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## Transcending race and diaspora in a colonial urban space: Ismaili Indians and their education in Mwanza, Tanzania (the 1920s to 1950s)

### Przekraczanie granic rasowych i diaspory w przestrzeni kolonialnego miasta. Hindusi ismailiccy i ich edukacja w Mwanzie w Tanzanii (lata 20. i 50. XX wieku)

#### Abstract

This paper discusses the Ismaili Indians' identity as manifested in the aspect of education when the British colonial government sought to develop a school system based on racial categories. It uncovers the British officials' attempts to promote a unified Indian diaspora and the Ismailis' opposition to such attempts on the basis of both archival and secondary sources. While existing studies provide a generalised view of competing identities among Indian migrants in East African colonies, this paper provides the details of such phenomenon from Mwanza town. The paper argues that education was an important tool of identity creation among the colonial subjects in urban areas. Ismailis in Mwanza town distinguished themselves from Indian diaspora and established separate schools to fulfil their religious and communal stipulations.

**Keywords:** diaspora, education, Ismailis, Indians, Mwanza, race, urban

#### Abstrakt

Niniejszy artykuł dotyczy przejawów tożsamości indyjskich ismailitów z mieszkającej w Tanganice diaspory uwidocznionych w systemie edukacji w okresie gdy brytyjski rząd kolonialny dążył do stworzenia systemu szkolnictwa opartego na kategoriach rasowych. Na podstawie źródeł archiwalnych i wtórnych omówione są próby propagowania zjednoczonej indyjskiej diaspory podjęte przez brytyjskich urzędników oraz sprzeciw ismailitów wobec tych prób. Istniejące badania dostarczają uogólnionego obrazu konkurujących tożsamości wśród imigrantów z Indii zamieszkałych w koloniach Afryki Wschodniej, natomiast niniejszy artykuł przedstawia szczegóły takiego zjawiska w mieście Mwanza oraz dowodzi, że edukacja była ważnym narzędziem tworzenia tożsamości wśród poddanych kolonialnych na obszarach miejskich.

Mieszkający w Mwanza ismailici odróżniali się od ogółu indyjskiej diaspory i zakładali oddzielne szkoły, co pozwalało spełnić wymagania dotyczące religijności i życia wspólnotowego ich społeczności.

**Słowa-klucze:** diaspora, edukacja, ismailici, imigranci z Indii, Mwanza, rasa, środowisko miejskie

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## Introduction

Race was an essential element of social interaction among the colonial subjects in the urban settings of colonial Tanzania. Its conception as held by the colonial officials was also used to provide a framework of education provision in urban areas. The colonial officials indeed sought to establish a system of education and educational institutions in a way that ensured the creation of colonial state in towns. Their endeavours to provide a racialised system of education considered the presence of Indian diasporas and endeavoured to maintain a unified Indian diaspora and promote its identity. However, such attempts encountered divisions among the Indian socio-religious groups seeking to promote their communal identities. Ismailis used the already existing educational framework to maintain their religious identity in various towns. This paper provides the insights of the socio-religious identity manifested by the Ismaili Indians within the established system of colonial education and educational institutions. It focuses on the Indian Ismaili migrants in Mwanza in the period between the 1920s and 1950s when the British struggled to design the colonial state in Tanganyika. In those years, establishment of schools in towns became a matter of urban space negotiated within identity parameters (cf. Bertz 2015).

This paper is grounded in the existing scholarship which tries to establish a complex history of Indian diasporas in East Africa. By focusing on the Ismailis in Mwanza, the paper seeks to show how the Indian diasporas in Tanganyika manipulated the colonial officials' racial conception and understanding of a diasporic identity. The paper also shows how the Indians revealed their ethno-religious differences which they brought with from the Indian subcontinent. Indeed, the Ismailis in Mwanza transcended the racial and diasporic identities by maintaining separate education and perpetuating a religious identity using political influences.

Studies on Indian diaspora in East Africa are enormous. Several studies have been published since the 1960s to date. The period of the 1960s and 1970s when East African countries achieved their independence was dominated by political scientists (cf. Ghai & Ghai 1965; Ghai & Ghai 1970; Bharati 1970; Tandon 1970), economists and historians (cf. Ramdas, 1970; Gregory, 1981; Gregory, 1992; Gregory, 1993; Walji 1974; Razvi & King 1973) and anthropologists (cf. Bharati 1965; Nanji 1974). All these scholars were seeking to enlighten a unique position of Indians, their contributions

and socio-cultural endurances in the newly independent states of East Africa in their respective disciplines. These scholarly inquiries have nonetheless prevailed towards the 1990s onward. However, since the 1990s, a new inquiry seeking to situate the Indian diaspora within the wider concepts of globalisation, transnationalism, migration and cultural hybridity has emerged (cf. Bertz 2011; Bertz 2015; Manger & Assal 2006; Oonk 2007).

Studies that view the Indian diaspora in connection with urban spaces of Tanzania are generally few. In this regard, Ned Bertz's *Diaspora and Nation in the Indian Ocean: Transnational Histories of Race and Urban Space in Tanzania* (Bertz 2015) stands out as a prominent publication. According to this study, an analysis of cosmopolitan connections through important socio-cultural institutions like education and leisure helps to highlight important categories of identity which shaped urban spaces of Tanzania beyond the mere depictions of racial segregations and interests of larger racial groups. However, Bertz provides only a generalised picture of the existing phenomenon from the whole territory. Drawing from his work, this paper extends the discussion with a case from Mwanza. It does not provide a counter narrative to the existing framework of the relationship between races, diaspora and urban spaces; it rather expands such explanation by focusing on a specific case of a small town generally neglected by historians. It utilises the data from archival and secondary sources. It shows how colonial objectives of education resulted into the formation of identities of transnational nature by the Indian communities in Mwanza like everywhere in colonial towns.

### **Background to racial conceptions and education provision in colonial towns of Tanzania**

A clear understanding of education as an urban space needs a reflection of the colonial officials' perception of the city and their wishes and attempts to structure it. According to Mbilinyi (1985) the city was indeed a place conceived as different from its rural counterpart. It was a place belonging to non-Africans, where only men, adults and wage employee from the countryside would stay (Mbilinyi 1985). Cities were therefore to be created in contrast to the countryside, which was conceived as a typical home for Africans. In this way, the colonial subjects in cities were categorised based on their racial differentiation. This differentiation, in turn, was used to manage and structure the city. The major differentiation was between Europeans and non-Europeans (referred to also as the coloured people). Among the non-Europeans (i.e. the coloureds), there were the natives and the non-natives. Natives was a category referring to Africans who were considered to be indigenous. Non-natives referred to the Indian migrants who were mainly traders and merchants in towns (Fouéré 2017: 13-14). Based on such categories, the city was meant to accommodate the urban wealthy elites, who according to Andrew Burton (2005: 56) were European and Indians and the few emerging African elites needed to serve the specific colonial purpose. It was on the basis of such backgrounds

that the British colonial government was able to structure and manage the town centres and formulate educational policies for the wellbeing of colonial subjects in urban areas.

The pioneers of formal schools' establishment in colonial towns of Tanganyika had been the Germans. They opened schools to meet their demand for middle- layer civil servants and semi-skilled artisans with a westernised education (Buchert, 1994: 15). By 1892 and 1899, they had established the earliest government schools in the towns of Tanga and Dar es Salaam respectively. They opened more schools on the coastal towns and later in urban centres of the interior. At the same time, in view of the inadequacy of public schooling, German administrators encouraged the Indians living in large towns, especially Dar es Salaam and Tanga, to establish schools for their children (Bertz 2015: 89-90). Various groups had responded vigorously and, with the aid from the government, established community schools in large centres of the territory. For example, the Ismailis had founded their first school in Dar es Salaam and imported seven teachers from India in 1905. As argued by Bertz (2015), this early attempt was an indication of identity formation inside a single community rather than Indian identity on a new frontier (Bertz 2015: 90). Such attempts had become common until the end of German rule. Racial divides started to develop slowly as each race dominated certain types of schools. Additionally, such aspects as religion, ethnicity and gender determined access to schools. Christian missions were attended by Christian students and the Muslim schools by Muslim students (Cameron and Dodd 1970: 57).

When the British took over the colony, race was considered as an important category through which the system of education was organised. The British administration made racial segregation policies the guiding principle of urban development and education provision. The British colonial policy was geared, among others, towards promoting the material and moral wellbeing and the social welfare of the colonial subjects (Iliffe 1978: 247). A newly introduced colonial government allowed the immigrant communities (especially the Indians) to carry on with their efforts of educational developments (Bertz 2015: 90). The government itself, continued with expansion of government schools for the inhabitants by improving the schools established by Germans and establishing new schools and educational colleges in many parts of the territory (Bertz 2015: 90).

By 1924, objective of the British colonial education was explicitly stated in the Annual Report of the Department of Education of Tanganyika, where the stated objective of education was to "provide for African needs and the same time produce a virile and loyal citizen of the Empire [...] where character, health, industry and a proper appreciation of the dignity of manual labour rank of first importance" (Bertz 2015: 91; Mbilinyi 1979: 78). Such educational objective set the movement of competing ideologies and racial patterns towards educational facilities and access in urban spaces. Both the colonisers and the colonised with their racial differences established and accessed educational institutions to suit their respective vested interests. According to Bertz (2015), such competing educational vested interests were also informed by

the general debate taking place across the British Empire after the First World War. This involved the British Tropical African continental policy of education drafted in 1925 and the subsequent education conference in Tanganyika held in the same year (Bertz 2015: 91). The bottom line stemming from the continental policy and education conference was the adoption of the Education for Adaptation policy. The aim of this educational policy was “the provision of basic reading, writing, and accounting skills in support of indirect rule, the transfer of vocational skills to develop peasant agriculture and the transmission of Western civic values and Christianity to ‘civilise’ and mute certain traditional values and customs” (Bertz 2015: 92; Buchert 1994: 30).

Thus, the British colonial government took drastic steps to promote a racially organised system of education in urban areas where different races settled. The reasons behind racial separation lay partly with the notions of preserving pure races, but also, significantly, with the need to ease colonial administration in the territory (Ilfie 1978: 338). From the point of view of colonial administration, the system of separate schools was in line with the British indirect rule system. To the British colonial authorities, separate education in urban areas was partly meant to extend control over “native” Africans, who were considered “detrribalized” after leaving the rural areas (Brennan 2012). In rural areas, the Africans were believed to be within the limits of tribal bondage under the local chiefs, who were instrumental in the Indirect Rule system that ensured proper control of the African population. Leaving from such bondage by moving to a town, the Africans would come into a new culture and possibly create a threat to the colonial authority. Thus, a direct approach of the administration was applied with more consideration on racial categories under the terms “native” and “non-native” than on tribes (Brennan 2012). Drawing on the experience acquired in India, this endeavour was informed by the fear of future organised political actions against colonialism that could ensue if two races were allowed to collaborate in the educational arena (Bertz 2015: 93). Apart from administrative conveniences, the racialised system of education was also influenced by political considerations. Drawing on the German policy of urban racial zoning, the British government sought to maintain racial barriers to avoid the possibility of opposition to its rule. Colonial officials had a feeling that putting Africans and Indians together in the educational arena would enhance African nationalism in a manner similar to what had been taking place in India in the early 1920s (Bertz 2015: 93-94). Thus, separate education for each race: the Europeans, Indians and Africans, became the main agenda in colonial towns.

Drawing from the above experiences, the government considered establishing a separate education for the Indian population. The government decision came in 1925 when the system of separate education for different racial groups in Tanganyika was officially established. The system manifested itself in the three tiers: the African, the Indian and the European, with the formulation and enactment of the 1927 Education Ordinance (Cameron 1967: 40). Under the newly formulated Education Ordinance,

the government adopted a colonial Indian education model to implement the system of separate schools. Under this model, the government used a grant-in-aid scheme to facilitate funding in the non-governmental institutions, especially the Indian schools, under certain conditions (Bertz 2015: 92). Likewise, the ordinance allowed the Indians (and other racial groups) to establish a separate committee of education entitled to determine the school curricula and oversee the employment of school staffs, build schools and maintain all educational facilities. To ease the proper provision of education to the Indians, the government encouraged Indians in various towns to establish the central bodies for establishing and managing Indian Public Schools in each town (Tanganyika Territory Report 1927: 52). To allow the government to make proper funding, the Indians in Mwanza established their first school, called the Indian Public School, in 1927. Similarly, they went further to form an education board entitled to oversee the proper management and efficiency of such a school in the town (Paroo 2017: 201).

### **Indian education and Ismaili identity in Mwanza**

Mwanza is an important town serving as the administrative and commercial centre of its surrounding region bearing the same name. It is located in the northern part of Tanzania, on the shores of Lake Victoria. As a colonial town, Mwanza started to emerge at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, attracting people of different ethnic and racial backgrounds. The three dominant racial groups (the Africans, Europeans and Indians) formed parts of the significant population of the township throughout the entire colonial period. During the British colonial period, the township lay within the administrative entity of the Lake Province. As it was customary, the town's establishment conformed with the segregated three racial zones – those for the Africans, Europeans and Indians.

The Indians were part of the town's population since the early years of town's development. They were generally groups of trade migrants whose settlement in the territory was necessitated by trading voyages across the Indian Ocean and the European colonisation of East Africa. Their settlement in Mwanza began in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century when the town emerged as an important commercial centre in the Lake Victoria region. Early migrants came from their initial settlements in the coastal towns and some trading centres of the interior in Tanganyika, Kenya and Uganda. They moved to Mwanza to seize trading opportunities when the Germans established a trading post in Mwanza (Rizvi and King 1973; Walji 1974). After the Second World War, the Indians were the largest group of non-Africans in Mwanza and had contributed significantly to the economic and social development of the town (Flynn 2001; Spencer 1964). Their growing number was linked with the growing commercial importance of Mwanza and the Lake Victoria region at large. In the 1957 census report, they were referred to as Asians subdivided into three groups: the Indians, Goans and Pakistanis, with a total population of 3,956. The three groups were linguistically the same, sharing either the Gujarati, Kutchi or Punjabi languages. However, there were multiple

distinctions among them regarding religion and castes. There were Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs and Christians. Among the Muslims, there were various sects. Ismaili Khoja, followers of the Aga Khan, were numerous and the most important among the Muslims, followed by Bohra and Ithna-Asheri. The Gujarati-speaking Hindus were the leading majority. There were also divisions among them. The largest dominant group in town was the Patels, traditionally merchants, owning the largest part of the town's shops ranging from small to large stores. Overall, the Indians dominated the town's trade and commerce. They owned ginneries, wholesale and retail shops, town stores and transport companies. Among the Hindus and Sikhs, there were also carpenters, masons, barbers, shoemakers, goldsmiths and tailors. Some of them, especially Goans, did clerical jobs in banks.

The provision of education for the Indian migrants in Mwanza was generally not distinct from what was taking place elsewhere in the territory. Available sources indicate that the Indian communities had ensured education provision for their children since the era of German colonisation. Initially schooling was generally informal restricted to home schooling depending on the knowledge level that the parents possessed (Paroo 2017: 162-163). Formal schooling developed slowly parallel to the establishment of schools, but increased after the First World War. The process of establishing schools started with parents of a small community by raising funds used for the establishment of a school in a specific town. A managing committee would later be formed with the task of finding school premises, constructing school buildings, and hiring teachers (Cameron 1967). The efforts to establish community schools were apparent in various towns and trading centres (Brennan 2012: 55). It followed that Indian socio-religious communities living in various towns owned and managed schools depending on the contributions made from members of the given community.

The earliest Indian school in Mwanza was the Aga Khan School owned by the Ismailis. It started to operate in 1925. The school building was given as a gift to the Aga Khan by A. Visram, an Ismaili follower, and the son of Seth Alidina Visram (TNA No. N/1, 22 June 1927). By 1928, the school had fifty pupils: 28 boys and 22 girls. It used Gujarati as a medium of instruction, with prospects of adopting English in the future (TNA No. N/1, 7 May 1928). However, the Indians were already making efforts to establish common schools since the early 1920s. Their efforts were attributed to the government's hesitation to support education for the Indian population (Tanganyika Territory Annual Report 1925: 72). Yet the British government had considered the presence of the Indian communities and their significant population in urban areas. Their education was discussed to avoid any confusion within the formulated policy. The earliest suggestions were given by the so-called Ormsby-Gore Commission in 1924 (Bertz 2015: 92; Kaizer 1996: 23). Until this time, the Indians had formed an association for addressing issues of common interests in the territory. Under this association, they had managed to solicit funds for establishing an Indian Central School in Dar es Salaam by

1921. In March 1925, they expressed a desire to be relieved from the burden of funding education for their children by obtaining the grant-in-aid from the government. Their desire was revealed in a correspondence between the Director of Education and the Chief Secretary of colony (TNA File No. 7682, 12 March 1925). In the same letter, the Director of Education indicated that the Indians as a community of immigrants wished to be distinguished from all other citizens, especially the Africans, who had been granted the right to elementary education (TNA No. 7682, 12 March 1925). The Indians' wishes to preserve their identity in public schools became the central argument between the Indians and the government. The distinction sought by the Indians was to promote Indian identity in their schools, especially by encouraging the use of the Gujarati language (TNA No. 7017, 16 June 1925). The government encouraged the use of English and expressed its commitment to extend support to only the Indian Public School where English was taught (TNA No. 7017, 16 June 1925).

In 1928, the Provincial Commissioner and the Indian Education Board had confirmed the struggles of Indian schools due to what they identified as a "perceived threat of identity" in Mwanza (TNA No. N/1, 7 May 1928). A similar case was revealed in the territorial annual report, which identified such identities as follows:

There are small Indian elementary schools in the principal towns of the territory. These have so far all been established and maintained by the Indian communities and unfortunately religious differences have in many cases prevented any real cooperation between various sects. Small, ill equipped, and poorly staffed schools have been maintained by each sect where one school would suffice and would have been well provided for (Tanganyika Territory Report 1927: 52).

We read from various sources that the government and its officials everywhere in the territory were keen and determined to promote a unified Indian diaspora in the territory through education. Decisive efforts were taken to encourage the establishment of Indian Public Schools and a common curriculum. Networks that circulated teachers throughout the Indian Ocean region were used to obtain teachers for the Indian schools. The Chief Secretary was giving approval to the requests of importing teachers from India submitted through the Director of Education.<sup>1</sup> We learn that a recruitment agent for Tanganyika named Mssrs Cowasjee Dinshaw & Bros., was in place in 1927 (TNA Secretariat Vol. 1, No. 11558, 17 December 1927). Recruiting agencies based in Bombay were formed to recruit qualified teachers. The prominent Parsi Gujarati firm Mssrs. Cowasjee Dinshaw & Bros under the contract of Tanganyika government was careful in search of suitable teachers. It placed advertisement in the *Bombay Chronicles* and the *Times of India*, where many advertisements frequently circulated in local Indian newspapers. Among the qualifications and conditions set for the appointed teachers

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<sup>1</sup> This was apparent from many letters between the Director of Education and the Chief Secretary throughout the 1920s to 1940s.



from India was “knowledge of Gujarati”. A teacher had to pass Vernacular Examination (Gujarati) with a Vernacular Final Examination Certificate offered at the Surat Centre in the Northern Division of India (TNA Secretariat Vol.1, No. 11558, 20 March 1929). The government also put in place incentives to attract the teachers recruited from India. Such incentives included higher salaries, six months’ leave and first-class travel to visit India (TNA Secretariat Vol. 1, No. 11558, 17 December 1927). The option of having local teachers was not favoured by the government. Both the government and the Education Department shared and expressed a common feeling that the Indian public schools would be served only by the Indian qualified teachers who, given the high qualifications required, were available only in India (TNA Secretariat Vol. 2 No. 11558, 20 March 1927). Those schools which were unable to find and recruit teachers on their own asked assistance from the government to import teachers from India (TNA Secretariat Vol. 3 No. 11558, 1940). All these trends necessitated the creation of a diasporic India in Tanganyika, as the Indians related to their homeland through teachers imported from their homeland.

Regarding the school curricula, the emphasis was put on imparting Indian knowledge and skills, and excellence in commercial prosperity, to Indian children. The rationale behind was that Tanganyika was viewed as a temporary stop for Indian migrants on the way to economic prosperity in their homelands (Paroo 2017: 164). A selection of subjects to be taught in Indian schools was thoroughly done in consideration of the relevance of the content of topics in such subjects. The discussions and decisions on what to teach was done in special meetings which brought together the Directors of Education from all East African territories of Kenya, Uganda, Tanganyika and Zanzibar (TNA, Acc. Tanganyika Secretariat, No. 21792, June 1933).<sup>2</sup> Similarly, special meetings involving representatives from Indian communities were held at the provincial levels and in each town (Paroo 2017: 175-176).

However, the colonial efforts to implement and promote a unified Indian education to the Indians were in contradiction with the Ismailis’ interests and efforts. At various points in time, the Ismailis in Mwanza indicated their disagreement with the government’s decisions and struggled to keep themselves isolated from other Indians. Their struggle started when the government came up with a grant-in-aid scheme in 1928. According to the scheme, the government was committed to dispense the grant-in-aid to only one school in each town. In this, the government gave priority to Indian Public Schools. By this time, the Ismailis were operating their Aga Khan School in Mwanza besides the Indian Public School (Bertz 2015: 95; Paroo 2017: 201). They were

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<sup>2</sup> For example, in June 1933, a conference held in Dar es Salaam had discussed and decided important issues regarding the teaching of history in Indian Schools, Inspection of Indian Schools and Agricultural Education in Indian Schools in TNA, Acc. Tanganyika Secretariat, No. 21792 (1933-1936): Teaching of History in Indian Schools.

not yet willing to merge with any Indian school in town. According to Kaiser (1996: 24), the Ismailis were not ready to merge with public schools because they wanted to instil Ismaili faith to their children. In 1929, following the pressure raised by Ismaili representatives in the Committee of Indian Education, the government started to provide support to the Aga Khan school in Mwanza. Since it received government fund, the Ismaili school was therefore required to open its door “to all applicants, including Africans, where places existed” (Bertz 2015: 94). Until 1931, however, not one African applicant was accepted in the school because the school was reported to have insufficient places (TNA 12957 vol. 1, 27 January 1931).

In the early 1930s, the British colonial government came up with a decisive plan of amalgamating schools in Mwanza. The plan was also intended to include the towns of Moshi and Tabora. According to Paroo (2017) the move was influenced by the amalgamation process in Uganda (Paroo 2017: 193–202). In Mwanza town and its surrounding region, the Ismaili leaders were reported to have agreed with the colonial authorities to support for the establishment of a new central school and the necessary facilities for building and maintaining such a school for the benefit of all Indian immigrants (Paroo 2017: 202). Such amalgamation meant that all denominational schools, including the Ismaili schools, would cease to operate. However, the evidence from government notes as cited by Paroo (2017) indicated that the Ismailis of Mwanza changed their mind once the central school was built; they maintained their separate school in town instead (Paroo 2017: 202).

The government’s complaints over the Ismailis’ withdrawal from the Indian public school reveal another important aspect by which the Ismailis sought to perpetuate their identity in the overall system of education. We learn that the Ismailis’ decision to withdraw their children from the Indian school in Mwanza resulted from the way the colonial authorities approached their community. According to Paroo (2017), the Ismailis claimed that the Supreme Council in Zanzibar was the only authority mandated by the Aga Khan to handle all matters affecting the Ismaili community everywhere in the territory. This body was, however, not consulted; instead, the government officials consulted and persuaded the Ismaili leaders at the local levels to implement the plan. Thus, the Ismaili community members interpreted such decision as illegal, since it did not follow proper organisational channels in accordance with the Ismailis’ institutional arrangement. They stated that until their claim was resolved, the Ismailis had no interest in taking their children out of their own schools (Paroo 2017: 202–203).

From the authorities’ perspective, the Ismailis had no adequate reasons to reverse the amalgamation decision. That being the case, the government chose to withdraw from giving financial support to the Ismaili school in Mwanza, as communicated in the governor’s decision to the Aga Khan:

Where Indian communities subsequently changed their mind and continued a separate community school, though their children could have been accommodated at the local public school, they have not, as a rule, received grants-in-aid, though awards have been usually been made from the balance of the Education Tax (TNA No. 21647, 29 November 1935).

However, the Aga Khan had responded strongly to the government decision by threatening to withdraw the financial support he was giving for funding part of the budgets in the Ismaili schools in the territory (Paroo 2019: 545). Since he had an influence in the Empire, the colonial officials were instructed to consider the Ismailis. According to Paroo (2019), the Secretary of State for the Colonies instructed the colonial officials to adopt “a less rigid policy” when it came to the Ismailis because he saw them as “a good lot of people”. In so doing, they could avoid friction with the Aga Khan (Paroo 2019: 545). Consequently, the government continued to provide grant-in-aid in all Ismaili schools in the territory.

We read from archival sources that the Ismailis were on board to establish a new Aga Khan school in Mwanza in 1946 (TNA No. 970, 11 April 1946). In that year, the Ismaili leaders sent their application for erecting a school building. Their application was well considered as the District Commissioner admitted that the government was on board to reserve the land for building an Aga Khan school (TNA No. 970, 11 April 1946). By the 1950s, a new Aga Khan primary school containing lower grades (up to three), and upper grades (up to eight) was already established (Grebbele 1971: 124). English was used as the medium of instruction in the school as this was the rule in all Aga Khan schools since 1952 when Gujarati was dropped. The Ismailis maintained their community identity in education, as they did in every aspect of life; their curriculum was by large in contrast to what was taught in the Indian schools. Such identity was not limited to the establishment of separate schools, but extended to the issues regarding management and curriculum content at the local and territorial level.

At the territorial level, the Aga Khan Education Board was instituted to oversee the progress, management and organisation of the Ismaili schools in the 1930s (Paroo 2017: 168). Within the Board, there was the Department of Education whose leader was appointed by the Aga Khan himself, with the responsibility of overseeing the general operation of schools in Tanganyika (Paroo 2017: 168). The leader of the Department of Education was assisted by two executive officers who together collected annual reports on schools’ finances and activities and submitted them to the Aga Khan. The department was also responsible for regulating religious and secular education provided in the Aga Khan schools in the territory. With various constitutional reforms, this body was reformed at various times to adapt to the changes of the Ismaili community and to conform to the Aga Khan’s advice (cf. Paroo 2017: 168-169).

While in most cases the curriculum content was not far from other Indian diasporas, the Ismaili curriculum was generally distinguished by the presence of religious

education. The Ismaili philosophy was built on the view that success could only be achieved with religious education. According to Paroo (2017), religious education was present in the curricula of all Ismaili schools. In the Aga Khan schools, Ismaili theology was weighed equally with all other subjects. As highlighted by Verjee, its emphasis was geared towards the interpretation of Islam with a focus on the centrality of the imam and the reinforcement of values, ethics, teaching, and ideologies which were specific to the Ismaili community:

[...] thoroughly acquainted with the fundamentals of our Holy Faith, and the Spiritual role of our present Lord Hazar Imam. Real and true intellectual understanding of our Holy Faith will bring spontaneous loyalty to our Imame [sic] Zaman, the Lord of the Age, and will bring realisation upon every Ismaili – about his priceless possession in Hazar Imam (Verjee 1945: 111).

In 1953, the Aga Khan commercial and vocational schools were introduced (cf. Paroo 2017: 172). The commercial section intended to prepare students for their future occupations by means of subjects such as bookkeeping, commercial correspondences, shorthand, typewriting and English. Vocational education was developed to cater for female students. The courses were offered in the evenings and centred around domestic and religious responsibilities; they included tailoring, cutting and stitching clothes (Paroo 2017: 172-174). From 1953 onwards other modern languages such as French, Latin, Sanskrit and Persian were to be taught in schools.

Why did the Ismailis chose to largely isolate themselves from Indian education? We generally find out that their perspective regarding education was different from what other Indians sought to achieve in the colony. As noted elsewhere, to the Ismailis, education was meant to promote the Ismaili faith – and this could only be attained in a purely Ismaili-organised system of education, far from the conceived Indianness. Specific reasons given by the Ismaili community in Mwanza, especially on the issue of amalgamation in 1932, indicate that the local Ismailis were not satisfied with the general condition of the city's Indian Public School. In a letter to the Director of Education, the lawyer who wrote it stated on behalf of the Ismaili community that "the Indian Public School of Mwanza was in such deplorable condition that it was not likely that it would be able to survive financially. Despite receiving a 2,000-shilling grant from the government, the teachers were not being paid their salaries" (TNA File N-1, 21 January 1932).

However, the most important reason was that the Ismailis in Mwanza, as well as elsewhere in the colony, were bound to the Aga Khan's instructions and support in opening schools and ensuring what they regarded as quality education for their children. As one Ismaili once reflected, in 1945 his instructions read:

It is the bounden duty of those placed at the helm of educational affairs of the Community to formulate – and carry out – an educational policy that will bear close and definite relationship to

the economic structure of the Community. They must fully realise that by virtue of their appointment, they occupy [...] the most important of the great offices of the Community – and accordingly bear the greatest responsibility to it. That great Greek philosopher Plato has observed “children are a man’s riches, the greatest of his possession, and the whole fortune of his house depends on whether they turn out ill or well. So long as the young generation is and continues to be well brought up, our ship of the state will have a fair voyage: otherwise the consequences – are better left unspoken”. This quotation informs us how greatly the welfare of the Community depends upon its younger generation and what great pains should be taken to inculcate the right type of education in our children – as otherwise it is better not to speculate about the consequences that may follow (Verjee 1945: 111, after Paroo 2017: 167).

Insisting on what the Imam wanted the Ismaili leaders to consider when dealing with education for the children residing in East Africa, Verjee encouraged them to

read – re-read and digest this direction received from [the Imam] – and take appropriate steps to devise and implement an educational policy with full aid and co-operation of the Governments of East Africa, that will produce a generation – which shall not only be an asset to the Community but – a positive gain to the countries of their adoption – or if you prefer their “home land” – namely East Africa (Verjee 1945: 112 after Paroo 2017: 167).

Based on these instructions, the Ismailis believed that they deserved educational facilities and treatment separate from the rest of the immigrants from the subcontinent. Sending their children to an Aga Khan school would allow them to control what they were taught. We read that the Ismailis were aware of the situation in the Indian central schools, which had many Hindu teachers (TNA, N/1, 22 June 1927). The Aga Khan himself had urged the colonial government to take into consideration the existing differences between the Ismaili Khoja and other Indian communities in the colony. He stated that most of the members in other communities still had their roots in the motherland and were sending “their children across the Indian Ocean for education and return to India later in life” (TNA, Acc. AB File No.1, 1924). He was especially concerned with anti-Muslim and anti-British teachings delivered by the Hindu majority which was dominant in the central Indian education in the territory (Paroo, 2017). A similar concern was also raised by the Ismailis in Mwanza, who argued that sending their children to the Aga Khan schools ensured that the Ismaili community had more control over the curriculum being taught by Hindu teachers than what would be the case if the schools amalgamated (Paroo 2017: 231).

## Conclusion

British officials’ understanding of racial categories in urban areas provided the base for policy formulation of colonial education and establishment of schools in urban areas. Considering Indian migrants as a distinct racial group seeking connection with its

homeland, the British colonial government supported the creation of diasporic identity in urban areas. In the tripartite system of education, the government formed separate bodies in charge of Indian education and sought to establish common schools for Indians. Through grants-in-aid and amalgamation policies, the British sought to unify Indian diaspora for easing education provision. They did not regard the socio-religious differences prevailing among the Indian migrants. The Ismailis, on the other hand, utilised such opportunity to manipulate the existing system of education to perpetuate their identity in Mwanza as they did everywhere in the territory. Archival and secondary sources indicate that the process of establishing and developing Indian schools encountered a deepened identity creation and discussions. At different times, Ismailis in Mwanza expressed their opposition to various proposals of the Indian common schools. They established and maintained separate system of schooling in accordance with Ismaili principles as stipulated by their religious leader. From such context they transcended the British conceptions of race and promotion of Indian diaspora in Mwanza and the territory in general.

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