

A land of contrasts

Kenya is a land of strong contrasts: a land where mountain summits on the Equator are capped with perennial snow, a land of wide expanses of grasslands and plains, teeming modern cities, palm-fringed beaches, and game parks from which people — except for tourists — have been banished.

There are contrasts too between Kenya's farmers and pastoralists, and their very different ways of life; between modern and traditional values; between the status of landed and landless people; between the values and prospects of young and old; between the lives and aspirations of women and men.

Then there are contrasts between Kenya's rich ruling and commercial elite and the ever-growing numbers of poor and powerless

people; between the country's former image as a shining model of economic and political progress, and a far more harsh reality now; between the hopes of those who fought for land and freedom from British rule and the fortunes of those who have lived in Kenya in the years since Independence in 1963.

This book will look at some of those contrasts, and at some aspects of the history of Kenya which continue to shape its present. Above all, it will focus on the lives of modern Kenyans, their hopes and fears, their struggles to improve the quality of their lives, and the many conflicts which lie at the root of the nation, hidden from the sight of the hundreds of thousands of foreign tourists who are attracted by an image of Africa which belies the reality.



left Storm clouds promise an end to the dry season, Baragoi, Samburu District

The Great Rift



above, top Looking east across the Rift Valley from Maralal, Samburu District

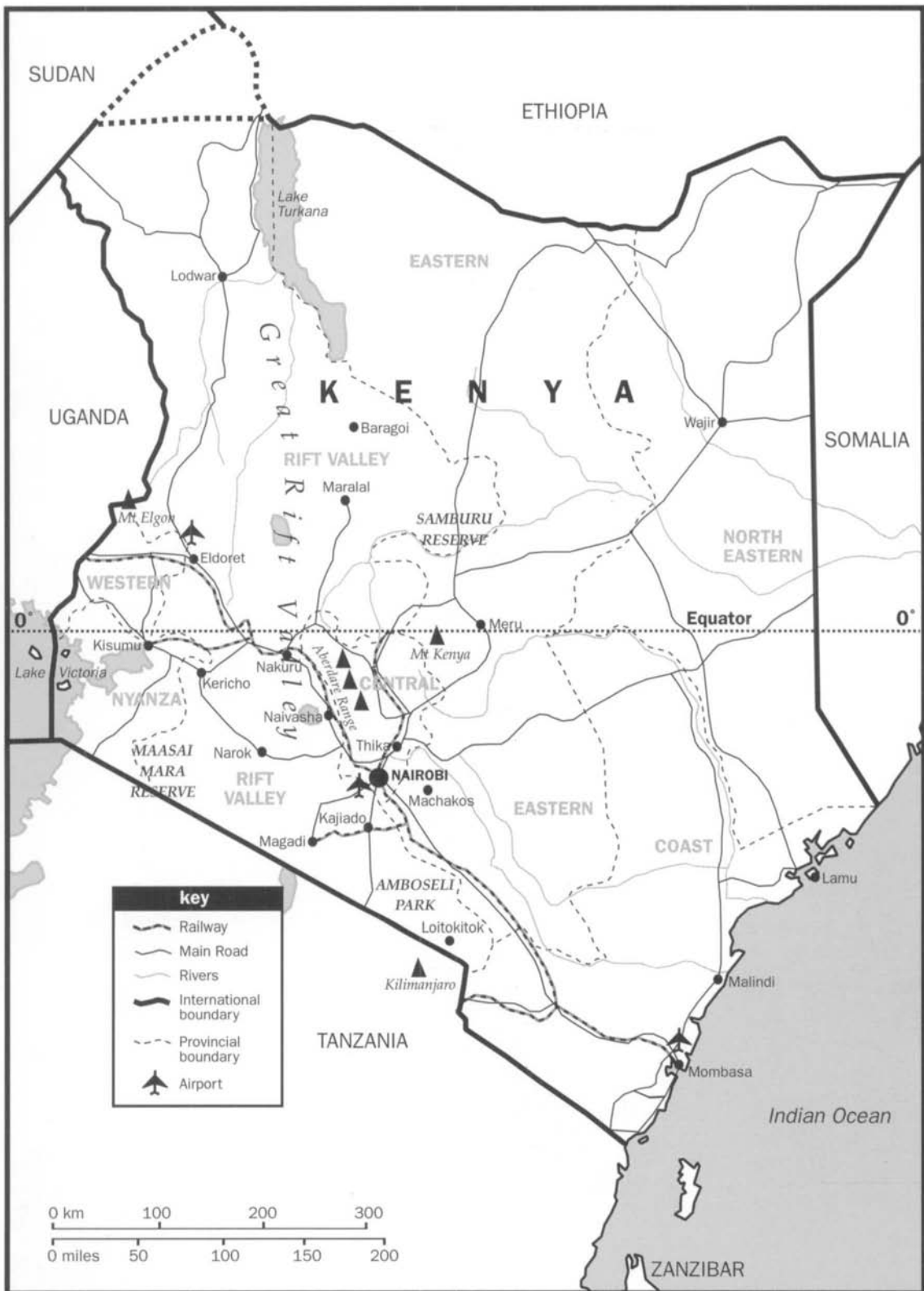
above The shores of Lake Turkana

Kenya's dramatic landscape has been shaped during the last 25 million years by the molten heat of the earth's interior. Upwelling magma lifted and cracked the earth's thin crust to create the highlands of East Africa and Ethiopia, and the deep scars of the Rift Valley that slash through the continent from the Red Sea to Mozambique. Out-pourings of lava along the fault lines of the Rifts threw up volcanoes which include the highest peaks in Africa: Mounts Kilimanjaro and Kenya. Some are still active, as the Rift continues to widen.

The Western Rift forms the modern borders between Uganda, Tanzania, Rwanda, and Burundi on the one side, and their huge neighbour the Democratic Republic of Congo — known until 1997 as Zaire — on the other. It is the Eastern or Great Rift which bisects Kenya, arresting travellers with the views from its rim across ancient savanna grasslands, traversed in distant silhouette by hump-backed Maasai cattle and their herders. In places the scarp falls over 600 metres to the valley bottom, which varies in width from 15 to 90 kilometres.

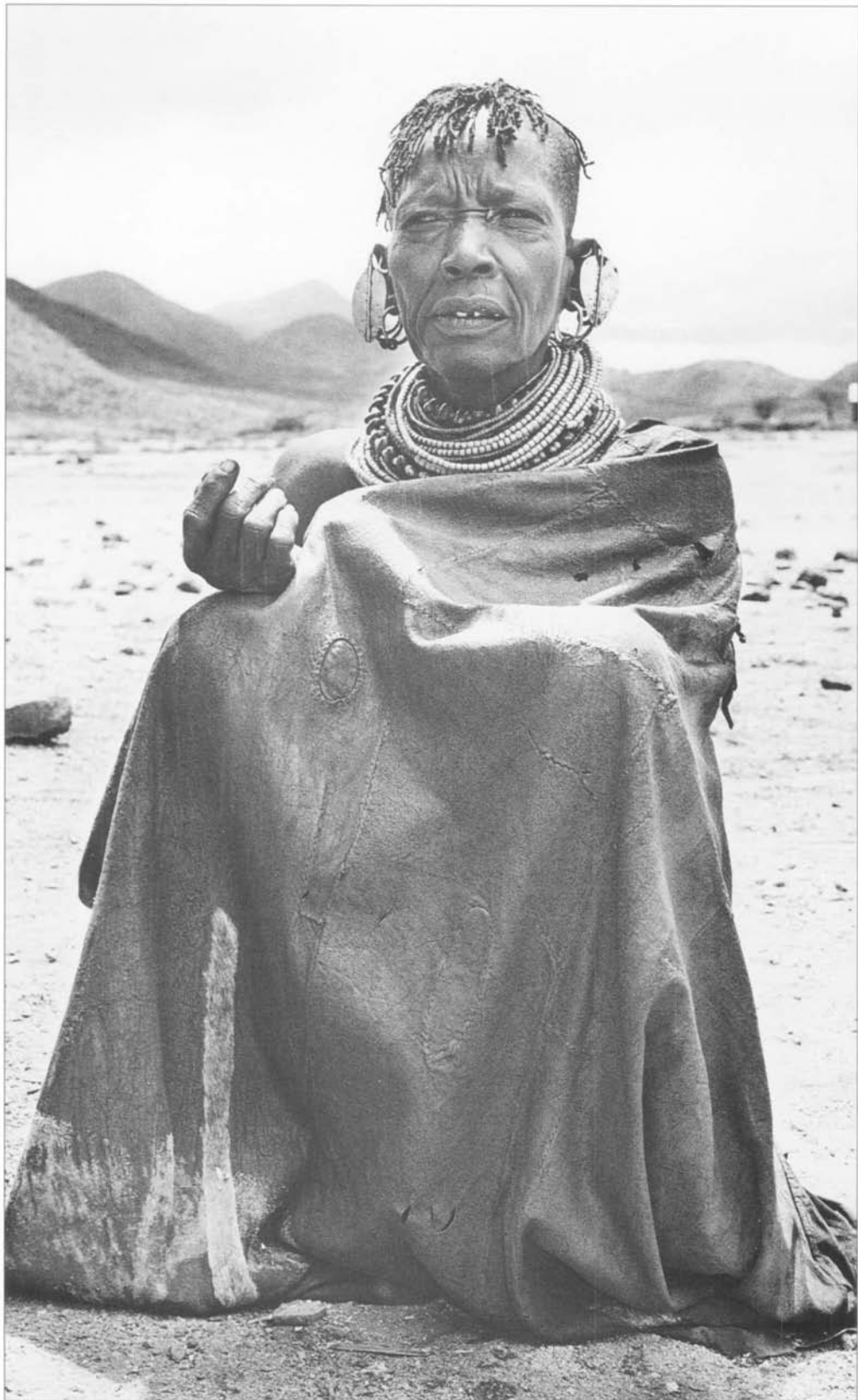
The Rift is threaded by lakes. The northernmost and largest, with a shoreline twice the length of the Kenyan coast, is Lake Turkana, which boasts Nile perch that can grow to weigh 100kg, and the world's largest population of Nile crocodile. Soda ash thrown out by volcanic eruptions has leached into the lakes farther south. Algae, thriving without competition in the corrosive waters, support one third of the world's population of Lesser Flamingoes. This same ash, forming a hard crust impenetrable to tree roots, has created the vast grasslands of the Maasai Mara and Serengeti.

On the upland plateau west of the Great Rift lies Lake Victoria/Nyanza, source of the Nile, and the world's second-largest freshwater lake. Its waters, rich in fish, are shared by Kenya, Tanzania, and Uganda.



A map of Kenya, showing places mentioned in this book

right Ome Lokenymeri, dressed in leather tunic and beads. The Turkana people eke a living from the harshest of Kenya's dry northern rangelands.



The bones of our ancestors

Our own flesh and blood began life in eastern Africa, perhaps in what is now Kenya, in the area of woodland, lakeside, and game-rich savanna which supported predators and scavengers: lion, leopard, hyena, vulture, and man. The climate and geology of the Rift Valley have made it a fossil storehouse: the remains of early humans were covered by a blanket of volcanic ash and sediments weathered from the uplands — to be revealed again by more recent rifting and erosion.

Hunter-gatherers at the dawn of human history

The fossil record shows the evolution of hunter-gatherer societies from the ape-like australopithecines, and the emergence about 1.5 million years ago of our ancestor, *Homo Erectus*, as the dominant hominid species. Larger-brained than his forebears, and better equipped for walking and running long distances, *Homo Erectus* spread through Africa, Europe, and Asia during the following million years.

At Olorgesailie, in the Rift Valley southwest of Nairobi, thousands of stone tools can still be seen scattered on the sandy earth, just as they were left half a million years ago by their makers. The hand-axes, cleavers, and scrapers must have been used for butchering and skinning the animals which *Homo Erectus* hunted or scavenged. Food remains found at the site included birds, zebras, hogs, elephants, baboons, and hippopotami.

Recent studies of DNA in modern populations seem to show that our own species, *Homo Sapiens*, evolved from *Homo Erectus* as little as 200,000 years ago, probably in sub-Saharan Africa. From that origin we have peopled the earth.

The first farmers

The discovery of bone harpoons shows that the teeming wildlife of the Rift Valley lakes may have played a large part in encouraging hunters to settle after 9000 BC. Domesticated livestock were eventually introduced into East Africa from the north, where farming was already well established. By 3000 BC, cattle, sheep, goats, and camels were being herded along the shores of Lake Turkana and the ancient Lake Chalbi, establishing a pastoral tradition that continues today in these arid lowlands. The first evidence of farming in the highlands of southern Kenya comes after 2000 BC, perhaps a result of migration from deteriorating pastures farther north, as the climate became drier.

Kenya's Iron Age

After 500 BC, Bantu-speaking peoples moved out from the vast tropical forests of west Africa to settle much of eastern and southern Africa, bringing with them the knowledge and practice of iron-working. This new technology had a dramatic impact. Clearing woodland for agriculture, tilling the soil, working timber for construction, waging war — all became easier with iron tools and weapons.

Not long after the Bantu ventured on to the East African plains, the first Nilotic speakers moved south from Sudan into the highlands west of the Rift Valley. These were probably the ancestors of the Kalenjin peoples who occupy much of the area today. Cattle were central to their economy.

The human settlement of the land that became Kenya was completed by the later arrival of Eastern Cushitic speakers who moved into the north-eastern lowlands with their camel herds.

below The Hariri ship
(based on an illustration
dating from AH 634
[AD 1237]): Arab
merchants in their
cabins, African slaves
on deck



Waterfront to the world

A Greek merchant from Alexandria, writing in about 50 AD, described a thriving trade with 'the markets of Azania' — East Africa. Already weapons — spears, swords, and axes — were being traded by Arab sea-captains for ivory, rhino-horn, and tortoise-shell.

By the ninth century the focus of trade had moved east to the Persian Gulf. Eastern Africa was exporting ambergris, leopard skins, gold, and mangrove poles for ship-building around the Gulf. Slaves were another commodity, taken to extract the salt at Basra, and to drain the marshes of lower Iraq. (The barbaric sea trade in human lives continued until 1872, when the British finally obliged the Sultan of Zanzibar to close down the market.)

The Arabian traders in their triangular-sailed *dhow*s brought more than pottery, beads, and cloth: they brought their Islamic religion and customs. Excavations on Shanga Island, near Lamu, have revealed a timber mosque, later rebuilt in coral; established in about 800 AD, it is the oldest mosque found south of Arabia. The discovery of locally minted coins suggests a ruling Muslim dynasty by the year 900.

Winds of change

The south-west monsoon blows from June to October. On the East African coast, these winds are deflected to south-easterlies, and would have carried the *dhow*s north to Arabia. By December the winds turn about, so that any Arab or Persian sailors and merchants who had not made the return journey would remain in the ports for a few months, repairing vessels, buying supplies, and exchanging sea-farers' tales much like those preserved in the stories of Sinbad. Many must have settled with local Bantu women, setting up trading depots in the flourishing towns, or farming the fertile coastal soils. Swahili culture and language grew from this marriage.



left The Indian Ocean, viewed from the ruins of Jumba la Mtwana

below *Dhow*s on the beach near Malindi. Such boats dominated Indian Ocean trade for more than a thousand years.



Though the name 'Swahili' is derived from the Arabic 'sawahil', meaning 'coasts' or 'shores', the language is Bantu, with loan-words from Arabic and other Indian Ocean sources. It spread quickly as a *lingua franca* among the various Bantu-speaking peoples of the coast, while rulers and merchants probably used Arabic. With the development of trade routes into the interior in the nineteenth century, the Swahili language was carried inland to the Great Lakes and beyond, becoming the common tongue of today's Kenya and Tanzania.

It was during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries that the Swahili towns of the coast flourished, with the busy sea-borne trade helping to create a common culture, expressed in language, architecture, and dress. Mombasa and Malindi became wealthy ports, and new towns such as Gedi and Jumba la Mtwana were founded and briefly flourished. Then the Portuguese arrived, and changed forever the patterns of coastal trade.

The coming of the Europeans

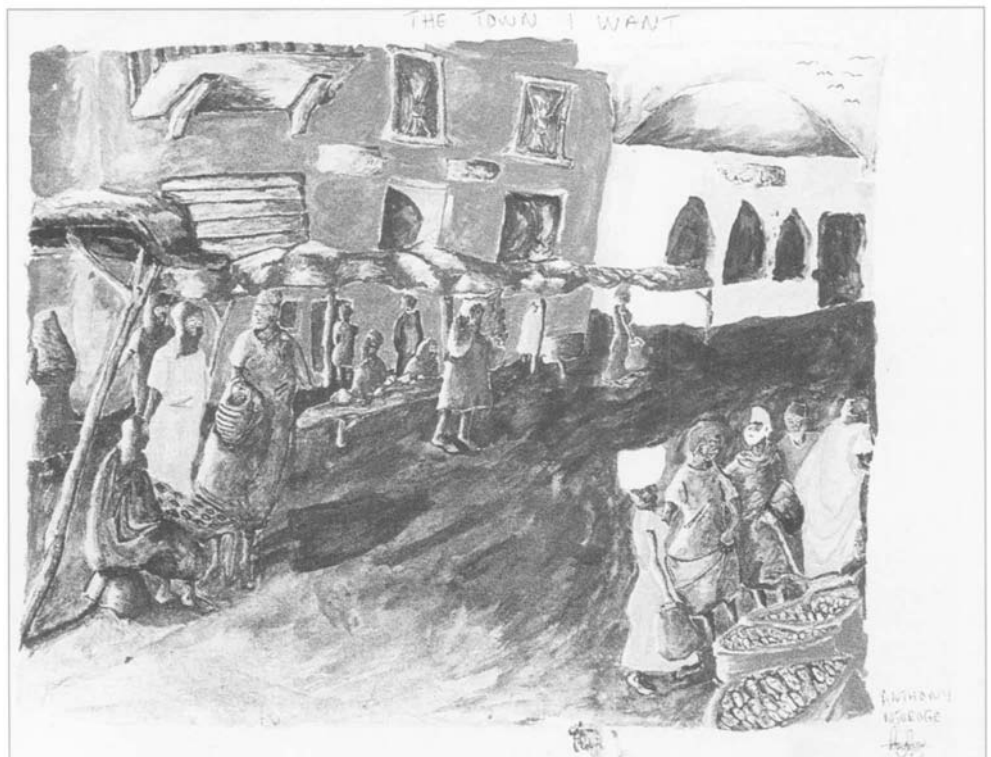
Arab control of the eastern Mediterranean and the Red Sea had effectively isolated East Africa from European influence — until 1497, when Vasco da Gama, the Portuguese explorer and navigator, sailed round the Cape into the sheltered waters of the Indian Ocean. This began the process of European expansion which led eventually to the partition and colonisation of eastern Africa, and the creation of a State called Kenya.

By 1510, most of the Swahili towns of the East African coast had been sacked and forced into tribute to the Portuguese. Only Malindi, jealous of its powerful rival, Mombasa, formed a lasting alliance with the Portuguese. Mombasa resisted but was eventually abandoned in 1632. By then new and stronger players, the Dutch and the English, had entered the Indian Ocean, intent on dominating the Far Eastern trade.

The Portuguese left few reminders of their stay in Kenya except for Fort Jesus, which still stands. They introduced maize from the Caribbean and left a handful of loan-words in Kiswahili, including *gereza*, which means 'prison', intriguingly derived from the Portuguese *igreja*, meaning 'church'.

right

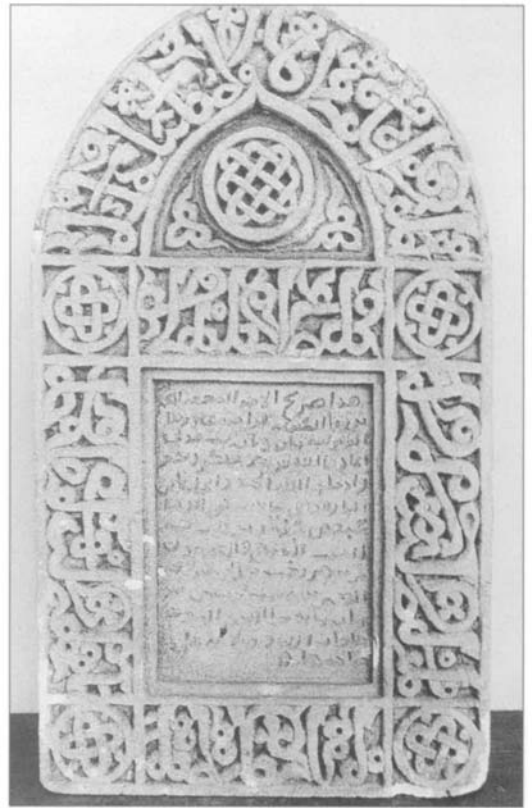
A schoolboy's painting, *The Town I Want*, depicts a typical Swahili street scene



below

- Tourists visiting the former Portuguese stronghold of Fort Jesus
- Jamia Mosque in Nairobi city centre

right A tombstone found on Mombasa island, dated 866 AH (1462 AD). The Arabic inscription invokes God's mercy and protection.



background
Samburu District

below
■ Western Province
■ Samburu District,
Rift Valley Province

The modern melting pot

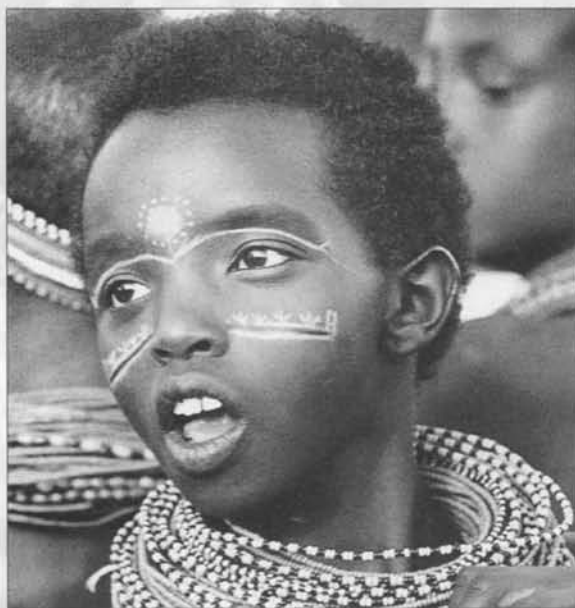
Those who have arrived and settled during the last 2,000 years are the most dominant groups in modern Kenya. According to the much-disputed census of 1989, two-thirds of the population are Bantu-speakers, of whom the most numerous are the Kikuyu (21 per cent), Luhya (14 per cent), and Kamba (11 per cent).

Most other Kenyans are Nilotic speakers. The Kalenjin group (11 per cent) includes Kipsigis and Nandi. The group took its collective name in colonial times from a radio programme which popularised the term 'Kalenjin'. It means 'I tell you' in the Nilotic tongues to which it is common. The pastoralist Maasai/Samburu (2 per cent) and Turkana (1 per cent) are also Nilotes, but most numerous are the Luo, who live along the shore of Lake Victoria/Nyanza (12 per cent).

Cushitic speakers comprise the pastoral peoples of north-eastern Kenya, including the Somali, Booran, Rendille, and Gabra. Though they occupy one third of the country, they make up less than 3 per cent of the population.

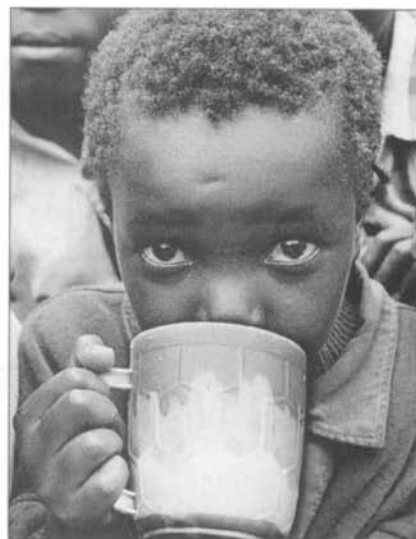
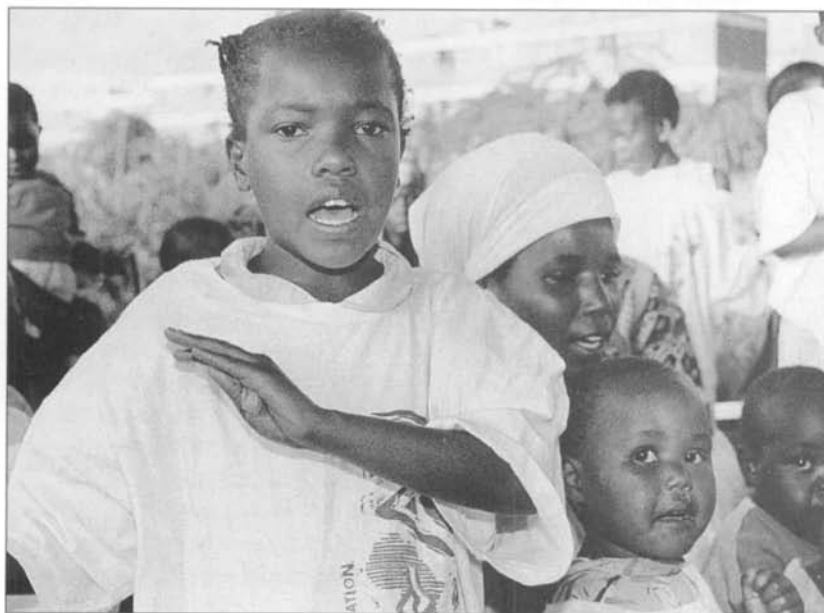
Those classed as Kenyan Asian and Arab numbered less than half of one per cent of the population in the 1989 census, but they wield a very significant commercial power. Only 3,184 Kenyan Europeans were counted, though many more are temporarily resident.

At Independence in 1963, Kenya's population was 8.5 million. It had risen to some 32 million by 1997, and is projected to reach 45 million by the year 2010.

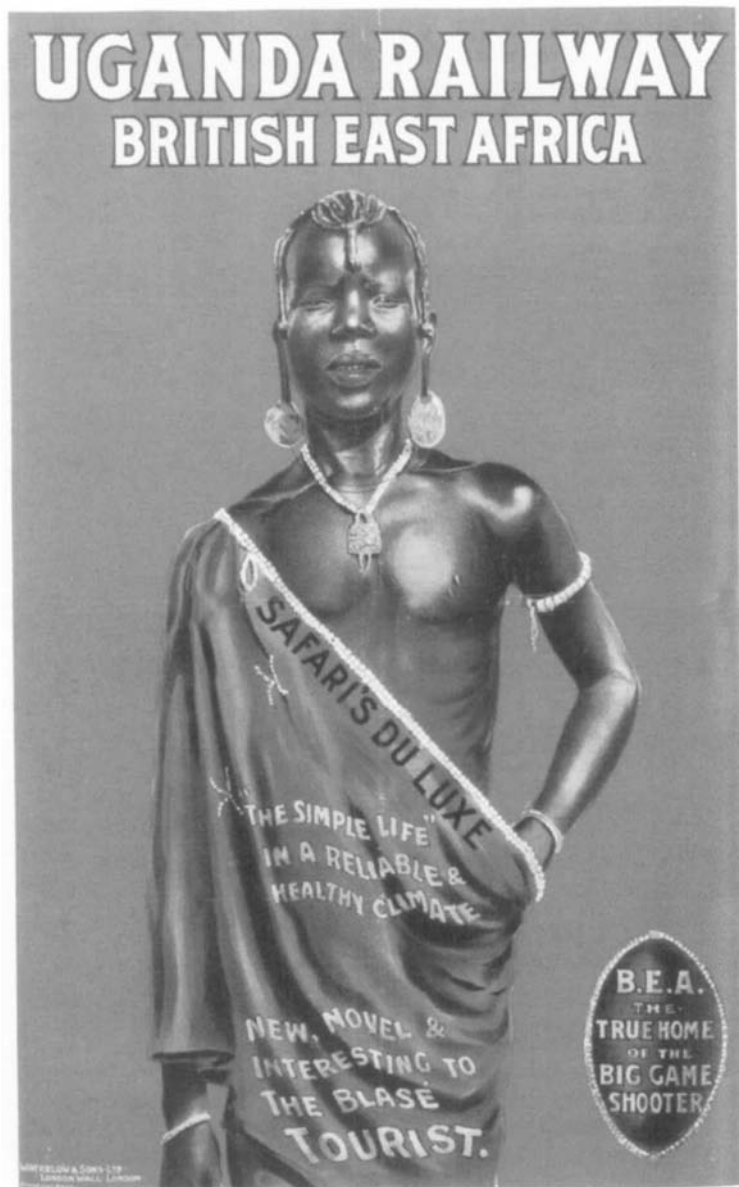


from right, clockwise

- North-Eastern Province
- Nairobi
- Nairobi
- Samburu District, Rift Valley Province



Commerce and conquest



At first, British interest in Kenya was motivated by a desire for free trade rather than by a quest for territorial expansion. The nearby island of Zanzibar was Britain's stepping stone into the East African interior. Exploitation of Kenya's resources proceeded at a brisk pace, overseen by Hindu 'banyans' — financiers and traders from British India. Behind the merchants came the European missionaries — of whom David Livingstone was the most celebrated — intent on saving souls.

The three C's

Europe's economic greed and technological superiority came to define — and poison — its relationship with Africa. The discovery of quinine in the 1850s helped Europeans to survive malaria, which had previously killed half of the new arrivals within two years. Steamships opened the continent to explorers and adventurers, and gave access to a world market for African commodities: palm oil, rubber, cotton, cocoa, cloves, hides, coconuts, and gum copal (a resin used in varnish). The return trade included assorted hardware, and cloth from Manchester and Bombay. The copper wires of the telegraph revolutionised communications. Above all, the development of weaponry — the breech loader, the repeating rifle, and finally the maxim gun — made even a small European army virtually invincible. Commerce, Christianity, and 'civilisation' were to be imposed by conquest.

Paper empires

Impelled by European rivalries and fuelled by trade, the partition of Africa became inevitable. By 1900, most of the continent had been parcelled out to the new colonial powers. The Congress of Berlin divided the East African spoils between Britain and Germany. In 1886 a line was drawn from the mouth of the Umba river to Lake Victoria, deviating to the north around Mount Kilimanjaro so that the Kaiser and his

aunt, Queen Victoria, could each possess a mountain. The embryonic States of Kenya and Tanzania had been created. (Four years later, the Germans traded Uganda and Zanzibar for the uninhabited North Sea island of Heligoland.) Kenya was declared a British protectorate in 1895.

The King of the Pink Cheek

Most East Africans knew nothing of these arrangements made in Europe. Almost everywhere in Kenya, British occupation faced popular resistance, which was met by force of arms. Between 1890 and 1907, military expeditions were sent against the Bukusu, the Kamba, the Taita, the Luo, the Ogaden, the Nandi, the Kikuyu, the Embu, the Kipsigis,

the Gusii, the Gishu, and the Gabra. Chief Kabongo of the Kikuyu recalled his first visitor from the British administration:

'A Pink Cheek man came one day to our Council. He sat in our midst and he told us of the king of the Pink Cheek, who was a great king and lived in a land over the seas. "This great king is now your king," he said, "and this land is all his land, though he has said you may live on it". This was strange news. For this land was ours. We had no king, we elected our own Councils, and they made our laws. With patience, our leading elders tried to tell this to the Pink Cheek, and he listened. But at the end he said, "This we know, but in spite of this, what I have told you is a fact. ... In the town called Nairobi is a Council or government that acts for the king. And his laws are your laws."'

Relations between the two peoples did not remain civil for long. Francis Hall, who established Fort Hall in the Kikuyu lands in 1899, was proud to claim that natives 'were always shot like dogs when seen'. His successor attacked Muruka on a busy market day. 'Every soul was either shot or bayoneted', he reported. 'Then I went home and wept for a brother officer killed.'

below Livingstone's last expedition, 1873



The Uganda Railway



Where there were no navigable rivers, railways were seen as the means of opening up Africa. Cecil Rhodes' dream of a route from Cape to Cairo was never realised, but by the late 1890s lines were pushing inland from the coasts of West and Southern Africa. In 1895 the British government decided to build a railway from the Kenyan coast towards Uganda, to ensure control of the interior. A British member of parliament described it as 'a lunatic line to nowhere'.

The line was begun on the mainland opposite Mombasa in 1896. In April 1899 the railhead reached Mile 327, close to the eastern rim of the Rift Valley. 'By this time the only thing that didn't need repair was the foreman's whistle', wrote the Chief Engineer.

A rail camp was set up for repairs and provisions on a marshy plain called by local

Maasai herders 'N'erobi' — 'Place of Cold Water'. Succoured by the railway, the settlement, Nairobi, grew rapidly to replace Mombasa as the capital of Kenya (then called the East African Protectorate) in 1907.

After crossing the Rift Valley, the line had to climb through forests to cross Mau Summit at 2,650m. Just before Christmas 1901, the track reached Mile 582 on Lake Victoria, and the first supply train clanked cautiously into Port Florence Station (now Kisumu). A fleet of steamships was already in place to continue the onward journey into Uganda or Tanzania.

The railway's records were well kept. It cost £5,502,592 and 2,498 lives. Almost all these deaths occurred among the 31,983 labourers brought in from India. Most of them returned to India, but 6,724 chose to stay on in East Africa, far outnumbering the few European immigrants. Most became traders, opening *dukas* (shops) and small factories, drawing on the experience of the Indian merchants and middlemen who had long operated on the coast.

In 1902 the eastern province of Uganda became the Kisumu and Naivasha provinces of Kenya, placing the 'Uganda' Railway completely under Kenyan control.

New crops — coffee, tea, and cotton — could now be exported through Mombasa. After 1913, further lines were built from Nairobi, one to Lake Magadi to export soda, and a second to Thika to carry coffee and sisal crops. The overland caravans and the work they provided for the Swahili, Kamba, and Mijikenda were no more.

Already in the nineteenth century railways had revolutionised the social and economic life of the industrialised world. Their impact in East Africa was even more dramatic, stripping away the protection that remoteness had given to the peoples of the interior. Within little more than a generation, their way of life was transformed by this contact with Europeans.

Kenya Colony

The White Highlands

The 'Uganda' Railway had to be paid for. How? For Governor Sir Charles Eliot, the answer was clear: bring in white settlers to farm the Highlands, export cash crops and import consumer goods.

Little regard was paid to the rights of Africans by the Europeans who arrived in the early 1900s, greedy for land. A series of labour and land laws entrenched white-settler control at the expense of Africans and Indians. By the early 1930s more than half of the productive agricultural land in Kenya — over 8 million acres — was reserved for little more than 2,000 white farms. Many Africans became squatters and labourers on their own lands, or were confined to 'tribal' reserves. The communities most affected were those which lay in the path of white settlement: the Maasai herders of the plains, the Kikuyu of the eastern highlands, and — to a lesser extent — the Kalenjin, Luo, and Luhya peoples to the west.

The use of forced labour was forbidden in 1921, but hut and poll taxes forced Africans into the cash economy, obliging them to work on the large settler estates. By the early 1920s a quarter of Kikuyus lived as squatters on white farms. African farmers were not allowed to grow tea, coffee, or pyrethrum, which might have given them a means of avoiding paid labour. The hated Kipande was introduced: an identity document which all adult Africans were required to wear in a metal box around their necks. Those with any education were confined to low-grade jobs in the civil service. Brochures aimed at new settlers extolled the virtues of 'Britain's most attractive colony', and generous terms were made available to them. Resources were poured into 'European agriculture', as it was called, but denied to black Kenyan farmers.

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The growth of African nationalism

Even in the 'tribal' reserves, the impact of white settlement on African life and culture was devastating. The local chiefs introduced by the British were alien to most Kenyan peoples. They eventually formed an elite, many using their positions to accumulate land and wealth. As congestion increased and individualism grew, particularly in the Kikuyu lands, traditions of land tenure and inheritance began to break down. Men were forced to leave their families to look for work. Migration to the towns created squatter settlements like Pangani in Nairobi, where the seeds of a new African nationalism germinated among Kenyans who had gleaned an education from the missionaries. Their grievances were heightened by the bitter experience of Kenyans in the First World War. Though only 10,000 fought in the campaign against the Germans in Tanganyika, more

than 160,000 were recruited, often forcibly, as porters. A quarter of them perished.

The colony's Legislative Council admitted Indians in 1923, but no African was appointed until 1944. The political power of the settlers grew steadily, and there were even occasional threats to kidnap the Governor or to issue unilateral declarations of independence from Britain. An ironic result of all this huffing and puffing was that Kenyan politicians learned the power of civil disobedience and protest. Among them was one Jomo Kenyatta.

Kenyatta — born Kamau wa Ngegi — received his schooling at a Church of Scotland Mission. Moving to Nairobi, he took jobs as a court interpreter and meter reader, and became active in the African political organisations which emerged in the 1920s. By 1928 he had become General Secretary of the Kikuyu Central Association, which took the land issue as the focus of its struggle. In 1929 and again in 1931 he was sent to London to campaign for the nationalist cause, staying on in Europe until 1946. He studied first at Moscow University and then at the London School of Economics, and was active in helping to establish the Pan-African Movement.

When Kenyatta returned, it was to an even more volatile situation. All political parties had been banned for the duration of the Second World War, and many leaders were imprisoned. Forced labour had been introduced on tea and coffee plantations. Unrest simmered as squatters were pushed off white farms, urban unemployment increased, and the cost of living rose. In 1947, Kenyatta was elected President of the Kenya African Union (KAU), which had been formed in 1944 and was demanding greater political and economic advancement for Africans.

The war had given new skills and a new awareness to many Kenyans. Over 90,000 had been recruited into the armed forces, seeing active duty in Burma, Madagascar, and Ethiopia. Some had served in India, where they learned of the Indian movement for independence. Some, like trade unionist Bildad Kaggia, met black American officers. Above all they learned, in Kaggia's words, that 'Africans, given education and opportunity, were capable of doing everything that the *mzungu* (white man) could do'. Demobilised, these men — cooks, carpenters,

engineers, truck drivers — could find no work. This was the recruiting ground for KAU and Mau Mau.

The struggle for independence

KAU became the mouthpiece of African nationalism in Kenya, and a forum for vigorous debate between moderates and radicals. With the involvement of the increasingly powerful trade union movement, KAU's membership grew to about 100,000 by 1952. It was dominated by the Kikuyu, because they were affected most acutely by the problem of landlessness and land alienation, and made up two thirds of the population of Nairobi. But their objective was Kenyan, not Kikuyu, independence.

Speaking to mass rallies throughout the country, Kenyatta continued to urge non-violence. But radicals in KAU had despaired of peaceful change, launching an underground movement to overthrow the ruling minority. To achieve unity and commitment, the members adopted the use of oaths, a practice which united the Kikuyu as nothing else could have done; unfortunately it largely excluded non-Kikuyu.

Arson, cattle-maiming, and the killing of 'loyalists' provoked increasing hysteria among the settlers. In October 1952 the Governor bowed to pressure and declared a State of Emergency which was to last until January 1960. The Mau Mau rebellion had begun.

Mau Mau

The refusal of the British to respond to demands for political rights had fuelled nationalist resistance. As the nationalists took up arms, the government rounded up their leaders, including the moderates who might have mediated for peace. Jomo Kenyatta and nearly 100 others were imprisoned, following trials which were travesties of justice. A few months later, KAU was banned. The government established police posts throughout the Kikuyu Reserve and armed a 'loyalist' Homeguard. All squatters had to be photographed, but many refused. About 100,000 were evicted by the end of 1953.

The government's crackdown only drove more disaffected Kenyans into the forests of Mount Kenya and the Aberdares, where General China and Dedan Kimathi had established the

Land and Freedom Army — or Mau Mau, as it came to be known. Their war was waged as much against collaborators — police, civil servants, chiefs, landowners — as it was against the European settlers. Inevitably it was the Kikuyu who suffered most during the years of bitter conflict which ended with Kimathi's capture in October 1956.

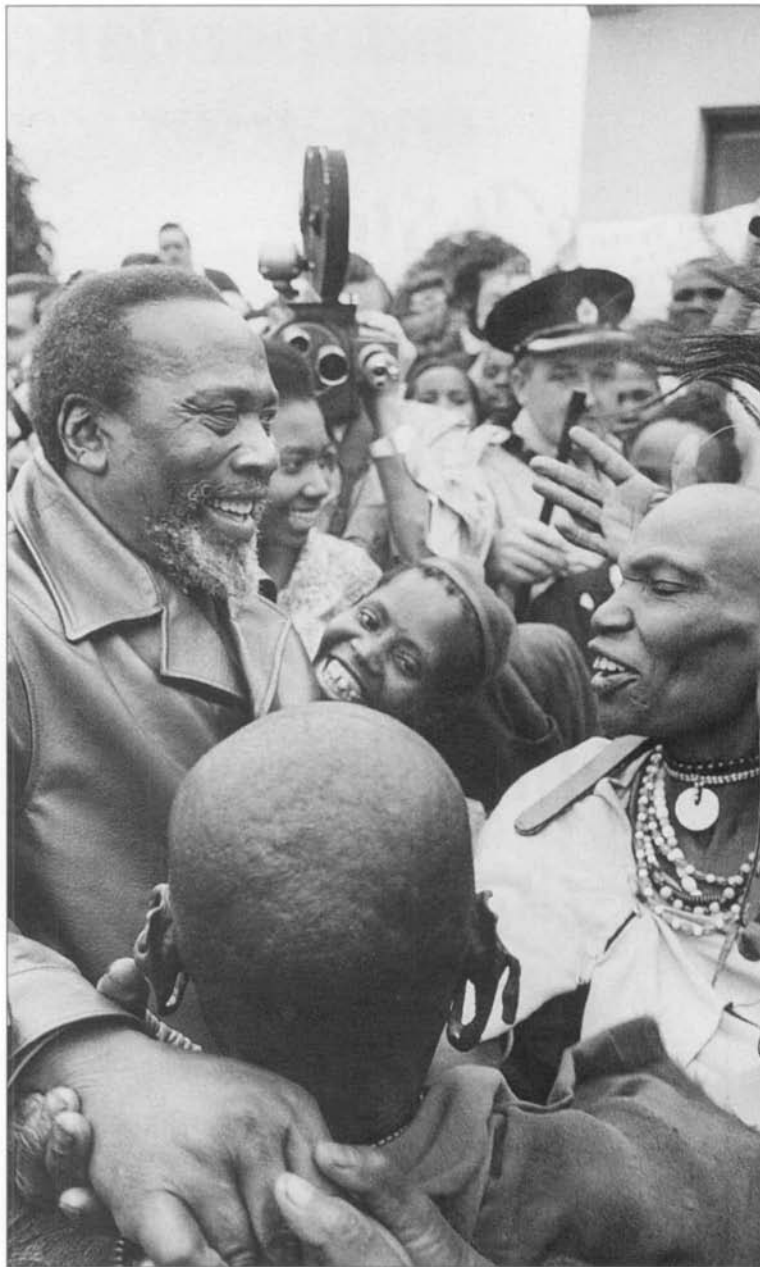
During Operation Anvil in 1954, Nairobi was combed by 25,000 soldiers attempting to flush out the Mau Mau supporters who were supplying arms and food to the fighters. About 20,000 were sent to reserves, and another 30,000 to detention camps. On the reserves, one million Kikuyu and Embu were forced to relocate into 'protected' villages. Land was confiscated and awarded to 'loyalists'. In Operation Hammer, launched in 1955, the British began bombing the forests, and hunted Mau Mau with gangs of surrendered guerrillas who knew their mountain hideouts.

Though government statistics underestimate the loss of African lives, they are stark evidence of the balance of power, and of death, in the first four years of the Emergency. Over 13,000 African fighters and civilians were killed, and over 1,000 hanged. Thirty-two White and 26 Asian civilians were killed. The security forces lost 167 dead, more than half of them Africans.

Uhuru — 'Freedom'

The Crown Colony's dependence on British troops confirmed that Kenya could not be a White Man's Country like Rhodesia. Even as the fighters were pushed higher into the Aberdares, the government began gradually to concede greater power to the nationalists. In 1954 one African minister was nominated to the Legislative Council. Three years later, Africans were elected to the Council for the first time, giving the eight successful candidates, led by Tom Mboya and Oginga Odinga, a new legitimacy. Among the eight was a future President, Daniel arap Moi.

By 1960 there were 14 African members, and all flew to the first of the two Lancaster House conferences held in London to chart a course towards African rule. Following elections in May 1963, Kenyatta became Prime Minister. On 12 December he led his country to independence.



Ian Berry/Magnum

As recently as 1960 the British governor had described Kenyatta as 'an African leader to darkness and death'. Kenyatta, however, turned the other cheek to his former oppressors and preached the need for reconciliation. A collection of his speeches, published in Kenya in 1968, was entitled *Suffering Without Bitterness*.

above Crowds welcome Jomo Kenyatta after his release from detention, 14 August 1961