An Assessment Of The Demographic Impact Of Colonial Kenya. Essay, Research Paper

In order to study demography, an understanding of related variables is essential; population size and distribution, gender, birth and death records, fertility, mortality (infant and adult), natural increase, life expectancy and data on migratory movements. All of these are terms associated with ‘demography’ and factors that would preferably need to be studied when considering the demographic change in Colonial Kenya. However, in assuming that the colonial period began with the Berlin Conference of 1886 dividing Africa up between the Colonial Powers of Europe (the Scramble for Africa), and eventually came to an end at Independence in 1963 (for Kenya), the population data for most of this period are estimations or inadequate enumerations and therefore unreliable for an accurate study. (The first official census in Kenya wasn’t until 1948). The figures obtained are perhaps more use as a guideline to trends and patterns rather than as specific quantities. In light of the aim – to determine the demographic change in Colonial Kenya, on instinct, one view would be that when the Europeans arrived in Kenya, the European population increased and the African population decreased, due to the resulting famine and disease etc. On closer inspection of methods of enumeration, results and specific examples, it is evident that the whole phenomenon is much more complex and that the arrival of the ‘white man’ to this vast continent sparked off a new phase of history, that was to have immense effects on the native population. Before studying the enumeration of the Native population and the results themselves, it is first necessary to understand the vast numbers of Non-Natives we are dealing with, enabling us to judge the impact on the African population. Prior to the arrival of the Europeans to Kenya, Indians had been using East Africa as a trading ground and slaving route for centuries. Also, Arabs had established its trade in this region, with the Sultan of Oman relocating his Empire in Zanzibar in 1832. However, it has been noted that in 1848, ” White men had never been heard of in Kikuyu ” (Southall, 1961, p163) At that time, explorers, such as the R.G.S in search of the Nile; missionaries; traders, such as the Imperial British East Africa penetrating into inland Kenya in 1889; and officials determining the straight-line boundaries through-out the land. It would not have been considered an issue to the Africans that within decades their land would be invaded by the ‘white man’. In 1897, Sir Arthur Harding estimated that there were 391 Europeans and Euroasians in Kenya (Kuczynski, 1949, p144). At this time, the method of enumeration was personal observation and guesswork. By 1901, this figure had increased to 506, and 596 in 1903. Up till this time the numbers had remained relatively low, but in 1903, there began a planned ‘white’ colonisation scheme. Commissioner Eliot, in 1904, said regarding Kenya, ” The interior of the Protectorate is a white man’s country.” (Eliot, The East African Protectorate, p103. cited by Kuczynski, 1949, p146) According to various sources – Census Reports, British Colonies Statistical Tables, East Africa Protectorate Colonial Reports, the general consensus was that, apart from minor setbacks in 1906 and during World War One, when the European population remained stationary or slightly declined, the population increased at an unprecedented rate. From 886 in 1904 to 1 738 in 1908, and 2 137 in 1909, when the Kenyan Plateau was opened up for development, (mainly by the Dutch from South Africa). After World War One in 1919, the total was put at 5 914 and increased to 9 651 in 1921 – three times the amount of ten years previously. The population increased over the next ten years until the census of 1931 put the total at 16 812. (All figures are cited from Kuczynski, 1949, pp146-149) Evidently, the population had increased by 75% in these last ten years. However, not too much weight should be put on the exact figures as their validity has been contended. All the statistics vary considerably according to sources, this is a problem when there is more than one source, as there was before the official census was introduced. Secondly, although the figures seem to increase staggeringly quickly in this thirty year period, it has been claimed that these are underestimates. It must be remembered that, on European penetration of Kenya, the numbers of Asiatics already in the Protectorate were immense. From 1911 to 1931, the total number of Asiatics in Kenya were recorded at 20 986 and 57 135 respectively. It is evident that although these figures are much larger in quantity than the European figures, the general rate of increase is smaller. The counts show that between 1921 and 1931, the number of Asiatics increased threefold, compared to five times larger the number of Europeans. After 1931, the European population continued to increase into the 1940’s from 16 957 in 1931, to 28 997 in 1942, compared to the number of Indians that decreased by 4 000 in two years, due to migration, and then increased from 33 735 in 1933 to 74 085 in 1944. The number of Arabs and Goans too increased during this period. Overall, an increase was seen in the Non-Native population in Kenya from 70 709 in 1931 to 136 534 in 1944. (Kuczynski, 1949, p159) The population counts made in the past, of Natives and Non-Natives, are not all similar in method and accuracy and don’t meet the standard of the modern demographer, so caution must be taken in their examination. The Native counts and censuses, however, will prove to be a farce at times due to their inaccuracies. More specifically, again, birth and death rates of the natives are few and unreliable, and so, few accurate assumptions can be made about the natural increase and life expectancy. Migratory movements of non-natives have been recorded but of the natives, tribal movements are frequent and less traceable. Prior to 1931, only censuses were carried out on the non-native population, with only a few after this date. The first decision to take a native census had been in 1921, but was rejected due to financial impracticability. In 1897, Sir Arthur Harding estimated the population of Kenya Protectorate at 2 500 000, whereas Portal put it at no more than 450 000, (Martin, 1961a, p17). Population counts were being estimated by Administration Officers already, based on the ‘Hut Tax’ (introduced in 1901, a tax imposed on all huts used as dwellings). These estimations lacked accuracy, assumptions being made all the time, for example, that there were three persons per hut,no estimations of sexes, adults or children were made and dishonesty of hut counters was common. Accuracy of these estimates varied from district to district and counter to counter, and on the whole, estimations were more accurate from 1919, as they were done along more modern lines. So, despite a fairly accurate count of adult males made annually due to taxation purposes, the number of children was determined on assumptions making the approximation of the native population merely a rough estimate, (assumptions were made that women constituted 51 % of the adult population and that children made up 37 % of the total population.(Martin, 1961a, p18)). Miscalculations were also a problem, for example, in the Masai District in 1935, 1936 and 1937, the number of natives counted were 37 708, 52 333 and 39 507, respectively. (Colonial Reports Kenya, 1937, p10, cited by Kuczynski, 1949, p138). The excessive figure in 1936 is clearly a miscalculation, causing the demographer to wonder how many more miscalculations go undetected. Another method of recording the native population was via the ‘Kipandi Records’. ‘Kipandi’ was a registration certificate, given to all native male labourers over sixteen years, when they registered and were finger-printed. The system began in 1920, when 194 750 native males registered and by 1937, over one million had registered. (Kuczynski, 1949, p139). Although there was the incentive to register as it was essential in getting work, not all natives did register, some registered twice, some natives of neighbouring Uganda and Tanganyika registered, and also records were inaccurate as some deaths went unreported and so remained on records. For the ten years prior to 1931, Councils had continually raised the issue of a general census among the entire population. After being rejected numerous times, it was eventually passed but the census of 1931 covered only 2 – 3 % of the native population. In 1932, Sample Counts were carried out in the Shimba Hills of the Digo District, where Sanitary Teachers were already stationed, to determine the sex and age composition of just a sample of the native population. However, overall in this period , counts of the native population were estimates and therefore inaccurate. In C. J. Martin’s opinion. ” These so-called censuses were nothing but rather elaborate forms of counts, usually based on existing information.” (Martin, 1949, p305) Until the introduction of the official census in Kenya in 1948, methods of enumeration had been based on personal observation, estimation, assumption and as a result, inaccuracy, miscalculation and inadequacy to use the data strictly numerically, qualitatively not quantitatively. So as not to deem the information collected as useless, and as long as it is acknowledged when quoting statistics that the inaccuracies are understood, then the figures can give demographers an insight into general patterns of population growth and decline during the period. Knowledge of the economic, political and mainly social events during the Colonial Period would be beneficial alongside data on population, as they are all interlinked and these connections would make it advantageous in determining the causes and consequences of population changes. There proved to be immense problems with carrying out an official census to count the entire population of Kenya, these were problems of time, expense, the question of which season of the year, the difficulty in obtaining enough literate staff, the number of questions needed, and the general response of the Africans themselves,bearing in mind the communication barrier and persuading them that the census was not for taxation purposes. Once the main census was carried out, it was planned that 10 % of the population would be questioned in the Sample Census, to obtain more specific information. The analysis of the Census was carried out centrally and deemed a success, considering the absence of a frame on which to base it. (The next major general Census was carried out in 1961.) After Harding’s estimate in 1897, of approximately 2.5 million, two Ugandan provinces became part of the Kenya Protectorate. After this boundary change, population was estimated as up to 4 million in 1909. The Chief Native Commissioner, the Annual Colonial Reports and the Colonial Office List, from 1911, published annually a count of the native population. Appearing similar in number, a closer inspection would reveal irregularities on tens and sometimes hundreds of thousands. For example, in 1911, the native population count according to the 1911 Census and the Blue Book for 1911-12, was 3,000,000 and 2,648,500, respectively, a difference of 350,000 people (after an estimation of 4 million in 1909 ?!). Also, in 1920, the Chief Native Commissioner, the Annual Colonial Reports and the Colonial Office List, arrive at figures of 2,464,071; 2,330,112 and 2,483,500 respectively. Seemingly similar, there is in fact large differences. On the other hand, for 1919, the Chief Native Commissioner and Annual Colonial Reports estimate populations of 2,684,845 and 2,684,847, respectively, a difference of 2 people. Compared to the estimated total population for Kenya Colony (the Protectorate became a Colony in 1920) in 1947 of 4,055,000 the Census total was 5,373,000 only a year later. (Martin, 1961a, p20) With an absolute difference of 1,318,000, even though the population was growing at this time, this seems a too huge growth. Perhaps a more realistic explanation is that previous figures were underestimates (not ignoring the fact that the 1948 census figure could be slightly incorrect). The basis of all the earlier counts is estimation and this is too unreliable a method to allow for any legitimate specifically numerical comments to be concluded on the extent to which populations have risen and declined. Despite the officiality of the Census from 1948 onwards it shouldn’t be considered as totally legitimate, for exact numbers, until very much later. Taking the emphasis off the methods and exact figures for population, a closer look is needed of the events during the Colonial Period, so as to enable a clearer judgement of the impact that colonialism had on the African population. For the earlier census results in Kenya, not much can be revealed about fertility and mortality rates. (Some references were made of these factors but they are not very reliable as they differ from source to source.) However, we do have knowledge of events that occurred and can therefore legitimately assume demographic outcomes, such as famines and catastrophes, and other factors linked with the European arrival. The first apparent major demographic change, after the European arrival, occurred in the late nineteenth century. Harding,s records tell of the rains failing for two summers in 1897 and 1898. Kuczynski (1949) refers to famine, a great bout of pleuro-pneumonia among cattle, followed by an epidemic of rinderpest and at near the end of the famine, small-pox ravaged the area. Miller & Yeager (1994) refer to a drought and epidemic of rinderpest ravaging South and Central Kenya, wiping out food crops in 95 % of the region, destroying cattle and decimating Kikuyu and Masai in unmeasurable quantities. Survivors of these tribes apparently fled to their heartland, which is when Europeans stumbled upon empty lands, and settled there. The exact mortality rates for this catastrophe are unknown, people have different opinions. Various doctors, missionaries and the Chairman of Land Commission have their own views to the extent to which the various tribes were affected by the natural disasters and Western diseases combined. Some estimated that 70 % of the Kikuyu around Kiambu died, some said that 15 % of the entire Kikuyu had been wiped out, others said between 50% and 75 % (Kuczynski, 1949, pp165-170). However, “The actual number of deaths which occur is far less important than the damage done to the people who live, rendering them liable to other diseases, either at the time or in the future.” (Kuczynski, 1949, p198) The causes of this widespread massacre have been labelled mostly as due to the Europeans, in building the Uganda Railway (1896), cattle allegedly infected with rinderpest were imported; safaris marching straight through Kikuyuland may have passed on diseases, such as the spread of a plague of the jigger insect from soldiers, and the demanding of Kikuyu crops will have enhanced the effect of the famine. It has been accepted that the mortality rates rose as the situation got progressively worse as, yet another rain failed, drought intensified, rinderpest wiped out herds of cows, swarms of locusts, starvation, dysentery. Then the spread of smallpox throughout the South and East of Kikuyuland and then spreading to the North. Smallpox is noted to affect certain age groups within a population, with the young and newly circumcised adults suffering the most (Dawson, 1982, p129). In addition, it can be commented that through the entire famine, the most affected age groups of the population will be the elderly, the young, pregnant women, and this would have an effect on fertility patterns as less children would be conceived in this disastrous time. The effect on the structure of the population would also mean a change in fertility pattern as when the famine was eventually over there will have been a decline in a certain age group and so less children born to that age group in the future. Also, the widespread belief that their population had suffered such great losses would mean that, after recovery, every attempt would be made to recover the population losses. In addition to the famine affecting the native population, migration was also a contributory factor in causing an alteration in the population structure. A degree of compulsion was enforced on the natives population so as to ensure an adequate supply of labour. The government imposed obligatory work on road building and other public projects, splitting families up and affecting future fertility rates. Many Kikuyu families moved permanently to squat on European farms, splitting up tribes and affecting their tribal values and bonds. At the turn of the century and for the first fifteen or so years, minor famines continued and sporadic cases of smallpox, dysentery and other diseases were reported, (Dawson, 1982, p129).However, as if the Kikuyu and the other natives had not suffered enough, with the outbreak of World War One, all the able-bodied men went off to join the forces or went as porters. During WW1, Britain employed Kenya Africans mainly as porters, and of the 250,000 men that enlisted in the African Carrier Corps, almost 50,000 died due to exhaustion and disease (Miller & Yeager, 1994, p 17). Back home, together with another rain failure in 1917 and the shortage of agricultural labourers, starvation was rife. After the War, as the war-torn soldiers returned, many more diseases were brought back into the tribes, malaria, dysentery, Spanish influenza, cerebre-spinal meningitis etc. Famine ravaged the countryside again and hit mortality rates hard. Estimates of mortality at between 10-17 % of the population due to the Spanish influenza and famine. Again there was a specific age group affected, this time apparently it was those aged between 20 and 29 years that were affected the most. Although not many records are available, the spread of plague was a major killer between 1919 and 1920, and this time swept into new areas of Kikuyuland (Dawson, 1982, p133). During the inter-war years, according to some sources, the mortality in Kikuyuland seems to have remained stationary or in some areas declined (Martin, 1961b), whereas to others, mortality increased in the Reserves, with outbreaks of sleeping sickness and then from the mid 1920’s, epidemics and famine were less severe (Kuczynski, 1949). Martin (1961b) implies that it wasn’t the increase in medical facilities, at this time that led to a decrease in mortality, but due to the growth in famine control and widespread elimination of some epidemics and diseases. During World War Two, a growth in research and drugs on malaria meant a drop in the number of cases and despite minor cases of tuberculosis, malnutrition and food shortage the population total continued to rise. In the post-war period there was an overall growth in the economy, which meant higher incomes and a higher standard of living for most of the African population which enhanced their knowledge about hygiene and thus lowered the death rate. Together with the factors mentioned above, more medical facilities, less epidemics and more successful births, the population steadily increased and since WW2 there has been a population increase of over 2 % per annum. From the Census in 1948,with the population total for Kenya being almost 5.4 million to 1960 when it was 8.1 million (Duignan & Gann, 1975, p472). To conclude, the population of Kenya underwent some serious changes during the Colonial Period. On the arrival of the Europeans in the nineteenth century, there was no method of collecting population data of the tribal people they came across, and only a means of recording numbers of non-natives themselves. This figure has increased multipally throughout the period in question and has had severe effects on the African population, so not only contributing majorly to the total population, the Europeans also caused fluctuations in the number of natives. During the course of the Colonial Period, major disasters occurred, such as famines, droughts and epidemics of different diseases – smallpox, malaria, sleeping sickness, cerebro-spinal meningitis, dysentery, influenza etc. It is a widely held view that these catastrophes were induced by the European arrival. The native population suffered due to these events, affecting the structure of the population as well as the total. The affect that migration had on the native population also caused fluctuations in its total. The impact of colonialism was perhaps greatest upon the Kikuyu, their economy was undermined, large numbers became landless and the effect that this period had on its population was unprecedented (Arnold, 1981). Overall, it can also be seen that of the population data that is available, not all is believable, and should not be used singularly to determine the course of population throughout this period. However, with a record of stories and events from this time, together with the available data, the path of the Kenyan population can be traced through the Colonial Period. Fetter (1987, p102) commented, ” Demographic evidence is not sufficient to explain colonial history, but it can give us a great deal to think about.” BIBLIOGRAPHY -Anderson,D. (1984) – “Depression, Dust Bowl, Demography and Drought : The Colonial State and Soil Conservation in East Africa during the 1930’s”, African Affairs 83 (332) pp321-44 -Arnold,G. (1981) – Modern Kenya, Longman Group Ltd, London -Baker,S.J.K. (1963) – “Population Geography of East Africa”, East African Geographical Review 1 pp1-6 -Dawson,M.H. 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