

**COLONIAL TRANSFORMATION OF THE AEMBU ACCESS TO LAND  
AND LABOUR DIVISION SYSTEMS ON FOOD CROP PRODUCTION AND  
FOOD SECURITY, 1906-1963**

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Requirements for the Award of the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in History of  
Chuka University**

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## DECLARATION AND RECOMMENDATION

### Declaration

This thesis is my original work and has not been presented for the award of a diploma or a degree in any other university.

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### Recommendation

This thesis has been examined, passed and submitted with our approval as the University Supervisors.

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## **DEDICATION**

I dedicate this research thesis to my parents Irene Gaturi Njuguna and Mr. Peter Mbogo who instilled in me the spirit of hard work. To my husband Mr. Newton Kivuti Njeru and our children Dr. Joylin Mumbi Kivuti, Shalin Mukiri Kivuti and Lolin Ngatha Kivuti.

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## ABSTRACT

Expansion of British colonialists to Kenya and their interaction with the Aembu people changed the traditional system of access to land and labour division in food crop production. British colonial practices and policies undermined the Aembu land and labour systems in food crop production and replaced them with new policies. Thus, the aim of the study was to analyse the effects of colonialism on the system of access to land and labour division in food crop production on the Aembu in Embu County between 1906 and 1963. The study's objectives were; to explore the Aembu pre-colonial land and labour systems on food crop production in Embu County up to 1906, to examine colonial transformation of the Aembu access to land and labour division in food crop production from 1906 to 1963 and to analyse the influence of the co-existence of pre-colonial and colonial access to land and labour systems on food security from 1906 to 1963. The study used descriptive research design. Articulation of Modes of Production Theory was employed to examine the interaction between the pre-capitalist and the capitalist modes of production. The study was conducted in Embu East sub-county, Embu West sub-county and Embu North sub-county. Targeted population was 16,144 people based on the 2019 Census from which a sample size of 50 respondents was used. Purposive sampling method and snowballing technique was utilized to reach out to the most resourceful respondents. Data was collected from oral interviews, archival records and secondary sources which were corroborated to guarantee validity and reliability of the study. Oral interviews and focus group discussions were used as instruments of data collection. Data was analysed using the Qualitative Data Analysis method. The study found out that the pre-colonial Aembu food crop producers had elaborate systems of land ownership and land use under clan heads which guaranteed all members land in different ecological areas suitable for production of crops. The land access system further accommodated practices like shifting cultivation and intercropping for increased food productivity. Further, the study revealed that the pre-colonial division of labour in food crop production incorporated all household members for enhanced food supply. However, when pre-colonial labour system was integrated into the colonial system through forced labour, low wages, migrant and communal labour it resulted to significant decline in food crop production. The study concluded that British colonialism transformed the Aembu land and labour systems while co-existence of pre-colonial and colonial access to land and labour systems on production of food crops exposed the community to food shortages. The study contributes to social, political and economic historiography of the Aembu people.

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## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **INTRODUCTION**

#### **1.1 Background of the Study**

Historically, production of food crops was first carried out in Middle East about 10,000 years ago where Mesopotamia is a renowned area of early civilization characterized by domestication of crops and animals (Simmonds, 1962). Spread of food crops from Mesopotamia to the other parts of the world was facilitated by human activities such as trade and migrations in search for new settlements. In America during the Trans-Atlantic trade, crops like banana and maize were used to feed the slaves due to their high nutritive value and provision of the greatly required energy for the plantation workforce. In the African continent, West Africa was the first area to grow crops like bananas followed by East African highlands (Smale, 2006). In the 16<sup>th</sup> century, the Arab traders at the Coast of East Africa carried out trade with the coastal Bantus like the Agiriama and the Ataita which facilitated spread of diverse crops like cassava, millet and yams to other parts of Africa as well as Kenya.

In African societies before the advent of British colonialism, the criteria of access to land and the different roles played on the resource determined many aspects of production which included making of decision regarding the types of tools for farming, types of crops, information required, skills necessary and overall food production (Middleton, 1953). Africans accessed land on the basis of specific personal and communal needs while labour was organized with the ultimate aim of increasing food production. There existed indigenous knowledge that was passed on from one generation to another for assurance of food security and people's wellbeing, conservation of environment, opportune warning against disaster and the management tactics (Mafogoya & Ajay, 2017). Pre-colonial African small-scale farmers had skills and coping mechanisms to ensure food availability. This was successful due to the existing traditional systems characterized by a well-versed criterion of accessing land that was most suitable for certain crops and labour organization in food crop production. Moreover, every African community had its exclusive ways of ensuring food safety within its confines and any radical changes on such traditional systems meant that the society would experience either food shortage or increased food supply. In Kenya, British colonialism expanded to the highlands in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century and this eventually affected the rest of the country. Colonialism destroyed the existing

traditional African cultural practices (Eyong, 2017). British colonial policies changed the traditional practices particularly through enacting of land and the labour policies within the country. Colonialism alienated African land and altered traditional land and labour arrangements without paying respect to the African socio-economic constructions that were in place. The newly introduced changes on land and labour undermined the already existing African traditional structures (Leys, 1975). The result was integration of African economy into the capitalist world system where most Africans lost their land to the settlers and became producers of raw materials for the industries. The changes initiated by the colonialists on traditional land and labour systems affected household food production (Staudt, 1993).

According to Omwoyo (1990) British colonial policies interfered with the pre-colonial agricultural practices which may have had effects on availability of food among many Kenyan communities. Rau (1991) asserts that there were cases of famine during the colonial period among African societies. Kisungi (2020) states that in Kitui west colonialism undermined the traditional systems leading to food shortages. Nayenga (1979) affirms that colonialism in Kenya either articulated or destroyed the modes of production of the pre-capitalist societies such as the communal systems of land ownership, intercropping, shifting cultivation and growing of root crops which ended up exposing the communities to famine.

According to the report from Food and Agricultural Organization of United Nations (2013) Africa's population about 78% of the people are unable to afford a healthy diet compared with 42% at the global level and the number is increasing across the continent. Kenya is not isolated from the latter scenario and it calls for more food production to mitigate the growing demand. In order to increase production of food in the country, it was essential to understand the dynamics of land access and labour resources during the colonial period as the traditional systems underwent significant changes throughout the era

Mwaniki (1974) affirms that there were a series of famines in Embu land such as *Kiverio*, *Gatathoni*, *Kithioro* and *Mianga*. However, Mwaniki has listed the major famines among the Aembu and drawn a generalized conclusion that the famines were as a result of intercommunity warfare, locust invasion and draught. Mwaniki, further

documents that the Aembu had different names for describing the severity of the famines. Serious famines were named *yura* meaning people go for more than a day without food whereas the simple were denoted as *wathima* meaning that they get less than three meals in a day. Mwaniki's work leaves a lacuna that requires to be filled with a historical inquiry investigating the causes of all the famines among the Aembu. Mwaruvie (1994) pre-colonial Ambeere producers had various mechanisms to avoid food shortages, the first being the way people manipulated hostile environments to divide labour and ensure sustainable livelihoods. However, to incorporate it into European capitalism, colonialists significantly disrupted the system of land access and division of labour in production of food crop among the Aembu people. Evidence from existing studies depict that the question of colonial alterations in the method of obtaining land and division of labour in production of food crops and the extent to which the various dimensions of food security among the Aembu changed from 1906-1963 has not received a lot of scholarly attention. It was crucial, therefore, to conduct a historical analysis of colonial transformation of land access system and division of labour in production of food crop so as to document the extent to which the various dimensions of the Aembu food security changed from 1906 and 1963.

## **1.2 Statement of the Problem**

Alteration to land access systems and the division of labour influence food crop production which has impact on food security. In the pre-colonial Aembu community, right to use land for cultivation of various food crops depended on specific tasks and division of labour and this in return influenced food crop production. Land was owned by clans and the family members could use the resource based on their needs which was determined by the elders of the community. Clan members accessed land for growing of food crops such as yams, cassava, grains, sweet potatoes, banana, legumes and arrowroots. Moreover, there existed clear guidelines on division of labour which ensured continuous supply of foodstuff. With the advent of colonialism, land access systems and the labour guiding principles in the production of food crops were transformed using the implementation of various colonial land and labour regulations. The move led to articulation of African pre-capitalist production to the world capitalist system which stressed for the individual ownership of factors of production like land. Furthermore, the changes in the access to land and division of labour interfered with the various dimensions of food security among the Aembu households.

The issue of transformations in land access systems and the division of labour, and its relationship to various dimensions of food security in Embu has not been researched on exclusively in a historical perspective. Therefore, this study sought to fill the gap by analysing British colonialism and its influence on the existing land access and division of labour systems in food crop production from 1906-1963. The study outlined the pre-colonial land and labour systems in production of food crops which provided a foundation for the analysis of colonial implications. The study therefore addressed land and labour systems in food crop production and the influence of colonial policies in guaranteeing supply of sufficient food within the Aembu households. It is expected that this study's findings will inform policy makers in the agricultural sector on the importance of embracing certain traditional practices in food crop production alongside the modern scientific approaches.

### **1.3 Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of the study was to examine colonial transformation of the Aembu access to land and labour division systems on food crop production and food security, 1906-1963.

### **1.4 Objectives of the Study**

This study was guided by the following specific objectives:

- i. To explore the Aembu pre-colonial land access and labour division systems in food crop production in Embu County up to 1906,
- ii. To analyse colonial transformation of the Aembu land access and labour division systems in food crop production from 1906-1963.
- iii. To establish the influence of co-existence of pre-colonial and colonial access to land and labour systems in food crop production on food security from 1906-1963.

### **1.5 Research Questions**

The study was guided by the following questions;

- i. How was the pre-colonial land access system and labour division in food crop production organized among the Aembu community up to 1906?
- ii. How did colonialism transform the existing Aembu land access and labour division systems in food crop production from 1906- 1963?

- iii. What was the influence of the co-existence of pre-colonial and colonial access to land and labour systems on food security among the Aembu from 1906-1963?

### **1.6 Significance of the Study**

Kenya highly depends on agriculture for growth and more precisely production of food crop, thus, the study focused on a historical examination of the relationship between British foreign policies and the traditional African mode of subsistence production which contributes to the agrarian history of Kenya. The study contributes on the influence of colonial land and labour policies to production of food and food security among the Aembu. It contributes to a fair understanding of the land and labour dynamics in Kenya at a time when the food produced is not sufficient to counter the growing demand and the country is progressively importing food stuff from other countries.

The study contributes to the articulation of modes of production theory which looks at the interaction between the pre-capitalist modes of production and the capitalist system whereby the capitalist mode slowly undermines the pre-capitalist mode to its advantage. The Aembu had well defined traditional land and labour systems in food crop production that ensured sufficient food supply within households but British colonialists failed to appreciate these systems and their aim was to install a new form of capitalist economy. This study has documented the importance of traditional land and labour system as well as traditional skills and practices that can be utilized by policy makers to increase food crop productivity and fight food insufficiencies in Kenya.

The study is in line with the World Bank that is working to ensure food security for everyone, universally and each day by funding nation's food systems through the global Agricultural and Food Security Program (GAFSP). The recommendations of the study may help realizing Kenya's vision 2030 (GOK, 2008) of eradicating poverty through provision of accessible, available, nutritious and stable food to all Kenyans all the time. Further, the study's recommendations may help in realising Kenya's goal in the constitution of Kenya 2010 (GOK, 2010) that reassures all citizens' right to

freedom from hunger and enough food of satisfactory quality. Further, the recommendations of this study may intensify the campaign by the Ministry of Health (MOH) that recommends consumption of indigenous foods such as cassava, yams and other traditional leafy vegetables as a way of evading lifestyle diseases. To the county government, the study's findings may inform the policy makers in the agricultural sector on the importance of embracing certain traditional practices in food crop production alongside the modern scientific approaches. The recommendations of this study may add to the existing knowledge about the Aembu's economic, social and political history. Further, the findings of this study may contribute to the debate on how Europeans perceived the pre-capitalist method of food crop production and the campaign to support the humanities and arts.

### **1.7 Limitations of the Study**

This study utilized three sources of data; oral sources, archival and secondary. Primary source had a limitation of inaccuracy because this form of data depended on the informant's memory which could lapse occasionally especially among those who were very old. To deal with this limitation, corroboration of data from oral sources with secondary and archival was adhered to ensure objectivity and reliability of study's findings. Some secondary sources of data had Eurocentric bias which posed as a limitation to this study. To overcome the limitation, a variety of Afrocentric and Eurocentric perceptions helped the researcher to eliminate the bias. Data from the archives had scanty, and non-comprehensive information to the area of study. To overcome this limitation, archival data was corroborated with oral and secondary sources. However, the the study came up with findings that can be applied to the three Sub-Counties since they shared alike topographies suitable for food crop production as well as fertile soils and reliable rainfall hence, they had similar colonial experiences.

### **1.8 Scope of the Study**

The period covered by the study was from 1906-1963. The year 1906 is significant in the history of the Aembu because that is when British colonial rule was officially established in the community after a punitive attack led by Captain Meinrthagen under the leadership of Edward Butler Horne. The same year, is remarkable to the history of the community because that is when the Aembu's first office of colonial

chief was established by the British government at a place called Ngoire and Kiriamiti was acclaimed to be the community's first colonial chief (Mwaniki, 2010). Consequently, colonialism subjected the Aembu people to the alien practices which undermined the existing traditional land access and labour division systems in food crop production. The study examined the pre-colonial land access and labour division systems in food crop production before establishment of British colonial rule. The new land and labour policies introduced by the colonial government which encouraged European settlement in Embu and close interaction between the two groups from 1906-1963.

The newly introduced land and labour policies which led to co-existence of the Pre-capitalist production with the Capitalist Mode of Production. This interaction had effects on the traditional food crop production among the Aembu since land alienation ensued which deprived the community members the most significant resource in food crop production. Moreover, new labour policies were introduced which undermined the Aembu traditional labour system and further demolished the indigenous system of producing food. However, in order to fully examine the colonial changes on land and labour systems in the Aembu food crop production and assess the extent to which the various dimensions of food security changed, the study examined the pre-colonial land and labour systems in food crop production by the Aembu hence laying basis for the inquiry. The study took place in three Sub-counties within the larger Embu County namely Embu North, Embu East and Embu West. The three sub counties were selected on purpose because they are different from the other two since they are endowed with fertile soils and reliable rainfall for food crop production which shows that the colonialists had a lot of interest in the area. Moreover, the area produced surplus foodstuff which promoted trade with the neighbours like the Ambeere, Chuka and the Kamba in the period before colonialism (Mwaniki, 20210). This explains that the three Sub- Counties (East, West and North) had an early interaction with the Europeans since the area had an ideal climate and fertile soils for their settlement and ideal for the study.

The year 1963 marked the exit of the study because of its significance to the history of Kenya as that is when colonialism came to an end and the country became sovereign.

The Period 1906-1963 was ideal for it helped in the examination of colonial alterations of land and labour systems in food crop production over the period. Moreover, the period provided a historical tread when examining the origin of the food shortages in Embu at present. Moreover, the study provides basis for further research on new forms of land ownership and labour systems that emerged after independence.

The study examined land and labour systems since they are the most important resources in food crop production. The Aembu system of land access ensured that every clan member obtained the resource based on their specific needs while labour was distributed within households throughout their seasonal year with the ultimate goal of increasing food production in all seasons. However, British colonialism introduced Capitalist economy alongside the Pre- Capitalist Aembu subsistence production which invited the for use of the Articulation Mode of Production as the guiding theory in this study. The theory was used to show the extent to which colonialism transformed the land and labour resources on food crop production among the Aembu.

### **1.9 Assumptions**

- i In the pre-colonial Aembu setup there existed clear land access and labour division systems in the production of food crops which ensured availability of food within households.
- ii British colonialisms transformed the Aembu's traditional standards of land access systems and labour division in food crop production.
- iii Co-existence of pre-colonial and colonial land access and labour systems negatively affected the four dimensions of food security among the Aembu from 1906 to1963.

### **1.10 Operational Definition of Terms**

**Access to Land:** In this study it refers to the methods used by the

Aembu community members to get suitable land for specific food crops in different ecological zones.

- Aembu:** People living in upper part of Embu land but the original inhabitants of the area.
- Capitalism:** In this study it refers to an economic structure where the proprietor of the means of production takes advantage of the productive resources for their profit. In this study colonial capitalism changed the pre-capitalist land and labour systems among the Aembu for its maximum profit.
- Change:** It refers to a process of transformation or alteration. In this study it refers to the way the Aembu pre-colonial systems of access to land and division of labour in food crop production changed from pre-capitalist to capitalist during the colonial period.
- Colonial Transformation:** In this study it refers to how British colonial government interfered with the Aembu land and labour policies between 1906 to 1963.
- Colonialism:** In this study it refers to a situation where a powerful nation dominates over a weaker one. For this case the British over the Aembu of Kenya.
- Customary:** An issue based on traditions, customs and values. For this case the Aembu traditions on land and labour systems.
- Division of Labour:** Refers to roles performed by male and females. In this study it refers to classification of roles assigned to members of the Aembu community in food crop production based on values, customs and traditions.
- Embu Land:** In this study it refers to land in Embu occupied by the people who speak the Kiembu language.
- Food Security:** In this study it refers to availability, Accessibility, Utilization and Stability of Food. In this study it refers

to the ability of the Aembu to feed themselves. The opposite of this is starvation.

- Factors of Production:** In this study it refers to two important resources of achieving production of food crops namely land and labour.
- Food Crop Production:** In this study it refers to the whole process of acquiring food for human consumption. It starts from accessing and, clearing of land, planting, weeding, guarding against harmful predators, harvesting, drying, storage, sorting and distribution.
- Influence:** In this study it refers to the extent to which colonialism interfered with food availability through undermining of the traditional Aembu land and labour systems.
- Kikuyu:** This study refers to them as people who live in central Province and they speak the Agikuyu language.
- Land Tenure:** In this study it refers to system or criteria of possessing land and its use in food crop production.
- Land:** In this study it refers to a natural resource where food crop production takes place among the Aembu.
- Livelihood:** In this study it refers to means of supporting sustainable living both socially and economically.
- Mbeere:** In this study it refers to people who live in lower part of Embuland which is usually hot and dry with unreliable rainfall.
- System:** In this study it refers to the rules or the organization style accepted by the Aembu based on the traditions and customs regarding land and labour.

## CHAPTER TWO

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### 2.1 Introduction

This chapter has three segments of literature the first being on pre-colonial land access systems and labour division in food crop production, the second on colonial

changes on land access systems and labour division in food crop production while the third one is on the extent to which the various dimensions of food security changed from 1906-1963. In the three divisions there is examination of studies conducted in Africa and among Kenyan communities including the Aembu over land, labour and food insecurities issues which have raised attention from many scholars. The presence of many studies shows the importance attached to land and labour resources in food crop production. Theoretical frame work is also found in this chapter.

## **2.2 Pre-colonial Land Access Systems and Labour Division in Food Crop Production**

Various studies have been carried out focusing on land and labour across Africa since these are fundamental factors of food crop production. Land is important because all human undertakings that sustain living depend on it. It is because of this reason that the resource has many scholars paying attention to it across the globe (Njau, 2009). For example, Prothero (1992) conducted a study in Sub- Sahara Africa on land ownership and asserts that, individual land tenure influenced other related activities. The study indicates that individual land tenure has influenced rural areas into townships. The study underlines the value of individual land tenure in regard with the associated activities on the parcel of land which makes it related to this study. However, the study covers sub-Sahara Africa while this study examined land ownership and the related activities restricted down to a level of the Aembu society.

Power hierarchies existed within families according to Carney & Watts' (1990), examination of rice production in Senegambia. Men held all control in the highly hierarchical organization. Men had authority over women's wealth and labour in the home. The study is related to the concluded inquiry when examining the division of labour and how the community members accessed land for food crop production. The two studies are different since this study critically analysed the pre-colonial land and labour access systems, colonial changes on the two resources and the extent to which the various dimensions of food security changed as a result of coexistence of the two systems among the Aembu people from 1906-1963.

Before colonialism in Kenya, the primary system of land possession was communal tenure. Individuals laid right on land that belonged to a specific community.

Economic activities such as hunting and fishing were jointly undertaken since land was communally owned and community members had equal rights over the resource (Ochieng, 1990). Pastoralists like the, Fulani of Nigeria and the Maasai of Kenya needed larger sizes of land to support the practice but the communal system was upheld. However, Ochieng further points out that there existed authorities to control land apportionment comprising of clans, tribal or family. He further contends that private land tenure system is alien and it was imposed during the colonial epoch. The study was a milestone to this work of historical enquiry because it gave insight when establishing land ownership system in the traditional Aembu society. However, this study investigated the influence of colonialism on the Aembu land and labour systems on food crop production and food security

According to Wanjara (2000), the land ownership systems in Kenya during pre-colonial era was totally unlike that in Britain though the system was introduced to Kenya. However, communal system was the commonest method of land ownership among the majority of Kenyan communities. This indicates that land did not belong to an individual but to the whole community. Moreover, all the community members were stakeholders with rights to access land based on their needs at the specific time. While Wanjara's study was carried out among the Agikuyu, he expounds that the tenure systems differed in characteristics from one ethnic group to the other across the country. By underlining the fact that land ownership system was not the same among all the Kenyan groups, the study contributes knowledge to the existing work. Further evidence from Wanjara's work indicates that it is impossible to generalize the land ownership system to all communities hence necessitated this study. However, Wanjara's work was limited to the changing system of land ownership while this study explored the Aembu characteristics of land and labour access system in food crop production, the alterations done due to colonialism and also examined how the community's traditional food crop practices were altered by the colonial government policies.

According to Mwaniki (1974), hunting was the earliest form of land ownership in Embu. The technique was used by the early immigrants to Embu, who were unaware of the domestication of crops. Mwaniki emphasizes further that clearing the first patch

of bush guaranteed land ownership. Clans developed after the Embu settled, and all clan members had legal claim to the land. The text further contains detailed information on the types of food stuff, socio organization and famine matters. The work of Mwaniki represents a milestone for this study since it has revealed some of the methods that clan members of the Aembu accessed land. However, the two studies differ in that this study investigated the colonial changes on the Aembu land and labour system in food crop production and the implications of the articulation of the two productive modes on food security.

Mwaniki (1973), has a detailed analysis of the political history of the Aembu and the Ambeere. The study is concerned with the way the Aembu were politically organized and this makes it related to this study since land matters are embedded on the political organization of a community. However, the study leaves a lacuna to be filled on the economic aspect of the Aembu history since the study lacks a critical analysis on matters related to land and labour in relation to food crop production. Moreover, it has added value to the current study. Further, Mwaniki (2010) in his study on *roots, migrations and the settlements of the Aembu* has detailed information regarding the history of the Aembu and the Mbeere. The study traces Aembu and Mbeere place of origin, the migration patterns and their final settlement areas. The information was beneficial to this study especially when tracing the Aembu origin and while addressing their political system which is linked to land possession in the community. The study has further discussed the socio-organization and different foods crops that the Aembu grew and that further contributes to this study for forming a basis of the inquiry. Mwaniki's work has a lot of information regarding the Aembu foods crops, origin, migrations and their settlement which benefited this study. However, a critically analysis of the land and labour access systems in food crop production, colonial transformation and the effects of the changes on availability of food has been explored in this study which marks the departure point between the two studies.

The use of land in traditional societies, according to Kamunge (2008), was guided by the communal chief who distributed it to the people of the village in accordance with their needs, such as those for farming, grazing, and gathering firewood. Land ownership disputes were a very uncommon event. The study is connected to the

suggested investigation to shed light on the land acquisition process used by several African communities. This study established that the systems of rulers distributing land were transformed by colonialism while it's crucial to remember that the systems were not the same among all Kenyan areas. The work has a general overview on land ownership system which equips this study with relevant specifics However, while Kamunge's work has laid emphasis on pre-colonial land ownership systems on the contrary, the current study defined the Aembu's access to land criteria and labour in production of food crop and the notable changes in indigenous production during the colonial epoch and the degree to which the various dimensions of food security changed.

According to Karuitha (2016), although Meru clans possessed land, the Njuri councils had complete control over land-related issues since they effectively regulated who needed to own what land and how it was distributed. The study aimed at understanding the socio-economic implications of land adjudication in Buuri. This study is significant to the current investigation since it reveals that clan leaders were in charge of deciding who owned and distributed land. However, the study illuminates on the clan system of land ownership when tracing the pre-colonial land access system among the Aembu. However, while Karuitha's study established the social and economic implications of land adjudication, the current study instead analysed changes introduced by colonialism on the pre-colonial systems of access to land and labour and further the implication of the coexistence of the pre-colonial and colonial systems on availability of food among the Aembu people.

Muriuki (1974) points out that, among the Agikuyu one could own land through being incorporated to a family or *muciarua* could marry from the family and he was allowed right to own land within the clan. In relation to this study, Muriuki's work highlights on various methods of acquiring land among the Agikuyu which is a milestone. While Muriuki's study has examined land ownership system among the Agikuyu, this study critically assessed the changes introduced by British colonialism on the traditional land and labour systems among the Aembu and the extent to which the changes interfered with food security. A study was conducted on land ownership

among the Agikuyu by Lambert (1956). The research work was carried out during the colonial era after the Native Lands Trust Legislation was passed in 1938, when land disputes between Kenyan people and the colonial administration became more frequent. Lamberts's findings were from the Agikuyu community but were generalized to other communities including the Aembu. The generalized findings failed to examine communities as isolated with their own systems. Nevertheless, this study will benefit from Lamberts's work when looking at the colonial changes on traditional system of access to land but differs in that the current research which analysed colonial changes on land and labour systems and how the changes influenced production of food crop among the Aembu populace.

Labour is an essential resource in the systems of production all over the world, in Africa and in Kenya. According to Tignor (1976), during the economic activities in Kikuyu, labour was highly gendered. The study indicates that the different roles in the production consequently determined decision making and division of labour. The study was conducted in Kikuyu land and is a milestone to this study for giving insight of labour system. However, aspects of labour organization in food crop production were not synonymous among all Kenyan societies since variations existed from one community to another which necessitated the current study. The present study analysed the land and labour access systems that the community held and its significance on production of food crops within households and the community at large.

Leakey (1977), indicates that farm labour in food crop production was gendered but flexibility was exercised. The study shows that men cleared all the land and hoed it since this work was considered more strenuous for women. According to Leakey women grew crops such as beans, green grams, kidney beans and millet. This study is related to the current work of historical enquiry when establishing labour organization in food crop production. However, the departure point between the two studies is that this study instead investigated the implications of colonial changes on land and labour on food availability among the Aembu.

According to Fisher (1950), men in precolonial Kenyan societies had no access to the women's storage facilities and women had entire control over their possessions. The conclusion is further explained by Muchoki (1988), who asserts that men in kikuyu land showed no interest at all in women's crops. The study provides information for the current work when examining labour division in food crop production. Besides, this study critically examined colonial changes on the traditional land and labour access systems in food crop production as well as the extent to which food security was interfered with among the Aembu between 1906 and 1963.

According to Mbiti (1969), in the pre-capitalist Akamba society women had authority to utilize resources without proprietorship and it was accepted that only sons could inherit their father's wealth. Further, a study by Muthiani (1973), affirms that under the Akamba patriarchal and matriarchal systems, the head of the family was the father which was similar to a government and women were senior most secretaries. The sons were secretaries who enjoyed authority while the other children were less secretaries with little power. The two studies provide useful information to the current historical investigation regarding the Aembu system of land and labour during food crop production. However, while the two studies are more concerned with the social systems of the Akamba, this study went an extra mile and established the colonial changes on the traditional land and labour systems and the influence of the changes on food crop productivity among the Aembu.

At the local level detailed investigation on the Aembu women traditional knowledge in food production was carried out by Njoki (2012). Use of indigenous skills by women was recognized in the study and the specific crops that men and women grew. Women crops were millet, sorghum, beans, black beans while men crop included banana and yams. While Njoki's work adds value to this study when analysing pre-colonial labour organization, the different crops grown based on gender and the indigenous knowledge used by women in production of food crops. However, the point of departure between the two studies is that the current inquiry analysed the pre-colonial land and labour systems in food crop production, examined how colonialism changed the whole system of land and labour and established the influence of the coexistence of the two systems on food crop production and food security.

### **2.3 Colonial Transformation of Access to Land and Labour Division in Food Crop Production**

According to Bryson (1980), introduction of commodity production during the colonial period in Tanzania alongside peasant production of food destabilized the development of indigenous drought resistant food crops which subjected the people to food insufficiencies and colonial famines. The situation could have been so because of replacement of traditional food crops which were resistant to drought and pests with fast growing and diseases vulnerable cash crops. The fact that the colonial government alienated land for the production of the cash crops could as well have contributed to food shortages. Indeed, land is an important resource in food crop production across Africa and the system of its possession may influence food productivity.

Since 1890, settlers had already acquired the individual land tenure system in Kenya colony (Ochieng, 1990). This was followed with individual land ownership system among Kenyans with the introduction of the 1959 and 1963 Acts on land registration. The other Land Ordinance that was enacted was in 1902 which declared all Kenyan land as property of the crown (Huxley, 1948). According to Huxley, the government set aside reserves for African in the unproductive areas that were unsuitable for agricultural practices carried out by Europeans. Boundaries were drawn based on ethnicity while regulations were passed to prohibit movement by the Africans from one area to the other within the designated reserves KNA/DC/ EBU/ 1/2/ 48. The studies provide information regarding the changed African traditional land ownership systems which is an aspect of the current study. However, Huxley has given a general view of change but the current study departs from Huxley's work since it critically examined the Aembu land and labour systems in food crop production and the interference by British colonial government practices and policies.

According to the 1902 Ordinance, Africans were evicted from their land and they became occupants of the highlands, while the government could sell, transfer and take away any land at will (Kanyinga, 2008). This marked the establishment of the ethnic distinctiveness and separations based on land control. To enforce the land laws, the colonial government employed security agencies who used a lot of force against

the Africans. This study adds knowledge to the current work when examining the alterations in the traditional land and labour access systems during the colonial period. However, this study differs from Kanginga's work since it assessed the magnitude to which the ability of the Aembu to feed themselves changed as a result of change in the land access and labour systems. Further, Kanyinga notes that, in 1952 there arose a rebellion against colonialism called Mau Mau and it transformed the mind-set of the colonialists since it majorly occurred as a result of land alienation. The government came up with a plan which aimed at improving African agriculture through large scale establishments and consolidation of parcels of land from Africans that had been acquired traditionally. This led to class differentiation whereby there emerged the rich and the poor based on the land. Some effects of colonial land policies have been highlighted in the study which is a mileage to this work. However, the current study conducted investigations on the extent to which colonial policies on land and labour influenced food crop production and food security among the Aembu.

According to Lays (1995) the advent of colonialism and subsequent introduction of monetary economy in Kenya gradually ushered in individual system of land ownership which spread all over the country. The study highlights that in some parts of Nyanza, chiefs and the educated people in the society bought land using the wages they acquired from the paid employment by colonialists. This culminated to rise of classes in the society based on the land resource. Lays work is a milestone to this study because it shows the importance of land and how it brings about inequality within societies. The current study, however, established the Aembu standards for access to land and labour organization in the production of food crops including the modifications made by colonialists and the degree to which the changes influenced availability of food over the period.

According to Githumo (1981) in his analysis of problems related to land in the Kenya, he traces the genesis from subjugation and occupation of Kenya by the British and subsequent alterations in the traditional system of African land ownership. Githumo contends that grievances related to land which included its alienation were major in the upsurge of nationalism and struggle for independence in Kenya. However, Githumo's work is dominated by the question whether land ownership among

Kenyans was communal or private in ownership. His work is a milestone to this study when unmasking the land ownership among the Aembu and the changes introduced on the resource during the colonial period. Githumo's work is different from the present study which established the alterations in land and labour access methods in food crop production and degree to which change of the said systems influenced food availability among the Aembu during the colonial epoch.

Ogendo (1991), had a serious assessment on land restructuring in colonial Kenya. His work centred on a probe whether reforms on land ownership improved agrarian efficiency and other income generating undertakings or not. To Ogendo, although individualized system was found necessary for the expected development within the African regions, it was noted that there were more problems to solve than anticipated. The continuous sub-division of land that comes with private ownership becomes insecure for agricultural related incentives like credit facilities which indicate that right to land does not assure increased production of food. The study is useful to the current work when examining land ownership changes among the Aembu but differs from the present which critically analysed colonial transformation of land and labour systems and the influence of the interaction of the pre-colonial and colonial land and labour systems on food security.

A comprehensive examination of Agikuyu land entity was conducted by a British government administrator in Kenya colony by name Lambert in (1956). The study included the Aembu as well. Lambert was commissioned to examine land ownership as outlined in the 1938 Native Trust Ordinance. He carried out his investigation at the time of serious land grievances across the country while the Agikuyu were the leading ethnic group. His findings were that all the other communities had troops similar to those of the Agikuyu. His work represents a milestone to this study when examining the colonial changes on Aembu land traditional systems but he failed to investigate the Aembu as a distinctive community bearing its unambiguous land ownership systems and gave a generalised view of communities. Nevertheless, the current study analysed colonial transformation of land and labour access systems in food crop production and the influence of the modifications on food crop productivity among the Aembu community members from 1906-1963.

Njeru (1978) investigated the effects of land judgements on the social systems of the Aembeere where he notes that, there is increased disparity and landlessness between the learned and the rest of community members as a result of change in the land systems of ownership. Further, Njeru observes that, the parcels of land owned by some farmers were on decline in terms of quality. Traditionally land disputes were solved within the clans but after the land reforms the disagreements were to be taken to courts for litigation. Coincidentally, the study found out that some of the community members had to apportion some of their land and sell in order to pay for the court proceedings. Others forfeited a tract of their land to pay the adjudication fee or to escape the risk of losing the whole land. Njeru's work provides information related to increased cases of conflicts with individual land ownership which contributes to this study. However, the current study critically examined the Aembu system of land and labour access systems in food crop production and the importance of the systems held in providing sufficient food supply in households.

Gacheru (2005) indicates that, the opening of Africa for the settlement of the whites was significant event in African history. In 1885, Kenya was made a protectorate; in 1920, it was made a colony. The alien land tenure system was then implemented in the colony as a result of the subsequent events, making it easier for the immigrants to purchase land. The railway's upkeep and administrative expenses would be covered through settler farming. With the intention of denying African's access to the most fertile soils and giving them to the settlers, the colonial authority enacted a number of land guidelines. When evaluating the changes made by the colonizers to land and labour access systems in food crop production among the Aembu, this study profited from the work. However, the two studies are unlike since the current investigation critically analysed the traditional land and labour access systems in food crop production among the Aembu, colonial transformations and the degree to which co-existence of the two productive systems influenced food supply in Aembu households from 1906-1963.

Individual land ownership system was introduced among settler farmers, according to Ochieng (1990). The customary system was thereafter superseded with African

individual land tenure systems through the registered land legislation of 1959. When examining colonial changes on access to land and labour in food crop production among the Aembu, the current study benefited from Ochieng's (1990) work. However, the current study examined the Aembu land and labour systems in food crop production, the changes that took place and the influence of the co-existence of pre-colonial and colonial systems on food security.

The crown land decree was legislated in 1902, and according to its provisions, property was sold to settlers for two rupees per acre and was rented out for fifteen rupees per 100 acres per year (Kinyati, 2008). Crown property was territory designated aside for Africans and it may be leased, sold, or divided up for colonization. While some Africans who owned the property were relocated to newly established reserves, others become tenants on settler farms. The investigation of how colonial land laws changed the traditional land and labour access systems and the extent to which the various dimensions of food security among the Aembu people transformed from 1906-1963 has reached a turning point as a result of this study.

Breen (1994), acknowledges that with the newly established land and labour laws passed by the legislative council (Legco) Africans found it difficult to protect their land. The British colonialists authored strict measures on ownership and control of the resource such that all the land belonged to the government. The unproductive parcels of land were left as reserves though with measures that prohibited African movement. Breen's work is a milestone to this study when investigating the effects of colonial policies on land ownership. However, the current study investigated the effects of the colonial changes on land and division of labour in food crop production and its influence on food production and security among the members of the Aembu community.

The origin of the private land tenure system in the Kenya, according to Wanjara (2000), was the change of the traditional land lease with foreign legislation. After the colonial government finalized with the question of land for the settlers, the question of labour was key and needed to be urgently addressed. The crown had to come up with mechanisms of accruing enough labour from Africans (Bennet 1963). Consequently,

the colonial government came up with various measures to meet the labour demands by the settlers which included the Northey Circular of 1919 and the introduction of the Kipande system in 1921. Wanjara's study gives insight on colonial transformation of African land and labour systems which makes it related to this study. Nevertheless, this study went a further to establish the influence of colonial labour and land regulations on the Aembu production of food crops and its implication on household food supply.

Karigi (2015), conducted research on Embu's crop productivity and land ownership systems. According to his research findings, production of crops has been hampered by ongoing land subdivision because the small plots of land are only suitable for crops that are intended for the market. Karigi also provides evidence for the progression of land lease structure since the colonial era. When examining the changes in the traditional system of land ownership among the Aembu during the colonial period, Karigi's work represents a milestone to the current study. While Karigi's study examined crop production in its broad perspective, the current study examined specifically food crop production. Nevertheless, the departure point between the two studies is that the current inquiry analysed the influence of co-existence of pre-colonial and the colonial access to land and labour systems on the various dimensions of food security among the Aembu people from 1906-1963.

#### **2.4 Influence of Co-existence of Pre- colonial and Colonial Access to Land and Labour Systems on Food Crop production and Food Security**

An analysis was carried out among the Mandinka of Senegambia on rice growing by Carney & Watts (1991). The study documented that there were increased household conflicts over land and labour as a result of surge in demand for rice as the most important food crop. The rising demand made women to channel most of their attention and labour towards rice production. Further, groundnut production as a crop for men undermined production of other crops like millet due to skewed labour patterns. The study by Carney&Watts (1991), is appropriate to this study because it validate how some crops might undermine others in terms of land and labour distribution. The current study is different from the Carney's work in that it investigated influence of colonialism on land and labour systems in food crop

production and how the co-existence of the two systems of production influenced supply of food within households among the Aembu people from 1906-1963.

Existence of food shortages in northern and western part of Africa in the 19<sup>th</sup> century has been documented by Rau (1991). Rau's study has focused on general factors contributing to food shortages and the work adds value to the current study when establishing the general and specific causes of food insecurity and coping mechanisms prior to the advent of colonialism. However, the departure point of the two studies is that the current study established the changes introduced by colonialism on land and labour systems in food crop production and the effect of the changes on household food supply among the Aembu.

Staudt (1984), carried out a comprehensive study on the causes of food crisis in Africa and she attributes the scenario to lack of acknowledgement to African women who are pivotal in food production. The work further acknowledges that food crisis may have been due to government's poor agricultural policies but understanding women labour from the colonial period is important. The work is a milestone to this study for it acknowledges that women are key in food crop production and the fact that poor agricultural policies can weaken food crop production. However, the study seems to have esteemed women and has used a gender theory and is silent about men in food crop production. The current study incorporated both male and female and utilized the articulation of modes of production theory in the analysis when examining colonial changes on land and labour systems and the influence of co-existence of the pre-colonial and colonial land and labour policies on food availability within the Aembu households.

Bryson (1980), carried out a study in Tanzania that examined the changes in peasant production during the colonial period. She examined both peasant and commodity production at the advent of capital production. The study points out that the commercial production led to adverse food shortage in Tanzania. The study offers insight to the current work when investigating the impact of cash crops over food crops during the colonial era in Embu. However, this study investigated changes in the Aembu's system of land access and labour division in the cultivation of food crops, and its implications on availability of food supply within the Aembu households.

Whiteman (1985), asserts that discriminatory land ownership systems are brought about by social and political policies and it is the source of food insufficiency in the developing countries. Further he expounds that the alien perception of individual tenure system means entitling land with the head of the house. The current inquiry differs from Whiteman's work in that the study examined the pre-colonial system of access to land and labour in food crop production, colonial changes on the two resources and the influence of the changes on the amount of food produced within households.

Muraya (2019), establishes that colonization altered how African women in the Agikuyu tribe produced food for themselves using the indigenous knowledge and skills. The study also shows that the adjustments resulted in the neglect of the indigenous skills used by the Agikuyu women in the production of food crops leaving the population vulnerable to hunger. The study adds value to the present work when examining colonial transformation of labour system in food crop production through application of various policies. However, Muraya's work differs from this inquiry theoretically in that Muraya's study has used women and development theory to show the place of women in development while the current study has used the articulation of modes of production theory to show how the Aembu land and labour systems were integrated into the European colonial capitalist system during the colonial era. The findings of Muraya's study, however, cannot be applied to the Aembu in general. The current study examined how the Aembu's access to land and labour organization in the cultivation of food crops has changed through time, as well as the implication of the changes on food supply within households.

A study was carried out on colonial prejudice to African women in the reserves in absence of their spouses by Ndenda (1999). Ndenda observes that, women were the primary food producers while their husbands sought for employment in settler farms as migrant labourers. The study looks at gender as asymmetrical and shows the disadvantaged place of women. Ndenda's work contributes to this work when looking at colonial labour policies which undermined the pre-colonial labour systems. However, this study went an extra mile and critically examined colonial changes on

land and labour systems in food crop production and the influence of co-existence of the pre-colonial and colonial land and labour systems on availability of food within households.

A study on colonial alteration of agriculture among the Abagusii was carried out by Omwoyo (1990). The work shows the competence of traditional production before the infiltration of the colonialists in the Abagusii land. Omwoyo notes that colonial advent transformed agriculture and weakened the traditional performance. Omwoyo's work contributes to this study when examining the importance of indigenous practices in food crop production. However, while Omwoyo has examined at colonial transformation of agriculture using a general approach, the current study has specifically investigated changes in land and labour systems in food crop production and the influence of the changes on food supply among the Aembu.

Stitcher (1975), points out that woman primarily produced food in Kisii. The study examines the various roles played by the Abagusii women using their innovativeness within households for sustainable food production. Since the study looked at how women fit into the food production process, it is valuable in addition to the current study. The current inquiry, however, analysed how the Aembu's access to land and labour distribution in food crop production changed during the colonial period and the effects of the changes on food accessibility and supply within households.

According to Musembi (2007), registering of land either with the household head or cooperatively denied women an opportunity to participate in family property sharing resulting to uncertainty. This scenario culminates to women being disadvantaged in terms of money and work which would promote land improvement. The land improvement in this case includes inability to access money for purchasing farm inputs in order to improve soil fertility for increased productivity due to lack of security of tenure. The study contributes to this study when looking at the importance of security of land tenure in food crop production while on the contrary, the current study examined colonial transformation of land and labour in food crop production and how that undermined food crop production and food supply among the Aembu.

Plateau (1995), contends that when land is owned privately it is efficiently used. Nevertheless, when land is owned privately decision on land use depends solely on the individual and no laws can be passed regarding its use at all. The idea is further entrenched by (Mwenzwa and Bunei, 2012) who strongly felt that private land ownership system can either be used for food production or be left fallow which makes it less gainful. The studies are a milestone to the present work when examining the land ownership system and its effects on food security. However, the current study examined pre-colonial access to land and division of labour system, colonial transformation of the two resources and its influence on the ability of the Aembu to nourish themselves.

Falloux (1987) asserts that, private land tenure promotes proper utilization of the resource and subsistence farmers will turn to commercial production in agriculture owing to the fact that the permanence will motivate the farmer. Indeed, a farmer who has security of tenure will protect the soil from soil erosion, add manure and practice agroforestry. Such agricultural practices will increase production within household and sustainable food supply making the study relevant to the current one. However, the current study examined the changes on land and labour systems in food crop production and the significance of the resources on food supply.

According to Njogu (2002), in his analysis of the link between farm sizes for cash crop and food crop in Kirinyaga, she asserts that most farmers in the tea growing zones assign land to cash crops at the expense of food crops. Further she argues that once money is obtained from the cash crops food is bought. The study is of importance to the present work when examining the effects of cash crops on food crops. However, Njogus study departure from the current study which investigated changes in land access and division of labour in food crop production and its influence on food supply within households in the area of study.

Embu County's food security is reportedly impacted by land fragmentation; this depends mostly on the agro-ecological Zone, according to Ndirangu (2017). The report suggests that laws be passed to prevent additional land subdivision, advance technology, and encourage the diversity of sources of revenue. The study findings are

that continuous land divisions into small parcels hinder effective farming in Embu County. The study provides context for the current investigation by providing information on how to examine access to land. However, Ndirangu's study differs with the current one that analysed the system of land access and labour division in food crop production, colonial transformations and the implications of colonial changes on Aembu food sustainability.

Tignor (1976), conducted a study among the Kikuyu on the roles played by both gender in food crop production. His findings were that all the economic activities were gender based which means that there existed well defined roles for both men and women. The study points out that the different roles consequently determined decision making and division of labour within households. The current analysis is based on Tignor's (1976) study, which was a pivotal turning point. It ascertained how colonial changes on land access and the division of labour influenced availability of food among the Aembu during the colonial period.

Musalia (2010), provides a thorough analysis of gender, labour division, and decision-making in kikuyu households. According to the study, Agikuyu agricultural output was strongly gendered, which is consistent with Tignor's (1976) findings. The study provides information on various roles done by men and women in production of food crops. However, Musalia (2010) looks at gender as a way of female discrimination by the male patriarchy which originates from the pre-colonial period and its perpetuation by colonialism. The study describes how the Agikuyu women responded to the male-dominated culture of the post-colonial era. Musalia's findings cannot be generalized to the Aembu since African communities were unique in their traditional systems and the colonial experiences were diverse as well. The current study, distinguished itself from Musalia's since it used the articulation of modes of production theory while Musalia used a gendered approach. Moreover, the current study examined changes in land and labour systems and the implications of the changes on food supply among the Aembu from 1906-1963.

Matheka (1992), has looked at the account of the Akamba people living in Machakos over the colonial era and he contends that colonialism interfered with the ecological

systems culminating to food shortages in the area. The study adds value to the current work when looking at colonial economy among the Aembu which promoted changes in the traditional systems of land and labour. However, Matheka's findings cannot be generalized to the Aembu community since the areas have diverse ecological features and agricultural practices. Moreover, the current study examined colonial land and labour changes in food crop production and the importance of the resources in production of food crop within the Aembu households.

The reviewed literature exhibit gaps that exist in colonial changes in land and labour system in food crop production and its influence on food security that required to be filled. The gaps identified called for an inquiry on the colonial changes on land access and labour division in food crop production and its influence on the various dimensions of food security among the Aembu from 1906 to 1963 which was the focus of this study

## **2.5 Theoretical Framework**

The importance of a theory in research is that it helps give study a clear direction, guides the methodology, aids in interpretation and analysis of findings. This study contextualized Kenya to its setting and historical experiences. Social, historical and ecological aspects have to a significant extent contributed to food crisis in the African continent. Food shortages have been experienced since the period of shift by Africans from the pre-capitalist economic system to the capitalist relations of production (Frank, 1978). This study therefore used the articulation of modes of production theory to help in examining the relationship between the pre-capitalist modes of production and the capitalist modes of production. Articulation of modes of production theory, served as the foundation for this investigation in order to examine the change of the Aembu from pre-colonial land and labour systems in food crop production, to colonial capitalism.

The Articulation of modes of production theory was established by Karl Marx 1848, and Claude Meillasoux (1975), later improved on Marx's perception. This theory came up as consequence of the criticism of modernization and dependency models that had been used to examine African economic history during the colonial epoch.

The theory was applied when examining how colonialism changed the division of labour in food crop production and customary method of accessing land and the influence of the changes on availability of food among the Aembu from 1906-1963. According to Karl Marx, relations of production are essentially how people interact with their surroundings and one another in order to generate basic necessities. The ultimate goal of the Marxian system of social relations is to change nature (Peet and Hartwick, 1991). Many colonialist studies across Africa have been guided by the articulation of modes of production model (Goodman and Recliff, 1981). Within societies, emergence of various methods of production may take place and these results to a form of coexistence. The prevailing modes of production may comprise the forces of production inform of land, labour and capital or the way surplus production is extracted and distributed (Ayres, 1995).

A capitalist mode of production (CMOP) eventually employs a non-capitalist mode of production (NMP) to its advantage, according to the Articulation of Modes of Production (AMP) theory. Although it aligns with it, the capitalist mode does not immediately replace the pre-capitalist form. The constant interaction between the two manufacturing methods yields unequal returns for each. But the pre-capitalist form is what determines whether the capitalist mode of production is successful. The study found out that colonialism affected and undermined traditional African socio-economic systems by articulating the modes of production thesis. The colonial capitalist mode of production reorganized the pre-capitalist Aembu mode of production when the two coexisted resulting to suppression and marginalization of land and labour systems which impacted negatively on food supply. The colonial government of Kenya enacted several labour and land laws in addition to local laws, demonstrating the interaction between western and traditional legal systems. During colonization, Kenya had two distinct legal regimes that created two distinct kinds of production.

The Kenya colony practiced colonial capitalism through massive land alienation, the establishment of African reserves, coercive labour conscription, taxing policies, and pass laws. Africans were forced from their land as a result of land rules. After that, cash crops were spread around the country, mostly in the highlands, including coffee

and tea. Africans whose land was seized moved to settlement farms, where they settled as squatters and earned dismal wages for tax payments. In reality, this was the extent to which Africans were economically exploited. The newly passed colonial land and labour rules did not take into account the Aembu people's traditional access to land or the division of work systems in the production of food crops. The new capitalist method of production gradually displaced subsistence crop growing of the Aembu.

Articulation of modes of production model has undergone criticism for fusing of unlike modes together which has led to insufficient platform for its reproduction. However, Articulation being the process of relations between the CMOP and the non-capitalist mode and the subsequent CMOP dominance over the non-capitalist modes (Omwoyo, 1990), the theory was valuable in examining the changes introduced by the colonialists on land access and labour methods in food crop production and the influence of co-existence of pre-colonial and colonial land and labour systems on the Aembu food security from 1906-1963. The theory proved to be the best analytical tool for this study.

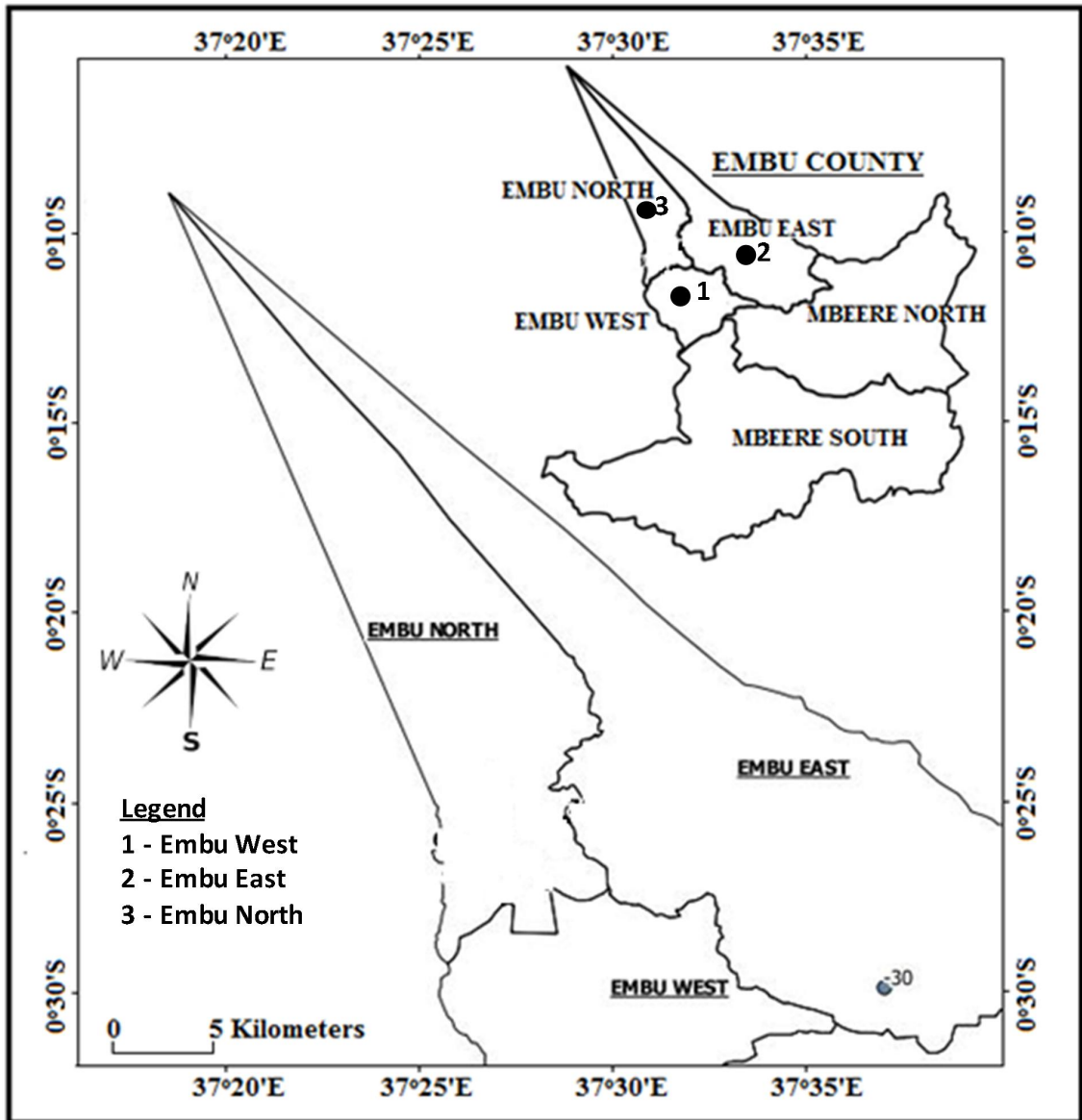
## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.1 Location of the Study**

The study was conducted in Embu County which has five Sub-counties. These are Embu North, Embu East, Embu West, Mbeere North and Mbeere South (County Government of Embu, 2010). Embu County is in Eastern Kenya and it is inhabited by the Aembu whose main economic activity is food crop production. The name Aembu was borrowed from the first descendant called Kembu according to the myth of the Aembu community origin (Mbogo, O. I., 2024). The study area was narrowed down to three sub-counties namely Embu West, Embu East and Embu North of Embu County. The three sub-counties are unlike the other two which are dry and experience irregular and unreliable rainfall throughout the year due to the influence of Mt. Kenya Forest making the area suitable for food crop production. There are several hills such as the Karue and Kirimiri as well as rivers and streams flowing from Mount Kenya forest namely Ruingaci, Thambana and Ena (Mwaniki, 2010). Moreover, there existed many African reserves for the Aembu settlement, early missionary activities and colonial administrative centres in the area. The area was suitable because the objectives of this study were achieved by conducting research in Embu North, Embu East and Embu North. The area has potential for food crop production and high influence of colonial policies on land and labour systems.

According to Embu County Integrated Development Plan (2019) there are 216 people per square km and 2,820.7 square kilometres of land. The coldest month, July, has a minimum temperature of 12 C and has a mean temperature of 21 C (Embu County, 2019). In the area of study, commonly grown crops include tea, macadamia nuts, coffee, banana, beans, arrowroots, cassava and potatoes. The crops are grown on small parcels of land. Historically, the current Embu County Headquarter at Embu town served as a colonial administrative centre. It was initially known as *Thithiari* because the place had trees known as *mithithia* growing there. The name changed later to Embu.



Source: Embu County Integrated Development Plan

Figure 1: A Map Showing Location of the Study Area.

### 3.2 Research Design

This study utilized a descriptive research design since it gives a rich description of the situation as it (Kombo and Tromp, 2006). The descriptive research design enabled the study to obtain both qualitative and quantitative data. The research design helped to organise data into correlated and recurrent groupings which were then utilized to give a descriptive analysis of colonial transformation of land access and the labour systems of the Aembu in food crop production. Moreover, chronological investigation was carried out to provide an outline of change in land and labour systems in food crop

production and the influence of co-existence of pre-colonial and colonial land and labour systems on food security among the Aembu from 1906 to 1963.

### **3.3 Target Population**

According to Kenya National Bureau of statistics in 2019, the area of study's population was 336,220 persons who are located in the three sub-counties namely Embu East, Embu North and Embu West of Embu County. Embu East is listed as having 129,564 people, Embu North 79,556 people, and Embu West as having 127,100 people. Target population according to Mugenda and Mugenda (2003) includes the total number of persons from which the sample will be drawn and findings of the study are generalized. The study's target population was 16,144 persons based on the Kenya National Bureau of Statistics (KNBS, 2019). The population was made up of both men and women aged 70 years of age or older comprising of ex-service soldiers, food crop growers, early Christian converts and the colonial government officials all living in the three Sub- Counties and were Embu residents in the era of colonialism.

### **3.4 Sampling Procedure**

Embu County is large in size and has varied climatical conditions. This made it necessary to constrict the area into a researchable region. There are five Sub-counties in Embu and the study sampled three sub-counties namely Embu East, Embu North and Embu West from the larger Embu. The sub- counties Embu East, Embu North and Embu West were sampled on purpose since they are located on the slopes of Mt. Kenya where the soils are fertile and they receive reliable and adequate rainfall throughout the year suitable for growing of various food crops which acted as pull factors to the settlement of Europeans. Moreover, the areas served as colonial administrative centres, areas of early missionary activities and the existence of African reserves. The areas are likewise known for providing the colonial government with two renowned colonial government African chiefs called Chief Muruatetu and Kiriamiti who were instrumental in effecting the colonial land and labour policies in the area of study. Moreover, the areas experienced food insufficiencies during the colonial period which is a contrast of the pre- colonial age when the Aembu produced enough food for consumption and surplus to trade with their neighbours.

The study utilized non-probability sampling methodologies which encompassed purposive sampling with the snowballing technique in selecting the respondents. Purposive sampling technique was used to select respondents who had the required information as per the objectives of the study. The respondent's senior in age were purposely sampled. Once the researcher identified one respondent, then they were requested to recommend another one who had related characteristics based on the objectives of this study. In snowballing, the researcher identified participants with similar characteristics until when the researcher got the number of respondents and the information that was required as per the objectives of the study (Mugenda & Mugenda, 2003).

Therefore, colonial era residents of Embu East, Embu West and Embu North comprising ex-service soldiers, food crop growers, early Christian converts and the colonial government officials aged 70 years and older were sampled on purpose because they were the most knowledgeable about the situation as it was during the colonial period. This category of respondents provided first-hand information as eye witnesses or second-hand information from individuals who interacted directly with colonialists. Hence, the study utilized respondents who had the most reliable and relevant information

### **3.5 Sample Size**

To get the sample size, the study utilized recommendations by Kathuri and pals (1993). In sample size determination, Kathuri and pals (1993) recommends that for a major sub group the minimum sample size should be 100 cases while for a minor subgroup, the sample sizes should be between 20 to 50 cases. In determining the sample size for this study, Embu East, Embu North and Embu West in Embu County being a minor sub-group of the larger Embu County, 50 respondents were interviewed for this study. From the 50 respondents, the researcher purposely identified the first respondent with the required characteristics from Runganga in Embu West who had worked as a colonial government agricultural officer and he had witnessed most of the changes that were taking place during the colonial Period. The respondent identified others who had similar characteristics with the use of snowballing technic. This continued until the point of data saturation of fifty (50) respondents was arrived at. According to Mugenda and Mugenda (2003) the essence of purposive sampling is to

choose respondents who have rich information on the subject under study and they continue to name others who have similar characteristics. For this study, the respondents identified had to satisfy the criteria based on age, gender, area and occupation.

### **3.6 Research Instruments**

Data for this study was collected using interview schedules and focus group discussions.

#### **3.6.1 Interview Guide**

Interview schedule are questions set to guide the process of the interview as the interviewer continues with the investigation (Orodha, 2004). The importance of the interview schedules is that they help in upholding control of the interviewee during the overall process of the interview. The researcher interviewed fifty (50) key respondents who were most knowledgeable on the topic of study using the criteria found in 3.5. According to Mugenda and Mugenda (2003), the importance attached to the use of interview schedules is that they help to achieve reliable and fair outcomes thus they are utilized widely in inquiries. For this study, the in-debt interviews had four sections (Appendix V). All informants were aged 70 years and above and they were exposed to the same questions including the focus groups. Section A comprised of respondents' demographic information. Section B contained questions about pre-colonial land access and the labour division in food crop production, Section C had questions on transformation on land access and the labour division in food crop production while Section D had questions on the influence of co-existence of the pre-colonial and colonial land and labour systems on food crop production and food security among the Aembu. The interview guide included both closed and open-ended queries for age seventy (70) and older who provided both first and second-hand information.

#### **3.6.2 Focus Groups Discussions (FGDs)**

According to Mugenda and Mugenda (2012), it's typical to combine different data collection technics and procedures in the same study in order to generate appropriate and valid information. Therefore, focus group discussions (FGDs) were used in this study. The importance of using Focus groups is that one gets information fast from

several key informants at the same time and participants have freedom to express their emotions, opinions and viewpoints using their own terms which provides detailed information. For this inquiry, three focus groups were formed with respondents who shared similar characteristics such as age, gender, occupation, location and colonial experience. To identify the participants in the focus group, the same sampling procedure and technique used in the interview guide was utilized. The focus groups (FGDs) discussed similar questions on the interview guide bearing both closed and open-ended questions. In cases where respondents were unable to provide adequate oral information due to memory retention gap or were unavailable to provide oral data, archival records and secondary sources were consulted and corroboration of the sources was done to promote dependability and validity of the data.

### **3.7 Type and Nature of Data Collection**

Data was collected from different historical sources based on the objectives of the study. Three categories of sources of data were utilized to inform this study namely primary, archival and Secondary.

#### **3.7.1 Primary Data**

This category of data was obtained from archival information and oral interviews with respondents. Structured in-debt interviews were conducted on people aged 70 years and above. The informants were purposely sampled with snowballing methodology. Since the objectives of the study were used as themes in data collection, information regarding the Aembu pre-colonial methods of land access and labour division in food crop production to 1906 was sourced, the changes introduced by the colonialists on land access and labour division in food crop production from 1906-1963 and the influence of the coexistence of pre-colonial land and labour systems on Aembu food crop production and food security from 1906-1963. A research assistant helped in conducting of the field interviews by taking notes and recording of the information coming from the orally administered interviews. From the oral interviews, first or second-hand information was obtained from the key respondents.

#### **3.7.2 Archival Data**

Archival data was acquired from the Kenya National Archives in Nairobi regarding British colonial rule in Kenya, precisely the Aembu living in southern parts of Central

Kenya. Records consulted included agricultural reports, minutes and correspondents, Native Affairs Policies, Health records, Annual, Economic Survey books, political record books, social records, handing over and taking over reports, trade and economies. The archival permit used by the researcher is attached in Appendix V111

### **3.7.3 Secondary Data**

To get data from secondary sources both published and unpublished materials were reviewed. The sources consulted included articles, books, journals, published and unpublished theses, dissertations, pamphlets, periodicals, magazines, newspapers and electronics. To obtain this category of data the study utilized various libraries and documentary centres including Jomo Kenyatta Memorial Library, University of Nairobi Library, the Catholic University of Eastern Africa Library, Chuka University Library, United States International University Library and Kenya National library services in Nairobi. Data from the three categories was corroborated for validity and reliability of the study. The historic documents were utilized to collect information regarding the Aembu's pre-colonial method of land access and labour division systems in food crop production to 1906, the changes introduced by the colonialists on land access and labour division in food crop production from 1906-1963 and the influence of co-existence of pre-colonial and the colonial land and labour systems on Aembu food security from 1906-1963.

### **3.8 Data Analysis Procedures and Presentations**

Data was analysed using Qualitative Data Analysis method. The method of qualitative data analysis was utilized to give rich description of the Aembu people pre-colonial method of land access and labour division systems in food crop production to 1906, the changes introduced by the British colonialists on land access and labour division in food crop production from 1906-1963 and the influence of the coexistence of pre-colonial land and labour systems on Aembu food crop production and food security from 1906-1963.

The collected primary data (in Kiembu) was translated into English and transcribed according to the objectives of the study, data was then categorized, coded, and tabulated before being sorted into numerous sets. Data was then subjected to thematic, systematic and chronological content analysis. Qualitative data was analysed

qualitatively using content analysis of meanings and implications coming from the respondent's information and the outcome was reported in descriptive narratives. In order to trace the pre-colonial methods of access to land and labour division in food crop production, alterations introduced by the colonialists, the influence of co-existence of the pre-colonial and colonial land and labour policies on food crop production and food security, historical trend analysis was adhered to. Data from oral sources, archival materials, and written documents was authenticated to ensure accuracy of the information. Finally, to affirm the authenticity, dependability, accuracy and validity of the information, all data from oral, archival and secondary sources was corroborated. Interpretation of data was done using articulation of modes of production theory which was helpful in analysing the pre-colonial land and labour systems in food crop production, colonial changes on the Aembu land and labour systems in food crop production and the influence of co-existence of the pre-colonial land and labour systems on food crop production and food security among the Aembu. The resulting data was systematically and chronologically organized into historical research.

### **3.9 Ethical Considerations**

All the accepted principles for setting out the process of research were followed strictly. The researcher requested Chuka University for a letter of recommendation in order to obtain a research permit from the National Commission for Science, Technology, and Innovation (NACOSTI). Research permit is in Appendix vii. The researcher used an introductory letter which was presented to the respondents explaining the purpose of the study. Researcher's self-introductory letter is found in Appendix iii. However, private matters were avoided and confidentiality was guaranteed according to Grinyer (2002). For the preservation of quality and integrity, respondents were persuaded to cooperate, and the privacy of the information they provided was ensured. Interviews were conducted in an impartial and objective manner and any form of harm was avoided to the participants. To avoid academic fraud and plagiarism, acknowledging and citation of relevant sources was adhered to, while recording of data from oral and secondary sources was done impartially.

**CHAPTER FOUR**  
**THE AEMBU PRE-COLONIAL LAND ACCESS AND LABOUR DIVISION**  
**SYSTEMS IN FOOD CROP PRODUCTION UP TO 1906**

**4.1 Introduction**

The chapter discusses background characteristics of the interviewees based on age, gender, and location. This was done with the aim of having respondents who share common characteristics based on the study's objectives as found in chapter one. However, the Aembu origins, migration, socio political and economic organisation were also presented in this section in order to lay the foundation for the historical investigation. The conclusion of the chapter is a detailed presentation of the pre-colonial Aembu land and labour access systems in food crop production for increased supply of food in the households.

**4.2 Background Characteristics of Respondents**

This segment has discussed the background characteristics of the respondents.

**4.2.1 Gender of the Respondents**

In this study gender is defined as either being male or female. It also refers to division of labour between men and women based on the Aembu customs. Gender of the respondents' results is found in Table 1.

Table 1: Respondents Gender

Gender of the respondents	Frequency	Percentage
Female	28	56%
Male	22	44%
Total number of respondents	50	100%

Table 1 reveals that most of the respondents were female comprising 28 (56%) while the males were 22 (44%). Female number was more than that of men based on the Kenya National Bureau of Statistics (2019). Both male and female respondents were useful in providing information regarding the pre-colonial Aembu land and labour systems in food crop production. Some male respondents had served as the heads of clans *miviriga* that were instrumental in land allocation for food crop production while others were in the council of elders *kiama* that settled both civil and criminal cases. Others worked as municipal council employees during the colonial period

while some female respondents worked as teachers in the African schools. A male respondent of ninety-six (96) years from Rungan'ga village of Embu West by name Mbogo Macharia was the first respondent. He was purposively sampled because he worked as an agricultural officer in charge of Veterinary Department in Kangaru area and an instructor to Africans on new methods of food crop production in Embu. Through the use of purposive and snowballing technic, other respondents were reached out. It was important that the researcher interviewed both gender for they held diverse opinions on the pre-colonial Aembu land and labour systems as well as the influence brought about by the co-existence of the pre-colonial and colonial land and labour systems on food crop production and food security. The fact that both male and female were interviewed guaranteed inclusivity of the enquiry.

#### 4.2.2 Age of the Respondents

The researcher inquired the 50 respondents to give their age in years and that is shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Age of the Respondents

Age (Years)	Frequency	Percentage
70-80	22	44%
81-90	18	36%
91 years and above	10	20%
Interviews conducted	50	100%

Table 2 shows Age of the respondents. The age was classified into three sets; 70-80 years (22), 81- 90 years, (18) and 91 years and above (10). Most respondents were aged 70-80 years, 81- 90 years while 91 and above years had the lowest number. Out of the 50 respondents interviewed the youngest in age was 70 years old and the oldest was 96 years. The respondents provided most of the required information on the pre-colonial Aembu land and labour systems in food crop production to 1906 since most of them had either direct or indirect interaction with the residents of Embu before the colonial period.

#### 4.2.3 Respondents Location

Location in this study refers to area of residence of the respondent which is either Embu East, Embu North or Embu West. Location of the respondents was useful

because it showed diversity and inclusiveness of the areas of study. The researcher asked the respondents to specify their location and the results are shown in Table 3.

Table 3: Respondents Location

Sub-County	Frequency	Percentage
Embu North	18	36%
Embu West	20	40%
Embu East	12	24 %
Total number	50	100%

Table 3 shows location of the respondent. The total number of respondents interviewed were 50 respondents. They were distributed in the three Sub-Counties as follows, Embu East 12 (24 %), Embu West 20 (40 %) and Embu North 18 (36%). Embu West and Embu North had most of the respondents because they are located in the upper area of the county which is endowed with the most fertile soils and reliable rainfall for food crop production due to the areas proxy to Mt. Kenya Forest. Secondly, according to the Kenya national bureau of statistics KNBS (2019), Embu West and Embu North areas have a higher population than Embu East hence more respondents were drawn from the two sub-counties. Respondents from Embu West were crucial in providing most of information regarding Aembu access to land and division of labour in food crop production prior to British colonialism while those from Embu East and West provided information on colonial transformation of land access and labour systems. The group was also instrumental in providing information on the influence of coexistence of pre-colonial and colonial land access and labour systems on food security from 1906-1963.

#### 4.3 Origin, Migration and Settlement of the Aembu

The Aembu are a Bantu speaking community who live in Eastern part of Kenya. Their settlement in the area was between 16<sup>th</sup> and the 19<sup>th</sup> centuries (Mwaniki, 1973). Like most Kenyan communities the Aembu have a number of versions of origin origin. According to Muriuki (O.I., 2024) in his mythology of the Aembu origin, at Mwenendega forest there lived a man called Ndega who had been created by God *Ngai* and herded his cattle *ruru* by the grove that bears his name. Mwenendega is therefore believed to have been the genesis of the Aembu community. One day Mwenendega had taken his cattle to take water at river Goro salt lick in Mukuuri and

he found a girl there whom he admired and pleaded with her for a hand in marriage. The girl had gone to bath along the river and after Mwenendega insistence she accepted the marriage offer. Mwenendega gave her a new name and started calling her *Ciurungi* which means around the river since she had been found on the river. To the Aembu rivers were associated with watering of cattle since the land was communally owned. The girl's parents and relatives were unknown and she was believed to be a God given gift to Mwenendega. After the girl gave in and joined mwenendega, the girl gave conditions to him that if he will ever insult or hurt her something bad will happen. The two lived happily as a husband and wife with a lot of caution not to hurt each other. One day the two were eating meat and as they feasted, the wife quickly took a portion from Ndega which resulted to her being nicknamed by the husband a snatcher or *Nthara*. The action may be concluded to mean that the girl loved meat.

Mwene-Ndega and the suitor Nthara were blessed with a boy and a girl named Kembu and Werimba. The two parents took care of their children until puberty stage. Fortunately, or unfortunately, Kembu and Werimba engaged in sexual relations and Werimba became expectant which forced the parents to excommunicate them from their homestead in the forest (Mwaruvie, 1991 & Mwaniki, 2010). Njagi (O.I., 2024) asserts that the crime committed by the two children was so hurting to the parents and was unforgivable. The Aembu saying for this action from the parents is *guta mwana na kiano*. The two consequently moved out and established settlements near Karûngû where they lived as a man and wife. Other children belonging to Mwene-Ndega and Nthara and those of Werimba and Kembu dispersed and settled in far land away from their parents as husbands and wives. These children of Ndega and Thara consequently populated Embu land. After a long period of cordial relationship between Mwene-Ndega and Ciurunji, Mwenendega reproached his partner Ciûrûnjî and this was followed with thunder and heavy rains of floods which are supposedly believed to have swept the two and disappeared forever (Mbogo O.I., 2024). In connection to the historical significance of the place for the Aembu, Mwenendega Primary school was located at their site of origin.

The Aembu, according to Wamai (O.I., 2024) like the other Bantu speakers have roots in northern direction *rugongo* a place which is known as Ethiopia, Tuku or Uru in oral source history. They moved from this area and established settlements in present Embu between the 16th and 17th Centuries. From Ethiopia they relocated to the south at Lorian Swamp, which is near Ewaso Nyiro River, in the North Eastern region of Kenya. From Lorian swamp the Aembu further moved to the current parts of Tigania, before moving to Igembe area. The people of Tigania and Igembe were unfriendly and fought them which forced the group to continue with their journey to Tharaka. Tharaka environment was unconducive coupled with famine something that prompted them to continue moving southwards where they crossed Thuci River and entered at Igambang'ombe. According to Mwaniki (2010), Igambang'ombe means somewhere the uproar of cattle is overheard. The cattle referred to in this case were those belonging to the Masai or (*ukavi*) (Ngai, O.I., 2024). The Aembu successfully expelled the Maasai and stayed at Igambang'ombe for some time. From Igambang'ombe due to population pressure majority of the Embu people continued moving and settled at the Mwenendega. Mwenendega was suitable because of its rich soils for food crop production.

The 2<sup>nd</sup> version of the origin rotates around a man called 'Kebu' or 'Kembu' and a female called Werimba. To some people the two were a man and wife while to others they were a brother and sister or father and daughter. Some people claim that the two lived by Mt. Kenya Forest at *Muthiru* while others held that, they lived in Kyeni near Kagaari. However, Kebu and Werimba lived as a husband and wife and their children occupied Embu land (Mwaniki, 2010).

In spite of the existing versions of the origin of the Embu community, the studies done indicate that the Aembu are immigrant of modern Embu land who had settled in their present area by 17<sup>th</sup> Century (Mwaniki, 1973 & Muriuki, 1974). The Embu oral traditions claim that there were other groups of people who were already living in the present Embu land. These people were Macaria, Gumba, Ndorobo, Thigagi, Maturathi and Raturathi (Mwaniki, 2010). There is limited information about the six of them but Ndorobo and Gumba are said to have lived cordially with the Aembu immigrants.

The Mbeere people claim to have found the Thigagi but not Gumba in their land (Mwaruvie, 1994). However, a corroboration of both primary and secondary sources indicate that the Aembu were not the original inhabitants in the Embuland. The fact that the Aembu and their neighbours found people who lived in their present lands when they arrived, we can conclude that the stories of Thigagi, Macaria, Ndorobo and Gumba were an attempt by the Aembu people to account for the people they found in their land when they arrived. The disappearance of these people may mean that they were assimilated, others left peacefully while the rest could have been expelled.

As already stated, the evolution and movements of Kenyan communities is a continuous deliberation among scholars. Anthropologist like Lambert (1956), have tried to link the Akikuyu, Embu and Mbeere with Shungwaya dispersion while others have a different opinion. According to Muriuki (1974) the Embu, Mbeere and the Akikuyu have no links with Shungwaya. Muriuki's study indicate that the Meru claim to have come from coastal region while the Akikuyu, Embu and the Mbeere originated from North-eastern or East of Mbeere. He asserts that by the 15<sup>th</sup> Century, the Agikuyu Chuka, Mbeere, Embu Ndia and Gichugu had migrated from Tigania and Igembe in Meru. Later, these groups moved to the south west near present Ishiara market and settled at Igambang'ombe, north of the confluence of Thuci and Theira rivers. From there, dispersal took place to various parts of Embu land.

Most writers pointed out that the migrations were brought about by famines and diseases. These groups consequently together with the Mbeere and the Akikuyu went to Igambang'ombe. At this point the Embu group divided into two where one group went southwards towards river Tana while the other group moved to the north (Muriuki, 1974). The group that moved northwards later settled at Mwenendega Grove. Mwenedenega being undisputed settlement area for the Aembu, it created a nucleus of what developed as Embu society (Mwaniki, 2010).

The early settlers at Mwenendega grove were members of Igamuturi, Kina, Igamukiria and Gicuku clans. These groups were already in Embu by 1700. From Mwenendega, which was the original grove, from there they migrated to other areas within the Embu. Migrations could have taken place due to population pressure on the

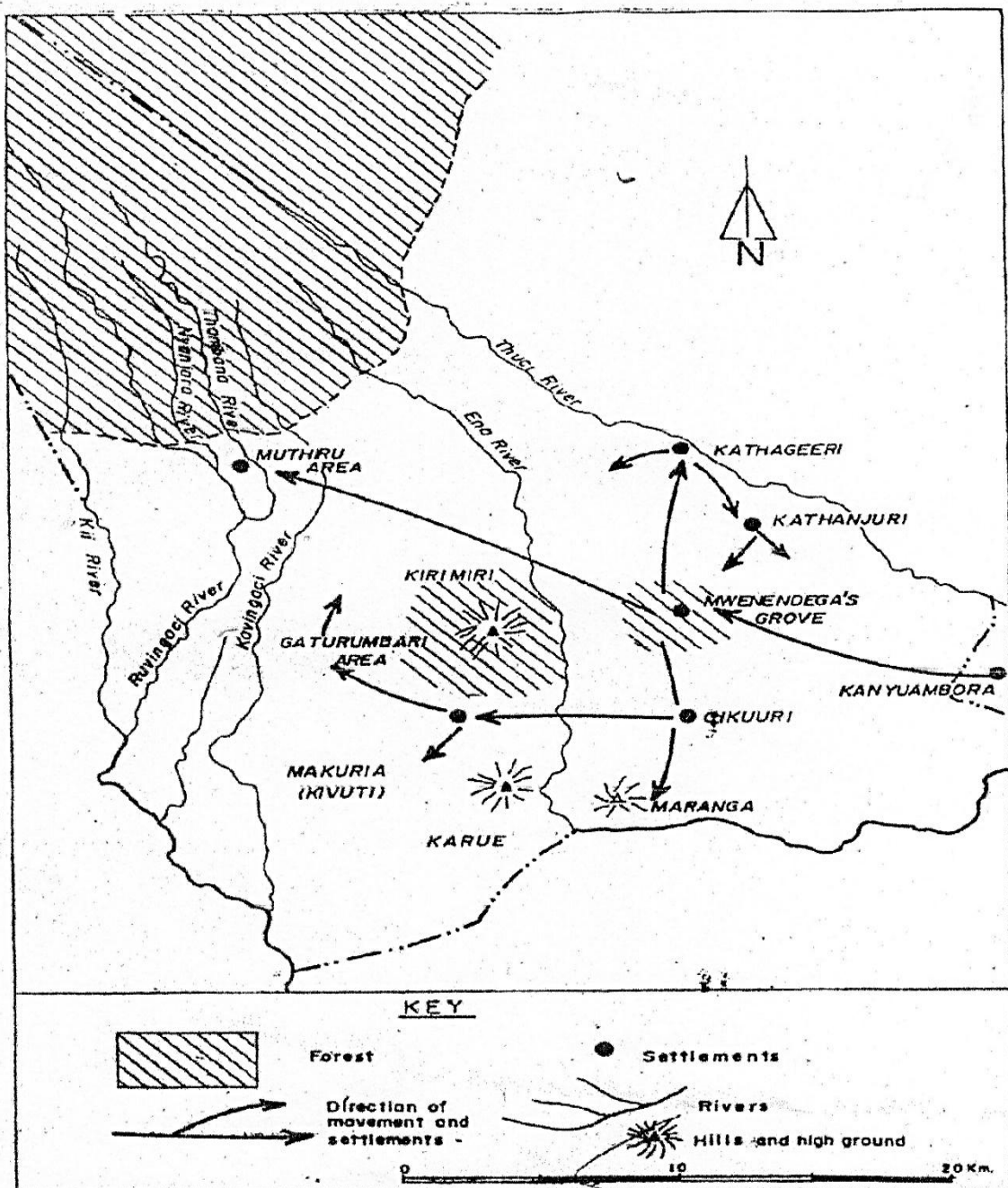
land, depletion of natural foodstuffs and in search for more fertile land (Mwaniki, 2010). This shows the impotence of land as a natural resource that all livelihood needs are derived from by all African communities since the time of their settlement.

Some sections of Igamuturi and Kina clans left Mwenendega and settled at Gikuuri. Some Igamuturi moved towards the present Embu and Mbeere border. Some Kina people left and settled at Mukuria or Rue the present day Kevote. From Kevote they moved to Kibogi, Kianjokoma and Kirinyaga. Another group left Mwenendega grove and settled at *Muthiru* comprising of Igamuturi members. Consequently, by 1650's nearly every part of Embu had been occupied but with sparse population.

The other group of immigrants who followed the southern direction from Igambang'ombe later found themselves on the Tana River valley. They followed the river valley and later found themselves at Kiambere hill. As they increased in numbers, some moved to Ithanga hills at the confluence of Tana and Thika rivers. The hills were a source of food and for security from wild animals. According to Muriuki (1974), Ithanga is the dispersal area for the Mbeere, the Embu, the Akikuyu, the Ndia and the Gichugu communities. Mwaniki (2010) revealed that Ithanga later moved to Mukurue wa Gathanga as proto kikuyu. Others moved out to settle in Muranga, Ndia and Mwea. Between 1680 and 1730's many people were arrived in Embu from Mbeere. They finally joined the other immigrants who had entered Embu at Igambangombe in Ishiara and spread all over the land guided by topography and suitability of land for food crop production.

Migration into Embuland was in small numbers from numerous directions. This means that as the Ithanga immigrants were arriving in Embuland, other immigrants especially from Meru side were also arriving. Some of the Kithami and Gicuku clan members arrived at this time. The Embu pattern of settlement was highly influenced by the directions from where they came from. The clans that came from Ithanga, Mwea or Mbeere settled in the *weru* area which is the drier part of the Embu. Those people who came from Meru direction settled in upper area which was wet with plenty of rainfall favourable for agriculture indicating that the migration patterns of the Aembu were linked to land resource for food crop production.

The Aembu speak a language called the Kiembu as a mother tongue. The Aembu proudly say that they speak Kiembu accurate or Muembu *Karinga* or unadulterated which simply means that they did not get any contamination in their language from the other groups who instead borrowed from them. The Aembu words pronunciation is dissimilar with the other Bantu speakers in the region. The southern parts of Embu are the Mbeere people and their dialect is Kimbeere (Njega, O.I., 2024). The western side of Embu are the, Kikuyu of Kirinyaga, Kiambu, Nyeri and Muranga who speak a Bantu dialect but different from Kiembu. On the Eastern side, Ameru are the borders of the Embu who are Bantu speakers but their dialect differs from that of the Aembu. However, there are those Aembu who live in the upper zone of Embu near the forest of Mt. Kenya and they speak slightly different from the rest of the native speakers. The Aembu from the lower parts of Embu refer to their language as *Kiruguru*. Other times they are referred to as the people of *Ruguru*, *muthiru* or *magasa* which sometime demean them (Ngai, O.I., 2024). However, the Aembu migration patterns were guided by search for security from wild animals and sources of food (Mwaniki, 2010) . Figure 2 shows migration and settlement of the Aembu.



Source: Mwaniki, S.K. (2010)

Figure 2: Map Showing Migration and Settlement to Embuland

#### 4.4 Social Organization of the Aembu in the Pre-colonial Period

The Aembu smallest social unit was a family and every one was a member of a particular family *nyomba*. The family could have been nuclear or extended. The Aembu were a patriarchal community and men were the family heads. Men therefore, were the heads of social political and religious organizations. Age was respected and

older members of the community were treated with respect since they were custodians of wisdom. The elders acted as clan heads and had responsibilities related to land allocation. Clan elders protected every individual's right to land which enhanced food crop production.

According to Ruguru (O.I., 2024), in a family women took care of children both boys *tuvici* and girls *turigu* but as they grew older separation occurred since young men were left under the counsel of their fathers and grandfathers while girls were guided by their mothers and grandmothers. At puberty grandparents took over in order to pass the knowledge required at that age regarding adulthood. Training based on gender division of labour was paramount at this point since as children grew, they were expected to perform various roles to enhance food crop production within households. Girls were trained in various skills like making of baskets used for food storage, moulding of pots using clay, planting of crops, weeding, harvesting and the overall production of food crops. Similarly, boys were trained on food crop production skills and their importance which included clearing the bush for the first time, planting and guarding crops against dangerous predators. Boys buried seeds during planting together with women as men dug the holes. According to Muriithi (O.I., 2024), the pre-colonial division of labour in food crop production was undermined during the colonial period when colonialism introduced new labour policies which led to increased male migration for paid employment outside their homes.

The Aembu people's homesteads had several houses. The man being the head of the family had a hut called *gaaru*, while the wife also had a hut called *ngucu*. For a polygamous man there existed several huts or *Nyomba* belonging to the wives (Ireru O.I., 2024). The general term for the family was *nyomba* which refers to a homestead with many huts. In a polygamous family, children born of the same father could call themselves by the name of their father and therefore belonged to the father's family for example, the family of Njeru or *nyomba ya Njeru* (Ireru O.I., 2024). The family *nyomba* was the basic socio-political unit whose members were related by blood. On the household level, a man was the head of his family which was made up of his wife or wives and their children (Mwaniki, 1974). A family belonged to patrilineage *mbari*

of a particular person who was not a very far ancestor (Rutere, 2009). *Mbari* could have been of three or four generations. So, *Mbari* consisted of several families closely related by blood. Several *mbari* having a common ancestor would make a house or a sub-clan. Such a family tree constituted a sub-clan. Several of these with a common ancestor could form a clan *muviriga* (Njeru, O.I., 2024). Clan elders ensured that their clan members acquired parcels of fertile land in different ecological regions as a sure way of increasing food crop production of different nutritional values.

According to Rutere (2009), Embu clans were many and for organizational purposes, the clans were divided into two social groups known as generational age sets called *thuke*. *Nthuke* were formed before the rise of clans and every *thuke* met at its own point which was referred to as *Kigomano*. The two main clans in Embu were Thagana and Irumbi (KNA/DC/EBU/3/4/ 1941). The system of *thuke* enhanced social cohesion and made serious decisions regarding the two groups such as forbidden marriages within the same group (Ileri, O.I., 2024). Rutere (2009), resonates with the oral informant about the existence of the generation age sets *thuke*. According to Rutere (2009), the two groups had a way of distinguishing themselves and each of the groups gave its children different names that are *Irumbi* and *Nyangi* respectively. When the *Nyangi* group married from *Irumbi*, they would say that they have carried their daughter's *ngua* meaning the carriers of their daughters into marriage in their group. Weveti (O.I., 2024), contends that the name *Nyangi* later changed to *Ngua* or *ngua migogo* meaning the log carriers. The oral informant further points out that when the *Irumbi* group married from *nyangi*, they called themselves *gatavi* or the plunderers simply meaning that they raided and disappeared with *nyangi* cows, girls or *arii*. The daughters were called cows because of the expected bride wealth when one married off the daughters. Wamai (O.I., 2024), asserts that when a person had many daughters that was a milestone in food crop production since they were married in many clans and the inlaws could organise and have working parties *wira wa athoni* to clear as much land as possible for the father in-law which increased production of food to the inlaws household.

The names of *Gatavi* and *Ngua* meant *Irumbi* and *Nyangi* social groups respectively which were the two main clans of Embu people where the smaller clans emerged from.

The two social clans were renamed *thuke* (Rutere, 2009). Ngai (O.I., 2024), asserts that even to date when the Aembu are surprised they usually exclaim this in *Kiembu* language, “*tegueii Gatavi na Ngua*”. Which is translated in English language to mean, listen to the two main clans that made the present Aembu clans. Moreover, clan elders were the custodian of land and they protected every member against landlessness which would hinder household food supply. The clans are listed in Table 4.

Table 4: The Aembu Clans

Thagana clans	Irumbi clans
1. Andu a Gathuci	1. Andu a Ngiiri
2. Andu a Mbogo	2. Gitiri
3. Andu a Njuki	3. Igamamuturi
4. Gicuku	4. Igandu
5. Igamatau	5. Ithima
6. Andu a Muthanga	6. Kina
7. Igambui	7. Marigu
8. Kamobea	8. Mukere
9. Igamurika	9. Mururi
10. Kithami	10. Ngai
11. Ngai	11. Ngaruguta
12. Ngiiri	12. Rukwaru
13. Rwamba	13. Thaaraa

Source: KNA/DC/ EMBU/3/4/1941

Table 4 shows the Aembu clans which are derived from the two clans called Thagana and Irumbi. The clan heads were the custodians of land and they ensured that every member accessed land for production of food crops.

Marriage was an esteemed establishment among the Aembu and it was exogamous in nature. To provide identity to the groups, one gave his children the name *irumbi* while the other gave theirs the name *nyangi* (Rutere, 2009). The two social clans were called generational age sets *Nthuke*. Each *nthuke* had its own meeting place. Generational age sets formed work parties and on rotational basis cleared large tracts of land which promoted food crop production in households.

The Aembu had areas that were specifically suitable for establishing homesteads. Building of Huts and granaries was done on high areas mostly due to the fact that safety was highly observed. According to Ileri (O.I., 2024), the Aembu houses were round in shape with a funnel roof. The food store or granary was smaller in size compared to the other huts and its location was at the farthest end of the homestead as

seen in figure 4. Erection of a food store in every homestead was a sign of food stability and accessibility. Njanamu (O.I., 2024), notes that there were specific trees that were utilized during the construction of huts since they were hard woods and could survive for long without interference from insects. These kinds of trees were *mûkwego, muu, Muringa and mûthaite*. According to Kanyagu (O.I.,2022), the structure of the circular hut was created with huge strong poles standing vertically around and firmly dug into the ground for support, the thin poles traversed horizontally from one vertical pole to the other. The hut would then be thatched with green banana leaves first, then two layers of ferns and a third final layer of reeds or tough grass. In most circumstances, some people could smear the walls with wet mud and plaster it with a mixture of ash and cow dung making the hut very warm and appealing. The expertise utilized in erection of the huts was a sure method of preventing rain water and cold air penetrating the structures which could otherwise interfere with the stored food (Ruguru, O.I., 2024).

According to Mbogo (O.I., 2024), Aembu males were polygamous. One could marry many wives on condition that he paid dowry and could support them fully. One important thing that the Aembu men needed to note before marrying many wives was that every wife needed a hut since co-wives *eru* did not sleep under the same roof. Wakina (O.I., 2024), notes that *eru* could not live under the same roof since *nitanyomba ciiri cia urogi* which means that co-wives are like two pots of witchcraft and that they could easily poison or plan a bad thing against one another. Susana Wakina, an oral informant reported this regarding polygamy and Chief Muruatetu of Gaturi,

*That man was highly polygamous. He believed that every beautiful girl was meant for him as a wife. When I was a girl, I had an encounter with him. Based on the fact that I was very brown like cowpeas, one day he saw me and he summoned his home guards to seize me for his wife. This did not happen because I ran very fast and hide myself. It was unfortunate for him because I was already married (Susana Wakina, O. I., 2024).*

However, the Aembu valued and attached a lot of importance to polygamy which was one of the factors that contributed to increased food crop production. Children in a

polygamous family were many and they provided the highly needed labour for increased food crop production while competition between co-wives in food crop production made households food secure.

The Aembu pre-colonial food crop producers had grain stores lifted up with strong wooden poles which was a sure way of guarding grains from damage likely to come from floods *muguu wa mbura* or rodents *makindu*. The raising of grain store ensured that their food was safe from any danger and one could store food for several seasons which was a sure method of sustaining household food supply. According to Ngai (O.I., 2024), for polygamous men there existed a grain store for every wife and a separate one for the husband. The manner in which the stores were constructed ensured safe method of keeping food for several seasons which enhanced continuous food supply in households even during situations of drought.

There was always the gate *mûvîrîga* and several huts or *ngucu* belonging to the wives whose doors *mirango* faced same direction to the centre of the homestead. At the centre of the homestead there was usually an area called *nja* where household members meetings took place (Wanjuki, O.I., 2024). The oral interview is supported by Kaaria (2022) who asserts that the first wives' hut was built to the right of the man's hut and the subsequent wives huts would follow in order of most senior behind first wives' hut. In the middle of the compound was the man's hut, *gaaru* whose door faced away from the other huts. Young sons and unmarried daughters slept in their mothers' hut. The young uncircumcised boys *kavici* (plural) *ivici* could sometimes sleep in their father's hut but after circumcision *kurua* they lived in separate huts that they built usually in between the first and the second wives *ngucu*. The vacant space in the middle of the huts and the granary had a lot of significance in food crop production. See figure 4. The space is called *nja*. The area was spacious and was utilized for threshing of grains while other cereals were spread on the smeared ground to dry and extract moisture before the food was stored in the granary for several seasons.



Source: Boma Zetu Archives, <https://www.bomayangu.go.ke> on 26th May 2024

Figure 3. Traditional Aembu Homestead

Figure 3 shows a layout of a traditional Aembu homestead. The open compound in the middle was smeared with cow dung and it was used for threshing and drying of grains so as to minimize wastage during harvesting. At the far end of the homestead was a granary that was used for storage of food for up to three seasons which is a clear indication that the community enjoyed food stability.

Aembu were very warm to each other and visiting each other was a common practice. Any time one visited the other it was mandatory that they provide some food or drink to the visitor (Mwaniki, 1974). Ngai (O.I., 2024), asserts that in case one did not give food to a visitor the person was described as mean or *muthunu*. The same person if he or she was given food and refused to eat then the person was believed to have feared of being bewitched and someone was always asked this question “*urarega irio ciakwa niundu urequire ni murogi?*” This is translated in English to ask, why are you refusing to eat my food, have you been told that I am a witch? Normally this could strain the relationship between the two. On the same Warue (O.I., 2024) asserts that before an original *muembu* gave a visitor food which may be mashed food *mukimo*, or grounded porridge *ucuru* she had to take a portion of it. Generosity in provision of food stuff to the visitors illuminates that the Aembu pre-colonial food crop producers

had plenty of uncommercialized food within households which was readily shared with outsiders who visited their homesteads.

Ruguru (O.I., 2024), asserts that Aembu community members were highly religious and they worshipped a Supreme being by name *Mwene Nyaga*. *Mwenenyaga* described ownership of the white top of Mt Kirinyaga which was full of snow. Ngai (O.I., 2024) notes that the God of the Aembu lived on top of the mountain and he checked the conduct of his creation from the top. She further asserts that as people went on their daily activities, they always sought for help from God who lived on top of the mountain. Like other African communities the Aembu were notoriously religious and mentioned the name of their God anytime and anywhere and in all circumstances (Mbiti, 1969). *Mwenenyaga* influenced food crop production and he had to be invoked all the time. Marigu an informant notes that the Aembu had a lot of respect for their God and had attributes to him when they prayed facing Mountain *Kirinyaga* and referred to him as,

*God the creator of heaven and earth, God the provider, God the most holy,  
God the most powerful, God who is all knowing, God who lives everywhere*  
(Marigu, O.I., 2024)

In case of crop failure, Aembu worshiped and beseeched *Mwenenyaga* facing Mt. Kenya which they believed was the dwelling place for their God. They could also offer sacrifices seeking for rains on land parcels designated for sacrifices leading to higher yields especially under the *mugumo* tree.

God provided all good things to his creation but he could also punish wrong doers either against him or his people. Mbogo (O.I., 2024) notes that, during calamities like famine, epidemics and rainfall failure, community members consulted religious experts and carried out sacrifices to appease *Mwenenyaga*. The form of sacrifice was usually a blemish less goat either black or white to seek for his intervention in ending the bad omen in the land. Ileri (O.I., 2024) opines that, the Aembu had strong believe in spirits which they called *ngoma* whom they believed to have been created by God or belonging to the deceased relatives. The spirits are in the hierarchy of God

although they are under him so they could be used to perform various things such as lightening, bring drought, floods just as God would find it appropriate. Some spirits could bring blessings while others bestowed catastrophe to the people although this highly depended on the conduct of the people. Since the spirits treated the people based on their conduct, it was the obligation of every community member to endeavour to behave in accordance to the wishes of the ancestral spirits (Ruguru O.I., 2024). Indeed, crop failure was attributed to some bad conduct by community members which called for sacrifices to appease the God for more food production.

Ancestral spirits were believed to live on tree tops, in far uncultivated land or inside caves. Spirits are believed to appear to the living during odd hours especially at night when people were asleep in form of dreams, unexplained occurrences like stones falling on the roof of the house, screams or drum beats (Ireru O. I., 2024). Ngai (O.I., 2024), asserts that during such instances people lived in fear and they always exclaimed that the evil spirits have come. Literally, all mountains and hills were associated with spirits and an oral informant from Embu west who hails near Karue and Kirimiri hills reported that they could occasionally hear the spirits from those hills screaming during the night and during such instance households remained silent listening to the spirits yells (Marigu, O.I., 2024). According to Mbogo a resident of Embu west near Karue hill said that this was the most common exclamation in kiembu language when people referred to the presence of spirits. “*uui tathikiriria ii mwigue ngoma cia Karue ikiugambu*” people were being kept alert to listen to the spirits of Mt. Karue screaming (Mbogo, O.I., 2024).

The Aembu believed in specialists who performed religious duties. Some of the religious specialists included healers or the medicine men commonly known as *andu ago* (plural) *mundu mugo* (KNA/DC/EBU/3/2/1941). The rain makers brought rains especially after a drought *areti a mbura*, diviners/diviners who used to unearth hidden matters *arathi*, prophets who used to predict something that would happen in future and sound warning to the community which they learnt of through dreams as well as the visions. Njeru (O.I., 2024), notes that *mundu mugo* was highly respected and he could be consulted many times over health matters, gave charms which helped to guard people against bad omen, protection of the lineage, abundant food crop

production and instilling the spirit of hard work to family members. However, its noteworthy that the Aembu social systems were closely linked to increased food production.

According to Peter Mbogo (O.I., 2024), in Embu West there existed a renowned medicine man *mundumugo* in his village of Makengi called Ileri Mutanginga. He received sickly visitors from far and wide who were seeking for treatment which he carried out using different herbs. Another famous medicine man was Ileri Irugi who came from Embu East near Runyenjes' (Marigu, O.I., 2024). Existence of medicine men among the Aembu is supported by an archival source (KNA/DC/EBU/3/2). The source reports that in Embu Division there were medicine men who played the role of a physician, diviner, and worked against witchcraft. However, the fact that those who sought medicine men services came from very far and not from the neighbourhood made the Aembu come up with a saying that *mundu mugo ndetikagua kua* which in English means that a medicine man is not valued in his own locality (Muriithi O.I., 2024). Agnes Ruguru O.I.; Peter Mbogo O.I., (2024) noted that, the living among the Aembu had a lot of commitment to the ancestors and spirits since they influenced their lives in a great way, they needed to appease them with sacrifices to maintain good relations at all time. Further the oral informants contend that the community members performed some rituals such as pouring some beer before drinking, milk, food and water to them.

During beer drinking parties, the Aembu could always say that they wanted to share some drink with the departed relatives and then poured a little on the ground saying this in kiembu language "*tatiga ngundie ariamathie gacovi kanin*". In English this means that they were pouring a little beer to share with the departed before they continued drinking. The practice was a firm believe that the departed family members communed with them at that particular time. Apart from giving the ancestors the foods, they also showed respect by mentioning their names during prayers to God and naming of children after them. Such kind of names included *Njoki* meaning coming back, *Kariuki* meaning has been survived (Ileri Kubuta, O.I., 2024). Some names were also linked to food crop production as a way of showing prudence like *murimi* which refers to a hardworking food crop producer *Kigundu* meaning a piece of

uncultivated land. Therefore, the social systems were associated with land and food crop production.

Marigu (O.I., 2024), resonates that among the Aembu existence of people who wounded the others was common and such people manipulated spirits with their powers and caused suffering to the innocent members of the community. The respondent notes that such people were called sorcerers or *arogi*. Njagi (O.I., 2024), notes that there were other people who were referred to as having bad tongues and if such people said something about someone, his animals or his children then underwent a suffering spell. This was followed by death of either his livestock or the children, or a serious illness like leprosy *mucukia* would attack the person where the comment was directed to. In case that person was known, then he or she was forced to spit saliva to the suffering person *gutuiira mata*. According to Njeru (O.I.,2024), *mugo* could also be called upon and reverse a situation that could have led to death of such persons and in case a *murogi* was known, he could be subjected to a painful death of being put inside a beehive and be rolled on a stiff cliff especially at Rupingazi watercourse.

To the Aembu, circumcision *marua* was a respectable practice for boys and also girls. The practice was a preparation for adulthood and marriage. The practice of circumcision took place throughout the seasons but only desisted during two months preceding rains. Circumcision rite was also linked to activities in food crop production and the rite of passage could not take place during the pick periods since community members were busy preparing the farms in readiness for the rains. The most important aspect to note is that planting, and guarding of the crops involved all members of the household regardless of gender and age for maximum productivity of food which called for good timing of the period to carry out the circumcision rites (Njoki, O.I., 2024).

The boys would be taken to Rupingazi River on a cold morning and dipped in the water to ensure pain reduction during the cut. For the girls, they were taken in the farm near the homestead very early in the morning when it was cold. They were then placed on banana leaves with their legs open which was followed with springing of

cold water on the clitoris to make it numb before the cut (Ruguru, O.I., 2024). The informant further revealed that because western medicine had not taken root, they used to burn banana leaf powder to smear on the cut and the cleaned using salted water to eliminate microorganisms. The girl slept facing upwards with legs apart so that the cut does not become septic as a result of friction. This facilitated the wound to dry up and cure within a short period so that the initiates resume their roles and eliminate any gaps that could otherwise hinder maximum food production in the household.

Mbogo (O.I., 2024), points out that the person who was in charge of circumcision known as *muruthia* had acquired special skill to carry out the practice whereby he cut the initiates using an iron knife *ruenji* specifically designed for the practice. The bleeding would be controlled through wrapping of the cut using leaves from banana. This was followed with the initiate being taken to the homestead where they stayed during the healing process. While in there, the initiates were always under supervision and instructions from the sponsor *mutiiri*. During the healing period, the young man was secluded and he received training *mataaro* on various topics such as family, secrets of the community and how to behave as a person who has been ushered in to adulthood stage (Ngai O.I., 2024).

If a young man delayed before being circumcised for some reasons, the father had to provide a goat. Rucia (O.I., 2024), asserts that clitoridectomy was carried out on girls before the girl had her first menstruation. According to Wakina (O.I., 2024), in case a girl menstruated before circumcision old ladies could make jokes out of it and whisper the following in kiambu “*Ooii tatigaii nimwire mwari wa ... aronire mambura aii kirigu*” In English it means that, oh let me tell you, it is very sad that the daughter of so and so started her menstrual periods before she was circumcised. To the Aembu this was a bad omen. The practice of circumcision was very painful but the initiates had to endure the pain which proved that they were courageous enough to face the responsibilities and hardships in the next stage of their lives. After both boys and girls underwent the initiation practice, celebrations followed where a lot of feeding and drinking continued to take place in all the homesteads represented. During the healing period, the initiates underwent various forms of training especially

division of labour in food crop production. Girls could be shown how to hold *muro* (plural) *miro* which was the most useful weeding tool for women.

Having graduated from childhood to adulthood the initiates were free to marry and have children hence perpetuating the family lineage. As noted earlier, the Aembu practiced both exogamous and polygamous marriages, Ngai (O.I., 2024), cited examples of highly polygamous people in Embu like Chief Muruatetu and Njagi muthangato. The two were colonial chiefs in Embu Locations namely Ngandori and Gaturi in Embu North and West sub-counties (KNA/ DC/ EBU/3/4). The importance of polygamy in food crop production is further seen since the two chiefs accumulated a lot of property after utilizing labour from their large families for food crop production which enabled them to acquire other forms of wealth like land and livestock.

Mbogo (O.I., 2024), notes that the Aembu had a strong religious believe in life beyond death which depended on the conduct of the relatives who were living either they are kind or bad to them. The community hated death and they mourned it seriously. In case a young person died before having any children they said he has not left a seed and would exclaim this in kiembu “*ucio ararii mutheri ndanatiga wana muri*”. In English this means that, the dead had no children at all for perpetuating his name and he had no seed. As mentioned earlier, the Aembu people never died naturally and every death had a cause. Death could have been attributed to a curse, witchcraft, or sorcery. Because of this believe, the Aembu could constantly go to seek for reasons behind certain occurrences to the specialists such as the seers and diviners, *kuringiambu* which means seeking to know the real cause of a phenomena (Marigu, O.I., 2024). Even when they unfortunately produced little food as a result of locust invasion, rain failure or floods they attributed the matter to something. The Aembu pre- colonial food crop producers could even offer sacrifices and seek for rains by pleading with *Mwenenyaga* for an immense harvest which indicates the close link between their social systems and food crop production.

The Aembu community believed in patriarchy whereby power within a household were under the control of men while women were subordinates. However, division of

labour ensured that food security was maintained within households and the community. Ruguru (O.I., 2024) contends that, the pre-capitalist labour systems were designed in such a way that men, women and children had their roles in the production of food crops which ensured food sufficiency within households. Moreover, the Aembu land and labour systems were slowly undermined in the 19<sup>th</sup> century when the pre-capitalist and the capitalist modes of production coexisted.

According to Lucia Marigu (O.I., 2024), the dominant diet of the Aembu food was *nyenyi / mukimo* it was a mashed diet where a variety of grains were cooked and mixed thoroughly with green vegetables using a long wooden stick called *mwiko* until all the ingredients were mixed evenly in a pot *nyungu*. The mixture components included bananas, beans, maize and green vegetables. The green vegetables were of different types such as Arrowroot leaves *matuma*, beans leave *maboco*, and others that grew widely such as the pregnant woman called *muka uri ivu* and the tongue of an antelope *karimi ka thia*. The components that were mixed to form the diet shows that the subsistence Aembu people fed on highly nutritious food which was found in different ecological zones facilitated by the systems of land ownership and labour which ensured plentiful food yield of diverse types.

In the evenings, especially when moon was bright members of the same homestead stayed outside *nja* for recreation as the mothers cooked inside the *ngucu*. This was followed with storytelling from the old to the young which were usually very educative since they showed them the importance of being brave, respective and hardworking. Riddles, tongue twisters, proverbs, wise sayings were also shared by the old to the young. The Aembu enjoyed singing and dancing with special attire made of sisal fibre, feathers from certain birds and horns which served as instruments for their music (Ngai, O.I., 2024). During leisure, boys played balls made of woven fibres from banana and other bushes which was hard to kick. Rope made from threads of certain plants were also used by girls for skipping while small children used to play a game of seek and hide. The oral informant further contends that, grown up men played wrestling and if one fell over that meant he lost the game. The loss was attributed to poor feeding habits and his wife could be ridiculed for not providing enough and nutritious food like gruel and mashed food *mukimo* to the husband

(Ruguru O.I., 2024). The challenge cautioned the wife to double her effort in production of food by ensuring that she provided nutritious food which was obtained from different parcels of land based on the soil type and landscape.

The Aembu engaged in drinking of alcohol that was made within homesteads by experts using ingredients from sugarcane, honey and millet flour. The cultural practices elucidate existence of clear division of labour and the cohesiveness of the Aembu before the advent of colonialism which transformed the values without regard as to why they existed. In most circumstances beer was taken as a form of leisure after work or as a way of motivating the work parties as they work. Moreover, the fact that beer was made with locally produced grains like millet and sorghum shows that food supply was adequate among the Aembu populace.

#### **4.5 The Aembu Economic Organization up to 1906**

According to Njagi (O.I., 2024) the earliest inhabitants of the Aembu were hunters and gatherers. To ascertain this view, the earliest method of acquiring land in Embuland was through hunting right where hunters placed traps for the animals in different areas. The areas with the traps were believed to have been occupied by the first Aembu settlers towards the end of 14<sup>th</sup> century. However, hunting and gathering might have declined when food crop production was adopted as a result of increased population during the 16<sup>th</sup> and the 17<sup>th</sup> century.

While hunting was a male dominated activity, gathering was done by women and children. The Aembu acquired iron tools from the Thigagi whose main economic activity was hunting. Gathering involved collecting of fruits, leaves and insects to supplement the other foods. According to Njoki (O.I., 2024), the practice required specialization since not all the fruits and leaves were healthy to the body. Some were bitter while others were poisonous. Initially, the gatherers moved from one place to another since they had not settled down. Gathering was important since the collected leaves, roots and insects supplemented their diet with extra nutrients. Gathering of vegetables was mainly carried out by women (Ileri O.I.; Wamai O.I., 2024). The practice was very successful soon after the rains since different types of plants had

sprung. The green vegetables were useful since the Aembu mixed them with flour to make a mashed dish which they called *mukimo*.

Alongside collection of leaves, women collected dry firewood which saved a lot of time. There were various plants that grew along river banks and as women went to fetch water, they sorted those that were edible. Ngai (O.I., 2024), asserts that alongside collection of leaves the Aembu women could look for edible fruits which was done in small groups for security purposes. Since some trees were very tall young boys could be carried to facilitate the process by climbing those that bore fruits. The boys could drop the fruits as women collected. Long tree branches could be used to fell fruits from certain trees. Some of the fruits included *macuca*, *ndare*, and *mbota*. Fruits were normally gathered after the rainy period since they had ripened at that time, otherwise soon after they would be destroyed (Ruguru O.I., 2024). Alongside gathering of leaves and vegetables there existed some insects that as well supplemented the diet.

During the rainy season termites *nguya* came to the surface of the earth and were highly edible thus could as well be collected for food, this practice was undertaken by the young boys and girls. Kamwere, Ileri & Wakina (O.I., 2024), asserted that it was very rare to find anybody suffering from food deficiency ailments since the food was highly balanced with animal protein, plant proteins, vegetables and vitamins from wild fruits. Honey gathering was also an important economic activity since it was used to make beer for food and for medicinal purposes. Honey was obtained from tree trunks and rocks before the Aembu learnt the art of making beehives *mwatu*. While gathering took place during the rainy season, hunting was mostly done during the dry spell after harvesting before the start of farm preparation when a lot of labour was required for more food produce. Availability of the various food types was facilitated by the fact that the pre-colonial food crop production was guided by efficient laid down guidelines of land access and labour system.

Besides gathering hunting was another economic activity by the Aembu. According to Kivuti (O.I., 2024), hunting was carried out to supplement the diet since they could not slay the livestock all the time. This form of hunting took place in near places as a

form of leisure after farm work mostly in the afternoons. Members organised themselves into two groups whereby one group chased the animals towards a confined area while the other waited for them on the opposite side (Mbogo, O.I., 2024). Apart from hunting in the near places the Aembu also carried out hunting in far places which combined other communities in the neighbourhood such as the Kamba, the Agikuyu and Chuka. Mount Kenya forest and Tana River *Thagana* provided fertile ground for this. For the distant hunting, normally huge animals were hunted ranging from elephant *njogu*, hippopotamus *nguu*, rhinos and Buffaloes *mbogo*. The elephant was important since it provided ivory while the tail fur was placed on arrow to enhance mobility. Presence of rhinoceros horns, leopard skins and Ivory enhance participation of the Aembu in the international trade at the coast where the Akamba became middle men (Kivuti O.I., 2024). Trade between the Aembu and their neighbours is clear evidence of surplus food in the households.

According to Ngai (O.I., 2024), hunting was basically for getting the needed food and garments but this changed and became highly commercialized with the rise of international commerce. Hunting which had become very attractive to most of the Aembu was discouraged by the British colonial government after the Aembu lost their independence in 1906 and new policies were passed that prohibited killing of animals. Such laws were against killing of animals like elephants, hippopotamus, rhinos and leopards between 1909 and 1915 (KNA/DC/EMBU/5/9). However, despite this, a ninety-six (96) years old informant by name Ngai Makinya asserts that, hunting did not cease completely but the practice was carried on together with other activities like growing of crops up to late 1960s. This illustrates that some elements of pre-capitalist practices have survived the articulation process through reproduction even after Kenya turned out to be sovereign in 1963.

Another important economic activity in the community was industrialization. In this practice, raw materials were worked on to produce products that were useful to community members. Such industries included making wooden tools for farming, bedding and clothing. Pottery industry *kumba nyungu* was a common practice among the Aembu as well. The Aembu used pots in various ways ranging from cooking and storage of grains. Crop cultivation being an important economic activity was

promoted by acquisition of iron tools. The Aembu acquired iron tools and pots were majorly acquired through exchange with grains from the Ambeere neighbours. To the Aembu food crop producers, various types of pots were utilized for food storage which ensured that the crops were not affected by rodents or elements of weather till the next season (Ruguru, O.I., 2024). The use of iron technology enabled Bantus to clear the bush for growing of food crops which led to increased food productivity, population increase and establishment of permanent settlements. According to Ochieng (1991), food crop production and the iron making technology first took place in East Africa around 3000 years ago. For the Aembu pre-capitalist producers, use of iron tools enhanced food production.

The Aembu just like the Agikuyu and the Mbeere neighbours could have first borrowed iron working from the Gumba and Thigagi during the process of settlement (Muriuki, 1974). The gumba and the thigagi were already in areas around Mount Kenya before the arrival of the Bantu. According to Mwaruvie (1994), iron ore was not found in all areas of Embu but areas like muminyi location, kiangombe and Ivurorii in Mbeere. This contradicts with Mwaniki (2010), who contends that the Aembu made their own iron tools while the Embu soils did not have iron deposits. However, according to Ileri (O.I., 2024), iron tools that the Aembu used were from mbeere which were battered with grains. The informant asserts that increased use of iron promoted food crop production which enhanced food security and increased population.

The Aembu engaged in trade as an economic activity. The Aembu whose main economic activity was food crop production exchanged the foodstuff with other items locally. It was through the Aembu and the Mbeere trade in bananas, arrow roots, sugarcane, sweet potatoes and yams that Aembu obtained iron ore (Njiru O.I., 2024). An archival source (KNA/DC, EBU/ 3/ 4), revealed that the Aembu soils are rich for agriculture with plenty of rainfall. This coupled with the fact that, land ownership was guaranteed to every member of the society by clan elders and labour distribution within household was well organised, abundant production of various foodstuff like arrow roots, beans, sweet potatoes and bananas was guaranteed which enhanced trade between the Aembu and the Ambeere neighbours during famines inform of barter

(Mwaniki 2010). According to Ileri (O.I., 2024), from the Ambeere the Aembu obtained *ithiga ri gukia, njuo, ciondo, nyungu, tuviu, mathanua*, arrowhead and files *inoro*, which they exchanged with grains. Further on trade, the Aembu could intensify labour during peak season by exchanging labour for grains especially with the Ambeere. A calabash *kauga* of grains was equal to work for one day (Njogu., O.I., 2024). The Aembu pre-capitalist food crop producers exchanged labour with grains which was a milestone to increased food productivity within households.

Cloth industry was similarly prominent among the Aembu. Women covered their bodies with clothes obtained from skins. There were people who were endowed with the special skills of making cloths from animal skins. Once animals were killed the skin went through a drying process where it was pinned on the ground to facilitate its drying. The skin was carefully cut to come up with the required sizes. During the making of cloths, the skin was put in water or put in a wet area, then it was softened through rubbing with hands. After oiling, it was fashioned to the desired cloth. Children were carried with *kagori* and a woman's short skirt called *ngathi* or cloth called *kithiri* for old men (Ngai, O.I., 2024). Skins from animals were also utilized by the Aembu community members to make storage containers for grains and honey which ensured safety of food for consecutive seasons. According to Ngai an oral respondent (O.I., 2024), use of skins from both domesticated and hunted animals enhanced storage of food which ensured food security in households since one could stockpile food for more than three years.

Apart from food crop production the Aembu domesticated livestock. Historians have raised debates regarding the origin of domestication of animals and the most popular contention is that domestication started in south East Asia from where it spread to the Northern part of Africa along the Nile River in Egypt. From the northern part of Africa, it spread to eastern Africa and particularly Kenya according to Ochieng (1991). The Aembu and their neighbours the Ambeere could have acquired the cattle keeping skills from the Maasai when they interacted in the 17th century since they had to live together (Mwaniki, 1910).

Livestock keeping was one of the economic activities during the pre-colonial period among the Aembu but it is not a focus of this study which examines how colonialism changed the Aembu land and labour systems and the extent to which the ability of the community members to produce enough food was undermined. Nevertheless, putting it at a periphery would mean providing inadequate information on the community's economic structure. The Aembu mainly acquired livestock through trade and dowry payment. If a household had many girls, then the family received goats, hence making the parents rich which led to development of a saying that *uriri ni utongangia mundu*. Which means one can get rich through products from the bed (Mbogo O.,1.,2024). The number of livestock that an individual owned determined whether to be regarded by society as poor or rich. The more the number of cattle one had the more one was considered as wealthy and this is illustrated by one of the key informants Wamai, (O. I., 2024), who notes that *a cow cannot be seen by a fool* meaning that a cow cannot be owned by a foolish person. The saying is used among the Aembu even today which shows the importance attached to livestock by community members especially because they produced milk which was highly valued for children growth. The oral informant explained that livestock had other uses such as dowry payment, medicine men services and buying of farm tools for increased food production, while some parts of a slaughtered animal could be exchanged for cultivable land. This assertion is supported by Mwaniki (2010).

The Aembu could acquire livestock through raiding which was a commonly accepted practice against their neighbours like the Chuka in order to get more livestock (Ngai, O. I., 2024). Mbogo (O.I., 2024), asserts that cows were valued compared to the bulls since they gave milk which was used by children for nutritional purposes during growth. Milk could either be taken in its fresh form or is fermented by being put in a gourd *kinya*. It could also be used as porridge or ugali when mixed with flour due to its nutritional value (Marigu, O.I., 2024). Informants revealed that cattle sheep and goats were highly valued since milk and beef helped to supplement food crops which enhanced food security.

Horns from cattle served as vessels for drinking and storage of a variety of herbs used for medicine. The horns were useful as a form of communication by the community

members especially when calling people for a meeting or when warning them of an expected bad happening. The sounds were different which therefore, conveyed different messages to those who knew their meanings. The Aembu celebrated live with dances and this enhanced the use of horns during dancing occasions. However, according to KNA/ DC/ EBU/ 3/4/1929 the Aembu possessed a fair number of sheep and goats but cattle were scarce and very highly prized. However, the punitive expedition of 1906 caused great losses from which they never recovered.

Initially due to the sparse population, the Aembu did their farm work communally. People cultivated a big piece of land called *rware or ngamba* and they could leave their homes early in the morning to the farm. According to Mwaniki (2010), men could accompany their wives' carrying weapons for defence purposes. As women carried out the weeding for the crops, men kept shifting the weapons ahead of the women. With the increase in population and expansion of the household, land ownership system started being based on clans and food crop production stopped being communal. However, clear guidelines existed regarding access to land and labour resources with the ultimate aim of increasing food production.

The Aembu pre-clonial land and labour systems in food crop production were slowly transformed when the pre-capitalist and the colonial land and labour systems co-existed during the 19th Century (Mwaniki, 2010 & Mwaruvie, 1994).

#### **4.6 The Political Organization of the Aembu during the Pre-colonial Period**

A Political system refers to the way an entity is organized for maintenance of direction and the regulation which helps in modelling the conduct of community members. The Aembu community was decentralized and had a patriarchal system with an established homestead *mucii* where men headed the social political and religious institutions. Family being the smallest political unit each household was headed by father. A household was made up of father, wife or wives and children. According to Ileri (O.I., 2024) Aembu were patrilineal which meant that the head of a family unit was the father *vaava* and was the foundation of power. The father *vaava* was the overall source of power within his household. Members of the same family were related by blood and they claimed a common ancestry. Ngai (O.I., 2024), asserts

that the father made most decision especially regarding land allocation whereby he allocated land to his wives in different zones, he decided when planting could take place, and the crops to be planted. This illuminates on the effective systems of land access and labour in food crop production among the Aembu at the level of the household which helped to increase food production.

Beyond a homestead *mucii*, there existed council *kiama* (plural) *ciama* also known as leaders or elders *muthamaki* (plural) *athamaki*. *Athamaki* were custodians of wisdom, wealth, traditional knowledge, caring over the community members and good image. Njoki O.I., (2024), notes that *Kiama kia ituura* (village council) was at the lowest level. Every *ituura* had a council whose composition was of elderly men known as *athamaki*. Following the village council there existed a clan council *kiama kia muvirira*. Every Aembu clan had a council whose responsibility was hearing and settling disputes that may arise especially on land related matters and any other form of bad or prohibited conduct. On land matters, they made dealings associated with the land resource at clan level and assurance of justice to all the clan members whenever disputes arose (Ileri O.I., 2024). Mwaniki (1973), contends that clan elders were responsible for administration of justice and dealt with land related affairs within the clan. Clan elders protected people's right over land and ensured that members acquired land in different ecological zones which ensured high yields of food with different nutritional values all time.

Njue, O.I., (2024), points out that there existed another council called the military council *kiama kia ita / njama ya ita*. The military council purely dealt with matters related to war and diplomacy within the clan. The *kiama* blessed and advised warriors before going to a fight with the neighbours. The oral informant contends that the military council worked closely with religious leaders like the medicine men for consultative purposes. The military council *kiama kia ita* (plural) *ciama cia ita* had the duty of implementing the policies established by the justice council *kiama kia ngome* (supreme council).

An oral informant by name Mbogo (O.I., 2024), opines that members of *kiama* were referred to as *athuri a kiama* (council of selectors) and they had a lot of authority

compared to that of *Kiama kia muviriga*. The council membership was of people who were respected and they had a lot of wisdom when dealing with Aembu traditional issues where impartial judgement was required. The clan council was highly respected because of their senior status in the community and wisdom when dealing with community matters which made them to be referred to as *athuri* or selectors (Muriithi O.I., 2024). Once cases were taken to the council of selectors *athuri a kiama* they heard them and passed judgement based on the Aembu customs and traditions. Afterwards, the matter was forwarded to the military affairs council *njama ya ita* for execution of the recommended justice (Ngai, O.I., 2024).

The senior most council was *kiama kia ngome* whose power surpassed all the councils that existed. The group of *ngome* members had jurisdiction over all manner of cases that the other councils could not handle and arrive at a justifiable resolution. The *ngome* council made the final judgement and was entrusted with both criminal and civil cases which included adultery, rape, disrespect to the elders, land ownership issues, laziness and irresponsibility towards family obligations. Persons condemned over the forementioned crimes were put to death usually by being put into a beehive *mwatu* and then rolled over a hill (Njanamu, O.I., 2024). The fact that the highest council dealt with land matters, all members right to land access for food crop production was guaranteed which enhanced food supply.

The oral informant Njanamu further notes that the elders superiority in age and experience enabled them to use an indirect language especially when they sat to settle cases and they needed to eat as they discussed the matter. They usually said the following, *A dry mouth does not talk. We are likely to die of yawning. An empty stomach has no ears* (Njanamu, O.I.). In this case yawning communicates that the elders were hungry and they needed to eat. It was customarily that a goat *mburi* and beer *njovi* for the village elders *athuri a muviriga* were provided by the two people in scruffle.

According to Ileri (O.I., 2024), there existed generational age sets *nthuke* whose duty was to make laws that regulated conduct of the Aembu people. *Nthuke* made laws regarding bride wealth that was paid during the marriage negotiation by a young man

who had identified a suitor. There were two generational age sets and each was made up of the Aembu clans. The *nthuke* were instituted before the formation of clans and could not be altered. Each generational age set was in power for a specified period of time usually about thirty-five years and after the term power was transferred to another age set in an official ritual that was commonly referred to as *nduiko* where celebrations were continuous for a period between two weeks to a month (Nyaga, O.I., 2024)). Rutere (1991), further expounds on the importance of the age set power and the handing over ceremony *nduiko* where a lot of meat and liquor were feasted on for a long period.

Mwaniki (O.I., 2024), notes that originally the Aembu did not have generational age sets *thuke* but this started during a famine they called *nvaraganu* meaning destructor. The famine was very destructive and it led to great losses in terms of human lives as well as livestock. The Aembu elders decided that due to the great losses it was necessary to divide the community into two age sets for disaster alertness. The two were called *Irumbi* and *Nyangi* (Rutere, 2009). An archival source (KNA/ DC/ EBU/ 3/4/) validates the oral sources that there existed the two generational age sets and that membership was from varied regions across Aembu land and they made rules to guide the community members.

Mwaniki (2010), asserts that from the two Aembu clans others emerged such as Marigu, Gicuku, Rwamba, Iga Muturi, Irua, Kina, Igandu, Gicuku, Mitau, Ngai, Kithami and Njuki, Thagana and Irumbi. The age groups had acquired new status and responsibilities. A young uncircumcised lad *kavici* progressed into a class of a warrior, and acquired status of a *mwanake* after circumcision. An oral informant Njagi (O.I., 2024), points out that immediately the young man was circumcised he entered a warrior class and joined the various age sets *mariika*. The warriors could meet and plan raiding with the blessing of *mundu mugo*, and a diviner who blessed them as well as informing them of any unprecedented occurrence like a misfortune during the raid. According to Mbogo (O.I., 2024), the warriors protected the community against external aggression and cattle raids that would be executed on the neighbours. Njeru (O.I., 2024), notes that the Aembu warriors once raided their Chuka neighbours which was very victorious making one of the fighters by name

Karuku to earn a lot of praise and respect from the rest of the warriors. Another expedition was fashioned towards the Akamba in 1900 and was equally successful (Mwaniki 2010). Warriors were instrumental in protecting any invaders who wished to take away the Aembu land which demonstrates that political matters were linked to land due to its usefulness in ensuring food security.

There was a military affairs council *njama ya ita* was made up of people who had expertise in warfare. The military affairs council *Njama ya ita* executed the orders of justice council and the supreme council *kiama kia ngome*. Members of the council were known as *athuri a kiama*. The council had more power than the clan council *kiama kia muviriga*. This council was made up of reputable elderly men based on wisdom in judgement of cases, authority in traditional matters and age (Rutere, 2009). The duties of this council were to hear cases. After passing judgment, the council would pass the case to the military affairs *njama ya ita* to execute. The supreme council *Kiama kia ngome* was the top most and the most powerful and it attended judicial matters in both civil and criminal fields. The council acted as the final court of appeal because all the difficult cases were taken to it and its decision were final. It could deal with complicated cases such as murder. The council could declare whether the warriors could go to war or not. Generational age sets power declined when the community was subdued to colonial authorities in 1906 and the community was officially put under colonial rule which undermined the system of land access and labour in food crop production (Mwaniki, 2010).

#### **4.7 Pre-colonial Land Access System in Food Crop Production among the Aembu**

This section aims at examining the manner in which the Aembu accessed land for food crop production before the advent of British colonialists. Land tenure is concerned with an individual's right to ownership and utilization of the resource. Njau (2009), notes that land was a valued resource since all the economic activities revolved on it. These activities included food crop production, livestock keeping, hunting, gathering and industry.

The initial system of land ownership was communal and members or individuals laid claim over land belonging to a specific community. After the settlement of most Kenyan communities in their present homelands, the population was low and for security purposes they lived in groups and carried out their activities communally. The initial economic activities such as hunting and gathering were communally carried out and members of a community had equal rights to land (Ochieng, 1990). Mwaniki (2010), asserts that during the pre-colonial period, Aembu people left their homes very early in the morning to work on a common portion with protection from men who carried bows and arrows. They worked the whole day and, in the evening, they returned to their homes. However, since the population was low, land was in plenty and belonged to the society. After the population increased, migrations took place to other places but land was still available for farming. When people settled down as households, *mbari*, crop production stopped being communal. According to Ileri (O.I., 2024), the pre-capitalist Aembu producers moved to any vacant land as a group and settled there without any form of restrictions at all which enabled them to produce enough food of different types based on the ecology and household needs.

After the community got organized into clans which originated from the two original clans namely, Irumbi and Igamatau, then the system of land ownership changed from communal to clan ownership. Ileri (O.I., 2024), asserts that the initial method of land ownership by the clan members was through trapping. The early inhabitants of the Aembu community engaged in hunting and gathering whereby they moved from one area to another searching for wild game, fruits and vegetables and this explains why the initial method of accessing land was through hunting rights or *mutego*. To acquire land using hunting rights, the hunters dug pits in several areas especially the paths used by the animals on their way to the watering points, they covered the holes with grass and returned the soil to confuse the animal. The animals could fall into the pit and stayed inside until the hunter came to remove them. The hunters marked boundaries to identify the areas where they dug holes to trap their animals. This method of land ownership through hunting is supported by Mwaniki (1974), resonates the method was used by the earliest inhabitants of Embu who had no idea about domestication of crops and animals. According to Wamai (O.I., 2024), demarcation between one hunting area and another was done through planting of a tree known as

*murigi*. The informant further contends that the marking of the boundaries reduced conflicts among the hunters and stealing of the trapped animals. The practice was common during the initial years of settlement into Embuland. The form of land acquired through *mutego* or hunting right was scattered in many areas but several clans owned it. According to Ngai (O.I., 2024), some of the clans that owned land in Embu were *gicuku, rwamba, marigu, rukwaro, mukoro, ndiri, kiragua and muthaiga*. The land consequently belonged to the clan members and the practice came to an end around 1942 (Ileri O.I., 2024). During this time, clan elders were directly responsible to clan lands and members lived in confined areas (KNA/ DC/ EBU/ 1/2/1938). The clan members were usually people related by blood. However, Mbogo (O.I., 2024), points out that foreigners could be allowed to join the clan, *mivirig* based on the method of land ownership. Ileri (O.I., 2024), asserts that beekeepers and the hunters, *aguimi*, formed bands which came to be called clans but with related family members.

The subsequent method of acquiring land was called, *ngamba ya kuna na kathanua* meaning land first acquired through the use of a chopper or axe (Mwaniki, 2010). This system of land ownership was put in place when the Aembu settled down and started domestication of crops. The groups of the early cultivators had formed the Aembu clans and all the people who had descent from those clans had right to use the land for cultivation of crops. According to Njanamu (O.I., 2024), the fact that one cleared the bush for the first time did not guarantee individual ownership but the land *ngamba* belonged to the members of the clan. This means that when a member of the lineage cultivated a piece of land, the produce belonged to the individual but he did not own earth, *muthetu* and no payment was required when he or she utilized the resource. Due to increased population, within a lineage, it became necessary that one of the oldest members of the lineage becomes the custodian of land, *mumenyereri*. According to Njoka (O.I., 2024), the *mumenyereri* had to regulate the utilization of the land resource and he was in control of all land tracts either acquired through clearing or as trapping areas by the first clan members. Thus, the pre-colonial system of land ownership highly influenced food production since land was acquired in different eco-friendly areas which accommodated different types of crops with different nutritional values.

The guardians could have been many but this depended on the number of parcels in existence. Njeru (O.I., 2024) maintains that, the main duties performed by the *mumenyereri* were to grant right to access land to the people who did not belong to the clan and protecting the boundary marks in case anyone changed them. The marks were guarded so that they remained in place and every member had to know their location and the names of the neighboring clans. In case of disputes between clans, all the members were invited and they contributed food and beer to be feasted on as they arbitrated the case. Oath taking, *kunyua muma* was also concluded in the ceremony which showed the seriousness of the ceremony. The political system was structured in such a way that the issue of landlessness was unheard of which ensured all households produced enough food for feeding their members.

The other method of land access that followed was through buying which was referred to in kiambu as, *mugunda wa kugura*. Mwaruvie (1994), referred to this method of buying land among the Ambeere as land acquired through *Nguri*. The method became common to the late comers of the land. This is because initially land was plenty due to the low population and over time, the population increased making demand higher than the supply which encouraged land buying. Ngai, O.I.; Mbogo, O.I.; (2024), pointed out that land could be bought using an axe, goat, grains, sheep, cattle or even a portion of a slaughtered animal. Mwaruvie (1994), asserts that similar items were used to buy land among the Ambeere. However, buying and selling of land did not take place as one pleased but one had to inform the immediate family members. This was because it was not common to sell land to a person who did not belong to the clan unless none of the clan members was in a position to purchase. When none of the clan member could readily purchase the parcel of land, then the clan members and the buyer could look for a convenient meeting point to agree and conclude the process. Other members whose presence was important were the neighbours, *mundu wa mukumbu* and council of elders *athuri a kiama kia muviriga* (Njega, O.I., 2024). Land sold out without the ceremony was customarily wrong and could be submitted back to the owner. The person buying land was expected to provide a he-goat, a she-goat and a witness. After the ceremony, there ensued marking of the boundary which was usually done by the witness whereby planting of a tree called *murigi* was carried out. Njogu (O.I., 2024), emphasises that, land with hard

woods like *Miringa*, *Mikwego*, *Miuu* were more valuable than the others since the hard woods were used to make important things like pestles and mortar for grinding grains. They were likewise used as poles to support raised granary for safe storage of food thus hindering effects of floods.

After the process of acquiring land through buying *kugura* then the buyer was free to utilize the land in various ways and it became personal or private land. However, this did not guarantee the sale of the parcel of land without consultation with his family members. Once the person died, his sons inherited the land with the first son being the custodian or *mumenyereri* but *mumenjeri* was expected to be as wise as the departed father and adhere to land systems and adhere to the expected norm of protecting family members from landlessness which could otherwise result to food insecurity.

Another method of land ownership for cultivation of food crops that followed was through use of fines. In case one murdered a person he or she could lose land to the family of the person as a form of compensation for the crime (Ireru O.I., 2024). Young men could get land from his uncles, *aamamawe* from the mother's side upon providing a he goat for people to feed on as they blessed the parcel of land *ngamba*. Like in many African societies that were patriarchal, women in Embu could acquire land for food crop production from their husbands or male relatives (Njega, O.I., 2024). This is supported by Njoki (2001), who asserts that the Aembu women obtained land through their husbands. According to Wamai an informant from Embu West, when he was asked whether there were landless people among the Aembu, with bitterness, he said the following.

*I hate remembering the land matter. Matter to do with land are difficult. My father was a victim of landlessness during the colonial period. Let me tell you my mother, stop asking me about those things. It all started when the system of land ownership system changed with the advent of colonialism (Wamai, O.I., 2024).*

These revealed the importance attached to land as a productive resource in food production and the beginning of landless among the Aembu in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century.

However, people without land did not lack a parcel to grow food crops or to live on since the right of occupancy was for everyone (Ngai, O.I., 2024). Production of food crops and living on a parcel of land that one did not own required certain protocol so that one does not claim ownership in future. The person gave out beer for rent which was taken by clansmen who consented the tenancy. Foodstuff produced on such land was owned by the tenants and his household. Some tenants who proved to be good enough could be given land on permanent terms. If they gave out a goat and they were ritually born to the family, *guciarua na mburu* in the ceremony, they swore to be royal to the clan and never to let their secrets out. After this the person was accepted in the clan as a family member who is ritually born *muciarua* and he became part and partial of that family (Mwaniki, 2010). The practice was also carried out among the Ambeere and the rebirth ritual was referred to as *giciaro* whereby according to Mwaruvie (1994), the person was forbidden from exposing the secrets of the clan to the enemies. On the same breath, a renowned man called Kara from Meru owned land around Kivue in Embu west where he grew sugarcane and banana (Ireru, O.I., 2024). The pre-colonial system of land ownership guaranteed every member rightful access to land for all activities specifically food crop production. Ireri (O.I., 2024) contends that, since the Aembu practiced shifting cultivation, if one land was in a distant place as they waited for it to regain fertility, one could be a tenant of land from members of another clan. This simply implies that one does not necessarily have to be landless to be a tenant and the practice of tenancy continued up to the 1900s.

Nonetheless, there existed public land. In the public land, there were shrines or the sacred places where sacrifices were carried out, livestock watering and licking salt areas (Lucia, O.I., 2024). The informant contends that, though the areas belonged to certain clans they did not claim the land. However, having a vast parcel of land was a sign of being propertied, but the manner in which the resource was utilized by members of the family brought disparity between households. Large families stood a better chance because of labour availability on the land resource hence food security was guaranteed. As the number of people in the community increased, land became more valuable while the advent of British colonialism created a class of landless and food insecure people after new ways of accessing land and labour in food crop production emerged (Wamai, O.I., 2024).

However, food crop production is an imperative activity in the history of most communities in Kenya from the time of people's settlement to the modern period. Food crop production guarantees food safety within households and increased population. Most of the crops found in various parts of Kenya originated from other parts of the world (Ochieng, 1990). However, various versions exist explaining the origin of crops domestication where some scholars assert that it began in southern East of Asia, others maintain the practice was first carried out on the Nile valley in Egypt while others believe in independent theory. However, archaeological evidence depicts that domestication of food crops took place in the rift valley in as early as 3,000 years ago a practice which could have been borrowed from the Cushite who were from the highlands of Ethiopia. Crop production later spread to other areas following migrations of both the Bantu and the Cushite. The close interaction between the two groups led to emergence of food crop growing communities in Kenya comprising of Bantu speakers who live in highly potential areas mainly in the Kenya highlands which is suitable for food crop production (Maxon, 1990). Serious domestication of crops was started after the settlement of the Aembu and the acquisition of iron implements from the Thigagi (Irereri, O.I., 2024). The Aembu being a representative of Eastern Bantus live in an area endowed with regular rainfall and fertile soils that support food crop production throughout the year and this made the practice their major occupation. However, settlement patterns of the Aembu were closely linked to the volume of foodstuff produced by the society members.

When asked whether they grew food crops during the pre-colonial period, Ngai (O.I., 2024), alleged that banana of various types such as *itigi*, *mitoboto*, *muraru*, *gitumia*, *munjuu*, and *karigu*. *Mwere*, *mukombi*, *mugimbi*, *njavi*, *njugu* and a variety of potatoes such as *karuga*, *kavoro* and sugar cane varieties like *micore* and *ibogo*, arrowroots and yams. However, banana, rice, coconuts, yams came into Kenya during the Indian Ocean trade (Oliver, 1981). Other crops like cassava were introduced by the Portuguese along the coast of East Africa in the 14<sup>th</sup> Century. These crops gradually spread to most parts of the Kenyan interior through migration and trade. Mwaniki (2010), points out that the pre-colonial Aembu food crops included sorghum, yams, bulrush millet, sweet potatoes, finger millet, foxtail millet and maize which is supported with the oral sources. From the types of foods listed, the Aembu type of diet was mainly made up of carbohydrates, vegetables and vitamins which enabled the

community members to live healthy lives. Most commonly utilized vegetables according to Ileri; Njoki; Marigu and Rugugu, (O.I., 2024), were *mathoroko*, *maruoga*, *manage*, *mamianga*, *maboco*, *Karimi ka thia* and *muka uriivu*. The vegetables were mixed with banana, maize, flour and beans then they were thoroughly mashed in a big pot *nyungu* to make a mashed type of food called *mukimo* or *nyenyi*. *Mukimo* type of food was very nutritious and very popular among the Aembu. The pre-colonial Aembu knew the need for a balanced diet and observed it closely since according to Ngai (O.I., 2024), a variety of fruits were collected by young children and women to supplement the diet which included *macuca*, *matunda*, *mabota*, *ndare* and *ndigu ndune* or the ripe bananas. Maximum utilization of land boosted food security within households.

According to Njoki (O.I., 2024), the Aembu grew crops such as *mwere* and *mukombi* which were used for making gruel. They also had a variety of bananas like *gitigi*, *muraru*, *mutumia*, *matoboto*, *munjuu* and *mutika*. A variety of potatoes were also grown such as *karuga* and *kavoro*. Ileri (O.I.,2024), asserts that during child birth there were celebrations and people shared mashed food while banana, beans and green vegetables were mixed due to their nutritional values. He points out that malnutrition was non-existent and a banana type known as *mutika* was the most important crop and new born babies were fed on it. Further the informant points out that even if the parent of the new born did not own one in their farms they were readily given by those who had. This type of banana was freely given out to mothers once they gave birth by their neighbours for weaning the babies. Mbogo (O.I., 2024), contends that sorghum and millet were grounded to flour for making ugali, *kimere* or beer *njovi ya mutu*. Millet grains were occasionally chewed or mixed with milk to make porridge. According to Ngai O.I.; Janet O.I., Ruguru O.I.; Mbogo, O.I., (2024), millet was referred to as the water foods *irio cia maji* because they were majorly used in making gruel or porridge. The Aembu grew different types of foods which required different soil types based on the environmental and the nutritional value expected from the crop. This was facilitated by the fact that every community member accessed land without restrictions based on their crop needs. The existing land regulations under the heads of clans allowed individuals to cultivate any part of land which ensured that the pre-capitalist Aembu food crop producers obtained different types of food which ensured the society food security.

Mbogo (O.I., 2024) authenticates Mwaniki (2010) and contends that, there existed a variety of sugarcane such as *micore and ibogo*. Sugarcane was planted at the valley of land next to the water mashes since the areas were the most suitable. Sugarcane was used for preparing traditional beer known as *karuvu* or *njovi ya igwa*. The traditional brew was taken during ceremonies like *ruracio* and in communal work parties during clearing of land, planting, weeding and harvesting periods. The type of beer that was made from the sugarcane was a form of motivation to the workers since after drinking they suppressed laziness and boredom which made them to work on an immense parcel of land leading to increased food crop production.

Aembu also allocated land for tuber crops like Yams and sweet potatoes. The crops were utilized in form of food security and they were not uprooted any time but when there were food shortfalls. Yams could be planted along the hedges of farms while sweet potatoes were planted along the contours especially where land was steep. Arrowroots were usually cultivated at the bottom of the valley near the streams since they needed a lot of water. Yams and sweet potatoes were usually roasted and eaten or grounded to make flour that was eaten by the old toothless people or the young children (Ruguru (O.I., 2024). The grounded flour was highly nutritious and it complemented other foods in terms of nutrients.

Table 5 shows the indigenous crops the Aembu produced on their parcels of land.

Table 5: Traditional Aembu Food Crops

English Name	Botanical name	Kiembu name
1. Sorghum	Sorghum	Muvia
2. Finger Millet	Eleusine coracana	mugimbi
3. Bulrush millet	Pennisetum glaucum	Mwere
4. Foxtail millet	Setaria Italica	Mukombi
5. Sweet potato	Ipomoea batatas	Ngwaci
6. Cassava	Manihot esculenta	Mwanga
7. Yam	Dioscorea alata	Gikwa
8. Sugarcane	Saccharum officinarum	Kigwa
9. Banana	Musa paradisiaca	Ndigu
10. Arrowroots	Maranta arundinaceae	Nduma
11. Beans	Phaseolus vulgaris	Mboco
12. Pumpkin	Cucurbita moschata	Marengo

Source: Marigu (O.I., 2024)

Table 5 shows the crops produced by the Aembu which had carbohydrate, vitamins and proteins. Having produced the crops listed on their different parcels of land,

Aembu mixed different grains and leafy vegetables to come up with a variety of diets showing a balanced diet. Aembu had different types of foods which were prepared using the listed crops. This is found in Table 6.

Table 6: The Aembu Types of Food and Its Composition

Type of food	Composition
1. <i>Mukimo</i>	Mixture of beans, greens, banana and maize
2. <i>Kiviri</i>	Grounded maize flour mixed with the arrowroot leaves
3. <i>Ucuru</i>	Grounded millet or sorghum
4. <i>Nguja matu</i>	Grounded maize flour mixed with leafy vegetables
5. <i>Kimere</i>	Grounded millet or sorghum in its solid form

Source: Wakina (O.I., 2024)

Table 6 shows that Aembu prepared their food by skilfully mixing different types of cereals and leafy vegetables to come up with nutritious diet especially *mukimo*. They also grounded certain cereals to get gruel *ucuru wa mukio* which was very nutritious. The researcher wanted to find out about the crops that were most popular and the respondents revealed that millet, sorghum, banana, beans and maize were rated higher than the other crops. This was so because they took a short time to mature and were highly nutritious. They also revealed that the crops were allocated more land compared to the other food crops. Respondents also added that the crops could be intercropped which enhanced food security due to different maturity periods. Aembu traditional food crops played a significant role in provision of food and nutritional security since they acquired all the nutrients the body needed. The fact that community member's accessed land readily in different ecological zones suitable for different types of crops, there was increased household produce.

Respondents revealed that near the Aembu homesteads there was cattle sheds which were fenced with thorny bushes to protect the livestock from damaging crops. The surrounding parcel of land was usually very fertile because of the animal wastes and a variety of leafy vegetables were grown there. The leafy vegetables included Amaranthus, African night shades and spider plants which were used to nourish the food. However, 44 (88%) of the informants regretted that currently they are eating cabbage which is simply water and that most of traditional food crops that gave them strength have slowly been abandoned since the colonial period. Maundu (1997) asserts that, there existed a variety of leafy vegetables that were consumed in most traditional African societies which were highly nutritious but were slowly abandoned

when land was utilized for production of fast-growing food crops and vegetables. However, Maundu points out that during the colonial and post-colonial eras, consumption and production of the traditional leafy vegetables among the African communities had dwindled leading to malnutrition. Table 7 shows indigenous food crops grown by the Aembu indicating their nutritional values though to a large extent most of them were undermined during the colonial period causing food deficits.

Table 7: Some Traditional Food Crops Produced by the Aembu and their Nutritional Values

Food	Energy (Kcal)	Protein (g)	Fats (g)	Carb, (g)	Calcium (mg)	Iron (mg)
Maize, white, whole kernel, dried	345	9.4	4.2	72	16	3.6
Finger millet whole grain	315	7.4	1.3	73	395	17
Bulrush millet (whole grain)	340	10	4	70	22	21
Sorghum	345	11	3.2	72	26	11
Cassava tuber	140	1.2	0.2	35	68	1.9
Sweet potato (yellow)	110	1.6	0.2	28	33	2
Arrow root	94	1.8	0.1	23	51	1.2
Yam	110	1.9	0.2	27	52	0.8
Cowpea (dry mature grain)	320	23	1.4	57	80	0.5
Pigeon peas (dry mature grain)	310	20	1.3	58	16	5.0
Beans (dry)	320	22	1.5	57	120	8.2
Bambara nuts (fresh)	345	19	6.2	57	62	12

Source: FAO, 2006

Table 7 has highlighted most of indigenous food crops grown by the Aembu including their nutritious values which indicates existence of a balanced diet. Reduced production and intake of the food crops causes food insecurity.

Respondents revealed that both men and women in Embu had right to access land for food crop production. The clan elders as seen earlier protected every individual's right to land access which enhanced food supply in households. According to Mwaniki (1973) in Embuland married women accessed land for production of food crops from their husbands. After the family head cleared a large tract of virgin land, he allocated it to the wives for food crop production. Mwaruvie (1994), revealed that the same criteria was followed by the Ambeere people. According to Ruguru (O.I., 2024), if a woman was unmarried, she could access land for food crop production from the father. The unmarried woman could grow food crops on the same farm with her mother but if she wished to get her own portion, she was granted the freedom and her father

allocated her the land. The oral informant contends that in case one's son in-law *mugurani* was landless he could also acquire land from the parent in-law *athoni*. The head of the household also had a portion of land where he cultivated his food. This system ensured that all clan members produced enough food since concerted effort was guaranteed.

The researcher sought to establish whether men and women grew similar crops and the findings are shown in Table 8.

Table 8: Respondent's Responses on Cultivation of Different Food Crops by the Aembu Men and Women

Different Crops for Men and Women	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	44	88%
Both	43	86%
Not certain	18	36%
Total no of respondents	50	100%

Table 8 shows respondents responses on dissimilar crops for men and women among the Aembu. At least 44 (88%) of the informants pointed out that the crops were based on gender and men took care of crops that required strenuous work like uprooting of yams while 43 (86%) of the respondents said that crops were jointly planted and 18 (36%) were not certain who grew what. Mbogo, O.I., Kanyau, O.I., Wakina (O.I., 2024), noted that crops produced by the Aembu women included millet, sorghum, beans, cowpeas and sweet potatoes. The informants further revealed that men produced crops like sugarcane, banana, cassava, yams, and pumpkins which required more tedious labour force.

The respondents were asked to give crops based on gender and the informants revealed that women were in charge of most of the crops although there existed those that belonged to both men. This information is shown in Table 9.

Table 9: Gender Based Food Crops among the Aembu

English Name	kiembu name	Women	Men	Both
Yam	Gikwa		1	
Banana	Ndigu			1
Bulrush Millet	Mwere	1		
Fox tail millet	Mukombi	1		
Arrowroots	Nduma			1
Sweet potatoes	Ngwaci			1
Sugarcane	Kigwa		1	
Lablab bean	Njavi	1		
Cowpeas	Nthoroko	1		
Indian millet	Muvia	1		
Kidney beans	Mboco	1		
Cassava	Muanga		1	
Total	12	6	3	3

Source: Marigu (O. I., 2024)

Table 9 shows that women owned most crops but the idea was not to demean men but to show how household labour was distributed in food crop production. Moreover, 25 (50%) of the informants pointed out that flexibility was allowed but the ultimate goal was to increase the produce in households.

Since every community member had an equal opportunity in getting land for food crop production with different land terrains and soil types, then it was expected that every household was food secure. However, the Aembu linked land and food crop production to their naming patterns. This was because having a big piece of land did not guarantee plenty food production. Some names described character of persons in food crop production which may show positive or negative characteristics. Some of those names could even be given to children once they were born especially if the name described character of a hard-working food crop producer as reported by (Lucia Marigu, O. I., 2024).

Table 10 shows terms used to describe character of people based on land use and food crop related activities among the Aembu

Table 10: Terms used to Describe Land Related Activities and Character of People in Food Crop Production among the Aembu.

Activity	Character	English translation
1. Gukia	mukii/ Gakii	gruel expert
2. Kurima	murimi / Karimi	Farmer
3. Kuvinyara	muvinyaru/ Kavinyaru	Hardworking
4. Guketha	Mukethi	Harvester
5. Kugurukia	Mugurukia	husks expert
6. Kuaruka	mwaruki/ Kambi	Starter
7. Kiguta	muguta/ Kiguta	Lazy
8. kuvandi	Muvandi	Planter
9 Kuthera	mutheri /	weeding expert

Source: Agnes Ruguru (O.I., 2024)

Table 10 shows the value for land and food crop production which was extended to naming of people. Some names described good character while others depicted that one was not enthusiastic in his land and food crop related activities. Lazy *muguta* describes a lazy person while *Kavinyaru* showed a hard-working food crop producer.

Warue (O.I., 2024, concurred that every member of the community had right to access land for food crop production which was facilitated by the fact that land was vast and there existed laid down regulations on land access which assured members sufficient food supply. The study revealed that members accessed land in different ecological zones that suited different types of food crops hence food supply was assured in the households. The Aembu subsistence food crop producers utilized the land resource and obtained surplus food which they supplied to the neighbouring communities like the Akamba and the Mbeere (Mwaruvie, 1994). Different crops were required owing to their different nutritional values, which demanded appropriate land terrain and soil formations which had been assured to all members.

The Aembu knew that certain crops did well in different ecological zones which demanded that they obtained parcels of land in divergent regions. Through existence of a well guided system of land access and proper utilization of labour within and outside households then the pre-colonial Aembu produced plenty food and lived healthy lives with minimal cases of food insecurity or malnutrition (Nyaga, O.I.,

2024). Ileri ninety-six (96) years old informant sadly said the following regarding current food intake,

*Let let me tell you my mother, even the illnesses we are suffering from today its because of the types of food that we are eating. Long time ago we ate foods like roasted bananas, smoked arrowroots, yams potatoes, gruel, mukimo and different types of green vegetables. These days we eat cabbages, kale bread and rice which are only full of water (Ileri, O.I.,2024).*

The findings show the importance the Aembu had attached to the traditional foods which have currently been replaced with modern foods. According to the informant the modern foods are of low nutritional value resulting to lifestyle diseases. The informant further revealed that when the system of land access for food crop production changed, the Aembu could hardly get land in the required sizes and zones associated with different soil types and types of food. Accessing land in many areas was a sure way of mitigating climatic risks and reducing failure of the crops which led to food security among the pre-colonial Aembu producers.

The discussion above has shown that the pre-colonial system of land access highly influenced food crop production. As community population increased, land became scarce and more valuable while the advent of British colonialism created a class of landless and food insecure people. The articulation of pre-colonial and colonial land and labour systems impacted on food crop production and security among the Aembu.

#### **4.8 Pre-Colonial Access to Land and Division of Labour in Food Crop Production to 1906**

As revealed in the previous segment of this chapter, Aembu access to land for production of food crops was guaranteed to all members. Land access for food crop production could also be extended to members from outside the clans so long as one did not claim ownership (Mwaniki, 2010 & Mwaruvie, 1994). However, it is important to note that right to land access for food crop production did not guarantee increased food yields. The manner in which land was utilized and labour was organized determined the amount of food produced in a household. This section examines land use and labour organization in food crop production among the Aembu.

Western writers have a generalized view of African agriculture and term it as purely shifting form of cultivation. The view is Eurocentric and it shows biases in the organization of African form of cultivation whereby the consideration of African nature of land and their skills in the management of the environment is put at a periphery. However, studies have shown that, there existed several systems in production of food crops among Africans. According to Zeleza (1986), intercropping was the main system of African cultivation and this is line with modern writers of African agrarian accounts (Njoki, 2002, Omwoyo, 1990, Esese, 1990), assert that the intercropping system of cultivation was rooted in the African food crop production practices. Shifting cultivation as one of the systems of African food crop production was facilitated by the fact that land was plenty and one could leave the land fallow to regain fertility and to avoid crop losses as a result of continuous cultivation that depleted the nutrients (Njega, O.I., 204).

After accessing land for food crop production, a *muembu* had to carefully plan the types of food crops to plant on different regions and soil types ranging from a variety of cereals like beans, millet, sorghum, yams, sweet potatoes, bananas and sugarcane. The researcher wanted to know who in the family decided on the type of crops to be planted on the already cleared land. Respondents revealed that since most of the crops were women crops then they had an upper hand on the choice of crops to be planted on different parcels of land (Caci, Warue & Wakina, O.I., 2024). Further, the respondents pointed out that some parcels of land accommodated intercropping due to their fertility which minimized Labour loss which was highly needed especially during weeding period. The intercropped species had different maturation period and this ensured provision of food all the time and the practice reduced overworking during harvesting period since the process remained continuous throughout the season (Ileri O. I., 2024). Muchoki (1988), resonances with the informant and asserts that, planting of fast growing and dawdling crops help to prevent soil from the detrimental effects of rainwater and there is maximum utilization of the present moisture in the soil as well as the nutrients. Planting of crops bearing different types of leaves was also observed since this could decrease struggle for the light as opposed to when crops of the same type were planted on the same parcel of land. Ileri (O.I., 2024), asserts

that intercropping was the most important aspect of the Aembu crop farming since it was a sure way of avoiding food shortages since two crops that matured at different intervals ensured continuous supply of food.

Out of the 50 interviewees, 48 (96 %) concurred with the fact that intercropping as a method of land use and food crop production had many advantages to the pre-capitalist crop producers since it was a sure way of avoiding food insecurity. Nevertheless, the practice of intercropping was not carried out all the time since some crops like *mukombi* and *mwere* required intensive care when maturing such as guarding against predators like birds which demanded an open setting. Therefore, different varieties of beans such as *kithiga*, *mbiraru*, *gaceru*, *kathambi* and *gatune* were comfortably planted together with maize. Njeru (O.I., 2024), asserts that the beans were planted at different period though intercropped with maize because the two crops had different maturing periods and the farmer could bridge any gap that could lead to lack of food. Ruguru (O.I., 2024), resonates and adds that because maize and sorghum took long to mature, they were planted during both long and short rains to maximize on any rains that fell. When informants were asked the importance attached to intercropping 45 (90 %) of the respondents said it's because it helps in the sharing of nutrients which enhanced the production, 30 (60 %) said it was relatively important while 18 (36 %) said it was necessary to intercrop because of different maturity periods which safeguarded the community against food shortage. Table 11 has this illustration:

Table 11: The Importance of Intercropping among the Pre-Colonial Aembu Food Crop Growers

Importance of intercropping	Frequency	Percentage
Very important due to sharing of nutrient	45	90%
Relatively important	30	60%
Not necessary	18	36%
Total no. of interviews collected	50	100

Source: FGD, 2024.

Table 11 shows the importance Aembu food crop producers attached to the system of intercropping. Out of 50 forty-five (90 %) respondents revealed that intercropping was important because crops shared nutrients, 30 (60%) indicated that it was relatively important while 18 (36%) asserted that it was not necessary. However,

majority had embraced intercropping and said it was very important because of different maturity periods which ensured continuous food supply.

Based on the fact that the Aembu land is on the slopes of Mount Kenya and that the area experiences a lot of rainfall, then the soil types were varied depending on the nearness to the mountain and the topography (Mwaniki, 2010). As noted earlier, the Aembu accessed land in different areas so that they could not miss any type of crop whatsoever, this was a sure way of avoiding food shortage. Different food crops did well on certain soil types and landscapes. Some did well on the valleys while others were planted on the flat land. Naturally, the Aembu land was in three levels i.e., the flat land near the home stead, then the steep land towards the valley and the valley bottom of the land which was in most cases flat and usually wet and marshy.

According to Marigu, Ruguru & Mbogo, (O.I., 2024) they were all in agreement that, crops like sugarcane of different types, bananas, and arrowroots were grown at the valley bottom near the stream since they required plenty of water. The area was called *Irimba* (plural) *marimba* and it was usually wet and marshy suitable for the mentioned types of crops. Steep land was utilized for sweet potatoes to cover the ground and prevent soil from erosion during heavy rains since in most cases the areas had hips of soil suitable for the root crop Kanyau, Ngai & Ileri (O.I., 2024). Moreover, 46 (92 %) of the informants revealed that burning of the bush was a common practice which was essential in addition of nutrients to the soil especially in areas that appeared deprived. Burning of bush was usually carried out after men cleared the virgin land in readiness for planting by women leading to increased food harvests (Warue, O.I., 2024).

On the flat land near the homestead where the soil was fertile due to chicken and livestock wastes, crops like maize and a variety of beans were grown. Other crops that were planted in this area included millet and sorghum since they required protection from birds before harvesting started (Mbogo, O.I., 2024). According to Muriithi (O. I., 2024), yams and cassava were highly valued perennial crops and the two root crops were regarded as men crops since it was quite strenuous for women to uproot. Nevertheless, the crops were considered as underground food reserve to cater for hard

times like during crop failure brought about by either drought or locust invasion. The crops did well in almost all soil varieties except in marshy areas and they could as well be intercropped. According to Wamai (O.I., 2024), the crops could be planted at the hedge or along the contour across the farm. The yams required live supports and this was done using trees referred to as *miururi* which were planted closely to the plant so that it mounted over the tree. The crops were uprooted only under certain circumstances like during spells of food shortages. Njoki (2003) asserts that, yam crop was one of the Aembu male crops but useful in cushioning the community against food shortages. Some of the features of pre-capitalist food crop production have survived and are evident among the contemporary Aembu food crop producers (Mbogo, O.I., 2024).

The Aembu could acquire as much land as one could clear and this enhanced shifting cultivation which was a major way of ensuring that the soil regained fertility after prolonged use. As noted earlier, one could own land in a distant place not necessarily because he did not possess any but to give his portion time to regain fertility. The practice of shifting cultivation involved leaving of the parcel of land uncultivated for at least three to four years before reuse. According to Warue (O.I., 2024), if a Muembu woman was found planting crops on an infertile land, the husband was ridiculed and was referred to as lazy *kiguta*. This is because curving a new parcel of land was strenuous for one needed to clear bushes, uproot the plants and make the parcel cultivable and ready for crop production by his wives. The practice of clearing of a virgin land was carried out by men based on the existing division of labour. The land access system among the pre-colonial Aembu food crop producers facilitated shifting cultivation since land was plenty and one could acquire land in different areas without any restrictions which guaranteed increased food foodstuffs in the households.

Once an individual accessed land for food crop production, Ileri (O.I., 2024) notes that, one could make lines *miconjo* from cleared bushes and residues from crops to help reduce soil erosion. This helped to take full advantage of the parcel of land in increasing food crop production. According to Ruguru (O.I., 2024), it was easy to know when soil was fertile or not through observation of some weeds that dominated the parcel of land. The informants revealed that presence of *kimore*, *managu* and

*ruoga* was a sure way of ascertaining soil fertility on land and this gave it another chance for food crop cultivation before seeking for an alternative virgin land. Similarly, if soil was dark and compact in nature during hoeing that indicated that the soil was fertile and its suitability for production of more food crops. On the contrary, if a plant like *muguku*, was found on a piece of land then the parcel was infertile and it needed to be left fallow for a number of seasons in order to regain the highly required nutrients by the crops for increased yields.

Different parcels of land and soils were suitable for specific crops and if one failed to get land in any of the ecological zones then one could not access a certain type of food which was a threat to nutritional and food security. However, the pre-capitalist system of land ownership was in such a way that everyone got land based on their needs in the production of food crops and right to land access was highly protected by the clan elders which made the Aembu to increase food produce.

As stated earlier, labour was a necessity in food crop production since access to land did not guarantee increased food production. The system of labour in a household dictated the amount of food the household produced. Therefore, labour guidelines existed within households which enhanced increased food productivity. Two rainy seasons are enjoyed by the Aembu from the planting to the reaping period. The long rain *mbura nene* and the short rains *mbura nini*. Short rains take place during the months of October and ends around December while long rains begin in March and end around August. During the short rains crops like millet were grown and it was referred to as *kimera kia mwere* while the long rains was referred to as the season of *njav* (Njeru O.I., 2024). When the two rains fell, the Aembu describe it as *Muratho* or *mbura ya mavanda*. Mbogo (O.I., 2024), asserts that the Aembu food crop growers were busy throughout the year dealing with food related activities in order to increase the yields.

Table 12 shows Aembu land and food crop activities throughout the year.

Table 12: Aembu land and Food Crop Related Activities from January to December

English	Work Done
January	Harvesting beans of various varieties and mill
February	Threshing, preservation and storage of food
March	Late harvesting and preparing of gardens
April	Planting of various beans varieties, and sorghum
May	Weeding period and protecting crops
June	Guarding crops
July	Harvesting of sorghum
August	Threshing sorghum and peas
September	Preparing farms by burning
October	Planting different types of crops
November	Weeding for the crops
December	Guarding crops against animals and birds

Source: Ileri Kubuta (O.I., 2024).

Table 12 shows that Aembu were busy throughout the year. From the activities in table 12, it is clear that Kitching (1980) and the DC Embu Crompton had a negative view of African men when they claimed that most of their time was underutilized because many working hours were spent drinking (KNA/DC/ EBU/ 3/4/ 1927). The two had a Eurocentric view of Africans and they failed to take time to understand the systems of labour that existed among Aembu. The fact that men did the most strenuous farm work like clearing land for the first time, it was difficult to find men and women in the farm at the same time. However, the labour systems had one goal of increased food production in the household.

The Aembu land was mainly covered with thick bushes with big trees during the 19th century. For a person to come up with a farm, clearing of trees and the bushes was necessary according to colonial records (KNA/ DC/EMBU/ 3/1/51). This called for much labour and based on the fact that men were considered stronger than women, the work of clearing virgin land was left aside for them. Married men were expected to clear land *gutuguta* after which he shared the parcels to the wife *muka* (plural) wives *aka* (Kamwere O.I., 2024). A wife whose husband did not clear land for her and worked on an infertile parcel of land such a man was referred to as lazy or *kiguta* and was despised by fellow men. After men cleared the bushes, they were burnt and cleared for addition of soil fertility leading to increased yields hence food security assurance in households.

However, though household labour for food crop production was relied on majorly, some people who wished to access vast pieces of land *rware* could go an extra mile and acquire labour from outside the family *nyomba* (Mbogo, O.I., 2024). Therefore,

there existed different forms of labour that were utilized. Communal or cooperative labour commonly known as *irima* or *rutua* involved forming of working parties whereby members could work on one parcel of land jointly on rotational basis until each of the members had a big piece of cultivated land. Labour could also be exchanged for a goat or grains especially during famines. After the work parties cleared a large piece of land, the parcel was left for several months and no livestock was expected to get into it. Fencing was done to prevent animals getting inside with some thorny bushes. The farmer could move round the farm cutting down any bushes that might have grown and flattening of the land. According to Njue (O.I., 2024), all the farm clearing activities were carried out by men and once he was comfortable with the initial laborious activities, he could be joined by other members of his family to weed and hip the bushes in readiness for burning during the dry spell. At this point the owner of the farm provided beer and food for the workers to feed on. For existing farms less labour was required and women could comfortably carry out the duties required especially planting during both the short and long rains. The system of access to land and labour division were closely observed leading to increased food crop produce in households.

Immediately after harvesting, the Aembu needed to conserve seeds for planting in the next season. According to Marigu (O.I., 2024), identification of quality seeds was done early enough and various forms of preservatives were used which included use of common pepper, firewood residue and cow excrement. Njoki (2000), opines that natural preservatives were utilized to safeguard seeds for the next season. Warue (O.I.,2024), contends that selection of seeds for planting in the following season was done by women and the main reason for doing that was to ensure that no seeds failed to germinate which helped to boost harvest.

The Aembu had the advantage of accessing large tracts of land for food crop production and they utilized various farming methods and forms of labour to ensure household food security. As stated earlier, there existed two seasons in Embu namely the short rains *mbura ya mukombi* and the long rains *mbura ya mwere*. In the two seasons after land was fully cleared, planting took place around April and in October. When asked the methods of planting they used , 48 ( 96 % ) of the informants agreed that Planting in the cleared virgin land was done through the broadcasting method

which involved scattering of seeds from one corner of the farm to the other until the whole farm was covered while 38 ( 76% ) revealed that for the existing and old farms planting method was different since men dug holes using a long wooden stick while children and women carefully put the seeds in the holes and turned the soil to bury the grains. Table 13 shows respondents’ responses on system of planting food crops.

Table 13: Responses on the System of Planting

Method	Frequency	Percentage
Broadcasting	48	96%
Women and children put seeds in the whole and turn soil	45	90%
Men dug holes	45	90%-
Interviews conducted	50	100%

Source: FGD, 2024

Table 13 indicates that, the main method of planting was broadcasting with 48 (96%) of the respondents corroborating. The practice was carried out by women and it involved throwing grains from one side of the farm to the other. While women and children buried the seeds, men were busy digging holes since it was a more strenuous exercise that women could not comfortably undertake. The table demonstrates that all household members participated in food crop production.

According to Njoki (O.I., 2024), about two to three weeks from the day of planting the grains, weeds germinated almost at the same rapidity with the food crops. The informant asserts that this was the busiest period of the year and concerted efforts which involved all the family members. During this period, it was easy to know the hard-working *murimi muvinyaru* and a lazy farmer *murimi kiguta*. For a *kiguta* his/her farm could be destroyed by weeds and this lowed the production while the hard-working farmer produced more food since his crops did not compete for nutrients with weeds. This provides an insight that having a huge parcel of land did not guarantee increased food production but that the two resources are a necessity for food supply in the household. Furthermore, this may explain the importance of polygamous marriages in most traditional African societies since in most cases household labour was utilized and families with many children had larger tracts of land and they produced more food.

However, according to Wamai, Ngai & Marigu (O.I., 2024), a hard-working farmer could clear weeds from his farm many times repeatedly to ensure no weeds ever existed *gucokia yuka* while the lazy farmer could be mocked and called *kiguta* which is similar with *kivuno* among the Ambeere. In the short rains *mbura nini* weeding was carried out from April to June while during the long rains *mbura nene* the work was done between October and December. Weeding tools used by women were made from hard woods like *mikwego*, *miringa* and *mivuti* and were called *miro* while men used a long wooden tool whose end was sharpened. Out of 50, 48 (96%) of the respondents revealed that the work of weeding was mainly carried out by women and not men because the exercise required sitting on the heels and men were not comfortable with it. Respondents revealed that to enrich soil fertility they utilized residues of the previous season on the farm *gutandikira macaki* that could reduce growth of weeds, help to retain moisture and add soil fertility. Through mulching the pre-colonial Aembu food crop growers were assured of reduced labour constraint during weeding period as well as increased food productivity.

Muriuki, Njeru, Ruguru & Kanyau (O.I., 2024), respondents revealed that when crops showed signs of maturity, they needed to protect them from animals like monkeys and birds. The informants revealed that they could lay traps, fence the farm or even spend the night in the farm. The food crop growers could light fire using fresh bushes that smoked throughout to scare the predators. Out of 50 respondents 47 (94 %) asserted that the work of protecting crops was carried out by all members of the household including the young whereby men kept watch during the night while children and women protected at day time. Men erected some artificial beds on top of trees or on a platform in the farm called *rutara* whereby they sat as they scared the animals and birds away. Ngai (O.I., 2024), revealed that as women continued to guard the crops, they made baskets which were useful in food storage. However, it was the responsibility of every family member to ensure that predators were kept away by all means because interference with the crops before maturity would definitely lead to reduced food produce. During the short rains harvesting was carried out in the month of January while in September harvesting for long rains was done. According to Njoki, Mbogo, Njeru, & Marigu (O.I., 2024), all noted that harvesting of different crops was gender based and Millet, sorghum and beans were harvested by women while men

played the role of cutting stalks of maize, sorghum and putting them together awaiting harvesting by women once they were dry. Labour division between men and women ensured that no food losses took place during harvesting which would otherwise lower the anticipated produce.

Respondents revealed that immediately after harvesting, the grains needed good preparation and subsequent storage. Out of 50 respondents, 45 (90 %) agreed that women were responsible for threshing the grains and storage. Threshing of beans took place outside the homestead where the ground was swept and cow dung was used to smear it. The smooth ground facilitated collection and avoided grain losses. Another 43 (86 %) revealed that to preserve beans the surest method was by drying under the sun and when the seeds dried up fully, they were finally mixed with preservatives like ash and pepper before being stored in the granary *ikumbi*. Out of 50 respondents, 45 (90 %) revealed that for polygamous men every wife had her own grain store. Presence of food stores helped the Aembu to store food for more than three seasons which was a guarantee against food insecurity even when rain was erratic in some seasons. Table 14 indicates the Aembu land and food crop related activities based on gender.

Table 14: Land and Food Crop Production Activities Carried out by the Aembu Based on Gender

Activity	Women	Men	Both
Establishing a new farm		1	
Planting			1
Weeding	1		1
Reaping/ harvesting			1
Winnowing/ threshing	1		
Protecting crops during the day	1		
Protecting crops at night		1	
Cooking/ grinding	1		
Making beer / brewing	1		
Conserving food	1		
Summary	6	2	3

Source: Ileri (O.I., 2024)

Table 14 shows that, most food crop activities were carried out by women. This may explain why most decisions in food crop production were women centered. The table

indicates that there existed activities that were shared by the both men and women which enhanced food production.

The study examined various forms of labour employed by the Aembu in order to ensure food and nutritional security within households. The labour systems included household labour, communal labour, paid labour and co-operative labour and paid labour. This section will refute the allegation by most Eurocentric scholars that Africans were purely subsistence producers who could only use household labour for their subsistence production. Aembu did not only utilize household labour to produce for the household but also other forms leading to surplus food production which they exchanged with their neighbours (Mwaniki, 2010 & Mwaruvie 1994). Labour within the household involved a man, his wife *muka* (plural) wife's *aka*, and the children but during peak periods labour was sourced from outside for increased produce of food.

Most of the informants revealed that men usually cleared virgin land and burnt the bush and then apportioned the land to each of the wives. All the women continued with the rest of the work with the assistance of their children. Children labour utilization led to variation in the amount of food produced within households. According to Mbogo (O.I., 2024), a woman who had many children stood a better chance compared to those with few and very young who could not manage to provide labour in the farms. This explains why most men in traditional Aembu set up were polygamous. As the men subdivided land to the wives, he left his own portion which was usually in the mid of the farm. The central position of his farm was a sure way of getting support from the wives and children during the period of planting, removing of the weeds, reaping and storage Njeru, Ruguru & Njura (O.I., 2024). The respondents further revealed that the produce from a man's farm was stored separately from that of the wives and could only be used during famine *yura*. Cowives provided labour in their farms competitively to appease the husband which increased food yields within households and the community (Njanamu O.i.,2024).

A focus group discussion held on 14<sup>th</sup> May, 2024, revealed that shared labour was common among the Aembu whereby friends formed working group's *rutua* or *marima* with the aim of supporting each other on a rotational basis. The practice was

common among both men and women during the weeding, planting, and harvesting period. The friends organized and moved to each of the friend's farm with the insistence of clearing the work within the shortest time possible. During the working days, the owner of the farm provided plenty of the Aembu mashed food *mukimo* and drinks like fermented porridge *mukio* or beer *njovi*. Out of 50 respondents, 45 (90%) revealed that communal form of labour was common among the Aembu. This form of labour has been able to survive the articulation of the pre-colonial and the colonial labour system in food crop production up to mid-1970s and early 1980s (Njeru O.I., 2024). This form of labour helped in clearing of more land which led to increased food harvest among the pre-colonial Aembu food crop producers.

Another type of labour that the Aembu utilized was the communal form. Communal labour was common among the wealthy individuals who had large tracts of land. Similarly, the communal labour system was utilized when demand for labour was at its top especially during weeding, clearing of new farms and harvesting periods. Persons who needed this form of labour were required to provide workers with a lot of food and liquor. However, 49 (98 %) of the respondents revealed that the fruitfulness of this form of labour depended on the generosity of the landowner in providing the meals and his relationship with the people around him. The practice served as a form of entertainment and praise songs were sang to inspire the most *muvinyaru* person. Those who were very fast at work left others behind *iguta* and it was required that they had to toil further in order to catch up which facilitated tilling of more land for increased food produce.

To appease the in-laws, the bridegroom *mugurani* could organize with his close friends to go and work for the in-laws *athoni* during clearing of new farms, weeding and harvesting periods. The working party could have more than thirty workers. However, the bridegroom was expected to feed his people with food and beer. Ngai one of the key informants pointed out that in case one failed to provide adequate food and beer to the working party, songs were sung to provoke him for more.

*Let me tell you my friend, know that work depends on stomach. If you don't provide enough food, we shall slow our hands and work less on your farm and you will suffer from food shortage* (Ngai, O. I., 2024)

The informant revealed that for the invited workers they demanded to eat a lot since it was only out of good will that they were in the farm and they needed no form of compensation. For this reason, they feed in at least three intervals which included breakfast ahead of any work, lunch and supper (Mbogo, O.I., 2024). Supper could be accompanied with a lot of beer *karubu*, *uki* or *muratina*. Communal labour was also common among the Ambeere (Mwaruvie, 1994). Singing gave workers morale to continue working as they followed the song to combat tediousness. Utilization of communal form of labour led to increased food production as opposed to when one depended only on family members.

Food for labour was also common and agreement demanded that after an individual worked on another person's farm then he or she is paid back or compensated. In the pre-colonial Aembu community, this was not new but it depended on circumstances within the community and elsewhere. The practice was common during times of food shortage (Ochieng, 1989). People who had surplus production in their food stores *makumbi* utilized the method and exchanged grains with the less fortunate households and communities. Such people had their farm work done early enough in exchange for grains before the rains which assured them opportune timing for another good harvest.

For the Aembu food crop producers, the proportions of grains to be bartered were negotiable between the two parties. Muruiki, Mbogo, Marigu & Janet (O.I., 2024) noted that, paid labour which involved exchange of grains for labour was mostly common between the Aembu and the Mbeere whose environment was hostile and rainfall was unreliable. Mwaniki (2010, resonates with the informant and asserts that the Aembu were like a granary of grains for their neighbours the Ambeere where they exchanged grains with leather products, baskets and iron tools. The grains could be measured in calabash *kauga* which was equivalent to one day's labour. Respondents revealed that livestock or some parts of a slaughtered livestock could as also be exchanged for labour. Njeru (O.I., 2024) asserts that, the practice has continued to date but in a reduced magnitude which shows that the practice has survived the process of articulation.

According to Mwaruvie (1994), the mbeere people came to Embu for *Kurimia* and they stayed for about four days before going back to their land on a particular day when the relatives waited for them. This indicated that the Aembu were in need of labour for food crop production throughout the year due to presence of rich soils and plenty rainfall that led to fast growth of weeds and maturity of food crops. However, up to the twentieth century, the colonial government employees like chiefs and headmen could pay for labour with rupees (KNA/ DC/ EMBU/ 3/1). Through the systematic and careful utilization of the traditional forms of land and labour highlighted above, the Aembu were able to handle most of the food production undertakings and the community sustained food and nutritional security.

#### **4.9 Conclusion**

The Aembu are a Bantu-speaking community in eastern Kenya, believed to originate from Mwenendega. Their fundamental social unit is the family *nyomba*, headed by a man including his wife or wives and children. Each family belongs to a patrilineal *mbari*, linked to a recent ancestor, and multiple *mbari* formed a house or sub-clan. Several sub-clans with a common ancestor created a clan called *muviriga*. Clan elders helped secure fertile land for food production. The Aembu's primary staple is *nyenyi* or *mukimo*, a dish made from mixed grains and green vegetables. The Aembu community operated under a patriarchal structure, with men in authority and women in subordinate roles. Despite this hierarchy, a clear division of labour was essential for food security, as men, women, and children each had specific responsibilities in food cultivation. Initially, land ownership was communal, allowing members to claim land for their group. Aembu producers could collectively migrate to unoccupied land, enabling them to cultivate diverse food types suited to ecological conditions and household needs.

The Aembu community initially accessed land through trapping, practicing a nomadic lifestyle of hunting and gathering. Their first method of land access was based on hunting rights, known as *mutego*. As they settled and began farming, a new land acquisition method emerged called *ngamba ya kuna na kathanua*, which involved using a chopper or axe. Although individual lineage members farmed specific plots and kept the harvest, they did not own the land itself, referred to as *muthetu*. As lineages grew, an elder became the land custodian, known as *mumenyereri*. This pre-

colonial land access system significantly influenced food production by facilitating access to diverse, eco-friendly regions for various crops. The conversation emphasized the importance of land for food production. Even those without personal land had access to parcels for cultivation or residence, as occupancy rights were universally recognized. The pre-colonial system ensured that all community members could access land for various purposes, especially food crops. The Aembu community practiced shifting cultivation, allowing individuals to temporarily use land from other clans while their own plots recovered. This meant one could be a tenant without being entirely landless, a practice that continued until the 1900s. Additionally, there were public lands for shrines, sacred sites, livestock watering, and salt licking.

This chapter revealed that malnutrition was absent, with the *mutika* banana as the primary crop and staple for new-borns. Millet was occasionally consumed as porridge mixed with milk. The Aembu cultivated diverse foods suited to specific soil types and environmental conditions, benefiting from unrestricted land access for all community members. Clan leaders' regulations allowed individuals to farm any available land, enhancing food security in pre-capitalist Aembu society. Various labour systems were employed, including household, communal, paid, and cooperative labour. Household labour typically involved a man, his wives, and children, with external help during peak seasons. Working groups, or *rutua/marima*, formed among men and women for mutual support in farming tasks. Wealthier individuals often utilized communal labour, boosting food production beyond family efforts. Compensation in food for labour was common, with agreements ensuring workers on farms received payment. Those with surplus food, stored in *makumbi* and, traded grains with less fortunate households. The Aembu effectively managed food production through traditional practices, ensuring community food security. However, in the 19th century, their land and labour systems faced challenges as pre-capitalist and capitalist production methods began to co-exist.

**CHAPTER FIVE**  
**COLONIAL TRANSFORMATION OF THE AEMBU ACCESS TO LAND**  
**AND LABOUR DIVISION SYSTEMS ON FOOD CROP PRODUCTION**  
**FROM 1906- 1963**

**5.1 Introduction**

This segment examined how the colonial system of land access and labor division affected the Aembu people's ability to produce food crops in Embu County between 1906 and 1963, are presented in this chapter. This chapter uses the Articulation of Modes of Production theory to show how colonialism changed the Aembu of Embu County's food crop production system, including labor division and access to land. This chapter's discussion addressed the reasons behind the colonialists' entry into Embu territory, the Aembu people's response to the colonists' arrival, whether the colonists took land from the Aembu, new agricultural policies and crops in Embu, colonial labor laws among the Aembu, agricultural farms established by the colonial government, and the effects of the Aembu being recruited as soldiers during the world wars on the production of food crops.

**5.2 Establishment of Colonial Rule in Embu and its Effect on Aembu Land Access and Labour System in Food Crop Production**

As stated by Lipscomp (1972), East Africa was placed under British dominion on July 1, 1895, following the Imperial British East Africa Company's (IBEAC) inability to manage the region. This is consistent with Dilley's (1966) assertion that the Uganda railway was put into service the same year with the intention of linking Uganda with the Indian Ocean, since the country had been Britain's top priority since the discovery of the River Nile's source in 1862. This meant that it was time for the new administrators to cover the entire nation for efficient administration, since the IBEAC Company had already created fortified sites from which military expeditions against rebellious populations were launched. Furthermore, much of Central Kenya's caravan commerce was thriving by 1902, when the majority of the Embu neighbors had been colonized (Leakey, 1977). The new government needed to successfully control the Embu, who posed a threat to this commerce because of their frequent incursions. As a result, the British focused on imposing their authority on Aembu.

Mungeam (1979) notes that S.L. Hinde, the Sub-Commissioner Kenya Province, made the suggestion that the Embu should be subjugated and occupied on May 23,

1906. Furthermore, the Embu Country served as a haven for anyone escaping the legal system in the remaining parts of the province. Lastly, the Embu claim they are too powerful for the government and would back dissidents because of their immunity from punishment. Captain J.W.O. Maycock, who commanded an expedition against the Embu in June 1906, carried out the recommendations of this report.

At this point, the British had built Fort Hall at Murang'a (Mbiri) and had taken control of all the Kikuyu territory. Captain Fredrick Lugard constructed the Fort in 1891 (Tignor, 1976). The Kikuyu had already formed an alliance by this point, and the neighbors from Mbeere, Embu, to the south, had visited Mbiri (Fort Hall) many times to request that the Whiteman build a fort at Mbeere. Thus, in addition to the pressure being exerted by forest concessionaires and settler interests, the collaborators may also need an extension of government authority over Embu property. An oral responder Nguu (O.I., 2024), confirmed these feelings stating that the collaborators longed for a piece of the profits if the Embu were conquered, while the colonial government officials desired the Embu land and its riches, which they saw as a possible source of government cash.

Data collected from the conducted interviews revealed that British soldiers led by Mbeere and Kikuyu war commanders carried out the Embu mission in June 1906. Muthuri commanded the party to the south to defend the Mbeere from any attack, while Rumbia wa Ngotho led the warriors in the woodland fringes. Mutabo headed the column in the center. The majority of sources stated that the Embu warriors had already attacked the Chuka at the time of the invasion. The Whiteman had learned of this knowledge through leaks to the Kikuyu and Mbeere collaborators (Kamwana & Njathika, O.I., 2024).

According to Mwaniki (2010) the European firearms, arrows, and spears used by the African warriors who were reinforcing them quickly defeated the elderly and wise warriors who were discovered, since they were unable to provide any significant opposition (Kubukubu, O.I., 2024). This oral testimony was supported by Mwaniki (2010), who stated that the Embu understood it would be pointless to oppose the pistol given the circumstances, having already witnessed the force of it during

Gibbons and Meinertzhagen's "swoop." In order to defeat the Embu, who may have put up a strong fight, the British used the Mbeere and Kikuyu warriors in their divide and conquer strategy.

The British invasion of Embu had a profound impact. The Mbeere and Kikuyu warriors set fire to many of the Embu's possessions after the mission, including cattle and houses (Mungeam, 1979). According to Ruguru (O.I.,2024), the Aembu lost resources, including grain that was stolen without their will and used to fuel the military expedition.

The Embu District Record Book, an archival report, also documented these feelings, stating that,

*A punitive expedition on a large scale was sent against the Embu 'tribes' in 1906 owing to their 'truculent' attitude. Large amounts of stock were taken, the majority of which was restored, and many people were slain (KNA/DC/EBU/8/6).*

Losses incurred by the Aembu in 1906 during the punitive attack is shown in table 15

Table 15: Aembu Losses during Attack in 1906

Cattle	Sheep	Goat
Column No.1	400	1,150
Column No.2	1,340	5,000
Police	1,440	1,000
Total	3,180	7,150

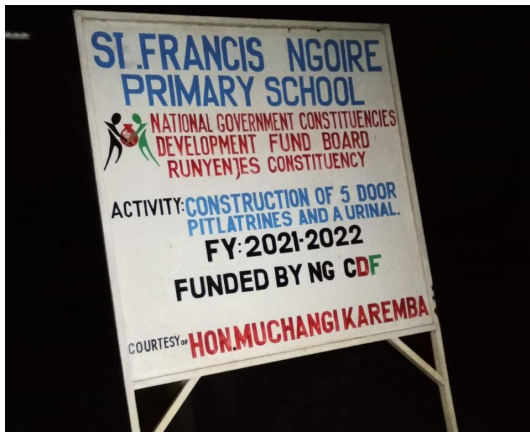
Source: G.H. Mungeam, (1979) Kenya Select Historical Documents 1884-1923, East African Publishing House.

Table 15 shows that the Aembu faced a punitive attack from the British colonial government which were not recovered. From the table losses were majorly inform of livestock.

Abiud (O.I., 2024), claims that one British contingent erected their first camp at Kariari as they continued to conquer Ngandori following the conquest. The next camp was held at Kavutiri at Gitituuri. After Murue was successfully subjugated, this camp was relocated to Muva, therefore it did not stay here for very long. In the end, the camp was relocated to the current Ngoiri Primary School in Gatituuri (Mungeam, 1979). It is reported that at this point the Embu ceremoniously gave over their shields

and spears to the British. Additionally, British appointed the first Embu leaders in this camp. It is reported that the Embu thought of the largest guy when the Whiteman sought to see their leader, *Munene*. Kiriamiti, who was renowned for his enormous stature, was thus called.

According to Mwaniki (2010), the Whiteman engaged in peaceful negotiations with Kiriamiti without even conducting an investigation to ascertain the nature and extent of Kiriamiti's political authority. This was because the Whiteman was eager to establish himself in Embu land and wanted to legitimize his rule as soon as possible. According to the majority of informants, Embu had councils of elders and spiritual leaders in the traditional sense before Kiriamiti's appointment, but in less than two weeks, the region was overrun by chiefs (Njeru, O.I., 2024). The colonial authority provided headmen to each small community and ridge through Kiriamiti. The Embu were instructed to relinquish their weapons at Gatituuri (Nguiri) in order to demonstrate that they had totally surrendered as their hand-picked delegates had proclaimed on their behalf and that they would be loyal to the Whiteman's administration. Later the place was renamed *Ngoire* which was translated to mean where the shields were piled after the surrender of the Aembu. For the historical significance of the year and the area, there are two schools located there. That is CCM Ngoire (where the shields were) primary and CCM Ngoire Secondary schools in Embu West. This illustrated how firmly British colonial control had established itself in Embu, a place that had previously lacked imperial influence and knowledge. Photographs of both Ngoire Primary and the Ngoire Secondary Schools are in figure 4.



Source: 2<sup>nd</sup> May, 2024

Figure 4: Photograph of Ngoire Primary and Secondary School Gates

Figure 4 shows Ngoire Primary and Ngoire Secondary School Gates. The two were established for historical remembrance of the place where the Aemba lost their independence and the first African colonial chief among the Aemba was acclaimed.

In Embu, the colonial-appointed chiefs were responsible for a variety of duties. The chiefs they appointed were tasked with selecting headmen to help them with their administrative duties. But as we saw in chapter two, the Embu only adhered to the customary laws established by the community, making it impossible for these newly appointed rulers to govern the people (Mbuti, O.I., 2024). The headmen and chiefs were required under the Whiteman's power to submit to the colonial administration and enforce their people's obedience to all orders, regardless of whether they went against societal norms. As a result, it was challenging for the chiefs and their headmen to combine the two categories of duties in order to fulfill the goal of Whiteman's rule. From then on, in order to get the subjects to follow the rules, force had to be used against them (Mwaniki, 2010). The new colonial leaders were despised by the aboriginal people as a result of these laws. Ideally, they were opposed by the Embu

people, who regarded them as agents of colonization in their homeland *Njama cia thirikari* as noted by (Mbogo O.I., 2024).

The development of Embu's agriculture was not the primary goal of the British colonialists' conquest of the country. The colonial masters' goal was to use the natural riches for their own gain, much like in many other previously conquered territories (Omwoyo, 1990). This supports the assertion made by Sorenson (1968) that the region's significance in supplying food to the European caravans made it crucial for Britain to take control of it. Effective local governance was required, and tax measures had to be implemented because the British Crown supported colonization at a minimal expense.

Archival data KNA/DC/EBU/8/3 states that new social groups were brought into Embu society with the arrival of colonialism and eventually came to hold positions of great influence. The chiefs who played a key role in the Embu's integration into the colonial capitalist system were the main new centers of authority. By virtue of the 1902 Village Headman Ordinance, they were appointed. The primary goal of the incorporation was to further the capitalist mode of production by providing a labor supply for the administration. In exchange, they received benefits in many forms, as the Native Authority Laws strengthened their authority. These leaders were essentially the first to profit from the capitalist economy. The newly appointed chiefs had a tendency to amass vast land holdings, which helped them achieve economic success within the defined modes of production and had an impact on the pre-colonial system of land ownership and labour access in food crop production.

A number of ordinances that allowed the appropriation of African land enabled the settlement of European in the Kenyan highlands. All of Africa's "unoccupied" land was designated as Crown Land by the Crown Lands Ordinance of 1902 (Mungeam, 1976). As noted by Mwaniki (2010), this would have an impact on the land ownership system in Embu during the British takeover in 1906, when they took property for the headquarters at *Murinduko* Hill and then at *Nthinthiari*. Aside from the proposed Kanja Dairy program, which was abandoned in 1955, it appears that no land was alienated for agricultural production in Embu (KNA/DC/EMBU/1/14/1955). However,

the ground was eventually bent to provide room for marketplaces, chiefs' camps, and missions. Despite having a lot of agricultural area, Embu's topography and distance from the railway line made it unappealing to settlers (Mwaniki, 2010). As a result, a large number of European settlers preferred the regions near the railway, such as Kiambu and the Nairobi region (Wangari, 2010).

Despite the fact that British settler farmers in Embu County were not denied property, the Crown property Ordinance of 1915 had an effect on crop output and land ownership. The Embu lost their lands when the Crown Lands Law of 1915 went into effect, just like all other Kenyans. This clarifies the reason behind the later alienation of property for marketplaces, offices for the government, agricultural experimental centers and Christian missions. Mungeam (1979). This increased the lease length from 99 to 999 years since the Ordinance gave the governor the authority to grant lease or otherwise alienate in His Majesty's behalf any Crown Lands for any purpose and on any terms and conditions as he may think fit. Furthermore, it acknowledged that there were reserves in Africa.

According to the terms of the aforementioned Ordinance, the Embu and all other African colonists were inhabiting what they termed their territory on behalf of the Crown. As a result, they became tenants of the crown and lost any legitimate claim to their land. Later, European Law would essentially supplant the pre-colonial customary norms that controlled how land and labor were utilized especially in production of food crops. After being compelled into reserves, some of them began to understand the consequences of this rule. Before the arrival of the colonists, the inhabitants of Embu had generally engaged in intensive agriculture, presuming that there was an ample quantity and quality of land and labor that be fitted their needs for food crop production.

Following the Crown Lands Ordinance of 1915, little changed in terms of agricultural output and land ownership. The way that land was used in Embu had not changed all that much by now. Both the lowlands *Weru* and the highlands *Ruguru or muthiru*, which were constantly populated, nonetheless had a lot of vacant land (Ruguru O.I., 2024). Until the 1930s, the native boundaries established by the Ordinance did not

immediately result in any general pressure on property. Africans had more land available for growth than they had in the past during periods of population pressure, unlike in Kiambu (Wangari, 2010). Individuals' rights to land included everything they could efficiently cultivate in four years or less, whereas clan rights were determined by the ratio of people to accessible land (Matenguru, O.I., 2024).

The native crops continued to predominate in agricultural output at this early stage since the newly imported crops had not yet solidified. In general, colonial conditions compelled the locals to begin cultivating crops for market above and beyond the level of pre-colonial output. They were progressively brought into the money economy and discovered that they could produce both for their own needs and the market (Mwaruvie, 1994). As a result, the pre-colonial habit of practicing barter trade with surplus was replaced with deliberate production of surplus for sale within the capitalistic system, and the Embu peasantry began to progressively take shape. This supports the claim that the two modes of production are trapped in an antagonistic relationship as the capitalism mode of production eventually overtakes the pre-capitalist ones hence making the articulation of modes of production theory the rightful tool for guiding this study.

Muchoki (1988), asserts that a new maize variety was introduced in Kenya. The variety was taking long to mature and had higher yields. Due to its long maturity period, people were opposed to it. Later on, the maize variety gained popularity as the colonial authority fed African laborers with maize meal, or *posho*, on a regular basis. In the eyes of the government and the settlers, maize meal was the most affordable and perfect nourishment for the working class (Wright,1977). Thus, the new variety of maize gained more value in money than other traditional Aembu food crops like bulrush millet. This is illustrated in the table 16 that shows Embu produce and export in 1937-38.

Table 16: Produce and Exports from Embu

Year	Maize bags	Maize meal bags	Legumes bags	Potatoes bags	Wattle
1937	11,260	40,451	13,535	216	105
1938	23,682	62,335	28232	1,099	195

Source: KNA/DC/EBU/1/2/1938

Table 16 reveals that, maize had become the most popular crop taking a larger percentage than the other crops produced in Embu by 1938. The reason behind the phenomenon being that initially, the colony's planters and settlers needed to provide food for their employees. Second, maize was a crop that could be used for both sustenance and commerce. Thirdly, maize was less expensive and simpler to farm because, although having less nutrients than native crops like sorghum and millet, it produced more food and the essential energy that the large number of workers needed. Due to their increased sense of fulfillment and well-being as a result of its supply, the workers were able to work with vigor and happiness (Bowles, 1979). Because maize was a more marketable commodity, it was used as a vehicle to spread capitalism into rural regions. According to (Omwoyo, 1992), maize was introduced in order to assist a change in the mode of production in Kenya as a whole to a capitalist mode.

### **5.3 Change in Land and Labour Systems with Introduction of New Crops**

Facilitation of commodity production was necessary to make the colony self-sufficient. This was accomplished, as was previously indicated, by producing agricultural goods that could be sold both domestically and internationally. Following the introduction of the new maize variety, the administration came to the conclusion that other crops needed to be experimented with. Beyond maize, efforts were undertaken to locate additional exportable crops from the Embu, and government representatives conducted a few small-scale trials. Since these trials were conducted across the colony's fertile regions, they were not exclusive to Embu. The colonial government understood that without skilled native instructors, the trials would not succeed.

Therefore, educating local agriculture educators was the first step. In 1920, the Department of Agriculture said in its annual report that many instructors will be required to succeed in effecting a substantial improvement in native agricultural practice and an increase in production (Lipscomb, 1972). It was assumed that, local teachers would succeed in areas where their European colleagues would not. Following their training, they would be sent to oversee a demonstration farm in their home territories. The local indigenous people would get seeds from these demonstration centers. In addition, the indigenous people adopted new crop varieties such as maize and techniques for achieving higher yields than they could have with

the earlier approaches. In Embu such a farm was established at Kangaru area where Embu University is currently located but dealt majorly with livestock matters (Mbogo O.I., 2024).

The goal of increased commodity production was to include Africans in the new capitalist mode of production in addition to exporting them. It was believed that crops like maize, sorghums, millet, groundnuts, cotton, beans, and peas would be ideal for pressuring the populace to adopt a cash economy. Additionally, Lipscomb observed that,

*A portion of the adult male population would always seek employment elsewhere rather than in the reserve, while the policy to be adopted requires careful consideration and while there is room for differences of opinion, it may be held that by lifting the native out of his lethargy and as a consequence increasing his wants (Lipscomb, 1972).*

Two training institutes were constructed, one at Scott Agricultural Laboratories in Kabete and the other at Bukura in Nyanza, to carry out this program. Later, seed farms were built at a number of locations around the nation. According to the Annual Report for 1931 (KNA/DC/EBU/1/2/17/18), there were two seed farms by that year: one at Embu and another at Chuka. Farmers in the surrounding areas were obtaining suitable and high-quality seed from these facilities. Simultaneously, the Agricultural Department had hired three permanent teachers who were touring the reserve and dispensing guidance and instructions. In several sections of Embu, experiments were carried out using beans, potatoes, wattle, wheat, onions, cassava, peas, and pyrethrum. The majority of Embu and the environs of Kianjokoma were planted with pyrethrum (Abiud, O.I., 2024). While not in every part of the county, the majority of the crops that were tested out proved to be successful. For example, Gituara's administration gave up in 1928 after attempting to introduce new crops but failed. According to the head of the Embu Native Council, many areas of fertile land were not being utilized in any way, and production in the district was only a fraction of what it might be. The tools used were antiquated, and there was no chance of cultivating extremely profitable crops like wheat, groundnuts, simsim, and European beans

(KNA/DC/EBU/2/1/2/6/10). This demonstrated the extent to which colonial land and labour policies undermined African systems in food crop production.

In Embu County, maize and a few types of beans were the most productive crops by 1930. "Despite the devastating ravages of locusts, the harvests of all crops have been on the whole satisfactory," according to a 1931 report. Since October, more than 250 tons of maize have been exported under licenses (KNA/DC/EBU/1/2/1931). This suggests that the maize experiment was successful and that the local population was gradually assimilating into the capitalist mode of production through the manufacture of goods for sale. The 1938 report asserted that,

*The Embu Division is seeing a rapid increase in the growth of Boston beans; however, the amount produced thus far has not been adequate for export, and the beans themselves were very small due to draught." As a result, neither Rose Coco nor Canadian Wonder have been able to achieve higher prices for Boston beans. Nonetheless, it seems that locals find them appealing, and there's cause for optimism that they might end up being quite valuable in the future (KNA/DC/EBU/1/2/1938).*

The newly introduced crops were vulnerable to erratic rainfall and prone to diseases but were slowly transforming the pre-colonial land access and labour divisions system in Embu food crop production. It should be highlighted that sorghum, maize, and bulrush millet continued to be the most significant food crops for exchange and consumption despite the introduction of other experimental crops. This supports the thesis that, in contrast to the capitalist mode of production, the pre-capitalist method of production does not entirely vanish but rather continues to replicate itself in various ways. As a result, the inhabitants in the sub-counties were progressively integrated into the colonial capitalist system through crop production. Market power, crop price setting, and produce transportation were all under the jurisdiction of merchant capital, which was initially ruled by colonialists and subsequently by wealthy chiefs and headmen. The inexpensive price of these crops forced the inhabitants in the region to extend their acreage, which ultimately resulted in ecological damage as would

become clear later. Embu labor became a commodity and was exploited by means of the cultivation of these crops.

According to a FGD carried out on 18<sup>th</sup> May, 2024 the Embu pre-colonial economy was thrown out of balance by the introduction of colonial capitalism. The introduction of saleable commodities like maize, which monetized rural regions, left the local population subject to an economy over which they had little influence. In order to pay taxes, the farmers began to produce excess produce for sale, but the colonialists set the pricing for the products. As a result, via the manufacturing of commodities, the colonial capitalistic system continued to subjugate them both socially and economically. Nonetheless, they were able to express their pre-capitalist relationships inside the framework of the prevailing capitalism, and conflict resulted when the two were unable to work together. The Aembu food crop producers gradually changed into peasants and producers of commodities which undermined their traditional land and labour systems.

According to Nyong'o (1981), peasant communities share a few characteristics. First, most peasants live in rural areas; second, they produce surpluses that are transferred to the dominant classes in a given social formation through a variety of mechanisms; third, peasant producers of surpluses have little control over how these surpluses are used; and fourth, a large number of peasant societies depend on non-peasants for goods and services, which they frequently pay a high price for. Supplying these products and services is frequently a means of extracting excess from rural communities (Wolf, 1974). In this regard, Atieno-Odhiambo (1974), notes that the peasantry in Kenya as a socioeconomic category is a byproduct of the colonial condition. The colonial system's establishment in Embu, like in many other parts of Kenya, initiated the development of the peasants. The important thing to remember is that, as will be discussed later, the Embu people lost more and more control over how the excess was disposed of, with the Europeans and Indians taking the surplus for sale at higher prices to the producers at a later rate. Worse still, Africans were denied trading licenses (Kanyau, O.I., 2024).

In order to assess the new crops' potential effects on the land and labor systems, the tests conducted on the novel crop types are analyzed. It will be maintained that the introduction of these new crops, particularly maize, aided in the expansion of the capitalist mode of production within the field of study. One of the main points of emphasis here is how the residents of Embu County responded to these new developments. As a result, it is clear how the new technology is affecting the conventional crop kinds. The evolution of social divisions among the Embu people as a consequence of the most recent adjustments to crop output, the land and labor resources is also looked at. The idea of the articulation of modes of production serves as the analytical instrument in this case. When the CMOP interacts with the pre-capitalist modes at this stage, it is pertinent.

#### **5.4 Colonial Taxation and Labour Policies Influence on the Aembu Land and Labour Systems in Food Crop Production**

Zezeza (1989) notes that the British colonial government and the settlers both required a significant amount of labor. In the early years of colonialism, the settlers needed a lot of labor for their plantations, and the government needed infrastructure in the shape of roads and offices. Since the protectorate was intended to be financially independent of Britain, the administration also required a sufficient amount of funding and labor to carry out its operations. Numerous taxes and labor laws were implemented in order to accomplish this. The goal of these labor and tax laws was to compel Africans to provide wage labor to the settlers and the government which would undermine the Africans land and labour systems in food crop production.

In the instance of Embu, Africans were compelled to look for wage labor both inside and beyond the nation by labor and tax laws. It should be mentioned that the whole protectorate including the inhabitants of Embu was intended to benefit from these new labor, land, and tax laws. This is a result of the foreign office's growing worry at this point about the amount of grant-in-aid going to the Kenya Protectorate for management and retaliatory missions such as the one that was carried out in the region in 1906. Hence, in order to make both the protectorate and the railway pay, Britain had to figure out how to increase local export output.

Thus, forced labor was the first policy to be used in order to compel individuals to work on government projects. This was put into effect in accordance with the 1908 Communal Labour Law, which sought to provide labor for government projects including the construction of railroads, roads, bridges, and canals. Africans were frequently forced to labor (Presley, 1992).

In Embu, Mbeere, Ndia, and Gichugu by 1902, land, labor, and tax policies had already taken hold, and a large number of Africans in these regions had already accepted wage labor both inside and outside of their districts, where they were already employed by the White settlers (Mwaruvie, 1994). There are signs that there was a significant level of labor mobility among Embu residents despite the lack of statistics. More men were leaving the reserves in pursuit of work as a result of the changed socioeconomic conditions, which included tax demands and other financial commitments. The traditional division of labor between men and women broke as a result (Wamai O.I., 2024).

The Village Headman Ordinance of 1902 gave government-appointed representatives the authority to hire labor for village-beneficial public works projects. Therefore, these headmen were mandated to use the Native Authority Laws of 1910 and 1912 to force Africans to stop producing domestically in order to work on government projects. This implies that all physically fit men and women living in the reserves were compelled to provide labor for government initiatives and not food crop produce. Njeru a senior respondent asserted the following regarding labour recruitment for government project.

*The colonial government was so merciless to the Aembu people. I can remember vividly that we used to be buddled forcefully to go and provide free labour in government projects like building of schools, road and health centers. In case anyone failed to go, that was seen as disobedience and the crime was highly punishable. At Makengi village, in Embu West the government apprehended those people who were suspected of inciting others. Examples of those people were Karuga and Gaciani (Njeru O. I.,2024).*

An archival source (KNA/ DC /EBU/ 1/2/51) reports that the chief of the area was summoned and warned against people's disobedience and stern warning was given against the two suspects.

The white man moved to Murinduko Hill, a place that was more central for the supervision of Ndia, Gichugu (former Iria-ini), Mbeere, and Embu, after successfully obtaining the Embu's entire submission at Ngoiri. Murinduko got its name from the hill bearing the same name, Kirimari. The planned headquarters had to relocate from Kirimari, so it took the name with it and sowed "Kirimari" on Embu territory. The place was known locally as *Nthithiari*, meaning the place where the bushes known as *mithithia* grew. Using forced labor, its headquarters was constructed in 1906–07 (Mwaniki, 2010). After the local government deceived the people into traveling to Nthithiari to retrieve their animals, only to find themselves encircled, the first work was completed with just their bare hands (Kanake & James, O.I., 2024). This shows how the Aembu labour was diverted from food crop production to communal works during the colonial period.

The construction of the Nthithiari headquarters and the construction of roads not only pushed the Embu into labor outside of their own nation as various kinds of laborers and porters later in Kikuyu territory and even as far as the coast. Whenever the white officials traveled over Embu country, the chiefs and headmen were expected to arrange for porters (Mwaniki, 2010). The residents were greatly humiliated by this, especially the former fighters who were constantly coerced into becoming porters for the European safari chairs and hammocks. Since portage was necessary when people were busy weeding or harvesting their products, which interfered with the production cycle, the necessity for porters had a disastrous effect on the food crop production system (Marigu, O.I., 2024). The need for more food put more of a strain on those who had to raise the greatest he-goats so that the chiefs and European settlers could consume them. The men were obliged to look for paid labor outside of the county in order to escape this humiliation and eventually being conscripted as Carrier Corps during the war. Table 17 indicates the number of people living in the Embu native reserves in 1951.

Table 17: People Living in the Native Reserves in 1951

Men	Women	Children
24,236	30552	33,920

Source: KNA/DC/ EBU/1/10/1951

Table 17 shows that the reserves were majorly inhibited by women and children since most men had migrated to look for paid employment outside their county. This had an impact on food crop production due to lack of male labor which was customarily household based. The result of male migration was that most women were left with too much to bear since they doubled the government communal burdens, those for the husbands and their own which undermined food production in the households.

In order to construct chiefs' camps, bridges, and roads leading to each chief's quarters, the headmen and chiefs were also expected to arrange for forced labor (KNA/DC/EBU/ I/2). The persons who disregarded the rule had to be dealt with brutally. If residents did not provide forced labor for the building of these projects, the chiefs would take their animals and food (Karingi, O.I., 2024). The headmen and leaders took this feature of forced labor very seriously indeed. For instance, it is said that these chiefs gave the order for laborers constructing "roads" to burn crops in a person's garden if they were absent without permission an activity that was detrimental to the African food producers during the colonial period (Munyi, O.I., 2024).

All genders participated in building the chief's encampment because, while men built the huts, women searched for grass or mucked it (Wanjuki, O.I., 2024). These labor demands had an influence on farmers' working hours, which in turn hampered food crop productivity. This had a disastrous impact on the Aembu's food crop productivity which depended on the efficiency of the traditional labor land ownership systems. This is due to the fact that the settlers needed laborers to either weed, harvest coffee, or cut sisal from March to July and November to January. The best times to grow, weed, and harvest grains for the Aembu was throughout the same time frame.

The municipal government established an official system of recruiting forced labor by 1911. The chief concerned was notified by message, and those of his personnel who were in need of employment were sent in (KNA/PC/CP/1/1/1/189). Even though the

records indicate that the chiefs only sought out those who wanted to be recruited, force had to be utilized if the chief missed the necessary number of volunteers (Karingi, O.I., 2024). At Nthithiari, where the headquarters had already been constructed, the settlers awaited the workmen who had been hired. The systems of land in food crop production, as well as the laborers themselves, were severely impacted by the strategy of recruiting forced labor for the settlement farms. In many instances, these forced immigrants were greatly exploited as laborers. For instance, the settlers gave them a lower income than the prescribed amount. Mbogo (O.I., 024), asserts that they were forced to work without any money at all which was detrimental to food crop production in households.

By 1911 the government salary structure for workers showed that ‘an ordinary labourer was to be paid RS 3 a month or 10 cents a day. In addition, if employed far from his district, food at a rate of 6 cents a day is supplied,’ (KNA/PC/CP/1/1/1/189). Generally, the white settlers had the obligation to follow the 1910 Master and Servants Ordinance which informed “masters” of their obligations to their “servant” (Zwanenberg, 1975).

The district's total agricultural production decreased by 1912 as a result of the concerning state of the labor market. This decline was ascribed to the use of forced labor in hiring. According to the District Commissioner's report:

*The area under cultivation in parts of the district was regrettably noticeable decrease, probably due to the large proportion of male population that works outside the district constantly (KNA/ CP/CP/1/5/84).*

These findings show that the transformation of labour systems in food crop production among the Aembu. The enormous number of male immigrant laborers received inadequate compensation, leaving women as the only employees on the farms. Force was employed to enlist Africans as warriors and carriers in the WW1 (1914–1918). All over the colony, headmen and leaders carried out this task. This battle had a profound effect on crop output, labor and the land ownership structure. Due to the sudden departure of practically all physically capable men, women, the elderly, and children were forced to perform agricultural labor on both African and

white farms. Food shortage resulted from this, particularly in Embu where it hampered food crop output. This conflict is blamed for the 1918 Kithiuro famine (Mbutei, O.I., 2024).

In 1920, the 1915 Native Registration Ordinance was implemented, making it illegal for a "servant" to leave their "master" in order to maintain a steady supply of African labor for the government and the settlers (Zwanenberg, 1975). The notorious kipande system thereafter went into effect over the whole colony. An attempt was made to systematize and regulate African labor by preventing workers from being deregistered after they were registered. Additionally, it made it easier to enforce labor contracts by allowing criminal parts to be returned to their previous employers. Runaway employees might be located thanks to the assistance of local chiefs who tracked down these deserters. Any African who left his reserve without a kipande ran the risk of being taken into custody by the police. According to Zeleza (1989), the kipande also contributed to the standardization of low pay. This is due to the fact that it rendered it almost hard for an employee to negotiate a pay that was more than or unrelated to his previous wage as shown on his kipande when he started working for a new company. From the beginning of colonialism until the conclusion of the war, forced labor was employed in Kenya and Embu in particular, but it was not official British Foreign Office policy. Noteworthy, was its impact on land and labour system in food crop production.

The reason for the forced recruitment of African labor was, as mentioned before, the settlers' lack of capital and their need on the government to provide them with enough African labor. Thus, when the October 1919 Northey Labour Circular was released, "it set out to institutionalize an existing situation; but it did not fundamentally change the direction of existing policy of recruitment through forcing labor" (Zwanenberg, 1975). The circular worsened the state of labor in Africa by giving chiefs and headmen more autonomous authority. This circular had a detrimental effect on the system of land ownership and production of food since it forced more Africans from the reserves to labor for the growing number of white settlers.

Even while forced labor was common, the colonial government did provide certain residents permanent jobs. These included the headmen and chiefs, as well as the

clerks and the police, who were referred to as *Askari Kanga* throughout the community. Out of the estimated populations of 20,885 and 35,053 in the three regions, respectively, there were 12 government employees from Mbeere and 40 from Embu in 1914 (Mwaruvie, 1994). In the pre-colonial Embu society, this job was one of the capitalist strategies used to establish social classes. The practice of forced labor drastically altered pre-colonial Aembu labor patterns hence impacting on the pre-capitalist food production.

It is important to include the broader settler colonial economy when assessing the local population's contribution to the colonial labor market. The colonial authority, which was governed by the imperial ideology of self-sufficiency, was unable to provide more than a basic infrastructure, and the Kenyan settlers were not given enough wage labor or financial capital. Thus, the acquisition of surplus generated by the inexpensive and poorly compensated labor of Africans formed the foundation of colonial capital accumulation (Zwanenberg, 1974). Without a doubt, labor migration contributed to the rural community's impoverishment. African peasants' land was not completely taken away from them, and the families of migrant workers continued to provide for their own needs as well as those of their frequently unpaid migrant relatives, lowering the socially required wage in the process of capitalist accumulation. The self-exploitation of their relatives who remained at home was used to make up for the migrant workers' labor being removed from domestic production (Berry, 1984).

The second strategy to drive the Embu people off their land was to impose taxes. Several levies were imposed following the conquest. Thus, in 1907, hut tax was implemented throughout the region. By 1901, the colony had imposed these and other taxes, which served as the primary source of income for the colonial administration. Zeleza (1989) claimed that taxes had two functions: they restrained peasant accumulation while simultaneously promoting wage employment and peasant commodity production. In 1907, a three-rupee hut tax was instituted (Mwaruvie, 1994, Mwaniki, 2010). All married men who led each household contributed this amount for each hut. This was intended to drive people away from their farms and encourage them to look for paid work outside of the district which undermined the pre-colonial land and labour systems in food crop production significantly.

The method used in collection of taxes had a detrimental effect on the systems of land and labor in food crop production. The tax collectors utilized a variety of cruel tactics, including rape, cannibalism, and property seizure (Matenguri, O.I., 2024). People who could read and write were utilized in the exercise because the Askaris were the most ruthless tax collectors, and in 1910 they were forbidden from collecting taxes. In order to reduce overcharging by chiefs and other tax collectors, the Embu District Commissioner hired Swahili clerks to write the names of tax donors (KNA/PC/CP/1/1/1).

Implementation of a Poll Tax was done, which had been implemented in other regions of the colon, as a result of the hut tax's inadequacies in meeting revenue collection requirements. All male individuals over sixteen were required to pay this tax (Mwaruvie, 1994). It raised the taxes on married men even though it was aimed at young men who were not yet married. By 1910, each married man was required to pay both the hut tax and his personal poll tax (Zwanenberg, 1975). Many young men from Embu were compelled by this levy to look for wage employment outside Embu. Not only did extensive family networks disintegrate with the advent of a cash economy, but the types of collective action covered in the previous chapter also began to wane. The Embu were compelled to provide labor by colonial legislation and the necessity to generate tax revenue, same as other African groups in Kenya which transformed the pre-colonial land and labour systems.

According to a letter signed by DR Crampton on 2<sup>nd</sup> /8/1927 (DC/EBU/ 3/4/27), Embu was divided into divisions namely Murue, Kikuare, Karuriri, Ngandori, Gatari, Kiarangano, Kagaari, Gaikuri and Njuri. All the nine locations were under African chiefs and headmen (DC/EBU/1/2/1938). Chief's obligation was to collect hut and poll taxes. In the archival source, Chief Muruatetu of Gatari in Embu West is recommended for having performed exemplary well in the tax collection together with Chief Arthur who had collected 80% of his tax cess. As a result of the good performance, Mr Goodbody the then DC took chiefs and local Native councilors to Nairobi for an instructional tour. They visited areas where natives were engaged including the railway, workshops, veterinary laboratory, Agricultural Laboratories, Medical Laboratories and Coryndon Museum and Mr. Abdul Wahids zoological gardens. They were also taken for short flights in an airplane. This aimed at

motivating the African chiefs because of their enthusiasm in tax collection which in real sense helped to undermine the Aembu food crop production within households. This meant that such chiefs were beneficiaries of large tracts of land and chief M' tetu of Embu was not an exceptional. On land matter, the colonial chief had amalgamated a lot of land and he donated part of the resource to two schools. The two schools bear his names; M'Tetu Primary School, M'Tetu Secondary School.

According to (KNA/DC/ EBU/1/1/2/38), the the cooperative chiefs in the collection of taxes received honors of a badge and a certificate from the Provincial Commissioner at a combined meeting of the Local Native Councils held at Nyeri on 7<sup>th</sup> of September 1938. Examples of those who received the honorary were chief Kombo and Arthur. The same archival source points out that if a chief was suspected of inefficiency in tax collection, he could be deposed. Chief Petro had to be deposed for gross inefficiency and the natives of his location were given the option of being amalgamated with one of three other locations. When asked of their wish they unanimously desired to be amalgamated with chief Jocton's Location. Several minor chiefs were dismissed and their places were filled with literate persons who assisted the chiefs as clerks (KNA/DC/EBU/ 1/10/49). Chiefs too could confiscate cattle from the civilian for use by the government troops who were usually the porters and carrier corps (KNA/DC/EBU/1/10/1941. Since the chief's main duty was to collect taxes from the natives to assist in the cost of colonial government administration. Table 18 shows native poll or Hut tax collected by Embu Chiefs in 1938.

Table 18: Native Poll or Hut Taxes Collected in 1938

Name of Chief	Hut tax (Kshs)	Rate (Kshs)
Arthur	19,368.00	1,204.00
M'tetu	25,248.00	1,494.00
Johana	6,000.00	500.00
Petro	4,800.00	533.00
Njagi	31,200 .00	2,049.00
Kombo	21,616.00	2,000.00
Jacob	16,164.00	1,022.00
Nguru	17,760.00	1,022.00
Njega	31,200.00	2,100.00
Naaman	14,400.00	900.00
Justin	18,000.00	1,155.00
Joshua	12,000.00	798.00
Jecton	10,200.00	928.00
Ngochi	9,600.00	695.00
Kimwea	1,200.00	77.00

Mugera	30,000.00	1,847.00
Ngoroi	20,400.00	1,205.00
Kabandango	2,748.00	182.00
Gathara	12,160.00	1,048.00
Manunga	12,160.00	1,048.00
Karinga	6,900.00	500.00
Total	321,064.00	2,1578.00

SOURCE: KNA/DC/EBU/1/2 District Commissioner Annual Report 1938

Table 18 shows the amount of taxes collected from the Aembu during British colonial rule. Indeed, imposition of taxes led to migration of males from the reserves for paid employment so as to pay the required amounts of tax. This affected household labour in food crop production. Additionally, Aembu could not afford to buy food when the production went down since the little money obtained went to payment of taxes which worsened the food situation. Thus, colonial authority was able to compel the inhabitants of Embu County into a new capitalist mode of production through the use of labor and tax laws, which had a detrimental effect on the pre-colonial system of land and labor in food crop production. Wage labor and the manufacture of commodities were used to accomplish this. The production of commodities was a more lucrative option for those with sufficient land than the meager income provided by the colonial administration and settlers. When people realized that producing commodities improved their economic standing, they produced more and as a result, used more land and diversified labor.

### **5.5 World Wars Effects on the Aembu land and Labor Systems on Food Crop Production**

East Africa was caught off guard by Britain's declaration of war against Germany on August 4, 1914. Throughout the conflict, only East Africa was annexed by the British Empire. The Germans, led by Von Lettow Vobeck, first gained some advantage by seizing Taveta and a portion of Kisii and conducting many raids on the railway in quick succession (Bell, 1964). However, a group of South African and British soldiers drove them back.

Later, the British administration started enlisting large numbers of Carrier Corps members from around the province in order to utilize them against Von Lettow in Tanganyika. Every area of the economies of Kenya and Uganda was significantly impacted by this war. This occurred as a result of the recruiting of a large number of

physically fit individuals to serve in the Carrier Corps. More than 200,000 Africans from all throughout East Africa joined the Carrier Corps, and there was no shortage of recruits for the K.A.R.'s new battalions.

The headmen and leaders in the area recruited young men for the Carrier Corps by use of violence. These colonial operatives had prior experience enlisting slave labor for government initiatives and settlers. Of course, compulsion was necessary in order to organize so much labor. As so, the majority of regions saw the worst kind of forced conscription in history. For instance, in Gusii, young people were gathered up during cultural occasions, and at night, others were removed from their homes (Omwoyo, 1990). These colonial operatives had prior experience enlisting slave labor for government initiatives and settlers. Of course, compulsion was necessary in order to organize so much labor. For the case of Embu war recruits, they suffered throughout the war and then returned to confront the 1918 *Kithioro* famine. Informants claim that the Embu/Chuka road building, which used forced labor at the same time of the conflict, is to blame for this catastrophic famine (Mwereza, O.I., 2024). According to (KNA/ PC1/16/1915) construction of the Meru -Nanyuki railway almost the entire labor supply was drawn from Embu and Meru and this exercise acted as a famine relief work for young men from the affected areas. This could explain the reason behind having more women than men during the conducted census reports.

The war years were a time of broad market disruption and labor shortages that left much of the colony in a state of doom and despair (Gordon, 1946). As previously indicated, the Embu market was scheduled to open every Friday in order to supply food for the war effort. The government ordered for the headmen of each division to deliver produce for sale at the market, the *Askaris* were sent out two or three days in advance to warn the populace (KNA/PC/CP/1/5/129). Trade was disrupted and reorganized as a result of the war, and during the 1918–1919 famine, it nearly came to an end. The agricultural product commanded less money than it had in the years prior to the conflict, and the Embu were hungry, destitute, and without money.

In Kenya, the First World War had a profound impact. This is due to the protectorate's pre-war economy's heavy reliance on settler production. The majority of the settlers

were engaged in combat; some never came back, and those who did discovered their plantations in disrepair. Other funding sources were required by the colonial administration in order to strengthen the colony's economy. The post-war economic policies were heavily affected by the settlers who had been active in managing their affairs since Governor Sir Henry Belfield formed the War Council in 1915. It was necessary to build settler agriculture alongside African agriculture, which was first largely ignored (Lipscomb, 1972). Thus, during this time, the colony's economic, political, and social elements came together to form a pattern that would determine the future paths taken by its African and European sectors (Lipscomb, 1972). Therefore, it is only possible to examine the food production labor and land systems in the research region in light of the political and economic policies that were established during this time.

The Aembu people had increased their agricultural production prior to 1920, but more as a result of their own initiative and reaction to the money market than as a result of direct government assistance. The land issue was becoming increasingly significant due to the population's constant expansion. However, the native land tenure system remained unchanged to allow for the long-term habitation of a portion of the clan land by those who were not initially granted the right to cultivate it. As a result, the two systems of land and labor in food crop production would subsequently suffer as a result of these political and economic policies implemented after 1920.

Following the Devonshire Declaration of 1923, the colonial administration developed the dual policy, which served as the primary economic strategy and attempted to start the lengthy process of events that would eventually revolutionize African agriculture and the continent's economy as a whole. The African peasant farmers needed to produce enough food for their own sustenance as well as an excess to sell. In addition, the strategy sought to incentivize males to pursue wage labor both inside and outside the reserve. "Complementary development of non-native and native production" was how Governor Sir Robert Corydon put it (Berman, 1990). Although the program began in 1923, it wasn't until 1927 that the administration sent out a government circular to District Officers emphasizing the value of advancing the twin policy of economic growth (Lipscomb, 1972).

The dual strategy, which incentivized Africans to generate excess reserves for export, significantly influenced the land ownership and agricultural production systems. More space was needed for increased production, but land was already getting limited. Cash payments for land were gradually replacing the pre-capitalist system of land ownership by the 1930s (Kamwere, O.I., 2024). The Kenya Land Commission of 1932, led by Morris Carter, was established at the same time as the land situation had come to be worse over the majority of the colony. The commission's task was to determine how much land Africa will need and, if needed, to suggest expanding African reserves (Lipscomb, 1972; Sorenson, 1967). The increased need to cultivate cash crops resulted in rise of land cases almost everywhere in the colony (Wamai, O.I., 2024). Table 19 shows the rise in land cases between 1923 and 1945 as a result of the growing demand for additional land for the cultivation of saleable crops.

Table 19 shows rise in land cases brought about by increased demand for land.

Table 19: Rise in Land Cases among the Aembu and the Mbeere

Year	Embu	Mbeere
1933	621	82
1934	254	131
1935	564	202
1936	375	193
1937	664	295
1938	767	358
1939	825	250
1940	745	174
1941	725	281
1942	1,710	300
1943	1,774	439
1944	1,363	414
1945	1,409	395

Source: KNA/ DC/EBU/3/2/1917-1958

Table 19 shows that rise in production of saleable crops increased demand for land among the Aembu which led to increased land cases over time. This contrasted the pre-colonial period whereby such cases were rare since land for food crop production was plenty and everyone had right to access the land through clan elders.

## **5.6 The Mau Mau and its Effects on the Aembu Land and Labour Systems in Food Crop Production**

The Mau Mau insurrection resulted from the politicization of land disputes by African ex-servicemen and the capitalism system's dominance over the pre-capitalist system, which made people aware of class differences. The individualistic capitalist system had supplanted the pre-colonial social solidarity that was manifested in the moral economy through access and land allocation. Therefore, the movement's leaders saw swearing as a means of reinstating the weakened sense of unity.

The administrators of the oath were young Ambeere from Nairobi who had moved to the city. To raise awareness of subaltern consciousness among the natives, these groups gave their lives in sacrifice. Oral testimony from those former urban rebels indicated that they would teach the locals about the necessity of banding together to overthrow British rule. Thurley (1955) observed that corner boys were compelled by their conditions to seek employment in Nairobi. After taking their oaths, these lads went back to their positions and eventually left for Nairobi. They informed the people of Embu about Dedan Kimathi and his opposition to the loyalists. Embu was aware of notable individuals like Jomo Kenyatta and Field Marshall Dedan Kimathi and their goals for Kenyans. Subsequently, the writers who supported Mau Mau reshaped the perception of Kimathi and reaffirmed their moral-political beliefs, raising Dedan Kimathi to the status of Lenin (Yenjela, 2021).

The only choice left to the inhabitants of Embu was to support the liberation effort led by the Mau Mau. They joined the fight with the others because they believed they would lose out if they were left out of the national cake sharing event. According to Nderitu (2017), political consciousness began to grow when Jomo Kenyatta invited Kimathi and other leaders to organize a meeting in Nyeri in 1952. The conference was attended by around 75,000 individuals, and the mobilization was carried out by breathing *mivevu*. Following this gathering, there were other public gatherings in Mbeere, Embu, and Central Kenya. The ethnic communities of Embu, Meru, and Mbeere were well-represented during these gatherings (Nderitu, 2017). In 1953, as the conflict grew more intense, Dedan Kimathi threatened the Embu District Commissioner, chiefs, and Home Guards with four letters on the Mau Mau

movement's intended attack on the Gatari area in current Embu West under chief Muruatetu. However, as the Embu District Intelligence Committee of July 1953 stated (KNA/DC/EBU/1/14), Kimathi never posed a danger to the Aembu and their leaders.

In rural places, young women were left behind to tend to houses, while young boys were supposed to move around in quest of greener pastures. First, because there were few ways to search them, women of all ages performed crucial roles as couriers (KNA/DC/EBU/1/14). Second, they weren't worth worrying, according to the colonial authority. In addition, the women had sidearms, money, and messages (KNA/DC/EBU/1/14). Thirdly, women had unrestricted movement and could gather clothing, weapons, and ammo for the combatants in the jungle. Women were left to care for the children while males walked into the wilderness. In rural regions, the majority of Aembu women were forced to perform community labor by excavating ditches which undermined food crop production since the labour system had already been interfered with.

It was thought that, locals made up the majority of a few minor fighters in the Embu District (KNA/DC/EBU/1/14). After engaging in raids, these gangs went back to their homes. According to British intelligence, these cells were made up of local countrymen who organized and carried out activities in locations where the general populace was unaware of them. Recalling their time spent serving in Kikuyu districts, Kathagu wa Titima and his companions hid in Kianjiru hill. These fighters had plenty of handguns and weapons. As was mentioned at a FGD conducted in Kianyaga on March 12<sup>th</sup>, 2024, the reason the countrymen who resided in Kianjiru Hill were reported was because their hunger for food drove them to steal animals. A crucial aspect of the insurgency was the problem of food production.

The Mau Mau movement's operational ability and credibility among its followers to defeat state forces were great when food supply was steady (Salehyan & Hendrix, 2014). Nonetheless, the lack of food suggests that the rebels were unable to battle for very long, and group cohesiveness suffered. Notably, the Mau Mau rebels were forced to cross the enemy line in order to obtain food due to shortage. The lack of protection in the Mbeere area led to it being a fighters' main center for food distribution, as

demand outpaced supply. For instance, in 1954, there were constant issues and grievances arising from various aspects of hunger (Jackson, 2003). Among the Aembu, it caused a significant rise in stock theft and destruction of food crops since the warriors did not cultivate their own food (Warue, O.I., 2024).

Kathagu wa Titima and Njeru wa Nyanya prominent leaders of the Mau Mau uprising among the Aembu, were based at Kianjiru Mountain (Wamai, O. I., 2024). Because they were familiar with the Embu region, the two were the tower of strength for the movement. Consider the following statement made by Mbeere, Gathagu wa Titima, also known as General Kimere: "Immediately following that we talked, we would meet with them at Kianjiru hill, after which I would go back and convince our people on the importance of taking the oath, and they would take it. General Chui, a Mbeere native and brother of one of the respondents, Mbogo, was another leader of the Mau Mau uprising. Ambeere from Kanyariri General Mwaniki Chui used to deliver the oath to the Mbeere people during the Mau Mau rebellion. General Nyaga wa Mwangia, who administered oaths at Mbeere, was one of the other significant leaders in the city. However, as confirmed by a Focus Group Discussion conducted at the Kombo Munyiri sublocation and Mwanyare, he was slain at Kiangungi Mountain near Kĩamaranga/Maranga Mountain in Embu. Nguyu Wamugwete, also known as "General Makanyanga," Kivuti wa Mbuta, Njagi wa Munyori, Ngondi wa Mulingi, and Njanthingi Makindi were among the other leaders (Ireru, O. I., 2024).

The independence warriors slept in densely forested areas or caves on the Kianjiru Mountain, which provided great hiding places. The freedom warriors used to bury bones and other trash. They would not let a trench around Kianjiru Mountain stop them; they would operate from the hill into the settlements. The militants for the Mau Mau movement in Mbeere were known to the colonial authorities to be based at the top of Kianjiru Mountain. According to Njeru Muchiri (O.I., 2024), he joined the warriors at Kianjiru Mountain after graduating from school at Nyangwa. However, the Mbeere Home Guards' raids and bombs claimed the lives of several Mau Mau rebels. In that area, the Mau Mau movement's secretary, Kaumbuthu wa Ngaiyari, was slain by the colonial *askaris*. According to Jeremiah Mugo (O.I., 2024), Kianjiru, near Mavuria, was the location of the Mbeere Mau Mau.

Since they gave warriors food, those who accepted the pledge and remained silent at home fed those who ventured into the forest. They said nothing about their issues. During the conflict, some were in the forest of Kirinyaga. In this area, the Mau Mau warriors took refuge on Kianjiru hill. They were difficult to find as they were well-hidden in the shrubs and trees. The colonial government soldiers tried to drive them out of the jungle by sending bomber planes over it once their whereabouts were discovered.

Muriithi (O. I., 2024) mentioned the forced labor, taxes, questioning and detention of residents in villages which were encircled by trenches. In addition, they faced harsh directives and were afraid of being attacked by the colonial authority, the chiefs, and their Home Guards, particularly when the locals refused to provide information on the combatants of the Mau Mau movement and their activities. In the villages, they would use their imaginations despite the lengthy trench that was constructed around Kianjiru Mountain. Concurrently, there was a great deal of colonial information that could track movements into and out of Kianjiru Mountain. According to Njeru Muchiri (O.I., 2024), who joined the fighters at Kianjiru Mountain but escaped the bombs, the British intelligence found success in digging trenches around the Mountain as a counter-insurgency strategy since their paths were closely traced. Mbogo (O. I., 2024) asserts that the the digging of trenches was forceful and no payment was expected hence labour in food crop production was reduced during such periods.

Mugo (O.I., 2024) states that Kianjiru was the location of the Mbeere Mau. Indeed, there were Kivuti wa Mbuta and Kathagu wa Muchoria. Additionally, a Kirinyaga resident was shot at Kianjiru. They were not brought where the others were, even if they were later detained and relocated. They were hated less. Together with a battalion, Kathagu and Kivuti wa Mbuta retreated from Kirinyaga into the jungle. It happened about 1954. Nyaga Kamotho (O.I., 2024) also noted that individuals who made the oath but never entered the forest were another group that has never been honored in Embu and Mbeere. The people who fed those who went into the bush were the ones who took the oath and remained silent at home and supported the warriors who were in the forest. This was detrimental to food crop production since the

insecurity and anxiety led to reduced food supply in the household. Many food crop producers abandoned their farms during the period of political crisis (Ruguru O.I., 2024).

According to Ileri Kubuta (O.I., 2024) the fighters who overthrew the colonial administration in the interior are mostly undocumented. The "Generals" who served in Mount Kenya or the Aberdare hills and were from Fort Hall, Nyeri and Kiambu received a lot of attention. According to this viewpoint, the Mau heroes and heroines of Mbeere and Aemba were thus overlooked. Despite giving their lives to support Kenya's independence, these groups are never honored. He also mentioned the forced labor, taxes, questioning, and detention of residents in villages, which were encircled by trenches. In addition, they had to live under constant threat of assault by the colonial administration, their appointed leaders and their Home Guards. This anxiety increased when the locals refused to provide information about the warriors of the Mau Mau movement and their whereabouts.

The number of pure Maasai among the Mau Mau movement was not disclosed by the colonial authority as the conflict went on, but a list of names for the pure Maasai who were imprisoned at Olokuro (KNA/DC/EBU8/6 & KNA/DC/EBU/8/3) existed. When the Dorobo were screened as part of the Mau Mau movement at Narok Works Camp, they were given the name "fully 'Kikuyuised' Dorobo" in order to hide their true identity. The report claims that majority helped maintain the Mau Mau movement's secrecy and sustenance, and that some even provided their homes to oath administrators. The Kikuyu and other people outside of the Mount Kenya region, however, were treated differently, according to the dossier. Whichever Kikuyu were inspected in the Narok Camps were imprisoned, regardless of whether they were associated with the Mau Mau movement. "A member of his/her family thoroughly indoctrinated and firm Mau Mau supporter who would help and feed gangs if not detained," was how they were described.

The Kikuyu's affiliation with the Mbeere in the Mwea region was questioned by the colonial authorities. The more primitive and credulous Embu "tribesmen" were seen to be harmed by the Kikuyu influence (KNA/DC/EBU/1/14). When DO 2 of the Mau

area produced a Mau Mau movement report for April 1954 on the interaction of the Mau Mau movement with other ethnic groups in Narok, it raised doubts about the effect of the Kikuyu on other ethnic groups. The Wandorobo, who came from Laikipia and lived on the western edge of the Mau area, were government loyalists, according to DO 2. However, individuals who came from Kikuyu country were viewed as disloyal; "This inference is a consequence of the Mau Mau purge of some seven Wandorobo in the Western area, who discovered that their movements were reported to the security forces every time they traveled publicly in that area.

The colonial authority was wary of any community linked to the Kikuyu, Embu, and Meru. For example, the Maasai had close relations to Kikuyu land and were seen as more Kikuyu than Maasai. According to colonial officials, the half-bred Kikuyu Maasai persuaded General Ole Kesio, a pure Maasai, into the Mau Mau revolt (KNA/BB/8/16). Ole Kisio had an important part in the Maasai Mau Mau oath rite, although he is not honored with his second in command, Ole Ngapian (KNA/BB/12/45). As a result, they continue to be regarded as the unsung Mau Mau heroes and heroines.

Groups who communicate in a secret language do so to conceal linguistic information from others. The idea that the English language was a tool of Western domination deprived Africans of their own language. Thus, the Mau Mau movement adopted Kikuyu as a means of communication. The similar strategy was used by Rastafari, who created dread-talk, an in-group language that defined Rastafarian experiences and transmitted members' consciousness (Barrington, 2012). The Mau Mau movement members also let their hair to grow naturally to demonstrate their dedication to the naturalness that dreadlocks represent. Mugo Kamwana (O.I., 2024) stated that they used to smoke cannabis, a natural herb that promotes social healing and a sense of calm and harmony. As they smoked, they praised unity and self-awareness while seeing European as 'small children.'

With increasing infiltration into the movement by colonial troops and pseudos, the Central Committee became odious to those within it as Mau Mau movement spies, necessitating the use of intricate codes of speech and behavior specific to survival. For

example, when Kimathi Mukami evaded police inspection at Muthaiga Police Station, Mukami Kimathi fled to Muthaiga Club, where she knew a Mau Mau movement member who controlled a network of waiters to get information, which she then sent to Kimathi. Mukami walked to the kitchen and told the chef *Mariboti na ndubia* meaning the most recent report and a cup of sugarless tea (Nderitu, 2017). This language was only known to those in the group, as the rest couldn't understand it.

The Mau Mau had resolved to attack kamitu Prison and release their colleagues. At each meeting to plan the assault, its leader, General Baimungi, stressed that it would take place on the night of December 9. He thought that someone among his followers was a police informant. During their last meeting, he held up to the light a piece of paper with the number 9 scrawled on it. They assaulted on sixth and fled with twenty of their men. The police informer had alerted the jail warders that the attack would take place on December 9. However, nine and six were interchangeable in Mau Mau lingo. As a result, if they mentioned six, they meant nine, and vice versa.

According to Wanyumbari (1993), oathing rites used blood and flesh. Interestingly, the initiates would take the oath while pressing moistened earth on their stomachs with their right hand. It represented the individual's willingness to do whatever it took to safeguard the people's land. While the Mau Mau movement's oathing varied from place to place, the importance of retaining the soil remained consistent. Another sort of handshake used in the Embu region was described in a FGD in Kathimari and confirmed by Julieta Warue (O.I.,2024). The secret handshake, as represented entailed interlocking both palms while pulling the thumb outwards. Those who had not taken the pledge could not decipher the message and were immediately identifiable; this was also true in other parts of the country where there was significant participation in the movement.

The Mau Mau movement's moment of brilliance in survival craft was short-lived because the Home Guards and farm guards were constantly in charge. The tide shifted against the Mau Mau movement with the arrival of dependable chiefs who had a track record of aggressive resistance to the Mau Mau movement, which was widely known among the locals. Also, some headmen were concerned because the colonial authority utilized the trial-and-error approach to jail headmen accused of supporting the

movement. Interestingly, Aembu were dispersed around the district, and their wide fields became designated areas where Mau Mau militants could hide and gather supplies. For instance, Ileri Kubuta, a Mau Mau scout, said in a FGD held at Kiambu on April, 30th, 2024, how they were on the watch and utilized a hidden warning: *Runji nirwaicura* meaning the river is full. When they heard this, they knew the enemy was nearby. It demonstrates that individuals who have similar agendas, live in the same region, and share same interests are more likely to generate distinct forms of language that are only recognized in a limited circle.

According to Bailey (2010), the Mau Mau movement militants in the woodlands were unprepared for this and remained optimistic. As a result, they were unable to differentiate persons in the forest's obscurity. The uncovering of the Mau Mau argots dealt a significant blow to the movement, as the infiltrating squad would pass the information they discovered to security forces, allowing them to apprehend the members and destroy the movement (Molnar, 1965).

Kenyatta (1938) identified the Gikuyu nation as the middle section of Kenya, split into five districts: Kiambu, Fort Hall (Murang'a), Nyeri, Embu, and Meru. Anyone from these districts was considered a Mau Mau rebel until proven otherwise. In the colonial mentality, the Mau Mau movement was located in central Kenya, and the colonial authorities endeavored to confine it inside these borders. As Likimani (1985) points out, D.C. Steel of Nairobi stated that all Kenyan ethnic groupings supported the liberation fighters. As a result, the study included Aembu and other big ethnic groups in Central Kenya who were impacted by colonial military actions.

Curfews were imposed in Central Kenya just before the Declaration of the State of Emergency, confining locals to their homes as colonizers asserted self-legitimation. At the start of the State of Emergency, movement limitations allowed people with loyalty certificates to attend public meetings (KNA/PC/CP/12/24). In most situations, people in possession of these documents would be put to a halt for a thorough investigation. Faced with a crisis, the colonial administration issued detention orders and gave the governor the authority to imprison anybody he perceived as a threat to public order. Under emergency powers, the governor gave authority to police officers

above the assistant inspector's rank to arrest without a warrant, if he had adequate grounds.

According to Edgerton (1989), the colonial administration put anyone in a concentration camp without providing evidence of misconduct. Furthermore, on average, one African was hung every morning (Nderitu, 2017). African privacy was also violated when senior police officials were given the authority to examine properties without a warrant and to stop and search any car or people in public space. Africans were also forced to provide information, and the government implemented a provision granting power to demand information. Anyone who failed to produce information in response to a properly made request under the rule was guilty of an offense (KNA/PC/CP/12/24).

In a sad mood, an oral informant Susan Wakina reported this in a sad mood,

*My husband Njeru Dedan was a victim of the killings and he was murdered by the government officials during the emergency period at a place called kiamaguta in Ngandori. That time I was very young and I had only one child* (Susana Wakina, O.I., 2024).

This shows the ruthlessness of the British colonial government in Kenya's efforts to curb the local vigilante groups in the colony and specifically among the Aembu people. Families were left devastated and languishing in poverty due to the killing of the breadwinners of such families who could have engaged in meaningful for food crop production.

The emergency restrictions aided the military strategy during 1952. The initial arrests were made during Operation John Scott (1952). The leaders of the Kenya African Union were arrested and incarcerated. According to Nderitu (2017), the famous enormous arrest of KAU's main leadership signaled the start of major oathing, and Kimathi extended the Mau Mau movement membership through a massive recruiting

campaign. The Mau Mau Central Committee carried out this push even among individuals who were unable to fight, such as elderly people who could provide resources and knowledge to the Mau Mau movement.

As more individuals were oathed, the colonial authority arrested and convicted several Mau Mau suspects, while others waited trial in District tribunals. As a result, the colonial authorities deemed it essential to construct new incarceration facilities inside the area. The circumstances caused the colonial authority to subject Mau Mau movement captives to hard labor and more guards, as mentioned in the October 1952 Embu District Intelligence Report (KNA/DC/EBU/16/2). As a result, most operations in Embu District were halted, with the exception of those engaged with the Mau Mau uprising. Worse, they continued to intimidate loyal people in the district, as documented in the Embu District Intelligence Committee Reports of March 27 and April 3, 1953. The colonial authorities were so sure that 50% of the Kikuyu and Embu ethnic populations believed the Mau Mau had Russia's support and that Russia was supporting the organization with rifles and other supplies.

In contrast to other Embu inhabitants, Kaagari and Kyeni site people appreciated the villagisation policy because of the suffering they faced when the collective punishment destroyed their livelihood. Whittaker (2015) contends that any community suspected of collaborating with the Mau Mau suffered a counter insurgency operation that included property confiscation, incarceration without trial, livestock seizures, and other harsh measures. Concentrated communities were established in Kyeni and Kaagari in current Embu East with little documented opposition.

It was regarded as an internal answer to the Mau Mau movement's problems, and it was clearly effective. Nine Mau Mau movement militants were slain between April 29 and May 1, 1954, including two in Njukini woodland, two in Kieni, one in Kagaari, and others near Kangaru School in current Embu West. A hoeing guy shot one Mau Mau dead with a bow and arrow along the Kyeni-Evurore boundary (KNA/PC/CP/12/24). According to Anderson (2005), all counter insurgency techniques were bad, but villagization was the most severe since it denied insurgents food, and the colonial administration failed to provide essential services to people

within the villages who had limited chances of engaging in food crop production. Fear and insecurity of the period forced many people to abandon their farms and this resulted to low food production.

Villagization was a benefit for some in Kagaari and Kyeni since it protected people who desired change, loyalists' advances were made in executing the villagization program, indicating a change of heart; yet, this did not imply that the movement's advances and attacks had ceased. Notably, colonial officials recorded stock theft in Embu District as Mau Mau warriors attempted to collect food; there was also forced oath-taking, and individuals continued to acknowledge to taking the oath. The Mau Mau independence warriors continued to target Aemba in Kyeni. In June 1954, a Mbeere elder adult and a child were abducted along the Embu-Mbeere boundary (KNA/PC/CP/12/24). A group of 70 Mau Mau believed to have come from Nyeri District was also seen heading to Mbeere to engage in massive oath-taking; Kassam's group of about 75, along with about 30 Kaleba Company men, left the north Ngariama/Baragwi border en-route to Mbeere in two groups, moving either side of the Njukini forest. They will make several oath-taking attempts in Mbeere and Embu and may resort to violence if the oath campaign is rebuffed.

By August 1954, the Mau Mau's tactical goals had shifted to a battle for survival, nighttime intimidation of local residents, and the establishment of new channels to maintain a consistent food supply. Some Mau Mau fighters were spotted hiding in bushes and requesting for food. Food kept the militants' morale up, so they proceeded into high-access regions and acquired authority over the local populace to expand their operations. The British government's refusal of food was tactical. They recognized that the Mau Mau movement would be unable to attract significant numbers of potential members if they lacked food (Ireru, O. I., 2024). Due to food shortages, the Mau Mau guerrillas prioritized survival above fighting and recruiting. This is supported by Mbogo (O.I., 2024) who revealed that the government used civilians to dig deep and wide trenches to discourage Mau Mau interaction with the civilians in order for them to go without food. Koren (2018) observed that the frequency of staple crops influenced conflict patterns. Furthermore, high agricultural areas such as Embu, Meru, and Nyeri suffered increased violence during the Mau

Mau insurrection due their fertile land and the abundance of food produced in their land (Njanamu, O. I., 04).

As the colonial authority strengthened security controls, villages in the Embu area alternated between loyalists and Mau Mau movement sympathizers. They were waiting to see the side to join. In contrast, the loyalists' morale was strong due to the increasing number of British officers, which came with satisfaction and a constant supply of intelligence, allowing the security forces to chase the Mau Mau movement militants into the woodlands. Despite the constant flow of information about the Mau Mau movement, insurgents were reported in Mbeere on August 16, 1954, performing huge oathing; a team of five Mbeere, many of whom had previously spent time in Nairobi, were in charge of oathing rituals throughout the Mbeere region. The authorities are swiftly informed of these rites, and the Mbeere are only oathing out of force (KNA/PC/CP/12/24).

Following this episode, in September 1954, colonial soldiers discovered multiple Mau Mau guerrilla hideouts, and the ruthless Aembu Home Guards responded. The colonial authority was continuously on the alert for the Mau Mau movement operatives joining forces with other groups, which resulted in continual monitoring and sweet talks. Specifically, because colonial authorities understood rebels would exploit the topography for cover and Aembu households for food, they dug trenches and hailed the Mbeere as loyalists (Munyi Mburia, O.I., 2024).

### **5.7 Setting up Farming Schemes and its Influence on the Aembu Land and Labour Systems in Food Crop Production**

According to Migot and Ruigu (1989), colonial authorities discussed the Ishiara project in 1929 as a way to interrupt the recurring famine cycles in Embu. After discovering that water was a major cause of starvation in Ishiara, the Embu Local Native Council (LNC) of 1942-1950 recommended using Thuchi River water for cultivation. The LNC requested that the government study the potential of digging furrows from the Thuchi River to Ishiara. Paddocks were certified as an additional item in 1953. The Ishiara irrigation system was supported by taxes levied in Mbeere Division. Second, Ishiara in Mbeere, like other regions, was recognized as a possible irrigation site and an opportunity to make effective use of Mau Mau captives.

In the 1950s, the colonial authorities put Mau Mau movement inmates to work on irrigation projects. Just like the Perkerra, Mwea-Tebere, and Hola irrigation works, which required Mau Mau inmates. The Ishiara irrigation project was carried out by Mau Mau inmates under the supervision of African Land Development (ALDEV), who used a diverse group of Mau Mau detainees, including Kikuyu, Embu, Meru, and Mbeere captives imprisoned at Gathigiriri. Nyaga (O.I., 2024), imprisoned in Ishiara, described his time as a guard in Gathigiriri jail. On September 20, 1955, the Embu Community Development Officer wrote to the Church of Scotland Mission on the whereabouts of detainees, citing the existence of inmates of diverse ethnicities (KNA/DC/EBU/1/14). Nyaga's facts supported the Community Development Officer's letter. Notably, in Gathigiriri jail, there was no preferential treatment of the any ethnic group since guards were instructed to treat all detainees fairly.

The colonial authorities commended the program at Ishiara as a fitting tribute to the Mbeere's devotion to the cause of law and order. According to oral interviews in Mbeere, agricultural police monitored seventy acres of underutilized land, while Mau Mau movement inmates performed labor before walking back to Gathigiri camp. According to DC. Wilson, head of the Embu District Intelligence Committee (1954), the establishment of two huge work camps, Ishiara and Kiambere, was a possible source of conflict since the Mau Mau inmates were paid and given meals but the Mbeere Home Guards were not (KNA/PC/CP/12/24). He stated that paying the captives will have an impact on the Mbeere ethnic group's morale. Notably, all irrigation systems that employed Mau Mau inmate labor thrived; nevertheless, the Ishiara irrigation scheme nearly failed with the closing of the Gathigi camp and the release of detainees in 1956. By the 1960s, weeds had blocked the furrows on the Ishiara irrigation project, resulting in a drop in occupancy. Only 18 Mbeere farmers remained on the 100 acres that cost the colonial administration £6,374 (Blundell, 1962).

The reality on the ground contradicts the colonial government's claim to reward the Mbeere for their devotion throughout the emergency. The colonial administration had several conversations on how to enhance Mbeere, but little action was taken. Their

discussions included the formation of smallholding groups in Siakago, where the rains were modest, the irrigation system at Ishiara, the recovery of eroded regions in the Evurore site, and the implementation of grazing limits. Brokensha and Nellis (1971) contended that during the 1960s, Mbeere had a shaky network of social services, and that up until 1970, newly assigned DOs requested transfers at a higher rate than in other parts of central Province. According to Brokensha and Nellis (1971), one DO sought a transfer from Siakago, stating that it was not a suitable place for a civilised man to bring his family. These initiatives were not distinctive enough in Embu District to justify the colonial government's claim of compensating the Mbeere people.

The colonial authority said that the initial initiative involved the application of manure, which was unfamiliar to the Aembu. However, the use of manures was not unusual in Embu. Permanent farming was conducted at Kiamuringa, Kanyuambora, Siakago, between Siakago and the Ena River, and near Kiritiri, where the Mbeere applied manure to the farmland. In addition, loans for purchasing manure were available to all Divisions in the District. In some regions, ground was removed, leaving 3-4-foot-tall tree stumps. The waste was subsequently burned, and the area was cultivated for 2-3 years before being left fallow for 4-5 years. The tree stumps were not removed, allowing regrowth.

The colonial authorities also offered more lucrative animal varieties (milk strain Borans) for smallholdings in the area. However, the colonial authority established a similar initiative in Kanja for jersey bulls (KNA/BD/8/2). Even before the Mau Mau revolt began, the Local Native Council (LNC) examined the project and recorded its findings in the 1947 Embu District Report. According to the LNC, the government agreed to establish cattle breeding stations and schools in the Embu and Meru districts (KNA/PC/CP/2/1/12).

According to the Central Province Emergency Committee Appreciation and Plan of 1955, "rewards continue to be offered for information leading to arrests or killings, as well as seized weaponry... In addition, loyalists can get incentives like as high-quality cattle or cross-bred animals for replenishing farms (KNA/PC/CP/12/24). The Embu Mau believers had little choice but to adopt government propaganda; the government

route is one of advancement, money, and prosperity, as opposed to the Mau Mau path of conflict, death, and famine.

As Embu grew, the government tasked the Embu African District Council's Trade Committee with awarding plots for new markets and commercial malls. Trading centers were established in Embu in various areas including Kapingazi, Runyenjes, Nyakis, Rumbias, Mutuaburugas, and Kithambambairumis. Market plots have been given and Members of the public were required to write application letters to the residing chiefs in the regions where the retail centers were to be built KNA/DC/EBU/1/2/. However, the same program was used elsewhere across the county.

Finally, it has been demonstrated that production of food was the life hood for the Aembu. This was due to their efficient systems of land and labor in food crop production. Their crops were cereals and grains, which were dried and preserved. Other crops, like yams and cassava, were utilized sparingly, but mostly during famines. As a result, they developed excellent methods of storing varied products because the majority of their crops were seasonal. Each family was supposed to have its own grain storage (*ikumbi*) and millet store (*mururu*). However, food crop production was undermined by the capitalist system through the articulation process.

### **5.8 Aembu's Struggle for Land and Freedom**

Socioeconomic divisions and class struggle among the people hampers the building of a cohesive movement against the administration. The bulk of the land poor and landless backed violent change because they had little to lose, whereas the landowners and elites preferred constitutional means of political change. According to Sorrenson (1967), this class facilitated the colonial government's suppression of the Mau Mau War and the implementation of land tenure modifications in the 1950s. The governor, Sir Evelyn Baring, proclaimed a state of emergency on the evening of October 20, 1952, which crippled the movement. This came following the assassination of the most senior chief, Waruhiu, who was seen as a moderate seeking interracial harmony within the limitations of colonialism (Elkins, 2005). This proclamation was followed by the merciless operation 'John Scott', which resulted in the arrest of Kenyatta, Paul

Ngei, Fred Kubai, Bildad Kagia, Achieng' Oneko, and 180 other people in 1952 (Elkins, 2005). Although Kenyatta was detained as a Mau Mau leader, he was a moderate who supported techniques other than the violent side of the conflict (Trench, 1993; Murry-Brown, 1972).

After realizing that arresting the top political leaders would not be enough to suppress the Mau Mau movement, the authorities launched an aggressive crackdown on thousands of persons who had taken the oath. By the end of 1954, 77,000 people from Central Kenya were detained (Majdalany, 1962). The incarceration camps were separated into special and open camps. Special camps were for people considered as radicals, while open camps housed those who had a minor role in the movement. The special camps included Manyani, MacKinnon Road, Simba Hill, Lamu, and Hola (Karingi, O.I., 2024). Individuals were screened in prison centers and freed if they could establish their innocence. In Embu District, numerous individuals were held in specific camps. Among these persons were Ngai wa Kamwana, Njeru Gachivi, Kiarago wa Kathambo, Karingi Kamau, Nathan Kabiru, Peter wa Mwaririe, and Njiru wa Ndugu (Mbogo, O.I., 2024).

Women were also active participants in the movement's quest for land and freedom (Kershaw, 1997; Likimani, 1985). They fought in the wilderness with their masculine counterparts. Wamiti (Kubukubu's sister), Gichimu wa Kanjama (Jones), Lillian Wanjuki, Kagimbi wa Kagane, Mutindi, and Teresia Kinja were among those who battled in the forest (Ngai Makinya, O.I., 2024). The majority of the reserve's women backed the movement's usage as food providers, gun bearers, and informants (Kershaw, 1997). Some members of the Embu community joined the loyalists and were eventually assigned as home guards.

As a result, the villagization policy implemented subsequently not only served to crush the Mau Mau movement in Embu, but it also paved the path for land reform. It included the relocation of all Embu settlements from their fields to a single designated region. The government constructed these settlements in suitable locations to provide easy access. The property on which the communities were founded was derived from a percentage deduction of all landowners who agreed to form a certain community

(Samwel Kamwere, O.I., 2024). In the research region villages included makengi, Kithimu, Gatunduri, Kibogi, Kianjuki, Kagaari, Manyatta, Nemburi and Rukira (Lucia Marigu, O. I.,2024). The settlements were led by a headman and his aides, known as *kamandagati*. Thus, in 1953 and 1954, the colonial government's primary concern was the removal of the Mau Mau danger. This is when the forest ditch *munyutu* was built using forced labor (Ireru & Mbogo, O.I., 2024).

By October 1955, 1,077,500 Agikuyu and Embu had relocated to 854 communities (Sorrenson, 1967). The village policy had several advantages, according to the local colonial authority. For starters, the program allowed the government to exercise tight control over the populace in ways that had never before been considered. Second, it created a secure environment in which anti-terrorist activity flourished. Third, as a result of this anti-terrorist sentiment, Mau Mau fighters had lost not just popular backing, but also the dread of the repercussions of raiding villages for ammunition and supplies. Fourth, a perfect chance was offered and grabbed to instill sociological, agricultural, and other components of adult education in the residents. Thus, doing much to ensure that the Mau Mau era is rapidly succeeded by one in which there is respect for governments teaching and ideals' (KNA/DC/EBU/1/14/1955:3).

Thus, while the villagization strategy benefited the government, it had a severe impact on Aembu community. While the approach was effective in keeping sympathizers in the reserves separate from the military wing in the forest, it had a severe influence on the land and labor systems in food crop production. People were not permitted to continue freely with their engagement in food crop cultivation. They were given set times to visit the farms while being guarded by the *warurungana* (Mburia, O.I., 2024). According to (KNA/PC/EBU/ 1/16/2/46), the African reserves had the main significance of protecting civilians from the Mau Mau while they were expected to provide free labor for at least one day in a week. The villages were severely understaffed due to the loss of male labor in camps, government services like house guards, and in the forest as Mau Mau fighters, all of which had a detrimental influence on the system of land and labor in production of food. Thus, the villages created an opportunity for the government to impose strict rules that curtailed people's movement, associations and other rights (Elkins, 2005).

The colonial authority utilized the communities to broadcast propaganda designed to persuade locals to support land reform. Mobile theaters, particularly agriculturally oriented ones, were deployed to help propagate land consolidation propaganda. Most of them depicted well-organized farms with grade cows and lovely farm buildings. They were promised that land consolidation would make their property seem just like those in movies (Kamwere, O.I., 2024). The colonial government's land reforms in Embu entailed a series of steps, beginning with litigation, followed by consolidation, registration, and eventually the issue of title deeds. The Swynnerton Plan was used to create and oversee the land reform process. Swynnerton, the Assistant Director of Agriculture, had previously played an important role in fostering peasant agriculture in Tanganyika (Mackenzie, 1998).

### **5.9 The Swynnerton Plan and its Implication on the Aembu land and Labour Systems in Food Crop Production**

After then-Governor Sir Evelyn Baring proclaimed a State of Emergency in the province in 1952, the government gained broad powers, allowing it to wage a violent battle against Mau Mau sympathizers while also implementing land reforms aimed at reducing African support for the Mau Mau. To reform the tenure system, the government held several meetings and conferences to debate the matter. The Arusha Conference, held from February 8 to 22, 1956, was the most crucial. The conference argued against the application of traditional African land tenure, saying that in communally owned land, permanent crops and better farming practices were inconceivable (KNA/ LD/ 32/1/12).

Individual tenure was acknowledged by the conference as the most suitable type of tenure. Furthermore, it said that this type of tenure "provides adequate incentive to the individual in putting effort and capital to increase productivity and to make measures on soil conservation" (KNA/ LD/ 32/1/12). To confirm individual land ownership, the conference called for individual land tenure and the issue of title deeds. The title was viewed as protecting the individual landowner against members of the community, as well as the central and municipal governments. It was also seen as an important instrument that would protect the landowner against costly lawsuits. The title holder would benefit from government services such as agricultural equipment, loan advancement, and farm planning (KNA/ LD/ 32/1/12). Furthermore, the conference

encouraged the colonial authority to create individual land tenure in areas where population growth and competition for land had already begun.

Most of the then Western Province, Central, and Nyanza matched these criteria. However, across much of central Kenya, the bulk of political leaders had already been arrested following the proclamation of emergency, leaving a political vacuum in the region. Since they were in contact, politicians in Nyanza were able to successfully organize the population against the execution of land reform. Due to the governmental vacuum and the necessity to weaken the Mau Mau War, Central Kenya became an appropriate region to begin implementing the change. However, this analysis determined that the primary motivation for the changes to begin here was the land issue, which was a fundamental grievance in the Mau Mau uprising.

The colonial administration, having determined the need to reform African land tenure, authorized the department of agriculture to draft a comprehensive plan for the development of African reserves in light of tenure changes. Roger Swynnerton, the Assistant Director of agriculture, devised the concept after previously playing a key role in supporting peasant agriculture in Tanganyika. The Swynnerton Plan, or "a Plan to intensify the development of African Agriculture Policy in Kenya," announced in 1954, marked a significant shift in African agriculture from what the government described as a "circle of subsistence or near-subsistence agriculture" (Lipscomb & Cone 1972).

The Plan was conceived and implemented quickly to avert a return of violent politics among the arriving ex-Mau Mau inmates (Harbeson, 1973). As a result, a strategy for gradual development of the agricultural sector was devised. Unlike the 1946 Worthington Plan, which proposed reversing conventional land tenure, the Swynnerton Plan advocated for individual land tenure in agricultural regions. It also urged that, landowners produce income crops, which were formerly reserved for white farmers. The plan projected that it would take twenty years to implement. Coffee was to grow by 5000 additional acres each year, reaching 71000 acres by 1968; tea was to reach 70000 acres by 1968; and pyrethrum 48300 acres (Swynnerton, 1954). Indeed, the plan was meant to revolutionize agriculture by entirely

transforming Kenya's pre-capitalist mode of production into a capitalist production model.

In Central Kenya, the process of land adjudication, consolidation, registration, and title deed issue commenced in earnest, as planned. Access to property was now regulated by a codified rule that privileged those who were "highly placed" in society at the expense of Swynnerton's "poor or bad farmers" (Elkins, 2005). The Plan maintained that by establishing the landed and landless classes, it opened the door for both groups to be reintegrated not within their historic ethnic groupings, but with their equivalents in society as a whole (Swynnerton 1954). Thus, the Swynnerton Policy on Land established the standard for all future land policies. Indeed, the Plan explicitly called for class separation when a small landed class would absorb the landless, but only within the limitations of the capitalist system. Traditional institutions, including family and clan, were entirely sidelined in resolving land disputes, with courts serving as the final arbiter (Wamai, O.I., 2024).

Land reforms in Embu County began in 1956, following the suppression of the Mau Mau in the area (Kanyau Muragara, O.I., 2024). This is corroborated by the then-DC, R.H. Symes, who handed over to H.C.F. Wilks in 1956. "Mau Mau appears to be dead until a link is established with the existing political organization in Nairobi" (KNA/DC/EBU/2/16/56). The Land Plan Committee led the consolidation efforts. Njiri wa Mwara and Nathan Kabiru served on that committee in Embu. This group also planned for public areas such as schools, towns, water stations, coffee industries, and woods. As a result, land consolidation started throughout the region, and by 1959, substantial portions had been delineated.

### **5.10 Conclusion**

Based on the preceding debate, this chapter has revealed that during the period of colonialism the pre-colonial Aembu land and labour systems were significantly transformed through establishment of foreign land and labour laws which impacted on food crop production. The settlement of European immigrants in the Kenyan highlands was facilitated by passing of the Crown Lands Ordinance of 1902, introduction of new crops and new labour laws. However, the pre-colonial land and

labour systems transformation did not take place abruptly since it was through a process of interaction between the pre-colonial and the colonial land and labour systems in food crop production. Hence, articulation of modes of production theory was the best analytical tool for this study.

**CHAPTER SIX**  
**INFLUENCE OF THE CO-EXISTENCE OF PRE-COLONIAL AND**  
**COLONIAL LAND ACCESS AND LABOUR DIVISION SYSTEMS ON FOOD**  
**SECURITY 1906-1963**

**6.1 Introduction**

Land and labour are indispensable resources in food crop production and they cannot be underestimated in sufficient food supply within households. The Aembu system of accessing land and labour in food crop production guaranteed every community member food security. With existence of proper method of land distribution through clan elders, it was difficult to find landless people within the community as described in the previous chapters. The systems aimed at ensuring adequate food production within households and the community as a whole. The Aembu population had full command of the land resource and knowledge of the different soil types, climate changes, land topography and the environmental science which enabled the community members to be food secure. Community members through the well-defined system of land access enabled them to acquire land in different areas that suited different types of food crops which ensured that they did not miss any of the food types at any time. The community members had a defined labour system for maximum utilization of the land resource in food crop production. Apart from employment of family labour, there existed other forms of labour such as paid labour, communal labour and cooperative. All the labour types aimed at ensuring that community members increased food productivity within households. All members of a household played different roles in food crop production as found in the other chapters. Labour was distributed throughout the year and it was naturally directed with activities ranging from clearing of farms, planting, protecting crops, harvesting, storage and exchange. Indeed, this ensured food security within households. However, coming of colonialists into the Embu land undermined the traditional systems of land and labour leading to reduced food production and food shortages. An analysis of the extent to which the co-existence of pre-colonial and colonial land and labour systems influenced various dimensions of food security among the Aembu is the focus of this chapter.

## **6.2 Meaning and Implication of Food Insecurity**

According to food and agriculture organization of the United Nations (FAO, 2006) food security is achieved when all the people have physical, social and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food that meets dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life at all times. According to Kenya Ministry of planning and National Development (MPND, 2007) survey undertaken in 2007, 51% of Kenyans lack access to adequate food while 46 % poverty level is attributed to food security. In Kenya the Ministry of Health / Kenya Medical Research Institute (MOH/KEMRI, 1999) reported that the most common deficiencies in Kenya include vitamin A deficiency (VAD), iron deficiency (IDD) iodine deficiency disorders (IDD) and zinc deficiency. VAD and IDA are caused by dietary inadequacy, while IDD is determined by iodine content of soil and water in the environment (Hongo, 2003). The mentioned insufficiencies would be controlled through utilization of certain indigenous foods especially vegetables and fruits. Further, FAO (2006) indicates that hunger could be eradicated through increased food production by improved harvests in every season, production of the staple food, presence of enough storage facilities and adequate food for consumption. For a food secure society, the four dimensions of food security must be validated which include, availability of food, utilization, food access and food stability. In absence of the four pillars of food security then there is hunger within a household.

## **6.3 Colonial Land and Labour Systems Influence on Availability of Food Among the Aembu**

According to Food and agriculture Organization FAO (2006) food availability refers to physical convenience of food which addresses the supply side and it is determined by level of production and stock levels. However, for most African subsistence producers, the existing land and labour systems in food crop production ensured sufficient food supply in households. Therefore, the value attached to land was high and members of the community defended the resource jealously against any invaders. According to Zwanenberg (1975), abundance of land available for farming demand ability level and technology in the farming process which are the main factors that affected use of land. For the Aembu food crop growers, there existed abundant supply of land which they fully understood and commanded, coupled with labour division which ensured sufficient food production. Interference with such systems would

hinder food crop production resulting to food shortages. However, if the traditional land and labour systems can be regarded and utilized then households would be food secure.

According to Mwaniki (2010), Njoki (2000) and Mwaruvie (1994), the Aembu traditional food crop growers are recognized for production of surplus food which promoted trade with the neighbouring communities like the Mbeere, Gikuyu, Akamba and the Chuka. The three sub-counties, Embu North, Embu East and Embu West are located at the foot of Mount Kenya and they receive adequate and reliable rainfalls which favour food crop production (Mwaniki, 2010). However, it is evident that the Aembu went through famines during the colonial period (Ngai, O.I., 2024). Omwoyo (1990) and Muthiani (2021), contend that those famines existed in most Kenyan communities including among the Aembu.

Traditional food crops provided food and nutritional security among the Aembu during the pre-colonial period. However, this depended on the production amounts, the ecologies and their nutritional value. (Maundu, 1997) asserts that, traditional crop is an indigenous species native to a specific region or one that was introduced a long time ago and due to its long use, has naturalized and become part of culture of a community. In this respect traditional food crops among the Aembu included sweet potatoes, cassava, millet, sorghum, pigeon peas, yams, bananas, sugarcane and arrow roots. The Aembu through their carefully laid down systems of land and labour coupled with utilization of traditional skills, maintained household food security. All the food security dimensions were achieved successfully.

Labour changed from its original status of a resource to a commodity during the period of colonialism meaning that it became a proletariat (Zezeza, 1989). For Africans, they were expected to abide with the new labour demands such as the carrying of kipande which altered the traditional labour system hence lowering food production. The new colonial economy put the Aembu land and labour systems to a imbalance causing food shortages and famines. Some of the colonial famines included *Nvaraganu*, *Kibatau*, *kavovi* and *Kithioro* (Ngai, O.I.,2024). Informants revealed that colonialism in Kenya alienated land for cultivation of cash crop,

commercialized food crops and forced Africans to provide labour in the colonial farms which undermined the ability of the Aembu to feed themselves (Ruguru, O.I., 2024)

With the advent of colonialism, many changes took place which slowly undermined African traditional systems. Colonialism through enactment of colonial land and labour laws integrated the Aembu system of production to the capitalist system which co-existed and slowly insubordinate pre-capitalist system leading to inability of the community members to produce enough food for themselves. Colonialism utilized the three pillars of colonial economy namely land alienation, labour recruitment and taxation to undermine the Aembu food crop production leading to food shortages. Colonialism hindered Africans right to access land in different regions for constant supply of diverse food crops, undermined shifting cultivation, put an end to mixed crop farming, use of organic manure, food preservation techniques, and the overall labour reorganization which resulted to food unavailability among the Aembu (Warue, O. I.,2024). According to Eyong (2017), European colonialism undermined most African cultural practices which were linked to land and labour in food crop production resulting to food shortages.

The study findings were that the crownland ordinance that was passed in 1920 (KNA/DC/ EBU/ 31/12/1922) allowed Europeans to buy more land from the government at affordable prices which led to influx of European settlers in the colony. Most remarkable settlers were Lord Delamere who had acquired at least 100,000 acres of fertile land and Lord Francis who had bought 350,000 acres (Leys, 1925). The move disinherited Africans from their land which resulted to abandoning of clan systems that protected people's right to land access for production of food crops. The traditional system of land ownership was slowly integrated to the capitalist system with the introduction of cash crops and unfamiliar farming practices to the Africans. Africans found it difficult to carry out shifting cultivation, since the system of clan land access was undermined and farm sizes had reduced. The unfamiliar farming practices were too demanding and unaffordable for the Africans which resulted to reduced food supply in household (Mbogo, O.I., 2024).

The integration of colonial land and labour system to the existing pre-colonial system was a set back to the Aembu who could no longer access parcels of land in different ecological regions for successful food crop production. This was based on the fact that some crops like arrowroots required marshy areas while others like sweet potatoes needed deep soil which was inaccessible with the new system of land ownership (Ngai O.I., 2024). Infact, this lowered the yields as opposed to the pre-colonial period when people obtained land without restrictions based on their needs under the clan system.

The colonial government established large settlement farms and created African reserves in 1920s (KN /DC/EBU /1/16 / 36). The creation of reserves had the objectives of giving room for more white settlers, settling of the landless Africans and as a convenient way of recruiting Africans to work in the settle farms (Tignor, 1976). Warue (O.I., 2024), contends that in the reserves land was overpopulated and limited in size which caused soil degradation leading to limited food yields and limited food supply within households. This is in line with Overton (1988), who asserts that Africans in the reserves failed to access fertile land which led to reduced food production and overall food shortages.

Due to increased soil devaluation in the reserves, years of famines followed between 1920-1931 (KNA/ DC/EBU/ 1/16/54). According to Ileri (O.I.,2024), some of the reserves in the area of study included Gatunduri, Nembure, Manyatta and Kiandathi, Kianjokoma, and Kagaari. They were referred to as *Ituura* (plural) *matuura* and they were usually headed by a chief or sub-chief. The reserves deprived of the Aembu different ecological zones that favoured different crops and the traditional methods of farming like shifting cultivation and intercropping which led to reduced food crop production and food scarcities (Ileri, O.I., 2024).

The researcher wanted to establish the causes of food unavailability during the colonial period in the Aembu household and forty five (90%) of the respondents revealed that the colonial period had limited land resource in the reserves which occasioned insufficient production of food crops while thirty five (70%) of the respondents observed that the soils in the reserves were infertile and did not favour

food crop production while another thirty five (70 %) of the respondents blamed the food shortages to the migrant labour system which marginalized the traditional social systems in food crop production. Mwaruvie (1994) corroborates with the oral sources and contends that land alienation and recruitment of Africans to work in the settler farms restricted the Aembu access to land for various food crops and the labour resource which culminated to negligence of farms and some food crops resulting to a period of dismall food crop production in households. Moreover, thirty (60%) of the respondents reported that communal labour consumed most of time that could have been otherwise utilized in food crop production, 25 (50%) reported that harvests were meagre and another thirty (60%) reported that commercialization of food crops made food unaffordable to the Aembu people living in the reserves. Table 20 shows respondents' responses on factors undermining food supply.

Table 20: Colonial Land and Labour Policies that Undermined Food Supply

Land and Labour policies affecting food availability	Frequency	Percentage
Farms were too far from the reserves	30	60
Soils in the reserves were infertile for crops	35	70
Migrant labour system reduced labour in food crop farms	35	70
Communal labour took most of time needed for crop production	30	60
Limited land resource for food crop production	45	90
Harvests in food crop were meagre	25	50
Commercialization of food	25	50

Source: Kamwere (O, I., 2024)

According to table 20 at least 45 (90%) of the fifty respondents blamed food unavailability to limited land resources. Further 35 (70%) of the fifty respondents attributed the food unavailability to migrant labour system and the infertile reserves. The table shows that, several factors were responsible for food shortage among the Aembu but colonial policies on land access and labour division systems were top hindrance to food availability in Aembu households.

Moreover, the government discouraged production of traditional African food crops some of which served as underground food reserves and they could only be uprooted during famines (Wamai, O.I., 2024). This is supported by an archival source that notes that food crops had been replaced with cash crops like coffee, wattle and tea (KNA/DC/EBU/1958). The cash crops reduced production of indigenous food crops which certainly depressed food production. In the 1930s, the local government in

together with the colonial government took away hundreds of hectares of land for agricultural experimental purposes near Embu town (KNA/DC/EBU/6/57). The land was utilized for veterinary department to provide cattle breeding station and a school between Meru and Embu. The land became part of the crown land. In Embu cash crops were introduced such as wattle, tobacco and coffee. For wattle it occupied 2,288 acres and was grown by 4,065 natives. Chief Ngoroi son of Runyenjes an agricultural instructor did not initially support the project until later when many Aembu started planting the crop. Tobacco was planted on 8.5 acres by 204 Aembu in the season 1937/1938 while 31.75 acres were put to its cultivation between 1938-1939 (KNA/DC/EBU/ 1/2/4). Coffee was planted on 23 acres of land and was owned by 88 growers at Githungururu. However, Africans were discouraged from growing coffee and were encouraged to grow food crops for export which worsened the food insufficiencies.

The new crops were for the capitalist market and not for the benefit of the Aembu people. Out of 50 respondents, 45 (90%) revealed that the European newly introduced commercial agriculture undermined production of traditional crops and importance of indigenous crops that were highly nutritious and drought resistant. Other horticultural crops were introduced in most parts of Embu and they became staple food. The new crops were vulnerable to low rainfall and they required farm inputs and new technology which most Aembu could not easily acquire (Wamai SSNjega, 2024). The informants reported that the Aembu had abandoned their traditional food crops and they could not afford to purchase the farm inputs which exposed households to famines.

According to Mbogo (O.I., 2024), the colonial government discouraged the use of African traditional food crop production systems in the plantations which lead to their abandonment. Maundu (2006) asserts that, abandonment of traditional food crops contributes significantly to nutritional and food insecurity. However, the study revealed that during the colonial period, there was increased manipulation of food crops in the period between 1920s and 1930s which worsened the food situation among the Aembu (KNA/DC/EBU/12/38).

Africans were subjected to new labour demands such as carrying of Kipande which had been passed by the Native Registration act of 1920. This was followed with a large number of Africans working outside their home districts and in the European settler farms. African chiefs were empowered to enhance labour efficiency in the settler farms based on the Northey Circular regulations. Soil conservation programmes were initiated whereby digging of terraces and planting of grass was done under supervision of the chiefs (KNA/ DC/EBU/1/2/38). Chiefs exercised what Engel (1884) referred to as family oppression in his ideas. In the newly established capitalist structure, the Aembu land and labour systems in food crop production had been seriously undermined leading to food unavailability.

The capitalism system pushed community members to land that was characterized with poor soils, bad weather conditions and unreliable rainfall. Njagi, Ileri, & Marigu (O.I., 2024) revealed that this kind of land contributed to dismal food production since the soils were too poor in terms of fertility or were badly drained. The Aembu failed to access fertile land, well drained productive land for production of food crops as was the case during the pre-colonial period which contributed to increased famines.

According to Njeru (O.I., 2024) land discontent led to outbreak of the famous Mau Mau struggle against the colonial government. Njagi (O.I., 2024) pointed out that, the period of Mau Mau rebellion was characterized by soil erosion, human suffering, loss of lives and negligible of food crop production. Ileri (O.I., 2024) revealed that during the Mau Mau period there was no freedom of movement, no time to work in the farms and very strict curfews were put in place that curtailed African movement. The informant further points out that men and women had joined the rebellion which undermined food crop production due to labour deviations leading to increased famines.

Out of the 50 respondents, 30 (60%) revealed that during the period of the two world wars, able bodied people were recruited to the war as carrier corps or combatants which reduced labour in food crop production. Due to the political crisis and insecurity, little food crop production took place which complicated the famine situation in the area of study since food became unavailable in households

#### **6.4 Colonial Land and Labour Systems Influence on Food Utility among the Aembu**

FAO (1996) defines utilization of food as a way the body makes the most of various nutrients in the food. Sufficient energy and nutrients intake by individuals are the result of good care and feeding practices, food preparation, diversity of diet and intra-household distribution. Indeed, the pre-colonial Aembu produced a variety of food crops which included wheat, millet, yams, cassava, pumpkin, arrow roots, beans sweet potatoes, a variety of root crops and leafy vegetables which provided the required micronutrient. Unfortunately, with the spread of colonial capitalism new land and labour policies were initiated whereby Africans failed to access land in all areas as before. New crops and new methods of food crop production came up. According to the informants, the new agricultural practices were unfamiliar to the Aembu food crop producers which ended up lowering food supply in households (Wakina, O.I., 2024).

The researcher wanted to establish how introduction of new crops affected food utilization. Marigu, Wakina & Ngai (O.I., 2024) revealed that, the new crop could not provide all the nutrients the bodies required and the results were serious cases of malnutrition among the children. This could have been either due to negligence by the mothers or they lacked enough breast milk due to food shortages. According to (KNA/DC/EBU/1/13/1954), in the African reserves there was acute food shortage and malnutrition which was evidenced with children who had protruding stomachs indicating that they were suffering from kwashiorkor. A respondent by name Ngai Makinya revealed the following regarding food situation within Aembu reserves,

*Mothers and children suffered from lack of different types of food for building their bodies, it was difficult for a mother to produce enough milk from her breasts to feed her newly born child, and most of these children died before they could walk while for the older children, they had scabies, swollen stomachs and limbs that were protruded outside the body (Ngai Makinya, O.I., 2024).*

The informants revealed that there were serious cases of malnutrition. This had resulted from lack of the highly required nutrients from the types of foods that were

available during the colonial period. The fact that the Aembu had lost their land systems which assured them access to land suitable for different crops which had different nutrients, the resultant was malnutrition. This indicates lack of food choices since it was unavailable and limited nutrients in the food. Indeed, this is a sharp contrast of the Aembu pre-colonial period whereby young children were provided with a balanced diet consisting of carbohydrates, vitamins and proteins that were readily accessed due to the existing land and labour systems in food crop production.

According to a Government Assessment report mothers and the children were in deficit of proteins (KNA/DC/EBU/1/12/ 1947). Lucia (O.I.,2024) points out that, malnourishment led to an increase of other closely related ailments since the bodies lacked the antibodies to fight diseases. Death cases were reported whose cause was malnutrition (KNA/DC/EBU/1/12/48). Ileri Njanamu Njanamu cried out during the interview and said the following.

*Let me tell you my mother, I hate remembering the days when we lived in the reserves. This is because upon moving out for paid employment in settler farms, so that I could get some money to purchase food and pay the taxes, I had left my wife with four children and when I came back, I only found a wife and all the children had died of malnutrition (Ileri Njanamu, O.I.,2024).*

The respondent expressed the extent of food shortages in the reserves which had killed many children including his four young ones due to the changing land and labour systems which had undermined food crop production. Another respondent by name Ruguru further regretted life during the colonial period and asserted this,

*When we were living in kiandathi reserve, we could only take porridge and some time we went to sleep having not eaten at anything. One day my mother went out for communal work and she left me with my young brother to take care of him while he was on my back. When my mother came home in the evening and she wanted to take the baby for breastfeeding, she screamed that the child had died (Ruguru, O.I.,024).*

This demonstrates the magnitude of the infant mortality rate as a result of malnutrition during the colonial period when pre-colonial land and labour systems in food crop production co-existed. These oral sources are validated by an archival source (KNA/DC/EBU/1/10/51) which revealed that, kwashiorkor was common among children in the reserves which led to administration of vitamin B12 by the colonial government. Although the colonial response had a good motive of fighting malnutrition, the practice was a disgrace to the Aembu people who had always obtained sufficient and nutritious food from their indigenous food crops such as sorghum, millet, arrowroots, sweet potatoes, bananas, leafy vegetables and wild fruits whose value had been undermined by colonialism through changes in land and labour systems in food crop production.

Muriuki (O.I., 2024), remembers losing his two brothers when they had settled at Gatunduri Village *gicagi*. The diseases that infected people within the reserves included tuberculosis, measles, malaria, pneumonia, rheumatic fever, meningococcal meningitis Kwashiokor and prophylaxis pulmonary (KNA/DC/EBU/1/13/ 54). Because of the deteriorating health standards in the villages, the government found it necessary to intensify on Africans health and added 54 village supervisors (DC/EBU/1/13/54). According to (KNA/ DC/EBU/1/16/ 54), the food shortages exposed people to poor psychological wellbeing and underfeeding. Table 21 shows Native population for the district in 1938 hut count

Table 21: Native Population Hut Count of 1938

Men	Women	Children/ Unmarried Girls
44,224	51,055	35,253

SOURCE: KNA/ DC/EBU/ Annual report

Figure 21 reveals that, the lowest percentage of the hut count occupants composed of children, followed by that of men and women formed the bulk of the populace. This may be translated to mean that children suffered from infant mortality mostly due to undernourishment while most of men had migrated to seek for jobs outside their homes as migrant workers in the colonizer farms while others had joined the world war. The fact that most men had moved away from their families, complicated the food situation in the Aembu homes since it undermined the traditional labour organisation in production of food leading to food shortages. Majority of the people

left behind in the reserves were women and children. Ileri (O.I., 2024) asserts that, most children died of malnutrition in the hands of their mothers due to lack of quality and quantity food.

The researcher wanted to establish whether there existed alternative types of food and the number of meals consumed in a day. In response to this question, Kamwere reported the following,

*We could only eat one meal in a day or sometime we went to sleep having not eaten anything at all due to food scarcity. We only ate ugali or drunk porridge which was not even enough. Sometime our parents gave us their small portions of food and they slept hungry until the following morning by mercies of God (Kamwere O.I., 2024).*

The one meal mentioned inform of ugali or porridge provided only carbohydrates and it's a clear indicator that the food failed to meet FAO (1996) threshold of food utility as a dimension of food security. Wamai Njega (O.I., 2024), further notes that the Aembu suffered from food shortages to an extent that they could only get one meal in a day or none. The contention is supported by an Archival Source (KNA/DC/EBU/1/10/51) which reveals that, malnutrition was the major illness among children to an extent that the government provided supplements indicating that the type of food consumed did not meet the FAO (2006) threshold on definition of food security.

According to (KNA/DC/EBU/1/16/54, construction of the Meru-Nanyuki railway was seen as a form of famine relief to the affected areas and most of the required labour came from the Aembu population. This indicates the magnitude of food shortages in the area of study. As a result, all the able-bodied men who could not purchase the food obtained it as *posho*. The Aembu had no grains and no money to buy anything except the famine food supplies sent by the government KNA/DC/EBU/1/16/5/38. It was reported that the general health of the natives was poor during famines and a total of 55,353 natives were vaccinated with food supplements something that the Aembu had never experienced during the pre-colonial period.

Other factors contributing to labour shortage in both African and European farms was immigration in search of food in other districts, death caused by epidemics and casualties to the carrier corps during the world wars (KNA/PC/EBU/1/16/2/46). According to (KNA/DC/EBU/1/14/35), the new crops included boston beans, tea, rose coco, tobacco and Canadian wonder which were market oriented. The crops were for export and the colonial government did not promote African traditional food crops but instead insisted that Africans grew crops for export purposes (KNA/DC/EBU/1/2/38). The new crops replaced Aembu indigenous foods that were drought and diseases resistant and more nourishing than the newly introduced crops which culminated to malnutrition.

### **6.5 Colonial land and Labour policies Influence on Accessibility and Stability of Food among the Aembu**

Food access refers to the stable availability of nourishing, affordable, and suitable food while stability refers to continuous supply of food regardless of influence caused by other factors like rainfall failure (FAO, 2006). Traditionally, the Aembu had land and labour systems that ensured all members acquired enough food. Aembu stored food for more than three seasons which indicate that they could readily access foodstuff from their grain stores (Mwaniki, 2010). Apart from the stored food, community members had division of labour whereby men were in charge of foods such as yams which were conserved as underground food storage (Njoki, 2000). Women took care of food crops that matured fast which ensured continuous supply of nourishing food.

However, co-existence of pre-colonial and colonial land and labour systems undermined food crop production. The result of this was lowered food productivity resulting to reduction of both quality and quantity of food (Njega, O.I.,2024). When informants were asked whether they produced surplus food during the colonial period, 30 (60 %) of the respondents revealed that the production had gone down. Respondents further revealed that they had no food for storage as opposed to the pre-colonial period when every homestead had a granny. Ruguru one of the informants said this regarding food accessibility,

*When we were being shifted from our land to the reserves, we lost all our storage vessels and granaries. We did not have food at all. In case we got some little food from our infertile farms, everything was destroyed by rodents and running water after a short time. This was because we had no food stores unlike the period before the coming of British colonialists when we had elaborate storage facilities like Makumbi and miruru. We used to look for food to buy which was very expensive. It was sometime very difficult to get somewhere to buy food because the stores were very far and sometime, they were empty. Most of the time only those who had money could get food while most of us were hunger stricken (Ruguru, O. I.,2024).*

Out of the 50 respondents, thirty (60%) noted that, due to changes that took place on land and labour system African reserves were created which impacted negatively on the Aembu food crop production. In the reserves there was no surplus food or storage and they had abandoned their food stores and vessels which resulted in buying of food which was very expensive and unaffordable. Ileri (O.I.,2024) further revealed, the wages they received from the colonial government was too little to buy food from the markets and pay the taxes. Respondents revealed that, the available food was too expensive for the Africans to afford and the only available food was of limited variety which led to death of children as a result of malnutrition. Ileri (O.I., 2024) opines that, some of the colonial famines among the Aembu included *Kavuga, nakua ngwete, kithioro and gatathoni*. Mwaruvie (1994) contends that land alienation and recruitment of Africans to work in the settler farms restricted the Aembu access to land for various food crops and the labour resource which culminated to negligence of farms and some food crops resulting to food scarcities.

Moreover, the government discouraged production of traditional African food crops such as arrowroots and cassava which served as underground food reserves and replaced with cash crops (KNA/DC/EBU/1958). Introduction of cash crops reduced production of some of the Aembu indigenous food crops which provided a variety of nutrients to the populace. According to Muriithi (O.I.,2024), some of the reserves in Embu included Gatunduri, Nembure, Manyatta and Kiandathi, Kianjokoma, and Kagaari. They were referred to as *Ituura* plural *matuura* and they were usually headed

by a chief or sub-chief. In the Aembu reserves, the living conditions were deplorable. Wakina (O.I., 2024) revealed that the reserves were unbearable with congestion, cattle dung, garbage and human trashes which was a fertile ground for disease. The houses had rats which destroyed the little food available and they were poorly ventilated which made the conditions unsuitable for food storage (KNA/DC/ EBU 1/1/1936). This was a contrast of the Aembu food crop growers whose land and labour systems allowed people to acquire different types of food that was stored for many seasons as it was revealed in the previous chapter.

The study revealed that, food insufficiency was so acute such that the colonial government introduced relief food in form of maize and cassava flour, which was supplied through the colonial government African employees (KNA/EBU/1/16/54). Maize and cassava flour could only provide carbohydrate suitable for provision of energy to work in the settler farms and communal works but there was deficiency of certain nutrients which led to serious levels of malnutrition that were reported during the colonial period. Moreover, the study revealed that many Africans died due to famine leading to an outcry of labour shortage and increased migration of Africans from the reserves to look for food in the other districts (KNA/PC/EBU/1/16/2/46).

According to (KNA/DC/EBU/1/13/54), Africans could not continue farming from the reserves since the farms were very far and very tiring whereby a lot of time was wasted which forced Africans to abandon some of their farms. Marigu (O.I., 2024) asserts that it was very difficult for them to continue with their normal farming practices. Moreover, there existed strict curfews against movement which ended up impoverishing the community members and increased food shortages.

Despite the high population in the reserves, the colonial government had passed laws that restricted movement of Africans from one reserve area to another but this did not persuade the government to allow Africans to settle on the land since it had already acquired the crown land status and the African chiefs were empowered to control land use ( KNA/DC/EBU/1/2/1825) This indicates the transformation of the clan system of land control which undermined the Aembu ability to feed themselves during the colonial period. Colonial government alienation the Aembu land which

denied the community right to access land for food crop production leading to acute shortages of food.

In 1930s, the government introduced hybrid maize and wattle trees in Embu (KNA/DC/EBU/1/4/30). Coffee cultivation was also encouraged in the district which ended up replacing indigenous food crops while the crop could not counter the growing famines. According to (KNA/DC/EBU/1/6/47), Ngandori Coffee Growers cooperative society was established and the secretary was Mr. Ndwiga Karanga. Initially coffee was only grown by a few Africans since the colonial government discouraged African farming which could have otherwise reduced labour supply and competition in the market. The study further revealed that while the colonial government provided agricultural officers like Mr. L.H. Brown to promote efficiency of cash crop production in the white farms, Africans agriculture was neglected highly and undermined (KNA/DC/EBU/1/6/47). This resulted to poor methods of crop produce practice and reduced yields leading to colonial food shortages.

The Aembu were encouraged to grow food crops but for export purposes by British colonial the government. According to Ileri (O.I., 2024), food crops were grown in areas that were unfavourable for cash crops characterized by infertile soils. The new crops focused on profit returns and not for the wellbeing of the Aembu community (Mbogo, O.I., 2024). Subsistence African form of production had been gradually sidelined and substituted with a highly commercial form of production. The government introduced new varieties of maize and beans which were market oriented and the traditional Aembu food crops like cassava, millet, sorghum arrowroot, yams were shelved. Embu is reported to have exported lot of maize since the subsistence production had been highly commercialized. Aembu had been incorporated to the capitalist system (KNA/DC/EBU/1/4/56).

With the new form of production, labour became a commodity and it was no longer viewed as a means of production. The white settlers employed modern methods of farming and technology, income focused, private ownership of means of production basically land and labour which Africans were compelled to abide failure to which they were highly reprimanded. This marked the beginning of property privatization

and a shift from the communal pre-capitalist structure of land access system to individual tenure in the period of colonialism. The clan elders' systems were down washed and were replaced with African colonial chiefs. According to (KNA/ DC/ EBU/ 1/ 2/38), Aembu colonial chiefs included Arthur, M' Tetu, Johana, Petro, Njagi, Jacton, Kimwea, Ngoroi and Karinga among others. Soil conservation programmes were initiated whereby digging of terraces and planting of grass was done under supervision of the chiefs (KNA/ DC/EBU/1/2/38). Chiefs exercised what Engel (1884), referred to as family oppression in his ideas. In the newly established capitalist structure, the Aembu land and labour systems in food crop production had been seriously undermined leading to food shortages.

According to (KNA/DC/EBU/1/4/35), increased food shortages and forced labour compelled many people to start working for famine relief and towards the end of 1935 about 2000 persons were in such kind of engagement (KNA/ DC/EBU/1/2 54). The migrant system of labour brought a new form of labour organization within households which further impacted on food supply. According to Wood (1968) across Africa the system of migrant labour undermined the existing traditional practices and it ended up upsetting the economy in the rural regions. The increased movement to the towns especially by African men changed the Aembu traditional labour organization in the household which lowered food productivity resulting to famines (Wamai, O.I. 2024). Moreover, the salaries earned were too low to buy food and pay the required taxes which worsened the Aembu people food situation.

Soil conservation measures and public work by the government intensified communal labour recruitment by 1930s. Communal labour involved building of European houses, building chiefs camp, roads, bridges and any other form of required infrastructure. Both men and women were supposed to provide labour during the communal work since as men constructed women were supposed to look for grass and smearing of the walls with mud *kuthinga* (Ruguru, O.I., 2024). It was so difficult for women since they carried out the dual roles of subsistence production and the communal labour. During the interview a female respondent by name Ruguru sadly said the following regarding communal labour and the food situation:

*We used to be rounded up by the colonial agents to go for communal work in building of the houses even when we had small children. At that time, we had eaten nothing and we could not produce any breast milk to feed our young children due to lack of strong food. When we requested for exemption no one heeded and so we tied the children on our backs and continued with the communal work for many hours until when it was over. Some breast-feeding mothers could faint of dizziness caused by hunger. After the day's work, many women found out that their children died on their backs. I was one of those who lost children under such circumstances. I lost two of my children during communal work (Ruguru, O.I.,204).*

The account was so moving that the informant cried. These revealed the difficulties experienced and the magnitude of food shortage among the Aembu during the colonial period. According to Dr. Crompton (KNA/DC/EBU/3/4/27), in his report about the characteristic of the Aembu, he claims that the community has cheerful people who are willing to work as witnessed by the miles of road they constructed in the reserve without receiving a penny of pay. This could be translated to the same effort exerted in food crop production traditionally. However, it is important to note that the high demand for African labour reduced time for production of food within households which impacted negatively on food security since the farms went unattended. A total number of 42 (84%) informants revealed that mothers failed to produce enough milk for their breast-feeding babies because they could not readily access food that contained the required nutrients for a lactating mother. Such children died before they could walk as a result of malnutrition.

According to Kambi (O.I., 2024), the worst hit were women and children because most men had moved out as migrant labourers either to escape from the hard ships in the reserves or to get money for the payment of taxes. Table 22 shows responses on causes of death among the Aembu during the period of colonialism.

Table 22: Responses on Causes of Death during the Colonial Period

Reason	Frequency	Percentage
Unhygienic conditions	38	76
Lack of medicine/ health facilities	20	40
Lack of enough food	40	80
Lack of required nutrients	46	92
Inaccessibility to food	42	84
Unaffordability of food	44	88
Psychological trauma during political instability	18	36
Harassment	16	32

Source: O. I. (2024)

Table 22 shows that out of the total number of 50 informants, forty-six (92%) of the respondents reported that the main factor that led to death during the colonial period was malnutrition while 44 (88) revealed that unaffordability of food came second in the order. The responses indicate that lack of enough food, insufficient nutrients, food inaccessibility and food unaffordability were the main causes of death during the colonial period. Other factors like lack of medicine, unhygienic conditions, psychological trauma and harassment by the colonial government were secondary. From the summary, it is undisputable that the four dimensions of food security (FAO, 2006), were not adequately met during the colonial period which contributed to loss of lives among the Aembu. This was as a result of changes in the Aembu traditional systems of land and labour which ensured sufficient food production within households before co-existence of pre-colonial and colonial land and labour systems in food crop production.

During the first World War 1914-1918, both archival and oral sources revealed that there was an acute food shortage in the whole province because demand for the porters came during the time when labour was highly needed for food crop production. According to (KNA/ DC/EBU/1/2/ 1917-1918), labour and food shortages were reported due to the large number of able-bodied adults recruited for the war and the government responded by importing food from South Africa. A total sum of 8500 bags

were distributed and in addition 10850 bags come from Mombasa famine relief committee while 75, 000 came from the government.

According to (KNA/ PC/1/16/2/1919) report, Embu District was the worst hit. The influenza outbreak of 1918 coupled with famines led to 17% death of the natives whereby about 5000 people died. However, it is reported that the relief food only saved Africans who had possessed money to purchase food from the government. The Aembu had been habituated to cash economy and the fact that they could not afford to buy foodstuff for consumption, the issue illuminates on how colonialism deprived the community members an aspect of food affordability. The traditional Aembu had defined methods that assured households sufficient food during the periods of drought. The capitalist mode of colonial production had changed the status of the community members to that of being dependent on relief food. Chiefs were required to distribute food to their areas but in most circumstances, people waited for long hours and occasionally went home without any food (Agnes Ruguru, O.I., 2024).

The capitalism system pushed community members to land that was characterized with poor soils, bad weather conditions and unreliable rainfall. Njagi, Ireri & Marigu (2024), revealed that this kind of land contributed to dismal food production since the soils were too poor in terms of fertility or were badly drained. The Aembu failed to access fertile, well drained productive land for production of food crops as was the case during the pre-colonial period which contributed to increased famines. The food shortage led to increased migration of natives from reserves to labour markets or to squat on private land where food was purchasable or they could work for.

The period of the two world wars and the Mau Mau rebellion were characterized by soil erosion, human suffering, loss of lives and negligible food crop production. Ireri (O.I., 2024), revealed that during Mau Mau period there was no freedom of movement, no time to work in the farms and very strict curfews were put in place that curtailed African movement to their food crop farms. The informant further points out that able bodied men had been conscripted for the war while others served as carrier corps which further undermined food crop production leading to increased famines and malnourishment. Out of 50 respondents, 30 (60%) revealed that during

the period of the two world wars and Mau Mau rebellion, little food crop production took place which complicated the famine situation in the area of study.

During Mau Mau period, there was restriction of movement and people failed to get to their farms, cooking was also prohibited because it was assumed that if they cooked, they could give Mau Mau warriors food. To separate the people in the villages from the Mau Mau, the colonial government with the help of African agricultural officers forced both men and women to dig deep trenches of 25 feet deep and wide which discouraged anybody from closing it. It was assumed that the Mau Mau warriors would die in the forest due to lack of food and other basics like cloth and medicine as revealed by Mbogo Macharia one of the key respondents:

*Let me tell you my mother, myself I was lucky to have been employed by the colonial government as an agricultural officer in charge of livestock at Kangaru, I had been employed because I could interpret English to the Aembu people. I witnessed people being forced to dig trenches along the Aberdare Forest to hinder interaction between the civilian and the Mau Mau. People received totally nothing. Infact this did not even exempt women even if they had small children. The scenario undermined any form of profitable farm work in food crop production since there was limited or no time to go to attend the farms. Surely, there was a lot of fear and anxiety such that most people abandoned their farms which resulted to food shortages (Mbogo Macharia, O.I., 2024).*

The findings show the magnitude of colonial transformation of the Aembu land and labour systems in food crop production and the resulting food shortages. According to FAO (2016), there is increased abandonment of traditional food crops with the fast and high yielding types of food that are market oriented. Indeed, the new crops introduced by the colonialists were fast growing and high yielding but highly susceptible to rainfall shortages and pests which contributed to the colonial food shortages (Muriithi O. I.,2024).

According to Susana Wakina (O.I., 2024), Aembu food crop growers were mindful of the different varieties of crops that they cultivated including their nutritional values and the yield levels. As found in the previous chapters the pre-colonial Aembu had a diet comprising carbohydrates, proteins and vitamins which were available within their reach and that contributing towards a healthy living. During the colonial period, consumption of some of the foods had drastically reduced and majority of the Aembu started consuming new food varieties and vegetables (Janet, O.I., 2024). As revealed in the previous chapter, the Aembu mostly consumed food such as mukimo, kiviri, ucuru, ngunja matu, cassava, sweet potatoes, arrowroots and vegetables like *terere*, *kimore*, *maka uiivu*, *mukengeria* and *karimi ka thia*. Most of these crops were replaced with other vegetables such as kales, cabbage, carrots refined maize flour, bread, Irish potatoes and beverages like tea and coffee which did not provide the required nutrients (Ireru, O.I., 2024).

According to Muriithi (O.I.,2024), increased intake of genetically engineered foods has increased spread of life style diseases like blood pressure and diabetes. With the abandonment of traditional types of foods, the Aembu were left with no alternative but to buy food from the market and the traditional foods were unavailable. Infact provision of relief food is a characteristic of capitalism. According to (KNA/DC/EBU/1/16/38), Africans did not have money to purchase food. Moreover, the food provided by the government did not benefit everyone since the prices were too high compared to the meagre salaries that were received. All this culminated to colonial food and nutritive insecurity among the Aembu.

While the colonial government respondent by introducing vitamins and protein supplements vaccination against malnutrition, most people could not afford due to the cost implications. On the contrast, the pre- capitalist Aembu were advised to consume indigenous types of food such as millet, sorghum and animal products like milk and beef which were obtained from the community's mixed economy. This was extremely difficult since the crops had been undermined and marginalized by colonial capitalism through their punitive land and labour policies. The food situation was alarming such that some women were reported as having stolen food for feeding their children from their neighbours while they lived in the reserves (KNA/ DC/ EBU/ 1/2/

17/58). To the Aembu, the growing demand for food resulted to some people selling cooked food like *Mukimo*, boiled arrowroots and sweet potatoes since the foods had become very rare in the reserves. Moreover, others especially women migrated to the urban areas where they carried out petty trade and others engaged in prostitution (Ngai Makinya, O., I., 2024).

## **6.6 Conclusion**

The concluded discussion has revealed that colonialism negatively impacted on the Aembu land and labour systems which resulted to food insecurity. Despite the fact that the pre-colonial Aembu produced enough food within households and the community at large due to their safeguards in the land and labour systems, dissolution of the existing structures took place during the colonial period resulting to inability of the Aembu to feed themselves. The study found out that the most affected by food shortages were children who suffered from kwashiorkor as a result of malnutrition. This is supported by the fact that the hut count census in the Aembu reserves showed that children were lower in number than their parents. Moreover, most respondents revealed that colonial transformation of land and labour systems in food crop production undermined the ability of the Aembu to feed themselves. The food available during the colonial period failed to meet the four pillars of food security thus the interaction between the two productive modes resulted to food shortages among the Aembu.

## **CHAPTER SEVEN**

### **SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

#### **7.1 Summary**

This chapter presents a summary of the findings, conclusions, recommendation and suggestion for further research following the three objectives of the study. The objectives for this study were: to examine the pre-colonial system of access to land and labour division in food crop production up to 1906, to analyse the transformation in the system of access to land and labour division in food crop production during the colonial period and to establish the influence of the co-existence of pre-colonial and colonial access to land and labour systems on food security among the Aembu from 1906-1963. From the research conducted, the researcher found out the following;

The first objective of the study was to examine the pre-colonial system of access to land and labour division in food crop production up to 1906. This objective was aimed at establishing how the issues of access to land and labour division among the Aembu affected food crop production as a prelude to colonialism in the area of study. In this objective, the discussion commenced with findings on the background characteristics of respondents on the context of age, gender and residence. The discussion then proceeded with a brief social, economic and political organization of the Aembu in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. The history of the migration and settlement of the Aembu of Embu County is also captured in this objective. This objective specifically provided the pre-colonial historiography of the Aembu and this acted as background to the subsequent objectives discussed in this thesis.

The study established that, the Aembu are a Bantu speaking community who hail from the Eastern part of Kenya. Their settlement in the area was between 16<sup>th</sup> and the 19<sup>th</sup> Centuries. Their migration to the South western part of Mt. Kenya was brought about by a several factors which included wars, drought, famine and both human and animal diseases. The Aembu main economic activity was food crop production which included cultivation of crops like millet, maize sorghum, sugarcane, bananas, arrowroots and yams. The crops had spread from the early inhabitants of the area like the Gumba and Dorobo while others were spread through trade with the Portuguese at the coast between the 17<sup>th</sup> and the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The forementioned crops had become

indigenous among the Aembu before the community was subdued to colonialism in 1906.

The Aembu like the other Bantu speakers have roots in Ethiopia a place commonly known as Tuku or Uru. They moved from this area and established settlements in present Embu between the 16th and 17th centuries. From Ethiopia they relocated to the south at Lorian Swamp, which is near Ewaso Nyiro River, in the North Eastern region of Kenya. Tharaka environment was unconducive coupled with famine something that prompted them to continue with their journey southwards where they crossed Thuci River and entered at Igambang'ombe. Igambang'ombe means somewhere the uproar of cattle is overheard. The Aembu successfully expelled the maasai and stayed at igambang'ombe for some years. From igambang'ombe due to population increase majority of the Embu people continued moving and settled at the Mwenendega.

It was also found that the early settlers at Mwenendega were members of Igamuturi, Kina, Igamukiria and Gicuku clans. These groups were already in Embu by 1500. From Mwenendega, which was the original grove, Aembu migrated to other areas within the Embu. Migrations could have taken place due to population increase on the land, depletion of natural foodstuffs and in search for more fertile land. This shows the importance of land as a natural resource that all livelihood needs are derived from by all African communities since the time of their settlement.

Among the pre-colonial Aembu community land ownership system was both communal and individual but every community member had right to access enough land for food crop production including the outsiders. It was also on land that activities to sustain livelihood revolved. For this reason, the Aembu highly defended their land against any invader system. This study explored the Aembu land and labour systems in food crop production before the advent of colonialism in Embu County.

Socially, the Aembu's smallest social unit was a family and every one was a member of a particular family *nyomba*. The family could have been nuclear or extended. The

Aembu were a patriarchal community and men were the family heads. Men therefore, were the heads of social political and religious organizations. Age was respected and older members of the community were treated respectfully since they were the custodians of wisdom especially related to land matters.

The Embu clans were many and for organizational purposes, the clans were divided into two social groups known as generational age sets called *thuke*. *Nthuke* were formed before the rise of clans and every *thuke* met at its own point which was referred to as *Kigomano*. The two main clans in Embu were *Thagana* and *Irumbi*. The system of *thuke* enhanced social cohesion and made serious decisions regarding the two groups such as the forbidden marriages within the same group and the system of land access for food crop production.

Marriage was a respected institution among the Aembu and it was exogamous in nature meaning that members of the same clan were not allowed to marry. To provide identity to the groups, one gave his children the name *irumbi* while the other gave theirs the name *nyangi*. The two social clans were called generational age sets *Nthuke*. Each *nthuke* had its own meeting place. A ceremony would be organized after a generation period of thirty to forty-five years for each *nthuke* to give its children a name. The ceremony *nduiko* would be held jointly by the people of Embu and Mbeere.

The Aembu believed in specialists who performed religious duties. Some of the religious specialists included the healers or the medicine men commonly known as *andu ago* (plural) *mundu mugo*. The rain makers were could bring rains especially after a drought *areti a mbura*, diviners/diviners who used to unearth hidden matters *arathi*, prophets who used to predict what is likely to happen in future and sound warning to the community which they learnt through dreams as well as visions. *Mundu mugo* was highly respected and he could be consulted many times, also gave charms which helped to guard people against bad omen, protection of the lineage, abundant food crop production, instilling the spirit of hard work to family members and unearthing what is likely to take place in future.

The person who was in charge of circumcision known as *muruthia* had acquired special skill to carry out the practice whereby he cut the initiates using an iron knife *rueji* specifically designed for the practice. The bleeding would be controlled through wrapping of the cut using leaves from banana. This was followed with the initiate being taken to the homestead where they stayed during the healing process as they received training on matters like importance of hard work in food crop production and land ownership.

Bride wealth *ruracio* was highly valued Among the Aembu which was mainly inform of cattle sheep and goats. *Ruracio* was given by the young man who intends to marry to the girl's family and was a sign of appreciation though it has been commercialized. A man who married many wives was highly respected because he could manage to pay bride wealth for each one of them and he utilized the family labour to enrich himself in terms of land.

The Aembu community believed in patriarchy whereby all power within a household were under the control of men while women were subordinates. However, division of labour was in such a way that food security was maintained within households and the community. However, Labour system was gender specific where both men and women had their roles in the production of food crops which were slowly transformed during the colonial period.

Family being the smallest political unit each household was headed by a man. A household was made up of father, wife or wives and the children. Oral sources pointed out that the Aembu were patrilineal which meant that the head of a family unit was the father *vaava* and he was the foundation of power. Beyond a homestead *mucii*, there existed council *kiama / ciama* also known as leaders or elders *muthamaki* (plural) *athamaki*. *Athamaki* were custodians of wisdom, wealth, traditional knowledge, caring over the community members and good image. *Kiama kia ituura* (village council) was at the lowest level. Every *ituura* had a council whose composition was of elderly men known as *athamaki*. Following the village council there existed a clan council *kiama kia muvirira*. Every *ituura* had a council whose

responsibility was hearing and settling disputes that may arise especially on land related matters and any other form of bad or prohibited conduct.

Land tenure is concerned with an individual's right to proprietorship and use of the resource. Land was a respected resource for all the profitable activities revolved on it like food crop production, livestock, hunting, gathering and industry. The Aembu therefore shielded the resource from any outsiders using their warriors. After the settlement of the Aembu in their present homeland, for safety purposes they lived in groups and carried out their activities communally, *ngwataniro*.

Respondents revealed that clans that owned land were *gicuku*, *rwamba*, *marigu*, *rukwaro*, *mukoro*, *ndiri*, *kiragua*, *ndiri*, *muthaiga* among others. The land consequently belonged to the clan members and the practice came to an end around 1942 when African chiefs took over the responsibility of distributing land. Before, clan elders were directly responsible to clan lands and members lived in confined areas. The clan members were usually people related by blood.

The subsequent method of accessing land was called, *ngamba ya kuna na kathanua* meaning land first acquired through the use of a chopper or axe. This system of land ownership was put in place when the Aembu settled down and started domestication of crops. The groups of the early cultivators had formed the Aembu clans and all the people who had descent from those clans had right to use the land for cultivation of crops. The fact that one put the trap *mutego* on a particular piece of land or cleared the bush for the first time did not guarantee individual ownership but the land *ngamba* belonged to the members of the clan. This means that when a member of the lineage cultivated a piece of land, the produce belonged to the individual but he did not own earth, *muthetu* and no payment was required when he or she utilized the resource.

Land could also be accessed through buying during the early years of Aembu settlement. This was referred to as, *mugunda wa kugura*. The method became common to the late comers of the land. This is because initially land was plenty due to the low population and over time, the population increased making demand higher than the supply. Aembu land could be bought using an axe, goat, grains, sheep, cattle

or even a portion of a slaughtered animal. This was supported by other several secondary and archival sources as discussed in the previous chapters of this thesis.

Aembu diet was mainly made up of mixed carbohydrates, vegetables and vitamins which enabled the community members to live healthy lives. Most commonly used vegetables were *mathoroko*, *maruoga*, *managu*, *matuma*, *mamianga*, *maboco*, *karimi ka thia*, *muka uriivu*. The vegetables were mixed with banana, maize, flour and beans, then mashed thoroughly in a huge pot *nyungu* to make a mashed type of food called *mukimo* or *nyenyi*. This type of food was very popular and highly nutritious. The traditional Aembu knew the need for a balanced diet and observed it closely since a variety of fruits were collected by young children and women to supplement the diet which included *macuca*, *matunda*, *mabota* and *ndare* and *ndigu ndune*.

The most popular food among the Aembu was mashed food or *mukimo* followed by gruel / fermented porridge or *ucuru wa mukio*. Aembu traditional food crops played a significant role in provision of food and nutritional security since they acquired all the nutrients the body needed. This was enhanced by the fact that they accessed land readily in different ecological zones suitable for different types of food crops bearing different nutritional values while labour was well organized within household for maximum food crop productivity.

The study findings were that majority of the Aembu food crops were resistant to challenges of erratic rainfall and plant diseases and that they provided enough food to the households. It is important to note that in the 19th century Crop production was commercialized when trade between the coast and the interior ensued. The Aembu produced surplus and supplied food to the neighbouring communities like the Akamba and the Mbeere. However, for effective food crop production proper access to land and labour organization was necessary within households. The Aembu calendar was associated with food crop production activities ranging from land clearing, planting, removing of weeds, protection of crops, harvesting, preservation using natural preservatives and storage before the use of the annual calendar.

The study's second objective was to analyse the changes in the system of access to land and labour division in food crop production during the colonial period. S.L.

Hinde, the Sub-Commissioner Kenya Province, made the suggestion that the Embu should be subjugated and occupied on May 23, 1906. Furthermore, the Embu Country served as a haven for anyone escaping the legal system in the remaining parts of the province. The Embu claimed to be too powerful for the government and would back dissidents because of their immunity from punishment. Captain J.W.O. Maycock, who commanded an expedition against the Embu in June 1906, carried out the recommendations of this report.

The British invasion of Embu had a profound impact. The Mbeere and Kikuyu warriors set fire to many of the Embu's possessions after the mission, including cattle and houses. Destruction of property during European conquest took place to all communities and was not exclusive to Embu. The Embu District Record Book, an archival report, also documented these feelings, stating that "a punitive expedition on a large scale was sent against the Embu 'tribes' in 1906 owing to their 'truculent' attitude." Large amounts of stock were taken, the majority of which was restored, and many people were slain.

From archival sources, it was established that there were two seed farms by that year: one at Embu and another at Chuka. Farmers in the surrounding areas were obtaining suitable and high-quality seed from these facilities. Simultaneously, the Agricultural Department had hired three permanent teachers who were touring the reserve and dispensing guidance and instructions. In several sections of Embu, experiments were carried out using beans, potatoes, wattle, wheat, onions, cassava, peas, and pyrethrum. It was established that sorghum, maize, and bulrush millet continued to be the most significant food crops for exchange and consumption despite the introduction of other experimental crops. This supports the thesis that, in contrast to the capitalist mode of production, the pre-capitalist method of production does not entirely vanish but rather continues to replicate itself in various ways. As a result, the inhabitants in this sub-county were progressively integrated into the colonial capitalist system through food crop production. Market power, crop price setting, and produce transportation were all under the jurisdiction of merchant capital, which was initially ruled by colonialists and subsequently by wealthy chiefs and headmen.

The Aembu had increased their agricultural production prior to 1920, but more as a result of their own initiative and reaction to the money market than as a result of direct government assistance. The land issue was becoming increasingly significant due to the population's constant expansion. However, the native land tenure system remained unchanged to allow for the long-term habitation of a portion of the clan land by those who were not initially granted the right to cultivate it. As a result, the two systems of land and labour in food crop production would subsequently suffer as a result of these political and economic policies implemented after 1920.

On Mau Mau, the administrators of the oath were young Mbeere from Nairobi who had moved to the city. To raise awareness of subaltern consciousness among the native Mbeere, these group gave their lives in sacrifice. Oral testimony from those former urban rebels indicated that they would teach the locals about the necessity of banding together to overthrow British rule. After taking their oaths, these lads went back to their positions and eventually left for Nairobi. They informed the people of Embu about Dedan Kimathi and his opposition to the loyalists. Embu was aware of notable individuals like Jomo Kenyatta and Field Marshall Dedan Kimathi and their goals for Kenyans. Subsequently, the writers who supported Mau Mau reshaped the perception of Kimathi and reaffirmed their moral-political beliefs, raising Dedan Kimathi to the status of Lenin.

They joined the fight with the others because they believed they would lose out if they were left out of the national cake sharing event. Political consciousness began to grow when Jomo Kenyatta invited Kimathi and other leaders to organize a meeting in Nyeri in 1952. The conference was attended by around 75,000 individuals, and the mobilization was carried out by breathing. Following this gathering, there were other public gatherings in Mbeere, Embu, and Central Kenya. The ethnic communities of Embu, Meru, and Mbeere were well-represented during these gatherings. Maumau undermined food crop production due to absence of labour and the strict curfews that restricted movement of the Aembu to hinder provision of food to the group by the civilians.

Colonial authorities discussed the Ishiara project in 1929 as a way to interrupt the recurring famine cycles in Embu. After discovering that water was a major cause of starvation in Ishiara, the Embu LNC of 1942-1950 recommended using Thuchi River water for cultivation. The LNC requested that the government study the potential of digging furrows from the Thuchi River to Ishiara. Paddocks were certified as an additional item in 1953. The Ishiara irrigation system was supported by taxes levied in Mbeere Division. Second, Ishiara in Mbeere, like other regions, was recognized as a possible irrigation site and an opportunity to make effective use of Mau Mau captives.

The colonial authorities also offered more lucrative animal varieties (milk strain Borans) for smallholdings in Siakago. However, the colonial authority established a similar initiative in Kanja for jersey bulls. Even before the Mau Mau revolt began, the Local Native Council (LNC) examined the project and recorded its findings in the 1947 Embu District Report. According to the LNC, the government agreed to establish cattle breeding stations and schools in the Embu and Meru districts. Land reforms in Embu County began in 1956, following the suppression of the Mau Mau in the area. This is corroborated by the then DC, R.H. Symes, who handed over to H.C.F. Wilks in 1956. "Mau Mau appears to be dead until a link is established with the existing political organization in Nairobi. The Land Plan Committee led the consolidation efforts. Njiri wa Mwara and Nathan Kabiru served on that committee in Embu. This group also planned for public areas such as schools, towns, water stations, coffee industries, and woods. As a result, land consolidation started throughout the region, and by 1959, substantial portions had been delineated which hindered food crop production.

The third objective of this study was on the influence of co-existence of pre-colonial and colonial access to land and labour systems in food crop production on food security from 1906-1963. The Aembu traditional food crop growers are recognized for production of surplus food which promoted trade with the neighbouring communities like the Mbeete, Akamba and the Chuka. The three sub-counties, Embu North, Embu East and Embu West are located at the foot of Mount Kenya where there is plenty and reliable rainfall all the year which favoured food crop production.

However, it is evident that the Aembu went through famines during the colonial period.

It was found that, colonialism utilized the three pillars of colonial economy namely land alienation, labour recruitment and taxation to undermine the Aembu food crop production leading to food shortages. Traditional food crops provided food and nutritional security among the Aembu during the pre-colonial period. However, this depended on the production amounts, the ecologies and their nutritional value. Traditional crop is an indigenous species native to a specific region or one that was introduced a long time ago and due to its long use, has naturalized and become part of culture of a community. The Aembu produced traditional food crops such as wheat, millet, yams, cassava, pumpkin, arrow roots, beans sweet potatoes, a variety of roots and tubers and leafy vegetables which provided the required micronutrients as found in the previous chapters. However, the crops were marginalized by the colonial capitalism with the introduction of cash crops like coffee wattle and tea without regard to the value of the crops in terms of food and nutritional security.

The food shortages exposed people to poor psychosomatic health and undernourishment. In the reserves, they could only eat one meal in a day inform of white porridge or sometime they went without eating anything at all. The informants revealed that the wages they received from the colonial government was too little to buy food from the markets and pay the taxes. The available food was too expensive for the Africans to afford which led to death of many people especially children.

The study revealed that food insufficiency was so acute such that the colonial government introduced relief food inform of maize and cassava flour, which was supplied through the colonial government African employees. Maize and cassava flour could only provide carbohydrate suitable for provision of energy to work in the settler farms and communal works but there was deficiency of certain nutrients which led to serious levels of malnutrition that were reported during the colonial period. Children suffered from Kwashiokor and deficits of vitamins A, Iron, Zinc and Iodine. The study revealed that many Africans died due to famine leading to an outcry of

labour shortage and increased migration of Africans from the reserves to look for food in the other districts.

Moreover, the government undermined production of traditional African food crops some of which served as underground food reserves and they could only be uprooted during famines. The food crops had been replaced with cash crops land saleable foods like maize. The cash crops reduced production of indigenous food crops which certainly depressed food production as well as the nutritional status of the community members.

In Embu coffee was planted on 22 acres of land and was owned by 88 growers at Githungururu. However, Africans were discouraged from growing coffee and were encouraged to grow food crops for export which worsened the food inadequacies. The new crops were for the capitalist market and not for the benefit of the Aembu people. 50 % of the informants revealed that the co-existence of pre-colonial and colonial land and labour systems in food crop production undermined the systems of land ownership, production of traditional crops and importance of indigenous crops that were highly nutritious and drought resistant.

## **7.2 Conclusion**

From the research topic, influence of colonialism on the Aembu access to land and labour systems on food crop production and food security, 1906-1963, it is the researcher's conclusion that the most undisputable origin of the Aembu was the Mwenendega forest in Embu East. From the grove the Aembu had settled in their present homeland by 17<sup>th</sup> century whereby they found groups like the Ndorobo, Macaria, Thigagi and the Gumba among others. The community was organized into clans and there existed two main clans namely Irumbi and Nyangi from which other clans emanated. The clans were in charge of land matters and the community had a patriarchal system. The study established that the first method of land ownership was communal since the main activity was hunting and gathering and the population was small. When the community members settled down, clans developed and land started being based on clans. The clan members started acquiring land using other methods

such as the use of an axe, buying, use of fines and from uncles and inlaws especially for those young men who didn't have land.

That the Aembu food crops were, bananas, yams, cassava, wheat, millet, sorghum, arrowroots sugarcane and different types of fruits and vegetables. The Aembu had two rain seasons classified in terms of rainfalls namely *Mbura ya mwere* (period to plant millet) and *Mbura ya njavi* (period to plant njavi). The two seasons have a rain called "*muratho*" *mbura ya mavanda*. Labour for food crop production was from the household but during the peak periods the community could source for services from outside so as to maximize production. The systems ensured food security within households and the community at large. Surplus production could also be exchanged for labour during the period when intensive labour was required especially during planting and harvesting seasons.

That the pre-colonial Aembu people produced enough food within households and the whole community. This is supported by the fact that the community traded with the neighbours such as the Ambeere, the Agikuyu, Chuka and the Akamba with foodstuff. To their immediate neighbours the Ambeere who live in lower Embu where rainfall is unreliable for food crop production, they were regarded as the granary (Mwaniki, 2010, & Mwaruvie, 1991). The Aembu successful food crop production was based on a properly defined system of land access and labour distribution within households. Every member of the community had right to acquire land for crop production through the clan elders while labour was distributed based on age and gender within households with the aim of increasing food productivity.

The Aembu subsistence producers could therefore access land in different regions that were suitable for different crops. Different soil types were suitable to certain food crops and not all crops did well in certain regions. Shifting cultivation as a feature of the Aembu peasant producers which enabled soil to regain fertility while intercropping, and crop rotation allowed different crops to share nutrients. Shifting cultivation was facilitated by the system of land ownership and the fact that land was acquired based on ones needs.

The Aembu indigenous food crops included sorghum, millet, cassava, arrowroots, sugarcane, banana, yams and a variety of fruits and vegetables. This indicates consumption of a balanced diet comprising of proteins, vegetables and fruits. However, the pre-colonial Aembu producers were well versed with knowledge on the process of production which started from clearing of land, planting, uprooting of weeds, protecting crops against harmful animals, reaping, preservation and storage which ensured that the community had adequate food supply. The colonial government modified, undermined and destroyed the pre-capitalist systems which led to dismal production and deficiencies of food. The colonial regime influenced pre-capitalist production through a number of ways which included change of the traditional clan-based land access system, commercialization of food crops and transformation of labour to a commodity.

The study established that during the colonial period and especially when the Aembu lived in the reserves, members suffered several deficits such as vitamin A deficiency (VAD), iron deficiency disorder (IDD) iodine deficiency disorders (IDD) and zinc. VAD and IDA are caused by dietary inadequacy, while IDD is determined by iodine content of soil and water in the environment (Hongo, 2003). The mentioned insufficiencies are the major health concerns in the contemporary society and would be controlled through utilization of certain indigenous foods especially full grains, vegetables and fruits.

Therefore, the researcher concludes that, the history of Aembu's access to land and labour division in food crop production can be traced from the pre-colonial epoch. With advent of colonialism and establishment of colonial rule in Embu by 1906, pre-colonial and colonial land and labour systems co-existed and as a result the Aembu's food security was affected up to 1963.

### **7.3 Recommendations of the Study**

- i. The study recommends that the policy makers in the agricultural sector both at the National and County Government levels should start a campaign on farmers need to embrace certain traditional practices in food crop production alongside the modern scientific approaches.

- ii. To reduce the large number of landless people in Kenya, the government should come up with ways of reclaiming land through irrigation and distribute it to such people in order to enhance food crop production.
- iii. The ministry of Agriculture can do research on existing traditional food crops and encourage farmers to produce since they are more resistant to erratic rainfall and diseases.
- iv. Based on the fact that land sizes are small, the ministry of Agriculture can encourage production of horticultural food crops which will enhance food security.

#### **7.4 Suggestion for Further Research**

In the course of the study more virgin areas were uncovered for further research among the Aembu of Embu County. Researchers can therefore conduct:

- i. A study on the Aembu's access to land labour division and its effect on food security during the post-independence period.
- ii. A study on the political patriarchy on land access and land use in Embu County.
- iii. A study on strategies used by the Aembu to solve food insecurity in the county during the post-independence period.

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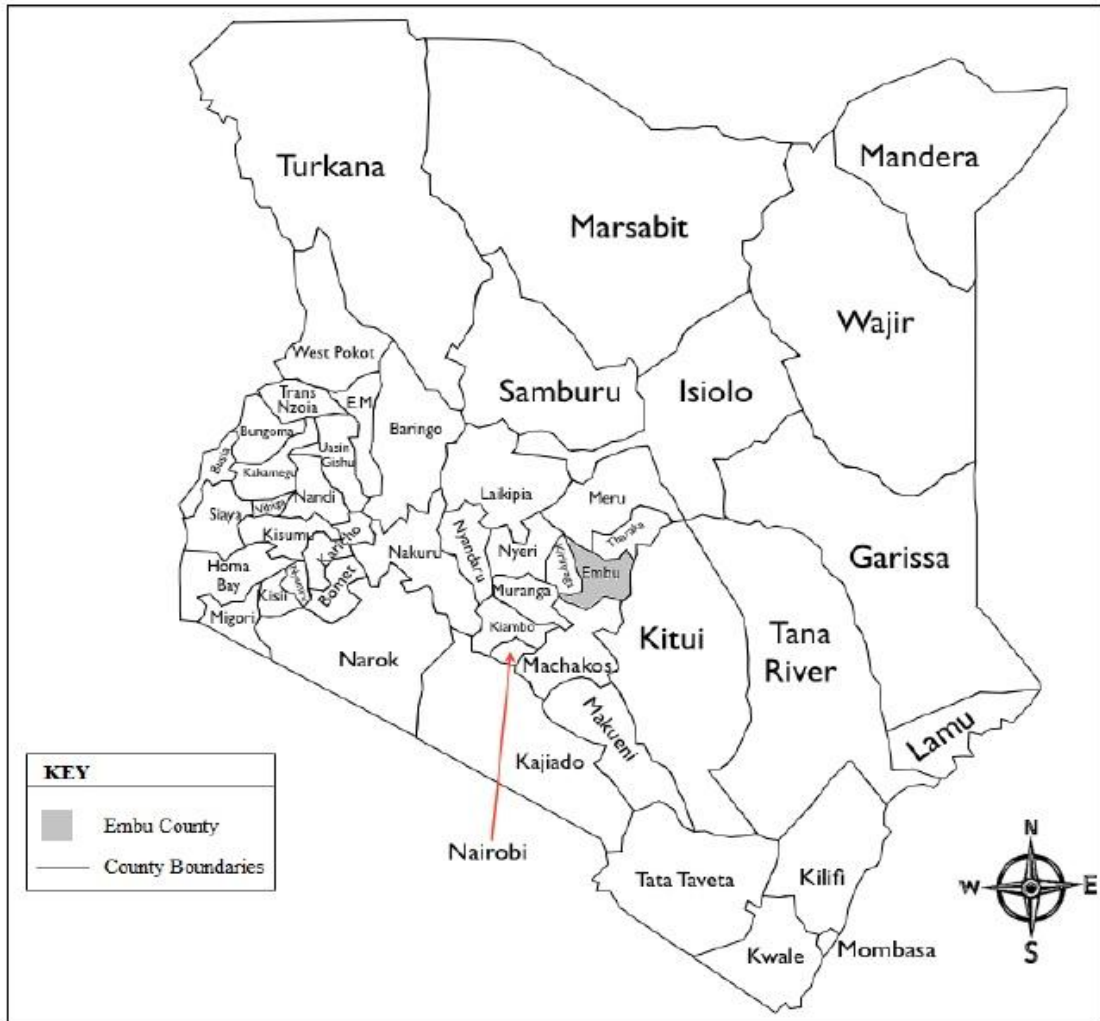
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## APPENDICES

### APPENDIX I: A Map of Embu County in Kenya



Source: Map data © Kenya bureau of statistics data 2014 © Google

## APPENDIX II: Data from the Kenya National Archives

- KNA/PC/CP/1/5/129: *Embu District Intelligence Committee summaries*, 1953 January 1 - 1954 December 31. Nairobi, Kenya National Archives.
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KNA/PC/1/16/2. Political Record Embu Division Events of importance 1927

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### APPENDIX III: List of Respondents

Name	Sub-County	Date	Age	Gender
Teresia Kanini	East	30/4/2024	95	F
Rawland Nguu	North	30/4/2024	81	M
Lucy Rwamba	East	30/4/2024	82	F
Wamirici	North	1/5/2024	84	F
Agata Igandu	East	1/5/2024	85	F
Timothy Munyi	North	1/5/2024	82	M
Penina Igandu	East	3/5/2024	75	F
Charity Wa Kathara	North	3/5/2024	78	F
Elizabeth Njeru	East	3/5/2024	92	F
Marigu Mwereza	North	3/5/2024	74	F
Muriuku George	East	6/5/2024	89	M
Mugo Njathika	North	6/5/2024	81	M
Njagi Mngungi	West	6/5/2024	72	M
Findes Wanjagi	North	10/5/2024	72	F
Wamai Njega	West	10/5/2024	88	M
Cacilia Muthoni	East	10/4/2024	71	F
Ireru Kubuta	West	13/5/2024	89	M
Samwel Njeru	North	13/5/2024	76	M
Janet Ngai Makinya	West	13/5/2024	96	F
John Kanake	North	14/5/2024	81	M
Muriithi Makinya	West	14/5/2024	76	M
Nyaga Kubukubu	West	14/5/2024	75	M
Agnes Ruguru	West	14/5/2024	78	F
Nguru Mbutei	East	18/5/2024	78	M
Mbogo Mcharia	West	24/5/2024	96	M
Njeru Mwangangi	East	24/5/2024	82	F
Gatavi Ireri	West	27/5/2024	71	F
Gladwel Kambi	East	27/5/2024	82	F
Susana Kanavu	West	27/5/2024	92	F
Ngira Matenguri	North	27/5/2024	76	F
Kivuti George	West	30/5/2024	96	M
Dishon James	North	30/5/2024	72	M
Ireru Njanamu	West	30/5/2024	94	M
Nyaga Kamotho	North	31/5/2024	79	M
Samwel Kamwere	West	31/5/2024	88	M
Prisca Jonah	North	4/6/2024	75	F
Kanyau Muragara	West	4/6/2024	88	M
Mugo Kamwana	North	4/6/2024	91	M
Lucia Marigu	West	8/6/2024	81	F
Evas	East	8/6/2024	86	F
Susana Wakina	West	8/6/2024	92	F
Mutitu Marigu	East	10/6/2024	75	F
Njeru Mwathe	North	10/6/2024	94	M
Caci Kagundu	North	10/6/2024	72	F
Peter Mbogo	West	13/6/2024	86	M
Mergery Njeu	West	13/6/2024	72	F
Weveti Njue	West	13/6/2024	78	F
Difatha Mbogo	North	24/6/2024	72	M
Jane Mbogo	West	24/6/2024	71	F
Warue Ngari	North	24/6/2024	88	F

**APPENDIX IV: Researcher's Self Introductory Letter**

MARY WANGAI MBOGO  
DEPARTMENT OF HUMANITIES  
CHUKA UNIVERSITY  
P.O BOX 109-60400  
CHUKA, KENYA.

Dear Respondent.

**RE: INTERVIEW SCHEDULE FOR DATA COLLECTION**

I am Mary Wangai Mbogo, Reg. No. AD14/38517/18. I am a bonafide student of Chuka University undertaking PhD in History. Currently, I am conducting research on Influence of Colonialism on The Aembu Access to Land and Labour Systems on Food Crop Production and Food Security, 1906-1963. Kindly take your valuable time and assist me with this information. The information given will be strictly used for research and academic purpose.

Yours sincerely,

Sign \_\_\_\_\_

Mary Wangai Mbogo

Chuka University

## **APPENDIX V: INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR THE 70 AND ABOVE YEARS**

This interview guide will collect data on the pre-colonial land access and labour division systems in food crop production, changes introduced by the colonialists and the extent to which the dimensions of food security changed among the Aembu in Embu County. Responses will be strictly used for academic purposes. Kindly give honest responses in all sections.

### **SECTION A: DEMOGRAPHIC DATA**

- 1) Name of the respondent.....
- 2) Indicate your gender.....
- 3) Indicate your age in years .....
- 4) Indicate your area.....
- 5) Occupation.....

### **SECTION B:**

#### **Pre-colonial methods of Land Access and Labour Division in Food Crop Production among the Aembu up to 1906**

##### **i) Land Access**

1. Describe the methods that the Aembu used to access land for food crop production before the onset of colonialism.
2. Did you own land for food crop production in the traditional Aembu community set up?  
If no, explain why \_\_\_\_\_  
If yes explain how you acquired the land.
3. Apart from food crop production how else did you use the land?
4. Did both men and women own land for food crop production in this community?
5. Kindly explain the reasons for your answer and the criteria used in each of the cases.
  
6. Were there some people who owned more land for food crop production than others?  
If yes explain why.
7. At what stage could a young man or woman have right to access land for food crop production?  
At birth \_\_\_\_\_

Puberty \_\_\_\_\_

After marriage \_\_\_\_\_

8. Who was the custodian of land for food crop production in Aembu community?

Clan elders \_\_\_\_\_

Father \_\_\_\_\_

Mother \_\_\_\_\_

9. Did you have specific ecological zones for certain food crops?

10. Could strangers own land for food crop production among the Aembu?

If yes kindly explain the criteria used

11. Did cases of conflict over land for food crop production exist within families?

If yes, kindly explain how such cases were solved

**(ii) Labour Division in Food Crop Production among the Aembu up to 1906**

1. Before the advent of colonialists which food crops did you grow? Kindly give their Kiembu names, their nutritional values and their uses.

2. Of the crops you grew, which ones were more important than the others. Kindly indicate in order of their importance and explain why

3. Did men and women grow identical crops?

If no, give the types of crops grown by either male or female

Kindly explain the reasons for your answer.

4. Within the family, who pre-dominated in decision making regarding the variety of food crops to grow?

5. How was labour for food crop production distributed within households?

Indicate according to age and gender

6. Explain the various forms of labour used in food crop production within and outside households?

7. What methods of farming did you use?

How effective were those methods in providing food within households?

8. Did food crop production bring differentiation in the community? Kindly explain how

9. Were there cases of famines during the pre-colonial period in this area?

If yes, kindly give the causes and the names that described the famines.

If no, give the mitigating approaches that the Aembu put in place.

**SECTION C**

## **Colonial transformation of Land Access and Labour Division systems in Food Crop Production 1906-1963**

1. What motivated the colonialists to enter into Embu land?
2. What was the reaction of the Aembu people to the coming of colonialists?
3. Did the colonialists take away land from the Aembu?  
If yes, list the methods they used to get the land.
4. Did the colonial government introduce new crops in this area?  
If yes, give examples of the new crops.
6. Did the colonialists introduce new agricultural policies in this area?
7. Can you recall any land laws that were passed by the colonialists?
8. Did the colonial government introduce new labour laws in this area?
10. Did colonialists establish their agricultural farms in this area?  
If yes, explain in details how they acquired labour for the farms and how African labour systems were altered.
11. Were there 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> world war soldiers from this area?  
If yes, how was production of food crop affected by their participation in the war?
11. Which areas were designated for African reserves in this area?  
Kindly explain how migration of Africans to the reserves interfered with food crop production in this area.
12. Did the Aembu of this area take part in the struggle for independence?  
If yes explain the roles played by you or your relative in the maumau movement.
13. Did Mau Mau rebellion interfere with labour provision in food crop production?  
If yes explain how.

### **SECTION D**

#### **Extent to which the various dimensions of Aembu food Security were changed during the Colonial Period**

1. How did the newly introduced methods of food crop production by colonialists affect food availability among the Aembu?
2. How did the newly introduced crops affect availability of food among the Aembu of this area?
3. a) Were there changes in the food production processes during the colonial period?  
Yes

No

b) If yes, kindly explain how the supply of food was affected by the change in the production processes in this area.

4. a) Which types of food crop did you grow for domestic use during the period of colonialism in this area?

b) Did you produce more food than you needed during the colonial period?

Yes,

No

c) If yes, where did you store the surplus after harvesting?

d) If no, name the alternative types of food you ate during the colonial period and explain where you got the food from?

5. a) Did you eat fewer meals in a day because there was no enough food?

Yes

No

b) If yes, how many meals in a day?

c) If one or two meals in a day what was the reason for having limited food supply?

5. a) Did you eat limited variety of food due to lack of choices during the colonial period?

Yes

No

If yes, what were the implications of having limited variety of food to the health of the Aembu population in this area?

6. Did anybody eat food that he disliked because of lack of choices to obtain other varieties of food?

Yes

No

If yes did the foods have all the required nutrients for a healthy living?

7. Did you eat small amounts of food because of limited supply?

Yes

No

If yes, explain its effects on the Aembu

8. a) Did the Aembu come up with strategies to counter the problem of insufficient food supply within households?

Yes

No

b) If yes, name the strategies employed

10 a) Did the colonial government design ways of ensuring sufficient food supply in Embu?

Yes

No

b) If yes, name the methods

11. a) Which were the factors that slowed down sufficient production of food crop among the Aembu during the colonial era?

**Thank you for the cooperation and sparing of your valuable time for the purposes of this study.**






## APPENDIX VI: Glossary of Aembu Words

<i>Arii</i>	Daughters
<i>Gaarua</i>	A hut for the head of the family
<i>Gatavi</i>	A hut for household head
<i>Guciarua na Mhuri</i>	Slaughtering a goat to be accepted in family
<i>Gutuguta</i>	Clearing bush
<i>Ikumbi</i>	Grain store
<i>Irima</i>	Communal work in farm
<i>Ithiga ria gukia</i>	Grinding stone
<i>Kagori</i>	Animal skin for carrying children
<i>Karubu</i>	Beer made from sugarcane
<i>Kathanua</i>	Axe
<i>Kauga</i>	Calabash
<i>Kavici</i>	Uncircumcised boy
<i>Kiama kia ita</i>	Military council
<i>Kiama kia ngome</i>	Supreme council
<i>Kiama</i>	Council of leaders
<i>Kiambu</i>	Original Aembu language
<i>Kigomano</i>	Meeting point
<i>Kiguta</i>	Lazy person
<i>Kithiri</i>	Cloth for old men made from animal skin
<i>Kugura</i>	Buying
<i>Kumba nyungu</i>	Making pots
<i>Kunyua muma</i>	Oathing
<i>Kurimia</i>	Providing farm work for food
<i>Kurua</i>	To be circumcised
<i>Maboco</i>	Beans leaves
<i>Makindu</i>	Rodents/ Rats
<i>Marua</i>	Circumcision ceremonies
<i>Mataaro</i>	Advice
<i>Matiri</i>	Sacred place for sacrifices
<i>Matuma</i>	Arrowroot leaves
<i>Mavanda</i>	Planting season

<i>Mbari</i>	Patrilineage
<i>Mbura nene</i>	Long rain
<i>Mbura nini</i>	Short rain
<i>Mburi</i>	Goat
<i>Mwenenyaga</i>	Owner of the white snow
<i>Mianga</i>	Cassava
<i>Miconjo</i>	Heaped contours in a farm
<i>Mucukia</i>	Leprosy
<i>Muembu</i>	Original inhabitant of Embu
<i>Mugurani</i>	Spouse
<i>Muguu wa Mbura</i>	Floods from rains
<i>Mukio</i>	Grounded and fermented porridge
<i>Mundumugo</i>	A medicine man
<i>Muro</i>	A weeding wooden stick
<i>Murogi</i>	Witch
<i>Mururu</i>	A weaved basket for storing grains
<i>Mutego</i>	Hunting stuff
<i>Muthunu</i>	Selfish
<i>Mutika</i>	A type of banana for weaning children
<i>Mutiri</i>	A sponsor during circumcision
<i>Muviriga</i>	Clan
<i>Mwatu</i>	Beehive
<i>Nduiko</i>	A ceremony where clan names were given
<i>Ngai</i>	God
<i>Ngathi</i>	Women skirt made from animal skin
<i>Ngombe</i>	Cattle
<i>Ngondu</i>	Sheep
<i>Ngua Migogo</i>	Carriers of daughters to marriage
<i>Ngucu</i>	A house where daughters and mothers cooked
<i>Nguya</i>	Termite
<i>Njovi</i>	Beer
<i>Nyenyi / Mukimo</i>	Aembu mashed food
<i>Nyomba</i>	Homestead

<i>Nyungu</i>	Pot
<i>Ruenji</i>	A circumcisor's knife
<i>Ruguru</i>	Upper part of Embu
<i>Ruru</i>	Livestock
<i>Rutara</i>	A wooden stand
<i>Rutua</i>	Collective labour
<i>Rware</i>	Big piece of land
<i>Thuke</i>	Generational age set
<i>Turigu</i>	Uncircumcised Aembu girl
<i>Uriri</i>	Bed
<i>Warurunga</i>	British colonial government agents
<i>Weru</i>	Lower part of Embu
<i>Yura</i>	Famine

**APPENDIX VII: Research Permit from NACOSTI**

 <p><b>REPUBLIC OF KENYA</b></p>	 <p><b>NATIONAL COMMISSION FOR SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY &amp; INNOVATION</b></p>
Ref No: <b>371819</b>	Date of Issue: <b>29/April/2024</b>
<b>RESEARCH LICENSE</b>	
	
<p><b>This is to Certify that Miss.. MARY MBOGO WANGAI of Chuka University, has been licensed to conduct research as per the provision of the Science, Technology and Innovation Act, 2013 (Rev.2014) in Embu on the topic: COLONIAL TRANSFORMATION OF ACCESS TO LAND AND LABOUR SYSTEMS IN FOOD CROP PRODUCTION AND ITS INFLUENCE ON FOOD SECURITY AMONG THE AEMBU, KENYA (1906-1963) for the period ending : 29/April/2025.</b></p>	
License No: <b>NACOSTI/P/24/35089</b>	
<b>371819</b> Applicant Identification Number	 Director General <b>NATIONAL COMMISSION FOR SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY &amp; INNOVATION</b>
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**APPENDIX VIII: Researcher's Archival Permit**



**Kenya National Archives  
and Documentation Service**

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AR-JKS25

Reg Date  
30 MAY 2024

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KENYAN

Address:  
EMBU

Full Name  
MARY WANGAI  
MBOGO

Valid from.  
30 MAY 2024

To  
30 MAY 2025



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