

This thesis discusses the response of the Arab-Swahili of Mombasa to Western education between 1875 and 1939. The main focus is on a constellation of factors that determined the response—namely, economic, political, administrative, policy and cultural factors.

The thesis shows that between 1875 and the end of the 1880s the response was negative. This was accounted for by two factors. In the first place, an atmosphere of hostilities existed between the mission establishments in the vicinity of Mombasa and the town residents over the question of fugitive slaves at this time. Secondly, as there were no employment opportunities requiring Western skills at this time, Western education had no cash value.

Between the mid 1890s and the early 1920s the response turned from negative to lukewarm. The value of western education was now demonstrated by the imperial British East Africa Company and later the government, the Railway, the new port of Kilindini, and commercial firms in the town. All these offered well-paid positions to those who had acquired western education. The elite in the community not only took advantage of the educational opportunities afforded by the Buxton high school but it also appealed to the government for a non-denominational school. The appeal led to the opening of the Arab Boys' School in 1912.

The rest of the community, though not hostile to western education per se, would have it only if it conformed to Islamic ideals. So this section avoided the Buxton high school because of its Christian orientation. The Arab Boy's school was unacceptable at this time because it excluded the Koran; though other factors, such as the school fees, which most parents could not raise; shortage of teachers; lack of adequate accommodation and language policy, also played a significant part.

From the mid 1920s to 1939 the response was generally good. By this time some of the major stumbling blocks and already been cleared. Payment of school fees had been abolished in 1920 and the Koran had been introduced in September 1924. In addition, the community had not been immune to the general political awakening, which swept across the country from the early 1920s. The two political associations formed in the community in this period appealed to their respective followers to take education seriously as the most effective weapon in the battle for both political and social rights in the racially stratified colonial society. More important still, the imperatives of economic well being made education axiomatic. Most of the traditional modes of earning a livelihood had long disappeared. Competition on the job market was keen, and education had become the arbiter of success.

Above all, the influence of the Islamic Reformist ideas played a key role in softening the resistance of even the most conservative elements in the community. Sheikh Al-Amin, the bearer of these ideas, pointed out to the community that there was no contradiction between Islam and secular learning. The Koran stresses the importance of acquiring knowledge.

As a consequence of this teaching the community made spirited efforts to domesticate Western education. Ghazali's Private Madrasa and the Muslim School, Changanwe, were the fruits of these attempts. Both schools taught the secular and the Islamic curriculum side by side. Girls' education was also accepted.

The conclusion of the study is that the response of the Arab-Swahili to Western education between 1875 and 1939 was not very different from that of other indigenous communities in the country in the same period. It was determined by similar factors.