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## The African Girls' Government School in Tanga Micropolitics on the Muslim Coast of Tanganyika in the 1930s

Florence WENZEK

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**The author:** Florence Wenzek is a PhD candidate in the history of education at the University Paris-Descartes, France. A former student at the École Normale Supérieure in Paris, she is agrégée in history since 2017 and holds a master's degree in history from University Paris-1 Panthéon-Sorbonne. She is studying female education in Tanzania, more precisely in the Tanga region, from the 1930s to the mid-1980s.

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**Abstract:** This paper focuses on micropolitics involved in the opening of a government girls' school in Tanga, on the coast of Tanganyika, in the early 1930s. Through a study of elites' involvement in the opening of the school, this paper deconstructs the colonial discourse concerning African and Muslim's rejection of girls' schooling. It shows that the opening of the school was not really a decision of the administration but rather the result of an interaction in which the colonized took major initiatives. The actors involved in the opening of the school were mainly male, but its early beginnings were carefully looked at by the pupils' mothers. This study case underlines how microhistory allows proposing new narratives of the development of schooling in a colonial context such as Tanganyika.

## Introduction

Colonial discourses on education equated schools with “progress” and interpreted resistance to schooling as “traditionalism” or “conservatism”. Since some categories of Africans, such as Muslims, were considered “traditionalists”, colonial authorities expected them to be hostile to what they saw as the vanguard of social progress in an African setting: girls' schooling in western institutions (Becker 2008).<sup>1</sup> Educated girls, provided they lived

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<sup>1</sup> Colonial sources seldom mention girls' presence in Koranic schools. Koranic schooling will not be discussed in this article.

by the standards they had learnt at school, were expected to bring “modernity” to Africa (Barthélémy 2010, Decker 2014).



The African Girls' school was located on the outskirts of the colonial city. Since it was built much later than most colonial buildings, it might be that no other space was available. However, we also can assume that colonial authorities deliberately chose to establish the school close to the African living quarters, just as the Maternity clinic next to it. This location would thus be iconic of the colonial authorities' will to bring the African women under its control.

Tanganyika, Department of Lands & Surveys and Survey Division, *Atlas of Tanganyika, East Africa*, 1956: 27.

British colonial officers of the Education Department of Tanganyika were in line with these common tropes. However, while circulating these ideas in their reports, they also stated contradictory facts. This is especially the case in their writings about the opening of the government girls' school of Tanga.<sup>2</sup> Tanga was one of the main towns of the Swahili

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<sup>2</sup> Documentation for this study-case comes from the Tanzania National Archives (TNA) and the series of the Colonial Office in the British National Archives (CO). Annual Reports of the Education Department (ARED) of Tanganyika Territory can be read in CO 736, TNA, the East African Section of the Main Library of the University of Dar es Salaam (UDSM) and at the National Library of Tanzania. The GIS-Institut du Genre—and my laboratory (CERLIS) partly financed my travels to Great Britain and Tanzania. IFRA-

coast and its primarily Muslim population was swahiliphone (Askew 2002). Colonial documentation shows that from 1929 at least the town elites asked for the opening of such a school and that since the British authorities delayed in their response, they organized its opening themselves in February 1931. These two facts reveal that the local situation was far more complex than what officials often described as the prevailing Muslim rejection of girls' schooling. The opening of the government girls' school does not so much appear as the result of a governmental policy shaped in the administrative headquarters but rather as a product of the specific political environment of Tanga.

Studies in sociology of education have shown how public policies are co-created through interactions between national and local actors (Ball 1990; Ball 1993) and historians have demonstrated how Africans contributed to shaping colonial education policies, either by asserting demands for schools and for specific kinds of education or by creating their own schools (Ranger 1965; Summer 2006). In the history of education in Tanganyika and independent Tanzania, however, top-down and Euro-centric approaches have long dominated (Cameron and Dodd 1970; Furley and Watson 1978). Some studies bend on specific schools and educational contexts, but Africans tend to be portrayed as secondary actors with little influence on the shaping of schooling policies and practices (Buchert 1994; Thompson 1968). Indeed, these studies explain that even if local actors, including African authorities, played a major part in the reopening of schools after World War One, the Education department controlled the development of schooling from 1925. From then on, African authorities would have got some influence on the shaping of policies only through their modest representation in advisory committees. This article, drawing on results put forward by the sociology of education on the role of local actors, but also on microhistory (Revel 1996), reflects upon the opening of Tanga Girls' School in order to propose another narrative. It tends to show that even after 1925, Africans played a much more active role in the development of schooling.

It is not to be seen as a unique case, but a series of sources illuminate for this school what might have applied to others. Many studies of education in Tanganyika have relied mainly on the annual reports written by the Education Department. Since these texts were written in order to demonstrate the work done by the department, they tend to underestimate or delete altogether the African contributions to educational change. We have for Tanga Girls' School alternative sources that allow uncovering another history: namely archival papers collected in Tanzania National Archives reporting discussions around the school within the administration and two texts published by the "African"<sup>3</sup> civil servant Martin Kayamba. From reading them we get access to the micropolitics involved in the opening of the school and we can see the role of the African male elites but also of the pupils' mothers.

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Nairobi recommended me to the School of Education of UDSM, which received me as a *visiting student*. I am very grateful to these institutions for the financial and practical help they provided me.

<sup>3</sup> The British administration in Tanganyika distinguished between "Europeans," "Asians" and "Africans." Though highly problematic, this racial categorization cannot be discarded, since it shaped the lives of everyone.

## 1. A long-ignored claim for a girls' school

Until 1929, the British authorities had no provisions for female education; girls only had access to missionary schools—either girls' schools or coeducational schools. In 1925, the annual report of the Education Department justified this choice by stating that it was mostly because of peoples' prejudices against female education. The tone changed in the following years. In 1928, it reported demand for girls' schools in the Muslim coastal towns. It observed that Muslim parents often sent their boys to missionary school when no government school was available but refused to do so for girls—though no explanation was given for this difference. In 1929 it mentioned, *“a persistent demand, particularly from Tanga.”*

Despite mentioning the existence of claims for girls' schools in the coastal towns, the Education Department decided to create the first two schools in the continental part of the country: at Malangali in 1929 and Tabora in 1930. They were boarding schools, meant to cater to elite girls—Tabora Girls' School, especially, was designed for the prospective spouses of the chiefs' sons, themselves trained in the same town. Tanga Girls' School, whose founding was announced in the 1930 report, was to be a different kind of government girls' school since it was created as a day school. The objective was not to train an elite but to school Muslim girls, a choice justified in statements about the administration's duty towards Muslims. The choice of building a school in Tanga rather than in Bukoba (Great Lakes Region), where there was also a demand for it, was explained by the fact that female education in Bukoba was already provided by various missionary societies.

Choosing to build a day school meant, however, that it would not satisfy the desires of all coastal Muslims. Why then was Tanga chosen over the other coastal towns? Tanga was an educational centre, with a prestigious central school for boys, a legacy from the Germans. This was an asset since it meant there would be qualified British educational officers to oversee the new girls' school. Still, Tanga remained a secondary town, since the British had settled their administrative headquarters in Dar es Salaam—where there was also a central school. What seems to have been most influential in the choice of Tanga was that there was an explicit local demand, whereas local administrators of Dar es Salaam were unaware of a similar demand. Indeed, in 1931 they launched an inquiry about people's opinion on female education and found that *“among the more educated the demand was unanimous, both among Christians and Moslems”* (ARED 1931: 8). However, it is noticeable that they needed an inquiry, while in Tanga, such a demand was expressed spontaneously some years before. These differences echo studies that show that attitudes towards girls' schooling varied along the Swahili coast: the elites of Zanzibar cooperated with the British officials to open a government girls' school in 1927 (Decker 2014) while the elites of Mombasa were vocally opposed to such schemes up to the mid-1930s (Strobel 1979).

One man played a specific role in making the claims for a government girls' school in Tanga audible: Martin Kayamba. He grew up in a highly educated Christian family since his father had completed his education in England. In the interwar years, Martin Kayamba was the Tanganyikan African with the highest position in the civil service (Iliffe 1979: 357). In 1928 he became a member of the Provincial Committee on African Education of Tanga and in 1929, of the territorial Advisory Committee on African Education. His part in the

discussions over the opening of a girls' school in Tanga is documented in the archives by the mention of his name here and there, and by a minute from 1933 in which he recounts the steps he took to ensure the opening of the school.<sup>4</sup> In his autobiography as well as in an essay titled *African Problems*, both written in the late 1930s, he advocated girls' schooling, thus showing a continuous commitment to girls' education after the opening of Tanga's school (Kayamba 1936; Kayamba 1948). These texts written by Martin Kayamba are precious since they represent the only documents on the topic of this article which were not produced by British administrators. He had the opportunity to state his opinion because he was considered by the British as an "African representative," which gave him legitimacy to speak in the name of "the natives." However, his texts account only for his own perspective and action, that were those of an African administrator who worked closely with the British and whose points of view were often close to theirs.

Nevertheless, Martin Kayamba was far from isolated in his request for a girls' school in Tanga. Various sources suggest widespread support for this request, to the point that local and educational administrators were worried that delays in answering it would be detrimental for the government's reputation. For instance, in the Provincial Advisory Education Committee of Tanga, it was underlined in May 1930 that "*there was a general feeling even yet among the natives [...] that the Government does not really favour female education.*"<sup>5</sup> *De facto*, the authorities did not prioritize female education, and the building of Tanga Girls' was delayed repeatedly. In June 1928, a site was earmarked for it.<sup>6</sup> Over two years later, nothing had been done and the Director of Education complained to the Chief Secretary that because of a budget cut the opening of the school was delayed an additional 18 months.<sup>7</sup> The mobilization of the African elites nevertheless allowed the school to open earlier, in February 1931.

## 2. The cooperation of Tanga's elites and the colonial authorities in the opening of the school

In December 1930, the African Association of Tanga proposed part of their buildings to the government for a quick opening of the girls' school. This association was composed of African and Arab civil servants, both Christians and Muslims. It aimed at the "*social advancement*" of its members, mainly through the organization of evening classes and

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<sup>4</sup> Typed minute signed H.M. Kayamba 27/3/33, numbered pp. 21-26 in TNA 19458, p. 21.

<sup>5</sup> "Minutes of the Fourth Meeting of the Tanga Provincial Education Committee Held at the Provincial Commissioner's House, Tanga, on the Sixth of May 1930" in TNA 19106. See also "A Report on the Activities of the Government Schools in Tanga Province for the Quarter ending September 1930" in TNA 19409.

<sup>6</sup> Letter from Tanga's Central School Headmaster to Tanga Housing Committee's Chairman, 3/09/1931, in TNA 493-E1/3.

<sup>7</sup> Extract of letter No. 14/14/19, dated 27/11/1930, quoted in TNA 19458. See also the delays mentioned in ARED 1929.

shared leisure<sup>8</sup>. It is likely that Martin Kayamba played a major part in this initiative, as the founder of this association and an advocate for girls' schooling.

Beyond Kayamba and the African Association, the school attracted large support from the local elites. The *Kadhi* (Muslim judge, one of the most prominent figures of a Muslim community) built a fence along the front of the building to create a protected area allowing girls to play. He also made sure that the school had a significant number of pupils by sending his niece there and by convincing men connected to his court to send their daughters to the school. *Jumbes* (a title for elders of small territorial units) were also among the first to send their daughters to the school.<sup>9</sup> These various local officials, as well as town headmen and *akidas* (title for elders with an authority superior to that of the *Jumbes*) had a meeting to ensure that the school had enough pupils to open. By immediately sending their daughters to the school, these men proved that the local African elite, mainly Muslim, was already convinced of the virtues of schooling girls. According to Kayamba, this was partly due to their education in the German school of Tanga. This assertion was part of Kayamba's discourse over schooling as a means to overcome "*the African prejudice and conservatism to anything that is new, [...] born of years of primitive life.*"<sup>10</sup> Not surprisingly, schooled Africans were the most vocal supporters for schooling and appropriated the colonial discourse on its intrinsic values. Kayamba also states that town headmen and *akidas* helped to convince the larger population that the school was not going to convert its pupils to Christianity. Together these men played the role of cultural brokers in making the government school that they had claimed for years acceptable to the people.

The British administration took advantage of these arrangements made by local elites that allowed the school to open inexpensively. Two years later, in February 1933, it displayed its support for the project by opening the first temporary buildings financed on public funds.<sup>11</sup> Though local elites did much by themselves to promote the school, British officials also encouraged them to do so, since they feared a potential opposition. For instance, on the day of the opening, in February 1931, an official of the education department, Mr Baker, wrote to the *Kadhi* and asked him to organize a meeting with parents the following week, in order to allow the Director of Education to discuss the new school with them.<sup>12</sup> Later, he asked Martin Kayamba if his daughter could serve as an assistant mistress since the one in charge was considered "*devoid of discipline and influence over the pupils*"; Martin Kayamba accepted and explained "*knowing what was wanted in education amongst Mohamedans [he] instructed [her] to teach not only by words but also by good example of her life.*"<sup>13</sup> W.E. Allen wrote in her report that she was especially grateful for their support and help in the first months of the school. This suggests that she did indeed

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<sup>8</sup> TNA 3715/4, quoted in Iliffe (1979: 267). Named "African Association" in the archival documentation, its actual name is the Tanganyika African Civil Services Association. It should not be mistaken for the African Association, more widely known, founded in 1929 whose ambition was to represent all Africans in the Tanganyika Territory.

<sup>9</sup> "Report. Government Girls School. Tanga. July 1931" by W.E. Allen, in TNA 19409.

<sup>10</sup> Typed minute signed H.M. Kayamba 27/3/33, numbered pp. 21-26 in TNA 19458.

<sup>11</sup> TNA 19458.

<sup>12</sup> TNA 493 E1/3.

<sup>13</sup> Typed minute signed H.M. Kayamba 27/3/33, numbered pp. 21-26 in TNA 19458, p. 22.

consider Kayamba, but also Muslim authorities such as the *Kadhi* as intermediaries between her and the people. Although there are no texts from the Muslim elite, their support is lauded in this colonial report.

### 3. The mothers' point of view: from doubtfulness to approval

As Corrie Decker underlines in her study of female education in Zanzibar, scholars have tended to underestimate the role of mothers in the resistance to or promotion of schooling, while—at least in the Swahili sphere—they had a major role in the decision to send a child to school or keep him or her at home (Decker 2014: 48). In the archival documentation on Tanga, letters by the first two headmistresses show mothers' initiatives in the decision to school their daughters.<sup>14</sup> These letters opposed the enthusiasm of girls and the reluctance of their mothers. W.E. Allen stated that “*a number of children have begged to come to school but [that she has] not been able to obtain the permission of their mothers.*” As for Helen J. Taylor, she described mothers' doubts about the school while suggesting girls were very keen to learn. Despite conveying colonial tropes, her three paragraphs on mothers' attitude contain anecdotes that give precious glimpses into these women's views of the new school. Taylor began by describing their opposition to schooling by listing all the reasons she attributed for their reluctance (uselessness of school education, fear of losing their authority on the girls, fear of seeing “*tribal customs*” disappear, fear of conversion to Christianity), implicitly contrasting women's conservatism and the administration's modernism and progressiveness. However, in the following paragraphs, she gives a detailed depiction of the mothers, while explaining what she did to gain their trust. She opened the school to all visitors, particularly mothers, who seized the opportunity to come and watch the classes. She recounts that she finally gained the mothers' approval when she asked to be taught a local handicraft (plaiting mats with raffia) and quickly mastered this skill. According to her, this demonstration attracted many mothers to the school: “*This is only a small incident but from that time on the women began to approach me with laughter and greetings and my numbers in school increased.*” This description gives some insight into the criteria the women used to judge who qualified as a good teacher for their daughters. First, they expected teachers to be mothers, but this was not sufficient qualification. They also had to prove interested in and able to perform local handicrafts. We can assume that local handicrafts were a gauge to measure whether this European was a woman with proper learning. More prosaically, if girls were to go to school, it could be thought important that they spent part of their school time learning handicrafts that were part of their informal education, for which they would have less time. This also suggests that knowing how to read and write was not especially valued – at least, it was not valued enough for the women to entrust their daughters with any European woman able to teach them that.

The number of pupils grew quickly. The small size of the African Association's clubhouse had limited it to 25, but thanks to the new buildings those numbers grew. By the end of

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<sup>14</sup> “Report. Government Girls School. Tanga. July 1931” by W.E. Allen, in TNA 19409 and “Girls' School Tanga”, 1933, by Helen J. Taylor in TNA 19458.

1934, the maximum number of 200 pupils that the school could accommodate was reached. Classes were given in the evening for girls considered too old to be accepted in the school.

Date	Major event	Number of registered pupils	Number of African teachers
27 February 1931	Opening of the school, with W.E.Allen as headmistress	10	1
End of March 1931		18	1
May 1932	Arrival of a new headmistress, H.J. Taylor	20	1
3 February 1933	Move to the new buildings	45	2
25 February 1933		90	3
July 1933		124	5
January 1934		160	6
October 1934		200	8

## Conclusion

The opening of a government girls' school in Tanga, though made possible because of a territorial-wide policy of expanding girls' education, was mainly the result of local initiatives. Local elites not only requested a school but also took an active part in its creation. Martin Kayamba played a major role, because of his unique position in the colonial administration. However, the Muslim leaders and native authorities that supported the school were essential to make it legitimate within the Muslim community, as well as the women's approbation after a careful observation of the headmistress and her educational practices. The numbers of pupils are undoubtedly significant of widespread local acceptance of the school. In the absence of more detailed sources though, we know little of the possible resistance to it, the reason behind the latter and if and why resistance eventually died down.

Such a case of microhistory gives new insight into the ways African actors contributed to the development of schooling. Contrarily to what major works on the history of education in colonial Tanganyika tend to suggest, Africans took major initiatives that contributed to shaping the educational landscape. Much more can be done in this field of study in history, especially using microhistorical approaches.

This study case also tends to a reappraisal of the discourses and actions of the colonizers and the colonised around the issues of female education. It demonstrates that since the 1920s and 1930s, many members of the African elites, including the Muslim elites, appropriated the idea that girls should go to school. Despite this appropriation, issues remained vivid, just as they do today when female education regularly appears as a topic of public debate around themes such as schoolgirls' pregnancies (HakiElimu Library 2004).

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