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THE ISMAILIS IN UGANDA.

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The Asians in Uganda did not form a homogeneous community but comprised a number of distinct sub-groups. This chapter selects one of these, the Ismaili community, and investigates its response to the changing situation in Uganda between 1958 and 1972: the nature and degree of its adaptation to British decolonization, African independence, and, finally, Asian expulsion.¹ The expulsion itself raises a number of issues. The historian needs to examine the two charges most commonly levelled at the Asians at that time—economic exploitation and social non-integration. However, the value judgements of 1972 must be avoided: the Ismailis were neither heroes nor villains.

The Ismailis were a minority within a minority. They formed the largest single Muslim Asian community, numbering about 14,000 in 1972, but the Muslims in Uganda were heavily outnumbered by the Hindus.² The Shia Imami Ismaili sect is defined, briefly, as those who accept His Highness the Aga Khan as spiritual leader.³ Within Islam, the major division is between various Shia groups who believe that the Prophet passed on both his spiritual and secular authority, and the Sunni majority who deny any such succession. Of the Shia group, only the Ismailis believe that the succession of Imams has continued unbroken to the present Aga Khan, the forty-ninth Imam, and this belief has had profound practical consequences especially in the last hundred years. The Ismailis became distinguished from other Shias by their claim that the succession passed through Ismail, as seventh Imam, and from this they derive their name. The forty-sixth Imam was a Persian nobleman who acquired the title of Aga Khan. When he moved to India the British honoured him with the further title of 'His Highness', since which time the community has preserved both appellations for its leader. It must be stressed at the outset that, notwithstanding some common beliefs and practices, the Ismailis are regarded as distinctly heretical by other Muslims; their perspective has been well illustrated by a reference to the Sunnis as 'the sect not accepting the leadership of the Imams'.⁴

The modern emergence of the Ismailis begins in nineteenth-century India, and their subsequent achievements in East Africa can only be

understood in relation to the developments of this earlier time. The Ismailis were then centred in the coastal city of Bombay and were commonly referred to as Khojas. A community of about 2,000 had migrated from Kutch and Kathiawar earlier in the century but their homeland may have been further north still. Originally Hindus, their conversion to Islam began in about the twelfth century and increased especially in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. In Bombay the Khojas outwardly practised Sunni rites for fear of persecution but they secretly continued to recognize the spiritual claims of the distant Aga Khan and to make financial offerings to him.

Migration to the urban setting of Bombay and the prosperity which accompanied it, as many small traders became important shipowners, put strains on the structure of the community. The most serious was the emergence of an educated and rich group who resented the claims of the Aga Khan to obedience and money, and who wished to 'reform' the Khojas by wholeheartedly adopting Sunni practices; this would not only sever the connection with the Persian nobleman but also improve relations with dominant Muslim communities in Bombay. It was in these years of the middle of the nineteenth century, however, that the Aga Khan came to be established without question as leader of the Ismailis in India.⁵

After an abortive rising against the Shah of Persia in 1838 the Aga Khan fled to India, and, having established himself in British circles by his assistance on the north-west frontier, eventually settled in Bombay. He was accompanied by over 1,000 relatives and dependants, and now his presence in the city enabled him to make his claims and exercise his authority with new force. There developed a deepening division between the 'reform' party, numbering about 800, and the majority of the Khojas who adhered to the Aga Khan. At last, in 1882, the reformers had recourse to the British courts and filed a suit aimed at preventing the Aga Khan's interference in the affairs of the community, which had become especially marked with his instruction that his followers must declare themselves openly to be Shia. It was the recourse to British adjudication which resolved this internal crisis: not, however, by supporting the 'reforms' but by establishing the Aga Khan's position, confirming religious tradition by legal sanction. Sir Joseph Arnould ruled that the Khoja community 'has always been and still is bound by ties of spiritual allegiance to the hereditary Imams of the Ismailis'.⁶ Arnould was not authenticating the line of succession but giving the community a legal definition in face of which the 'reform' party was forced to secede.

In several respects these developments represent a useful starting-point for a study of the Ismailis—the emergence of the Aga Khan and the

recognition of his status both within and outside the community; the urban, commercial setting; the discarding of Sunni practices and of the doctrine of *tajiyya*.⁷ Furthermore, prosperity was contributing to a concern for internal progress and order, and it was significant that the wealthier, better educated Shia Khojas who remained after the defeat of the 'reformers' took up the pursuit of change and improvement, especially in the areas of financial organization and educational advance. These all became dominant themes of the following century but already one other trend was becoming visible: Khojas had begun to migrate to other corners of the Indian Ocean.

In Zanzibar there were reported to be between 5,000 and 6,000 Indians by as early as 1860,⁸ and the Khojas formed the largest single community among these. Indians had been active on the east coast of Africa for centuries but the nineteenth century was something of a pre-colonial golden age for the Indians, unrelated to the later arrival of indentured labourers for the British East Africa Protectorate with which Indian settlement in East Africa has so commonly been associated. Encouraged and patronized by the Sultans—themselves under increasing British influence—the Indians in Zanzibar had an almost total grasp on overseas trade as well as controlling retail trade; as customs farmers they were in a position close to the Sultans; and as creditors they financed both the huge Arab clove plantations on the coast and the trading caravans which were beginning to penetrate the interior. A prominent Ismaili, Tarya Topan, encouraged other Ismailis by his outstanding success as a trader and he also pioneered welfare projects by founding a school and, in 1887, the first general hospital in Zanzibar.

The most remarkable Indian figure of the period of European partition was an Ismaili, Allidina Visram, who operated first in this Zanzibar context but then moved inland. Indeed, he can be said to have pioneered the Indian impact on Uganda, his enterprise owing little to colonial protection and nothing to promptings from any quarter. He had established trading centres in many parts of Uganda before the railway reached Kisumu and in 1902 Frederick Jackson wrote that 'Allidina Visram is already prepared to buy up as much as the natives like to cultivate'.⁹ He dealt in a wide variety of products, while his stores acted as banks and creditors. He diversified into small-scale manufacturing and processing, especially cotton-ginning. He displayed philanthropy as well as industry, contributing to a hospital in Kampala, a school in Mombasa, and, perhaps most remarkable, Namirembe Cathedral. By 1916, the year of his death, he had done more than any other Indian to realize the potential which Uganda offered the enterprising immigrant and at the same time he set a pattern for the subsequent activities of his community.

'By 1910, the scene in East Africa was more or less set. . . the picture did not substantially alter in the next 40 years.'¹⁰ In terms of the location of power, the distribution of economic activity, and the three-tier racially-stratified social hierarchy, this observation of H. S. Morris is valid. But within that 'unaltering' context, the situation of groups and individuals was far from static, but fluid and dynamic. As far as the Ismaili immigrants were concerned, there was a constant evolution founded on a willingness to adapt for the sake of the community's progress. The so-called 'Asian community' in Uganda was by no means homogeneous, though frequently treated as a unit by both government and Africans. Far more significant, as Morris has stressed, were the communal sub-groups, and for these the Ismailis acted as pace-makers in the process which he has termed 'communal crystallisation'; moreover, it was at this level that Asians won concessions and achieved most. For example, the Ismailis soon insisted on their right to have exclusive burial grounds and exclusive title to land for their *jamatkana*, or mosque. Characteristically, the community was also the first to insist on, and build, separate schools for their children. Indeed, by the mid-1920s the Ismailis had succeeded in winning legal recognition as a separate community, despite the government's preference for dealing with the Asians as a single category.

Thus established, and with their numbers growing steadily by natural increase and continued spontaneous immigration from India, the activities of the Ismailis as of other Asians in Uganda became more varied. Partly through choice, partly as a response to colonial policies, Asians diversified over the next three decades into wholesale trade, service industries, small-scale manufacturing, and, as a return on educational investment, into office jobs and indeed the professions. What distinguished the Ismailis in this period is their institutional evolution and the foundation of various self-help projects, most of which were the personal achievement of Aga Khan III. It was he who confirmed the status of the Imamate which had been won in India. On the surface there is a paradox in the fact that he reinforced his spiritual position in the eyes of his East African followers while becoming a statesman of international reputation, closely linked both politically and personally with the West in general, and Britain and France in particular. Yet it was vision and experience gained in this way which led him to promote change among his East African followers and it was the secular evolution and material progress which resulted from these changes which in turn reinforced his religious position.

Earlier, the Aga Khan's authority had been in question in Zanzibar as it had been in India, and between 1880 and 1910 there were many defections,¹¹ especially to the Ithnasheri, a closely related Shia group

which did not have a living Imam. The penetration of the interior, however, itself encouraged by the Aga Khan, changed this situation. In the 1920s the Aga Khan inaugurated a system of councils in Uganda, founding his community's organization on a written constitution according to the Zanzibar model which dated from the turn of the century. In 1937 he founded the Jubilee Insurance Company on the occasion of his fiftieth anniversary as Imam, making a substantial personal investment in a company which was to provide the whole range of insurance schemes for his community. Ten years later, in celebration of his Diamond Jubilee, he was weighed in diamonds, the value of which (£684,000)¹² he then donated to the community for the establishment of an investment trust which might invest in land and businesses and make loans to cooperatives, building societies, and related institutions of sums equal to their capital, while paying dividends to member investors in the trust. In the following decade, he launched a further project whereby all East African Ismailis might own their own homes by 1960. A building society was set up to provide mortgages for the better off and to acquire land and build houses in which less prosperous followers might take occupation as tenants but eventually pay back sufficient to become owners.

Thus we may agree that 'the progressive, prosperous, and united Ismaili community of present-day East Africa is virtually a creation of the late Imam'.¹³ Moreover, these developments represented a significant investment for a Ugandan future and contemporary emphasis on educational advance helped to confirm not only the community's commitment to Uganda but also their reputation as the most accomplished sector of what was, by the late colonial period, a most conspicuously prosperous Asian minority in East Africa.¹⁴ Largely through the practical guidance of an Imam who could claim divine authority, the Ismailis solved the problem which has faced all Muslim communities in recent times of how to adapt to change and compromise with modernity.

The pattern continued into the decolonization period, a demonstration that the enduring organization still found practical expression. A brief examination of this organization is necessary since it was the foundation of the various community projects and it will serve to explain the corporate nature of the response of the Ismailis to the political challenge of decolonization.

'Religious' and 'secular' leadership were inseparable and centred on the person of the Aga Khan, the living Imam; but Aga Khan III ensured that there was an efficient organization below him and reaching down to each member of his community. The fundamental unit was the congregation, or *jamat*, in each of the towns in which the Ismailis

dwelt. The *jamatkana* was in each case the focal point of the congregation, serving both as a place of worship and as a 'multi-functional community centre'.¹⁶ The largest of the three Kampala *jamatkanas*, for example, comprised a hall for worship, a council chamber, a library, and a dispensary.

The constitution for the Uganda Ismailis, dating from the 1920s, was updated by the late Aga Khan in 1937, 1946, and 1954, and further modified by the present Aga Khan in the year of Uganda's independence, 1962.¹⁶ By means of these constitutions the council hierarchy was maintained, with provincial and territorial councils working under an East African Supreme Council centred in Kenya. These councils, comprising prominent members of the community nominated from within the hierarchy but approved by the Aga Khan himself, 'directed, supervised and co-ordinated'¹⁷ the activities of the *jamats*. Each council had a president and secretary and a number of officers responsible for different departments, for example, health, education, finance, and housing. The constitutions periodically reformed the code of Ismaili personal law, so that the 1962 version, for instance, explicitly forbade the betrothal of boys below the age of 18 and girls below the age of 16, a remarkable contrast to Hindu practice. At the same time, the wife's rights in divorce cases were laid down, while the explicit prohibition of polygamy pointed to one of the many contrasts between Ismaili and local African Muslim practice.¹⁸ In these respects the community operated its own personal legal system, with its own structure of tribunals, within the host state of Uganda.

Social projects were financed by the regular payment by each adult of an eighth of his income to the mosque officers, the *mukhi* (treasurer or steward) and *kamaria* (accountant). This fundamental religious obligation predated the nineteenth century where, as noted above, it had contributed to a constitutional crisis within the community in India. The payments were deemed to be the Aga Khan's exclusive personal property but in practice the money collected—and collected also from gifts, initiation fees, and payments for ceremonies—was used to finance community services at the local level.

Also established in the constitutions were Ismaili Associations, in parallel with the councils but with responsibility for the religious life of the community. Although they played an important part in the East Africa Muslim Welfare Society, which will be discussed later, the Ismailis did not seek to propagat  their faith to non-Ismailis in Uganda. The purpose of the Associations was, rather, to teach the community itself, explaining the Aga Khan's interpretations of Islam, reviewing the faith in the light of modern science, and continuing to cleanse belief and practices of superstitions, like the use of charms, which had been

inherited from the Hindu past. Indeed the religious context of these constitutions, which were on the surface so secular in form and content, was made plain in the first two parts of the 1962 version, first the holy *firman* (verbal edict of the Aga Khan) by which the constitution was issued, second a clause to explain that nothing contained within it could be held to be binding on the Imam himself.¹⁹

Though appearing to constitute a state within a state, the Ismaili constitutions did not, in the light of the Aga Khan's guidance, have serious political implications. They served rather to clarify religious affairs and to found the welfare services, so conspicuous in the absence of state provision, on a solid organizational base. Local autonomy was preserved where possible but the wider the implications of any issue, the higher up the pyramid was guidance sought, with the Aga Khan always the ultimate authority. It would be hard to exaggerate the practical consequences for the Ismailis of having a living Imam, and this centralized, corporate organization which enabled successive Aga Khans to guide and effect change. First introduced by the young Aga Khan III, when he was called upon, in 1899, to settle problems both among his followers in Dar es Salaam and between those followers and the German authorities, the constitutions, in their revised forms, continued to regulate the communities' affairs and to confirm their separate identity vis-à-vis other Asian groups while binding them closer to other Ismaili congregations. Thus a young Ismaili's summary, 'our community has been taught to look after one another no matter what colour or nationality'.²⁰

The central significance of the Aga Khan appears to be disputed by H. Amiji's contention that 'the community is basically ruled by a small plutocratic elite'.²¹ The plutocracy existed, it is true. It included, for instance, Sherali Bandali Jaffer who, as a member of the UPC government, was perhaps the most prominent Ismaili personality in the 1960s, and a number of other prominent businessmen and property owners were reputed millionaires. Yet while undoubtedly forming an upper class within the community, these figures saw themselves as servants of the Aga Khan, they served in honorary capacities on the councils, and their rewards of titles and prestige were won from the Aga Khan and their proximity to him. They were partners in ruling, in that consultations were held with them before *firmans* were issued and in that the task of execution frequently fell to them. Nevertheless, they were subordinates to successive Aga Khans who could claim not only to possess divine authority along with their nineteenth-century predecessors, but also to have subsequently made unequalled personal contributions to the progress of their community. A further, minor, qualification to their status as an Ismaili 'upper class'²² might be made. Distinctions

of wealth and power within the Asian sub-groupings in Uganda and elsewhere in East Africa have tended to be overlooked by commentators though in fact representing yet further divisive criteria. Nevertheless it could be argued that the ordering of the Ismailis as outlined above minimized the class distinctions within the community, the rich contributing more to community funds and the poor receiving welfare payments; while, according to one member of the plutocracy, the Ismaili leaders sought 'to make the lower class middle class, and the middle class upper class, so that all might be equal at the top'.²³

The significance of the community's formal organizational structure was that it worked in a practical way and the community visibly served its members—and, increasingly in the 1950s, non-Ismailis too. To take one example, education was compulsory for all Ismailis. Thus, on the one hand, the continuing emphasis on school building, such as His Highness The Aga Khan Secondary School opened in Kampala in June 1959, soon to become possibly the finest day school in Uganda; on the other hand, school fees were provided for children whose parents were too poor to contribute their own. Furthermore, this school was, from the outset, open to Africans, as were other Ismaili foundations since the early 1950s.²⁴ Attention has already been drawn to the housing scheme, which only narrowly missed its target in 1960 and which, meanwhile, accelerated the tendency towards nuclear family units. Estates were built and flats bought for widows and the destitute. Nor were these projects confined to Kampala: in 1960, for example, a similar project, for twenty houses, was inaugurated in Masaka.²⁵ A further illustration of the community in action lay in the social security payments which were of two kinds: emergency expenditure in the case of, for example, hospital fees; and regular supplements to the poorest members. Although the community in Uganda could not match Nairobi's Diamond Jubilee Hospital, they did provide a health insurance scheme which entitled subscribers to treatment there, and local dispensaries—again open to Africans. Thus the Kampala Health Centre, independent of government financial support, was reported in 1963 to have a 65 per cent African clientele.²⁶ Meanwhile the longer-standing institutions founded by the late Aga Khan continued to operate: there were 4,000 Ismaili shareholders in the Diamond Jubilee Investment Trust at independence.²⁷ These activities added up to a significant willingness to invest, and, while originally and predominantly serving the communities' own interests, became open to non-Ismaili participation under the auspices of the successive Aga Khans in the 1950s.

It has been remarked that 'the history of the Asian communities [in East Africa] is largely one of accommodation to the prevailing

historical situation',²⁸ and this generalization was nowhere more fully illustrated than by the Ismailis' response to decolonization in Uganda. It is a mistake to assume that the withdrawal of the colonial power was an absolute hiatus in Ismaili history here. Rather, the Ismailis' accommodation at this time represented merely a further adjustment, consistent with their previous practice. Indeed, the succession of the present Aga Kan to the Imamate on the death of his grandfather, in 1957, heralded an era, not of defensive introversion, but of even closer involvement and identification with Uganda.

The events of the past decade in general and of the expulsion in particular hinder a balanced evaluation of the conditions prevailing at the end of the 1950s. For those who seek them, there are portents of disaster in these days; there is material to suggest that the Asians' position was precarious and must have been perceived as such: thus one commentator remarks upon the Asians' 'almost paranoid sense of vulnerability'.²⁹ There was, indeed, an uncertainty about the constitutional changes that were pending, both in terms of the timing of independence and the distribution of representation.³⁰ More alarming perhaps, the African political parties did not make clear their attitude towards the Asian community.³¹ Meanwhile, events in the Congo, following the abrupt departure of the Belgians, included the flight of expatriates—among them Asians; while nearer home, indeed in the neighbourhood of Kampala itself, a boycott of non-African traders, 'politically inspired' and aimed mainly at the Asian businessman,³² was accompanied, in 1959 and 1960, by acts of intimidation and physical violence, including murder,³³ and in March 1960 the Indian Merchants' Chamber reported that half the rural Asian traders in Buganda had been put out of business.³⁴ These events could be interpreted as the acceleration of an earlier trend seen in an anti-Asian ingredient in the rise of the Bataka party in the 1940s,³⁵ and the controversy over the installing of an Asian minister, in 1954.³⁶

But these are the impressions of hindsight or of those who believed that because the Asians dwelt in Uganda they must necessarily have in themselves represented a further 'problem'.³⁷ The Asians were not, however, a central issue in Ugandan politics at any time: concentration was so focused on constitutional change in general, and the Baganda in particular—a far more important 'minority' than the Asians³⁸—that not one editorial in the *Uganda Argus* was devoted to the Asian question in 1958. Undoubtedly the Asians were, as later events demonstrated, vulnerable: an alien trading community, dominating the towns, competing for jobs in the bureaucracy, yet politically weak through small numbers and lacking any mutual interdependence with the state. They had frequently been subjected to racial discrimination and

intolerance; they were used to periodic anti-Asian invective; even the boycott of 1959-60 was limited in scope and linked to the essentially Baganda Uganda National Movement. Nor did decolonization involve a significant loss of political power for the Asians since they were essentially exchanging masters of one race for another. Above all, it was the Asians' own experience of material progress in even these, to some extent, unfavourable circumstances which minimized not only the call for constitutional safeguards on their part but also the flight of personnel and capital from the country.³⁹ With African political leaders beginning to woo the Asians as voters and indeed also to appoint Asian candidates for the urban seats,⁴⁰ even the boycott, which died away in 1960, could be seen as a temporary factor of trade recession or Baganda obstructionism, rather than as a threat, as such, to the Asian community.⁴¹

Only by retaining such a view of the process of decolonization in Uganda, one in which the situation held promise of continued well-being as well as the possibility of danger, can one understand the political response of the Ismailis, and of other Asian groups, to these changing circumstances. Decolonization involved a change from communal to national politics, from nomination to direct election,⁴² and it implied an end to the conducting of Indian politics at an informal personal level between representatives of pressure groups and officials of government. As in Kenya, the central constitutional question for the Asians was whether to accept a common roll or to seek safeguards in the shape of separate seats for racial minorities. Though some voices, British⁴³ and Asian,⁴⁴ argued for the latter, there was a remarkable unanimity in the public expression of all Asian political organizations on the preference for the common roll—a unanimity which warns against making over-sharp distinctions between Ismailis and other groups. Again, as in Kenya, differences were of emphasis; indeed, they were generally lacking in substance so that rival groups were seen publicly to be disputing over trivia.⁴⁵

The oldest political grouping of Asians in Uganda was the Central Council of Indian Associations (CCIA), founded in 1921 as a congress comprising members from the various local Indian urban associations. Weaknesses of internal inter-communal differences became explicit in 1947 and led to the Muslims breaking away to form the Central Council of Muslim Associations (CCMA) which immediately sought separate representation on the Legislative Council.⁴⁶ However, in the decolonizing period, these two formed something of a common front, a remarkable achievement in view of their past rivalry and, indeed, of what occurred later in Kenya where Muslims insisted on special seats.⁴⁷ It is wrong to suggest that the CCIA proposed communal

representation at this time,⁴⁸ for in fact, by 1959, the Council was repeatedly rejecting such a proposal and finding the CCMA agreeing to a common approach.⁴⁹

This degree of consensus did not prevent the emergence in early 1959 of the Uganda Action Group (UAG). The UAG claimed to be not a political party but merely an advocate for the total disappearance of a distinctive Asian presence on the Ugandan political scene. Since it, too, therefore accepted the common roll, friction with the older organizations concerned symbolic questions, such as the rate of electoral registration in 1960 or which Asian group had first preached identification.⁵⁰ The most serious criticism UAG members levelled at the CCIA and CCMA was that of using communalism, by their very existence, as a supposed means of abolishing communalism. Perhaps the brief prominence of the UAG is to be seen in terms of a frustration felt by young radicals at a time when the older Indian establishment still claimed to speak for all.⁵¹ However, as Hilda Kuper rightly remarks, 'its own support was too limited and came too late to make a major impact on African leaders, or even to become known to the African masses'.⁵²

As the largest single Muslim denomination, the Ismailis were naturally prominent in the CCMA—indeed it has been asserted that the CCMA was 'dominated' by the community.⁵³ But, as H. S. Morris remarks, the Ismailis 'were never firm in their allegiance to any other group',⁵⁴ and while it is valuable to see the CCMA as a distinct category, it may well have been a reflection of the Ismaili influence in it that no public mention of the CCMA as such in the *Uganda Argus* is later than September 1960; the CCIA, on the other hand, continued to articulate and influence Asian views well into the independence era. At the same time, in its total abdication from politics as a group, the Ismaili community perhaps most closely resembled the UAG. On the other hand again, distinguishing the Ismailis from, say, the CCIA may result only from an optical illusion—while the CCIA held mass meetings, spoke up on the question of the boycott and indeed attempted to counter it with a form of 'Home Guard',⁵⁵ the Ismailis were also exhorting their followers through their communal organization, away from the public eye.

The instructions of the Aga Khan were notably unambiguous. *Though in some respects the 'secular' as well as the 'religious' head of the community, his existence posed no problem of political loyalty. At his installation in 1957, the young Aga Khan declared 'the position which I occupy... never will be a political one'.⁵⁶ Two years later at the opening of the Wandegeya Mosque in Kamapala, he repeated 'I have neither the wish nor the means to dabble in politics'.⁵⁷ His only

political advice, he added, was that his followers should identify with Uganda and help to develop it. Consistent with his advocacy of the common roll rather than communal seats, he explained that 'although as a community the Ismailis will never be involved in politics, individually they may well play a constructive part in their countries' political developments'.⁵⁸ Such participation was illustrated by Sherali Bandali Jaffer and by Kassim Lakha who was soon to join him as a UPC member of government.⁵⁹ Nevertheless, in the brief period of successive popular elections the Aga Khan reiterated, 'to tell people to vote for X or Y is not the role of the Imam'.⁶⁰

Perhaps a more productive distinction to be made between Ismailis and non-Ismailis than these differences of degree in disengaging from communalism in politics is to be found in the relative significance or weight of the exhortations made by different community leaders. As the UAG contested the claims of the CCIA and CCMA to be representative of Asian opinion, and the latter replied in kind, it became clear that the Ismailis possessed a leadership which enjoyed a different authority. The urgings of the CCIA that Asians should apply for citizenship or their claims that Asians supported the common roll appear unimpressive in view of remarks made by other Asians at the time. Thus in October 1959 the UAG declared 'the fact is that the mass of Asians in the country have never been represented by anyone. The most that these sectional bodies have ever succeeded to represent is the top, financially well-to-do 10 per cent of the Asians. . . The 90 per cent has seldom got within hearing distance of the conventional Asian "leaders"'.⁶¹ In the context of the colonial political structure this was not remarkable but even more critical was the voice of a newly elected committee member of the Kampala Indian Association itself who, in October 1960, admitted that that body 'speaks for only a couple of rich patrons. . . and is not an association of the people'.⁶²

This debate highlighted the special nature of the Ismaili community, which was no more democratic than any other Asian grouping but which did possess an unquestioned authority at its head, whose political impact was hence of great significance. Thus, as with the question of citizenship, for example, it becomes more important to note what the Aga Khan's advice was than to note that given by leaders of other bodies, if one is to explain mass response; for while the content of the advice may have been similar in all cases, it was only the Ismailis who had an external leader whose authority was so widely respected. In the case of other groups the absence of a community of interests between the small prosperous elite, which had an easier and more varied set of options, and the mass of ordinary Asians, greatly reduced the significance of the instructions the former gave to the latter. Though, for

instance, a degree of partnership existed between African and Asian members of the 'upper class', less prosperous Asians might perceive the frailty of African assurances and thus more seriously question their own supposed 'leaders'. While similar distinctions did exist within the Ismaili community, only they had the Aga Khan as a supreme source of guidance and, not least, the community itself as source of assurance. At a time of choice, it was Asians' identification with their own sub-groups which was of primary importance.

The Ismailis' confidence was vindicated by the political developments of the early 1960s. Not only did political parties make assurances both before and after elections, as in 1961, but they competed keenly for Asian support,⁶³ especially in the towns where the introduction of direct elections to both national and local assemblies gave scope to the predominantly Asian electorates. To African leaders at such times 'the Asians' were not an issue; it was neither necessary nor wise to alarm the community though below this level of articulation views may have been different. Even 'Africanization' was at this time only a remote threat, usually seen in relation to taking over European jobs in the civil service.⁶⁴ Granted this context, the Ismailis' political stance was not remarkable.

From a slightly different angle of vision, one can see the Ismailis in this period continuing a process of identification with Uganda which again had many precedents from the colonial period. As the leader of a people without a homeland, the late Aga Khan had seen the wisdom of adaptation not only institutionally but culturally. As early as 1914 he had told his followers in Burma 'to identify socially and politically' with the life of that country and to adopt 'the names, habits and customs' of the people there.⁶⁵ His advice to his East African followers was to make English their first language and to 'found their family and domestic lives along English lines'.⁶⁶ Successive innovations in their schools exemplified these trends in practice. English became the teaching tongue from the start of primary school and Gujerati was dropped; especially progressive was the accent on the education of girls; while even attempts to teach Luganda were made when the schools set an example by opening up to Africans in the 1950s. Other compromises were made, from the wearing of Western dress to the increasing incidence of non-arranged marriages. Certainly enough flexibility was displayed to question the assertion that the community was not 'emancipated', and the automatic equation between communal cohesion and being 'culture-bound'.⁶⁷ There was little that was specifically Indian in Ismaili 'culture' in Uganda by the time of the expulsion.

These moves towards identification were a feature of the colonial period but the young Aga Khan urged his followers to continue the

process, albeit in a different manner, in the independent state of Uganda. He said they must 'live their lives not as a separate race but as part and parcel of their national community',⁶⁸ giving the same loyalty to the new government as they had given to the former one. It was consistent, then, with both his own and his grandfather's previous policy when he advised his community by a *firman* in 1962 to make the most conscious and outward sign of identification, the acquisition of citizenship.

How far the very high proportion of Ismaili applications was a response to the promptings of the Aga Khan is arguable, bearing in mind the readiness of the community as a whole to remain in Uganda.⁶⁹ While many became citizens automatically because they fulfilled the qualifications,⁷⁰ the application of others was a bureaucratic formality, merely an expression of their willingness to continue to live and work in Uganda which is not difficult to explain. Members of the community saw the question simply in terms of whether or not they would be allowed to live, work, and prosper as before. The prospects appeared favourable in the light of the smooth transfer of power and the immediate offer of citizenship. As noted above, the Ismailis' historic links with East Africa went back more than a hundred years and the late Aga Khan had inspired a corporate unity, an organizational framework, and indeed solid material achievement which it was calculated amounted to a thirty-million-pound investment in 1962.⁷¹ Their infrastructure of houses, schools, and mosques was the envy of other Asians. Neither culturally nor in terms of economic potential were the Ismailis attracted to India, whereas Hindus and indeed the closely related Bohra Shias (whose spiritual leader, or *dai*, lived in Bombay) had deep religious associations with that country. Also, the description of the Asians as a British as well as an East African minority⁷² is least applicable to the Ismailis whose status was that of British protected persons. Under British law, people of such status were aliens and had never had unrestricted rights of entry into Great Britain. With members of the community setting each other an example in determining to remain, in the hope of building on their already remarkable success in the country, the specific guidance of the Aga Khan may have been superfluous, except in achieving a remarkably high proportion of Ismaili applicants. As Sherali Bandali Jaffer pointed out shortly before the expiry of the two-year period for application, it was the 'lower classes' who needed persuasion while the upper elite had more options open to them and could make up their own minds.⁷³ Whatever the explanation, the charge of 'calculation'⁷⁴ which was levelled by Africans at the time of the last-minute rush of applications is least applicable to the Ismailis, since Kassim Lakha announced that over half of the community

had already applied by September 1963.⁷⁵ Elsewhere in East Africa the Ismailis responded similarly, with 90 per cent of the community said to have joined TANU in Tanganyika.⁷⁶ Furthermore, the determination of the community to remain in Uganda even after August 1972 emphasizes that their attitude to citizenship a decade earlier represented a natural and reasonable attachment to their homes and commitment to their country of residence.

The most convincing sign of Ismaili good faith was the continuing programme of investment in Uganda, in which the Aga Khan again took a lead. No sudden break occurred in 1962, so the house schemes and the operation of the interrelated community institutions went on as before. Private investment could be seen in the building of 'The Fairway', a luxury hotel in Kampala opened only months before the expulsion. More significant, however, was the much greater degree of partnership and cooperation with African business and government which testified to the Aga Khan's conviction that, whether or not his community had an indefinite future in Uganda, it was wisest both for his followers' welfare and as a concrete gesture to African government, to be seen to be investing and sharing in the development of the country. Thus in 1961 he hired a German firm to investigate the economic climate of East Africa and offer advice.⁷⁷ The upshot was the setting up of Industrial Promotion Services (IPS) with its motto 'Partners in Progress'. The Aga Khan himself contributed most of the £1 million capital with which it was launched and ensured that it was staffed by young graduates like himself. It remained privately operated but its main object was to encourage selective local industrial development, along with African government and business, by contributing advice or capital. Many articles came to be manufactured in Uganda for the first time as a result, from suitcases to socks, fishnets to plastics. Another field was farming where in Fort Portal, for instance, tea, coffee, and poultry farming schemes were launched after a personal investigation of prospects by Prince Amin, the Aga Khan's brother. A later addition to the IPS network followed in the late 1960s in the shape of Tourist Promotion Services (TPS), at a time when Uganda's enormous tourism potential was becoming fully appreciated. TPS became jointly responsible with the Uganda Development Corporation for the construction of Mweya Lodge in the Queen Elizabeth National Park and for the operation of air charter services. The themes of these twin concerns, under the close personal supervision of the Aga Khan, were investment, cooperation, and diversification, and the contributions which the Ismailis were making won the recognition of the Uganda government.⁷⁸

There were other illustrations of the same approach. To take another

example from the educational field, in 1969 a second Aga Khan Secondary school was opened on Kololo Hill in Kampala. When the quota of Africans increased in the 1960s, there were insufficient places for all Ismaili secondary-school candidates at the school built earlier in Makerere Road. So the Kololo High School was built with community money to meet the need, though it, too, admitted African students. Even the problems of accommodation were dealt with, a multiracial girls' hostel adjoining the new school, while the Makerere Road complex included a boys' hostel along with the nursery school, primary and secondary schools, and teachers' flats.

An examination of one further area of Ismaili identification and cooperation will serve to illustrate still more vividly the nature of relations between the community and Uganda. In 1945 Aga Khan III founded the East African Muslim Welfare Society which had an apparently enormous potential for exploiting the religious bond of Islam and breaking down barriers of race.⁷⁹ The Aga Khan sought always to further the pan-Islamic ideal and his work in the creation of Pakistan was testimony to his breadth of vision. The East African foundation was part of that vision and to help realize it the Aga Khan not only contributed 3 million shillings at the outset but promised to contribute, shilling for shilling, sums equal to those raised locally by the Society.⁸⁰ The Ismailis remained the main source of finance for the Society which between 1945 and 1957 was responsible for 63 mosques, 75 schools, a training college, and a technical school,⁸¹ an emphasis on the promotion of education which was characteristic of the Ismaili involvement and which was emphasized increasingly in the later period. So great was the personal contribution of Sherali Bandali Jaffer as Vice-President that Prince Badru Kakungulu described him as 'almost a Muganda after all he has done for us',⁸² at the opening of the Wandegeya Mosque in 1959 by the Aga Khan—who had himself contributed half the funds. The work of the Society, however, demands careful evaluation. Montgomery Watt's optimism in 1966⁸³ that the Ismailis would increasingly contribute to the progress of African Islam deserves qualification, especially since the contribution was essentially one of funds. There was little in common in temperament or religious practice between progressive Ismailism and traditionally conservative African Islam in Uganda, and the mutual consciousness of heresy has already been noted. Nor was there much scope for social integration at ground level, while Ismailis worshipped in their own *jamatkanas*, contributing only financially to worship in African mosques. Ultimately the barriers of race proved more important than religious brotherhood, as the events of 1972 showed when an overtly Muslim President, with the support, later explicit, of a strongly Muslim Nubian element ordered

the expulsion of the Ismaili community along with all Asians of whatever denomination.

This brings us to the most controversial issue of the pre-expulsion days in Uganda: that of 'integration'. As Yash Tandon has recently written, 'the very vagueness of the term "integration" is the source of its most explosive potential in verbal dialectics'.⁸⁴ Theoretically there are two extremes of interpretation—first, pluralism, which involves 'different sections of the community living side by side but separately, within the same political unit...mixing but not combining',⁸⁵ secondly, assimilation which 'rules out all diversities' and, as Hilda Kuper has written, 'those who are supposed to assimilate the culture of others are in fact expected to subordinate the culture that was their own'.⁸⁶ What in practice were the different interpretations by Africans and Asians? And how did the Ismailis, in particular, 'integrate'? Asian tradition and also the colonial structure meant that, as H. S. Morris accurately observed, 'few found it improper to think of living in a society permanently divided into exclusive communities having restricted relations with one another',⁸⁷ so their interpretation was the pluralist emphasis. A characteristic expression of African sentiment, on the other hand, was given by Tom Mboya in Kenya when he said 'we are demanding the maximum from a non-African'.⁸⁸ Specific African demands tended to be related to the question of racial inter-marriage; President Amin concentrated on 'this most painful matter' at the Conference for Asian 'elders' in Kampala in November 1971, while the only specific injunction in *Freedom and After* was similar. The motivation or explanation of this concentration is not within the scope of this chapter; what must be said here is that it was a demand which not even the most progressive pluralists among the Asians were ready to meet, as we shall shortly see. This being so, the Asians were indicted, and even the expulsion itself effortlessly justified, in terms of their failure to 'integrate'.

Many examples have already been cited of Ismaili identification and cooperation with political, economic, and religious life in Uganda. It is remarkable, indeed, that this most distinct and cohesive community, this nation within the nation, with its own constitution within the constitution, was the Asian group which most closely 'integrated' in Uganda with indigenous Africans. But a look at the nature and extent of this integration resolves the apparent paradox. For what the IPS, the EAMWS, and even the Ismaili schools had in common was a degree of integration that was essentially financial and institutional, though even this latter aspect must be qualified by the Ismailis' continued existence as a distinct institution in themselves. What was absent was a significant degree of social integration at anything below leader-

ship level, and it was in this respect that the Ismailis were most similar to other Asians in their expression of pluralism. It has been argued that multiracial schooling was 'bound to lead to better race relations and to enhanced social contacts across racial lines'.⁸⁹ In practice, however, common attendance was not enough, since, in the Kampala secondary schools immediately before the expulsion, for example, streaming tended to divide the high-ability Asians from up-country African students who had serious linguistic disabilities to overcome, while casual social intercourse outside the classroom was generally on ethnic, indeed even tribal, lines. In such conditions, the stereotypes through which each group viewed the other could persist and even harden. On balance the contribution of the Aga Khan schools was to widen further the gap between Ismaili and African attainment.

The Ismaili distinctiveness, symbolized by their exclusive constitution, and so concretely translated in the two residential housing estates in Kampala, extended to the question of marriage. Sharing as they did with other Asians the dominant role in employer-employee, master-servant, relationships and lacking avenues for social mixing even in their various projects of investment and cooperation, the Ismailis had no social base on which intermarriage might have taken place. It is incorrect to speak of 'rigid' endogamy within the Ismaili community⁹⁰ for not only was the 1962 community constitution equivocal on this point⁹¹ but many examples since then have shown a certain flexibility in the community's attitude. But the three incidences of intermarriage in the case of one family demonstrate the limited extent of this flexibility—in each case the non-Ismaili partner was from another Asian community and in each case the Ismaili continued to attend the *jamatkhana* and to be treated as a member of the community.⁹² Thus the ultimate African demand for integration was not met—Ismaili girls reacted with horror at the suggestion for accelerated intermarriage made at the Asian conference convened by President Amin in December 1971—while for the community, not only racial but religious integrity would have been lost, along with their identity as an immigrant minority of 'strangers'⁹³ which they held to so closely. To conclude, whatever the substantive as opposed to the symbolic content of this issue in 1972 and before, the Ismailis' failure at the level of social integration led them to be associated merely with the general Asian category and can be said to have somewhat undone those other achievements which, on their own, present the Ismailis as at the same time the most distinct yet the most 'integrated' of the Asian communities in Uganda.

Much of the distinctiveness lay in the nature of Ismailism as a religion and the place of the Aga Khan in, or above, the community. In the

1960s, notwithstanding the specific projects outlined above, the community continued to look, from the outside, less like a religious congregation than a mutual benefit society. The Ismailis were therefore at the same time outward-looking and yet introverted towards their own affairs. The young Aga Khan himself said 'Islam is concerned with the whole life of the faithful, not only their religion',⁹⁴ and both the content of his leadership and the activities of the community in Uganda gave practical expression to this conviction. To the extent that they were seen to be building their kingdom in this world—in Uganda—the Ismailis fell short of the African expectation that the balance of their energies could be tipped in favour of outward-looking investment to the benefit of Ugandans as a whole.

Both the social exclusiveness and, as far as government was concerned, the financial features of this, came under scrutiny. The two, indeed, closely interlocked. Second to acknowledging the Imam, allegiance and obedience to whom superseded the other duties of non-Ismaili Muslims, the most important religious obligation of the community was payment of the 'eighth'.⁹⁵ This, and the attendance at the *jamakana* which went with it—itsself serving a social function though not, as one observer has suggested, 'compulsory'⁹⁶—was the cornerstone of weekly religious practice. Other, non-financial, religious obligations were few, and moral injunctions, for example, covering drinking and smoking, were flexible—hence an Ismaili's observation that 'our religion changes with the times'.⁹⁷ Considering the presence of an Imam, the community permitted remarkable scope for personal choice, and religious sanctions were few.

'Religious' and 'secular' departments of life became increasingly fused over time, as fused as were the 'religious' and 'secular' roles of the Aga Khan. An early parable lies in the story of the young Eboo Pirbhai in Kenya, to whom the late Aga Khan, on a visit to East Africa, said 'I give you my blessing for your business'; Eboo prospered and, as Sir Eboo Pirbhai, became President of the East African Supreme Ismaili Council.⁹⁸ Another illustration was the weighing in diamonds of the late Aga Khan at Dar; this celebration of a religious occasion, the sixtieth anniversary of the Aga Khan's succession to the Imamate, resulted in the foundation of the Diamond Jubilee Investment Trust. Further day-to-day examples could be cited: the relative prestige and position of Council, rather than Association, members; the English translation of the two central *jamatkana* officials, as 'treasurer' and 'accountant'. Ultimately, it becomes an artificial and purposeless question whether the community was held together by a religious bond or by the fact that it served its members' material interests.

So, too, with the Aga Khan, whose position, as described above in

the case of the late Aga Khan, has been such that material leadership and spiritual authority have reinforced each other. Since 'an outstanding feature of recent Asian history [in East Africa] has been the lack of inspired leadership',⁹⁹ the position of the Aga Khan deserves a little more treatment. Since the Imam acted as a religious and non-religious focus, articulation of the relationship between him and the community has found different forms—from the prayer which reads, 'from thee is my strength. . . thou art the Imam, the Truth, the Perspicuous, at mention of whose name prostration is due'¹⁰⁰ and the suggestion that as 'virtually an incarnation of the Deity'¹⁰¹ he can 'not only interpret but even abrogate'¹⁰² the Quran; to the perception of his functional value as a figure of international standing who can negotiate with national leaders on the community's behalf.

Leadership of this more practical kind has taken different forms, but its significance has lain in its giving direction to the operations of the community, or, in terms of the 'balance' referred to above, periodically recharging the outward-looking content of those operations. The Aga Khan led his community in Uganda in the 1960s by exhortation and *firman*s; by frequent visits; and, not least, by his own example in investing large sums from his own funds in Uganda projects. 'Identification', as noted above, was a consistent theme; 'diversification' was another. Fearful of the economic roots of racial tension, he advised his followers as far as possible to withdraw from trade and move into industry¹⁰³ and agriculture, where the IPS took the lead, and to take up the professions.¹⁰⁴ So, in October 1959, he not only urged followers to become teachers and nurses but increased the number of scholarships he was awarding for engineers, economists, and accountants. This advice to seek such specific goals, however, though heeded, had little chance to effect great change in the community in the single decade after independence, in view of the traditionally large numbers of *dukawallahis* (shopkeepers) and *fundis* (artisans). Thus there was no absolute distinction in occupational terms between Ismaili and non-Ismaili at the time of the expulsion; although by that time diversification had already come to include 'diversification' beyond Uganda, as the international nature of IPS and the personal affluence of individual Ismailis in Britain after the expulsion, for example, testify.¹⁰⁵

It is difficult at the present time to look at the independence decade as anything other than a prelude to the expulsion order of 1972 but it is dangerous to argue inevitability and historically unsound to assume either that events were leading to a general Asian exodus or that the Ismailis in particular felt this to be so. As noted above, the transfer of power in Uganda was delayed by primarily African political problems while the 'Asian problem' was seldom even acknowledged to exist. Similarly,

Obote's first years of power saw the continued prominence of almost exclusively African issues, notably the position of Buganda. When, towards the end of the decade, Obote gave more attention to the Asians, his enactments discriminated between citizen and non-citizen categories, thereby causing little concern to Ismailis, whose citizenship, if not acquired, had been applied for by at least the great majority. So the 1969 Trade Licensing Act required all non-citizens to possess a valid licence from the authorities in order to carry on business—and the Immigration Act of the same year required them to possess an entry permit,¹⁰⁶ in the absence of which they were liable to deportation or heavy fines. This, then, was the perceived value of citizenship—whatever the degree of 'calculation' in the 1962-4 period, citizenship was felt to be an insurance, and, until the 1972 crisis which discriminated in effect in terms of race, enactments and official statements sustained such a feeling. It is true that 'Africanization' as opposed to 'Ugandanization' was practised, but such moves were isolated and sporadic, such as some early seizures of business property in Kampala;¹⁰⁷ discrimination at Makerere University;¹⁰⁸ or, more far-reaching, the final demise of Asian participation in cotton-ginning, which they had pioneered.¹⁰⁹

There were in the 1960s, therefore, no particular periods or fields of tension for the Ismailis, little affected as they were by the dramatic political developments. An element of caution and secrecy became more marked, however, and some readjustments were necessary. The continued identity of the Ismailis and all its manifestations led to a fear by members of the community of being 'misunderstood'. They became particularly sensitive to public scrutiny of their financial operations and, when government attempted to regulate exchange control, the financial officers of the community had to show that the money collected from the community in Uganda was being retained in the country and not, as tradition demanded, exported to the Aga Khan. Indeed, in 1970, Obote caused more concern than previously with his avowed intention to work towards 'African socialism'.¹¹⁰ Although this never passed the stage of rhetoric, it did remind the community of the Tanzanian model which had already included nationalization of property—a move which would have affected many Kampala Ismailis—and encouraged members of the community to leave that country.

Herein lay the reason for the Asian welcome to the Amin coup in January 1971, representing not only a change from Obote's implied threat but also better relations between Uganda's government and Great Britain.¹¹¹ This calm was disturbed by the Asian census of October and the conference in December. The census was an examination of status, the conference a series of denunciations, with the Madhvanis' and Mehtas'¹¹² personal contributions rather than the communal

Ismaili achievements cited as exceptions. Moreover, though citizenship status issued 'properly' before the coup would be recognized, any outstanding applications would have to be re-submitted. In the following February, recognition for the Ismailis was publicly given in the *Uganda Argus*, now unmistakably a government mouthpiece, but even the assurance that 'the Asian Ismailis who are citizens and fully pledge their allegiance to the country have nothing to worry about' was qualified by a demand for more social integration.¹¹³

Nevertheless, citizenship was still regarded as sufficient insurance to render the ninety-day expulsion order of 4 August 1972 inapplicable to the Ismailis who had never regarded themselves as 'British Asians'. The announcement appears to have been received with a mixture of surprise and complacency, amusement and disbelief. Reaction was even more confused in the following weeks as Amin's decrees multiplied. In a decree of 19 August even citizens were included, only to be reversed three days later. Thereafter the citizenship question was rendered irrelevant. The Ismailis found themselves in a similar position to other Asians of whatever status: mass rejection of citizenship claims on technicalities such as late renunciation of British citizenship coincided with a campaign of terror such that, in a typical case, an Ismaili family, though in possession of citizenship papers which had survived official scrutiny, decided to leave the country on hearing of the murder of a relative. In such a way, the hope that Amin might change his mind rapidly gave way to the fear of being the only Asians left in the country. The role of the Ismaili community officials in this crisis could only be one final act of 'accommodation' to circumstances: leaders held their own censuses—the community numbered approximately 12,000¹¹⁴ in September; offered advice which, for citizens rendered stateless, included that focus on Canada which resulted in the 5,000 total of Asians admitted to that country comprising over 60 per cent Ismailis; and giving financial assistance to those who needed to buy air tickets.¹¹⁵

At present one can only conjecture to what extent the expulsion came as a surprise to the Ismailis. One must simply point out that there were signs both of surprise, and of fatalistic acceptance of an end previously anticipated. As far as the former is concerned, one can point to the complacency resulting not only from citizenship status but also from the illusion that all necessary steps, under the guidance of the Aga Khan, had been taken as a precaution against such a day. Yet one must recall the awareness of the Aga Khan that his followers might not have an indefinite future in Uganda,¹¹⁶ the precedent of Tanzania, and perhaps above all the discreet export of money which, as is now openly acknowledged,¹¹⁷ was widespread and in which Ismailis undoubtedly shared. In view of these instances, the surprise occasioned

by the events of 1972 could be seen as that of timing rather than substance.

In the event the Ismailis' separate identity was ignored in their identification as 'Asians'. The positive pluralism that they had displayed was not enough to counter the historical legacy, the racial stereotypes, the economic relationships, the political weakness and physical conspicuousness of the Asian minority. As traders and competitors for jobs, as aliens and 'strangers' (even 'criminals'), the Asians in Ugandan society were acutely vulnerable to an expulsion order. The Ismailis in particular found that, in the absence of political power or the presence of the external protector, their economic or political moves towards an alliance with the local African leadership—which as one observer pointed out could never be a partnership of equals and was thus unlikely to endure¹¹⁸—proved an inadequate substitute. The Ugandan Ismailis had to seek new countries of adoption but they could do so with a reputation as good citizens and as an accomplished and adaptable community, which their expulsion from Uganda, in spite of the individual human suffering it involved, did not destroy.