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HISTORY AND SOCIAL STRUCTURE ON THE EAST AFRICAN PLATEAU

I N T R O D U C T I O N

Africa never ceased to surprise the Romans; it has not yet quite ceased to surprise ourselves, who are in a sense their remote descendants. All through the history of relations between the peoples of Europe and of Africa these surprises have been occasioned by facts coming to light unexpectedly which did not square with "what Africa ought to be like".

In the traditional picture deeply ingrained in the consciousness of many, if not most, Europeans, Africa "ought to be" different; there must surely be something in its make-up that has to be accounted for by a background completely other than European, something that at the closest might have an affinity with our own ancestry in some primordial past common to all mankind, but not in any recent period of history.

This picture has many different facets which can be conjured up in different combinations on different occasions and for different purposes. Empire-builders of the late 19th century have not scrupled to exploit it for wholesale mis-construction and falsification, pretending that Africans present life on "the lowest rung of the ladder of evolution", barely human as yet; certain missionaries have thundered against their "savage heathen practices", less from informed judgment than from an overheated imagination; anti-slave trade campaigners, in paternalistic sympathy, have consoled themselves with the thought that "it was not their fault, they just never had a chance".

Exceptionally, individual Europeans have been able, without entirely disowning them, to relegate their prejudices to the background of their minds and to establish ordinary person-to-person contacts suffused with human warmth. The inimitable Mary Kingsley will always occupy an honourable place among the latter kind.

Such experience, where they have been expressed in literary form, inspire the question has not the rather more common failure to make such human contacts been due to the belief that Africans must be different, mysterious; of unaccountable psychological motivation, when in reality they were only too like ourselves? When, for example, the early European capitalist slave traders on the West Coast denounced their African trading partners as "bloodthirsty, treacherous savages" was it not capitalism that appalled them when they beheld it in African shape, rather than anything specifically African?

Tragic consequences have followed this overall failure to comprehend. Could it have been avoided, the history of relations between Europe and Africa might have been radically different and world history might have taken another course, for it would have been that much more difficult for the European capitalists to enlist the forces necessary to subordinate the countries of Africa to their own purposes.

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As it is, concerted attempts to understand African psychology and to arrive at a truthful picture of African societies were not seriously made by the scholars of the metropolitan countries until after the second world war had taken its devastating course, when it was becoming plain that the colonialist era was ending and that future relations between the peoples of the two continents would have to be based on entirely new foundations.

If that endeavour is to succeed, as it deserves to do if worse holocausts are to be avoided, the first necessity is to gather as much information as possible, not only on the effects of colonialism, but also on the African societies which experienced these effects. Recent population statistics show that these societies have not only survived the vicissitudes of alien rule but that many of them are growing in numbers at a rapid rate; what has endowed them with these enduring features?

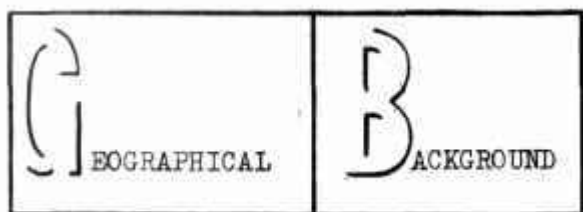
It used to be thought that African peoples have no history; a pardonable error, perhaps, if one was thinking only of the colonial territories, so recently established, and which as such had indeed no history prior to the European occupation. For their boundaries were arbitrary lines projected from certain coastal points, which divided the "spheres of influence" of the European powers, into the "hinterland", of the geography of which the same powers had only the vaguest notion.

The consciousness that historically formed African societies had existed long before the European colonisation became almost obliterated. The process was assisted by the habit of each separate colonial administration to issue its own reports and research materials without any overall guiding plan. One curiously inverted result of this practice has been the coining of such terms as "the early Rhodesian iron age", in reference to a period which antedates the birth of Rhodes in England, thousands of miles away, by one and a half millenia.

There happen to be not a few African societies whose countries were cut about by these artificial boundaries and which were incorporated piecemeal into different colonies and provinces. Their social structure could never be ascertained, and their very existence might never be suspected, however diligently one might search through the colonial records. Yet they might have happened to have played an important part in African history.

Exceptional value therefore attaches to the work of the anthropologists who, in the post-war period, undertook on-the-spot studies of individual African societies without regard to colonial frontiers (at least as far as that was practicable). It has brought into focus the East Africa plateau, well away from the coast, as an important theatre of African history over many centuries. Incomplete though it still is, the knowledge of this history has proved indispensable to the understanding of the social and political structure of these societies, hardly one of which could be fully understood without some knowledge of their historical interactions.

In the following pages an attempt is made to draw together some of the basic facts contained in an already voluminous literature which can throw light on the social conditions of these societies and the economic and political factors which gave them shape. To gain an idea which these societies are and where they are situated it will be useful to begin with a brief geographical sketch of the area.



If one takes the 1,000 metre (3,280 ft.) contour as a rough outline of the area with which this study is concerned, the East African plateau forms an almost perfect oval astride the equator. Its long axis extends from the Rungwe Mountains in the south (9° S) to the Lotuko Mountains in the north (4° N), a little to the west of the 34th meridian, its short axis roughly along the parallel $25^{\circ}30'$ S from the western foothills of the mountains of Ruanda and Urundi ($28^{\circ} 30'$ W) to the Teita Hills east of Mt. Kilimanjaro ($38^{\circ} 30'$ W), and it covers an area of over half a million square miles.

Two rift valleys cut into the plateau, marked by series of lakes; the Eastern Rift follows roughly the 36th meridian and contains Lakes Rudolf, Baringo, Nakuru, Naivasha, Magadi, Natron and Manyara, the Western Rift runs parallel and a little to the east of the crescent-shaped western margin of the plateau and contains the great lakes Mwitanzige (Albert), Ishango (Edward), Kivu and Uniamwezi (Tanganyika). The latter reaches its highest point in Lake Kivu (4,780 ft.); just to the north east of it the two volcanoes Karisimbi and Muhavura form the watershed between the twin sources of the Nile, one flowing northwards and converging at Ishango as the Semliki, the other southwards through Ruanda which becomes the Kager and after flowing through Lakes Ukerewe (Victoria) and Kioga joins the former at the north eastern end of Lake Mwitanzige. Southwards, the floor of the Western Rift drops away sharply from Lake Kivu to Lake Uniamwezi, which is reputed to be the second deepest lake in the world. The plateau itself, however, merges in the southwest with the central and south African plateau.

High mountains accompany the rifts, in places forming steep escarpments, so that the interior of the plateau is rather like a basin with raised rims the waters of which collect in the large but shallow depression of Lake Ukerewe, and the landscape is one of undulating plains on which grasses and scattered trees flourish naturally where they have not been converted into fields and orchards by the agricultural activity of the people. There are some woods left here and there, especially on the higher slopes of the mountains, and in the northwest the Ituri Forest climbs up the escarpment along the river courses.

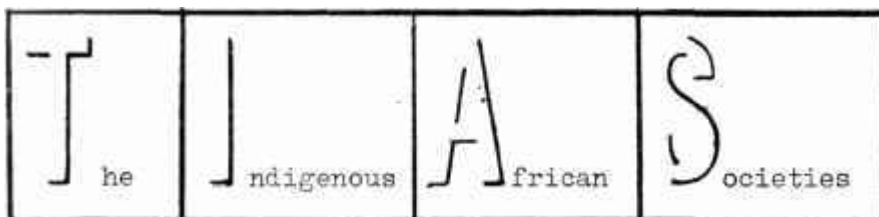
Since the greater part of the land lies between 3,500 and 6,500 feet the climate is almost temperate, mean annual temperature lying between 60° and 78° and varying within relatively narrow limits throughout the day and year. Over the greater part of the plateau rainfall is ample, if irregular, particularly on the west, north and northeast of Lake Ukerewe, in the northeastern highlands and on the mountains and most higher ground. The southeastern scarps catch the monsoon rains from the Indian ocean, but just behind lies a broad belt where the expectation of 30" of rain in any year is distinctly poor and becomes at best fair towards the north and west. Since the tropical sun causes evaporation which can be as high as 50" the southeastern quarter of the plateau has become progressively more arid during the past thousand years or so, the lakes of the eastern rift have shrunk and partly disappeared, and in many places where older maps show quite extensive lakes there are today but swamps. This is true even of parts of the better favoured western areas.

Fertile soils and lush pastures are to be found virtually all over the plateau, although they cannot everywhere be utilised, except by irrigation, for lack of rain. The soils are friable, and therefore easily worked, but, as the Report of the East African Royal Commission 1953-55 has pointed out:

"When mishandled they quickly decline in fertility and rapidly disintegrate under the action of wind and rain". (1)

It is therefore no small compliment to the careful husbandry of the people of the plateau that even after many centuries of occupation the soils of the plateau were still rich enough to form an irresistible attraction for European settlers when they arrived at the beginning of this century: though it is not much of a compliment to the latter that the land is now in the perilous state described in the Report, barely two generations later.

As the map shows (see facing page), settlement is extremely dense wherever the ground is high enough to provide a pleasant climate and sufficient rain, particularly in the northwestern section, where 20 million people, over 83 per cent of the total plateau population of about 24 million, live. The population figures are for 1961/2 (2), and there has been a rapid increase in population in recent years; between 1948 and 1961/2 the population of Ruanda and Urundi increased by 20 per cent, that of the plateau section of Tanganyika by 26 per cent, of Uganda by 32 per cent and of the Kenya part of the plateau by over 60 per cent.



One of the most striking features of the map is the indication of a number of distinct countries the boundaries of which are clearly outlined by the density pattern. This state of affairs is most immediately evident in the southeastern section of the plateau where the severe climatic conditions have done as much or more than foreign political interference to keep populations within certain boundaries. But even in the north and west, where recent population pressure has forced people to fill out the space available to them to its fullest extent, these boundaries are still traceable. Inter-colonial frontiers have taken scant notice of them, and administrative boundaries have in some cases deliberately ignored them (the greater part of Bunyoro, for example, was assigned to Buganda as a reprisal measure).

(1) Cmd 9475, paragraph 25.

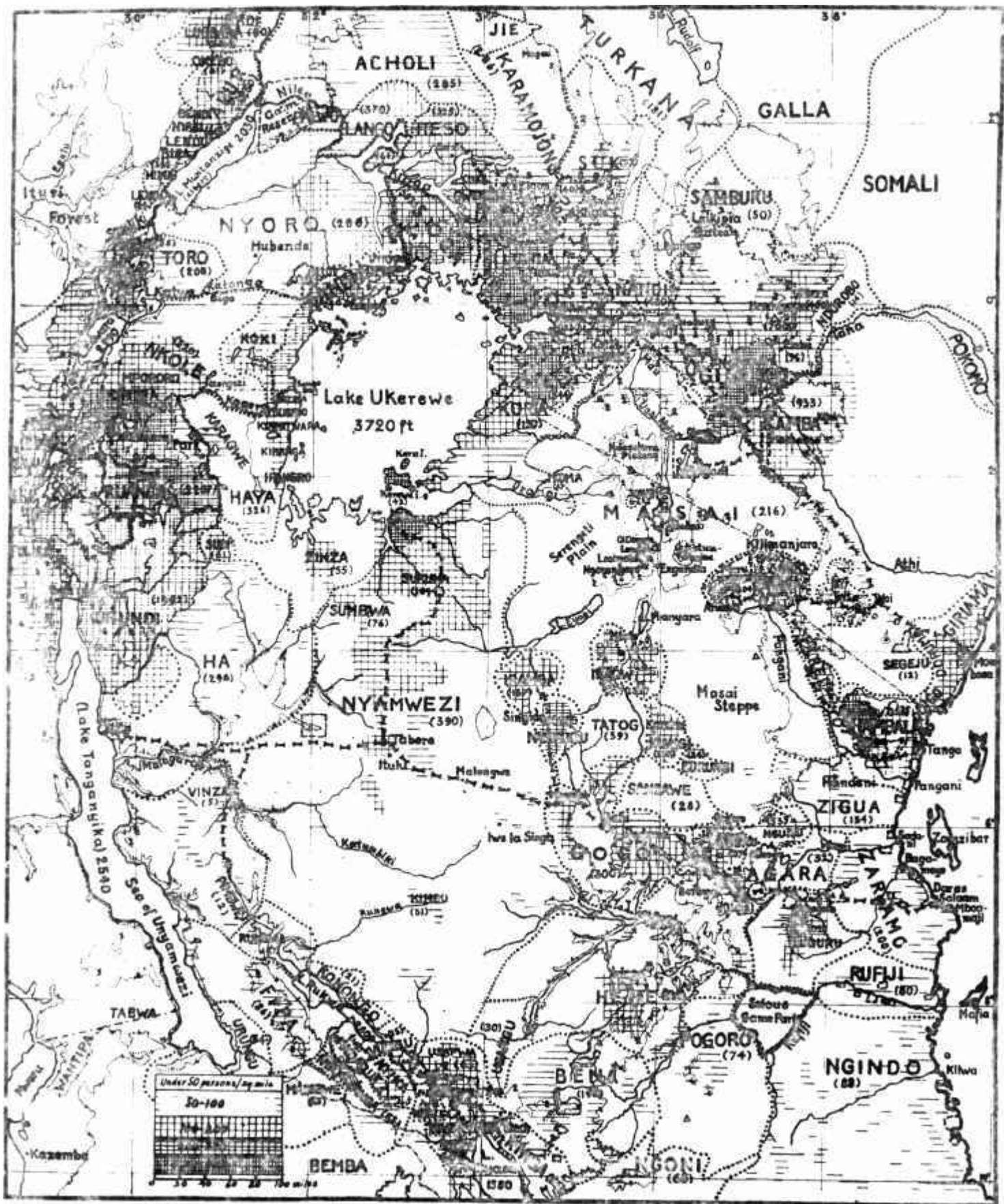
(2) United Nations Demographic Year Book 1964.

L E G E N D

T O

M A P I

- NYAMYEZI (390) Names, populations in thousands, and appropriate boundaries of African societies.
- Tabora geographical names; heights above sea level in feet; contours in 1,000 metres.
- .-.-.-.- colonial frontiers
- alienated land
- II-II-II-II-II-II-II railways (main 19th century trade routes)
- Density pattern: Note the rectangle in the left hand corner; for comparison its size (8,000 sq.miles) has been made equal to that of Wales on the scale 01 the map; and its area has been divided in proportion to the total area of Wales with the same population densities.
- Maps consulted: Map of Tanganyika, Dept. of Lands and Surveys, Dar-es-Salaam, revised ed. 1950. Scale 1: 2,000,000,
- Map of Kenya and Uganda, published by War Office 1940, 5th ed. 1943. Scale 1: 2.000,000.
- Population, tsetse fly and rainfall map of East Africa. Directorate of Colonial Surveys 1954. Scale 1: 3,000,000.
- Africa. Contour-coloured World Map Series. John Bartholomew & Sons, Edinburgh 1960. Scale 1: 10,000,000.
- (See also special text maps in references cited).



BEWA
(62)

OGORO
(74)

NGINDO
(88)

1500

0 20 40 60 80 miles

Each of these countries is in fact inhabited by a people with its own language, an economy built on the particular environment, its distinctive culture, moral and legal concepts, social and political institutions and historical traditions. Each represents a society in its own right linked by tradition with the country it occupies and has its own identity expressed in its name by which it can be traced on the map. They may, and do, have much in common; yet each has been formed through and in the course of its own history.

Recognition of this kind of identity has been the basis of anthropological studies in East Africa in the post-war years. Individual anthropologists have made their field one or another of these societies. Sharing the life of its people, learning their language, discovering the ways in which they cope with the everyday problems of living and ensure its continuity, they have studied the forces of cohesion which make them a society and followed up their ramifications throughout the country; by careful analysis of historical traditions compared with documented events they have gained an insight into the structure of the society and its development before the European occupation.

They differ greatly in size and population; the eight largest, with populations ranging from 900,000 to 2,200,000, account for half the total population of the plateau; 25 smaller countries with an average of about 330,000 account for another 8 million; and the remaining four million are distributed over some 50 small countries averaging around 72,000 people. These numbers appear small compared with most European countries, though it is not often remembered that there are about 15 countries in Europe with populations of less than 3 millions, or that Iceland is not denied a seat in the United Nations because her people number less than 180,000. But they are very large indeed compared with the 3-4,000 of the average tribe of American Indians, not to mention the 3-400 of the average Australian tribe.

From the earliest map made by the first European missionaries partly on the basis of their own travels in East Africa and partly with the aid of the geographical accounts of Arab travellers, it is possible to restore the mid-nineteenth century location of quite a number of the peoples named on the modern map.

Except for the coastline, the only part that had been surveyed at the time (1844-1853) Erhardt's map is badly distorted. It is overextended from east to west and compressed in the north-south direction, and all the lakes are fused into one great inland sea. One can, however, correct these distortions with the aid of the modern map and also make allowance for vagaries in spellings. One then finds that in all essentials the distribution of named East African countries was recognisably the same as today - the political map of the East African plateau seems to have changed less in the past century than that of Europe, except for the arbitrary lines laid across the indigenous pattern by the colonial boundaries in the second half of that period.

- (3) Travels, Researches and Missionary Labours during the Eighteen Years' Residence in Eastern Africa. By the Rev. Dr. Lewis Krapf (London 1860). A facsimile reproduction of the map of Jacob Erhardt is to be found in Stock's History of the Church Missionary Society, Volume II.

Historical enquiries have in fact established that the overwhelming majority of the peoples of the plateau have been settled in their respective countries for a much longer period. The most notable exception are the Luo, who have pushed their way into the area of the Gulf of Kavirondo and along the eastern shores of Lake Ukerewe conquering the land they at present occupy from the earlier inhabitants (Luhia, Kisii, Kuria) since the turn of this century. The pastoral Masai, although they have in the course of time expanded over the steppes of the eastern plateau, are thought to have arrived there at least in the 17th century. (4) About the same time the Gogo and Hehe settled on the plateau, and by the early 19th century were strong enough to prevent the further southward spread of the Masai.

Early in the 17th century (8 or 9 generations ago, a generation among them being reckoned as about a third of a century) the Nyakyusa separated from their forefathers, the Kinga of the Livingston Mountains, and settled on the plains which descend from the Rungwe Mountain to Lake Nyasa. (5) By implication, the Kinga have been there even longer. Earlier still, probably around 1500, a man named Gikuyu who came from Shungwaya (on Erhardt's map shown near the coast north of the Tana river mouth) discovered the fertile highlands south of Mount Kerenyaga where he raised a large family and became the ancestor of the people who still bear his name. (6) Meru, Embu and Kamba followed and occupied lands on the eastern fringes of the highlands not claimed by Gikuyu.

At that time the country to the north and west of Lake Ukerewe had already long been settled by farming people speaking Bantu languages who had become, or were in the process of becoming subjects of wealthy immigrant cattle owners. The dynasties which established themselves in such countries as Busoga, Buganda, Bunyoro, Toro, Ankola, Ruanda, Urundi, Ha, Haya, Nyamwezi trace their origins back over twenty generations or more, and in many cases replaced still earlier dynasties, like the Chwezi for example, which are still remembered in myths and legends. (7) The Ruanda, in particular, carry their history back for another twenty generations preceding the twenty of the present Tusi dynasty, which may represent a time span of between 900 and 1,200 years.

- (4) C.W.B. Huntingford in History of East Africa (Ed. by R. Oliver and G. Matthews, Oxford 1963)
- (5) Wilson, G: "The Nyakyusa of S.W. Tanganyika" (in Seven Tribes of British Central Africa, Oxford 1951), PP. 288-9.
- (6) History of East Africa l.c.
- (7) Oliver, R: "The Traditional Histories of Buganda, Bunyoro and Nkole (Royal Anthropological Institute 1953)*

Historians are still engaged in collating the various traditional histories of the peoples of the plateau with a view to arriving at a more precise time scale; but even without waiting for this difficult and complex work to reach a more mature state there are a number of useful lessons to be learnt about the structure of these societies from the picture the traditions give us of their development in the course of the generations. What manner of people were they, who, perhaps in the days of our own King Alfred, undertook to bring the soil of the "fertile crescent" between the mountains of the western rift and Lake Ukerewe under cultivation? By what social processes and historical interactions between different peoples did the societies emerge with which Europeans first became acquainted in the middle of the 19th century?

Only fifteen or twenty years ago such questions would have been asked by only a very few exceptional people. Today they form a subject of academic and practical studies, recognised by universities and international organisations and engaging the attention of large numbers of students and scholars. Still there are some who passionately refuse to acknowledge that there can be such a subject as African history. (8) Did not Stanley once write a book entitled "In darkest Africa"? And can darkness be a subject of history?

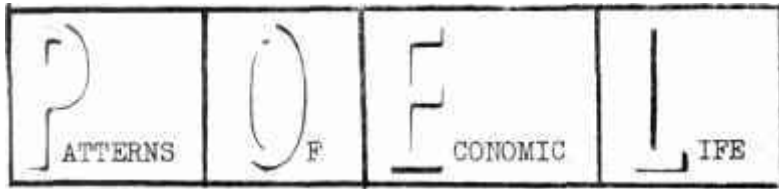
Professor Trevor-Roper's stentorian injunction is unlikely to be heeded; but it may serve as a not untimely reminder of the unquestioned dominance until quite recently of the stereotyped picture of the "barbarous tribes" and "heathen savages" of Africa which he presumably imbibed in his academic youth. Pre- eminent among the creators of the stereotype was Sir Harry Johnston, G.C.M.G., K.C.B., D.Sc, who, of course, knew better; but he did not choose to make much use of his genuine knowledge in his prolific writings, which became the standard textbooks for the training of two generations of British colonial administrators, ethnographers and anthropologists, and, in turn, of many Africans.

The newly acquired knowledge of African history has given rise to some heart searchings about the stereotype, and lengthy explanations have been given (9) to justify the continued use of its terminology (such words as "primitive" and "tribal") in application to African societies. As yet, only a few anthropologists have tried to do without them. (10). This study will therefore have to be concerned partly with an examination of certain propositions which have hitherto been taken for granted rather than tested against the rapidly accumulating knowledge.

(8) Hugh Trevor-Roper, Regius Professor of Modern History: "The Rise of Christian Europe". The first of six lectures, given on B.B.C. Television, originally delivered to an audience at the University of Sussex, Brighton. (Listener, 28.11.63)

(9) See, for example, Lucy Mair: *Primitive Government; Introduction* (Penguin Books, 1962).

(10) J.C. Buxton: *Chiefs and Strangers: A Study of Political Assimilations among the Mandari* (Clarendon Press, 1963). Cf. also Miss Mair's Review in *Man*, 1964, article 353.



With numerically insignificant exceptions the economies of the societies of the East African plateau are based on agriculture with the raising of livestock, poultry, sheep, goats, cattle in varying proportions, carried on with the use of iron implements. There is not in any of the traditions a memory of a time when this was not so, other than under temporary difficulties at the time of the initial settlement in their present country, or variations in the relative significance of soil cultivation and livestock rearing. Hunting for game and collecting of wild products make a small contribution to the economy in some of the less densely populated areas; for the most part hunting is done, if at all, with the object of preventing the depredation of the fields, and some people have a definite distaste for any sort of game and even fish (1). Others will make long journeys to the lake shores where agricultural produce can be exchanged for fish (2).

The type of agricultural economy which prevailed before the coming of the Europeans is usually spoken of as a "subsistence economy", the implication being that life under it was one of stagnation and poverty, that a surplus over bare subsistence was either non-existent or negligibly small. This idea has gained currency from the observation of the poverty-stricken conditions of the peasants in colonial Africa and has been used to exculpate the colonial regimes (3).

Gradually, a truer picture of economic conditions before the colonial period is emerging, and it is beginning to be realised that the stereotype of "stone age savages" was a gratuitous invention of zealous empire-builders at variance even with their own and their contemporaries' observations (4).

- (1) Gikuyu, for instance, dislike fish; Masai do not care for game. Little of either is eaten in Ruanda, where the Turi hunt only for sport.
- (2) Edward H. Winter: *Bwamba* (Cambridge, 1956), p. 165.
- (3) Cf., e.g., Margery Perham in the introduction to *The Native Economies of Nigeria*, 1946: "The poverty of tropical Africa, which may come with a shock to the economist who sees it for the first time and so give unwarranted sharpness to his criticisms, is the almost universal and immemorial condition of the continent, one which the British Government has, for lack of communications and close administrative grasp, only been able to tackle effectively for some twenty years".
- (4) The extent to which the observations of the earliest European travellers, Rebmann and Krapf, Burton, and Speke, and even Stanley, have been disregarded would be astonishing if it had not so eminently suited the purposes of those circles who intended to make of East Africa a "White Man's Country". Regrettably, it is still necessary to labour this point, since the prejudiced views of the latter find almost daily expression in the press and on the air and provide no small stimulus to racist propaganda. Even while this page was written, an ostensibly sympathetic observer, Judith Listowel, wound up her third lecture on "African Chequerboard" (B.B.C. Home Service, 10th June 1965) with a remark to the effect that she had witnessed the impact of modernisation on "Stone age life".

Only in the last decade of the colonial period were any significant efforts made by the administrations of the British East African colonies to elucidate the agricultural potentialities of the areas and almost incidentally these efforts brought to light some of the salient factors which governed the life of the people until it, was thoroughly dislocated and almost ruined by the growing European penetration. The customary judgments which ascribe all economic advance to the influence of the latter area now clearly seen to have been based on sheer ignorance.

In particular, two concepts have lately come under fire of criticism which have played a conspicuous part in perpetuating the false impressions of African economies; the idea of "subsistence economy" and of "shifting cultivation". The belief that a subsistence economy is one that produces no surplus and is synonymous with poverty and stagnation seems to be hard to eradicate; although a century ago it was derided by Karl Marx, who showed in very plain language that where there were no legal or political restrictions on the acquisition of land, as in the case of the early colonisation of America and Australia, it was exceedingly difficult for capitalist entrepreneurs to skim off the surplus produced by subsistence cultivators (5)« They simply enjoyed it themselves. The East African cultivators apparently enjoyed it so much that the early missionaries quite despaired of ever finding willing ears for their preachings of St. Paul's epistles to the Romans (6).

W. Allan, as Deputy Director of Agriculture in Northern Rhodesia, has on the basis of practical studies developed a number of concepts essential for the understanding of the true meaning of "subsistence" and "shifting" agriculture in the African context. In the course of this work the "simple and obvious idea" occurred to him "that subsistence cultivators, dependent entirely or almost entirely on the produce of their gardens, tend to cultivate an area large enough to ensure the food supply in a season of poor yields. Otherwise the community would be exposed to frequent privation and grave risk of extermination.

(5) Karl Marx "Capital", Volume I, ch. XXXIII.

(6) Op. cit. part I, chs. X, XII. In Krapf's honour it must be said that at least he did not fall for the myth of "cannibals" in the interior, but rightly conjectured that "these stories have been invented by the Wakamba and the Caravan leaders, in order to deter the inhabitants of the coast from journeying into the interior, so that their monopoly of trade with the interior may not be interfered with". (p. 172) Later travellers have been less discerning and their morbid pre-occupation with "cannibalism" created for them the reputation that they belonged to this hitherto unknown Dreed themselves. Acquaintance with the Christian ritual of the Holy Sacrament did nothing to dispel this belief, and as late as 1952 (or thereabouts) Amba hastily deserted their villages at the approach of a European stranger (an anthropologist, not an anthropophagist!) just as they had done 80 years before when Stanley passed through their country (E.H. Winter, l.c., p. 11).

or dispersal by famine, more especially in regions of uncertain and fluctuating rainfall. One would, therefore, expect the production of a 'normal surplus' of food in the average year." (7)

This proposition explained the astonishing quantities of maize offered for sale by African producers when a maize marketing board was set up in Northern Rhodesia in the 1930's: 234,000 bags instead of the expected 58,000 in the first year of operation of the board; it made possible the reliable prediction of future sales. It has profound implications far beyond the original circumstances in which it was first expounded and tested.

Some significant conclusions may be drawn from the figures given by Allan to sustain his thesis. Firstly, the size of the surplus is remarkable, particularly in view of the fact that the maize sales were rather in the nature of a bonus, the main cash income of the people concerned being derived from the sales of livestock, poultry and eggs. On Allan's estimate of 17,000 producing units cultivating maize on 6 acres on the average and requiring 13 bags (1.3 short tons) for their own subsistence, the surplus marketed in the 14 years from 1936 to 1949 averaged 0.78 tons per producing unit or 60% of the subsistence output. A surplus of this size is certainly not what is usually associated with the term "subsistence economy", yet it was potentially there.

Secondly, certain changes took place in the next period, from 1950 to '58. The network of marketing points was expanded and the number of producing units increased to an estimated 27,500: more and better land was taken into cultivation and the acreage increased from 6 to 7 acres (possibly more). Maize prices soared on the world market, and, although lower prices continued to be paid for African grown than for European grown maize, the total tonnage marketed by African producers increased from 13,266 tons annual average to nearly 39,000 tons, or from 0.78 tons to 1.42 tons per producing unit. Assuming also a small increase in subsistence requirements due to the greater labour expanded on the increased acreage per unit, this means a surplus approaching 100%. This example can therefore serve as an illustration of the speed with which a society of small peasant proprietors, originally producing for their own use alone, can become transformed into a society producing for the capitalist world market once it is brought into touch with it; provided there is sufficient land and labour for expansion and artificial obstacles put in their way are not overwhelming.

Thirdly, the yields suggested by Allan's figures, of 0.35 short tons per acre at the beginning and 0.40 at the end of the period, are not all that far below world yields, which were 0.58 in the period 1934-1938; they are above the yields of such major non-European maize producers as India (0.30) and Mexico (0.23).

(7) W. Allan, *The African Husbandman*. (Edinburgh & London, 196*5). Ch. IV: The Normal Surplus of Subsistence Agriculture, p. 38.

In both these countries plough cultivation is old established; in the part of Northern Rhodesia to which Allan refers it became widespread only towards the end of the period; at the beginning the maize was produced with the traditional methods of so-called shifting cultivation.

On this subject, Allan makes his second fundamental proposition which, on reflection, may be found as self-evident as the first: that African systems of cultivation are determined principally by the character of the soil. He is so impressed by the sound knowledge of soil characteristics of the African (8) husbandman, acquired through long generations of practice, that he bases his soil classification on the actual use made of the land in various parts of Africa. It ranges from Permanent Cultivation land, Semi-Permanent Land, Recurrent Cultivation Land, to Shifting Cultivation Land, Partial Cultivation Land and Uncultivable or Waste Land.

For the East African plateau, with its high population densities, only the first three of these categories are relevant. Marginally, a type of "shifting cultivation" may be used on occasions in less densely settled parts for crops supplementary to the basic needs of the society, such as the Kitara system of Acholi. (9) But in the main these countries present the aspect of vast stretches of continuous cultivation where every square yard of soil is used to its fullest extent, every field has its boundaries and its owner, waste land for pasture is scarce and fallows are short.

This picture is preeminently true of the Gikuyu country, but it also obtains in the countries around Lake Ukerewe, in the hills of Ruanda and the countries bordering on it, in the highlands west of Lake Mwitanzige, on the slopes of Mounts Elgon and Kilimanjaro, the Shambala highlands and the Nyakyusa plains. Nor is it very different in essence in the less densely populated parts such as Bunyoro or Haya, except that here the cultivated areas form, as it were, islands on the higher ground demarcated by streams and rivers, with wider stretches of grass and pasture land between them. (10) The "islands of fertility" themselves are as crowded as the continuous large stretches of cultivation; from the air they look rather like garden cities.

- (8) W. Allan, l.c., p. 5: "He can rate fertility of a piece of land and its suitability for one or other of his crops by the vegetation which covers it and by the physical characteristics of the soil; and he can assess the "staying-power" of a soil, the number of seasons for which it can be cropped with satisfactory results, and the number of seasons for which it must be rested before such results can be obtained again. His indicator of initial fertility is the climax vegetation and his index of returning fertility is the succession of vegetational phases that follows cultivation. In many cases his knowledge is precise and remarkably complete. He has a vocabulary of hundreds of names of trees, grasses, and other plants, and he identifies particular vegetation associations by specific terms."
- (9) R.M. Bere in Appendix D to The Acholi of Uganda (Colonial Research Studies No. 30, H.M.S.O., 1960), p. 232.
- (10) See aerial photographs in W. Allan, l.c., Plates V to VIII: for "islands of fertility": PI. TV. and John Beattie, Bunyoro, An African Kingdom, PI. 7a

In the blank areas of the map, indicating densities of less than 50 per square mile, the "islands of fertility" simply become fewer and farther between; the greater part of this area is virtually uninhabited and abandoned to the tsetse fly, but for the dry grasslands of the east where the Masai tend their cattle (population density 3 to 4 per square mile). Groups of Hima, who after long years of service as herders for the wealthy classes of the agricultural societies have acquired herds of their own, have here and there found pastures for their cattle in marshy regions unsuitable for agriculture; and on the lakes, where the shores are not too precipitous or the climate not too sweltering, small communities of fishermen have settled. There are also villages of salt-makers, notably on Lakes Mwitanzige and Katwe (11), and in the south on Lake Rukwa. All along the line of the Eastern Rift (between longitude 35° and 36°), from the Suk country in the north to Iringa in the south traces of irrigation terraces have been found; they were made by people who have long since vanished, and who probably built the remarkable city of Engaruka, now in ruins. But the Suk, and the Sonjo near Lake Natron still make use of the irrigation works left behind by their unknown predecessors. (12)

By and large, it can be said that the population density gradient from the populous to the uninhabited areas is steep, and that the typical country dweller of the plateau does not live out of sight and sound of his neighbours. (13) In Ruanda and Urundi where homesteads tend to be scattered rather than forming settlement clusters, the smallest administrative units of the royal administration are . neighbourhoods of some 50 to 60 households (Ruanda) or around a dozen "within" hearing distance of the cry of alarm" (Urundi). (14)

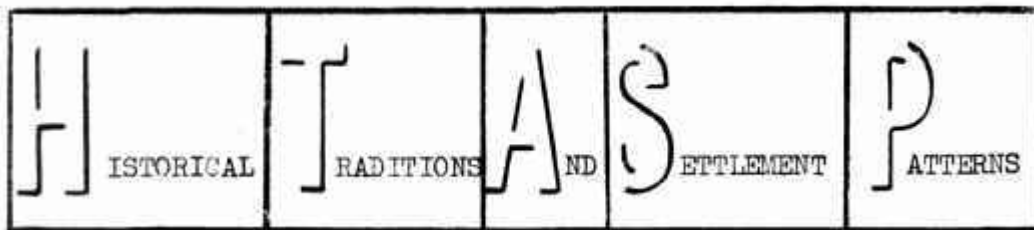
This density pattern, though to some extent disturbed and distorted by the intervention of the colonial regimes, seems nevertheless to be of long standing and is part and parcel of the history of the formation of the societies of the plateau. The skill of the African husbandmen has been to devise combinations and rotations of crops which have maintained soil fertilities in spite of population densities which for purely agricultural countries are high by any standards, and where these densities threatened to exceed the critical limit to employ a variety of

- (11) "The village of Kibero on Lake Albert has gradually grown to ever higher levels upon the broken remnants of pottery which has been used for the evaporation of salt water" (K. Ingham, *A History of East Africa*, Longmans 1962, p. 38). The map of Ehrhardt shows a "salt river" (probably Lake Rukwa) in the Fipa country and notes: "the water being fetched from great distances for boiling it down".
- (12) M.W.H. Beech, *The Suk* (Oxford 1911); P. 15. Remains of an Earlier People in Uhehe, by P.M. Worsley and J.P. Rumberger, *Tanganyika Notes and Records*, 1949, PP* 42-46; H.A. Fosbrooke, *A brief review of Archaeological Remains in Tanganyika*, T.N. & R. 1953, No. 33; *The Sonjo of Tanganyika*, by R.F. Gray (OUP 1963).
- (13) See e.g. Abrahams, R.G: "Neighbourhood Organisation" (in Nyamwezi). *Africa* Volume 24, 1965; p. 171.
- (14) See Albert, Ethel M: "Socio-Political Organization and Receptivity to Change: Some differences between Ruanda and Urundi. *Southwestern Journal of Anthropology* 16, 1960; p. 53.

methods to restore the soil. (15)

These careful methods of husbandry and the associated surplus made for a degree of well-being such as was probably not attained in most European countries while their economies were still predominantly agricultural. This factor provides the key to the remarkably high rates of population growth already noticed above. It has played a decisive role for the development of the social structure of these societies.

(15) W. Allan, l.c., Chs. XI and XII gives details of the agricultural methods of a representative number of the East African societies here considered.



For all the variability between one society and another, and even within the same society, there is a recognisable favoured pattern of settlement which is quite different from the familiar village patterns of rural Europe. Anthropologists have therefore found it difficult to describe it in the terms in which we think of rural life; neither "village" nor "hamlet" nor any other word is an exact equivalent of this pattern and so far no unanimity has been reached on the best word to use. Here "settlement" will be used, both because it is in a sense neutral regarding the shape and structure, and because it conveys a hint of how it came to be as it is.

The favoured pattern consists of a number of compact home farms ranging from a dozen or so to several hundred. They are more or less closely spaced and fill what may be termed the "cultivated area"; this is usually situated on elevated ground and surrounded by a strip of wasteland which descends to the boundary and on which cattle is pastured. With the intense methods of agriculture the size of the home farm can be quite small; measurements reported by Allan suggest that where grain is the staple a little over an acre is normally cultivated at any one time per member of the home farm; where bananas and plantains are grown, or where the climate permits more than one harvest to be taken a year (in the north and west), the requirement is as little as half an acre per person. Part of this may be an outfield, interspersed between the home farms or on the margin of the waste; the size of the home farm then varies between, say, two and eight acres at the most, and would fit comfortably into a rough circle of perhaps 100 yards radius. There is quite often less than a couple of minutes walk from one farm to the next.

The strip of wasteland between the settlements, though in some cases half a mile or a mile wide, is often reduced to the width of the stream and a narrow grass verge, where in the course of time the available cultivation area has filled up with the growing population. There is an evident connection between the settlement pattern, the length of time for which a people has been settled in the given country, and the rate of population growth, and this is confirmed by the historical traditions of the people.

Most of these traditions have this in common that they derive the origin of the present inhabitants of the given country from an individual ancestor who entered the country alone, or perhaps accompanied by a brother or a few followers, a stated number of generations ago. As evidence their burial places, as well as those of their descendants, are marked by sacred trees, some natural feature, or in some cases by the actual remains of a grave or dwelling, and some people have preserved detailed genealogies over many generations.

Anthropologists and historians naturally accept these traditional histories with certain reservations. Following Malinowski, they point out that tradition normally serves to validate present day social norms and institutions and is liable for this reason to have been subject to distortion. (14)

For the main outline of the history of settlement, however, the question of possible chronological inaccuracies is of secondary importance. The story of the individual founder-ancestor, or small family group, is so widespread that it deserves attention; it does not argue for the "mass migrations" still too often postulated for the recent past, allegedly on the testimony of oral tradition. (15)

(14) The question of what reliance may be placed on traditional African histories is one much discussed today. Some would relegate them entirely to the realm of myth (Cf., e.g. G.P. Murdock, *Africa, its peoples and their culture history*, N.Y. 1959) P. 43). Others, probably the majority, would regard this judgment as too sweeping, and Vansina (*Journal of African History* 1.1.1960, pp. 43-51) says simply and straightforwardly: "Sources are sources. They can be good or bad, out there is nothing intrinsically less valuable in an oral source than a written one...."

(15) R. Oliver, e.g., in *History of East Africa* (Oxford 1963), Ch. VI (p. 171) writes: "The first fact which becomes plain from an examination of the traditional evidence is that East Africa has seen within the last 500 years population movements on a scale which have not occurred in Europe since the dark ages, in the Middle East since the coming of the Turks, in South East Asia since the Moghul invasions".

J. Middleton, in *The Lugbara of Uganda* (New York and London, 1965), after relating the circumstantial traditions of the travels of individual ancestors of the Lugbara, remarks: "like the heroic myth, migrations distant in time are expressed in narrative of individual travels". (p. 31)

Evidently, the mass migration theory does not rest on the traditional histories but rather on a somewhat arbitrary interpretation of them based on an analogy of doubtful validity. It is unfortunate in that it introduces an archaistic element not present in reality.

Credence has been given to this mass migration theory probably because the rate of growth of African societies seems to have been greatly under-estimated. As we have seen, overall growth rates in the area which includes the East African plateau in recent years (between 1948 and 1961/2) have been surprisingly large and equivalent to between 50 and 100 per cent per generation, compared with an average for England since the Black Death of about 20 per cent per generation and a maximum of between 50 and 60 per cent in the 19th century. In individual instances the rates have been even higher. (16)

Whether this is a recent phenomenon, for which various not very convincing reasons are sometimes adduced, is doubtful. Recorded genealogies going back over several generations often reveal similar and even much higher rates of increase. (17) One cannot therefore ignore the possibility that high population growth rates are a feature of the economies of the African plateau, conditioned by high soil fertility, availability of land, particularly in the earlier phases, and social factors among which polygamy probably ranks high. At all events conclusions by analogy with pre-industrial European societies cannot be admitted as valid.

We may test this on a few examples. Middleton gives data for the Lugbara: they have at least 60 "clans" each of which derives its origin from a particular ancestor who lived from eight to thirteen generations ago. (18) The average population of such a "clan" is about 4,000 and consists of from 150 to 200 "family clusters" which in turn average about 25 persons (sons, wives and grandchildren) under the control of one man. The Uganda Lugbara have since 1948 increased from 183,000 to 236,000, an increase rate of 50 per cent per generation of 28 years. If we extend this rate into the past we find that in thirteen generations there would have been a 200-fold increase in population, and the ancestry of a "clan" of 4,000 people would have consisted of 20 persons, or about the present number of dependents of a single person. In eight generations the growth would have been twenty-five fold, and the maximum ancestry of such a recent "clan" would have numbered at most 160 persons, or considerably less than a lineage (some 200 persons) even in this case.

The removing of such small numbers of people from one neighbourhood to another is hardly what one normally understands by the term "mass migration". Middleton uses the term "migration drift" and says that it can be observed at the present day, when, however, only quite small family groups seem to be involved in any such move, as a rule under the control of a single "elder", or even "young men who have just married" (p. 12). Moreover, the main part of a "clan" almost always still inhabits the territory associated with the "clan" (p.30). Altogether the picture given by Middleton corresponds rather with what one might term "spread".

(16) See the discussion in Allan, l.c., pp. 341-6.

(17) See e.g. A.W. Southall, *Alur Society* (Cambridge 1956), pp. 54-5; 356.

(18) Middleton, l.c. Ch.3.

Greenberg's Language Classification and Early Iron Age Sites

- Early iron age sites, first centuries A.D.
- later iron age sites
- ⊗ Zimbabwe
- ⊗ Lake Kisale

Arrows (→) indicate hypothetical lines of spread of Benue-Congo (Bantu) speakers from Niger-Benue region of Nok cultures the "canoe route" Benue-Logone-Chari-Ubangi-Congo-Kasai-Zambesi in the first centuries A.D., and later lines of spread from secondary centres in the metalliferous region of Central Africa to Southern Africa, the East coast, and the East African plateau.

Arrows (↔) indicate lines of spread of Eastern Sudanic speakers to East African plateau from about 1600 onwards. (Nilotes, Nilo-Hamites, Hainites). For details see: Joseph H. Greenberg, *The Language of Africa*. *Int. J. Amcr. Linguistics* 29, No.1, 1963; Roger Summers, *The Southern Rhodesian Iron Age*. *J. Afr. Hist.* II, 1961, pp. 1-13; Jaques Nenquier, *Notes on some early pottery cultures in Northern Katanga*. *J. Afr. Hist.* IV, 1963, pp. 19-32; Brian M. Fagan, *The Iron Age Sequence in the Southern Province of Northern Rhodesia*, *J. Afr. Hist.* IV, 1963, pp.157-177; and *Radio-Carbon Dates for Sub-Saharan Africa (from ca. 1000 B.C.)* III. *J. Afr. Hist.* VI, 1965, pp. 107-116; *Third Conference on African History and Archaeology (School of Oriental and African Studies 3 - 7 July, 1961)*. *J. Afr. Hist.* III, 1962, No. 2.

Gikuyu tradition (19) is of a similar nature, but the number of generations back to Gikuyu himself is not stated; it may have been between fifteen and eighteen, depending on the numbers of years attributed to a generation. The present numbers (1962) are 1,642,000 and the rate of growth between 1943 and 1962 was 60 per cent, or around 156 per cent per generation; this phenomenal figure is, however, less than that for Kenya as a whole (170 per cent), no doubt due to the "Emergency". If Gikuyu lived 18 generations ago, the present figures would have been reached with a substantially smaller average rate of growth up to 1943, little over 100 per cent per generation; with the present rate, the date of Gikuyu would be placed fourteen generations ago, counting back from 1948. The average rate would, of course, include the years of disaster, rinderpest, smallpox and cholera of the second half of the 19th century, and hence would be somewhat smaller than the present rate.

Increase rates of around 100 per cent per generation are also implied in Ruanda genealogies collected by Maquet (2), although the overall rate of increase today is much smaller, between 40 and 50 per cent per generation. Even at the rate of 40 per cent, the entire modern population of Ruanda, of 2,400,000 could in the forty generations attributed to its presence in the country by legend have originated from the three mythical ancestors, two brothers and their sister.

These are but a few examples of the traditions which are almost universally held by the peoples of the plateau, and there seems to be nothing implausible in their contention that these societies originated not from mass migrations but rather by way of immigration of small family groups who in the course of time spread outwards from their first place of settlement until virtually the entire area became densely populated.

Long before this happened, however, these settler societies came into contact with one another, and often into conflict; the varying ways in which such conflicts were resolved depending on a great variety of circumstances have largely determined the social structure of the societies as they were in the nineteenth century. Much of this history has been embodied in the traditions, and a good deal of it has been preserved and can be collated, though with difficulty and not without controversy. (21)

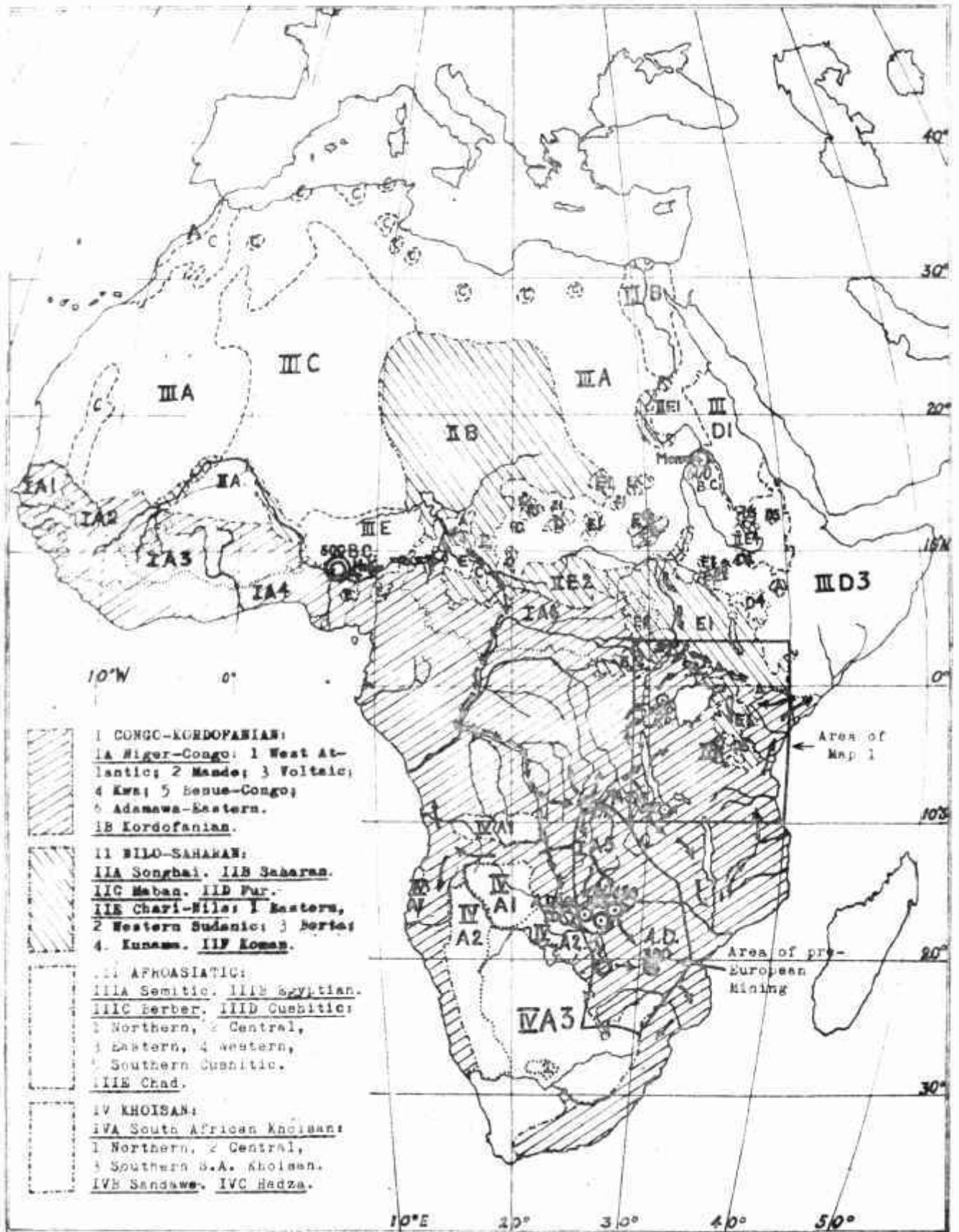
For an understanding of the results of this historical process it is also necessary to try and get at least a glimpse of the kind of people the first of these settlers were. Recent archaeological research has established that human populations inhabited the East African plateau, in particular the Eastern Rift area, from the earliest times (22); so far, however, it has not been possible to

(19) J. Kenyatta, *Facing Mount Kenya*, pp. 3-5 (London 1965)

(20) Jaques J. Maquet, *The Premise of Inequality in Ruanda*, pp. 31-32 (Oxford 1961)

(21) See e.g. Roland Oliver, *The Traditional Histories of Buganda, Bunyoro and Nkole* (Royal Anthropological Institute 1953)*

(22) Sonia Cole, *The Prehistory of East Africa* (2nd ed. 1964), p. 49.



Map 2. Greenberg's Language Classification and Early Iron Age Sites

discover any connection between the latest stone age remains and the modern populations. There is an unbridged gulf between the stone age peoples, who represent a very early and undeveloped phase of neolithic culture, probably even without a knowledge of agriculture, and the farming and stock-raising people equipped with iron implements and the knowledge of iron technology from whom the present societies are descended. By the time the latter arrived, the former had either left, died out, or survived in such small numbers that they have been absorbed without trace by the newcomers.

Whence, why and how they came is a problem that has for long remained obscure; in recent years, however, quite new theories which may provide a convincing solution have been stimulated by the re-classification of the African languages proposed by Greenberg (23). Still controversial as a purely linguistic theory, its implications for the history of the Bantu speaking peoples have initiated a fruitful discussion at the Third Conference on African History and Archaeology. (24) The outcome may be briefly summarised as follows:

There is a strong possibility that the spread of the Bantu speaking peoples over virtually the whole of the southern portion of the continent has its origin in the central regions of the Sudan, somewhere around the area of Lake Chad, and that it began certainly more than 1,500 years ago and possibly earlier. The earliest pioneers moved rapidly down southeastwards, probably by canoe, along the line of the Shari-Ubangui-Congo-Kasai rivers to the area of Katanga where they found an environment similar to their original homeland, and established a secondary centre of dispersal. They took with them the knowledge of agriculture and iron working, goats and sheep (possibly also some cattle) and brought much land under cultivation, creating the great grassland belt which stretches from the mouth of the Congo to the Zambezi. The favourable natural conditions of the area enabled them to multiply rapidly and in course of time to colonise all similarly favoured parts of the southern continent, eventually even penetrating and reducing the more densely forested areas of the Congo basin.

If, as at the moment of writing seems probable, this theory finds further confirmation from the systematic study of archaeological sites with absolute datings by modern methods, such as carbon-14, the ancestors of the present-day Bantu speaking peoples (speakers of the Niger-Congo family of languages in Greenberg's classification) were not primitive tribes of migrant savages, backward survivals of the stone age, but colonists from an area of developed iron age civilisation as represented by the Nok culture of the Niger and Benue basin, now reliably dated to the last centuries of the first millennium B.C. (25)

(23) J. Greenberg, *The Classification of African Languages*; *American Anthropologist* Vol. 50, 1948, pp. 24-29. *The Languages of Africa*; *Int. J. Amer. Ling.* 29, No. 1, 1963.

(24) *Third Conference on African History and Archaeology* (School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, 3rd-7th July 1961); *Journal of African History* III, 1962. No. 2.

(25) *Carbon dates for Nigeria*. By B. Fagg. *Man* LXV, Art. 8 (1965).

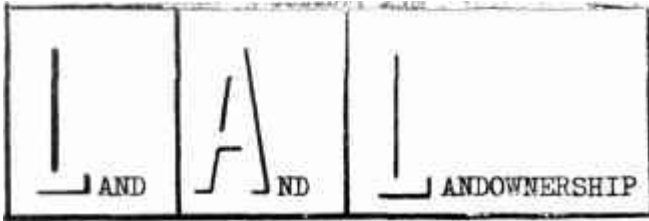
Carbon-14 dates so far recorded indicate (26) that the colonisation of the metalliferous region which stretches from Katanga to the Limpopo may have occupied the best part of the first millennium A.D. Before the end of that period, between 1200 and 1000 years ago if we go by the longest recorded tradition, the first groups of iron age farmers arrived on the east African plateau in the area of Ruanda. These traditions, cast in semi-mythical form, resemble in some respects those of the Luhya (between Mount Elgon and the Gulf of Kavirondo); they suggest that the area west and north of Lake Ukerewe was then devoid of population, so that the "First men" had to marry endogamously. (27)

In so doing they made a virtue of necessity, for it is against the essence of the moral concepts of the plateau peoples today, and these concepts are deeply embedded in their traditions. For at least a thousand years they had been reared in ways and ideas appropriate to a farming economy and its civilised manners, and these were re-asserted as soon as the first settlements had sufficiently increased in population. In the initial period, according to most traditional histories, this increase was even more rapid than the average rate of increase over the centuries; it had to be, for the colonists were faced with a task every bit as formidable as that which confronted the early settlers of America, or the Anglo-Saxon colonists of England.

Ruanda and Luhia, and much of the rest of the country between, was at that time still densely forested; the clearing of the forests for the making of fields required a large labour force. The colonists had come a long way from their original homeland, even some way from their most immediate previous place of settlement. They needed to find new sources of iron ore and other raw materials and to adapt their wonted methods to the resources of their new environment. As in all similar cases they had to make sure of a large progeny. This is nothing more than the driving force inherent in all food producing societies which distinguishes them sharply from tribes of hunters and gatherers limited by what nature's bounty provides.

(26) The earliest dates are of the first century A.D. and refer to what appear to have been temporary shelters, which may suggest that the original intention was not to settle, but to exploit the mineral wealth of Katanga for the benefit of the home civilisation. Cf. Cline, W: Mining and Metallurgy in Negro Africa. Menosho, Wis. 1937*

(27) J.J. Maquet, l.c., p. 108. The Abaluhia of Kavirondo. By Gunter Wagner, in African Worlds(ed. by Daryll Forde; Oxford 1954), pp. 29-30. The arrangements were that a brother married his sister, their daughter then married their younger brother, in the Ruanda case; their sons married their younger sisters, in the Luhya myth.



The expansionist nature of the plateau societies was conditioned by the surplus necessary in view of possible crop failures; it was made possible by their developed methods of husbandry, provided enough hands were available to do the work; and it goes a long way to explain their history and social structure. It is, of course, not confined to these societies, which represent a particular case of a very widespread type of society; from the anthropological point of view they have been called "segmentary" by Evans-Pritchard, from the economic point of view "peasant" societies by Firth, as distinct from the essentially, at least by comparison, static primitive societies on the one hand, and modern industrial society on the other. (1)

These two aspects of the societies here considered are linked by the land requirements of their agricultural economies. Until Allen's work this had never been quantitatively assessed; as a result, purely mythical, mystical or religious significance has been attributed to many institutions of African societies which can now be seen to be fundamentally rational, practical and legal in their importance; one of these is the so-called ancestor cult.

The land question has been the most frequent cause of friction between the African farmers and European settlers. The European saw wide open spaces and concluded they were his for the taking; the African farmer insisted on his right as first-comer and never ceased to wonder how the Europeans could be so shortsighted as not to understand that within a few generations all this land would be needed for the original African settler's progeny. The European would ask for his title to the land; the African would point to his ancestor's grave. But the European would fail to understand that, there being no other claimant, the ancestor had settled for the horizon as his boundary. That horizon might contain anything from a few hundred to a few thousand square miles, land enough for a good many generations; the ancestors usually took care to choose a hill for their resting place. So long as their descendents kept alive the memory of its whereabouts, their title to the land within its horizon was secure, at least among those who understood

(1) E.E. Evans-Pritchard, *The Nuer of the Southern Sudan*. In *African Political Systems*. Ed. M. Fortes and E.E. Evans-Pritchard (London 1940). At the time, Evans-Pritchard thought the Nuer system to be exceptional in Africa; it has since been found, in a variety of forms, to be virtually ubiquitous there.

Raymond Firth, *The Elements of Social Organisation* (London 1951).

and respected this simple rule. (2)

Within this large area individual land rights were established by the labour expended on clearing portions of it and preparing them for cultivation. This being the work of men, only men are therefore vested with property rights in land, and these rights are individual, not communal, in origin. They may become communal by inheritance, but this happens very rarely among the societies of the East African plateau.. As a rule a father provides for each of his sons separately during his lifetime; after his death, they separately inherit the fields which had been allocated to their mothers by the father for their use to feed their respective families.

During his lifetime, the father is usually in sole control of the property (he alone may refer to it as "mine"; his sons and wives must call it "ours"; or even "his") and exercises control and authority over his wives and sons, even after the latter have married, so long as they are settled in close proximity to the home farm. His wives and unmarried daughters are the main labour force on a man's land, although he may assist them; the sons' chief task is to herd and look after the livestock. The father alone has the right to allocate land to the members of his family or even to strangers; he disposes of the surplus of their combined labour as he sees fit.

In its bare essentials this is what we may call the "nucleic" situation in the first generation of settlement. It repeats itself with modifications in subsequent generations; these modifications are, however, at the root of the divergent developments which have gone to the making of the different societies. For the problems of the settlers did not end when they had found good soil in a new country, and they solved them in different ways according to different circumstances.

Although we tend to look upon peasant communities as more or less self-contained, and justly so by comparison with modern industrial society, they are very much less so when compared with primitive tribes of food gatherers, who, at least in the early phases of the human story, could not very well be otherwise. One can gain some impression of the way of life of the latter from the aboriginal

(2) This principle is evident in the traditions of all the Bantu speaking people of the plateau, and also among others chiefly depending on tillage. It has given rise to some curious customs and beliefs; e.g., the King of Ruanda must never bend his knees lest he diminish the realm of Ruanda, by reducing his height and thereby his horizon: J.J. Maquet, l.c., p.125. A King of Fipa lost his land, bar a tiny circle, to some newcomers, because they were ladies and he was too vain to expose a deformity under his armpit, so he did not stretch his arm out to full length to indicate the extent of his territory: R.G. Willis: Traditional History and Social Structure in Ufipa; Africa XXXIV, -1964, pp. 340-52. The principle is particularly clearly stated in Lloyd Fallers, Bantu Bureaucracy (Cambridge, no date) pp. 31-35* It is also implicitly admitted by those who do not respect it and only recognise title by right of conquest. G. Wilson, Luo Customary Law (Colony & Protectorate of Kenya, 1961), pp. 18-25.

inhabitants of Australia, the only people who have survived for ten thousand years in almost complete isolation, with a middle stone age equipment, living only by their knowledge of nature and their skill in hunting and collecting what she offered unaided.

The self-containment of an Australian tribe is most graphically illustrated by the fact that they are able to maintain the continuity of social life and propagate their kind by mating within their own family circle. Each individual was by custom compelled to marry a relative of a prescribed degree, and no other, thereby creating a pattern of relationships which was capable of repeating itself in perpetuity and always offered eligible spouses to every member of society.(3)

Apparently, their numbers increased slowly, for when the Europeans arrived it is estimated that there were at most 300,000 of them, or 1 in ten sq. miles, and it is doubtful whether the continent could have supported a significantly larger number on the basis of a purely hunting and collecting economy. Their survival depended on keeping their numbers low and on remaining widely dispersed in small groups over an enormous territory.

By contrast, the African farmer from the first moment of settlement on the plateau thought in terms of increasing the number of hands to bring the new land under cultivation, and of maintaining the contacts with his old home as well as making as many new ones as possible. He needed to maintain the supply of iron implements and he needed wives both for himself and his sons, and husbands for his daughters. Finally, he needed to dispose of the surplus of their labour. Where in a food gathering economy a stranger is resented as an extra mouth to share a meagre natural supply, in a farming economy he is welcome as an additional labourer, provided only he respects the authority of the owner of the land. The character of a society of farmers differs radically from that of a tribe of food gatherers; in place of a closely-knit family circle we have a political society of unrelated families, of owners and dependents, of rulers and ruled.

Property in land has been found to lie at the basis of the social relations in every society of the East African plateau which depends primarily on agriculture. It has also formed the source of the political struggles which make up the history of the plateau and which have given rise to the different societies which inhabited it before the colonisation. Some understanding of the nature of property rights in land is therefore necessary for an understanding of these societies.

This need has only been appreciated relatively recently with the development of anthropological and economic research. At the time when the colonial administrations were set up it was considered adequate to work on general assumptions, and the assumption most generally made was that African land tenure was communal. It provided a convenient pretext for the British colonial administrations to declare all land to be crownlands and hence alienable by the same administration as the representative of the crown.

(3) B. Ruhemann, A Method for Analysing Classificatory Relationship Systems, Southwestern J. Anthr. I, 1945) PP. 531-576.

Among the first to show the inadequacy of this assumption was Kenyatta (4). In his chapter on Land Tenure he explains the complex terminology required to describe the various forms of land tenure among the Gikuyu. The same basic categories of land holding can be traced in the property systems of the other East African societies that have so far been studied.

The most important distinction to be drawn is that between the Gikuyu country as a whole, over which the Gikuyu exercise rights as a people in the same sense in which England is the country of the English irrespective of individual property rights, and the private property in farm land of any particular farmer. The same distinction has recently been made by P.C. Lloyd in his study of West African land tenure (5). Kenyatta points out that the failure to make this distinction led to the idea that land was held in common. In fact this is no more true of the Gikuyu country than of England today.

There did exist a possibility of two families holding a property jointly; but this was rare. It is indeed rare in any of the plateau societies, although the law of inheritance in many cases encourages such property sharing among the surviving sons of the original owner. Theoretically, in these cases, the dead man's land becomes the property of his descendants in perpetuity, that is to say it becomes lineage property.

In practice this means that one of the heirs is put in charge of the property and of the other heirs as well, who have to submit to his authority as long as they wish to reside there and work the land. In the societies where this is the practice it tends to become a fruitful source of quarrels between the brothers, of mutual suspicions and accusations (6). In any case each heir works his own separate portion, usually that which, in a polygynous household, has been the allotment of his own mother during his father's lifetime. Once he marries and founds his own family this will soon become too small and unless there is plenty of unused land nearby he will be forced to seek additional land elsewhere.

Where population increase is as rapid as on the plateau, numbers doubling in every generation, the theoretical lineage holding rapidly ceases to have much practical significance and the tie of kinship to the lineage of the common founder-ancestor becomes correspondingly weakened. The lineage members become dispersed over wider and wider areas. They maintain their links largely by attendance at weddings and funerals, but it is rare to find them maintained through more than five or six generations, and some people do not remember further back than their grandfathers (7)

(4) Kenyatta: Facing Mount Kenya. (London 1938) pp. 20-52.

(5) P.C. Lloyd, Yoruba Land Law (O.U.P. 1962), p. 62.

(6) J. Middleton, The Lugbara of Uganda (New York and London 1965). Edward H. Winter, Bwamba (Cambridge, no date). A. Southall, Lineage Formation among the Luo (intemat. African Inst. Memorandum XXVI, 1952).

(7) A. Southall, Alur Society (Cambridge 1956), pp. 158-159.

The ambitious man who seeks to enlarge his farm and its surplus but who either has no brothers, or anticipates that he will not hold them for long, must therefore try to bind to himself men by other ties than those of kinship. The idea was not new in itself; wives had always to be obtained from unrelated lineages. Marriage was in fact a means of forming alliances with families who before had been potential or actual enemies (8) and at the same time a means of procuring devoted and loyal servants. A wife's loyalty was secured by payment of compensation to her family or lineage, and a man's wealth was therefore measured in the first place by the number of his wives.

Enlarging one's household by enlisting the services of men as well as women may be seen as an extension of the same principle; in fact the first nucleus of such an enlarged estate is often formed by men of a family or lineage with whom a marriage alliance has recently been concluded, brothers-in-law or sons-in-law, for instance, But the bond in this case is a personal one, and no concern of the families, provided only the person accepted into the farm is not of an objectionable character.

The inducement offered is either a plot of land, a loan of cattle, or a promise to assist the "client" in obtaining a wife; in return he is often not expected to do more than render support to his host in a quarrel with neighbours. Such a quarrel may grow into a feud or even regular warfare, when the obligation may turn into something akin to military service. He may also be required to render other services, such as running errands, and of his own volition may make his host presents from his produce. But the host may not be willing to convert such presents into regular payments of rent or tribute; for this would imply a recognition of permanent rights which he may not wish to concede. The relationship is essentially a temporary one, though in time it may assume a more permanent character; in that event, it will have to be renewed at the death of either the host or the client by their respective heirs. (9)

- (8) "We marry the daughters of our enemies" is the reply most frequently received by anthropologists enquiring into the rules which govern the selection of a marriage partner. See e.g. A. Southall, *Alur Society*, p. 65; *Lineage Formation among the Luo*, p.22; E.H. Winter, *Bwamba*, p. 92. In a sense the hostility between lineage members can be said to be institutionalised; it leads not only to their dispersal and the break-up of the lineage into segments, but when a sufficient number of generations has elapsed and kinship between the segments is no longer traceable, the more manifest their hostility the more it becomes possible for individual members to contract marriage alliances within what in the long forgotten past might have been a single lineage,
- (9) The intricate and varied relationships which result from these kinds of arrangement in the different societies of the plateau and the customary law relating to them have been studied in detail in each case by the authorities already quoted.

All these societies exhibit to one or another degree a stratification into "big men", wealthy owners of land, wives and cattle and masters of a following of men in their service, on the one hand, and a much larger number of relatively poor men on the other, many of whom struggle along on their small inherited share of land with barely enough cattle to subsist, let alone afford a wife and children, and from whom the "big men" recruit their following.

This dichotomy is by no means recent. In the majority of the plateau societies it gave rise many generations ago to a further subdivision into rulers and ruled, with the wealthy classes exercising great political influence and power under the over-riding authority of a monarch. Even the iron age sites of the 7th or 8th century A.D. from which the earliest settlers on the plateau may have stemmed exhibit such remarkable differences in the wealth of the grave goods of the few and the poverty of the many that they were originally assigned to a period 1,000 years later until correct radio-carbon datings were made. (10)

It is at least probable that the first settlers on the plateau were themselves the product of societies where this type of property was already well developed. The motives which prompted them to leave their old homes may have included the desire to escape the tyranny of the master-servant relationship which is much in evidence in the later traditions. But since they did not change this basis the end result, was invariably the same; history repeated itself in the new surroundings and the descendants of the rebellious servants became again either masters or servants themselves.

Marx has explained this kind of situation:

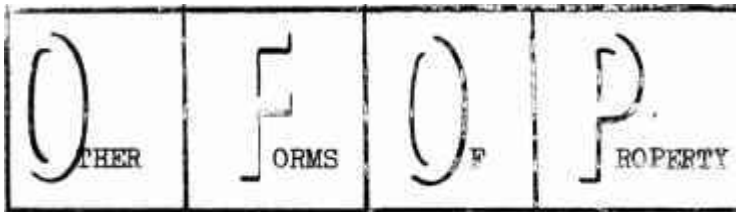
"Where the members of the community have already acquired separate existence as private proprietors from their collective existence as an urban community and owners of the urban territory, conditions already arise which allow the individual to lose his property, i.e. the double relationship which makes him both a citizen with equal status, a member of the community, and a proprietor". (Marx's italics) (11)

Although in this particular sentence Marx refers to urban communities his analysis is not confined to these, and he cites the case of the Germanic peoples, where this development "starts with the countryside as the locus of history" (i.e. p. 76). As far as the societies of the East African plateau are concerned, we can say that the countryside was the theatre of history, though we cannot yet say precisely how it started; for as far as tradition takes us back, or as far as the traditions purport to reflect history, the individual proprietor already appears as the pillar of society.

- (10) E.g. the extensive burial grounds on Lake Kisale (Jaques Nenquier, Notes on some early Pottery Cultures in Northern Katanga, J. Afr. Hist. IV, 1963) pp. 19-32) and the rich Ingombe Ilede site (Brian M. Fagan, The Iron Age Sequence in the Southern Province of Northern Rhodesia, do. pp. 157-177, and Radio-Carbon Dates for Sub-Saharan Africa, J. Afr. Hist. VI, 1965, pp. 107-116).

Marx, Pre-Capitalist Economic Formations (London 1964), PP. 93-94.

By the very act of settling in a new land he proclaims his independence; the society of which one day he will be called the founder is not yet in existence, except in his mind's eye; he is its creator. This is the idealised picture of the founder-ancestor given by the traditions; he did, of course, not act in complete isolation, and at least his wife is sometimes given a secondary recognition for her undeniable share. He, however, appears as the sole legal person, the master of the situation. As such he is the reputed original law-giver and his "spirit" is often believed to pursue wrong-doers, unless this role is now filled by a living ruler, the present representative of a long line of ancestors.



The chief limitation on the property of one farmer is the property rights of another. The members of his family have no such rights, though they may use land allotted to them at the discretion of the husband and father, and they remain in the legal position of minors during his lifetime. Joint property, where it does occur, say the joint property of two brothers after their father's death, is the product of the father's private property due to the operation of the laws of inheritance. More usually the eldest brother assumes the father's role, and his younger brothers remain minors under his care, until they set up their own independent households.

There are no such forms of communal property as we know from our own past, nothing equivalent to the Roman ager publicus or the common lands of England, no periodic redistribution of village land, nor even a traditional recollection of such things. The total land area over which a society consider itself as sovereign and which it will collectively defend against encroachments from outside consists of the individual properties of its members plus the temporary waste which from the start is intended to be converted into the property of succeeding generations, anticipated as becoming more and more numerous. Hunting or fishing rights, where these activities still form a significant sector of the economy, can also be individually held (1).

Communal activities, such as working parties arranged by friends or neighbours for clearing or weeding their fields in turn, for housebuilding or similar purposes which may require more labour than a single household is able to provide, do not convey any property rights. Among the ordinary people they are arranged on a basis of reciprocity. Wealthier farmers, with a sufficient surplus can recompense the helpers with a beer party; this can easily become one of the

(1) Kenyatta, l.c., p 22; M. Bere, Acholi Methods of Hunting (Appendix D in F. Girling, The Acholi of Uganda^ Colonial Research Studies No. 30, 1960)

means by which inequalities arise* (2) The original principle by which ownership is claimed by the man who performed the work of clearing is subtly transformed into a claim on the basis of the work performed by others.

An exception, and the nearest approach to a form of "communal" ownership of land, is the case of the Luo, among whom the strongest claim to land rests on the communal "work" of conquest. (3) The vanquished were allowed to remain as squatters, without ownership title; they could regain a title only by taking part in the next conquest, if it was successful. In this way the Luo have advanced in the past sixty or seventy years from a small strip of Land near the present Uganda border all the way around the Gulf of Kavirondo and far into Tanganyika, taking the lands of the Kissi and Kuria and absorbing parts of their population into their own society. Nevertheless, even among the Luo cultivation is individual, not collective, and there is no periodic redistribution. (4)

Even the cattle of the Luo are herded on the individual farm and not on any commonage. This individualisation of property accounts for the pronounced sense of individuality of the Luo noted by Mboya, and at first sight forms a startling contrast with the equally strong sense of solidarity which he describes also. Up to a point this contradiction can find an explanation in the somewhat unique situation in which the Luo found themselves placed at the beginning of the colonial period, and it is perhaps not without significance that the whole process of their expansion took place during that period. Initially they formed a small enclave in an area densely populated by people speaking not only different languages, but languages of an entirely different family (on any classification). They were, as it is often put, the "spearhead" of the Lwoo "invasion" into the countries of Bantu speaking cultivators from the north. (5)

Their origins are clearly derived from the group of peoples collectively called Lwoo, who in the course of the past three or four centuries have gradually spread up the Nile from the area of its junction with the Bahr el Ghazal and on to the plateau. They include the Shilluk and Anuak in the north, and the Acholi, Alur, Palwo and Padhola on the Plateau as well as the Luo, and many of the royal dynasties of the plateau kingdoms are said to be of Lwoo extraction. On closer study, however, the term "invasion" has been found to be singularly inappropriate to describe the political interactions between the two sets of peoples which form the complex web of history of the plateau societies. (6)

(2) W. Allan, I.e., p. 44.

(3) Wilson, I.e., pp. 18-25.

(4) Tom Mboya, *Freedom and After* (London 1963), pp. 170-173.

(5) Fa, J.P. Grazzolaro, *The Lwoo* (Verona 1951-4).

(6) A. Southall, *Alur Society* (l.c.)

F. Girling, *The Acholi of Uganda* (l.c.)

Military clashes and even wars have undoubtedly formed part of that history, but the determined and systematic advance of the Luo in the twentieth century does not seem to find any close parallel in earlier history. (7) Military engagements were not confined to struggles between different ethnic groups nor was the object necessarily the wresting of land from its present occupants; they ranged from family feuds and cattle raids to dynastic struggles and wars between political entities for supremacy over the inhabitants of a country.

Land was not the only thing that could be owned. Two other categories of property have exercised a profound influence on that history: iron, the material from which both the implements for tillage and weapons of war were made, and cattle, which became the supreme embodiment of wealth during an important historical phase.

In that capacity it far outclassed iron, and the memories of a period when iron was at least equally important as a form of wealth which conveyed distinction and influence on its owner usually refer to a period of such dim antiquity that it offers few clues for dating. A Gikuyu tradition remembers the Ndemi or cutters as the earliest generation who received the knowledge of converting iron ore into implements for clearing the bush and weapons to fight off wild animals from Ngai (god). (8) The word Ntemi for cutting, in particular cutting with iron tools, is a root common to both the Bantu (Niger-Congo) and Nilo-Saharan languages; (9) it appears as the oldest royal title in Nyamwezi (10) and elsewhere. The kings of the Kinga, from whom the Nyakyusa made themselves independent by their cattle wealth, are said to have excelled in the arts of the blacksmith (11). The king of Usambara who was succeeded by Mbego, the founder of the Kilindi dynasty, was Turi the blacksmith. (12)

- (7) Formally, the Luo type of advance bears some resemblance to the kitara cultivation of the Acholi; in both cases a group of men working side by side appropriate a piece of land in which each claims ownership of the straight strip which he has cleared. But the Acholi kitara is on a smaller scale and the land is cleared of bush, not of people. It may be significant, however, that the old Bunyoro kingdom under the early Lwoo dynasty was called Bunyoro-Kitara, which might imply a military extension of the kitara principle. It is, in a way, an ironical comment that the most patently warlike and violent extension of the kitara idea should have taken place under the aegis of the "Pax Britannica".
- (8) Kenyatta, l.c. Ch. IV.
- (9) Greenberg, The Languages of Africa, l.c., see the relevant vocabularies.
- (10) History of East Africa, ed. R. Oliver and G. Matthews (Oxford 1963)
- (11) Godfrey Wilson, The Nyakyusa of South West Tanganyika (in: Seven Tribes of British Central Africa, Oxford 1951), p. 289,
- (12) E.V. Winans, Shambala (London 1962), quoting the Habari za Wakilindi, p. 162s "Whoever comes to this country of Usambara must admit that he is Turi's man. That clan holds this country, because God gave them the gift of working iron and skill in war".

Such is the nature of the scattered evidence, mostly from the eastern and southern parts of the plateau, from which one may gather that in the past, perhaps nine or ten generations ago, the blacksmiths were an influential stratum of society and were often in a position to make themselves into rulers. In the western and northern parts of the plateau the evidence is scantier, largely because there the owners of wealth in cattle assumed positions of power very much earlier. Even the legendary dynasty of the Bachwezi, (13) who are credited with many inventions and miraculous performances and are said to have ruled a considerable empire west of Lake Ukerewe about 24 generations ago, had no part in the invention of iron technology which they already found in existence. This is consistent with the only so far dated iron age find in that area, the Nzongezi site, 1050 A.D. or some 200 or 300 years before the Baohwezi. But of the social position occupied by these early iron workers very little is known, unless one can connect the only remembered pre-Bachwezi dynasty, the Tembuzi of Nyoro, with the Ntemi kings.

At the present time, knowledge of iron working is so widespread that in many societies it can be carried on by almost anybody as a spare time occupation. Black-smithing is, however, still a skilled craft as it involves a knowledge of the entire process from the locating of the ore to the smelting of the raw iron and the making of the implements. The position of the blacksmith varies widely. In Alur Society, the Okebo supply the Alur chiefs with all their iron work as a form of taxation, but they are also agriculturalists. (14) In Sonjo, a group of villages in the middle of the Masai country, where agriculture is practised by means of irrigation, the Waturi smiths are something akin to a caste since they can only marry among themselves and cannot own or work any land; their wives are the potters. (15) Many people engage craftsmen from neighbouring countries as smiths or procure the iron or the ore by trade. (16) In Ankole, smiths were among the personal servants at the king's court and in the houses of the wealthy. (17) In Ruanda, the work of smiths and potters was performed by the lowest and most despised stratum of society, the Twa. (18)

Iron hoes and arrows often form part of the bride price, and in the distant past it may have consisted entirely of iron; among the insignia of kings

(13) Accounts of the Bachwezi differ in different countries. Useful comparative material is given in *East African Chiefs*, ed. Audrey I. Richards (London 1960).

(14) A. Southall, *Alur Society* (i.e.), pp. 172-3.

(15) Robert F. Gray, *The Sonjo of Tanganyika* (Oxford 1963)

(16) John Middleton, *The Lugbara of Uganda* (New York and London 1965), P. 7.

(17) K. Oberg, *The Kingdom of Ankole in Uganda* (in: *African Political Systems*, ed. M. Fortes and E.E. Evans-Pritchard), p. 146.

(18) Jaques J. Maquet, *The Premise of Inequality in Ruanda* (Oxford 1961), p. 10.

there are also often iron spears. These are indications that iron preceded cattle as a means of exchange. There is, however, no clear indication in the traditions that the people of the plateau were ever without cattle. The formerly widely held idea that cattle were introduced by an invasion of a 'superior' race, the Hamites, finds little favour today, and certainly no support in the traditions.

This, of course, is not to say that the earliest settlers on the plateau all came from one direction and were all of the same origin. But there is no special connection between certain peoples or races and either cattle or tillage, and the present distinctions of class or caste, which are so pronounced particularly in the west and north, according to the traditions, developed in the course of the history of political events. According to the Ankole legend, the population of that country consisted of tillers of the soil and herders already before the time of the Chwezi dynasty. This division arose simply from the fact that in the western parts of the country the soil was better suited for agriculture, while the drier eastern zone provided mainly pasture. The two sections lived peacefully together and exchanged their different products. (19)

When the Chwezi dynasty disappeared, it was the peasants, not the herders, who persuaded a Chwezi prince, Ruhinda, to return and rule the country; so far from having any particular connection with cattle, Ruhinda found it hard even to get used to drinking milk. A similar story is told of the first Bito ruler of Bunyoro (20), who also has a legend accounting for the present division of society into Iru peasants, Huma herders and the royal line by the allotment of these different roles to three brothers, sons of the first Tetabuzi king. (21) Even in Rwanda legend, Gatutsi, Gahutu and Gatwe, the ancestors of the three strata of Ruanda society which are so greatly unequal in rank, were originally brothers. (22)

(19) K. Oberg, l.c., p. 122. Oberg writes under the influence of the "hamitic" doctrine, but it is quite clear from his account that this is an arbitrary assumption which has nothing to do with the tradition itself.

(20) East African Chiefs, l.c., p.31.

(21) J.M. Beattie, Bunyoro, an African Kingdom (New York and London 1960), pp. 11-12} p. 15. Beattie compares the rise of the Bito dynasty in Bunyoro to the Norman conquest of England: pp. 39-40. He thereby dissociates himself from the theory of a mass invasion. The traditions he quotes do not even mention a conquest, and the passing of the Chwezi crown to the Bito dynasty could in this respect be likened rather to the "glorious revolution" of 1688, in as much as a king was imported from abroad to replace the previous ruler with whose dynasty he had some, albeit shadowy, connection,

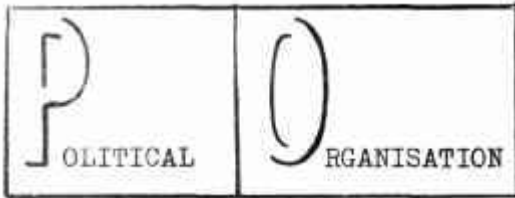
(22) J.J. Maquet, The Kingdom of Ruanda (in: African Worlds, ed. Daryll Forde, Oxford 1954), pp. 173-4.

All that one can infer from these legends is that as a form of storing wealth cattle eclipsed iron before the Chwezi dynasty, in Bunyoro probably during the Tembuluzi dynasty, and that this had a considerable influence on the political history of the peoples of the area. By the side of the class of owners of the soil there appeared a class of cattle owners, numerically smaller, but politically becoming increasingly powerful. A clue to this rise in power of the cattle owners may be found in their attitude to the land, which differs profoundly from that of the cultivators.

Unlike the latter, the pastoralist puts his labour not into the soil but into the care of his cattle and developing new breeds. He usually takes the pastures as he finds them and moves his cattle with the season; his property in land is not, therefore, based on the labour he has spent in bringing it into use but on the requirements of his cattle on which he spends all his labour. Cattle require a great deal more land per head than the cultivator, and a purely pastoralist economy requires more cattle than people; moreover, given proper care cattle multiply more rapidly than people. From the few data available for this purpose, Allan has made some estimates which give at least a qualitative picture of this contrast. (23)

Allan estimates that under the conditions prevailing in the dry climate of the eastern parts of the plateau some 15 acres are required to feed each live-stock unit (for the purpose of this calculation 5 sheep or goats reckon as one head of cattle, one camel as two heads of cattle), a minimum of six or seven livestock units are needed to feed one member of a purely pastoral society; a herd can increase at between 4 and 10 per cent per annum in normal times, that is excepting years of disaster such as were experienced at the end of the 19th century,, On this basis he calculates that if the herds of the Kenya Masai alone were to increase at the lower rate of 4 per cent, within less than a century an area larger than the combined territory of Kenya, Tanganyika and Uganda would be required to feed them.

It is, of course, the prospect of having to face possible disaster years which compels the pastoralist to keep the size of his herds in excess of immediate requirements just as much as it prompts the cultivator to produce a surplus in a normal year. This does not mean that even the most inveterate pastoralists, who despise agricultural labour, set no limits at all to the size of their herds, or that the recurring droughts do not contribute to their limitation (although the herds of the Masai at present apparently are double or treble the minimum). But it illustrates two complementary aspects of the problem: the need for pastoralists and cultivators to exchange their respective surpluses, and the tension that arises from their very different land requirements.



Both economies, that of pastoralists as well as that of cultivators, create properties which endure beyond the lifetime of the original owner. The problem of disposing of the property after the death of the person who created it by his labour was solved by establishing rules of inheritance, among the plateau societies as everywhere else. Inheritance already involves a breach of the principle according to which title to property is based on the owner's own efforts; the same legal fiction that was used by the Romans lies at the basis of the inheritance rules of the plateau societies: "though the physical person had perished, his legal personality survived and descended unimpaired to his Heir or Coheirs, in when his identity, so far as the law was concerned, was continued". (1)

In the majority of the plateau societies it had already before the beginning even of legendary history been settled in favour of males in the agnatic line; only in the south, chiefly in the Nyamwezi country, did the inheritance go to males in the maternal line. The same rule did not necessarily apply, however, to the inheritance of property and to that of the social position, title, or family name of the deceased, and this gives rise to a bewildering variety of arrangements almost every one of which was realised in one society or another.

Rules of inheritance could also differ for different kinds of property, for land and livestock, for small livestock and large cattle. One kind of property might be partible, the other not; brothers as well as sons might be included among the heirs; women, however, were virtually excluded from inheriting anything but small personal belongings.

Since the potential heirs are always members of the deceased's family or other near relatives in one particular line, anthropologists often call these societies 'kinship based'; but it is important to realise that this is relevant only to very limited aspects of their conventions. There is a most fundamental difference between these agrarian plateau societies and primitive tribes, such as the first Australians; the latter have so far as we know never had any means of cultivating food supplies. They can support themselves only in quite small numbers and hence live in closed family circles, where man and wife are always kin to each other by birth.

Marriage on the plateau, as in virtually all agrarian societies anywhere, has quite a different significance; it involves a contractual relation between two lines along which property descends and which can be, and often are, strangers to each other until the marriage takes place. If the whole long history of the two lines were known, some distant kinship might in some cases be traceable; but this is irrelevant to the marriage, and socially they are considered unrelated. In other cases a contract once concluded between two lines may be reaffirmed in the next generation by a marriage between a man and his mother's brother's daughter; but this is not a matter of course, but of policy in which figure such considerations as the price to be paid for the bride, or the political influence which the

(1) Henry Maine, Ancient Law (1861)

two families can wield by thus being connected.

Marriage, moreover, is not the only form of contractual relationship which occurs in these societies, as we have seen in section 5 above. The relationship between landlord and stranger, or that between cattle owner and client, various other forms of remunerated service performed by craftsmen, herders, medical practitioners, priests of various cults, musicians and the like bring into the society persons who are not necessarily kin to each other or to the bulk of the members of the society. In all the plateau societies this kind of process has been going on for generations, with the result that they are ethnically quite inhomogeneous and socially composed of unrelated families and lineages, members of widely dispersed clans who have long ceased to consider themselves related, or are of quite different extraction, some of whom are the distant lineal descendants of the original founder, some have been resident in the country for a few generations, and others are still strangers. (2)

There are, therefore, many points of potential conflict and these cannot be settled within the family since a natural, kinship determined authority is lacking between unrelated persons. Inevitably, other ways and means have had to be found to settle disputes of one kind and another, and one of the major contributions which anthropologists have made to the study of African societies has been to distinguish them by the kind of institutions which they have developed for just that purpose. (3)

They range from the great monarchies situated to the west of Lake Ukerewe (Buganda, Bunyoro, Toro, Ankole, Ruanda, Urundi) with a combined population of over 6 million to "acephalous" societies, so-called because no individual ruler stands at their head, which in the main occupy the northeastern sector of the plateau. They include the Kamba, Luhia, Luo and Gikuyu, with populations ranging from about a million to over a million and a half; a number of other peasant societies with smaller populations, around the half million mark, and a few mainly or exclusively pastoral societies with around 200,000 members, such as the Tarkana, Masai and Karamojo. The combined population of these "acephalous" societies - "peasant republics" as Krapf, deprecatingly, called them - is about ten million.

Concerning the nature of the former no one entertains any doubt but that they represent states; not only because formally speaking a monarchy is, of course, a

- (2) In the process of their integration into the society they may accept the original founder as their "putative" ancestor. The habitual reference of many anthropologists to this ancestor as "real or putative" tends to disguise the profound difference between a simple kin grouping and the complex society which emerges from the former at the end of protracted historical processes.
- (3) This kind of analysis began with E.E.E. Evans-Pritchard's work on the Nuer and was first put in generalised form in "African Political Systems" (1940, ed. M. Fortes and E.E.E. Evans-Pritchard). It has since been greatly amplified and expanded by the work of many anthropologists, among them those whose works are cited and referred to in this Article. A useful analytical summary can be found in L.A. Fallers, "Political Anthropology in Africa".

particular state form, but because they possess well developed forms of administration, tax collection, courts of justice and a hierarchy of governors directly or indirectly appointed by the supreme ruler who is a member of a hereditary dynasty. They therefore possess all the essential attributes of the state form of ordering social relations.

Doubt is sometimes shed on the state character of the acephalous societies, and some anthropologists continue to apply to them the designation "tribe". (4) This word, like the word "chief" (5), answers to such a wide variety of different definitions that it is quite useless as an analytical tool. Not one of these definitions, moreover, covers conditions of the kind prevailing among the "acephalous" plateau societies and it would be merely misleading to use such words in this connection at all.

Krapf's designation of "republic", even though he disliked their democratic ideas, was a good deal nearer the mark; for their political institutions were created in response to the same problem which elsewhere gave rise to monarchical states: the settlement of conflicts arising from differences over the ownership of certain properties, be they land, cattle, or for that matter women. The differences in the form which their state organisation took are likely to have been caused by differences in the nature of the properties and their distribution, in other words in the different class structures of the various societies.

Some of these differences are quite obvious even to the casual observer. In the monarchies of the western section of the plateau there exist rigid hierarchies typical of aristocratic societies; the Tusi class of nobles, in particular, must have been the most idle and arrogant of any in recorded history: waited upon hand and foot by a multitude of personal servants, they even left the administration of their estates largely to their wives or to some favoured Hutu clients. The Hutu commoners, who formed the mainstay of the society, had virtually no rights and depended entirely on the protection of their lords, while the Twa (pigmies) who formed the lowest stratum were despised by both.

In contrast, the societies of the eastern plateau more resemble associations of equals, although also of equals in wealth. For there exist considerable gradations in wealth and position, and corresponding differences in political influence. They are, however, not reinforced by almost caste-like exclusiveness. Here the class distinctions run through each household and only secondarily

(4) Cf., e.g. Middleton, J. and Tait, D. (eds.): "Tribes without Rulers" (London 1958). J.C. Buxton's study of the Mandari, referred to above, has cast doubt on this designation at all events in this particular case.

(5) Cf. East African Chiefs, l.c., pp. 36-37.

between households; between the independent household heads and the dependent, younger members of the household and its servants, and in society at large between the wealthier and poorer individual homesteads, rather than between whole lineages.

This more democratic form of organisation finds expression in the division into age grades for military purposes; each age set takes its turn at serving in this universal militia in their younger years, irrespective of birth, family or lineage, later to earn promotion to rank as councillors in the decision-making bodies. Theoretically, this promotion is open to all; in practice, a great deal depends not only on a man's personal characteristics but also on the wealth and position of his family.

Women have, of course, no place at all in government or administration in either type of society; though this does not necessarily preclude them from enjoying a certain amount of social standing and prestige in some societies (notably at the two political extremes: among the Gikuyu and the Tusi). Fundamentally, they are property, the property of men, though not in the sense of ordinary commodities of daily use but rather of wealth.

For women are the basic labour force and, together with cattle, the basic form in which wealth can be accumulated; they have served to differentiate the rich from the poor. These differences are sometimes even more striking in the democratic than in the aristocratic societies, though in the latter they pervade all the Estates of rank. Estimates have in some instances been made which suggest that a rich man may own as many as 5,000 cattle and a hundred wives or more, where a poor man may have but a few scraggy goats and be hard put to it to raise the cattle to pay for even one wife. (6) But such estimates are difficult to make, for the number of cattle owned by a rich man is a secret guarded as closely as that of the shareholdings of a modern business tycoon. And one can never tell by the number of cattle a man is seen to be herding; for he may be looking after his own as well as the cattle he has on loan as a client.

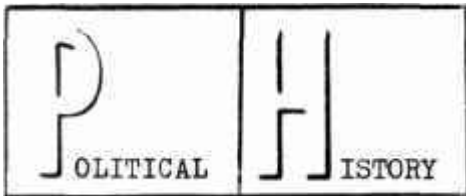
Between the two extremes of the large monarchies and the democratic peasant societies there are a large number of smaller societies which do not quite conform to either pattern, they account for another 6 million of the plateau inhabitants. Here one and the same society may be politically divided into a number of small kingdoms, ranging in population from over 100,000 to less than 5,000, without any overall political authority. Among them are the Acholi and Alur in the north, the Haya and Zinza, distantly related to the Nyoro; the Ha, another domain of the Tusi; the large country of the Nyamwezi with its

(6) A question that has been much debated is whether women are regarded as chattels and whether it is legitimate to speak of a "bride price". R.F. Gray, in "Sonjo bride-price and the question of African wife-purchase" (*American Anthropologist* 62, 1960, pp. 34-57), concluded that "... anthropologists, with a few notable exceptions, have tended to ignore the economic implications of the facts which they set forth, owing to the pervasive influence of the doctrine denying the existence of wife-purchase. As a result of this bias, the close inter-relations between economic and marriage systems have been neglected".

sub-divisions, the southern portion of which is virtually uninhabitable because of tsetse fly, and the large number of peoples who have settled along the escarpments of this southern part of the plateau. Some of these kingdoms may be so small that there is perhaps little to choose between the authority of such a king and that of a "big man", the head of a large family or lineage, in a more democratically constituted society.

The latter, too, may lack any overriding governmental authorities of a permanent nature. Their members may have no redress but to engage in unending feuds. More usually, and of course even feuds have to be terminated some time, they settle their conflicts by ad hoc tribunals. These are constituted for the occasion by influential persons who have gained a reputation for giving good council. (7)

- (7) They have been given the designation "contingent political system" (see Fallers, *Political Anthropology in Africa*, l.e., pp. 5-10).



How are we to account for this extraordinary variety of political forms in a relatively small area with fairly uniform economic conditions? Does it contradict the famous passage in Marx's Preface to his Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy which has given rise to extensive discussions in recent years? (1) E.J. Hobsbawm (2) has described the present state of Marxist discussion in this field as "unsatisfactory": "Marx's original approach to the problem of historical evolution has been in some respects simplified and changed, and such reminders of the profound and complex nature of his methods as the publication of the Formen, have not been used to correct these tendencies. Marx's original list of socio-economic formations has been altered, but no satisfactory substitute has yet been provided", he concludes.

In this situation, what are we to make of the African material? a discussion on very similar questions has taken place also among anthropologists, including many who have produced the original studies on which the general theme of this paper has been based. In particular, the question of the nature of the socio-

- (1) Karl Marx and Frederick Engels: *Selected Works*, Volume I, pp. 362-364. London 1959.
- (2) Karl Marx, *Pre-capitalist Economic Formations*; Introduction by E.J. Hobsbawm, section V, p. 65, and authorities cited in that section. London. 1964.

economic formation of African societies has been raised; should they be reckoned among the feudal societies, or do we need new categories to describe them adequately? The societies of the East African plateau have provided much of the background for the controversy. (3)

A characteristic feature of these discussions, which distinguishes them from the kind of academic disputes which used to take place around similar questions in Marx' and Engels' own time, is that today their approach has gained a marked influence on sociological and anthropological thought, even though few of the participants in the discussion would call themselves Marxists:

"Of course, certain general trends of development in political, legal and economic institutions are rightly accepted by all students of society, and the study of these trends has often gained much from the approach associated with the names of Marx and Engels" (J. Goody, l.c. p.10).

The fact that this is objectively the case, whether or not it is always so handsomely acknowledged, makes the post-war studies of African societies exceptionally valuable for the advancement of the whole question of the relationship between sociological and historical studies. If the present state of the discussions are unsatisfactory even where the Marxist contributions are concerned, we might profitably ponder Engels' comments on Marx' Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy (4):

"The development of the materialist conception even in regard to only a single historical example was a scientific work which would have demanded years of tranquil study, for it is obvious that nothing can be done here with mere phrases, that only a mass of critically sifted, completely mastered historical material can enable one to accomplish such a task".

(3) See, among others:

I.I. Potekhin: Clan Relations in the system of social relations of the present-day African village (Papers presented by the Soviet delegation at the 5th International Congress of Anthropological and Ethnological Sciences; Moscow 1956)

E.M. Chilver: 'Feudalism' in the Interlacustrine kingdoms (in: East African chiefs, I.e. pp. 37S-393)

J. Goody: Feudalism in Africa? Journal of African History 4, 1963; pp. 1- Full bibliography.

J.H.M. Beattie: Bunyoro: An African Feudality? Journal of African History 5, 1964, pp. 23-35.

Marc Bloch: Feudal Society (tr. L.A. Manyon; foreword by M.M. Postan. London. 1965)

(4) Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, Selected Works 1, pp. 367-376. London. 1959.

We are today fortunate in having at our disposal some very painstaking studies of just this kind for enlarging our understanding of the historical processes which have shaped African societies. The study of these materials gains added significance because it may assist in the clarification of the general picture of sociological development through the ages; it will help to fill a gap that was clearly felt by Marx, as is evident from a reading of the Formen. This gap could not be filled in the 19th century because very little was known of Asian, and next to nothing of African societies.

The picture we possess so far should be a warning against overhasty generalisation, something that Marx and Engels themselves have repeatedly warned against. Mechanical correlations between economic structure, social conditions and political organisation would be extremely difficult to establish; the exceptions would prove more numerous than the rules. A point in the famous passage from the Preface to the "Critique" that has perhaps received less attention than it deserves may appropriately be emphasised here:

"With the change of the economic foundation the entire immense superstructure is more or less rapidly transformed".

The expression "more or less rapidly" in the context of the whole, highly condensed, statement can signify a history of centuries, even millennia, or it can signify a single lifetime. The History of the Kilindi (Habari za Wakilindi) (5) tells of the establishment of the Kilindi dynasty in the Usambara mountains by a remarkable man, Mbega by name, a fugitive from justice in his own country, but whom "God had given grace of person and of speech".

Here evidently the right man happened along at the right place and the right moment. Shambala consisted of one of the most heterogeneous collections of immigrant communities, attracted by the climate and agricultural conditions from all points of the compass. The power of Turi, the blacksmith king, was waning, and the danger of the society disintegrating in internecine strife imminent. The astute Mbega turned this situation skilfully to the advantage of himself and his descendants.

The failure of a greatgrandson of Gikuyu to establish himself as a king in that country underlines the importance of the right combination of circumstances for the success of such ambitions. (6) For in this instance the Gikuyu were still sparsely inhabiting the fertile highlands which promised an ample life for generations to come to an industrious, independent peasantry in no need of a king.

In the extreme northwest of the plateau, the Alur provide an example of a protracted process of penetration by a wealthy, cattle owning aristocracy, possessed of considerable political skill, of a fairly newly colonised peasant country. (7) Their ability in settling disputes at first made them welcome to a feud-ridden society. Besides, they paid handsomely in cattle for wives.

(5) E.V. Winans: Shambala - the constitution of a traditional state London 1962
Appendix.

(6) Kenyatta, l.c., pp. 186-187.

(7) Southall, A., The Alur, l.c. In a remarkably revealing passage, Southall quotes his Lendu informants as saying: "The Alur came slowly, slowly like you British. They came friendly, and to friends you exchange food, and so they became chiefs"..., (pp. 201-202).

But this "bad habit" had unforeseen consequences of a kind which has been significant also in other plateau societies: the Lendu were not allowed to marry Alur wives, but the wealthy Alur could buy many Lendu wives. As a result, the Lendu were short of women, which led only to an intensification of their feuds; while the Alur multiplied rapidly, so that their rule became more and more oppressive. Many Lendu and other subject people of the Alur took to the forests to escape the oppression; but life was hard there, and the Alur kings in time expanded their possessions and so kept pressing on their heels. Hence a fluctuating situation arose which lasted until the Europeans came.

The history of the largest kingdom on the plateau, Rwanda, has been studied by Vansina. (6) He has established that Rwanda in the past consisted of a large number of small kingdoms, one of which gradually reduced its neighbours to subjection. The modern kingdom of Rwanda was the outcome of a prolonged history of external and internal wars, involving several changes of dynasty, which began early in the 16th century. It was still expanding, against the smaller kingdoms in the west, against Burundi and against the Chiga peasants in the high mountains of the north, when the European colonisation froze the position.

Like the Alur, the Tusi nobles had the problem of keeping their own numbers down in relation to the lower orders. They seem to have done this by restricting themselves to one or two wives, while the wealthier Hutu might have four. Nevertheless, by 1956 they numbered nearly 17 per cent of the total population of Rwanda. (9) The Sanda met the problem by stringent birth control exercised by the women, and if necessary abortion. (10) The people of one of the larger Soga states appear, according to their histories, by the time of their twelfth ruler Lamogi XII to have found themselves in the predicament of all being Lamogi; whereupon they changed the title of their rulers, (11)

(8) J. Vansina, *L'evolution du royaume Rwanda des origines a 1900*, Brussels 1962.

(9) Maquet, J.J., *The premise of inequality in Ruanda*, l.c., p.10. This disproportion seems to have given Maquet cause to ponder over the strains it must have caused in the society; as subsequent events have shown, not without reason.

H.H. Prince Akiki K. Nyabongo (London 1936): *Africa answers back; Part II, Ch. VIII*. This delightful book contains other evidence of the advanced art of surgery in Buganda. (in Bunyoro, R.W. Felkin, an Edinburgh medical student, was in 1879 present at a competently performed caesarian section in which the lives of both mother and child were saved; see D. Allbrook, *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 92, 1962, pp. 102-104).

(11) Fallers, L.A: *Bantu Bureaucracy; Cambridge 1956; p. 129.*

The question was a serious one in the case of the royal families, since every ruler lived in fear of his brothers, and at every royal death a war of succession was liable to break out. Princely rebellions and popular revolts often led to secessions, and together with external wars gave the plateau peoples a history as chequered as that of any part of Europe in the middle ages. The apparently bewildering confusion of many different political forms can perhaps best be understood as the consequence of the European interregnum bringing to a temporary standstill an energetic movement of historical change in the course of which old empires like that of the Chwezi crumbled, small kingdoms expanded into large ones by successful military operations, or diffused their influence over fluctuating areas by investing princes of the royal house with governmental powers or acquiring vassals to whom they afforded protection.

It is as if we entered a filmshow where something has gone wrong, and instead of a moving picture we see the frozen attitudes of a complex still. The study of the still can teach us a great deal; but we would learn more if we could start the film again and see it from the beginning.

This moving picture we see as yet only in fits and starts; but the study of the still at least assists us in seeing the class forces at work which animate it and provide a connecting clue. We observe the inequalities of wealth which give rise to the master-servant relationship; in certain places and at certain times we see it hardening from a contractual into a hereditary institution, or weakening again in accordance with the balance of economic and political strength between the owners of land and the owners of cattle, or depending on the combination of both types of ownership in the hands of either a class of rich peasants or a hereditary aristocracy.

For the southern part of the plateau we get some tantalising glimpses of the early development of trade which may go back to the 15th century and must have had certain effects on the political history of its peoples. But this is a subject, fascinating though it may seem, which has not yet found sufficient attention from historians as far as this particular area is concerned. (12)

The economic nucleus of these developments was the large, almost self-sufficient farmstead, ruled, as often as not with a hand of iron, by its patriarchal head. If he was an astute manager, and if in addition fortune smiled on him, he might become the possessor of many wives, still more children, and of

(12) Dapper, O., in the section on NIMEYAMAYE (Naukeurige Beschrijvinge der Afrikaenische Gewerten van Egypten, Barbaryen, Lybien, Biled-ul-gerid, Negros-lant, etc; Amsterdam 1697; French translation 1780), tells of Portuguese reports of this country (Nyamwezi?) situated between two great lakes and extending southeastwards over great distances. The title of the ruler seems to have been Monoemugi (modern Bantu spelling Mwenemugi - Lord of the Land); its spectacularly wealthy ruling class was in touch both with the Monomotapa (Lord of the Mountain) and with the coastal cities of Mombaze, Kiloa, Melindep Sofale, etc. They traded gold, silver, copper and ivory for silks and cottons from Gambaye, and took bead money as payment.

goats and sheep and cattle. On a large patrimony there would be occasion for the engagement of the services of strangers, for a fee in land, cattle or produce, and so the scene would be set for the far reaching historical movements of the ten or twelve centuries which gradually drew wider and wider circles into their orbit while time and again throwing up new growth points on their circumference (13).

There seems to be little doubt that the main centre of origin of this historical movement is the extreme west of the plateau where there exist the most highly developed monarchical states with the longest recorded histories and where the economic nucleus shows the closest resemblance to the medieval manor of Europe (14).

Parallels with the economic organisation and political history of Europe in the middle ages, up to the emergence of the national kingdoms of England and France after the hundred years' war and much later in Spain, Italy and Germany, are indeed so numerous and striking that the reluctance to include the societies of the East African plateau within the general category of "feudal society" (which Potekhin argued, perhaps too briefly and therefore not altogether convincingly; l.c.) is not easy to understand. Some of the arguments put forward against the proposition seem spurious and even contradict each other; where some would concede that there might be justification in calling these societies "pre-feudal" or "proto-feudal". others argue that kings can only be called feudal if they are "primus inter pares" and not absolute hereditary monarchs like those which followed the feudal period in Europe; by which token the plateau monarchies would have to rank as post-feudal.

The work most frequently quoted in sustaining objections to the feudal nature of African societies is Bloch's Feudal Society (l.c.). Beattie, e.g. in his examination of the institutions of Bunyoro (l.c.), finds that in almost all respects these conform to various specifications of Bloch's definition, except in respect of his "reference to the survival in some form of the idea of the state" (Beattie, l.c. p. 26). "In Bunyoro, as in some other African kingdoms", he writes (p. 27), "the policy sometimes called 'feudal' was really a means of achieving and sustaining a system of centralised administration; in no sense was it a symptom of the breakdown of such a system".

It would not be difficult to show that Beattie here does less than justice to Bloch, to his own references to the Chwezi kingdom as the larger predecessor of Bunyoro, and to the fact that the outcome in Europe also was the emergence of

(13) Cf. The Family Estate in East Africa. Studies in the role of property in family structure and lineage continuity. Eds. R.F. Gray and P.H. Gulliver (Boston 1964), in particular the introduction by Gray (pp. 15-16).

(14) Life on the Manor in Gisaka (Rwanda) by Pierre Bettez Gravel. Journal of African History 6, 1965, pp. 323-331.

centralised administrations under monarchies exercising sovereignty over, in the main, national territories.

Even the much more closely argued and more open-minded papers of Chilver (l.c.) and Goody (l.c.) appear to fasten their argument a little too much on a narrow interpretation of a narrowly selected passage from Bloch, a tendency against which M.M. Postan explicitly warns in his foreword to the 1965 edition of Bloch's *Feudal Society*. All the same, Bloch did encourage the restriction of the epithet "feudal" to two brief periods in a relatively small area of western Europe exclusively, where and when contracted services, especially military, were remunerated by a fee, and this kind of service was not found degrading in the same way as hereditary serfdom. Elsewhere, he would only admit Japan as a possible parallel. He rests his case largely on the etymology of the words "feudalism", "feodum", and "fee"; ironically, if we took him at his word we would have to declare the cattle clientship of the Vikings and of the East African plateau as the only feudal institutions worthy of the name (Volume I, p. 165).

Fortunately, Bloch himself did not too rigidly insist on this etymological interpretation, and at least allowed the historian the latitude of applying it to an entire epoch and to the totality of the institutions against which the French revolution was directed. His whole vivid, fascinating work seems to be an almost passionate outcry against rigidity and narrowness of interpretation. For us it has the great merit of focussing attention on the fact that there existed in the feudal epoch voluntary contractual relationships in which services rendered might, according to circumstances, be remunerated by a fee, consisting either of a capital loan or cattle or, when trade was brisk and money plentiful which was not often, of a money payment. And these existed side by side with, and often in the course of history alternated with hereditary fixation of the master-servant relationship.

As both Engels and Marx have briefly noted, periods of freedom and unfreedom alternated in the European middle ages, and the degrees of servitude and serfdom were innumerable, so that no hard and fast line can be drawn between the feudal institutions of medieval Europe and of other countries and epochs. (15)

There is, however, one consideration which hardly appears in all these arguments, but which may well be at the back of the reluctance to accord African societies the status symbol "feudal". That is the great difference in the technical equipment used by Africans as against European societies, in particular the absence of any form of machinery embodying the principle of rotary motion, even

(15) Letters from Engels to Marx, December 16, 1882; December 19, 1882. Selected Correspondence, p. 408-409; 411-412. The date of this correspondence is significant; it shows how ready Marx and Engels always were to absorb new information. Marx died the very next year, and we can hardly blame Engels for not having had the opportunity to go through their earlier works with a fine toothcomb to trace every instance where such later recognitions demanded the modification of their arguments. Marxists of our own time will, naturally, feel themselves under an obligation to take account of such instances.

the pottery wheel and the horse-or ox-drawn cart, the wind-or watermill, and of writing. Although the paintings in the tomb of Hui (18th Egyptian dynasty) show the tribute of the Negro people of Kush being brought in by ox-cart and wheel-barrow, and the still undeciphered Meroitic scripts prove that 3,000 years ago and more Negro Africans were, if anything, in advance of their European contemporaries in inventiveness of this kind, it is an undeniable fact that their descendants have found little or no use for this sort of aid. In modern times they have, however, taken to the motor car with great alacrity.

Have we turned in a circle to return to the question posed at the beginning of this section in but slightly modified form? How are we to account for the variety of forms of political organisation, which resemble nothing so much as the social and political institutions of feudal Europe, without the corresponding technological equipment?

Or shall we take the more positive view that the remarkable new material to which we have gained access in recent years through the work of Africanists enables us to raise old questions anew and, in the same spirit which informed the enquiries of Marx and Engels themselves, try to answer them on this new and much more extensive basis of factual material?

We are still far from the complete mastery of this historical material demanded by Engels in the passage cited above. At best we can see the broad outlines of the formulation in which the question may present itself. What are the decisive features by which we may distinguish the great successive epochs which have occurred in the history of most, if not all, peoples? Is it meaningful to look beyond the three major modes of life: the mere acquisition of natural products, with here and there subsidiary forms of agriculture; the deliberate raising of crops and animals for food, with subsidiary forms of crafts and industries; and the industrial cum agricultural mode in which industry plays the dominant role, with a view to discovering a universal linear dependence of political institutions on economic and social factors?

In the course of trying to find answers to such questions it may be found necessary to answer quite a few of the subordinate questions which Marx raised; even if he did not attempt to answer them all, in his "Introduction to the Critique of Political Economy": questions such as the role of trade and money in differently constituted agrarian societies (he instances the apparently contradictory features of, e.g. society in ancient Peru) and the study of the whole range of individual societies, including the physical and geographical conditions of their existence, their relations and interactions with other societies, the development of communications, the role of accidents in history; in short, the entire complex of factors which have contributed to the merging of the histories of individual societies into world history in the course of time (16).

(16) Zur Kritik der Politischen Ökonomie, Moscow-Leningrad 1934, pp. 215-248.

Today Marx's work could be most profitably continued in co-operation and discussion between a whole range of scholars, Marxists and non-Marxists, Europeans and non-Europeans, economists, sociologists, anthropologists, linguists, and last but not least historians. This work will best be furthered if too much is not taken for granted, and if we do not proceed by ticking off items 1, 2, 3, etc. of some rigid and inevitably arbitrary definition, but rather by seeking to establish what it is that various independently developed societies have in common; by tracing the histories of certain, significantly delimited, regions instead of comparing incongruous parts of arbitrarily selected bits of the world or periods of history; and by bearing in mind that where more than one variable is involved, such as different forms of property and different endowments of the environment, it is unreasonable to expect that we shall be able to present our results in the form of a linear progression.

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