Journal of Emerging Trends in Educational Research and Policy Studies (JETERAPS) 3(5): 701-709
© Scholarlink Research Institute Journals, 2012 (ISSN: 2141-6990)
jeteraps.scholarlinkresearch.org

Migrant Labour in Kimilili, Kenya: Capitalism and African Responses, 1940-1963

Ndalilah Joseph W.

School of Education and Social Sciences,
Department of Social Sciences, Kabianga University College,
P. O. Box 2030, Kericho, Kenya.

Abstract
The issue of labour is presently a central theme in Kenyan history, but the emergence of wage employment is one of the most neglected although interesting stories about it remain to be told. Earlier works are mostly generalised, not focused on a specific category of labour. This necessitated the need to examine the migrant labour system in Kimilili, a largely unmapped area of recent Kenyan social and economic history. The study investigated the emergence of a wage labour force in response to the economic changes brought by British annexation and establishment of European farms. This paper, apart from tracing African squatter's response to wage labour between 1940 and 1963, also examines the early forms of protest. It also analyses the colonial government's reaction to squatter responses to wage employment, in Trans Nzoia in the neighbourhood of Kimilili. In particular, the reaction of the colonial government to *Dini Ya Musambwa (DYM)* and labour consciousness is highlighted. This is partly assessed in terms of accommodation; a situation when squatter labourers accepted European employment and solved labour issues amicably. The study was based on archival research, oral interviews as well as analysing the existing literature on socio-economic history in general and labour history in particular. The African labourers were adversely exploited as was clearly manifested in the low wages paid, 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 the rise of migrant labour. African labourers made concerted efforts to ameliorate their working conditions through desertion, evasion of harsh employers, strikes and finally open protest through *Dini ya Musambwa*. The study contributes to a wider understanding of labour history in Kenya and coping strategies of labourers to the wage economy. Policy planners can apply this knowledge to solve labour related issues by designing favourable policies. Scholars, on the other hand, can use it to further research, innovate, and expand the frontiers of knowledge on labour.

Keywords: rise, labour consciousness, political action, Bukusu people, Colonial Kenya

INTRODUCTION

A considerable amount of work has been done on labour history in Kenya. Unfortunately, the existing literature is inadequate in the treatment of African labour on the European farms. Within a capacity system, cultivators are ultimately divorced from means of production and turned into wage labourers. However, such a state of affairs was not reached in Kenya during colonial rule because majority of Africans still retained access to land, a weakness of peripheral capitalism which required continued existence of some form of pre-capitalist economy to subsidise it.

Generally, the literature on Kenya's economic development has a limited systematic account. To date, apart from an earlier work by Kitching (1980) and a recent one by Ochieng' and Maxon (1992), which are thematic in approach, there have been limited systematic studies of economic history in general and labour history of Kenya in particular. At the same time, issues of land tenure and colonial land policy in Western Kenya have also attracted some scholarly work. For instance, Maxon (1992) focuses on the colonial land history of the Abagusii and describes their experiences under colonial rule, which shaped the present Abagusii economy. Maxon's (ibid.) work throws light on African options in the exigencies of colonial rule. Among the authoritative works on Kenya's labour history is that of Van Zwanenberg (1977). Van Zwanenberg (ibid.) discusses wage labour, its evolution and consequences on African groups. He asserts that the establishment and growth of settler agriculture was key in the development of wage labour. In his view, taxation, *kipande* system and force assisted colonial government to provide the much needed labour on the European farms. While analysing forms of labour, Van Zwanenberg (ibid.) observes that an obvious reason for the widespread adoption of squatting was land shortage. He notes that African labourers migrated to European farms where their life as squatters would allow them to evade further harassment. Van Zwaneberg's work sheds light on the development of wage labour in Kimilili.

Sharon Stichter (1982), in *Migrant Labour in Kenya*, postulates that peripheral capitalism in Kenya gave

rise to the migrant labour system. Stichter ably analyses migrant labour during both the colonial and post-colonial periods, emphasizing that accessibility of Africans to land is a yardstick to the understanding of labour struggles. On the causes of migrant labour, Stichter (ibid.) contends that both taxation and administrative coercion forced Africans to join wage labour. Using Stichter's work it is possible to explain the causes of wage labour in Kimilili. Wolff (1974) in *Britain and Kenya 1895-1930*, discusses the causes of wage labour in Kenya. Wolff aptly examines Kenya's economic history during the colonial period, which witnessed the radical transformation of the African society into a wage labour force and a systematic suppression of African farming. Wolff (ibid.) observes that the colonial development programme for Kenya increasingly created new and difficult constraints, diverting labour from African agriculture to wage labour on European settler farms.

This argument is further elaborated by Brett (1973) who examines the process of underdevelopment and argues that the impact of colonialism was inherently exploitative. Brett (ibid.) observes that settler dominance virtually excluded agricultural development among Africans and colonialism led to a net transfer of resources from the African to the European sector. The African sector was reduced to an underdeveloped labour reservoir for the European sector. Hence, the stagnation and non-development of the African sector was directly related to the progress and development of the European one (Brett, 1973, p. 283). Brett (ibid.) further maintains that taxation, coercion and the *kipande* system were the major tools through which labour was attained. These observations are very central when assessing both the agricultural and labour policies in Kimilili and the surrounding areas during colonialism.

Fearn (1961) writing on the impact of European Settlers and Asians on the economic development of Nyanza argues that Africans sought employment to supplement farming and trading incomes and obtain additional incomes needed to acquire consumer goods. However, Fearn (ibid.) does not analyse the extent to which administrative coercive labour policies contributed to wage labour. Barker (1950), writing on the history of Nyanza, attributes the emergence of migrant labour in Kenya to the establishment of European agriculture. Barker's work makes it possible to examine wage labour and the concomitant problems and contradiction in Kimilili, Kenya.

Clayton (1964) has analysed the policies that facilitated the improvement of Africans and discusses labour policies in relation to Kimilili. Samir Amin (1974) discounts the notion that African workers are a "pampered class" and argues that unskilled labourers are a deprived lot. Sandbrook (1975) has ably shown that solidarity among African workers is facile because of poor trade union(ism) and wide dispersal of workers. While contributing on the relationship between the labour movement and the first independence government in Kenya, Sandbrook (ibid.) observes that the colonial government's stringent measures against radical trade unions led to the emergence of "bread and butter" trade unions and that labour consciousness was adversely impeded by the petty bourgeoisie and the labour aristocracy while labour movement was characterised by ethnic and clientelist politics (Brett, 1973).

Another study on labour history is that of Tiyambe Zeleza (1982). Zeleza traces the origins of the penetration of capitalism in Kenya, and the creation of the working class during the colonial period. He observes that there has been overdramatization on the migratory nature of African labour and that the capitalist mode of production also favoured the pre-capitalist mode. According to Zeleza, squatters on better farms combined both modes of production to prosper. Zeleza further explains that labour consciousness was initially lacking in agricultural sectors because of agricultural and pastoral economies. Zeleza's study can be used to explain why African labourers, particularly squatters in Kimilili, used both modes of production to survive. Among the effects of wage labour in Kimilili was the rise of African nationalism. Vincent G. Simiyu's (1997) biography of Elijah Masinde depicts an enigmatic and controversial figure in Kenya's nationalist and religious circles. Masinde is depicted as a political and religious visionary and as a demented rabble-rouser who remained a mystical figure right to the grave. Simiyu (ibid.) notes that, "to understand Masinde's philosophy, one has to look at him within the cultural context of his people, the Bukusu community." In his own words Masinde was charismatic and everyone who knew him well acknowledged this quality. In this view analyse the contributions of squatters in the shaping of Masinde and the growth of nationalism. Migrant labourers in the study area used Masinde and *Dini ya Musambwa (DYM)* to air their grievances.

Mboya (1986) observes that trade unions were formed by genuine workers to fight for their rights and privileges and not an off-shoot of Communism. Singh (1969) convincingly traces the protest movements in Kenya and contends that trade unionism and nationalism are inseparable. Lubembe (1968) analyses the labour movement in Kenya and concludes that colonialism introduced and facilitated the exploitation of labourers through institutionalization of low wage policies. Mboya, Singh and Lubembe being pioneer trade unionists in Kenya, and as authors, provide a framework upon which studies on labour history and labour movement

are centred. However, much of what they have written is urban orientated to rural labourers.

Kanogo (1987) has meticulously traced the origins of Mau Mau, in her book *Squatters and the Roots of Mau Mau*. She notes that the story of the squatter presence in the "white highlands" is essentially the story of conflicts and contradictions between two agrarian systems, the settler plantation economy and the squatter option (Kanogo, 1987, p. 1). Squatter labour studies are, largely concerned with the dynamics of the squatter presence in the "white highlands" the initiative, self-assertion and resilience with which they faced their subordinate position as labourers. Kanogo (ibid.) emphasises that, the Kikuyu squatters looked at the opening up of the "white highlands" as an opportunity for expansion while herders visualised the "white highlands" with its vast expanses of unutilized virgin territory as a land of opportunity where the enterprising could make their fortune (ibid.). It offered squatters an escape route from the extortionate authority of the village chief and tax demands.

Kanogo (1987) ably analyses the subtle and sometimes unsubtle strategies squatters adopted to resist oppressive labour laws and concludes that the squatter question laid the foundations for Mau Mau rebellion. She contends that, the seeds of the violent protest that characterised the next phase of Kenya's history had been sown and so was the ideology that questioned the legitimacy of colonial rule. According to Kanogo (1987), Mau Mau was a nationalist movement with squatter reinforcement. Her conclusion is that the history of Mau Mau as a movement is incomplete without the integration of women activism into its historiography. The same was true of Kimilili in reference to the squatter activism through *DYM.* In fact, the leader of *DYM*, Elijah Masinde, at one time worked for a European settler in Namanjalala area of Trans Nzoia district. Moreover, Atieno-Odhiambo (1995) concurs with this view notes that fear to lose land gave vibrancy to *DYM*.

Wipper's (1977) *Rural Rebels and Colonial Kenya* is a scholarly work focusing on Kimilili. Wipper (ibid.) glorifies *DYM* terming it the Mau Mau of the Babukusu. Drawing from Wipper's work, this paper analyses the role of wage labourers in the emergence of Masinde and *DYM* . To some members of the Bukusu community, Masinde was more than a hero. He was a prophet and a liberator in both the religious and political sense (Wepukhulu, 2000). To the colonial administrators, he was a trouble maker, a social misfit, a habitual law breaker and a hardcore criminal, but it was not easy to ignore Masinde (Wepukhulu, 2000).

Critical Issues on Colonial Labour System and the Rise of Labour Consciousness

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. Earlier works have dealt with labour on European farms elsewhere and in towns, ignoring wage labour in Kimilili, as insignificant during the colonial period. Most 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 systematically analyse 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.

This paper is an exploration of a still largely unmapped area of recent Kenyan social and economic history. It deals with the emergence of a wage labour force in response to the economic changes brought about by British annexation and establishment of European farms. The author also investigates the factors that led to the emergence of wage labour, the changes it underwent in response to colonial economic policy and African adaptation and the impact on African households. The paper attempts to answer the following questions: What socio-economic and political processes and events generated labour migrancy during the colonial period? How did African cultivators react to various government policies which were geared to ensure labour supply and why? What were the effects of labour migrancy on the African political economy?

LIMITATION OF THE STUDY

This paper is limited to a study period 1940-1963 in relation to wage labour in Kimilili. For the purpose of comparative analysis, the study privileged from the background account of forms of labour since 1918 – a period which designates the introduction of the squatter system (labour) in Kenya - up to 1963, the year of independence. The paper was limited to the social, economic and political effects of wage labour between 1940 and 1963.

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 chiefs' *askaris*. These informants provided data underscoring and conceptualizing the question of labour and migrant labour in the context of pre-capitalism and capitalism to present. 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 either to refute or corroborate, authenticate, and supplement secondary data. It also used Secondary information on labour and socio-economic history of Kenya in general.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Early Forms of Protest

Although labour action in Kenya has been underestimated, response depended on the articulation of African agricultural sector and European farming in relation to migrant labour systems. Due to the economic constraints and employer strategies, African labourers made creative and culturally specific responses (Stichter, 1982). Migrant labour protests began with the establishment of forced labour system, aiming first at limiting African involvement in it. As economic pressures to provide labour replaced coercive ones, protest turned towards attempts to control wage earners' options within the system rather than outside it (Stichter, 1982). The thrust was towards freedom of mobility, in response to the need to raise wages through strikes finally merging with nationalism. Initially, African reaction was along ethnic or communal lines, not class-based Stichter, 1982, p. 158). But this "primary response" of ethnic communities to foreign rule necessarily involved acceptance or reflection of the provision of pre capitalist tribute labour, the first form in which the British extracted labour from African societies. The arrival of European settlers and forcible establishment of the migrant labour system meant further and more profound economic disruption (Stichter, 1982). To most Africans, short-term material consequences of the new order were negative. This led to different forms of protest (Stichter, 1982).

On the ethnic level, was the rise of millenarian movement which expressed feelings of deprivation and reflection of European impositions (Stichter, 1982). The second form of protest was by the African chiefs and the educated few like Harry Thuku. However, both groups were limited to the wage-earning population with their impact felt in rural areas and in this case Kimilili. The third form of protest INVOLVED specific strategies of migrant labourers: avoidance of recruitment, desertion of employment, boycotts of bad employers and passive resistance on the job (Stichter, 1982). This was common in Kimilili.

The situation in the African economy had an important bearing on African labour action. Earlier, African rural cultivation offered better opportunities relative to wage labour. Africans chose to let the African economy set the limits of their participation in wage earning. In general, desertion to the African reserved areas, seasonal work, resistance to recruitment and avoidance of bad employers, were the most important and effective strategies of resistance by migrant labourers (Fwamba Majimoto, OI, September 21, 2001). Employers constantly complained of inefficiency and dishonesty on the part of their labourers. From the labourers' point of view, laziness, theft and minor deceptions were a measure of freedom or personal dignity, or to protest against low wages, late payment of wages or deductions. Responses included desertions, feigning of obedience or of illness, avoidance of assigned work, drinking beer on job and theft (Batumayo Nayele, OI, October 10, 2001). Often employers imposed collective fines for theft, but this usually punished the innocent, since those who stole had already ran off (Albert Nabwana, OI, November 9, 2001). On the European farms in the neighbourhood of Kimilili, for instance, protests against harsh *nyaparas* cursing labourers or shouting them down was common (Batumayo Nayele, OI, October 10, 2001). Labourers reacted against close supervision and paternalistic tendancies precipitating militancy which found expression through *DYM* (James Furaha, OI, November 23, 2001). Resistance was influenced by work regime on European farms and importantly from the fact that most African labourers had rural connections.

Protest among African Labourers, 1945-1963: Elijah Masinde, the Rise of *Dini ya Musambwa* and Related Activities

DYM was formed in 1937 by Elijah Masinde, popularly known as Elijah wa Nameme. Masinde was born in 1911, at Maeni in Kimilili location, Bungoma

District. As a young man he joined the Friends Church, through which he acquired some education (Simiyu, 1997). Masinde started *DYM* with his aides Joash Walumoli and Israel Khaoya after deserting the Friends Church, his words as ''a symbol of oppression'' and argued that Christianity was part and parcel of colonialism. He also left his job as a summons processor at the Tribunal Court at Kabuchai in the 1930s (Simiyu, 1997). In 1937, he stunned everybody when he shrugged off the uniform and threw it at the District Commissioner stating that "I have had enough of this work" (Simiyu, 1997). He went ahead and started DYM but left Kimilili, his home area, to work for a European settler in the Namanjalala area of Trans Nzoia district to meet tax demands (Joseph Manyoa, OI, November 5, 2001). African labourers, mainly of the Babukusu sub-ethnic group, got influenced by Masinde's anti-colonial ideas. Between 1938 and 1941, Masinde worked as a *nyapara* on a European farm. On leaving European employment he noted that:

> I left this job after realizing that Europeans were nothing but confused. My *mzungu* had a very bad habit. He wanted me to call him *bwana mkubwa*. I was fed up with those words. I sat down and thought twice why I should be loyal to that *mzungu*. The only answer I got was to be rude until he suspended me. My work was to command other labourers in the big farm and yet my boss described me as a *nyapara* meaning senior labourer. Sometimes he called me *shamba* boy. I deserted and went without collecting my pay. I warned the *mzungu* that he would one day leave his big farm to Africans (Simiyu, 1997).

When Masinde returned to the African reserved area in Kimilili in the early 1940s, a number of labourers in collaboration with *nyaparas* could sneak from the labour camps on European farms at night to attend *DYM* meetings. They eventually filtered back to the farms to continue with Europeans employment as usual (Elijah Masinde, OI, November 9, 1970). In the process, Masinde came to be identified as a socio-religious and political figure. He was charismatic and everyone who knew him well acknowledged his quality (Simiyu, 1997). Masinde launched the DYM in earnest in April, 1943. While echoing this point, Shimanyula (1978) observes that:

> One night in April, 1943, God visited Masinde while he slept and told him "I am your God *Wele* of *Musambwa* Spirit. I am speaking from *Sayoni* in the Consecrated Mount Elgon… Tell *Musambwa* followers not to wear the clothes of Europeans; they should dress in the skins of monkeys." The following day Elijah Masinde, at the age 33, started preaching the words of Wele to his people, the Babukusu (p. 9).

Thus, *DYM* sought to turn the minds of the people against Europeans. The British found difficulty to win the battle of the brains and spirit of the people (Simiyu, 1995, p. 8). The colonial government was against it and crackdowns against its followers were common (Jackton Wafula, OI, October 12, 2001). In response, Masinde held several explosive rallies which often drew huge crowds and caused a lot of tension. Masinde's explosion of the unjust policies of the colonial regime earned him many followers. A major confrontation was in1947, when Masinde addressed highly-charged meetings at Kimilili and Kimalewa and urged the Babukusu to take up arms against the colonialists. Then, he conducted a commemorative ceremony at *Chetambe* fort, on a hill overlooking Webuye town to remember those killed for resisting British rule in 1895 (Shimanyula, 1978, p. 3).

Masinde went underground after the commemorative ceremony at Chetambe with spirited efforts by the colonial government to curb DYM activities and also arrest him. While in hiding at Chesamisi with his aides, his followers were shot during a demonstration at Malakisi in February 1948 (Nicasio Nalianya, OI, September 21, 2001. The demonstration was in solidarity with Masinde's conviction that Europeans were to leave Bukusuland. Eleven people died in the incident. Masinde was arrested while followers of *DYM* were severely fined and punished (Joseph Wafula, OI, September 4, 2001).

His exposition of unjust policies of the colonial regime earned him many followers in Bungoma, Trans Nzoia Districts, Kabras, Lugari, East and West Pokot (Joseph Wafula, OI, September 4, 2001). In fact, the sect gained momentum so much that a 1949 report commissioned by the then Bungoma District Commissioner, Mr. L. Campell, described it as spreading like a machine without a break (Joseph Wafula, OI, September 4, 2001). The colonial government then ruled the Babukusu through Wanga. Colonial campaigns to improve agriculture were met with resistance. For instance, the notorious order (campaign) by the colonial government to uproot and eradicate the dangerous Mexican Marigold weed was issued in 1944. The colonial Agricultural Officer based in Bungoma District, ordered the Babukusu to uproot the weed from their farms, to stop its spread to European farms in Trans Nzoia. Masinde not only protested against the order but also threatened to discipline the Agricultural Officer. It is on record that Masinde and two friends, Wekuke and Wenani, obstructed the Agricultural Officer in the execution of his duties in the campaign to eradicate the weed (Joseph Wafula, OI, September 4, 2001).

This action provoked the colonial government to arrest Masinde. During arrest, he bravely told the Provincial Commissioner that "I may be going to Kakamega but on my return, I shall not find the Assistant Agricultural Officer here, nor his house"

(Joseph Wafula, OI, September 4, 2001). Members of *DYM* went to the Officer's house but after failing to get him, they set his house on fire (*Daily Nation*, 2000, March 29). They also burnt the Friends Africans Mission or Friends Church at Lugulu, which he detested (ibid.). In reaction to this, the Provincial Commissioner K. L. Hunter (1947) wrote to the Chief Secretary of state and noted that:

> I consider that it is very important that some form of redress should be required from the people … Elijah has openly boasted that he would cause the Agricultural Officer to leave the area and I consider that he and his followers would sadly embarrass the administration and our future agricultural work in the area if the incident went unpunished (KNA African Affairs Department, 1948).

This intensified conflict between African and European interests. With Masinde's release, this scenario became even more complicated. *DYM* drew the attention of the colonial administration and was singled out for special concern. In his Annual Report for 1948, the Native Commissioner for North Nyanza, E.R. Davies wrote:

> The most serious of these movements was that one originating in the Kitoshi area of North Nyanza district. Its particular prophet Elijah Masinde, had apparently found sufficient leisure during his period as a certified lunatic to frame a political policy to fit his pronounced tendency to violent religious mania… set about the task of stirring supporters into action under the guise of religious fervor (KNA African Affairs Department, 1948).

The spread of *DYM* was a national issue in which conflicts increasingly occurred (Luka Buyuni, OI, September 1, 2001). In reference to its spread, the colonial government embarked on pacifying "tribesmen led astray by *Dini Ya Musambwa*, a curious brand of fanaticism" (Shimanyula, 1978). Of importance to this study, the effects of *DYM* went beyond the religious bar. In fact, because of Masinde's charisma, African labourers joined *DYM* in pursuit of economic and political goals (*Daily Nation*, 2002, August 3). Masinde, raised the grievance of colonial exploitation beyond European farms. On one occasion, he was jailed for inciting African police in Bungoma to mutiny on the grounds of underpayment and mistreatment (Luka Buyuni, OI, September 1, 2001). The worst confrontations between the colonial forces and DYM took place in Kimilili on the frontier of the "white highlands," making it a hot-bed for DYM activities. Kimilili like the rest of Bungoma District was an African labour reservoir for European settler labour needs and Public Works (KNA, North Nyanza District Annual Report, 1948).

Generally, in the late 1940s and 1950s, African labourers in Bungoma were conscious of their rights and became militant because of the unfolding social, economic and political changes in the country. For example, it is noted in the 1948 North Nyanza District Annual Reprot that, in July 1947, Masinde armed himself with a whip and blocked the road in support of protesting forty men recruited for a labour camp, claiming they had paid their tax (Shimanyula, 1978). In addition, African labourers harassed settler farmers with strikes for better pay or working condition, go-slow, absenteeism and threatening letters ordering them out of Kenya (KNA African Affairs Department, 1955). Thus, by the 1950, DYM was viewed as a dangerous movement, a fact echoed by the Colonial District Commissioner. The 1955 North Nyanza District Annual Reports quote the District Commissioner of North Nyanza, Wyn Harris that,

> *Dini Ya Musambwa* sect is a greater potential threat to law and order than Mau Mau, owing to the fact that a large percentage of the labour force in the district comes from the North Nyanza reserves (KNA African Affairs Department, 1953, p. 2).

In his 1946-1947 Annual Reports, Wyn Harris, had further written that:

> Several instances of religious fanaticism or possible dishonest politics under *Dini Ya Musambwa* occurred in Kimilili location. There has been considerable trouble caused by Masinde. It appears to be probable that the recrudescence of female circumcision in Kimilili and Kabras, the breaking of all the windows in the Friends Mission at Lugulu and the burning of three buildings at Kolanya were instigated by Masinde (KNA African Affairs Department, 1953, p. 2).

By 1953, the colonial government was convinced that prosecutions were necessary form time to time against members of the sect, who in the worlds of the DC Nyanza, "seemed unable to separate religion from fanatical and dangerous anti-European feelings" (Ogot, 1995). By the 1950s, *DYM* had entrenched itself and had won the loyalty of the squatter labourers, who comprised majority of African labourers on European farms in neighbouring Trans Nzoia. Due to pressure from *DYM*, a number of European farmers relaxed some labour conditions. In sum, African labourers on European farms used *DYM* to voice their grievances. This opened doors to the colonial reform response and African accommodation of wage labour from 1950 to 1963.

Colonial Reforms Responses and African Accommodation of Wage Labour, 1940-1963

The effect of land alienation after European settlement in Trans Nzoia became more pronounced

on the Bukusu community from the 1930s. Specifically, land alienation benefitted European settlers. The *esiamba* as the European farms were referred to by the Babukusu, remained predominantly for European settlers with Africans as labourers. Small land holdings with poor soils in areas designated as African reserved areas on one hand, and taxation on the other, forced Africans in areas neighbouring European farms to drift into these farms to seek wage employment, poverty in African reserved areas accelerating the pace. European farms had been natural grazing grounds. Therefore, the introduction of settler agriculture greatly changed the African socio-economic set up, in Kimilili, neighbouring Trans Nzoia District.

The Babukusu resented colonial policies such as land alienation, taxation and used *DYM to* voice their grievances. However, the struggle against *DYM* like Mau Mau movement in the 1950s had exerted political price from the British imperialist (Ogot, 1995). Their military occupation of Kenya could not last indefinitely, nor could they return the country to the status quo. Reform therefore became imperative (Swynnerton, 1954). The main objective of these colonial reforms was to create a base upon which a collaborative African leadership could emerge, and to undermine the support of African labourers for nationalism.

In 1953, the colonial government set up the Swynnerton Commission whose objective was to identify means of improving agricultural production in the African occupied areas (Ogot, 1995). From 1954, the Swynnerton land consolidation programme became an essential prerequisite for an agricultural revolution in African areas and marked the rise of a group of collaborators. This group acquired large tracks of land before the official division and issued with title deeds (James Wakhungu, OI, September 1, 2001). Under the Swynnerton Plan, land became the main basis of social differentiation in Bukusuland. The resources aimed at developing agriculture in African occupied areas were concentrated on developing these people's farms (Shikuri Simon, OI, September 2, 2001). African cultivators would be transformed into "an African middle class," one that engaged in economic production, while at the same time offering employment to those rendered landless by the Plan (Kanogo, 1987). In the words of Sorrenson (1967), the newly landed Babukusu were to act as a collaborator buffer class between the masses of the impoverished militant and the landless… and the colonial government. Indeed, the Swynnerton Plan created social differentiation among the Babukusu cultivators of Kimilili.

The colonial government adopted various measures and strategies to control both labour consciousness and unionization. Before the 1940s, the colonial state was hostile to the formation of African trade unions (Lubembe, 1968) and discouraged them in the agricultural sector (Sandbrook, 1975). Trade unionism dates to the 1930s, when the Labour Government in Britain pointed out that trade unions protect labourers from abuses and exploitation by employers. Thus, in 1940, under the Colonial Development and Welfare Act, grants could only be provided to a colony on condition that with a free functioning trade union movement (Sandbrook, 1975). As a result, labour organization emerged earlier in urban areas in Kenya, due to the concentration of labourers in close proximity, good communication and literacy. Casual and unstabilised labour in the agricultural sector inhibited early emergence of labour organizations (Sandbrook, 1975). The migrant labour system that characterized European farming was an obstacle to collective labour consciousness, as well as organization. Cohen and Sandbrook (1978), in *The Development of an African Working Class*, contend that before the 1950s labour organisation was less developed in terms of organization. Besides, African labourers on European farms were under close surveillance of *nyaparas* holding back any labour action as was the case in Kimilili.

The first trade union in Kenya was the Labour trade union of Kenya (LTUK), formed by Makhan Singh in 1935 (Singh, 1969). The enactment of the Trade Union Ordinance in 1937 mandated any organization purporting to be a trade union to either apply for registration or cease operation. European settlers used the press, for example *The East African Standard* which was under European control, to clamp down on the nascent trade unions terming trade unionists as irresponsible agitators. However, pressure from the British government, led to the creation of the post of Trade union Officer to guide trade unionism (Singh, 1969). Thus in 1947, James Patrick became the first trade union Labour Officer in Kenya. In the same year (1947), F.W. Carpenter, the acting Labour Commissioner stated that, Africans would only be allowed to form trade unions as long as they embraced the tenets, purposes and organization of trade unions (Singh, 1969). Partick, asserted that he would not sanction the formation of trade unions by uneducated labourers who still lacked good qualities of leadership and organization such as farm labourers. The 1948 Colonial Annual Report quotes the Labour Commissioner stating that:

> Considerable difficulty arose over the misconception in the mind of the African of the true purpose of a trade union, partly due to a growing political consciousness. On this part, action had to be taken to guide certain African associations chiefly formed for political motives, but calling themselves trade unions, into a one formal channel of trade union practice (Singh, 1969).

By the late 1950s, no legal forum for agricultural labourers had emerged because of the unstable nature of the labour force and the high rate of illiteracy among African labourers (Singh, 1969). African labourers oscillated between wage labour and the African production sector in the reserved areas. *DYM* became the only forum for labourers through which they could air their grievances, a launching pad of African labour consciousness and nationalism. The colonial government also arrested officials of urban based trade unions sympathetic to the Mau Mau struggle (Mboya, 1968). But in 1953, the colonial government appointed a Committee under F.W. Carpenter, to examine the low wage structure to the African labourers (Carpenter, 1954) and reform the colonial labour structure disturbed by Mau Mau uprising (Colony and Protectorate of Kenya, 1954-1995). This would end the tendency of labourers' oscillation between wage employment and the African farming sector in the reversed areas (ibid.). This confirmed the view held by employers that, in paternalistic relations supposedly characteristic of European farming sector, independent trade unions were regarded as inimical since they interfered with business harmony (Kenya Federation of Labour, 1955).

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This paper has traced African response to wage labour in the period 1940-1963. It has analyzed the colonial government's policies towards the African response to European employment. Apart from analyzing early forms of protest, we have also traced the emergence, spread and effects of DYM on African labourers on European farms in the neighbourhood of Kimilili. It has been pointed out that prior to the 1940s, desertions were the main form of protest in Western Kenya. It is also true that the colonial government opposed any kind of welfare organization for African labourers on European farms. Moreover, wage employment undermined African agricultural production especially in Kimilili leading to social differentiation. Consciousness led to improved working conditions for African labourers evidenced in the various labour Reports.

REFERENCES

Amin, S. (1974). Accumulation on World Scale. New York: Monthly Review Press.

Atieno-Odhiambo, E. S. (1995). The Formative Years 1945-55. In B. A. Ogot, & W. R. Ochieng, (Eds.), Decolonization and Independence in Kenya 1940-93. London: James Currey, pp. 25.

Barker, E. E. (1950). A Short History of Nyanza. Nairobi: East Africa Literature Bureau, pp. 2-20.

Brett, E. A. (1973). Colonialism and Underdevelopment in East Africa: The Politics of Economic Change 1919-1939. London: Heinemann.

Carpenter, F. W. (1954). Committee on African Wages. Nairobi: Government Printers, pp. 1-50.

Clayton, E. S. (1964). Agrarian Development to Peasant Economies: Some Lessons from Kenya. London: Pergamon press Limited, p. 40.

Cohen, R., & Sandbrook, R. (1978). The Development of an African Working Class. London, Oxford University Press, pp. 24.

Daily Nation, (2000, March 29). Daily Nation. Nairobi: Nation Media Group.

Daily Nation, (2002, August 3). Daily Nation. Nairobi: Nation Media Group.

Fearn, H. (1961). An African Economy: Study of the Economic Development of the Nyanza Province of Kenya: 1903-1995. London: Oxford University Press, p. 18.

Kanogo, T. (1987). Squatters and the Roots of Mau Mau. Nairobi: James Currey, pp. 164-180

Kenya Federation of Labour, (1955, July 8). Newsletter, No. 10. Kenya Federation of Labour.

Kitching, G. (1980). Class and Economic Change in Kenya: The Making of An African Petite-Bourgeoisie 1905-1970. London: Yale University Press, pp. 14-19.

KNA African Affairs Department, (1948). Annual Report, African Affairs Department, pp. 2-3.

KNA African Affairs Department, (1955). Annual Report, African Affairs Department, pp. 4.

KNA African Affairs Department, 1946-1947, Annual Reports. African Affairs Department.

KNA African Affairs Department, (1953). Annual Report, African Affairs Department, pp. 2.

Hunter, K. L. (1977). Letter dated 26 January 1945 from PC to Honourable Secretary of State. In Wipper, A. Rural Rebels in Colonial Kenya. Nairobi: Oxford University Press.

Lubembe, C. (1968). The Inside of Labour Movement in Kenya. Nairobi: Equatorial Publishers, pp. 52-55.

Maxon, R. M. (1992). The Establishment of the Colonial Economy. In Ochieng', W. R., & Maxon R. M. (Eds.), An Economic Historory of Kenya (pp. 63). Nairobi: East African Educational Publishers Ltd.

Mboya, T. (1986). Freedom and After. Nairobi: Heinemann, pp. 18-20.

Ochieng', W. R., & Maxon, R. M. (Eds.), (1992). An Economic History of Kenya. Nairobi: East African Educational Publishers Ltd.

Ogot, B. A. (1995). The Decisive Years 1955-63. In W. R. Ochieng, & B. A. Ogot, (Eds.), Decolonization and Independence in Kenya 1940-93. Nairobi: James Currey, p. 55.

Sandbrook, R. (1975). Proletarians and African Capitalism: The Kenyan Case 1960-1972. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 144.

Shimanyula, J. B. (1978). Elijah Masinde and Dini Ya Musambwa. Nairobi: Trans Africa, p. 4.

Simiyu, W. (1995). Lumboka/Chetambe Centenary Newsletter, Webuye, p. 8.

Simiyu, V. G. (1997). Elijah Masinde. Nairobi: East African Publishing House, pp. 40.

Singh, M. (1969). History of Kenya's Trade Union Movement to 1952. Nairobi: East African Publishing House, pp. 49-50.

Sorrenson, M. P. K. K. (1967). Land Reform in Kikuyu Country. Nairobi: Oxford University Press, pp. 7.

Stichter, S. (1982). Migrant Labour in Kenya; Capitalism and African Responses, 1895-1975. London: Longman, pp. 17.

Swynnerton, J. M. (1954). A plan to intensify the Development of African Agriculture in Kenya. Nairobi: Government Printers, pp. 21.

Van Zwanenberg, R. M. A. (1977). Colonial Capitalism and Labour in Kenya, 1919-1939. Dar-es-Salaam: Macmillan, pp. 60-70.

Wepukhulu, H. (2000, March 29). Elijah Masinde: A Man of God or Common Criminal? Daily Nation. Nairobi: Nation Media Group.

Wipper, A. (1977). Rural Rebels and Colonial Kenya. Nairobi: Oxford University Press.

Wolff, R.D. (1974). Britain and Kenya 1897-1930. The Economics of Colonialism. Nairobi: Transafrica Publishers, pp. 139.

Zeleza, P. T. (1982). Dependent Capitalism and the Making of the Kenyan Working Class During the colonial period. Ph.D. Thesis, Dalhousie, Dalhousie University.