

'After shaking his hand, start counting your fingers'.

Trust and Images in Indian business networks, East Africa 1900-2000.

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## 1.0 Introduction

In this study we examine how 'ethnic' trading networks are created and re-created, but may also fracture and fall apart. This occurred among some Indian groups in East Africa, who initially strengthened their economic and cultural ties with India by intensive trade relations and taking brides from the homeland. However, after one generation, their economic focus was on East Africa, Japan and the UK. Many of today's well-off Indian businessmen in East Africa show little economic interest in India. On the contrary, Gujurati businessmen in East Africa created new, rather negative images of their counterparts in Gujurat. During the last century, the overall image of Indians in India was transformed from one of a 'reliable family or community members' to one of 'unreliable, corrupt and, untrustworthy 'others'.

In the literature on 'diasporas', there is a tendency to explain the economic success of Chinese, Indian or Jewish businessmen in terms of 'trust' based on ethnic background and trading networks. The major aim of a 'network' is the circulation of capital, credit, information, goods and produce, men and women. In general, an existing ethnic network does not trade inside information and does not exchange women with other networks. Nevertheless, trade, credit and information may be bought from other networks. In general, these networks are seen as a rather static informal organised system, which is instrumentally used by its various members. In general we assume that notions of the same religion, language, and regional background reinforce concepts of 'trust', mutual aid, and shared values

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among migrant traders and businessmen. Within these networks there is a strong emphasis on a hardworking ethic, the moral and economic support of each other, and the gift of a superior 'business mind'. In most literature the system itself is not questioned, but how the members of a business community take advantage from it. As a rule, this type of literature tends to emphasize 'success stories' of migrant business communities.<sup>2</sup>

This is particularly true of the literature on South Asians in East Africa where, the economic and political contributions of Indians to the East African countries account for many pages in this vast and growing literature. Nevertheless, this literature provides a poor explanation of the success of Indian business communities in East Africa. Most of the literature stresses the importance of hard work, long hours of labour, community support in setting up new businesses or in providing credit, and the so-called entrepreneurial skills of South Asian traders and industrialists in East Africa.<sup>3</sup> Recently, the long list of these often teleological explanations was extended with the 'diasporic' argument, in which the economic success of diasporic groups is seen to result from the mutual pooling of resources, the transfer of credit, the investment of capital, and the provision of services among family, extended kin, or members of the same group. The decisive argument within 'diaspora studies' seems to be the role of the 'motherland', which is often seen as an endless source for capital, labour and a reference for the maintenance of the ethnic identity.<sup>4</sup> In many definitions

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<sup>2</sup> J. Kotkin, *Tribes: How Race, Religion, and Identity Determine Success in the New Global Economy*, New York 1992. Recent studies on the 'success of the Indian diaspora' include: C. Dobbin, *Asian Entrepreneurial Minorities. Conjoint Communities in the making of the world-economy, 1570-1940*, Curzon 1996; In his recent study, Claude Markovits, makes a strong argument against these 'ethnic' notions of trust. He emphasises that local networks, whether ethnic or not, play a crucial role in determining the 'success' or 'failure' of business communities/groups. In his view, this is not the result of sharing secrets or specific business attitudes, but the fact that a 'good name', and reputation is easily gained or lost within these business networks. C. Markovits, *The Global World of Indian Merchants 1750-1947. Traders of Sind from Bukhara to Panama*, Cambridge 2000.

<sup>3</sup> R. Gregory, *India and East Africa: A History of Race Relations within the British Empire, 1890-1939*, Oxford 1971; R. Gregory, *South Asians in East Africa.. An Economic and Social History, 1890-1980*. R.R. Ramchandani, *Uganda Asians. The end of an Enterprise*, Bombay United Asians Publications, Bombay 1976; Boulder: Westview Press, 1993. C. Voigt-Graf, *Asian Communities in Tanzania. A Journey Through Past and Present*, Hamburg 1998.

<sup>4</sup> Steven Vertovec overvalues this argument in his otherwise interesting study: *The Hindu Diaspora. Comparative Patterns*, London Routledge 2000, p25. R. Cohen sees the relation with the homeland as

or descriptions of the concept of 'diaspora', the homeland, motherland, or heimat is considered to be of importance to the migrants in diaspora. The relationship with the motherland is described as a cultural bond experienced by almost all migrants. Many studies emphasize that the religious, cultural, and often economic orientation towards their country of origin plays an important role in the identity of migrants in a foreign country. As Clifford has put it, 'the language of diaspora is increasingly invoked by displaced peoples who feel (maintain, revive, invent) a connection with a prior home (...).'<sup>5</sup> Robin Cohen assumes 'a collective memory and myth about the homeland' and the 'development of a return movement' to be among the common features of a diaspora.<sup>6</sup> In this concept, diasporic notions are reinforced by institutions which endeavour to control everyday activities, like for example religious practices, the education of children, and the conclusion of marriages.<sup>7</sup> In this article, however, I found that the homeland is becoming less and less important for some Asian Africans as an economic source or a cultural point of reference. The images of the homeland may be important for many overseas migrants, but not for Hindu Lohanas in east Africa. In addition, this diaspora literature fails to see the shifting loyalties of kinship, caste, and community, and in particular, the shifting importance of the role of the native soil, or homeland

The Indian government also tends to overestimate the importance of the Indian 'diasporic feelings'. In its recently published Report of the High Level commission, it states that 'Since India achieved Independence, overseas Indians have been returning to seek for their roots and explore new avenues and sectors for mutual beneficial interaction from investment to transfer of economic skills and technology, to outright philanthropy and charitable work. This trend has become more marked in the last decade, as the Indian economy has opened up, giving rise to a

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an important key for identity questions of diasporic groups. R. Cohen, *Global Diasporas. An Introduction*, London 1997.

<sup>5</sup> J. Clifford, 'Diasporas.' *Cultural Anthropology* 9, 1994, p 310.

<sup>6</sup> R. Cohen, *Global Diasporas. An Introduction*, London 1997, p26. See for a critical review of this book: W. Safran, 'Comparing Diasporas: A Review essay,' *Diaspora* 8 (3), pp255-291.

<sup>7</sup> For a critical analyses of these concept, see: D. Schnapper, 'From the Nation-State to the Transnational World: On the Meaning and Usefulness of Diaspora as Concept,' *Diaspora* 8 (3), pp225-254.

new range of opportunities for emerging generations.’<sup>8</sup> This is, in fact, far from true and the consequence of whist full thinking. The main aim of the commission is to explore the possibilities of improving the relationship between India and ‘Persons of Indian Origin’ [PIO] and ‘Non Resident Indians overseas [NRI]’. This is, of course, the result of the disappointment of the Indian Government in the role played by PIOs and NRIs , so far.

In this article I investigated how ethnic networks are created, and re-created, but also how they fracture, split, or fall apart. I argue that there is a need to study ‘the importance of the motherland’ as a local ‘bottom-up’ process. Local, in the sense of a well defined geographical and historical area and ‘bottom-up’ in the sense that we choose to take the perspective of the ‘agent’, the one who creates, experiences and mythologises the motherland, or not. By taking this perspective we may gather a view of how the ‘motherland’ is defined by the *creators* of ethnic networks themselves. This may provide us with insights in the economic and cultural agenda of individuals as well as groups in a fast changing economic and cultural environment.

Below, I describe how the economic focus of Gujarati businessmen in East Africa changed from an orientation towards India to an orientation towards East Africa, Japan, the UK, Canada, and the US. Many well-off Indian businessmen in East Africa show little economic interest in India. The once favourable Indian counterparts in Gujarat have lost their place in the mind of Indians in East Africa. Gujarati businessmen in East Africa created new, rather negative images of their former partners in Gujarat. The overall image was transformed from one of ‘reliable family or community members’ to one of ‘unreliable, corrupt, and untrustworthy ‘others’’. Simultaneously, the image of India changed from that of ‘the beloved motherland’ to one of an ‘overcrowded, stinky and unorganised and underdeveloped country’.<sup>9</sup> Most significantly, the growing preference of Gujarati businessmen for marrying Gujarati women, who were raised in East Africa and, at the same time, an increasing economic orientation towards the West cut off the economic and kinship bond with India.

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<sup>8</sup> The Indian High Level Commission, Report on the Indian Diaspora, 2000.

<sup>9</sup> In this article, we use the terms ‘South Asian’ and ‘Indians’ as synonyms. Formally, it would be more correct to use ‘South Asians’, because South Asia was split into India and West and East Pakistan in 1947. Nevertheless, colonial sources refer to ‘India’ and ‘Indians’ and many ‘South Asians’ in East Africa refer to themselves as Indians, or recall that they went to ‘Indian’ schools.

The transformation of images and notions of trust within the Gujarati business network has to be seen within the broader perspective of social, economic, and political change. The growth of the Indian settlement in East Africa was strongly related to the British Empire. Following the Independence of India (1947) and of the East African countries (1960-61) South- Asians had to made up their minds and 'choose' to where they 'belonged'. In fact, by then they had already made up their mind and tended to focus on the West, especially the UK. Most argued that they had no emotional (family) or economic bonds with India. 'We had nothing there, Bwana, no family, no business, no nothing. We have stayed here for ages, this is our home,' an informant stated. This may be true for many, however, they had hardly more business or family relations with the UK or the West. In other words, the change of orientation from India to the West was made instrumentally. And the emergence of negative images of India and towards Indian businessmen in India has to be seen within this framework.

This research was based on the life histories of twenty Hindu Lohana families who have lived in East Africa for three or more generations.<sup>10</sup> The results of this research are particularly accurate for those families who settled between the 1880s and the 1920s in East Africa.<sup>11</sup> Most interviews were conducted in Dar es Salaam, the Coastal Region, and Nairobi. The focus is on two interrelated successful Gujarati business families who made their wealth in East Africa, the Hindu Lohana families of Sunderji Nanji Damordas and Keshavji Anandji.<sup>12</sup> Within these two families there

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<sup>10</sup> These families include more than 200 people of whom 78 were interviewed between 1999 and 2003. Extended fieldwork and archival research took place from June 2002 to July 2003. Information on occupation, knowledge of languages, and, for example nationality is available for almost all the family members. Seven or eight key informants were interviewed three or four times or more often. In addition informal meetings, dinner parties and celebrations of holidays were attended by the researcher.

<sup>11</sup> Those who settled after the 1930s tend to have stronger emotional and physical relation with India. This however doesn't mean that they produce a more positive image.

<sup>12</sup> Hindu Lohanas in East Africa come from the rural districts of Cutch and Kathiawar (Gujarat, West India). They were traditionally laborers, masons, husbandmen, shopkeepers and traders. Their history is related to that of one of the Kshatria (warrior) castes, which in ancient times was called Lavan. The plural form of this was Lavanam and, over a period of time it changed first to Lavana and finally to Lohana. In the nineteenth century, many turned to weaving and textile trading. Those in Kathiawar were especially well established as maritime traders and many were doing business in Oman. When

emerges a remarkable change regarding their social and economic relations with India. India used to be the most important economic business partner and supplier of brides to the male members of these families, whereas after Indian Independence India had become economically insignificant for these families, while at the same time they developed a preference for Indian women who were raised in East Africa.<sup>13</sup> As the presented picture is representative of the Hindu Lohana business community in East Africa as a whole, it is by no means the definite picture of the South Asians in East Africa.<sup>14</sup> Especially, the Muslims (including, Ithnasheries, and Khojas Ismailis) have followed a different pattern which is beyond the scope of this article.

The argument in this article is built on four sections. First, we introduce the general migration history of Indians in East Africa. In this section the main focus will be on the absence of Hindu women in East-Africa. This is followed in the second section of the life histories of early Lohana migrants who settled in East Africa between 1880 and 1920. Here, the main aim is to show how Indian families literally lived in two worlds; India and Africa. This, however, changed in the period after the 1920s, when more and more Indian businessmen settled with their wives and families, the theme of the third section. In the period between 1920 and 1960 we see a shift in economic and social orientation of Hindu Lohanas from India to Africa and the UK. In the fourth and concluding section we provide some possible explanation for this shift and the changing attitude of Hindu businessmen in East Africa towards their counterparts in India.

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the Sultan of Oman moved his headquarters from Musquat to Zanzibar (1832), Lohana traders quickly followed him and set up shops there. From there they spread to the mainland from 1885 onwards.

<sup>13</sup> The focus on (Lohana) Hindus is a consequence of my personal network of Asian businessmen. Nevertheless, they form the majority of Hindus in East Africa. See Robert G. Gregory, *Quest for equality. Asian Politics in East Africa, 1900-1967*, New Delhi 1993, pp 13. It was estimated that, in 1995, there were 3,000 Lohana Hindus among 10,000 other Hindus in Tanzania. Among the other Hindu communities were Bhatias, Patels, Vantias, Brahmins and 'others'. None of these other Hindu jatis had more than 800 people each. In addition, the number of South Asian Muslims was estimated at 26,000 in 1995. See, C. Voigt-Graf, *Asian Communities in Tanzania. A Journey Through Past and Present Times*, Hamburg 1998, p53.

<sup>14</sup> Those businessmen who are active around Hindu (Lohana) temple activities tend to relate stronger to India. Nevertheless, they as well diminished their business activities with India tremendously.

### **(1) Migration and Settling of Indians in East Africa.**

In the nineteenth century trade between South Asia and East Africa was constrained by the rhythm of the monsoons. The well known beautiful dhows sailed from November to March from West India to East Africa, and from April to October the returned journey fare was made. The trade in cotton textiles, ivory, and spices was profitable, but dangerous. Many traders did not return home safely. The rough sea, pirates, and various diseases took the lives of many traders and early adventurers.

It was only in the late nineteenth century that some Indian traders started to settle in Zanzibar and the East African Coast. These early Indian settlers are nowadays seen as the pioneers of many South Asian family business houses in East Africa, such as that of Nanji Damordas, who came at the age of ten, accompanied by his father, to look after some business in Zanzibar. Most of these early migrants were asked to join the flourishing family businesses or to assist in the businesses of community members. Initially, they travelled back and forth to India, but slowly they settled in East Africa and invited their brothers and sisters, wives and children to settle with them.

The general migration history of Asian East Africans is well documented. Long before East Africa was 'discovered' by Europeans, Zanzibar and the East African Coast were well-known trading destinations for Arabs and South Asians. The trading relations were strengthened during the establishment of the British empire in East Africa. In the period between 1880 and 1920, the number of South Asians in East Africa grew from about 6,000 to 54,000. These included Hindus (among them well-known business communities like Patels, Lohanas, and Shahs), Muslims ( especially Ithnasheries, Bohras, Ismailis), Sikhs, Goans, and others.<sup>15</sup>

The various Asian business communities that arrived in the late nineteenth century developed far more intimate social and economic relationships with each other than they did in India. These linkages resulted in new business habits, marriage policies, and forms of capital accumulation . Their shared knowledge of the Gujurati language and their minority status (never more than 2 per cent of the total population in

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<sup>15</sup> R.Gregory, *South Asians in East Africa.. An Economic and Social History, 1890-1980*. Boulder: Westview Press, 1993; R. Gregory, *Quest for Equality. Asian Politics in East Africa, 1900 - 1967*.

East Africa, somewhat higher in the main trading ports) in a new society played an important role in this process. Despite the development of intimate social economic links, intercaste marriages and marriages between Hindus and Muslims were still uncommon.<sup>16</sup>

The Muslims settled earlier with their families than Hindus owing to the Hindu taboo on travel overseas.<sup>17</sup> Upper-caste Hindu men considered Africa to be "alien" and "unsafe" for women, and believed that women would be better cared for if they stayed behind in their own extended households in India. Owing to economic and social uncertainty in East Africa, most Hindu women often remained behind in India to look after their parents-in-law, children, and property, and to take care of their children's education.<sup>18</sup> The unmarried Hindu men generally went back to India to marry, and their wives stayed behind from the beginning with the men making frequent trips back and forth. Otherwise, the women came to the East African Coast for a few years, returning to India for childbirth, where they generally remained for 10 to 20 years until their children finished their education.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Literature on this subject includes, Robert G. Gregory, *India and East Africa. A History of Race Relations within the British Empire, 1890-1939*, Clarendon Press, Oxford 1971; M. Mamdani, *From citizen to refugee: Uganda Asians come to Britain*. R.R. Ramchandani, *Uganda Asians. The end of an Enterprise*, Bombay United Asians Publications, Bombay 1976. H. Tinker, *Separate and Unequal. India and the Indians in the British Commonwealth 1920 - 1950*. St. Lucia: University of Queensland Press 1976; H. Tinker, *The Banyan Tree*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977.

<sup>17</sup> According to the 1887 census, there were 4866 Muslims and 1022 Hindus/Jains in Zanzibar

<sup>18</sup> Diverging concepts of purity and impurity made it rare for Hindu merchants to take their wives out of India, while Muslim merchants generally travelled with their families, especially to Muslim lands. Little is known about the Hindu taboo on crossing the seas. There is evidence that Hindus have been crossing the seas without compunction for many centuries, but the kind of ritual penances which had to be performed on their return is obscure. In some communities, such as that of the Gujarati Vantias of Porbandar during Gandhi's time, we know that these rituals took place, but on other communities we lack information. One hypothesis which seems plausible, however, is that the generalized taboo on the voyage of women represented a kind of substitution. The fact that the woman of the household did not travel beyond the seas seems to have been sufficient to ensure the continuing purity of the household. However, questions remain about what happened when Hindus decided to take their wives and children to East Africa. Claude Markovits, *The Global World of Indian Merchants, 1750-1947. Traders of Sind from Bukhara to Panama*. Cambridge University Press 2000, pp27). See for the fact that the burden of maintaining religious and caste "purity" fell largely on Hindu women, R. Nagar.....

<sup>19</sup> The interrelation between social ties and business is clearly seen from various family histories. The eminent Mohammedan firm of the Karimjis was established in Zanzibar in the early

The sultan of Zanzibar, Seyyid Bargash, must have been aware of this as he encouraged Hindus to bring their wives to Zanzibar. He sent his private vessel to welcome the first Hindu woman in Zanzibar and gave her a reward of Shs 250/-. In addition, he promised to turn Zanzibar's Old Fort into a residence for the wives of merchants and offered to equip it with water pipes fitted with silver taps to ensure that Hindu women need never appear in public.<sup>20</sup> At the same time, the Hindu community in Gujrat revolted successfully against Brahmin priests and religious customs which were cramping their mercantile activities and making commerce overseas difficult.<sup>21</sup> All these activities paved the way for Hindu migrants and settlers in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. A new (in fact very old) world was to be discovered.

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1800's as general importers and export merchants. The founding father of the Karimji family was Mr. Jivanji Buddhaby. He had three sons: Mr. Pirbhoy Jivanjee; Mr. Karimji Jivanji and, Mr Esmailji Jivanji. They carried on their father's business under the name of Mr. Pirbhai Jivanji till 1861. By then the brothers separated. Mr. Karimji Jivanji started his own business while the other two brothers worked jointly. Karimji Jivanji was followed by Alibhai Karimji Jivanji. In the late 1800s he went to India for the marriage of his only son, Alibhai. As he had separated from the family business and because of the considerable sum he had to pay towards the marriage he invested in buying goods in India to bring them to Zanzibar to trade. The sailing ship in which he was returning on the way to Zanzibar after the marriage of his son met with a storm on the way and the whole cargo had to be jettisoned. Mr. Karimji Jivanji thus landed on the Zanzibar shores with his investments lost, no capital of his own and debt to others. Source: family archive.

<sup>20</sup> Contemporary sources on the position (and absence) of Hindu Women in East Africa include: Richard Burton, *Zanzibar: City Island and Coast* vol 1 London 1872, pp329-35; F.B. Pearce, *Zanzibar, The Island Metropolis of Eastern Africa*, (Frank Cass 1967) 1920, 257. See also: M. Honey, *A History of Indian Merchant Capital*, Unpublished Ph-D thesis, Dar es Salaam 1982, p74.

<sup>21</sup> A. Sheriff, *The Rise of a Commercial Empire*, Unpublished Ph-D thesis, London 1971, p354.

## (2) Marriage, money and markets, 1880-1920.

The migration history of Sunderjibhai follows the pattern of the well-known migration history of Hindu Lohanas in East Africa. At the age of ten, he arrived together with his father, Nanjibhai Damordar, in Zanzibar in 1916. They were asked to look after a shop of a relative, Kesawji Dewanji, whose sons didn't want to settle in East Africa and returned to India.<sup>22</sup> At an earlier stage, one of his younger sisters had already married a Lohana Indian (same jati) in Uganda.<sup>23</sup> He traded in 'everything where money could be made'.

At the beginning of the twentieth century the main goods in which South Asians traded, included textiles, garments, ivory, gold, and foodstuffs such as maize, beans, and grains. Textiles and garments were imported from India, whereas ivory and gold were sold in India. Most foodstuffs were bought and sold locally. In addition, some more well-off families were involved in a form of banking. Most goods sold to (mainly Indian and Arab) traders upcountry were sold on a credit of 90 or 120 days, with an interest of between six to nine per cent. Thus, the profits of these traders included a profit on sales as well as a profit on the advancement of money. Some bigger families exchanged 'hundis' (bills of exchange) with traders in Bombay, Zanzibar, Muscat and Dar es Salaam.<sup>24</sup> This is often seen as an early and sophisticated way of banking. Keshavji Anandi [99 years, Hindu Lohana], the grand old man of the Anandji family recalled:

My grandfather had all kind of connections with Bombay, Porbandar and Muscat. In Porbandar we had some relatives who looked after the interest of my grandfather. In the same way, he had

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<sup>22</sup> We actually know very little about those families who went back to India. If we assume that the reasons are, business failure, bad management or the like, we also may assume that this may be the reasons why stories of those who settled in East Africa have become (mainly) success stories.

<sup>23</sup> Child marriages were quite common in those days. This marriage also shows that the chain migration had many of side-effects. Not only did Sunderji's father have friends who went overseas, he also married one of his daughters to an Indian man who lived overseas.

<sup>24</sup> There is still very little known of the importance and functions of 'hundis'. The most detailed information, related to the notion of trust among Chettiars in South India can be found in: D. Rudner, 'Banker's Trust and the Culture of Banking among the Nattukottai Chettiars of Colonial South India,' *Modern Asian Studies* 1989, 23 (3), 417-458.

his brother-in-law in Bombay, who looked after the family business interest at that place. Now, whoever cashed the Hundi in say Dar es Salaam, they could travel to Bombay or Porbandar and got the money there and then. Within the family trust we would arrange the balances. That went on for a long time. In fact we made a lot of money on the commission of writing and cashing hundis next to our trading activities.<sup>25</sup>

What is important here is that the family business was represented by family members in various cities in various parts of the world. These networks existed because of the active communal relations and marriage patterns. Some family members had migrated to East Africa, whereas others did not leave India and looked after the 'Indian' part of the business interest, including real estate property and land. The family and community relations were reinforced by the activities of traders and messengers who often in the name of the family eldest made a trip once a year to be informed about the family business. However, many Hindu Lohana in East-Africa, after being settled with their wives, were very reluctant to make the journey to India once more.

In these days, some migrants visited India 'when it was really necessary', for example to attend marriages or funerals or because of the immediate health problems of family members. Many of my elderly informants in East Africa do not recall their fathers and grandfathers visiting India often, except for the following reasons: to find a suitable bride; to get medical treatment and to retire and to have a peaceful life back home and 'have his ashes scattered above the Ganges.'<sup>26</sup> Most elderly Hindu migrants recalled: 'We seldom went back, but we had good business relations with India'. This means that the typical Indian family networks emerged,

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<sup>25</sup> Interview Dar es Salaam, 2003. This oral evidence is supported by Sommerset Playn's business directory of 1909. Here we find, e.g. the family of Lalchund Moolchund who has business branches in Zanzibar, Mobassa, Dar es Salaam, Bombay and Hyderabad. The father lives in Hyderabad and the son looks after the East African branches. Playne, 113.

<sup>26</sup> Martha Honey stated in her unpublished Ph-D that: 'India was, therefore, primarily important as a source of business connections, rather than a source of capital. India served as a reservoir for new recruits for East African firms and as network of business contacts which could be utilized by the East African traders.' Honey, *ibid*, p63.

which supported the international trade relations between South Asia and East Africa. In this network the business is ideally centred around the family eldest and/or his brothers. The business activities are usually separated among the sons. The profits of the family are usually ploughed back into the family and each male member gets his share of the family profits.

Nevertheless, the family structure of Indians in East Africa changed from 'joint family' to a 'nuclear family'. Because of the overseas business connections it was impossible to live under one roof. Therefore, the traditional business-structure where the family-income was to be divided among the male members had to be altered. The ideal of a joint patrilinear family business was not supported by 'Hindu law' in East Africa. In the Mithakshara school of Hindu law, which applies in Gujrat, all agnatically related males born into the family have an equal undivided share in the family business, which is mostly headed by the family eldest. In East Africa, therefore, the only accepted basis for the division of property was by legally registered shares in a partnership or company. As a result, the familiar 'sharing' of business amongst the brothers and their (grand) father remained an Indian sentiment and was replaced by more individual forms of ownership. In addition, the Indian family members in Africa started to do some business on their own account.<sup>27</sup>

At the same time, successful Lohana business families builded typical 'extended family' houses in order to reproduce Indian culture as much as they could. Though these houses were meant for the extended families to live in, most of them spreaded around East-Africa and developed more nuclear units.<sup>28</sup> However, those pioneers who decided to stay in East Africa rather than retire in Gujrat, did everything to reproduce their 'Gujurati culture' in their homes in East Africa. In the case of Sunderjibhai, this consisted of a typical extended family house in Mombassa. In his house there is a large living room with colonial furniture and a traditional Gujurati rocking couch (which can still be seen in many Gujurati houses in East Africa). The portraits of his parents have a prominent place and are decorated with

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<sup>27</sup> H.S. Morris, 'The Indian Family in Uganda,' *American Anthropologist* 61 1959, pp779-789.

Interview...

<sup>28</sup> One family which I met in Nairobi decided to live under one roof again after being separated in East-Africa for some twenty years. This shows, that there is no 'natural' tendency towards a more nuclear family.

fresh flowers. Except for some small traditional African art, the living room exudes the air of Gujarat.

Next to the living room is the kitchen. The house is a typical one-kitchen house, where the extended family lives and shared their meals. There are various compartments where couples with their children have their bedrooms. The living room and kitchen, however, are shared with the whole family. There is no table in the kitchen, which means that the woman sit on the floor while cleaning the vegetables, cutting the fruits, and preparing the meals. They are assisted by a Gujarati Brahmin (woman) cook.<sup>29</sup> Next to the kitchen is the dining room where there is a big family table where the meals are shared. We have to take off our shoes before entering the dining room. Men and women eat separately. In this house neither liquor nor meat is consumed. This family has maintained their Gujarati tradition of being vegetarians and non-drinkers. Sunderji wears his traditional Nehru (Hindu) cap and dhoti or pyama with pride.<sup>30</sup>

Within the process of migration and the re-enforcement of Gujarati culture in East Africa the idea of the joint family relation remained important. The Mombasa business of Sunderji and his father, for example, flourished as they made use of the advantages of running an informally organised family business. Not only did they use their family network in Zanzibar and India, but they also outplayed colonial law. In the nineteen twenties a person was not allowed to be both a broker and a trader. So, Nanjibhai applied for the broker license, while his son Sunderji acquired the trading license. In this way, the family was able to provide both services to their clients. By law, these firms were separated.

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<sup>29</sup> This reflects a typical Indian tradition where there used to be a strong notion of purity and impurity in relation to food and the acceptance of food from others. One cannot accept food from everyone. The food restrictions is not so strong observed in East-Africa, but even so, it is Brahmins who operate the many vegetarian restaurants and sweet shops.

<sup>30</sup> Some remarkable differences with the South Asian Muslim communities in East Africa occur. Most of them had settled earlier and with their families. They did not leave any property behind in India and they were not inclined to invest in their homeland (build a house to spend retirement) in order to have a nice retirement. 'We have nothing there, bwana, no family, no friends, no business, nothing, this is our country, here we lived our lives and here we will die,' as one Ithnasherie informant puts it. The fact that South Asian Muslims in East Africa feel that they have no physical relationship with West India is strengthened by the Partition of India and Pakistan in 1947, when many Indian Muslims migrated to Pakistan.

In short, the first generation Indian businessmen was born in India and maintained a strong economic and social bond with India. They took their wives from India; they had property and business there and they chose to retire in Gujurat or to reproduce their 'Indian' style in East Africa, like Nanji Damordar did. Though Indians in East Africa did not visit India very often, their homeland was still an important point of reference. It is interesting to note that the cultural and charitable relations with India were not necessarily explored within the joint family but along community ties. The heads of nuclear families tried to improve their status by charity. Some Indian pioneers in East Africa made generous charity contributions to the Indian villages they came from. The Anandji family built a hospital, the family of Damordas built a small school and house for orphanages and the well known Madhvani en Mehta families contributed to similar projects. These examples show that India was still in the heart of these businessmen, even when they were not able to visit India themselves.

### **(3) Marriage, money and markets: 1920-1960.**

In the second period two major changes occurred. First, there was the emergence of a preference for marrying Hindu woman raised in East Africa, instead of Lohana women raised in India. Consequently, caste boundaries were crossed in finding partners. The fact that Hindus allowed the constraints of caste boundaries to be broken illustrates the change which took place as the Indian community became socially more oriented towards East Africa. To be more precise: they were more oriented towards Indians in East Africa. Initially, however, the demand for (Lohana) Hindu women from India was still great as there were twice as much Hindu men as Hindu women in East Africa.<sup>31</sup>

Second, India became less important as the business partner of the Indian settlers in East Africa. They tended to focus more on East Africa, the UK, and Japan. India lost the international competition in the textile industry to Japan and, to a lesser extent to Europe. Its general market share in East Africa diminished dramatically and it became less important as a major export destination.<sup>32</sup> This was the result of two major economic developments. India lost its economic momentum to become a major industrial nation, whereas East Africa started its initial promising steps towards industrialization, in which Indians played an important role.<sup>33</sup> East Africa tried to produce its own textiles.

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<sup>31</sup> The Tanganyika Census of 1931 counted 5,162 Hindu men and 2,600 Hindu woman: Report on the Non-native census, 26 April 1931, p38. Note that the issue here was not where the people were born. In fact many of these men and women were born in India as it was the practice of Hindu women to have the delivery of their babies –whenever possible- at their mothers' places. Often, this was in Gujurat, India. After the delivery mother and child would go back to East Africa, where the child was raised.

<sup>32</sup> The imports from India in East-Africa rose from 679(1901) to 2.313 x £1000, (1921) after which it declined to 658 (x 1000BP) in 1938. In the same period, the exports from East Africa to India grew from 136 to 3,500 x £1000 (1900-1938). Despite of this, the 'old Indian migrants' have been more involved in exports to the UK which showed the same growth in this period. Imports from Japan were insignificant in 1900-1910, and rose from 171 to 1,763 x £1000 in the period 1920-1938. See R.G. Gregory, *South Asians in Africa. An Economic and Social Survey, 1890-1980*. Westview Press, 1993, p51.

<sup>33</sup> The causes of India's economic decline are part of a long dispute among Marxist, Nationalist and European scholars. A few excellent studies are: A.K. Bagchi, *Private Investment in India, 1900-1939*, Oxford 1972 and, more recently, Debdas Bannerjee, *Colonialism in Action: Trade Development and*

At the same time, a growing number of Asians in East Africa were educated in so called 'Indian schools' in East Africa, where teaching up to fourth standard was in Gujarati and after that in English.<sup>34</sup> Therefore, a growing number of Asian East Africans were fluent in Gujarati as well as in the English language. For them, the step towards further education in the UK was relatively small. A number of well-off students attended colleges and universities in the UK. This meant that they developed a strong sense of the English language and the European culture, while remaining 'Indian' in outlook and religion. Ultimately, this shift towards the West is reflected in the images these businessmen developed about business men in India.

Bharat is a typical example of a Hindu Lohana who did not marry within the Lohana community. He was born in Dar es Salaam and studied in the UK. He then fell in love with a Patel woman and proposed to her. He was the first male member of his family to break the Lohana chain, i.e., to marry outside the Lohana community.<sup>35</sup> He explained his preference for a 'local raised Indian woman' in terms of her knowledge and experience of the East African way of life. This included general attitudes; such as the 'slow pace of life', and knowledge of the Swahili language, of how to train African servants, and of how to cook Gujarati food, which by then had already changed in East Africa. It was less spicy, milder, sometimes with coconut milk, and the use of Ghee was declining. In his view, it was better to marry outside the community than within the community with a Lohana raised in India, who 'would not know nothing about Africa'.

Nevertheless, it was not an easy task for the young man to convince his father that he wanted to marry outside the caste.

It took me a year to convince my father. Though, I have to admit that he was pretty cool about it. In the sense that, of course he told me that I was the first one of the male heritage of Nanji Damodar, to be breaking this particular

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*Dependence in Late Colonial India*, Sangam books London 2000. For the role of Indians in the Industrialization Process in East Africa, see M. Honey, 'Asian Industrial Activities in Tanganyika,' in *Tanzania Notes and Records*, 1974 (74), pp55-69 and Himbara...

<sup>34</sup> 'We lost our gift of expression'. Loss of the mother tongue among Indians in East Africa, 1880-2000.

<sup>35</sup> Two of his elder sisters had already married outside the community, and that they married within the Hindu community was considered 'good enough'.

tradition. I said, but to me an Indian is an Indian. I must say, there was some resistance more from some of my brothers. They are more traditional I would say. My father was pretty open-minded to this. Once you talk with him, even to the extent of accepting marrying an non-Indian or a Muslim person. My youngest brother is married to a Muslim person. So he accepted this.<sup>36</sup>

What was the argument that convinced him?

Well basically I said, give me one reason, besides the argument that I am breaking any particular traditional pattern, that I should not marry this woman. If I was to marry another Indian then I can understand. But there is no change in the religion, there is no change in the tradition even. We both speak Gujarati. I can understand, I can accept his argument, if it was a different religion, different race, then fine, then you have to think about what happens to the offspring. But he was not able to give such argument. I think he finally he saw my point of view without admitting. But we had various discussions about this thing.<sup>37</sup>

In spite of his argument, something did happen to his offspring. His two daughters do not consider themselves Lohanas (born of a Patel), but Hindus. At the same time, the perceptions of his elder brothers didn't change. Some still wanted to see their own children marry within the same caste. Bharat: 'However, I don't think their children will face the same resistance as I had. So if they show up with another Hindu, this would be 'acceptable.'

Thus, some of the male members of the family developed a preference for Hindu females raised in East Africa-raised, even when this meant marrying outside their caste.<sup>38</sup> The main explanation given for this was that they knew 'East African culture'. This preference for Indian woman raised in East Africa, ultimately led to the

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<sup>36</sup> Bharat in Dar es Salaam 1999.

<sup>37</sup> Bharat in Dar es Salaam 1999.

<sup>38</sup> Note that the issue here is not where the woman is born. In many occasions she might be born in India as it was the practice of Hindu women to have the delivery of the babies –whenever possible- at their mothers place. Often this was in Gujarat, India. After delivery mother and child would go back to East Africa where the child was raised.

deteriorating social and family relations with India. India became less and less important for a source for finding marriage partners. This was especially true for those families who migrated before the beginning of the twentieth century. They lost their family ties with people India and, therefore, the urge to visit India for family reasons.

Not only the demand for Indian woman raised in India was declining, some offspring of pioneer families mentioned a remarkable change in the quality of products coming from India. In general, most agreed that the quality of Indian produce deteriorated, especially after the second World War. This process of deterioration started in the 1930s. It is especially well illustrated by the case of textiles. Khangas, shirts, saris, and cloth which used to be imported from India, but from the 1930s onwards, the Japanese textile producers had taken over the East African market. Most of the informants recalled that the Japanese were able to offer better quality textiles at a cheaper rate. Their products were better finished, dyed, and manufactured than products from India. In addition, it was said that the Japanese were 'very ambitious', whereas the Indian industrialist had become too 'arrogant and unreliable'.

The above mentioned firm of Keshavji Anandi closed its (Indian) Porbandar firm around 1935. From that moment, the business bond with India was broken. This coincided with the opening of Keshavji Anandi's trading firm in Japan. In the words of one of the offspring's:

In Mombassa we imported textiles from India in the late thirties. Now, in the late thirties there was a man who was employed in our firm. This man was very ambitious and very enterprising. He said, you are a good company and you deal with Japan, why don't you let me to open an office there and buy locally and export to East-Africa, because we know exactly what is required here. So it was in the middle of thirties that a company in Japan was opened in the name of Devani & Company. And he bought goods from manufactures and exported them here, to Mombassa and Dar es Salaam. Now again, there was also a partnership firm in the name of Devani brothers in Dar es Salaam. They dealt with retail business also. So there were three main companies importing from Japan. The family company from Mombassa, the family company from

Dar es Salaam, and Devani & Co in Japan. Japan was prospering during the War, but the office was taken over as a 'enemy property' in the War.<sup>39</sup>

Indian East African firms went to Japan and the Japanese were ambitious enough to have at least three trading companies in Mombasa and Dar es Salaam: Japan Cotton Trading Company, Washo kibushik Kaisja, and Tokio Kibushik Kaisja.<sup>40</sup>

The gradual economic separation with India was a consequence of the cutting of social ties evidenced by the growing preference for marrying Indian women raised in East Africa and the deterioration of the economic relations.<sup>41</sup> Nevertheless, statistics reveal no dramatic decline in the figures for imports and exports figures with India. On the contrary, my general impression is that India remained the second largest exporter –next to the UK- to East Africa.<sup>42</sup> Confronted with this evidence, many second-generation Indians in East Africa replied that these trade activities were conducted by 'new Indian migrants', especially those who came after the Second World War.<sup>43</sup>

The second generation Indians in East Africa started to focus on new ventures in the UK. In my view it is not surprising that Asian businessmen in East Africa developed a new image of India and businessmen in India in this period. Without exception, informants spoke negatively of India, and in one way or the other, they legitimised the fact that Asian East Africans do not want to do business with India.

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<sup>39</sup> Manilal Devani in Dar es Salaam 2002.

<sup>40</sup> Nanji Damordar in Mombasa 1999. The issue of the Japanese Competition is also discussed in the annual reports of the Bombay Millowners Association. The Indian millowners were especially concerned about the China market and to a lesser extent the East African market.

<sup>41</sup> In the Tanganyika National Archives we found an earlier record of an Indian family which requested to be repatriated to Zanzibar: 'The reason why these people wish for repatriation to Zanzibar instead of India is that their family has been domiciled in Zanzibar for two generations and they have entirely lost touch with India. (...)'TNA, Access nr 7, 40/7, 1919 21.

<sup>42</sup> See various blue books 1906-1960, which include a rich variety on statistical material related to import and export size on various products. As well Gregory, *ibid*, p51.

<sup>43</sup> It was not only Hindus who decided to focus on East-Africa more and more. From the personal archives of some of my Muslim informants it became clear that had written several requests to the Indian Government to allow collaborate with the transfer of property [land and real estate] from India to East Africa, in order to re-invest this there. Obviously, the separation of India and Pakistan in 1947 may well have accelerated the process of untying with India for Muslims.

They don't want to retire or settle there and, they do not trust an Indian from India.<sup>44</sup> Many of these views are the consequence of experiences. For example, as one informant stated,

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

In a second interview, he added,

You see, my parents and grandparents had family members in India. So, we knew there was someone to rely on. Someone who took care of the 'Indian' side of the business, but now Bwana, we have no-one there. Who can you trust if you have no-one there?<sup>45</sup>

The coincidence of the deterioration of the economic position of India and the social orientation (in terms of family and marriage patterns) towards East Africa reinforced the idea that the 'Gujurati Community' in East Africa was different from the Gujurati community in India. This is in sharp contrast with the previous period during which Indian imports in East Africa were still important, and most Indian families in East Africa had some family members to look after their businesses overseas.

Despite the fact that family and community ties with West-India were weakening, some Indian Africans continued to deal with businessmen in India. But

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<sup>44</sup> These negative images occurred with some hesitation. In my introduction to this research I told many informants of my earlier research in Gujarat. Nevertheless, from that point informants tried to convince me that Indians in East Africa were more 'modern' and educated.

<sup>45</sup> Anonymous informant in Dar es Salaam 2002. This is not to say that family members are per definition reliable. This informant was cheated by two of his half-brothers and lost a huge part of his business in the early 1980s. H.S Morris noted in the late nineteen fifties that the Indian African said: 'Do not go into partnership with your brother. He is sure to cheat you.' H.S. Morris, 'The Indian family in Uganda,' *American Anthropologist*, 61 1959, p785.

over the years they realized that 'something' had changed. A Gujarati from India was not the same as a Gujarati from East Africa anymore. Eventually this became the difference between chalk and cheese.

One other informant, Bharat, told us that,

I am more comfortable to do business with a Gujarati from East Africa than a Gujarati in India. Especially when we talk on the phone. As a rule, I would take someone's word for it. Normally eight out of ten times this doesn't go wrong, nevertheless with Gujaratis in India eight out of ten times this goes wrong. (...) For example, we dealt with various business houses in India and also with houses owned by Gujaratis. There was one case in which there were certain deals which could not be documented, and basically we had a verbal agreement. And in the end there was a difference on what we agreed to. This would not happen with most of the Gujaratis from East Africa. There would be unwritten unspoken understanding of mutual trust.<sup>46</sup>

Bharat felt that Gujaratis from East Africa were more civilized, more reliable, and more exposed to modern life. In his view, this was a consequence of the higher standard of education East African Gujaratis enjoyed in East Africa and the UK. He experienced more transparency among Indian East Africans than with Gujaratis from India during the various rounds of consultations before finalising a deal. Of course, there may be other reasons for this which have nothing to do with education. However, in the interviews differences in education were mentioned by many often together with 'civilisation', as a main cause of difference. See for example the following:

You see, they don't know how to speak properly. They, in India, are crude, more rough than we are. When our parents arrived in East Africa, we were with the British, we were educated by them. So we learned how to speak, how to dress. This is lacking there, especially in the villages.

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<sup>46</sup> Bharat in Dar es Salaam 2003.

Next to the role of education and the exposure to a more 'western lifestyle', another argument arose. In India, there is more competition, so Indian businessmen are more competitive than their Indian African counterparts; they are sharper and faster in their dealings. Eventually, this led to a 'lot of mistrust' towards Indians from India in the Indian East African community.

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

As can be seen from the above, the second-generation Indians show a remarkable change in their perceptions of Gujaratis in India. They constructed an image of a dissimilar overseas community, which in their view is no longer a part of their own community. Gujaratis in India are seen as 'untrustworthy', 'unreliable' and 'uncivilised'. At the same time they present a 'western' lifestyle. This is reflected in their 'suit and tie' western dress, written business agreements in English, and the discontinuation of the practice of reading Gujarati newspapers and magazines. Bharat, for example, hasn't subscribed to any of the Gujarati newspapers or magazines. His English was fluent and he kept his business correspondence in English. However, sometimes, when he wrote to his father, he made the effort to formulate at least a few sentences in Gujarati. With other Gujarati businessmen of his generation he spoke Gujarati, sometimes mixed with a few English words. At home, he spoke Gujarati with his wife and children; while his wife will answer him in Gujarati, his children might answer in English. India has become a foreign nation to them. Indeed, they visited India only once, as tourists.

Conclusion.

The literature on diasporas tends to highlight the importance of the motherland. This is seen as the migrant's umbilical cord with their homeland. It seems to be unthinkable that migrants would cut off this relationship, but this is exactly what happened in the case of Hindu Lohanas in East Africa. Initially, India

was primarily important as a source of business connections and served as a pool for new recruits for East African firms. In addition it was an important reservoir for marriage partners, which served as an important notion of purity within the Indian network. Nevertheless, the Indian subcontinent changed from the beloved 'mother' into an alien other. In this article I have shown that Indian Africans do not trust Gujarati businessmen from Gujarat. They are seen as 'unreliable', 'uncivilized' and 'untrustworthy'. This change in image can be explained by two interrelated causes: on the one hand, Gujaratis in East Africa developed a preference for Indian marriage partners raised in East Africa, who know 'their culture'. At the same time, their interest in doing business with India diminished. They were educated in East Africa and Europe, and developed an interest in a European lifestyle. However, there is no denial of the fact that the cultural roots emerged from Gujarat. But the cultural, and more important, economic interest in India declined.

These conclusions raise questions about the importance of the concept of the 'diaspora', especially in respect of the meaning of the role of the 'motherland'. In my view, the notion of the motherland loses its importance (whether invented, imagined or real) if it is not instrumentally reinforced. By taking a 'bottom up' approach in which we follow the informants' arguments it becomes clear that migrants, more easily than is thought in the diaspora literature, discontinue thinking about their roots as a source of recognition, identification, and appreciation. This is ultimately shown in the fact that Indian Africans refuse to do business with 'fellow Gujaratis' in India, who are not seen as members of the same community. There is no 'ethnic' business network or 'natural trust' within this trading diaspora. In other words, ethnic trading networks are created, but also may fall apart. Concepts of trust, mutual aid within these networks are not 'natural', but have to be earned by experience. Within these networks a 'good name' is easily lost or gained. India lost its good name.