KENYA ‘SAMAJ’: INDIAN MERCHANTS, COMMUNITY LIFE, AND URBAN SOCIETY IN COLONIAL EAST AFRICA, C. 1890-1980

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A dissertation submitted to Johns Hopkins University in conformity with the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Baltimore, Maryland

May 2019
ABSTRACT

Much scholarship about Indian populations in East Africa examines their histories through categories of race and class. Immigrant groups, according to these narratives, are often seen as agents of the British Empire or as a minority racial diaspora that experienced marginalization during the colonial and post-independence periods. This dissertation takes a different approach. Examining Indians as interconnected yet separate vocational populations, it argues that Indian immigrants played a central role in making Kenya’s colonial economy, urban society, and post-independence political order. Indian merchants—the focus of this dissertation—assumed positions of economic, social, and political prominence in Kenya, building up household wealth by situating themselves between African agrarian societies, the territory’s urban markets, and the colonial state. Despite the rise of anti-Indian sentiment during the colonial period and after independence, Indian merchants cultivated linkages to new political leaders and activated longer-standing communal connections to re-assimilate into Kenya’s post-independence environment. Community networks, I argue, not race or nation, became the primary mode of belonging among Indian merchants in twentieth century Kenya, as they migrated, settled, and accumulated wealth, among other goals.

This dissertation examines a diversity of historical sources, including traders’ diaries, merchants’ memoirs, court records, commercial contracts, newspapers, and records from the Kenya and India National Archives. It argues that, over the course of the twentieth century, Indian merchant groups cultivated an urban society around the tenets of a samaj, or a social collective comprised of distinct merchant communities moving in a “united manner,” as the Indo-Aryan word implies. This society, oriented around caste and kinship networks, allowed merchants to maintain control over household wealth and marriage alliances, while simultaneously integrating
themselves into avenues of local commerce and trade. Moreover, as British colonization intensified, strategies of integration enabled Indian merchants to align their capital interests with Kenya’s colonial legal institutions and imperial political realms. What is more, they also enabled them to cultivate webs of connection about the colony and circumvent the state’s regulatory intentions, acquire urban property and public assistance, and erect social and prayer halls and other urban institutions. *Integrative corporatism* is the term I use to describe how merchants were able to maintain endogamous communities and commercial dominance while integrating themselves into Kenya’s colonial and postcolonial urban societies.

Dissertation Advisor: Professor Pier Larson
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to acknowledge the support of several individuals who helped me to complete this dissertation. Foremost, I wish to acknowledge the time, patience, and enthusiasm of Pier Larson, who, along with members of Johns Hopkins University Africa Seminar, including Sara Berry, Jane Guyer, Randall Packard, and Elizabeth Thornberry, provided me with invaluable direction and feedback. I also wish to acknowledge the support of several others who helped me with its development and completion. These people include Ralph Austen, Mark Bradley, Ambreena Manji, Charlotte Walker-Said, Paul Ocoboek, Chella Vaidyanathan, and Heather Dana Davis Parker.

In addition, I would like to thank the individuals who helped assist and guide my research. They include Murtaza Gandhi, of the Gandhi Memorial Museum (Ahmedabad); Ramji Savalia, of the Bho Je Institute (Ahmedabad); Richard Ambani, of the Kenya National Archive (Nairobi); and Radha Upadhyaya, of the University of Nairobi, Kenya. I also wish thank mentors and teachers. They include Arvind Bhandari, Archana Patel, and Pinky Pandya, of the American Institute for Indian Studies; Nilotpala Gandhi, of Gujarat University; Adhya Saxena, of M.S. University; Chhaya Goswami, of S.K. Somaiya College; and Sachin Ramesh Nikarge, of the United States-India Educational Foundation. I also wish to thank the following research and grant-giving institutions: the British Institute in Eastern Africa, the Johns Hopkins University Department of History and Office of the Dean, the Lois and William Diamond Fellowship Fund, and the IIE/USIEF Fulbright-Nehru Doctoral Research Fellowship Program.

Last, I wish to thank friends and colleagues from various institutions and research sites. They include Julia Bailey, Hannah Elliot, Sheline Lugonzo, Emma McGlennen, Jessica Levy, Kirsten Moore, Julia Cummiskey, Nathan Marvin, and Sudev Sheth.
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## CONCLUSION

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“We were very unsure about things at the time,” Kiran Lal, a Nairobi businessman and member of the local Oshwal community, explained to me in early 2015. In the 1960s, he and other Indians viewed themselves as targets of Kenya’s new policies to economically empower the country’s black African majority. “Africans [or Nairobi’s black African businessmen] wanted our shops,” he said. “They said, ‘this is no longer yours.’ Lots of people received notices to quit.” However, as Lal remembers it, what really turned the circumstances of that time into a crisis for Indian businesspeople and professionals was not Kenya’s racialized Africanization policy. Nor was it the prevalence of anti-Indian sentiment in Kenyan newspapers and radio broadcasts. It was the remnants of Indian merchants’ racial privileges and imperial protections coming to an end, especially those concerning movement and migration. In 1968, Britain revised its immigration laws, effectively closing its doors on Africa’s Indians, many of whom retained possession of British Commonwealth passports and held out the possibility of migrating with their families from East Africa to the U.K. Leading up to the implementation of the new British law, tens of thousands of Indians departed East Africa in what residents and scholars have come to refer to as the “Exodus.”¹ “I would go into the street one day and meet someone from the community,” Lal told me. “Next day, I would find out that he sold his house—and sold it very cheaply—and left with his wife and kids overnight.”²

Across East Africa in the years after independence, different Indian populations became targets of government policies aimed at correcting perceived racial economic imbalances inherited from the colonial era.

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² Discussion with Kiran Lal, Nairobi, 22nd February and 25 May 2015. All names in this dissertation have been changed to protect my informants.
from the colonial past. In Tanzania, Indian businesspeople were made frequent targets of local riots and pogroms. In 1971, Tanzania’s National Assembly passed the Acquisition of Buildings Act, confiscating all private properties valued at over £5,000—96 percent of which were owned by Indian immigrants. Julius Nyerere, Tanzania’s first President, proclaimed that Africans would no longer fall prey to a “class of people who live and thrive by exploiting others.” In Uganda, policies of African empowerment were even more extreme in their intent to target Indian residents. What began as an attempt by Milton Obote’s government to “move to the left” and position Africans at the top of the economic pyramid gave way to aggressive campaigns of expropriation. In 1971, when Idi Amin came to power via a military coup, he promised to correct Obote’s shortcomings and wage an “economic war” against “Asians who still live in the past.” One year later, he terminated most Indian enterprises and closed the border to trade between Uganda and Kenya. In 1972, he expelled nearly three-fourths of the country’s Indian population for failing to take up Ugandan citizenship and “integrate” themselves into Uganda’s post-independence society.

Kenya’s policies were mild by comparison with those of Uganda and Tanzania, but they were not without significant risks for Kenya’s Indian populations. Soon after independence, Kenya’s new regime initiated the Africanization of the country’s civil service, effectively replacing all Indian and other non-black personnel with indigenous Kenyan new hires. New parastatal corporations established by the post-independence Kenyan government created additional burdens

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by mandating that all local distributors buy supplies from indigenous “African” producers. More significantly, in 1967, Kenya’s government passed a new immigration law nullifying Indians’ residency certificates and requiring all Indian non-citizens—nearly 90% of Kenya’s 176,000 Indians at the time of independence—apply (or re-apply) for citizenship, or otherwise obtain new entry permits and residency passes. In the same year, Kenya’s government also enacted new trade licensing schemes to limit the scope of commercial activity among non-citizen residents trading in staples such as sugar, rice, and maize. As historian Robert Gregory explains, many “[Indian] non-citizens failed to obtain trading licenses and work permits, and many who applied for citizenship met delays and obstacles.”

By 1968, only 48,000—or just over a third of the Indian population that remained in Kenya—had obtained citizenship. In late 1967, in one of the most symbolic displays of Africanization, Nairobi’s City Council evicted all “non-African” traders from the city market, handing out stall spaces to black Africans at steeply discounted rates. Gujarati essayist Ramnik Shah wrote that the new policies were a stab in the back to Indians who supported Kenya’s independence. “Now Africa’s governments are in desperate need to integrate its people,” he wrote in 1973. “Kenya [and] Tanzania appear to be following in [Idi] Amin’s footsteps.”

This prognosis proved inaccurate, especially regarding Kenya. Many Indian migrants departed the country—especially those dependent on wages and occupational licenses for their livelihoods. Early departees included members of the civil service, teachers, lawyers, and other professionals and their households. Low-income artisans and small-scale shopkeepers who could not afford the new application fees, the wait time, or the regulatory hurdles involved also left.

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However, the vast majority of Kenya’s Indian population chose to stay in country. Many of these latter were descendants of merchant families from the port towns and hinterlands of Gujarat, Kutch, and Sind—or the Western region of present-day India and Pakistan. Others, to a far lesser extent, were tied to networks from Punjab or Goa. Many had resided in Kenya for two or three generations, while others were more newly arrived but invested all the same in local commercial and communal enterprises. These merchants and merchant-descended groups maintained control over local trade and distribution in the country. Utilizing their capital and connections, they scaled operations from petty commerce to wholesale businesses and even small-scale manufacturing.  

With new tariffs and incentives, Lal told me, they even expanded avenues of accumulation in Kenya’s postcolonial times of trouble by diversifying into the country’s industrial sectors. “People [by which he meant Kenyan Indians] did well [at the time] once the British had left,” Lal said. “The next question was, who would run the factories? Many [of these families] went back to India and started looking up their cousins and brothers-in-law,” he explained.\(^8\) By 1972 many of the same “non-African” stallholders who had been evicted from the Nairobi city market in 1967 had returned and relocated themselves to other areas of Nairobi’s central district. Taking up shop just a couple of blocks away from the market, their return prompted the black African stall holders to complain to city officials about Kenyan Indians still “dealing [in] the same items [as before].”\(^9\)

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8 Conversation with Kiran, Nairobi, 22nd February and 25 May 2015. Many such Indian family companies, in fact, became Kenya’s largest conglomerates today, and are best known in Kenya’s financial and business sector by their holding company names—e.g. Hebatulla Brothers, BidCo, or Comcraft, just to name a few. Community holding groups, such as the Aga Khan Development Network, today manage portfolios of companies that run the gamut of hotels, foods and agriculture, utilities and media, together with banking and finance. A full list of the Aga Khan Development Network’s Holdings may be found online. The site lists 19 companies in Kenya, 7 in Tanzania, and 12 in Uganda. [https://www.akdn.org/our-agencies/aga-khan-fund-economic-development/akfed-companies](https://www.akdn.org/our-agencies/aga-khan-fund-economic-development/akfed-companies) (accessed 18th January 2019).

9 Nairobi City Market General Traders to the Minister for Local Government, Nairobi, 2nd June 1972, Kenya National Archive (KNA) S/8493.
Indian merchant capitalists’ staying power—as well as their rebound and expansion—in the post-independence era has been a topic of great interest as well as confusion for scholars of Africa seeking to differentiate African and non-African capitalists or to explain the presence and prominence of Indians in Kenya today. However, it shouldn't be a point of confusion for historians of urban East Africa and the Indian Ocean world, where Indian merchant capital was anything but neatly contained within racial categories or geographical spaces. Building on existing studies about Indians in East Africa and about global merchant diasporas, this dissertation examines the history of Indian merchant populations in Kenya from the late nineteenth to the late twentieth century. It argues that over the course of the colonial and postcolonial periods, Indian merchants living in Nairobi cultivated an urban society around the tenets of *samaj*—or a social collective comprised of distinct merchant communities moving in a united manner. This society, oriented around caste and kinship networks, allowed merchants to maintain control over household wealth, while simultaneously integrating themselves into Kenya's commercial spheres, between indigenous agrarian African societies, on the one hand, and urban markets and the colonial state, on the other. Merchants cultivated linkages with officials and postcolonial leaders, many of whom would benefit from Indian merchant networks of patronage and reciprocity. Community, as a result, as much as racial privileges or imperial citizenship, provided Indian merchant with the facilities for accumulating profits and earnings and converting them into long-term social gains. This dissertation considers the evolution of Indian mercantile activities and interests over Kenya’s

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10 One example of this fascination may be found in David Himbara, *Kenyan Capitalists, the State, and Development* (Trenton: East African Publishers, 1994). See Introduction.

11 I derive my definition of *samaj*, an Indo-Aryan word, from Swarup Gupta. See *Cultural Constellations, Place-Making and Ethnicity in Eastern India, c. 1850-1927* (Leiden: Brill Publishers, 2017). Gupta describes *samaj* as an “idea-in-practice,” which embodied certain social values of inclusion and exclusion. A *samaj* could range in scale from a single interdependence or partnership between two people to a “social-cum-political order.” “Samaj,” she wrote, in regard to Bengali nationalism, “became a metaphor, and means for forging unity alongside, and in contention, with bonds of caste, class, clan, and micro-region which comprised internal divisions within the larger en bloc categories [of different ethnic groups].”
colonial and postcolonial periods. It examines the degree to which Indian businesspeople and their households were able to utilize community structures to protect economic dominance and transition from Kenya’s colonial to its post-independence context. In addition, it considers how Indian merchant households transformed from colonial Indian subjects into post-colonial African residents, and assumed the position of what political scientists David Himbara has called Kenya’s homegrown “bourgeoisie.”

INDIANS, AFRICANS, AND RACE

Most scholarship about Indians in East Africa has addressed merchants’ roles as imperial agents and emphasized Indian political contributions together with their minority status and marginalization during the postcolonial period. J.S. Mangat, for example, writing in the wake of Kenya’s independence, traced Indian merchants’ nineteenth-century presence on the Swahili Coast and their movements into the interior alongside the Uganda Railway and its force of indentured laborers and civil service personnel. “With these immigrants,” he wrote, “came also some of the institutions of British India—including the rupee currency which became the standard currency all over East Africa, and Indian laws—as well as British methods of administration.” Employing documents from the Colonial and Foreign Offices in Britain, as well as the Kenya and India National Archives, Mangat’s study provided an overview of merchants’ activities as customs farmers, railway contractors, and cotton manufacturers and exporters. His granular-level focus provided a rich empirical tableau of merchants such as Alidina Visram, whose network spanned from Bombay to Bagamoyo and included over thirty mercantile branches in East Africa. “His firm,” Mangat added, "employed over 500 Indian and many more African assistants, apart from

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12 See Himbara, Kenyan Capitalists, the State, and Development, Introduction.
the traders who acted as his agents.” No subsequent scholar has pursued Indian occupations and business activities as closely as did Mangat. Nevertheless, Mangat’s study, written as it was during the height of Kenya’s Africanization efforts in the early 1970s, took as its central problematic what he perceived as Indians’ essential “weakness” in Kenya’s colonial racial pyramid. Thus, despite Mangat’s detailed focus on Indian merchants and their “social and economic gains,” he did little to demonstrate how they transferred such gains into long-term investments via community networks that endured after Kenya’s independence.13

Recent waves of scholarship have provided a more nuanced understanding of Indian political, rather than economic, activity during the colonial period. Dana Seidenberg, for example, focusing on the interwar and postwar periods—or the years of African political awakening and movements for political independence—tracked the development of Indian support for new African elites and anti-colonial nationalism. “The various political organizations of the two [racial] communities,” she wrote, “agitated for increased representation on the Legislative Council, universal suffrage, and removal of the color bar from all aspects of colonial life.”14 Seidenberg’s study called attention to the way in which Indian political leaders sought to bridge social fragmentation among Indians in Kenya in the aftermath of India’s independence and partition, when, as she explained, “Muslims in Kenya, in [an] almost reflex action, asserted that Hindus could no longer represent their ‘vital’ interests.” It also brought focus to the ways in which Indians aligned themselves politically with black African causes to protect their capital interests. “A new wave of unexpected Asian political activity began to take shape,” she wrote, “with the emergence

of the Kenya Freedom Party, [whereby Indians hoped] to realign themselves with the politics of the new African state.” At the same time, Seidenberg’s tendency to view Indian history in Kenya via a nationalist lens, together with her emphasis on Kenya’s Indian political associations, trade unions, and media presses, overlooked the importance of Indian community networks in shaping political alliances with Kenya’s colonial and post-independence leaders. Her study also gave disproportionate representation to a minority of Indian political “radicals”—journalists, nationalists, and lawyers—while overlooking the majority of Indian businesspeople, who were, as she described, more “conservative,” “moderate,” and ambivalent toward African political initiatives such as the Mau Mau. (Ironically, it tended to be these latter persons who remained in Kenya after independence and thrived economically and contributed to the new political power structure.) In turn, her study did little to account for how Indian populations aligned with British colonial institutions as well as African nationalist leaders. Nor did she account for how merchants utilized community structures to forge links with Kenya’s postcolonial ruling elites and protect their capital interests in the wake of Africanization policies.¹⁵

To what extent did merchants utilize communal institutions to align their interests with the colonial state and its legal institutions? How were merchant populations able to leverage communal networks to secure urban investments and negotiate access to state welfare, and overcome racial hostility at the time of independence? Much subsequent scholarship has tracked away from Mangat and Seidenberg’s focus on mercantile and anticolonial activity and moved toward questions relating to colonial administration, urban development, and the making of postcolonial racial identities. James Brennan, for example, examining debates about wealth and race in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, argued for the importance of daily economic interactions and

¹⁵ Ibid, 111.
colonial administrative categories as much as nationalists projects in creating anti-Indian hostility on the eve of independence. “For Africans,” wrote Brennan, “Indians were the shopkeepers on the other side of the counter who bought low and sold high, extracting African wealth between the margins.” His study went on:

Racial caricature grew in tandem not only with the economic interactions for which it was a shorthand but also with a more fundamental rethinking of territorial origins, descent, and belonging, the core elements of identity in this Indian Ocean City. Credit, more than any other element of daily life, entwined strategies of urban survival with processes of racial caricature.

Brennan’s study helped bring focus to the way racial identities formed alongside economic interdependence between Indians and Africans who met regularly in dukas (shops) to exchange food, clothing, and hardware. He also shed light on the way colonial state’s welfare schemes unintentionally heightened racial solidarities among Indians and Africans. “Urban entitlements,” Brennan wrote of colonial assistance programs during the Second World War, “[which] were created to maintain political security through the regulation of the costs of living and human mobility, [instead] generated spiraling material expectations and racial solidarities that legitimated employment of mass action to better negotiate levels of entitlement.” Yet, by focus on the production of racial identities, whether by the colonial state or African nationalists, Brennan’s study overlooked the importance of Indian community structures in accumulating and safeguarding Indians’ commercial wealth. Brennan even admitted that “Communal Associations proved the most durable of Tanganyika's Indian Institutions for collecting and redistributing financial resources, as well as for political lobbying,” but left this important avenue of research and its implications for understanding Indians’ transition to the post-independence period unexplored. In Kenya, for example, Indian merchants employed communal networks and
institutions to forge connections to the country’s postcolonial political elites and maintain, if not expand, commercial activity during the period of Africanization.\textsuperscript{16}

Research about race and urban development has also been matched by a focus on discourses of Indian diaspora. Sana Aiyar, building in new directions from Mangat and Seidenberg’s studies, revised previous narratives about Indians in Kenyan politics to focus on Indians’ evolving and contradictory political arguments during the twentieth century. As Aiyar demonstrated, Indian belonging and identity in Kenya were both interregional and intergenerational, based in part on exclusive and increasingly racialized Indian privilege as “non-native” immigrants and citizens of the British Empire. “Competing and contradictory political claims,” she wrote, “[were] simultaneously created in moments of interracial solidarity and discourses of racial difference.” Indians sought dual modes of belonging that were both civilizational and territorial. “Diaspora consciousness [emerged] from Indian connections and interactions between two local spaces, tethered to two homelands,” she added. Aiyar’s study, in brief, provided a comprehensive overview of Kenyan Indian discourses about race and class and their claims to imperial rights and African citizenship. It also alluded to Africans’ frustrations and grievances regarding Indian petty traders, who bought low, sold high, and falsified weights to extract maximum profit from African farmers. However, Aiyar’s focus on political discourse and the “postcolonial historical conjuncture at which negotiations over nationhood fell apart” limited her attention to the multiple ways in which segments of Indians and Africans were economically and politically entangled in twentieth-century Kenya. Her narrative, for example, culminated with the mass departure of Indians from East Africa, as if emigration were the logical outcome of Indian history in post-colonial Kenya—an exodus, she explained, which was the product of “unresolved

\textsuperscript{16} Brennan, Taifa. For “categories of belonging,” see 11; for urban entitlements, see 115; and for communal associations, see 50.
competing political imaginaries”—when, in fact, two-thirds of Kenya’s Indians remained in the country.\textsuperscript{17}

Much scholarship about Indians in East Africa, in sum, has shed light on Indians’ economic and political activities by tracing their political vulnerability as a minority racial diaspora. They have also demonstrated the degree to which economic interdependencies between Indians and Africans as well as colonial racial categories led to African nationalists’ tendency to frame Indians as racial others, outside the boundaries of the nation state, at the time of independence. However, few studies have accounted for the ways in which Indian merchants were able to utilize community structures to secure their long-term investments in East Africa. Nor have they provided for the way that Indian merchants, by attending to their communal interests, were able to shape the very logic of East Africa’s urban society through sponsorship of urban institutions. In Kenya, as sociologist John Zarwan has pointed out, Indian populations’ ability to accumulate wealth and re-assimilate to the post-independence context varied greatly by their particular social and economic linkages to other merchant households. Trajectories of migration, “Exodus,” and re-assimilation were a product of connections to other caste and kinship members and marriage structures as much as racial identity or imperial citizen status.\textsuperscript{18} Many Indians who remained in Kenya after independence, for example, were descendants of Shia Muslim merchant households who arrived in East Africa during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Typically divided between Ismaili, Bohra, and Ithna Asheri, these merchants identified at that time as "Khoja" (from the Gujarati word \textit{Khwaja}, meaning "respectable gentleman") and worked as wholesale traders (or \textit{vakharwalas}, lit. "warehouse owners"). Possessing ties to colonial officials and merchant houses

\textsuperscript{17} Aiyar, \textit{Indians in Kenya}, Loc. 92, 187, 5445.  
\textsuperscript{18} See John I. Zarwan, “Indian Businessmen in Kenya during the Twentieth Century” (PhD. Diss., Yale University, 1977), Introduction.
in Mombasa and Zanzibar, they accumulated fast wealth by provisioning the construction of the Uganda Railway or exporting cotton from eastern Uganda. Others, arriving during the pre- and interwar periods, were petty traders (*feria veparis*), peddling merchandise to African farmers in newly formed Native Reserves, they accumulated profits, as well as ties to local farmers and consumers, before bringing over wives, other household members, and extended networks of relatives. Certain segments of these small-scale new arrivals were Jain devotees, originating from Gujarat's Halar region near the city of Jamnagar. Grouped together by kinship, they identified as “Visa Oshwal,” or members of the “twenty” villages claiming descent from “Ossiya” city in present-day Rajasthan. Others were members of Hindu sub-castes. Most of this latter category—who represent the majority of Indians in Kenya today—arrived in East Africa during the interwar and postwar periods. Some claimed descent from traditional Bania trading castes, while others began as artisans or service professionals and transitioned into business over time. Notably, many Indians to arrive in Kenya in the twentieth century were not merchants at all. Some came as civil servants or professionals; others, particularly from North India, worked as artisans or engineers. This study, then, which focuses primarily on Indian merchant populations and their commercial, social, and political activities, is not a history of all Indians in Kenya. It is a study of certain merchant populations and households, which were able to maintain a lasting presence in the country and form the bedrock of Kenya’s urban society. For these groups represented the primary trend in Kenyan Indian history during the mid to late twentieth century.19

TRADE DIASPORAS, COMMERCIAL SOLIDARITIES, AND CIRCULATORY SOCIETIES

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To what extent have historians accounted for the ways in which merchants integrated themselves into host societies across different times and places? How, furthermore, have previous studies examined the way members of various merchant diasporas cultivated commercial solidarities with other merchants and non-merchant populations alike? Most studies examining merchant diasporas have tended to examine merchant groups as culturally sealed or circulatory societies. Historian Phillip Curtin, for example, studying cross-cultural trade from antiquity to modern times, emphasized merchants’ capacity to forge settlements and connections in host societies. “The merchants who might have begun with a single settlement abroad tended to set up a whole series of trade settlements in alien towns,” he wrote. “The result was an interrelated network of commercial communities forming a trade network, or trade diaspora.” Curtin’s framework, which he derived from sociologist Abner Cohen’s study of Hausa traders in mid-twentieth century West Africa, provided an important foundation for analyzing merchant communities in historical perspective.20 "The idea of traders in a diaspora,” as historian Sanjay Subrahmanyam later noted, “has become a simple but power tool to analyze the phenomenon of what [Curtin] terms 'cross-cultural trade' [among] 'a nation of socially interdependent, but spatially dispersed communities'.”21 In addition, Curtin’s study provided a useful template for investigating how merchants developed “cultural strategies”—or intricate systems of inclusion and exclusion and social control. In Kenya, for example, as seen in this study, merchants relied on caste and kinship networks to navigate interior spaces and cultivate new connections and protect social and economic gains via urban investments. However, Curtin’s tendency to conflate merchant diasporas

with categories of race, ethnicity, or culturally sealed groups obscured the importance of examining how merchants’ ability to integrate local political spheres and form more complex societies, as was the case in colonial Kenya.22

Kenya’s Indian merchants were, in fact, rarely bounded by ethnicity or race. On the contrary, merchants developed commercial solidarities along the lines of vocation, trade specialization, or, at times, home region. Claude Markovits, in his study of Sindhi merchants between the eighteenth and twentieth century, argued that merchants often cultivated “fictive ties” of brotherhood in order to extend trade networks across vast geographic expanses. “Community meant above all locality,” he wrote, “and the bonds which defined it were those of co-residence and kinship rather than of ethnicity, religion, and caste.” Markovits’s framework helped to shed light on the spontaneous, often improvised, schemes of belonging among merchant communities overseas. In Kenya, for example, Indian merchants, as seen in Chapters 1 and 4, forged connections with black African traders and commercial populations for the purpose of expanding avenues of agricultural trade and distribution. In addition, Markovits's study brought focus to the ways in which merchants aligned their communal interests with British legal and imperial protections. In Kenya, as seen in Chapter 2, Indian merchants employed their status as “non-native” citizens to gain property protections and access to colonial common law courts. However, while Markovits’s study brings attention to important synergies between merchant capitalists and the state, his focus on “temporary” merchant migrants precluded the possibility of him examining merchants’ social investments in overseas contexts in depth. Markovits’s study, for example, confined community life and household matters—including merchants’ “sexual economy”—to Sindhi merchants' home region. In turn, he left open question how these same merchant groups might have recreated

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22 Philip D. Curtin, Cross-Cultural Trade in World History (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 2. Regarding host societies and “cultural blends,” see 5 and 11
endogamous community structures, though in unique forms, in overseas contexts such as East Africa. Examining these new and unique forms of communalism, as they relate to Kenya over subsequent generations of merchants residing there, is a central focus of this dissertation.23

Kenya’s Indian merchants not only recreated community structures in overseas contexts such as East Africa. They also molded them to integrate themselves into local economic and political spheres. Francesca Trivellato, focusing on early modern Europe, argued that merchants frequently acculturated themselves to local social environments to expand access to judicial tribunals or gain political protections and diplomatic concessions. “Merchants,” she wrote, in her study of Sephardic traders in early modern Italy, “combined social incentives, shared norms about the conduct of commerce, and legal commitments to secure their agents' cooperation.” Her narrative pointed to merchants’ multiple methods of cross-cultural collaboration between merchant and non-merchant populations in making what she described as “social systems of interlocking interests that rendered expectations more predictable.” In Kenya, as seen in Chapters 2 and 3, Indian merchants adjusted commercial practices to reap benefits of colonial common law institutions and make claims as British Indian citizens against the state. Her narrative, in addition, provided important glimpse into merchants' strategies of commercial and social solidarities—or what she characterized as a “communitarian cosmopolitanism” whereby agents adjusted legal norms, communication techniques, and commercial protocols to build linkages to so-called “strangers”—or traders of another corporate group. Similarly in Kenya, Indian merchants, as seen in Chapter 4, adjusted trade practices to extend networks across racial and cultural boundaries in rural contexts as well as cities to develop predictable methods of commodity exchange. However, by limiting her focus to questions of trust between merchant households, Trivellato’s study stopped

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short of investigating the ways in which merchants steered private or public monies toward urban institutional development as a way to nurture those same forms of trust. Nor did she describe the ways in which merchants utilized corporate structures to forge alliances with local political elites.²⁴

To what extent have historians investigated how merchant communities developed political as well as commercial linkages in overseas locales? How have historical studies demonstrated the ways in which merchants utilized urban patronage to garner wealth and influence and expand their commercial dominance in the diaspora? Sebouh D. Aslanian, building from Philip Curtin and Claude Markovits's studies, argued that merchants patronized communal institutions as a means to maintain so-called “anchor points.” At these anchor points, he wrote, in his study of Armenian merchant populations during the early modern period, “there were [not only merchants, but] also physical buildings such as churches and printing presses that were 'fixed' in some of Julfa's overseas nodes.” His study helped to shed light on the importance of sedentary merchant community institutions in facilitating the circulation of agents, information, and capital. “These anchor points,” he wrote, “were important in shaping the mobility and circulation that linked these nodes to the center.” In addition, Aslanian's study also brought attention to the importance of communal institutions in maintaining spheres of trust and accountability and the circulation of market knowledge. In Kenya, as seen in Chapters 1 and 5, Indian merchant-cum-community-entrepreneurs administered wealth and patronage as a means to maintain networks of trust and cooperation among a range of commercial actors, followers, and dependents. At the same time, Aslanian's tendency to focus on Armenian merchants' "circulatory societies" precluded him from examining how merchants harnessed communal institutions to integrate themselves into local political contexts. Aslanian even described the case of one merchant, Khwaja Petik, who was the

“superintendent of the all the khans [i.e. soldiers], baths, and other institutions of Aleppo.” However, he did not explore in detail how, if at all, Petik’s sponsorship of these community projects helped him maintain what Aslanian characterized as his “monopoly” over the city’s silk trade or his position as “customs master for all of Ottoman Syria.” It is the relationship between merchant patronage, political institutional arrangements, and market positions that this dissertation will take up in the coming chapters.25

Much scholarship about merchant groups, in sum, has examined their histories via a lens of cultural strategies or methods of circulation. These frameworks have provided important understanding for how merchants settled and integrated into overseas contexts in places like Kenya. In addition, such studies have shed light on the way that merchants patronized local communal institutions in order to sustain long-distance networks and avenues of local exchange. However, few studies have given significant attention to how merchant populations invested in community structures to safeguard social and economic linkages between and among sedentary merchants. Nor have they explored the way merchants harnessed corporate connections to protect local property by forging linkages to political elites. In Kenya, Indian merchants—particularly those who remained in cities like Nairobi after independence—not only integrated themselves in local spheres of exchange. They steered private and public investments into communal networks by sponsoring houses of worship and clubs, schools and libraries, and housing schemes and hospitals. These investments, and the systems of urban welfare redistribution that accompanied them, had a profound effect on the Indian merchants’ fates in the postcolonial years. These provisions were not the accomplishments of trade diasporas or circulatory societies alone. They

were culmination of strategies, continually revised by merchant patrons, who organized Kenya's urban society around the logic of merchant accumulation and corporate institutions and the sedentary households that supported them.

CORPORATE NETWORKS, SOCIAL INVESTMENTS, AND URBAN SOCIETY

To what extent did Indian merchants’ community structures in Kenya serve as vehicles for economic and social investments? How did such activities, furthermore, enable merchants to redistribute welfare and make bids for belonging on the eve of independence? For decades, scholars of South Asia and its diaspora have examined corporate structures in relation to political and economic alliances together with the making of modern urban society. Historian C.A. Bayly, for example, argued that corporate structures provided the basis of merchants’ mobility in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century North India. “The evidence suggests not only that the economic and political importance of the great trader–bankers was enhanced [by their communal-corporate connections],” he wrote, “but that corporations of townsmen, merchants and religious specialists had developed a new coherence and autonomy which in some cases amounted to a virtual civic self-government.” Bayly's examination helped to bring attention to how merchants organized around caste and kinships groups to integrate themselves into urban environments and influence local or regional leaders. In Kenya, likewise, merchants’ corporate councils even performed certain government functions such as distributing welfare aid and administering social services like the low-income housing schemes I write about in Chapter 5. However, while Bayly's study pushed back against notions of caste and kinship groups as passive political entities, his study overlooked the importance of those same caste and kinship institutions in securing ownership over urban property and capital in overseas contexts. In Kenya, for example, merchants utilized corporate
belonging not only to expand trade, commerce, and political participation. They also employed community associations, in new and unique ways, to engineer endogamous communities and neighborhoods and redistribute state resources and public assistance across a broad spectrum of urban populations.26

Indeed, in Kenya, Indian merchants’ corporate structures came to serve multiple functions, intersecting with economic, social, and political realms. David Rudner has argued that corporate structures among Indian merchant groups often served as “social portfolios.” They reflected their members’ specializations and diversifications as well as forms of symbolic capital. “Castes,” he wrote in his ethnography of Chettiar merchant bankers of South India, “[should] be treated not so much as legal corporations, enduring timelessly through history, but rather as social investments, structured by and structuring human action over time.” His perspective lent valuable insight into community associations as springboards and strategies for long-term economic ventures and capital management. Merchants, whether in South India or Kenya, patronized community associations, as well as charities and prayer halls, to secure their urban investments and maintain social and economic linkages. Rudner’s framework also provided a prism for analyzing community institutions as systems of administration, management, and participation. Kenya’s Indian merchants, as will be seen in Chapter 5, utilized community apparatuses as tools to redistribute private and public assistance, and welfare and social services, not dissimilar to African voluntary and ethnic associations during the interwar and postwar periods. However, by focusing solely on a single caste and its internal dynamics, Rudner’s study overlooked the way that merchants’ corporate organizations also facilitated external relations and cross-cultural integration. In Kenya, merchants’ corporate belonging provided broad access to trade networks

across cities and regions, where members of various caste, kinship, or community groups were stationed and active in business as well as social and political life. These linkages were responsible for traders’ access to credit and market information and access to state officials and postcolonial African elites and in cultivating a complex urban society around multiple merchant communities.27

To what extent did Indian merchants in Kenya organize corporate institutional structures according to British colonial principles of urban governance? In what ways did these modifications both enhance the legitimacy of such structures and enable merchants to expand avenues of economic and political integration? Corporate institutions, historian Tirthankar Roy has argued, helped to facilitate internal administration among caste members and navigate external economic and political spheres. "Market negotiations," he wrote in his study of enterprise and community in early modern and colonial India, "necessarily involved a number of people not related between themselves by marriage or kinship, [as] the caste panchayat would be powerless to address disputes between communities." Roy's study helped to shed light on how Indian merchant groups formed collectives on the “fringe” that followed a caste logic but existed outside of the boundaries of traditional caste or kinship groups. In Kenya, similarly, Indian merchants formed several sub-caste umbrella religious or home-regional organizations such as the Cutchi Leva Patel Samaj, as seen in Chapter 5, that increased their political influence among local officials. In addition, Roy’s study helped shed light on how corporate institutions did not necessarily conflict with colonial rule but gained, in fact, new added legitimacy. "[Corporate] groups did more than act in emergencies,” he wrote. “They made rules for the formation of partnerships and principal-agent relations, fostered cooperation and regulated competition among members, [and] framed property rights and successions.” Nevertheless, while Roy's study brings attention to the "implicit compromise”

between pre-colonial lineages and colonial rule, his study left open to question how merchant
groups in overseas contexts such as East Africa were able to deploy caste structures and idioms to
secure investments and belonging during times of political transition. In Kenya, as seen in Chapters
5 and 6, merchants utilized community structures to re-align their interests with Kenya’s new
ruling elites after independence.  

How did Kenya’s Indian merchants’ modes of communal belonging enabled them to
preserve household wealth and simultaneously align their commercial interests with the colonial
state? To what extent did merchants also use corporate networks to cultivate commercial
solidarities across caste, kinship, and racial boundaries and integrate themselves with colonial state
and postcolonial political elites? How, in addition, did such communal belonging enable merchants
to transfer their wealth and property from the colonial to post-colonial periods during a time of
growing anti-Indian sentiment? One way to answer these questions is to take Rudner's framework
of envisioning corporate institutions as social portfolios and examine how merchants developed
and manipulated these portfolios over time to fit Kenya’s evolving economic, social, and political
context. Indian merchants managed boundaries strategically to invest capital and preserve “core”
networks around endogamous caste and kinship structures, while also developing solidarities
around their corporate networks’ “fringes.” At the core, communities were held together by
arranged marriages and household networks, and communal spaces and activities that nurtured
them. On the fringes, communities integrated themselves economically and politically by forming
inter-communal and -racial solidarities. In other words, Indian merchants guarded community
structures to preserve household wealth and corporate institutions, while using those same
structures to develop a myriad of new connections with indigenous traders, political leaders, and

28 Tirthankar Roy, Company of Kinsmen: Enterprise and Community in South Asian History, 1700-1940(New Delhi:
Oxford University Press, 2010), 2-21.
market participants. Employing a flexible communal business logic, merchants exhibited what I call integrative corporatism, or a system of alliances to reproduce their corporate cores while simultaneously extending their networks outward on the fringes. This system, I argue, helped merchants garner local wealth and influence, and secure national belonging in Kenya on the eve of independence. It also enabled them to plant their interests firmly within Kenya’s postcolonial political and economic order, even positioning themselves on a stronger footing than before. By utilizing strategies of integrative corporatism, furthermore, Indian merchants managed to organize urban institutions in cities like Nairobi around the tenets of samaj, and transform from colonial Indian subjects into post-colonial African residents, and become key builders of Kenya’s urban society.

By examining Kenya's Indian merchants through a lens of communal life, this dissertation provides a different view of Kenyan Indian history than what emerges from much existing scholarship. First, it seeks to examine Kenya’s Indian merchant diasporas in relation to their economic, social, and political activities as opposed to the racial or national categories often ascribed to (or at times claimed by) them. Over the course of the twentieth century, merchant populations developed a variety of horizontal linkages to other Indian households and merchant groups as well as vertical connections Kenya’s black African and European populations. Second, it demonstrates the degree to which Indian merchants deployed capital as a means to expand commercial networks and build urban institutions and associations in cities such as Nairobi. Corporate bodies and boards—manned by a legal infrastructure of trustees, secretaries, and chairmen—provided the nexus for economic and social investments and became lobbying tools for merchants seeking to access state capital for redistribution in the form of social services and welfare. Third, it narrates Kenya's Indian merchant history as a set of constantly evolving
strategies. Merchant groups continually adjusted their alliances as best fit their needs to ensure protection of capital and investments, maximizing their mobility and profit-making potential. In addition, by tending to their communal interests, Indian merchants played an unexpected but significant role in the making of Kenya’s urban society. This dissertation, in sum, situates the world of Indian merchant diasporas firmly within African history, demonstrating the degree to which Indian Ocean migrations altered the fate of East Africa’s trajectory from the precolonial to the postcolonial period.

SOURCES AND OUTLINE
To trace the history of Indian merchants and the making of Kenya’s urban society, this dissertation examines a wide variety of historical sources, each of which provides a different view into merchants’ economic, social, and political activities. I view the extensive archival and linguistic work underpinning this dissertation as equally important to its claims as the theoretical orientations toward Indian mercantile activity in twentieth-century Kenya discussed in the previous pages. The first section of the dissertation—Chapters 1 and 2—examines sources relating to the expansion of merchant capital into the East African interior. Chapter 1 looks at the diary of a Bohra merchant named Ebrahimji Adamji, using it to analyze merchants’ cross-cultural alliances and interdependence with coastal as well as western Kenyan populations. As merchants first settled in the interior, they harnessed different forms of social infrastructure to extract resources and to protect capital and wealth. Adamji’s diary demonstrates the way that merchants constructed extensive networks of knowledge and support with other merchants and with local black populations, providing them with ease of movement as well as accommodation and market information. The Uganda Railway may have been responsible for “opening up” the interior, as
many Indian and European visitors (and scholars following them) have proclaimed. However, as Adamji’s diary illustrates, merchants depended, well beyond the railroad itself, on many improvised and highly local systems of patronage and material interdependence managed by Arab, Swahili, and indigenous caravanners, porters, assistants, and villagers. These were networks built from the ground up.

Chapter 2 expands on the theme of Indian merchant capital expansion and protection by examining it in relation to the spread of Anglo-Indian law in the colony of Kenya. By employing files from a colonial-era advocacy law firm, Daly & Figgis, with specific attention to its clients’ civil cases, correspondence, and matters of probate and administration, Chapter 2 demonstrates how merchants aligned themselves with colonial legal institutions. Making use of their identity as “non-native” immigrants in Kenya’s colonial legal system, merchants were able to protect capital and investments in the interior and access credit from abroad. They filed complaints in Kenya’s common law colonial courts, something unavailable to black Kenyans who were classified as “natives” at the time and denied access to these common-law courts. In addition, as more merchants settled and expanded commercial activities in the Kenyan interior, they adopted and internalized colonial common law for purposes of contract enforcement and dispute adjudication. Specifically, colonial legal institutions provided the basis for the formation and execution of merchants’ partnership arrangements, debt and mortgage contracts, tenancy agreements, and probate and administration services. In turn, merchants not only utilized the colonial legal system available to them to facilitate their business expansion. They also conformed their commercial practices to Anglo-Indian legal tradition as part of a broader strategy to link merchant corporate structures of capital ownership with the interests of the state and financial institutions in India and England.
The second section—Chapters 3 and 4—examines files from both India’s and Kenya’s National Archives to further depict merchants’ political and economic strategies in relation to the state. Chapter 3 examines records from the East Africa Indian National Congress and colonial India’s overseas department, with specific attention to collaborations among Indian merchants as a racial group. It argues that merchants transcended corporate boundaries to band together as imperial citizens to make effective claims against colonial officials in protection of trade and access to local markets. As merchants confronted racialized competition at the hands of white settler interests, they formed new national political associations and, later, an East African Indian National Congress. The associations helped them to coordinate various modes of political activism such as petitioning, boycotts, and other forms of agitation examined by other scholars. Yet, as this chapter argues, merchants’ political activity was not confined to Kenya alone. It assumed an interregional scale, stretching from Kenya to both India and England. Merchants crafted a dual strategy of negotiation with officials in Kenya and India simultaneously, often employing contradictory claims to advance their interests. Whereas one set of arguments spoke the language of African paternalism and protection, the other played up the importance of racial privilege and imperial citizen protections. In turn, this chapter illustrates how merchants were able to forge inter-communal solidarities and prod Indian officials to intervene in East Africa’s political affairs on merchants’ behalf.

The next chapter—Chapter 4—examines files from colonial Kenya's provincial offices and its Departments of Commerce and Industry, on the one hand, and Ministry of Agriculture and Natural Resources, on the other. Specifically, it focuses on how a subset of merchants and petty traders came to wield market influence by virtue of their position in Kenya’s dairy sector. By focusing on officials’ reports and correspondence regarding domestic production of ghee—or
clarified butter—it argues that merchants emerged as “strong market markers,” with the ability to
determine production rates and consumer prices. As officials sought to develop Kenya’s ghee
industry under closely monitored schemes, merchants erected parallel production and distribution
channels. They utilized colonial state resources and circumvented its legal bureaucracy to make
markets and find premiums. During the Second World War, as officials introduced new price
controls on ghee and ghee substitutes, merchants responded by forming an inter-regional “black
market” of illicit, adulterated ghee. This chapter, in turn, demonstrates merchants’ capacity to
exploit colonial state weaknesses and ambiguities as well as operate beyond colonial officials’
gaze. It also demonstrates how segments of merchants were able to harness long-standing
relationships with African farmers, consumers, and low-level bureaucrats to extract surplus and
labor, often to the consternation of colonial officials.

The third section—Chapters 5 and 6—examines Kenya’s colonial archives, alongside
merchants’ biographies and memoirs. Chapter 5 turns toward files from the Land and Local
Government Department, as well as Departments of Cooperative Societies, Education, and Health.
By examining department files concerning charities, religious organizations, and corporate bodies,
it examines the rise of “community” life among Indian merchant households in new colonial
cities such as Nairobi. As merchants accumulated unprecedented earnings and profits during the
pre- and interwar periods, they used communal structures in these new colonial environments to
invest their proceeds in associations, charities, and other institutions. These investments, which
followed a classic British colonial logic of communal investment and care, helped solidify
merchants’ endogamous communities and economic dominance in Kenya’s urban society.
Utilizing colonial laws providing “non-natives” perpetual succession to land, merchants steered

capital toward the construction of prayer halls and social venues as well as housing schemes, schools, and hospitals. Associations, this chapter demonstrates, not only provided modes of urban belonging and the reproduction of corporate structures among the bulk of Kenya’s Indian merchant populations. It also constituted an argument for merchants claiming access to state assistance and patronage, particularly in the aftermath of Britain’s new public investments in Africa following World War II. This chapter thus helps shed light on the way that caste, kinship, and religious community structures became a vehicle for social investment and political negotiations. It also shows how community associations helped promote strategies of integrative corporatism in urban society, ultimately paving the way for merchants’ successful bid for belonging in the post-colonial context.

Chapter 6—the last chapter—examines a mixture of memoirs, oral archives, and files from Kenya’s Office of the President. It analyzes these various sources to illustrate merchants’ political strategies in the postcolonial context. In the wake of Africanization policies and the rise of anti-Indian sentiment, many Indians left Kenya. Between 1967 and 1980, nearly one-fourth of Kenya’s Indian population departed for England, in what many Kenyan Indians have come to call the “Exodus.” However significant this emigration was at the time, this chapter demonstrates that the vast majority of Kenyan Indians remained in the country. Merchant households, in particular, re-assimilated to postcolonial Kenya by using corporate networks to forge alliances with Kenya’s new leaders, just as they had with its old ones. This chapter shows how merchants became participants in Kenya’s new practices of patronage politics. Despite the rise of anti-Indian sentiment and national programs aimed at redistributing urban wealth away from Indian merchants to black African capitalists in the 1960s and 1970s, Indian merchants managed to maintain and even expand their commercial activities in Kenya. Utilizing corporate structures, they redistributed
resources to party operatives and power brokers and curried favor from local administrators after independence. Whereas some communities showed overt acts of political support, others nurtured networks of reciprocity behind closed doors. Merchants’ ability to re-assert their capital interests in postcolonial Kenya proved so effective that many black Kenyans continued to lodge racialized grievances against Indians in Kenya with state officials by expressing disillusionment with the perceived shortcomings of independence and African nationalism. Indian merchants had outrun these developments in part by nurturing community organizations and pursuing cross-racial alliances with Kenya’s new African nationalist powerbrokers.

In conclusion, this dissertation illustrates Indian merchants’ pervasive influence over both colonial economic and social history as well as postcolonial political and economic development in Kenya. By examining a broad range of historical sources and settings, interspersed with newspaper sources and Indian merchants’ memoirs, it calls for a re-thinking of the role of Indians in East African history, which, to phrase Sana Aiyar, has generally been relegated to a “footnote.”

Over the twentieth century, Indian merchant households situated themselves between African agrarian societies and the colonial state by aligning themselves with a variety of colonial legal institutions and local networks of commerce and patronage. They also secured protections over property by investing in social institutions, which safeguarded endogamous community structures and influenced the development of Kenya’s urban society as a whole. Twentieth-century Kenya, by this logic, was not only a home to European colonizers and emerging African nationalists. Nor was Kenyan history simply a story of Indian and African political collaborations and conflicts. Kenya was also a site of Indian merchant migrations and settlements, commercial engagements and expansions, and social investments, communal activities, and political alliances. It was, in

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other words, the site of a *samaj*. Indian merchants’ imbrications in Kenya’s political economy, to be sure, were not always welcome by black Kenyans—or by European colonial officials. Nor were they free of contention in regard to Indians “social distance” and policing of women’s sexuality and interactions with non-community members. Many Kenyans would come to contest Indians’ commercial presence and stronghold over local credit, distribution channels, and real estate. However, Indian merchants’ permanence in Kenya’s economic history—and in its present—cannot be denied. It must be explained. For this reason, this dissertation provides Indian merchants with a central place in East Africa’s most recent full century and the making of the region’s urban society and post-independence nation states. It also sheds light on the importance of integrative corporatism as a system of economic expansion, urban development, and political assimilation.

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 CHAPTER 1
 NETWORKS, MARKET KNOWLEDGE, AND MOBILITY

Indian merchants had long been in contact with East Africa and the West Indian Ocean before the period of British colonization. Trade networks tied together by dhow crossings extended from India to East Africa and the Persian Gulf from as early as the twelfth century. However, from the late 1880s to the First World War, merchants from the Asian subcontinent arrived in East Africa in increasing numbers. Between 1887 and 1911, for example, the number of Indian Muslims in East Africa increased from 4,866 to 5,939, while Hindus increased from 1,022 to 3,205. Some remained in port towns such as Zanzibar and Mombasa, while many settled inland where they established businesses as far west as the Eastern Congo. A merchant testifying to officials in 1912 claimed that Nairobi, founded only 13 years earlier, had already become home to over 5,000 Indian traders and their household members. This number would double by the end of the decade. Some newcomers were fortunate enough to procure government contracts to provision departments, settler agriculture, or official settlement schemes. Others managed to obtain lucrative positions in wholesale markets, making profits off of bulk movement and storage of imports and exports. Many of lesser connections, social standing, or financial resources borrowed merchandise on credit and peddled wares into rural areas or remote outposts. Setting up shops in designated trading areas, they scheduled journeys into villages, encampments, and other sites with potential consumers, and traded in rupee currency, bartered goods for farm surplus, or lent out the former on credit cycles that could extend for half a year.

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Table 1.1 Populations of Kenya by Race

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1911</th>
<th>1921</th>
<th>1926</th>
<th>1931</th>
<th>1948</th>
<th>1962</th>
<th>1969</th>
<th>1979</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>African</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2,348,788</td>
<td>2,682,848</td>
<td>2,966,993</td>
<td>5,251,120</td>
<td>8,355,942</td>
<td>10,742,705</td>
<td>15,101,540</td>
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<tr>
<td>Indian</td>
<td>10,651</td>
<td>22,822</td>
<td>26,759</td>
<td>39,644</td>
<td>97,687</td>
<td>176,613</td>
<td>139,037</td>
<td>78,600</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>1,136</td>
<td>2,431</td>
<td>2,565</td>
<td>3,979</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>European</td>
<td>3,175</td>
<td>9,651</td>
<td>12,529</td>
<td>16,812</td>
<td>29,660</td>
<td>55,759</td>
<td>40,593</td>
<td>39,901</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>9,100</td>
<td>10,102</td>
<td>10,557</td>
<td>12,166</td>
<td>24,174</td>
<td>34,048</td>
<td>27,886</td>
<td>39,146</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>627</td>
<td>1,259</td>
<td>1,346</td>
<td>3,325</td>
<td>3,901</td>
<td>1,987</td>
<td>67,874</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Part of what spurred the expansion of Indian merchant capital in Kenya’s interior was Britain’s imperial project. Planners and engineers laid down transportation and communications infrastructures and encouraged the arrival of Indians, who were also British subjects. By the turn of the twentieth century, colonial officials had completed a new deep-water harbor in Mombasa, installed telegram wires beneath the ocean, and connected the interior Lake Region with the Port of Mombasa via the Uganda Railway. All of these new colonial infrastructures facilitated the spread of so-called “legitimate commerce.” Yet, what also helped to spur the expansion of Indian merchant capital in East Africa was the development of new social infrastructures. Networks of primarily but not exclusively male kin and non-kin members formed new commercial solidarities. (Notably, many Bantu-speaking traders around this time were women.) New forms of cooperation and collaboration tied together spheres of trade between a range of participants from different ethnic, linguistic, and religious backgrounds. As newly arrived Indian traders extended their networks inland, they relied on a host of old participants—caravanners, local indigenous traders

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and assistants, and villagers and headmen—to accumulate levels of wealth unprecedented in East African mercantile history. These human contingencies, while less visible in colonial archives and in recent historiographies of East Africa, were no less important in providing merchants with avenues of circulation and mobility.

This chapter and the next examine the expansion of Indian merchant capital in East Africa’s interior. Here I argue that, in the wake of British colonization, merchant households constructed new systems of human infrastructure, comprised of social relationships and modes of interdependence derived from previous eras of commerce, travel, and cross-cultural encounters. Relying foremost on caste or kinship networks, Indian merchants forged new commercial solidarities with merchant and non-merchant populations. Whereas many confidantes and collaborators were found among caste and kinship members, others were found among participants previously engaged in East Africa’s caravan trade. Many were of Swahili or “Arab” origin and, through years of experience traversing the interior, were able to provide market information, logistics, and transport. In addition, Indian merchants utilized corporate networks to cultivate linkages with indigenous populations. While caste or kinship members provided access to capital, and caravanners offered support and navigation techniques, indigenous populations, whether they were traders, assistants, or villagers, provided modes of accommodation, protection, and hospitality. Indian merchants, as a result, were able to navigate the interior not only with the help of steam trains and station masters. They also circulated between port towns and interior trade locations with the help and knowledge of various local actors. New social infrastructures, notably, did not possess the regularity or durability of colonial transportation or state government projects. Traders’ timetables, insofar as they had them, were dictated not by the strict hours of the clock so much as by credit cycles, rain seasons, and the monsoon winds. However, these human
infrastructures did possess a marked flexibility and provisional nature. They joined separate, if interrelated, spheres of exchange via newly devised systems of communications and logistical support. In addition, they provided Indian merchants significant profit-making opportunities and possibilities for linking long-distance trade networks, generally composed of corporate members, with local traders, partners, and market goods.

Until now, most scholarship regarding Indian commerce in East Africa’s prewar period has focused on the relationship between Indian merchant capital and the state. Abdul Sheriff, for example, has characterized Indian merchants as “compradorial” class, or agents of British capital interests who helped to overturn Omani rule in the late nineteenth century.5 Bruce Berman and Lonsdale, furthermore, have shown how merchants helped to stimulate the much-needed local surplus that provided the colonial state with a taxable economy.6 Thomas Metcalf, in a more recent study, has cast a similar light on the nature of Indian capitalists and the development of the colonial state. “East Africa,” he wrote, “became, in the early decades of colonialism, almost an extension of India itself.”7 These studies have shed light on how merchants maintained a special set of relationships with British administrators in the Indian Ocean and East African interior. Metcalf, moreover, by drawing on official communications and memoranda, has demonstrated how colonial administrators in India as well as East Africa and England came to form a range of opinions regarding Indian migration, agricultural settlement, and commercial opportunities. However, by interpreting Indian activities in East Africa as a function of state expansion, these studies have overlooked the extent to which merchants also relied on corporate connections as well

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as expansive set of human relationships to circulate goods, people, and capital within the interior and between the interior and the coast.

To what extent do merchants rely on networks with caste or kinship members to access capital and credit in the interior? How did merchants utilize structures of caravan traders to expand merchant mobilities? How, in addition, did Indian merchants collaborate with indigenous populations to protect property and learn about market intelligence and travel conditions? To answer these questions, this chapter looks beyond the colonial state itself and to the networks and relationships between actors on the ground. Specifically, it draws inspiration from sociologist A.M. Simone’s concept of “people as infrastructure,” which he used to explain the resemblance between human infrastructures in Johannesburg, South Africa and that of an “African village.” Human infrastructures, he wrote, “are characterized by incessantly flexible, mobile, and provisional intersections of residents [where] collaboration is based not on the [populations] adhering to specific rules but on their capacity to improvise.” These collaborations, he argued, were what made the city livable for residents of limited means. This same concept may be applied to early twentieth-century Kenya, to contexts outside of the city (or village), and at the intersection of varying foreign and local commercial populations. Operating likewise on limited means, Indian merchants and interior populations were able to expand commercial opportunities by forming “assemblages of increasingly heterogenous elements”—or mixed portfolios of traded goods, currencies, and informational sources—as well as “complicated collectives”, or alliances between people from across the Indian Ocean and the Lake Region of Kenya and Uganda. These might not have made up the infrastructure categorized or described in colonial handbooks or policy memos. But they were necessary for newly arrived merchants who hoped to deepen access to the resource-
rich regions of the African interior or to coordinate business and travel, protect property, and develop markets of exchange.8

For historians, access to these “assemblages” and “complicated collectives” before the First World War can be difficult—a task that necessitates resourceful and incessantly flexible approaches of its own. For this reason, this chapter turns away from state archives and toward the diary of an early Indian merchant traveler named Ebrahimji Adamji. Completed in the first few years of the twentieth century, the unpublished diary—a narration of Adamji’s African travels—provides a privileged glimpse into the world of coastal Indian merchant and caravan operations in the continental interior. Born in Mombasa to a Bohra merchant family, Adamji attended a Christian missionary school before becoming the youngest partner—of three older brothers—in his family firm. Over the course of the diary, Adamji—then only eighteen years old—made three different trips to western Kenya and Uganda, where he sought to intercept a caravan led by two ivory hunters of Baluchi origin who owed his family Rs. 45,000, a hefty sum at the time. To be sure, Adamji’s diary was intended for a Gujarati-reading population of both the African coast and Indian subcontinent, and was colored with many of the coastal prejudices then common in East Africa that perceived the interior as a “jungle” and “dark” space. However, these characteristics of the diary make it useful as a historical source, for the work provides a rich account of commercial transformations in East Africa in the wake of colonial expansion as well as the intelligence and new alliances that Indian merchants cultivated with coastal and interior populations. Over the course of three different trips, Adamji wrote of relationships with Bohra merchants and caravan traders as well as encounters and conversations with villagers of western Kenya. He revealed

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changing relations between Indian merchant capitalists as well as between merchants and a host of other participants who populated their networks of knowledge and support.9

COLONIZATION, INFRASTRUCTURE, AND INTERIOR COMMERCE

From the early modern period up until the twentieth century, Indian merchants maintained a steady, if fluctuating, port presence on the Swahili Coast. Following the demise of Portuguese hegemony in the West Indian Ocean and the rise of Omani political rule in the nineteenth century, many Indian merchants regained a monopoly position, with several farming the Omani Sultan’s customs in port towns from Mogadishu (Somalia) down to Sofala (Mozambique). Many merchants residing in Zanzibar and Mombasa during the second half of the nineteenth century were members of the so-called Bania caste—comprised of “traditional” seafaring and trading groups from Kutch and other areas of western India.10 Toward the end of the century, they were increasingly accompanied by merchants from India’s Shia Muslim communities, from Karachi and Kutch as well as from Bombay and Gujarat. Among them were Bohra, Ismaili, and Ithna Asheri merchants, including Tharia Topan, who, as leader of the Ismaili merchant community in Zanzibar, had become a premiere banker for the Omani Sultan and European merchants and even sponsored local hospitals and schools.11 Many British and American visitors passing through Zanzibar in the

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10 See J. S. Mangat, A History of the Asians in East Africa, c. 1886 to 1945 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970), Chapter 1. Regarding individual merchants, see 15-12. Regarding Hindu merchant castes, for example, he writes, “At the head of their ranks in Zanzibar stood the firm of Jairam Sewji—belonging to the Bhattia Hindu caste—which farmed the customs at Zanzibar from 1835 to 1886, and held considerable influence in the commercial life of the East African coast.”

11 Tharia Topan has become a fixture in the historiography of Indian Ocean and East African trade. His first mention in English print was likely Richard Burton’s diary Zanzibar: City, Island, and Coast (London: Tinsley brothers, 1872). He has been mentioned in writings and diaries, and scholarship about debt, commerce, and mobility in the Indian Ocean ever since. Among the latter, some recent studies include Fahad Bishara, A Sea of Debt: Law and Economic Life in the Western Indian Ocean, 1780-1950 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017); Johan Mathew,
second half the nineteenth century were surprised by his and other merchants’ agencies up and down the coast, along with a variety of other Indian bankers who were reaping profits from the coast’s commercial revival. “All banking and mortgage business passes through Indians hands,” wrote European official Bartle Frere in 1873. “Hardly a loan can be negotiated, a mortgage effected, or a bill cashed without Indian agency.”

Up through the early nineteenth century, Indian merchants’ primary business was in imports and exports. In exchange for beads, glass, textiles, and metal wares, local populations dealt merchants raw produce and precious materials—clove, coconuts, gum copal, and ivory—not to mention slaves. Under protections of the Sultan and Islamic legal institutions, Indian merchants took increasingly dominant positions in local business and finance. Some lent to European merchant houses and others to coastal planters. One colonial official, John Kirk, noted that most Arab and Swahili plantations were “heavily encumbered” to Indian merchants on the coast. He estimated the Indian capital invested in Zanzibar Island in the 1870s was no less than £1,600,000. They also invested in the caravan trade. With the rise of ivory prices in Europe and at the African coast, merchants became bullish on moving hunting expeditions into the interior. “Indian finance,” explains historian J.S. Mangat, “took the form of loans and advances, [as well as] traded goods intended for exchange in the interior.” Typically organized on three-to-six-month credit schedules—cycles dictated by the monsoon winds and the comings and goings of merchandise-stocked dhows—caravans were, in fact, tremendously risky. Some were able to diversify, and recoup gains from successful ventures. Not a few suffered major losses and bankruptcies due to

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12 See Metcalf, *Imperial Connections*, 166.

13 Mangat, *Asians in East Africa*, 10-11. Mangat writes that European official Bartle Frere was told, “few of the larger Arab estates in Zanzibar are unencumbered by mortgages to Indian capitalists, and a large portion are so deeply mortgage as virtually to belong to the Indian mortgagee.”
bets gone bad.\textsuperscript{14} In any event, with the exhaustion of ivory and enslaveable populations along the coast, caravan expeditions moved farther and farther inland and into the Lake region by the end of the nineteenth century. Abdul Sheriff argues that, by the early 1870s, Tanganyika’s hinterlands witnessed increasing penetration of hunters and traders. “A single Indian firm at Zanzibar,” he writes, “had advanced MT\$270,000 to ‘the Arabs of Unanyembe’”—about 500 kilometers into the Tanganyika interior.\textsuperscript{15}

British colonization at first had a mixed impact on Indian merchant capital. Several scholars have noted that many merchants suffered losses on portfolios invested in slave-labor enterprises, especially in plantation agriculture (Metcalf, for example, argued that Indians often resisted British attempts to emancipate slaves, since much of their capital was stored up in ventures dependent on slaves or invested in the traffic of human chattel.\textsuperscript{16}) As British imperial presence increased in East Africa, merchants were able to take advantage of new protections and markets for provisions and goods, shifting away from direct investment in enslaved labor. Many gained contracts from incoming officials, others outfitted missionaries’ and explorers’ expeditions, and some built up lucrative positions in local distribution of imports fueling ivory caravans or the growing “native trade.” With the founding of the Imperial British East Africa Company in 1888, and later the East Africa Protectorate in 1895, merchants were able to harness their business expertise to supply goods and imported indentured labor to railway engineers and colonial planners as well as foreign manufacturers. “The freedom of enterprise generally allowed them by the European Administrations,” writes Mangat, “accounted for the continued expansion of their


\textsuperscript{15} Abdul Sheriff, \textit{Slaves, Spices & Ivory in Zanzibar: Integration of an East African Commercial Empire into the World Economy, 1770-1873} (London: James Currey, 1987), Chapter 4.

\textsuperscript{16} See Metcalf, \textit{Imperial Connections}, Chapter 6.
historical mercantile connections.” With the abandonment of Zanzibar as a free port in 1899, many merchants began to shift their outfits toward Mombasa and other mainland ports. By 1897, over a thousand Indian shopkeepers resided in Mombasa, according to Metcalf, many of whom had “amassed immense wealth.” One of these was A.M. Jeevanjee. Born in Karachi, he had arrived in Mombasa in 1890 and began work in the dhow trade and later become a general merchant and labor recruiter. Another was Alidina Visram. Originally from Kutch, Visram arrived in Zanzibar in 1877 before moving his firm’s base in East Africa to Bagamoyo. He opened shops across the central caravan route in Tanganyika and later Uganda by way of Tabora and Mwanza. He became the primary buyer of local products, including hides and skins, groundnuts and chilies, as well as sesame and cotton.  

Yet perhaps the single greatest development insofar as circulation, mobility, and Indian merchant capital were concerned was the completion of the Uganda Railway. Its construction brought not only a windfall in profits to major firms that procured contracts, labor, and supplies such as Jeevanjee and Visram. It also proved to be a major catalyst for the expansion of thousands of petty traders upcountry. Until the 1900s, cargo transport over land in East Africa had cost approximately Rs. 7 per ton-mile (chiefly porterage costs); on the railway, by contrast, the cost fell precipitously to some 4 Annas—or a 96 percent reduction. To no surprise, Indian traders were quick to take advantage of falling transport rates. Whereas some traders appeared along the railway, opening up shops in bazaars, others spread out into the countryside to barter imports for local goods. As official A.H. Hardinge noted, traders’ goods served as the railway’s primary cargo once the trains were functional. Many merchants were heading into the interior at such a speed that the rupee currency of South Asia was beginning to be “understood and used” by a number of

interior African populations who were selling produce in significant amounts. “There has been considerable trade in grain,” wrote another officer in central Kenya, “and I am glad to say that an Indian merchant has opened a shop and commenced trade at Samburu, where [he] has given the Chiefs some European potatoes to plant in order to trade in that article with Mombasa.” From areas around Kiu and Machakos came ghee and salt; from further inland came rubber and copra. “In all that mattered,” writes Metcalf, “the Uganda Railway was a ‘wedge of India,’ driven into the heart of Africa.” This “wedge” included teams of officers, technical staff, and department personnel. It also included a vast number of petty traders, who were contributing to the transition from a trade economy structured around caravans to another that depended on colonial trade centers and the railway.

EBRAHIMJI ADAMJI: IVORY MERCHANT AND TRAVEL DIARIST

Merchants’ systems of connections, and the patterns of circulation and mobility they enabled, can be gleaned from Adamji's family history. The problem facing his family firm—collecting on debts in the East African interior—was not unique among Bohra merchants of the late nineteenth-century. Nor were his journeys inward and stories about his relationships with other merchants and persons uncommon for new arrivals from South Asia. According to his biographer, Judith Aldrick, the Adamji family was an “old” Mombasa household that had established itself in the decade prior to completion of the railway. Once provisioning British troops fighting “pacification” campaigns in western Kenya, the Adamji family soon after entered the caravan business hoping to make

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profits from growing markets for ivory. Sometime around 1900, the firm advanced Rs. 45,000
worth of goods to two Baluchi ivory hunters named Shambe bin Abdulla and Iddi bin Shero.
According to their agreement, Abdulla and Shero were meant to pay back the Adamji firm an
installment of Rs. 5,000 within the first year—or once the two ivory traders reached Uganda. They
were also in agreement to pay back the remaining portion of the debt within the second year.
However, as Adamji related in the first section of his diary, nearly a year had gone by and the
Baluchis had sent neither money nor ivory. Not only that, but they had managed to evade Adamji’s
brothers who had made trips into the interior to locate them. “Not a pice had been sent,” wrote
Adamji. “We were experiencing a great shortage of money [and] serious financial difficulty [as a
result].” It was at this point that Adamji decided, against his brothers’ will, that he would make a
trip via the railway into the interior himself and recover the debts from the two hunters.22

Around the turn of the century, many Indian merchants, like Adamji and his brothers, set
their eyes on the African interior to extend their networks of wealth accumulation. Adamji’s diary,
for this reason, reads partly like a merchant’s manual, replete with information about settlements,
interior populations, and trade and travel conditions. Similar to other Gujarati travel writers from
the early twentieth century, Adamji outlined a variety of new developments in colonial
infrastructure, both on and off the railway. These included a running list of stations as well as
details about towns along the way.23 He noted where the train stopped and for how long, which
stations had telegram or post offices, and where travelers could expect to disembark for the night.
The town of Makindu, he wrote, had “a beautiful station, [with] good houses [and] roads,” while

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22 Adamji, My Journeys to the Interior, 30-31
23 Ibid., 25-46. In Kisumu, “The bazaar [had] about ten to fifteen shops. The main shops belong to Seth Alidina Visram
and Seth Khoja Dharamshi Khatru. That rest of the shops belong to other Khoja, Punjabis and Goans.” Mumias, he
adds, had “ten businessmen.” Adamji is routinely taking notes on which shops are located in which towns or at which
stations. In Machakos, there were ten more, all belonging to Khoja merchants.
Kisumu’s station, on the other hand, was still only composed of tents. Nairobi, which in the early 1900s had become the railway headquarters but was not yet the administrative capital, was already buzzing with traders. “When you see all these people [come to the station],” Adamij wrote, “it makes you feel [as if] you are in your own country…. Many people from India, especially Punjabis, and some English people have bought land to do extensive farming.” Adamji advised merchants to see Nairobi on par with the coast’s living standards and economic possibilities. It was a commercial network node for mobile populations, including merchants and other foreign actors, not dissimilar from historian Fransesca Trivellato’s depiction of early modern Livorno as a city that was at once culturally tolerant and socially divided and economically uneven. “Nairobi is well established today,” he wrote. “It has become an important place [with] a large population [of] Europeans and Indians.”

Many of his readers, also itinerant traders, would have been well-familiar with his experiences of travel. These experiences include uncertainty, disconnection, and loneliness. Hence, Adamji committed much of his text to describing his emotional conditions on his journeys. He included many passages in which he admitted that “the wilderness was strange to me, [and that] after seeing the natives [and] the dense forest and huge mountains, [he] started feeling uneasy and scared.” However, Adamji was also aware that he was an early arrival in the interior and that many readers would be interested to know precise details about local climate, geographies, and people. Merchants, for example, would have found in Adamji’s diary anecdotes about different African populations of interest, particularly in regard to which populations sold surplus and consumed Indian merchants’ imports. The Kikuyu of central Kenya, Adamji wrote, were “very

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tall, well-built and strong [and] are very good farmers and grow beans and maize.” He noted that they walked a full day to Nairobi to sell their produce. He also wrote about the people around Lake Victoria. Many lived on scattered islands and commuted from one to the other by canoe. “[Around] Wadera River Camp,” he added, “the river is very long and it is about 50 feet wide.” Rainy seasons had made it very difficult for him to cross the country. Around the time he made his first journey, in 1902, Adamji wrote that travelers making their way into areas that lacked railways and roads were certain to be held up. “The road from Kirawra to Wawe Kaja [near Kampala] was rough,” he explained, “and we had to cross many rivers and streams. There was so much mud that we were covered up to the knees in sludge, [and] at other places there was thick bush which had to be cut to make a path to pass.” 27 In this way, the diary offered important glimpses into interior regions as well as the kinds of logistical hurdles merchants could expect to face.

In his work, Adamji also emphasized the importance of cultivating proper and necessary social relationships. Many of his paragraphs, and sometimes even pages, are spent elaborating the various modes of human interdependence requisite for successful mercantile ventures. Adamji was “truly grateful,” he wrote, to other merchant passengers who kept him company on his journey or invited him to ride with them in their second-class compartment. 28 He also expressed appreciation for the Lohana trader who offered him an “old [smelly] Indian quilt” to sleep with in the Nakuru Railway station. 29 In Mohorani—half-way between Kikuyu and Kisumu—a Punjabi railway worker offered him his first “freshly cooked meal in three days.” 30 By their actions, merchants and civil servants, as well as caravan personnel and local populations, provided Adamji with important assistance and support. When Adamji waxed poetic about the pleasures of meeting merchants and

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27 Ibid, 48-54.
29 Ibid, 21.
30 Ibid, 35.
other contacts, he was teaching his readers about the necessity of building social relationships. “People need to think carefully about the circumstances of this world,” he wrote. “Wise men study them and act accordingly whereas a foolish man ignores them and gets bitter about life.” Adamji relied on numerous alliances, relationships, and forms of collaboration to help make his trips to the East African interior a success. For many merchants, the path into the interior was originally plowed open by the railway. But much of their mobility, between railway stations and the vast countryside, was facilitated by practices of patronage and structures of support.

CORPORATE STRUCTURES AND NETWORKS

Adamji relied on a host of participants and social relationships to navigate interior spaces. The most common connections he mentioned were with members of his religious Bohra trading community. Throughout his diary, Adamji regularly noted all the other Bohra merchants who he met or relied upon: they totaled fifty-one, in addition to eleven other Khoja merchants. More than just companions, these businesspeople were resources without whom, it is clear, Adamji would have been stranded and immobile. Of first importance was the market intelligence and travel information they provided to him. Merchant community networks proved to be important conduits for the latest updates regarding trade news and travel information. Adamji first heard about the drop in ivory supply, for example, before he arrived in western Kenya. On the train, a fellow Bohra traveler told him that, due to conditions upcountry, “ivory merchants in Mombasa were now suffering.” In Nairobi, he heard the return schedules of caravans from other merchants. This information included the caravans’ distance outside of town and the estimated number of days

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31 Ibid, 14.
32 Ibid, 18-20. “Bohra Alibhai Jivanji Mamuji said that ivory merchants in Mombasa were now suffering. Many businessmen in Mombasa had heard that [the firm] of Bohra Noorbhai Adamji was in difficulty and had no ready money.”
until their return to the coast. Last, merchant networks provided critical information about the general turnover of merchandise in station stores. When Adamji made a tour of the bazaar in Kisumu, he greeted each shopkeeper individually and inquired over their accounts. “We first went to Seth [i.e. merchant] Khoja Alidina Visram’s shop and then to Seth Khoja Dharamshi Khatau’s shop,” he wrote. “I inquired politely about their business and that way got some useful information concerning my business too. We sat for a while and I was observing [all] the merchandise for sale.”

Adamji’s Bohra network also served as sources of information about risky travel and other advisories. When Adamji found himself traveling between Nairobi and Fort Hall (Muranga), he received a letter from a Bohra merchant telling him to stay where he was. “They sent me a message that I should wait,” he wrote. “I asked him what the news was and he said they weren’t sure what was happening.” A day later, while he remained in Nairobi, he heard from his brothers in Mombasa via a telegram that a traveler on the same road was killed by a lion. On his third journey into the interior, Adamji provided similar information to the other merchant travelers. This time he had been staying for weeks in Mumias—a town in western Kenya near the Uganda border—and advised others passing through to avoid traveling to Uganda. “It would take about ten days to reach Jinja,” he told one traveler. “I advised him not to go…because there was a danger of wild animals attacking people on the way [and he would be best] to send a telegram instead.” In this way, Adamji’s writing makes clear how advice about movement and transport was in constant circulation among merchant groups as they moved between locations of the interior.

33 Ibid, 25. He also learns individual information about which merchants have agents where. As he writes, “[we] then went to Khoja Kassam Damji’s shop and went and sat in one Khoja’s shop. I asked him his name and if he was the owner of the shop. He said he was not the owner but was running the shop for Khoja Suleman Verji and Sons.”
34 Ibid, 59.
Networks of traveling traders also organized accommodations. In central as well as western Kenya, Adamji utilized connections to other Bohra merchants to find stay-and-storage houses. Some arrangements appear to have been makeshift. When he arrived in Kisumu, for example, he was shown to a sleeping place by Alidina Visram’s assistant. “He asked me if I was alone or if there was somebody else with me,” Adamji wrote. Adamji followed him to the small shed where “all his people were asleep, [but where] the people took rolls of Amerikani [cloth] and spread them on the ground [and] covered them with a blanket.” There he slept. Other arrangements were more commodious. Not long after the railway reached interior towns, major merchants began sponsoring stay houses for merchants of their respective communities. (Hindu groups, too, had accommodations organized by networks of mandals—or “associations”—which are described in the memoir of Gijubhai Badheka.36) Among the Bohras, Jeevanjee—who is referred to in Adamji’s diary as the local “millionaire”—organized a chain of bungalows. “I am not flattering or praising anyone unduly,” wrote Adamji, “when I say that Seth A.M. Jivanji & Co. went out of their way to look after the best interests and comforts of all Bohra travelers.” One exclusive stay-house in Nairobi was explained in the following terms:

There were separate rooms with comfortable facilities, built behind Seth A.M. Jivanji’s [sic] go-down and his bungalow. These rooms were a great convenience to travelers. There were always anywhere from five to eleven lodgers there from different places such as Kiu, Kitui, Muranga, and Mombasa....They [Seth A.M. Jivanji’s accountant Abdulhussein Mulla Karimji and also Mukhi Karachiwala, leader of the Bohra community in Nairobi] took special pains to try to satisfy the needs of various types of travelers staying in their guest rooms.37

36 Gijubhai Badheka, Africana Safar (A Trip to Africa) (Ahmedabad: Gujarat Balvikash Sansthan, 1944), 21-24. Badheka wrote that he shared his dorm with suthars (carpenters), Kanbi, Luhana (iron smiths), Sonis (gold smiths), and Brahmins. Describing his common room in Nairobi, where members stayed, Badheka wrote, it was a big room with a round table in the middle and a lamp hanging above it, beds were on the sides of the room. They were always kept spread. A friend made those beds from discarded wood…[We] attached [the beds] to the pillars of the wall and put down dirty mattresses from Bhavnagar which some of us had used on the steamer on the way over.

37 Adamji, My Journeys to the Interior, 41-42.
Similarly, in Entebbe, Jeevanee’s other visitors’ bungalow provided a useful rendezvous point, which helped to explain the dividends such stay-houses paid for merchants as well as Jeevanjee, whose reputation and prestige no doubt rose by his acts of hospitality. Adamji wrote:

    I saw everybody was eating when I entered the room. I was very happy to meet [the] Bohra[,] Mohammedali Esmailji Engineer, and his guest from Karachi. They had come from Mombasa so I asked them all the news about my people there. They said that everyone was fine. After some time Mr. Chaganlal, who was Seth A.M. Jivanji's accountant, gave me a letter that had come for me from Mombasa.

Accommodations were not something to be expected blindly, however, even from Adamji’s self-defined community. Adamji inquired at certain shops only to find the door closed on him. In Mumias, he even slept on the doorstep of one merchant’s shop and had his porters watch over him. A common solution to make connections was to bear a letter of introduction. In Machakos, for example, Adamji produced such a letter when he greeted a Shia Ismaili merchant. “[Dhalla Esmail] read the letter,” Adamji wrote, “and invited me to sit in the shop. He asked me where my luggage was...he welcomed me and gave me food, and as it was night time he made space in his shop for me to sleep.”

References and contacts helped organize networks of resources, thus creating early semblances of a class system among traders who were connected to the right individuals or could gain entry to the right partnerships or syndicates.

Perhaps the most crucial kinds of connections were to capital. East Africa’s Indian merchant networks were largely organized around administration of patronage and who made capital available. Access to funds made or broke business deals and sometimes determined shopkeepers’ fates in East Africa. As Adamji traveled between towns, he routinely noted not only which merchants were where, but also which locations had shops belonging to large merchant houses. This was not just Indian-merchant social geography. It was a necessary and practical

38 Ibid, 68.
exercise. Adamji’s note-taking paid off when he needed a quick loan to transport a load of ivory. After meeting the caravan near Kisumu, he approached a shop managed by an agent of Suleman Virjee.

Before going to the bazaar [Adamji wrote] we went to see somebody from Khoja Suleman Verji & Sons. I told him that I had to send ivory to Mombasa. If he had enough money to lend me I would write a credit note to Mombasa in exchange for the cash. He agreed to get about 500 rupees and said he would come and see me…On the third day Khoja Suleman Verji’s man brought 350 rupees in cash. So I wrote a credit note to Mombasa, payable in one month.39

This loan may seem a lucky find for Adamji. It is hard to imagine merchants in the East African interior distributing money freely to any trader claiming access to ivory. (Ivory hunting was an incredibly risky business.) However, a similar sequence ensued not long after. Short Rs. 800, Adamji again approached a shop belonging to a large established merchant, this time Alidina Visram. Adamji proposed a deal whereby Visram’s father-in-law, Abdul Rasul, would buy up the caravan’s ivory for the “lowest price,” and between the two of them they “would buy the whole lot of ivory.” Adamji’s plan amounted to market coercion, but it was an opportunity to “do good business and make a profit.” Abdul Rasul agreed to his suggestion and counted out Rs. 800 “on the spot.”40

Connections among Bohra merchants offered obvious material advantages. Information, accommodation, and capital were the lifeblood of overseas merchants, whether in East Africa or elsewhere. However, it would be wrong to assume that because they occurred within religious or communal circles that these connections were natural or uncultivated. Just as patrons such as Jeevanjee sponsored stay-houses, Adamji had to nurture bonds with fellow Muslims and Indians.

39 Ibid, 24. At first Adamji voices hesitation about borrowing from them—should his brothers be unable to meet the obligation. However, he wrote in his diary, his family had lent the Virjee firm Rs. 5,000 in a prior transaction. “I realized, I do not have to think twice about writing the credit note.”
40 Ibid, 29. “From my half of this money I paid Baloch Shambe bin Abdulla’s share,” writes Adamji. “I was promised that the rest of the money would be paid by Balochi Iddi bin Shero in Mumias.”
His efforts took the form of reciprocity and services, especially to merchants more senior and elderly to him. In Mumias and Kisumu, for example, Adamji volunteered to carry letters along to the next destination. He helped one merchant organize his goods at the custom house, equipping himself “with a hammer and chisel” in so doing. He also made several greetings according to proper etiquette. Adamji routinely shared tea and meals with Bohra and Khoja travelers, whether in the bazaars or on trains. The most representative example comes from his third journey, when he stayed in Mumias and saw “three brethren of [his] community” making their way unexpectedly through the bazaar. “As soon as I saw them, I took them to my tent,” Adamji wrote, describing his hospitality toward these visitors. “I spread a carpet on the floor for them and looked after them with all due respect. I made arrangements for them to wash, I ordered tea for them, and then took them to the shop.” Adamji went on for nearly a page describing their activities: their “special dinner,” how they had a “chat” and “pray[ed].” Adamji even went out of his way to write that he brought them extra blankets and took them “as [his] guests” to see the bazaar. No doubt Adamji saw this display of hospitality as necessary etiquette. Yet, even his diary must be seen as a display of generosity. Many readers would have been other Bohras who would have been impressed by Adamji’s gestures and goodwill. In this way, Adamji went out of his way to nurture his relationships with fellow Indian readers in East Africa and beyond.

CARAVAN LEADERS, ASSISTANTS, AND PORTERS

One of the more prominent debates in Indian merchant historiography regards the nature of agent systems. On one end are historians who tended to emphasize the importance of caste and kinship

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41 Ibid, 36. Upon leaving Kisumu and heading to Mumias, for example, he offers to carry Bohra merchants’ letters to his next stop. “If they wanted to send any letters to Seth Tayabali Mulla Jivanji [son of A.M. Jeevanjee] or Jafferji Esmailji I would take them.”
42 Ibid, 50.
Pedro Machado, for example, who focused on the eighteenth and nineteenth-century Indian Ocean trade between Daman and Diu and Mozambique emphasized the importance of extended family member networks. “Firms were structured hierarchically around senior members,” he wrote, “whose experiences and...mercantile reputations were indispensable resources.” On the other side are scholars who have focused on communal and inter-communal structures beyond kinship. They include David Rudner, who examined the inner workings of Nattukottai Chettiars of southern India and their system of principals and proprietors who lent goods on credit to a “field staff” of agents as well as hometown associates. They also include Claude Markovits, who adopted a similar framework to write about Sindhi merchants in Central Asia during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Markovits, in his study, identified the Shah-Gumastha agency system to demonstrate the importance of hometown roots and vocational specializations in determining the circulation of capital over long distances. “Bhaibands”—or “brotherhoods”—he argued, were purely pragmatic and based circumstance rather than on any individual’s ritual purity or religious affiliations. All of these structures (or their variations) appear to some extent in Adamji’s diary set in Kenya’s interior. Adamji, in the first place, introduced himself as the youngest of four brothers and explained that he is accountable to his older three brothers’ managerial decisions and plans. (Adamji knowingly acted against their consent when he traveled upcountry the first time.) Adamji also reminded the reader of his connections to other Bohra and Khoja merchants, whose links were imperative in helping him

43 Mangat, Asians in East Africa, Chapter 1.
47 Adamji, My Journeys to the Interior, 31.
complete his business. Yet, Adamji also related how Indian merchants formed other commercial solidarities with local participants. A variety of social infrastructures—or what Simone identified as an “economy of collaborative practice”—helped him to move capital and cargo safely, circulate to different areas of the interior and retrieve his firm’s dues.

Perhaps the second most pertinent network of connections, alongside merchants’ corporate networks, were to syndicates of caravan traders. Along the way, Adamji routinely relied on them for logistical support as well as knowledge and advice. To be sure, these relationships were not based on an easy trust. Adamji remained doubtful as to certain “Balochi” caravan traders’ intentions. He was slow to depend on them, both before they met and even into his second and third journeys. At times they would not give him “straight answer[s].” Adamji also found that Baloch Shahbek had “intentions [that] were not honorable.”

Numerous times Adamji took preemptive measures to avoid further reliance on them, such as when he went to the railway station to arrange an attachment on the ivory in his name instead of that of a Baluchi trader. However, Adamji’s dependence on caravan personnel—both the Baluchi ivory hunters and their assistants—is undeniable. Adamji’s first rapport with the Baluchi ivory hunters developed with his debtors’ junior assistant, identified in the text simply as “Hasham.” When Adamji arrived in Kisumu, Hasham helped him settle in and get situated. “I asked him to heat water so I could have a bath,” wrote Adamji, “and to get my clothes washed, [and] he at once called a Baloch to boil water.” This was all done “properly,” added Adamji, a reference to the fact that Hasham, like Adamji’s family,

48 Ibid, 20-25. In one instance, Adamji wrote, “I asked Baloch Azad how much ivory the caravan was carrying but he did not give me a straight answer. He said it had not been a profitable safari. They had been surrounded by some ‘washeszi’ [thieves] and they had been lucky escape. He talked some more and then went away.” In another instance, Adamji wrote that he was told a lie by one Baloch named Shahbek. Shahbek told Adamji that he only brought back 25-30 frasilas of ivory from his hunt—a number that Adamji found strikingly low. “[His] intentions were not honorable,” wrote Adamji. Adamji then decided to apply for an attachment for the ivory he collected in his own name before Shahbek had opportunity to send it back to Mombasa in his own name.
was originally from Karachi and shared the same concept of cleanliness and hygiene. “He [also] knew Hindi,” Adamji noted, “and I got a good opportunity to speak that language.”

Part of Adamji’s dependence on the Balochi caravan traders stemmed from the latter’s years of experience in the East African interior. Later into his first trip, Adamji developed another bond with Shambe bin Abdulla—his debtor. Abdulla’s business acumen, as well as knowledge of caravan logistics, helped Adamji make his own financial decisions. In one instance, Abdulla advised Adamji on paying out Rs. 800 to his caravan porters—the same Rs. 800 that Adamji had to borrow from Visram’s shop. In addition, back in Mombasa, Adamji took Abdulla’s advice in lending him more money to buy up merchandise to resell in the interior. “Baloch Shambe bin Abdulla wanted to buy some miscellaneous items,” recalled Adamji. “I told him to make a list, and then I went to buy all those things in the Bazaar.” In the end, he bought up for Shambe bin Abdulla 45,000 rupees worth of goods—the same amount that was originally owed—while Adamji also acquired his own merchandise to sell in Uganda—all of which both were able to sell “within a month.”

Adamji also depended significantly on caravan assistants and porters. He may have relied on the railway and government personnel for safe passage to points along the trunk line. Stations and camps near and far from the rail line were guarded by soldiers or barbed-wire walls. But travelling off the grid, as it were, into villages and forests still bore great risk for merchants like Adamji. To ease and protect his movements, Adamji employed teams of workers. Primarily of Swahili-origin, many of these participants entered Adamji’s diary under the titles of “men” and “boys.” As Adamji noted, they often provided him logistical support, hauling ivory tusks,

49 Ibid, 25. Adamji wrote that he chatted so much he felt he “had known Hasham for a long, long time and was meeting after a separation.”
50 Ibid, 50.
collecting firewood, or fetching water. They set up camp, prepared, or bartered with local populations for “a clay pot.” Perhaps the best example of Adamji’s reliance on his assistants came one evening after his porters set up camp. One of his “boys” alerted Adamji about his cargo. “After dinner,” Adamji wrote, “I asked my 'boy' to go and collect dry and green grass to make a mattress for me to sleep on.” He went on to describe the incident in this way:

He cut some grass from the forest and then he covered it with a bed-sheet. [When he came back from washing his clothes in the river], my “boy” asked me, “Bwana...have you [heard] the news?” I replied...“I haven't [heard] any news.” So he said...“A snake came out of your spices.” I asked him...“where is it?” He said he had killed it and thrown it in the river.

In towns, these same assistants guarded merchandise and ivory cargo as well as negotiated for other supplies and provisions. In some circumstances, Adamji appeared to have maintained meaningful social relationships with his African assistants after their work contracts were over. On his return trip to Mombasa, for example, Adamji located an old Swahili assistant named Zuberi at the station in Voi. Adamji approached him, he wrote, because he and other Bohra merchants found themselves running short on food. After Adamji explained his predicament, he wrote that Zuberi, who Adamji described endearingly as a “young man of my own kind…gave me half of everything on a plate, [including] the chicken and the chapatis.” As Adamji’s passage made clear, Indian merchants could express, publicly before an audience of Gujarati traders, kinship with Africans whose own ethical orientations or commercial or social trajectories intersected with their own.

While most African caravan porters and assistants were not indigenous to the interior regions in which Adamji traveled, on occasion he did decide to hire locally. Tapping into interior

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51 Ibid, 51.
52 Ibid, 52-60.
labor markets enabled Adamji to ease logistical costs and other difficulties or to enjoy other comforts and luxuries. When catching up to a steamship on Lake Victoria, he paid two local men to sail him on a “small boat” to meet the ship. “There were two men in the boat, one was the oarsmen and the other was there to bail the water out of the boat.” Later on, when Adamji stayed in Kisumu, he decided to hire a “young Buganda boy,” who worked as his cook and helped him organize his tent and belongings in Hasham's compound. Notably, Adamji spent a month in Kisumu without the help of another Bohra merchant—at least according to his diary. Yet Adamji utilized local porters, mostly on his travels between Entebbe and Kampala. As road and rail infrastructure had not yet reached into these parts, Adamji was left to rely on human carriers. For his journey from Entebbe to Kampala, Adamji hired “men” who carried him in a hammock. In addition, Adamji procured the help of “hundreds” of porters who protected the caravan route between Entebbe and Kampala. “[Their] work was to light the 'mabua' sticks and escort travelers to their next destination at night.” On his way back, he similarly employed local service providers, this time through informal references provided by other Bohra merchants stationed in Kampala. “Five men carried the ivory,” he wrote. “Four men carried me in a hammock and one man carried my mattress and others carried all the foodstuff.” Adamji may have relied on government infrastructures and corporate networks on certain portions of his trip. However, a variety of caravan-trade participants—traders, assistants, and haulers—filled in the cracks by providing critical information as well as logistical support.

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54 Ibid, 47.
55 Ibid, 50.
56 Ibid, 55.
“NATIVES,” PROTECTIONS, AND MARKET INFORMANTS

Beyond the circuit of caravan personnel, Adamji also relied on assistance from the various indigenous peoples of western Kenya. Over the course of his travels, he routinely utilized connections to villagers, farmers, and chiefs referred to as Wakavirondo (lit. “people who sit on their heels”). These Bantu- and Nilotic-speaking peoples are today better known by their modern ethnic identities as Kisii and Luo. At the time of Adamji’s travel, they were not actively part of the caravan trade (at least according to Adamji’s record). Nor were they working or inhabiting town areas or sites near the railway. (These populations, as we will see in Chapter 4, became far more integrated into colonial production and trade economies during the interwar and postwar periods.)

Like many other travelers of his time, Adamji described them as a “simple” people—symbolized largely by their relatively sparse clothing, among other things. However, Adamji made repeated references to Wakavirondo, particularly in connection to how helpful they were in facilitating his travel around the Gulf of Winam on Lake Victoria. They provided a meaningful network of support and knowledge for all newly arrived merchants who lacked familiarity with local environs or modes of agricultural production and subsistence. Adamji relied on them for information and accommodation, and professed gratitude for their patronage—“simple” for him as it may have been.

Navigating interior areas required knowledge of local geography and places—information few people knew better than the African interior’s residents themselves. To no surprise, Adamji’s first mention of an Mkavirondo came toward the end of his first trip when he found himself adrift from his caravan’s course and unsure of his geographical orientation. He and other Balochi travelers, Hasham and Sorabji, had set out from Kisumu to find his wayward and indebted ivory hunters. They had traveled a full day in hope of intersecting the caravan in the countryside when
they found themselves lost. “We continued walking [but] saw no sign of the caravan,” Adamji wrote. “We didn’t have the courage to go any further, so we decided to turn back [to Kisumu].” Only just as they were making their turn, they ran into a member of a local village. “We met a Mkavirondo,” wrote Adamji, “[who was] coming towards us.” He went on:

[The Balochi] Sorabji got hold of him and asked him in his native language to show us the way. He led us as far as another native hut and then he ran away. We asked the man in the hut where the caravan was. [And while] he argued with us, [he] then finally showed [us] the way. We saw the Caravan, just as directed by the Mkavirondo, after about fifteen- or twenty-minutes’ walk.  

Tensions between the group of participants are palpable in this story. Adamji did not say much about why the first Mkavirondo evaded them. Nor did he mention why the second was argumentative. We might infer that the Wakavirondo villagers had a negative impression of caravanners, with whom they were already familiar. However, in follow-up encounters, interactions were more congenial. Adamji recalled how, when his own caravan was later in need of provisions and other goods outside of Mumias, they pulled up to a place in the vicinity of the Wadera River where they found “many natives bathing and drinking water.” His porters, he wrote, were able to “buy milk, carrots, maize, and chickens from the natives.” As Adamji explained, “They accepted beads (common glass pearls) which they used instead of money. I gave my men beads to buy their food from natives, [and] after bathing and changing into dry clothes, we had tea and some snacks.”

Wakavirondo also provided mercantile travelers with rest and with protection of their property, from both others and the elements. Along the road to Kisumu, according to Adamji, many stopped in and stayed at “native” huts. Sometimes visitors pitched their tents on the village grounds. At other times they received more hospitable welcomes. In one instance, Adamji was

57 Ibid, 27.
58 Ibid, 38.
shown the proverbial red carpet. “I had carried a canvas tent with me,” he explained. “But instead of pitching this tent I decided to spend the night in the Mkavirondo's hut.” Adamji was storing his luggage and stacking his goods when the head of the village approached and greeted him. He turned out to be the local chief. Many qualities about the chief surprised Adamji. For one, he spoke proficient Swahili (as did Adamji) and “it was a good opportunity for me to talk with him and get information.” Adamji inquired about travel distances as well as local geography and “asked [the chief] how many more nights would have to be spent on the way [to] Mumias.” Adamji also asked the Mkavirondo chief whether he could buy milk from him. The chief, he wrote, “happily agreed.” “He filled the big kettle full of fresh milk, [and] I paid him with five strings of beads.”

Similar circumstances repeated themselves on later trips. Adamji stopped at an Mkavirondo’s hut at one point, arriving at 8 AM with his crew of assistants and finding provisions to cook lunch and take rest. Due to rainy weather, he added, the caravan even spent the night there.

Interactions with Wakavirondo could also result in increased knowledge of and familiarity with customs, aesthetic styles, and consumer tastes—all valuable insights into the state of local markets of the East African interior and therefore critical information to merchant businesspeople like Adamji. According to Adamji’s diary, after he met the chief (mentioned above), they sat down in his hut to let their conversation take more profound turns. Adamji asked why Wakavirondo did not possess the same demand for Indian merchants’ imported textiles as other populations did, yet they remained interested in purchasing other imports, such as jewelry and metal articles. Adamji recalled, their conversation began with the basics. “I asked him why he was roaming about naked?” Adamji said. The chief responded in full:

“Where [am I] to get clothes?” [The chief asked.] I told him to buy clothes with money. He said, “where [am I] to get money?” I then suggested [that] they should

59 Ibid, 36-37.
60 Ibid, 44.
wear skins like some other tribes. His reply was that it was not customary for them to wear clothes. I told him that he had said they had no money; so where did he get the money to buy the beads and copper and brass wire ornaments? I said if they had money for those things, surely they could use that money to buy clothes. He said they did not care for clothes.

Adamji’s recounted conversation with the Mkavirondo chief about money and textiles is meaningful and not only because of the chief’s contrarian position toward textile consumption. Textiles, by the end of the nineteenth century, had already gained great popularity across large swaths of the interior. The passage is also meaningful because it evinces how Adamji was able to collect information, saving him the possibility of transporting the wrong merchandise to the wrong region. Up until that time, Adamji’s primary view into local market demands came via hearsay, caravanners, or observing merchants’ shop inventory. The chief gave him critical first-hand insights into the consumer thinking of the East African interior. In this way, we see how merchants relied on indigenous residents for mobility and movement as well as information about the supply and demand for commodities that were the staple of itinerant Indian traders.

CONCLUSION

Merchants reaped great benefit from colonial Kenya’s infrastructure projects at the turn of the twentieth century. New deep-water harbors and railway lines provided opportunities to expand trade networks deep in the East Africa interior. However, colonial government projects were not the only kind of infrastructure during this time. At the dawn of the colonial period, Indian merchants also relied on a variety of new social relationships and connections—or what I’ve referred to here as human infrastructure. While invisible in many historical documented penned by colonial officials, this infrastructure was critical in opening up new avenues of circulation and mobility among itinerant businesspeople. Indian merchant household members, in providing
connections between East Africa and its global markets, relied on numerous networks of trust, knowledge, and labor. Foremost, they relied on relationships with other caste and kinship members, who at this time were primarily, but not exclusively, new male arrivals. Corporate networks provided merchants with access to capital and credit, as well as trade and travel advice. In addition, Indian merchants relied on caravanners for market knowledge and logistical support in moving goods in and out of the interior. Finally, they formed partnerships with indigenous populations of Western Kenya who provided accommodations, hospitality, and a range of market intelligence. By analyzing the diary of one Indian merchant, Ebrahimij Adamji, this chapter has demonstrated the importance of such projects. It has also shed light on the multitude of alliances merchants cultivated in order to move, safeguard, and accumulate capital in the early years of the twentieth century.

Merchants would continue to link together various commercial spheres over the coming decades. In Chapter 4, for example, we will see how Indian merchants utilized a variety of partnerships and alliances to expand their trade in agricultural commodities such as ghee. However, the growth of such intercommunal and -racial networks did not result in the emergence of a single commercial society. On the contrary, merchants’ strategic links to different markets of production and consumption had the ironic result of preserving Kenya as a patchwork of separate, if occasionally overlapping, spheres of commercial exchange. By traversing these different spheres, each with their own set of rules and norms, merchants were able to expand avenues of wealth accumulation and organize methods of arbitrage between varying commercial populations. As the next chapter demonstrates, merchants used their status as “non-native” subjects to protect these gains and safely make new investments in property and trade partnerships. Availing themselves of colonial common law legal institutions, East Africa's Indian merchant households
were able to file claims against partners and debtors and pass down wealth through generations via wills and other instruments of inheritance. Indians’ special status gave them a strong advantage in trade and commerce that was not available to "native" African populations. In addition, it enabled them to strengthen their community structures via the acquisition of urban property and to lay groundwork—both metaphorically and literally—for Kenya’s twentieth century urban society.
CHAPTER 2

COMMERCE AND COLONIAL LAW

In 1904, H. Ismailji Jeevanji, a Bohra merchant, published a commercial manual about East Africa for an audience of Gujarati-language readers in Bombay. In it, he reported that ports and customs houses in Zanzibar and Mombasa were, much to his surprise, being “kept in a proper manner.” “In former years,” he explained, “the account office had previously kept its books in Gujarati and Arabic. But nowadays they are all kept in English.” This was significant, he added, because “[British] head officers are watching over all of the departmental staff [to ensure compliance].” Jeevanji was equally positive about the introduction of colonial common-law courts. Following Britain’s trade and treaties over the prior two decades, its imperial jurisdiction had spread from the coast into East Africa’s interior. Indian merchants could now file claims against “cheaters” in colonial courts, Jeevanji asserted. Those cheaters, by his description, included Arabs, who liked to “deal with daggers at their side.” “During a negotiation,” he explained of the new legal dispensation, “if the seller tricks the buyer…the buyer can cancel the deal. Or if the [local] seller won’t return the [imported] goods, the buyer can go to the British court and the cheater will be punished.” The spread of British imperial rule in East Africa brought significant advantages and safeguards to Indian merchants like Jeevanji, who as British subjects of “non-native” status in East Africa had access to common law courts that “native” African or “Arab” traders did not have. “Mombasa is now [a] safe place for ships,” Jeevanji concluded. “[The port city] has “completely changed from years before.”

1 H. Ismailji Jeevanji, Afrikā Prakās (Africa Illuminated) (Bombay: Duftur Ashkara Oil Engine Press, 1904), 78-130.
Much of Jeevanji’s manual focused on the coast and on port cities like Mombasa, which by 1904 was handling “8,000-10,000 tons of shipments” and had quickly grown to 30,000 residents. However, much of what Jeevanji wrote with regard to coastal trade could have been said about the interior areas of central and western Kenya and Uganda a decade later. One year after Jeevanji published his manual, Nairobi became the “throne”—to use his words—of the East Africa Protectorate. Alongside railways and warehouses came new government offices and court houses, district headquarters, and police forces. New institutions were staffed by civil servants—officers, magistrates, judges, and clerks. New advocate offices appeared to help merchants represent themselves in court and piece through new civil codes enacted by Kenya’s government and legislators. These changes, as previous scholars have shown, bifurcated East Africa’s legal spheres between “native” and “non-native” categories in accordance with colonial racial administrative ideology. Courts were places where the sinews of colonial racism and administrative thinking were exposed, and where lines of racial privilege and protection of property were drawn, despite officials’ attempts to “protect” African interests. However, courts were also more than that. For the tens of thousands of Indian merchant household members pouring into the interior in the prewar and interwar periods, the new colonial legal institutions proved important capital protections and mechanisms of dispute adjudication for their growing businesses. Indian merchants who were building up networks of human connections and infrastructure on the East African coast and in the interior in pursuit of their mercantile interests, now went to colonial courts. They solidified the proceeds from these new businesses via partnership agreements,

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2 Ibid, 18-90.
contracts, and other instruments, into the colonial legal system, verified and stamped by the colonial state. In addition to the networks and relationships that nurtured it, merchant capital benefitted from Britain’s colonization of the interior.

This chapter examines the spread and protection of Indian merchant capital in East Africa during the first half of the twentieth century. By focusing on the colonial legal sphere, it argues that during the prewar and interwar years, merchant households utilized East Africa’s colonial laws and its common-law courts to protect their capital and investments and (for some) to accumulate vast amounts of new wealth from trade with African populations and partnerships with other Indians. Benefitting from their status as “non-native” populations of colonial Kenya, such merchant households brought their networks and transactions under colonial protection and used these protections to build and maintain businesses in trade, urban real estate, and small-scale manufacturing. Indian merchants, by virtue of their “non-native” status, were able to sign stamped agreements, obtain title deeds, and underwrite short-term and long-term loans with protections of the court and ultimately the colonial state. They were able to access credit from metropolitan financial institutions and pass estates onto heirs and beneficiaries—including brothers and sisters or wives and children—or otherwise securely invest in community networks and infrastructure.

Merchant firms not only conformed their practices in Africa to the Anglo-Indian legal principles that were worked out in India and introduced to East Africa by British administrations, this chapter argues. They internalized Anglo-Indian ideas and became proliferators of colonial law by serving as arbitrators in “private” communal realms. In turn, Kenya’s colonial legal sphere did not replace or override corporate structures, networks, or connections. On the contrary, it helped to reinforce them. The two spheres proved mutually constitutive as merchants creatively adapted their practices
and incorporated colonial principles into their networks of commerce with Indian partners and counterparties alongside their growing trade with African populations.

Up until now, much scholarship has emphasized how merchants across different global contexts have adjusted commercial practices or their political identities to utilize local legal institutions. Pedro Machado, for example, has argued that Gujarati vāniyā merchants in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century East Africa cultivated mechanisms of contract enforcement via an informal Mahajan (or socio-economic organization) as well as Portuguese courts. “The Mahajan and imperial courts,” he wrote, “operated as complementary mechanisms to regulate merchant and commercial behavior.”

Historian Fahad Bishara has also argued that Indian merchants in nineteenth-century Muscat and Zanzibar strategically claimed multiple domiciles as a way to gain access to British imperial courts in East Africa and litigate against creditors there. “It did not take long,” he wrote, “for the Indian mercantile communities of Muscat and Zanzibar to identify the gaps in the emerging British policy on jurisdiction and take advantage of them.” These studies have helped to shed light on how Indian merchants straddled multiple legal spheres to cultivate systems of global exchange between India and East Africa. “Merchants and litigants were savvy to what was going on around them,” Bishara added, in demonstrating how merchants saw East Africa as a site for legal venue-shopping. At the same time, while these studies shed light on the complex legal landscapes dissecting the Indian Ocean, they overlooked the degree to which merchants incorporated colonial legal concepts and principles into their own private communal practices. Whereas Machado saw the informal corporate realm as separate from formal legal spheres, Bishara argued that Indian merchants eventually turned away from British legal ideals during the interwar period as British officials reoriented their imperial bureaucratic and legal

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architecture to safeguard assets and earnings of white settlers, Arabs, and “native” Africans as opposed to Indian businesspeople and financiers.⁵

To what extent did merchants utilize Anglo-Indian traditions to form partnerships with other Indians and conduct trade with African, Arab, and European populations as well? How did merchants rely on colonial courts and bureaucracies to safeguard wealth and investments, which they could transfer to household, kinship, or community members? How, in addition, did Indian merchants willingly conform their commercial and household financial practices to colonial legal concepts, thereby fusing both corporate and colonial legal structural realms? One scholar to look at a similar set of questions is Man Bun Kwan. Writing about salt merchants in late imperial China, he found that the Qing Code was not arbitrary or irrational or otherwise removed from merchants’ everyday dealings, as previous scholars contended. Rather, it coexisted in “relative harmony” with merchants. Merchants internalized its implicit principles because state codes were just as effective, if not more so, than customary practices in promoting one highly important public good: order. “How officials decided which mode of conflict resolution to apply in civil cases,” he wrote, “demonstrates the further complex interplay between the state, the public, and the private realm.”⁶

While it is open to doubt whether colonial law coexisted in “relative harmony” with Kenya’s Indian merchant households, officials applied Anglo-Indian legal principles that were intentionally meant to help advance Indian merchant capital interests. This hybrid legal tradition of colonial law provided merchants a common language for conducting business between each other as well as a basis for legal protections in the context of cross-cultural trade with other “non-native” immigrants as well as “native” African populations. In turn, merchants not only came to “internalize” colonial

law, as Kwan would predict. They came to serve as its proliferators, and very practitioners, in public as well as private realms.

To make its case, this chapter turns toward legal contracts and correspondences found in the client files of a colonial East African law firm, Daly & Figgis. Founded in 1899 by Oscar B. Daly and Edward Figgis, the law firm became a premiere advocacy group in Kenya specifically and East Africa more broadly. It catered to both European and Indian clienteles; most of the latter were of medium or large-size fortunes. Others were small, low-income clients—petty traders or agents—who were likely referred to Daly & Figgis via communal or Indian Associations or some other political body. (Notably, up through the Second World War, the firm did not represent a single black African client, probably because Daly & Figgis did not litigate in so called “native tribunals.”) While the firm handled both criminal and civil cases, nearly all the files examined in this chapter were of commercial or household (family law) nature. That is, they were civil cases. Most documents pertaining to partnership contracts, tenancy agreements, or claims and settlements or arbitration involved male members of merchant households. Other pertaining to matters of probate and administration referenced both men and women. While the firm on one level reflects the spread of European metropolitan traditions and institutions into East Africa in the twentieth century, it also provides a valuable glimpse into the world of Indian commercial life during the same period. If examined from the perspective of the merchant households themselves—perspectives brought out through contemporary newspaper editorials, folk literature, and written oral histories—the firm’s archive opens up a unique door into understanding not only how Indian merchants utilized colonial law and financial institutions to protect and invest capital in the East African interior. It also demonstrates how they were able to expand their commercial portfolios in
areas of trade and real estate, reproducing household wealth via structures of caste, kinship, and community.\footnote{The Daly & Figgis (DF) papers are available at the University of Nairobi Library (UONL) in Department of Archives and Rare Collections (ARC). From here on out, files from Daly & Figgis will be cited as UONL RAC DF.}

**MERCHANTS, ADMINISTRATORS, AND KENYA’S ANGLO-INDIAN LEGAL SPHERE**

British India’s imperial jurisdiction first extended into East Africa beginning in the early nineteenth century. In 1822, Captain Moresby signed a treaty with the Sultan of Muscat, granting the Royal Navy right to patrol the western Indian Ocean. While largely a measure to monitor and capture outbound slave ships, the treaty provided an important precedent for Britain’s presence and involvement in commercial affairs along the Swahili Coast. In 1839, British officials signed the Convention of Commerce with Oman, which gave them power to adjudicate “mixed” cases involving Omani and imperial subjects.\footnote{Y.P. Ghai and J.P.W.B. McAuslan, *Public Law and Political Change in Kenya* (Nairobi: Oxford University Press, 1970), 15-27.} Many Indian merchants operating in the ports of Zanzibar or Mombasa, J.S. Mangat argues, remained under the sovereignty of the Sultan of Oman and obtained lucrative contracts farming his customs there. Some even preferred protections of the Omani courts to British ones, given that their financial assets and fortunes were tied up in slave holdings.\footnote{J. S. Mangat, *A History of the Asians in East Africa, c. 1886 to 1945* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969), 4} However, by the late nineteenth century, following various imperial proclamations and decrees, as well as the opening of the British consulate at Zanzibar, merchants increasingly realigned with the British flag. In 1884, Britain issued an Order-in-council formally declaring Zanzibar a part of the District of Bombay. By the 1890s, British officials had established a second high court in Mombasa. “Officials witnessed the implementation of a more structured and

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\footnote{The Daly & Figgis (DF) papers are available at the University of Nairobi Library (UONL) in Department of Archives and Rare Collections (ARC). From here on out, files from Daly & Figgis will be cited as UONL RAC DF.}


entrenched legal bureaucracy on the East African coast,” Fahad Bishara writes, “one that claimed an expansive jurisdiction.”\(^{10}\)

In 1895, imperial legal apparatuses expanded into the interior with Britain’s East Africa Protectorate. Acquisition of new territory was followed by an Order-in-council in 1897, which provided for a bifurcated system of higher and lower courts serving “non-native” immigrant subjects, on the one hand, and “native” African populations, on the other. Whereas the former were subject to a colonial law couched in British Indian concepts and philosophies, the latter were subject to “customary” codes and a separate set of courts and tribunals designed and structured by colonial officials. A court ordinance of 1907 further delineated procedures and jurisdictions for these two systems of justice. On the common-law side, it instituted a three-class system of subordinate courts, held by a resident magistrate as well as senior or provincial officer (the officers were considered magistrates \textit{ex-officio}). Second class courts were held by a district officer, while third class courts were held by assistant district commissioners. Above these courts was Kenya’s high court, which handled all jurisdictions and matters of probate and administration.\(^{11}\) In theory, Muslim (or “Arab”) populations remained under the Sultan’s sovereignty on the coast—a sovereignty that stretched for a ten-mile strip from the ocean. These Muslims retained the right to bring disputes before \textit{khadis}, or Muslim jurists. However, as Bishara writes, colonial subjects could and regularly did appeal to their own laws, while court officials solicited Islamic legal opinions and weighed in on Islamic courts with opinions of their own.\(^{12}\)

From a point of jurisprudence, much of East Africa’s common law codes applying to “non-natives” were drawn directly from colonial India. The 1924 Civil Procedures Act, drafted by

\(^{10}\) Bishara, \textit{Sea of Debt}, 156.


\(^{12}\) Bishara, \textit{Sea of Debt}, Chapter 5.
Kenya’s bureaucrats and passed by its Legislative Council, bore an uncanny resemblance to India’s Code of Civil Procedures—enacted first in 1858 and later amended in 1908. The Kenyan version included an 11-part, 100-section law to facilitate resolution of civil disputes, with a system of arbitration and private mediation as well as matters of arrest, attachment, and the basis for seizure and foreclosures. While European officials might have authored the overriding legal architecture for their East African colony, day-to-day work was almost entirely in the hands of Indian subjects—magistrates, court brokers and clerks, and auctioneers. Many of these colonial judicial employees included Parsi, Goan, or Gujarati civil servants who were trained on the subcontinent or in England and arrived in East Africa in their early or middle career. As one European official wrote to Kenya’s attorney general in 1917, his staff handled “enormous pile[s] of work.” That staff were versed in all legal topics—probate, administration, bankruptcy, and high court appeals—making Kenya’s colonial legal system not only one of overlapping ideas and principles, but also experiences, ideas, personnel, and skills.13

PARTNERSHIP AGREEMENTS

This colonial court system and its personnel were of tremendous benefit for Indian citizens wanting to invest in East Africa. Many Indian merchants might have operated through certain informal or semi-formal institutions or networks. As Machado shows, joint or extended family firms or organizations ensured the possibility of pooling and guarding capital over vast geographic expanses.14 However, many Indian businesspeople in East Africa needed to form new partnerships;

13 Resident Magistrate Court Nairobi General, 1917, KNA AG/53/3. A.E. Beckett, Acting Registrar, wrote a memorandum regarding Clerical staff, in which he stated, “When I arrived back here…Sorabji had an enormous pile of work in his insolvency basket, a great deal in High Court basket and Probate and Administration basket, and any amount of odds and ends.” Furthermore, he went on to say, “None of the Clerks are capable of doing Mr. Sorabji’s work — not [that] they possibly get time to do it — for the exception of Roque and Pereira.”
14 See Machado, Oceans of Trade, 48-52.
for that, legal agreements and contract law were especially useful. Some of these partnerships were comprised of merchants and agents belonging to the same caste or community. Others were formed with members of varying groups of Indian immigrants. (Notably, no commercial partnerships, according to the records from this particular archive, were formed between Indians and Africans, as Africans were not able to own the same title deeds as Indians nor be subject to the same contract clauses.) Extension of colonial law—or, more specifically laws drafted in India during the 1880s—into East Africa provided the overarching legal framework for merchants and other commercial participants from a variety of “non-native” immigrant backgrounds. Merchants in East Africa were able to make use of forms of protection already familiar to them from home to help govern their relationships. Some agreements bound merchants together for short and temporary ventures—e.g. in the context of trade agreements involving seasonal agriculture. Other contracts lasted for several decades, as in the context of forming new firms or taking part in collective urban real estate investments.

In this way, merchants were able to fall back on colonial state apparatuses for legal protections. Signees assumed responsibilities as “active” or “non-active,” “sleeping,” partners, as well as with “general” or “limited” partners. Partnership contracts possessed all staple agreements and terms: the distribution of shares, division of profits and liabilities, stipulations regarding competency, as well as consideration and terms of sale. In East Africa, Indian merchants often signed agreements to raise capital with which to purchase or borrow new equipment or to expand inventory. Certain merchants, in need of saving money on trade or delivery, found synergies between trading syndicates and thus signed partnership agreements to lessen one another’s overhead costs. (This was particularly useful for renting transport equipment and storage space.)

15 See Ritu Birla, Stages of Capital: Law, Culture, and Market Governance in Late Colonial India (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009), 49-51.
In such cases, they would share shipping or delivery costs and even jointly hire Indian or African assistants. Nathoo Kanji, for example, an Ismaili merchant who arrived in Kenya in 1914, was partner to nearly half a dozen agreements over a period of fifteen years. He partnered with other merchants from his community to operate shops in Mihuti and Nairobi, which retailed imports in exchange for African cash crops and agricultural goods. In one instance, Kanji remained the majority shareholder, while other partners paid in less than 5 percent of the total capital. In other instances, Kanji maintained only a minority stake, while other partners paid in nearly 70 percent of the total capital. Whereas the former arrangement was conducive for Kanji to manage his single shop, the latter arrangement helped him gain a new foothold in western Kenya’s growing cotton industry by renting six mills in the Koru area.16

Under protections of colonial law, commercial diversification became safer and more common. In some circumstances, partnerships were comprised of members of varying backgrounds and trade or retail specializations. With new markets forming, traders and other Indian immigrants acted rapidly to secure profit streams with the help of other Indian immigrant traders, mechanics, and artisans. Meat traders partnered with mess hall keepers, drapers and outfitters partnered with masons, and textile retailers partnered with money lenders. In 1931, for example, a partnership formed between a syndicate of traders, transporters, and contractors in Limuru—a town in Kenya’s Central Highlands that was home to Kikuyu-speaking farmers and

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16 Odhavji Bejhar Bodani vs. Nathoo s/o Kanji and Nathalal Ranchhod, 1931, UONL RAC DF, Series 1, File No. 190. Kanji’s full testimony states: “[Kanji] came to Kenya in 1914 and went into partnership in 1916 with Ratanshi Dharamshi and opened a Duka at Mihuti between Fort Hall and Nyeri [in Central Kenya]. [The] partnership dissolved in 1924 and [the] debtor received Ksh 4,700/- as his share of profit and goodwill. This Duka was thereafter carried on by the other partner. In April, 1924, [Kanji] started to work as Commission Agent in Nairobi, and ceased at the end of 1925. [He] earned living expenses only. In September, 1934, [he] opened another Duka at Mihuti in partnership with Tathalal Ranchhod, and traded as Nathoo Kanji & Co. [The] debtor put Ksh 4700/- in capital and other partner Ksh 250/- only. [The] business [was] managed by Rathalal Ranchhod. After 15 months trading made a profit of Ksh 2400/-, and in November 1925, [they] took another partner Jadavji, who put in Ksh 6250/-. [Kanji also] took on hire at six mills at Koru from Wali Hasham & Co., on [a] monthly [basis].”
increasing numbers of Europeans. To expand orders and clientele, the merchants hired carters and fuel contractors from another transport company. By all readings, it was a complex partnership. Yet it saved the shop managers expenses by enabling the firm to pay salaries of Ksh 150 per month to transport employees (instead of for each delivery individually). It also saved the transport company’s costs of having to house its employees. The head merchant—rumored to be a “rich man”—provided accommodation space in one of his Nairobi shops to the cart men and fuel contractor as part of the agreement.17

Perhaps the most important protections that merchants gained in Kenya’s colonial law were in relation to the dissolution of partnerships. In some cases, partnerships were simply dissolved. Agreements bore specific dates of partners’ retirements as well as instructions for dividing profits as well as stock and trade interests. In the case of Kanji’s partnerships, for example, he managed to recoup precisely the value he invested—or share price plus interest and earnings. However, not all partnerships had such simple terms. Some possessed complex clauses requiring certain partners to buy back others’ shares or assume liabilities at pre-determined rates. (Buy-back clauses were particularly popular among masons or traders in need of short-term finances to purchase certain equipment or stock.)18 Others possessed terms preventing the sale of one partner’s shares without the consent of the other partners involved. This was the case of the partnership agreement signed between Allah Rakha, Mohamed Sharif, and Mohamed Din, a meat trader and two retailers in Nairobi. In 1944, Rakha and Sharif invested Ksh 10,651 in New Market Meat Supply by signing a partnership with Din—the owner at the time. The agreement stipulated that Din remain the head

17 Dalip Singh vs. Atma Ram, Bir Singh, and Lal Chand, 1931, UONL RAC DF, Series 1, Serial No. 249.
18 One includes the case of Jan Mohmed Umardin and Kurshed Mohamed, masons of Mombasa’s Ithna Asheri community. In 1938, Mohamed formed a partnership with Umardin to raise money to buy a stone crushing machine. Mohamed agreed to supervise the labor and machine and divide the profits. See, Jan Mohamed Umardin vs. Khurshed Mohamed, 1938, UONL RAC DF, Series 1, File No. 814.
butcher for the duration of the contract. Thus, when Din sold his shares one year later to retire, he complained that the expiration date of the contract was “vague.” Rakha and Sharif took him to court.\textsuperscript{19} Although we don’t know the outcome of the case, colonial legal institutions provided the two partners with protections over the capital they had invested in Din’s business.

REAL ESTATE AND RENTS

State institutions also provided avenues for “non-native” immigrants to invest in immovable property. Under protection of the new colonial bureaucracy, Indian merchants gained legal rights over urban plots as well as investments in real estate holdings. In 1896, the India Land Acquisition Act was extended to East Africa, granting the Protectorate officials authority to possess “unoccupied” or “waste” land. Five years later, the government enacted the Crown Land Ordinance of 1902, giving the Commissioner (or, later, Governor) the right to re-distribute Crown land as he saw fit. Come the following two decades, lands were surveyed and districted, townships were drawn up, and commercial areas were divided up into plots and sold at public auctions, typically to “non-native” immigrants. (“Native” populations, meanwhile, were allocated certain market plots or settlement areas on the outskirts of town.) Following these transformations, merchants found opportunities to buy up leases, register title deeds with the Land Office, and either occupy or rent out commercial or residential space. Certain merchants such A.M. Jeevanjee and Alidina Visram acquired large sections of township land. Whereas Jeevanjee acquired his as compensation for his work for the Uganda Railway, Visram bought up Nairobi’s Eagerton Estate

\textsuperscript{19} Allah Rakha and Mohamed Sharif vs. Mohamed Din, 1945, UONL RAC DF, Series 1, Serial No. 949. According to their plaint, they entered into partnership as “sleeping” partners, whereby Din was to be the sole “active” partner in the company and thus work as the head butcher. When Din disposed of his shares in the business, essentially retiring from his role as head butcher, Rakha and Sharif took Din to court, praying for the dissolution of the partnership as well as “an account of all monies received and paid” by Din. They claimed “7,500 Shs in damages.”
(later renamed the East Township), which he converted to workshops, residences, and go-downs.\textsuperscript{20} Other merchants-turned-real estate developers settled for smaller holdings, re-investing earnings in Kenya’s growing market by buying up plots in Mombasa as well as Kisumu, Nakuru, and Nanyuki.

During the prewar period, most merchants signed 7-year leases for plots. Spaces designated as “Indian” areas by the state were typically sold to merchants and artisans who later erected structures of wood and corrugated iron. By the interwar period, many managed to have their plots converted to 50- and 99-year leases, on which they built stone and cement structures. With state recognition of land titles, merchants were able to earn revenue streams as landlords, renting out space to other firms and agents as well as a variety of other populations—African as well as Indian, European, and other “non-natives.” (Nairobi’s Indian bazaar, for example, became infamous for housing Bantu-speaking prostitutes and other African women.\textsuperscript{21}) In Nairobi and Mombasa, small-size plots (e.g. 14 by 50 feet) typically fetched Ksh 50-100, while large plots (42 by 50 feet) might earn Ksh 100-300. Prices depended on the plots’ proximity to customers, as well as roads, sewage, and other urban amenities. Nevertheless, it was not uncommon for renters to sublet sections of their shops, opening up a secondary market for sub-renters. Newspapers such as the \textit{East African Standard} routinely reported on so called “verandah-traders”—or subletters who rented out the front porch. Despite its cost efficiency, it was largely this secondary market of sub-leasing that led to repeated complaints by Indians, settlers, and officials alike regarding the congestion and “unhygienic” nature of Nairobi’s Indian bazaar.\textsuperscript{22}

\textsuperscript{20} See, for example, “Municipal Committee: Trading on Verandahs,” \textit{East African Standard} (Nairobi), 7\textsuperscript{th} November 1914.


\textsuperscript{22} See “Sanitary Commission: Indian Bazaar Question, Mr. Suliman Virjee gives evidence,” \textit{East African Standard} (Nairobi), 19\textsuperscript{th} April 1913; and “Sanitary Commission: More about the Bazaar,” \textit{East African Standard} (Nairobi), 26\textsuperscript{th} April 1913.
Many landlord-tenant agreements were made verbally or informally. As Visram testified to the Nairobi Town Council in 1912, “There is no lease binding the tenant and [the landlord, and the plot] is not transferable without the consent of the landlord.”23 However, Nairobi’s real estate market largely flourished because colonial courts provided formal protections, even if the initial agreement was not made in writing. Several landlords indeed brought their tenants to court over unpaid dues and damages. Managers of Walji Hirji & Sons, for example, landowners along Nairobi’s Race Course and River Roads, filed suit against several defaulters over the course of the 1930s. One of their tenants, Kalyanji Odhavji, was behind for only one month, while another, Jagjivan Dajibhai, was behind for two. In another one of Hirji’s suits, his tenant Rugnath Prasad, who rented a farm on the outskirts of Nairobi, was behind by a full year.24 It is not clear how he became so deep in arrears, but it is likely that he planned to compensate the plot owners in-kind with produce from the season’s harvest. In addition, landlords were able to appeal to the courts to handle matters of damages and evictions. In 1931, for example, managers from Munshi Ram & Co., took a merchant named Ibrahim s/o Piranditta to court. Ibrahim, the defendant, was a butcher leasing “two living rooms with outhouses” near Jeevanjee Market for Ksh 75 per month. He appears to have paid the rent on time but he misused the property and was required to pay one month’s rent and vacate the premise immediately—lest he owe the landlord Ksh 5 for every day he remained on site.25 In this manner, merchants investing in urban real estate were able to rely on state institutions to help protect their capital and property.

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23 Ibid. Visram further added: “Rs. 1,000 is paid for the stand premium of a plot. [The landlord] gets a rental from his tenant who in turn sub-lets at exorbitant rates.”


CHITS, MORTGAGES, AND SETTLEMENTS

There is a story called “Hero” from Gujarati folklore printed in a Kenyan-Indian newspaper in the pre-war period. It tells of a merchant (or “Seth”) who falls on hard times after learning that his shipments never came into port. At one point in the story, all his money lenders come to his shop and meet with him and his accountant. His moneylenders first demand their dues, fearing that they won’t get their money back. But, as the story goes on, when they saw the Seth’s accountant paying out “Rs. 500,000” and “Rs. 700,000,” they calmed down and their worries subsided. “They huddled together,” the story reads, “and decided to give him more time.” By this means, an amicable settlement was eventually reached between the Seth and his creditors. The story conveys an image of patient, merciful moneylenders (“Why else,” they wonder, “would the accountant be paying out so much money if the Seth did not intend to pay back all his debts?”). It also conveys a merchant, who is, above all, worried about his “reputation.” As he tells his wife at the end of his story, “more than his business [it is his] reputation that matters.”

The method of conflict resolution in this story may have been the ideal for merchants across the Indian Ocean. Many scholars have pointed to semi-formal institutions or organizations providing contract enforcement and reputation management. However, such scenarios don’t appear to have been very prevalent in twentieth-century Kenya, at least judging by court records from the Daly & Figgis papers. More often, merchants brought debtors to court. They utilized access to colonial legal institutions to settle their disputes. To be sure, some creditors granted their debtors leniency or temporary postponements; others assessed borrowers’ finances before forgiving certain portions of their debts in acts of goodwill. But in most cases the evidence suggests that claims were filed in court against late payers. As merchants expanded commercial activities

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26 See “Hero: An Interesting Story,” *The Indian Voice of British East Africa, Uganda, and Zanzibar* (Nairobi), 22nd April 1912. The story was published in the Gujarati language portion of the newspaper.
into the East African interior, they utilized colonial courts for the recovery of debts and the execution of indentures. They lent out capital knowing that should debtors neglect to pay on schedule, they would face legal action and, potentially, other consequences such as property attachments, seizures, or possibly imprisonment. It was these measures which the Bohra merchant H. Ismailji Jeevanji, mentioned at the start of this chapter, referred to positively in the commercial manual he published in 1904.

Perhaps the most common claim among creditors was for short-term promissory notes. As Indian merchants expanded retail and wholesale businesses in Kenya, they accepted endorsed “promises” of payment termed *chittī*, in Hindi, or “a pass.” (The English word “chit” comes from this term.) Between distributors and retailers, merchants typically lent out inventory for periods ranging from as short as one to four weeks to as long as three to six months. Borrowers (or “endorsers”) paid no more than 1.5 percent per month or 10 percent per annum. Denominations were for Ksh 1,000 or less. Borrowers often paid their lenders on site, or by depositing amounts at designated financial institutions, typically colonial banks such as Barclays, the National Bank of India, or the Standard Bank of South Africa. Payments were made in installments. This was the case with Umed Brothers, a Tanganyika-based firm. Umedali Gokalbhai and his two siblings paid back a Nairobi creditor, Madat Ally G. Thobani of the Jubilee Emporium in monthly installments of Ksh 200 on promissory notes worth over two thousand shillings.27 Frequently, merchants paid off promissory notes with other promissory notes. Take the case of Tara Singh, a mess keeper, who paid back his shopkeeper, Kaluram Ganeshdass, for Ksh 420-worth of goods with another promissory note signed by one of his customers, Harnam Singh.28 Through this practice, we see how merchants and other immigrants, utilizing colonial and metropolitan institutions, authored an

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27 Madat Ally G. Thobani vs. Umed Brothers (Arusha), 1950, UONL RAC DF, Series 1, File No. 1014.
28 Harnam Singh versus Tara Singh, 1936, UONL RAC DF, Series 1, Serial No. 769.
exchange-based promissory-note debt economy. Recognizing the prevalence of this practice, the European diarist W.F. Foran wrote in 1936 that the chit was the “normal currency” of Kenya.\textsuperscript{29}

Securitized loans were also a popular debt instrument. Merchant lenders were able to use courts for the execution of contracts involving mortgaged property. As opportunities for profit earnings expanded, merchants lent out money to each other on a long-term basis—often in denominations of multiple tens of thousands of shillings. Collateral included immovable property (e.g. a shop or warehouse plot). It also included moveable property, such as motor cars, machine equipment, and even jewelry. Most loan maturities were set between seven and twenty-five years. Merchants signed agreements promising to pay back loans at a fixed amount of principal and interest per period, surrendering the property’s title deed if they did not. Colonial courts enabled both the signing of contracts—agreements were signed and sealed by official stamp—and their execution. In the case of defaults, mortgage lenders filed suit. In 1935, for example, Waljee Hirjee & Sons took their borrowers, A.M. Jeevanjee & Sons, to court over a Ksh 300,000-loan on thirteen properties.\textsuperscript{30} The same happened in the case of Pirbhai and Nazarali Sunderji, who took the owners of Kilosa Myombo Estates to court in 1931.\textsuperscript{31} In both cases, the court not only ordered the defaulters to surrender the properties specified in the contract. It also ordered that they pay various advances relating to the costs borne by the plaintiffs in renting out or selling the properties.

Courts played an integral part in debt recoveries. All of the above cases—as well as the ones in the table directly below—are drawn from instances in which creditors were able to file suit in court on unpaid dues. However, courts also served an important function in limiting liquidity

\textsuperscript{30} Ismail Rahimtulla Waljee vs. Husseinbhai s/o Gulamhussein Mulla Jeevanjee and Gulumabbas s/o Gulamhussein Mulla Jeevanjee, 1935, UONL RAC DF, Series 1, File No. 762.
\textsuperscript{31} Pirbhai Sunderji, Nazarali Sunderji, and Jivraj Kachra vs. Kilosa Myombo Estates, 1931, UONL RAC DF, Series 1, File No. 360.
shortages or contagion effects stemming from insolvencies. A default in one account book might easily have resulted in a default in many account books, and this would have unleashed a hazardous domino effect across trade posts and urban centers, whose fortunes were equally tied to those of African farmers and manufacturers. (This topic will be discussed more in Chapter 4.) The evidence suggests that court settlements were made with an eye toward the plaintiff as well as levels of systemic risk across the trade economy as a whole. “Poor trading conditions” were often cited as a basis for lenient settlements. Courts granted debtors extra time for trading conditions to resume. In 1932, for example, Kishenchand Diwan Singh, a vegetable merchant who was late on two unpaid promissory notes, revealed that he still owed Ksh 7,500 to 10 different note holders. The court permitted him to re-structure his debts so that he could pay down his lenders piecemeal at the rate of Ksh 1,000 per month, selling off portions of his goods and property, which he claimed were worth Ksh 25,000.  

Table 2.1. Unpaid Promissory Notes (1930-1950)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Plaintiff/Creditor</th>
<th>Defendant/Debtors</th>
<th>Terms or interest rates (if stated)</th>
<th>Amount (Ksh)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1930</td>
<td>Gurdial Singh Bros., Merchants</td>
<td>Kundan Lal</td>
<td>Payback in Cash or Goods</td>
<td>774</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1931</td>
<td>Churanjilal &amp; Co., Contractors</td>
<td>Chanan Din and the Ahmadiyya Muslim Association via General Secretary Syed Mahmud Ulla Shah</td>
<td>Payback in Cash or Goods</td>
<td>425</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1931</td>
<td>Shah Punja Jivraj &amp; Bros, Merchants</td>
<td>K.M. Shah</td>
<td></td>
<td>200</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

32 Atma Ram s/o Gurandittamall trading as “Atmaram & Son” versus Diwan Singh Trading as “Kisenchand Diwan Singh,” 1932, UONL RAC DF, Series 1, Serial No. 364.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Borrower</th>
<th>Payback in Cash or Goods</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1931</td>
<td>E.B. Gill, Trustee of the Property of Lachhmandass Aggarwalla &amp; Ralaram Aggarwalla</td>
<td>Ram Singh Daffedar s/o Uttam Singh 1.5%/month 3,184</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1931</td>
<td>Nand Singh s/o Ganda</td>
<td>Vir Singh s/o Kartar Singh -- 500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1931</td>
<td>Gina Singh</td>
<td>Jagat Singh -- 640</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1933</td>
<td>Ismail Rahimtullah Walji</td>
<td>Abdul Hussein Visram -- 2,096</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1939</td>
<td>Munshi Ram &amp; Co., Money Lender</td>
<td>Santokh Singh Mehta; Lekh Ram trading as “Kenya Soapworks”; Subha Khan &amp; Alla Ditta Payback in Cash or Goods 748</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1950</td>
<td>Madat Ally G. Thobani, of The Jubilee Emporium</td>
<td>Umed Brothers (Arusha, TZ) 6% per annum 2,351</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Mortgages were another area in which colonial courts came to the aid of both creditors and debtors. Debtors in distress gained protections by filing for bankruptcy, which helped them gain leniencies or deferments to wind up companies or restructure obligations. In the case of Nathoo Kanji (mentioned above), courts ordered that one of his creditors, Odhavji Becher Odani, release ownership of a “petter oil” engine—a stationary open-crank motor designed for agricultural use—following Kanji’s insolvency. The engine was Kanji’s only major movable asset, and its sale proceeds were used to pay down Kanji’s landlord, Kirparam & Sons, instead.34 In the case of A.M. Jeevanjee & Sons, the firm’s managers also filed for bankruptcy to protect themselves from creditors’ claims. While the exact year of their bankruptcy filing is not clear from the records, it does appear that A.M. Jeevanjee & Sons utilized the court’s protection for more than a decade.

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34 Odhavji Bejhar Bodani versus Nathoo s/o Kanji and Nathalal Ranchhod, 1931, UONL RAC DF, Series 1, File No. 190.
(A.M. Jeevanjee was adjudicated insolvent in the Bombay High Court in 1922.) The court appointed accountants Gill & Johnson to act as receivers and manage and oversee collections of accounts. One of A.M. Jeevanjee & Son’s managers, Gulab Hussein, utilized bankruptcy status to improve the firm’s expenditures by surrendering properties in Karachi as well as Nairobi to pay down a Rs. 200,000 loan from a merchant banker in Delhi. He also paid down millions of shillings in mortgaged loans to the Standard Bank of South Africa, the National Bank of India, and Lloyd’s Bank of London, alongside the Ksh 300,000 loan from Waljee Hirjee & Sons. It emerges clearly from these cases that colonial courts were the basis of capital protection, not only for financiers but also for borrowers and mortgage debtors.35

ARBITRATION AND LEGAL CONFORMISM

Courts might have provided formal apparatuses for dispute adjudication where merchants could bring their claims against one another. However, common law civil code also allowed for "alternative" methods of settlement. That is, merchants could appoint arbitrators—typically well-respected accountants or businessmen from their own communal spheres—to serve as mediators. Merchants belonging to different communal spheres likewise could appoint arbitrators who, under supervision of an umpire appointed by the court, adjudicated the parties' liabilities and rewards. In this way, colonial law expanded not only because of its network effect and appeal to Indian merchants—or by the fact that its public good increased with the sheer number of plaintiffs resorting to it. It also expanded thanks to the fact that merchants and arbitrators willfully drew on it for the "alternative" dispute resolution methods. Merchants-turned-state-sanctioned-mediators became powerful authorities in these circuits. As proliferators of Anglo-Indian legal traditions in

35 For all matters of bankruptcy files and civil suits related to A.M. Jeevanjee & Co. c. 1927-1935, see UONL RAC DF, Series 1, File Nos. 7, 29, 149,155, 209, 363, 469, 480-484, 531-540, 553, 557, 688, 779.
East Africa, they defined its tenets and scope of application. The following two cases demonstrate how merchants strengthened their corporate structures by blurring the lines between public and private legal frameworks, internalizing colonial metropolitan principles and creating what Kwan describes as a "hierarchy" of legal principles and institutions.36

Case 1. Naidoo versus Tandree. By 1930, C.V. Naidoo, owner of Direct Fish Supply Company in Nairobi, had built up a sizable customer base among local restaurants and hotels. He earned enough orders to purchase hundreds of crates of fresh fruit per season to help market his fish—crates which were provided by another merchant, T.K. Tandree, owner of Kenya Fresh Provision Supply. During the late 1920s, Naidoo’s orders from Tandree amounted to Ksh 2,000-worth of pears and grapes as well as Ksh 500-worth of plums. Naidoo even planned for pre-purchases at a fixed rate in the next season. He had shipments from South Africa warehoused in cold storage and delivered by train to Nairobi. Business between the two merchants continued until April 1931, when a slump in Naidoo’s business resulting from the world financial crisis made their dealings deteriorate. Late payments from Naidoo turned into unfulfilled orders from Tandree. Claims began to pile up and within months the two reached an impasse. Tandree refused to sell Naidoo any further fruit. Naidoo filed suit, and, later that year, the two men entered arbitration proceedings to settle their debts and obligations to each other.

As both merchants were from the Ismaili community, they appointed a prominent Ismaili merchant, Madatali Suleiman Virjee, as their arbitrator. Over the course of several meetings, they

36Such legal conformism does not fall comfortably in line with recent historical narratives about law in sub-Saharan Africa or on the subcontinent. In most cases, historians have sought to call attention to the way colonial subjects were able to venue-shop between multiple legal spheres to gain a favorable outcome. “The creation of multiple legal spheres,” Richard Roberts writes, “structured by colonialism and involving the seepage of metropolitan legal concepts and procedures into native law and practice…often led to changes in the legal character and the legal capacity of individuals.” However, among Indian merchants operating in colonial East Africa, colonial law was internalized to the point where it could be practiced in absence of colonial authorities. For a study regarding legal pluralism in Africa, see Richard L. Roberts, Litigants and Households: African Disputes and Colonial Courts in the French Soudan, 1895-1912 (Westport: Praeger Publishers, 2005), 18.
worked out an agreement: Naidoo had claims for Ksh 4,731 of undelivered fruit and Tandree had claims of Ksh 5,904 in late payments. According to the arbitration notes, Tandree was willing to write off the Ksh 1,173. (In fact, he was urged to do so by Virjee, the arbitrator.) However, plagued with insolvency, Naidoo refused to accept the final agreement and instead filed a new claim in colonial court against Tandree for the sum of Ksh 12,000. According to Naidoo’s lawyer, the “damages” to Naidoo included Ksh 6,000 for undelivered fruit—as mentioned in the arbitration proceedings—as well as another Ksh 6,000 for a separate venture with Tandree—previously unmentioned in arbitration—that had gone awry. As Naidoo’s lawyer explained, Naidoo and Tandree had made a verbal agreement to grow produce together: Naidoo would begin “extensive planting” on purchased farmland that was “approved and inspected” by Tandree. Tandree had agreed to be the “sole agent” (i.e. purchaser) of the farm’s produce, only to later renege on it.

Tandree was able to refute the claim. He purported that there was never any agreement between the two men, verbal or written. His attorney stated on his behalf that “[Tandree] merely indicated the likelihood of being able to market [Naidoo’s] vegetables in Mombasa.” However, what was most significant about this case was the power that Virjee wielded as arbitrator. Naidoo attempted to open a new case in court and appeal to state judicial authorities. However, after reviewing the arbitration notes, the judge presiding over the new case issued a stay order, in effect preventing Naidoo from circumventing Virjee’s authority. Tandree, meanwhile, sought to appeal to Virjee’s good graces. He asked a business contact to implore “Uncle Madatally [to] please help [him],” claiming himself to be a victim of Naidoo’s “underhanded tricks.” Tandree sent Virjee an additional Holiday gift of “two inbound fruit boxes…with season’s compliments,” As he reminded his contact, “whilst sitting at the Arbitration [with Virjee], the matter of a [Promissory note] of 1000/ [was] thrashed out. The result was a final settlement...between that fellow Naidoo and
myself. [Only] since then [Naidoo] has tried in many ways to get me to deal from him and to supply him with fruits.” The case caused Tandree many headaches, but his appeals to Virjee were not issued in vain. Following the judge’s stay order, Virjee upheld his previous opinion and settlement. Naidoo’s new case was eventually thrown out by the court.  

Case 2. Abdulla vs. Mawji and Abdulla. In February 1934, when Gulamhussein Abdulla entered a partnership with Rehemtulla Mawji and Suleman Abdulla, their business was to manage “Abdulla & Co.” But the shop, despite having a prime location in central Nairobi, did not fare well. The partnership operated at a loss in the first year, making its first month of profits in March 1935. Two months later, in May, fourteen months after the partnership had begun, Gulamhussein decided to retire. He informed his partners, Mawji and Abdulla, who agreed to buy Gulamhussein’s one-third of the partnership shares at Ksh 3,605 (or Ksh 3,000, plus profit and interest). The sale apparently went smoothly, at least according to Mawji and Abdulla. But when Gulamhussein returned to Nairobi from a visit to India in 1936, he learned that Mawji and Abdulla had renamed the shop the “Fair Price Store.” In addition, he discovered that the partnership was doing so well that Mawji and Abdulla had ascribed a new “goodwill” value to the next buyer—a value they calculated at Ksh 5,000. This was a substantial value over what they had paid Gulam Hussein for his shares.

Learning of this new premium, Gulamhussein filed legal action. He alleged that he, too, was owed a one-third share of this goodwill—or Ksh 1,951 (i.e. goodwill plus interest). The parties agreed to an arbitration proceeding. Gulamhussein appointed arbitrator Karmali Jaffer, a “book-keeper” from the Bohra community, while Rehemtulla Mawji and Suleman Abdulla appointed Rajabali Kassam Suleman Virjee, a partner from Suleiman Virjee & Sons, the same family firm.

37 C.V. Naidoo vs. T.M. Tandree, 1932, UONL RAC DF, Series 1, Serial No. 539.
of Madatali Suleiman Virjee (mentioned above). However, after 22 sittings—each averaging three hours—no settlement could be reached, and the case was sent back to colonial court. The umpire ruled in favor of the defendants, finding that Gulamhussein was not entitled to any goodwill because he had accepted the prior purchase of his shares and had little claim on the shop’s goodwill after investing in it for only 14 months. Yet what is remarkable about this case was the degree to which the arbitrators, despite their disagreements, argued their rewards on the basis of metropolitan legal principles. Karmali Jaffer, the first arbitrator, wrote a 12-page, 82-section-long statement upholding Gulamhussein's claim. It named the partnership contract’s “profit clause” as the reason for rewarding Gulamhussein goodwill. It also doubted that Gulamhussein’s sale was achieved by mutual agreement and suggested that Mawji and Abdulla be “cross-examined [for] contradictions.” Virjee’s statement, on the other hand, argued that goodwill could not be claimed by Gulamhussein after only 14 months. He cited a nineteenth-century court case as well as “super profit theory,” a concept put forward by an English accountant he identified as “Leakey.”

“What is goodwill?” Virjee’s statement read.

In a case which came before the courts in 1810 [he continued], goodwill was defined as [the] “probability that all customers will resort to the old place,” and this puts the thing in a nutshell...It is generally used to denote the benefit arising from connection and reputation, and its value is what can be got for the chance of being able to keep that connection and improve.

In arguing for three kinds of goodwill—shop location, personal reputation, and reputation of goods sold—Virjee claimed that no goodwill could be proven. “[It] can hardly be said to have any precise signification,” he added. His opinion would eventually prevail. After the case returned to

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38 Gulamhusein Abdulla vs. Rehemtulla Mawji; and Suleman Abdulla, 1936, UONL RAC DF, Series 1, Serial No. 757. According to Virjee, “[super profit theory had been] rapidly gaining recognition in business circles.”

39 Ibid.

40 Ibid. Virjee argued that Abdulla & Co.’s location was “common and could be easily acquired”; Gulamhussein, he argued, had operated, more or less, as a “dormant partner,” during his 14 months; and the partnership, by his estimation, was a “very ordinary business,” with “nine out of ten shops in the same area carry out the same business.”
court, the umpire came down on Virjee’s side. Even more, the umpire was astounded by the extent to which the arbitrators fought tooth-and-nail along colonial legal lines. In a most telling gesture, he even criticized the arbitrators for having “unnecessarily prolonged the investigation [and] bother[ing] their heads about invented technicalities and other things that did not matter.” Merchant arbitrators, in other words, had profoundly internalized colonial legal tenets and had become its proliferators in communal commercial realms.

EXPOSURES, LIABILITIES, AND COUNTERCLAIMS

Merchants were able to gain much needed legal protections from colonial institutions. But they were also, in a few circumstances, put in situations of greater risk. Laws did not always work in their favor, nor did plaintiffs always win their legal suits. In some cases, colonial law proved antithetical to merchant interests. Merchants predictably rose up in widespread objections against the Shop Hours Ordinance when it was first introduced in 1918 and later enacted in 1925. Such regulations offered Indian shop assistants and agents a legal basis for filing suits against managers and merchants for unpaid salaries and fees. (This legislation would later lead many Indian shop managers to hire black African assistants instead, since they were not able to file the same claims.) Hired contractors also filed claims. In 1933, for example, Sarvan Singh, a cartman, sued his employers, B.S. Biant and S.L. Madhoram, for Ksh 858/50—or a total 21 workdays and extra fees. The defendants argued that Singh did not fulfill the terms of his contract and should not be considered an employee nor remunerated accordingly. However, the court ruled in Singh’s favor.

41 Ibid.
42 For full detail of the objections to the Shop Hours Ordinance, see archive of the East African Indian National Congress. See, in particular, M.M. Desai, Hon. Secretary of Indian Employee Federation to President, Indian Association, 30 October 1919, KNA East African Indian National Congress Papers (EAINC), Roll 1. Records from the East African Indian National Congress Papers consulted in this dissertation were found on microfilm at Syracuse University’s Bird Library, Special Collections Research Center.
It found that he had worked for eight hours a day—the length of the workday described by colonial law—despite taking extra part-time jobs on the side. Moreover, the Magistrate made a full inspection of Sarwan Singh’s accounts and summoned witnesses to make statements to verify that Singh had, in fact, carted certain goods for Biant and Madhoram as he had purported.43

Merchants could also find themselves subjects of counterclaims. By opening their books or disclosing the full extent of their businesses and agreements, plaintiffs often became subject to unintended litigation. It was not uncommon for civil disputes to be argued over extensively, with numerous third-party witnesses. In one case, an accountant named Ahmed Hussein Malik sued Firoz Bukhed Khan for Ksh 398 of unpaid debts. However, over the course of the suit, Malik found himself subject to Khan’s counterclaim that Malik, in fact, owed Khan Ksh 600 for payments made on Malik’s mortgage while he was in India for five months. In another case from 1935, Walji Hirji & Sons took one of their tenants, Rugnath Prasad, to court, claiming that Prasad owed them 12 months of rent—or Ksh 260—on his shamba (farm). But after a series of hearings, Walji Hirji & Sons became subject to Prasad’s counterclaim. As Prasad alleged, they all had an informal agreement that Prasad would pay rent in-kind to Ladharam Devraj, one of the firm’s managers, with produce cultivated from the land. Furthermore, he claimed that Devraj had agreed to compensate Prasad for the trees planted at a cost of Ksh 2 for fruit trees and Ksh 5 for banana trees. In turn, Prasad claimed Walji Hirji & Sons owed Prasad Ksh 184—not the other way around.44

ESTATES AND INHERITANCE

43 Sarvan Singh vs. BS Biant and SL Madhoram, 1933, UONL RAC DF, Series 1, File No. 605. Singh’s contract was signed at Ksh 3 per day, plus an extra payment of 62 cents per ton per mile within a radius of six miles and 90 cents per mile outside the radius.
44 Walji Hirji & Sons vs. Rugnath Prasad, 1935, UONL RAC DF, Series 1, File No. 801.
Outside civil circuits, colonial courts also provided for matters of probate and estate administration. As merchants amassed new wealth, they turned to court systems to guarantee estate transfers to kin or community members. Wills were drafted, executors and trustees appointed, and heirs and beneficiaries named. Merchants and household members, together with other parties, turned to colonial courts for processes of verification and approval as well as interpretations of wills and testaments. In some cases, assets were passed to family heirs and beneficiaries. This was how Kassam Virjee, who named his brothers as executors and trustees of his estate, benefitted from the courts. Upon his passing in 1918, Virjee bequeathed to his four sons an estate consisting of three mortgage bonds and twenty properties in Nairobi and Mombasa. He also bequeathed his one-third share—along with interest, stock and trade, and goodwill—to the firm Suleiman Virjee & Sons, one of East Africa’s most prominent merchant firms at the time.\(^{45}\) Similarly, Bhagvanji Meghji, who passed away in 1934 in Bombay, appointed his Nairobi-based brothers, Somchand and Raichand, to manage his estate, which consisted of five Kenyan properties.\(^{46}\) Some merchants willed their estates to be divided among family members as well as charities and community organizations. Rahimtulla Walji Hirji, for example, who died in 1934, bequeathed much of his property to his relatives. However, he also bequeathed over Ksh 400,000 to the Aga Khan, the spiritual leader of the Ismaili community. Hirji gave the Aga Khan and his councilmen much free reign in this regard, instructing them to use income from specific mortgage assets to sponsor “Friday dinners” as well as a “Community Hospital” and a “dispensary.” He also requested that the Aga Khan use estate proceeds to construct “open spaces” and “any institution for the benefit

\(^{45}\) In the Matter of the Estate of Kassam Suleman, 1918, UONL RAC DF, Series 5, File No. 2.
\(^{46}\) In the Matter of the Estate of Bhagvanji s/o Meghji, 1934, UONL RAC DF, Series 5, File No. 20.
of the Ismaili community either at Nairobi or Mombasa, [including an] Inn, Orphanage, Boarding, Nursing House, High School.”

Merchants turned to the courts, then, for purposes of social and cultural reproduction as much as estate management. Testators provided strict guidelines for kin, caste councils, and members to utilize estate proceeds to specific ends. Thaker Premjibhai Ranchood, for example, a native of Kutch who accumulated properties in Mombasa, drafted a 5-page will before his death in 1920. It spanned both family and community objectives. His wife Zaverbahi appears to have had the most lenient arrangement: his will granted her Rs. 2,500 “to dispose of as she likes” and instructed her to “keep jewellery and clothes” as well as properties in Mombasa (or the sale proceeds thereof). He also granted her the remaining shares of interest he had in his joint family trust. Other portions of the estate were bequeathed with more specific mandates. They included payments for the expenses of his cousin’s weddings—so long as he celebrated matrimony with “a girl in our [Bhatia] caste”—and donations to the “Hindu Community” of Mombasa. That “Hindu community” was to build a house and sink a well for “public feasts [and] public meetings.” He also willed that they donate sums to Kenyan Indian politics—or a society that “deals with political movements for the benefit of [the] whole Indian community residing in East Africa.” Last, he provided instructions for donations to be made to honor Ranchood’s former school master, Andrew Dick, who was to have a memorial tablet made in his name and mounted “in any English protestant church either in Mombasa or in any country in East Africa.”

Courts also provided merchants the possibility for interventions into the interpretation of wills and the administration of estates. Perhaps the most common form of litigation in this area

48 This document is found not in the Daly & Figgis papers, but in the papers relating to the East Africa Indian National Congress. See The Will of Thaker Premjibhai Ranchordass (Deceased), c. 1920, KNA EAINC, Roll 2.
concerned matters related to estates’ shared interests. As merchants diversified holdings during their lifetimes, they frequently invested in partial ownership of plots and other assets. This might have been a favorable business practice at the time to reduce risks and build relationships, but it often led to conflicts after the merchant’s death. Thaker Kanji Dershi, for example, purchased a one-third interest in a plot on Nairobi’s Victoria Street with a European widow named Mrs. J.F. Reynes, who owned the other two-thirds share. In 1934, in the wake of road improvements implemented by the government which raised the value of the property considerably, Reynes sold her portion to merchant Monji Narshibhai. Kanji appears to have agreed to the sale at first. But it took no more than a year for Jamnadas Kanji, the administrator of Dershi’s estate, to file action against Narshibhai in court. Kanji claimed that Narshibhai was mismanaging the property and not providing sufficient accounts for the rents collected. He requested, pursuant to his responsibilities as administrator of the estate, that the court either force Narshibhai to surrender the property to an estate agent or allow Kanji to sell his and Narshibhai’s portion. (Kanji argued that he was unable to sell his share at a “reasonable price” so long as Narshibhai remained the co-owner.) The court ruled in Kanji's favor, ordering that the whole property be sold at public auction, thus granting Kanji protection over his estate capital.\textsuperscript{49} The colonial state’s legal institutions, in this way, helped ensure merchants’ inter-generational wealth transfers, investments in community structures, and estate management. They also provided for the re-making of “community” in the form of wills and around the influence of the wealthy merchants who left them.

PORTFOLIOS, SPECIALIZATIONS, AND CAPITAL EXPANSION

\textsuperscript{49} Jamnadas Kanji, Administrator of the Estate of Thaker Kanji Dhershi Deceased vs. Monji Narshibhai, 1937, UONL RAC DF, Series 1, File No. 1151.
By conducting financial transactions and forming partnerships along the lines of Anglo-Indian legal tradition, merchants who pressed their “non-native” legal rights in Kenya’s colonial courts were able to turn their human networks—explored in the previous chapter and largely invisible in these records—into protected wealth in the East African interior. This last section pursues my inquiry into Indians and colonial courts by examining the portfolios and business histories of particular merchants. It further demonstrates how merchants were able to safeguard investments and wealth and use them to reproduce community and caste networks. The Daly & Figgis law firm files, when examined together with merchant families’ written oral histories, suggest that merchants amassed vast holdings and relied on metropolitan financial institutions as well as other merchants in India and East Africa for capital. Whereas some merchants specialized in catering to certain clients—particularly government offices—or other Indian merchants and immigrants, others branched out into numerous trades and opened shops in small trade centers across East Africa. Some merchants found themselves deeply invested in certain sectors of agriculture (e.g. cotton), while others were able to serve as distributors and exporters for a host of local products.

I. A.M. Jeevanjee & Co. Many of the earliest Indian merchants to Kenya during the twentieth century were members of Shia Muslim communities and had prior histories of trade in the Indian Ocean or in East Africa. One such merchant was Alibhai Mulla Jeevanjee, member of the Bohra sect. Born in Karachi, he began work in Mombasa in 1890 following a short stint in Australia. Obtaining contracts from the British Imperial East Africa Company and later the Uganda Railway, he rose from working as a stevedore to a recruiting agent for indentured laborers and provisioning railway camps and stations as well as colonial government posts. These activities are described in a biography published by his granddaughter. See Zarina Patel, *Alibhai Mulla Jeevanjee* (Nairobi: East African Publishers, 2002), 4.

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Nairobi’s most prominent landlord, owning both commercial and residential property. By the interwar period, Jeevanjee’s holdings included 20 plots in the Indian bazaar and other commercial areas. He leased spaces out to 16 different tenants, including shopkeepers, artisans, and contractors (one of these was a European firm under the name of A. Burgee & J. Markey) whose rents ranged from Ksh 60 to Ksh 235 per month. (See Appendix 1.) Jeevanjee also managed plots in peri-urban and rural areas around the colony. In Nairobi, these comprised spaces in Parklands Suburb. In Mombasa, his plots included areas of city Crown land together with others under the control of the Province of Seyidie—or the Sultan of Zanzibar.

It is not exactly clear why Jeevanjee’s firm entered financial trouble. According to Zarina Patel, A.M. Jeevanjee’s granddaughter and biographer, Jeevanjee’s anti-colonial political activities cost him valuable relationships with colonial officials. Burnt bridges ended his lucrative career supplying government offices and public works with imported goods and labor. In any case, in 1922, Jeevanjee was adjudicated insolvent in the Bombay High Court. Soon after, the firm filed for bankruptcy in Kenya, where it failed to pay back a range of loans. The firm disposed of its properties in Karachi and Kenya and pledged some of its Nairobi properties as collateral against a loan from Walji Hirji & Sons. According to his Daly & Figgis records, certain family members were able to retain ownership of Jeevanjee’s 7-acre villa in Mombasa—at least until it was surrendered to a merchant from Delhi. Financial distress strained relations between Jeevanjee and his sons. As advocates’ letters suggest, it was frequently “difficult [to] obtain assistance” from the sons after Jeevanjee’s death. One remained in Karachi in “undischarged bankruptcy” (or without a grant of discharge from the court), claiming no knowledge of the East African business.\footnote{From E.M. Jeevanjee to Messrs. Daly & Figgis, 30 April 1932, Tayabali A. Mandviwalla vs. Ebrahimji Mulla Jeevanjee; Gullamhussein Mulla Jeevanji; Tayabali Mulla Jeevanji; Official receiver of estate of AM Jeevanjee. 1932, UONL RAC DF, Series 1, File No. 363. E.M. Jeevanjee writes, “You know that my allowance has been stopped and I have to tell you that I am very hard hit. I cannot express to you how seriously I have been handicapped. I shall}
other two brothers who remained in Mombasa were able to secure allowances from the firm’s receivers but otherwise pled “complete ignorance” of each other’s whereabouts or activities—a fact that often caused the lawyers for Daly & Figgis and other firms “considerable difficulty.”

II. Suleiman Virjee & Sons. Another notable case is that of Suleiman Virjee & Sons. Members of East Africa’s Ismaili community, the firm’s founder Suleiman Virjee arrived in Mombasa in 1880. He worked in the shipping business and later set up a firm dealing in imports and exports as well as distribution and retail. By the early 1900s, the firm had opened shops in Voi, Kibwezi and Makindu, supplying a variety of building materials, produce, and imports including “native cloths, twines, and provisions of all kind[s],” according to a family member. They also marketed themselves as “safari outfitters.” The firm expanded briefly into cotton ginning, buying up mills in the Masaka region of Uganda. However, when the First World War broke out, the venture shut down due to the impact of new textile imports on the local market. “Demand for low price clothing increased [among African consumers] and had a very bad effect on the [sale] of [our] high price[d] goods,” the family’s oral history notes. (Presumably, the high-priced goods were intended for a European, Indian, or high-income African consumer market that never materialized.) New tariff rules and market changes led to a substantial dent in the business across all merchandise classes, so much so that by the end of the war, the firm had even foregone paying a 20 percent custom duty to release goods from a Mombasa warehouse. “As [there was] no

52 From Ross Christie to Daly & Figgis, on 26th February 1932, Seth Bernarisidas Nanumal v. Gulamhussein Mulla Jeevanji et al, 1932, UONL RAC DF, Series 1, File No. 155. As Ross Christie, lawyer for one of the Jeevanjee sons, Gulam Hussein, writes, “In the meantime, we may say that we are having the usual difficult of obtaining assistance from these clients, and so far we have not been able to arrange a meeting with them. To make matters worse, we are informed that Mr. Taibali Mulla Jeevanji intends to return to Nairobi to-day, and as you are aware, his brother, Gulam Hussein, usually professes complete ignorance of these matters, so that we anticipate considerable difficulty in conducting the case.”
sell[ing],” the family’s written oral history states, “there was no point of releasing[ing] the goods and pay[ing] the duty.”

The firm would eventually downsize further during the interwar period. Following the dissolution of the family partnership in 1927, Madatali took over the Nairobi store from his brother Hussein and continued management on his own. However, the family had accumulated considerable wealth from real estate investments in central Kenya and on the coast. According to Daly & Figgis files, one of Suleiman’s sons, Kassambhai, drew up a will for the distribution of his estate before he passed away in 1918. That estate included no less than twenty properties in Nairobi and Mombasa, which were evaluated at half a million shillings and provided Ksh 3,660 in annual rents. It also included three mortgage bonds valued at Ksh 152,000 (see Appendix 2). According to their file, the estate sponsored family and community events, including a wedding as well as donations to Aga Khan schools and the Diamond Jubilee Celebration—one of the many celebrations held by Ismailis to mark the Aga Khan’s anniversary as their Imam. Family records also show donations to a gymkhana (recreational club) and the Nairobi Ismaili Jamatkhana (congregation and prayer hall). (See below.) Another beneficiary took out a Ksh 30,000 loan against the estate to fund law studies in England. While the partnership did not last into the postwar period, the family had succeeded in accumulating significant wealth, with which it supported community networks and other resources.

Table 2.2. Virjee Family Donations (1900-1945)

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53 Written materials were provided to me during conversations with the Virjee family on 8th of August, 2015, Nairobi. One descendant described the firm's forays into the native cloth business as such. “Madatali decided to import clothing for the Uganda market. Expensive material costs approx. 20/ a yard. [But] this material [was well] liked by Uganda[n] women...His success [encouraged] him to import large consignment worth some million of [sic] shillings. Custom ware house goods were stored unpaid custom duty. After 1914/1918 was Japanese clothings [sic] imported by other and sold material from one shilling a yard to 10/ a yard.”

54 In the Matter of the Estate of Kassam Suleman, 1918, UONL RAC DF, Series 5, File No. 2.

55 Virjee Family Papers, Nairobi, 2015. Written materials were provided to me during conversations with the Virjee family, 8th August 2015.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Organization</th>
<th>City</th>
<th>Asset type</th>
<th>Amount</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1900</td>
<td>Sultan Mohamed Shah Imam</td>
<td>Mombasa</td>
<td>Cash donation</td>
<td>Rs. 100,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1917</td>
<td>Suleiman Verjee Gymkhana, Parklands</td>
<td>Nairobi</td>
<td>15 acres of land, furniture, sport ground construction</td>
<td>Rs. 150,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1919</td>
<td>Aga Khan Club, Parklands</td>
<td>Nairobi</td>
<td>Land</td>
<td>Rs. 100,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1920</td>
<td>Dharkana (Town) Jamatkhana</td>
<td>Nairobi</td>
<td>Cash donation, construction supervision</td>
<td>Rs. 1,500,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1927</td>
<td>Sultan Mohamed Shah Imam</td>
<td>Mombasa</td>
<td>Land, school building</td>
<td>Shs. 350,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1945</td>
<td>Aga Khan III Diamond Jubilee Celebration</td>
<td>Nairobi</td>
<td>Cash donation</td>
<td>Shs. 300,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**III. Jaffer Alidina & Sons.** Last of the Shia Muslim merchants examined here is the firm of Jaffer Alidina. Like many other Ismaili merchants during the prewar period, Jaffer Alidina established a trade in Uganda’s cotton industry. In 1912, he and his three sons—Rehemtulla Alidina, Gangji Permohamed, and Mohamed Ali—opened Jaffer Alidina & Sons in Kampala with the help of a Rs. 15,000 loan from the Standard Bank of South Africa. By 1918, the firm was averaging Rs. 100,000 in annual turnover. Following the passing of Jaffer Alidina Visram, a new partnership was formed by the sons under the name of Rehemtulla Alidina & Bros—“Rehemtulla” being the name of the eldest brother. By this agreement, the brothers divided 90 percent of the profits equally among each other. The other 10 percent of the firm’s earnings were allocated to Ismaili charities and community functions as well as family members, parents, and in-laws.56 To meet new demand, the firm took out a second loan of Rs. 200,000 in 1920. One portion of the loan

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56 A more specific rundown of the agreement went as follows: The 10% was divided into 1) 2.5% to charity; 2) 2.5% for to [their mother] during her lifetime; 3) 2.5% for maintenance of the partners’ parents; 4) 2.5% to Perali Alidina partners older brother (during life time); and 5) 90% to be shared between the two partners. It also specified that Expenses for partners for boarding and lodging and for jamatkhana shall be paid from the shop account.
was used to renovate and increase the size of their Kampala store. Another Rs. 85,000 portion was used to construct 3 shambas (farms), which they rented out from a Mbogo chief in Uganda at Rs. 48 per acre. The brothers, furthermore, utilized a facility from the Standard Bank of South Africa classified as “document against payment,” wherein the bank handled outbound shipments of cotton exports for client firms. By the mid-1920s, the firm was prospering, exporting more than 300 barrels of cotton each year.

Over the pre- and interwar period, the firm gained many customers in India and England. One of them was a Bombay-based Ismaili merchant by the name of Manji Ladak. In 1917, the Kampala firm entered into an agreement with Ladak to supply him with bales at Rs. 750 in exchange for financing at a rate of five percent per month up to Rs. 87,000. This agreement continued until 1924, when the Standard Bank of South Africa made a fateful mistake. According to the litigation records, the bank’s agents mislabeled consignments and mis-shipped Rs. 75,000-worth of cotton to Liverpool instead of Bombay. It is not clear precisely how much the brothers were able to redeem from taking legal action against the bank. (The bank had offered a Ksh 140,000-settlement, which the firm refused, and we don’t know the outcome.) Nor is it clear how the firm fared following the settlement, if there was one. However, by the interwar period, Rehemtulla Alidina & Bros. appears to have been suffering financially and, for this reason, looked to reopen the case with the help of East Africa’s Aga Khan Council. “We had to sell our valuable properties such as three ginneries, etc. at the lowest price we could get,” wrote one firm partner, Fazal Jaffer. The firm eventually filed suit against the Standard Bank of South Africa for damages of Rs. 245,000.57

**IV. Ladha Parbat & Brothers.** Alongside Shia Muslim merchants doing business in East Africa, castes from Gujarat belonging to non-Muslim populations were also pursuing opportunities in Kenya. These included immigrant traders of the Halar region, most of whom were members of a restricted group of fifty villages there. Over the interwar period, these merchant immigrants gained considerable presence in East Africa’s import sector as well as retail, distribution, and the “native” trade. One such group was the firm of Ladha Parbat & Brothers. After Ladha Parbat settled in Kenya in 1914, he was joined by his brother Jethalal four years later. Originally trading as separate agents, they formed a partnership in 1927 together with two non-kin partners, Govindhji Kanji and Lakhamshi Hirji. The group opened a shop in Nairobi’s Pangani district, where they retailed a range of goods. According to their 1931 financial statements, they borrowed Ksh 13,000 worth of goods on short-term promissory notes. By taking out a Ksh 28,000 mortgage, they opened a second shop the next year in Muguga, a small western Kenyan town, where they carried Ksh 4,800-worth of merchandise. Turnover would increase to Ksh 10,000 by 1930. However, the Great Depression sent shock waves through small merchant businesses like Ladha Parbat & Brothers. In 1928, just before the global downturn, the firm averaged Ksh 7,000 in turnover per month between its two locations. In 1931, this number decreased to Ksh 4,000. Following the global crash, the two non-kin partners retired and the partnership was dissolved.58

**V. Other Gujarati merchants.** Several other small- and medium-sized firms from Gujarat merit examination. Over the interwar period, they would come to contract with preexisting merchants as well as find new markets and profit opportunities by trading with African populations and establishing small manufacturing and moneylending operations. These firms included a

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58 Maghanlal Bhatt, Re: Ladha Parbat. Information regarding Ladha Parbat & Brothers is actually found in the client file of Maghanlal Bhatt, as Bhatt filed legal action against Ladha Parbat & Brothers in 1931. See UONL RAC DF, Series 11, Serial No. 123.
consortium that began with the Premchand Brothers, who acquired the financially strapped firm Imtiazali & Sons to form a syndicate of flour and sugar distributors. The five partners of Premchand Brothers provided a two-year, Ksh 50,000 loan to Lahori Ram and Yakoobali Imtiazali, secured by their partnership's two properties in Nairobi.  

Another was Kachara Dharamshi, who according to Oshwal oral history arrived in Kenya in 1908 and, after trading in miscellaneous retail items, became an exporter of ivory, rhino horns, and ostrich feathers. During the interwar period, Dharamshi, together with other Halari merchant households, became an exporter of local coffee. As Shah Kachra Dharamshi wrote when applying for a license to enter the Tanganyika market in 1943, “I am dealing in all sorts of East African coffees since 1920 [and] in near future if circumstances allows [sic] me, I intend to open an Office either at Moshi [or] Arusha.”

Finally, merchants of Hindu sub-caste groups were also doing business in Kenya. One included Atma Ram & sons, vegetable and fruit merchants, who transported goods to expand their distribution network. Another was Maghanlal M. Bhatt. During the 1930s, in the aftermath of the Great Depression, Bhatt was able to buy up properties from insolvent merchants on the cheap. He expanded his business portfolios by also underwriting mortgages on various single plots. He made one for Ksh 15,000 to Ladha Parbat & Brothers at 10 percent per annum. He also financed several short-term notes to small businesspeople. In 1938, he underwrote several promissory notes, for example, to a consortium of drapers and outfitters, contractors, tinsmiths, and carpenters. In this, Kenya’s colonial legal institutions not only offered opportunities to established Indian merchants wanting to borrow capital from metropolitan financial institutions. They also provided necessary

59 Bankruptcy case No. 103, Re: Lahori Ram and Yakoobali trading as “Imtiazali & Son[s],” 1931, UONL RAC DF, Series 7, Serial No. 21.
60 Kachara Dharamshi, Miscellaneous, 1943, UONL RAC DF, Series 11, Serial No. 413.
61 Maghanlal Bhatt Re: Ladha Parbat, 1931, UONL RAC DF, Series 11, Serial No. 123.
protections to small- and medium-sized Indian firms wanting to lend out money, acquire urban property, or finance new commercial partnerships.

CONCLUSION

Up through the nineteenth century, Indian merchant houses were largely located on the coast of East Africa. Under Omani protection and later British imperial rule, they established residence in port towns, financed the caravan trade, and provided a link between interior trade economies, the Asian subcontinent, and the global marketplace. It was not until the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, with Britain's colonization of East Africa, that merchants were able to expand business networks and settle inland trade centers. Following the expansion of Britain’s imperial jurisdiction into the interior, merchants utilized Kenya’s colonial legal apparatus to safeguard property and increase holdings and investments in Kenya and Uganda. They conformed their commercial practices to access metropolitan financial institutions and transfer wealth—much of it accumulated from trade and commerce with African populations—between household kin, caste, and community members. Merchants, in this way, not only harnessed Anglo-Indian legal principles to expand trade between each other in East Africa’s overseas context. They served as the primary proliferators of colonial law as they looked to expand their own avenues of wealth accumulation among other Kenyan populations, including Indians, Europeans, and black Africans.

Much scholarship has tended to focus on Indian merchants’ corporate institutions and imperial legal systems as two separate, if complementary, realms. In doing so, they have shed light on colonial subjects’ methods of legal venue shopping in modern South Asian and Indian Ocean contexts.\(^{62}\) This chapter, by contrast, has sought to demonstrate a more profound imbrication

\(^{62}\) Some studies already mentioned in this chapter focus on venue-shopping. See, for examples, Machado, *Oceans of Commerce*; and Bishara, *Sea of Debt*. For a more detailed analysis regarding legal venue shopping in the South
between these two realms. As seen in twentieth-century Kenya, Indian merchants adjusted their practices to align their capital interests with the colonial state and its common law legal system. Merchant communities, in and among themselves, utilized the tenets of Anglo-Indian tradition to mediate conflicts and reproduce community structures and institutions. This symbiotic relationship between Kenya’s Indian merchant communities and the colonial state would intensify over the coming decades, particularly during the postwar period, as seen in Chapter 5, when merchant households harnessed “community” as a discourse to negotiate financial assistance and welfare from the colonial state. Yet, merchants also employed a set of other tactics and discourses to expand capital interests. As the next chapter shows, many Indian merchants transcended communal divisions to form political solidarities with members of other merchant communities and make shared claims on the state. As Indian citizens, they took their grievances to Kenya’s colonial officials and, subsequently, to Indian officials in Delhi and London, where they gained sympathies from imperial authorities who intervened in East Africa’s political affairs on merchants’ behalf.

In February 1943, Mombasa’s piece-goods merchants met to protest recent actions taken by Kenya’s government. Their first order of business was to condemn the government’s proposal for a new textile agency. “The monopolistic corporation” that was proposed, merchants contended, would have “far reaching and damaging consequences.” Secondly, they protested against new customs’ inspections. In a recent crackdown on contraventions of wartime regulations, Kenya’s colonial officials singled out five Indian merchant firms and were threatening to investigate more. Merchants concluded the meeting by appointing a twelve-member “Committee of Action,” which sent a letter of complaint to Kenya’s governor. Furthermore, the Committee made representations to the Government of India, stating that India’s government ought to make “strong representation [in] regard to the widespread opposition both here and in the African colonies on the part of Indian merchants.”

By utilizing claims to Indian citizenship and knowledge that the Indian colonial government sought to protect its subjects overseas, Indian merchants were able to block the implementation of the textile agency in Kenya. India’s trade commissioner met with Kenya’s chief secretary, who assured him of the Kenyan government’s “compromising spirit.” Within weeks, Mombasa’s piece-goods merchants were no longer reporting further worries or “harassment,” as customs officials permitted the return to regular business.

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1 Dawood Hajee Nasser Esq., President of the African Shippers Association, to Commerce Member of Government of India, 26th February 1943. Indian National Archive (INA), India Overseas Department (IOD) OS/51/7/43. According to this communication, the Deputy Price Controller specifically demanded “the following particulars in respect of cotton piece-foods: 1) the date of importation; 2) the number of packages imported during the said period with marks and package number of each package; 3) the C.I.F. value; 4) cost price including Customs Duty; 5) the parties to whom the goods were sold; and 6) the date of such sales; and 7) the price at which they were made, etc. etc.”
This story brings to light important dimensions of merchants’ political life in Kenya. Merchant households might have gained important protections from the colonial legal bureaucracy, as seen in the last chapter, but they were not exempt from colonial officials’ regulatory regimes or their tactics of control, surveillance, and reorganization. As immigrant traders and businesspeople, Indians were continually resisting bureaucratic overreach as well as taxation measures by Kenya’s colonial state—licenses, tariffs, and property assessments. They were able to harness their colonial political status and imperial networks to make claims on the colonial state and prod the Indian government to intervene. The sort of protest mentioned above was not unique, either in terms of merchants’ grievances or in terms of appeals to India’s officials. Over previous decades, such strategies had become commonplace. Merchants, rebuked locally by the Kenya colonial government, took their case to India to seek redress. They utilized their place in Britain’s imperial structures to prod India’s government to intervene on their behalf, forming political associations and linkages with department heads and Indian nationalist leaders. Just as merchants were accumulating unprecedented wealth in the East African interior by trading with Africans, Europeans, and other Indian populations, they became embroiled in new trans-national scales of political activism, marked by rhetorical tropes of sub-imperialism and anti-colonial criticism. They circulated memos and telegrams, and placed opinion pieces in East African and Indian newspapers. Lobbyists in Kenya often gained support from Indian conduits, including India’s legislative or executive council members who were able to elevate their case to a high level in London. In the case of the textile merchants with whom I began this chapter, N.R. Pillai, Chief Secretary of the Department of Commerce, sent a communication to heads of the Indian Office,
who requested Kenya’s government conduct an “investigation.”² In other words, diplomatic overtures and aggressive campaigning brought significant pay off for Indian merchant activists.

This chapter examines Indian merchants’ influence in colonial policy via transactions on the imperial stage. It argues that over the course of the interwar period, merchants in Kenya and East Africa more broadly, developed a two-pronged approach for negotiating with colonial officials. Faced with setbacks on a local level, particularly in the aftermath of the Devonshire Declaration of 1923 that limited Indians’ political representation on Kenya’s Legislative Council, merchants enlisted the support of India’s government to do their bidding and overturn local policies and rulings in East Africa. By escalating their claims to the imperial level, merchant activists in Kenya pivoted geographically and institutionally, and modified their political discourses to demand extra-territorial protections. Emphasizing their status as overseas Indian citizens, they sought to exact concessions on a host of issues spanning from trade and transportation to immigration. Such language, while shaped by contradictory arguments of imperial privilege and paternalism toward Africans, helped them strengthen linkages to Indian nationalists, whose own capacity to handle overseas Indian affairs was bolstered by changing political environments on the subcontinent as well as in British colonies elsewhere. The result was an inter-continental imperial process of checks and balances, which served to bolster Indian interests amid heightening racial tensions with East Africa’s European settlers. It was also the emergence of a triangular structure of petitioning and decision-making that involved Nairobi as well as New Delhi and London.

² For details of meeting, see Circular: Resolution adopted unanimously by 73 Indian Piece-Good Merchants at the Meeting Held on 1-1-1943, INA IOD OS/51/7/43. For Government response in India and Kenya, see Sangat Singh, Esq., Indian Government Trade Commissioner in East Africa, to Secretary of Government of India, 23rd February 1944, INA IOD OS 51/7/43.
Few, if any scholars, have cast light on this structure of imperial appeals from the point of view of Indian merchants in East Africa. Most, instead, have focused on Indians’ place in East Africa’s racial hierarchies and the impact of racial competition on their political advances. D.P. Ghai, for example, has written that Indian political activity in East Africa had always been one of accommodation: “[Indians] were [left] responding to the forces around them,” he wrote, “rather than influencing or fighting them.” J.S. Mangat, elucidating this point further, wrote of “The weakness of Indians’ political position—for they neither enjoyed equality with Europeans nor the long-term political security of the African majority—contributed to the[ir] general isolation.” In more recent decades, scholars have expanded their emphasis from stratification to connections and linkages. This is particularly the case for scholars investigating historical relationships between Indian and African populations, and especially politicians. Historian Sana Aiyar, for example, wrote that Indians and Africans developed avenues of inter-racial collaboration in constructing anti-colonial discourses and nationalisms. “A common enemy, the European settlers,” she wrote, “and a shared aspiration to racial equality led Indian leaders within and outside the Legislative Council to make common cause with African grievances on multiple occasions in the realm of organized, institutional politics.” These studies have helped to shed light on Indians’ quest for

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racial parity and demonstrate the way the Indian Ocean become a realm of competing and complementary nationalist aspirations. However, they overlooked the degree to which certain Indian merchants themselves were able to build networks of political activism and mobilize support for common and occasionally highly specific causes. Furthermore, they do not take into account how merchants utilized imperial structures and authorities from India and England to negotiate with colonial officials in Kenya.

To what extent did merchants in Kenya build intra-Indian linkages as well as interracial ones? How did merchants’ political activism play out in India, where India’s government faced new political currents and pressure to protect overseas Indian citizens? In which ways did Indian officials take up the cases of East Africa’s Indians, and to what extent did these grievances influence policy as well as merchant activity? To answer these questions, this chapter turns towards theories of agenda setting and interaction theory. As political scientists Frank Baumgartner and Bryan Jones have written, political systems with “vague or ambiguous jurisdictional boundaries create opportunities for strategically minded policy entrepreneurs to shop for the most favorable locus for their policies.” Conflict expanders, they wrote, “are not limited only to appealing to wider and wider groups. They may be much more complex and specific [as they] identify particular venues [or] any other relevant institutions in their search for allies.” Most important in these processes is “image manipulation.” That is, actors not only shop for the most sympathetic venues, they also modify arguments for new audiences. It is no wonder, then, that merchants elevated their grievances to the imperial level and changed their arguments and criticisms before different audiences, whether in East Africa, India or England. This chapter demonstrates that merchants in multiple cases redirected and revised their claims to exert influence over a range of policy decisions.
To argue its case, this chapter looks across two different kinds of archives. The first are records from East Africa’s Indian Associations and the Indian National Congress. As these records demonstrate, merchant households—or, more specifically, their male business heads—developed political organizations in East Africa to mobilize support among merchant and other Indian interest groups and to petition Kenyan officials. During the pre- and early interwar periods especially, these organizations played crucial roles in cultivating a political culture of petitioning, print production, and public debate—one which gave way to political agitation and postures of non-cooperation. Second, the chapter also looks at records from India’s National Archive. Files from the Indian Departments of Education, Health, and Lands and Commonwealth Relations show that merchant activists in East Africa routinely appealed to Indian officials to intervene on their behalf. Telegrams, letters, and memoranda leave a strong paper trail testifying to merchant advocacy as well as remnants of a buoyant political network stretching from East Africa to India and England. They also demonstrate Indian merchants’ influence over imperial officials, who called for investigations and compromises, and amended or overturned legislation in the colonies. To be sure, these archives demonstrate the intricate web of bureaucratic machinery that overtook the world of Indian Ocean and East African trade in the twentieth century. The Indian government, for example, had no fewer than seven departments and more than a dozen offices handling the claims of overseas citizens in East African territories. Nevertheless, this chapter also shows how, within a global imperial context, Indian merchants in East Africa were not mere marginalized subjects within colonial racial pyramids, as some have argued. They were political entrepreneurs who pulled levers at high levels to negotiate with officials and make sure that imperial authorities, as one merchant activist described it, “[kept] a watchful eye.”

8 INA Commonwealth Relations Department (CRD) OS/102/16/45.
INDIANS, EUROPEANS, AND RACIAL COMPETITION

The emergence of Indian merchants’ imperial political strategies was not a *fait accompli*. For much of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, merchants maintained amiable relations with colonial officials. Interdependence between merchants and the state in East Africa began in early nineteenth-century Zanzibar and increased with the founding of the Imperial British East Africa Company in 1888. “The Indian mercantile community saw in this expansion of British authority an opportunity it was not slow to take advantage of,” writes historian Thomas Metcalf. “Contracts with the company for the supply of the goods and even laborers were highly profitable ventures; at the same time, the company’s establishment of outposts…drew Indian traders and merchants along in their wake.”

Perhaps the most beneficial element to colonial rule, alongside the state’s legal institutions, as seen in Chapter 2, were new transportation infrastructure projects, as mentioned in Chapter 1. In 1896, administrators completed the Kilindini—or “deep” water—harbor, enabling steamships and large vessels to dock on Mombasa’s mainland. Five years later, the Uganda Railway connected Mombasa to Lake Victoria and opened the interior to movement of heavy cargo as well as passengers traveling to and from the Indian Ocean. Merchants also made use of urban amenities such as public works, roads, and sanitation. “[There was not] a single Indian in British Central Africa [when I arrived],” remarked explorer Harry Johnston in 1894. “Now there is quite a colony of Banyans [i.e. Indian traders] on the Lower Shire, at Port Herald and elsewhere.”

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Merchants would remain deeply linked to and invested in the colonial project. However, around the turn of the century, their relationship with administrative officials and the state entered a new chapter. By 1905, Kenya had become home to several hundred white settlers, many of whom took up roles in colonial farming. Arriving from South Africa and Europe, they brought with them racial ideologies that evinced a notable anti-Indian sentiment. In 1902, the European Colonist Association released a petition calling Indian migration to Kenya “entirely detrimental to the colony”; in 1907, Kenya's governor wrote to the Colonial Office that “[the European] spirit is akin to that prevailing in Natal and elsewhere and is due to the fact that the white man cannot compete in the least with the Indian shopkeeper for supplies of provisions and articles.”

Increasing from 3,175 in 1911 to 16,812 by 1931, Europeans in Kenya were able to exert pressure on both local and foreign governments to increase their influence on local policies. As Robert Gregory demonstrates, Europeans agitated local officials on a range of controversies, from an Indian's purchase of Nairobi town plots to use of Indian currency.

European efforts to create a place for themselves in Kenya impacted management of the colony in two significant ways. The first was in regard to land ownership and settlement schemes. Europeans were granted exclusive access to Kenya's highlands on the grounds of “administrative convenience.” This precedent, which was passed into law in 1906, disallowed the transfer of property between races without approval of Kenya’s governor. (The same provisions later applied to urban areas with a 1915 amendment.) The second concerned political representation. In 1906, at the behest of European settlers, Kenya formed a legislative council to advise the governor.

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12 For statistics, see Ghai and McAuslan, *Public Law and Political Change in Kenya*, 36.  
and the colony's executive bodies. Consisting of six nominated official members as well as two non-official European members, it provided only one seat to an Indian in 1909—in this case to A.M. Jeevanjee—before it was rescinded after his first two-year term. After the First World War, white settler groups again agitated for privileged representation, forcing the passage of the Legislative Council Ordinance in 1919, which gave Europeans an elective representation of seven seats while limiting Indians to two appointed ones. (Africans, incidentally, who represented the vast majority of the colony’s population, would not gain any political representation until the postwar period.) “The outstanding effect of European settlement,” write legal historians Yash Ghai and J.P.W.B. McAuslan, “was to accelerate constitutional development [and] convert the territory into a colony of settlement, with the eventual aim of responsible government under white rule.”

In many respects, European settlers did not succeed in either maintaining a political majority or in making Kenya into the “White Man's Country” that they had envisioned. As the 1923 Devonshire Declaration asserted, colonial administrative officials—through the governor—maintained veto power over European settlers; the colony, furthermore, was to be managed in the principle of “African Paramountcy” rather than European settlement. However, white settler populations did manage to gain important concessions over the years. These included currency reforms. Between 1918 and 1920, East Africa's governments replaced the Indian Rupee with the Florin and later the Shilling. These reforms largely benefited white settler welfare at the expense of Indian traders as well as African populations. Agriculture schemes also provided white settlers with state assistance. During the interwar period, Kenya's government embarked on a dual policy

16 See, for example, Wambui Mwangi, “Of Coins and Conquest: The East African Currency Board, the Rupee Crisis, and the Problem of Colonialism in the East African Protectorate,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 43, no. 4 (2001): 763–87. Mwangi writes that it was a win for Europeans while coming at the expense of Indian merchants as well as African laborers, whom became more strongly subjected to colonial “appropriation, pacification, and domination of space.”
to promote and stabilize both white settler and black African cultivation. Subsidies supported white settlers’ cooperative schemes such as the Kenya Creameries and Farmers' Association, which soon became the primary mouthpiece of European agricultural interests. In 1935, Kenya's government enacted the Marketing of Native Produce Ordinance, which designated specific marketing control zones and limited Indian traders' licenses. The ordinance's nominal objective was to protect African producers, writes Sana Aiyar, by improving crop quality, production stability, and access to global markets. However, it also resulted in limiting the influence of merchant networks by “undermin[ing] the monopoly of Indian traders [and] breaking the link between dukkawallah [shopkeeper] and wholesaler/exporter.”\(^{17}\) These patterns of racialized policy making continued over much of the colonial period in Kenya and throughout East Africa. But they also garnered a significant response from a variety of populations, including Indian merchants.

ASSOCIATIONS, ACTIVISM, AND AGITATION

Amid heightening racial competition, Indian merchants responded to restrictions and regulation of their activities with claims of their own. Beginning as early as 1903, merchants banded together to take a stand against the government's highland reservation policies. In 1906, A.M. Jeevanjee raised Rs. 20,000 for a delegation to travel to England to make representations. By the early 1910s, he had published half a dozen pamphlets and editorials in foreign newspapers citing what he described as a deliberate attempt to “debar us from any share in commerce and agriculture.”\(^ {18}\) These complaints would continue. By the end of the First World War, merchants began agitating for

\(^{17}\) Aiyar, *Indians in Kenya*, Loc. 2330. As Aiyar writes, the “bill was introduced to reorganize and control the marketing of African produce by issuing trade licenses [and] ensure closer government control over trade in the reserves.”

expansive political representation. Their claims were two-fold: they sought equal elective representation, on par with Europeans; and they demanded that Kenya allow for a common electoral roll for “British subjects” (conceived as non-Africans, or at least without differentiation between Indians and Europeans). In 1919, imperial officials produced what was known as the Wood-Winterton proposal, which would have given Indians common electoral representation on the basis of education and property, enfranchising some ten percent of the colony's twenty-five thousand Indians. However, European settlers and the Kenyan government batted this proposal down. Whereas settlers rejected it on the grounds that it did not safeguard against Indian predominance in the future, officials predicted that a common roll would not bridge the gap between the two races, but widen it. “No candidate,” explained Ghai and McAuslan, reiterating the government's thinking, “could stand as an advocate of the interests of the other race without sacrificing the support of his own.” Indians thus kept up their agitation, igniting a response in the publication of Lord Devonshire's White Paper of 1923, which brought Indian representation from two to five but left appointments on a communal basis.19

The outcomes of political struggles in Britain’s colony of Kenya during the early 1920s proved a significant setback for Indians. “The Devonshire Declaration,” writes Aiyar, “was received with great resentment by Indians within Kenya and their transnational group of supporters.”20 However, over the interwar period, merchants would continue to mobilize around the claims and privileges of British imperial citizenship while revising political rhetoric to criticize the colonial state. During phases of agitation, new political associations emerged across Kenya and East Africa, perhaps the most significant of which were overseas Indian Associations.

19 For summary of the conferences and compromises regarding Indian-European political representation between 1905 and 1923, see Ghai and McAuslan, Public Law and Political Change in Kenya, 42-50.
20 Aiyar, Indians in Kenya, Loc. 2258.
Between 1900 and 1938, two dozen Indian Association offices opened in Kenya, along with eight more in Tanganyika and six in Uganda. In 1914, A.M. Jeevanjee and other Association patrons convened the first East African Indian National Congress. Their intention was to gather not only merchants, but also political spokesmen from East Africa’s other Indian immigrant groups. According to Aiyar, during the interwar period the Congress “emerged as the main voice for Indian politics [at the] colonywide [level].”21 During this time, dozens of trade groups also became active. In 1914, a group of merchants formed Kenya’s first Indian Chambers of Commerce under the chairmanship of Ismaili businessman Suleman Virjee. Over the following two decades, chambers opened in East African cities and trade towns, with the first Federation of Indian Chambers meeting in 1928.

Outside of national and commercial trade groups, merchants also sponsored a variety of print publications. Beginning as early 1911, certain merchants donated to Nairobi’s first bilingual newspaper, *The Indian Voice of British East Africa, Uganda, and Zanzibar* (1911-1914), which published both English and Gujarati content. By the interwar period, others underwrote a range of print periodicals, including *The East African Chronicle* (1921-1922), *The Democrat* (1923-1930), *The Colonial Times* (1932-1962), and *The Kenya Daily Mail* (1927-1964)—the latter of which became the *de facto* newspaper for Indian opinion during the interwar and postwar periods. Many of Kenya’s early print publications found guidance in South Africa’s print networks. Mahatma Gandhi, for example, founded the International Printing Press in 1898 and later published pamphlets such as *Hind Swaraj* (1909) and *Indian Opinion* (1903-1915). His “textual experiments,” Isabel Hofmeyr writes, provided a “basis for trying out new forms of community” among overseas Indians—or those she describes as “colonial born.”22 However, Kenya’s print

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21 Ibid, Loc. 2506.
networks also served a second function in promoting interracial collaboration alongside merchant political activism in a way that was not the case in early twentieth-century South Africa. Bodil Folke Fredriksen argues that Indian newspapers were not only responsible for the proliferation of ideology or providing a “fulcrum for political action.” They also linked readerships by promoting “joint political projects, and productive conflict, particularly in the late 1940s, a period of intense-imperial and nationalist resistance.”

Some scholars have questioned how significant national associations or print discourses were to the everyday lives of Indians. Sociologist H.S. Morris, for example, has argued that the construction of an overseas Indian community was tenuous at best; its remnants, he notes, have been elevated by scholars researching East Africa's all-India institutions and the language of a few outspoken “principal Indian actors” whose discourse “found its way into the archive [and] often gave an impression (very occasionally correct) of an Indian community solidly united.”

Nevertheless, certain paper trails reveal widespread participation in these associations by Indians, particularly during moments of hardship. In 1921, when Kenya's Indian Associations orchestrated a colony-wide income-tax boycott, more than four-fifths of Indian rate payers withheld payments on the grounds that “taxation [and] trade license [were] heavy enough [but] the Indian community do not get their share of the benefits.” The following year colonial authorities suspended the income tax after collecting only £58,000 of an estimated £328,413.

In 1924, merchants again participated in boycotting the non-native poll tax. The precise number of participants is not available. However, Nairobi’s Indian Associations were in receipt of dozens of participants' updates—letters, court summons, as well as news of imprisonments and property attachments.

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Letters from two shopkeepers in Kisumu read that merchants in western Kenya had been “standing firm” and “[would] not back out.”26 Others in Mombasa were “happily ready to go to jail.” As one shopkeeper in Londiani, Mathurbhai Patel, even wrote, “I am prepared for jail, though I will have to close my shop [and not] pay my Hundis for the next two or three days.”27 In this way, merchants mobilized as political activists across kinship and community groups and even racial categories to protect profits and gains.

PETITIONS, PLEAS, AND INTERVENTIONS

Most scholarship focusing on Indians in Kenya portrays political activity during the interwar period as increasingly anti-colonial. “As the limits of imperial citizenship revealed themselves,” wrote Sana Aiyar, “new migrants who were influenced by the anticolonial rhetoric of India settled in the colony, abandoned the demand for parity, and criticized the racial hierarchy of colonial rule.”28 Narratives have portrayed a shift in political discourse and collaboration within the colony, as Indians began siding with African nationalists against the exploits of colonial rule. However, these narratives focused on Kenya reveal only part of the larger picture of merchants’ political activism and efforts to negotiate their positions in East Africa. Another significant arena of activity took place at the imperial level and focused more narrowly on Indian mercantile interests. In 1923, in the same year that Lord Devonshire issued his white paper, India’s government expanded its bureaucracy to manage emigration and overseas affairs by founding a new division in its

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27 Mathurbhai V. Patel to Secretary Indian Association, Fort Hall, 5th April 1924, KNA EAINC, Roll 3; and Mathurbhai V. Patel to Secretary Indian Association, Fort Hall, 4th April 1924, KNA EAINC, Roll 3. Texts translated from Gujarati.
28 Aiyar, Indians in Kenya, Loc. 1540.
In 1935, India’s Government Act established the External Affairs Department, a predecessor to the Commonwealth Relations Department, with which it was combined nine years later. An independent India Overseas Department opened in 1941 and served as the chief body for overseeing Indian citizens throughout the British Empire. Historian S.A.I. Tirmizi writes that “The Protection of Indians domiciled in other parts of the world (notably British dominions)…loomed large on the political horizon of India.”

Indian merchants in East Africa were more than happy to avail themselves of the new offices connecting New Delhi and London. They only had to modify their arguments to appeal to imperial audiences and gain entry into their jurisdictions. In the aftermath of the Great Depression, for example, when Kenya’s government added tariffs to bolster local production, merchants appealed to India’s government for an intervention. In 1930, Isher Dass, General Secretary of East Africa’s Indian National Congress, sent a letter contending that new wheat pool proposals had the possibility to “unduly increase [local] living costs” for Indians in East Africa. Policies, he added, were a bad precedent and would “result in clamour [in] other industries like sugar and coffee.”

Indian official F. Noyce took up the matter with Kenya’s officials, even accusing them of “throw[ing] stones at India”; as a result, Kenya’s government provided railway rate reductions on a variety of cereals at an expenditure of £70,000, and Kenya’s governor assured the India Office that new railway subsidies would not make any form of racial distinction.

A similar strategy was employed by merchant activists in regard to corn. In the aftermath of the Native Marketing Ordinance, merchants made appeals to loosen license regulations for local

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29 Up until this time, matters of Indian emigration were dealt with by the Home Department as well as the Revenue, Agriculture, and Commerce and Industry Departments.
31 I. Dass, General Secretary EAINC to Member I/C, Education, Simla, 23 September 1930, INA Education Health and Land Department (EHLĐ) OP/208.
maize traders. In 1936, the Indian Chamber of Commerce sent a petition to Kenya’s government about new rules which would “eliminate” Indian trade, with an attached complaint about a half-million pound loan scheme that would “enable European farmers to redeem their farms [while] the natives and Indians bear the brunt of the interest and sinking funds.” Merchant argued to imperial authorities that this was also an affront to overseas Indian interests. In a lengthy memorandum written by Mombasa representative J.B. Pandya, merchants averred that “the Bill will be difficult to work in practice, [since] it will create a lot of complications, and traders will be harassed for book keeping, details of buying and sales.” Merchants kept up their campaign, sending telegrams to the Overseas Branch in New Delhi. It was received there with interest and concern, as Indian official G.S. Bozeman wrote Secretary of State, the Marquess of Zetland, that he should feel “justified in watching developments somewhat closely.” Acknowledging complaints that Kenya was “utilising the [Indian] middleman…as [its] ‘tax’ collector,” the Marquess even requested Kenya’s government investigate the claims put forward by Kenya’s Indian Chamber of Commerce.

Merchants’ appeals for interventions were not limited to trade licenses or tariffs alone. Nor were they made in the interest of renouncing the need for racial distinctions. Sometimes it was precisely the opposite. Over the course of the interwar period, political association representatives implored Indian officials to intervene on disputes concerning commerce, broadly speaking. This included the management and regulation of East Africa’s transportation facilities. As Kenya’s government centralized regulatory bodies, merchants advocated for decreasing surcharges and

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33 See Letters from the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industries of Eastern Africa, Nairobi, dated 16th and 28th April 1936, INA EHLD Land & Overseas (LO) OP/136/36/1.
35 Viceroy to the Most Hon'ble the Marquess of Zetland, Secretary of State for India, London, 10th August 1936, INA EHLD LO OP/136/36. See Extract within.
safeguarding alternative modes of movement and shipment. In 1935, Kenya’s Indian Chamber of Commerce made pleas again to Kenya and India’s government to help its bid to add an “Indian” representative to Kenya’s Harbor and Railway Advisory Boards. Kenyan Indian legislator J.B. Pandya explained that the Indian Chamber had been rebuked on the grounds that Indians had willingly withdrawn their representative in 1924, when Indian Associations were in a posture of non-cooperation. His appeal fell on deaf ears in Kenya. The Mombasa Chamber of Commerce—with nine Indian members—was already represented, according to Kenya’s governor, and thus no more Indian representation was needed. However, Pandya implored India’s government to “take up an attitude supporting [their] contention,” while emphasizing that merchants had formed their own separate chambers of commerce to look after Indian interests separately from those of black Africans or Europeans. “The Government has always recognized separate and special interests of the Indian Commercial Community,” he wrote to Indian officials, while citing Kenya’s Tariff Committee, Marketing Advisory Council, and the Trade Licensing Committee as examples of places where Indians had been granted special representation on racial grounds. (Pandya sent Indian officials the chambers’ rosters to prove the racial makeup of the associations.) Again, his complaints were not made in vain. They prompted Under Secretary of State, L.B. Freeston to request that Kenyan officials conduct a review and abolish certain rates on designated foodstuffs—rates that he deemed “unfair” or “obsolete” and which were already abolished in neighboring Tanganyika.

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36 See Memorandum prepared by the Hon. J.B. Pandya, on the question of Indian representation on the Railway Advisory Council and the Harbor Advisory Board in Kenya, INA EHL LO OP/35, 12-34. Regarding their contention with the Mombasa Chamber of Commerce, Pandya wrote that of the Mombasa chamber’s sixty-eight members only nine were Indian. These nine were part of the predominantly European organization, because, according to Pandya, they “do not wish create any racial split in commerce.”

37 L.B. Freeston to Governor of Kenya, 14th November 1935, INA EHL LO OP/35/12/34.
Furthermore, in 1937 merchants took great effort to escalate tensions again regarding East Africa’s inter-territorial consolidation of regulatory boards. Following the publication of a Royal Commission’s “Report on Co-ordination of Transport in Kenya, Uganda, and the Tanganyika Territory,” merchants alerted Indian officials about the imminent threat to their businesses posed by the new legislation. As the Federation of Chambers of Commerce argued, the bill would put inland dhow owners—or dhow proprietors operating on Lake Victoria—out of business. “The restrictions proposed…were totally unnecessary,” he wrote, “unjustified and un-called for, [and will impact] 100 dhows from 10 to 50 tons capacity representing a capital investment of over £30,000.” In addition, merchant representatives, together with Kenyan Indian artisan groups, mechanics, and engineers, complained about restrictions to motorcar and bus services. “If adopted,” they wrote in a joint petition, “[this bill] will not only continue a complete prohibition of Motor Transport in areas where the present prohibitory law is in force but will also render operations of Motor Transport in other areas, which are now open, well nigh [sic] impossible.”

Notable about these petitions were their bifurcated and contradictory discourses. To colonial officials, Indian representatives played up tropes of sub-imperial mandates and paternalism toward black Africans. Dhows, they wrote, had been “serving the Lake Coast for nearly fifty-two years and [had] done great pioneering service,” and employed over 3,000 natives and paid out in excesses of £20,000 per year in wages. Yet, to Indian officials, Indian representatives in Kenya alleged and played up grievances related to racial favoritism. New legislation, the Indian Chamber

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38 Criticism: The Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce & Industry of Eastern Africa is strongly opposed to the Bill on the following grounds, INA EHLDO OP/195/37/24.
39 Ibid, 272-273. As Memo reads, “The dhows have served the Lake Coast for nearly fifty two years and have done great pioneering service in the development of trade and industry of all the country surrounding Lake Victoria Nyanza and in country where the native producers are poor and most of their produce cannot bear the heavy transport charges imposed by the Kenya and Uganda Railway with arbitrary mileages.” They also argued that motor car transport “encourage[d] the native to use mechanical transport…vehicles [in] penetrating the reserves along the worst possible roads in all weathers…for the transport of his perishable produce.”
insisted, was really a sly maneuver by Europeans to shift financial burdens from agricultural interests to railway authorities and, subsequently as a result of usage fees, to transporters. “The colony at large cannot be expected to make good on this loss of the Railway by bearing the burden on the carriage of high-class goods,” they wrote. “It would be much better…to discontinue this suicidal policy, [so] the Railway then would be in a position effectively to compete with the Road transport.”

These arguments, tailored to imperial audiences, inspired significant sympathies and actions from officials in India and England. After reading petitions, members of the viceroy’s executive council such as A de C. Williams urged the Indian government to intervene to ease the “perturbation” of Indian interests. Members of London’s India Office such as F.F. Turnbull insisted that motorcar licensing boards have at least one member “commanding the confidence [of the Indian community],” while provisions relating to inland dhows, he added, should have been “removed” altogether. Colonial Secretary W. Ormsby-Gore wrote several letters to Kenya’s governor stating that the dhow provisions were “directly against Indian interests” and that he was eager to learn about what “attitude is adopted in Council by the Indian members.” This pressure led East Africa’s government to implement new rules with “various modes of coordination” and to accept Indian representative S.T. Thakore to the inter-regional licensing board.

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40 The Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce & Industry of Eastern Africa. Criticism of the Report of the Committee appointed to investigate and consider the desirability of co-ordinating and regulating all forms of transport in the colony, INA EHLD LO OP/195/37/274. Speaking on the matter of maize farming directly, they added that “it would pay the country to pay the Maize growers not to grow [it].”
41 See “Questions and answers in Legislative Assembly and Council of State regarding Kenya Transport Licensing Ordinance, 1937,” INA EHLD LO OP/195/37. In addition was Raja Yuvraj Dutta Singh, who brought up transporters’ grievances numerous times before the Council of State, and insisted that the government act so “Indians are not precluded from being appointed to the [licensing] boards.”
42 F.F. Turnbull, India Office to Under Secretary of State, Whitehall, 31 December 1937, INA EHLD LO OP/195/37.
43 See W. Ormsby Gore to Robert Brooke-Popham, 30 November 1937; and W. Ormsby Gore to Robert Brooke-Popham, 30 November 1937, INA EHLD LO OP/195/37, 233-239.
measure, Indian merchants and other members of Kenya’s Indian immigrant groups were able to utilize imperial citizenship and overseas political connections to prod Indian officials to intervene on their behalf.

LEGAL APPEALS

Empire-based strategies of appeal and petition were utilized not only in the context of legislation. As merchants found themselves subjects of litigation or government prosecution, they appealed to India’s government to overturn rulings in Kenya. In 1929, for example, Abdul Hussein Khaderboy sought an appeal to India’s Privy Council after East Africa’s courts forced him to relinquish ownership of the property he acquired in 1901 on a 75-year lease. According to Khaderboy, the neighborhood had subsequently been converted into a European enclave by “special decision,” after which his land was confiscated. After losing in Mombasa court, Khaderboy applied to East Africa’s court of appeals, where he was met with a split decision. With the help of Mombasa’s Indian Association, Khaderboy next took his case to New Delhi, where Pandya explained that “the question of segregation had cropped up [again] in Mombasa.” Emigration official A.D. Reid was “doubtful” about the Indian Privy Council’s willingness to hear the case. He worried that such a move would be “awkward” given that Kenya lay outside of India’s legal jurisdiction. However, the delegation won sympathies from leaders in India’s Legislative Assembly, including P.

45 Extracts from Minutes of meeting of members of Standing Emigration Committee held on 10th September 1929, INA CRD OP/OS/148/2. To quote from the document presented by Khaderboy –also spelled “Khaderbai”—the general condition read: “Europeans only will be allowed to bid and purchase, and no person will be allowed to purchase more than one plot…Not at any time during the term of the grant shall the grantee permit the dwelling-house or outbuildings to be used as a place of residence for any Asiatic or African who is not a domestic servant employed by him.”

46 Ibid. His letter also went on: “The Local Indian community,” he wrote, “had up till now been left to defend its own case in the courts; [and] it would seem awkward at this final stage for the Government of India to support the case. Nor would it appear quite appropriate for the Government of India openly to defend or assist defending an appeal lodged by the Kenya Government before the Privy Council on such a subject.”
Thakurdas and Darcy Lindsay, who agreed that the Government of India “should assist them if it can be done without transgressing the rules and regulations of the Government.”

A more favorable outcome was achieved a decade and a half later when Karimbhoy Abdul Hussein appealed to India to intervene on a ruling made in Kenya. In 1943, he was sentenced to three months of imprisonment and a £500 fine for his non-compliance with custom officials’ inspections—the same customs inspections mentioned at the start of this chapter. Abdul Hussein appealed to East Africa’s High Court only to have his conviction upheld. This he did not accept. With the help of Mombasa’s Indian Association, Abdul Hussein took his case before India’s government, arguing that the conviction was revenge on merchants’ opposition to the Government’s new textile agency proposal. Inspection requirements, he stated, were “unreasonable, unjust, and impracticable or nearly impossible to comply with.” India’s Overseas Department, as a result, launched an investigation. Legislative Council Member Hooseinbhoy Laljee condemned the “high-handed attitude adopted by the Kenya government in attempting to enforce extra-judicial measures.” While it is not clear from the record whether the ruling was overturned, in January 1943, only weeks after Mombasa merchants protested the ruling, Indian officials learned that merchants were now giving “full co-operation” to Kenya’s price controller and had “no ground for complaint.”

47 Ibid.
48 Circular: Resolution adopted unanimously by 73 Indian Piece-Good Merchants at the Meeting Held on 1-1-1943, INA IOD OS/51/7/43.
49 Dawood Hajee Nasser Esq., President, The African Shippers’ Association to Commerce Member, Government of India, 26 February 1943, INA IOD OS/51/7/43.
COTTON TRADERS ON THE IMPERIAL STAGE

Appeals to the Indian government were not a Kenya story alone. Indian merchants across East Africa reached out to Indian officials in New Delhi and London to negotiate legislation and protections, and utilized the same strategies of making pleas to overseas officials to intercede on their behalf. In 1920s Tanganyika, merchants worked closely with India’s government, James Brennan contends, to resist “ham-fisted” forms of segregation and the creation of the East African union that “would plainly benefit white settlers at their expense.” In 1930s Zanzibar, merchants availed themselves of connections to India’s National Congress to protest officials’ support for the Arab-dominated Clove Growers’ Association. (As in Kenya and Tanganyika, merchants in Zanzibar staged a buying boycott against the island’s clove production.) In Uganda, cotton traders also cultivated linkages to Indian officials and nationalists. Over the course of the interwar period, many traders operating in Uganda’s secondary market made repeated attempts to negotiate local rules and compensation schemes by appealing to India’s government and trans-regional political networks for support. As rounds of petitions failed, they escalated their case with Uganda’s government and began making their claims on the imperial stage. By cultivating links with political advocates on the subcontinent, they were able to utilize imperial networks and institutions to their advantage.

Merchants’ first representations came in the late 1920s. Following a 1926 cotton ordinance that restricted merchant activities to protect black African cotton farmers and ginners, Indian cotton traders formed the “Free Traders’ Union.” Their concerns included minimum price measures, abolition of buying posts and redistribution centers, and the creation of Uganda’s Cotton Seed Buying Association. Notably, cotton traders’ arguments before Ugandan officials were

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couched in a language of paternalism toward Africans and their welfare. “[New laws],” they argued, “had thrown out of employment a large number of native…transport workers [as well as] hundreds of native clerks and labourers.”52 There were also consequences for African peasant populations, merchants argued, who have “had to sting [themselves] owing to poorer return and retail trade in imported goods.” Fortunate for the Free Traders, they found valuable support from the Young Busoga Association. Around the same time, its president, M.L. Kaduyu, made representations to Uganda’s government that regulations were also increasing “expenditures placed on the Musoga peasant.”53 These complaints did not persuade government officials, however. In the wake of the Great Depression, and sinking demand from Liverpool and Bombay markets, officials increased stabilization mechanisms. New controls and syndication schemes further reduced secondary market trading and Indian business. In 1933, Uganda’s government enacted the Cotton Zone Ordinance, which prohibited movement of raw cotton between specified “zones.” It also made it compulsory for ginners to cultivate Africans’ raw cotton at a specified rate, no matter its quality.54

Cotton traders escalated their demands by enlisting the help of India’s government, this time making claims for compensation in the name of extra-territorial citizenship. Drawing on language from a 1929 government commission, they made their claim on account of traders having previously “sunk capital into permanent [cotton buying] stores” and were now being forced out of business by new reforms. In 1934, cotton growers renamed themselves the “Middlemen and Cotton Grower’s Society” and sent letters to overseas officials beseeching them to “exert as much interest as possible on behalf of your nationals.” Spokesmen Manibhai Vias and Pirbhai Lalji wrote that

52 History of Uganda’s Cotton Industry by U.K. Oza, INA EHLD LO 89/38.
53 Ibid, 118.
54 Ibid.
Uganda had become home to “continuous [Indian] migration [which] takes place every season into the Protectorate, [and where] such immigrants seek employment as cotton buyers [and] produce commission agents.” In this manner, their claims only invoked discourse pertaining to imperial citizenship. They also drew on tropes about economic opportunity and inclusion—two hot button issues on the subcontinent, as in East Africa, during the late interwar period.\(^55\) As the letter went on, “Uganda has infinite possibilities for small Indian skilled artisans, middlemen traders and later, small farmers. [But] the Government of the Protectorate are pursuing an economic policy which tends to eliminate from all economic opportunities all Indians immigrants who trade on a small scale.” Uganda’s cotton traders enlisted the help of Indian nationalist U.K. Oza, who became the cotton traders’ official spokesman. In 1938, new, detailed, and lengthy memoranda were circulated to Indian government departments, the Indian National Congress, Bombay’s government, and the Anti-Slavery and Aborigines Protection Society. Oza wrote that it was the responsibility of the “home country [and] parent state [to] exert pressure on the leaders and heads of Uganda[’s] cotton ginning firms.”\(^56\) Their overtures were met with positive response. India’s Legislative members, such as Seth Govind Das, demanded that Uganda's government appoint a new commission to investigate the fallout on the country’s cotton traders.\(^57\) Overseas official G.S. Bozeman made inquiries to the Colonial Office, suggesting that the Indian government voice opposition on “humanitarian grounds.” “The [minimum] rate,” he contended, “does not allow for any margin of profit to the middleman and is intended to eliminate him.”\(^58\) India's Under Secretary of State, R.S.


\(^56\) U.K. Oza to Hon. Member of H.E. the Viceroy’s Executive Council in charge of Department of Education, Health, and Lands. February 1938, INA EHLD LO 89/38. It went on: “In the absence of consular representatives of India in the colonies…the natural protectors of Indian interest in the non-Indian world are the Government of India whose diplomatic functions may [be] exercised in London in the interests of middlemen.”

\(^57\) Question for the Legislative Assembly, 1 September 1938, INA EHLD LO 89/38.

\(^58\) Mr. Bozeman’s note dated 21.1.38, INA EHLD LO 89/38.
Mani, also entered the fray. Finding the “apprehensions of the middlemen…not altogether baseless,” he wrote a letter to Uganda’s director of agriculture stating that “although the number of middlemen now operating is very small…we must endeavor to see that they are not thrown out of employment without compensation.” Mani’s pressure led Uganda's chief secretary to respond to him by saying that “[he] may be assured…that [the] Government will not lose sight of the interests of the Middlemen.” In this way, similar to the cases from Kenya whereby merchants brought matters before Indian officials, Uganda’s cotton traders were able to prod imperial authorities to intervene on their behalf.

EMPIRE, CITIZENSHIP, AND IMMIGRATION

The more merchants made appeals to Indian authorities, the more they were able to succeed with imperial strategies. In Kenya, where racial competition between Indian and European populations was at its highest, merchants crafted their political networks between Nairobi and New Delhi to serve the greater needs of East Africa’s Indian populations. This was particularly true for controversies surrounding immigration. Over the course of the colonial period, Indian representatives made pleas to India’s government to advocate on behalf of increasing Indian migration to East African territories. During the prewar period, merchants looked toward India’s government to support recruitment of 1,200 labor migrants to Kenya. In the postwar period, Indians made representation to India to safeguard migration access. At the time, Kenyan officials had floated new proposals to limit inter-continental migration on the basis that such limitations

59 INA EHL D LO 89/38, 5-12, 19-29.
60 Mangat, Asians in East Africa, 104. For another example, see Positions of Indians in East Africa, INA Commerce Department (CD) 1911/05/1. In 1911, the All-Muslim League, whose honorary president was the Aga Khan, advocated for increased state sponsored Indian migration to Kenya, deeming new waves of Indian labor “indispensable” in its development. “Planters and fibre manufacturers are eager for the recruitment of their labour supply by Indians,” wrote the League's Secretary M.T. Khaderboy. “The development of the greater part of the area, now lying untilled, by Indians would…increase profits of the European farmers themselves.”
would serve to increase African employment in the colony. In response, Indian Associations in East Africa drew up petitions and memoranda that appealed to India’s government—one last time, on the eve of Indian independence—making claims on the basis of imperial citizenship, while the citizenship was still theirs.

Merchants’ protests against the immigration bill began on a regional level. As British East Africa’s colonial governments sought to extend wartime immigration restrictions, Indian associations and chambers of commerce sent a flurry of letters and telegrams to local officials. Mombasa representatives, for example, claimed that “Indian communities [were] alarmed and perturbed” about the restrictions. Associations in western Kenya and Jinja averred that “Indians [will be] ruined forever” by the measures.61 In 1946, East Africa's Indian National Congress made representations to the East Africa Governors' Conference, requesting the bill’s “immediate postponement” until a thorough examination was complete. Indians’ arguments were two-fold: on the one hand, they argued that recently enacted colonial development and welfare schemes increased the need for new personnel and capital inflows into East Africa from the subcontinent. New construction contracts would require “increased man-power, enterprise, initiative, and finance” from their communities. On the other hand, they asserted that the government’s plans for providing for an “Employment Committee” and principal immigration officer and immigration board gave colonial authorities “unlimited” scope to restrict Indian migration. Kenya’s Indian Chamber of Commerce published editorials in the *Kenya Daily Mail* proclaiming the immigration bills to be “one of the worst crises during the period of Indian settlement.” Another urged that “The whole bill must be scrapped.”62 An inter-regional East African Indian committee chaired by

61 INA CRD OS/24/5/46.
Ugandan businessman H.K. Jaffer wrote to Kenya's Governor claiming that the Indian community had been previously informed that wartime restrictions would be of a “temporary nature” and would be overseen “in a liberal spirit.” However, present conditions were creating “a very unhappy experience,” he wrote, “[with] several old residents [being] refused entry permits on flimsy grounds.”

Protests soon escalated to the imperial level. As appeals to Kenyan officials proved ineffective, Indian activists sent along pleas to Indian officials to intervene. Here, their arguments emphasized the racial exclusion of the immigration restrictions. Activists purported that immigration proposals did not stand to benefit African populations so much as the colony’s European minority. “Though the bill is, on the face of it, non-racial in character,” wrote Jaffer to the head of the Commonwealth Relations Department, “its provisions are drafted in a manner as to permit new European immigration and to stop new Indian immigration.” It went on:

Provisions have been made to allow European immigration in every possible manner without the least hinderance, for example miners, agriculturalists, industrialists, civil servants, pensioners etc. etc., whilst in the case of the Indians[,] provisions made are such as not only to discourage immigration, but would also result in virtual prohibition.

Restriction on Indian immigration, in other words, was a way to prop European business interests by protecting them from non-European competition. A.B. Patel, president of the East African Indian National Congress, followed up on Jaffer’s letter, adding that Europeans had been making “insistent and vociferous” attempts to restrict Indian immigration for “decades.” It should be no surprise, he claimed, that officials were floating new restrictions on the basis of “Native [African] Welfare.” Meanwhile, on the subcontinent, special interest groups aided the rhetoric of East Africa’s Indian activists. Indian insurance and banking heads, mobilizing via Bombay's Indian

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63 H.K. Jaffer to Member in Charge, Commonwealth Relations Department, 20th May 1946, INA CRD OS/24/5/46.
64 INA CRD OS 24/5/46, 76-77/92.
Merchants’ Chamber and Africa and Overseas Merchants Chamber, argued that restrictions were “fraught with grave danger” and would have “severe repercussions” for India’s financial companies. The secretary of the New Indian Insurance Company explained that firms were accustomed to “send[ing] their own manager and qualified assistants [for] three to five year contracts and [they] have to naturally be replaced by others from India on the[ir] expiry.”

North Indian artisan groups, who stood to gain from migrating to Kenya to work in construction, also sent India's government dozens of telegrams via Ramgarhia organizations—or councils representing Punjabi Sikhs. “Indian labourers particularly Sikh Artizans [were] responsible for economic development of East Africa,” they stated, “[and are] extremely perturbed over [the] proposed immigration bill.” Now the fight for the free flow of individuals did not pertain only to merchants.

These representations motivated a variety of responses from high offices in India and England. Officials in India, for example, sought immediate repeal. “Continuance [of wartime immigration restrictions],” wrote the governor general of the Commonwealth Relations Department, “can no longer be justified, [and the] Government of India is extremely embarrassed in meeting public criticism.” In 1946, the Department deputed Sir Raja Singh to East Africa to investigate “local opinion” about immigration, particularly from East African news editors and black African political leaders. In his report, he claimed that indigenous populations welcomed Indian migration. While admitting poor relations between Indian traders and black Africans in the Native Reserves, the publication stated that “no case has been made out for restrictions of

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65 Secretary, New India Insurance Company Limited of Bombay India to Hon. Secretary, Dr. N.B. Bhare, M.P. Africa & Overseas Merchants Chamber, 5th June 1946, INA CRD OS/24/5/46/3. As the letter explained, “Such personnel is, as you are aware, employed on three to five years contracts and have naturally to be replaced by others from India on the expiry of such contracts.”

66 Ramgharhia Sabha, Old Delhi Cantt 15 40, 1946, INA CRD OS/24/5/46/7.

67 Governor General to The Secretary of State for India, London, 22nd October 1945, INA CRD OS/1/69/17/46/1/4.
immigration on economic grounds.” Nor was there deep anti-Indian sentiment among black African political leaders, as anti-immigration proponents suggested. A.V. Pai, then Department Secretary, wrote that the immigration bills should be “postponed *sine die* if not withdrawn.” He urged the Commonwealth Relations Department to make aggressive overtures to England, as “[we] see no prospect of the bills being withdrawn unless pressure was brought to bear on the colonial governments from the highest quarters in the UK.”

India’s Secretary of State, Baron Pethwick-Lawrence, in addition, agreed that the immigration bills were “too drastic in scope.” He initiated a “secret” line of communications to the Colonial Office requesting that the bills be withdrawn so a “comprehensive immigration policy for East Africa [could be] examined.” Officials from the Viceroy Executive Council kept up pressure, too, until a “sufficient time” was granted for India’s government to make recommendations.

It is open to doubt whether the original immigration bill would have severely halted the free flow of Indians to East Africa, as activists claimed. The original bill only mandated that decisions regarding immigration applications be made in coordination with both postwar economic development planning and officials overseeing African welfare and labor opportunities. However, merchants and other Indian populations were able to rest assured. In 1948, in the aftermath of India’s independence (and subsequent partition), East Africa's governments passed a significantly scaled-back version of the immigration bill. While the Principal Immigration Officer clause remained, the Employment Committee had been removed altogether. These modifications likely bore important consequences. Indians, by and large, earned the right to migrate freely between

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68 Avi Pai to Governor General, 1946, INA CRD OS/1/69/17/46. A.V. Pai himself brought such pressure by stating to the Colonial Office that “the enactment of immigration laws against Indians would have serious bearing on whether India should remain in the Commonwealth.”

India and East Africa up through the end of the colonial period. Whereas Indian migration to Kenya had averaged 1,000 per year before the legislation, post-1948 it averaged 6,800 per year. Hence, between 1948 and 1963—and in the midst of Mau Mau and other political and economic changes—Kenya's Indian population mushroomed from 97,687 to 176,613—by more than 180 percent.\footnote{For populations statistics, see Aiyar, \textit{Indians in Kenya}, Loc. 5514.}

\section*{CONCLUSION}

During the colonial period, merchant households relied primarily on corporate institutions to extend trade networks into the interior. As seen in Chapters 1 and 2, corporate structures, as well as privileges granted to Indians as “non-native” citizens, enabled them to expand commercial linkages and safeguard urban property and wealth in the interior. However, as this chapter has shown, in the context of Kenya’s colonial political sphere, merchants often relied on race and citizenship as mode of making claims against the state. Prompted by white settler competition in the colony, Indian merchant activists forged racial solidarities that transcended communal categories. They mobilized around Indian nationality toward common causes, developing all-India trade and political associations, chambers of commerce, and an East African Indian National Congress. Political activism, in addition, was not limited to East Africa alone. Nor were merchants beholden to a single political discourse to negotiate with colonial state officials. Rather, merchants, prompted by Indian overseas bureaucracies, cultivated a dual strategy to negotiate privileges with officials in Kenya as well as India and England. Merchant activists modified their arguments to appeal to state officials in East Africa as well as imperial audiences abroad. By prodding imperial
authorities to intervene on their behalf, Kenya’s Indian merchants were able to key themselves into trans-regional networks of political activism alongside those of long-distance trade.

Most scholarship has emphasized Indian politics in Kenya via the lens of a single racial diaspora. Sana Aiyar, for example, has drawn attention to merchants’ anticolonial critiques and interracial collaboration. “From the late 1920s on,” Aiyar writes, “Indian political discourses and strategies were intimately linked to African politics as brown and black non-Europeans pushed against the racial hierarchy of the colonial state while constituting racial frontiers in their claims and languages of belonging.” However, as this chapter has shown, Indian politics at times were also concerned very specifically with the needs and interests of Indian merchant households. Indian activism in Kenya, and East Africa more broadly, took up matters related to Indian trade in agriculture, transportation advisory boards, and urban property ownership. Merchants also made claims to protect cotton exporters in Uganda and Indian migrants crisscrossing the Indian Ocean during the postwar period. Yet, merchants did not always succeed in lobbying officials to their benefit. As the next chapter shows, merchants, in some cases, had to organized themselves around state regulatory schemes in order to continue their activities of wealth accumulation. In trading ghee—or clarified butter—merchants developed networks of distribution that relied on and simultaneously circumvented the colonial state. Such networks would ultimately help solidify the place of Indian merchant households in Kenya’s economy up through the end of the colonial period.
In July 1950, Kenya's Central Commodity Board voted to suspend regulatory controls it had previously imposed on the price and distribution of ghee—or clarified butter. In the preceding seven years, the Board had mandated that ghee, which is used extensively in South Asian cuisine, be fixed at prices based on the going rate of third-grade butter (the lowest consumer grade, typically sold in bulk).\(^1\) Prior to 1950, the board had also implemented a rations program, limiting purchases to .25-.5 lb. per consumer per month. Not long after the controls were first imposed, Kenya began witnessing shortages in ghee supply. Most of the colony's ghee-eating public, who numbered 100,000 by the late 1940s and consumed on average 3-4 lbs. of ghee per month, began buying their requirements from the so called “black market.” As Ahluwalia Pitram, an Indian member of Kenya's Legislative Council explained, “Ghee control now benefits black-marketers only.” Considerable quantities of ghee, he went on to say, have been “smuggled into the colony principally from Tanganyika and sold on the black market at prices of about Ksh. 120/- per tin.” By comparison, the government-controlled price for a 36-lb tin of ghee was Ksh. 72.\(^2\) However, what happened when controls in Kenya ended in July 1950 surprised both the Board and Pitram: ghee prices didn't drop as intended. They soared. As officials subsequently discovered, traders reacted to new market prices in Kenya by exporting ghee out of the colony and into neighboring Uganda, where, with controls still in place, traders were able to sell ghee at a considerably higher

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1. Third-grade butter was Imperial Britain’s lowest grade of consumer butter, typically sold in bulk. Characterized as sour tasting, and with a sticky and watery texture, it is comparable to U.S. Grade B standard or Canada 3 grade butter.  
2. Memorandum from Office of the Members for Agriculture & Natural Resources and Member for Commerce and Industry to all members of the Executive Council, 1950, KNA S/2116.
profit. “The position of the availability of this essential commodity has gone from bad to worse,” wrote the Secretary of Kenya's Indian Ration Retailers' Association of the situation. As a result of Kenya’s colony-wide ghee shortages, the Board voted six months later to re-impose its former price and ration control system. After the regulations went back into effect, ghee traders began shipping ghee back into Kenya’s cities and towns, where it fetched Ksh 72/- per tin on the controlled market and up to Ksh 120/- on the illicit one.

This incident brings to light the complex set of relationships that transpired between Indian merchants, the colonial state, and Kenya’s consumer populations. Over the interwar and postwar periods, Indian merchants—both small-scale traders and established merchants—organized themselves within the structures of the state-regulated colonial economy, redistributing vast amounts of Kenyan agricultural produce in urban centers. Teams of traders—many of them recent arrivals who took up shop in rural reserve areas—moved goods between multiple, highly variegated local markets swiftly and efficiently, bartering imported wares in exchange for “native” produce. Yet, this incident also demonstrates another important dimension of Indian commerce in Kenya. By reselling African produce in Kenya’s towns, merchants wove themselves between and around the boundaries of indigenous economies and the colonial bureaucratic state and its regulated economy. Merchants utilized state programs to maximize profits or cut costs, when possible, and circumvented state rules and policies when more profits were too be found outside of—or because of—state mechanisms. Indian merchants, by this measure, were not “compradorial” or “sub-imperial” agents at the service of the colonial state, as some scholars have

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3 Secretary, Indian Ration Retailers' Association, to Officer-in-charge, Maize & Produce Control, 26th May 1954, KNA RV/14/417. His letter went on to say: “It was expected by the consumers that, [with] the abolition of [the] control of ghee, it will be available in more quantities, but the effect has been adverse, [and] Ghee has disappeared from the market, and the public is making hue and cry.”

postulated. Instead, they were independent operatives, exploiting regulatory loopholes and gaps, whose combined influence—however decentralized or segmented their networks might have been—far exceeded the commercial legal architecture and intents of colonial state planners.

This chapter examines the history of merchant networks, regulatory spheres, and market power in colonial Kenya. It argues that over the course of the mid-twentieth century, Indian merchants emerged as what I call “strong market makers”—or participants who, by virtue of their connections, were able to influence, if not dictate, terms of trade and consumption as well as production supply. In the wake of new state bureaucratic contexts and actions, Indian merchants organized nodes of production and networks of distribution that both intersected with and transcended state-sponsored programs and regulatory spheres. They exploited the state's resources, together with its ambiguities and weaknesses, while expanding their linkages to local African producers, wholesale merchants, and urban retailers. As the case of Kenya's ghee industry demonstrates, merchant networks could obtain dominant positions in Kenya's colonial economy, not because of their willingness to embrace and carry out colonial designs but because of their ability to evade and act independently of them. By cultivating a parallel distribution structure to that operated by the colonial administration, these Indian traders were able to condition Kenya's agricultural production according to their own logic and rules. They were able to maintain both operational dominance and commercial control and transform from small-scale or medium-scale network intermediaries into industry managers and economic power brokers. (More on this will be seen in Chapter 6.)

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Few scholars have focused on Kenya's agricultural economic history from the standpoint of commercial distribution. Most, instead, have examined Kenya’s agricultural sector from the standpoint of European or African producers and the British colonial state. John Lonsdale, for example, in his survey of economic transformations during the Second World War, has argued that the state was largely responsible for dispensing resources and privileges as well as determining profit margins to farmers along racial lines. “While the colonial state was ostensibly designed to promote the [white] settler interest,” he wrote, “it could not avoid raising their competitors, the big men of African agrarian society [who] began to become capitalists as their production was summoned up to keep the state afloat.” I.D. Talbott, in addition, has argued that the state supported a “dual economy” of agricultural production by propping up “traditional” African methods alongside European agricultural plantations. “Beginning the Depression with an emphasis on settler agriculture,” he concluded in his study of agricultural development and innovation in interwar Kenya, “the colonial government made several attempts at re-enforcing and expanding African cash crop farming in order to support and underpin both the colony's financial structure and the European settler economy.” These studies have helped to draw attention to the state's increasing role in twentieth-century Kenya as a “collective farm manager,” to employ John Lonsdale’s words. They also shed light on how the state continually intervened in local economies for the sake of protecting producers and stabilizing agriculture production. Yet, despite their important findings, these studies give little, if any, attention to the role that Indian traders played.

as distributors in influencing Kenya’s agricultural sector. Talbott even pointed out that Kenya's Indian population operated businesses “dealing with agricultural produce [and] in retailing of various products including farm supplies, and in forwarding produce, particularly that of African origin.” However, he does not demonstrate the degree to which Indian merchant networks were able to mobilize capital to operate alongside, if not compete with, state-sanctioned spheres of exchange. Nor did he explore Indian merchants’ role in manipulating agricultural output, leaving their involvement in Kenya’s distribution economy only as a source of “controversy” that administrators had to work around.\(^9\)

To what extent did traders operate networks of agricultural distribution and use their influence to determine modes and rates of commodity production and marketing in Kenya? How were merchants able to adapt to new colonial bureaucratic contexts by constructing parallel “black” markets of supply and distribution? To what extent did parallel markets eventually come to compete with and even undermine state development and regulatory schemes? One scholar to examine a similar set of questions is Johan Mathew. Focusing on “trafficking” and capitalism in the nineteenth- and twentieth-century Arabian Sea, Mathew argues that maritime merchants exhibited a performative technique in colonial bureaucratic contexts that he called “contrivance.” “Merchants documented their commodities at local market prices and then secretly bought below or sold above those prices,” he wrote. “Capitalist ideology framed transactions within its categories, but merchants also arranged their business to exploit the ambiguities in those categories.” This argument, fashioned in the context of maritime commerce in the western portions of the Indian Ocean, finds resonance in inland colonial Kenya, where networks of traders adapted to new bureaucratic regimes while simultaneously manipulating British policies and regulations to

\(^9\) Ibid, see 11-12, 74.
their advantage. Traders in Kenya were also attuned to legal loopholes, as Mathew would predict, and “the hidden margins of conceptual categories.” However, while Mathew’s study focuses on how merchants concealed transactions from the state’s view, this chapter is concerned with how traders in Kenya cultivated alliances within and alongside the state’s legal architecture, sometimes in plain view and sometimes surreptitiously. Kenya’s Indian merchant networks, it argues, were not only adjusting their trade practices to respond to local bureaucracies. They were simultaneously competing with state-sanctioned commerce by collaborating with producers and officials, transforming landscapes of African agricultural production in the process.10

To demonstrate merchant traders’ market power and strategies of circumvention in twentieth-century Kenya, this chapter turns toward a wide variety of records from Kenya’s colonial archive. Specifically, it looks to officials’ reports, memoranda, and correspondence concerning ghee production, marketing, and distribution. Following a brief background of Kenya’s development and regulatory context, the chapter first examines the administrative records of the Nyanza and Rift Valley provincial and district commissioners. Correspondence between officials suggests that merchant networks operated both in tandem with colonial interests and in opposition to state-planned schemes, inciting conflict between African producers and Native Councilmen on one end and Indian political representatives on the other. The second and third sections examine files from the Department of Commerce and Industry as well as Ministry of Agriculture and Natural Resources. These records show how cadres of small-scale traders, as well as large wholesale and import merchants, adapted to wartime and postwar consumer controls by developing a market in ghee distribution. Merchant networks utilized a variety of strategies to increase adulterated ghee supply while smuggling tins of ghee between towns and across colonial

borders. Last, the chapter turns toward files from Kenya's Veterinary and Cooperatives Departments. Letters between senior- and junior-ranking staff demonstrate how merchant networks managed to frustrate government programs seeking to bolster black agrarian producers. Specifically, traders mobilized connections to local departments and market participants and utilized credit relationships with those same producers to manipulate levels of supply.

Many of these records, to be sure, demonstrate the state’s attempt to micro-manage Kenya’s rural economic sectors. They suggest that officials were highly fixed on utilizing Indian trade networks to their advantage in increasing African cash-crop production and in bolstering Britain’s colonial project financially. However, reading against the grain of these officials reports—specifically their observations about the “black market” and their knowledge gaps—we can see how Indian merchant networks employed a variety of tactics and strategies to circumvent state plans. Petty traders and established merchants, from a diversity of caste, kinship, and religious backgrounds, organized their household networks to maneuver within and around state sanctioned spheres and to adapt to state regulations. As they deepened their connections to Kenya’s agricultural economies, these merchants and trade participants extended new capital investments, adjusted their alliances, and formed new partnerships across racial lines. Merchant networks, as a result, obtained not only an important position of dominance in local consumer markets. They also implanted their interests firmly within Kenya’s rural trade sector and postwar economic order.

GHEE PRODUCTION, WARTIME CONTROLS, AND MARKETING SCHEMES

Merchants’ expansion into Kenya's ghee sector came in the aftermath of the colonial state’s plans to develop African economic output in the interwar and postwar periods. Faced with political instability and desperate for tax revenues, state officials turned toward agricultural development
as a political remedy for these dual challenges. New outreach programs focused primarily on implementing “traditional” African farming methods in cash crop production as well as introducing new products to local farming households. One of these products was ghee. Beginning in the 1930s, in the wake of the Great Depression, colonial officials began equipping farmers with new “separators” for private ownership and sent out Veterinary field officers to organize “boiling sites” where producers were able to use their separators to make ghee. Colonial officials trained African populations in churning techniques as well as business methods and informed them about points of sale. “Milk would be brought in each morning from each of the 20 or 30 neighboring bomas,” explained a district official, “and made into ghee by the women from each boma in rotation under the instructor.”

They also organized schemes to supply African separator owners with milk supplies. Officials set up so-called “control stores” to serve as inspection points where ghee could be certified by colonial officials and then given a label of “first” or “second” grade. By these several measures, officials intended to ensure a “fair price” to African producers while monitoring the ghee for quality before it was sent out via distribution networks to consumers.

“Ghee, [which is] the property of Government or made under departmental supervision[,] should be sold through the agent [of the colonial administration],” read the Director of Agriculture's draft rules in 1933. “But in the case of ghee made under the auspices of Local Native Councils, it has been agreed that this service [of government supervision] will be voluntary.”

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11 V.M. McKeag, D.C. Eldama Ravine, to D.C., Baringo, 13th February 1931, KNA PC/RVP 6A/7/3.
12 E.J.A. Leslie, Registrar of Cooperative Society, to Honorable Member for Agriculture & Natural Resources, 27th July 1949, KNA S/6767. See Memorandum within. Following inspection, traders would then re-sell the ghee to wholesale distributors—appointed by government officials and paid an additional incentive fee—for distribution to urban retailers.
13 Alex Holm, Director of Agriculture to Chief Native Commissioner, Provincial Commissioners, The District Officers, The Veterinary Officers, and Agricultural Officers, 1st March 1933, KNA ADM 1/18/1. See Memorandum within. As incentive for producers to utilize the government system, traders were instructed to distribute “bonus payments” for every high-quality tin of ghee they collected. In Rift Valley, where ghee production was less easy to monitor due to scattered, low-density pastoralist populations, over vast geographical expanse, separator owners were required to sell ghee to registered agents and only registered agents.
Kenya sustained a steady increase in ghee production during the late 1930s and 1940s. As the number of dairies increased to 800 colony-wide, Kenya averaged more than 4,000 tins of ghee output per month.\textsuperscript{14} However, with increases in Indian immigration to East Africa, matched by local wartime military demands, Kenya’s consumer market found itself in short supply of the essential cooking fat. During the 1940s, Kenya’s government, in tandem with the other East African colonies of Britain, enacted regulatory controls as part of broader wartime “emergency” measures. The intent was to guarantee a minimum distribution and price for basic foodstuffs, as in Britain itself, part of what James Brennan has called “urban entitlements” or the guarantee of a certain minimal quality of life.\textsuperscript{15} Between 1942 and 1943, Kenya’s officials, along with policy planners in Uganda and Tanganyika, introduced new schedules for the distribution and price of ghee and ghee substitutes (vegetable oil, cooking fats, and the like). A Central Commodity Distribution Board was tasked with the job of determining prices to be observed. It aimed simultaneously, and perhaps contradictorily, to provide a “fair” price to the producer as well as to allocate “as much supply as possible” to the consumer.\textsuperscript{16} To try and fulfill this difficult task, administrators revisited market conditions on a monthly basis; they suggested ongoing re-adjustments and issued import permits to make up for short supply.\textsuperscript{17} Originally designed as a wartime expedient, controls became a permanent fixture of Kenya’s economy for the remainder of the colonial period. Regulations and subsidies helped to stabilize local production and develop Kenya’s export sectors in a planned fashion. “Experience has shown,” an official commented in

\textsuperscript{14}“Indian Pioneers of Gee Industry in Kenya,” \textit{Kenya Daily Mail}, 13\textsuperscript{th} August 1937, in KNA S/1521.
\textsuperscript{16}John L. Riddoch, 26\textsuperscript{th} September 1949, KNA AE/3/204. See Memorandum within titled Board of Commerce & Industry. Subcommittee on control of Ghee & Produce Control. Reference Mr. D.P. Suchak's Memorandum on Foodstuffs, Ghee, and Edible Oils.
\textsuperscript{17}R.C. Swain, Controller, to Member for Industry and Commerce, 15\textsuperscript{th} March 1951, KNA S/2118. In 1948, for example, in light of droughts and production shortfalls, officials in Kenya granted permits to merchants to import ghee from Tanganyika as well as West Africa.
1950, “that marketing controls are of utmost value to Native agriculture, and they have been responsible for the spread and increase of production by providing a known fixed price everywhere”—by which he meant “everywhere” within the controlled zone. John Lonsdale observes that price controls produced new political constituencies in rural districts with the creation of Native Council investment funds, something he describes as farmers’ “post-war credit.” “By the end of the war,” he writes, “there was a division, marked as never before, between agricultural, relatively rich, politically active districts and the pastoral, relatively impoverished districts where political activity took forms that rarely reached the notice of readers of the African press in the towns.”

State interventions continued during the postwar period as Kenya lurched from international conflict to the Mau Mau Emergency and beyond. By this time officials pinned their hopes on developing African cash crop production via the formation of cooperative societies. These societies, in brief, were organizations intended to cut down on overhead production costs and coordinate marketing and distribution as well as government-backed financial guarantees. Under this new administrative scheme, officials grouped together dairy producers by locale. They organized for bank loans, transport facilities, and supervising personnel for these geographically contiguous collectives, providing regular infusions of public capital to integrate producers into Kenya’s financial economy. “One of the advantages of the Co-operative Society [as a form of development],” an official explained, “is that there is a complete system of accounting[,] from the gill of cream right up to the receipt from the Produce Control agent.” In short, they fulfilled a dream of control and accountability favoring black African agriculture. Any ghee sold on the side,

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18 The Organized Marketing of Ghee for the Producers' and Consumers' Benefit, KNA S/2118.
or outside official channels, he added, would require “considerable ingenuity.” State officials even drew up plans to “pool” ghee transport, hiring lorry trucks and even teams of donkeys to circulate to remote areas to pick up ghee supply from pick-up points. In the Rift Valley and Coast Provinces, officials also instituted new production and distribution programs. In Kajiado, for example, plans included centralization and consolidation schemes, as herders inhabiting the region tended to live in geographically dispersed and low-density settlements. “The idea would be to have milk picked up by taxis at fixed collecting points [and] brought in to Loitokitok [for] ghee-making,” wrote a local official. Officials from Kilifi District, out on the coast, also made plans for a dairy factory, which, they contended, would deal in as much as “2500 gallons of milk per day, 1500 from Kwale [and] 1000 from Kilifi.”

Alongside methods of production, officials also took great effort to organize ghee marketing schemes. Beginning as early as the 1930s, Kenya's government enacted several new ordinances designed to bolster the position of African farmers and monitor distribution channels for their produce, the majority of which were manned by Indian traders. This was not conceived of as a laissez-faire economy. Colonial trade laws were meant to regulate marketing and trading practices via license controls as well as close surveillance of government-designated “buying centers.” The latter were typically market centers in the reserves where Indians were allowed to rent designated plots and interface with producers under the watchful eye of government administrators. During the postwar period, development schemes cooked up by Kenya’s colonial administrators also focused on keeping close tabs on Indian traders’ marketing and distribution.

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20 E.J.A. Leslie, Registrar of Cooperative Society, to Honorable Member for Agriculture & Natural Resources, 27th July 1949, KNA S/6767.
21 District Officer, Loitokitok, to District Commissioner, Kajiado, 12th May 1958, KNA DC/KJD/3/23/13. His letter read: “These wholesalers will endorse on their invoices to retailers the maximum price per lb. at which retailers may sell; this price will be fixed by me. The public will be informed in the press of the retail price, and supplies will be withheld from wholesalers or retailers who neglect to observe these maximum prices.”
22 G.N. Milner, Managing Officer, Coast Province, to District Commissioner, Kilifi, 2nd February 1953, KNA CL/15/5.
methods. In its inception, the dairy industry’s administrative “reorganization”—as it was frequently called by officials—changed relations between black Kenyan producers and Indian traders. Officials drew up new councils, including the Nyanza Marketing Board, which was tasked to coordinate activities among reserve traders and wholesale buyers. Composed of European and black African officials, as well as representatives of Indian merchant interests and African stock producers, the council’s new plans included a label and receipt system to guarantee that proper “bonus payments” were paid to producers via local chiefs. It also included surveillance techniques and publicity of market information for both milk and ghee. “Wholesalers…will be offered their allocation [of ghee] at a price F.O.R. [i.e. “Fresh off the Rail”] at all stations in Kenya,” wrote Kenya’s Deputy Controller in 1954, “conditional on their reselling to retailers at no more than a given price.”23 By these many measures, state officials intervened to bolster African production as well as to prop up reserve populations in relation to the interests of Indian merchant capital that swirled around agricultural production in Kenya. It was officials’ duty within this plan to organize production and distribution along bureaucratic lines and within colonial legal boundaries. In addition, it was officials’ intent to limit Indian merchant capital’s influence in manipulating these same processes. In these aims, however, officials would have only limited success.

TRADERS, DAIRIES, AND COUNCILMEN

Traders in the reserves organized themselves to take advantage of the state's new programs. Extending networks alongside African dairy development initiatives, they integrated themselves into areas of production and distribution. Some traders facilitated ghee production by coordinating milk supplies and drop-offs, redistributing milk to separator owners who subsequently churned it

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23 S. Everett to Deputy Controller, Nyanza Province, 5th November 1954, KNA RV/14/417.
into ghee. “In the knowledge that payment for supplies is relatively certain,” a Veterinary Officer remarked, “Sellers of milk frequently prefer to sell to an Indian rather than to an African.”\textsuperscript{24} (Indian traders, as will later be seen, gained this preferential position because they purchased milk with imports or store credit.) Other traders also leased out machinery and equipment, which was paid for by Africans in installments of churned ghee. By this arrangement, traders purchased equipment and then gave it to African producers, who filled tins of ghee, which they also exchanged for shop credit. “There is no doubt,” wrote one official, “that the Indian, whose dairying operations in Central and North Kavirondo have been rigidly confined to the Trading Center, has played a very valuable part in the development of the dairying industry in South Kavirondo.”\textsuperscript{25}

By the mid-1930s, Indian merchants’ role in Kenya’s dairy sector grew well beyond distribution and finance. Many had become boiling site managers in Kenya’s burgeoning ghee economy. They obtained dairy licenses from local authorities, with which they churned out ghee under their firm’s name using milk supplied by black African households. In South Kavirondo, for example, 32 merchant firms were found to operate 140 dairies by 1936. Some of them managed as many as eight different separators. Not many Indian-owned sites appear to have been operated by Indians themselves. Traders-cum-dairy site managers hired African assistants or laborers. Others structured more complex agreements with African partners to take advantage of Africans’ privileges such as access to cheap rate licenses or preferred boiling sites while remaining the primary investor in the dairy. “[The Indians] had finance[d] natives to erect dairies in the reserve, which were operated by natives,” wrote Nyanza’s Provincial Commissioner in 1937. It was

\textsuperscript{24} Veterinary Officer, Maseno, to Provincial Commissioner, Nyanza, 26th October 1937, KNA S/1521. As he explained, “Purchase of cream protects the separator owner, but gives him an opportunity of defrauding his suppliers...Nevertheless, the present policy is to buy cream whenever possible, and standard 4 ounce jars are now being issued to all dairies, [with] the price for 4 ounces of cream being fixed by the Veterinary Officer.”

\textsuperscript{25} Ibid.
difficult to discern the precise nature of capital ownership, he reported, because Indian traders’
relationships to African operators could appear ambiguous. His letter went on:

There were many Indians who had bought separators and churn[er]s and had
financed natives to erect dairies in the reserve, which were operated by natives. It
was not always clear whether the Indian owned the dairy and the native was his
employee or whether the native owned the dairy and was in the position of having
had his equipment advanced to him by the Indian. There were many intermediate
relationships between these two.  

Some traders even leveraged their ownership of debbi tins—or ghee storage and transport
containers—to demand discounts from African producers. Officials, concerned about this
widespread practice, advised African producers to charge extra to any traders who did not give
them back their tins free of charge. One senior official even floated the idea of transporting ghee
from reserve areas in “40 gallon petrol drums, which would then have to be considered as
returnable.”

In 1937, Native councilmen took a more radical stand against these practices by Indian
traders: they evicted all Indian dairy managers from the reserves. By doing so, Native councilmen
intended to allocate more revenues to black African producers. “The natives are quite worked up
on this,” reported an official, who attended a Buch Johala, or Native Council meeting in December
of that year, “[for it] has assumed a political aspect in their minds.” However, the result of the
Councilmen’s action was the opposite. By 1938, ghee production dropped by 26 percent from the
previous year. Indian financial linkages to local markets had proven so critical in promoting ghee
production that many dairies and separators were now reported to be lying “idle” throughout the

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26 Provincial Commissioner, Nyanza, to Colonial Secretary, 24th August 1937, KNA S/1521.
27 To District Commissioner, South Kavirondo, 30th April 1936, KNA S/1521. The author (unidentified in the file)
added: “Unfortunately the Indian can easily defeat this by maintaining his present attitude, as within a few weeks
producers would have nothing whatever in which to keep their ghee...Alternatively, [they can] insist on the return of
the debe [sic] in which the ghee is sold.”
28 District Commissioner, South Kavirondo to Provincial Commissioner, Nyanza, 13 December 1937, KNA S/1521.
reserve. “I would ascribe a fall of about 15% as being due to the elimination of Indians,” wrote one official. “I do not consider the seasonal or other causes are responsible for the reduction.”

Ironically, some traders retained their profits from dairy production, despite having to give up licenses over productive property. The provincial commissioner noted, for example, that many Indians, who apparently had “sold” their separators, as required, had in fact only handed them off to black Kenyan associates. “[They] made them over on terms to their native employee,” he wrote, “who was then issued with the license [and] the dairy went on as before.” In other words, while the state sought to empower Africans by allotting them the right to productive property ownership, disparities in capital ownership between Indians and Africans kept economic relations on the same ground as before. “The [only] difference,” another administrator commented, “is that natives who were previously operating them under licenses held by Indians are now operating them under licenses held by themselves.”

Nyanza Province was not the only ghee-making region where Indian traders manipulated government programs. In Kenya’s Rift Valley, traders also circumvented state regulations by forging alliances with milk and ghee producers. In Kajiado, for example, reserve traders operated in close collaboration with black Kenyan producers, strategically bypassing government-supported channels in favor of organizing their own supply chains with local households. The process began with merchants’ delivery of milk. Traders steered milk supply toward preferential production

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29 Veterinary Officer to Provincial Commissioner, Nyanza, 1st September 1937, KNA S/1521. The other side of the fall, he suggested, was due to “improved economic conditions,” and thus a lack of need for Africans to produce ghee in the first place. In any event, the precise breakdown was the following: “Exports during the first six months of 1937 totals 9,152 tins as against 11,932 tins for the corresponding period of 1933, and 11,273 tins for the first six months of 1925; a drop of 21.2% below the average.”

30 Provincial Commissioner, Nyanza, to Colonial Secretary, 24th August 1937, KNA S/1521.

31 Ibid. He letter goes on: “If it can be shown that there has been a fall in efficiency this should be clearly pointed out to the native council at their next meeting. It is probably that a few good creameries held on lease by Indians and operated under Indians [sic] would improve the standard all around and I consider that, if the point is clearly put to the natives with a statement of the facts as to the fall in production, they will agree.”
partners and clients rather than to government-sponsored dairies in trading centers. “It was proposed to put up still further dairies,” Kajiado's district commissioner explained to his higher-up, “but instead all those operating are closing down for the want of milk supplies.” Traders appear to have operated largely under local headmen's consent, which made the district commissioner’s intent to persuade households to sell their milk at the government stores all the more difficult. “The traders have obviously sweetened the palms of responsible headmen,” he added, “and filthy manyatta ghee is being sold in the markets.” He called the situation a matter of “considerable urgency,” and suggested that the government take a hard stand in mandating that local households distribute milk at government stores or not at all. “I propose literally to 'chance my arm,’” he wrote, “and instruct the headmen to order the tribesmen in the vicinity of the dairies to take their surplus milk [to the local market].”

Officials might have known Indian merchants to exploit their position as market makers in underpaying African producers. However, part of the problem in the Rift Valley, officials soon discovered, stemmed from competition between and among reserve traders and established wholesale merchants. Many Indian traders mobilized connections and resources against certain Indian merchants in an attempt to control local markets and accumulate profits from the regions’ limited resources—which consisted primarily in milk and labor. “This industry which was beginning to flourish,” wrote the same Kajiado district commissioner, “has been brought to a standstill through the machinations of the local traders, [and] In the case of ghee, the opposition may have been increased because one firm got a contract by tender for all Government controlled ghee.” Subsequent to the government contracting out its business to the one firm, traders organized themselves against the lead merchant as a retaliatory tactic. They implemented what economic

historians Avner Greif, Paul Milgrom, and Barry Weingast have described as a “multilateral
response,” whereby traders penalized certain network or guild members for violating their
commercial code—or what in this case appeared to be cooperating unfairly with the government.
“A temporary remedy might be to sell all the controlled ghee in the local market by auction,” the
district commissioner added. “But I fear the traders would form a ring and so bring down the
price.”

Another part of the problem stemmed from the fact that reserve traders were able to take
advantage of the Rift Valley’s vast geographic expanse. With the state thinly spread out over the
region, merchants exploited regulatory loopholes and found opportunities to scale returns by
manufacturing illicit product. “It is now the practice [in the Rift Valley] to sell such ghee to local
traders, who not infrequently are prepared to pay the price somewhat higher than [controlled]
market value,” the chief veterinary officer wrote. “[They] recoup themselves by adulterating ghee
so purchased with cheap imported ghee.” This practice, he worried, posed a reputational risk to
the provincial administration’s carefully planned ghee production scheme, as traders were able to
sell this adulterated ghee at “top price” on the strength of it being the “D.C.[s]”—or District
Commissioner’s—“Ghee.” Furthermore, illicit production, he supposed, had the capacity to make
market prices shift in ways that “do not prompt[ly] reflect the price movements of the
commodity”—or at least as the government had intended the prices to be. At this time, the chief
veterinary officer only flagged this scenario as a departmental alert. No other records from the
interwar period suggest officials knew of merchants adulterating ghee on a widespread scale.
Come the Second World War, however, adulteration would become the norm, not the exception.

33 Ibid.
34 Deputy Director (Animal Industry) and Chief Veterinary Officer to All Veterinary Officers; Instructors-in-Stock,
Stock inspectors, Veterinary Officer, Mombasa, 6th November 1936, KNA PC/RVP 6A/7/3.
Merchants, by virtue of their ability to both exploit and circumvent regulatory controls, would manage to influence both the methods of production as well as distribution throughout the colony.

ADULTERATORS, TRAFFICKERS, AND “BLACK MARKETEERS”

Beginning during the Second World War, merchant networks responded creatively to bureaucratic regulation. As shortages across the colony increased, reserve traders organized new channels of production and distribution. They cultivated linkages to ghee producers and other ghee traders, as well as wholesale merchants and urban retailers. Furthermore, they integrated themselves with other webs of participants, including stock inspectors, storage house attendants, railway workers, and government assistants. Mismatches between bureaucratic measures and market demand made producing and trading in illicit product more lucrative. Network participants offered a variety of kickbacks and favors in exchange for assistance or complicity. However, mismatches also made consumers dependent on “black marketeers” to meet their household purchasing requirements. By the late 1950s, as Kenya's ghee-eating public reached nearly 200,000 people, merchant networks utilized their market power and methods of network integration to move hundreds of millions of pounds of falsely “government-certified” ghee within one of Kenya's most expansive illicit marketplaces.

Most merchants scaled up supply by adulterating “pure” (or high quality) ghee. They collected ghee from field dairies and then added in ingredients during the shipment process. According to a 1948 administrative estimate, 7,000 of Nyanza’s annual 40,000 tins of ghee (17.5 percent) found their way into the illicit market.\(^\text{35}\) This percentage was believed to be far higher on the coast, where officials allocated far less capital to organizing dairy marketing and distribution.

\(^{35}\) Director of Veterinary Services to Member for Agriculture & Natural Resources, 4 December 1948, KNA S/2116.
Other merchants scaled up ghee supply by importing supplemental batches from other territories. In 1947, for example, the Central Commodity Board specifically banned permits for Somali ghee on these very grounds. “It was felt that if this inferior ghee was imported,” explained an official, “the trader would adulterate Kenya stocks with it, in order to dispose of it at a high price.” For merchants, adulteration rings held numerous advantages. First, they enabled merchants to fetch extra premium on high-quality stock. “This large scale evasion,” wrote a legislative council member, “is organized not by the African separator owners, but by the traders who are at present authorized to collect the ghee from African producers [and] extract part of the ghee from the tin and to substitute other fats or oils.” Second, mixing high-quality ghee with other substances helped merchants holding low-quality ghee or partially filled tins—both of which were considered government “rejects”—to find a secondary market. It was not unusual, an official explained, for African producers to deliver “ghee to the merchant in less than a debbi [a large tin] full [whereby] it is the merchant who makes up the debbi, solders it, and sends it to the Control or to the Control Agent.” In this way, adulteration became the rule, not the exception. Regardless of its origins or add-ins, adulterated ghee eventually came to represent the lion’s share of the East African marketplace, or what most officials estimated, during the 1940s and 1950s, to be 80-90 percent of Kenya’s stock (some 5-5.5 million pounds per year).

Adulterators were able to utilize several location points within the distribution chain to mix new ingredients into the stock. Some appeared to adulterate supply prior to inspection, immediately after it was collected from the field dairy. In 1949, one inspector was sure that this

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36 Controller to Member for Agriculture & Natural Resources, 27 October 1953, KNA S/2118.
37 Re-Organization of Ghee industry, 23rd September 1949, KNA S/2116.
38 E.J.A. Leslie, Registrar of Cooperative Society, to Member for Agriculture & Natural Resources, 27th July 1949, KNA S/6767, See Appendix 'A' - Notes on how Ghee get on to the Black Market from the Producers' end. Regarding ghee, Kenya’s total ghee supply, and the amounts believed to have been adulterated, see TML/GSB to M.A., A.S.A., 28 November 1951, KNA S/2116.
practice was so rampant that it was damaging the industry and African producers’ good name. “My inspectors estimated that eighty percent of their present production is Grade I ghee,” he wrote. “They fear, however, that much of it is adulterated by agents on its way to the Control.”39 Other merchants adulterated ghee after inspection. They took tins that were previously certified as “Grade I” or “high quality,” unsealed them, and added in additional ingredients before they reached retailers’ shelves. (This technique was facilitated, in part, by the typical packaging for ghee in East Africa: the debbi, or artisan-manufactured tin, which made it relatively easy to open and close at will without easy detection.) As one official argued, “the question of transportation from collecting stations...to some central point presumably at railhead is also very important matter, [as] it is at this stage that much of the adulteration takes place.”40 Regardless of whether the mixing location came before or after inspection, adulteration techniques were well planned. Indian traders made numerous efforts to evade account book auditors or inspectors as well as exploit information gaps on the part of African producers. In 1949, an official from the Cooperatives Department circulated a memorandum regarding the different mechanisms merchants might use to get around state law enforcement. It brought officials’ attention to four particular mechanisms.

1) Privately owned cars go out and visit the separator where they take direct delivery of the ghee at the black-market price.

2) The merchant who collected the ghee can omit it from his records (which are subject to inspection) and sell it on the black market.

3) The merchant who collected the ghee may keep a true record of all the ghee he collects but increases its quantity by adulteration, i.e. he extracts five or six pounds of ghee from every debbi and fills it up with sim sim oil or groundnut oil or any other oil that he happens to have handy.

4) The merchant who collects the ghee may insist on a debbi containing 42.5 lbs.

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39 E.J.A. Leslie, Registrar of Cooperative Society, to Member for Agriculture & Natural Resources, 27th July 1949, KNA S/6767.

40 To deal with the question of decontrolling distribution of ghee and the lifting of consumer price control on ghee, 1950, KNA S/2118.
of] ghee. He then abstracts the difference between that and 36 lbs. which is the proper amount of ghee that should be in one tin and markets the difference on the black market.\textsuperscript{41}

Many of these strategies appear to have been risky and in fact subject to severe penalties. Kenya’s courts penalized traders with fines and even imprisonment for misconduct. However, the pay-off for adulterating ghee was substantial: “black market” prices floated 20-50 percent above the fixed government price. A representative from the Indian Chamber of Commerce Representatives, Ibrahim Nathoo, wrote in 1950 that “The amazing part is that now you cannot obtain a tin of ghee at anything under Shs. 95/- for the simple reason that all the tenderers know that quite a lot of ghee has been given at a price [above] this figure.”\textsuperscript{42} In turn, merchants took their chances in whatever opaque corner of the market they could find, whether on land or on water, to adulterate their stock. As the report above specified, adulteration, particularly between borders, took place on ships. “I am told that there is a distinct danger,” the memorandum read, “that if you put ghee on one of the lighters [i.e. flat-bottom barges, which were used to ship goods across Lake Victoria] it will be tempered with on the way and that an adulterated ghee will arrive at the other end and some pure ghee will go off into the black market.”\textsuperscript{43}

Yet these were not the only techniques available to adulterators. Kenya’s market for dairy commodity production and imports provided other avenues for scaling up supply. Some adulterators produced illicit product, for example, by rendering down butter. By this method, traders purchased butter in bulk, and then melted it down in shops or storage houses before mixing it with additional ingredients. This form of malpractice was particularly hard to police. For one,

\textsuperscript{41} E.J.A. Leslie, Registrar of Cooperative Society, to Member for Agriculture & Natural Resources, 27\textsuperscript{th} July 1949, KNA S/6767, See Appendix 'A' - Notes on how Ghee get on to the Black Market from the Producers' end.

\textsuperscript{42} E. Nathoo to Member for Agriculture & Natural Resources, 16\textsuperscript{th} August 1950, KNA S/2118.

\textsuperscript{43} E.J.A. Leslie, Registrar of Cooperative Society, to Member for Agriculture & Natural Resources, 27\textsuperscript{th} July 1949, KNA S/6767, See Appendix 'A' - Notes on how Ghee get on to the Black Market from the Producers' end.
many affluent ghee-consuming households typically purchased butter and had it melted down for private consumption. “It is common knowledge that as soon as Creamery Butter comes into free supply,” one official reported, “the well-to-do sections of the Ghee consuming community purchase butter in quantities as large as 50-lb slabs.” It was also difficult to police because officials looked to butter importations and legal butter-based ghee production during years of severe shortage in Kenya’s milk supply. In 1949, for example, Kenya's director of produce disposal issued permits for 25,000 lbs. of butter imports in June, 50,000 in July, and then 300,000 lbs. in September and October. “Until such a time as when the price of ghee approximates the price of butter,” wrote Nyanza’s provincial commissioner, “so long will the black marketing of ghee continue.” This was no secret. Officials were routinely suspect of any unusual applications for butter importation permits into the colony, particularly in seasons when the market was already saturated with supply. In 1952, for example, officials intentionally denied import permits to Bharat Overseas Agencies, noting that the firm was eager to re-sell butter locally at the “competitive” price of £340 per ton despite the colony already having an “abundance of local butter.”

By these means, merchants were able to creatively adapt to new regulatory regimes and market environments. Price and distribution controls did not necessarily “control” or limit supply. On the contrary, they had a peculiar way of unleashing it in greater uncontrolled quantities by creating market differentiation. Merchants were able to utilize their market power to exploit regulatory ambiguities, inefficiencies, as well as gaps in law enforcement. As the years went on, traders developed a massive trade in illicit supply. Officials realized the futility of price controls to effect their purpose, as controls posed only a perverse set of incentives, bringing about the

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44 Maize and Produce Controller to Member for Agriculture & Natural Resources, 10th January 1952, KNA S/2118.
45 Provincial Commissioner, Nyanza, to Member for Agriculture & Natural Resources, 12th August 1949, KNA S/6767.
opposite of their intentions. Some continued to defend regulation as the lesser of two evils. Removing such controls, they argued, would deprive the “poorer Asian consumer of the colony [of] even his modest average 7 lbs. of ghee per head per year.” They also argued that, absent controls, times of plenty would generate uneconomic returns, to the detriment of both producers and distributors. “The European and African producer would be equally affected,” an official remarked, “and the merchant would suffer as the direct result of a breakdown in agricultural economy.” However, many stakeholders, particularly the representatives of Indian consumers, pointed to the drawback of the government’s regulatory framework, since officials implemented rules and regulations that they, by and large, could not enforce. “Fixed prices [are] not desirable,” asserted the secretary of the Indian Chamber of Commerce, “[as they] offer no incentive to producers for improving qualit[y] but [provide] easy profits result[ing] in increased malpractices [and] total ruination of the industry.”Perhaps the most astute observation was provided by a senior official from the Department of Commerce and Industry. He asserted, in 1953, that it mattered little whether animal ghee was under price controls or not: “The supply of suitable Ghee at a price which the majority of Asian consumers is prepared to pay,” he wrote, “is always so inadequate as to render effective price control impossible.” The reason for this was not only Indian merchant networks’ ubiquitous position in Kenya’s commercial economy. It was also traders’ well-crafted strategies of exploiting regulatory loopholes and categories and integrating themselves into a variety of networks.

SMUGGLERS, COMPETITORS AND INTER-TERRITORIAL MOVEMENT

47 R.G. Waller, Deputy Price Controller of Coast Province, to Controller of Prices, 4th April 1952, KNA S/2118. 48 Secretary of Federation of Indian Chamber of Commerce to Member of Agriculture and Natural Resources, 13th October 1950, KNA S/2118. 49 To Member of Commerce and Industry, Confidential, 4th February 1953, KNA S/6949.
Indian traders’ networks extended not only between producers and consumers in Kenya. They also reached across borders and oceans. Most merchants operating in Kenya during the interwar and postwar periods retained kinship or caste connections to the Asian subcontinent or other areas of sub-Saharan Africa. Others possessed commercial ties to traders elsewhere in the British Commonwealth, including far-flung and dairy rich territories such as New Zealand. Overseas connections made local networks in rural or urban Kenya highly adaptive. Traders were able to link local markets to producers abroad. They strengthened their position by extending ties with market participants across different geographies and trades. As officials tinkered with domestic controls, merchant networks drew Kenya’s economy into a larger regional and global marketplace, sometimes with government-issued permits, but most often without. They moved ghee and ghee substitutes in and out of the colony in line with consumer demand, developing a parallel sphere of exchange that expanded far beyond the colonial legal state and its abilities to effectively regulate commerce.

Most of the time, supplies arrived inbound to feed Kenya’s consumer marketplace. As Kenya’s ghee-eating population expanded toward 200,000 by the end of the colonial period, merchant networks moved hundreds of thousands of tins between production points, storage houses, and stores. Merchants frequently utilized railway transport, on which they shipped goods with help of consignment agents. In July 1955, for example, police intercepted 100 tins of ghee on their way from Messrs. Keshavjij Jethabhai of Tanganyika to a buyer identified as Ibrahim Karimbux of Nakuru. “These tins were not declared to [a] Customs Officer either at Tanganyika or at Nakuru,” wrote a police officer. “Messrs. Ibrahim Karimbux refused to accept the delivery of these tins, as they were aware that a prosecution might follow their acceptance.”

In other cases,

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50Inderjeet Singh to Officer in Charge, Police Station Bukene, 10th July 1955, KNA S/6949.
merchants shipped ghee across borders in the guise of other products. A common strategy was to fill a tin with ghee that was designed for other liquids or cooking agents. In 1955, for example, an Arusha-based distributor, Piara Singh, shipped several tins of ghee to a Nairobi merchant named Lakhamshi Bros. in the form of “Holland Ghee”—a label synonymous with vegetable oil. “Enquiries have been made in Nairobi,” wrote the Senior collector of Customs, who suggested the government launch a more thorough investigation. “[But] Messrs. Lakhamshi Bros. categorically deny having received this ghee or having had anything to do with Piara Singh of Arusha.”

Intercepted shipments such as this one could do more to confuse officials than they did to provide clues or answers to merchants’ procedures. Illicit networks, while well-organized from traders’ point of view, were often purposely opaque, full of rabbit holes, or replete with dead ends from officials’ perspective.

Merchant networks also proved capable of moving ghee out of Kenya. This was particularly the case during years of abundance or when prices in neighboring territories became higher than in Kenya, as in the story with which the chapter opened. Means of outbound transport often varied. When smuggling goods to Uganda, merchants often moved ghee by dhow over Lake Victoria. In a memorable and droll case of 1948, police intercepted a dhow named “Jai Hind” (or “Victory to India”—the Indian nationalist slogan) transporting 55 tins of ghee from Kisumu to Entebbe. “The permit [holder] is said to have gone by road with other ghee [belonging to] Bhaganlal Meghji,” wrote the police official. “This is an old game.” Others played the “game” by coopting non-merchant participants, including low-level civil servants, to help transport ghee between territories in the guise of personal property. In 1949, police took into custody a clerk from

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51 Senior Collector of Customs & Excise, Nairobi, to Regional Commissioner of Customs & Excise, 28th July 1955, KNA S/6949.
Kisii who claimed to work at the District Commissioner's office. He was stopped at Sondu, en route to the Tanganyika border, and was found with maize as well as tins of ghee. “On being requested to produce the authority to move the ghee,” wrote an officer, “he produced an export permit which authorizes the movement of two tins of ghee from Sareh to Kakamega”—a town which was in the opposite direction from where he was driving.53 Regardless of how merchants moved ghee between territories, networks appeared to have operated efficiently and quickly, and were remarkably adaptive and flexible. As soon as price controls changed—or neighboring territories revised their own price regimes—merchant networks pivoted almost immediately. In 1948, after Kenya’s Control Board revised its fixed price downward, traders began collecting ghee from field dairies and shipping it directly southward, even bypassing control stores. The situation soon reached a “crisis,” according to a Veterinary Department official. He alleged that his colleague was “on the telephone almost daily complaining that he has practically no ghee available for distribution.” “The whole of the Nyanza production,” he wrote, “is said to be going over the border to Tanganyika.”54

Some merchants responded to ghee shortages by importing substitutes. Part of the parallel market that ran juxtaposed to Kenya’s official ghee industry was composed of cheap alternatives, whereby traders linked urban retailers with foreign manufacturers. Among the most popular substitute—as well as adulterators’ add-in—was vegetable oil. Between 1946 and 1950, Kenya consumed, on average, 100,000 tons of vegetable oil per year (or nearly 10,000 tons per month). Some of it was produced domestically by Kenya's East African Industries, a corporation that sprang from a state-sponsored pilot scheme manufacturing items in short supply during the Second World War. However, half of the market was supplied by importers—29 out of 30 of whom, in

53 Ibid, see letter from Assistant Inspector of Police, Sondu, to Veterinary Officer, 16th April 1949, KNA BJ/17/3.
54 Member for Agriculture & Natural Resources, 16th June 1948, KNA S/2116.
1952, were reported to be Indian. One merchant named Manjibhai Madhovani evidently controlled 80 percent of imports, supplying product ground from cottonseed factories in Uganda. His ability to dominate Kenya’s market bewildered local producers—most of whom were white settlers—as well as officials. Whereas Kenyan-produced stock went for Ksh 60/- per debbi, Madhovani’s debbis went for as low as Ksh 46/-. Network ties to foreign exporters helped fill Kenya’s shortages in local ghee supply and restructured the industry as a whole by forcing local suppliers to lower prices. “East African Corporation Limited,” explained one official, “maintains that they have cut their profit margins to the bone in order to compete with ghee produced at Jinja.”

Much of the vegetable “ghee” coming into Kenya during the postwar period arrived legally. Officials issued permits to merchants who were willing to pay import tariffs that hovered around 80 cents per pound. However, Kenya’s demand for vegetable oil also led to the cultivation of illicit channels in trade of vegetable-based products just the same. In 1952, a deputy price controller working at Mombasa’s harbor reported that he found smuggled tins full of vegetable oil in a ship waiting offshore to unload goods into the colony. “Neither tin had any distinctive stamp or marking on the tin other than a paper label,” he wrote, “which if not becoming detached in transit, could easily be detached by the traders.” The tins were not allowed to come onshore and be released into the open market. However, they did help control officers come to grips with the variety of merchants’ creative techniques and opportunities for moving illicit products just beneath the eyes of the state. Moreover, they demonstrated merchants’ methods of deception and the gamut of performative strategies when it came to capitalist categories. “It is agreed,” the deputy price controller added, “that there would be much scope for chicanery, malodorous malpractice and general humbuggery.”

55 To Miss Patterson, Secretary for Commerce & Industry, 11th January 1956, KNA S/6949.
56 R.G. Waller, Deputy Price Controller, Coast Province, to Controller of Prices, 4th April 1952, KNA S/2118.
Merchants adapted to price regimes by cultivating networks of trade on a local and regional scale. They utilized various modes of transport—railway, ship, and motor—to build illicit channels. They also expanded import markets to include ghee substitutes such as vegetable oil, which became a “black market” commodity as well. To no surprise, representatives from Kenya's Indian associations came out hard against East African governments’ restrictions on inter-territorial trade. They did not blame Indian merchants so much as government policies, which they alleged were wholly responsible for incentivizing merchants to act in bad faith. “The root cause of shortage of ghee is the obnoxious Control on inter-territorial movement,” wrote the Secretary of the Indian Chamber of Commerce to the Chairman of the Central Commodity Board. “If permitted to go to the Traders and consumers at their natural market level, Ghee would no longer remain in short supply.”

Representatives purported that abolishing inter-territorial restrictions would force “hoarders” to come out with their stock. “All these supplies,” the secretary added, in another communication, “would certainly...bring down the cost of living generally of the poorer people.” However, Indian political representatives appear to have been confused over the degree to which Kenyan bureaucrats were able to persuade foreign colonial governments to suspend their own controls or regulations. Unlike Indian officials, who, as seen in Chapter 3, were able to appeal to imperial high authorities to protect Indians’ overseas interests, Kenyan officials did not have the same bureaucratic authority or extra-territorial jurisdiction. As a result, instead of achieving regional integration, Kenyan officials looked to bolster domestic production by “reorganizing” Kenya’s industry.

57 D.P. Suchak, Secretary of Indian Merchant Chamber of Commerce to Chairman, Central Commodity Distribution Board, 25th June, 1949, KNA AE/3/204.
58 Secretary, Indian Merchant Chamber of Commerce to Member for Commerce and Industry, 17th December 1951, KNA S/2118.
59 Produce Controller, 14th September 1949, KNA AE/3/204. “It is only natural,” Kenya’s Produce Controller remarked, “that the respective Controllers in the three East African Colonies ensure that their own internal supplies are assured before permitting export to their neighbors.”
CONTACTS, CONNECTIONS, AND CREDIT

The more officials ramped up state-sponsored schemes, the more merchant networks were able to adapt to new bureaucratic structures and circumvent government regulations. During the 1950s, merchant traders maintained influence over ghee production not only by the methods described in previous sections of this chapter, but also by mobilizing capital swiftly and strategically in the form of both credit and bribes. In the wake of postwar development plans, Indian merchants exploited contradictions and ambiguities within Kenya’s colonial bureaucratic structures. As higher-level colonial officials looked to extend their supervision over the Kenyan economy, traders mobilized their connections to local officials, often solidifying alliances with low-level bureaucrats with whom they had a long history of favors and paybacks. They also utilized their market contacts and credit relationships with producers to influence the costs and quantities of production. By the end of the 1950s, merchant capitalists had obtained a new level of dominance in Kenya’s ghee sector, operating fully within the state’s legal commercial sphere as well as in a parallel illicit marketplace that remained a permanent feature of the colony’s mid-century economy.

Many merchants expanded their influence in part by cultivating mutually beneficial networks of reciprocity with bureaucrats. Both groups shared in proceeds from the ghee economy by calling in favors and exploiting regulatory ambiguities and weaknesses. A Nyanza ghee inspector remarked, for example, that many traders were still managing to funnel adulterated ghee through inspection points. “Most of the ghee is [still] delivered by Indian dealers who wouldn't like to have any of their working capital tied up in 'rejects',” he reported. “Some of these dealers and PSO producers have been known to adulterate ghee which they deliver to the board [and] through fiddle”—by which he meant bribery—“[have managed to have] inferior quality or
adulterated ghee pass through the grading. 60 Other officials from the Agricultural or Cooperatives Departments also were certain that merchants bribed officials in other departments to bypass quality controls. “I heard [of] frequent allegations,” wrote Kenya's Registrar of Cooperatives, “that the Veterinary Department Scouts, who supervise the production of ghee in the native areas[,] make quite a good thing on the side out of the black market.” 61 Merchants made use of kickbacks not only to sneak adulterated ghee passed stock inspection points. They also used them to protect the free flow of ghee between towns and over colonial borders. A livestock officer at South Nyanza maintained that Kisumu's low-level port staff were easily susceptible to Indian traders’ gifts. “I don't think the little work they do justifies the salaries they get,” he asserted. “I further doubt whether these scouts would report the Indians, [who], as you know [,] would try to bribe them.” 62

Indian merchants operating in the ghee economy were also able to harness their market relationships and information to leverage their position. Despite the government’s scheme to streamline and manage production, merchants pursued their interests by manipulating access to inputs into the ghee-making process. Take the most obvious of those inputs: milk. Merchants manipulated information asymmetries, whether in regard to connections to milk dairies or wholesalers and retailers. One Senior Inspector vocalized this advantage in 1957, explaining how merchants were highly strategic in obtaining, holding, and releasing information. “Any changes in the prices of the ghee should receive as early and [as] wide publicity as possible,” he wrote, “and the cattleowner clearly told the minimum cents per gill to expect for his cream and the date the change takes effect.” Indian dealers, the senior inspector warned, due to their constant movement or connections to flows of market information, were able to learn about price changes in milk well

60 Senior Inspector, South Nyanza Ghee Area, to Asst. Registrar of Co-op. Societies, 22 July 1957, KNA S/6767.
61 E.J.A. Leslie, Registrar of Cooperative Society, to Member for Agriculture & Natural Resources, 27th July 1949, KNA S/6767, See Appendix 'A' - Notes on how Ghee get on to the Black Market from the Producers' end.
62 Livestock-officer, South Nyanza, to Provincial Veterinary Officer, Nyanza Province, 29th April 1949, KNA BJ/17/3.
before any of the African milk producers. As a result, traders routinely underpaid African milk producers for supply, which they later re-sold up the line to ghee makers at the new high market price. “They [Indian traders],” the senior inspector added, “of course try and keep secret for as long as possible any increase in price—and it is the cattleowner [sic] who suffers financially each time an unhappy thing happens in the ghee marketing system.”

Indian merchants also confidently retaliated against government efforts that nicked too deeply into their profit margins or posed them significant hassle. The same Senior Inspector mentioned above remained hopeful that cooperative schemes would help eliminate Indian dealers from trading centers. New programs included carefully supervised transport and delivery methods between boiling centers and control stores. However, coming up with ideas to ensure government regulations were observed was one matter. Administering such schemes, which were more difficult and costly for colonial authorities to implement, was another matter. Once the measures took effect, the inspector realized that the new programs needed far more working capital, department resources, and reliable staff than they in fact enjoyed. “Already I have a fear,” he wrote, “that Indian dealers whose throats this scheme will cut, can attempt to influence the grading and get the [Milambo Cooperative Dairy] Union stranded with many tins graded as 'Rejects'—thus locking up the £500 working capital (borrowed from the bank).” In other words, maneuvering around Indian merchant networks required strategies and ample resources, as Indian traders could mobilize wider webs of commerce to influence the sale and distribution of ghee. In this colonial “game” of cat-and-mouse, senior administrators almost always came up short.

Traders not only maintained their on-the-ground influence due to their long experience of market distribution and many connections near and far. They also wielded control by virtue of  

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63 Senior Inspector, South Nyanza Ghee Area, to Asst. Registrar of Co-op. Societies, 22 July 1957, KNA S/6767.
64 Ibid.
their ubiquity in Kenya’s economy of exchange and their experience in managing the production and distribution of other consumer products as well as consumer credit. Many Kenyan Indians were proprietors of local imports and managers of local shops, and they could manipulate these advantageous positions to influence their relationship with ghee producers. Primary among these was consumers’ ongoing need for advances and loans, which Indian merchants supplied in addition to moving ghee products about East Africa. In 1953, an official surveying separator owners on the coast discovered that African producers had little interest in producing ghee in exchange for cash. Instead, what they sought by producing and supplying ghee to Indian merchants was continuing shop credit and the payment of existing debts. A transcript from one of his research interviews makes this point clear.

Q. Do you make ghee? [he asked a producer]
A. Yes.
Q. Do you eat it?
A. No.
Q. Why do you make it then?
A. To buy something
Q. What do you buy?
A. What we want.
Q. What do you want?
A. Posho — or anything.
Q. Where do you sell the ghee?
A. Bamba sometimes, Ganze sometimes [i.e. two market centers near the coast].
Q. What quantity do you sell it in?
A. In bottles.
Q. How many bottles?
A. One, sometimes two.
Q. How often do you do this?
A. When we want something in the Duka.65

65 G.N. Milner, Managing Officer, Coast Province, to District Commissioner, Kilifi, 23rd March 1953, KNA CL/15/5.
Indian merchants remained particularly influential in Kenya’s Coast Province, where foreign imports had a long history of circulation. In 1953, officials mulled over the idea of erecting a “ghee plant” at Mariakani, a town 40 kilometers northwest of Mombasa. The district commissioner alerted the developers that similar projects in the past had proven unsuccessful, due to Indian traders’ control of agrarian capital. “These discussions raised in my mind the whole question of making ghee throughout this district,” the district commissioner wrote, “where I believe considerable quantities of very poor-quality ghee is prepared by Africans and sold presumably on the black market.” In making estimates for agriculture and cooperatives officials, he arranged for an inspection of local ghee suppliers and cattle herds. Most of the ghee, he assumed, arrived to shop counters via illicit channels. “I do not know where this ghee comes from,” he wrote. “Nor does any other person if the answer I have been given can be believed.” He also noted that much of the “evening milk” from the region’s herd went unaccounted for on a daily basis. “On the assumption that the evening milk is about 2/3 of the morning’s yield,” he wrote, “we have about 1,870 gallons unaccounted for.”

Merchant networks also remained highly dominant in conditioning local production in Nyanza province as well. There, Indian merchants planted themselves firmly in local economies by offering credit to producers, who, like those on the Coast, were also consumers at Indian shops. As colonial officials sought to infuse additional cash into Nyanza’s ghee areas, they discovered that local producers preferred to utilize the ghee that they produced as payment for past credit purchases from Indian merchants. “The whole district is not poor,” wrote A.S. Walford, Registrar of Cooperatives. “There are many thousands of cattle[.] But [it is] short of ready money, [and] this

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67 G.N. Milner, Managing Officer, Coast Province, to District Commissioner, Kilifi, 2nd February 1953, KNA CL/15/5.
leads to constant 'borrowing', advances and so on.” Walford was aghast by the degree to which Indian merchants and African producers operated on a credit-based system. Indian merchants in rural Kenya were ghee traders and dealers as well as consumer financiers—all functions in one. It is worth quoting Walford’s 1957 letter to local inspectors at length, for his astonishment speaks to the degree to which merchant networks were able to maintain control over the terms of local ghee production despite administrative efforts to the contrary. “I see no reason,” Walford pronounced, “why sales should be made on credit. To what sort of person are they made and why?” He continued:

> A merchant sells on credit when he has to do so in order to persuade people to buy his goods. In order to make a sale he accepts the credit risk.

> Nyanza Marketing Board will buy all ghee so the Societies have no trouble in selling it. Why then do they take a credit risk [in selling ghee to Indian merchants]? It is thoroughly bad business. As sellers of ghee, they are in a strong enough position to say “If you want our ghee the price is so and so, CASH… I further advise putting up large notice[s] at all Boiling Centers saying “All Sales of ghee from this Boiling Centre are for Cash only.”

> It is questionable that Walford’s suggestion for posting large notices displaying “cash only” at official collection points would have made much difference. Producers would likely have directed their ghee to Indian shops as opposed to government channels just the same. Indeed, by the late 1950s, colonial officials were already liquidating cooperatives for “financial mismanagement.” In 1957, for example, the Milambo Union, a project closely monitored and managed by Kenya’s departmental staff failed to meet basic financial criteria. Officials cited internal troubles: insufficient account keeping, unpaid loans, “quarrel[s]” over misuse of separators, and an “intense suspicion” and “mutual distrust” among its members. However, officials may have also identified the pervasive influence of Indian merchant capital and the market

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power of Indian merchants as strong market makers. “With one hand, we are working to eliminate the middleman,” commented a senior inspector. “And with the other [we] are improving marketing facilities for him in a way which might strengthen him in competing against the producer.”

Indian merchant networks remained dominant features in Kenya’s economy of agricultural production and distribution. Through their ability to employ debt and their position as retailers of consumer goods to attract ghee produced by black Kenyans, merchants were able to maintain significant influence over local Kenyan ghee through independence. Despite administrators’ efforts to empower local producers and infuse ghee-producing areas with cash in exchange for ghee and other agricultural and dairy produce, merchants were able to significantly influence terms of production and purchase. Whereas some merchants mobilized their contacts and connections to do so, others utilized credit relationships with local producers to retain control over the supply chain. To be sure, administrators’ attempts at re-organizing Kenya’s agricultural sector had a significant influence over African agricultural production. The state, in introducing bold schemes, deployed ample amounts of capital and dispatched field personnel to Kenya’s dairy-rich region, where unprecedented levels of ghee and other dairy products were made. However, programs also served to heighten the contradictions and ambiguities within Kenya’s regulatory and market spheres, and to demonstrate the power and influence merchants had as market makers. Many producers and traders remained—to quote one official—“non-cooperative” as they strategically utilized aspects of cooperatives programs, while circumventing them to move ghee through illicit channels. “We

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are turning a blind eye to that fact in this case,” the same official opined, “in the hope that the advantages to be derived out-weigh the disadvantages.”

CONCLUSION

By focusing on networks of agricultural production and distribution, and the specific roles of merchant networks within them, this chapter has shed light on Indian merchants’ market power in Kenya’s agricultural sector during the colonial period. Deep and broad networks of connections, commodity movements, and capital lending turned Indian merchants—erstwhile reserve traders, wholesale merchants, and importers—into strong, independent industry managers—or what I have called “strong market markers.” By organizing themselves efficiently and expansively, these merchant capitalists maintained a dominant position vis-à-vis both Kenya’s government and its farmers as brokers and dealers who were able to pattern supply and distribution and even, at times, dictate prices to the consumer. Moreover, during the Second World War, merchants adapted to changing bureaucratic contexts by cultivating a market for illicit production and trade. By concocting and distributing millions of pounds of adulterated ghee per year, merchants both competed with and undermined state sanctioned spheres of production and exchange. During the postwar years, they continued to undermine government dairy reorganization schemes by mobilizing their extensive connections and contacts as well as utilizing credit to retain individual relationships with producers outside of formally supervised sales channels. Indian merchants, in short, were able to stimulate local agricultural production in tandem with the colonial state as well as on their own terms.

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By virtue of their influential position in Kenya’s trade economy, Indian merchants began to accumulate vast amounts of profits and earnings. Many reaped great benefit by situating themselves between interior markets, urban consumers, and the colonial state. Visiting Gujarati diarist, Narayan Gokaldas Dosani, wrote in the mid-1930s that Indians in Kenya were already becoming “rich businessmen”, amassing great fortunes, and owning shops and offices in different towns. “One large company in the area is called Messrs Premchand Rai & Co,” he wrote in his travel diary that was published in 1935. “It has offices in Thika and Mombasa as well [as in Nairobi, where] the company gets a big share of its business from buying native produce.” Yet, as the decades went on, Indian merchants also allocated money away from business ventures and into new social ones. As the next chapter shows, merchant households invested their earnings in community associations and urban institutions such as prayer halls and schools. Such strategies enable them to safeguard household structures and simultaneously convert surplus capital into urban wealth. In this way, Indian merchants would come to make long-term investments in Kenya’s urban society in ways that generated economic and political advantages. Perhaps the most important benefit coming from these investments would be Indian populations’ ability to secure a place in Kenya’s postcolonial context on the eve of independence.

CHAPTER 5
COMMUNAL ASSOCIATIONS, URBAN INVESTMENTS, AND SOCIAL WELFARE

Much scholarship examining urban welfare in Colonial Kenya has focused on “native” associations and postwar development or rehabilitation schemes. Luise White, for example, has shed light on the role of ethnic associations in the interwar period, arguing that such organizations were the primary unit of “social cohesion” in cities. “Frequently,” she wrote, “these groups were amalgams of Christians and Muslims, skilled workers and householders, [and] stated as their goals the use of memorial halls…for dances or meetings [or] sporting events and talks.” Historian Joanna Lewis has also drawn attention to the Kenyan state’s efforts to re-assimilate rebels in the aftermath of the Mau Mau rebellion via social welfare schemes. “The promotion of community development [was] the most appropriate form of social engineering,” she wrote. “Local organizations, clubs and committees on African soil were [meant] to distract from politics, to represent a wide section of society and to be the training ground of home-grown civil servants.”

Yet, “native” Africans were not the only populations building urban associations in colonial Kenya. Nor were Mau Mau rebels the only recipients of community development funds and programs. Indian merchant groups also employed their capital to support a broad variety of community associations to promote social cohesion and civil society. As privately funded organizations, many of these associations would achieve considerable social and political clout.

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over time. Internally, they strengthened members’ social and economic linkages to one another via the structures of endogamous communities. Externally, they increased their political influence to lobby Kenya’s colonial government for public assistance and help transform the colony’s urban space.

This chapter examines Indian merchants, communal associations, and urban welfare in colonial Kenya. It argues that, over the course of the colonial period, Indian merchant patrons utilized communal organizations to convert their accumulated profits and earnings into urban wealth and political capital. As merchants acquired new gains, they looked to urban township areas to invest surplus capital and concentrate their holdings in social and inter-generational ventures. They bought up land at discounted rates, and built community associations as well as prayer halls, sports clubs, and other educational and recreational facilities. Merchants-turned-community entrepreneurs formed boards and councils, financed schools and hospitals as well as charities and men and women’s volunteer leagues. Communal associations helped to provide the legal and social basis for Indian “community” apparatuses. That is, they helped merchants to redistribute the wealth to clients and other followers along hierarchical lines and build private urban spaces for their communities’ men, women, and children. They also helped them negotiate access to state resources and patronage. Particularly in the aftermath of Great Britain's Colonial Welfare and Development Acts of 1940 and 1945, which expanded the scope of Kenya's social welfare and community development programs, merchant households cultivated a discourse around the abstract category of “community” as a way steer public assistance to their private-public partnerships. Communal associations, in this way, became more than vehicles for safeguarding household wealth and urban property. They became long-term social investments and strategies to
transfer wealth between generations and seek political belonging in Kenya's colonial and post-independence state.

The tendency of historians of Kenya to overlook the importance of communal associations among Indians stems in part from their sustained focus on race as a primary category of analysis. According to these narratives, forming communal urban associations was something that black Kenyans did, not Indians or Europeans. James Brennan, for example, in focusing on urban politics in colonial Tanganyika, argued that state assistance meant to maintain the living standards of urban populations led to a solidification of racial identities, as the amount of rations a person received was racially determined and the colonial state relied on Indian shopkeepers to supply most black Africans with consumer goods.4 With her focus on Indians in Kenya, Sana Aiyar argued that urban activists—both labor unionists and political entrepreneurs—sought interracial collaborations to obtain higher salaries and better standards of living for urban black and brown laborers. “From the late 1920s on,” she wrote, “Indian political discourses and strategies were intimately linked to African politics as brown and black non-Europeans pushed against the racial hierarchy of the colonial state.”5 These studies have shed light on the way that state-led welfare programs heightened modes of racial consciousness and political resistance. They have also demonstrated the degree to which both Indians and Africans made claims on the state and on state employers in the name of racial equality. However, they overlooked the importance of sub-racial categories of belonging—namely community or communal belonging—in gaining access to state support as well as maintain social control over Indian and African populations. Richa Nagar, in her studies of postcolonial Dar es Salaam, affirms that the production of communal discourses and spaces played a significant role in redistributing wealth to city residents, both community members and

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non-members alike. They also contributed to the reproduction of Indian populations’ endogamous community structures by hardening the social boundaries between Indian and African populations. These themes, as they existed in colonial Kenya, will be explored in this chapter.⁶

To what extent were merchants able to simultaneously convert accumulated capital into urban investments via communal associations and safeguard household networks? How were merchants, patrons, and other social entrepreneurs able to leverage private capital with public assistance to build urban institutions? How did cultivating urban institutions enable merchant populations—erstwhile “non-native” immigrants in Kenya’s colony—to secure national belonging in the lead-up to independence? To answer these questions, this chapter returns to David Rudner’s study of the Nattukottai Chettiar caste in nineteenth- and twentieth-century India. By drawing on his framework of caste, kinship, and other corporate structures as social portfolios, it argues that such community associations should not be viewed only as legal entities alone. They should also be viewed as investment and diversification strategies. “Caste,” he wrote, “must be reconceived, not as a unitary phenomenon, but as an umbrella concept, covering categories of people who are potential candidates for different kinds of practical and moral linkage.” His framework helps conceptualize “community” as a means of social control, whereby patrons utilized access to wealth to protect networks of trade and household wealth by redistributing resources to members, followers, and other clients. It also helps to conceptualize Kenya’s Indian merchant associations as vehicles for private investment and for negotiating state privileges and assistance. Yet, while Rudner’s study defines corporate structures primarily by their “component investments in elite

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status, marriage alliance, descent group, and temple cult,” Indian merchants in Kenya utilized such structures for external as well as internal administration and management. This chapter demonstrates that Kenya’s Indian merchants sponsored a variety of communal associations as a strategy to manage internal relations and leverage private capital with public assistance. It also demonstrates that patrons sponsored such associations as a tactic to become candidates for national belonging on the eve of independence.⁷

To illustrate the extent of these tactics, this chapter examines records from Kenya’s colonial archive, with specific reference to Indian community association activity. After a brief historical background, it first examines papers from Kenya’s Department of Lands. As papers from these records show, during the interwar and postwar periods, Indian merchant associations made use of new ‘perpetual-succession-to-land’ laws to establish religious and charitable organizations and invest private earnings in places of prayer and social halls as well as clubs and other facilities for male and female household members. The second section of the chapter then turns to files from Kenya’s Cooperatives Department, established in 1944. These records demonstrate that merchant associations also utilized access to postwar housing development schemes from the 1950s to provide low-income housing to association members and households. While communities intended to privately finance affordable housing schemes, many patrons and tenant members ultimately turned toward government officials for various forms of assistance to build and maintain their properties. The third section of the chapter turns toward files from the Department of Education—and specifically files related to the department’s grants-in-aid program. As the state ramped up new social welfare schemes in the postwar period, merchants lobbied officials for public assistance to build primary, secondary, and special education schools. The last section of

⁷ For Rudner’s discussion on caste, see David West Rudner, Caste and Capitalism in Colonial India: The Nattukottai Chettiar (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 213-214
the chapter turns toward files from the Department (and later the Ministry) of Health. As these records show, merchants appealed to education officials for public support to build multiracial community hospitals. Furthermore, records also show the way patrons ultimately utilized support for these urban medical institutions to garner goodwill and belonging in Kenya's post-independence state.

Many files, to be sure, demonstrate the ubiquity of colonial and state administration in determining land and welfare distribution. Furthermore, they evince the state’s capacity to sculpt urban growth via policy initiatives such as township schemes or “community development” programs. However, they also demonstrate the way that merchants were able to utilize these programs to make strategic investments in urban areas and leverage private capital to build viable urban institutions around the abstracted and highly contested category of “community.” In addition, by reading against the grain of these communications, this chapter demonstrates how Indian merchant households were able to protect household wealth and community structures by building urban spaces and institutions. Indian merchant proprietors, in this way, came to seek a home of their own by courting both the state’s changing cast of officials and members of their social communities. They also came to profoundly influence the shape of Kenya’s urban environment as it would take shape in the years after the Second World War, when Indian and European city residents were joined by an increasing number of black African migrants and wartime returnees. Indian merchant populations were able to key themselves into various colonial projects of urban development. They would have a more difficult time, however, convincing many ordinary Kenyans that their uses of capital anchored them in the emerging Kenyan nation.

ASSOCIATIONS, WELFARE, AND DEVELOPMENT
Community associations did not always play a significant role in shaping colonial urban society. Up through the end of the First World War, Kenya’s government had been the prime overseer and provider of urban social services in township areas. In the 1910s, officials founded the departments of Education and Health, which managed facilities and distributed resources to urban dwellers, primarily along racial lines. (Generally speaking, Europeans were the prime beneficiary of such services, followed by Indians. Africans had not yet been counted as part of Kenya’s settled urban population.) However, at the beginning of the interwar period, colonial officials began to promote communalization of urban resources via the registering of charities and religious groups. In 1923, in the wake of new town planning initiatives, Kenya's government enacted laws enabling perpetual succession to urban land. Its passage meant that city residents who founded or were members of legally recognized corporate organizations were able to obtain township land at discounted rates from local government for community purposes.\(^8\) Plot allocations were generally subject to municipal committees’ “recommendations,” which varied highly from one township to the next on account of geography, demographics, and local politics.\(^9\) However, by the late 1920s, officials, when dealing with matters of perpetual succession to urban land, began referring to the so-called “usual terms” for land granted in the city to newly established religious or charitable organizations. Typically, organizations obtained 99-year leases with a rent of Ksh 72/- per annum (no stand premiums or upfront payments were required). Subsequently, associations were granted a 1-2 year period to build a “stone building of approved design,” lest the Municipal Council retain the right to reacquire the plot.\(^10\) In this fashion, officials were able to prod urban immigrants—the majority

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10. Regarding “usual terms,” see, for example, KNA BN/6/34.
of whom were of Indian descent—to build neighborhood enclaves by erecting stone structures on surveyed plots in the name of urban development.

At the outset of this new law, the state appears to have offered limited financial support to community associations for their activities. The majority were self-supported. They raised funds via local or trans-national networks of patrons. However, by the late 1920s, state officials began providing assistance to such “voluntary” organizations as a part of broader cost-sharing initiative to facilitate the provisions of township development schemes and social services within the colony. In 1925, officials passed a new education amendment providing grants-in-aid to community schools. Grants were given for initial construction and, to a lesser extent, ongoing expenditures. “By the end of [the interwar] period,” writes J.S. Mangat, “the basis for modern Indian education had been laid all over East Africa—Kenya leading the way with the introduction of compulsory primary education for Indian children resident in Nairobi, Mombasa, and Kisumu.”11 Similarly, colonial departments also began providing financial assistance to public health. Historian George Ndege indicates that by the onset of the Great Depression, officials were determined to “[sustain] the tempo of expansion of colonial health facilities and services in an era of economic deprivation and scarcity.” New rules passed into law in the early 1930s required the Director of Medical Services to provide “relief” to government as well as non-government facilities. While much government aid was granted toward missionaries operating in rural regions—as Ann Beck points out, education spending to missionaries increased by a factor of four between 1924 and 1928—Indian legislators also steered funds toward public and private Indian institutions.12

During the postwar period, officials expanded social welfare schemes significantly. In 1945, following the passage of the second Colonial Development and Welfare Acts, Kenya’s government established a new welfare office, which was renamed and expanded two years later as the Social Welfare Organization. “The colonies were told in no uncertain terms,” writes Joanna Lewis, “that social welfare could not be planned from the top; rather it must grow from the bottom up. The official line was that through associations, clubs and committees people could do this for themselves in their own way, receiving ‘maximum of inspiration’ and ‘minimum of oversight.’” Investments were directed primarily toward African populations. In the aftermath of labor unrest in the 1930s and 1940s, government officials organized a new Native Welfare Commission and African Affairs Committees to oversee issues of finance and trade, unemployment, and education. In the wake of the Mau Mau insurgency, officials also sought to neutralize political resistance by organizing rehabilitation schemes, food programs, and training institutes. “The government sought to stem the tide of African militancy both through force, as in ‘Operation Anvil,’” affirms Ndege, “and through social programs aimed at improving the welfare of Africans.” Yet, officials also redistributed state patronage among a variety of colonial populations—including Indians. In 1953, Kenya’s government established a new Central Housing Board, whose objectives were to increase access to housing either via direct building or loan

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facilitation to so-called “tenant-purchase schemes.”"\(^{17}\) Officials also earmarked funds for education. Mangat notes that “Government capital expenditures for Asian education was increased on the basis of a fifty percent (£-for-£) grant-in-aid to schools, [along with funds] raised by increases in fees and the Indian education tax.”\(^{18}\) Last, Kenyan officials ramped up public health spending. In 1956, at the end of the Mau Mau, Governor Evelyn Baring put into place specific policies to increase medical spending for hospitals, clinics, and nursing homes, using private as well as public funds raised within the country and loans guaranteed by the colonial state.\(^{19}\)

The final years of the colonial period marked an important new political turn: decolonization. By the 1960s, Kenya’s Legislative Council was composed of African, European and Indian Officials. (By 1958, the number of elected African officials increased to 14; by 1963, they represented the majority of Legislative representatives.) The rise of African political representation and nationalist interests led to the government’s new push to build multiracial urban institutions—both schools and hospitals. “Throughout the 1950s,” writes George Ndege, “the urban population continued to swell so much that social projects such as those involving education, health, and housing were no longer considered peripheral. The nationalists interpreted the inadequacy of these projects as the clearest reflection of the social organization that had been nurtured by the colonial state.” Officials renewed attempts to govern welfare on a “nonracial” basis—or without reference to any form of racial favoritism. New outlays were approved by a Council of Ministers, a body established in 1954 with the Lyttleton Constitution and whose membership included African as well as European and Asian representatives. Finally, officials

\(^{17}\) Fenno Ogutu, “The Role of National Housing Corporation in the Provision of Housing in Kenya” (PhD Thesis, University of Nairobi, 1978), 26. Schemes were overseen administratively by the colony’s Department of Cooperative Societies, which approved access to development funds and savings and loan societies


handed out assistance to consolidate political support. Daniel Branch argues that government officials looked to distribute aid strategically to “loyalists”—or those who would help protect Great Britain’s strategic and economic interests in the future. “The disparate components of this African elite,” he writes, “first fused together and then fused with the Asian and European elite and interests.”

As a result, social welfare, by the very end of the colonial period, was distributed both widely and with complex and rapidly changing set of political prerogatives.

**LAND LAWS, DISCOUNTS, AND URBAN INVESTMENTS**

In the 1920s, Indian merchants began registering community organizations. With the new rights granting perpetual succession to land in force, many formed councils and committees to raise funds to purchase plots and build edifices. Association members elected trustees and secretaries as well as board members to oversee the purchases, and then erected prayer houses and shrines as well as social halls and clubs. In most cases, access to these institutions was limited to association members only. This was particularly the case for associations built according to sectarian, caste, or kinship identities (such as Ismaili, Lohana, Oshwal, and the like). In other cases, access was determined by religious practice or home region, as with Kenya’s Muslim Association or Cutchi Gujarati Hindu Union. (This was also the case with several *mandals*, or associations, which, generally speaking, were not legally registered entities but were still points of social belonging and control among Hindu populations in colonial Kenya.) No record provides a definitive list or count of all the different social group organizations that were founded in colonial Kenya. However, it is notable that several Gujarati diarists visiting Kenya during the interwar and postwar periods were impressed with the number of Indian communal associations, temples, and social or religious

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venues they found. Diarist Narayan Gokaldas Dosani, for example, writing in Gujarati, noted in 1932 that cities like Nairobi had become home to large number of “cultural associations” and clubs for women. “The Lohana, Patel, Vaniya, Karigar communities have built a library here,” he wrote, “While on the outskirts of the city there is a new Sanatandhram Sabha, Cutchi Gujarati Hindu Union, and an Arya Samaj Temple....Certain [associations] have even started programs for women, [such as the] the Ismaili Khoja Muslims, who are especially prosperous, and have a Club, a Ladies Volunteers Corps, and other facilities.”

Some groups managed to erect prayer halls, shrines, or common rooms on narrow city plots. Others, however, were able to build extravagant complexes in suburban areas. In 1929, for example, Ismaili councilmen—referred to by Dosani—applied for land plots in Nairobi’s Parklands suburb. They applied for two separate plots, one for a sporting ground and the other for a council office. Proposals were sent into the Municipal Council and put up for debate. Aside from a few opponents who questioned whether a council office deserved the “charitable” rate, the proposal passed easily. Kenya's Land Commissioner approved the application, pointing out the impressive amount of investment Ismaili patrons were putting into the new structures. “[They] proposed to spend £2,000 or thereabouts on the Pavilion to commence,” the Commissioner observed. “And the building is designed so as to provide for future extension in the form of wings.” The association’s patrons also planned to spend additional funds on the “garden layout…consist[ing] of Murrum Roads and paths, flowering and other trees with lawns and herbaceous borders and other gardening effects.” Trustees also submitted elaborate blueprints for the council office, which had an estimated building cost of “£400-500.”

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22 Assistant Land Officer to District Commissioner, 19th December 1929, KNA S/853.
have been especially accommodating in helping the association meet its financial needs. When the transaction was finalized in 1932, the monthly rent on both plots—which amounted to 3.5 acres of land—was knocked down from £350 to £292—£58 below the suggested rate.\(^23\)

Not all groups were able to obtain such favorable rates. Others had to negotiate for land on suitable terms. In 1930, for example, Bhora merchants applied to expand their association's premises to build a school alongside their mosque. They accepted municipal officials’ “recommendation” to exchange their old mosque site for a new plot on Victoria Street, in proximity to the Indian bazaar as well as the Bhora “child community.” After construction commenced, the Bhora trustees came back to the Municipal Council asking for additional land adjacent to the Victoria Street plot—all on the same freehold terms. “The original grant alone for the old mosque,” wrote the Bhora association president, “which was granted to my community at White House Road was about 19000 sq. ft, whereas the whole total area granted to us [on the new plots] for the both purposes is approximately about 13,000.” He also stated that more land was needed for living accommodations for a “priest-in-charge,” who was to take care of the mosque. “According to our religious rules,” he added, “we could not pay the rent[,] and the plot in question is a mosque plot which [the] Government after consideration have kindly granted our community [on a] freehold grant.”\(^24\) Bhora councilmen managed to secure the second plot directly across the street from the mosque and the school. They also had it registered in the name of the association (or specifically, in the name of “Dai Sayedna Tahir Seifudeen who is at present on the throne of Emamu Zeiman”).\(^25\) However, they were unable to obtain it on a freehold basis. As one official stated, “the

\(^{24}\) President, Bhora Community to Commissioner for Local Government, Lands & Settlement, 4th August 1930, KNA BN/6/34.
\(^{25}\) Mulla Tayabali Mohammed to Commissioner of Lands and Local Government, 19th November 1930, KNA BN/6/34.
granting of this application [would] mean the sacrifice of Government land worth £1,350[,] and from a town planning point of view there is nothing to be said for it and everything to be said against it.” As a result, Bhora patrons paid a £60 stand premium in addition to the “usual terms” of Ksh 72 per annum.26

Oftentimes, association patrons negotiated their terms based on changing demographics and financial circumstances. Some were able to make significant investments in certain years, but were unable to maintain structures or communal activities in others. This was particularly the case for associations whose religious halls or social venues remained open to people who were not necessarily paying dues. In 1933, for example, committee members from Nairobi's Jamia Mosque applied to the Lands Department to convert portions of its premise to commercial plots for the purpose of improving the mosque's finances. As the committee secretary explained, the mosque had originally been built and maintained by paying members. (In fact, its original donors included not only members, but also a range of patrons such as Bohra merchant A.M. Jeevanjee, who sponsored its upkeep for the sake of many indentured laborers worshipping there while working on contracts procured by Jeevanjee’s firm.) However, after the Great Depression, it suffered financial setbacks, along with many Muslims of North Indian descent living and working in Nairobi. Some even left Nairobi for other towns in Kenya, East Africa, or India. “It is not unlikely,” wrote the mosque secretary, “that the Indian Muslim population may further decrease in the near future to an extent that the Mosque will be left almost entirely for the use of the native population who would certainly not be in a position to provide funds for its maintenance.” In addition, he noted, “sufficient income [is needed] to make the mosque [financially] independent.”

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26 See President, Bhora Community, to Commissioner of Lands and Local Government, 4th August 1930, KNA BN/6/34; and President of Bhora Community to Commissioner of Lands and Local Government, 30th March 1931, KNA BN/6/34.
officials were sympathetic to their proposal, particularly in light of its broad membership of Indian and “Native” worshippers. They agreed to convert the premises into two commercial plots, which the mosque committee used to make a go-down space and car park.\footnote{Yusuf Ali, Jamia Mosque Secretary, 15th January 1938, KNA S/2822.}

Not all Indian community associations confronted waning membership or financial contributions. During the interwar period, and more commonly during the postwar period, many saw their registries of donations grow with increasing migration and wealth. One group to have expanded its activities was the Visa Oshwal association. After building a small temple in the Indian market area during the prewar period, patrons, in 1941, purchased a new plot in the Ngara area to build a community hall or mahajanwadi. They also sponsored construction of two temples directly opposite the community hall in 1950 and 1964.\footnote{See John I. Zarwan, “Indian Businessmen in Kenya during the Twentieth Century” (PhD. Diss., Yale University, 1977), 86. I also visited the site in Nairobi myself on 31st August 2015. I obtained information from a present member of one of the temples during a discussion in Nairobi on the same day.} Various Hindu caste groups from Gujarat and Cutch also built more than half a dozen temples and social halls in Nairobi during the 1940s and 1950s. Some were followers of Shree Ram, who built a temple in 1950 in Parklands. A number included devotees of India's Neo-reformist Swaminarayan Satsang, a religious order whose members sponsored the Laxmi-Narayan temple in Nairobi in 1945 as well as another Shree Cutchi Satsang Swaminarayan Temple and Shree Shidant Savijan Mandal in 1955. When I asked current Nairobi residents about the history of these religious sites, they characterized them, partly, as the result of ongoing competition between patrons for clients and prestige. However, several caste groups appear to have coordinated their investments jointly with other associations and modified communal boundaries. In 1945, for example, patrons from the Cutchi Hindu Gujarati Union expanded and re-named their association the Shree Cutchi Leva Patel Samaj to incorporate a wider group of castes and religious sects—namely Kenya’s Patel caste. In 1954, the organization, which
by that time numbered over 6,000 members, built a multi-purpose community site in Nairobi’s South C Estate costing £35,000 and consisting of social hall, school, and library.  

Nairobi was not the only place where patrons were making investments in lands with the right of perpetual succession. According to Lands Department files and Municipal Council minutes from other townships, the “Hindu community” applied to build temples in Gilgil and Eldoret, in central and western Kenya, in 1928 and 1932, respectively. In 1938, the Patel Brotherhood built a library on a plot in Nakuru, which they were able to gain on a freehold basis, so long as the library was to be accessible to all of the “Indian community.” Ismailis applied for land to build a cemetery in Machakos in 1929. It was in Nairobi, however, Kenya's administrative capital and major commercial hub, where Indian merchants appeared to have made far and away the most investments. Over the interwar and postwar periods, merchant patrons built new edifices and thereby remade wide swaths of the city’s urban space. They utilized the city's town planning schemes, including public works projects (i.e. roads, electrical grids, and sanitation systems) to cultivate new neighborhood areas. These investments not only changed the ownership of urban areas and suburban enclaves. They also had profound impact, for certain populations, on their belonging in the city. This was the case for city residents, who, Richa Nagar argues, constructed mental maps around communal spaces, commercial stores, and other geographies of everyday life. It was also the case for visitors from India such as Gujarati diarist Sarabhai Chokshi, who

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29 KNA CS/8/22/51.
30 See KNA BN/1/120; and BN/6/27.
31 See KNA S/LND 42/4/2.
32 See KNA BN/38/8.
was so impressed with these investments that he wrote during his 1956 visit to Kenya “When I walk in [Nairobi], I feel as if I am still in India.”

HOUSING COOPERATIVES, LOANS, AND TAX EXEMPTIONS

Much scholarship focusing on Kenya’s postwar welfare regime has brought attention to the making of Nairobi’s “African locations.” David Anderson, for example, has argued that Nairobi’s 1948 *Master Plan* included provisions for new African neighborhood units. “The ostentatious plan,” he wrote, “featured new administrative buildings set in landscaped public spaces [as well as] 'model' housing estates for the better class of African white-collar workers.” David Throup has drawn attention to Nairobi’s efforts to build municipal housing complexes in the city’s southern and eastern estates. “The provision of new housing failed to keep pace,” he wrote, “not [because] the government and municipality failed to take any action, but rather [because] they were overwhelmed by the tidal wave of new urban immigrants.” Yet, postwar welfare schemes in Kenya also provided financial resources for non-African locations. Beginning in the 1940s, state officials organized housing assistance programs on a multi-racial basis. One new initiative included tenant-purchase housing schemes within the Department of Cooperative Societies. It provided resources not only to African populations, but also Indian populations, who channeled the assistance into housing projects, neighborhood development, and community investments.

In theory, housing societies were intended to be self-sufficient. Association patrons registered their societies under the rules of the Cooperatives Ordinance before arranging

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for a loan from one of the government's new development funds, building programs, or savings and loan societies. Patrons, who normally served as housing society trustees or chairmen, then divided the land into sub-plots, which were re-sold on separate titles to tenant purchasers. Nearly all of these tenant purchasers, who were community members and households, paid upfront costs to initiate construction of the homes. They acquired the final unit by agreeing to pay various installments over the short or long term. (Payment plans varied by society, depending on the finances of the community, the land plots that patrons purchased, and the size of the flats they intended to build.) Tenants then paid for the residual cost of the home over the full maturity of the loan—typically 14 to 16 years. By virtue of such schemes, tenants were able to acquire affordable housing via membership in community associations or other bodies recognized by the Cooperatives Department. They were also able to save costs in housing construction as well as society maintenance, such as road work, security, gardening, and the like. Last, they were able to acquire housing on an affordable basis in proximity to their communal organizations such as prayer or social halls, clubs, and schools.

In practice, however, housing societies often required government resources or assistance to make ends meet. Many societies were subject to divisions and disagreements over construction as well as other maintenance costs and fees. Faced with liquidity shortages, society members, via their respective association’s board, appealed to officials for new allowances. In 1956, for example, Adam Habib founded the Nairobi Muslim Housing Society. It included 30 sub-plots on 1.5 acres of land. Members paid upfront payments of Ksh 17,000 for mansionettes valued at Ksh 35,000. The remaining balances were to be paid over 14 years. The mansionettes were completed on time, but the contractor’s costs far exceeded the initial Ksh 750,000 quoted in the original tender. Habib appealed to authorities to expand his borrowing limit—originally set at Ksh 100,000—so
that the society could acquire additional bank loans to pay off his contractors. His plan, he explained, was to have individual members borrow against their single plot of land to maximize the society’s overall borrowing potential. Cooperatives Department officials were perturbed by the society’s many requests and what the Deputy Commissioner for Cooperative Development, I.V. Merlyn Davies, described as its overall dysfunction. “It seemed [to me] that the Society was split in two, the committee being on one side and certain members on the other side,” he explained. “Members of the committee had little idea of the meaning of the word ‘Co-operation’ or for that matter even the slightest idea as to the basic principles of the co-operative movement.” Evidently, some attendees who had been against the new plan decried Habib as a “crook” and a “swindler” before walking out. However, cooperatives officials organized a second round of financing to the tune of £20,000 after receiving the society’s audit report and various pleas by its members. They also granted the society’s requests to lower the overall ground rent for its 1.5 acres of land.37

Even well-capitalized housing societies appealed to the government for financial aid. In 1958, for example, the Nairobi Ismaili association financed the construction of the High Ridge Housing Society, which included 93 mansionettes. Members acquired units worth Ksh 38,000-40,000, which they paid off in monthly increments over 14 years. The society was well-funded and cared for by its patrons. Despite some members falling behind, the association chairman granted them leniency by drawing on credit facilities from the Ismaili-sponsored Diamond Jubilee Investment Trust. At one annual meeting, he even “decided that some relief should be given to the defaulters by granting them time.” However, tenant members complained about what they viewed as extraneous and burdensome stamp duties and taxes assessed at the time of purchase. “The members of the society were of very limited means,” read a letter penned by the Ismail

Association’s secretary, “and [the] levying of a stamp duty for the second time will cause great hardship upon them.” The Secretary’s plea found sympathy among government officials. The Collector of Stamp duties, prodded by the Cooperatives Department, wrote to the Treasury to remit the Ismaili tenant purchasers their duties.\(^{38}\) In the end, the government granted the Ismaili housing society members the same relief as it had given those of the less capitalized Nairobi Muslim Housing Society, mentioned above.

Officials were willing to accommodate housing societies’ requests for credit in part because of their members’ general tendency toward self-sufficiency. Some were even gleeful about tenant purchase schemes and their possibilities for providing urban housing in post-independence Kenya, commenting that it was “obviously the very latest thing in Asian housing.”\(^{39}\) However, financial circumstances did not always permit officials to grant every request. In 1959, for example, the Goan Overseas Association—whose members included traders as well as civil servants, teachers, and other professionals—arranged for the building of fifteen units in proximity to “a church, school, shopping centre, and medical centre, and bus route.” The Association capped initial entry fees at Ksh 750 as well as upfront payments at Ksh 17,000 for houses that cost Ksh 47,000 to be paid in total over the course of 15 years. In 1961, the society ran out of funds due to a sudden government-placed moratorium on new building loans—a moratorium that was part of the government’s overall strategy to manage and preserve financial resources in the lead up to independence. The association secretary appealed to officials from the Cooperatives as well as

\(^{38}\) See Secretary of Ismailia High-Ridge Cooperative Society to Registrar of Cooperative Society, 29th September 1960, KNA TR/8/578; and Collector of Stamp Duties to F.B. Kynoch, 23th August 1962, KNA TR/8/578.

\(^{39}\) Commissioner for Cooperative Development of Kenya, Mr. M.E.W. North, 2nd November 1960, KNA TR/8/578. “These are all two-storey residences with sitting-room, dining-room and kitchen below and bedrooms upstairs,” the Commissioner went on to write. “[Land,] Mr. Manji told us, cost about £ 6,000 per acre—a high price but well worth it, in his opinion, since it was in the right place, in a very healthy and pleasant site in the Parklands area where the Ismaili community have built numerous schools and a hospital—and it was most advantageous that children could walk to school.”
Labor Departments for assistance. “Most of these Goan Participants,” the secretary wrote, “have put all their life savings in the scheme and the fact that a loan is not available is making them panicky and restive.” But their request for a mortgage was again denied. While officials expressed “considerable sympathy” for the members and the association, they stated that the government was not “justified in providing financial aid.” “At the present moment,” they added, “everybody is losing.”

EDUCATORS, SCHOOLS, AND PUBLIC ASSISTANCE

Housing projects proved to be a major component of public assistance programs in postwar Kenya and a backbone of neighborhood development. However, other welfare schemes also provided merchant groups with new opportunities to leverage private capital to build urban institutions. This was particularly the case in regard to new school financing. During the 1950s and 1960s, patrons utilized associations to gain access to so-called “modern streams”—or funding organized via the new postwar social welfare organization to build educational facilities. In nearly all cases, state assistance was distributed on a matching (or “£-for-£”) basis. Patrons raised funds, drew up plans and budgets, and applied for funding from education officials, tabulating expenditures and tuition fees ahead of new projects. In cases where associations had already built schools, they applied for increased funding to meet new financial costs or expand facilities and programs. In either case, community association patrons were able to grow private education facilities for primary and secondary students, both girls and boys, by a significant measure in a few short years. Applying for public funding, to be sure, came with caveats: patrons opened up schools to closer

40 I.X.C. Ferreira, General Secretary of Government Overseas Association to Minister for Labor and Housing, 12th April 1961, KNA BFN/326/04.
state supervision; education officials often conducted a full inspection of the school and assessed the cost of education per pupil as well as teachers' salaries and qualifications; in some cases, government officials even joined community school boards. However, communities gained tremendous funding advantages and opportunities to invest in social and cultural life as well as educational organizations more broadly. It would be these organizations that supported community structures and their reproduction over subsequent generations.

Some patrons negotiated funding for construction together with land grants on which to build the new schools. In 1951, for example, members of the Oshwal Education and Relief Board applied to build a new school to accommodate 600 pupils. (The pupil count would later grow to 1,000.) Officials originally struggled to find a suitable plot in the Parklands area, per the Oshwal board’s request. The only available crown land, officials explained, had been earmarked for the Cutchi Gujarati and Aga Khan schools. Education authorities suggested that that the Oshwal Council select available crown land in eastern or southern Nairobi. Alternatively, if they wished to remain in Parklands, patrons could also select a private plot to buy and the government would cover half of the purchase price. Only Oshwal patrons responded negatively to what seemed to be, by officials’ account, a generous offer. “In [the] past,” wrote the President of the Oshwal Board, “in all the cases[,] if a section of the [Asian] community is undertaking to erect the school on [a] 50/50 [matching funds] basis[,] the Government has always granted a piece of land free of charge.”

His letter went on:

Accordingly if the Government has no Crown Land in the area stated above, they should either exchange with some-body, who has in that area or should agree to pay the total value of the purchase price.…. With regard to your proposal for Eastern and Southern Areas, I regret to state that my community is not willing to consider these areas[.] as most of the members of my community reside only in the Parklands, Fort Hall Road, Ngara Road and Limuru Road.42

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42 President, Visa Oshwal Community to B.T. Lindahl, AG. Director of Education, 27th June 1951, KNA S/8004.
After negotiations and appeals, patrons were able to persuade department officials to pay full amount for the land purchase. Only a few weeks later, Oshwal patrons followed up with the government to notify them that they had located two “suitable” sites in Parklands. One plot of interest belonged to a “Mr. S.T. Thakore,” who was asking for Ksh 125,000. The other—one block away—was offered by its owner for Ksh 195,000. “If the Government is willing to pay the total amount toward the purchase price,” the Oshwal Board wrote, “the negotiation with the owner of the property could be started immediately.”

Others appealed to officials for public funding to expand previous facilities. Between 1947 and 1963, for example, Ismaili councilmen made applications for grants to expand schools, upgrade equipment, and extend curricula for girls’ education. In one instance, councilmen were aiming to expand public support, so that it would match private investment on a £-for-£ basis. As a representative from the Nairobi Aga Khan girl’s academy wrote, in 1951, “it must be appreciated that as far as the Grant-in-Aid schools are concerned, the Government is paying 1/3rd of what it actually costs us and that it seems to me that any a time this factor seems to escape the attention of the Government.”

After a set of inspections and interviews, officials increased their outlay per the school’s request. Yet, in addition to covering one-half of the school's ongoing expenses, officials also provided a grant, “ex-gratia,” for £4,000 to help fund the school’s new program to offer secondary girls' education. The department was persuaded, one official noted, as much by the councilmen's requests as by the Aga Khan Academies' general principles of communal inclusion. The schools, he noted, had often opened their classrooms to “girls of all Indian communities” at the department's request. “It has continued to co-operate,” he added, “more

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43 President, Visa Oshwal Community, to Special Commissioner and Acting Commissioner for Lands, 1st September 1951, KNA S/8004.
44 Administrator, HH Aga Khan Shia Imami Ismailia Education Department for Kenya, to Director of Education, 18th August 1951, KNA S/8004.
effectively with the Department in providing services which the Government Indian Girls' school cannot at present provide.”

Many communities also appealed to officials for funds to educate students with alternative needs. In 1960, Ismaili councilmen sought grants for special education in their schools. Whereas Ismaili patrons had previously opened a special needs school in Mombasa, by this time they intended to open a second in Nairobi, in vicinity to other community facilities and Ismaili residents. The proposal, in turn, was for a matching grant to construct new classrooms and a hostel as well as an assembly hall. It also included an application to provide matching assistance for teachers' salaries and classroom costs on an ongoing basis. “As you will readily appreciate,” wrote an Ismaili board member, “the administration of a Special School calls for specialist teachers who are very difficult to recruit and also calls for special equipment which is fairly expensive.” Officials willfully complied and approved. Over the two years it took to complete the school, the government offered numerous advances and reimbursements for a variety of contracting costs, teaching, and general maintenance. By 1963, education officials had provided Ksh 211,500—precisely fifty percent of school's budgeted costs—and yet they remained magnanimous regarding future outlays. “Subject to funds being available, this scheme could normally qualify for [a] 100 [per cent] grant,” one official noted. “[But] only a 50 grant has been requested.”

The postwar years described here did not represent the beginning of government grants to Indian private schools. Officials had been administrating grants case-by-case to Indian community associations since the 1930s. However, the postwar years marked a considerable increase in public funds for such schools. The idea of “community” earned considerable purchase among

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45 Director of Education to Chief Secretary, Nairobi, 19th November 1943, KNA S/8004.
47 P.E. Upward, Ag. E.O.(D), 12th June 1963, KNA S/8004.
administrative funding priorities, and association patrons from Indian merchant groups as well as Indian populations more broadly were happy to take advantage of it. Historian Robert Gregory notes that between 1938 and 1960 the number of “private” Indian schools in Kenya increased from 65 to 115, while the number of government Indian schools increased only from 13 to 44. He also notes that whereas during the interwar period private schools averaged between 100 to 200 students, during the postwar period many accommodated upward of 500 and even a thousand. In this way, merchant groups, like other Indian populations, were able to increase community investments and convert profits and earnings into urban community wealth with the help of the colonial state.

HOSPITALS, HEALTH, AND THE POLITICS OF DECOLONIZATION

Beyond utilizing community associations to solicit public grants for education, merchant patrons also made use of their networks and the associations they directed to raise monies for medical institutions. Over the 1950s and 1960s, they amassed funds from private networks of charities, which they used to apply for additional government support and resources. In 1951, for example, Oshwal patrons obtained government assistance to purchase the Parklands’ Lady Grigg Maternity Hospital, which was later renamed the D.P. Shah Hospital in honor of its principal benefactor. In 1958, they also obtained assistance to acquire the Parklands Nursing Home, which was renamed the M.P. Shah Hospital in honor of another donor. Building medical institutions in the postwar period entailed another dimension of community entrepreneurship and political negotiation. Namely, patrons were forced to revise their plans to build institutions intended for Kenya’s

49 Ibid, 97-99.
multiracial society. As elected officials—especially newly elected African officials—exerted pressure on government agencies to provide for Kenya’s increasing number of urban African migrants, community patrons responded by demonstrating their commitment to Kenya’s new “nonracial” social and political structures as well as its future visions of self-rule. As a result, patrons managed to leverage private capital in providing medical services to “community” members and clients. They also leveraged it to secure belonging in Kenya’s post-independence society.

Some hospitals began as racially exclusive institutions only to revise their racial mandates in light of changing political contexts. In 1951, for example, Indian patrons connected to the J.B. Pandya Memorial Committee in Mombasa raised private and public funds to build a new hospital in honor of the late businessman and Indian legislator, who was an advocate of Indians’ rights as a racial group of Kenyan citizens. Originally “run and staffed by Indians for Indians,” according to its brochure, the hospital eventually later changed its mission to apply for government matching funds. The Pandya Hospital was not a “community” hospital, per se. However, it still exhibited the work of private networks and financing as well as appeals for government support found among associations at this time. “By the time of its opening,” writes historian Robert Gregory, “the Pandya family had given Ksh 350,000 and Asian individuals, trusts, and business concerns [had given] more than two hundred [thousand shillings] in all.” Gregory also points out that over the coming years the hospital would revise its mission to be “the first nonracial hospital in East Africa.” “The government’s matching contribution was pledged only after the hospital was built,” Gregory adds. “By 1963 further Asian donations and [a] matching government grant had enabled Ksh 1.4 million of additions and alterations.” New tenets of racial inclusion enabled the hospital to ramp up its facilities and treatment areas, which included “side wings and adjacent buildings of concrete and
stone [as well as] an operating theater, a maternity ward, an X-ray room, a section of outpatients, [and] staff quarters.” It also enabled the board to form political ties with local African leaders and officials, who came to sit on the board in the years following independence.  

Some hospitals espoused a “nonracial” mission to gain government support from the outset of construction. In 1958, for example, Ismaili patrons opened the new Aga Khan Diamond Jubilee Hospital in Nairobi, which was in the words of the Aga Khan himself “a monument to the ideal of racial partnership.” It was, accordingly, to be “managed and staffed by Asians, Africans, and Europeans alike.” It included a nursing school for Indians, Europeans, and Africans. It also provided health examinations for African civil servants free of charge. All of these amenities, patrons pointed out, were offered by the “community” on a voluntary basis.” Every branch of medicine is represented [at the hospital],” read the Ismaili Council’s press release in 1958, “includ[ing] Consultative Clinics of Gynecology, Eye, Ear, Nose and Throat Specialists, besides a new Physio-therapy Department—the first class X-Ray facilities and Laboratories built for Bio-chemistry, Bacteriology and Hematology with facilities for a Blood Bank.” Patrons liked to compare the institution to London’s St. George Hospital, and boasted that the Aga Khan Hospital met the “highest possible standard” and was “considered satisfactory by the General Nursing Council of England and Wales for reciprocity with England.” To no surprise, it all came with a hefty price tag. Much of the initial £475,000 to build the hospital came from private networks—or, more specifically, donations raised from the Aga Khan’s 1955 Diamond Jubilee Celebration (or 70th Anniversary as Imam). However, by fashioning itself as an institution catering to Nairobi's new African populations, the hospital and its patrons were able to tap into £200,000 of government

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51 Speech by Aga Khan on the unveiling of the Aga Khan Hospital, 1957, KNA S/7182.
assistance. They also acquired commitments from health officials to provide £80,000 on an ongoing annual basis.\textsuperscript{53}

The example of the Aga Khan hospital brings focus to a broader form of political negotiation regarding Indian merchants’ belonging in Kenya. Patrons were able to utilize Indian community associations—and the urban institutions they built—as a means to claim both funding as well as an ongoing role in promoting Kenya’s nationalist vision and goals. In 1961, Ismaili councilmen applied for a new round of funding to extend the Aga Khan Hospital’s outpatient capacity. Patrons explained that health officials had originally made them a “verbal promise” to provide a £100,000 grant for the estimated £200,000 project. However, in 1963, after construction plans had already been granted to contractors, health officials reneged on their commitment, citing only a “moral obligation”—as opposed to a “legal” one—to fund the hospital’s expansion. That is, they would fund it if possible. In budget meetings with Kenya’s Council of Ministers, the newly elected African Minister of Housing and Health, J.N. Muimi, drew attention to what he described as other pressing political matters. “With the general shortage of hospital beds throughout the country,” he stated, “and in the South Nyanza and Kisii areas in particular, a new hospital at Homa Bay should be a first priority on available funds [provided by the Ministry of Health].”\textsuperscript{54}

Ismaili patrons did not relent on their appeals, however. Instead, they revised their requests and pleas for government support in light of Kenya’s new political environment. They renewed their vows to support Kenya's transition to self-rule as well as help its new government meet its financial obligations to provide medical services. Central to this proposal was a new insurance plan for black African citizens, sponsored by the Ismaili council and its investment trusts. “The Board feels,” wrote the Aga Khan's Hospital head administrator, Eboo Pirbhai, “that with the

\textsuperscript{53} EN Griffith Jones, Attorney General, to Deputy Governor of Kenya, 14 March 1963, KNA KA1/1/1.
\textsuperscript{54} Minister for Health and Housing to Council of Ministers, January 1963, KNA KA1/1/1.
population of Kenya approaching the seven million mark it is unlikely that the present Health Services of the country will be able to meet the heavily increasing demands...through the efforts of Government alone.” His memo read on:

It is only by a combination of Government Institutions, Private Institutions, Community support, Hospital Insurance schemes, and private or charitable funds[,] that the heavy costs and the increased services involved can be met. In order to relieve workers of the expense of the unexpected illness and make available the facilities of modern medicine provided by the Aga Khan Hospital to all races and maintain a flow of income to defray the expenditure incurred in providing accommodation and treatment, the Board are preparing a Hospital Insurance Scheme to coincide with the opening of the additional beds which the extension will give...The object is to provide medical treatment and hospital facilities for a small premium within reach of the ordinary citizen of the land.\textsuperscript{55}

It is not quite clear from the Health Ministry records whether the proposal for the insurance scheme helped change officials’ minds. However, in March of 1963, an upper level official wrote to Kenya’s Governor, that he had received a visit from an Ismaili councilman, Jan Mohamed, who informed him that “the matter had been resolved.” “Jimmy Gichuru [another of Kenya’s new elected African officials],” the official went on to explain, “had been commissioned by the Council of Ministers to discuss the matter with the Aga Khan in the light of the moral obligation which the Government recognized regarding the £100,00 grant.”\textsuperscript{56} In this way, merchants had managed to obtain funding by utilizing “community” as a strategy of appeal. Moreover, they were able to employ it as an argument for inclusion in Kenya’s new political order on the eve of independence.

CONCLUSION

Alongside their commercial activities, Indian merchants looked to make social investments in the East African interior to protect their household wealth and caste and kinship structures. By

\textsuperscript{55} Eboo Pirbhai to Governor, 28\textsuperscript{th} October 1962, Deputy Governor of Kenya, KNA KA1/1/1. See memo within.

\textsuperscript{56} To Governor of Kenya, 23\textsuperscript{rd} March 1963, KNA S/7182.
donating to communal associations, and other community-based urban substitutions, merchants were able to convert trade profits and earnings into urban wealth. In addition, they were able to gain financial assistance from the state during the postwar period. By examining records from colonial Kenya's Departments of Lands, Cooperative Societies, Education, and Health, this chapter has demonstrated how Indian merchants utilized community associations to shape urban spaces and institutions and leverage access to public funds. “Community” was not only a mode of organization or structure that merchant patrons used to distribute urban wealth among clients, it has argued. It was also a strategy of political negotiation. Merchants-turned-social entrepreneurs were able to lobby officials for funding to build a variety of housing developments, schools, and hospitals and solidify their bid for citizenship in post-independence Kenya. They were able to harness community associations to build up urban space, make a claim to the city, and cultivate a new twentieth-century Kenyan urban society around the ideals of samaj.

Many of these institutions subsequently helped merchant groups maintain their place as permanent residents in Kenya. The case with the Aga Khan Hospital, in particular, demonstrates that patrons leveraged their capital to expand their facilities and provide African citizens with services that the state was unlikely to afford. However, as the next chapter argues, such efforts were not always widely appreciated. Many of Kenya's black citizens saw these investments in Indian communal institutions as proof of the racial disparities that Kenya’s colonial government fostered and maintained. Development schemes mentioned in this chapter helped provide for African urban migrants struggling to eke out an existence and obtain access to housing, education, and health. However, they also on the whole widened material inequality between Africans and Indians. “In the wake of increasingly violent confrontations that took place in towns with large Indian populations, especially Nairobi,” writes Sana Aiyar of the early post-independence period,
“the structural privileges in employment and education with which Indians started at *Uhuru* [i.e. independence] developed new political salience in the first few years of independence.” This resulted, she adds, “in a racialized nationalist discourse that questioned the very presence of Indians in the postcolonial nation-state and threatened their entrenched economic position as its petty bourgeoisie.”

As the next chapter shows, Indian merchants would have to reaffirm their presence in Kenya’s independent state by renovating their political alliances with Kenya’s new African leaders. In this they were largely successful.

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By the late colonial period, Indian merchant households had expanded their networks far into East Africa’s interior. Many had formed a variety of partnerships with local traders, service providers, and producers that were key to their business success. They utilized Britain's colonial legal apparatus to protect their wealth and property as well as ramp up their capital base. As the years went on, a number of merchants maintained access to capital markets by strategically employing Great Britain’s imperial structures and their claims as Indian citizens and “non-native” subjects in East Africa. Beginning in the interwar years, moreover, merchants strengthened their trade dominance in Kenya’s rural reserves, taking advantage of colonial agricultural development schemes and their market power to expand their earnings. All the while, many converted surplus capital into urban investments. They built prayer and social halls as well as schools and hospitals, which helped them to protect household wealth and lay claim to national belonging on the eve of Kenya’s independence. Despite these impressive economic, political, and social gains, however, Indian merchants’ investments did not carry over easily into the post-independence period. Nor did Indian merchant households manage to preserve the protections over their property and urban businesses without paying a price.

Kenya obtained independence in late 1963. Coming into office a year later, Kenya’s first president, Jomo Kenyatta, promised millions of Africans the “fruits of freedom.” At the time of Uhuru (Kiswahili for “freedom” and the common way independence was designated in East Africa), 67.2 percent of all Kenyan firms were owned by Indians. By comparison, Europeans owned 24.1 percent of Kenya's firms, while 5.2 percent were described as “interracial
partnerships.” Indians owned four-fifths of all manufacturing firms employing 50 people or more at the time and three-quarters of the colony’s private, non-agricultural assets.¹ Sana Aiyar argues that decolonization did not automatically overturn the economic inequalities of colonialism.² Between 1965 and 1968, Kenya’s National Assembly enacted several laws to reallocate urban wealth to the nation’s black majority, designating the project as one of “Africanization.” Politicians debating these measures charged Indians with exclusionary communal practices and exploitative commercial tactics, resulting in what historian Peter Brooke describes as a “frenzy of uncertainty.” Many tens of thousands of Kenyan Indians would leave the country by 1969.³ However, as Brooke also points out, many of these same populations would eventually return to the country, or simply stayed there. Joined by new arrivals from India and Uganda, they re-assimilated themselves into Kenya’s post-independence economy and forged links with Kenya’s new ruling class. By the 1970s, Kenya’s Indian merchant groups had come to retain much of the same wealth and influence as they had during the colonial period. Many maintained holdings in urban commerce and property. Some firms even expanded into the industrial sectors of production. While the years of the 1960s and 1970s brought many historical changes to Kenya, particularly with respect to black African majority rule, they also demonstrated several continuities. Namely, Indian merchants maintained dominance in urban commerce and trade. Merchant networks managed to preserve their legal, political, and economic protections, which enabled their profitmaking ventures not just to continue but to flourish.

³ Peter Brooke, Duncan Sandys and the Informal Politics of Britain’s Late Decolonisation (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 182.
This chapter examines patronage, politics, and the persistence of Indian merchant networks in post-independence Kenya. It argues that following the rise of nationalist discourses that targeted Indians as exploitative others, merchant capitalists utilized new strategies of patronage to maintain protections over their capital, to gain access to new markets, and even to expand into industrial production. From 1963 to 1978, or until the end of Kenya’s first administration under the Presidency of Jomo Kenyatta, Indian merchants made targeted donations to new leaders as well as public displays of support for Kenya’s government and its black nationalist objectives. As Kenya's leaders sought to consolidate power among a variety of ethnic and racial groups via policies of “Africanization,” merchant groups pooled together resources and capital which they dispensed tactically to retain and even expand their commercial role. During the 1960s, merchant groups were able to exact privileges, favors, and exemptions from Kenya’s government. They were also able, in the case of new manufacturing concerns, to gain anti-competitive protections against potentially cheaper imports and secure procurements and contracts. Furthermore, as this chapter demonstrates, Indian merchant networks remained sufficiently entrenched in Kenya's postcolonial economic order to expose contradictions between Africanization's official goals and political leaders’ actual modes of governance. This development generated many opportunities for Indians, but it simultaneously created disillusionment among aspiring black African capitalists, whose grievances against the state continued to invoke the language of race and citizenship espoused by political nationalists.

Few academic studies have examined the role of patronage or the transformation of Indian commercial networks and activities after Kenyan independence. Most scholarship, instead, has focused on the political marginalization of Indian minorities in the context of new racialized
states. James Brennan, for example, has focused on the rise of racial discourse in Tanganyika, a set of negative ideas which targeted Indians in the public sphere as TANU’s most significant racially exploiting “other” and led to the nationalization of Indian property in 1971. “The economic logic of accumulation,” he wrote, “which had enriched Indian and African rentier landlords alike for decades, was confronted by the political logic of urban *ujamaa*.”

Writing of the Kenyan context, Sana Aiyar has emphasized the outmigration of tens of thousands of Indians in the wake of racialized hostilities and a fragmented nation-building process in the mid-1960s. “The racialized nationalist vision that triumphed in 1967,” she wrote, “and triggered the exodus of Indians out of Kenya and into Britain was the product of a particular postcolonial historical conjecture.” These now-prominent studies have drawn attention to the way that postcolonial discourses about race and citizenship in East Africa led to the expropriation of real estate as well as what many Indians in East Africa have come to refer to as the “Exodus.” But both have overlooked how certain segments of the Indian population in East African countries revised their strategies for gaining economic and political state protections during the postcolonial period. They also have overlooked the way that Indians’ increasing dominance in local industrial sectors continued to frustrate African populations aiming to participate in East Africa’s new urban economies. The experience of Kenya perhaps best illustrates this resiliency and staying power of Indian merchant households after independence.

To what extent did these Indian merchant households utilize patronage politics to protect urban investments in Kenya following the transition to independent rule? What kinds of alliances

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developed between merchant networks and political leaders within Kenya’s new regime? What impact did Indian merchants’ gains, both in trade and industrial production, have in promoting or hindering nationalist development goals to redistribute wealth to black Kenyans? To answer these questions, this chapter turns to recent political science scholarship about postcolonial African states, patronage, and clientelism. In her study of merchant capital and state power in postcolonial Senegal, Catherine Boone has argued that European firms were able to maintain anti-competitive protections in Senegal’s local textile industry due to the postcolonial regime’s dependence upon the interests of the established economic order. The political class’s inherent weakness, she argued, forced the regime into an “accommodation” with foreign interests to maintain control over the state itself. “Only the terms of this accommodation,” she wrote, “were set by merchant capital, [as] industry would progressively ‘internalize’ its logic and its local modus operandi.” In Kenya, too, political elites cultivated a nationalist development discourse that sought to promote indigenous “African” capital, only to end up accommodating Indian merchant capital, from which many politicians were able to muster financial support. However, while Boone’s study examined French merchant importers and national development, this chapter examines resident Indian merchant households in Kenya and the risks of race and citizenship they underwent, resulting in their quest for new protections as non-citizens in an Africanizing state.⁶

To demonstrate Indian merchants’ success in re-inserting themselves into Kenya’s postcolonial political order, I pursue two avenues in this chapter. In the first and second sections, I examine accounts from present-day Kenyan business families. During 2015-2016, I conversed with several Indian shopkeepers and residents about their recollections of the 1960s and 1970s while working in the Kenyan archives. Many recounted personal experiences of Africanization to

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me and explained why some Indians left and others remained in Kenya. Others provided details about Indian expansion from commerce into industry. I also located Indian-authored accounts of Africanization in autobiographies, family histories, and community “souvenir” booklets. During the 1990s, many patrons authored personal and communal histories as part of Kenya’s multicultural embrace and return to multi-party politics. Based on merchants and merchant family descendants’ personal memories, such life testimonies provide insight into lived experiences—how decisions were made, individual relationships were built, and assets retained or lost. If, as historian Emily Callaci explains, such texts—or what she calls “street archives”—were organic to the social world in which they operated, personal accounts provide a privileged glimpse into Indian merchants’ mode of re-assimilation and adjustment in Kenya’s postcolonial context. They also demonstrate merchants’ common strategies as well as the alliances they pursued with Kenya’s new black African political elites.

The third section of this chapter examines records from Kenya’s Office of the President, with specific attention to “Complaints and Petitions from the Nairobi Area.” In the aftermath of independence, Kenyan citizens filed thousands of grievances with the nation’s President, Jomo Kenyatta. Their intentions were to make claims on land, lower their education and medical expenses, and gain employment in Kenya’s newly Africanized postcolonial civil service. However, as many files demonstrate, citizens also filed complaints regarding urban commerce and perceived racial imbalances in the new nation. As many black Kenyans failed to gain decent salaries, procurement contracts, or affordable housing in Nairobi, they penned government officials about the shortcomings of Africanization—which they interpreted as the immediate

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7 Some of these were given to me by individuals. Others were found in the Asian-African Heritage Trust in Nairobi.
redistribution of resources away from “foreign” interests, including Kenyan Indians, and toward the nation’s black citizens. Many of these complaints demonstrate the broad reach of racialized political discourse in post-independence Kenya. Many citizens simply invoked the same resentments against Indians as voiced by certain Kenyan politicians. However, by reading against the grain of these files, I demonstrate how Indian networks’ continued control over local trade and industry fostered public disillusionment about what many perceived as a lack of achievements in official Africanization policies. As certain black African politicians and citizens stoked racial grievances, Indian merchant networks adapted to a new era of racial majority rule and gained new protections via the efficient distribution of patronage, political maneuvering, and the formation of alliances with Kenya’s new political classes.

AFRICANIZATION, CITIZENSHIP, AND ANTI-INDIAN SENTIMENT

Africanization, in its original iteration, did not aim to threaten Indian commercial interests in Kenya. Following the defeat of Mau Mau in the 1950s, and later the transition to self-rule, Africanization served as a program to reward Kenya’s so-called “loyalists” and to restructure Kenya’s civil service with “homegrown” personnel in place of non-African—primarily Indian and European—officials. However, Africanization eventually came to include the private sector as well. By the mid-1960s Kenya’s new political leaders faced multiple political crises. “Throughout the country,” writes historian Daniel Branch, “local leaders sought to give voice to a pronounced disenchantment with independence [as] every Province and major town saw mass rallies at which one aspect or another of the government was roundly criticized.”

To allay these growing concerns, Branch, *Kenya*, 53. In 1964, Branch also writes, one month after Kenyatta was sworn into office, several hundred took to the streets crying foul at Ministers’ lavish lifestyles and fancy homes and cars while most of Kenya continued to “suffer.”

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African leaders turned increasingly to racialized discourses that took aim at non-Africans and their control over Kenya’s local economy. As Sana Aiyar contends, racial discourses were the most effective strategy for reconciling political leaders’ critiques of neocolonialism with others’ desire to create an African capitalist middle class. “The practical implementation of the slogan ‘African for Africans,’” she writes, “was the one thing the [Kenyan political] left and right could agree on.”

Africanization was formalized into a policy document in 1965, two years after independence. At the time, Tom Mboya, President Jomo Kenyatta’s Minister of Labor, introduced a document titled “African Socialism and its Application to Planning in Kenya” to the National Assembly. The overarching goal articulated in the document was to ensure that the country’s private and public resources would remain out of foreign hands. “A large share of the planned new expansion [of the economy],” it read, was to be “African owned and managed.” By “African,” it was clear the document meant black. Furthermore, the paper urged new leaders to govern by “African tradition,” which was spelled out in a metaphoric language of kinship whereby redistribution and mutual social responsibility was to be an “extension of the African family spirit.” Measures would be taken to ensure that black Africans gained access to economic resources via “transfer, reorganization, and development.” Moreover, the government, in handling manners of licenses and contracts, should show a “deliberate bias in favor of African applicants [and citizens].” The document itself did not name “Indian” or “Asian” business interests as foreign or as the intended target of Africanization. However, as Aiyar notes, Mboya spoke in no uncertain terms about Indian business interests and their relationship to Kenya’s inherited economic structure from

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10 Aiyar, Indians in Kenya, Loc. 5531.
the colonial period. “Mboya pointed to Indians,” she writes, “rather than Kenyatta’s government, as neocolonialists who were the main impediment to national integration and economic growth.”

Mboya’s kinship metaphors about the African family spirit leading to African empowerment and ownership quickly translated into policy. From the mid-to-late 1960s, Kenyatta’s regime implemented new programs intended to bolster African capital and diminish foreign competition. To be sure, some policies looked to increase African participation in Kenya’s trade economy by removing previous handicaps regarding Africans’ access to credit or right to landownership in trading towns. However, other programs took direct aim at the dominance of Indian business interests in the economy. In 1967, Kenyatta’s government passed a new Immigration Act. It effectively nullified Indians’ residency certificates, rendering, with a vote in Parliament, the vast majority of Indians as non-citizens in the country of their long-time residence and even their birth. In 1968, Parliament passed another piece of notable legislation known as the Trade Licensing Bill. Promoting new African trading classes, it excluded all non-citizens—read “Indians”—from central business areas, including Mombasa and much of Nairobi—two areas, which, as Mwai Kibaki had mentioned two years earlier, were the “real problems [in] effect[ing] the Africanization of commerce.” The bill also disqualified non-citizens from trading in certain products. These included food staples such as sugar, rice, and maize. In the 1970s, this list would expand to textiles, soap, and cement. Last, the bill created an additional

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13 Ibid, Loc. 5558.
14 Brooke, *Duncan Sandys*, 187. Brooke argues that the legislation penalized over 100,000 Kenyan Indians who did not apply for citizenship between 1963 and 1965. In turn, every Indian was required to reapply for a permit—or citizenship—both options of which were onerous and costly.
hurdle for non-citizens by making them periodically re-apply for business licenses, a process that, as Aiyar notes, required many Indians to pay an extra £25 fee as well as put down new security deposits.\textsuperscript{17}

Over the coming decade, Africanization would expand to encompass more than immigration papers and business licenses. As a means to buoy new African capitalists, the state founded a variety of new parastatal organizations that implemented programs of racialized economic nationalization. In 1967, for example, Kenya’s Parliament passed the Imports, Exports, and Essential Supplies Act. The law granted, among other things, monopoly status to the Kenyan National Trading Corporation, whose primary initiative was to appoint and assist black African traders. It also granted powers to a new Industrial and Commercial Development Corporation (ICDC) to promote African interests in commerce, finance, agriculture, and industry. “As the lead vehicle of state capitalism,” writes political scientist David Himbara, “ICDC was responsible for acquiring or establishing firms in such subsectors as textiles, services, radio and automobile assembly, steel, fishing, agrochemicals, ceramics and salt.”\textsuperscript{18} These efforts did not directly impinge on the businesses of Indians. However, they served to further racialize the distribution of the state’s resources in the name of propping up black African business classes via grants and loans. During the 1970s, such parastatal organizations multiplied to include the Industrial Development Bank, the Kenyan Industrial Estates, Joint Loan Boards, and the Development Finance Corporation of Kenya. As Himbara writes, by 1982, Kenya's government was involved in 323 statuary boards. By

\textsuperscript{17} Aiyar, \textit{Indians in Kenya}, Loc. 5880. Aiyar notes that costs for licenses ran £25 for application and £150 for bond. Permits would last for only 3-6 months.

\textsuperscript{18} David Himbara, “The Failed Africanization of Commerce and Industry in Kenya.” \textit{World Development} 22, no. 3 (1994), 469–482. Himbara notes that “In its role as facilitator of private sector African capitalism, ICDC's program included provision of small industrial loans to assist Africans entering simple industrial processes; commercial loans to finance Africans seeking to expand their commercial operations; property loans to purchase or construct commercial premises; and share-holding loans to enable Africans to purchase shares in larger existing companies.”
1986, parastatal bodies were involved in over 103 manufacturing enterprises. In many of them, it had become the majority shareholder.\textsuperscript{19}

Yet more than making economic changes, Africanization ignited new racializing political discourses in the public arena. In the 1960s, as politicians sought to curry support for Kenya’s new policies, leveling accusations against Indians for Kenya’s ills became commonplace. Rally speeches called out Indians as disloyal and impediments to national reform and progress. Kenyatta accused Indians of maintaining a “cat and mouse friendship,” while Daniel Arap Moi characterized Indians as having “one leg…in Kenya and the other in India.” Anti-Indian sentiment also found expression in the media, with state-sponsored outlets such as the Voice of Kenya criticizing Indians in ways reminiscent of nearby Tanzania, as “blood suckers”, “devils”, “locusts”, and “leeches.”\textsuperscript{20} As Aiyar notes, “broadcasts positioned Indians as hangovers from the colonial past in both origin and attitude, situating them as onerous to the nation.”\textsuperscript{21} In 1968, a group known as the “Working Party,” operating under the auspices of the Department of Christian Education and Training of the National Christian Council of Kenya, published a report titled “Who Controls Industry in Kenya?” It included an overview of Kenya’s various commercial sectors and manufacturing companies, listing the name of each firm—most of them Indian—and posing to readers the question of whether the system was “just,” or whether “the control of the economy [was] in the hands of Kenyans.”\textsuperscript{22}

To no surprise, these discourses found their way into the echelons of Kenyan society, with many black Africans utilizing the same racial tropes to lodge petitions with the government. In 1964, for example, black African employees wrote to government officials, alleging that their

\textsuperscript{19} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{20} Brooke, \textit{Duncan Sandys}, 184. For Tanzania refer to Brennan and the discourse of sucking as exploitation.
\textsuperscript{21} See Aiyar, \textit{Indians in Kenya}, Loc. 5585.
Indian manager was a “cheat” who didn’t reward African employees as he did his Indian ones. “There are some clerks who have a service of ten years,” they wrote, “and the amount which they are given is [Ksh] 140/- per month.”

Beyond appealing to political leaders as fellow African “Brothers” and “Comrades,” they regularly referred to Indians as “unscrupulous” and “greedy capitalists.” Indians’ words were “pure lies,” another letter writer contended. They were “unaware of our country’s [i.e. Africans’] freedom and [are] following an imperialistic attitude [and] do not have any mercy upon [the African] worker.”

Even politically moderate Swahili newspapers such as *Baraza* printed accusations of Indian betrayal to the Kenyan nation. In 1966, a Kikuyu reader complained about Indians’ belittling attitudes toward African citizens. “[They] refuse to treat us equally,” the reader wrote. “We are served last in shops, always behind Europeans, who are treated in a polite and pleasant manner.” Moreover, his column perpetuated popular images of Indians’ dehumanizing regard for Africans. “When [we] come up to the counter, [Indian] shopkeepers won't even look us in the eyes,” it claimed.

Thus, despite its piecemeal policies, enacted over the course of several years, Africanization as a policy still gave a strong voice to the disenchantment that was prevalent among Kenya’s black African citizens wanting access to urban wealth and prosperity. As Aiyar writes, “between 1964 and 1967, the state articulated a discourse of racial majoritarianism that, on the one hand, emphasized a deliberate state bias aimed at the preferential treatment of Africans by taking economic advantage away from Indians, and, on the other hand, positioned Indians as extraneous to the nation.”

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23 Supermarket Staff to Jomo Kenyatta, Nairobi, 30th November 1965, KNA S/5371.
24 Ibid.
25 “Wageni wabagua Waafrika Pwani” (“Foreigners are discriminating against Africans at the Coast”), *Baraza*, 3rd February 1966.
DELAYS, DEPARTURES, AND DISPERSIONS

As a result of rising racial hostility and majoritarian discourses, Indians in Kenya began to hedge their bets. Many hesitated to apply for the Kenyan citizenship they had been recently deprived of. According to the new constitution, Indians had a two-year window, beginning in 1963, to apply for a citizenship that would enable them to live in Kenya as immigrants. However, by 1967, only 48,000 had done so. Some Indians, particularly those who worked in the civil service, including lawyers, clerks, and teachers, moved to England immediately, taking up positions that were no longer available to them in Kenya.\(^27\) The vast majority of the country’s Indians—somewhere over 176,000—chose to remain in Kenya under the status of “permanent residents.” (Such status would eventually be cancelled by the 1967 Immigration Bill.) They retained their commonwealth passports, while buying time to see whether the political environment would change. Kiran Lal, the owner of an imports firm in central Nairobi, explained to me that Indian businesses had “taken a hit, [and] families had to decide whether to go or not.”\(^28\) In addition, many Indians were likely scouting out opportunities abroad. According to the U.K. Commonwealth Immigration Office records, between 1965 and 1967 50-100 Indians exited Kenya, on average, per week. Those traveling to the U.K. were predominantly single men without wives or children. In 1965, according to these figures, men outnumbered both women and children departing Kenya three to one. In 1966, they outnumbered them two to one.\(^29\)

The change that initiated the so-called “Exodus”—or sudden departure of tens of thousands of Kenya’s Indians in the late 1960s—was not the direct result of any new action by Kenya’s

\(^{27}\) Ibid.

\(^{28}\) Conversation with Kiran Lal, Nairobi, 22nd February and 25 May, 2015.

\(^{29}\) Application of Immigration Control to Citizens of the United Kingdom and Colonies who do not belong to the United Kingdom, 20th September 1967, TNA Commonwealth Office (CO) No. 18/7. See memo by the Home Office titled “South Asian – General: Social: Asians UK Citizens: Emigration,” and, within the memo, see Annex II.
government. Rather, it was a sudden change of policy in Great Britain. In 1948, Britain’s Parliament had granted Kenyan Indians the right to apply for British Commonwealth passports. Under the rules of the time, Kenya’s British Commonwealth citizens were welcomed to enter and reside in the United Kingdom. However, in September 1968, under political pressure from Conservative Party opponents, Britain’s labor government amended the legislation, disallowing any further migration of British Indian passport holders from Commonwealth countries. As Aiyar explains, the news sent a shockwave through Kenya’s Indians. Within a matter of days, thousands of Indians began “purchasing one-way tickets from Nairobi to London.” Prior to Britain’s Immigration amendment, a total of 6,000 Indians had left Kenya. In the first two months of 1968 alone, 12,000 departed. By 1978, more than 50,000 Indians had left Kenya. Many of them were persons of meager financial means—petty shopkeepers and traders, or artisans, clerks, or tradesmen who were most vulnerable to Kenya’s Africanization policies and procedures complicating permit renewals for non-citizens.30 Whereas those migrating to the U.K. in 1965 and 1966 were predominantly men, by 1967, with the onset of Britain’s immigration controls, the male-to-female ratio become fully equal. In other words, Indians were now leaving Kenya as households (see Appendix 3).31

The Exodus remains an important moment in the shared historical memory of Kenyan Indians as well as those who migrated to England. However, the focus of much scholarship on the Exodus has tended to obscure the fact that the majority of Indians did not leave Kenya. In addition, it also overlooks that many who left eventually returned. As Peter Brooke points out, while 50,000 Indians left Kenya between 1967 and 1969, many of them fled only temporarily. Between July 30 Aiyar, Indians in Kenya, Loc. 5838. 31 Application of Immigration Control to Citizens of the United Kingdom and Colonies who do not belong to the United Kingdom, 20th September 1967, TNA CO No 18/7. See memo by the Home Office titled “South Asian – General: Social: Asians UK Citizens: Emigration,” and, within the memo, see Annex II.
1967 and February 1968, some 24,000 Indians—or nearly half the number who had fled during the Exodus—came back to Kenya. By 1969, a total of 50,000 of Indians had registered to become Kenyan citizens, and by 1970, Kenya was home to 127,301 Indians, or approximately 72 percent of the pre-Exodus population. The number of Indians in Kenya continued to grow during the 1970s. Most stayed in the country as non-citizens to work there as temporary residents. (As late as 2015, many still mentioned the paperwork for renewing temporary residency cards as part of the “formalities” for doing business in Kenya.) Those who stayed in Kenya benefited from a change in political stance among some of the country’s politicians. Seeing the sudden outmigration, certain leaders began to scale back their rhetoric, fearing a standstill in local trade and commerce. In 1968, for example, Kenyatta urged the government to slow down the pace of Africanization so as to avoid “endanger[ing] the buoyant state of the economy.” His Vice President, Daniel Arap Moi, followed with similar recommendations that any new economic planning be implemented in a “phased” manner.

Many Indians also benefitted from possessing Commonwealth passports. Specifically, multi-generational Kenyan Indian families, some with substantial property and network ties, were able to preserve assets in Kenya while extending their networks from East Africa to various overseas locations. The Chandaria family, for example, one of the country’s longest standing merchant houses, who by the time of independence managed aluminum plants and food products, were able to make rapid expansions in Africa and overseas. Family members migrated to Tanzania and Uganda, where they produced aluminum and galvanized steel roofing, before eventually

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32 Brooke, Duncan Sandys, 182-189.
33 Speech by Jomo Kenyatta to the National Assembly, 26 February, 1968 in Aiyar, Indians in Kenya, Loc. 6053. Aiyar also notes that many other policies were scaled back. “Removing some of the ambiguity that had accompanied the legislative acts, Moi clarified that the immigration bill that canceled work permits would be implemented in a ‘phased’ manner and would apply only to certain kinds of jobs. Irrespective of citizenship, all work permits and trade licenses would be issued for a period of five years to give traders time to transfer their businesses successfully.”
having a business presence in over five continents and eight countries. “By the late 1960s,” according to Arun Amritlal Raishi Shah’s oral account,

The family business had a strong presence in Zambia, Ethiopia, Bujumbura [Burundi], Nigeria, and India and by the 1970s business interests were established in Papua New Guinea and Australia. During the mid-sixties, Ratilal, [along] with the eldest son of Devchandbhai, Praful, established business interests in the United Kingdom. In the 1970s, the family sent Ratilal and Praful to Singapore [and] Keshav and Chand to Canada. [This] led to a major expansion in South East Asia and North America.34

The Chandaria family history may be an extreme example of overseas network expansion. But other data provides further corroboration that other business families were migrating as well. Some families sent kin to Australia and New Zealand as well as South Africa. Others moved to Canada, joining the ranks of East African Indians migrating from Tanzania and Uganda. As one resettled Ismaili immigrant wrote from Canada back to a contact in Kenya in 1975, “The best way is to apply [for visas] in Nairobi, Kenya, [where] there are lots of Ismailies [sic] coming from Kenya to Canada every month.”35 Independence posed many new obstacles for Indian merchant networks and their commercial opportunities. But it also provided a stimulus to explore and expand new business opportunities overseas. As Indians’ citizenship and residency status in Kenya made them less secure and more mobile, they tended to mitigate potential risks by extending the geographical reach of their capital interests, ironically strengthening their staying power in East Africa.

PATRONAGE, CLIENTELISM, AND COMMERCIAL EXPANSION

Studies about the political relationships between Indian and black African Kenyans have typically focused on interracial alliances in the anticolonial and nationalist movements and among the country’s leftist leaders. Dana Seidenberg, for example, has demonstrated the linkage between

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35 Udham Ahluwalia to Juma Khan, Nairobi, 24th July 1975. Letter provided to me by Juma Khan in Nairobi in 2015.
anti-colonial Indian activists such as Makhan Singh and Kenya’s freedom struggle in the postwar period. “Having spent eight years in India actively participating in the trade union movement and the political struggle for independence,” she wrote, “Makhan Singh was well-equipped to breathe new life into Kenya’s labor and freedom campaign.” Sana Aiyar has illustrated the close alliance between Kenyan Indian journalist and politician Pio Gama Pinto and nationalist leaders at the time of independence. Pinto, she wrote, “along [with] Odinga, Kaggia, Murumbi, and Achieng Oneko…push[ed] their socialist economic agenda, including, allegedly, putting together a policy document that threatened to undermine Kenyatta’s regime.” Beyond the nationalist political limelight and formal leftist politics, however, many other Indian operatives forged alliances with black African leaders in independent Kenya. Beginning late in the colonial period and enduring up through independence into the postcolonial period, many Indian merchants made donations and other contributions to cultivate new financial links to Kenya’s political elites and to retain protections over their accumulated capital.

Notably, many Indian merchant networks built strategic ties with Kenya’s leaders to secure and sustain their business interests in the new rocky political environment. Z.K. Shah, who served as Secretary of Nairobi’s Oshwal and Indian Associations, recalled that during the early 1960s, he and other members donated to Kenyatta’s presidential campaign and met with members of Kenya’s KANU party. ”Upon Jomo Kenyatta's release [from prison],” he wrote, “the Hindus in Kenya decided to give him a welcome and build a house for him.” They traveled to Tom Mboya’s home and had “discussions” about the country’s first election in 1958. “I would go there along with my friend Amritlal Bharmal, Amritlal Raishi and Kantilal Punamchand (K.P. Shah),” Shah wrote.

37 Aiyar, Indians in Kenya, Loc. 5492.
“[Later,] a dinner was kept to honour Mzee Jomo Kenyatta by Mr. Velji Khimchand at the Mahajanwadi [the Oshwal community hall].”\textsuperscript{38} In the run-up to independence, many others dispensed donations and resources. Contributions to the country’s up-and-coming political leaders helped Kenyan Indians demonstrate goodwill towards the country’s new black African orientation as well to as secure beneficial relationships with its leaders. In 1961, Madatally Manji, a prominent Ismaili businessman, made a trip to Kenyatta's home in Gatundu. According to his memoir, he “congratulated” Kenyatta on his freedom from political imprisonment and paid the rising political leader “homage.”\textsuperscript{39} Across Kenya, Indians made other efforts to show solidarity and support for party operatives and new government initiatives. Indians in Nakuru donated £1,000 to the Nakuru Branch of KANU; certain Oshwal patrons donated Ksh 84,000 to the political party headquarters; other Indian businesspeople pledged Ksh 80,000 to build an X-ray facility at the Gatundu Hospital near Kenyatta's ancestral home.\textsuperscript{40} (To my knowledge, no concentration of Indians had ever resided in Gatundu.) In later years, groups such as the Hindu Council, which was founded in 1972, donated tens of thousands of shillings to Kenya’s government ministries. Most funds went to agricultural development, food distribution, and famine relief.\textsuperscript{41} By 1968, financial contributions had evidently become common enough that Kenya’s political leaders began pressuring Indian capitalists for more. Sana Aiyar writes that in November of that year the Minister of Agriculture in Kenyatta’s government summoned various Indian community leaders to his office to give them a “Confidential message from President Kenyatta that he was expecting Indian residents of Kenya to make ‘generous donations.’”\textsuperscript{42}

\textsuperscript{39} Madatally Manji, \textit{Memoirs of a Biscuit Baron} (Nairobi: Kenway Publications, 1995), 141-142.
\textsuperscript{40} Aiyar, \textit{Indians in Kenya}, Loc. 5820.
\textsuperscript{42} Aiyar, \textit{Indians in Kenya}, Loc. 6079.
Not all patronage politics played out behind closed doors. Some made signs of support for Kenya’s government publicly visible and symbolic. In 1966, for example, the Aga Khan made a personal visit to Kenya to declare his loyalty to Kenyatta and his new regime on behalf of the Ismaili community. He came on another official visit in 1972 to do the same, this time with his wife and newborn son.\(^{43}\) Ismailis, who had both resident communities and capital to protect, also launched corporate and development organizations in independent Kenya. In 1959, after the opening of Nairobi’s Aga Khan Hospital, Ismaili businesspeople founded the Nation Media Group, which oversaw Kenya’s *Daily Nation* as well as four Swahili-language newspapers. Journalist George Ogola viewed the formation of the conglomerate as a “shrewd attempt to protect [community] business interests,” while catering to politicians and Kenya’s reading public.\(^{44}\) Today, the *Daily Nation* is the highest-circulating newspaper in Kenya. Ismaili contributions to Kenya’s economy after independence also extended to the Aga Khan Development Network (AKDN), which sponsored Kenya’s Industrial Promotion Services (IPS), manager of several infrastructure and industrial projects. In the early 1970s, the AKDN initiated the Tourism Promotion Services (TPS) agency, whose primary investment included the 400-bed Serena hotel in Nairobi as well as other lodges and safari camps.\(^{45}\)

Contributions often paid off handsomely for merchant communities and households. Businesspeople such as Madatally Manji expanded their companies and product lines. Having acquired a property on Delamere Avenue in 1959, he demolished the original structure and built

\(^{43}\) See special issue of *Africa Ismaili*, Vol. 4, no. 8 (1972).
the Baring Arcade, a shopping mall which opened in 1968. “Having met many of the leading nationalists,” he wrote in his memoir, “I was not overly concerned by the political situation in the country and continued with the building plans.”\textsuperscript{46} He also added that during the colonial period the government refused to grant him protections against imports as he sought to expand his food production business into areas such as biscuits as well as cereals and pastas. However, after independence, the government proved more amenable. “The Ministry [of Commerce and Industry] not only gave the protection we had requested,” he wrote, “but also gave us a lot of encouragement to invest further and open new product lines.” This was not the outcome of good fortune alone. Manji went on to say that during the 1960s he made several “courtesy calls” on ministers, having lunches at Parliament, and attending “garden parties” at Kenya’s State House. All to good effect. “No import licenses were given for products which could compete even remotely with ours,” he wrote. “With Kenya's independence, things had changed dramatically for the better, [and] the kind of protection that we could not get from the colonial administration was now a matter of government policy.”\textsuperscript{47} Some of Kenya’s Indian merchants-turned-industrialists benefitted from new import-substitution protections favored also by the country’s African nationalists.

Manji’s case might have been exceptional, but other Indian businesspeople scored important gains too. According to Lal, Indian firms recognized Kenya’s “void” following the demise of European capital at the end of colonialism. “[After] shop owners got notices to quit,” he said, “[they] decided to go into industry.” Over the course of the 1970s, families engaged in mercantile activities transferred their capital into factories, plants, and mines, new leading sectors of the Kenyan economy. Others produced building materials, cement, aluminum, and chemicals.

\textsuperscript{46} Manji, \textit{Memoirs of a Biscuit Baron}, 148-149.
\textsuperscript{47} Manji, \textit{Memoirs of a Biscuit Baron}, 111-114
“Some people started plastic firms,” he added, “and now they have many factories.”

Across the economy, Oshwal and other Indian families scaled up production in steel, packaging and logistics, as well as consumer products. Bidco, originally a textile manufacturer founded by Bhimji Depar Shah, extended into soap and edible oil production. By the 1980s, it possessed subsidiaries in Uganda and Tanzania. Malde & Co., which descended from an early Mombasa Oshwal merchant, expanded into coffee. By 1971, according to a community biographical record, Malde & Co. was the country’s largest coffee exporter. A survey taken in 1989 by the Kenyan Association of Manufacturers found that 26 out of 29 manufacturing firms founded since 1970 were owned by Indians (see Appendix 4).

For many, it appears, independence expanded opportunities rather than restricted them. Africanization intended to increase black African participation in urban sectors previously dominated by Indian merchants during the colonial period. However, with the flight of European capital, accompanied by new state controls limiting trade expansion among non-black Africans, Indians shifted investments into new industries. In other words, Africanization had the seemingly ironic result of increasing Indian merchants’ diversification of capital into new areas of production, especially manufacturing, and therefore further protecting and expanding their capital base. This result led to an increasing concentration of wealth in particular Indian communities and caste groups. “After the people did well,” Lal told me, “the next question was, who would run the factories? Many went back to India and looked up their cousins and brothers.”

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48 Conversation with Kiran Lal, Nairobi, 22nd February and 25 May, 2015. According to Lal, this even encouraged migration from the subcontinent to Kenya. “After people did well,” he explained, “the next question was who would run the factories? Many went back to India and looked up their cousins and brothers.”


50 Shah, Oshwals in Kenya, 71.
factories.” When I asked Lal about whether any of these Indian firms hired black Africans, he responded that Kenya had a sufficient workforce, but Indian businesspeople preferred accumulating wealth among other members of their caste and kinship groups. “No matter what anyone says,” he added, “people always wanted to hire and look out for their own.”

AFRICANS, INDIANS, AND RACIAL GRIEVANCES

Many Indian merchants made strategic maneuvers to protect and expand their capital interests during the post-independence era. However, they were also aided by Kenya’s ruling elites, who appeared to accommodate Indian merchant capital by protecting their property and helping them build their commercial presence in trade and industry. In doing so, the government met a political backlash in the unmet expectations for greater racial and economic equality among black Kenyans. Over the 1960s and 1970s, Nairobi’s population continued to increase, mushrooming from 292,622 in 1960 to 861,661 in 1980. Historian Kenneth King has observed that the majority of new black migrants to cities like Nairobi did not replace or even challenge Kenyan Indian business interests. Instead, they worked in the informal sector, often for the benefit of Indian retailers and factories. However, many of these same black urban migrants became subject to Nairobi’s acute housing shortage, which left much of the city’s underclass living in overcrowded “resettlement” zones or in “informal” shanty structures. They continued to voice complaints regarding racial discrimination faced by black people in the country as well as the government’s failed attempts to redistribute private and public resources to its majority of black citizens. Most saw the government...

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51 Conversation with Kiran Lal, Nairobi, 22nd February and 25 May, 2015.
53 Regarding Nairobi’s housing shortage, see Illegal Squatters in Nairobi, KNA S/5363. In 1970, despite government plans to construct multiple resettlement schemes, Kenya’s police demolished 2,000 shanty structures. They were estimated to have been housing approximately 11,000 residents.
as subordinating their capital interests to the Indian merchant-industrial class. Finding themselves excluded from the high rungs of commerce and industry, which they had imagined they might be able to enter upon independence, capital-poor black Kenyans lodged petitions against the government in hope of gaining access to urban economies. Complaining about barriers to entry posed by capital-rich Indian firms, they expressed grievances over the limited opportunities they had in Kenya’s economy on account of officials’ protections of Indian merchants-cum-industrialists.

Many black Kenyans voiced criticisms about the apparent growth of bribes and corruption among officials, together with other closed-door dealings that benefitted the political class. In these complaints, Indian employers and their practices did not escape such criticism. In 1964, for example, a dozen black employees from Nairobi’s Supermarket Ltd. complained about their Indian manager, Tan Nanji, who was depriving them of “fair and equal pay.” Receiving 30 Shillings less per month than Indian staff, they accused him of holding back “increments” and “pensions,” and treating black Africans like “children.” “The money is not correct for a period of four times,” they wrote. “The company does not have any mercy upon the [African] workers.” In December of 1964, the government sent out a wage inspector to look into these allegations. He met with Nanji as well as his “shop steward” and secretary. However, by early 1965, the case had been dropped. No raises were granted, and according to staff, Nanji “ignored” additional representations: he fired thirteen employees and replaced them with lower-paid personnel. The staff again wrote to officials

54 Supermarket Staff to Jomo Kenyatta, Nairobi, 30th November 1965, KNA S/5371. Nanji, they wrote, employed dozens of African employees in “consignment, custom forms, invoices, dispatching and correspondence plus filing.” Their full complaint read as follows: The company does not have any mercy upon the [African] workers. There are some clerks who have a service of ten years and the amount which they are given is 140/- per month. The Africans who are clerks are regarded as laborers and the Manager is cheating us...It is utterly annoying to see Asians doing an equal amount of work [and] being paid higher salaries.” The letter pleaded for immediate intervention. “We are sure we are in trouble,” it stated. It insisted the manager had “sacked” employees for being “ill” and treated them as dispensable. “[Save us] from the oppression of this Indian,” their letter read. “He refuses to treat our presence as contributory to the [country’s] overall economic development.”

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in November of that year complaining about the wage inspector, who evidently accepted a bribe from Nanji to leave things as they were. “Kindly send us someone who cannot be seduced by this Manager with things like tea or soda,” they wrote with exasperation in the second letter, “someone who can feed himself.” The complainants noted that Nanji was able to evade new rules because of his ties to local officials, something he bragged about openly to his aggrieved black African laborers. “The manager [Nanji],” they wrote, “had said that he has got a lot of money which he can lend to all [the] Ministers [and] whether we have freedom [or not] we are under his shoes.”

Many petitioners to Kenya’s government also complained about unfair competition by Indian trading firms. In 1966, Nairobi's City Council moved to evict “non-Africans” from the City Market as part of a larger strategy to, in the words of Mwai Kibaki, then Minister of Commerce and Industry, “effect Africanization.” By 1970, all 59 Indian tenants had been evicted from their spaces and all 59 market stalls had been given to black African traders at a 20 percent discount.

Many went on to deal in produce, meats, and handcrafts. However, by 1972, African stall holders began to file complaints citing their financial struggles. A letter signed by several stallholders complained that although they now enjoyed prime marketing space, they continued to face stiff competition from Indian firms. “When [the market was] Africanised,” they noted, “[Indians] move[d] out and open[ed] shops within a short distance of the Market and [began] dealing in the same items [as] the oncoming Africans.” They continued:

These Indians do this because they move away with their former customers, whom they do not wish to lo[s]e [and] maneuver to undermine Africans by sabotaging the

55 Ibid.

Then Minister of Commerce and Industry, Mwai Kibaki, claimed the eviction was meant “to promote a great equality of economic opportunity.” Speaking on the Parliament floor, Kibaki urged Representatives to embrace “a [new] system of licensing so that [Indians will be] restricted to trading in some other part [of the city].” “Non-Africans,” he explained had come to own 59 out of 64 plots in the City Market. Many traders even owned multiple plots—”seven, five or three stalls.”
concerted effort of the African stall holders...most of whom are new in the trade and do not have enough capital to match the intrigue of the outgoing Asian Trade. The complainants also accused government officials of rewarding contracts to Kenya’s Indian rather than its black sellers. The letter implored government officials to shift their procurement policies to benefit black African firms instead. “Awarding of Tenders,” they wrote, “for those items which are handled by City Market General Traders should not at all be given to Asians whose shops are in the adjoining areas of the Market.” Apparently, the eviction of Indians from the City Market did little to alter their networks of influence and government access. Petitioners concluded their plea by listing merchandise that African stall holders could offer in significant quantities. These included “vegetables, fruits, eggs, meat and offal [and] flowers,” all of which remained undersold due to competition from Indian firms.\(^{57}\)

Winning contracts from Kenya’s nationalist government proved to be tricky business for black newcomers as well. Many discovered that licenses to sell were insufficient to forward their interests, for Indian businesspeople possessed long-standing relationships with government offices and personnel. This was especially true in the realm of technical and construction services, where Indian firms had built up years of professional experience. During the 1960s, black newcomers made hopeful bids for contracts, but did not win much business from the government. One petitioner suggested that seeking contracts from the government was a fool’s errand for a black Kenyan. Take Kamamieh Njuguna, a self-employed technician who after independence founded a company named “Arts Formula.” In 1966, he applied for a contract with Kenya’s government to design public signage for streets and buildings. Several African firms, he wrote in his petition, have been overlooked for such basic jobs.” Since the last [few] years, we have tried to get such Kenya Govt. [sic] contracts but it has been all in vain,” he explained. “We see such contracts given

\(^{57}\) Nairobi City Market General Traders to the Minister for Local Government, Nairobi. 2\(^{nd}\) June 1972, KNA S/8493.
to some big firms (mainly Asian firms) [and not black Africans].” His letter went to plead for “help” in the spirit of Harambee (or “pulling together”), which was one of the primary slogans of nation-building employed by Kenyan politicians and nationalists. “We have the same qualifications,” he added, “or we may [even] be ahead in some cases.” Just as the stallholders had discovered about old webs of commerce, African technicians confronted high barriers to entry in sectors with well-established Indian firms. More important than racial politics to Kenya’s new leaders were the lower prices and quality of service that could be provided by more established and highly capitalized Indians.

Not all complaints and petitions from black Kenyans to their government pertained to urban trade. In some cases, black Africans also filed complaints in hope of gaining access to urban property and wealth. Many black Kenyans implored Kenya’s government to follow the lead of Tanzania’s leaders by expropriating property owned by Kenyan Indians—particularly those who had left the country. In 1972, a self-identified “African” wrote to government officials to complain about an Indian he identified as “Pancy” who owned a commercial complex on centrally located Kimathi Street in Nairobi. The letter writer alleged that Pancy bought the property in 1966 for £32,000 by borrowing money from an Ismaili-owned financial company, Jubilee Insurance. Despite moving to England, the Indian manager still enjoyed “£10,000” in annual rents from a “Pop-in Restaurant” and a “curio shop” at the property. Whether or not the “African” letter writer was in full possession of the facts—£10,000 in annual rent was exorbitant amount, even for a building on Kimathi Street—his suspicions reveal the extent to which Indian landlords continued to retain, manage, and benefit from urban property.59 “This building has been rented since

58 Kamamieh Njuguna to Office of the President, 21st April 21st 1966, KNA S/5371.
59 I derive this approach from Luise White, Speaking with Vampires: Rumor and History in East and Central Africa (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 57. She writes that rumors may be viewed historically as “events analyzed and commented upon,” however misinterpreted or deformed.
1966/67,” he continued, “I understand [that its] 2 year lease is [soon] to run [out]. [And] It is rumored that this property is being bought by an Asian for 65[,]000 pounds which means [the] total profit…will go to London.” Despite the writer’s anonymity and unfounded claims, his protest reveals a broader consciousness about continuing Indian dominance in the commercial sector. This consciousness was conveyed in a discourse of racial inequality, conflating African and black, that permeated Nairobi life during the 1970s. At the end of the letter, the “African” writer condensed his objections into a few short rhetorical questions. “Why [is this] being sold at this fantastic price after having made all the rents[?] [And] When are we Africans going to own buildings in Kimathi Street[?]”

To be sure, some black African traders and servicemen were able to gain new market share in the post-independence period. Nairobi became home to a burgeoning class of traders and laborers during the 1960s and 1970s, historian Claire Robertson has shown, many of whom received intermittent government support. This was particularly true for Kikuyu entrepreneurs, who received more than half of the ICDC’s commercial and industrial loans by 1971.61 Kenneth King has argued that black African businesspeople took pride in their micro-enterprises, often seeing advantages in the skills they learned from having previously worked for or interacted with Indian merchants or artisans.62 However, the gains made by black ethnic networks after independence did not offset what many still perceived as the economic imbalances of the colonial economy drawn along racial lines. Ramanlal Shah, a Gujarati writer who visited Nairobi from Bombay in 1983, commented that Indians benefitted from the postcolonial economic environment, but also were made targets of street crime because of their success. “After the British left,” he

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60 “An African” to Vice President, Minister of Housing, and Attorney General. 22nd May 1972, KNA S/8493.
62 King, Jua Kali Kenya, 11.
wrote, “Kenya’s Gujarati community started to expand their businesses. Many wealthy Gujarati families flourished in Kenya and started living in grand bungalows…furnished with the latest furniture.” His trip was marred, however, he wrote, by worries of “snatchers” and “hooligans,” the number of which, he contended, were growing substantially and who specifically targeted neighborhoods such as Parklands or Ngara—two Indian enclaves. “Many of our Gujarati people travel from one place to another via motorcar,” he wrote. “While doing so, they roll up their windows out of fear that, if the windows remain open, a robber might snatch their ornament or necklace.”

Today, despite the rise of a small black Kenyan middle class, many black Africans in the country continue to resent the wealth disparity between most black Africans and Indians. In 2012, I talked with Felix Lukasa, a Luhya man who worked as an assistant for an Indian-owned garment shop. He told me that as an “African,” he was left doing the “donkey work” and earned little money compared to his Indian colleagues. He explained that this was normal. Like many black Kenyans, he made up for his low salary by hawking merchandise on the side. Yet he did not blame Indians for their influence in urban economies. They were “smart businessmen,” he explained, “who know how to protect themselves.” The problem, he explained, was the government. “Officials know that the Asian community is a pillar of the current system, so they go around and collect money from them.” In addition, he explained, “around election time Asians [Indians] raise money from their community and give it to the parties. Later, if Asians have a problem, they can easily get around it.” Lukasa’s comments characterized the deep networks between party officials, businessmen,

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and the several power brokers in-between. “For people like me,” he added, “the whole system is corrupt.”

CONCLUSION

Most scholarship on postcolonial East Africa has drawn attention to the political marginalization of Indians in postcolonial East Africa. James Brennan, for example, has shown the way that the racializing languages of national citizenship in the post-war era resulted in the postcolonial state’s confiscation of Indian-owned urban property in Tanzania during the 1970s. Sana Aiyar, furthermore, has argued that nationalist politics became increasingly racialized in 1960s Kenya. As a result of a racially fragmented nation, she wrote, tens of thousands of Indians departed Kenya for the United Kingdom in what became known in popular memory as the “Exodus.” This chapter has taken a different approach. Grounding itself in the experience of Indian business communities, it has argued that, among those who remained in Kenya during 1960s and 1970s, many utilized the state’s longstanding history and practice of patronage politics to maintain protections over their local investments. Amid the new policies of “Africanization,” or black African economic empowerment, that rhetorically threatened Kenyan Indians’ investments and strategies of wealth accumulation, many Indian community and commercial networks revised their strategies of reciprocity and redistribution to forge new links with postcolonial government officials in the wake of decolonization. Some of these ties were developed behind closed doors; others were made in public, whereby Indian merchants exhibited support for Kenya’s new regime. In any case, over the 1970s, many Indians maintained commercial dominance and even expanded into industry. By the

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64 Conversation with Felix Lukasa, Nairobi, 17 April 2012.
65 Brennan, Taifa.
66 Aiyar, Indians in Kenya.
1980s, partly with the help of state protections, Indians’ holdings had increased well beyond the scale of commercial and industrial firms seen during the colonial period. Indian businesspeople were able to maintain their properties and holdings in the country, so much so that black Africans increasingly voiced resentments against the new political leadership, utilizing a language of race and citizenship as a means to rectify the continuing—and in some ways even expanding—racial inequities of the colonial past. Many saw the increasing domination of Indian merchant capital in Nairobi as proof of the subordinated and neglected interests of black African capitalists.

Yet, this chapter demonstrates another set of findings, when looked at in the context of Kenya’s full twentieth century. Previous decades of commercial activity and community investments, it turned out, did more than help Indian merchant groups to accumulate profits and earnings and convert capital into urban wealth. They positioned them to secure belonging in Kenya’s nation after independence and to weather the political storm that accompanied the transition from colonial to postcolonial rule and the rise (and fall) of Kenya’s black African economic empowerment policies. This chapter—and the dissertation—thus calls into question the significance of the colonial/post-colonial juncture and the difference in the social, economic, and political structures that defined these two periods. When seen from the perspective of Indian merchants, Kenya’s history evinces a remarkably similar set of trends over the twentieth century. Namely, its history evinces the willingness of the ruling class, whether it be white or black, to accommodate and protect Indian merchant networks, despite the broad set criticisms regarding Indian merchant practices and influence that permeated Kenyan society. It is this continuity that demonstrates Indian merchants’ intimate relationships to the story of Kenya’s political economic development and the creation of an urban society around the tenets of *samaj*. It is also this
continuity that leaves open to question the impact that political independence has had on the promotion of economic inclusion more broadly.
CONCLUSION

This dissertation has explored the activities and strategies of Indian merchants in twentieth-century Kenya. By focusing on their community networks, it has provided insight into the connections between Indian merchant capital and Kenya’s pre- and post-independence political and economic orders. Whereas much scholarship about Indian populations in East Africa has examined their histories through categories of race and class, or narrated their histories as agents of the British Empire or as a minority racial diaspora, this dissertation has taken a different approach. Examining Indians as interconnected yet separate vocational populations, it has argued that Indian merchant households assumed positions of economic, social, and political prominence by situating themselves between Kenya’s African agrarian societies and urban markets, on the one hand, and the colonial state and imperial networks, on the other. Despite the rise of anti-Indian sentiment in the aftermath of Kenya’s independence, Indian merchants cultivated linkages to new political leaders and activated longer-standing communal connections to re-assimilate into Kenya’s post-independence environment. Community structures, I argue, not race or nation, became the primary mode of belonging among Indian merchant households in twentieth-century Kenya. It also became the primary foundation for building Kenya's new urban society around the tenets of samaj, or a social collective comprised of distinct merchant communities “moving together” in a united manner.

When I began to investigate the history of Kenya's Indian merchant class, I started by questioning the impact of Indian merchants in structuring colonial Kenya's commercial and industrial sectors. Only as I made headway into my research did I discover that Kenya was not home to one but to several different Indian merchant communities. The historiography I had read
in preparation for my research focused on racial politics in East Africa and tended to render Indian Kenyans as a monolithic “Indian” whole. However, in and among themselves, Indians in Kenya were characterized by separate, diverse populations and histories. They each possessed their own claimed origins and trajectories of migration and settlement. Even among merchant populations of western India, who became the focus on this dissertation, businesspeople varied by caste, kinship, and religious affiliation. Many possessed different home regions, heritages, languages or dialects, or they arrived in Kenya at different periods. These facts alerted me to a necessity: that any history of East Africa's Indian merchant communities would need to pay heed to their tremendous diversity—a diversity that was in part due to their origins in South Asia and in part built and newly expressed in Kenya, but has been generally flattened in East Africa’s historiography.

As I examined my many sources, from merchants’ diaries and memoirs to commercial contracts and records in both the Kenya and India National Archives, I noticed another important trend. Community councils and boards were responsible not only for administering internal welfare and controlling social alliances such as marriage. They were also responsible for mediating external trade and methods of political and economic assimilation. This finding ran contrary to most academic thinking in the South Asian context. Scholars have tended to regard caste, kinship, or religious community as methods of distinction, if not exclusion, separation, or, as one scholar has even called it, “repulsion” (of others).1 In East Africa, though, community played an unlikely, counterintuitive, and additional role: an integrative one. Community boundaries were not static or fully closed, but adaptive and versatile. They provided closings as well as openings. They supplied internal and external boundaries as well as economic and political outlets. Merchants employed

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1 For an up-to-date discussion of caste and corporatism in the South Asian economic context, see Tirthankar Roy, *Company of Kinsmen: Enterprise and Community in South Asian History, 1700-1940* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2010).
community networks to move commodities and capital securely between trade locations and to insure long-term investments. Community networks, in short—at least in “dispersion” if not also at “home”—provided merchant groups with tremendous flexibility to strategically deploy capital and resources, to administer private and public funds and redistribute resources to members and non-members alike.

In narrating the chapters of this study, I have called Indian merchants’ general strategy one of integrative corporatism. Integrative corporatism, I have argued, enabled Indian merchant households to secure investments at their "core," while extending their commercial and political networks outward along their “fringes.” In other words, Indian merchant households remained socially closed but economically open. They continually drew social boundaries around marriage, cultural activities, or, as some scholars have argued, women's sexuality. As seen in Chapter 5, these network cores were largely nurtured by the production of communal spaces that helped protect their endogamous structures and reproduce caste or kinship relationships. Yet, Indian merchants also employed communal structures to expand commercial and political solidarities across non-community contexts. As seen in Chapters 1 and 4, Indian merchants cultivated connections to caravan traders and interior populations as well as African farmers and low-level bureaucrats. Furthermore, as seen in Chapters 2, 3, and 6, they deployed community structures to align their capital interests with colonial legal institutions and Kenya’s nationalist development goals. Integrative corporatism, in short, enabled merchants to become simultaneously durable and adaptable to changing contexts, and gave them ways to advance their capital interests while expanding their political and economic linkages.

How best to situate Indian merchants and their histories in the historiography of Africa remains an open question. Sana Aiyar, as I mentioned in the introduction to this study, has commented that most histories of East Africa relegate the region’s Indian diaspora to a “footnote,” something she sought to rectify with her extensive writing on Indian politics in Kenya. “Where does the Indian diaspora belong?” she has recently written, reflecting on the dilemmas of writing about Indians in East Africa and the Indian Ocean more broadly. “Diasporic mobility [has] created an analytical dilemma for historiographical approaches to the study of the Indian diaspora as area-studies frameworks focused the gaze of historians within the territorial boundaries of South Asia and East Africa.” One option I propose to rethinking the place of Indians in East African history might be to deepen connections between East Africa’s twentieth-century history and its precolonial Indian Ocean antecedents. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Indian merchants played a significant role, argued Pedro Machado, in tying East Africa’s hinterland consumers and producers to the traders, bankers, and textile manufacturers of inland India. Jeremy Prestholdt has also argued that Kutchi and Kutchi-born Bombay businesspeople fueled East Africa’s regional economic expansion and consumerism in the nineteenth century through capital investment and credit. In this approach, East Africa’s twentieth century may be interpreted as an extension of a long history of trans-oceanic connection, whereby Indian merchant networks found new impetus to expand into East Africa’s interior under the protection of British colonial rule, and the people of East Africa sought ways to transform their lives and economies by engaging with such visitors and joining together different sets of networks.

Another option might be to interpret Indian merchants’ presence and activities in and around cities as part of a broader sub-Saharan African urban historical tradition. David Anderson and Richard Rathbone have argued that African cities have long been a site for immigrants who brought their own cultural values and urban mores. “All of these migrant communities were brought to Africa by imperialisms of a kind,” they wrote, “but their absorption into the social and cultural fabric of African towns was very much part of an ancient, indigenous process [in which the] absorption and pluralism did not imply the abandonment of identity.”

Similarly, in his overview of East Africa’s urbanization, Andrew Burton wrote that East African cities in the twentieth century became home to increasing number of citizens exposed to “several economic, political, and, most of all, cultural influence[s as well as] income and capital generation, consumption patterns and popular culture.”

Something similar might also be argued for Indian immigrants to East Africa as well as indigenous migrants. Most of Africa’s cities were new spaces to which all comers had to connect and adjust, even the migrants of earlier centuries who had sunk roots in existing but transforming towns. By this approach, Indians may be seen as one of many non-indigenous groups who brought with them new social and economic organizations as well as ideas about community, culture, and society. This approach would place Indian migration at the center of discussions regarding discourses about citizenship and politics. It would also place urban development, property, and social administration at the center of African historiography, especially as African cities are soon poised to hold half of the continent’s population.

Both of these frameworks would help to provide new perspectives on East Africa’s history, including that of its immigrant merchants. However, neither of these approaches can fully account

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for how Indian merchants were able to integrate themselves into Kenya’s postcolonial economic order while fundamentally reshaping its urban society. For this I suggest that historians might consider a new economic-historical method that places cross-cultural trade as well as urbanization at the center of historical inquiry. This method would not only incorporate previous traditions of scholarship regarding Indian Ocean commerce and urbanization into a new paradigm. It would add new dimension to long-standing debates about African wealth and society, expanding Jane Guyer’s oft-cited “wealth in people” to include wealth in connections and integration by Indian Ocean immigrants. It also explains how Indians were able to rapidly gain commercial prominence in twentieth-century Kenya. By these means, historians could examine Africa’s twentieth century not only as a time when European rule fell apart and Africans confronted the shortcoming of independence or the disappointments of development, as Fedrick Cooper and others have recently done. They could also examine it as time when indigenous Africans made increasing connections to immigrant “others” in rural and urban spaces, revised strategies of wealth accumulation and investment, and incorporated new ways of thinking about capital and its reproduction. In short, it was a time when Africans came into contact with new modes of merchant capital and mercantile strategies, both of which quickly circulated and reproduced in African cities, farms, and villages.

To be sure, neither these proposals, nor this study, is meant to romanticize the history of Indian merchant capital, nor that of any other group in twentieth-century East Africa. As I have shown, Indian merchants’ activities in Kenya were fraught with tensions and distrust as well as internal mechanisms of social control. Their presence in local and regional economies led to increasing hostility and suspicion on the part of many different participants—white settlers and

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indigenous farmers, rural and urban consumers, and even many Indians. However, the conflicts accompanying Indian merchant households’ expansion in twentieth-century Kenya do not preclude their importance in shaping Kenya’s urban society and its post-independence political economy. Indian merchant groups became and have remained, in their diversity, what political scientist David Himbara has called Kenya's homegrown “bourgeoisie,” and what I in this study have preferred to describe, in staying true to Indian merchants’ own modes of internal social organization, as Kenya’s *samaj*.

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Whether East Africa’s Indian merchants remain in their dominant social and economic positions in future years is to be seen. In 2016, I went to visit a construction site in Nairobi, off Langata Road. It encompassed dozens of acres and was to be the location for the city’s new Shree Kutch Satsang Swaminarayan Temple. At the time, it was nearly at the point of completion. In addition to the temple, the community had planned an entire “society,” or community complex, which included schools, a clinic, and approximately 1,000 apartment units. “This will be the biggest Swaminarayan temple in East Africa,” said my guide for that day, Rajesh, who was a member of Nairobi’s Swaminarayan Temple in Parklands and a Kutchi-born immigrant to Kenya. The temple had several notable features, most of them architectural: it was entirely separated from other neighborhoods around Langata road and had private roads and grass; apartment complexes were fenced and gated, and looked out to Nairobi National Park, one of the city’s major tourist attractions. However, the most notable aspect of the temple was not its physical nature, but its

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10 Himbara, *Kenyan Capitalists*, Chapter 2. He writes: “As for the Kenyan Indian capitalists, they adopted a different defense: a remarkable number shifted in more complex industrial sectors, where larger scales of capital and management placed them beyond the reach of the Africanization drive.”
social one. As we drove in, we passed workers—teams of black African construction crews and Indian supervisors, security guards, messengers, and transporters. Rajesh and many others I met casually referred to this temple site as the “Laxmanbhai temple.” “Laxmanbhai” was shorthand for “Laxmanbhai Construction,” one of the largest builders in Kenya and East Africa.Founded by Laxmanbhai Bhimji K. Raghwani in 1953, it generated a vast amount of capital and business over the years and now sat at the nexus of networks of hardware suppliers and manufacturers as well as countless numbers of laborers, skilled workers, and other contractors and recruiters. “Many have donated to build the temple,” explained Rajesh. “A large donor will put in 30 million Shillings very easily. We believe that if you give, you will receive in return 4 times of what you give.”

In short, strategies of integrative corporatism remain a fixture of Kenyan Indian life. New profits and earnings have fueled social institutions and investments, and many Indian merchants continued to sponsor schools, hospitals, and prayer halls. It was also clear that these strategies and investments were paying handsome dividends. Many of today's largest business conglomerates in Kenya are the outgrowth of Indian merchant family firms—many of which were founded during the colonial period and are in their second, third, or fourth generation. They include Laxmanbhai Construction as well as Hebatulla Brothers, BidCo, and Comcraft, just to name a few. Some businesses continue to be maintained by communal institutions and holding companies. The Aga Khan Development Network, for example, manages portfolios of companies that run the gamut of hotels, foods and agriculture, utilities and media, together with banking, finance, and even a

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11 Conversation with Rajesh Malde, 14 June 2015, Nairobi.
12 Many of these companies are outlined in David Himbara’s study of Kenya and capitalist development. See Himbara, *Kenyan Capitalists, the State, and Development*, Chapter 2.
university.\textsuperscript{13} They also continue to manage the Nairobi medical institutions whose history is examined in Chapter 5.

For many Indians from the subcontinent, migrating to Kenya remains an opportunity to make a quick and easy buck. Their desire for fast, short-term gains has earned them the name “Rockets,” which Kenyan Indian families call them degradingly to connote their money-driven mentality and, as one of my interlocutors told me, even their “manners.” However, many Indians with longer histories in Kenya, believe that times are changing for them. At the time of my research in 2015 and 2016, many Indian businesspeople in cities like Nairobi were voicing concerns about new challenges. Some mentioned increasing competition from Somali traders and retailers, whose commercial presence had grown considerably over the last quarter century in major Kenyan cities and towns—but particularly in Nairobi.\textsuperscript{14} Many also mentioned competition from Chinese immigrants, particularly in the building sector. As Rajesh explained to me on our visit, part of the reason for building the temple complex was to help consolidate commercial networks around a social and religious institution. “It’s become very hard on Indians,” he said. “It’s 200,000 shillings for our work permits, while the Chinese have been getting 2-year work permits for 40,000 shillings. They come to Kenya for two-year periods and manage projects for larger builders.” Many of these builders, Rajesh later explained, were Kenyan, operating on Chinese financing and foreign direct investment.

Fortunes might not accumulate for Kenyan Indians at the same rate as they once did in the past. However, integrative corporatism remains a primary strategy for preserving commercial


networks, long-term investments, and economic opportunities. When I asked Rajesh precisely how building a temple would help Indian builders survive competition, he asserted that the goal was to lessen the costs of local Indian householders as well as new workers coming into the country. “People connected to the temple will protect each other's interests,” he said. “Someone will buy from their friends as a favor, or otherwise help their business through contracts. A hardware dealer will give a builder a good price on materials,” he said. In other words, they will continue to maintain their commercial networks by making more social investments. These donations, they hope, will pay off in expanding their commercial and community networks among local suppliers, contractors, and clients. The more they invest, the more connections they will continue to accumulate, and the more profits they will help to make. “We will just continue to help each other,” said Rajesh.\(^\text{15}\)

\(^{15}\) Conversation with Rajesh Malde, 14 June 2015, Nairobi.
## Portfolio of Tenants in Arrear Renting Plots from A.M. Jeevanjee (1931-1934)\(^1\)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Plaintiff/Landlord</th>
<th>Tenant</th>
<th>Plot</th>
<th>Neighborhood/Street</th>
<th>Rent (Ksh/Month)</th>
<th>Months unpaid</th>
<th>Amount</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1931</td>
<td>A.M. Jeevanjee &amp; Co.</td>
<td>Mehar Singh, Carpenter</td>
<td>Godown plot No. 683</td>
<td>Victoria Street</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>410</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1931</td>
<td>A.M. Jeevanjee &amp; Co.</td>
<td>Dhobi Bheju Kala; Dhobi Dana Rupa Chatra; Asuram Kistue; Dhobi Mangla Suja; Dhobi Ganpat Chatra</td>
<td>Plot No. 220</td>
<td>Ngara Road</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>455</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1932</td>
<td>A.M. Jeevanjee &amp; Co.</td>
<td>Dhobi Marbheshanker S. Trivedy</td>
<td>Plot No. 477</td>
<td>Indian Bazaar</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>920</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1933</td>
<td>A.M. Jeevanjee &amp; Co.</td>
<td>Dalip Singh</td>
<td>Plot No. 668</td>
<td>Duke Street</td>
<td>235</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3900</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1933</td>
<td>A.M. Jeevanjee &amp; Co.</td>
<td>CV Naidu, Nairobi Direct Fish Supply Company</td>
<td>Shamba on plot No. 120</td>
<td>Ainsworth Causeway</td>
<td>250</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1700</td>
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<tr>
<td>1931</td>
<td>A.M. Jeevanjee &amp; Co.</td>
<td>Abdul Hussein Rehmanji, Cinema Film Contractor</td>
<td>Plot No. 750-751, Rooms 1&amp;2</td>
<td>Indian Bazaar</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>2270</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1935</td>
<td>A.M. Jeevanjee &amp; Co.</td>
<td>Abdul Ghani</td>
<td>Plot No. 125</td>
<td>Indian Bazaar</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>600</td>
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<td>1932</td>
<td>A.M. Jeevanjee &amp; Co.</td>
<td>Varsanji Mulji Duicha</td>
<td>Plot No. 463 and 120</td>
<td>Indian Bazaar</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1045</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1931</td>
<td>A.M. Jeevanjee &amp; Co.</td>
<td>Virjee Premji c/o Alibhai Kanji, Shopkeeper</td>
<td>Plot No. 750</td>
<td>Indian Bazaar</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1932</td>
<td>A.M. Jeevanjee &amp; Co.</td>
<td>Kurji Kasanji</td>
<td>Plot No. 751</td>
<td>Indian Bazaar</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>885</td>
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<td>1932</td>
<td>A.M. Jeevanjee &amp; Co.</td>
<td>A. Burgess &amp; J. Markey</td>
<td>Plot No. 75</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
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<td>A.M. Jeevanjee &amp; Co.</td>
<td>Nairobi Ration Store</td>
<td>Plot No. 747</td>
<td>Indian Bazaar</td>
<td>--</td>
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<td>798</td>
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\(^1\)Bankruptcy files and civil suits related to A.M. Jeevanjee & Co. c. 1927-1935, UONL RAC DF, Series 1, File Nos. 7, 29, 149,155, 209, 363, 469, 480-484, 553, 557, 779, 531-540, 688.
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<tr>
<th>Year</th>
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<th>Title and Name</th>
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<th>Area</th>
<th>Rent</th>
<th>Category</th>
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<td>Abdul Rahum Hussein</td>
<td>746</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>Indian Bazaar</td>
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<td>A.M. Jeevanjee &amp; Co.</td>
<td>Ebrahimji Mohamedbhai, Shopkeeper</td>
<td>746</td>
<td>140</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>700</td>
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<tr>
<td>1932</td>
<td>A.M. Jeevanjee &amp; Co.</td>
<td>Jan Mohamed, Fuel Contractor</td>
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<td>--</td>
<td>Indian Bazaar</td>
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<td>1934</td>
<td>A.M. Jeevanjee &amp; Co.</td>
<td>Mohamed Abdullah, Merchant</td>
<td>495</td>
<td>150</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>River Road</td>
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242
## APPENDIX 2

### List of Properties of Late Mr. Kassambhai (1918)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Lot</th>
<th>Lot Description</th>
<th>Value (Shs)</th>
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</thead>
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<tr>
<td>No. 1</td>
<td>Building in Government Road at present occupied by Messrs. Lalchand Moolchand &amp; Bros.</td>
<td>85,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Building in River Road Nairobi at present occupied by Mr. Abadi Moosle [sic]</td>
<td>20,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A plot near the Shamba of Matallibhai in Mombasa</td>
<td>5,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A plot at Mombasa, opposite market</td>
<td>1,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A plot at Mombasa, near mosque</td>
<td>1,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>112,000</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Income of the first plot per month</strong></td>
<td><strong>900</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. 2</td>
<td>A plot at Mombasa on Kilindi Road</td>
<td>45,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A building at Nairobi at present occupied by Mr. Alibhai Hajee</td>
<td>45,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A Godown at Mombasa at the rear of the premises of Messrs. Suleman Virjee &amp; Sons</td>
<td>30,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A Building at Nairobi River Road, at present used as bakery</td>
<td>28,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>148,000</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Income of the second plot per month</strong></td>
<td><strong>900</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. 3</td>
<td>A building at Nairobi, in Indian bazaar at present occupied by Messrs. Vallibhai Yusufally and Husseinhbai Suleman Virjee</td>
<td>65,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A godown of corrugated sheets situated at the rear of the premise of Messrs. Suleman Virjee &amp; Sons</td>
<td>12,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A building at Mombasa in Vasco D'Gama Street</td>
<td>28,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A building of corrugated sheets situated at Kisumu</td>
<td>7,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A plot at Mombasa by Khonzi Mosque</td>
<td>10,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>123,000</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Income of the third plot per month</strong></td>
<td><strong>1,000</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lot 4</td>
<td>A building at Mombasa at present occupied by the family of late Mr. Kassambhai</td>
<td>60,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A building of corrugated sheets at Nairobi at present occupied by Mr. Hussein Karmali situated in Indian Bazaar</td>
<td>37,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A stone godown at Mombasa situated by the premises of Messrs. Suleman Virjee &amp; Sons</td>
<td>12,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A godown at Mombasa with the stone plynth and wall of the corrugated iron sheets, situated near Mombasa Custom</td>
<td>3,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A plot with 2 huts on [it], close by the Shamba of Mr. Madatally S. Virjee</td>
<td>1,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A plot at Mombasa opposite market</td>
<td>4,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>118,500</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Income of the fourth plot per month</strong></td>
<td><strong>860</strong></td>
</tr>
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2 In the Matter of the Estate of Kassam Suleman, 1918, UONL RAC DF, Series 5, File No. 2.
APPENDIX 3

Kenyan Indians Traveling to the United Kingdom from East Africa (1965-1967)\(^3\)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Children</th>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td>159</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>March</td>
<td>636</td>
<td>390</td>
<td>103</td>
<td>143</td>
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<tr>
<td>April</td>
<td>594</td>
<td>334</td>
<td>130</td>
<td>130</td>
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<td>May</td>
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<td>283</td>
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<td>June</td>
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<td>201</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>94</td>
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<td>July</td>
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<tr>
<td>August</td>
<td>809</td>
<td>411</td>
<td>187</td>
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<td>September</td>
<td>662</td>
<td>304</td>
<td>164</td>
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<td>October</td>
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<tr>
<td>November</td>
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<td>101</td>
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<tr>
<td>December</td>
<td>470</td>
<td>175</td>
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<td>175</td>
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<td>Total</td>
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<table>
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<td>554</td>
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<td>521</td>
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<td>261</td>
<td>107</td>
<td>113</td>
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<td>June</td>
<td>405</td>
<td>170</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>146</td>
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<td>July</td>
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<td>298</td>
<td>222</td>
<td>145</td>
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<td>925</td>
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\(^3\) Application of Immigration Control to Citizens of the United Kingdom and Colonies who do not belong to the United Kingdom, 20\(^{th}\) September 1967, TNA Commonwealth Office (FCO) No 18/7. See memo by the Home Office titled “South Asian – General: Social: Asians UK Citizens: Emigration,” and, within the memo, see Annex II.
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<td>578</td>
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<td>493</td>
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Administration, Nyanza Province
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Department of Trade and Supplies
Department of Veterinary Services
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Ministry of Health
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Office of the Chief Secretary
Office of the President
Office of the Vice President

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Department of Education, Health and Land
Department of Indians Overseas

**The National Archive, U.K. (London)\(^{438}\)**
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Foreign Office

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Daly & Figgis Records
  Bankruptcy Cases
  Civil Cases
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\(^{437}\) Records from the East African Indian National Congress Papers consulted in this dissertation are available on microfilm at Syracuse University’s Bird Library, Special Collections Research Center.

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Zarwan, John Irving. *Indian Businessmen in Kenya during the Twentieth Century: A Case Study.* New Haven: Yale University Press, 197
Misha A. Mintz-Roth  
Johns Hopkins University, Department of History

Education

JOHNS HOPKINS UNIVERSITY, DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY  PhD, 2019

THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO, COMMITTEE ON INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS  MA, 2011

NORTHWESTERN UNIVERSITY  BA, 2006
- Completed Major in Mathematics, Minor in Business Administration, and Independent Study in Economics.
- Completed four semesters of Accelerated Mathematics and two semesters at Albert-Ludwig University (Germany).

Academic Publications


Academic Distinctions and Awards

- 2018-2019 Diamond Write-up Fellowship, Johns Hopkins University
- 2015-2016 IIE/USIEF Fulbright-Nehru Doctoral Research Fellowship
- 2014 Andrew W. Mellon Language Study Travel Award, John Hopkins University
- 2013 History Department Foreign Language Study Grant, Johns Hopkins University
- 2012-2015 Diamond Fellowship, Johns Hopkins University
- 2011-2012 Graduate Attachment Scheme, British Institute in Eastern Africa
- 2011 Alternate Finalist, U.S. David L. Boren Fellowship
- 2010-2011 Non-Endowed Scholarship, University of Chicago

Teaching Experience

COURSES IN AFRICAN HISTORY
2014 “Modern African History, c. 1850 to Present,” Teaching Assistant for Professor Pier Larson, Johns Hopkins University, Spring Semester.
2013 “African History to c. 1850,” Teaching Assistant for Professor Pier Larson, Johns Hopkins University, Fall Semester.

COURSES IN HISTORY
2016 “Japan in the World,” Teaching Assistant for Assistant Professor Yumi Kim, Johns Hopkins University, Fall Semester.
“U.S. History in the Age of Revolutions,” Teaching Assistant for Professor François Furstenberg, Johns Hopkins University, Fall Semester.

**Conference Presentations**


2016  Presentation: “Migrants and Mandals: Perspectives from Gujarati travel writing in colonial Kenya” at the South Asian Studies Association (SASA) 10th Annual Conference, TERI University (New Delhi), 19 March.


2013  Presentation: “Constructing Distinctions: ‘Indian’ traders, Gikuyu soldiers, and everyday exchange in the Kenyan Highlands, c. 1890-1920” at the John Gissander Symposium, Towson University, 19 April.


**Workshops and Seminars**

2018  Paper: “Traders, Farmers, and Officials: The ghee trade in Western Kenya during the interwar and post-War period,” Africa Seminar, Johns Hopkins University, 2 February.


2015  Paper: “‘We have a ‘Voice’ here’: Racial solidarity, public opinion, and urban development in Nairobi’s Indian bazaar, 1907-1914,” Africa Seminar, Johns Hopkins University, 30 January.


Guest Lectures

2015 “Cities on the Move: Urban transportation and the politics of mobility in sub-Saharan Africa,” Faculty of Planning, Center for Environmental and Planning Technology University (CEPT) (Ahmedabad), 19 April.

Journalism and Other Publications

2008  “Nagila in Nairobi: Experiences from Kenyan Jewish Life,” Shelanu (October)

Non-Academic Employment

FINANCIAL SECTOR DEEPENING TRUST OF KENYA (NAIROBI)  Consultant, 2012
• Researched mobile money usage in urban and rural Kenya and drafted concept and conference papers.
BRITISH INSTITUTE IN EASTERN AFRICA (NAIROBI)  Research Attaché, 2011-2012
• Researched newspaper satire in Kenya and legal education in Nkrumah’s Ghana for senior research fellows.
US SENATE COMMITTEE ON BANKING, HOUSING AND URBAN AFFAIRS (DC)  Legislative Aide, 2008-2010
• Assisted in drafting Chairman Chris Dodd’s (D-CT) federal legislation for financial regulatory reform, economic stabilization, US-Iran sanctions, and anti-money laundering programs targeting Sudan and Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC).
DYER AND BLAIR INVESTMENT BANK LIMITED (NAIROBI)  Consultant, 2007-2008
BEAR STEARNS ASSET MANAGEMENT (NEW YORK CITY)  Employee, 2006-2007
• Assisted hedge fund managers with an investment company’s initial public offering and daily credit market analysis.

Languages

Swahili  Reading (Advanced) and Speaking (Advanced)
German  Reading (Advanced) and Speaking (Advanced)
Hindi  Reading (Intermediate) and Speaking (Intermediate)
Gujarati  Reading (Intermediate) and Speaking (Intermediate)
Hebrew  Reading (Intermediate) and Speaking (Basic)
Spanish  Reading (Intermediate) and Speaking (Basic)