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Negotiating the Racial Boundaries of Khōjā Caste Membership in Late Nineteenth-Century Colonial Zanzibar (1878–1899)

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Abstract

This article explores late nineteenth-century identity formation and caste boundaries among the Khōjā of colonial Zanzibar. The central concern regarding children born to a non-Khōjā parent was what status, particularly regarding rights of inheritance, the multiracial children born of these relationships had within the caste structure. The case of *Nasur Jesa v. Hurbayee* suggests that the attitude toward these children was inconsistent; sometimes they were embraced, and at other times they were shunned by the Khōjā community. The Khōjā caste schism in the late nineteenth century and the arrival of Aga Khan III in 1899 further complicated the practice of exogamy. The Sunni and Ithnā ‘Asharī Khōjā further opened their communities through exogamy and continued the practice of plural marriage. At the same time, a command from Aga Khan III to the Āgākhānī Khōjā led to the reinstatement of traditional caste endogamy and a prohibition of interracial marriage. Therefore, both the demographic realities of Zanzibar and the politics of caste affected how the Khōjā interacted with multiracial members of their community and whether they included or excluded them within the caste structure.

Keywords: chotara, jotawa, Khōjā, Zanzibar, Ismaili, Ithnā ‘Asharī, Aga Khan, firman, jamat

Given the genetic isolation of Indic populations, possibly since the Late Pleistocene, Khōjā exogamy in nineteenth-century Zanzibar is a particularly

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interesting historical development in the malleability of caste through shifting geographies.¹ Perhaps not surprisingly, for South Asian Muslims this caste exogamy was the continuation of processes that began with the development of Muslim identities among “converted” castes in South Asia, such as with the Dāʿudī Bōhrā. The processes by which South Asians became Muslims allowed castes the possibility of new links to their West Asian coreligionists, thereby expanding the limits of caste endogamy.² For varied reasons, early to mid-nineteenth-century Zanzibar represents such an episode in Khōjā history wherein strict caste boundaries were relaxed during the early process of indigenization in East and Central Africa. While many contemporary studies of East Africa have very accurately described the insular nature of postcolonial Asian life and the complex relationships between Africans and Asians, only a few have provided invaluable theoretical insights and practical details on the function of caste in East African praxis, which particularly informs this study.³

This study of the Khōjā seeks to understand the liminality of caste identity in nineteenth-century Zanzibar. The central questions to be addressed are the extent to which there were multiracial relations between the Khōjā and non-Indic peoples, how such relations were recognized, and the status of multiracial children with Khōjā parentage. Two primary sources, in addition to scholarly literature in languages from English, Sindhi, Gujarati, and Arabic, form the basis of my study. The first is a civil case, *Nasur Jesa versus Hirbayee, widow of Jesa Damani*, tried in 1878 in the court of the consul general in Zanzibar (no. 382).⁴ The second are the *firman*s (orders) of Sultan Mahomed Shah (Aga Khan III) to his East African Khōjā *bhagatē* (devotees), which he delivered during his first visit to East Africa in 1899.⁵ These sources allow an exploration of that central question that continues to vex this diasporic caste till today: who precisely *is* Khōjā?⁶

Terminology

The term *Asian* as opposed to *Indian* is employed in this article as it is the term used by the contemporary Khōjā in Dar es Salaam and Zanzibar. Indian is a rather loaded political term in the contemporary period and was rarely used by the Khōjā to refer to themselves in nineteenth-century Zanzibar. Rather, Khōjā regional and linguistic identities, such as *kacchī* (of Kacch) and



kāthīyāvādī (of Kathiawar), were primary self-identifiers in addition to caste. In the late twentieth century, this has gradually given way to African regional identities, such as *janġabārī* (of Zanzibar) and *dārēsālāma* (of Dar es Salaam).

Similarly, the term *caste* is used as a translation for the term *jñātī* in Gujarati and Kacchī. The term *caste* is also used descriptively to refer to this phenomenon even though, technically, it does not exist from a normative Islamic perspective. The Khōjā in Africa functioned as a caste—a hereditary Indic community that practiced varying levels of endogamy, shared a profession (merchantry), and had caste-specific religious traditions that were observed in a communal manner in the caste hall. The African *mahājanavādī* (caste hall) functioned as a gathering place for members of a particular caste to observe religious events, including partaking in the *jamaṇ* (communal meal), during the life of the community. In their ancestral homeland, the primary frame of reference for identifying self and others was caste, which for the Khōjā in the late eighteenth century was not necessarily delineated on the basis of an exclusive religious tradition. It was through the prism of caste that race entered Khōjā collective consciousness in the context of imperial Zanzibar, drawing on existing Indic attitudes toward particular phenotypes.

While there was a certain level of correlation between race and class in colonial Zanzibar, it was not determining, and putting too much stress on it obscures the dynamic economic relationships that existed in the archipelago.⁷ The constructed racial categories of colonial Zanzibar were codified by the British but based on precolonial typologies.⁸ With regard to the case presented here, two categories are relevant: Khōjā and Swahili. The Khōjā were assumed to be governed by their caste traditions with regard to inheritance and racialized as “Indians.” Swahili is an ethnolinguistic category that referred to the indigenous populations of the Swahili coast during this period, roughly spanning Lamu to Minengani, inclusive of the adjacent archipelagos. The Swahili were racialized as “Africans,” though tribal and geographic subcategories were also acknowledged in the legal proceedings. Here the term *multiracial* refers to a child born of a Khōjā father and non-Khōjā mother.

Background

In a general sense, the Khōjā are an Indic Muslim merchant caste that hail from a geographic expanse stretching from Sindh to Gujarat. Permanent



migration from India to parts of East Africa is estimated to have occurred as early as the twelfth century, such as in the case of Madagascar.⁹ I focus on the settlement of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.¹⁰ Until the mid-nineteenth century, *khōjāpanth* (the Khōjā religious complex) was caste specific, engaging in regional Indic practices and rituals that integrated its eclectic Muslim traditions.

The mid-nineteenth century was witness to a fundamental transformation in Khōjā religion and caste identity with the arrival of Mahomed Hoosein Hoosanee to the province of Kacch in 1900 VS (1844 CE).¹¹ In Bombay, he filed a series of suits to acquire the communal property of the Khōjā caste, claiming he was their imam. In 1866, the Aga Khan case (*Daya Mahomed et al. v. Mahomed Hoosein Hoosanee et al.*), also known as the Khojah case, was argued in the High Court of Bombay between the elders of the Khōjā caste and supporters of the Persian exile known also as the Aga Khan. At stake was access to the caste's extensive trading networks and control over its considerable financial resources. In essence, the plaintiffs argued that Hoosanee's claim to be the exiled imam of the Khōjā caste was spurious. Eventually, the case was decided for the defendant, a verdict that had the effect of fracturing the modern caste into three Islamic creeds—Ismā'īlī, Ithnā 'Asharī, and Sunni.¹² Aga Khan's forceful insertion into the internal affairs of the Khōjā is a nexus point in modern Khōjā history, which set into motion a series of events that ultimately led to the fracture of the Khōjā caste, resulting in three distinct modern reactions to colonization. As the waves of the 1866 case in Bombay reached the shores of Zanzibar, caste identity gave way to religious identity in defining Khōjā caste membership.

The Swahili coast and areas throughout the Western Indian Ocean region, as well as Madagascar, provided a very challenging environment for strict racial classifications during the various European colonial periods.¹³ According to testimony provided in the *Jesa v. Hurbayee* case by Tharia Topan, the head of the Khōjā caste, in 1837 there were 205 Khōjā households in Zanzibar and only 20 Khōjā women. Many Khōjā men had partners who were *suria* (concubines). By 1870, the Khōjā caste numbered 718 males, 642 women, and 540 children.¹⁴ It appears that the initial paucity of Khōjā women had been filled in the intervening decades through emigration. Within this new demographic reality, the status of *chotara* (half-caste) children born to non-Khōjā mothers began to be renegotiated as culturally unacceptable.¹⁵



Etymology

The term *chotara* (pl. *machotara*) in contemporary Tanzanian Sawhili is a noun of the zero/ma- class (5/6) meaning “half caste,” “mulatto,” and “crossbreed” (of seeds or animals) and is used, for example, in the phrases *kuzaa watoto chotara* (miscegenation) and *mbwa chotara* (mongrel/mutt).¹⁶ In *Jesa v. Hurbayee*, the term is used descriptively to refer to biracial offspring. The term can refer to any multiracial combination, such as between an Arab and a Swahili, though in the nineteenth century it seems to have been exclusively used for Afro-Asian peoples.¹⁷ For the purposes of this article, I use the term to refer specifically to the offspring of an Asian Khōjā male and an African female. In popular usage, the term has retained its nineteenth-century pejorative connotation and is not socially appropriate in public, except to describe liminal racial categorizations.¹⁸

The etymological origin of the term *chotara* is somewhat disputed.¹⁹ It does not occur in Krapf’s dictionary while Sacleux lists it and attributes it to an undetermined Indian origin.²⁰ According to Johnson’s dictionary published the same year as Sacleux’s, the possible origin of the term is Arabic from the verb *shaṭara* (half).²¹ However, it is unlikely that the syllable /ʃa/ in Arabic would have transmuted into the syllable /tʃo/ in Swahili. Additionally, usage of the term in the nineteenth century almost exclusively refers to an Afro-Asian individual, which lends more credibility to an Indic origin of the term. Lodhi concurs with an Indic etymology, although he curiously states, without a source reference, that its origin is from “a vulgar Indian expression” meaning “offspring of the vagina.”²² Given that the oldest extant Asian communities in Zanzibar are predominantly Kacchī and that the Zanzibari Khōjā creole that developed on the archipelago borrowed heavily from Sindhi (of which Kacchī is considered a dialect) rather than Gujarati (of which Kāthiyāvāḍī is the primary dialect in East and Central Africa), the term’s origin is more likely from the Sindhi *chutō* (impure) the past participle of the infinitive *chuhānu* (to touch) and possibly ultimately derived from its Prakrit diminutive *chuttā* (small).²³

The Case of *Nasur Jesa v. Hurbayee*

Jesa Damani was a Khōjā merchant who split his time between his two wives. He died in Zanzibar with his second wife, a Khōjā named Hurbayee, who lived in Zanzibar and with whom he had a son and a daughter aged



nine and six, respectively. His first wife was a Swahili woman; they lived in Kilwa Kivinje and had two sons, aged sixteen and fourteen at the time of his death, one of whom was Nasur Jesa.²⁴ Damani's last will and testament stated that Tharia Topan would be the executor of his will and that his estate should be divided among "all of my children according to the law of Mahommed, the Prophet of God."²⁵ Hurbayee, however, refused to give Nasur Jesa a share of his inheritance. Therefore, Jesa was constantly borrowing money from people in Zanzibar, which then became known to the sultan of Zanzibar, Barghash ibn Sa'īd. The sultan, after meeting with Jesa, sent a communiqué to the British consul general John Kirk on 5 Dhū l-Qa'da 1295 AH (October 31, 1878) asking him to expedite adjudication of the inheritance case. Presumably, the case was being adjudicated by the British court rather than the sultan because by this period Kacchīs were subject to British dominion despite Kacch being a protectorate and not under British rule.²⁶

The Plaintiff

Significantly, the plaintiff Nasur Jesa's *arjī*, or petition (in Gujarati), to the court to receive his due share was written in Gujarati and dated 8 Kāratak 1935 VS (October 23, 1878).²⁷ While the main body of the petition was written by a scribe, the signature is in Jesa's own hand. His signature reads "hāñāsar jēsāñī pātāna." In signing, he combined his forename and surname, writing *jēsāñī* rather than *jēsā dāmāñī*, his forename and father's full name. Additionally, he used the incorrect reflexive pronoun in referring to the signature "in his own hand" using the female *pātān[ā]* rather than the male *pōtānā*. But despite the grammatical and stylistic issues with his signature, it is clear that he had been trained in the basic forms of the Gujarati alphabet and the rudiments of the language. That he had the knowledge and training in the language to sign his name on his own to petition the court indicates a significant level of Indic Khōjā acculturation and education in a caste language. The ability to speak, read, and/or write an Indic language, particularly the Khōjā dialects, was a marker of caste identity and thus identified him as an insider. The ability to maintain an Indic tongue in such a diasporic environment meant a continuation of an unbroken ancestral link and unambiguous place within the caste. If he lost the language, Nasur Jesa's inheritance claim would have been further



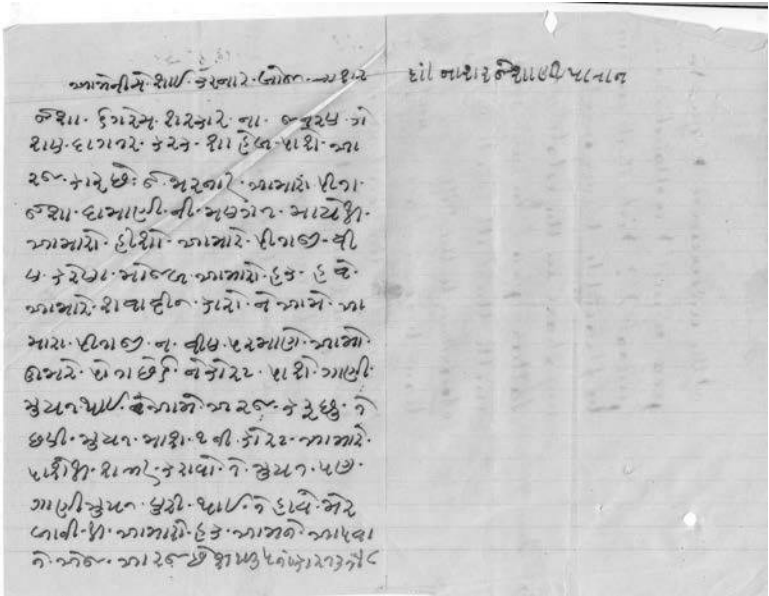


FIGURE 1 Nasur Jesa's *arji* (petition) to the court, dated 8 Kāratk 1935 V.S. (Zanzibar National Archives, HC7/106).

complicated, given that he was unknown to other caste fellows, lacked knowledge of caste etiquette and rituals, and had an unfamiliar phenotype from a non-Khōjā parent.

I, the undersigned, Khōjā Nasur Jesa, request Her Majesty's Counsel General Dr. Kirk that my share of the estate of my late father, Jesa Damani, be remitted to me as per my father's will, having come of age. For quite a while I have entreated this court and was told to wait a month. That time has long since elapsed, and I pray that my share be rightfully restored to me.

Samvat 1935 Kartak 8
Signed by Nasur Jesa in his own hand

The Defendant

In much the same way that the Khōjā religious complex existed in an inter-space between Hinduism and Islam, so too did caste custom run the gamut.²⁸



Both in India and East Africa, from the mid-nineteenth century to the early twentieth century female inheritance was being contested. The central question was that of identity: were the Khōjā Hindu or Muslim? According to the Indic customs of the Khōjā, daughters would not inherit property according to the Hindu custom, whereas according to Islamic law they would.²⁹ In the practice of Islamic law in Zanzibar according to 'Ibādī interpretations of Quranic verses 4:11, 12, and 176, the offspring of a Swahili *suria* (concubine) would have rights of inheritance from the father.³⁰ Khōjā custom was at best ambiguous on the matter, and even if such an offspring were determined to have inheritance rights, she would not be accorded an equal share as would a male heir of dual Khōjā parentage.

In her first argument, the defendant Hurbayee similarly appealed to Khōjā custom. She claimed that Khōjā custom, following Hindu caste tradition, does not allow *chotara* children to inherit property, citing the belief from the Khōjā oral tradition that *āpaṇā dīṭh asmāmma pramāṇṇē* ("from our perspective there exists no equality [between a Khōjā and a non-Khōjā *chotara*]"). Conversely, according to her, Islamic law and tradition on the Swahili coast recognizes the status of *chotara* and non-*chotara* child as equal, such that *mahmadō sarō pramāṇṇē* ("Islamic law establishes well [their equality]"). Hurbayee argued that they were subject to the unwritten Indic caste law of the Khōjā and therefore implicitly claimed that they were not Muslim.

Hurbayee's second argument was to deny that Nasur Jesa was a legitimate son of Jesa Damani. She again cited Khōjā custom, which regarded Damani's liaison with Nasur Jesa's mother, a concubine, as illegitimate. From Hurbayee's perspective, informed by Khōjā custom, she was the only legally recognized wife and thus she and her children were entitled to all of her late husband's estate. This was a clearly inconsistent position, as the very Khōjā customary law she invoked against Jesa would also preclude her daughter from receiving any inheritance from her late father's estate.

In an interesting twist, Hurbayee's third argument was to question the authority of the Zanzibar court itself in ruling on her late husband's last will and testament. She claimed that Jesa Damani was an Indian and thus was under British Indian jurisdiction; therefore, the case should be allowed an appeal to the Bombay High Court. From the defendant's perspective, Bombay would have been a more favorable venue for her position, as the case would have been heard in a place far from the reality of permissive East African



Khōjā custom regarding multiracial relationships that developed in the early to mid-nineteenth century.

Precedent

To fully consider the case, Judge Erskine Foster called in Khōjā witnesses to testify about their knowledge of previous cases in which a *chotara* was given a share in an inheritance dispute. According to Rahimtula Hemani, there was the case of Koorji Mamdani, a *chotara*, who was given MTT \$100 from an estate of MTT \$5000; in contrast, the *chotara* children of Allarakia Pirbhai received no share of their late father's inheritance. There existed precedent both to give inheritance and to deny inheritance to a *chotara* offspring. In the case of Jesa Damani, the Khōjā, including Tharia Topan, who was the leader of the community and executor of Damani's will, knew Nasur Jesa as his eldest son. This is significant because the witnesses in previous *chotara* cases can further be divided into those to whom the children were known and those to whom the children were unknown. With the loss of Kacchī and Kāthiyāvādī to Swahili as the mother tongue of many second- and third-generation Khōjā, knowledge of the child's existence and status by other caste members would have been (and still is) recognized through the child's attendance at community functions periodically hosted in the Khōjā caste hall.³¹

To emphasize the communal recognition of Jesa as Damani's son and to expedite the case, the sultan sent another communiqué to the judge in which he supported the plaintiff's case by citing the *dufter*, or records, of the Khōjā community as proof that Damani brought his son to the caste hall and thus that the community de facto recognized him. He informed the judge that he had the registers in his possession and the judge could, if he would like verification, come and inspect them himself. The sultan appeared to have had a vested interest in establishing the equality of *chotara* and non-*chotara* subjects in his dominion.

The Verdict

Finally, on March 21, 1878, the verdict was returned in favor of the plaintiff, Nasur Jesa, awarding him an equal share of his late father's estate. The judge



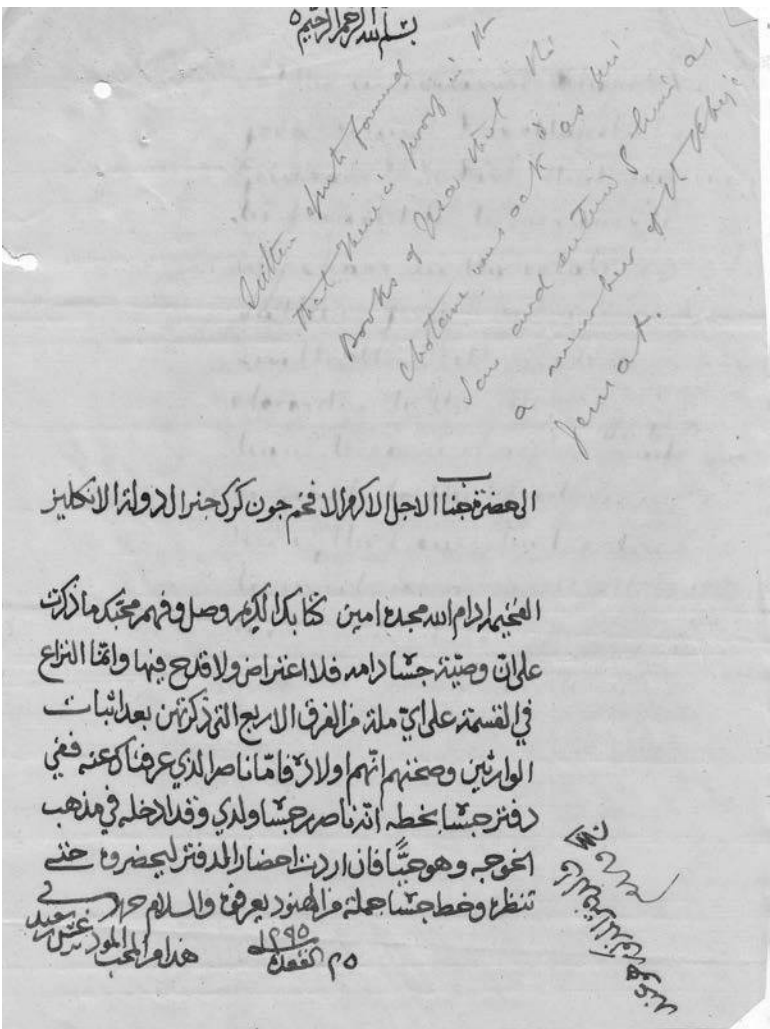


FIGURE 2 The sultan of Zanzibar Barghash ibn Sa'īd's communiqué to Judge Erskine Foster on 25 Dhū l-Qa'da 1295 AH (November 20, 1878) on behalf of the plaintiff for the case of *Nasur Jesa v. Hurbayee* (Zanzibar National Archives, HC7/106).

ruled that when Jesa Damani wrote his will, he had a daughter and son with Hurbayee, the Khōjā wife, as well as two sons with his *suria*. Damani's will stated that he left his estate to "all his children" in the plural. According to Khōjā custom, daughters did not inherit property. So if Damani had wanted his estate to be divided according to Khōjā customary practice, his Khōjā wife's son would have been his only legitimate heir. Had this been the case,



Damani would not have used the plural in referring to his offspring; therefore, he intended his *chotara* children to equally inherit his estate. Therefore, Damani intended his wealth to be distributed according to Islamic law rather than Khōjā custom.

The larger implication of the Jesa case in Zanizbar was the legal status accorded to the *chotara* through Islamic law over caste custom. As evidenced by the witness testimony and the caste's *dufter* records offered by the sultan, knowledge of a *chotara* child through introduction by the father to the community allowed for eventual recognition of a child as a full member of the caste. Jesa's rudimentary knowledge of Gujarati was additional evidence of his acculturation within Khōjā language and customs. Damani's preference for Islamic law was a thrust toward opening the way for female inheritance by Khōjā women in Zanzibar, in much the same way as the assertion of an Islamic identity and the application of sharia inheritance law empowered women in colonial India.³² In practice, these cases were quite contentious and hard fought, as evidenced by the 1894 case that typified these legal battles: *Hasum Dato and Dharamsi Khataw, administrators of the estate of Khanmahomed Mayji v. Rematbai, widow of Khanmahomed Mayji*.³³

The 1899 *Firman*s of Sultan Mahomed Shah

Concurrent with the case of *Jesa v. Hurbayee* was an escalating factionalism in Zanzibar among the Khōjā as to the religious identity of the community. The division was predicated on the assertion of authority of the Aga Khans as the imams of the Khōjā, who defined the Khōjā as exclusively Ismā'īlī. That religious mélange of the Khōjā was being systematically reimaged within normative Islamic creedal identities and shorn of its "Hindu" character.³⁴ In Zanzibar, as in Bombay, religious identity was beginning to overwrite Khōjā caste identity. A "neo-Isma'ili" identity was emerging among the Āgākhānī Khōjā, the central component of which was loyalty and obeisance to the imam and his orders.³⁵

The term original Sindhi term used for Aga Khan's orders (*firman*) is *pharamān* (pl. *pharamānā*), of Sanskrit or Persian etymology, alternatively spelled *farman* or *firman* in English, which, according to Michel Boivin, "signifies an order, a command, or patent letters" ("qui signifie un ordre, un commandement ou une lettre patente"), and in this context refers to the orders by which



simply were adopted by some relation or family friend and grew up like anybody else. In my Indian community, the fundamental differentiating factor was religious faith. Last year, when I visited Dar es Salaam, I was asked to see some early education kids, and when I stood in front of them I was amazed to see Asians [Indians], half-Asians, and total Africans [using these descriptions to describe their features]. All this is not to say there are never any problems. There are always problems when races mix, and poverty is around. Race is an easy fault line, and life for most people is hard.⁴²

Conclusion

The case of *Nasur Jesa v. Hurbayee* records one of the the last moments in the history of the Zanzibari Khōjā when they were still a single group before the official *jñāti bahār* (outcasting) in 1899. In this lawsuit, both Nasser Noormohamed and Tharia Topan testified as expert witnesses on Khōjā custom in support of Jesa's inheritance claim. Later, both merchants would become leaders of their respective communities—Noormohamed of the Hujjatul Islām Ithnā 'Asharī Khōjā and Topan of the Āgākhānī Khōjā—but would, nevertheless, produce an interesting interwoven legacy regarding the charitable dispensary endowed for the welfare of the Khōjā caste.⁴³ As the Khōjā male-female ratio became more balanced in late nineteenth-century Zanzibar, it appears there was a push for the reestablishment of caste endogamy as an exclusive identity within this cosmopolitan sultanate. Nasur Jesa was recognized as Khōjā because his father *willed* it. Nasur Jesa was known by the prominent Khōjā leaders in Zanzibar, despite living in Kilwa Kivinje, because he had attended caste functions, had been instructed in the rudiments of Gujarati, and was included in his father's last will and testament. He became Khōjā through his father's insistence and public recognition, though with the adjective *chotara* attached to his person. For a *chotara* child to be Khōjā means to be raised in full view of and with the community.

For the Āgākhānī Khōjā, the orders of Sultan Mahomed Shah codified the transformation of Khōjā identity in the late nineteenth century from an Indic caste to a Muslim religious community.⁴⁴ The changing demographics and competing creeds among the Khōjā appear to have been the motivation for Shah's ban on African multiracial relations. Faith became a determinate



criterion and the source of an irreconcilable division for Khōjā membership as visualized by Shah: **ગણુકે તપહાવતી આહે. યાને ગણુચેટો આહે.** *Gaṇṇukē taphāvatī āhē. Yānē gaṇuchēṭō āhē.* “There is enormous distance, i.e., an irreconcilable chasm.”

By the turn of the twentieth century, once the Khōjā religious complex became incongruous with new “Islamic” identities patterned on Near Eastern forms, caste ceased to be the sole determinant for Khōjā membership. The Indic Khōjā religious complex was disconnected—simultaneously forgotten and reimaged. For example, in terms of devotional literature this meant that the Ithnā ‘Asharī Khōjā preserved the *navahā’ō* (elegiac poetry) and discarded the *jñānō/ginānō* (bhakti poetry) and the Āgākhānī Khōjā did the reverse. Both discarded what appeared to be “Hindu” elements of ritual culture while zealously Islamizing others. Once religion became the primary identity marker among the Khōjā in the late twentieth century, multiracial relations and exogamy again became more acceptable. Theoretically, the foregrounding of religion in modern Khōjā identity means that being Ithnā ‘Asharī or Ismā‘īlī is more important than caste or racial considerations for marriage, and yet endogamy persists. Agehananda Bharati has adroitly described this East African phenomenon:

In many kinds of critical discourse, modern Asians make *is* statements where the situation would require an *ought* proposition. Thus, when young Asians proclaim that there is no caste system left in the Indian communities in East Africa, and that everybody intermarries according to his or her own wish, this must be interpreted as a statement of perssuasion, viz. “there *ought to be* no caste anymore, everyone *ought to marry* whomsoever he or she wants to.” But in reality less than 1% of the East African Asians, Hindu and Muslim alike, have married across caste lines during the past three decades.⁴⁵

The Khōjā of early nineteenth-century Zanzibar were a caste in flux and demographically askew, which allowed Khōjā men in the cosmopolitan Islamic culture of Zanzibar to engage in multiracial relations and polygamy with Africans, Arabs, and Iranians. As the Asian Khōjā demographic became more balanced by the late nineteenth century and as the import ascribed to religious identity grew, the reimposition of endogamy among the



Āgākhānī Khōjā created a new hierarchical organization distinct from the traditional class divide between wealthy merchants and humble stalwarts. Khōjā communities in East and Central Africa imagined themselves to be inclusive Islamic communities even as they continued to effectively function as castes, the result of more than two centuries of path dependency. In the early nineteenth century and again today, Khōjā membership is restricted to those who carry the bloodline, even partially, *and* who are known to the caste through their religious attendance at the caste hall as well as through socioeconomic networks within the community. With the current trend of rapid depopulation of the Khōjā from East and Central Africa primarily to Western Europe and North America, it is quite likely that these communities will functionally disappear as dynamic producers of African Khōjā culture long before the *jñātī-jamātī* paradox is satisfactorily resolved for this globalized Muslim caste.

Notes

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1. Gyaneshwer Chaubey, Mait Metspalu, Toomas Kivisild, and Richard Villems, “Peopling of South Asia: Investigating the Caste–Tribe Continuum in India,” *BioEssays* 29, no. 1 (2007): 91–100. Khōjā n. /^hkəʊdʒə/ [*v.t.* Sindhi *khōjaṇu* “to search for”] is the name of an Indic Muslim caste whose purported medieval origins lie in Kashmir and Punjab. According to oral traditions, the original community comprised two major Hindu castes, Caka and Lōhāṇā, which were expanded through the incorporation of various tribes on the centuries-long trek from their homeland to the Indus valley, where the group established a permanent settlement in the Sindh-Gujarat corridor. Today, this ethnic community professes primarily three Islamic creeds: Āgākhānī Ismāʿīlī (known in the early twenty-first century as Nizārī Ismāʿīlīs), Ithnā ʿAsharī, and Sunnī. See Farhad Daftary, *The Ismaʿīlīs: Their History and Doctrines* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007); and Nānījānī, Sacēdīnā. *Khōjā Vṛttānt* (Ahmedabad: Dhī Amarasinhajī Prī. Prēs, 1892).



2. A. H. Bittles, S. G. Sullivan, and L. A. Zhivotovsky, "Consanguinity, Caste and Deaf-Mutism in Punjab, 1921," *Journal of Biosocial Science* 36, no. 2 (2004): 221–34; Muthukrishnan Eaaswarkhanth et al., "Diverse Genetic Origin of Indian Muslims: Evidence from Autosomal STR Loci," *Journal of Human Genetics* 54, no. 6 (2009): 340–48.
3. For studies on the insular nature of postcolonial Asian life and the complex relationships between Africans and Asians, see Dharam P. Ghai, ed., *Portrait of a Minority: Asians in East Africa* (Nairobi: Oxford University Press, 1965); Mahmood Mamdani, "The Ugandan Asian Expulsion: Twenty Years After," *Journal of Refugee Studies* 6, no. 3 (1993): 265–73; Robert G. Gregory, *Quest for Equality: Asian Politics in East Africa, 1900–1967* (Hyderabad: Orient Longman, 1993); Paul Theroux, "Hating the Asians," *Transition*, nos. 75–76 (1997): 60–73 (originally published in *Transition*, no. 33 [1967]); John R. Campbell, "Culture, Social Organisation, and Asian Identity: Difference in Urban East Africa," in *Identity and Affect: Experiences of Identity in a Globalising World*, ed. John R. Campbell and Alan Rew (Sterling, Va.: Pluto, 1999), 169–98; Akbar Keshodkar, "Marriage as the Means to Preserve 'Asian-ness': The Post-Revolutionary Experience of the Asians of Zanzibar," *Journal of Asian and African Studies* 45, no. 2 (2010): 226–40; and Dibyesh Ananda and Nitasha Kaul, "A Disruptive Ethnography of Tanzanian-Indians," *South Asian Diaspora* 3, no. 2 (2011): 183–95. For studies that provide in-depth detail on the function of caste, see Agehananda Bharati, "Patterns of Identification among the East African Indians," *Sociologus* 15, no. 2 (1965): 128–42; Agehananda Bharati, "The Unwanted Elite of East Africa," *Trans-action* 3, no. 5 (1966): 37–41; Agehananda Bharati, *The Asians in East Africa: Jayhind and Uhuru* (Chicago: Nelson-Hall, 1972); Bharati, "Ideology and Content of Caste among the Indians in East Africa," in *Caste in Overseas Indian Communities*, ed. Barton M. Schwartz (Chicago: Chandler, 1967), 282–320; Richa Nagar, "The Making of Hindu Communal Organizations, Places, and Identities in Postcolonial Dar es Salaam," *Environment and Planning* 15, no. 6 (1997): 707–30; and Nagar, "Communal Discourses, Marriage, and the Politics of Gendered Social Boundaries among South Asian Immigrants in Tanzania," *Gender, Place and Culture: A Journal of Feminist Geography* 5, no. 2 (1998): 117–39.
4. A copy of the proceedings can be found in the Zanzibar National Archives, HC7/106.
5. Sultan Muhammad Shah, *Farmāns*, 1899, Middle Eastern Division, Widener Library, Harvard College.
6. Technically, in Gujarati the plural form to indicate the entire membership of the caste is *khōjō*. *Khōjō* can be an adjective or noun referring to the caste or a male member of the caste. *Khōjī* and *khōjēna* are used to refer to a female member of the caste. In English, the term *Khōjā* has come to replace all noun and adjective forms originally used in Gujarati and Sindhi. In the contemporary period, connotative definitions of *Khōjā* subcastes vary by region in East and Central Africa. For example, in Anglophone Tanzania among Indic communities *Khōjā* refers to the



- Āgākḥānī Khōjā, whereas in Francophone Madagascar Khōjā refers to the Ithnā 'Asharī.
7. Abdul Sheriff, "Race and Class in the Politics of Zanzibar," *Africa Spectrum* 36, no. 3 (2001): 301–18.
 8. Jonathon Glassman, *War of Words, War of Stones: Racial Thought and Violence in Colonial Zanzibar* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2011).
 9. Gwyn Campbell, *An Economic History of Imperial Madagascar, 1750–1895: The Rise and Fall of an Island Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).
 10. Abdul Sheriff, *Dhow Cultures of the Indian Ocean: Cosmopolitanism, Commerce, and Islam* (London: Hurst, 2010).
 11. V.S. refers to the *Vikrama-saṃvat* calendar date, which begins approximately 58 BCE (Nānjīānī, *Khōjā Vṛttānt* 252–64).
 12. Teena Purohit, *The Aga Khan Case: Religion and Identity in Colonial India* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2012).
 13. Sophie Blanchy, *Karana et Banians: Les communautés commerçantes d'origine indienne à Madagascar* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1995); Anthony J. Christopher, "Race and the Census in the Commonwealth," *Population, Space and Place* 11, no. 2 (2005): 103–18.
 14. Jagdish S. Gundara, "Aspects of Indian Culture in Nineteenth Century Zanzibar," *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies* 3, no. 1 (1980): 14–27.
 15. The less-used term for an individual of Afro-Asian multiracial heritage is *jōṭāvā*. Its etymology is unclear. To my knowledge, two theories have been posited as to its origin. The first is that it is derived from the Sindhi and Gujarati root *jōḍa* ("unite" or "join"). The second is that both *chōṭārā* and *jōṭāvā* are in fact surnames found in Maharashtra and Gujarat, which in Zanzibar were then transformed from proper nouns into common nouns. See Bharati, *Asians in East Africa*; James R. Brennan, *Taifa: Making Nation and Race in Urban Tanzania* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2012); and Joana Pereira Leite and Nicole Khouri, *Indiens du Mozambique et d'Afrique orientale* (Leiden: Brill, 2008).
 16. Taasisi Ya Uchunguzi Wa Kiswahili, *Tuki Kamusi ya Kiswahili-Kiingereza* (Dar es Salaam: Chuo Kikuu cha Dar es Salaam, 2001).
 17. Susan Beckerleg, "From Ocean to Lakes: Cultural Transformations of Yemenis in Kenya and Uganda," *African and Asian Studies* 8, no. 3 (2009): 288–308.
 18. David Phineas Bhukanda Massamba, *Historia ya Kiswahili: 50 BK hadi 1500 BK* (Nairobi: Jomo Kenyatta Foundation, 2002).
 19. The term *chorata* also referred to a type of mixed-quality ivory, "the point and lower portion" being composed of *gendi* [hard ivory], and the middle and upper parts of soft ivory." Samuel Carter Gilmour and Eustace Alfred Reynolds-Ball, eds., *Travel and Exploration, an Illustrated Monthly of Travel, Exploration, Sport, and Adventure*, vol. 1 (London: Witherby, 1909), 372–73.
 20. Johann Ludwig Krapf, *A Dictionary of the Suahili Language* (London: Trübner, 1882); Charles Sacleux, *Dictionnaire swahili-français* (Paris: Institut d'ethnologie, 1939).



21. Inter-Territorial Language Committee for the East African Dependencies, *A Standard Swahili-English Dictionary*, ed. Frederick Johnson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1963).
22. Abdulaziz Lodhi, *Oriental Influences in Swahili: A Study in Language and Culture Contacts* (Göteborg: Acta Universitatis Gothoburgensis, 2000); Brennan, *Taifa*.
23. George Grierson, *Linguistic Survey of India: Sindhi and Lahnda* (Calcutta: Government Press, 1919); George Stack, *A Dictionary, Sindhi and English* (Bombay: American Mission Press, 1855).
24. Outside of this case file, no other known colonial records exist on Nasur Jesa, making it impossible to ascertain even basic facts about his life such as birth and death dates.
25. William Murison, Sidney Solomon Abrahams, Thomas Symonds Tomlinson, and Gordon Kennet Knight-Bruce, *Law Reports Containing Cases Determined by the High Court for Zanzibar and on Appeal Therefrom by the Court of Appeal for Eastern Africa and by the Privy Council*, vol. 1 (London: Waterlow and Sons, 1919).
26. Abdul Sheriff, *Slaves, Spices and Ivory in Zanzibar* (Oxford: James Currey, 1987); Edward Simpson, *Muslim Society and the Western Indian Ocean: The Seafarers of Kachchh* (London: Routledge, 2006).
27. Despite Kacchī being the predominant mother tongue of the East African Khōjā, Gujarati was almost exclusively used in formal communication and for recording business transactions, such as accounts. Among the African Khōjā, the Kacchī language had a stronger oral tradition than a written one as evidenced by the surviving extant literature in the archives of the Federation of Khoja Shia Ithna Asheri Jamaats of Africa in Dar es Salaam, which has materials from Khōjā communities throughout East and Central Africa almost exclusively in Gujarati.
28. J. C. Masselos, "The Khojas of Bombay: The Defining of Formal Membership Criteria during the Nineteenth Century," in *Caste and Social Stratification among Muslims*, ed. Imtiaz Ahmad (Delhi: Manohar, 1973), 97–116.
29. Carissa Hickling, "Disinheriting Daughters, Applying Hindu Laws of Inheritance to the Khoja Muslim Community in Western India, 1847–1937" (PhD diss., University of Manitoba, 1998).
30. Anne K. Bang and Knut S. Vikor, "A Tale of Three Shambas," pt. 2, *Sudanic Africa* 11 (2000): 1–24.
31. Michael Twaddle, "East African Asians through a Hundred Years," in *South Asians Overseas: Migration and Ethnicity*, ed. Colin Clarke, Ceri Peach, and Steven Vertovec (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 149–66; Iqbal Akhtar, "The Oriental African: The Evolution of Postcolonial Islamic Identities among the Globalized Khōjā of Dar es Salaam" (PhD diss., University of Edinburgh, 2013).
32. Rachel Sturman, *The Government of Social Life in Colonial India: Liberalism, Religious Law, and Women's Rights* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).
33. See Zanzibar National Archives, HC7/106, for a copy of the case.



34. Amrita Shodhan, "Legal Representations of Khojas and Pushtimarga Vaishnava Politics as Communities: The Aga Khan Case and the Maharaj Libel Case in Mid-Nineteenth Century Bombay" (PhD diss., University of Chicago, 1995).
35. Nile Green, *Bombay Islam: The Religious Economy of the West Indian Ocean, 1840–1915* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).
36. *Oxford English Dictionary Online*, s.v. "firman, n."; Michel Boivin, *La renovation du Shi'isme ismaelien en Inde et au Pakistan: D'apres les écrits et les discours de Sultan Muhammad Shah Aga Khan* (London: Routledge, 2003), 17.
37. A. K. Adatia and N. Q. King, "Some East African Firmans of H. H. Aga Khan III," *Journal of Religion in Africa* 2, no. 2 (1969): 179–91; Nicole Khouri, "Parler de ses relations aux autres et se révéler à soi: Femmes Ismaili du Mozambique à Lisbonne," *Journal des anthropologues*, nos. 116–17 (2009), <http://jda.revues.org/3455>. An exploration of this dynamic can be found in Zahra N. Jamal, "'Work No Words': Voluntarism, Subjectivity, and Moral Economies of Exchange among Khoja Ismaili Muslims" (PhD diss., Harvard University, 2008).
38. This 1899 manuscript of recorded *pharamānā* by Sultan Mahomed Shah is in *khōjki* (the Khōjā Sindhi character). Anshuman Pandey's collected introduction to the Khōjā script continues to be the most comprehensive reference. See Ali S. Asani, *The Harvard Collection of Ismaili Literature in Indic Languages: A Descriptive Catalog and Finding Aid* (Boston: G. K. Hall, 1992); and Anshuman Pandey, "Revised Proposal to Encode the Khojki Script in ISO/IEC 10646," *Unicode Consortium*, September 12, 2010, www.unicode.org/L2/L2010/10326-n3883-khojki.pdf.
39. I would like to acknowledge Pyarali Jiwa, and his grandson Faisal, who developed the Khojki font for transcription of Khōjā texts as employed here. To compensate for the font's limited functionality, an approximation is offered in transcription, but the original text is represented in the transliteration that follows. The double *mahāvīrām* (colon) that surrounds the negative *na* here suggests a form of emphasis in this context.
40. It is unlikely that this is a scribal translation error. Evidently the orders were given by Shah in "English, Persian or Urdu, and translated on the spot into Gujarati and written down[.] . . . apparently without much editing" (Adatia and King, "Some East African Firmans," 181). In English, Persian, and Urdu the terms for *slave*, *concubine*, *African*, and the like are sufficiently dissimilar in form and connotation to be confused. Even among the local Asian community in Zanzibar, there was a clear difference in the use of terms such as *mānāmke* (woman), *mjākājhi* (slave woman), *surīā* (concubine), and so on, in the local Zanzibari dialect of Swahili as understood by Gujarati speakers. See Adatia and King, "Some East African Firmans," 181; and Alidina Somjee Lilani, *A Guide to the Swahili Language, in Gujarati Characters, with English and Gujarati Translations Chiefly for the Use of Indians Having Relations with Zanzibar* (Bombay: Education Society's Steam Press, 1890).
41. Richa Nagar, "Religion, Race, and the Debate over Mut'a in Dar es Salaam," *Feminist Studies* 26, no. 3 (2000): 661–90.



42. M. G. Vassanji, interview by Mosaic, *Interview*, April 9, 2013; Qamar Abbas, FW: *Gujarati Expert*, electronic correspondence, Karachi, May 28, 2013.
43. Ludovic Gandelot, "Islam Shia Ithna Asheri et Migrations: Chez Les Khojas, 1860–1925," in *Les Ismaéliens d'Asie du sud: Gestion des héritages et productions identitaires*, ed. Michel Boivin (Paris: L'Hartmann, 2007), 199–219.
44. To better understand the transformation of the Khōjā from *jñāti* (caste) to *jamāti* (community) in the context of colonial and postcolonial Zanzibar and Dar es Salaam, see Akhtar, "Oriental African."
45. Bharati, "Patterns of Identification among the East African Indians," 132.

