

The changing culture of the Hindu Lohana community in East Africa

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ABSTRACT This article describes the cultural change and adaptation of the Hindu Lohana community in East Africa. It examines changing food habits and marriage policies, both well-known examples of the Hindu notion of 'purity'. Initially, men of this community would marry Lohana women raised in India. Over time, however, Lohana men developed a preference for Hindu women raised in East Africa. In addition, Lohanas developed from strict vegetarians and non-drinkers to consumers of meat and alcohol. This was not a natural, harmonious process, but one with conflicts in which painful decisions had to be made. This process of stretching and closing preferences of identity have eventually led to an Indian East African identity. To understand the creation of this identity, this article argues that there is a need to study cultural change as a local (a well-defined geographical and historical area) and bottom-up (using the perspective of the agent who changes, adapts, mixes, integrates or assimilates) process.

Contacts between South Asians, Africans and Europeans in East Africa have a long history, greatly influenced by the economics and politics of colonization, and the emergence of nation-states. This long-standing relationship resulted in a particular South Asian East African business culture in which Gujarati (Indian), Swahili (East African) and European culture were adapted, transformed and re-invented. The migration from South Asia to East Africa, and the minority status of South Asians in the host society resulted in mixed strategies of adaptation. This was not a natural, harmonious process, but one with conflicts in which painful decisions had to be made in order to survive in a fast-changing economic and social context.

In this paper, I argue that South Asian culture changed as the result of three areas of cultural contact. The first concerns its interaction with Swahili culture and a new geographical environment, including becoming a minority in East Africa. The second is its interaction with the white colonial elite, including the growing importance of Western education to South Asians in East Africa, as well as the importance of the European market. The third is the cultural and, in

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some periods, economic outlook of South Asians in East Africa towards their ancestral land of South Asia.

Cultural interaction

How and why does culture change, and in what direction? These questions refer to a long debate in historical anthropology relating concepts like acculturation, assimilation, integration, syncretism, hybridity and diffusion.¹ Recent debate seems to concern two basic outcomes of cultural interaction. The first is that all kind of cultural interaction will eventually evolve towards a Westernization of the world culture. In general, this refers to a top-down process where the dominant Western culture is eventually adapted by the subordinated non-Western culture.² This is seen in most studies of colonialism, which have tended either to condemn or to celebrate the perspective of the colonizer. Little attention has been paid to the actual strategies of the colonized.³ No doubt, cultural interaction is an uneven process in which different groups have different ranges of choice. However, it is very difficult to define the various complex layers of power and unevenness. But we do know, for example, that most colonized cultures had little control over the colonizer's culture.

The second basic outcome of cultural interaction concerns globalization, which seems to praise the postmodern process in which cultures 'are more globalized, cosmopolitan and creolised or hybrid than ever'.⁴ Here, the celebration of hybrid cultures leads to quasi-philosophical notions that 'cultures have always been hybrid' and 'contemporary accelerated globalization means the hybridization of hybrid cultures'.⁵ Ulf Hannerz refers to 'a combination of diversity, interconnectness, and innovation, in the context of global center-periphery relations'.⁶ In his view, creole cultures no longer refer to the particular cultures in a specific historical and geographical context, but rather to a globalized quality of existence.

Although processes of creolization (the mixing of cultures) may take place within a global continuum of relations,⁷ they nonetheless attain their significance in concrete contexts of inter-personal relations. History and geography are important. In this article, I argue that there is a need to study cultural change as a local, bottom-up process. Local is used 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 who changes, adapts, mixes, integrates or assimilates. By taking this perspective, we may gather a view of how the range of choices is defined by the actors of change 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.

In this particular case, we take the perspective and experience of the changing culture of three generations of business families from the Lohana community, which constitutes the majority of Hindus in East Africa.⁸ The paper focuses on changing food habits and marriage policies, well-known examples of the Hindu notion of 'purity'. This research is based on the history of more than 20 Hindu

Lohana families who have lived in East Africa for three generations or more. These families include more than 200 people, of whom 78 were interviewed between 1999 and 2003, including during a year of fieldwork between July 2002 and July 2003. Some seven or eight key interviewees were interviewed more than three or four times. In addition, all kind of informal meetings, dinner parties and celebrations of holidays were attended. The interviewees are assigned to one of three generations: the 'pioneers' born between 1880 and 1920 who decided to settle with their families in East Africa, the 'South Asian East Africans' born between 1920 and 1960 who made East Africa their home, and the 'internationalists' born between 1960 and 2000 who have roots as South Asian East Africans, but are economically oriented towards the West, and culturally towards the West and the East.

The first generation: pioneers

The migration history of South Asian East Africans is well documented. Long before East Africa was discovered by the Europeans, Zanzibar (Tanzania), Mombassa (Kenya) and Bagamoyo (Tanzania) were well-known trading ports for Arabs and South Asians.⁹ These trading relations were strengthened when Seyyid Said moved from Oman to Zanzibar in 1840, and many South Asian residents in Oman followed. During the establishment of the British Empire in East Africa, relations with South Asian traders again expanded. In addition, Indian indentured laborers supplemented the growing community of South Asian traders. Between 1880 and 1920, the number of South Asians in East Africa grew from about 6000 to 54,000. These included Hindus—among them well-known business communities like Patels, Lohanas, and Shahs—as well as Muslims, Sikhs, Goans and others.¹⁰

The various South Asian business communities that arrived in East Africa in the late nineteenth century developed far more intimate social and economic relationships with each other than they had enjoyed in India. These linkages resulted in new business habits, marriage policies and forms of capital accumulation. Their shared knowledge of the Gujarati/Cutchi language and their minority status in a new society (never more than 2 per cent of the total population in East Africa, although somewhat higher in the main trading ports)¹¹ played an important role in this process. Yet, despite the development of more intimate social economic links, inter-caste marriages and marriages between Hindus and Muslims remained uncommon.

Diverging concepts of purity and impurity made it rare for Hindu merchants to take their wives out of India, while Muslim merchants generally traveled with their families, especially to Muslim lands. That the Hindu woman of the household did not travel overseas seems to have been sufficient to ensure the continuing purity of the household.¹² Nevertheless, that men traveled alone caused different problems. Their food should to be prepared by family members and, therefore, eating 'outside' and 'taking food from others' was considered to be impure. This may have caused some delay in the migration of Hindu Lohanas

from Gujarat to East Africa. In 1876, James Christie, the British doctor in Zanzibar, described how the Hindus 'never, even now, settle permanently, as it is not lawful, or according to their customs, for their women to cross the sea'.¹³ The earliest reference to Hindu women arriving in East Africa dates to 1879 when the first Hindu (Bhatia) woman arrived in Zanzibar, to be followed by the first Vania woman in 1882. They were warmly welcomed by the Sultan of Zanzibar, Seyid Bargash.¹⁴ Soon, more and more Hindu businessmen began to consider Zanzibar as their permanent home. Although the Hindu men generally went back to India to marry, their wives stayed behind, with the men making frequent trips back and forth. As this happened, religious taboos were frequently sidestepped.

The religious struggle for purity among Hindu Lohanas may be attributed to all kind of adjustments and rejections. As their marriage functions ought to be attended by Brahmins, who were still not allowed to travel overseas, the first generation got married in India. Some of the youngsters even went back for years to India in order to find a suitable spouse. Most marriages, however, were arranged, and it was just a matter of sailing the Indian Ocean, getting married and coming back.

The first, pioneer generation of Hindu Lohanas in East Africa was born between 1880 and 1920 in Gujarat. A prime example of this group is Sunderjibhai.¹⁵ In 1916, at the age of 10, he arrived together with his father in Zanzibar. Most of this generation had received at least a primary education in Gujarat, and many were able to read, write and speak Gujarati, while some had a little knowledge of English.

Sunderjibhai's family had been asked to look after a shop of a relative whose sons did not want to settle in East Africa, and had returned to India.¹⁶ Their business was flourishing. Not only did they use their family network in Zanzibar and India to their commercial advantage, they also outplayed colonial law. At that time, a person was not allowed to be both a broker and a trader. So, Sunderjibhai's father applied for the broker license, while his son acquired the trading license. In this way, the family was able to provide both services to their clients.

Today, at 96 years of age, Sunderjibhai is known in the family as 'uncle' or, respectfully, as 'the old man'. He is partially blind, has difficulty walking and his voice is low. Nevertheless, he still makes daily visits to his office (now run by one of his sons) six days a week. Sunderjibhai lives with his two sons and their families in a typical extended family house in Mombassa. He wears traditional Indian dress like white khadi, dhoti and pyjama.

While waiting to meet the old man, I was offered a glass of water. When Sunderjibhai arrived in the living room, two other visitors went to him and, before shaking his hand, touched his feet in the traditional Indian gesture of greeting a respected elder. Instinctively, I did the same as I was used to this type of greeting in India. However, it turned out to be the only time in East Africa that I was part of this Indian greeting ceremony. In addition, I noted that there

was no typical Indian namaste, the traditional greeting in which you put your hands together, palms inward, and give your friend or relative a little bow.

Sunderjibhai's house has the atmosphere of the Gujarati family houses of businessmen I am familiar with in Ahmedabad, India,¹⁷ including a large living room with colonial furniture and a traditional Gujarati rocking couch. The portraits of his parents have a prominent place and are decorated with fresh flowers. Except for some small traditional African craft, the living room exudes the air of Gujarat. The house of Sunderjibhai is a typical 'one kitchen house'. The three married couples who lived in the house (Sunderjibhai and two married sons with their children) shared one kitchen. There is no table in the kitchen, which means that the women sit on the floor while cleaning vegetables, cutting fruits, and preparing meals. They are assisted by a female Gujarati Brahmin cook.¹⁸ Next to the kitchen is the dining room where there is a big family table where the meals are shared. Visitors have to take off their shoes before entering the dining room. Men and women eat separately, and this family has maintained their Gujarati tradition of being vegetarians and non-drinkers.

The maintenance of vegetarianism was a major issue in the family. Even after Hindu wives started to join their husbands in East Africa, some of the old taboos remained in effect. Sunderjibhai remembers his father and grandfather faced difficulties in opening new business ventures upcountry because of food problems. Sunderjibhai recalls that his grandfather had to close the business upcountry in Jinja, Kenya, because of the absence of Hindu women or Brahmins:

I remember that my father told me about his uncle who opened branches of our company in Mombassa and Jinja in 1905. At that time, Jinja must have been a very small place. And he placed a manager there. However, in Jinja there were no Hindu families as such. The foods were cooked by the local people and being *vaisnavanias* they find it very difficult to stay. They eventually had to close the Jinja branch because of the food problems, because the managers would not accept the food prepared by the locals because they were strict vegetarians. But in Nairobi and Mombassa and, even in Zanzibar, there were no problems at that time. Our men had settled with their women, there.¹⁹

It was difficult to find out whether the importance of food was the only reason to close down Sunderjibhai's family business in Jinja. At that time, other Indian communities were prospering and the town was 'flourishing'.²⁰ It is, however, plausible that the food habits of Hindu Lohanas hampered their economic development in this area. When asked to compare the food habits of his father and grandfather, Sunderjibhai suggested that there was only a slight change between the two:

There was not much change in the eating habits as far as my father is concerned. The only thing I heard from my father is that my grandfather was man of taste, he was strict to certain items in the food whereas my father followed the same style, but this was more 'free style' than my grandfather. But they were all vegetarians. My father didn't mind going around. All though he was a *vaisnavias*, he didn't mind eating out. So, he was not as strict as his father.²¹

The father and the grandfather remained strict vegetarians and would not drink alcohol. Nevertheless, eating outside the home slowly became acceptable, which was a necessary condition to expanding the business overseas and upcountry.

Over time, the pioneer generation's taste in food changed. Almost all the interviewees belonging to this generation revealed that they no longer like the Gujarati food found in Gujarat, India. This issue came up many times as we discussed my stay in Gujarat in the early 1990s. Those who went back to India for business, holidays, or medical treatment stated that the food there was not well prepared. 'We like it more mild, you know. Not that oily',²² is a remark I frequently encountered.

It is interesting to note that, despite the majority of the pioneer generation being very fond of their Gujarati vegetarian lunches and dinners, many were quite happy to join their grandchildren for a vegetarian pizza and a soda at one of the fast food stands in Mombassa and Dar es Salaam, Tanzania. They seem to be quite mild about the changing food habits of their children and grandchildren, even when it comes to eating meat and, to a lesser extent, drinking alcohol. However, according to the second, South Asian East African generation (see also later), these attitudes were not common 40 years ago. Then, the pioneer generation could become furious with those not respecting the tradition of being vegetarian, even to the extent that their children decided to leave the house for that reason.

In short, two important pillars of Hindu purity eroded in the first, pioneer generation. Those who settled with their wives and children surmounted the taboo on overseas travel for Lohana women. The Hindu migrant trader, being exposed to economically successful Arab and Indian Muslim communities on the African east coast, must have felt at least some inspiration to overcome this constraint. At the same time, the migration of Lohana women simplified the preservation of their community's food traditions of being vegetarians, non-drinkers and not accepting food from outsiders. However, we do see a slight change occurring in the acceptance, under certain conditions, of eating outside.

It is difficult to make out to what extent the erosion of traditional notions of Hindu purity was a consequence of cultural interaction with Europeans, Arabs or Africans. It may be safe to assume that the Lohana traders followed their economic instinct more than their religious one. We cannot enumerate the families who stayed in Gujarat and who did not migrate to East Africa with respect to the ban on overseas travel. But those who settled in East Africa had to side-step traditions by definition.

The second generation: South Asian East Africans

The second, South Asian East African generation of Hindu Lohanas was born in East Africa between 1920 and 1960. One such example is Bharat, the third son of Sunderjibhai's brother. I met him for the first time in February 2000 at his office of the Old Textile Mills in Dar es Salaam. Bharat is about 50 years old. His office reflects his status as the director of the Old Textile Mills. A huge dark brown leather chair, three telephones on his desk and his mobile telephone show

his importance. He wore huge glasses, a style my father used to wear in the early 1970s. His European suit fit perfectly, and his shoes shone like a mirror. He very much reminded me of the Gujarati businessmen I had encountered in Mumbai and Ahmedabad.

Bharat's Indian background was emphasized by the pictures of his parents and grandparents on the corner of the table. These pictures were hung with a garland of fresh flowers, indicating that they had passed away. This a common Indian tradition of remembering and honoring family ancestors. Behind Bharat's chair, I noticed on the wall a picture of the current president of Tanzania. Although not spotted in his office, another common feature in the offices of South Asian East African business men is a calendar with photographs of Hindu temples in Gujarat and the United Kingdom, and posters with wise sayings such as 'Work is meditation' or 'Wasted time is wasted work, is wasted meditation, is waste life'.

At first sight, Bharat and his office could have been in India just as easily as Dar es Salaam. Only a few minor details suggested that this was East Africa. For example, when I entered the office, I was not offered a glass of water before getting tea or coffee, unlike the practice that commonly occurs in India (and as happened when I visited the house of Bharat's uncle, Sundarjibhai). Also, during our conversation, Bharat did not shake his head in the typical Indian side-to-side motion done to show that the listener is following a story or argument. Instead, he kept still or just nodded to show he was listening. While speaking to me, and during the frequent telephone calls he received during our conversation, Bharat used three languages: Gujarati and English (as would have been the case in India), as well as Swahili (as only could have been in East Africa). However, he has a more British English accent than his colleagues in Gujarat.

Although his office may appear typically Indian, Bharat insisted that he himself was not: 'I could never settle down in India. Their ways of thinking and behaving differ so much. We will never agree with their mentality. I can't trust a Gujarati businessmen. It is the difference between chalk and cheese.'²³ Bharat's words reflect a typical second-generation Indian business migrant in East Africa. They know that their roots are Indian. In Bharat's words: 'our food habits and cultural traditions are the same'.²⁴ He also maintains strong ties with India. Bharat went to India on his honeymoon, helps to sponsor a school in the town where his grandfather was born, and feels that each of his family members should go to India at least once in their life. However, he realizes that he has become a South Asian East African; that is, an East African with South Asian roots.

Some members of the second, South Asian East African generation of Hindu Lohanas have started to eat meat and/or drink alcohol. In most of these instances, however, it was not the first or second son who altered eating and drinking habits in the family, but the third or fourth (or next) son who did so. Confronted with this observation, most second-generation interviewees admitted it would be more difficult for the first and second son in the family to become a non-vegetarian than for the others.

Most second-generation interviewees who started to drink alcohol and/or eat non-vegetarian food remember the first time they did so very well. Most felt ashamed and, mainly out of respect, avoided discussing this change with their parents. It was always in their teenage years or early twenties, and always together with Europeans (not Africans) that these interviewees first tasted meat or drank alcohol. As Bharat recalls:

My father had sent me to a missionary school in Pune, India. The majority of the students there were British. They used to drink beer outside the campus and I felt that I wanted to be a part of that group. After I tasted my first beer, I knew I would continue drinking. Moreover, in our family drinking liquor was associated with diseases, being drunk and dirty and all that. This was not what I encountered with the European students. They were quite decent. However, when I started studying in the UK in the sixties, I saw some students getting drunk all weekend. I didn't like it.²⁵

Nonetheless, in many cases interviewees felt confronted with the natural way alcoholic drinks were served, and accepted the practice. They slowly started to share the fact that they drank alcohol with other Indian friends, but would not tell their parents.

Eating meat or drinking alcohol was never done in the house of the parents. Even in restaurants or at dinner parties or marriages, no one would drink in front of his father. 'I would never drink in front of my father out of respect', recalls Bharat. Curiously, mothers were hardly mentioned during discussions about drinking alcohol.²⁶ At the same time, the interviewees were fairly sure that their fathers knew they had changed their food and drinking habits. Although Bharat 'never drank in front of my father or my uncle ... of course they suspected [me]. But they don't want to admit for themselves. But they knew.'²⁷ Indeed, they did. Bharat showed me his father's will, which asked his eldest son to: 'Please encourage your younger brothers to behave properly in the tradition of the community. Ask them to refrain from unhealthy habits.' Bharat admitted that the 'unhealthy habits' included his smoking and drinking.²⁸ Although the generational change to drinking alcohol and, to a lesser extent, smoking were not discussed with one's father, their importance is shown by their being mentioned specifically in wills.

Sometimes differences in food habits are pronounced within the same family. In one case, two of my interviewees were brothers involved in family businesses. One is living in Mombassa with their father, who is more or less retired. In this house, the family is strictly vegetarian and no alcohol is served. The second brother lives in Dar es Salaam, where he runs a trading business. He told me that, after World War II, there was an unspoken agreement that whenever they had to 'entertain business relations' (mostly Europeans) who were known as 'drinkers', they would do that in his house and, whenever they entertained strict vegetarians, they were invited to the Mombassa house.²⁹ The brothers accepted their different food habits, whereas the father simply refused to talk about the matter. Thus, in this family, eating or not eating meat or drinking or not drinking

alcohol is not a contentious issue, simply something you do or do not do. It is not discussed. It is known and accepted.

Nevertheless, in Nairobi, Kenya I came across a group of second, South Asian East African generation businessmen who tried to legitimize their habit of eating red meat, especially beef. They all started to eat beef about 10 years ago when 'it became acceptable'.³⁰ I asked them whether the cow was not holy anymore in their community. To my surprise, they replied that it was. However, African cows were not holy in their view, only cows in India were. A local Brahmin of the Hindu Lohana temple in Dar es Salaam told me that this justification was not acceptable in his community, and he invited Brahmins from India to pledge vegetarianism in their community.³¹

Some of the lectures in the Hindu Lohana temple in Dar es Salaam were related to the subject of food. Religious traditions and reasons of health were the main arguments used to attempt to convince the audience to eat vegetarian food only, not without success. One of my third-generation interviewees (see also later) recalls how her father, who used to eat meat and drink, has become vegetarian again:

My father used to eat meat and drink, but he stopped two years ago. I am allowed to eat chicken. It is not a big deal. But we don't eat it in the house. He stopped because of this man, you know from India, who comes to the temple and gives a lecture. Basically what happened is that this man said that when you eat meat, you make a graveyard of your stomach ... My father was touched by that.³²

While being vegetarian and not drinking alcohol is an important part of Hindu tradition, they have become practices left up to individual choice. In the case already cited, the father decided to become vegetarian again, but did not force his children to follow his example (the mother in the family never ate meat). However, within the home, no meat is served. Other family members and friends accept that in this house there is no meat or alcohol. However, in houses where meat and alcohol is accepted, families always make sure that vegetarian dishes are readily available during dinner parties and other occasions. In most South Asian East African families, we see that some members are vegetarian non-drinkers whereas others are non-vegetarian drinkers. In general, eating meat and drinking alcohol has become acceptable, if not widely discussed, in the Hindu community. People know which family members are vegetarians and which are not. Their choices are accepted and respected.

In the second, South Asian East African generation, a major change in the marriage pattern has occurred. In East Africa, there was no complete cross-section of ranked caste from any Indian region, forcing Hindu men to broaden strict caste barriers and marry any higher caste Hindu woman. However, the demand for Lohana women from India remained strong. Indian men went to India for a wife because they could not easily find partners from their own region and caste in East Africa (there were twice as many Hindu men as Hindu women in East Africa),³³ they still had friends and relatives in India who could arrange a marriage, and travel between the two regions was relatively cheap.³⁴

Even so, Lohana men began to develop a preference for Hindu women raised in East Africa,³⁵ even when this meant marrying outside their own caste (marriages with Indian Muslims, Africans and Europeans remained very uncommon). The men felt that an East Africa-raised Hindu woman would know their culture and lifestyle better than those imported from India, including a familiarity with the 'slow pace of life' in East Africa and a knowledge of Swahili and how to train African servants. How to cook Gujarati food in an East Africa style (less spicy, and prepared more with coconut milk and less with clarified butter) rather than the traditional Indian way was also very important.³⁶ In this second generation, it became acceptable for the food to be cooked by an African servant. This would have been unthinkable in the first generation. Nevertheless, many Lohana families emphasize that their wives supervise the process of cooking and/or employ a Gujarati cook from India.

Bharat is a typical example of a Hindu Lohana who did not marry within the Lohana community. He fell in love with a Hindu Patel woman and proposed to her, becoming the first male member in his family to break the Lohana chain. Already, two of Bharat's elder sisters had married outside the Lohana community. Nonetheless, it was not an easy task for a young man to convince his father that he wanted to marry outside the caste. Bharat recalls how:

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 did tell me that and advised me that I was the first one of the male heritage of my family to be breaking this particular 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.³⁷

Bharat went on to explain the argument that convinced his father to allow him to marry outside the Hindu Lohana community:

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 someone from a different religion, 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 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 [it].³⁸

Bharat's winning argument was that family tradition would not be affected by marrying outside the Lohana community.

However, the consequences of marrying outside the immediate community are not the same for male and female members of the Lohana community. In contrast with men, females are no longer considered Lohanas if they marry outside the community. For example, Bharat's two daughters do not consider themselves Lohanas, but Hindus. In the past few years, marriages of Lohana women outside their community have been the cause of considerable debate.

People around the Hindu Lohana temple executive committee told me that, after heated discussions, the question of whether these women should be allowed in various temple ceremonies came down to one vote. It was the consulted Brahmin priest who convinced several community members that Lohana women who marry outside the community should not be allowed back into the temple.³⁹

In the second generation, the notion of Lohana purity became eroded. In accepting alcohol and, to a lesser extent, non-vegetarian food, their exposure to European culture seems to be of prime importance. Once drinking and eating meat was accepted, it became instrumental in their entertainment of business relations. In this sense, it broadened the social circle of Lohanas. The same came about with the choice of spouses. The loosening of caste and community ties within East Africa enlarged social relations with other Indian groups. At the same time, relations with India faded as the country no longer provided a marriage market. This seems to coincide with the declining importance of economic relations with India, and the growing importance of Europe and the United States as commercial markets.

The third generation: internationalists

The third, internationalist generation of Hindu Lohanas was born between 1960 and 2000 in East Africa.⁴⁰ Typical of this generation are Bharat's two daughters, then 22-year-old twins, who politely shook my hand when we were introduced. Although they replied to my greeting of *namaste* (hello) with *kem chho* (how are you), they see Gujarati as an 'old-fashioned' language that they cannot read or write, but only speak at home with their parents.⁴¹ Even then, they prefer to respond to a question in Gujarati with an answer in English.

The daughters have only visited India once, when they were very young. For them, India stands for an unhealthy climate, unhygienic people and environment, and a chaotic lifestyle. At the same time their rooms are filled with pictures of Indian (Hindi) film stars, and they like Hindi music very much (although they hardly understand the language of the lyrics). They quarrel with their parents when they have to wear 'Indian dresses' at official functions, but also admit to liking to dress so as well on certain occasions.

Neither of Bharat's two daughters wishes to return to India for a holiday, preferring to visit Zanzibar, South Africa or London (which they have visited more than once). They enthusiastically told me about their last holiday in Zanzibar, spent with some friends from school. I was surprised their father allowed his daughters to go on their own, but this was considered quite normal. Bharat argued that, in this way, he prepared his daughters for a longer stay in London where they would go next year to study. However, their mother would join them there for the first few months and 'teach them how to cook a decent meal'.⁴²

In the third generation, there is a great variety of food and drinking habits. A few teenagers and those who are in their early twenties present themselves as citizens of the world, as they were born in the United Kingdom or Canada, raised

in East Africa, have studied in the West and speak Gujarati, Swahili and English. When it comes to food habits, some of them stated that they are happy to 'eat everything', while others even said they would 'eat everything but Indian food'.⁴³ This generation has a strong taste for international favourites such as pizza, pasta, fish and chips, and steaks. They choose non-Indian restaurants when they eat out—although many enjoy their Indian dishes twice a week at home. Some developed a new taste for Indian food while studying in the United Kingdom.⁴⁴

Basically, we are quite tired of English food by now. The canteens offer nothing but junk food, so we try and cook for ourselves (now that we have had two years experience in cooking!) Food will range from meat, to vegetables, and sometimes Indian food!! (which my sister cooks, because I don't know how!!!) Its [*sic*] quite ironic that while we were living in Dar, we hated eating Gujarati food, but now we cook it in our own house because we miss it!⁴⁵

In this generation, there is still a strong consciousness of who is vegetarian and who is not.⁴⁶ Being vegetarian is not considered conventional or old fashioned, but simply something which you are or are not. People know who eats 'veg' or 'non-veg', and the matter is rarely discussed, although the temple priest tends to make an issue of it. 'It is not a big deal',⁴⁷ stated one of my interviewees who, after her father became vegetarian again, was allowed to eat chicken outside the house.

A small part of this third generation have enjoyed the taste of beer and wine. It is unsurprising that this tendency is stronger with the offspring of parents who drink alcohol themselves. However, drinking is still not very acceptable, even among those who are in their twenties. The importance of family control and, especially, community control comes up frequently, especially when it comes to young women drinking alcohol. One interesting change from previous generations is that the internationalist one had their first drink in a variety of environments; some at home with their parents, others after school among Hindu and/or European friends, and a few among students in Europe. One member of this generation explains how:

a lot of my Indian friends, boys and girls, their parents don't allow their children to drink, or go out and lot of other things, whereas we are lucky. My parents are very liberal ... Here community is really quite a big factor. So, if I get critical, my parents might have no objection me doing something, but say, 'it is not us, it is the community'. It is people around us.⁴⁸

Even when their parents agreed, the youth of this third generation often would not drink in front of them. Notwithstanding a number of liberal parents who accepted the changing food and drinking habits off their offspring, I came a cross quite a few who proudly stated that their children remained vegetarian and non-drinkers 'despite living or having lived in the West'.⁴⁹

Many members of the third generation are not yet married. The theme of potential partners is often discussed in the Hindu communities. Most

third-generation Hindus agree that the range of choice of potential mates is set by their parents. Some will have an arranged marriage within the Lohana community while others may have one outside the Lohana community. In some cases, the regional background of the potential mate also is important. Very rarely does anyone marry outside the Hindu community. Some youngsters stated that they were free to choose their partner, 'as long as it is a Hindu'.⁵⁰

Despite the relatively traditional choice of marriage partners as already described, one important aspect has changed for the third generation: all but one interviewee stated that they would never consider marrying a Hindu Lohana from India. A preference for an East Africa-raised partner has become common to women, as well as men. One of the main reasons for ignoring India as a source for marriage partners is that the number of Hindu women in East Africa is now roughly equal to the number of men. Also, as before, male and female Lohanas feel that Hindus from India know nothing about modern life in East Africa: 'They don't know how we live here in East Africa. They think we live like monkeys, in the bush, like Tarzan and Jane'.⁵¹ East African Hindus think Indians from India are more traditional, whereas they see themselves as more liberal in terms of food habits, dress codes and relationships between men and women. Here, parents and children agree, marrying an Indian from India was out of the question.

The role of parents in arranging the marriage of their children is considered very important in the Lohana community. Although the third generation agrees that this role has somewhat lessened in importance, they acknowledge that parents must, in the end, approve any marriage partner:

Well, the thing is, my parents have grown more liberal than my grandparents have but, at the end of the day, it will be an arranged marriage ... it won't be so strict that you have to marry the one they choose. You will have a choice basically, but not much.⁵²

The important thing is that potential marriage partners are openly discussed with the parents. Many realize that mothers are more liberal than fathers:

You know, my mum is very liberal. She says 'I don't mind who you marry as long as you are happy', whereas my dad would say 'it has to be a Hindu'; it's like that. My father used to insist that I marry a Lohana. Now he is satisfied when it is a Hindu. I might end up with a Hindu as far as I can see.⁵³

It is interesting to note the gender differences in families related to issues of purity and impurity and, therefore, notions of identity. On the few occasions in which the parents expressed different opinions over the choice of a marriage partner, the mother was always considered more liberal, allowing for a wider choice in terms of caste, class or community background, while the father was more strict.

Conclusion

This paper has described the process of cultural change and adaptation of the Hindu Lohana community in East Africa by focusing on changing food habits and marriage patterns. By taking the perspective of the community members themselves, the paper reveals that cultural change is a subtle and often obtuse process. Popular terms like globalization, Westernization and creolization only gain meaning in the context of specific geographical regions and real life histories.

When it comes to food and drinking habits, the contrast between the three generations of the Hindu Lohana community is striking. The first, pioneer generation tended to maintain their Gujarati habits of being vegetarians and not drinking alcohol, even if this meant losing business in areas where the food was cooked by outsiders and therefore 'unclean'. While the second, South Asian East African generation allows for more leniency in food habits, the third, internationalist generation is inclined to eat non-Indian food cooked by outsiders. However, this does not mean that this latest generation has completely lost their taste for Indian food. One of Sunderjibhai's granddaughters provides a succinct description of the changing taste for Gujarati food in her own family:

All though we like traditional food, we like it less than our parents. For example, my dad, when he comes home tonight or every other night, he wants his Indian food. Even when there is a Western dish, you know, he eats it Indian-cooked, you know, and added the Papadams, chapattis. And if you go back to my grandparents they will have it with lunch and dinner. So, they need it all the time, my father needs it every day or every two days, whereas we need it twice a week to be happy. I only need it twice a week, you know, I won't miss it that much.⁵⁴

The acceptance of non-Indian food and alcohol may be interpreted as the Westernization of the Hindu Lohana community in East Africa. However, while this term may be apt in that many Lohanas started drinking alcohol as a result of interactions with Europeans, it is more problematic when it comes to the community's changing food habits. No doubt there is a growing acceptance of non-Indian food, but this does not directly translate into a preference for Western food, at least not as we in the Europe may understand it. In East Africa, Indian food has changed to become less spicy and oily than that found in Gujarat, to the extent that many Indian East Africans do not enjoy the food to be found when travelling in India. At the same time, there is a tendency to 'Indianize' Western food; see, for example, the popularity of chicken curry pizza in Dar es Salaam. That some Hindu Lohana families use African cooks, while others import Gujarati cooks from India, is another example of the difficulty of concluding that this community is becoming more or less Westernized.

Marriage presents another example of the changing nature of the Hindu Lohana community in East Africa. In the first generation, the importance of caste and background were extremely important, and men would return to India to find a suitable bride. In the second generation, the emergence of a growing preference for an East Africa-raised Hindu woman sustained the community's rooted-

ness in East Africa. In the third generation, the influence of youngsters in the process of deciding the final choice of a marriage partner has grown. However, they remain firm believers in arranged marriages to someone of the same religion and East African experience. So has a process of stretching and closing preferences of identity eventually led to a unique South Asian East African identity.

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Notes and references

1. In 1935, R. Redfield, R. Linton and M.J. Herskovits published their standard work on acculturation, 'Outline for the study of acculturation', *American Anthropologist*, Vol 38, 1935/36, pp 149–152. They distinguish three types of results of acculturation: (1) acceptance—adoption of a large part of the other culture without protest or adaptation; (2) adaptation—combining some of their 'own' cultural elements with some of those of the 'other' culture; and (3) reaction—a re-accentuation of their 'own' culture. See M.J. Herskovits, *Acculturation: The study of Cultural Contact* (New York: Gloucester, 1938), pp 135–138.
2. S. Latouche, *The Westernization of the World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).
3. Good exceptions include A. Nandy, *The Intimate Enemy* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1983); and Ranajit Guha, *Dominance without Hegemony* (Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1997).
4. S. Vertovec as cited in R. Cohen (ed), *Global Diaspora: An Introduction* (London and New York: Routledge, 1997) p 128. See also U. Hannerz, 'The world in creolisation', *Africa*, Vol 57, No 1, pp 546–559.
5. J. Nederveen Pieterse, 'Globalization as hybridization', in M. Featherstone (ed), *Global Modernities* (London: Sage Publications, 1995), p 64.
6. U. Hannerz, *Transnational Connections: Culture, People, Places* (London: Routledge, 1996), p 67.
7. L. Drummond, 'The cultural continuum: a theory of intersystems', *Man*, Vol 15, 1980, pp 352–374.
8. It was estimated that in 1995 there were 3000 Lohana Hindus among 10,000 other Hindus in Tanzania. Among the other Hindu communities were Bhatias, Patels, Vanias, Brahmins and others, none of which numbered more than 800 people each. In addition, in 1995, the number of South Asian Muslims was estimated at 26,000. See Robert G. Gregory, *Quest for Equality: Asian Politics in East Africa, 1900–1967* (London: Sangam books, 1993), p 13; and C. Voigt-Graf, *Asian Communities in Tanzania: A Journey Through Past and Present Times* (Hamburg: Institut für Afrika-Kunde, 1998), p 53.
9. For more on this early period see, for example, K.N. Chaudhury, *Trade and Civilization in the Indian Ocean: An Economic History from the Rise of Islam to 1750* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985) and *Asia Before European: Economy and Civilization of the Indian Ocean from the Rise of Islam to 1750* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990); and M.N. Pearson, *Port Cities and Intruders: The Swahili Coast, India, and Portugal in the Early Modern Area* (Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins University Press, 1998).
10. See R. Gregory, *India and East Africa: A History of Race Relations within the British Empire, 1890–1939* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971) and *South Asians in East Africa: An Economic and Social History, 1890–1980* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1993). Despite the information we have on the number of migrants, their religious background and the reasons of migration, we hardly know anything about the 'cultural baggage' of these migrants and even less about how this changed after their migration. Some

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- information may be found in C. Salvadori, *Through Open Doors: a View of Asian Cultures in Kenya* (Nairobi: Kenway, 1989).
11. R. Nagar, 'The South Asian Diaspora in Tanzania: A History Retold', *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East*, Vol. XVI (2), pp 62–80.
 12. Little is known about the Hindu taboo of crossing the seas. There is enough evidence that Hindus have been crossing the seas without compunction for many centuries, but what is relatively obscure is the kind of ritual penances that had to be performed on their return. One plausible hypothesis is that the generalized taboo on the voyage of women represented a kind of substitution. See Claude Markovits, *The Global World of Indian Merchants, 1750–1947: Traders of Sind from Bukhara to Panama* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p 27. For the debate on notion of purity and impurity in the Indian caste system, see L. Dumont, *Homo Hierarchicus: The Caste System and its Implications* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1980 [1969]).
 13. James Christie, *Cholera Epidemics in East Africa* (London: Macmillan, 1876), p 345.
 14. There is one reference to Hindu women who came as slaves in 1849. But this was exceptional, if true at all. See ZA [Zanzibar Archives] AA2/AA12/1A.
 15. The names of the interviewees used in my research and cited in the text have been changed to protect their privacy.
 16. We know very little about those families who returned to India. If we assume that the reasons for returning were 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. Another explanation may be that religious taboos made them feel unhappy and uncertain in East Africa.
 17. See G. Oonk, *Ondernemers in Ontwikkeling. Fabrieken en fabrikanten in de Indiase katoenindustrie, 1850–1930* [Entrepreneurs in Development. Mills and Millowners in the Indian Cotton Textile Industry, 1850–1930] (Hilversum: Verloren, 1998) and 'Mills or millstones: the managing agency system in Bombay and Ahmedabad, 1850–1930', *Indian Economic and Social History Review*, Vol 38, No 4, 2001, pp 420–452.
 18. This reflects a typical Indian tradition of a strong notion of purity and impurity in relation to food and the acceptance of food from others. The food restrictions are not so strong observed in East Africa but, even so, it is Brahmins who operate the many vegetarian restaurants and sweet shops. For second-generation and third-generation South Asian East Africans, it has become fashionable to have a Brahmin cook in the house.
 19. Interview, 10 October 2000.
 20. TA [Tanganyika Archives] G-21 6, Jinja Wirtschaft.
 21. Interview, 10 October 2000.
 22. Indian food in East Africa is not cooked in *ghee* (clarified butter), as it is in Gujarat. Therefore, it tastes less oily. The main reason for not using *ghee* is a strong consciousness among East African South Asians that oily food is unhealthy; a perception I did not encounter much in Gujarat.
 23. Interview, October 2000. Other reasons mentioned by various interviewees unwilling to live in India included its hot climate, stifling bureaucracy, general poverty and 'unhygienic' lifestyle.
 24. Interview, October 2000.
 25. Interview, January 2002.
 26. Interview, December 2001. This may reflect asymmetrical gender roles, where the father tends to be the moral standard when it comes to drinking habits, whereas the mother is often mentioned as the moral standard in eating habits, especially when it comes to the vegetarian diet.
 27. Interview, 8 February 2002.
 28. The will of Karsandasbhai, as shown to the author on 3 November 2001.
 29. Interview, 10 October 2000.
 30. Interview, 27 November 2002.
 31. Interview, 6 January 2003.
 32. Interview, 10 February 2002. I came across several men in their sixties who had a background of eating meat and drinking alcohol but who, after retirement, had decided to become vegetarians again and dress in a more 'Indian style'.
 33. The Tanganyika Census of 1931 counted 5162 Hindu men and 2600 Hindu women. See *Report on the Non-native Census*, 26 April 1931, p 38.
 34. R. Nagar, *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East*, Vol. 16, No 2, 1996, pp 62–80.
 35. Note that the issue here is not where the woman was born. In many cases, the woman might have born in India, as it was the practice of Hindu women to deliver their babies in their mother's home whenever possible. Often this was in Gujarat, India. After delivery, the new mother and child would go back to East Africa to raise the child.
 36. There is an interesting paragraph on the Swahili and Oriental influences of Indian/Gujarati cuisine in East Africa in A.Y. Lodhi, *Oriental Influences in Swahili: A Study in Language and Cultural Contacts* (Göteborg: Acta Universitatis, 2000), pp 83–89.

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37. Interview, 24 June 1999.
38. Interview, 24 June 1999.
39. Interview, 12 January 2003.
40. Or, according to delivery norms, those born in the United Kingdom or Canada who then were raised in East Africa. See *op cit*, Ref 35.
41. One of the reasons they cannot read or write Gujarati is that the language is no longer taught at school. During the colonial period, most Indians in East Africa went to a so-called Indian school financed by the colonial government, where they were taught to read and write their 'own' languages. In addition, various Indian communities sponsored their own schools. After Tanzanian independence, Swahili became the *lingua franca* at all schools, with the exception of the international school, where English is the language of instruction.
42. Interview, 3 September 2002. Note that these girls are used to having servants to cook, clean and drive for them. Study abroad is seen as 'very tough' because 'you have to do everything yourself' and are a long way from home.
43. Interview, 3 September 2002.
44. It is interesting that Lohana youngsters frequently reminded me, somewhat proudly, that 'Indian take-aways' now outnumber fish and chips shops in Britain. See also A. James, 'Cooking the books: global or local identities in contemporary food cultures?', in D. Howes (ed), *Cross-Cultural Consumption: Global Markets, Local Realities* (London: Routledge, 1996), pp 77-92.
45. E-mail correspondence with an interviewee in the United Kingdom, 12 October 2002.
46. I would estimate about one-half of this generations is vegetarian. Maybe one-third will eat chicken and fish, while the remainder eats red meat regularly.
47. Interview, 3 September 2002.
48. Interview, 16 July 2002.
49. Interview, 16 July 2002.
50. Interview, 3 September 2002.
51. Interview, 16 July 2002.
52. Interview, 15 July 2002.
53. Interview, 15 July 2002.
54. Interview, 15 July 2002.