Kenya Evangelization and the Beginning of Strathmore College

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Abstract: *Strathmore College was the outcome of a diplomatic intervention by the Holy See, driven by a concern to strengthen the Church in Kenya in view of its approaching independence. The Cambridge (UK) Conference on Education marked a substantial change in racial segregation in education, initiating multiracial and interterritorial college policies following the recommendation of the working parties of 1955 and 1958 for British East Africa. These working parties also considered an expansion of higher education that provided the opportunity for Strathmore to begin. The article explores the historical and sociological background within which Strathmore College and Opus Dei eventually developed in Kenya.*

Keywords: *Racial and Religious Segregation – Education – Evangelization – Josemaría Escrivá – Opus Dei*

L'evangelizzazione del Kenya e l'inizio dello Strathmore College. *Il Strathmore College fu il risultato di un intervento diplomatico della Santa Sede, motivato dalla preoccupazione di rafforzare la Chiesa in Kenya in vista della sua imminente indipendenza. La Conferenza di Cambridge (Regno Unito) sull'istruzione segnò un cambiamento sostanziale nella segregazione razziale nell'istruzione, che iniziò con politiche universitarie multirazziali e interterritoriali seguendo le raccomandazioni dei gruppi di lavoro del 1955 e del 1958 per l'Africa orientale britannica. Questi gruppi di lavoro esaminarono anche un'espansione dell'istruzione superiore che fornì l'opportunità per l'inizio dello Strathmore. L'articolo esplora il contesto storico e sociologico in cui lo Strathmore College e l'Opus Dei si sono infine sviluppati in Kenya.*

Keywords: *Segregazione razziale e religiosa – Istruzione – Evangelizzazione – Josemaría Escrivá – Opus Dei*

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Introduction

Msg. Gaston Mojaisky-Perrelli (1914-2008) became the Apostolic Delegate to British East and West Africa in 1957. He resided in Mombasa and understood that the lack of educational opportunities combined with the racial and religious segregation of the colonial education system were deep African yearnings needing redress. The uncertainty caused by the proximity of independence of the East African countries, and the development of the Catholic Church in Kenya explain his request to St Josemaría Escrivá (1902-1975), inviting Opus Dei to start a Catholic university in Kenya.

As a political entity, the name "Kenya" entered history in 1920, with the creation of the Colony of Kenya[1]. It had no boundaries in the sense we understand them today. In the North was the Ethiopian Empire, Sudan under the rule of the Anglo-Egyptian condominium and an Italian sphere of influence in Eritrea; Tanganyika in the South was a German sphere of influence, and Uganda in the West was a British Protectorate. Kenya's coastal strip along the Indian Ocean was part of the Protectorate of Zanzibar. From Mombasa, the Taru desert and the Masai people were formidable obstacles to trading with the hinterland until the building of "the most romantic and wonderful railway in the world […] [for] the white man and all that he brings with it, for good or ill"[2]. After the First World War, the German areas of influence in Africa ceased, and so did the Italian area after the Second World War. By the beginning of the 1960s, almost all colonies in Africa had gained independence.

The evangelization of Kenya started with the arrival of the Portuguese to Mombasa in the 16th century; however, their effort did not prosper for reasons that are beyond the scope of this article. In the 19th century, there were new attempts that eventually bore fruit. We describe the enormous importance of the mission schools in the evangelization of sub-Saharan Africa, encapsulated in the dictum "whoever owns the school will own Africa"[3].

We describe graphically the colonial system of education and its racial bias, and highlight some of the conclusions of the Cambridge (UK) Education Conference that are relevant to this story. This section concludes with the Holy See's concern about the situation and Mojaisky-Perrelli's request to Escrivá.

A brief description of Kenya social context at the beginning of the colonial period follows. For those acquainted with the present-day situation of the country, it will be a reminder of the tremendous development it has experienced since.

[1] Cf. Central Bank of Kenya 2016.
[2] Churchill 1909: 3.
[3] Cf. Njoroge 2022: 329.

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The description of Opus Dei involvement starts with the exploratory trip of the two envoys of St Josemaría and the first steps to settle in Nairobi. The article concludes with the Catholic bishops' proposal to the colonial government on the future Strathmore College.

Methodology

Primary and secondary sources intermingle in this article to describe the historical and sociological context. After a tour over the earlier evangelizing efforts in Kenya, our account begins with Mojaisky-Perrelli's request to St Josemaría to start a university in Nairobi. We have not formulated any hypothesis because our aim is only to describe the context and relate complex events in an orderly fashion, to facilitate their comprehension and further research.

To achieve our purpose we have examined primary sources available in Nairobi at the Nairobi Archdiocese Archives, the Holy Ghost Fathers Archives and the Opus Dei Prelature Nairobi Archives.

Based on our experience in Kenya spanning for more than four decades, we have consulted purposely selected secondary sources and interviewed some eyewitnesses. No history of Strathmore College would be complete without studying the role of St Josemaría, which is documented in the General Archive of the Prelature in Rome.

The evangelization of Kenya in modern times

On 22 December 1860, a group of missionaries made up of two French diocesan priests, six nuns, a medical doctor and some workers disembarked in Zanzibar. They had travelled at the request of Bishop Armand Maupoint of St Denis (Reunion), Apostolic Delegate for East Africa. The group met the Sultan on the second day of their arrival and explained him that they had come "to care for the sick, to help the poor, to educate the children and instruct them in trades". Within months, they had started a hospital, a small pharmacy, and an iron workshop. They also started schools for Africans, Indians and Arabs. The African pupils were abandoned slaves or those they ransomed from the slave market. The first Holy Ghost missionaries arrived in Zanzibar on 16 June 1863 to take over the Apostolic Prefecture of Zanguebar[4].

During those early years, the Spiritan missionary effort in the coastal region of East Africa addressed ransomed slaves and non-Swahili immigrants,

[4] Cf. Jong 2011.

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as missionaries were not permitted to convert Muslims. The attempt to produce native African clergy failed. The paternalistic system they applied perhaps denied responsibility and full maturity to the potential candidates. Possibly this cause, more than the moral and social problems that the African Religious faced, was the main reason for the poor results[5]. Slavery disappeared gradually due to British political influence. However, in 1959, the Nairobi Archdiocese was still receiving "anti-slavery subsidies"[6] from Propaganda Fide and some American dioceses.

The Spiritans arrived in Mombasa in 1889 and reached Nairobi ten years later. In 1901, the railway reached Kisumu. The new route to Kenya's interior allowed twelve missionary societies to venture into evangelizing projects: nine of them were Protestants and three Catholics. Three of the Protestant societies hailed from England including the Anglican established church, five from the US and one from Canada. Together with the Independent African Churches that appeared from 1914 onwards, they turned Kenya into a Protestant country[7]. Besides Mombasa and Taveta, the Spiritans evangelized Nairobi, Kiambu, Kabaa and Mangu. The Consolata evangelized around the Mount Kenya region and the Mill Hill missionaries Western Kenya.

In a few decades, all missionaries in sub-Saharan Africa, Protestants first and Catholics later, discovered that the best evangelizing method was to translate the Bible into local languages and teach people to read it. Johann Ludwig Krapf (1810-1881), a pioneer of the Church Missionary Society, opened a mission and a school near Mombasa, transcribed the Swahili language from Arabic to Roman characters, and translated the New Testament. Zanzibar Anglican Bishop Edward Steere translated and published in Swahili several religious texts and the entire Bible in 1891[8]. The Spiritan Pére Baur composed a Swahili catechism. In 1914, the Consolata missionaries published the New Testament in the Kikuyu language[9]. In some missions, basic skills to read the Bible became a criterion for Baptism[10].

These translations of the Bible triggered a mass-education phenomenon in sub-Saharan Africa, with the help of African teachers and catechists who carried the bulk of mission schooling. By the 1850s, there were parts of the Bible translated into 27 African languages; it had increased to 112 by 1904[11]. Some mission schools also taught English, which gradually became a coveted skill for formal employment.

5 Cf. Jong 2011.
6 This is the term used in some documents we examined, e.g. letter of Archbishop McCarthy to Propaganda Fide acknowledging receipt of 5,000 shillings, 14 July 1959, Correspondence KEC-PF 57-61, ANA.
7 Cf. Baur 2005.
8 Cf. Pawlikova-Vilhanova 2006: 80-89.
9 Cf. Njoroge 2022.
10 Cf. Urch 1971: 249-264.
11 Cf. Johnson 1969: 68-76.

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Up to the end of the First World War, education in East Africa was in the hands of missionaries, as a means to evangelization, under the benevolent eyes of the colonial authorities who considered it their responsibility to facilitate the moral development of Africans. The Great War changed Africa in several ways. Kenya lost 45,000 men in the conflagration[12], approximately 13% of the male active population[13]. After the war, there was a steep increase of Kenyan exports. With the help of legislation, by 1919 the whites' control of the Kenya economy had increased from 14% to 70%[14].

From an economic point of view, the post-war years heightened the need for qualified labor. The appointment within a short span of time of three independent teams to study the education of Africans is a witness to this concern. The American Phelps-Stokes Fund supported one of the studies. Its report, originally requested by the American Baptist Missionary Society and the Foreign Missions Conference of North America, was published in 1924 under the heading "Education in East Africa". The British Advisory Committee on Education, appointed by the Government in 1923, handed in its report on "Education Policy in British Tropical Africa" in 1925. The East Africa Commission, appointed in 1924, published its report also in 1925. All parties saw the need to modernize education while preserving its moral dimension through religious training. Implementing it required setting up a formal education system. The colonial authorities had to get actively involved and missionary schools had to face novel demands[15].

The report of the British Advisory Committee favored cooperation with missions but reserved to itself "the general direction of educational policy and the supervision of the old educational Institutions, by inspection and other means". Its new comprehensive program of education went far beyond the training of skills and literacy. It proposed to assume responsibility for raising the character and efficiency of the majority of the people and for the improvement of their condition of life[16].

While monitoring these developments, the Holy See concluded that the policies of the British Government were favorable for its missionary work[17] but required a certain degree of alignment between Vatican and British interests. To drive this most delicate operation in 1927 Pope Pius XI appointed Mgr. Arthur Hinsley Apostolic Visitor to the British colonies in Africa. At the time of this appointment, there were 111 Catholic mission territories in Africa, 51 of which

[12] Cf. Paice 2007.
[13] Cf. Sondhaus 2011.
[14] Cf. Strachan 2004.
[15] Cf. Beck 1966: 115-138.
[16] Cf. Beck 1966: 115-138.
[17] Cf. Urch 1971: 249-264.

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were in British dominions. British East Africa had thirteen such territories: eight in Tanganyika, two in Uganda and three in Kenya. Only two territories in British Africa were in the hands of diocesan priests, both in South Africa[18].

For obvious reasons, British Catholic missionary presence in Africa was insignificant. The British Mill Hill Missionaries, the majority of which were Dutch, run two missions in Uganda, one in Kenya and one in Cameroon. The English Province of the Society of Jesus had missions in today Zimbabwe and Zambia, formerly Rhodesia. The remaining missions were in the hands of fourteen European religious institutions[19].

On the eve of the First World War, the number of Catholics in British Africa was approximately 540,000, of which 230,568 were in Uganda. By the time of Mgr. Hinsley's appointment, the total number of Catholics was 988,732. The 43,000 Catholics in Kenya lived in four territories: the Vicariate of Nyeri and the Prefecture of Meru both run by the Consolata; the Prefecture of Kavirondo in the care of the Mill Hill Missionaries, and part of the Vicariate of Zanzibar served by the Spiritans and the White Fathers[20].

When in November 1928 Mgr. Hinsley held its first conference with the Kenya Colony ecclesiastical authorities, the Director of Education was H. S. Scott, a civil servant with reservations towards Catholic schools[21]. In a private audience, the Pope had told the Apostolic Visitor that "setting-up schools was the most important part of the mission". Propaganda Fide stressed the same point, highlighting the importance of schools as the portal of the Church. If it is a question of building a church or building a school, the school takes precedence, even if the building should double up as a church[22]. A letter to Bishop Mathurin Guillémé in Nyasaland condenses the source of the Apostolic Visitor's authority and the essence of his mission:

> Schools are a means to reach the masses, and it is my mission to insist that missionaries concentrate their efforts on schools. Schools are more important than churches. The school is the vestibule into the church. The sacraments are given in the church, but it is in the school that you prepare the subjects of the sacraments. Therefore at the Sacred Congregation of the Propagation of the Faith I have been told to state clearly that where a choice is to be made between building a church and building a school, it is the school that is to be chosen[23].

[18] Cf. Hagerty 2008.
[19] Cf. Hagerty 2008.
[20] Cf. Hagerty 2008.
[21] Cf. Hagerty 2008.
[22] Cf. Saayman 1991: 29-44.
[23] Hagerty 2008.

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Mgr. Hinsley supported the transformation of Kabaa into a High School. In 1930, the precursor of Mangu High School, the first Catholic secondary school in Kenya, started preparing African students for the Cambridge School Certificate Examination. During the period 1916-1924, Catholic missionaries had not sought aid from the government because of its perceived prejudice against them. The Education Ordinance of 1924 was supposed to remedy this problem. However, the first subsidy Kabaa High School received was in 1932, and it was that of a Primary School: 150/- shillings per pupil per year, plus primary school salaries for teachers. At the time, Alliance High School was receiving a High School grant of 700/- shillings per pupil per year, and its students would pay fees at the rate of 150/- shillings per year. Prior to 1935, Kabaa High School charged no fees[24].

The unpublished work of Frank Duffy attributes to the encouragement of the Apostolic Visitor the beginning of St Mary's School, which opened its doors in 1939 as the first private school for European Catholic boys in Nairobi[25]. However, it also admitted a few European students from other religious denominations[26].

Mgr. Hinsley encouraged Catholic missionaries to accept the grant-in-aid subsidies the colonial administration offered to all schools, regardless of their denomination. Catholic missionaries had reservations on each other, on their rival Protestant missionaries[27], on the colonial administrators' fairness to allocate grant-in-aid, and mistrusted the colonial school inspectors[28]. Addressing bishops from Anglophone Africa in Dar es Salaam in 1928, Msg. Hinsley said "whoever owns the school will own Africa"[29]. The change of attitude towards the colonial educational grant-in-aid he encouraged among Catholic missionaries, in our judgement, made it possible that a fifth of Kenya's population may be Catholic today.

The request of Msg. Mojaisky-Perrelli

Msg. Hinsley became Apostolic Delegate to the British Colonies in Africa on 9 January 1930. From Mombasa, he was supposed to oversee sixty ecclesiastical divisions covering nine million square miles with a population of 80 million. Unfortunately, his four-year tenure could not escape the impact of the

[24] Cf. Jong 2011.
[25] Duffy, Frank (CSSp), *A History of St Austin's Mission – Nairobi – 1899-1945* (unpublished and undated draft), HGFA.
[26] "Journal of St Mary's School (1955-1968)", HGFA.
[27] Cf. Blixen 2016: 33.
[28] Cf. Jong 2011.
[29] Njoroge 2022.

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world economic depression. From 1932 to 1934 expenditure on education in East Africa slumped by approximately 30%. Mission schools had their income reduced by 45% causing staff reduction and sowing seeds of doubt among Africans, who perceived unfair play between the European administrators and missionaries, against the African independent schools supervised by the Native Authority Schools[30].

In the following two decades, there was a significant transformation of the Kenyan society. African military personnel serving overseas or interacting with foreign soldiers, returned home with novel views. Msg. Mojaisky-Perrelli sensed their yearnings, the lack of well-formed African leaders, the all-pervading uncertainty about independence and the challenge of non-Catholic denominations to the future development of the Catholic Church in Kenya. These circumstances explain his request to St Josemaría Escrivá, inviting Opus Dei to start a Catholic university in Nairobi.

> We have reached to a crucial point: the number of Christians, the increasing number of conversions, the approaching self-government, etc., turn it into a match whose outcome will have far reaching consequences for the future of Africa. In twenty years it will be established, perhaps for long, if Catholicism will be the religion of the majority and of more influence in this land, or—God forbid—it may get reduced to one of the several Christian sects.
>
> It is of great importance to found, therefore, a Catholic University, even with only one school, with the basic introductory courses. It is essential to reach before others do: when the opportunity is over we will be left without a chance.
>
> We have lost the race in the Central Africa Confederation[31] […], where the Queen Mother has inaugurated a university a few months ago. We have lost the race in Uganda (the most Catholic territory in this Delegation), where the Makerere College is already in operation. I am unwilling to lose the 'last round'.
>
> Hence consider in the presence of God if you can avail me in the shortest possible time people able to start a civil engineering program in Nairobi, Kenya.

We can assume that the Apostolic Delegate had studied carefully the problem with his superiors because in the last but one paragraph he says, "I should add that Propaganda Fide would provide economic help".

Escrivá found the last paragraph compelling: "I beg you for a positive answer and request that you see whether you can send someone to study the project in loco" (My translation)[32].

[30] Cf. Hagerty 2008.
[31] Federation of Rhodesia (today Zambia and Zimbabwe) and Nyasaland (today Malawi).
[32] Letter of Msg. Mojaisky-Perrelli to Escrivá, 26 October 1957, Serie M.2.1: File 27-1-1, AGP.

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A few months earlier, Pius XII had appointed St Josemaría Consultor of the Sacred Congregation for Seminaries and Universities[33]. The words of Blessed Alvaro del Portillo in Nairobi would indicate that the idea of Strathmore project belonged to the Holy See and therefore carried the approval of the Pope:

"I remember that around the year 1958 the Holy Father Pius XII asked him [St Josemaría] to choose an African nation where Opus Dei could start working. Those words from the Pope were more than a suggestion. When a good son guesses what his father wishes, he tries to put it into practice. And after thinking about it a lot in the presence of God, he chose Kenya" (My translation)[34].

On 4 November 1957, Escrivá answered that he would send two members of the Work to study the situation on the ground[35]. A lawyer, Michael Richards, and Fr Paul Cummings arrived in Nairobi on 28 February 1958 for a visit that took them to Mombasa and Kampala.

Why a university in Nairobi?

The birth of Nairobi was as a railway camp at the end of the 19th century. Its population estimate for 1958 was 252,000[36]. Despite the Mau Mau rebellion, it had become a vibrant city taking the lead in East Africa. Why would the Apostolic Delegate be so specific about the university project being located in Nairobi? Although Mombasa had been the most important city of Kenya for centuries and the first capital of the Protectorate, it started losing importance when Nairobi took its place in 1907. The estimated population of Mombasa in 1958 was 144,000[37]; its infrastructure and amenities were behind those of Nairobi. Dar es Salaam in 1958 had an estimated population of 140,000[38] and Kampala 120,000[39].

Above all, Nairobi was a modern city that was developing according to the careful planning of the colonial authorities. It was the see of government where business, social problems and politics were more intense. Edel Quinn

[33] Letter of Escrivá to Pope Pius XII, 2 August 1957, Serie A.3: 570802-03, AGP.

[34] Recording of a public gathering at Jomo Kenyatta International Conference Center with Msg. Álvaro del Portillo on 4 April 1989, PKA.

[35] Letter of Escrivá to Msg. Mojaisky-Perrelli, 4 November 1957, Serie M.2.1, File 27-1-1, AGP.

[36] Cf. https://www.macrotrends.net/cities/21711/nairobi/population. Last visited on 14 December 2023.

[37] Cf. https://www.google.com/search?q=Population+of+Mombasa+in+1960&oq=Population+of+Mombasa+in+1960&gs_lcrp=EgZjaHJvbWUyBggAEEUYOTIGCAEQLhhA0gEJMTMyNDJqMGoxqAIAsAIA&sourceid=chrome&ie=UTF-8 . Last visited on 16 November 2023.

[38] Cf. https://www.macrotrends.net/cities/22894/dar-es-salaam/population, last visited on 13 January 2024.

[39] Cf. https://www.macrotrends.net/cities/22744/kampala/population, last visited on 13 January 2024.

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(1907-1944) was an Irish member of the Legion of Mary, whom St John Paul II proclaimed Venerable in 1994. On 16 December 1936, she wrote:

> To give you an idea of the color question. One day I had arranged to meet the Goan Treasurer, as I wanted to speak to her among other things about her duties. There was not a restaurant or a hotel in Nairobi that we could go into to discuss matters without placing her in the position of being asked to leave. Eventually we applied to the manager of a hotel whom the President knew and as a very special favor he gave us his private office at the top of the building […][40].

The education system

Racial segregation

The organization of the Department of Education was along racial lines before independence, with departments for European, Asian, African and Arab students. Quality had priority over quantity. The school-age population was as follows:

Table 1

Ethnic Group	Number of pupils	Total number of children	% at school
PRIMARY SCHOOL EDUCATION			
African	840,677	2,421,300	34.7
Arab	3,322	9,000	36.9
Asian	40,915	52,800	77.5
European	6,639	8,900	74.6
SECONDARY SCHOOL EDUCATION			
African	10,593	829,700	1.3
Arab	292	3,100	9.4
Asian	13,912	17,200	80.9
European	3,265	3,300	98.9

Kenya, Ministry of Education, Triannual Survey, 1961-1963 (Sheffield, 1971)

To the eight years of lower and upper primary education followed four years of secondary education that ended with the Ordinary Level School Certificate. Two more years of study were required to sit for the Advance Level

[40] Suenens 1954: 103-104.

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Examinations. Progression was strictly on merit and student attrition was huge. Lack of educational opportunities condemned many to wastage.

Gender Balance

Britain has a long-standing tradition of providing government financial support to faith-based schools. Although Christianity was unknown in some places of its Empire, this tradition reached the colonies. In Kenya, these schools took the name of mission schools. They were the majority until independence and, following Christian traditions, they were single gender at secondary level, and quite often at primary level too. In the year 1958, the gender situation in secondary schools, teacher/technical/vocational training was as follows[41]:

Table 2

Number of Secondary Schools by Race							
Europeans		Asians & Goans		Arab & Others		Africans	
14		34		2		28	
Enrolment of Males and Females							
M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
1508	1441	4936	3087	224	24	3507	415
Number Teacher Training Colleges, Technical & Vocational Training							
0		3		0		42	
Enrolment in Teacher Training Colleges							
0	0	118	151	0	0	2500	1045
Enrolment in Technical & Vocational Training							
0	0	0	0	0	0	1114	0

Education and Gender in 1958 (© C Sotz)

Table 2 shows virtually gender parity among European students, which is almost non-existent among Arab students. In the 1950s, the average African family could afford educating few of their children and would normally start with the eldest and/or brightest son.

[41] Cf. East Africa Statistical Department 1959.

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Secondary education

The 1955 White Paper[42] breakdown for the School Certificate Examinations in Ordinary level shows 2345 candidates for the entire East Africa, of which only 1537 were successful:

Table 3

1954 School Certificate Examination					
	European	Asian	African	Arab	Private
Kenya					
Candidates	389	713	175	6	115
Pass	347	410	162	6	35
Tanganyika					
Candidates	12	164	123		
Pass	7	109	108		
Uganda					
Candidates	0	166	270		101
Pass		128	227		30
Zanzibar					
Candidates	0	77	14	20	
Pass		45	4	11	
Total Candidates	401	1120	582	26	216
Total Passes	354	602	501	17	63

"Higher Education in East Africa" (1958)

In 1954, only 501 Africans candidates completed secondary education successfully; there were no schools for them to do the advanced level, which was the standard requirement for university education. Makerere University College offered advanced level subjects that allowed some of them to complete a degree. The same White Paper provides the following breakdown:

[42] "Higher Education in East Africa", Serie M.2.1, File 27-1-1, AGP.

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Table 4

1954 Higher School Certificate Examination			
	European	Asian	Territorial Total
Kenya			
Candidates	60	18	78
Pass	50	16	66
Tanganyika (1955)			
Candidates	0	12	12
Pass		9	9
Uganda			
Candidates	0	0	0
Pass			
Zanzibar			
Candidates	0	0	0
Pass			
Total Candidates	60	30	90
Total Passes	50	25	75

"Higher Education in East Africa" (1958)

University and professional education

Figures of the White Paper showing the number of students doing degrees and professional courses overseas sponsored by their governments were not encouraging either:

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Table 5

1954-1955 Degree Students Overseas					
	UK & Ireland	India	South Africa	USA & Others	Territorial Total
Kenya (1955)					
European	96	0	8	6	110
Asian	105	200 (1954)	0	2	307
African & Arab	28	31	2	13	74
Tanganyika					
European	25	0	0	0	25
Asian	30	5	0	0	35
African	1	5	0	2	8
Uganda					
European	5	0	0	0	5
Asian	19	9	0	0	28
African	34	28	4	0	66
Zanzibar	19	16	0	0	35
Total	362	294	14	23	693

"Higher Education in East Africa" (1958)

The White Paper points out that the distinction between degree and professional students overseas is based on the assumption that two-thirds of the total were degree students[43].

[43] "Higher Education in East Africa", Serie M.2.1, File 27-1-1, AGP.

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Table 6

1954-1955 Professional Students Overseas					
	UK & Ireland	India	South Africa	USA & Others	Territorial Total
Kenya					
European	94	0	9	10	113
Asian	194	114 (1954)	0	3	311
African & Arab	23	15	7	0	45
Tanganyika					
European	22	0	0	0	22
Asian	71	1	0	0	72
African & Arab	6	1	0	3	10
Uganda					
European	21	0	0	0	21
Asian	69	2	0	0	71
African	68	1	0	0	69
Zanzibar	28	4	0	4	36
Totals	596	138	16	20	770

"Higher Education in East Africa" (1958)

The lack of educational outlets for progression and advancement was such that the White Paper remarks: "education has become the greatest task and opportunity of the overseas territories"[44].

Cambridge Conference on Education on British Tropical Africa

In 1950, a new Study on Educational Policy and Practice on British Tropical Africa was undertaken sponsored by the Nuffield Foundation. In September 1952, thirty years after the Phelps-Stokes commissions studied the theory and practice of education in Africa, there was a meeting at Cambridge (UK), to discuss the reports of the new study.

The composition of the gathering is worth noting: 20 members were from the Colonial Office and the Advisory Committee. Another 92 members came from fourteen different territories in Africa; 29 of these were Africans. All were engaged in educational administration and practice, men and women, Christians (including Roman Catholics) and Muslims.

[44] "Higher Education in East Africa", Serie M.2.1, File 27-1-1, AGP.

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Sir Philip Morris, the chairperson, explained that the purpose of the gathering was not to formulate policies, but "to place on record the best views which could be formalized and expressed, so that hereafter those who have responsibilities in the shaping of policies and in the carrying out of educational work, should find in the record of this conference opinions and conclusions which had been refined by discussion, but which had not been pressed into uniformity"[45].

One committee for West Africa and another one for East and Central Africa prepared a report on African primary and secondary education. The conference identified five topics of importance and divided itself into as many groups to study them. One of them dealt with 'Responsibility and Control' over education. Some of its conclusions are relevant for this study. Regarding the place of religion in education, "secular education is not enough […] our deliberations presuppose an education with a religious basis and a spiritual doctrine of human nature and destiny". This was the deep conviction of the entire conference, missionaries and laypeople, Christians and Muslims[46].

One other of the five topics the Cambridge Conference addressed was 'Organization and Curriculum'. Within it they explored training in race-relations, particularly within plural communities. There was agreement that classroom teaching was not an effective way of addressing it: "Proper attitudes are acquired almost unconsciously from association with teachers who themselves show by their lives goodwill towards people of other races. They are learnt by pupils in the process of living, working and playing with pupils who belong to other communities. Boarding schools can do much within their own limits, and valuable lessons are learnt in multi-racial scout camps, etc., and through playing games against teams of other races"[47].

"Fraternization, in its original undebased sense, need not end on the sports field; there are encouraging examples of the success of Music Festivals, Inter-school Debates and other forms of cultural cooperation. The most radical suggestion made was for the greater use of inter-racial schools and colleges. There is a very strong case for contending that at least all universities should be inter-racial socially and academically"[48]. This quotation is particularly striking if we consider that, even in the first few years after Kenya independence, in some churches the seating arrangement was still along racial lines[49].

The White Paper on Higher Education in East Africa was the result of a working party that traveled to East Africa in 1955. The second Working Party

[45] Greaves 1953: 318-331.
[46] Cf. Greaves 1953: 318-331.
[47] Greaves 1953: 318-331.
[48] Greaves 1953: 318-331.
[49] Interviews to Maurice De Souza (14 October 2022), Dr. Malachy De Souza (31 January 2023) and Martyn Drakard (31 January 2023).

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on Higher Education in East Africa traveled to East Africa in July-August 1958; Cummings wanted to meet them but the Apostolic Delegate was uncomfortable with the idea[50]. Both reports mention the need to expand higher education in East Africa, with colleges in Kampala, Nairobi and Dar es Salaam, enshrining their interracial and inter-territorial character, and eventually leading to the development of a local university. From the point of view of Strathmore College, the most relevant recommendation was that Makerere University College would raise its admission standard from Ordinary to Advanced Level. To bridge the gap, higher certificate courses would start in selected schools of Uganda, Tanganyika and Kenya. Despite the shortage of university places, the colonial governments of these territories opposed the request to start a Catholic University in Kisubi (Uganda) affiliated to a Canadian university[51].

The context

The social scene

Historians generally agree that controls over the movement of Africans, racial segregation in townships and land zoning excluding Africans from towns, coupled with the dual mandate ideology,[52] shaped up the social landscape of the Colony and Protectorate of Kenya[53].

Before analyzing the colonial legal framework, a few examples may help visualize the social landscape at the end of the 19th century. Without delving into the causes, we have deliberately selected some of them. The first one is that the wheel was known but not used in sub-Saharan Africa until colonial times[54]. When Kenya became a Protectorate, it had approximately two and a half million inhabitants[55], no political identity, no roads and no towns except in the coastal area.

In the hinterland, iron working was going on in a small scale only among the Kikuyu and the Kisii tribes[56]; it was more widespread among the Arab-Swahili settlements along the Kenya coast, which had been using the technology for centuries[57].

[50] "Relacion con el Gobierno", 1 June 1958, Serie M.2.1, File 27-3-1, AGP
[51] "Higher Education in East Africa", Serie M.2.1, File 27-1-1, AGP.
[52] This was the approach of Frederick Lugard (1858-1945): to open up Africa to the civilized world and the African mind to civilization.
[53] Cf. Home 2012: 175-193.
[54] Cf. Chaves *et al.* 2014.
[55] Cf. O'Neill 2019.
[56] Cf. Hirst 2020.
[57] Cf. Kusimba 1996: 386-410.

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Maize, a foreign crop to Africa, gradually became the staple food of East Africa. There is an account from 1643 of Portuguese settlers growing maize in Zanzibar and Pemba islands to supply their garrison in Mombasa. Captain J. A. Grant, a member of John H. Speke's party, refers to maize in Uganda in 1861-1862. Another reference to maize is from the Uganda Governor, Sir Harry Johnston, in 1901. Very likely Arab traders brought maize to the Buganda people[58]. The author remembers a conversation with Ertiman Gendia (1950-1996), one of the early African Numeraries, who could recall when he was a child and maize replaced sorghum for their porridge at his home in Migori.

Cotton cloth production was making inroads in East Africa by the middle of the 19th century, but at the beginning of the 20th century was still facing competition from alternative garments made of bark cloth, raffia and skins[59].

With the arrival of Islam in the 8th century, literacy and Arabic script reached the Kenya coast. By the end of the 17th century, Swahili writing in the Arabic script had established itself along the coastal strip, producing a considerable number of manuscripts[60].

The political organization of Kenyan tribes was along the lines of chieftains and councils of elders, generally showing little differentiation in their societies. The individual had less autonomy than in western societies; the interest of the group would take precedence over personal preferences. The monogamous Christian family was still spreading and Strathmore College family-like atmosphere was an instant success among students brought up with a distant and authoritative father figure[61].

Except for the remains of 116 Swahili-Arab settlements discovered between southern Somalia and the Kenya-Tanzania border[62], no tribe in Kenya used permanent materials for construction. However, there are megaliths built as burial sites dating from the second millennium BC in the eastern Turkana region, in northwestern Kenya[63]. Bantu people built Thimlich Ohinga[64], a stone settlement near present day Migori, dating from the 16th century, which provides evidence of pottery, metallurgy craft industries and long-distance trade before the arrival of the Luo people.

During the 19th century, the pastoralist Masai were one of the largest tribes in East Africa. The 1889-1897 rinderpest epidemic decimated wildlife and cattle alike, causing a widespread famine. If we add warfare and the outbreak of

58 Cf. Miracle 1965: 39-55.
59 Cf. Frederick 2020.
60 Cf. Samsom 2012.
61 Cf. Strathmore Remembered 1986: 16.
62 Cf. Wilson 1982: 201-219.
63 Cf. Holl 2021: 363-412.
64 Cf. UNESCO 2018.

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smallpox[65], all combined to end their supremacy. These events coincided with the arrival of the white man. Some estimates indicate that in this debacle the Masai lost two thirds of their population in what is now Tanzania[66]. Soon after the Kikuyu replaced them as the largest tribe in Kenya[67].

On the world stage, Zanzibar abolished slave trade under British pressure in 1876, but kept slavery legal until 1897[68]. East Africa coastal people exported gold, ivory, cat skins, rhinoceros' horn, iron, timber and slaves. Imports included textiles and ceramic items. With the arrival of the white man, two economic systems started running simultaneously: the traditional and the western[69]. For short periods they ran in parallel (education and war), all throughout in open and sometimes violent competition (labor and agricultural land).

In 1901 and 1910, respectively, the colonial power introduced the hut and poll taxes to cover the expenses of the colonial administration; community chiefs and headmen collected it. Tax payment was in cash, which became a way of forcing African men into European employment. African clamor for political representation and freedom grew as the white man built its hegemony.

Western culture and Christianity had an enormous impact on the traditional African way of life. The number of urban settlements was insignificant: in the early 1960s it housed 7.8% of the total population, with only 34 towns above 2000 inhabitants[70]. Missions and schools had a widespread influence on African culture: on singing and dancing, practices like polygamy, marrying young girls and female genital mutilation, ancestor-worship, standards of order and personal grooming. Even the building of churches and schools bore a European imprint that had an influence on architecture and décor, imposing the ethos and character of the Christian Western civilization. Protestants and Catholics alike wanted to form a Christian character in their converts. Eventually, some African elites started challenging the perceived mission school aim of forming European-Africans at the expense of their traditions, because they understood it as another form of colonization.

The legal framework

Since its inception, the East African Protectorate identified and developed laws for three social groups: natives (Africans), non-natives (European and Asians) and Mahomedan natives in the dominions of the Sultan of Zanzi-

[65] Cf. Overton 1988: 109-126.
[66] Cf. Normile 2008: 1606-1609.
[67] Cf. Brückenhaus 2016: 60-85.
[68] Cf. Fröhlich 2019.
[69] Cf. Lonslade 1979: 487-506.
[70] Cf. Morgan 1969: 76-87.

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bar[71]. The influential European non-native group generated the fastest-growing and dominant body of legislation. As the settler-community (European/White) became the dominant political force and Kenya became a Colony in 1920, the Devonshire Declaration of 1923 established that African (native) interests should be paramount, but the skewed political power crystalized into three legal bodies of legislation that shaped the life of Kenya: registration, master and servant, and vagrancy. The Colonial Government was not able to run the colony without the support of the settler community and chose not to confront them.

The Native Passes Regulation (1900) and the Ordinance (1903) required Africans to have a Pass/Identification Card (*kipande*) when leaving their district (the *tribal reserve* for Africans)[72]. The Registration of Natives Ordinance (1915) required Africans over the age of 15 to wear a *kipande* card around their necks (with their fingerprints and employment history) when leaving their *reserves* for the settled (European/White) areas. This hated system, enabled officials and employers control African labor and enforce labor contracts to supply the much-needed labor. Moreover, it allowed them to control the movement of people.

The *kipande* consisted of a small red book in a metallic holder hung around the neck. Introduced during the First World War, its implementation happened only after the war. Africans hated it because it contained a record of their employment and, besides the Police, any settler, owner or employer, had a right to see it and add comments on it. Discontinued in 1946 and brought back during the Mau Mau emergency, the *kipande* also helped to keep Africans out of townships.

The Master and Servants Ordinance (1906) was a system for regulating labor, enforcing the rights of the master but offering little protection to the servant. Its Amendment (1919) created an inspectorate that was largely ineffective because of lack of resources. A relevant detail in this piece of legislation was that it made employers responsible for housing their workers[73]. This legal framework is at the root of some townships and present-day shantytowns that used to provide housing and accommodation for male workers whose families remained in the *reserves*.

The Vagrancy Ordinances allowed the authorities to treat as vagrant any native found outside his *reserve* without a *kipande*. At times, juvenile vagrants would be "deported" to their *reserves*. "These interlocking movement controls were mainly targeted at African males of economically active age, for whom there was an insatiable demand from the colony's railways, harbors and white settlers"[74].

[71] It included the 10-mile coastal strip of present-day Kenya.
[72] Brückenhaus 2016: 60-85.
[73] Cf. Home 2012: 175-193 and Ocobock 2016: 44-72.
[74] Home 2012: 175-193.

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When the British arrived in East Africa, the agriculturalist tribes, because of the climate, lack of infrastructure and primitive technology, had not developed the culture of producing large surpluses to trade. This situation shaped the work ethic of males, which was very different from that of females at domestic level. All tribes, agriculturalists or not, considered working for Europeans a foreign concept[75]; capitalism was unknown to them.

The colonial legal framework promoted land zoning. Although the colonial culture sponsored Christian values, settlers in particular, used their self-perceived cultural superiority to justify racial segregation. After independence, some segregation remained but it became socially motivated[76].

Another factor that facilitated segregation was a health concern. Just before the turning of the 20th century, British doctors declared that African babies carried and spread malaria, indirectly establishing a form of segregation for African mothers. Only in 1902, science identified the role of the *Anopheles* mosquito in spreading malaria. However, the *sanitation syndrome* lasted longer. In 1914, Kenyan settlers obtained the Public Health Ordinance that constructed the notion of "inherently unhygienic races" and the sanitation argument remained[77].

The land question in Kenya remains controversial to this day. Since we are only outlining the context, we can say that the legal framework established settled areas (which included urban areas), reserves and Crown land. Settled areas were for European habitation and farming while reserves were for African habitation and farming. Crown land was native land under the dominion and control of the colonial government[78]. There was a lack of proportion between the areas allocated to the native population and the settlers; there were also restrictions to the crops Africans could plant to avoid competing with settlers' interests, e.g. coffee. These double standards were one of the triggers of the Mau Mau revolt[79].

Nairobi

In 1919, permission was granted to create native areas in Nairobi, and in 1928 the Municipal Native Affairs Officer was installed to "accept responsibility for native affairs within its boundaries". The first official census of 1948 counted 64,397 Africans, 43,749 Asians and 10,830 Europeans in Nairobi. The colonial government considered young African men as short-term wage earners and tem-

[75] Cf. Hofmeester 2018.
[76] Cf. Hay 2007: 504-530.
[77] Cf. Coquery-Vidrovitch 2012: 267-286.
[78] Cf. Cheruyot 1977.
[79] Cf. Blacker 2007: 205-227.

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porary residents. Hence, the segregated native locations to the East of the railway line and downstream from the industrial discharge. Between 1932 and 1947, the Nairobi City Council spent only 1-2% of its revenues on services for Africans[80].

Segregation went beyond urban or rural accommodation. It could involve other elements of daily life: markets, public places, schools, transport, relaxation and culture. The organization of colonial life hinged around lines of inclusion and exclusion of specific groups. In Nairobi, Eastlands for the Africans; Parklands, Pangani, South B & C and Eastleigh for the Asians; various leafy neighborhoods with ample plots and spacious housing for Europeans. Sanitation reflected this segregation[81].

Social clubs mirrored the same state of affairs[82]. Nairobi Club was for British soldiers and European civil servants while Muthaiga Club was for European settlers; formed in the early sixties, the Public Service Club became the club for African civil servants. There were clubs for the different Asian communities, for Goans and for Africans. The physical development with invisible but impregnable walls, replicated the running of the Colony. Within the Social Clubs for the various races, there was unwritten segregation rules depending on provenance, castes and countries.

The lines of inclusion and exclusion encompassed schools and even the practice of sports. The first recorded rugby match played in Kenya was in Eldoret in 1909, between British and Afrikaner settlers[83]. It became a *European* game and was taught and practiced in European schools[84]. Strathmore College had to break another barrier with Kenya's first interracial rugby team. From St Mary's School Journal we learned about its busy sports calendar competing only with European institutions and, in the years prior to independence, cricket and hockey games against Doctor Ribeiro Goan School[85].

It was precisely in the social scene where segregation began to crack. Pumwani Social Club was an African institution that welcomed Europeans. In 1946, twelve Europeans, ten Asians and eleven Africans founded the United Kenya Club. Eight years after its formation, Kenya first multiracial constitution was announced[86].

The experience of segregation

There are forty-three tribes in Kenya. A tribe is a community with its own culture, traditions, language and religion. A tribe also has a territory with loose

[80] Cf. Coquery-Vidrovitch 2012: 267-286.
[81] Cf. Bin-Kasim 2020.
[82] Cf. Owen 2018: 85-109.
[83] There was a wave of impoverished Boer immigrants in 1908 that settled in Eldoret (Kenya).
[84] Cf. Kiereini 2016.
[85] "Journal of St Mary's School (1955-1968)", HGFA.
[86] Cf. Nabende 1990.

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boundaries within which, it has certain rights, according to its way of life. By the middle of last century, Kenya population was still eminently rural and the few opportunities for peaceful tribal interaction were mostly trading, employment and boarding schools. Asians—mostly Indians—and Europeans, the two main immigrant communities in the first half of the 20th century, usually lived in towns.

"Ethnicity is, along with family, locality, and religion, among the most ancient and powerful of bonds for mankind"[87]. The census of 1962, on the eve of Kenya independence, showed a total population of 8,636,263, of whom 8,365,942 were African and Somali, 176,613 Asian, 55,759 European, 34,048 Arab and 3,901 others[88].

Until the arrival of European settlers, immigrants in Kenya were mostly from the Arabic peninsula and the Indian sub-continent; they were usually traders and tended to settle in urban areas. In some townships, like Mombasa and Kisumu, they greatly out-numbered the Europeans. Within the Asian community there was a conspicuous group known as Goans, because they originated in Goa, a former Portuguese colony. They had Portuguese citizenship and were mostly Catholic. The fact of being Christian, their western outlook and lifestyles, made them feel quasi-European within the context of the colony. After independence, most of them emigrated to the UK, Australia and Canada.

Maurice De Souza (1943) joined Strathmore College pioneer class and became one of the first members of Opus Dei in Kenya. His grandfather, Alexio Caetano De Souza, was a South Asian of Goan descent who arrived in Mombasa by dhow in 1898. He worked as a shipping clerk and retired from Smith Mackenzie & Company to start a grocery and bar. "Kilindini Bar" started in 1908[89]. Beer came from South Africa, as there was no brewery in Kenya yet. At first, the facility would only admit Europeans and Asians because of the colonial color bar policy of racial segregation[90]. Maurice remembers an occasion when the police arraigned his uncle in court for selling alcoholic beverages to an African; he had to pay a fine. Maurice also remembers that he would take the train home during school holidays and passenger accommodation was along racial lines. The same happened with public transport in Nairobi. When he was boarding at Strathmore College, on Saturday afternoon would go to the movies; there was no segregation at the movie theater because Africans at the time neither had the money nor had developed the taste for movies[91].

[87] Nisbet 2000: 10.
[88] Cf. Morgan 2000: 76-87.
[89] Cf. Wanyama *et al.* 2022: 52.
[90] Cf. Wanyama *et al.* 2022: 52.
[91] Interview to Maurice De Souza on 14 October 2022.

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Maurice also recalls occasional racial abuse. After doing his Advanced levels at Strathmore College, in 1963 he went to Italy to study engineering. On completing his degree, he returned to Kenya with a job in an Italian company. He was posted to Mikumi in Tanzania. When the European campsite supervisor saw him in his office, he asked his assistant: *chi è questa scimmietta*? (Who is this little monkey?). Embarrassed, the assistant explained that Maurice was the engineer they were expecting and that he spoke fluent Italian[92].

The experience of Jim McFie (1946) was at the opposite end of the spectrum. Jim, one of the first members of Opus Dei in Kenya, recalls that European boys like him were living in a cocoon. Jim did his Ordinary Level School Certificate Examinations in St Mary's School. He remembers that life at St Mary's, before going to Strathmore in 1962 to do his Advanced Level Examinations, was organized in such a way that they hardly interacted with Africans, and those they interacted with were mainly house servants and cooks, gardeners or farm laborers[93].

The beginnings of Opus Dei in Kenya

Cummings and Richards arrive in Nairobi

In preparation for the visit of Escrivá's envoys, Msg. Mojaisky-Perrelli sent a questionnaire to the Education Secretary General for the Catholic Missions in Tanganyika, Uganda and Kenya, Rev. Benedict Kominiak (OSB), Fr H. Beckwith (diocesan) and Fr John Joseph O'Meara (CSSp), respectively. The questions were[94]:

a) Is there a need for a Catholic University in East Africa?
b) What would East African bishops expect from a Catholic University?
c) What faculties would be required?
d) How to start it?
e) What would be the legal set up?
f) What would be the economic challenges?
g) Would it be possible to get land?

They sent in their answers and, on 1-2 March 1958, met in Mombasa at the Apostolic Delegate residence, to discuss the idea of a Catholic university with Richards and Cummings. Prior to the meeting, none of the Education Sec-

[92] Interview to Maurice De Souza on 14 October 2022.
[93] Interview to Jim McFie on 12 October 2022.
[94] Report on the first trip to Kenya, Serie M.2.1, File 27-4-4, AGP.

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retaries knew about Opus Dei. The Apostolic Delegate provided the necessary explanations since he had encountered activities of Opus Dei in a previous diplomatic destination in Mexico.

Rev. Kominiak was of the opinion that to start a university at that moment would be top-heavy; it would be better to build it up from a Higher School Certificate and a professional course in Education. He stressed that it should serve all races. Fr Beckwith pointed out that there was a Catholic University College Pius XII in Basutoland and a Louvainium in Belgian Congo. Apart from these, there were no comparable Catholic facilities in any African university, except the Catholic chaplaincy in Makerere University College, which catered for 180 male students out of 700[95]. He pointed out that it would not be easy to match the six million sterling pounds the British government had spent on Makerere, and it would be a challenge to equal its well-deserved prestige. He also recalled the government refusal to start a Catholic University in Kisubi[96]. The three clerics expressed their preference for an affiliation to London University, but did not oppose the sponsorship of any other reputable university.

They all agreed that Africans were able to discern quality and preferred Makerere degrees to the professional programs of the Royal Technical College. They also thought that a true university should offer an arts degree and, eventually, theology[97].

Some of the opinions Richards and Cummings collected indicated that Kenya independence was still 10-15 years away, because the British had first to secure their investments and recover an estimated twenty-million pound spent to put down the Mau Mau rebellion[98].

Mgr. Mojaisky-Perrelli confided to Cummings that he did not think the Colonial Government would approve a Catholic university. To Cummings amazement, he favored starting with a Higher School Certificate[99] without consulting the authorities, and presenting it later on to the Government as a *fait accompli*[100]. Another surprise came from the meeting with the Bishop of Kampala, Msg. Billington, who pegged his support for the new college to the ability to put up something better than Makerere University College[101]. In a note sent to the General Council, the highest organ of government for men in Opus Dei,

[95] "Higher Education in East Africa": in 1955 out of 528 students 30 were female, Serie M.2.1, File 27-1-1, AGP.
[96] "Higher Education in East Africa", Serie M.2.1, File 27-1-1, AGP.
[97] Report on the first trip to Kenya, Serie M.2.1, File 27-4-4, AGP.
[98] Report on the first trip to Kenya, Serie M.2.1, File 27-4-4, AGP.
[99] HSC from now on.
[100] Report on the first trip to Kenya, Serie M.2.1, File 27-4-4, AGP.
[101] Report on the first trip to Kenya, Serie M.2.1, File 27-3-1, AGP.

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Cummings discusses this point and the fact that African students were not able to pay for their education and accommodation[102].

Cummings expected a government refusal to a Catholic university, and agreed about starting with an HSC. He had studied Government Notice No. 1101 (21 October 1952), Part X and XI, which described the comprehensive powers government had to control schools and teachers. He had acquainted himself with its powers on land transactions and immigration, and concluded it did not make sense to risk losing the new HSC by antagonizing the authorities. He favored pitching the unavoidable battles at the beginning[103].

On 1 April 1958, Escrivá met Cummings in Rome and entrusted him the task of starting the apostolic activities of Opus Dei in Kenya. The circumstances were so unique—he remarked—that they could not decide in Rome on the specific ways of going about it: Cummings would have to do so. Besides choosing the most appropriate way to start in Kenya, he could also suggest the persons that could accompany him. While the educational project took shape, he suggested avoiding the name *university* and using instead some vague and non-committing title. Showing his supernatural and practical sense, he also instructed Cummings to remind the Apostolic Delegate to petition Propaganda Fide for the necessary funds[104].

Cummings spent the following months in Ireland and England exploring possible university affiliations for the future college. Like in Kenya and Uganda, the clerics he would meet with experience in Africa, stressed that the priority was not to upset the concessions the colonial government was already granting the Church: salaries for Catholic schoolteachers, subsidies for school buildings, scholarships, etc.[105] Moreover, the Church in East Africa was so poor that in those years no diocese could survive without the support of Propaganda Fide[106]. In a curious twist of events, these clerics were inducting Cummings in the spirit of Msg. Hinsley, the influential Apostolic Visitor who had died only fifteen years earlier. This would explain that, despite Msg. Mojaisky-Perrelli's reservations about the Colonial Government, Fr O'Meara was not in favor of leaving them in the dark, as we shall see.

On 10 April 1958, Cummings visited Archbishop J. J. McCarthy who was in Dublin for a medical operation. From his hospital bed, he wrote to St Josemaría stressing "the need, urgency and importance of proceeding vigorously with this undertaking"[107]. The Archbishop of Dar es Salaam, Edgar Maranta, did likewise on behalf of the bishops of Tanganyika[108]. These letters prompted Escrivá

[102] "Cuestiones Economicas", 1 June 1958, Serie M.2.1, File 27-3-1, AGP.
[103] Report on the first trip to Kenya, Serie M.2.1, File 27-4-4, AGP.
[104] Notes of the meeting of Escrivá and Cummings, 2 July 1958, Serie M.2.1, File 27-4-4. AGP.
[105] On the possibility of starting a Catholic University in Kenya, Serie M.2.1, File 27-3-2, AGP.
[106] "Cuestiones Economicas", 1 June 1958, Serie M.2.1, File 27-3-1, AGP.
[107] Letter of McCarthy to Escrivá of 10 April 1958, Serie M.2.1, File 27-1-1, AGP.
[108] Letter of Maranta to Escrivá of 3 May 1958, Serie M.2.1, File 27-1-1, AGP.

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to write to Msg. Mojaisky-Perrelli committing Opus Dei to this apostolic venture: "I have received your kind letter of 25 April, and am gladly sending you these lines to tell you that, hoping that our Lord will bless with his grace the effort, we will take care of the future University in Nairobi, as your Excellency wishes, and also the Episcopate, according to the letter that Msg. McCarthy and Msg. Maranta have sent me recently"[109].

At the beginning of July 1958 Escrivá met Cummings in Rome and asked him when he was departing for Kenya[110]. There was no British subject among the pioneer group. They all had to extricate themselves from their professional engagements and apply for work permits, which were difficult to get without a contract. The Apostolic Delegate knew this and offered work for an architect and an engineer to design the Major Seminary in Nairobi[111]. Eventually Ed Hernandez got a contract through the Apostolic Delegate and Fr Cummings got a Residence Permit through Fr O'Meara.

Fr Paul Cummings[112] and Edmund Hernandez (1926-2019) were the first to land in Nairobi on 25 August 1958 to start the apostolic activities of Opus Dei. From Nairobi they facilitated the documentation for Kevin O'Byrne (1934-2008) who followed them in September, Fr Joseph Gabiola (1928-2015) who arrived in October and Harald Nickelsen[113] who landed in December[114].

African political pressure for freedom was relentless and the expansion of the Higher Certificate Schools became a priority, if not of the Colonial Government at least of the Department of Education. On 11 April 1959, Fr O'Meara wrote to the Apostolic Delegate with copy to the Nairobi Archbishop, informing him that the following May 5 there would be a meeting to choose the three schools to start Higher Certificate Courses. Everybody assumed that the Protestant school would be Alliance[115], the Government school would be Kagumo or Meru, and the Catholic school would be Mangu. The three Higher Certificate Courses would be "for boys as it is considered that the problem of the girls is not urgent". The letter concluded with "I think, Your Excellency, that the time has come to put our plans openly before the Education Department"[116].

[109] Letter of Escrivá to Mojaisky-Perrelli of 10 May 1958, Serie A.3, 580510-01, AGP.
[110] Meeting of Cummings with Escrivá on 2 July 1958, Serie M.2.1, File 27-3-1, AGP.
[111] Letter of Escrivá to Mojaisky-Perrelli of 10 February 1958, Serie A.3, 580210-01, AGP.
[112] Paul Michael Cummings (1929-2021) was the first vicar of Opus Dei in Kenya. He discontinued his priesthood and membership to Opus Dei in 1979.
[113] Harald Olaf Nickelsen, Art Designer and Fellow of the Royal Society of Arts. He discontinued his membership to Opus Dei in 1983 and returned to the USA in 1988 where he died.
[114] Diary of Ennis Drive Centre (1958-1960), Serie M.2.2: D345-8, AGP.
[115] The first and most prestigious Protestant secondary school in Kenya.
[116] Letter 3/25 of O'Meara to Apostolic Delegate, 11 April 1959, in Correspondence Ed. Sec. and Dept. Ed. 57-66, ANA.

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The first steps

Settling in Nairobi was a sobering induction to racial segregation. The diary of the first center of Opus Dei in Africa provides many details. For example, on 1 October 1958, they moved into a house they rented along Ennis Drive (today Muthangari Drive). The house was at the back of St Mary's sports fields, a Catholic school for European boys in a white neighborhood. It did not have furniture but had an African cook called Omuka, whose skills, from the very first meal, earned him by popular acclamation the title of "*Mpishi* (cook) Number 1". The house was about 40-minute walk from the Royal Technical College, the only post-secondary institution where they could interact with African students.

Friends of the residents started frequenting the Ennis Drive House, mostly Europeans and a few Goans. The diary entry of 22 March 1959 records a small but significant event: on that day, Aaron Kioko[117], a draughtsman at Kevin O'Byrne's office, became the first African ever to step in a center of Opus Dei in Africa![118] The entry of 20 October 1959 registers the departure of Francis Mbugwa to study in Italy, the first African they managed to send to study in Rome with a scholarship of the Italian government[119]. Many others would follow to study not only in Italy but also in Spain.

During the months he spent in Ireland and England after his first visit to Kenya, Cummings had done a thorough study on the possibility of starting a Catholic university in Kenya. He had consulted relevant people and concluded that the British Government would not approve a Catholic University, and without it, there would be no official financial support either. Therefore, the only way to go about this project was by starting a university hall of residence near the Royal Technical College. This could get official approval, and could become the seed of a college affiliated to the future East African University[120]. Upon hearing about these conclusions, the Apostolic Delegate was absolutely dismayed and disappointed. He let St Josemaría know about his feelings, which motivated the first trip of Fr Pedro Casciaro to Nairobi in October 1958[121].

The Archbishop of Nairobi sided with the Apostolic Delegate and suggested embarking on both projects: the HSC and a residence[122]. Eventually Cummings submitted a 20-page report to both of them[123] and repeated what he had

[117] The spelling in the diary seems to read *Kioto* but we have chosen the common name of *Kioko*. The author remembers a passing remark of Kevin O'Byrne clarifying this misspelling.
[118] Diary of Ennis Drive Centre (1958-1960), Serie M.2.2: D345-8, AGP.
[119] Diary of Ennis Drive Centre (1958-1960), Serie M.2.2: D345-8, AGP.
[120] Hernandez and Cummings meet the Apostolic Delegate, 3 September 1958, Serie M.2.1, File 27-3-1, AGP.
[121] Telegram announcing the trip of Fr Gabiola and Fr Casciaro, Serie M.2.1, File 27-3-1, AGP.
[122] "Cuestiones Economicas", 1 June 1958, Serie M.2.1, File 27-3-1, AGP.
[123] On the possibility of starting a Catholic University in Kenya, Serie M.2.1, File 27-3-2, AGP.

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learned from St Josemaría: *we will second the wishes of the hierarchy*. Fr Pedro Casciaro, who was hosted at the Apostolic Residence in Mombasa with Fr Cummings on 30-31 October 1958, reports that Msg. Mojaisky-Perrelli explained to him the importance for the Church of going a step forward and opening a Higher Certificate School for people of all races, from the best Catholic schools of the country. He stressed that there was only one Higher Certificate College is East Africa, Makerere, and it was non-confessional[124].

A turning point in Strathmore College story was a meeting in Rome at the beginning of 1959 between the Apostolic Delegate and Escrivá. There is an account of this meeting written by the third person present at the occasion, Fr Pedro Casciaro[125]. Msg. Mojaisky-Perrelli stated he had a written commitment from Propaganda Fide supporting the project to the tune of US $200,000 per annum[126]. Escrivá expressed his reservation to getting involved if it meant displacing any religious institution. The Apostolic Delegate answered that it was precisely the Archbishop of Nairobi, a Spiritan, whose community run some of the best schools in Kenya, the one soliciting the Work to take care of this project. St Josemaría then said that Opus Dei would accept the Apostolic Delegate's decision, provided the bishops of Kenya also agreed.

On 6 May 1959, Fr Cummings submitted a report to the Apostolic Delegate that became the basis for the detailed financial request to Propaganda Fide[127]. Some days before, the Education Secretary General of the Catholic Missions in Kenya, Fr J. J. O'Meara, had written to the Director of Education laying down the following terms for the HSC project[128]:

> a) The [initial] courses would be conducted on their own, distinct from any of our existing secondary schools;
> b) Science and Arts [studies] would be taken;
> c) The staff will be drawn from a new Society not hitherto engaged in educational work in Kenya. This Society, called Opus Dei, is a high-powered lay Catholic organization whose members are all qualified, professional men. It is international in character with work in many countries. This Society

[124] Visit to Msg. Mojaisky-Perrelli in Mombasa, 30-31 October 1958, Serie M.2.1, File 27-3-3, AGP. Perhaps the Apostolic Delegate ignored that the Royal Technical College in Nairobi also offered advanced level subjects.

[125] Meeting of Msg. Mojaisky-Perrelli and St Josemaría, 14 January1959, Serie M.2.1, File 27-1-1, AGP.

[126] Only the first tranche was disbursed, Cummings Memoranda of his meetings with Msg. Guido Del Mestri, Apostolic Delegate, on 13 June 1961 (No.1) and 16 January 1962 (No.4), PKA. "Cuestiones Economicas" No.8, 1 June 1958, Serie M.2.1, File 27-3-1, AGP.

[127] Letter of Casciaro to Apostolic Delegate, 5 July 1959, PKA.

[128] Letter 1/3/13 "Higher Certificate Courses", 1st May 1959, with the proposal of the Kenya Episcopal Conference to the Director of Education, in Correspondence Ed. Sec. and Dept. Ed. 57-66, ANA.

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guarantees as many qualified personnel as the project demands and, in the future, will meet any requirement due to further expansion;

d) We realize […] that this method of tackling Higher Certificate work will be more costly in capital expenses than the more accepted method of adding it on to an existing school but the Catholic Missions are prepared to meet this extra cost. There should not be any appreciable difference in recurring costs once the courses are started;

e) The site will be in the vicinity of Nairobi.

The last paragraph of the above letter is worth quoting:

> We are happy about this solution. The question of really good staff of the caliber necessary for this important work is well covered by the introduction of this Society[129]. The Societies already engaged in Secondary Schools […] would all find it extremely difficult at present to furnish members of the quality that is needed. Besides, it is the intention of the Mission, when the time is ripe, to open their Courses to all races[130]. Obviously, this is more easily accomplished by this distinct institution rather than by adding on to one of our existing schools, all of which are sited well within the African Land Units.

For Escrivá, the multiracial higher school certificate for boys remained the first step towards the original university project. Following the White Paper, when the territorial governments of British East Africa started upgrading some of their ordinary secondary schools into higher certificate schools, Strathmore appended *college* to its name to signal it was aiming higher.

Further evidence that Strathmore College was to be the seed of a future university for Escrivá and those working with him in Rome, is in an internal memo signed by Fr Pedro Casciaro[131]. Therein he discusses that the junior college could be open to women and that their residence could be at Kianda Secretarial College, about a mile from Strathmore College. At the time, the only existing female advanced level streams were for European girls. According to our research, the Kenya High School, a leading public school for European girls in Nairobi, admitted the first African student, Ann Mithamo, in 1961[132]. There were no public coeducational higher certificate schools in Kenya, except for Lord Delamere High School for Europeans in Nairobi Upper Hill.

D. S. Miller, the Director of Education, answered Fr O'Meara with a stern letter asking for confirmation that the risks of starting a HSC course on

[129] Until 28 November 1982 Opus Dei was a Secular Institute.

[130] Racial segregation and religious segregation were determined by land zoning.

[131] "Posibilidades futuras de Strathmore (teniendo en cuenta también la labor de la Sección Femenina)", 4 April 1962, Serie G4.4.1, 0535-02-03, AGP.

[132] Cf. Kenya High School website: http://www.kenyahigh.ac.ke/ Last visited on 24 November 2025.

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its own "were fully understood". He feared that a two-year course was too short a period to establish traditions within an institution. Moreover, economic reasons would invite demands for the extension of such a school at the top or the creation beneath it of a secondary school. "Extension at the top would certainly be against Government policy for the foreseeable future, and the introduction of classes lower than High School Certificate would, as you know, prove very difficult for financial reasons […]"[133].

A few days later Fr O'Meara explained to the Apostolic Delegate that "in answer to our letter to the Director of Education", £40,000 had been included for the HSC project in the African Capital Estimates for 1960/1963. "Any additional money needed would have to be found from Catholic sources"[134].

Fr O'Meara's letters to the Director of Education and the Apostolic Delegate anticipate three of the main hurdles laying ahead of Strathmore College project. The secularity of the members of Opus Dei despite recognizing them as *professional men*. The reference to the *African Land Units* was a euphemism pointing at the country racial land zoning, which made multiracial institutions impossible in practice. The *African Capital Estimates* was public money meant for the education of Africans, rather than for a multiracial institution as per the explicit wish of St Josemaría[135]. A few years later, the sponsorship for the HSC project would elicit a government takeover attempt.

Conclusion

Three months later, Msg. Mojaisky-Perrelli informed the Archbishop of Nairobi that Propaganda Fide had agreed to fund the project[136].

Twenty-two months after the first letter of the Apostolic Delegate to Escrivá, or one year after the arrival of the first members of Opus Dei in Kenya, the Government and the Catholic Bishops of Kenya[137] had agreed to a project that would become Strathmore College.

Msg. Mojaisky-Perrelli was ordained a bishop in Rome on 1 November 1959 and moved to Leopoldville (present-day Kinshasa) to continue his work as Apostolic Delegate. Strathmore College opened its doors on 6 March 1961.

[133] Letter 5/700/21/Vol.II/27 "Higher Certificate Courses", 11 May 1959, Response to Kenya Episcopal Conference, in Correspondence Ed. Sec. and Dept. Ed. 57-66, ANA.
[134] Letter 1/3/16 "Higher Certificate Courses (African), 14 May 1959, to Apostolic Delegate, in Correspondence Ed. Sec. and Dept. Ed. 57-66, ANA.
[135] Cf. Casciaro 2008.
[136] Letter No.3109 on Propaganda Fide approving HSC project, 26 August 1959, from Mojaisky-Perrelli to McCarthy, in Correspondence KEC-PF 57-61, ANA.
[137] The Servant of God Maurice Otunga was at the time the only Catholic African Bishop in Kenya.

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Kenya gained independence on 12 December 1963. In August 2002, the Commission of Higher Education granted Strathmore a letter of interim authority to operate as a university. In 2008, through an Act of Parliament, Strathmore University obtained a university charter.

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