

INSTITUTE OF CURRENT WORLD AFFAIRS

RFG - 6
A Rural Trading Center

P.O. Box 308
Arusha, Tanganyika
April 12, 1955

Mr. Walter S. Rogers
Institute of Current World Affairs
522 Fifth Avenue
New York 36, N.Y.

Dear Mr. Rogers:

The Cape-to-Cairo railway of which Cecil Rhodes dreamed will probably not be realized for a long time in the future, but some of the purposes of such a railway are now served by the Great North Road--a fairly dependable motor road that can be followed from Cape Town to Nairobi and still farther north. As it traverses the length of Tanganyika Territory, this road passes through a variety of towns, hamlets, and tribal areas. A traveler following the road south from Arusha in the Northern Province first crosses the sweeping Masai Steppe. This is undulating plain of grassland and light thorn bush etched with the shallow ravines which are locally known as "korongas." The lack of rainfall and permanent water rendering it unsuitable for ordinary agriculture, this land is used by the nomadic Masai tribe for the seasonal grazing of their cattle, which share the grass with herds of zebra, antelope, and giraffe. The landscape is saved from monotony by volcanic mountains dotted about the plain, and by a complex of escarpments and massifs to the west, including the famous Ngorongoro Crater. The only human habitations along this stretch of road are the small P.W.D. camps, where a handful of Africans struggle with the task of keeping the road passable, and several native eating places which supply tea and fried cakes to African travelers.

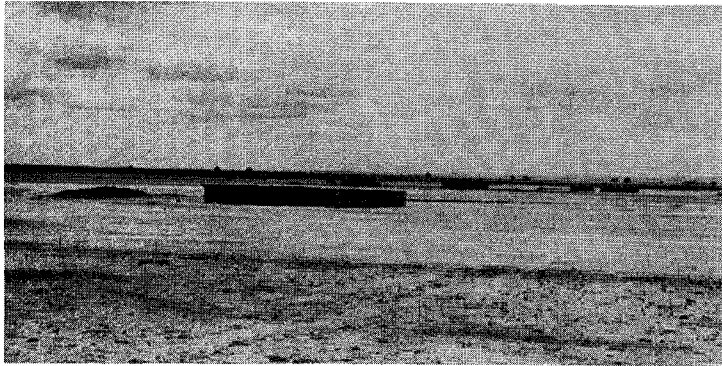


Native Tea Shop on Great North Road

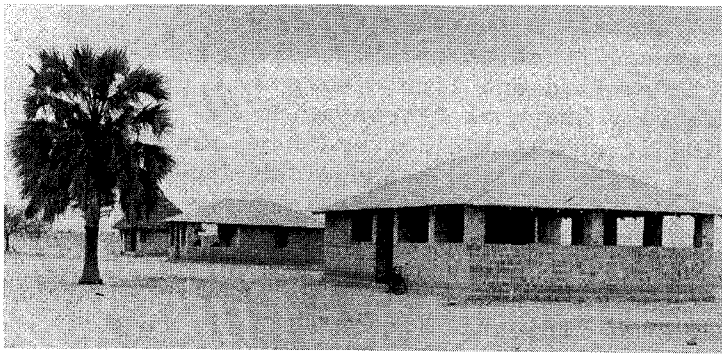
After traveling eighty miles through this wilderness, one suddenly comes on a settled country called Mbugwe and occupied by the Wambugwe Tribe. The scene which meets the eye is the same as that seen in 1893 by Oscar Baumann who was the first white man to visit Mbugwe.¹ The Wambugwe live in houses of an unusual type, commonly called "tembe," which with various modifications is used by several tribes in northern and central Tanganyika.

It is a low, square, earth-covered structure, four or five feet in height, but with a breadth and length of up to fifty feet. The houses are located on a flat alkaline plain which is an old extension of the bed of the salt-water Lake Manyara. On hot clear days a heat mirage arises from the plain giving the houses the appearance of house boats floating on water. The cultivated

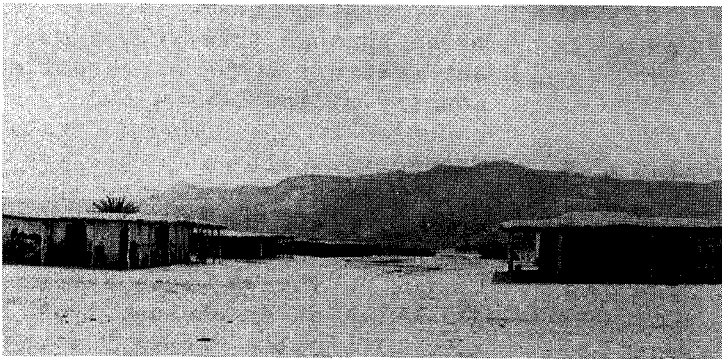
¹For a description of this visit see Oscar Baumann, "Durch Masailand zur Nilquelle," Berlin, 1894, pp. 180-88.



Mbugwe Houses



Government Buildings at Madukani



Indian Shops at Madukani

plots are located on the higher ground surrounding the alkaline plain. The cattle are taken each day for grazing to the grasslands which lie beyond the cultivated zone. At night they are brought home to be stabled in the houses which they share with the people.

The scarce and irregular rainfall in Mbugwe makes life hazardous and uncertain. The people work hard for the sheer necessities of life. They are conservative and hold tenaciously to their old primitive ways. Thus, although the tribe is located on the Great North Road, it is but little affected by the modern world. The subsistence economy provides little surplus for civilized luxuries. Almost the only source of money for the tribe is the sale of livestock and hides at the monthly auctions supervised by the government. Part of this money goes to pay taxes; the rest is used for buying necessities and a few simple luxuries--axes and hoes, beads, sugar, a little kerosene; and for the few wealthier Wambugwe cheap umbrellas and white canvas shoes. As in other parts of East Africa, these imported goods are supplied by Indian traders whose "dukas" (shops) are located at Madukani (Swahili for "Place of Shops") which is the only village in

Mbugwe. With a view to investigating a commercial center at a primitive level, I recently spent several days at Madukani visiting the dukas and talking with Indian merchants and other villagers. The small retail trade of Tanganyika is almost exclusively in the hands of Indians. Some of these commercial families have become quite wealthy, possess modern town homes, and give their children excellent educations. But in almost every case their origins were humble. The Madukani merchants are in many ways representative of East African commercial Indians at a comparatively low stage of economic development. They also illustrate some of the religious and cultural differences which divide the Indian community.

Madukani, which is situated two miles west of the Great North Road, is also the seat of government for the Wambugwe. The three government buildings are located at one side of the village. These are stone structures with corrugated iron roofs comprising a "baraza" where the chief and elders hold court, a dispensary, and a dwelling for the medical attendant. The other buildings in Madukani are flat-roofed earth-covered structures, much like the native tembes only higher so that they can be entered without stooping. From a distance the village would not be recognized as such except for the roofs of the government buildings. The nucleus of Madukani consists of five Indian dukas which are run by five separate families, though some of them are related by kinship ties. The general arrangement and organization of all the dukas are similar. The front part of the building is occupied by a long counter behind which are shelves of Merchandise. From the retail shop a single door leads to the back rooms which serve as storerooms and provide living quarters for the large families. A stout wicket fence encloses a court yard behind the building. There the cooking and other household tasks are carried out in the usual oriental manner.

These families appear to lead a very restricted life and seldom leave the duka or its compound.



Bandala

The senior member of this little community is Bandala, a thin white-bearded old man who estimates his age at seventy-five years. Bandala came to Mbugwe in 1910 shortly after landing at the port of Bagamoyo where he had come from India on the advice of an uncle who was already an established trader. Reports of large profits to be made by traders in the newly opened regions of the interior of Tanganyika enticed him to make the arduous safari to Mbugwe. He obtained a trading license from the German government and started a duka, at first as an agent of his uncle on the coast. As his business prospered he became financially independent. On a trip to Tanga he married an Indian wife and brought her to Mbugwe, but she died a few years later. Bandala recalls with apparent pleasure the conditions of life in Mbugwe under German administration. The discipline exercised over the Wambugwe was much stricter than in the case of the present British administration, and he feels that the prosperity of the country was more secure. But all that was a long time ago. Some years ago he gave up handling imported merchandise, and now carries on a small business in local products—fruit, tobacco, onions, and the like. He lives in his duka with a robust African wife and a small daughter whose paternity is a subject of gossip among the Wambugwe.



"Mama" Jivraj in her Duka

The other four dukas are going concerns. The most progressive of the Madukani Indians are undoubtedly the Jivraj family. Hasan Jivraj left his home in Cutch (near Karachi) in 1914 to take a job as clerk for the Kenya government. After several years he decided to become a trader and came to Mbugwe. After establishing his duka, he went back to Cutch to marry a wife whom he brought to Mbugwe with him. They have lived there ever since, except for one year in Uganda where he went to investigate the possibility of a more favorable location. Hasan was killed in a motor accident in 1947, leaving his wife and eight children to carry on the business. Last year the family opened a new duka at Kibaoni, a more enterprising trading village at Magugu Settlement some ten miles south on the Great North Road. At present the retail trade at the Madukani duka is managed by the mother--an elderly but competent woman whom everyone calls "Mama" Jivraj--and the 21-year old daughter Malek. The sons now spend most of their time at the Kibaoni establishment. The family possesses a truck and a small car. In addition to their retail trade, the family buys hides, beeswax, and castor beans--the only Mbugwe products of commercial importance--and transports them to markets at Arusha or Dodoma. They also buy dried animal bones which the Wambugwe collect in the forest. These fetch a good price at market for their lime content.

All seven children--one died in childhood--have received good educations and speak fair English. Noorali, the eldest son, and Pyarali who is 24 years old went to the Aga Khan School at Arusha. These two sons are the business men of the family and are making ambitious plans to expand their retail and wholesale trade, but they have lost interest in backward



Malek Jivraj

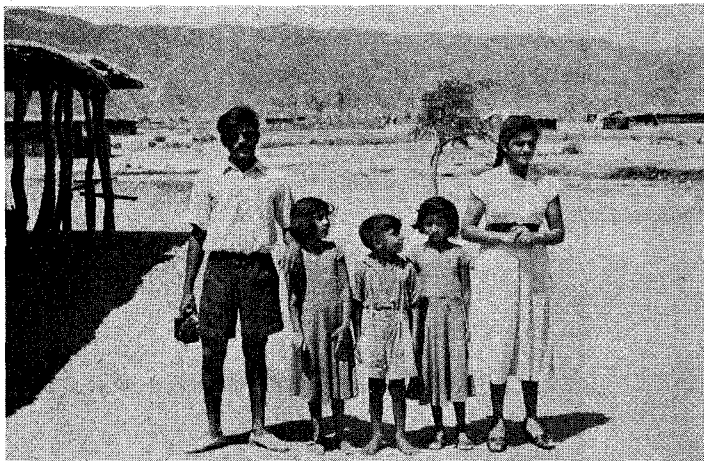


Mrs. Jessa and Daughter

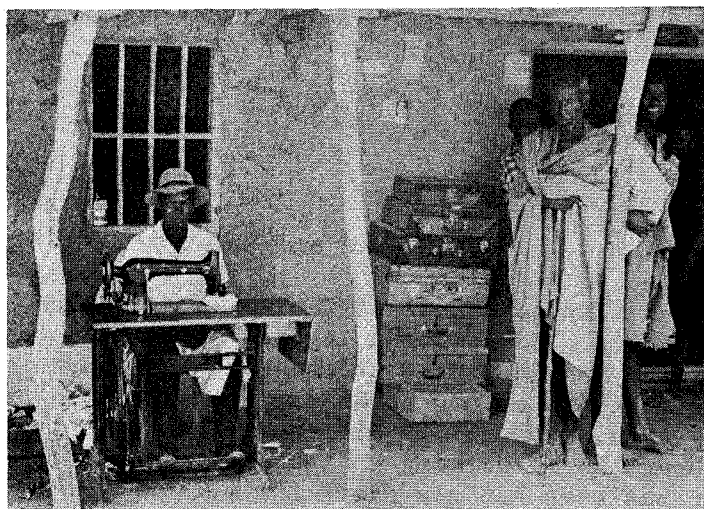
Madukani. The second son Abdulla was sent to school at Dar es Salaam where he took his Senior Cambridge Certificate. He is now a teacher at the Arusha school. The youngest son Amin is studying in Arusha at present. Another son, Sherali, has just returned from school at Dar es Salaam where he received the Junior Cambridge Certificate. Sherali is different from the others in his manner and interests. Although he is working in the Kibaoni duka at present, he has little interest in business but has great admiration for the British way of life. He has rehabilitated the old family rifle for hunting and is a competent amateur photographer with an efficient little dark room in the back of the duka. The oldest daughter Malek is an attractive but shy girl who speaks excellent English and helps her mother at the Madukani duka. She is now twenty-one and hopes soon to be married. The younger daughter Saker is just finishing school, and then will work in the duka until her marriage.

The entire property of the Jivraj family is owned jointly by four of the sons, the teacher Abdulla being excluded on the grounds that his professional education constituted his inheritance. In talking with these people, I was especially impressed with their enthusiasm for education and with their ambition and belief in progress coupled with the realistic patience and humility necessary to acquire the financial resources for improving the cultural level of the family.

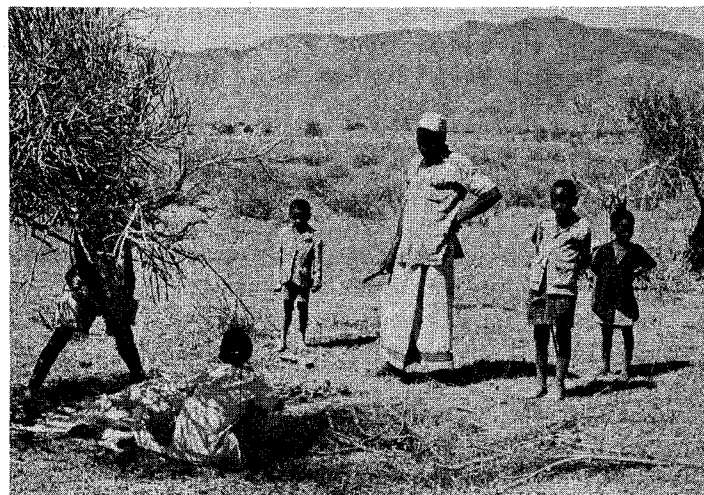
Another fatherless family is that of Gulamhussein Jessa, who died of an undiagnosed disease two years ago. Since his death, Mrs. Jessa, a good-looking woman of about thirty-five, has managed the retail trade of the duka almost single-handed. Her seven children are either in school at



Sadrudeen Datto with Sisters and Brother



A Tailor and Sewing Machine at every Duka



Madukani Abattoir

Dodoma—where they stay with relatives—or are too young to be of help. Having no man in the family to buy hides or other market products, she depends entirely on retail trade and has the largest variety of merchandise in the village. She hires a good tailor and sells a large share of the clothing which the Wambugwe require.

Hussein Ladak would like to be a big promoter and trader in raw materials. He buys grain and hides from the Wambugwe and rice and cotton from other settlements in the region. He deprecates the retail trade of his duka, but that seems to be the most reliable source of income. Like the Jivraj family, he appreciates the trade possibilities of the more dynamic village of Kibaoni and has built a modern duka there with concrete floor and corrugated iron roof which is run by a brother. As Hussein is usually traveling about the country in his truck on big business deals, his wife takes care of the Madukani shop most of the time. She is a large handsome woman who has a reputation among the Wambugwe for driving hard bargains.

Rajabali Datto is the proprietor of the fifth duka. His goods are less elegant than in the other shops and he deals with a poorer class of Wambugwe. In contrast to the Jivraj family, his ten children are uneducated. The eldest son Sadrudeen and his sister Saker each spent one year at the local mission school—the only Asians among the African children. Rajabali has brothers at Arusha and Morogoro and has sent a son to stay with each of them; presumably they will enter schools

at those places. The other children seem to have received no formal education. However, the father has taught the older children to read and write Gujarati. No one in the family speaks English, but they all know Swahili and some of the native Mbugwe language. Rajabali has developed diabetes and is in poor health. Sadrudeen does most of the work of managing the duka. In the case of the Datoo family, the younger generation have made no cultural progress beyond the level of their parents.

Around this nucleus of Indian dukas are clustered some forty houses. About half of these belong to aliens from other tribes and the rest to native Wambugwe. Apart from a butcher shop run by the Swahili Daudi and several "hotelis" where tea and fried cakes are served, the houses are residential. The aliens are mostly employed at the dukas. Each duka possesses several Singer sewing machines and hires one or two tailors. The other Africans are employed as errand boys, house boys, and for the endless tasks of carrying water from the wells and firewood from the forest. Those who are better paid employ servants of their own. The Wambugwe of Madukani are mostly farmers and do not work for the Indians. They are natives who have somehow been jostled out of their home districts in the hinterland and have taken the first step towards detribalization. Two of the houses are occupied by government servants—a veterinary assistant and an agriculture instructor.

Economically this little urban community is closely integrated, but it is divided by racial, cultural, and religious differences. Except in the case of old Bandala, there seems to be little contact between the Asians and Africans outside of business hours. The stout doors of the dukas are bolted at dark and the Indian families remain inside till morning.



Mohamedan Elders at the Mosque

The Africans of all tribes are united by their common liking for native beer which brings them together for long hours of the night. But judging from the court records at the baraza, they hold their liquor well, and criminal charges against Africans in Madukani are rare. One factor which no doubt promotes temperance and social order is the Mohamedan group. Almost any afternoon when the heat of the sun has abated, the council of Waislamu Wazee (Mohamedan Elders) can be found seated in a circle in the shadow of the mosque. Until recently they supported a full-time mwaliimu—a teacher of the Koran who wore an orange-colored gown to denote his rank. But the present mwaliimu is a man of dubious qualifications who is obliged to spend part of his time cultivating a shamba in order to make a living. The butcher Daudi is the lay leader of the Islamic community. The elders complain bitterly of the

godlessness of the younger generation and the lax discipline which Mohamedan parents now exercise over their children. As an indication that even the elders are becoming careless in their religious duties, they were not all able to produce the prescribed kanzu or white gown to have their photograph taken as a formal group.



Young Madukani Girls

sects follows its own religious practices, but they seem to recognize a common bond in Islam. Once a year on Idi, the last day of Ramadhan, they join together in prayers.

The pace of life in Madukani is very slow, and except that goods are now transported by trucks the conditions of life have probably changed but little since Bandala first arrived in 1910. Considering the economic limitations of the land, I can see little opportunity for fast progress. In fact the government has thought of requiring the Indians to move their dukas out to the Great North Road in order to stimulate the community by bringing it in closer contact with the outside world. The Madukanians resist this idea vigorously. The village is more than just a "place of shops." However poor and backward it may be, it has developed the personality of place that characterizes an organic community.

Sincerely,

Robert F. Gray

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