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Narrating National Identity. Fiction, Citizenship and the Asian Experience in East Africa*

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Abstract

The paper examines the crucial question of postcolonial identity in East African nation states, with particular reference to the Asian experience in East Africa. It attempts an examination of the conflict between citizenship and descent, particularly as regards the identity of East African Asians. It argues that descent and race are considered more important identity markers than citizenship in postcolonial East Africa, a distinction that has continued to frustrate attempts at building a multi-racial/multi-cultural society. Among other factors, the paper traces British colonial practices, for instance, the construction of a three-tiered society where Whites occupied the top seats, the Indians the middle ones and the Africans the lowest, as furthering a complex social structure and exacerbating conflict situations. The paper explores the various ways through which citizenship and descent conflict has affected and influenced, policies and pronouncements on Asian identity in East Africa.

Résumé

Cette contribution se penche sur le thème majeur de l'identité post coloniale des nations de l'Afrique de l'Est, et porte particulièrement sur l'expérience asiatique dans cette partie de l'Afrique. Elle tente d'étudier la dichotomie entre les notions de citoyenneté et d'origine (identitaire), en ce qui concerne les Asiatiques d'Afrique de l'Est. Cet article affirme que les notions d'origine et de race sont considérées comme des marqueurs identitaires plus importants que la citoyenneté, en Afrique de l'Est post coloniale. Ce fait continue de remettre en cause les

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tentatives de construction d'une société multiraciale/ multiculturelle. L'article décrit, entre autres, les pratiques coloniales britanniques, dont la construction d'une société à trois niveaux, au sein de laquelle les Blancs figuraient en première position, suivis des Indiens, et enfin, des Africains, qui occupaient une position subalterne; ceci ajoutait à la complexité de la structure sociale et exacerbait la situation conflictuelle. Cette contribution étudie les différentes manières dont les conflits autour de la citoyenneté et des origines ont influencé les politiques et déclarations sur l'identité asiatique en Afrique de l'Est.

Introduction

East African Asian fiction, like any other fiction concerning (im)migrants' experiences, centers on the special postcolonial crisis of identity and explores the various forms— racial, cultural, ethnic, national, etc.—in which this identity manifests itself. This exploration is done from the (im)migrants' point of view because the 'traditional' East African Asians—distinct from the contemporary 'investor Asians' who are making their (first) settlements in East Africa in the 1980s, 1990s and 2000s—are by and large an immigrant community, or to be more accurate, descendants of an immigrant Asian community, or communities, that settled in East Africa before, during and even after European colonization of Uganda, Kenya and Tanganyika.¹ The paper highlights national identity and attempts to analyze the way this identity is narrated in East African Asian fiction, particularly in the selected novels of M.G. Vassanji, Yusuf K. Dawood and Peter Nazareth.²

The choice of fiction as a critical and creative medium of producing knowledge is deliberate, for as Wa Thiongo (1997: 4-7) and Tolstoy (1960: 12) observe, literary art (of which fiction is a key component) embodies in word images the tensions, conflicts and contradictions at the heart of a community's being and becoming, and directly or indirectly affects the lives of the people who make or experience the events of a given epoch. In the East African context, these tensions, conflicts and contradictions basically arise from three things that hindered, in the colonial era, any possibility of a harmonious relationship between Asians and Africans: Asians' (alleged) racial and social exclusiveness; Asians' (alleged) economic exploitation and domination of Africans, and Asians' (alleged) identification and collaboration with the British and German empire builders. Suffice it to say—before we make an analysis of how these allegations relate to Asians' identification with East African nation-states—that this paper gives central attention to several specific markers of national identity. These include natality (place of birth), ancestry/descent,

place of residence, culture (names, languages, foods, etc.), and commitment and contribution to a particular nation-state.³

Let us now highlight the various ways indigenous East Africans construct East African Asians as partial, provisional, second-race citizens in the fiction under study, bearing in mind the fact that this is one of the four aims of this paper, the other three being: to locate this construction in the political and economic history of East Africa; to deconstruct the constructions in order to show the weaknesses inherent in them; and finally, to suggest key lessons that East African governments could learn from the Asian writers' portrayal of citizenship so that the rejuvenation of the East African community under way may herald concerted efforts towards the creation of a multiracial, multiethnic and multicultural society, where all citizens will be considered full citizens regardless of racial differences.

The Construction of Asians as Provisional, Partial Citizens

In East African Asian writing, two interpretations of citizenship are clearly portrayed. The first limits citizenship to possession of a passport, the magical book that demystifies territorial boundaries and internationalizes travel. This tendency has its origin in the libertarian conception of citizenship, which sees citizenship predominantly as a legal status and attempts to give the individuals the maximum amount of freedom, and believes that self-interest is the basic motive upon which citizens act. This self-interest is, of course, controlled by the laws of the state, which stipulate given rights and obligations for the citizens. As a trading immigrant community, the Asians of East Africa adopted this libertarian conception of citizenship mostly because their major concern was the security of their families, their trade and savings (Vassanji 1989: 52).

The second interpretation of citizenship emphasizes social participation in public and community affairs and demands that the individual citizen contribute to the common good of his or her community (read: nation). This interpretation, which Voet (1998: 10) calls the communitarian conception of citizenship, appealed to the indigenous Africans who wanted to see the Asians contribute more and more to the economic, social and political development of the post-colonial East African nation-states of Uganda, Kenya and Tanzania. The aspects the Africans wanted to see in their relationship with the Asians were primarily three: unity in the struggle against British colonialists; racial tolerance and social inclusivity; and fairness in business and trade. These aspects coalesced to create the Africans' view of a good Asian citizen: a person who worked towards harmony between Africans and Asians, and this harmony basically en-

tailed uplifting the living standards of the Africans, which in turn meant heavy sacrifices on the part of the Asians whose major concern, as we have mentioned before, was the security of their families, their trade and savings. This inevitably led to a clash of interest—the libertarian self-interest (favoured by Asians) and the communitarian ‘common good’ interest (favoured by the Africans). This clash of interest was inevitably racialized with the unfortunate result that the Asian citizen was considered a harmful element, prejudicial to the interests of East African nation-states. And as a harmful citizen, the Asian was considered a provisional and partial citizen whose citizen status could be erased. This is what former president of Uganda, General Idi Amin, did when he expelled both citizen and non-citizen Asians from his country in 1972.

One reason to explain this provisionality of the Asians’ citizenship is that some Asians did not fully identify themselves with the post-colonial East African nation-states, for they either did not apply for Ugandan, Kenyan and Tanzanian citizenship, choosing to remain British passport holders, or if they did, they still identified themselves not as Ugandans, Kenyans and Tanzanians, but as Goans, Pathans and Indians despite the fact that the passports they were holding were Ugandan not Goan, Kenyan not Pathan, and Tanzanian not Indian. As for those who held British passports or any other countries’ passports, they were technically aliens in their countries of adoption (Gupta 1975: 125). In fact, 80,000 of the Asians Idi Amin expelled from Uganda held British passports and were therefore British citizens, which is why the General asked Britain to make arrangements and receive them (*Uganda Argus*, August 7, 1972). In the fiction we are studying, there are examples of such Asians. In *Return to Paradise* we have Masood Khan and his family who pass for Ugandan citizens but hold British passports; in *In A Brown Mantle* we have Bernie Rodrigues and the narrator’s father. Our concern in this paper is not these ‘British Asians’, but the East African citizen Asians.

We have already mentioned that some East African Asians did not fully identify themselves with East African nation-states, but with Goa, Peshawar and India, even when the passports they bore were Ugandan, Kenyan or Tanzanian. This shows that these Asians privileged their countries of descent and marginalized their countries of adoption, to the dissatisfaction of East African nationalists who seized upon this opportunity to condemn ‘Asian ingratitude’ and ‘lack of commitment to the destiny of Africa’. Theroux (1967) gives examples of condemnatory statements made by the first President of Independent Kenya Jomo Kenyatta and his Vice President Daniel Arap Moi, who bluntly demanded, on several occasions

that Asians leave Kenya if they refuse to subordinate their social, cultural and economic interests to those of black Africans, sometimes called 'African Africans' to emphasize the descent and racial issues at stake. This condemnation was fuelled by other factors including Asians' (alleged) racial intolerance, economic exploitation, and middlemanship between the Africans and the British during the colonial era. It is for this reason that this paper argues that in order to understand the Africans' construction of Asians as provisional, partial citizens, we need to take a look at the political and economic history of East Africa.

Colonial History and Asians' Postcolonial Predicament

Colonial East Africa was a racially stratified society, with the whites constituting the upper class, the Asians the middle class and the Africans the bottom class, hewing wood, fetching water and baby-sitting white and brown babies. In this three-tiered racial structure, the British used the Asians to serve the imperial interests by acting as the intermediary between the white colonizers and the black Africans. Being the individuals who put colonial exploitative policies into effect, they came to assume the blame for an exploitative colonial system while the real authors of the system, operating invisibly behind the buffer, remained relatively free from black African hatred (Ocaya-Lakidi 1975: 82) It is for this reason that Robert Kyeyune, the agitator for Damibian (Ugandan) independence, observes thus:

The British are clever. They placed a middleman of another race between them selves and Africans so that they could rake in the profits undisturbed. Do you know the story of Cleopatra and Antony? When the messenger brought news to Cleopatra that Antony had been defeated, Cleopatra executed the messenger! It is the one who deals directly with the African who is hated most. The British remain aloof and are neither loved nor hated (Nazareth 1972: 45-46).

In fact, the British did not remain aloof as Kyeyune suggests; fearing a potential Asian–African political alliance, they propagated the view that the Asians were the merciless exploiters of the Africans, and a monolithic trading community that had come to East Africa at the turn of the nineteenth century to grab what they could and leave. They also gave the Asians the epithet 'Jews of Africa', which contained the same negative assumptions about the Asians as were to be found concerning Jewish merchants in Europe (Seidenberg 1983: 14). Other adjectives describing the Asians abounded—crafty, money-making, cunning, someone with his soul bound to his body by the one laudable and religious concern to turn

his coin to better advantage; the user of false weights and measures and a receiver of stolen goods, among others (Ocaya-Lakidi 1975: 85). An extract from a colonial Kenya newspaper, *Sunday Post*, summarizes the colonial project of setting the Asian against the African:

In the future Kenya will have to suffer to an extent never contemplated in the past from the most evil influence of oriental feudalism. Thousands of years of autocracy have made the Indian people what they are today: a race of usurers and gamblers. Usury and gambling are in the pigmentation of their blood. They can no more resist the temptation to exploit their fellow men than a drunkard can resist the taste of liquor. Land, food, living space, the means to live, are the counters with which most love to gamble (quoted in Seidenberg 1983: 33).

Now, we should note that the above adjectives describing the Asians are the same adjectives postcolonial black Africans used in cataloging the 'evils' of the Asian race in East Africa. In *In A Brown Mantle*, Mr. Gombe-Kukwaya, an influential Damibian (Ugandan) politician of the pioneering post-colonial generation tells a crowd of his supporters at a politically rally:

[I]t is not only the white people who have exploited us—we have within our midst the Brown people, the Muindi, who continue to exploit us to this day! We have only tolerated the Muindi, because we thought they would change and become part of us, but we know now, after bitter experience, that they continue to exploit us as though we are cattle. Will we continue to tolerate this enemy within our midst for much longer, my brothers and sisters? (Nazareth 1972: 74).

A similar speech is made by Dr. Musozi Ebongo (Singh 1973: 45).

These fictional leaders, needless to mention, prefigure actual leaders like President Milton Obote, who told the Ugandan parliament on April 20, 1970 that his government wanted non-citizen Asians to leave Uganda because 'they have never shown any commitment to the cause of Uganda or even to Africa,' for 'their interest is to make money, which money they exported to various capitals of the world on the eve of our independence' (Pain 1975: 188). Better still, the leaders prefigure President Idi Amin, who expelled the Asians from Uganda in 1972.

The racial stratification of the colonial East African society also affected the Asians in another way: coming second to the British, the Asians considered themselves superior to the Africans whom they regarded members of the lowest caste, and atavistic remnants of the Neolithic Age (Seidenberg 1983:7). Simatei (2001) suggests that this feeling of racial

superiority on the part of Asians, together with the notion of exclusion, which is so ingrained in their caste-centered social organisation that it comes to them almost naturally, militated against social (and sexual) intercourse between them and the Africans (Simatei 2001:74). No wonder then that Asian social clubs, for instance the Goan institutes in Kampala, were until independence, racially exclusive (Nazareth 1972:133). And little wonder that the Asians discouraged intermarriage with Africans so much that Karim Hussein, a Ugandan Asian in the play, *Sweet Scum of Freedom*, beats up his wife when his daughter marries an African. The wife is beaten up because she did not teach her daughter proper manners, that is, she ought to have impressed upon the girl day and night that marrying an African was the least an Asian could know not to do. How do other Indians react to Hussein's 'tragedy'? One of them sends all his daughters to India to get married lest they get seduced—mark the word seduced—by African men (Singh 1973:47).

Because of this exclusiveness, the return of the Asian to India for a marriage partner is a recurrent motif in East African Asian fiction. In *In A Brown Mantle*, the narrator's father goes to Goa for a wife (1972: 6); in *Water under the Bridge*, the Desai family does the same, which is why Kanti's wife, Rheka, is referred to as an 'imported bride' (Dawood 1991: 54). In *Return to Paradise*, Masood Khan has to leave Uganda for Khyber pass that he may get a real Pathan woman, with unalloyed and unspoilt Pathan blood (Dawood 2000:11-12). The irony is that in all the novels the Asian runs to the African women for casual sex, giving the impression that he considers prostitution the African woman's calling. When an African prostitute asks an Asian client why Asians do not want to marry Africans, he answers thus:

They are so pure and clean—must say their prayers and wash their bodies every day. And they are so rich—most of them and they have such big cars and you don't—so they will never marry you (Singh 1973: 46).

What is implied here is that the African is dirty and irreligious, a thing that parallels the racial arrogance of the whites who construct(ed) Africans as lazy, unintelligent, immoral, ignorant, dirty and irreligious. This attitude was bound to cause inter-racial tension between Africans and Asians—a tension that in one respect climaxed in the 1972 expulsion of the latter from Uganda on the grounds that they were not committed to the social, economic and political development of the country. Let us now examine how Asian economic practices enhanced the view that Asians

were get-rich-quick immigrants-in-transit who did not care about the future of their countries of adoption.

Asian Economic Practices and the Get-Rich-Quick Immigrants-in-Transit Image

By and large, Asian economic practices have, from the colonial period to the present, bordered on exploitation and dishonesty. In *Water under the Bridge*, an Asian businessman and Kenyan national, Jaffer, admits that the Asians exploit Kenya through 'unfair competition, price rises, siphoning of foreign exchange [and] embezzlement' (Dawood 1991: 308). The unfair competition Jaffer is talking about had its origin in the prices the Asian traders charged for commodities, especially to African retailers; these retailers were sold at a high price, forcing them to sell to their consumers at an even higher price. Because of this, the Africans ended up buying from Asian shops, where commodities were relatively cheaper, a dynamic that forced the Africans out of business. Wa Thiongo (1964) puts this concern thus:

Black people too bought things from the Indians. But they also bought in the African shops which stood alone on one side of the town near the post office. The Africans had not many things in their store and they generally charged higher prices so that although the Indians were not liked and they abused women, using dirty words they had learnt in Swahili, people found it wiser and more convenient to buy from them (7–8).

Besides, the Asians were experienced bargainers to the detriment of the Africans. When Jaffer leaves young Oloo in charge of his fish business to join his sick wife in Canada, this is the instruction he gives him:

You know our suppliers. Pay them from the float we keep in the till. Never pay them what they ask for. You know what I mean. You have seen me haggling. If they ask for ten shillings for their load, you start with an offer of one, and finish at three or four. Only on the day when you find the fish in short supply, you go up to five (Dawood 1991:31).

This extract makes it clear that the African fish seller is cheated for the difference between what he and the Indian got was so big that for the latter, 'even with the packing and transport costs added, there was a huge profit margin, *which ran into two to three hundred percent* (emphasis added) (26).

The Africans were not only cheated through selling, but also through buying. 'These people', a black Ugandan pointed out in 1972, 'have and are still exploiting the sons and daughters of Uganda in many ways, e.g.

when one goes to buy a dress you find there written a price of 140/= . As you go on bargaining you will surprisingly find that you have bought the dress at 100/=, which means that they are never straightforward to us at all' (Ocaya-Lakidi 1974: 93–4).

The most painful form of exploitation was probably the siphoning of forex from East African countries. There were several ways through which this was done. One of these was direct smuggling of the forex and jewelry. When the Desai family in *Water Under the Bridge* (1991) decide to invest in Canada, one source of capital available to them is the jewelry , travelers' cheques and foreign currency to be smuggled out of Kenya by Rajoo. This is how Rajoo is to do it:

Fill your suitcase with them. You are allowed thirty kilos, because you travel first class. No label on the suitcase, no clues about the owner anywhere. You check in at the counter where the airline staff is only worried about the weight. Nobody from the customs checks the outward bound suitcase which accompanies a passenger. At Geneva Airport enroute to Canada, you pickup the suitcase. Nobody cares there what you are bringing, as long as you don't carry drugs or arms (139).

Every thing works out well, and the Desai family begins a business in Canada. Tribe (1975) gives us other ways through which capital was exported from East African countries by Asians: over-invoicing of imports, under-invoicing of exports, false declaration of factor incomes such as profits and rents and improper use of personal transfers (144–153). For an Asian businessman with, for example, imported goods worth ten million shillings, he would send double the amount so that the balance is put on his London or Swiss account. If he exported goods worth twenty million shillings, he would under-invoice them and declare that they were worth five million. The fifteen million, again, would find itself on the London or Swiss account. Besides, the Asians involved in the tourism industry were paid in London banks, meaning that the post-colonial East African governments were sidelined. Even the taxes levied by the authorities were evaded by the Asians, who kept two books – one for themselves and the other for the income tax department (Dawood 1991: 43). This second book understated, of course, all the transactions conducted so that as little money as possible could be taken by the government in the form of taxes. Consequently, the image of the Asians, earlier constructed by the British as crafty, money-making, cunning, unscrupulous, etc., was upheld by African nationalists – Presidents Milton Obote and Idi Amin in real life, and Musozi Ebongo and Gombe-Kukwaya in the fictional world.

An Attempt at Deconstruction

What is at stake here really is not so much the question of contribution versus commitment, but that of ancestry. The citizen status of the Asian exploiter is questioned not just because he is sabotaging the progress of East Africa, but because he is perceived as a foreigner, a stranger who has no right to plunder his adopted country. This is why no one questions the citizen status of the black exploiter. And so, when Mr. Gombe- Kukwaya, a minister in a Ugandan post-colonial regime in *In A Brown Mantle* buys a golden bed for his wife, he is accused of mismanaging government funds, not of being a 'bloody foreigner'.

In fact, there are several examples in the fiction under study that show the black African as an active and enthusiastic participant in the exploitation of East Africa. Listen to the thoughts of a black character in *Water Under the Bridge* on the power of a member of parliament and the benefits that accompany this position:

A member of parliament was a powerful figure and if [I] ever became a minister or even an assistant minister, [I] would be considered a demigod. [My] patronage would attract wealth like a magnet. To wield power and amass wealth, one had to climb the political ladder and the first rung of that ladder was a seat in parliament. The returns were so great, no price was too high (Dawood 1991:146).

Notice the absence of the voters' welfare in this meditation: no mention of health centers, schools, income-generating projects, rural electrification. What matters to this politician is not the economic and social progress of his country, but his personal welfare:

What appeals to me most is that as a minister you don't have to wait anywhere—not for lifts, not at the airport—no waiting in offices, everywhere you are received and your path made smooth and easy. All the drudgery of life is taken out. Everyone gives you preferential treatment; foreign travel is no longer an ideal—it is a luxury. You are received and looked after like a lord. You know, on my last visit to England with his Excellency, we were invited to stay at Buckingham palace (Dawood 1991: 232–33).

The question that comes to mind is: What kind of commitment to the East African nation—states is this kind of leader capable of? What kind of contribution is he likely to make in developing his country? The answer is simple: nil. The primary interest of such leaders is not the pursuit of development strategies, but staying in power and using the state as an instrument for predatory ostentatious consumption. Believing that cun-

ning (read: theft, robbery) is more profitable than hard work, these leaders pray:

Cunning, be my guide,
 And lead me all the time,
 Waking and sleeping.
 And wherever I go,
 I would like you to give me
 The food I eat,
 The water I drink,
 Even the clothes that I wear (Wa Thiongo 1982:103).

And whoever stands in the road of this cunning must be crushed. This is what happens to Pius Cota, the 'bloody Mugo' in *In a Brown Mantle* who is assassinated for unearthing a scandal in which a minister steals a consignment of prefabricated houses from a foreign country meant to mitigate the housing problem in Azingwe (Kenya). This is the irony of the commitment/contribution argument: the Asian who is interested in the social and economic development of his country of adoption is referred to as a 'bloody Mugo' and a 'pain in the neck' (Nazareth 1972: 147). The reference to Cota's Goanness is, of course, an attempt to estrange him from Kenyan citizenship, to make him a foreigner in a country he fully identifies with and dearly loves, a country whose independence from the British he fought for. What the assassins are telling him is that as an Asian, he has no business in 'meddling' in the affairs of Kenya, a Black Country for Black Africans, and that as an immigrant his only business is trade, not politics. Thus Cota, who feels it his duty to fight corruption in order to contribute to the common good, is frustrated by the Africans themselves.

Even Deogratius D'Souza, the narrator of the novel, is discriminated against: he is called a Mugo meddler and asked to return to his country, even though he was born in Uganda. 'Hey Mugo', the golden-bed-minister, Gombe-Kukwaya asks:

When are you going back to your country? . . .if I were in power, I would chase all these brown people into the sea. They kept aloof from us until we won our independence and now that we are the bosses, they are trying to be friendly (ibid.:114).

True, some Asians collaborate with British colonialists. But others like Deogratius D'Souza and Pius Cota (in the world of fiction) fully participate in the fight for East Africa's independence. D'Souza, for instance, serves as personal Assistant to Mr. Robert Kyeyune, the leading national-

ist fighting British colonialism in Damibia, which is the pseudonym for Uganda. He even encourages the Goan community in Damibia to identify itself with the country by taking its citizenship—a call hearkened to by the younger generation Goans like Joaquim D’costa. He is honest enough to admit that at independence, there was a need to reorganize the economy that was visibly in the hands of the Asians (who owned land in towns, held most of the jobs and owned almost every shop) and invisibly in the hands of the British and other Europeans (who owned banks, import and export houses, motor vehicle agencies, and the insurance companies) so that the Africans move to the center of controlling their resources (ibid.: 110). That D’Souza makes such an observation sets him apart as a genuine African nationalist.

Pius Cota, who is modeled on the Kenyan Goan journalist, Pio Gama Pinto, goes even a step further to fully identify himself with the well-being of both Damibia and Azingwe (Kenya). He dedicates his life to fighting colonialism, and when independence is achieved he continues fighting the injustices meted out on the poor peasants by the leaders of newly independent Kenya. This fight, as we have already seen, costs him his life, for he is assassinated by his former comrades who have betrayed the cause of independence by using their positions to amass wealth to the detriment of the poor peasants in shacks, and the under-employed and unemployed Africans who are starving to death. In fact, D’Souza describes Pius Cota as a man who spent all his time being a dedicated nationalist, pan Africanist, and socialist (ibid.:69). And Father Van Santen compares him with Jesus Christ, for both give up their lives for their people (ibid.: 71). This is in the world of fiction.

In the real world, we get more examples of East African Asians dedicated to the liberation of East Africa from colonial rule. Isher Dass, as a member of the Legislative Council from 1933 to 1942, made frequent representations on behalf of Africans, especially in respect of their demands for more land, political representation and the removal of restrictions on the growing of economic crops. Other Indian representatives on the LEGCO helped him in this task—B.S. Varma and U.K. Oze—by opposing further alienation of land to non-Africans (Mangat 1969:168).

Logistically, the Asians helped in the printing of African nationalist newspapers from 1942-1952 (and even earlier in the 1920s when Harry Thuku was agitating for freedom from colonial rule). Examples of these newspapers are the Kikuyu daily *Inoororia Gikuyu* (Gikuyu sharpener), a Swahili weekly, *Afrika Mpya* (New Africa), *Mwiguithania* (Conciliator), *Sauti ya Mwafrika* (Africa Voice), *Hindi Ya Gikuyu* (Gikuyu Times) and

Habari Za Dunia (News of the World) (Seidenberg 1983:76) The contribution of these newspapers (and therefore of the Asians who financed their printing), to the achievement of Kenya's independence in 1963 cannot be underestimated.

Besides, East African lawyers helped defend African nationalists like Jomo Kenyatta and other Mau Mau detainees. In 1954, for instance, A.R. Kapila (who, together with F.R.S. De Souza, S.N. Pritt, Chaman Lall and Jaswant Singh had defended Jomo Kenyatta) defended General China, a renowned leader of the Mau Mau. From 1953 to 1957, De Souza defended over 200 Mau Mau suspects. Other East African Asian lawyers—E.K. Nowrjee, A.H. Malik, S.M. Akram, S.P. Handa, Sheikh Amin, M.K. Bhandar', K.D. Travadi and Arvind Jamidah—worked behind the scenes defending Mau Mau suspects (Seidenberg 1983:116). Asian journalists, for instance, Harun Ahmed, Pranlal Sheth, D.K. Sharda and Pio Gama Pinto—on whom, we have already observed, Peter Nazareth modeled his African-Goan Politician, Pius Cota—also threw in their lot to support the African cause. What these examples show is that not all East African Asians were anti-African independence/progress. There were fingers that brought oil, but these did not soil the entire hand. Thus, labeling all the Asians as traitors, opportunists and exploiters is erroneous, just like it is to label all Africans as true nationalists.

Conclusion

What the above discussion makes clear is that the most important marker of national identity in East Africa is ancestry/descent, not commitment/contribution to the nation-state, and not natality. This point becomes more clear when the question of distribution of resources and opportunities arises. Where the Asian citizen amasses wealth, it is expected by the indigenous citizens that he uses part of this wealth for the development of the country, lest he is labeled an ingrate or a bloody foreigner fit for deportation, irrespective of whether he was born in East Africa or in India/Pakistan. In other words, the brown citizen is expected to negotiate his citizenship through being good, which really means being charitable and apolitical. The black citizen, on the other hand, remains a citizen whether he is a thief or a rebel. He can only become a bad citizen, never a 'bloody foreigner'.

It is for this reason that East African leaders, who are tirelessly struggling to fully rejuvenate the East African community, should seriously address the possibility of a multiracial and multicultural East African society. They should work towards the elimination of racial discrimination in their countries, and should strengthen links between East African gov-

ernments and Asian countries like Pakistan and India, where descendants of East African Asians have emigrated. The leaders should demonstrate that true multiculturalism is possible. The indigenous Ugandans' voting of Jay Tana, a Ugandan Asian, to the sixth parliament as the representative of the youths from the Eastern region of the country shows that it is possible to iron out racial prejudices, and for different races to become accommodative. I am singling out Uganda because this is the country that experienced the worst form of racial friction after the country's independence in 1962, a friction that climaxed in the expulsion of Asians from Uganda in 1972 and the consequent confiscation of their properties.

In my view, the success of the East African community should be judged, in one respect, from its commitment to social integration across ethnicity and race so that the three countries face the challenges of poverty and economic stagnation in an environment of ethnic and racial harmony. An ideal, some people will say. But who said ideals are unattainable? Doesn't Shakespeare tell us, in *Measure for Measure*, not to think impossible what seems improbable?

Notes

1. The immigration of these 'traditional' East African Asians into East Africa did not stem entirely from the building of the Kenya-Uganda railway at the turn of the nineteenth century as empire-building historians sometimes argue. In fact, small numbers of Indians have lived in the coastal regions of East Africa for centuries, arriving long before the days of European settlement. See George Delf (1963), *Asians in East Africa*.
2. These novels are *The Gunny Sack*, Vassanji; *Water under the Bridge* and *Return to Paradise*, Dawood; and *In a Brown Mantle*, Nazareth.
3. For a more engaging discussion of these markers of identity, see Frank Bechhofer, et al., 2001, 'The Framing of Scottish National Identity', in N. Abercrombie and A. Warde, eds., *The Contemporary British Society Reader*, Cambridge: Polity Press.

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