

THE POPULATION GEOGRAPHY OF EAST AFRICA¹

S. J. K. BAKER

From time immemorial there have been population movements, mainly from the north, along the open routeways of East Africa; and it is out of these movements and the various cross-currents associated with them that the present distribution of ethnic groups among the African population has emerged. The eastern and western highlands, in particular, seem to have been veritable lands of promise, especially to pastoralists, and to have encouraged the southward migration of immigrant groups. From another, related point of view it is possible to think of East Africa as a zone in which the Hamitic and the Negro worlds show a deep interpenetration. Racially and culturally the East African population thus presents a very considerable variety. Biologically the population is more varied than, for example, that of Western Europe; and it is everywhere permeated by Hamitic influences.

Marked linguistic contrasts are especially in evidence over the northern half of East Africa, where the distinctions are not so much between individual languages as between families of languages, i.e. Sudanic, Nilotic, Nilo-Hamitic and Bantu. In Uganda the southern two-thirds of the population is Bantu-speaking, and the northern one-third is divided among Sudanic, Nilotic and Nilo-Hamitic speakers. In Kenya the Hamitic-speaking folk of the north-east penetrate southwards between the coastal Bantu and those of the East Kenya highlands; whilst the Nilo-Hamitics of the Eastern Rift valley and the West Kenya highlands separate the Kikuyu and related groups from the Nilotic Luo and the Bantu-speaking Baluyia of the Nyanza plateaus. This predominantly meridional distribution of languages in Kenya is significantly paralleled in the map of the new administrative regions determined by the Kenya Regional Boundaries Commission. It is only in Tanganyika that the Bantu-speaking majority is overwhelming, a situation but slightly impaired by the presence of intrusive Nilo-Hamitic speech and some pre-Bantu, relict languages in the Masai and adjacent areas.

¹ The revised form of a lecture delivered at a refresher course for teachers held, under the title of "Geography in the service of development in East Africa", at Makerere University College in December, 1962.

Complementary to the north-south orientation which is reflected in linguistic and ethnic distributions, East Africa has its frontage on the Indian Ocean. The eastern margins of East Africa have long been linked with other lands on the periphery of the Indian Ocean; and in this they present a contrast with the West African lands which were isolated until the sixteenth century upon what was virtually a trafficless ocean. The advantage of the monsoon winds the Arab dhows thus made their seasonal voyages around the periphery of the Indian Ocean. As a result of these contacts Arab and Indian traders came to the East African coastlands; Arab plantation owners settled on the coast, Arab rulers controlled the urban settlements which they founded on the coast, and the Swahili tongue had its origin as an Arabised-Bantu language and the mixed race formed the Arabo-Negroid ethnic stock which is still prevalent in the coastlands.

For many centuries the maritime orientation of the coastlands had little influence upon the human geography of the interior of East Africa. The eastern side of Africa is simply the western shore of the Indian Ocean, having few connexions with what we may consider to be its natural hinterland. It was rather more than a century ago that the influences began to expand into the interior as an accompaniment of what appeared to have been an acceleration in the tempo of the East African slave trade. The spread of Islam as a result of the trading and raiding activities contributed to the linguistic unification of the country and ultimately provided Tanganyika with its national language, and the introduction of modern administration has effectively linked the coast and the hinterland. A major development which had its concrete expression in the construction of railways at the beginning of the twentieth century. The presence of Arab students at Makerere University College is a happy social expression of this linkage; and the observant eye may notice the influence of the Zanzibar door provided for the College mosque by Seyyid Sir Khalifa bin Harub, the late sultan of Zanzibar. Thus although position on the Indian Ocean has only recently become important to East Africa as a whole, the two main historical influences, Arab and Indian, have come direct from the east coast. The connexions with India and the presence of Indians, Pakistanis and Goans in the population are further manifestations of this maritime element in the space relations of East Africa.

The population totals of the three mainland countries, their distribution between the countries and their distribution between the main ethnic groups, according to mid-century estimates, are shown in Table 1. The estimates are controlled by the previous census and the figures for Tanganyika and Uganda, with censuses respectively in 1957 and 1959, are more reliable than those for Kenya, which are controlled by the census of 1948. It should be noted in parenthesis that a further census was taken in Kenya in 1962.

In round figures, out of a total mainland population of 23½ million, 9½ are in Tanganyika, 7¼ in Kenya and just over 6¼ in Uganda. The population is overwhelmingly African, the respective percentages being:— Uganda, 98.6; Tanganyika, 98.0; and Kenya, 96.0. The density of population is roughly three times as great in Uganda as in the other two countries. There is clearly some significance in these figures as regards mean population density; but a glance at any good population map will serve as a reminder that this is one of the many cases in which the average figure should be viewed with caution. The distribution of population over East Africa shows the patchiness and irregularity which is characteristic of population distribution in most parts of the world.

EAST AFRICA

POPULATION ESTIMATES FOR MID-YEAR 1961

All figures in thousands except col.6

Country.	Land area in sq. mls	African	Non- African.	Total	Popul- ation per sq. ml. of land area	Analysis of Non-African			
						European	Indo-Pakistani & Goan	Arabs	Other
Kenya	220	6,998	289	7,287	33.2	66.0	178.0	39.0	6.0
Tanganyika	341	9,258	146	9,404	27.6	22.7	90.5	27.6	4.9
Uganda	76	6,751	94	6,845	89.9	11.6	77.4	2.1	2.5
East Africa	637	23,007	529	23,536	36.9	100.3	345.9	68.7	13.4

TABLE 1

All figures in thousands except col.8

Country	Land area in sq. mls.	Afro-Arab*	Asiant+	European	Other, incl. Somali	Total	Population per sq. ml. of land area
Zanzibar	1	291.4	19.2	0.60	0.35	311.5	305.2

TABLE 2

* Including Arabs, Zanzibar and mainland Africans, Comorians.
+ Excluding Arabs.

Note:— Owing to rounding of the statistics there are slight internal inconsistencies in the tables.
Source:— *Economic and Statistical Review*, No. 4, September, 1962.

The non-African population of the mainland countries totals more than 500,000, of whom well over half are in Kenya. Tanganyika has almost exactly half the non-African population of Kenya, the biggest discrepancy between the two countries occurring in the European column where Tanganyika is seen to have only one-third of the Kenya numbers. The Uganda figures fall well below those of Tanganyika, coming nearest to the Tanganyika figures in respect of Indians and Goans and dropping furthest away in respect of Europeans and, above all, Arabs. There are one-third of a million Indo-Pakistani Indians and Goans in the mainland countries, 100,000 Europeans and nearly 70,000 Arabs.

The pattern of the varied and racially mixed population of Zanzibar is sufficiently different to necessitate setting out the estimates for it separately in Table 2. A total population of rather more than 300,000 yields a density of 305 per square mile. The figures, which are controlled by the 1958 census, cannot be so readily broken down into ethnic groups as those of the mainland countries. It can, however, be seen that perhaps four-fifths of the Afro-Arab group consists of Africans and that there are decidedly more Arabs than Indians in the total population. The very small number of Europeans showed a steady tendency to increase in the period 1948-62.

The discussion of the two simple tables of population estimates does not exhaust the interest yielded by the population geography of East Africa: indeed it provides more than a beginning of the study. A further feature of geographical relevance is the degree of urbanisation, which in the mainland countries is notably low in respect of the total population and the African population but presents a very different picture in relation to the non-African population. In Zanzibar, though, the degree of urbanisation is significantly greater. The age and sex compositions of populations are affected by the essentially geographical phenomenon of migration; and consequently they have different geographical aspects, as have fertility, mortality and population growth.

What of the statistical trend of the population, *i.e.* its upward or downward movement? Confining attention to the mainland countries and taking the Indo-Pakistani and Goan group first, as numerically the most important in the non-African population, the suggestion is that its natural increase may be at the high rate of 2½% to 3% per annum. The increase was at one time considerably aided by the excess of immigration over emigration, but with the decline in immigration and the increase in emigration this was reduced to a few hundreds in 1961. It is thus difficult to estimate the future population; but one's guess is that the Indo-Pakistani and Goan population of East Africa will continue to grow by natural increase. On the other hand, it must be noted that there was an absolute decrease of 3,200 of this group in Tanganyika for the period mid-1961 to mid-1962.

In the ten years 1948-57 the European population increased at a faster rate than the Indian but with smaller totals involved. The percentage increase was greatest in Uganda, an indication of the fact that the immigration was of "technicians" rather than of "farmer settlers". One uses technicians in a very broad sense to include, for example, teachers of geography! After a period of gradually tapering increase, the first decline (1,700) occurred in Kenya in 1960-61, followed by decreases of 1,300 in Tanganyika in 1961-62 and of 400 in Uganda in the same year. For East Africa as a whole, the year 1961 witnessed an excess of European emigration over immigration amounting to 2,900.

ore than 500,000. After considering this changing situation there is no need to remind ourselves that
y half the non- facts of human geography are essentially dynamic.

ries occurring The history of demographic studies of the African population has been one of
f the Kenya gradual realisation first that the population was increasing and later that the increase
rest to the T was at a much greater rate than had earlier been visualised. At present the assumed
away in respo rates of increase for Uganda, Kenya and Tanganyika are respectively 2½%, 2¼% and
do-Pakistani ¾% per annum. These rates, which are somewhat hypothetical, take both natural
00 Arabs. increase and migration into account,

zibar is suffic There is an impressive amount of African migration into East Africa from the
r in Table 2. A surrounding countries and within East Africa itself; and the phenomenon is evident
per square mi in each of the three mainland countries and in Zanzibar. By way of example, the
eadily broken tremendous movement of population into the focus of economic opportunity presented
owever, be s by the Lake Victoria zone of Buganda and Busoga may be briefly considered. The
nd that there movement is partly from inside Uganda and partly, as in the case of the Banyarwanda
small number and the Luo, from adjacent countries. According to the 1959 census there were 828,
62. 027 non-Baganda Africans in Buganda as compared with 1,006,101 Baganda, the
s does not ex immigrants comprising almost half the total African population. In the intercensal
ed it provide period, 1948-59, the African population of Buganda increased by 531,966, with non-
relevance is Baganda accounting for more than two-thirds of the increase. Everywhere in south
w in respect of and central Buganda there is an appreciable proportion of non-Baganda. Sub-county
ent picture in percentages as high as 40 are usual; there are a number of sub-counties with between
ee of urbanis 50% and 60% and six with over 60% immigrant population; whilst four-fifths of the
s are affected African population of the city of Kampala are non-Baganda. These are facts of human
tly they have geography: from them inevitably there stem economic, social and political consequences,
th. the pursuit of which would take us outside the proper scope of geography.

r downward m One must now try briefly to respond to a group of interrelated questions on
do-Pakistani the subject of the balance between population and natural resources. To what extent
t population, can the natural resources support the present and the future population? Is there
to 3% per an over-population? Has the optimum population been reached?

migration over There are certainly some areas in which under the existing degree of skill in
migration this the utilization of natural resources the optimum has been exceeded: areas where
e the future p land is being impoverished by its utilization instead of enriched. These are not
of East Afric necessarily the most densely populated parts, for the phenomenon of over-population
oted that there tends to occur in the poorer environments of lighter and less reliable rainfall. As a
od mid-1961 whole relatively few signs of soil exhaustion and erosion occur in the better watered
and more populous north-western parts of the region.

a faster rate t There is little doubt that the population of East Africa as a whole is below
was greatest its optimum level, in the sense that the present population is insufficient to make
ians" rather the fullest use of the natural resources at its disposal. It is significant that an area
include, for ex of high population density such as the Lake Victoria zone of Buganda should also be
se, the first d a goal of immigration. To quote from the report of the East Africa Royal Commission
) in Tanganyik 1953-1955, p.36:- "Paradoxical though it may appear, taking East Africa as a whole,
whole, the y a growth of population accompanied by appropriate social and economic institutional
ounting to 2,

changes is necessary to bring about an appreciable increase in the general of life"

This brings one back to the first of the three interrelated questions: can the natural resources support the present and the future population? not very well, to judge by the generally low standard of living. To realise potentialities there is need not only for a growth of population but also for social and economic institutional changes". The changes prescribed are that can come from within, e.g. in systems of land tenure, and partly those from without in the form of fresh accretions of capital, enterprise and skill. The quotation from the Royal Commission report, p.143, will clinch this point:— "The aids the indigenous population would not merely be deprived of the opportunity to participate in a favourable economic future: they might find it impossible, under the growing numbers of population, to maintain the degree of improvement which has occurred".

There, then, is the fundamental challenge of the Royal Commission report to us who live in East Africa. The challenge is now eight years old, but it has been neither fully accepted nor fully explored. If as geographers, working in what we can bring some of the concepts of this challenging document before the eyes of including the senior pupils of secondary schools, geography and development can be brought into fruitful inter-relationship.

REFERENCES

The references are listed according to the sections of the paper.

- Goldthorpe, J.E. *Outlines of East African society*. Kampala: 1958.
- Goldthorpe, J.E. and Wilson, F.B. *Tribal maps of East Africa and Zanzibar*. London: 1960. (East African studies no.13.)
- Kenya. Report of the Regional Boundaries Commission. London: 1962.
- East African Statistical Department. *Economic and statistical review*, no.4, September 1960.
- Blacker, J.G.C. *The Demography of East Africa*, pp. 22-36 of *The Natural resources of East Africa*, edited by E.W. Russell. Nairobi: 1962.
- Richards, A.I., editor. *Economic development and tribal change: a study of immigration in Buganda*. Cambridge: 1954.
- Baker, S.J.K. Buganda: a geographical appraisal. *Transactions and Papers of the Institute of British Geographers*, no.22, 1956, pp. 171-179.
- East African Statistical Department. General African census 1959, Tribal analysis, Volume 1, pt.2, *Tribal analysis for Buganda province: districts, counties and divisions*. Entebbe: 1960
- East Africa Royal Commission 1953-1955 report. London: 1955.