

*"...what tribe should we call him?"*

## **The Indian Diaspora, the State and the Nation in Tanzania since ca. 1850**

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### **Abstract**

Based on a historical survey, this essay sketches the relationship between successive states in Tanzania and their subjects of Indian origin. Issues of class differences have frequently been racialised, presenting the concentration of profits in the hands of certain groups as a matter of origin and culture rather than a peculiar economy. As Indians took a special position as a so-called middleman minority until independence, discussions frequently highlighted this particular group and constructed it in a particular way. In line with different interests of the colonial state(s) and the post-colonial state, representations of Indians were formulated in narrow terms while also being influenced by popular discourses and pressure groups. On the other hand, Indians in Tanzania have always been a highly diverse group that could hardly be called a community, especially with many axes of difference being remarkably enduring. A common diasporic identity as Indians became meaningful only during times of threat and rising South Asian nationalism.

## Introduction

In a poem submitted in 1946 by C.M. Binti Hassani to the government-owned newspaper *Mambo Leo* of British-Tanganyika, the author reveals the ambivalence of the categorisation of East African Indians: “If he arrives in Africa, we say he is Indian, / If he goes to India, he is reviled as an African” (cited in Brennan 2006: 133). The excerpt reveals uncertainty about how to call a person who is usually referred to as “Indian” in most parts of Africa. Yet, as the poet rightly observes, the Indian who has lived in Africa for a long time, or was even born in Africa, will not be considered Indian in India. There, in India, he “is reviled as an African”. The poem reflects a feeling of discomfort because everybody, one may read between the lines, should be assigned to a certain group. Hence, the poet ponders: Which term would even be appropriate to denote such a person, “what tribe should we call him?” (ibid.)

The question itself is far from being innocent. This lust for categorisation and pigeon-holing has not only been pursued by poets, but also by the state and various opinion leaders throughout the last two centuries of Tanzanian history. Beginning during the Busaidi Sultanate of Zanzibar in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, growing numbers of Indians settled in Zanzibar and in towns along the East African coast while also enjoying additional protection of the British Crown. Further waves of immigration and advancements into the interior during the German colonial period stabilised the position of Indians as a middleman minority, a term which I will explain below. The relation of successive states and governments to their subjects with Indian origin would be determined by differing mixtures of racist contempt, legal discrimination and economically favourable policies – encompassing also the British colonial period. Only after independence did Tanganyika, and shortly thereafter Zanzibar, officially become a non-discriminatory state in which the social construction of race was deemed not to play any role. However, at the same time, pressure groups and politicians would exploit social tensions and blamed particular groups – especially Indians, though often in a deliberately vague and metaphorical language. In this politically charged context, it is not only necessary to deal with the shift in the relations between Indians and the state or influential groups but also to analyse political activities of Indian communities themselves and the

differences among these groups. The complex group relations were forged dialectically within the territory, but also through networks extending far beyond Tanzania and even East Africa.

*Terminology: Diaspora and Indian*

The term *diaspora* has been subject to much theoretical debate in the last two decades, a debate to which I do not want to contribute here. My working definition of the central term diaspora is adapted from Oliver Bakewell (2008: 5) who understands diaspora as a group of people which has moved from an original homeland to other countries and retains, or develops, both a common vision of the homeland and a strong ethnic group consciousness which is complemented by border-crossing social activities. A diaspora is not uniform or clear-cut group identity. As is obvious in the case of the Indian diaspora, language, religious and caste<sup>1</sup> differences may be more important. These other differences – further including gender, class, ethnicity and age – structure relations within the diaspora and relations with other groups in the respective host society. Members of a diaspora may play out their diasporic identity at one time and emphasize other aspects at other times. As I will argue, a diasporic (i.e., pan-communal) Indian identity did not emerge until German colonial policies exerted considerable definition power over the population and provoked individuals to identify themselves as Indians.

Despite justified reservations (cf. Voigt-Graf 1998: 1), I will keep with the term *Indian* for it has been the one predominantly used by state officials<sup>2</sup> and in popular discourses during most of the time under review in this paper. The artificial term *South Asian*, which is brought forward as an alternative in recent literature, lacks “any and all emotive or intellectual force that is sometimes contextually conveyed – with both joy and

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<sup>1</sup>The term caste here relates to the more specific concept of *jati* (endogamous birth groups) rather than the much more general concept of *varna*, the theoretical system ranking four major groups as described in the Veda (Lochtefeld 2002: 740).

<sup>2</sup>Depending on the period, “Indians” (English), “Inder” (German) or “Wahindi” (Swahili). The postcolonial state has abstained from asking for ethnic or “racial” origin since the 1967 national census, in which question concerning these categories were included for the last time (Voigt-Graf 1998: 4-5).

discomfort – by the term 'Indian' and its Swahili equivalent, *Mhindi*" (Brennan 2012: 20).

*Research on the Indian diaspora in East Africa*

The Indian diaspora in East and Southern Africa has received exceptional attention in two distinct periods. The first wave of increased scholarly interest occurred in the 1960s and 1970s with political scientists being interested in the new status of Indians after East African states had acquired independence, economists asking for the role Indians had played and would play in their economies and anthropologists keen to explore the cultural persistence of the Indian diaspora (Voigt-Graf 1998: 4; Oonk 2007a: 15). Dramatic political events such as the expulsion of Indians from Uganda in 1972 contributed to much of the interest. The second wave of scholarly interest has been much less caused by specific political events on a nation-state basis. Since the 1990s, the social sciences have been grappling to come to terms with a new reality characterised by globalisation, transnational networks, migration, and hybrid cultures (cf. Manger/Assal 2006: 7; Oonk 2007a: 16). More recent studies of the Indian diaspora in East Africa have emphasized trans-local and trans-national cultural practices, focussing for instance on Bollywood movies or newspaper audiences (Bertz 2011, Hofmeyr et al. 2011), but also the impact of the Indian diaspora (and Indian nationalism) on nationalism in East Africa (Aiyar 2011a,b; Brennan 2006; Brennan 2011).

Much against the negative image that has been so characteristic of displays of Indians since the beginning of European colonialism in East Africa, these accounts emphasise aspects of Indians' activities that have been neglected – most of which are also more “agreeable” from the perspective of a politically informed reading. As Manger and Assal (2006: 17) critically remark of a certain perspective in diaspora studies, “the diasporan subject has replaced the anti-hegemonic heroism of earlier working class and subaltern subjects” so that diasporan populations “are now seen as liberating agents”. James Brennan (2012: 7; cf. Dickenson 2012), cautions that celebrations of Indian anti-colonialism in the Indian Ocean silently pass over the role that Indians have (also) played in sub-imperialism. To avoid any misunderstandings, I am far from charging any of the works quoted above with turning the Indian diaspora into a liberation movement. Still it

seems necessary to not let the pendulum swing too far in the other direction and take care that neglected aspects of the Indian diaspora's political role do not become overemphasised.

*Relations between state and diaspora in the special case of a middleman minority*

For South Africa, it has been stated that “[th]e 'Indian community' [...] can be viewed 'as the product of state definition as well as the manner of accommodations and resistance to the state and its agenda'” (Singh/Vawda, 1988: 3, cited in Maharaj 2009: 69). This statement indicates that the political interrelations between the state and a certain population group are crucial for the very existence of a diasporic community. Moreover, the scare quotes – 'Indian community' instead of Indian community – draw attention to the fact that the community does not exist as a natural unit but is a result of historical contingencies.

This paper is based on the assumption that a community – of which a diaspora is a certain type as defined above – comes about through historically specific circumstances and needs to be continually re-constructed as an existing group. On the one hand, the state is seen as a powerful actor in this never-ending process of construction. The state creates, shapes or simply selects “ideas about who its subjects are” (Brennan 2012: 16) and imparts or reinforces a material reality to these ideas through policies and resource allocation. The categorisation of a group or person as being Indian, native, or Tanzanian is seen as a performative act connected to political and economic interests of the state, the state's representatives and pressure groups. On the other hand, persons which are subsumed under a category (Indians) as well as those excluded from it (Africans, Arabs, Europeans) are unequivocally affected by these categorisations which in the Tanzanian history of the last one and a half centuries have had substantial repercussions in the legal framework, allotment of political rights and access to economic resources.

Although powerful, these “sorting codes” (Ann Laura Stoler cited in Brennan 2012: 12) and taxonomies had to be negotiated in daily struggles, in which their imagined character became obvious at times. In Zanzibar between 1924 and 1931, when people could avoid forced labour and get access to rice and cloth if they successfully claimed to be “Arab” or

“Shirazi,” the British colonial authorities registered a startling numerical rise of Arab and Shirazi against a decrease of the number of Swahili (Brennan 2012: 12). A focus on the state must also not overemphasise its influence on processes of identity construction which spring from many different sources (cf. Glassman 2011).

Despite these restrictions of the state's definition power, official efforts to categorise, sort and rank have particular effects on middleman<sup>3</sup> minorities like Indians in East Africa, who have been described as a typical middleman minority (Bonacich 1973). Other cases include the European Jewry, the Lebanese in West African countries or the Chinese in Southeast Asia. These groups have typically been endogamous and introduced new goods into pre-industrial societies marked by reciprocity. The reciprocal obligations common among members of the majority did not apply to the middleman minority due to their outsider status – which allowed for economic profit concentrating among members of the middleman minority (Voigt-Graf 1998: 15-26). In Tanzania, this degree of accumulation was unprecedented in many local societies and continued to be a rare exception due to colonial colour bars. As Brennan (2012: 8) illustrated, “[f]or Africans, Indians were the shopkeepers on the other side of the counter who bought low and sold high, extracting African wealth between the margins”. The scapegoat role of middleman minorities is a frequent result of their economic success combined with sociocultural particularities (e.g., endogamy). In their vulnerable position as a familiar yet resented minority, they depend upon the support of the political elite (Brennan 2012: 8; Voigt-Graf 1998: 15-26).

Being in an economically and culturally distinguished position in relation to other groups, racial explanations often serve to politicise and channel potential of social conflict in the direction of the middleman minority (cf. Hund 2007: 123). For reasons of being (1) vulnerable, (2) in a scapegoat role and (3) in need of elite protection, middleman minorities can be expected to be politically extremely cautious.

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<sup>3</sup> Some authors (e.g. Onk 2006) use the term in the plural form, „middlemen minority“, misquoting the influential 1973 article by Edna Bonacich.

### **The Busaidi Sultanate of Zanzibar (ca. 1850 – 1888): Attracting Indian Traders**

The Swahili scholar John Middleton unmistakably holds that “Indians have settled in and traded with the Swahili towns for many centuries”, with “some Muslim Indian groups such as the Bohra hav[ing] been an integral part of the larger towns of many centuries” (Middleton 1992: 13). Permanent settlement of a greater scale definitely came about with the efforts of Omani rulers to attract Indians to Zanzibar and the Swahili coast as financiers, traders and planters.

#### *Migration, settlement and the economic role of Indians*

When *Seyyid* Said moved his court from Oman to Zanzibar in 1841, he brought Indian Hindus from the Persian Gulf with him. Their task was to run *Seyyid* Said's financial and commercial affairs. Indians enjoyed tax incentives, were granted unrestricted land ownership and guaranteed religious freedom. Said's policy was effective and resulted in back-and-forth migration of several hundred Hindus of the Bhatia caste and more permanent migration of Shia Muslim traders to Zanzibar. Within the commercial empire of Zanzibar, they acted not only as merchants but also as moneylenders and customs collectors along the coast. Most of the Indian traders and moneylenders operated in interregional networks and had relations to capitalist trading ventures in Bombay. Swahili dictionaries published in Bombay in 1841/44 and Lucknow (in today's Pakistan) in 1880 give a hint at how sophisticated these far-reaching trade networks have been (Noronha 2009: 22). By the 1880s, Indians had established and secured total control of a bank-like financial system providing substantial loans.

The position of Indians as a middleman minority thus dates back to the period before European colonialism. Although Europeans (British, French, Germans) as well as US-Americans exchanged significant amounts of goods with Zanzibar and competed for influence on the *Seyyids* political decisions, they were prohibited from trading on the East African coast. Here, Indians had a virtual monopoly of trade and were encouraged to settle in the coastal towns where the *Seyyid* had some influence. Through a system of customs duties and taxes and a trade monopoly along the East African coast, both the middlemen (mostly Indians) as well as the successive Sultans of

Zanzibar could realize substantial profits. (Becher 1997: 28; Iliffe 1979: 43; Pesek 2005: 48-50)

Besides the already mentioned incentives, Indians also enjoyed specific protection by the Sultan – most visibly in the enforcement of debt repayments. This preferential treatment of Indians was related to the Sultan's own financial interest as well as to their status as citizens of the British Empire, and the British influence on the court of Zanzibar (Glassman 1995: 32, 52; Glassman 2004: 735). Traders owing money to influential Indians were persecuted by the Sultan's agents (sometimes even far from the coast into the interior) and forced to repay their debts. Itinerant merchants thus had to be sure to make sufficient profits lest they suffered prosecution. The caravan trader Sleman bin Mwenyi Tshande (1901: 42) described how transactions in the interior were to be carried on at least until the Indian creditor could be repaid.

#### *Community lives and differences within*

Since the different communities engaged in different trades, there was little rivalry between them (Amiji 1975: 36-38). Members of Muslim Shia factions (Ismaili Khojas, Bohoras) were overwhelmingly merchants, while Muslim Sunni factions as well as Hindus organised in endogamous caste groups (*jati*) were active as shopkeepers and artisans of different professions (Brennan 2012: 49-51; cf. von der Decken 1978: 11-12). Like other Muslims and Hindus from British India, they enjoyed additional protection under the umbrella of the British Consulate which had been established in Zanzibar in 1841. Should the Arab state elite turn against the Indians, the British could be expected to interfere resolutely. Once, the British consul intervened against the powerful customs officer Jairam Sewji, the latter in the Omanis' service for almost seventy years. Being Indian himself, Sewji wanted tighter control of the commercial operations and tried to compel other Indians to repudiate their status as British subjects – which most refused (Coupland 1938: 485). Thus, most Indians in Zanzibar and along the coast actively welcomed their status as British citizens because of the Crown's protection they enjoyed in their vulnerable situation. By 1861, there were five to six thousand Indians in Zanzibar Town alone (Amiji 1975: 36).



Contrary to Arabs, whose shared history with the East African coast had for centuries entailed settlement, intermarriage and comprehensive sociocultural transmissions, Indians (and here mostly Hindus) seem to have stood more apart from the local population, but children of intermarriages seem to have been easily accepted into the urban Swahili society (cf. Coupland 1938: 28). Accounts of European and American travellers from the mid-nineteenth century speak of general despise on parts of “Arabs” towards Indians, the latter having to suffer insults and indignity. The quintessential Indian was – according to a French captain who claimed to represent an “Arab” perspective – “a parasite who always takes and never gives” (Guillain cited in Coupland 1938: 303). A German traveller to Zanzibar reported separated “Indian Quarters” and a “Hindu Street” and likened them to Jewish quarters he knew from Europe (von der Decken 1978: 11-12).

### **Indians in German East Africa (1888 – 1918): The indispensable “yellow peril”**

The German conquest of the coast was a violent and long-lasting process. The argument which had been brought forward most often for the military intervention of the German state was the necessity to fight the East African slave trade. In fact, while slave-raiding and commercial slave trade could be suppressed after some years, German authorities did not legally abolish slavery lest to undermine the authority of the cooperating slave-owning elites (Deutsch 2006: 244). Nevertheless, and quite against the intentions of the administration, the bargaining power of slaves and opportunities to free themselves increased through colonial policies. This had a substantial impact on the Arab planter class, whose sugar plantations were made profitable only through the cheap labour of slaves. Being heavily indebted to Indian financiers, much land passed through mortgage from Arabs to Indians (Ilfie 1979: 132). Thus, Indian creditors were able to acquire more land.

#### *The consolidation as a middleman minority*

Indians also strengthened their important middle position in trading and crafts sectors in the colony (Becher 1997: 130; Iliffe 1969: 93-94). State activities were favourable for Indian traders to expand their business networks and opportunities for economic profit. The railway construction

opened the way for traders to new markets in the inland. Wherever the railway went and German administrative centres sprung up, mostly along the new railway, Indian traders followed with their small retail shops. Thousands of African traders were sub-contracted, yet without chances to accumulate larger capital (Koponen 1994: 575-576). The owners of the small shops, or *dukawallahs*, and their sub-contractors were of primary importance for opening up the markets in the interior (Grube 2008: 62).

In contrast to (numerically much more significant) migrations to British colonies, where many Indians went in the framework of a servitude-system of contracted labour, Indian immigration to German East Africa can be characterised as basically free, voluntary and economically motivated. In 1901, colonial sources registered 3,420 Indians (plus 149 Goans, who – being Catholics and Portuguese subjects – had a special status). In 1913, some 8,784 Asians (plus 656 Goans) were counted in the territory, ca. three-fourths of whom were traders (both self-employed and agents for larger German or Asian companies) and the remainder artisans. What these numbers hide is, first, the circular character of the migration process and, second, that an unknown number of immigrants failed and went back to India as penniless as they came (Oonk 2006: 8-13; Iliffe 1979: 139).

#### *The double-construction of Indians as “natives” and “yellow peril”*

The official and popular attitudes towards Indians were ambivalent and dynamic. Initially, German authorities wanted to attract Indian workers to their colonies and even applied to the Government of British India to permit emigration of Indians to German East Africa (Voigt-Graf 1998: 36). Indians were indispensable to equip German expeditions and acted as agents for German trading firms and missionaries (Amiji 1975: 39).

Rechenberg, the liberal-minded Governor of German East Africa from 1906 to 1911, was openly in favour of Indian immigration while discouraging large-scale immigration from Germany. His economic policy was directed towards a free play of market forces, including “colour blindness” (Koponen 1994: 277). German settlers, one of the most influential pressure groups in the protectorate and with excellent contacts to right-wing parties in the metropole, openly expressed their disregard for Indians. They feared competition and were anxious to undermine the Indians' unchallenged

position as traders in the colony. The *Deutsch-Ostafrikanische Zeitung* (German East African Newspaper), primarily bent on promoting settler interests, proposed a whole catalogue of discriminative policies to diminish the influence of Indians and restrict further immigration. Contributors to the right-wing paper lamented the low prices of Indian traders with which no European could compete and brought forward arguments typically levied against middleman minorities. The construction of an “Indian threat” (*Indergefahr*) or “yellow peril” primarily relied upon the juxtaposition of Indian and European business interests (DOAZ 1905), though the arguments presented often also depicted an Indian exploitation of Africans (Förster 1909)<sup>4</sup>.

Nationalist rhetoric and motives were closely intertwined with the economic discourse. The economic practices of Indians, as well as Indians themselves, were considered “to a certain extent a national danger” (Lindequist to Government, 1911, cited in Iliffe 1969: 94). The argument of a national threat was further supported through the status of Indians as British citizens, which was a reason for constant suspicion. A negative influence of Indians on the African population was also feared. An Indian with the name Kamrudin was expelled from the colony for a reason as negligible as “repeated contemptuous utterances before natives against German justice in the Protectorate” (TNA 1912: 4).

Finally, the liberal wing had to give in to the settlers' pressures. When the more conservative Heinrich Schnee replaced Rechenberg as governor of the colony in 1912, Indian immigration was restricted (although this discrimination against British subjects contradicted the Congo Act).

#### *Legal situation and political activities of Indians*

A constant feature of German colonial policies was the segregated pattern of urban planning and construction, which reflected the socioeconomic hierarchies. Dar es Salaam and Tanga were clearly divided into African

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<sup>4</sup> Of African perspectives on Indians in this period we know very little due to the scarcity of sources which can reveal internal views. Poems composed by coastal scholars and travel reports written by Swahili traders (Velten 1901, Mieke et al. 2002) occasionally mention Indians. In these occasional remarks, they figure as well-off, owning property, lending money. They were probably seen as a social group very different from Arabs, Africans and Europeans (cf. Glassman 1995: 48).

quarters, Indian quarters and European quarters, including the obligatory “cordon sanitaire” (Becher 1997: 171-172; Pesek 2005: 20). Segregationist tendencies in housing policies reinforced existing patterns of secluded living, or created new seclusion (Brennan/Burton 2007). This policy, artificially creating separated quarters, also gave more credibility to an objective reality of “racial” differences and was seamlessly taken over by the British.

The disciplinary order of German colonialism was based on the assumption of European superiority paralleled by the inferiority of all other “races”. In legal terms, there was no differentiation between Indians, Arabs, and Africans; all were “natives”, barred from observing civil law reserved for Europeans (Iliffe 1979: 140). In practice, due to their status as British subjects (which made them even more suspicious to Germans), Indians often still enjoyed a preferential treatment in comparison to Arabs and Africans. Those Indian merchants who were better off were able to afford qualified lawyers who gave German officials, almost none of whom had a background in legal affairs, a hard time to conduct judicial proceedings in their usual patriarchal style (Pesek 2005: 283).

A group of Indian businessmen in Kilwa confronted German sovereignty in a much more direct way in 1895. They were alleged to have supported a rebel movement led by Hassan bin Omari and found guilty. The whole community of Kilwa had to pay a hefty fine, but three individual Indians received a much more severe sentence – they were expelled from Kilwa. Their shame and the exceptionality of their punishment are reflected in a contemporary poem which describes how the Indians “disembarked like slaves” with chains cutting their bodies (Muallimu Mzee bin Ali bin Kidogo 2002: 287).

Being judged in the same way like Africans “greatly offended Asians among whom colour racialism was deeply engrained” (Iliffe 1979: 140). Resentment, especially concerning their legal status, eventually led a small group of Indians to establish political organisations. Three separate activities are recorded in which Indians demanded a separate legal status. In 1906, the Indian community complained to Governor Rechenberg. One year later, a deputation demanded concessions. In 1914, residents from Tanga prepared a long memorandum, which was ignored. The

memorandum was probably linked to the establishment of the first non-religious organisation of Indians in mainland Tanzania, the *Tanga Indian Association*. It had sixteen members and was, despite its objective of fighting for a better legal status, explicitly apolitical (Ilfie 1969: 94). Typically for a middleman minority, “protests were cautious, for Asians were vulnerable and politically impotent” (Ilfie 1979: 140). The change to British rule meant the end of both cautiousness in political activities and the despised legal categorisation as natives.

### **Indians in British-Tanganyika (1918 – 1961): Sub-imperialism and anti-colonialism**

During World War I, Indian residents in Tanzania suffered from the collapse of commerce but quickly recovered thereafter. German East Africa passed into the hands of the British as a mandate territory<sup>5</sup> of the League of Nations (later United Nations), meaning that it was supposed to be administered to the benefit of the “native” population (and not to the benefit of the metropole or immigrants, be they European or Asian). In reality, while British colonial officials purportedly did their best to protect the African population from the encroachment of “non-natives”, the colonial state provided the means for certain groups of Indians to improve their political and socioeconomic situation in the territory.

#### *Plans to make Tanganyika a sub-colony of India*

The British had used Indian troops during their East African campaign which stimulated ideas to make the newly conquered territory a sub-colony of India (itself still a colony at this time). Leaders of the *Indian National Congress* discussed the proposal which had originally been brought forward by Britain's Secretary of State for India. Prominent political figures, among them the leader of the Muslim Ismaili Khoja community, the Aga Khan, demanded that German East Africa become a sub-colony of India in return for India's wartime support (Brennan 2012: 51). Indians in Kenya and Zanzibar rallied for the proposal, while Indians in the former German colony also received the idea favourably and planned a territorial rally as well (Brennan 2012: 51). However, when African civil servants heard that

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<sup>5</sup> I will, however, continue using the term “colony” in order to avoid the weaker connotation of “mandate territory” in a context of persisting *de facto* colonialism.

some Indians would conduct a meeting to discuss their rule of an African territory, they quickly assembled and proclaimed, utilising the paternalistic language of colonial discourses: "We East Africans need the control and care of Europeans for the development of ourselves, our country, and our children." (cited in Iliffe 1979: 267) The proposal eventually disappeared in the drawers in 1920 and was not to be debated again, but it had sparked the political consciousness of both Indians and Africans. The political consciousness was, moreover, characteristically racialised – subimperial and nationalist ambitions were now pursued through colonially ascribed racial categories (Iliffe 1979: 264, Voigt-Graf 1998: 37, Brennan 2012: 51-52).

#### *State-sponsored segregation and Indian political activities*

The British, who needed English-speaking subjects in both the administration and economy, recruited Indians as clerks and artisans. Until 1925, there were more than 25.000 Indians in Tanganyika – three times more than in 1913. Indians equipped with the advantage of experience and sufficient capital were able to buy into the estates and urban properties left by the German settlers, who had had to leave the colony. Only ten years had the territory been in British hands until Indians owned almost 90% of Dar es Salaam's freehold land (equal to one third of the total area) and almost all hotels and stores. Profits were realised especially by those who diversified their businesses to include industry and agriculture. It was also Indians who filled vacant positions in the administration, for educated Africans were still few in number and because it would have been too costly to recruit Europeans. In a typical move for a middleman minority, Indians were able to fill an existing status gap between state and society (Voigt-Graf 1998: 37-38).

The British, who like the Germans before them, discriminated in the legal system, assigned to Indians a middle category which gave them more rights than Africans, but considerably less rights than Europeans – especially political rights. Among Indians themselves, loyalty to the British Empire stood in a tense relationship with challenges from the *Indian National Congress* and feelings of discrimination. Pro- and anti-colonial sentiments coexisted (Brennan 2011: 42). In the 1920s, Indian large-scale capitalists entered the Executive Council of Tanganyika and were now able to influence colonial policies. The Provincial Council of the Ismaili Khojas was

also taken over by businessmen who became allies of the British (Iliffe 1979: 374). Regional associations established to foster the political influence of Indians, like the *British East Africa Indian Association* or the *East Africa Indian National Congress*, remained largely unsuccessful (Grube 2008: 64). The pan-communal Tanzanian *Indian Association* (IA), which was formed in 1918 in Dar es Salaam, was later able to branch out to other urban centres. When Gandhi was sentenced to six years of imprisonment in 1922, the members of the IA began imitating his tactics of civil disobedience and were quite successful in mobilising support from the different communities. Until World War II, the main political activities concerned the struggle against European discrimination against Indians (Iliffe 1979: 264; Brennan 2011: 56; Voigt-Graf 1998: 78).

In 1923, the *Profits Tax Ordinance* imposed 4 per cent tax on profits and required all non-English-speaking shopkeepers to keep books, and keep these books in English or Swahili. Trading Indians felt discriminated, as many of them knew neither to write nor did they have sufficient command of English or Swahili. In a rare pan-communal action, Indians closed their shops for 54 days – until the ordinance was repealed and a compromise reached (Iliffe 1979: 265; Brennan 2011: 49). Feelings of “Indianness” increased through both, common resistance to British colonial policies in Tanganyika and the growing strength of nationalism in India (cf. Iliffe 1979: 321). Events like the arrests of Gandhi in 1922 and again in 1930 provoked demonstrations of Indians in Dar es Salaam and the establishment or politicisation of existing Indian newspapers (Bertz 2011: 12; Brennan 2011: 47). The political aim of a “Greater India” was widely shared among Indians who lived in all corners of the Indian Ocean. A nationalist speaker visiting Dar es Salaam explained what “Greater India” was supposed to mean:

When you leave India you must leave behind you all caste and creed. Abroad you must be Indians – first and foremost Indians. Thus, and thus alone you can fight with success the battle of existence against other nations. (K.A. Master 1935 cited in Brennan 2011: 50)

But internal differences could not easily be brushed aside. Gujaratis, claiming linguistic and ethnic affinity with Gandhi, were much more active than Indians from other regions. Sentiments of anti-colonial unity against

the British were also disrupted by the growing salience of Hindu-Muslim differences in India (Brennan 2012: 18) and ebbed away in the Great Depression of the 1930s.

After World War II and with the independence of India and Pakistan drawing near, reticence again made way to vocal political awareness. In Zanzibar's and Dar es Salaam's cinemas of the late 1940s and 1950s, nationalist movies from newly independent India would incite the primarily Indian audiences to vehement reactions. As a filmgoer recalled, "So I see a film about some freedom fighter being put in jail by the British, and our blood would be boiling." (cited in Bertz 2011: 80) Many of these movies, however, were not only tales of Indian resistance against British imperialism, but also of holy Hindu heroes against despotic Muslim rulers. Blood would thus also particularly be boiling among urban Muslims of South Asian origin who threatened cinema owners with vandalism, arson and boycotts (Brennan 2011: 60, 74). Until the mid-1950s, groups of Muslims celebrated the Independence Day of Pakistan while groups of Hindus celebrated India's.

#### *Axes of identification of Indians in British-Tanganyika*

In Tanganyika, it was the local framework of racial categories (Europeans / Indians / "natives") and related policies of segregation in quarters and schools which served as the main impetus for a feeling of Indian unity, while also strengthening communal ties. Religion, caste, political attitudes, gender, and class informed relations between the different Indians and were responsible for divergent relations with the state. Economically, class divisions became more pronounced. State policies encouraging African agricultural cooperatives made it increasingly difficult for Indian traders and shopkeepers to buy crops. Many small Indian crafts like shoe-making, tin-smithing and tailoring "simply collapsed under pressure of mass-produced imports" (Ilfie 1979: 450). On the other hand, Indians who had managed to diversify their economic activities or collect rents in the towns were able to accumulate substantial physical and financial capital. This group supported British colonialism.

Conflicts between the different religious communities led to stiffer sectarianism. The *Ismailia Council* petitioned the British government to



cancel Hindu-owned newspapers in which supposedly ridiculing articles about their leader, the Aga Khan, had been published (Brennan 2011: 54). Communal violence was expressed also more openly in stone-throwing during parades in honour of Gandhi or the Aga Khan. Developments within the communities and their relation to the state were influenced by transnational connections. For instance, the Aga Khan instructed the Ismaili Khojas in Tanganyika in 1952 to follow a policy of Westernisation (Iliffe 1979: 449). The separation between “progressives” and “traditionalists” became an additional line of sub-division in Indian communities (Amiji 1975).

#### *Indians becoming the “Other” of Africans*

In the government-owned newspaper *Mambo Leo* (Current Affairs), Indians and specifically their economic strategies were keenly debated among editors and readers who sent in their letters. Already in the first issue from 1923, the author of an article entitled “The Africa of Tomorrow” (*Afrika ya kesho*), giving himself the name “Native of the country” (*Mwenyeji wa nchi*), describes Indians as those who control the trade and make profits – which they are going to take with them when returning to India, leaving “us” Africans and “our stupidity” behind (Mwenyeji wa nchi 1923: 9). Indians, as strangers (*wageni*) are contrasted with Africans, who fail to conduct business in a successful way. I support Katrin Bromber's argument (2000: 116) that the juxtaposition of successful Indians and unsuccessful Africans (in relation to their divergent business practices) in this and other articles in *Mambo Leo* was not meant to raise the standing of Indians, but rather to give guidelines on how to squeeze Indians out of their dominant position in the trading sector. Notably, the publication of the article coincided with restrictions of the British colonial administration against Indian businesses described above.

The articles in *Mambo Leo* mark the early stage (though constituting by no means the sole origin) of a relation between “Africans” and “Indians” as constructed groups in which Indians serve as the constitutive “Other” for African nationalists. As James Brennan (2012: 2) stated:

For most Africans in colonial and early postcolonial Dar es Salaam, that 'Other' was neither the town's tiny European

community, which figured so prominently in Africa's settler colonies, nor its similarly small Arab population, which figured so prominently in neighboring Zanzibar. Rather, it was the town's Indian community, who outnumbered Europeans and Arabs combined by nearly four to one, and who constituted roughly one quarter of colonial Dar es Salaam's population.

“Racial” consciousness was stimulated not only through economic circuits (African producers – Indian traders and shop-owners – African consumers) and the zoning of residential areas, but also through wartime policies of rationing during World War II. The state allocated and distributed resources and ration according to (its knowledge of) community needs. Here, taxonomies based on “racial” criteria were used – to the greatest disadvantage of African consumers. African resentment against Indians grew. Unlike Europeans, they were visible profiteers in the racialised rationing schemes of the state and they also dominated the visible channels of the black market. The figure of Indians not “belonging” to East Africa became more popular during British colonialism as the counter-image to those who belonged to the territory, the *wenyeji* (natives; Iliffe 1979: 375, Brennan 2012: 11).

### *The way towards Independence*

Experiences during the years of World War II shaped the opinions and strategies of nationalist leaders. Especially in the tense situation of Dar es Salaam, popular African politics made wide use of racial categories (Brennan 2012: 16-17). Together with Arabs, Asians were increasingly identified by African intellectuals as Tanganyika's “chief malefactors” and obstacles to African self-improvement in the 1940s and 1950s (Brennan 2006: 392, 404). British efforts to establish political “multiracialism” with equal numbers of representatives for Asians and Europeans as for Africans generated a heightened awareness of “racial” identities and fears of a persistent Asian-European minority rule (Bertz 2007: 165). “Racial” polemics necessarily also hit those Indian nationalists who “attempted to guide African postwar politics toward a generic critique of European unaccountability” (Brennan 2012: 158).

Contributions like these were marginalised or forgotten in the decades that followed. Ideas brought forward in Indian newspapers in 1940s, for instance concerning the derogatory nature of the English term “native” which should be exchanged against “African,” significantly shaped the intellectual framework of African nationalism (Brennan 2011: 53). The generic anti-colonialist stance of some Indian papers was appropriated, as were more universal concepts of “civilization” and majority rule. The African nationalist newspapers which emerged in the 1950s (*Mwafrika*, *Sauti ya TANU*, *Zuhra*) were supported by Indian capital. While most Indians, being mainly concerned with business, distanced themselves from or even ridiculed the struggle for the control of the state, a number of “radical” Indians whole-heartedly supported African nationalism. The Tanganyikan *Asian Association*, established in 1950, tried not only to reconcile Indians and Pakistanis, but also identified with Tanganyika and African nationalism. Its leaders frequently met with Julius Nyerere and other TANU representatives. After the new “multi-racial” constitution of 1955 was introduced, in which Europeans, Asians and Africans were allotted one third each of the Legislative Council's seats, TANU also sponsored Asian candidates and could thus win the elections of 1958/59 with an overwhelming success. Yet, all of these interconnections were seldom, if ever, acknowledged (Voigt-Graf 1998: 80-84).

In the *African Association*, the most important nationalist organisation which became the *Tanganyika African National Union* (TANU) in 1954, so-called *machotara* or “half-castes” (most of whom were born to African mothers but had an Indian or Arab father) were barred from membership. Only by 1955 were they allowed to join – on the condition that they legally classified themselves as natives. Julius Nyerere later remembered that this partial decision resulted from the lobbying of African women, “who said that after all they were their children” (Nyerere cited in Brennan 2012: 151). The party was opened for persons of all origins shortly after Independence. Approximately half of the members of the dissolving *Asian Association* registered with TANU (Brennan 2006: 420; Brennan 2012: 148-155).

### **Indians in Tanzania after Independence (1961 – ): Becoming Citizens?**

What used to be a colonial state became a (postcolonial, independent) nation-state. A political change like this has important repercussions because “[c]ontrary to the Empire [...] the nation state demand[s] full identification” (Bang 2006: 102). All nationalists agreed that “membership in the new nation depended on the commitment of each citizen to combat exploitation and the enemies who thrive on it” (Brennan 2006: 391). To achieve true independence required to break free from all kinds of exploitation, and a true member of the Tanzanian nation-state could only be the individual who was committed to fight exploitation. In this wider debate of citizenship and development, Indians figured – meanwhile almost a tradition – as scapegoats.

#### *The rhetorics of African Socialism and Ujamaa*

The postcolonial state under the leadership of Julius Nyerere quickly abandoned colonial categories of race and gradually employed a new political terminology of *Ujamaa* (familyhood) and African Socialism (Brennan 2006: 395). In the interplay with popular discourses, *Ujamaa* rhetorics also had consequences for the Indian population (cf. Grube 2008: 80). Although Indians were not targeted as a specific group of malefactors in official communications, the actualisation of the categories in popular and also some few state-sponsored discourses definitely pointed to a unidimensional image of Asians as exploiters.

The Swahili word for “exploitation,” *unyonyaji*, carries a strong metaphorical content which was widely shared in East Africa. It literally means “sucking”, and was portrayed in cartoons with images of Indians, Europeans, Arabs and malevolent Africans sucking blood and other fluids from Africans (Brennan 2006: 392-393). Two terms also used by Nyerere (in a general sense) were “parasites” (*wanyonyaji*) and “ticks” (*makupe*). “Parasites” and “ticks” were common metaphors in the 1960s and 1970s for people whose behaviour purportedly made national development impossible. Rhetorical de-humanisations as these are a characteristic element of both racism against “foreign groups” and the degradation of other, “inner” groups (Hund 2007: 123). The ideology of *Ujamaa* was presented as the “medicine” (*darwa*) against the exploitation, a term

reverberating with the popular language of healing and discourses of witchcraft (Brennan 2006: 399). It would thus be insufficient to read the state's language only as contained in speeches and documents, for it was interconnected with popular discourses.

The quintessential "Indian" character in the press of the 1960s and 1970s was the rhetorical personage going by the name "Patel". Patel was the exact opposite of the upright citizen (*mwananchi*) and the hard-working, but exploited peasant. Patel's exploitative behaviour, again expressed in the language of "sucking blood," figures as the obstacle that has to be overcome to realize the familial cohesion (*undugu*) of the nation. In debates of good citizenship, Indians were displayed as the non-citizens and exploiters *par excellence* (Bertz 2011: 71; Brennan 2006: 413).

One day at a Sundowner, Patel was there with his tea, Smith with his glass of beer, everyone saying we are one family (*sisi wote dugu moja*) in front of *manaizesheni* (successful Africans), tomorrow (Patel) will see his servant and disregard this *Mwananchi*, in fact he lords it over him and bullies him and continues to suck his blood. For the same work Kabwela [representing the exploited African, E.B.] receives 150,- and Patel receives 300,-; Juma carries a heavy load, and Patel carries a light load. Oh friend what kind of family is this? (Letter from Justin D. Mungia to Uhuru, 30 Jan 1965, cited in Brennan 2006: 405)

The quote aptly illustrates the different measures for Indians and Europeans. "Smith", the Briton, appears shortly; but in the rest of the quote it is Patel who is the target of the accusations. Africans expected and demanded more from Asians than from Europeans, whether in intermarriage or in the participation in nation-building activities.

#### *The impact of Nationalisation and Africanisation on Indians*

In 1962, shortly after independence, Julius Nyerere proclaimed that there was "[n]o room for land parasites" (cited in Brennan 2006: 394). All lands were effectively nationalised, which disproportionately affected Indians. The same is true of banks, industries and services which were turned into state property following the *Arusha Declaration* of 1967. The status as a middleman minority was henceforth gone, or at least considerably

weakened. Many Indians, especially those without a Tanzanian citizenship, were forced to give up their posts in schools and civil service due to a programme of Africanisation. The "racial" distinction between Tanganyikan citizens of African and Asian origin was only upheld until 1964. Nyerere, despite facing hostility from fellow party members and the army, argued that "[w]e cannot allow the growth of a first and second class citizenship [...] Both as a matter of principle and as a matter of common sense, discrimination against certain Tanganyikan citizens on grounds of origin must go" (cited in Voigt-Graf 1998: 113).

In their position as traders, Indians were affected adversely through the state's monopolisation of foreign trade and the government-sponsored establishment of agricultural cooperatives. Dual citizenship was not allowed, meaning that Indians who not automatically qualified for Tanganyikan citizenship at independence had to choose. Almost all of those who opted for Tanganyika were granted Tanganyikan nationality, but certain TANU members continually demanded that it be denied to them. Rewards for those Indians who had supported African nationalism were minimal. Nyerere's first cabinet was made up of seven Africans, four Europeans and just one Asian. Still, Indians remained politically active in the TANU so that in 1968, 10% of all TANU cell-leaders in Dar es Salaam were Asians, but very few occupied higher positions than cell-leader. Voigt-Graf (1998: 96) argues in this relation that Indian support of Nyerere's policies was probably less grounded in a hailing of socialist economic principles but more in a support of his principle of non-discrimination. Maltreatment of Indians in Uganda and Kenya as well as anti-Indian remarks from other TANU members contributed to their persistent involvement in politics to actively prevent similar events in Tanzania (Grube 2008: 65; Voigt-Graf 1998: 82, 89, 95, 143).

In Zanzibar, president Abeid Karume held convictions pretty much opposite to Nyerere's principle of non-discrimination. The revolution in 1964 had been openly anti-Arab, with thousands of Arabs being killed. There had been almost no casualties among Indians, but many shops had been looted. Most Indians fled to the mainland in the aftermath of the revolution and in the following years. In 1970, Karume demanded that all Indians without Tanzanian citizenship be expelled within one year.

Moreover, trade licenses were not given to Indians for some time and Indian women were forced to accept any proposal of an African man (except he had syphilis or was a leper). The policy of forced intermarriage was the “answer” to practices of endogamy in Indian communities (Grube 2008: 66-67).

In 1961, some 112,000 Indians had lived in Tanzania (including then still colonial Zanzibar) (Bertz 2011: 71). By 1980, not even 60,000 remained. Emigration intensified in the years following independence. A case-in-point was the *Building Acquisition Act* passed in 1971. Following popular pressure, the government nationalised all buildings worth over 100,000 Tanzanian Shillings which were not entirely occupied by the owner in April 1971. The lists of the affected buildings, which were published in the newspapers the following day, named almost exclusively buildings owned by Indians. In front of a political parade-cum-celebratory march made up of several thousand Africans, Nyerere proclaimed that the goal of the *Building Acquisition Act* was “to prevent the emergence of a class of people who live and thrive by exploiting others” (cited in Brennan 2012: 4). The socialist terminology also evoked, as shown above, racist stereotypes of Indians. Nyerere admitted in 1997 that he saw himself forced to nationalise buildings and businesses lest racial conflicts would arise (Brennan 2012: 199). Asian themselves also perceived the state's policies through a “racial lens” and felt severely discriminated, “which in turn enhanced the segregation and ethnic consciousness” (Voigt-Graf 1998: 116).

#### *Liberalisation of the economy and multiparty elections*

Beginning with the 1980s, the Tanzanian government left its path of *ujamaa* and African Socialism under pressure from the *World Bank* and the *International Monetary Fund* to liberalise the economy. That liberalisation was cautious in some sectors was influenced, as a former economic advisor to Julius Nyerere wrote in 1995, by “fear of the dominance of the Asian business community” (Svendson 1995: 122). The 1990s saw a hiking number of attacks in the media against Indians (and Arabs) with the “usual” charges of exploitation and refusal of integration (Grube 2008: 66).

1995 was then the year when the first multi-party elections in the United Republic of Tanzania took place. The fiercest opponent of the later president

Benjamin Mkapa (running for CCM, the successor of TANU) was Augustine Mrema (running for *National Convention for Construction and Reform*, NCCR-Mageuzi). Accusing Indians of applying illegal business practices and controlling the largest part of the economy, Mrema called for a policy of *uzawa*, or “birthness” – endorsing indigenisation based on racial categories (Brennan 2012: 199). Similarly, Christopher Mtikila (the head of the unregistered *Democratic Party*) spoke of *wazawa* – relating to those who were “born Africans” – opposed to Arabs and Indians, whom he wanted to expel, subsumed under the term *magabacholi* (“parasites”).

Faced with renewed and heavily politicised racial populism, Indians supported the CCM with substantial sums, but tried to keep their support secret in case another party might win. In the months and weeks leading up to the election, African-Asian relations soured considerably, with many Indians being told to “leave Tanzania and go home to India”. Due to a general feeling of insecurity, Indians prepared for all eventualities in case the state representatives would be unable to fulfil their protective function, or turn a blind eye on violence. Shops were closed, capital was sent abroad, imports were stopped, and whole families left during the time of the elections. More significantly, mosques, temples, churches, Asian schools and other community institutions were prepared as places of refuge – open for members of all the different denominations and ethnicities. Community leaders held meetings and agreed to cooperate in the case of an emergency (Voigt-Graf 1998: 97-98). CCM and Benjamin Mkapa eventually won the elections and pan-communal cooperation decreased again, but the fear that political parties might use racist stereotypes and identity politics to gain followers has persisted (Voigt-Graf 1998: 142).

#### *Political life and self-identification of Indians in contemporary Tanzania*

Most Indians today belong to the third or fourth generation living in East Africa, are Tanzanian citizens and have a feeling of “home” towards Tanzania and the respective town. Some Indians, as so-called “twice-migrants”, remember both India and Zanzibar as a former place of home. Identification with the Tanzanian nation and a feeling of belonging are contrasted in a persisting aloofness of a majority of Indians towards the African population in social life as well as vivid memories of state-sanctioned repression in the past (Grube 2008: 68, 80; Voigt-Graf 1998: 40).



Most Indians are still little involved in state politics – though, once more, this depends on religious and ethnic affiliations and individual decisions. Generally, however, participation in politics is unimportant and major investments are done in community infrastructures (Grube 2008: 64). A common identity as Indian, or Tanzanian Indian, is of importance only in relation to the African population. Endogamy within the religious community continues to be of utmost importance (Grube 2008: 67-68).

Several voices coming from Tanzanian citizens of Indian descent seem to advocate for a process of “de-diasporisation” to be recognized as fully belonging to the Tanzanian nation. This would be the result of individual choices “not to reconnect with India, Indian languages and culture” while developing “a more 'Indian African' identity” (Oonk 2007a: 21). This “Indian African” identity, in popular discourse also called “Afro-Indian” or “Afrodian,” emphasises hybridity and multiple origins of local identity while rejecting the image of a universal Indian diaspora (Oonk 2007b). The rejection to belong to India needs also to be seen in the light of a heightened interest of the Indian state in its diaspora. According to Sharma (2004: 11), a new question entered state politics and research projects concerning the Indian diaspora in the 1990s: “[W]hat should the Indian state do to cultivate and harness the Indian diaspora as a resource for Indian development?”

## **Conclusion**

While emphasising several important characteristics of Tanzania’s population with Indian origins, the concept of a middleman minority, itself neglecting internal differences, fails to explain both the political activities of Indians in Tanzania in certain periods (Brennan 2012: 8) and continuing discrimination against Tanzanians with Indian roots. To understand the complex and historically changing relationship of the Indian diaspora and the (nation-)state in Tanzania, it is necessary not only to look at state classifications and appropriations of these sorting codes on the side of the diaspora, but also to include in the analysis transnational practices as well as local struggles between and within communities. A question that has always been central in these relationships was how to find an adequate category of identification, as exemplified in the poem cited introductorily, where the poet asked: “what tribe should we call him?” With the Indian state promoting terms like “People of Indian origin” (PIOs) and “Non-

Resident Indians" (NRIs) (Dubey 2003: 154), this question of identity and belonging is as open and relevant as ever.

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