Shifts in the Status of Asian Indians in East Africa

A Comparison between the Four Stages: Pre-1905, 1905-1964, Postcolonial and Modern

With a Focus on their Identities and Perception by Others

The Indians, residing on the massive South Asian subcontinent, played an essential role in the imperial system of the British ever since they first came into official contact with the British East India Company in the 17th century. As the control by the Company, and later the Crown, over India gradually extended in duration and space, the peoples of India were absorbed into the global network constructed by British imperialism, a far-reaching system based on commercial interests, military necessity and political sustainability. Among the many instances that illustrate this involvement, a primary focus is given to the Indian soldiers fighting overseas for the British on all fronts in the two World Wars or the indentured workers recruited for the plantations in the Caribbean, yet the less formalized or institutionalized trend of permanent voluntary immigration was not paid their due attention. This paper seeks to examine the Indian population in British East Africa, including the states of Zanzibar, Kenya, Uganda and Tanganyika (for the sake of discussion, Mozambique will also be incorporated in this paper), and the transition of their status from within a colonial setting to a post-colonial, nationalistic arena. In this essay two major themes will dictate the research; one is the notion and experience of the

"Indian Diaspora", which has been subject to many scholarly works, yet is lacking in definition and scope, the other is the inevitable changes in political ideologies, economic policies, cultural identities and intellectual understandings that follow any colonizing, consolidating and decolonizing efforts in Africa and elsewhere. These two forces were interlocked and together contributed to the way in which Indians in East Africa interacted with other ethnic and cultural groups in proximity, which, upon closer investigation, can reveal to us more about the niches of them in that part of the world, as well as the way they perceive themselves, and were perceived by locals and British alike. Therefore, this paper necessarily discredits the "diasporic" notions often forced onto this particular group, and instead proposes that their history is simultaneously one of significant economic ties back to the mother country and one of uncompromisingly differentiating political interests with those on the subcontinent, and that a diaspora that conforms to its theoric definition was merely a relatively new phenomenon among them that only emerged after the 1980s.

"DIASPORA"

Historiography, Definition, Flaws and Methodology

Review of any literature about the East African Indians will inevitably yield results that put the term of "diaspora" at the center. Some of the most comprehensive and renowned works on this issue, including Sana Aiyar's *Indians in Kenya: The Politics of Diaspora*,[1] a frequently referred-to work in this particular discipline, saw the history of Indians in East Africa as a history of diasporic persons and communities, and this presumption was established with such firmness and prevalence that these sources rarely bother to explain the rationale of labelling Indians

[1] Sana Aiyar, *Indians in Kenya: The Politics of Diaspora*, (Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 2015).

abroad so. This development of diasporic rhetorics in itself, originally, served as a mechanism promoting the "transnational history" of the displaced Indians, and as a response and challenge to the earlier historians' claim that they "played only a marginal role in the expanding conflict between the white power elite and dominated African population."[2] Aiyar also stressed diaspora as the only tool for historians to disassemble the "racially bound nationalist narratives of anticolonialism" which, while emphasizing African nation-states, necessarily reduces Asians to "political obscurity"[3]. Other scholarly or popular writings in history or politics as well are likely to portray them as diasporic in their attempts to rationalize their political participation or the lack thereof, and to see this dispersion as one of political strength, which usually is the predominant concern of such pieces.[4] Overall, this pivotal position given to the otherness and deprivation of motherland supposedly suffered by the East African Indians is the predominant interpretation of their experience by historians of Western, African, and Indian backgrounds alike.

However, this theory is not without dissents. A few scholars have pointed out that the concept of an "Indian Diaspora" has always been ambiguous, and tends to be overgeneralizing and overused,[5] and may not be exactly helpful to the understanding of Indian presence in the East African environment. Some historians ventured to question the indiscriminate applicability diaspora assumes and bring up the claim that "a common diasporic identity as Indians became

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[2] Carl G. Rosberg, Jr., and John Nottingham, *The Myth of "Mau Mau": Nationalism in Kenya* (New York: Praeger for the Hoover Institution on War, Revolution and Peace, Stanford University, California, 1966), v.
[3] Sana 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 (2011): 987.
[4] For example, see Amit Kumar Jain, Upendra Nabh Tripathi and Vinita Katiyar, "An Overview on Indian Diaspora in Africa," *Educational Quest: An International Journal of Education and Applied Social Science* 8, no. 1 (2017): 19.
[5] Steven Vertovec, "Three Meanings of 'Diaspora,' Exemplified among South Asian Religions," *Diaspora: a Journal of Transnational Studies* 6, no. 3 (1997): 277.

meaningful only during times of threat and rising South Asian nationalism"[6], yet almost none went further to doubt whether the foundational components that constitute a "diaspora" were met, i.e. if a diaspora ever took place in the colonial and de-colonizing timeframe provided. Even when they did, their claims were founded on the basic presumption that the Indian migrants "cut off [their] relationship" with the "motherland", thus the importance of origin, so fundamental a part of the diasporic design, was actually nonexistent.[7] Indeed this statement contains some truth, but only a partial and incomplete portion of it, while the larger picture is entirely missing.

In order to engage in a discourse on diaspora, therefore, a specific definition of "diaspora" must be laid out, which historians should be able to use for objective analysis and historic application. Some have been ardently opposing the idea of studying diaspora theoretically, insisting on "moving away from the dehistoricized theoretical predilections" and to concentrate on specific case studies,[8] even explicitly rejecting any "coherent and authoritative definitions"[9]. Nonetheless, this paper argues otherwise, and will present some commonalities shared by all widely recognized diasporas. First, even the anti-theorists agreed upon three principles: that a diaspora must deal with "deterritorialized" personnel whose political focus is intensely related to that of their native locality, that it must reveal the seemingly paradoxical co-existence of struggle for universal political rights and that for a distinct localized identity, and that it must expose some complicated interplay of political, economic, social and cultural forces.

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[6] Eric Burton, "The Indian Diaspora, the State and the Nation in Tanzania since ca. 1850," *Wiener Zeitschrift für kritische Afrikastudien* 13, no.25 (2013): 1.
[7] Gijsbert Oonk, "India and the Indian Diaspora in East Africa: Past Experiences and Future Challenges," *Global India Dialogue Series*, ODI Lecture at New Delhi (2015): 1-2.
[8] Aiyar, "Anticolonial Homelands across the Indian Ocean: The Politics of the Indian Diaspora in Kenya, ca. 1930-1950," 988.
[9] Rainer Bauböck and Thomas Faist, eds., *Diaspora and Transnationalism: Concepts, Theories and Methods* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2010): 7.

[10] This complexity was better developed in the theoretical frame raised by Vertovec, who affirmed that any diaspora holds three meanings: a social phenomenon, a conscious awareness, and a means of cultural production.[11] Upon further elaboration, the implications became more clarified and overlapping. To summarize, diaspora must show the geographical dispersion, an alienation from the populations of their host nation, a difficulty in pledging political loyalty to either the mother country or the host territory, the awareness of own distinctive foreignness, a pride in some shared identity, *and* a recognition of their realistic, disadvantaged position, which leads them to be greatly interested in advocating for their rights and well-being as an independent group. He also talked about how South Asians in various parts of the world showcased some of these characteristics.

However, despite the thoroughness of these designations, which this paper happily adopts, its two major flaws are also as pronounced. First, they greatly undermined the effect of assimilation by discrediting the role of their overseas residence entirely, as if those Indians who migrated to East Africa forever retained a significant portion, if not the entirety, of their original mentalities, without engaging in the local societies or taking up new roles and niches. Second, in order to label a group diasporic, historians must be examining an ethnic or cultural group *at one particular place in one particular period of time.* If within this time-space a community meets all the aforesaid criteria, then we can say a diaspora has taken place. Yet, it would be irresponsible if we take separate pieces of a group from around the globe and across a timeline of centuries, put them together and come to this conclusion, because then none of these pieces shows a complete diasporic picture, and if the discussed community was never diasporic at any moment along its

[10] Ibid., 14-16.
[11] Vertovec, "Three Meanings of 'Diaspora,' Exemplified among South Asian Religions," 278-292.

timeline of existence, it certainly cannot be diasporic if viewed as a holistic whole. Nonetheless, this is exactly what many historians are prone to do, to use "Indian Diaspora" arbitrarily as an umbrella term that covers the entirety of Indian-African interactions "since ages"[12], disregarding the multiple phases of their historic development that each exhibited unique sentiments, demands, and identities.

To fill in this gap, this paper will methodologically conduct a comparative study between the following four time periods, or, phases: pre-1905, 1905-1964, 1964-1980s, and post-1980s, and demonstrate, with a primary focus on contemporary documents and sources, that the Indian immigrants, who began as a commerce-oriented non-politicized population, underwent major changes in political and cultural perceptions. They were on one hand compelled to break free from their own communities as East African nation-states gathered force, as a response to the disintegration of a British-sanctioned and guaranteed "middle-class" position and the growth of racially aware and exclusive African nationalism, yet on the other hand these whole-hearted efforts to assimilate and connect appeared largely futile as the end of 20th century approached, along which came the diasporic interpretation of their past.

PHASE ONE

Pre-Colonial to 1905, Political Inactivity and Native Hostilities

During the colonial era, most scholars argued that Asian Indians in these East African states acted as a middle caste between the British colonial officers and the African locals, tending to business and trade.[13] [14] They were racially distinct from the other groups, and largely relied on

[12] Amit Kumar Jain, Upendra Nabh Tripathi and Vinita Katiyar, "An Overview on Indian Diaspora in Africa," 21.
[13] H. S. Morris, "Indians in East Africa: a Study in a Plural Society," *British Journal of Sociology* 7, no. 3 (1956): 194.
[14] Dharam P. Ghai, and Yash P. Ghai, "Asians in East Africa: Problems and Prospects," *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 3, no. 1 (1965): 35.

the arbitration of the British to counter the local hostilities, resulting not only from racial differences, but also from a pronounced socio-economic inequality. Their extensive commercial activities and relative prosperity must have contributed to their seclusion from the rest of society. To some observers, they were seen by Natives, and sometimes even their British superiors and "protectors" in a way not very different from the perceptions of Jewish people by Europeans throughout the Middle Ages, as outsiders whose reckless pursuit for profits brought inequality and an unfairly disadvantaged local population. Some contemporary source materials allowed for a more direct examination of this sentiment. An article in Mozambique's *The Beira Post* in July 1898, citing a report made to the Foreign Office by a Mr. Consul Grenville, commented that "[the Indian Merchant] supplies the natives and many Europeans with almost every article of daily consumption, of extraordinarily poor quality and at astonishingly high prices",[15] hinting at the indispensable roles of Indians as well as their poor reputation.

This specific instance of grievance, seemingly a economic concern over commercial interests, was not a isolated event. The same newspaper, in their April 27th, 1898 issue, had a telegram titled "Won't Have Banyans: Boycotting in Umtali" reprinted in it. This document deals with the local resentment and "general indignation" towards an Indian merchant who was granted a "license to trade". However, disguised by this facade was a blatantly racial discrimination, which, assuming the surface economic stage, was gathering force. The other traders and residents rallied to demand "that the Government be asked to draw a defining line between Europeans and Asiatics and to place the latter on the same footing as natives", and an "Anti-Banyan League" was established soon afterwards. This piece, as a rare testimonial directly

[15] "Chinde Trade," *The Beirat Post,* July 27, 1898, World Newspaper Archive.

exposing the blurred identity lines trespassed by Indians, indicated several significant facts and contradictions regarding their existence.[16]

On one hand, they were, legally, "British subjects", a term used by a Mr. Cloete of local colonial administration to justify this issue of grant[17], yet on the other they possessed a distinctly "Asian" feature that separated them from the ruling race within the hierarchy. Nonetheless, this formally non-elite status, which should have placed them together with the African locals, did not really earn them an opportunity even to acquire "the same footing" as the natives, who saw them as siding with the colonial masters and as "outsiders" as well.

Living in such unfavorable an environment, the Indian immigrants of East Africa had no option but to cling to the British colonial government for support and address of grievances. To them the imperial system was more friendly and guaranteeing than any local organizations, as the former paid its due respect and recognition to their Indian identities, and saw in it not a reason of alienation but one of familiarity. One, if not he single, Indian statesman in East Africa in late 19th century, Alibhai Mulla Jeevanjee, went as far as saying that "I would… advocate for the annexation of this African territory [Kenya] to the Indian Empire, with Provincial Government under the Indian Viceroy."[18] It was indeed a reasonable and wise choice to expect British arbitration, considering the peculiar fashion in which the British authorities defined racial identities. The flexibility of British on race is already well explored by scholars, citing examples such as the enfranchisement of all British adult male subjects residing in England or the respect paid to the powerful Indian princes despite their oriental background and Indian ancestorship.

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[16] "Won't Have Banyans: Boycotting in Umtali," *The Beirat Post,* April 27, 1898, World Newspaper Archive.
[17] Ibid.
[18] A. M. Jeevanjee in Elspeth Huxley, *White man's country. Lord Delamere and the making of Kenya,* vol. 11 (London, 1935): 121.

This emphasis on social and economic might, instead of rigid, uncompromising racial division partially explains the situation of East Africa, but another, more institutional factor was also in effect, and demonstrated the amazing malleability of the relationships between the British and the Indians.

As one of the most established colonies in the Empire, India's specialness in the British eyes cannot be disputed, with its own administrative and judicial structures adopted by other colonies. Multiple sources indicated that the early legal codes of several British East African colonies, such as those of Zanzibar and Uganda, were entirely borrowed from colonial India, whose High Court in Bombay was designated to take appeals from the High Courts in these two colonies.[19] J. E. R. Stephens, Magistrate of the Courts for the Sultan of Zanzibar in 1913, also addressed this fact, that Indian statues ranging from the standardization of criminal procedure to the statutes concerning lunatics were adhered to, in an essay outlining the Zanzibari legal culture. [20] All the evidence presented above portrays British India, and subsequently the residents of it, as more "civilized", "developed" and "Europeanized" than the Natives of Africa, thus entitled to a slightly more privileged position. They were also perceived to be more productive, and this industriousness earned them credit and even some legal recognition based on the British doctrine of property, focusing on the improvement and labor one puts into the natural land and produces. [21] This appreciation was best embodied by the speech of Winston Churchill during his tour of East Africa in 1902, in which he exclaimed that "[The Indian] may point to as many generations of useful industry on the coast and inland as the white settlers… [and he had] established himself

[19] A. N. Allott, "Reviews: Essays---East African Legal History," *Journal of African Law* 18, no. 2 (1974):204.
[20] J. E. R. Stephens, "The Laws of Zanzibar," *Journal of the Society of Comparative Legislation* 13, no. 3 (1913): 603-4.
[21] See John Locke, *Two Treatises of Government* (London, 1823, reprinted by Rod Hay for the McMaster University Archive): 117, http://www.yorku.ca/comninel/courses/3025pdf/Locke.pdf.

under every scrutiny of public faith".[22] By elevating the Indian contribution to the colonies to a level parallel to that of the British, a distinction was obviously made between the South Asians and the "innocent and gullible natives", whose roles in building the economics of East Africa were nearly entirely excluded from the British narratives.

Another interpretation, I must propose, is that this unique niche reserved for the Indians was another incidence showcasing the classic British "divide and rule" scheme, enlisting the loyalty of Asian dependents to suppress the more numerous and less manageable Natives. In Zanzibar Order-in-Council, 1906, the British created, more or less arbitrarily, a category named "British protected person" who would be exempt from any laws signed and enforced on behalf of the local Sultan. Included in this group were all natives "of any place beyond the dominions of the Sultan of Zanzibar". Stephens further narrowed this definition down to subjects or citizens of any state "in amity with" the British Crown.[23] Taken the contemporary Zanzibari demographic composition into consideration, it is more than likely that this Act somewhat intentionally shielded the vital Indian commercial communities from the arbitrary power of the Sultan and his subjects, a group legally separated from the BPPs. However, rationalizing this explanation also means that the British inclination towards the Indians was probably an insincere, political manipulation. This unfortunate assumption was not without warrant. Lord Delamere, a prominent settler in the fertile Kenyan highlands and a spokesperson for the British planter class, held a deep racial prejudice towards the Asian immigrants. His remark that "physically the Indian is not a wholesome influence because of an incurable repugnance to sanitation and

[22] Winston Churchill, *My African Journey* (Toronto: William Briggs, 1909): 50.
[23] *Ibid.,* 606.

hygiene"[24] exposed the opinions of at least some British colonists in East Africa, and signified that direct economic interests may override and undermine the racial amity on the surface.

No doubt both of the aforesaid rationales were present, and that the actual image of Indians in a British mind was sometimes self-contradictory, but it is similarly doubtless that no matter what the reasons might have been, the overall treatment of South Asian settlers was favorable. All these facilitative policies and beliefs must have in part contributed to the peculiar situation, in that the Indians, it seems, were granted a more respectable and recognized stance by emigrating from their motherland. Despite some "glass ceilings" present at the highest echelons of the colonial economic hierarchy, "there was nothing to prevent [the Indian immigrants] from amassing a fortune in the commercial and industrial world and in private professional practice."[25] Some historians also have explicitly commented that the "levels of wealth and affluence" achieved by some members of these communities were "unattainable in their homeland".[26] These clearly reveal a categorization and stratification which the Indians never protested against at the time. Of course, it is not possible to know definitely how the South Asian communities reacted to the situation at hand, but many scholars speculate that they were willing, if not eager, to embrace this social order, which spared them of "the pains of transition and the tensions of racial conflict and competition"[27] and offered benefits to their precious ethnic identities to which they held and identified with great dearness.

Along with this extraterrestrial superiority and their financial success, the Indian groups in East Africa during the early 1800s to late 1900s, being the central figure of this paper, were

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[24] Rasna Warah, *Triple Heritage. A journey to self discovery* (Nairobi, 1998): 22.
[25] Ghai & Ghai, "Asians in East Africa: Problems and Prospects," 36.
[26] Robert G. Gregory, *South Asians in East Africa: An Economic and Social History, 1890-1980* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1993), 351.
[27] Ghai & Ghai, "Asians in East Africa: Problems and Prospects," 36.

also remarkable in how they remained rather unnoticed in the public realm of this region. Compared to their commercial passion, Indian communities were rather reluctant and slow to engage in expressively political or cultural activism. They did not publish in newspapers, never officially gathered in associations, and rarely made their names known to the governmental records of any kind. The lack of Indian voices and agency characterized the entire timeline before the First World War, which, arguably, ignited Indian participation in political campaigns, might be seen as a lack of initiative, as they were not, at that time, particularly invested in East Africa. Sir Bartle Frere, the British Consul of Zanzibar around 1875, once made the statement that the Indians "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".[28] Acting as agents and temporary "emissaries", there is no need for these international merchants to take interest in local politics[29] or to befriend the local population, as long as the governments of these colonial possessions still demand their imports of cotton, which, according to a British pamphlet published in 1877, was of great quantity and importance.[30]

Therefore, it must be recognized, that the first phase of Indian presence in East Africa, up until the early 1900s, did not conform with the traditional "Diaspora" historiography nor its definitions. The Indians, despite their physical residence on foreign soil, were never "removed" or "deterritorialized" as many tend to believe. First, the essentially permanent and involuntary

[28] Gijsbert Oonk, "South Asians in East Africa, 1800-2000: an entrepreneurial minority caught in a 'Catch-22'", *The Low Countries Journal of Social and Economic History* 10 (2013), 59.
[29] R. V. Ramdas, "The Role of Indians in the Freedom Struggle of East Africa," *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress* 32, vol. 2 (1970): 281.
[30] James Stevenson, *The Civilization of Southeastern Africa* (Bristol: Bristol Selected Pamphlets by Univeristy of Bristol Library, 1877): 23.

emigration never took place, and no compelling barrier was presented to prevent their return; on the contrary, as the Oonk testimony demonstrated, their establishment in Africa, or their connections back home was anything but political, and correspondence with the family and companies back in India was frequent and routine, as well as their journey back to the subcontinent. Second, though the South Asians in East Africa faced local alienation, an important feature constituting a diaspora, a collective consciousness of displacement or being disadvantaged, factual or fictional, was lacking. From all sources available, they expressed no noteworthy concern other than trade and profit for the entirety of 19th century, and in fact they saw Africa as a land where they could excel their fellow Indians back at home. Indeed, these new avenues and opportunities of prosperity under the British aegis proved to be so anticipated and successful, that Harry Hamilton Johnston, British commissioner to Uganda, titled East Africa "from every point of view… [to be] the America of the Hindu."[31] Therefore, the Indian experience in East Africa before 1900s was one infused by pursuit of profit, relative superiority and advantages protected by law and practice, and it is unlikely that these benefited individuals would in any way see themselves as a dispersed people, who must struggle for fair treatment and political rights.

PHASE TWO

1905-1964, Active Political Movement Strongly Tied to the Subcontinent

This trend of political and social inactivity was deterred and put to a halt after 1905, not due to some impending external pressure but the result of a transformation of the Indian demographics in East Africa and their prospects. The construction of Uganda railroads required

[31] Robert G. Gregory, *A history of race relations within the British Empire 1890-1939* (London, 1971): 96.

cheap and efficient labor, and the completion of this artery of transportation opened up the interior of this region,[32] both contributing to the consequence that many more Indians traveled to these colonies, either as indentured laborers or entrepreneurial youth. The former were less economically well-off and thus faced more explicit discrimination, while the latter were, before their emigration, aware of the political sentiments on the rise in India, and were determined to continue this campaign elsewhere. The influx of these groups radicalized the Indian populations of East Africa, especially in Kenya, and led to the prelude of a paradoxical phenomenon. Their immediate "diaspora" from the subcontinent allowed them to maintain close ties to the mother country, and thus easily influenced by the ideologies back in India to which they were already exposed, yet at the same time their perspective of a rapidly changing world necessarily drove them to create a social and political space for themselves in a foreign (which soon became native) setting, inevitably distancing them from the old system whence they came. Both ends required politicizing actions.

The former point can be demonstrated most directly by the establishment of East African Indian National Congress in 1914, an event that had a tremendous impact on the political ecology in that part of the world.[33] Apparently modeled after the original INC on the subcontinent, this new organization, formed by politically conscious Indians, adopted a similar platform of anti-imperialism and embraced the ideals of national independence. Unlike in India where the INC, representing an overwhelming majority population, was powerful and cautious enough to press for demands and redress grievances within the imperial system at first, the EA-INC was directly responsible for, and thus supported by, a miniscule portion of the East

[32] Oonk, "South Asians in East Africa, 1800-2000: an entrepreneurial minority caught in a 'Catch-22'," 79.
[33] Ramdas, "The Role of Indians in the Freedom Struggle of East Africa," 281.

African population. This fact provided the Congress no other option but to side with the African natives, an only collective political force comparative to the British in the entire region. By doing so, the Indians in Kenya must break the collaborative relation with the colonial powers altogether and adopt new ideologies. Nonetheless, initially they were reluctant to give up their "Indianness" and hailed their political identity as a distinctively racial one, which, while glueing the previously inactive South Asian community together, maintained a separate stand and sphere from the native Africans despite the possibly genuine wish to repair and elevate their relationships with them.

This political necessity in itself casted a shadow on the experiences of the Indians, even altering the way they perceived their past interactions with other groups. It has been reported that the President of the Kenyan Indian National Congress in 1920 has made the announcement that " We have since the time that we first settled in this country lived at peace with and been friendly to [the Africans]. We have always been in sympathy with and tried to encourage them in their aspiration".[34] By siding with the nationalistic Africans, the Indians in these colonies attracted the attention and sympathies of their like-minded companions back in India, and a global network struggling for Indian interests at home and abroad began to emerge, a process accompanied by a stronger recognition and acceptance of one's "Indian" identity, as part of a transnational community. In early 1920s, the Indian National Congress (of India) published nineteen "Resolutions on East Africa",[35] whose provisions demonstrated how deep connections run across the Indian Ocean. It is not difficult to perceive a certain sense of paternal endorsement in this document, which, by authorizing two representative agents "to attend the forthcoming Indian

[34] Ibid.
[35] S. A. I. Tirmizi, *Indian Sources for African History, Volume II* (New Delhi: Manohar Publications, 1989): 279-287.

Congress in Kenya and study the situation and advise the Indian community there, as to what steps they should take in carrying on their struggle", certainly treated the Indians in East Africa as members within the global *swarajya* movement that required guidance and protection from the umbrella of INC core. This list of decisions called for a large-scale boycotting "the British Imperial Exhibition, the Imperial Conference, the Empire Day celebrations and all other imperial functions" to support the Kenyan Indians, and instituted an all-India boycott on cloves from Zanzibar, where the local government violated "the just rights of the Indians" by establishing a clove monopoly that excluded Indian merchants from its management.

This paternal protection, however, also exposed a great problem in the universal Indian struggle for self-determination and equal rights, in that it reduced the Indian communities abroad to a merely peripheral and subordinate position compared to those in India proper. The first clause of the Resolutions put this belief in a most direct and firm fashion, affirming "the opinion that unless *Swarajya* is won for India, the sufferings and grievances of Indians abroad cannot be properly remedied."[36] Therefore, it would be safe to state that, despite the ideological affinity to the INC on the East African Indians' part, this geographical and, as time went by, cultural gap must obstruct the development of strong, long-lasting or effective unison as their interests differentiated. This prompted the Indians in Kenya, Zanzibar and Uganda to downplay their unique ethnic identity, and, for the first time in their history, to make attempts of being ideologically assimilated into the "African" populations, whose grievances and demands now highly coincided with those of theirs. This transition in Indian self-perception marked their formal participation in the de-colonizing efforts on the African continent. It is speculated that the

[36] *Ibid.,* 279.

reason behind this shifting identity was two-tiered. First, a South Asian persona still had persistent economic and suppressive, instead of political and suppressed, implications to an African, who, standing at the bottommost rung of the colonial social ladder, despised the "masterly" positions of both an Indian and a European. Therefore, only by abandoning Indianness entirely can the new generation sever its ties to the imagined past of Indian oppression of the locals, and begin to assume new influence among the local communities. The second layer of explanation was more realistic, that the economic favoritism of the Indians was in decline, as the racial categorization and discrimination of the British had grown more rigid and explicit. One instance was particularly worrisome and antagonizing to them, which was the exclusion of Indians from the most fertile agricultural plantations on the "central highlands" of Kenya.[37] As the business of coffee and tea cultivation became more lucrative and the number of South Asians in the colony grew, the discontent brewed. This conflict would soon force many Indians to join the African cause, which was primarily to drive out the imperialist system of the British.

This process started in Kenya, with some of the most reputed and influential Indian leaders heralding this campaign. Isher Das (or Dass), a prominent Indian lawyer in Nairobi who was a close associate of Jomo Kenyatta, argued to a Legislative Council in August, 1938 that "African paramountcy was not being implemented" in the recent colonial statues and policies.[38] This shift in attitude occurred within less than a decade, and was welcomed by local politicians, one of whom admitted that "the Indian members are more helpful to the African Community than the Europeans because they think of what the African Community desire".[39] Nonetheless, in

[37] Oonk, "South Asians in East Africa, 1800-2000: an entrepreneurial minority caught in a 'Catch-22'," 79.
[38] Ramdas, "The Role of Indians in the Freedom Struggle of East Africa," 282.
[39] Ibid., 283.

the very same speech we also heard him say how him siding with the "helpful" Indian community was "forced by circumstances and cannot help it", suggesting an unwillingness, or at least an inertia, in accepting them into the nationalist cause.

This notion persisted through the entire first half of 20th century, trapping the East African Indians in a strange dilemma. The urge to fight alongside the African locals who also suffered at the hand of the colonists was strong and endorsed by many, but the "Indian identity" occasionally expressed by their speeches tend to be ignored. To put it simply, it is the African cause, not the African identity, which the South Asian communities took up, and it is the same which the African populations would have willingly offered and the same they would have rejected --- the gap and schism between the two races were still largely left open. The word "Indian" remained a primary term addressing themselves, and they would aid, help and promote the Africans, but the line between was not erased.

Overall evaluation must yield the conclusion that the existence of a collective diasporic experience was not seen in this period also. Even though at this stage Indians were found in larger numbers, and with more permanent interests in these colonies, their mentor and backbone was not only modeled after the distinctively Indian INC, but sometimes this very organization itself. The close economic and trading ties with the mother nation persisted in another more political form, but the connection was as strong as it had ever been. On the other hand, this technical adoption of the Indian organizational methods was put to use in an African context for an African end, and these two threads intertwined effectively to characterize the South Asians in East Africa in the first half of 20th century in a way that was complicated and seemingly unconventional, but was not in the least confusing to themselves.

This rising political participation of Indians in East Africa, while giving them the rare opportunity to engage in the decision-making process of the colonial politics and to have their voices heard by the Imperial authorities, had its own downside. It is arguable that, by addressing their problems and demands, the Indians had entered a more visible role of subjecthood and servitude intellectually and consciously. Before 1900s, they, being a force with commercial semi-monopoly and economic dominance, largely remained a group insulated from the daily interactions between the European superiors and their African subordinates, and therefore uninvolved in the structure of political hierarchy or the language of inferiority. Yet, by taking up the cause of African decolonization and an African identity, they voluntarily put on the clothes of a colonized people, and gave up the advantageous position they previously possessed. This shift, unfavorable as it seems, implied the development of these Indian communities into more sophisticated and politically mature constituencies whose objectives superseded the immediate gains of losses, a theme that led the discussion into its third phase.

PHASE THREE

Postcolonial to 1980s, Assimilation and Abandonment of Indianness

The second phases came to a close around late 1950s and early 1960s, when the decolonization was in full fling. An interesting transformation occurred at this moment, that the South Asians in East Africa no longer saw themselves as “Indians abroad”, but more as “Africans of Indian descent”, or at least made the pretence to appear so. Though this identity, completely self-made, was not always seen as legitimate by their African companions, the mere existence of this belief has put Indians and Africans not only on the “same side”, but also under a shared “common role”, in which no ground was given to their Indianness. During this exciting

period several Indian persons rose to leading positions within the East African nationalist movement. Many of them belonged to the peculiar group of Goan-Kenyans, whose ancestors migrated from the coastal, Catholic city of Goa on the Western shore of India. Among these many personas was Pio Gama Pinto, one of the national heroes and martyrs of Kenya, who took up the African cause with great endurance. Being a representative voice of the local Indian communities, his wife Emma recollected in an interview, Pinto firmly held the belief that "Africans should have the loudest say in the running of their country".[40] In 1963, Pinto made the announcement that the goal of their struggle was to create "a democratic, African, socialist state",[41] in which the prospects of Asians would be integrated into, and shared by, the African majorities, and all racial lines erased.

Interestingly, information during this stage about the Indian politicians was as lacking in quantity and quality as that about the East African Indian National Congress, and most of the available sources are of an Indian, rather than an African, authorship. This could be attributed to the predominance of African nationalism and racism, which is to be the topic of the following section, but more likely this revealed the nature of this phase to be brilliant but short and unsustainable. During this period the collective nature of the Indian communities was temporarily suspended, and the proliferation of political participation, as exemplified by the EAINC, was replaced by the individual fights of several elites, whose authority and actual influence were limited due to the failure of Indians to unite as a distinct ethnicity under a same cause, which was a consequence exactly of the assimilating efforts these politicians called for. Despite this failure to exert concrete power, the Indians did enjoy two decades of friendship and

[40] Selma Carvalho, "Mrs Emma Gama Pinto," *The Goan Voice,* http://www.goanvoice.org.uk/supplement/EmmaGamaPinto.html.
[41] Durrani Shiraz, *Pio Gama Pinto: Kenya's Unsung Martyr* (Nairobi: Vita Books, 2018): 35.

alliance with the African majority, and were recognized (vaguely) as the enlightened class which "advocated grievances… and pleaded justice" for the Africans by contemporary reviews[42] and modern historians alike.

This era was the least "diasporic" one for the local Indians. Though the familiar imperial structure was brought down, they were welcomed into new, independent nation-states to whose creation they also contributed. A certain sense of pride and belonging could still be detected even in writings decades later looking back to these days. As they were granted the Kenyan, Ugandan or Tanzanian citizenship, legally and psychologically they became naturalized, and a diaspora cannot exist if there is no distinction between the "home" and the "host".

PHASE FOUR

The Modern Era after 1980, The Beginning of an Authentic Diaspora

This short period of racial amity soon ended, however, and with it died the half-century long history of African Indians trying to deny their collective past. After 1960s, the political climate in East Africa gradually deteriorated, and a narrow definition of "Africanness" prevailed. A contemporary scholarly piece in 1965 indicated that at that time "race is too fundamental a factor", and that the Asians "think that they have no future in East Africa".[43] The radicalization of Kenyan government, as a disproportionate favoritism leaning towards the Natives has decimated the early Indian economic well-being in that country, increasingly marginalizing them to only small-scale trading and running family shops. After 1970, even obtaining local citizenship and passports failed to shield Asians from violation to their civil and property rights[44]

[42] See Ramdas, "The Roles of Indians in the Freedom Struggle of East Africa," 281.
[43] Ghai & Ghai, "Asians in East Africa: Problems and Prospects," 50.
[44] Gijsbert Oonk, "Gujarati Asians in East Africa, 1800-2000: Colonization, de-colonization and complex citizenship issues," *Diaspora Studies* 8, no. 1 (2015): 72.

, and nationalized, African-managed corporations threatened the less industrialized and capitalized Asian enterprises. The unstable political situations, combined with occasional and successive tyrannies and coup d'etats, produced some traumatic events. For example, the arbitrary President Idi Amin of Uganda once delivered a speech titled "Asian Farewell", ordering all Asians, citizens or not, to leave his dominions in 90 days, virtually destroying any civil rights and economic prospects of them.[45] Similar but less violent measures were seen in Tanzania under the disguise of legal statutes such as the infamous Acquisition of Buildings Act of 1971, which nationalized all property[46], including the most wealthy South Asian shopkeepers and industrialists. As soon as some political order and democracy were restored in the 1980s, this loss of hope pushed them to resort to affirmative action, once again embracing their Indian ancestry, and here began the more recent emphasis on the culture, trauma and pains of the Indian Diaspora. Being othered, the Asian Kenyans in 2017 petitioned to be incorporated into a separate "tribe", a designation which, similar to those in India, was a caste-like system used to categorize the different cultural, linguistic and ethnic populations in the state.[47] Most Indian Kenyans welcomed it as a recognition of their status of "first-class citizen[s]", which was based on the official endorsement of their separate but equal footing.[48]

Indians in East Africa today, despite the rapid development of technologies in communication and transportation, were never further away or more isolated from the Indian subcontinent. Their pre-1900s pioneers held constant and massive monetary and trading contacts

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[45] "1972: Asians given 90 days to leave Uganda," *BBC News,* August 7, 1972, http://news.bbc.co.uk/onthisday/hi/dates/stories/august/7/newsid_2492000/2492333.stm.
[46] *Kenya National Assembly Official Record, Vol. XXV* (Kenya National Assembly Library, 1971): 1430.
[47] Kimiko de Freytas-Tamura, "Asian Kenyans Seek to Be Declared a 'Tribe' of Their Own," *The New York Times,* May 25, 2017, https://www.nytimes.com/2017/05/25/world/africa/kenya-ethnic-groups-asians.html.
[48] Zain Verjee, "Kenya's 44th tribe: Why I'm finally a first-class citizen of my country," *CNN Kenya Decides,* August 7, 2017, https://www.cnn.com/2017/08/04/africa/kenya-asian-community/index.html.

with the mighty business houses in Goa, Bombay and Madras, and their forefathers in the first half of the last century enjoyed the political alliance throughout the British imperial reach and beyond, ranging from Calcutta to Minnesota. The 1960s witnessed some of the most respected Indian leaders in Kenya and Uganda, yet today most such connections locally or internationally are nonexistent, and they must retreat back to their original identities, and endorse their distinct cultural and religious symbols to remain visible in the predominantly African society of contemporary East Africa.

CONCLUSION

Therefore, only in the modern era after 1980, I argue, was there a legitimate "Indian Diaspora" in East Africa, because of the following reasons. First, a geographical dispersion has taken place, and these families no longer possessed the tremendous economic or political success that allowed them to establish enduring ties with the Indian subcontinent. Second, there was a struggle between the strong African nationalistic sentiments and the equally persistent Indian identities. The writer who enthusiastically "support[s] the Kenyan cricket team" and "vote[s] in every election" at the same time harkens back to the past when her great great-grandfather was an influential figure in the local Hindu community.[49] They must be both an African and an Indian, and this confusion of identity clearly indicates a diasporic mentality. Furthermore, with the combination of identities come not privileges but disadvantages and burdens, which not only include being a minority in a modern state, but also hint at a troubled past, which exerted a powerful impact on the imagination as the reality does.

[49] Ibid.

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