



The Omani Diaspora in Eastern Africa

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Diasporas play an important role in international relations by connecting homeland and host country. Diasporas can act as a bridge between the sending states and the receiving states in promoting peace and security, and in facilitating economic cooperation between the two sides. Omani people started to settle into Eastern Africa 1300 years ago. It intensified dramatically and reached its peak during the Golden Age of Oman. After Oman lost power and territories in the last century, the natural Omani Diaspora emerged in five different African countries. Perhaps there are millions of Omanis in the region, but the data is not well known. This study concentrates historical background of the Omani Diaspora and today's Omani Diaspora situation in the region. To understand their current situation in the region, a visit plan was projected and 4 countries and 17 cities were visited, 155 families' representatives were interviewed with 13 interview questions. In this study, the Omani Diaspora's tendencies, cultural developments, family relations, home country (Oman) relations, economic situation, political participation, and civil organisational capabilities have been explored. If they establish a diaspora confederation in the region, it could be a bridge and a contributive actor between Oman and Eastern African countries today.

Key words: *Diaspora, Diaspora in Africa, Omani Diaspora, Multiculturalism, Cultural Studies, Omani Culture.*



1. INTRODUCTION

Omanis started to settle in East Africa in the 2nd Century AD and continued until the 1700s. Omani settlements and immigration reached their peak during the rule of Said bin Sultan who ruled Oman and Zanzibar from 1806 until 1856 (Almougairi, 2012), after which they started to decline. Some of the Omanis returned to Oman but others stayed in East Africa, and they became citizens of those regional countries after the Omani rule receded. This study explores the status of the Omani Diaspora in East Africa. First, it elaborates the historical background of Omanis' immigration, and then explores the contemporary Omani Diaspora's situation in the Eastern African countries. To do this, one of the authors travelled to the region, visited 4 countries, 17 cities and contacted thousands of people, and conducted an interview and a survey consisting of 13 questions with 155 family representatives. The main aim of the interview was to understand the Omani Diaspora's economic, social, cultural, political, and international relations affairs and particularly their ties with Oman and Omani relatives. It also targeted their organisational situation, the capacity of established Omani non-governmental organisations (NGO), and civil society groups (CSG) in their host countries. Their political and economic influence on the regional countries has also been studied. Also, the linkage between the diasporas and the homeland (Oman) is an important topic in this study. It describes whether the Omani Diaspora is ready and willing to serve as a bridge between Oman and East African countries.

Omani immigration can be divided into four different stages starting with early trade relations with East Africa 1300 years ago, where most of the immigration was economically motivated. The second stage of immigration took place around the 1200s, which led to the creation of Omani Kingdoms on the African coast. In the third stage, the relations with the East African coast grew stronger leading to the annexation of part of the African coast to Omani control especially during the Yaruba and Busaidi rules. This period was the Golden Age of Oman and its territories stretched from Pakistan to Mozambique as a maritime empire. (Yenigun, Maashani, 2020). At that time Omani and local peoples travelled freely in the Omani Empire and today's diaspora was created naturally. In the fourth stage, Oman lost power and control in almost all places in Eastern Africa, receded from the region and perhaps hundreds of thousands of Omani people remained as diaspora in the region. Maybe their population reaches to millions in Eastern Africa, however accurate numbers are not known due to various political and social reasons, such as the diaspora not wanting to be known, a lack of well-developed statistical techniques and centres in the regional countries, they have already been hybridised, a large portion of them having already been assimilated, and some of them migrating to the United Kingdom and Oman.

2. EARLY OMANI RELATIONS IN EAST AFRICA: TRADE, MARRIAGE, AND KINGDOM

There were a few ancient kingdoms, which became known in the southwest of Arabia. However, the Kingdom of Saba was maybe the most famous among those most mentioned in

the history books. It is very likely that those kingdoms were involved in the trade activity and were the link between Arabia and East Africa. It is worth mentioning that the geographical boundaries of those kingdoms is not well known. In the region, it is believed that the Saba Kingdom dominated the East Coast of Africa, and large areas of the Arabian Peninsula. (Pearce, 1967, pp. 20,21). It is very clear that the connections between the coast of Arabia (including Oman) and East Africa were well-established before the Christian era reached East Africa. The Saba Kingdom's zone of domination over the Arabian and African coasts likely overlaps the Omani Golden Age coastal zones. Throughout history, relations between the Arabian coasts and East Africa have always been well established because of business, trade, and intermarriage.

Abdulmalik bin Marwan (684–705) was nominated Al Hajjaj as a Governor of Iraq in 693. He wanted to bring Oman under the control of Amou Khalifat (Alnamani, 2012). For this purpose, he sent two military campaigns to conquer Oman. He failed in the first attempt and succeeded in the second one where he defeated the Omani army. The rulers Suleiman bin Obaad bin Al Julanda and his brother Said (Alnamani, 2012) escaped to East Africa in 684 (Pearce, 1967). This emigration included their families, relatives, tribes, and soldiers within three ships. They settled in Lamu on the northeast coast of Kenya. They established their kingdom in Lamu and it lasted till 1170 (Harold, 1897).

They were able to establish their own kingdom which lasted for approximately 471 years, which is quite a long time. As mentioned earlier, Arab immigration and settlement in East Africa started at a very early time. It could be the existence of those early settlements which encouraged the two brothers to seek refuge in this area. Being former Omani leaders may have helped them to establish some kind of authority and government, and gave them the skills to rule and gain the respect of the local people. Moreover, immigrating with their followers and the small-sized army would assist them in establishing their ruling authority.

This immigration is the first recorded potential diaspora in Oman's history to East Africa and the first of the descendants of those people who emigrated from Yemen after the destruction of the Marib Dam. Therefore, this immigration should be a continuation of those old immigrations to East Africa regardless of the reason and their motives. By now, it seems that the east coast of Africa had become the known destination for people leaving Yemen or Oman's shores. Suleiman and Said's emigration was definitely a forced emigration and it can be categorised as a victim diaspora resulting from war. They were running for survival to escape captivity or being killed by their adversary. This could be the first recorded forced emigration from Oman to East Africa.

In 1203, 33 years after the end of Al Julanda's rule in Lamu, Suleiman Al-Nabhani, who had good relations with the island's governor, Ishak Al Batawi, started to establish better relations with the local authorities. The relations between the governor and Suleiman should be no surprise when considering the area was ruled by Omanis and their descendants for a long time

and established connections between Oman and the East of Africa (Alnamani, 2012). In the same year, Suleiman married Ishak's daughter and was anointed king of Pate Island as a gift from his father-in-law. Suleiman established an inherited rule system, which lasted for 610 years until 1813 (Alnamani, 2012). This period could be divided into two eras: the first is called the prosperity era between 12013-1506 when Omanis and local people mixed with each other and economic development raised dramatically, and the second could be called the confliction era when the Portuguese arrived on the East African coast between 1506 and 1813. (Alnamani, 2012). In those years, although there are not many resources about Oman and East African Omani states' relations, the connection between Omani Motherland and East African Omani states continued. Separated or independent Omani presence in East Africa continued until the 17th century when Al-Yarubi brought the coast of East Africa under direct Omani rule.

3. DIRECT OMANI RULE IN EASTERN AFRICA

The Al Yarubi family ruled Oman between 1624-1741. They were able to create a strong navy, which was capable of responding to calls for assistance from the East African coast to drive out the Portuguese. In 1660, Imam Sultan bin Saif sent the Omani navy after receiving a request from the people of Mombasa. With the help of local Omanis and after a long siege, he took the city from the Portuguese, but after a short time, the Portuguese recaptured the city. Almost forty years later, in 1698, his son Saif strengthened the navy to 28 vessels, succeeded the Sultan, defeated the Portuguese, and took Mombasa back. (Pearce, 1967; Harold, 1897). Starting at this time, thousands of Omanis settled in Zanzibar until the 1750s (Croucher, 2015). Throughout these 50 years, the East African coasts fell under the direct rule of Omani authority, and a natural diaspora emerged within the region. After the Yarubi family, Sayyid Said's rule continued in 1806-1856. He consolidated Omani rule in East Africa and displaced the capital from Muscat to Zanzibar as the capital of Omani Empire. Due to its location on the Indian Ocean, Zanzibar became the trade hub for all trade routes linking Asia, Africa, Europe, and the Americas.

During Sayyid Said's rule, hundreds of Omanis immigrated to East Africa. As it integrated into the Omani empire under well-established Omani authority, many immigrants travelled to East Africa, especially to Zanzibar, due to its economic status with regard to trade and agriculture. Because of this, there was a large increase in job opportunities, encouraging many Omanis to emigrate to this part of the empire which became a promising land for many people. Some people travelled with their families while others left their families behind. However, all immigrants wanted to improve the standard of living for themselves or their families. Living in the Asian part of the empire was harder than East Africa due to the harsh environment and fewer job opportunities.

Africa as a whole, including Zanzibar, presented the main source of income for the Omani Empire. Mostly it came from agricultural production, such as clove plantations in Zanzibar and Pemba. Another source of income from Africa was ivory, a very valuable product. The increase



in the trade movement helped the economic exchange between the African and Asian possessions of the empire as well as other destinations, such as India and other Asian countries. Many Omanis started working in the high-value ivory trade upon their arrival in East Africa. This product had high demand in many places, such as China, for instance. The East African ivory trade was unique in the world and became an accelerative factor of much Omani immigration from Oman to East Africa. This resulted in the establishment of settlements along the ivory trade routes extending as far as the Congo and Uganda. Those settlements were a means of extending Omani authority and consolidating their presence in new areas. This resulted in creating an Omani Diaspora in the inland territories of Africa, which still exists today.

4. THE EMERGENCE OF OMANI DIASPORA

After the death of Sayyid Said in 1856, the Europeans' interest in East Africa increased. However, the European intention was not immediately revealed. Sayyid Majid replaced his father as ruler of the African part of the empire from 1856 to 1870. Then, his brother Barghash replaced him. Under the latter's rule the Omani Empire in East Africa started to shrink (Pearce, 1967).

In 1876, the Belgian king invited the European nations for a conference in Brussels to discuss the "exploration and civilization" in Africa. As a result of the conference, the "International African Association" was founded. With its headquarters in Brussels, the association conducted exploration on behalf of participating nations. The declared aim, which was to stop the slave trade, was very innocent. In fact, the real aim was to pursue the interests of those European nations by extending their influence and domination to explore new territories and exploit their natural resources (Pearce, 1967).

Ten years later in 1886, the Western countries reached East Africa. Confronted with the Omani Sultan, the three main colonisers, Britain, France and Germany, recognised the authority of the Sultan over the eastern seashore of Africa, a strip of coast ten miles wide and 600 miles long extending from the Rovuma River to the Tana River. It included the islands of Zanzibar, Pemba, and Mafia off the coast of Tanzania. Lamu and Mombasa, the coastal towns of Kenya, as well as Kismayu, Brava, Merka, and Mogadishu; the towns of the Somalia coast with 10 miles radius around them, were also recognised as part of the Sultan's territory. The town of Warsheikh with only a five-mile radius was also recognised as part of the Sultan's authority (Pearce, 1967).

The Omani Empire gradually weakened and lost its power because of increasing Western domination on the African continent. Omani influence diminished as well due to this decline. Omanis who had emigrated and settled in those areas are still living there today. However, because of the power change in Zanzibar in 1964, some people were forced to return to Oman,



and in the post-1970 era, many others voluntarily returned to Oman because of the improved economic situation in Oman.

Omani immigration continued until 1964, when the revolutionary government in Zanzibar took power through a military coup aimed at ousting the Omani-dominated government. The coup marked the end of Omani rule in East Africa, thousands of Omanis were massacred, and many fled to Oman and elsewhere. This coup, which was carried out by the Afroshirzy party led by Obaid Karomi, had a great impact on the Omani presence in East Africa, especially the islands of Zanzibar and Pemba where the number of Omanis dramatically decreased. Until 1940, Omani ships were reported sailing between Oman and the island of Zanzibar (Croucher, 2015.). There was a continuation of connections between Oman and Africa; these connections were related to trade as well as social connections between people who lived in Africa and their relatives in Oman. This fact indicates that the Omani settlements in Africa did not stop with the dismantling of the Omani empire. Zanzibar and other areas remain attractive for many Omanis.

People who remained in East Africa are still scattered in different places in this region with more presence in Tanzania, especially the islands of Zanzibar and Pemba but also in other countries like Kenya, Burundi, Rwanda, Uganda, and their close areas, creating Omani Diaspora communities. Since the start of the early emigrations of Omanis to East Africa, there have been people who settled this region throughout various historical periods. However, due to lack of a record it is very difficult to recall the number of people there. It is the same for the locations of the settlements, which are again difficult to determine.

It is very likely many of those immigrations resulted in the creation of diaspora communities, which over time dissolved in local communities because of many factors, i.e. complete integration with indigenous people. It could be that some of their descendants still live there today, but they would have no idea about their ancestors, who they have lost trace of. They probably lost their original appearance due to intermarriage with the locals and have become very difficult to distinguish from the rest of the community in their regions.

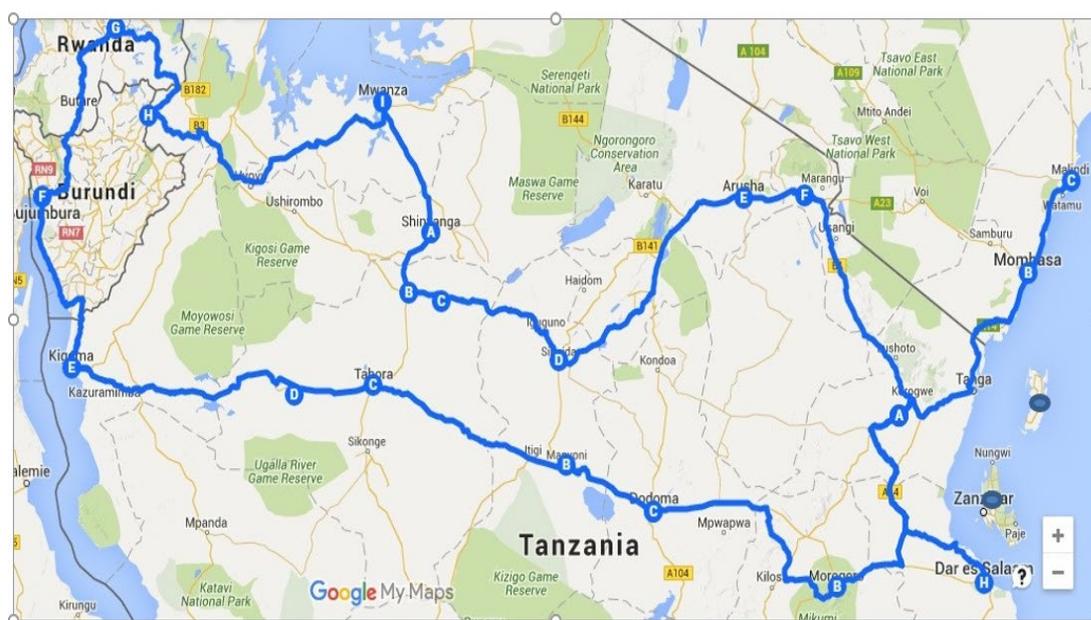
In terms of classifying the Omani Diaspora, it is easy to classify the early immigrations as trade diaspora, which has clear underlying motives for the movement, but one case does not fall into this category. For the contemporary diaspora's existence, there are two main factors: one is economic like the early immigrations. After East Africa came under Omani rule, it represented an attractive factor for many Omanis in the Asian part of the empire who travelled to East Africa for better economic opportunities, whereas the Asian part of the empire, having fewer economic opportunities, represented the "push" factor. The second reason for this immigration is the one state status, which made the movement of people from one part of the empire to another normal, regardless of the motive of travel, which could be economic, visiting friends, or others. In this case, it could be compared to the Omani Diaspora resulting from this

immigration as imperial like the British or the Dutch, but also it was very much economically motivated in most of the cases and so it could be classified as a trade diaspora.

5. CONTEMPORARY OMANI DIASPORA

In comparing different diaspora communities in Eastern Africa, during a visit to the region, it was noticed that there was a big concentration of Omani Diaspora in Zanzibar, Pemba, the port city of Dar-Es-Salaam and the town of Tanga in Tanzania. Less populated Omani communities, like Tabora, are located in the north of Tanzania. A similar situation exists in Bujumbura, the capital of Burundi that has a high concentration of Omani Diaspora while small-scattered communities are found outside the city. In the region, Tanzania hosts the biggest diaspora communities.

To understand the Omani Diaspora's situation in all aspects, the author visited 4 countries, 17 cities, conducted a physical survey, and asked 13 interview questions. Almost 155 families were visited and the interview was conducted with one of their representatives. Regarding identity, smaller communities like Tanga preserve more of their identity features such as wearing a dress or having inside community marriage in comparison to those installed in Zanzibar and Pemba. Among the countries, Kenyan communities, especially in the city of Malindi, are better at preserving their original culture. Regarding political participation, the communities in Zanzibar and Pemba are more enthusiastically supporting the opposition parties for historical reasons. In the mainland of Tanzania, most of the people support the ruling party. In Kenya, Rwanda, and Uganda the Omani Diaspora is less interested in political participation and mostly votes for the ruling party. With respect to the issue of education, income, assets, and connections with the homeland, there is no clear distinction among the scattered Omani Diaspora communities.



Map 1: Survey and Interview Route

5.1 IDENTITY

The Omani Diaspora's identity is affected by the local culture because of dynamic interactions between peoples. Therefore, the change in the diaspora's identity is inevitable and vice versa; the diaspora's identity affects the local identity. Rhetorically, identity is an incomplete production and evolves continuously even in homogeneous communities; this fact is seen in the Omani Diaspora in Africa. This also affects linguistics when the diaspora adopts a new language. Other social practices are also affected such as dress and food from the local culture. The least affected component of the local identity is religion. One of the major factors behind this effect was the long period of interrupted connection with the homeland. This happened when older generations who held memories of the homeland passed away; the younger generations did not have the chance to connect with the homeland to refresh those memories. However, when connections are regained, they affect the identity of the diaspora, and after the diaspora is exposed to its original identity environment, it becomes easy to regain its original culture and identity. This is seen clearly when some of the diasporas returned to Oman. They quickly adapted to homeland culture, except for the language, which might take a longer time to be learned. Therefore, when the connection between the diaspora and homeland happens, it will greatly help to retain the original identity of the diaspora.

5.2 THE DIASPORA'S LANGUAGE PREFERENCES

Language is one of the identity indicators for any community (Maani & Yenigun, 2021). In the case of the Omani Diaspora, it is clear that Arabic is an issue because it is only spoken by a small number of people. There are small numbers of people who speak limited or a few Arabic phrases. The reason behind the disappearance of Arabic among Omani Diaspora members can be more than one factor. According to the survey, only a quarter of the responders can speak good Arabic, one-third can speak it limitedly and almost half of them cannot speak Arabic.

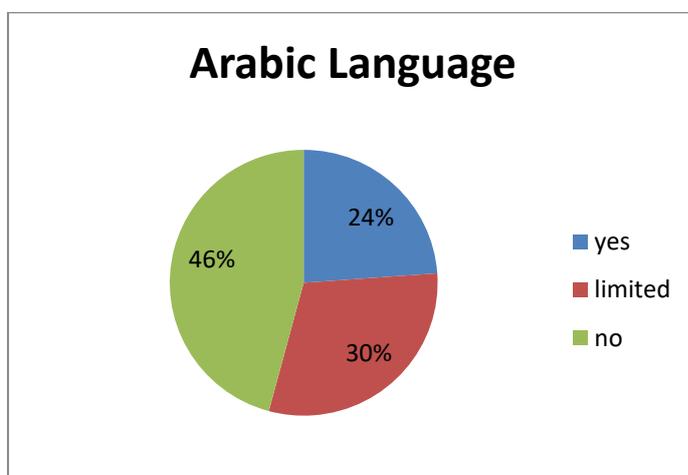


Figure 1: Omani Diaspora's Usage of Arabic Language

First, before the 1964 power change in Zanzibar, Arabic was taught in schools and Swahili Arabic script. Overall, Arabic was widely used in all aspects of life. When the revolutionary government took power, they forbade the usage of Arabic. They also stopped using Arabic script in Swahili and replaced it with the Roman alphabet. Another factor was a large number of casualties during and after 1964 events, where many Omanis escaped from Zanzibar and Pemba. Those three factors minimised the number of Arabic speakers in East Africa. In addition, post-1970, when the economic situation improved in Oman, many Omanis who spoke Arabic migrated to Oman.

For those who stayed in the islands, they were seen as suspected groups by the African governments. This discouraged them from speaking Arabic, fearing they could be targeted by the government if they did and their Arabic identity would be revealed. Another factor for the disappearance of Arabic was the lack of commitment and the underestimation of the importance of the language among diaspora members, which made them less interested in teaching the language to the younger generations. However, if strict rules were adopted in the family, it would force the language to be spoken at least inside the home among family members. Another factor was the absence of the movement of Omanis between East Africa and Oman after 1964 because of the political situation in Zanzibar which was not positively improved until after the 1980s.

5.3 THE DIASPORA'S DRESS, CUISINE AND NAMES

Omani dress, especially the “dishdasha”, is widely worn in different parts of East Africa. However, it is not always worn by Omani Diaspora members because it is not found suitable in farms. Another reason is that it is expensive to buy and there are no tailors. Most people who wear dishdasha have received or bought it from Oman. That's why Omani dress has become more ceremonial; especially for Friday prayers, religious, social, and family celebrations.

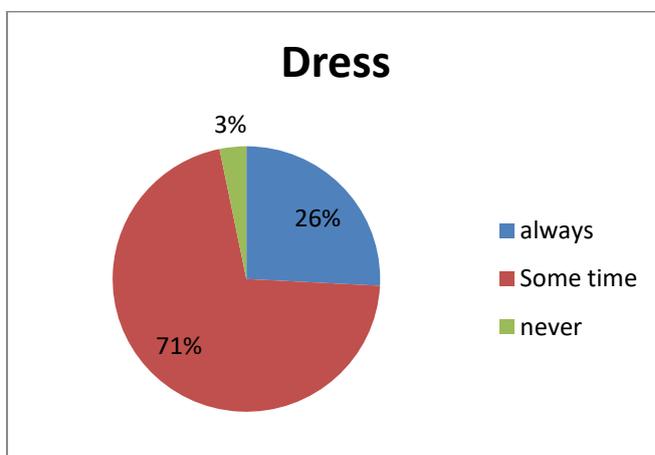


Figure 2: Omani Diaspora's Dress (Dishdasha)

According to data taken from the interviews, most diaspora members wear Omani dress sometimes only, which means it is only worn during some special occasions. This represents 71% of people interviewed while 26% wear it all the time. However, a very small percentage never wears Omani dress especially in Zanzibar and Kigouma.

For identity, the interviews focused on language and dress, which can be identified easily. For other indications, such as practising Omani traditions, most people answered that they practise these traditions within their families and community. One obvious indication is the cuisine. People do not cook Omani food every day; sometimes they do not cook it at all favouring Swahili cuisine. From the responses it was seen that Omani food is rarely cooked and mostly cooked during religious celebrations. People indicate “there are some similarities between Swahili and Omani cuisines and that’s why they easily adapted to Swahili cuisine”. In addition, it was answered that “it would have been different if they had more Omani female members”. However, both reasons are not convincing because there are similarities between many different cuisines, not only Omani and Swahili ones. There are also many differences between Omani and Swahili cuisines.

There are many indicators for the identity of the Omani Diaspora community members. First, their appearance, which makes them look different from the Africans. They look like Yemenis, but this will always be the case because Arabs from throughout the Arabian Peninsula have a similar appearance. The second indicator is the Omani tribal system. It can be a good indicator because all Omani Diaspora members identify themselves with long, extended names; sometimes with more than four names plus the tribal name, which is only common in the Omani community. Moreover, those tribal names match with some tribes found in Oman.

5.4 DIASPORA’S EDUCATION LEVEL

Most of the Omani Diaspora members have basic education. Some of them have completed a basic education program while others only finished ninth or even sixth grades only. People who have no basic education are mostly from old generations; however, they are very small in numbers. There are very limited students who have gone to university. It is very common among diaspora members that youth go to work with their parents after school. There is a general belief that higher education is not a beneficial factor, but joining a business is more lucrative. For females, they prefer to marry and raise children, and so they would not be motivated to complete their education.

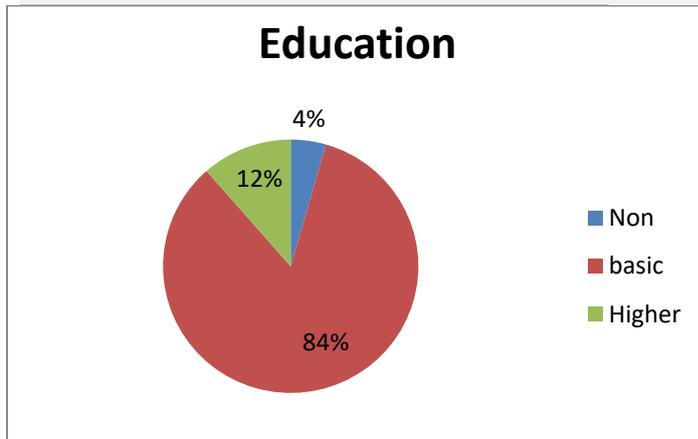


Figure 3: Omani Diaspora Education Level

According to the survey, 85% of the responders have basic education, 5% have no education, and only 12% continued higher education. The highest percentage of higher education students was in Tanga, where 26.7% completed their studies after school. Among the diaspora communities according to the survey, there are 12 communities with zero percentage of higher education.

5.5 LINKAGE BETWEEN THE OMANI DIASPORA AND THE HOMELAND

In the contemporary world, the linkage between the diaspora and the homeland is a usual fact. Especially after the 1980s, the exchange of visits between diaspora members and their relatives in Oman takes place on a frequent basis. Sometimes it happens on an annual basis. Omanis in the homeland travel to East African countries by a tourist visa. Diaspora members have the chance to travel by a “visitor” visa for three months. A residence visa is possible also if an Omani relative applies for it.

One of the factors affecting the links between the two sides is economic status. A very limited number of rich diaspora members could visit Omani relatives, but those who have a modest income level could not visit Oman even once. In this case, Omani relatives visit them in Africa. Other factors which used to exist but are no longer a concern was the absence of direct flights between Muscat and East Africa. Today, there are daily flights between Muscat, Zanzibar, and Dar-Es-Salaam.

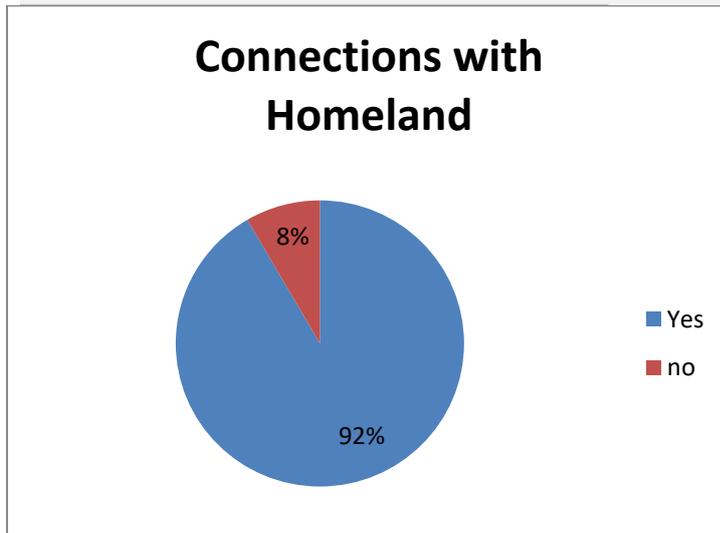


Figure 4: Visits from/to Oman

Based on the survey, 92% of the interviewed people who have connections with the homeland answered that they either visit Oman or their relatives visit them. About ten communities in East Africa indicated “full homeland connections”. Social media became another way for connection between the two sides: it makes communication available and cheap on a daily basis; diaspora members can now communicate very frequently via social media.

5.6 HYBRIDITY

Despite the long period since some Omanis started to settle in East Africa, some Omani Diaspora members still keep their original ethnicity regardless of the long period of integration with African communities. In the beginning, Omani immigration was male-dominated, which resulted in many intermarriages between Omanis and Africans. Omanis also used intermarriage as a tool to integrate with the African community and build good relations in the last centuries. Today, because of the low economic status of the diaspora, Omanis join with Africans and Omani males marry African females due to the high dowries of Omani women. This happens in many places in East Africa but seems more prevalent in Uganda. The majority of Omani Diaspora members still preserve their original ethnicity and commit to continue doing so. Even when there is old intermarriage in the family, the present generations still resist any new intermarriage.

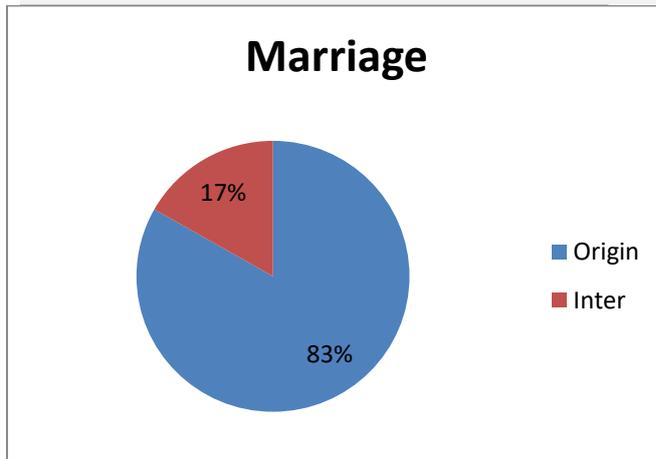


Figure 5: Hybridity Indicator

83 % of the respondents say they are homogenously Omani and insist on family or community bounded marriages. The highest indicator of intermarriages was observed on the island of Zanzibar. Another finding is that wherever there is a small Omani Diaspora community, intermarriage is less prevalent or does not exist at all, such as in the city of Malindi in Kenya (see Figure 5) because of limited integration with the African community.

5.7 ECONOMIC STATUS

Most Omani Diaspora members work in private business. There are very small numbers and it is very rare to find someone who works in the public sector. When diaspora communities are divided into three main sections in terms of income: low, medium, and high, it is clear that most Omani Diaspora members fall under the medium income category. This category includes owners in the trade of foodstuff, garments, and the small number of public sector staff. The low-income category forms a small percentage and includes farmers, who normally grow crops and sell them for living. The high-income people are those who own large businesses, for example, in transportation, car sales, spare parts, as well as those who own mines of diamond or copper and those who own factories. It is considered that people who earn 5,000-7,000 Tanzanian shillings or below as in the low-income category. Medium income categories are those who earn 20,000 to 50,000 shillings and those having an income above 50,000 shillings are considered to be in the high-income category. This categorisation was created in accordance with the information of the interviewed people.

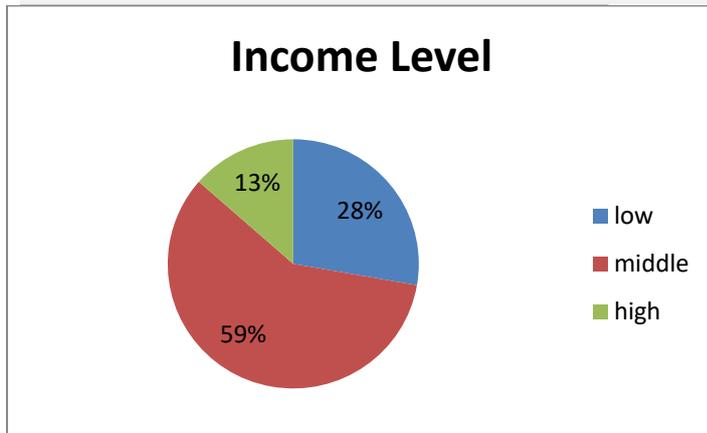


Figure 6: Income Level Indicator

According to the survey, 59% of the respondents have a medium-income while 28% have a low income and those categorised as high income represent 14%.

5.8 SENSE OF BELONGING TO THE HOMELAND

There is no doubt that a sense of belonging to the motherland is strong among the Omani Diaspora members. They consider themselves Omanis even though they are citizens of the regional states. According to the findings of the respondents, some of them would love to return to Oman if they have the chance to do. Most of them are proud of the Omani history in East Africa. At the same time, they are very loyal to their current governments and enjoy very good relations with African communities. Most of them consider themselves part of their countries, and even if they get Omani citizenship, they would prefer to settle there because of the source of living they have established there. The people who prefer to go to Oman permanently are those in the low-income category, thinking they would have a better life in the homeland.

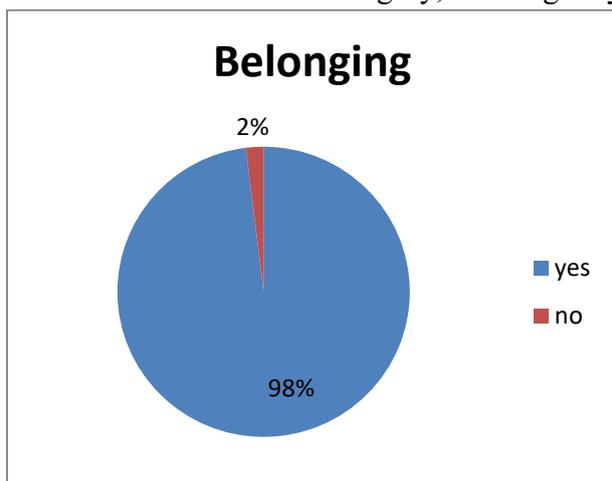


Figure 7: The Sense of Belonging Indicator

The very few people who don't have a sense of belonging to Oman make up only 2% of the interviewed people are from the early Omani Diaspora members who lost the connection with

Oman and those who think they should receive more help and recognition from Oman or they do not seek any help or recognition.

5.9 POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

Political participation is an important tool for the Omani Diaspora to influence the decision-making posts in their countries. It can be done by elections, i.e. making a difference in the results of the election. However, this requires the participation of large numbers of people. Since the diaspora makes a small percentage of the population, lobbying is the better option for the diaspora, and this could be achieved by financially supporting a particular candidate or party.

The Omani Diaspora in East Africa is scattered over different countries, the highest population of which is the Republic of Tanzania including the Islands of Zanzibar, which is semi-autonomous, having its own executive, legislature, and judiciary systems, with separate elections from the mainland.

In Tanzania, Kenya, and Burundi, the Omani Diaspora can play a role in the political arena with its rich capacity and higher population, but in the case of Rwanda and Uganda, the diaspora is weak with small population size and low economic capacity. In Burundi, the economic status of the diaspora presented in having different sorts of businesses might make them able to lobby. However, due to the political unrest in the country, this role might not be desirable until the political environment improves.

In Kenya, the Omani Diaspora community is located in the coastal area. They are small in number but they have a good economic status, especially in Mombasa. They can play role in politics, at least in the case of elections of the city's representatives. In addition, if they can form some sort of agreement or unity with other diaspora communities such as Yemeni or Saudi communities, this could be an advantage to carry more weight.

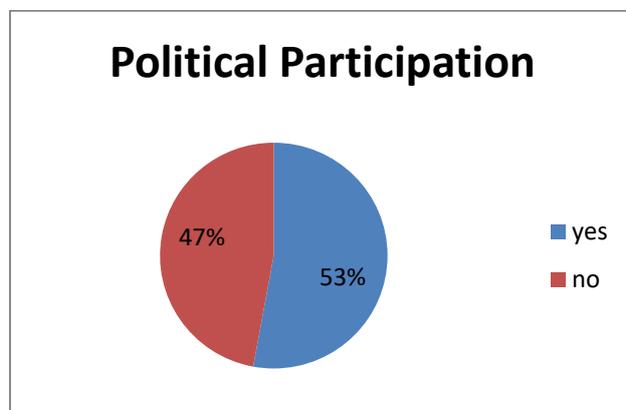


Figure 8: Political Participation Indicator

As for the interviews conducted in the survey, 53% of people showed interest in political participation. In Tanzania, due to a high percentage of political participation and domination of the ruling party, almost all Omani Diaspora supported the ruling party (CCM). Some interviewed people pointed out that they vote for the ruling party because if they do not, they might be considered against the government and it is always worth voting for the winning party.

The Omani Diaspora is quite active in political life in Zanzibar, which includes the islands of Zanzibar and Pemba due to the historical status of the islands. The population of the two islands, Zanzibar and Pemba are 1,303,569 according to the 2012 census (Statistics, 2016). The main island is Zanzibar, which also called Unguja, hosts 58% of the total population and Pemba Island 42%. 93% of the population are Muslims. There are several groups in the islands, Hadimu, Tumbatu, and Pemba Shirazi. These groups are believed to be an early interaction between Persians and Africans. Other groups are the Arabs who came from Oman and Yemen and the last group are Africans who emigrated from the mainland or are descendants of the old slave trade. With interaction between all those groups, intermarriages happen and so hybridity becomes obvious. According to the 1948 census; 15.8% are Hadimu, Tumbatu 17.4%, Pemba Shirazi 22.6%, Mainlander 19.8%, Arabs 16.9%, Indians 6.2% and Comorians 1.1% (Killian, 2008).

The two islands were part of the Omani empire until 1890. After the decline of this empire, they came under the protection of Britain and were ruled by the Omanis. In 1955, while Zanzibar was still under British protection, the Arabs were the first to establish a political party called the Zanzibar Nationalist Party (ZNP). In 1957 the Shirazis and Africans formed another party, the Afro-Shirazi Party (ASP). The ASP was supported by the continental Africans and the Hadimo Shirazi in the islands of Unguja and Pemba while the ZNP was supported by the Arabs and Shirazi groups of Pemba. In 1959, the Pemba Shirazi separated from the ASP and formed a new third party called the Zanzibar and Pemba People's Party (ZPPP). Later on, this party established a close relationship with the ZNP. In July 1963, the left-wing of the ZNP party separated from the main party and formed the new Umma Party, which had socialist leanings. However, the Umma Party was not assigned a candidate and so it started to support the ASP. In July 1963, in the last elections before the independence referendum, the ZNP and ZPPP coalition won the elections and the ASP became the opposition party (Killian, 2008).

After the elections, it was decided in the parliament to establish an independent country based on constitutional monarchy; the Sultan was going to be Head of State (HoS), and the Prime Minister (PM) was going to come from the Shirazi community. The state constitution decided to be bicameral; the lower house to be elected by the people and the upper house to be nominated by the Sultan (Killian, 2008). This arrangement was not accepted by the ASP members who were mostly Africans. They felt marginalised and decided to seize power forcing the newly formed government out of power and adopting a revolutionary government. On January 12th, one month after independence from Britain and with the new government in

office, everything was set to change in Zanzibar. Besides the new government, the Omani monarchy was ousted and a great deal of violence took place when large numbers of Omanis were killed or forced to leave the country. On April 26th, 1964, Zanzibar united with Tanganyika, forming the new United Republic of Tanzania. Also, the revolutionary government took over the supporters of the ZNP and ZPPP and forced them to comply with the new system or else ousted them from the island (Killian, 2008). Although the ZNP-ZPPP Coalition had established a democratic system in 1963, after the revolution democracy and elections were suspended. 17 years later elections came back to the political life in Zanzibar, a new constitution was introduced, and the first election was held again in 1980. New parties were supported by the same people, only the party names were different. The Chama Cha Mapinduzi (CCM) party incorporated the old ASP while the Civic United Front (CUF) incorporated the old ZNP-ZPPP parties. The CCM accused the CUF of being controlled by the Arabian Gulf with allegations of intending to bring Arab rule back to the island. On the other hand, the CUF officials describe the CCM as the control of the black man and being a tool of control by the mainlanders. They believed that Zanzibar should be ruled by the original inhabitants, not by people from Africa or the mainland. This brought worries to the government in Tanzania thinking that the CUF was in favour of the independence of Zanzibar and that if they came to power, they would call for the island's independence (Killian, 2008).

These facts show the power and impact of the Omani Diaspora in East Africa. If they can play a proactive role peacefully in their regions, it could develop the region and Omani relations positively.

5.10 NON- GOVERNMENTAL ORGANISATIONS (NGOs)

The Omani Diaspora in East Africa has very few NGOs and civil society groups (CSGs). The majority of them are charity organisations and could be scattered almost everywhere in East Africa. They are supported financially by donations from the Arabian Gulf. Their main role is limited to maintaining and managing local mosques and helping some poor members of the diaspora as well as building schools. Sometimes those schools are public, not restricted to the diaspora members only. They are open to all local people including non-Muslims in the region. In some areas, there are few NGOs with a very limited role. They cannot be considered a fully functioning communal organisation because they cover only very limited aspects of the community such as religious and some financial issues.

In some areas, which have a very small Omani Diaspora community, as in Malindi, diaspora members have their own CSGs. They are well-organised and their organisations take care of different aspects of life, including religious affairs. They are self-financed by local people and recognised by the government as communal organisations. They have regular gatherings and meetings at a local level.

Similarly, the Baluchi tribe in Mombasa has a very organised and self-financed CSG. They take care of different social matters of the community. Other Omani tribes in Mombasa do not



join Baluchi CSG gatherings. Meanwhile in Dar-Es-Salaam, Tanzania, the Baluchis' CSG annual gatherings are becoming very attractive and Omani tribes join their gatherings.

In general, there is no confederation nor a unified CSG or NGO for the Omani Diaspora in Eastern Africa. All of them work in a limited area and for specific aims, mostly social and economic matters. Their gatherings cannot be called diaspora meetings to resurrect relations with Oman, but instead they focus on local issues. Nevertheless, those gatherings at a minimum keep the Omani Diaspora together in the scattered regions of Eastern Africa with their original kitchen, clothes, language, and culture.

6. CONCLUSION

There are three periods of the Omani Diaspora in Eastern Africa. Early trade relations and minor settlements were more than a thousand years ago. The second phase of Omani immigration was establishing a small kingdom on the coast of Africa. Omani groups emigrated as large groups from Oman to the region and once again, most immigrants were traders. The third phase was the domination period. Some portion of this coast came under the direct authority of Oman. During this period, a portion of the East African coast became part of Oman when people were travelling freely as citizens of one empire. However, most of the movements of people from the original Oman to the new extension of the country were economically motivated due to the fact that the African part of the country had better economic status and climate conditions. Therefore, as a result, the Omani existence in Eastern Africa could be generally categorized as an economic diaspora.

Today, the Omani Diaspora is scattered in different countries in East Africa, namely Tanzania, Kenya, Burundi, Rwanda, and Uganda. There are incentive Omani population(s) in Tanzania such as Zanzibar, Pemba, and Dar-Es-Salaam. In the other countries, there are small communities existing in different areas. Those different communities communicate with each other by personal connections within those groups of the diaspora. They do not have a common diaspora organisation at the country or regional level. However, there are some CSGs and NGOs in limited areas with limited roles.

The economic status of the Omani Diaspora is divided into three levels: low, medium, and high. Most of them are on the medium-economic level. Those who are in the high and medium levels are mostly traders and sometimes have more than two businesses. The low-income level of diaspora members mostly run small shops or work in the agriculture or mining sector.

Omani identity is still preserved among them. Definitely, it is affected by the local identity in different ways i.e. the language; most of the diaspora can speak Swahili only and a small percentage of them still know Arabic. Other socio-cultural areas, for example, food and dress are also mixed; but despite all of these effects, the sense of belonging and nostalgia for the homeland is very strong among them.

The connection of the diaspora with the homeland is subject to the financial capability and the rules governing the movement of the diaspora members between host country and homeland. The relations with the host countries and host communities are very good. The Omani Diaspora is respected and has a good reputation among the local people. Even now, it cannot be used as the host country term for diaspora anymore, because they have already been very well integrated into the region, and they see these nations as their homeland too. In this regard, some level of integration is achieved between the Omani Diaspora and the local communities; this level is demonstrated in different ways, especially in intermarriages.

The Omani Diaspora participates in the political activities in their regions. However, this participation remains as local movements and Omani groups do not come together under a confederation. That is why they cannot/do not use (maybe they do not want to use) their potential populist power in politics for nominating a member of parliament or bulk voting. They are not well organised and act individually in the different cities in the region.

The Omani Diaspora has the potential to play an important role such as promoting the relations between homeland and host country. However, they need to improve their status in order to have a better and stronger influence over decision-making in their host countries. The improvements should include different aspects of diaspora life, namely economic, socio-cultural and political. Maybe the most important step is to establish a confederation to unify those mini CSGs and NGOs under one umbrella in the region, including different countries.

Although contemporary diasporas can create both positive and negative effects on their host countries, negative impacts are not seen for the Omani Diaspora in Eastern Africa, because their homeland, Oman, follows an active neutrality foreign policy (Yenigun, Baig, 2021). Oman does not have any agenda to enlarge her sphere of influence or intervene in any other country's internal politics. So, the Omani Diaspora can be only a positive tool and a constructive middleman between Eastern Africa and Oman's economic, socio-cultural, and international affairs. Businessmen in the Omani Diaspora might resurrect Omani and Eastern Africa trades again reciprocally, because they know both sides better than any other businessman in the world. Fishery policies, tourism agreements, export-import goods, oil sales, and agricultural products are the main potential venues for cooperation between the two sides and the diaspora can be the main actors and mediators to implement these potential economic projects for a triangulated benefit between East Africa, Oman, and the Omani Diaspora.

Clash of Interest: There is no clash of interest.

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