

Colonial Capitalism and the Making of Wage Labour in Kimilili, Kenya: 1900-1963

Ndalilah Joseph W

Department of Social Studies

Kabianga University College, School of Education and Social Sciences

P. O. Box 2030, Kericho.

Abstract

The study investigated the emergence of a wage labour force in response to the economic changes brought about by British annexation and establishment of European farms in Kimilili Division, Kenya. This paper argues that colonial land policies, introduced, nurtured and intensified underdevelopment of Kimilili. The study was based on archival research, oral interviews and an analysis of existing literature on socio-economic history in general and labour history in particular. In 1902, the colonial government in Kenya fixed the boundary between Kenya and Uganda to its present area from Naivasha. This was followed by establishment of European farms in the Kenya highlands. As exclusive owners of the land, European settlers expected, with political backing from the colonial state, to limit Africans' (in this case the Babukusu) role solely to labour provision. The role of traditional council of elders changed according to the whims and dictates of the colonial state and targeted labour recruitment. The colonial state enacted a series of measures to create and maintain supply of labour including hut and poll taxes in 1902 and 1903; the Masters and Servants and the Resident Native Labour Ordinance (RNLO) in 1918 which defined both the legal status and labour obligations of the squatter. In particular, Kimilili provided the bulk of African labourers on Europeans farms created in adjacent Trans Nzoia district. This paper also examined the creation of African reserves and an analysis of legal and extra legal methods of labour recruitment.

Key Words: Role, Land Alienation, Incorporation, Bukusu Community, Kenya, Colonial Labour Economy

Introduction

In 1902, the colonial government in Kenya fixed the present boundary between Kenya and Uganda after the conquest of Kenya. This was followed by establishing of European farming the mainstay of the colonial economy in the Kenya highlands. Against this background the question of labour became central in Kenya's political economy. African labourers on the European farms were adversely exploited as clearly manifested in low wages, poor working conditions, arduous tasks, and worse still, the creation of labour camps through which labour on European farms was easily forthcoming. This was the genesis of migrant labour on European farms. African labourers from the outset made concerted efforts to ameliorate their working conditions through desertion, evasion of harsh employers, strikes and finally open protest through *Dini ya Musambwa*. Wage employment undermined African agriculture as able bodied males entered the wage labour market leaving African agricultural production in the hands of women and children.

The story of wage labour in Kimilili is essentially the story of conflict within the agrarian system of the settler plantation economy and the African agricultural options. In their response to the policies of the colonial system, wage labourers were neither passive nor malleable. On the contrary, they actively resisted coercion and subordination as they struggled to carve out a living for themselves and their families. It is against this background that a new dimension in labour provision was introduced namely resident labour. While examining wage labour in Kimilili, focus is on the incorporation of the Babukusu into the world capitalist system. In pre-colonial Bukusu society, every male member had the right to land but the advent of colonialism altered this set up. As exclusive owners of the land, European settlers expected, with political backing of the colonial state, to limit Africans' (in this case the Babukusu) role solely to provision of necessary labour.

The role of the traditional council of elders changed according to the whims and dictates of the colonial state and targeted labour recruitment. The colonial state enacted a series of measures to create and maintain labour supply including hut and poll taxes in 1902 and 1903; the Masters and Servants Ordinance 1910, and the *kipande* system and the Resident Native Labour Ordinance (RNLO) in 1918, which defined both the legal status and the labour obligations of the squatter.

The construction of the Uganda Railway in 1895 to 1901 marked yet another chapter in Kenya's labour history. Therefore, European agriculture was established to pay for rail maintenance. With this in mind, the colonial government demarcated the areas where agriculture was practised on large scale. Kimilili Division, in particular, was also declared settler area. However, European dream of curving Kimilili into the "white highlands" did not materialize because the Babukusu elders outwitted the colonial government by transferring the boundary to the Far East and named the river/boundary as "Kamukuywa" meaning "come to Kuywa." In 1928, Kimilili was made a reserve by Africans. From the mid 1930s, it became a nationalist hot-bed, a frontier of both labour supply and a centre of controversial nationalistic and religious leanings under the auspices of *Dini Ya Musambwa (DYM)*; an independent church movement related to the decolonization process in Kenya under the leadership of Elijah Masinde, an enigmatic and renegade squatter.

This paper traces the origins of the labour reservoirs in Bungoma District with emphasis on Kimilili Division. This is examined in the light of the colonial land and labour policies in Kenya. It also examines the creation of African reserves and an analysis of the legal and extra legal methods of labour recruitment. In particular, Kimilili provided the bulk of African labour on European farms that were created in the adjacent Trans Nzoia District.

Critical Issues on Land Alienation and Colonial Labour System

A lot of literature has emerged and the issue of labour is presently a central theme in Kenyan history. But the emergence of wage employment and more specifically the history of squatting in Kenya has been one of the most neglected yet interesting stories which remain to be told in full. The emergence of European farm labour in Kimilili has not been properly studied. Earlier works have mainly dealt with labour on European farms elsewhere and in towns ignoring a study on wage labour in Kimilili. Most of these early studies are generalised works, not focused on any specific category of African labour. Hence, there is need for historians to look at micro level and represent a systematic analysis of labour in a particular sector. Not only is it important to focus attention on wage labour, but the period upon which the research centres represents an important epoch in the emergence and growth of wage labour on European farms.

Materials and Methods

The study was conducted in Kimilili Division, situated in the expansive Bungoma District in Kenya. It is bordered by Mount Elgon District to the North, Bokoli Location (Webuye Division) to the South, Sirisia Division to the West, Saboti Division of Trans Nzoia District, and the expansive Tongaren Division of Bungoma to the East. Kimilili Division consists of Maeni, Kibingei, Chesamisi, Kimilili and Kamukuywa locations. During the colonial period, it was a buffer zone between the European owned farms in Tongaren Division and Trans Nzoia District. The area consists of volcanic and alluvial soils on the slopes of Mount Elgon which support a number of crops, namely coffee, bananas, sugar cane, maize, potatoes, groundnuts, onions, tomatoes, fruits, beans, and sunflower. Livestock keeping is also a predominant feature in this area. In general, the inhabitants of the area practise mixed farming.

This study drew extensively from both primary and secondary sources. Primary sources were archival materials obtained from the Kenya National Archives (KNA) and oral interviews. Oral interviews involved posing questions to elderly people who had an acquaintance with wage labour; labour officers in the labour Office in Bungoma; surviving colonial chiefs and the chiefs' *askaris*. These informants provided data underscoring and conceptualizing the question of labour and migrant labour in the context of pre-capitalism and capitalism. The questions covered pre-capitalism, origin of wage labour, forms of labour organization and the means of production in Bukusu pre-capitalist society. Save for pockets of Iteso, Sabaot and Tachoni, Bungoma is inhabited by the Babukusu. The author carried out the interviews in the *Lubukusu* language. Archival research was conducted at the Kenya National Archives (KNA) in Nairobi. Archival sources were used to refute, corroborate, authenticate and supplement secondary data. It also used Secondary information on labour and socio-economic history of Kenya in general.

Results and Discussion

The Impact of British Military Conquest

The establishment of British rule in Kenya was mainly through force (Ochieng', 1986, p. 88). This was after the British administration discovered the African groups were not willing to forego their independence without some military show (Ochieng', 1986, p. 90). Between 1895 and 1912, the British organized a series of military expeditions against what they called "recalcitrant tribes" in Kenya (Ochieng', 1986, p. 88). Among the ethnic groups were the Giriama, Nandi (1895-1905), the Babukusu (1895), the Aembu (1905), the Abagusii (1904, 1908 and 1914), the Kipsigis (1905) and the Kabras (1907).

Although it is appropriate to take 1894 as the year signifying effective beginning of British colonialism in Western Kenya, the start of British influence in the region is traceable to the activities of the Imperial British East African Company (IBEACo) established in 1888 (Ochieng', 1986). Nonetheless, in the year 1894, Colonel Coville in an attempt to establish British rule in Kenya, dispatched Fredrick Spire, the first British colonial administrator, to establish an administration post at Mumias (Were, 1967). On 1 July 1985, A. H. Hardinge, a British Consul General at Zanzibar, announced the taking over administration of the whole coast from Vanga to Kismayu and as far as Kikuyu, proclaiming present Kenya a protectorate (Were, 1967, p. 157).

The extension of British colonial rule in Western Kenya was done by Charles Hobley, the officer commanding "Kavirondo," after the departure of Spire in 1895. He was entrusted with "pacifying" Western Kenya and establishing the colonial administrative structures. According to Hobley, force was the answer to what he termed "recalcitrant tribes." He observed that:

The reaction of native race to control by a civilized government varies according to their nature and to their form of government. But in every case, a conflict of some kind is inevitable before the lower races fully accept the dictum of the ruling power (Ochieng', 1986).

Such conflict might come sooner or later but according to Hobley, the quicker the better (Sorrenson, 1968). Hobley's persuaded conviction on the role of "force" in colonial conquest made him dispatch military expeditions against Luhya sub-ethnic groups from his base at Mumias in Wanga Kingdom. Among them were the Babukusu who fought the British in the Lumboka/Chetambe war of 1895 and the Banyala of Navakholo in 1896. The Babukusu fought the British in two battles at *Lumboka* and *Chetambe*, a fort on a hill overlooking Webuye town. In reference to the battle at Lumboka, Hobley noted that:

The Babukusu tribesmen then emerged from their villages like a swarm of infuriated bees and attacked the detachment of Sudanese mercenaries. They (Sudanese mercenaries) fought gallantly, but they were speared one by one and eventually annihilated... my first task was to endeavour to get in touch with the Bukusu leaders and extract some reparations for this slaughter (Ochieng', 1986; Hobley, 1907).

Constant threats forced Hobley to appeal for an expeditionary force from Uganda to subdue the Babukusu, a people he considered powerful with many "wild and turbulent spirits." This led to the defeat of the Babukusu in August, 1895 (Wandibba, 1995). The fall of both *Lumboka* and *Chetambe* forts signified the beginning of effective British colonialism in Bungoma district, the home of the Babukusu. Save for skirmishes of *DYM* from 1937, the Babukusu remained largely peaceful. While echoing this point, Hobley observed that:

The great point about the (Babukusu) people, however, was that they were men. Once they were beaten, they readily made peace, and once they made peace it was peace. For within a few hours, the women were in camp selling food and one had no anxiety about subsequent treacherous attack either at night or on the road. Under these circumstances mutual respect gradually supervened and we became great friends (Wandibba, 1995).

Mumias became the epicentre from which colonial influence diffused to other areas in Western Kenya as their resources increased (Were, 1967). In 1902, the present Western Kenya which was part of the Eastern Province of Uganda was officially transferred to British East African Protectorate to consolidate the administration of the Uganda railway and strengthen the colonial administration in probable areas of settler interests.

Having established an administrative post at Mumias, the British spread their rule to other parts of Western Kenya through force which, in the main, persuaded African populations to surrender (Ochieng', 1986). They established alien political domination, conducive conditions for the penetration of capitalism in this region (Ochieng', 1986). In this regard, Lonsdale and Berman (as cited in Maxon, 1992) observe that:

African pre-colonial forms of production were subjected to a historic break in their autonomous development; in the terminology of the time they were literally "opened up." They became part economies externally oriented to suit the dynamics of a capitalism that had been imposed upon them from outside (p. 63).

The articulation of pre-capitalist forms of production and colonial capitalist economy resulted in change and continuity in the pre-capitalist forms of production (Berman & Lonsdale, 1992). In agriculture, new patterns of land use and labour organization were effected and in time, a fresh orientation towards the market emerged, a turning point for the Bukusu indigenous economy. Specifically, the period 1895 and 1919 was formative in the evolution of settler agriculture, a period of land alienation and experiment on agricultural production (Berman & Lonsdale, 1992).

The military campaigns between 1895 and 1912 in Kenya made lands available for alienation. Livestock captured became property of European settlers (Kenyanhui, 1992). Besides, the economy and social customs of African groups in Kenya prevented them from selling either land or livestock demanded by the European settlers. Thus, the colonial state embarked on a series of military campaigns to satiate European settler demand for both land and African livestock stagnating indigenous production in the period 1895 to 1919. All these happened in Bungoma district which Kimilili was part and parcel before 1919. Therefore, Kimilili being on the frontier of the "white highlands," offered the bulk of labourers on European farms in Trans Nzoia.

Land Alienation and the Development of European Settler Agriculture

The European settlers from the outset made a concerted effort to prevent the alienation of agricultural land in the Kenya highlands to Asians. Asians had come to Kenya during the building of the Uganda railway (1896-1901) as labourers and entered business. In 1906, the European settler controlled Land Board recommended that since only a small area of the country was suitable for European settlement, the colonial government should reserve it for exclusive European settlement. For example, in 1906, Lord Elgin, by then British Secretary of State for Colonies, declared that, land in the Kenya highlands should not be granted to Asians (McGregor, 1927). This statement was popularly referred to as the "Elgin Pledge" which tacitly reserved the Kenya highlands for Europeans (Swainson, 1980). Africans were moved to reserves. The European settlers were opposed to Asian settlement in the Kenya highlands because of racial prejudice and fear of Asian competition. McGregor (ibid) and Ochieng' (1986) observe that European settlers did not want Asians to buy land in the Kenya highlands. Ochieng' (ibid.) further points out that, the pioneer Asian traders in the country were on the aggregate far much wealthier compared to the pioneer European settlers. Thus, Asians could have outbidded European settler in free acquisition of land. The colonial government also put obstacles on the ownership of land by Africans (McGregor, 1927).

Moreover, the 1915 Crown Land(s) Ordinance sealed the fate of Asian and African land ownership in the Kenya highlands. Under the ordinance, the Government of the British East Africa Protectorate was empowered to veto any land transaction involving people from non-European racial backgrounds (Sorrenson, 1968). The aim of the Ordinance was to forestall any possible sale of European owned land in the Kenya highlands to Asians and ownership by Africans. In the case of Africans, their involvement in agricultural undertakings was severely constrained as noted in this study. The Crown Lands Ordinances transferred millions of acres of African land to the ownership of Europeans (Sorrenson, 1968). Accordingly, land not owned by Europeans eventually became "Crown Land" and Africans owned no land according to the British law (Ochieng', 1986). Crown Land was seen as all public land in East Africa Protectorate, which was subject to the control of the King of the United Kingdom (Ochieng', 1986). Generally, land alienation in Kenya was done through direct seizure, conquest, pressure on chiefs, trickery, swindling and every other means open to the colonialists (Okoth-Ogendo, 1991). These methods were characteristic of European alienation of part of Bukusu land in the period under review (Ochieng', 1997). The European settlers were obliged to apply to the Protectorate for ownership of lands considered "vacant" (Kanogo, 1987). Based on the belief that the Crown, and not the local people had original title to land, the colonial government alienated vast lands from the Kenyan groups.

From 1897, European could acquire twenty one year renewable land leases in Crown Lands, in 1902 the lease became 99 years while from 1915, the leases were extended to 999 years. Sorrenson (1968) observes that:

The Crown Lands Ordinance of 1915 allowed a land registration scheme to be started for settlers. Most importantly, "Crown land" became land occupied and reserved for Africans. They became "tenants at will" of the Crown and could thus be turned off their land at the government's pleasure.

With the same zeal the colonial government expanded their boundaries to agricultural districts (Kanogo, 1987). According to Ghai and McAuslan (1970), there were three cardinal policy implications to encourage European settlement. First, ensuring that necessary legal powers were involved to grant land to European settlers on sufficiently attractive terms; secondly, provision would have to be made to regulate where Africans would be allowed to live, cultivate land and tend their livestock. Thirdly, a decision had to be made as to whether Africans would be encouraged to work for the incoming European settlers. For these policies to be viable, the colonial system of land ownership had to be sustained by law that rigidly separated Europeans, Asians and Africans into strata of different status, rights and privileges (Kenyanhui, 1992). Pressure from European settlers and sympathy for them by the Governor, Sir Henry Belfield, saw a new Crown Lands Ordinance approved in 1915 allowing land held under the previous Ordinance and land regulations to be converted to leases of 999 years duration (Maxon, 1992).

Generally, European settlement was an expensive operation (Maxon, 1992). The colonial state provided substantial support, often at very uneconomical levels for European production to survive and prosper in Kenya. It was moreover, a major way in which wage labour began. Loss of land forced men to seek wage employment as squatters on settler farms as an alternative to agricultural production. Thus, European settlers had a favoured position in the country as stressed in 1903 by Charles Eliot:

I am inclined to think it will be better to keep Indians and Europeans apart as far as possible to avoid friction. It would be better not to grant any large holding to Indians between, say Machakos Road and Fort Ternan. But I see no objection to Indians having small plots or to station officials having little ground near their stations if the railway will allow it (Great Britain, 1934).

A conflict of interest in relation to land between African and European settlers and between European settler and Indian on the other, led to the Devonshire White Paper of 1923. The paper signified a marked change in the British government's attitude to the role the Europeans settlers would play in the advancement of the African population and in the governing of the country. This change of attitude was reflected in the Paper which emphasizes that:

Kenya is primarily an African territory ... the interest of the African natives must be paramount and if and when these interests and interests of the immigrant race conflict, the former should prevail. His Majesty's government regard themselves as exercising a trust on behalf of the African population and they are unable to delegate or share that trust, the object which may be defined as the protection and advancement of the natives (Devonshire White Paper, 1923).

But the declaration of the Devonshire White Paper did not change African plight, rather the Paper further consolidated the dual policy of European secluded areas and African reserves later to be endorsed by the Kenya Land Commission (KLC) of 1932. Overly, the KLC legitimized the racial and ethnic boundaries formed due to the European expansion into the "white highlands" in Kenya (Great Britain, 1934). The following is the relevant statement of policy of the KLC:

Whatever the circumstances in which members, i.e immigrant communities have entered Kenya there will be no drastic action or reversal of measures already introduced such as may have been contemplated in some quarters. The result of which might be to destroy or impair the existing interests of those who have already settled in Kenya. After reviewing the history of this question (i.e reservation of the "white highlands"), and taking into consideration the fact that during the last fifteen years, European British subjects have been encouraged to develop the highlands on this understanding, his Majesty's government has decided that the existing practice must be maintained as regards both initial grants and transfers (Great Britain, 1934).

Thus, the KLC was instrumental in consolidating European settlement in Kenya. The colonial state's land policies had earlier on been legalized in 1926 by the gazetting of the African reserves and later the "white highlands" by the Order in Council in 1932 (Great Britain, 1934). The reserve demarcation process was completed in 1926 and Africans were evicted to create room for European settlement and agricultural enterprises. Thus, European settlement in the agricultural heartland of Kenya not only precipitated a land "shortage" but also created a problem which increasingly became acute as the population in the surrounding African reserved areas grew.

But in the period that followed, dissatisfaction became so pronounced and widespread that the KLC was appointed in 1932 to look into the land problem in Kenya and ascertain whether Africans had sufficient land for future purposes. The different Luhya sub-ethnic groups were represented in the KLC by Reverend Monsignor Brandma. According to the deliberations of the KLC, Africans were not to be encouraged to take up more land outside the African reserved areas, unless well controlled (Great Britain, 1934). However, the Commission also identified some crowded locations in what was known as North Nyanza. By 1932, population pressure was being felt in a number of areas in North Nyanza.

Despite this apparent land shortage, the KLC of 1932 remained not-committal on the subject of land shortage. The Commission noted that:

All natives in the Reserves of North, Central and South Kavirondo have land, either as members of families having hereditary rights to rights or as tenants. But the distribution of population is very uneven, some locations being over crowded, other carrying small numbers. In very many areas which cannot be called densely populated, the industry and patience of the Africans cultivating the most rocky and seemingly hopeless hill sides speak in striking terms of the pressure of the population on the soil. These difficult sites are cultivated only because better places are not available (Great Britain, 1934).

According to Roger Van Zwanenberg (1977), from about the mid 1920s many areas of Kenya began to experience pressure against resources with land being increasingly commercialized. This was true of present Western province in general, and in particular Kimilili. Trans Nzoia and Uasin Gishu formed the most important and expansive unit of European farming in the Kenya Highlands. The basic economic activity was mixed farming, centred both on grain and coffee growing and dairying (Mwasame Wamang'ati, OI, September 18). Kimilili neighbouring Trans Nzoia District was declared an African reserve and labour reservoir. In this case, land alienation in Kenya is central to the understanding of the agricultural and labour changes in Bungoma District in general and Kimilili division in particular. One of the effects of colonial policies was land alienation. Land alienation led to land shortage in African occupied areas negatively impacting on pre-colonial agricultural in Kimilili. It is therefore imperative to assess the policies that transformed African labour to the European sector.

The Creation of African Reserves

The development and success of the European settler agriculture as the basis of Kenys's colonial economy depended heavily on the availability of land, labour and capital (Kanogo, 1987). Through enacting of laws, the colonial government alienated about 7 million acres of the most fertile land in Kenya (Kanogo, 1987). This formed the bedrock of what came to be termed the "white highlands" exclusively set aside for European agriculture by 1932 rendering many African groups landless (*ibid.*). For instance, the Maasai and Kikuyu lost big tracts of land considered "empty" to European settlers while the Nandi, Kipsigis and the Luhya, mostly the Babukusu, were moved to the African reserved areas to create room for European agriculture.

In 1904, the first African reserve in Kenya was created (Kanogo, 1987). This was the reserve for the Maasai, while in 1905, four more African reserves were designated (Ochieng', 1986). This policy was spread to the rest of Kenya, where different African groups were restricted to the reserved areas. The creation of reserves was further boosted in 1932 by the Kenya Land Commission, which fixed the boundaries of reserves (KNA: MGM 1/17/16). To consolidate this move, African reserves were legalized in 1926, followed by several other laws binding Africans to the reserved areas. By the Native Land Trust Ordinance of 1930, it was declared that African reserves belong to Africans forever (Ochieng', 1986). In the same vain, this was followed by the Kenya Land Commission of 1932, which in addition to fixing the boundaries of the "white highlands," removed all Africans from the "white highlands" (Ochieng', 1986). In this case, land alienation and the making of African reserves can be viewed in the context of loss of land as well as African independence.

Under the chairmanship of Morris Carter, the Commission sealed the fate of several ethnic groups in Kenya. It gave security to European settlers by removing all Africans from the “white highlands” to gazetted areas known as African reserves. Among those areas which fell into African reserves was Kimilili Division and Bungoma District as a whole. It became the source of wage labour on settler farms in Trans Nzoia. Forms of labour included forced labour, casual labour, migrant labour and squatter labour (Andrea Ndalila, OI, November 13, 2001). While forms of labour on European farms are discussed later in this paper, it is worth to discuss the making of labour reservoirs in Kenya in general and the study area in particular.

The Making of Labour Reservoirs; Legal and Extra Legal Methods of Labour Recruitment

The creation of African reserves from 1904 and their legalization in 1926 was one major step toward the making of labour reservoirs. Land alienation in the creation of the “white highlands” left many African communities displaced, sometimes relocated to new settlement gazetted reserve. The Babukusu lost their ancestral land in Trans Nzoia through land alienation. The Babukusu economy was a mixed one, but with lands alienated, economic opportunities were thinned. This was one of the causes of wage labour. Africans entered in to wage labour as casual labourers, migrant labourers and later as squatters. The bulk of the labourers were to be found in the African reserves, which in addition to being homes became labour reservoirs, from which labour on European farms was easily forthcoming. In the case of Kimilili on the frontier of the “white highlands,” it provided the bulk of African labourers.

The initial poor response by Africans to wage labour was partly because of self-sufficiency of their traditional economies. This was, however, later reversed with land alienation. To add on that, save for taxation merchandise cash economy had not yet taken deep root in Kimilili before the 1920s. From the onset of European farming, owing to lack of mechanization, clearing forests and establishing farms was done manually through African labour. Before the 1940s, Africans willing to engage in wage labour preferred to work near their homes, because of social and economic obligations (Charles Fwamba, OI, September 23, 2001). This enabled them to attend to their own farms and livestock more closely. However, the situation changed with expansion of European farming which increased labour demands on European farms. They wanted to obtain enough labourers, retain them in employment, and ensure that they worked productively (Zakayo Mufubi, OI, September 23, 2001). The creation of labour camps ensured labour demands were adhered to as was the case in Kimilili (David Muraka, OI, September 21, 2001).

Furthermore, the Master and Servants Ordinance of 1910 defined short-term or casual labourer as adult labour engaged on daily or monthly basis, 30 day tickets on 90 day contracts (KNA: MGM 1/17/16). Casual labour made it possible to combine wage labour with African agricultural work. Secondly, it enabled the labourers to remain within their home area to fulfil their cultural and other social obligations (Ochieng', 1986). Lastly, it was a source of income to African labourers with no other means of earning a livelihood after the penetration of capitalism, but who were not tied to a particular employer. However, the casual labour system to the employer was characterized by low daily turnover since the labourers were not under full control of the employer (Elizabeth Nafula, OI, September 5, 2001).

Despite the definition of casual labour as adult labour under the Master and Servants Ordinance of 1910, women as well as juveniles were engaged as daily paid casual labourers in the settler farms. Women and juveniles from the nearby Kimilili area were engaged in planting maize, weeding and harvesting. Men on the other hand, cooked for European settlers, tended European livestock, milked and took milk to the market for sale on behalf of their employer (Makokha Nabilayi, OI, October 10, 2001). It should be noted here that, casuals come from Kimilili mainly because of proximity to European farms apart from a few.

As earlier noted, the colonial government introduced the policy of land alienation and the creation of African reserves to induce Africans to seek wage labour on settler farms. Thus, from the European settler point of view, the ideal African reserve was a recruiting ground for labour, a place from which the able bodied went out to work, returning occasionally to rest and beget the next generation of labour (Harlow & Chilver, 1965). In this case, Kimilili served as an ideal African reserve. On the other hand, taxation was one of the direct mechanisms to induce Africans to enter wage labour. It was first introduced in Nyanza (including the present Western province) in 1900, in the form of hut tax, of one rupee per hut annually, and it was officially gazetted in 1901 (KNA: MGM 1/17/16).

It was a source of revenue to the colonial administration but an economic burden on Africans, some of who sought wage labour to obtain cash for hut tax (Clayton & Savage, 1979). All married adult males and females paid the hut tax (Elizabeth Nafula, OI, September 5, 2001). However, taxation did not force all Africans into wage labour. Before World War I, only poorer Africans entered wage labour because some could obtain cash through sale of surplus agricultural produce or trade (Elizabeth Nafula, OI, December 9, 2001).

In 1906, the colonial government introduced a 30 day ticket system of work. The ticket was marked at the end of each day to indicate daily performance. But, the reverse was true when labourers failed to oblige to the daily labour demand. A labourer was paid at the end of 30 working days based on the record of the ticket. This system was very unpopular with African labourers because it was misused and abused by the employer. In some cases, the employers could deliberately fail to mark the ticket even when the labourers had performed duty or claim the labourers had not performed the task to the required standards (Harlow & Chilver, 1965). Worse still, some employees could dismiss their labourers before the end of the 30 working days required to merit payment. The ticket system was also in use in the neighbouring European settler farms in Trans Nzoia, on which Kimilili, a labour reservoir, supplied the bulk of labour.

The colonial administrators had allowed local chiefs and headmen to recruit labour for both public and private enterprises. A chief's efficiency and effectiveness was judged from the number of labourers he recruited. Some chiefs later on became overzealous and predatory in their work. For example, in Kimilili, chiefs Murunga, Walucho, Amutala and later, Pascal Nabwana had these attributes (Clayton & Savage, 1979). However, this policy was discontinued in 1908 by order of the Colonial Secretary and replaced with that of "encouragement" (David Muraka, OI, September 21). Chiefs were not allowed to take part in direct labour recruitment. Even though this was spelt out clearly, it was not adhered to because they did not see any difference between force and encouragement (Stichter, 1982). When chiefs received labour recruiters in their station, it became their duty to obtain labour for them. In Kimilili, chief Murunga, an agent of Nabongo Mumia of Wanga, invited recruiters to recruit African labourers.

In 1912, the colonial government appointed a Labour Commission to investigate and report on the issue of labour demand and supply. Babukusu witnesses who appeared before this Commission complained that chiefs and headmen had put pressure on them to enter into wage labour (Stichter, 1982). It was also adduced that some chiefs were corrupt and exempted from labour conscription people who bribed them (Clayton & Savage, 1979). Oral information points out that, among the colonial Chiefs, Chief Murunga of Kimilili had good relations with the pioneer European settlers through whom labour was easily acquired. This was extended to other African chiefs in the wider Bukusu reserved areas including Sudi Namachanja of West Bukusu and Jonathan Barasa of Malakisi. Chief Barasa Barasa for example, is on record for having "encouraged" "wrong doers" in his Malakisi location, neighbouring Kimilili to go to European farms to work (Andrea Ndalila, OI, November 13, 2001). Any defiance was met with force. Hence, Malakisi location became fertile ground for wage labour, through migrant labour, the precursor of the squatter system. With the banning of forced labour recruitment officially in 1908, there emerged professional labour recruiters in Nyanza province (McGregor, 1927). The Master and Servants Ordinance No. 4 of 1910 defined a labour agent as anybody who by himself or through an agent or messenger recruited labourers for other employers (KNA: NNAR 1903-18). It nevertheless left out persons who recruited labour for their own use.

In 1908, the colonial government introduced a poll tax for every unmarried male aged above 16 years (KNA: NNAR 1903-18; Van Zwanenberg, 1977). This tax was applied to stimulate labour supply. Thus, by the 1920s, a number of African labourers from Kimilili were working in the European farming enterprises on monthly ticket contracts without *posho* (Clayton & Savage, 1979). Based on oral information, such wage rates were too low because in some cases a labourer was expected to earn enough money to pay tax for even relatives in addition to his daily needs (KNA Trans Nzoia District Quarterly Reports [QR], 1908-1918). Clayton and Savage (ibid.) note that unskilled labour wages were not at par with the cost of living. With this kind of scenario, it became prudent for the European farmer to have labour at his disposal and convenience (Stichter, 1982). Stichter (ibid.), in *Migrant Labour in Kenya*, argues that many people in Western Kenya had entered into wage labour by 1920 because of cooperation of the local African chiefs and nearness to European farms as was the case in Kimilili. However, oral information records that European farmers faced labour shortage especially during harvest time because of Africans unwilling to work for European settlers for long working hours at low wages (Stichter, 1982, p. 47).

African labourers complained of poor working conditions, for example poor housing, lack of health care and cruel masters (Diminah Nabalayo, OI, October 23, 2001). This labour shortage could only be solvable through new labour recruitment initiatives such as the creation of labour camps, through which alleviation of labour shortage could be realized.

According to oral information, there was famine known as *enjala ya mutokaa*, meaning famine after the introduction of the motor car which affected the Babukusu in the reserves. Consequently, Kimilili witnessed increased population movement to European farms in search of wage employment. Traditionally, the Babukusu were self sufficient but, the penetration of capitalism disrupted their economy (Van Zwanenberg, 1977). For instance, the penetration of capitalism saw the introduction of European goods in African occupied areas that were appealing to Africans (Julius Namachanja, OI, September 1, 2001). A taste for European goods such as bicycles, blankets, clothes, and money to pay taxes made the Babukusu enter wage labour (Japheth Lichuma, OI, September 1, 2001). The Babukusu ended up being either casual labourers, migrant or contract labourers, or entered into the squatter system depending on the distance between the African reserves and the European farms (Kanogo, 1987). In sum, the creation of wage labour which was preceded by land alienation and the creation of African reserves and labour reservoirs, especially in Kimilili, became contingent upon the establishment of a British colonial government in Kenya which was affected by 1920 (Mason, 1978).

Way Forward

This paper has discussed the factors that led to wage labour in colonial Kenya and Kimilili in particular. This was achieved through conquest, land alienation, creation of African reserves and taxation, stringent measures that discouraged African ownership of the means of production. To the colonial government, African movement to European farms was only supposed to salvage labour shortage. In this case, land alienation, taxation and authoritarian labour policies forced Africans to enter wage labour, either as casual and migrant labourers or squatters. Generally, the Babukusu economy was adversely affected by wage labour.

References

- Clayton, E. S., & Savage, D. C. (1979). *Government and Labour in Kenya 1895-1963*. London: Frankcass, p. 72.
- Berman, B., & Lonsdale, J. (1992). *The Unhappy Valley: Conflict in Kenya and Africa*, Book 1. Nairobi: Heinemann Kenya, p. 70.
- Devonshire White Paper (CMD 1922). Indians in Kenya. In Mungean, Q. H. (pp. 622-623).
- Ghai, V. P., & Mc Auslan, J. P. W. B. (1970). *Public Law and Political Change in Kenya*. Nairobi: Oxford University Press, pp. 9-14.
- Great Britain, Kenya Land Commission, (1934). *Evidence and Memoranda Vol.III*. London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, pp. 2834-2835.
- Harlow, V., & Chilver, E. M. (Eds.), (1965). *History of East Africa, Vol.II*. Oxford: The Clarendon Press, p. 246.
- Hobley, C. W. (1970). *Kenya from Chartered Company to Crown Colony*. London: Frank Cass and Company, p. 155.
- Kanogo, T. (1987). *Squatters and the Roots of Mau Mau*. London: James Currey, p. 9.
- Kenyanchui, S. S. (1992). European Settler Agriculture. In Ochieng', W. R., & Maxon, R. M. (Eds.), *An Economic History of Kenya* (pp. 115). Nairobi: East African Educational Publishers Ltd.
- KNA: MGM 1/17/16. *Casual Labour Recruitment Rules*. KNA
- KNA: NNAR 1903-18. *North Nyanza Annual Reports*. KNA
- Mason, M. (1978). Working on the Railway Forced Labour in Northern Nigeria, 1907-1912. In Gutkind, P. C., Cohen, W. R., & Copans, J. (Eds.), *African Labour History*. London: Sage Publications.
- Maxon, R. M. (1992). The Establishment of the Colonial Economy. In Ochieng', W. R., & Maxon R. M. (Eds.), *An Economic History of Kenya* (pp. 63). Nairobi: East African Educational Publishers Ltd.
- McGregor, R. W. M. (1927). *Kenya from Within: A Short Political History*. London: Allen and Unwin, p. 115.
- Ochieng', W. R. (1986). *A History of Kenya*. London: Macmillan, p. 88.
- Ochieng', W. R. (1997). *The Second Word: More Essays on Kenyan History*. Nairobi: East Africa Literature Bureau, p. 110.
- Okoth-Ogendo, H. W. O. (1991). *Tenants of the Crown*. Nairobi: African Centre for Technology Studies, p. 110.
- Sorrenson, M. P. K. (1968). *The Origins of European Settlement in Kenya*. London: Oxford University press, p. 179.
- Stichter, S. (1982). *Migrant Labour in Kenya; Capitalism and African Responses, 1895-1975*. London: Longman, p. 17.
- Swainson, N. (1980). *The Development of Corporate Capitalism in Kenya 1918-1977*. London: Heinemann, pp. 53-54.
- Van Zwanenberg, R. M. A. (1977). *Colonial Capitalism and Labour in Kenya, 1919-1939*. Dar-es-Salaam: Macmillan, pp. 60-70.
- Wandibba, S. (1995). Lumboka/Chetambe Centenary Festival Newsletter. Webuye, December, p. 7.
- Were, G. S. (1967). *A History of the Abaluyia of Western Kenya, C. 1500-1930*. Nairobi: East Africa publishing House, pp. 155-160.