Excerpts: His Highness the Aga Khan on globalism
- Part 5/7: English: the 'predominant global language' & 'of global connection'

"As regards education, for example, remember the 1970s. At that time, certain governments, in Africa, Asia and the Middle East, tried to create an artificial national unity by encouraging the teaching of languages that no one outside the country could speak. This linguistic nationalism had regrettable consequences at international level. For example, a degree in medicine from Pakistan in Urdu was worthless outside Pakistan, which was absurd."

His Highness the Aga Khan’s 2010 Politique Internationale Interview with Jean-Jacques Lafaye, ‘The Power of Wisdom’ (Paris, France)
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/9473/

"After Independence, education in the developing world was often used to seek to foster a greater sense of national identity, with a particular tendency to focus on the promotion of national languages. But when this turned exclusionary, the resulting insularity became a severe handicap. How can one educate students for a global environment in a language that has no international reach? Lessons have been learned. Today, whilst the use of national languages has, in many cases, been retained at the primary level, increasingly, educational systems in developing countries provide for the teaching and use of English at the secondary and higher levels, so that students are able to access the world and its opportunities."

His Highness the Aga Khan’s 2004 Aga Khan Academy, Maputo,
"As independence was achieved across Asia and Africa in the post-war period, new nationalist governments asked what was to be the role of their country's educational system in building a wider sense of nationhood.... Teaching in national languages was emphasised. But it became evident that governments of developing countries could not alone carry the mounting cost of providing education to their growing numbers of children. Private initiatives would have to play a part. It also became clear teaching in the English language was essential because it had become the global language of diplomacy, education, transport, science, commerce and medicine. The Ismaili schools across Asia and Africa lived through this process. They were among the first to open their doors to other communities. They had retained English as an essential language and they sought continuously to improve by professionalising and upgrading teachers and administrators."

"The vast majority of the [Ismaili] community is not in the West, and its first language is not a Western language. We have made English our second language.... Because, in the sixties, in the seventies, we needed to have a language policy. If a community was without a language policy, it would dissociate itself from its development potential. And English is the language that we chose. So today, the Ismaili community speaks Farsi, Arabic, Swahili, English, French, Portuguese, etc. And then, there is a language that is more and more common, it's their second language, for a large majority it is English."
Don Cayo: [If you look at subsequent [immigrant] communities that have come [to Canada after the Ismailis] under difficult circumstances, I don't know if there are any success [sic] to this degree [of the Ismailis], and some are troubling.

Aga Khan: Well there are a number of issues obviously that helped. The fact that the community had English as a language was, I think, a great facilitator, because when these communities came into Canada they were able to communicate very, very early on in the language of the country. So I think that was important. I think basic levels of education were important because people came in to Canada who already had a basic quality of education, although they came from Africa and other areas. Where you get communities that are neither English-speaking and have no educational base whatsoever, or are essentially rural communities, then that must become more difficult.

"The disintegration of the Soviet Union and the end of British and French colonial rule in Africa and Asia have resulted in the birth of a number of new nations, struggling with the challenge of nation building, including the integration of ethnic groups, previously undivided, across the newly created political frontiers. Many approaches have been tested, including single party centralised political systems, nationalised economies where civil society was suffocated, and the imposition of a single national language such as Swahili, Urdu, Arabic and others. Many of these early endeavours
have failed -- perpetuating poverty and division. They have since
been replaced by multi-party political systems, a new space
supporting individual initiative, and language policies which have
accepted the unavoidability of the English language a the
predominant global language of knowledge."

His Highness the Aga Khan's 2012 article 'A Life in the Service of
Development' published in Politique Internationale (Paris, France)
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/10062/

"Forty years [after the de-colonisation in Asia and Africa], the
world's dominant foreign language, English, is viewed as a necessity
in most areas -- but not yet as an opportunity. For cultures in the
developing world to be globally accessible, understood, respected
and admired, and to be represented in electronic communications,
they must ensure that their cultures find expression not only in the
national language, but also in English....

"[M]any of the world's most important cultures cannot communicate
in the English language. They are not able to communicate, their
resources are constrained in their language; and, in fact, that has
become worse due to the policies that were in place at the time of
decolonisation, to treat language as a building block for nationhood.
Some countries opted for an African language or an Asian language
and in that way, in a sense, worsened the issue.

"I think there are significant cultures around the world that would
need to be assisted to convey to the world their cultures in English.
That doesn't mean giving up the national language. It means
exposing to global understanding their own culture. It will improve
the global understanding, it will enhance their own respect for their
own culture."

His Highness the Aga Khan's 2000 Remarks at the White House
Conference on Culture and Diplomacy (Washington D.C., USA)
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/5890/
"I think that this notion of indigenous culture and respect and enhancement of that culture -- continuity with time, making it part of society's vision -- is something which is very, very important indeed and with [the] sort of internationalisation of communications, our societies are at risk and not only as was proven in architecture but is being proven today in entertainment and all the rest. So I hope very much that we can together enhance our own indigenous cultural expressions. They're free. Export them. Export them in the English language in such a way that the world has direct access to our own expressions of culture."

His Highness the Aga Khan's 2000 Imran Aslam Interview (Karachi, Pakistan)
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/5829/

"But if the media have sometimes been part of the problem -- amplifying the threatening aspects of globalisation -- then the media can also be part of the solution. If a careless or superficial press can exacerbate the clash of cultures, then a more sensitive and studious press can accomplish the opposite. The same media which serves to distort or discredit old cultures, can also be used to re-validate them, and to help explain them to others. In some cases, this will mean a greater effort to adapt to the world's ways -- to write or speak in the English language, for example, as we tell old stories to new audiences. If the mysteries of ancient Samarkand or Turfan or Kashgar are relayed predominantly in Uzbek or in Uygur, then the sharing will be incomplete -- and inconsequential. Global technologies imply the use of a global language -- not to obliterate old traditions, but to rescue and revivify them. There was a time when a variety of authentic cultures could thrive because of their separation from one another. But that day is past. The only answer now is that we come to understand and appreciate one another. And in that endeavour the media must play a central role."
Peter Mwaura: Taifa Leo [a Kiswahili daily] was the first newspaper you published in Kenya. Its circulation and advertising have been declining over the years. The question many people ask is why do you still keep it?

Aga Khan: What has happened in Kenya is that since Independence, English has become a more and more dominant language and Kiswahili has tended to lose its support at least in urban environments. In Tanzania, the situation is completely different, where the language used is massively more Kiswahili than English. So we have to keep in mind that it's essentially the rural populations in Kenya that will be reading Taifa because they are not educated in English or not massively so. Secondly, at the time of elections, if you want to communicate effectively to the electorate you cannot ignore the national language; you have to publish in that language. What's happening is that in Kenya the print market has changed in favour of English. In Tanzania, it's gone the other way. But the central issue is the quality of publications in the national language. I am not sure that we know the answers.
its variety. A fully homogenised world would be far less attractive and interesting. The roots we inherit from our history, linking us to a particular past, are a great source of strength and joy and inspiration. And a sound educational system should help nourish those roots.

"That is why the Aga Khan Academies, wherever they exist, will follow a dual-language curriculum. They will teach in English in order to connect to global society. And they will also teach in the appropriate local language. Here in Dhaka that means teaching in both English and Bangla. Because they will be fluently bilingual, our students will be prepared to unlock the rich treasure chests of history and culture, art and music, religious and philosophical thought, which are integral to one's identity and one's values and which and are such powerful elements here in Bangladesh....

"In the process of nurturing a healthy sense of identity, we must resist the temptation to normatise any particular culture, to demonise 'the other', and to turn healthy diversity into dangerous discord. This is why the Academies' curricula, in addition to using English as a connecting language, will emphasise areas of focus such as comparative political systems, global economics, and global cultures, along with the importance of pluralism and a sound ethical foundation."

His Highness the Aga Khan's 2008 Aga Khan Academy, Dhaka, Foundation Stone Ceremony address (Dhaka, Bangladesh)
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/8787/

"The principal language of instruction [of the Aga Khan Academies] will be English -- today's primary language of global connection. But connectedness will also be enhanced in other ways. Every graduate will at least be bilingual, for example, and many will be trilingual. In his or her home Academy, a student will not only meet other students from a variety of cultural, ethnic and religious backgrounds -- but they will get to know one another as friends and neighbours -- something that residential schools are well-equipped to foster.
many will study for at least a year outside their home cultures, as well."

His Highness the Aga Khan's 2006 Aga Khan Academy, Hyderabad, Foundation Stone Ceremony address (Hyderabad, India)
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/7877/

"Here in Mozambique, for example, there is no tradition of residential primary and secondary schools, and there is not a great deal of experience in educating in English. Yet both concepts -- residential education and educating in both the national language and English -- are two common goals for our wider network of academies. These are questions which we must resolve with prudence, pursuing sound long-term goals, but understanding short-term realities."

His Highness the Aga Khan's 2007 State Banquet address (Maputo, Mozambique)
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/8338/

"It is with these principles in mind that during this visit I have examined the situation of the peoples of Tajikistan in order to determine whether and how I might be of help, in addition to assisting the Pamir Relief and Development Program in converting from humanitarian relief to long-term development. Indeed, I have concluded that some possibilities do exist. Clearly these possibilities will need to be tested carefully by the nation and regional Governments in Tajikistan, and by local institutions that would be involved, to make sure that others share my interest in them. But let me take the opportunity now to offer several possibilities.

"First, in response to the need to enhance the strength of Tajikistan's universities in certain critical disciplines, I would be willing to create an Education Fund to support training in English language and economics. Such a fund would extend over a two-year interval and
be focused particularly on faculty training. It would be available to universities throughout Tajikistan."

His Highness the Aga Khan’s 1995 Address at the Concert Hall (Dushanbe, Tajikistan)
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/5016/

"I am afraid the time does not allow me to describe all the other distinguishing characteristics of the Lycee and its programs. But I would like just to signal a few of them because they are important for the future of education in Badakshan. His Excellency the President mentioned that this was going to be a test-case institution in Badakshan where we will be testing new methods of education, new principles of education to try to bring into Badakshan the most sophisticated methods of education for young people. Some of the principles on which we will function will be [an] education -- and there will be an emphasis in education in the English language -- to enable graduates to access the wider world of education and market economies. Information technology to enable teachers and students to better understand and communicate with the world around them."

His Highness the Aga Khan’s 1998 Aga Khan Lycee Opening Ceremony (Khorog, Gorno-Badakshan, Tajikistan)
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/5436/

"The mission of the [new University of Central Asia] is to develop research and educational programmes focused on the mountain regions and peoples of Central Asia, and mountain regions more generally.... English, now recognised as an international language by the governments of the region, would be the medium of instruction for both degree programmes to ensure that graduates are able to participate in global systems of all sorts."
Riad Naguib El-Rais: [The issues facing Muslims living in the industrialised world occur] at a time when the industrialised world sees nothing in Islam but liabilities and negative aspects. In the eyes of the West, Muslims are terrorists, revolutionaries or saboteurs. Do you see for the Ismailis, and for yourself in particular -- as the Muslim leader who has lived longest in the West and has had the longest experience in dealing with the industrialised world -- a role to play in correcting this image?

Aga Khan: I believe that the first problem facing every Muslim living in the industrialised world, is that Muslim children will be born in the West for two or three generations to come. They will be young people having no personal contact with their family traditions, cultural background, or country of origin. Most likely, they will not speak their mother tongue: Arabic, Urdu or Persian for example. They will have no contact with their language, its culture or its civilisation. Here in particular there is a series of basic questions to be answered: how will these Muslims deal with their culture and traditional background? How will they deal and associate themselves with the industrial society in which they live, its culture, its civilisation, its language? All Muslims, be they Sunnites or Shiites, are confronted with this problem. From this viewpoint we should ask ourselves: how can we combine our Islamic traditions and culture with the traditions and culture of the industrial society without losing both?
"Still, today, there are Ismaili children born in [England], who like many other immigrant children, grow up sometimes unable to speak their ethnic language and who learn and adopt as their own ways which their parents always considered alien or worse. Many of these young people themselves seek to preserve their cultural heritage and to strengthen their bonds to their communities of origin. For this to happen, educational materials that reflect the rich humanistic and cultural dimensions of Islam have to be accessible to them in English. Such materials of the required calibre, unfortunately, are not always available, either in the country of settlement, or in the country of origin. Also, for religious education effectively to complement what children learn in secular schools, it has to be intellectually stimulating and pedagogically sound."

His Highness the Aga Khan’s 1994 Ismaili Council Dinner address (London, United Kingdom)
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/4833/

See also: His Highness the Aga Khan on globalism - Part 1/7: the ‘death of distance’

See also: His Highness the Aga Khan on globalism - Part 2/7: competing in a global arena

See also: His Highness the Aga Khan on globalism - Part 3/7: the vital importance of high standards in the developing world
See also: His Highness the Aga Khan on globalism - Part 4/7: the pace of change

See also: His Highness the Aga Khan on globalism - Part 6/7: threat to culture and pluralism

See also: His Highness the Aga Khan on globalism - Part 7/7: the hazard of a superficial, homogenised mega-culture

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