

Collaboration, Resistance and Compromise? African Response to European Coffee Growing in Colonial Kiambu County, Kenya 1900-1952

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Abstract: In the realm of agriculture, three main things, or perhaps more, determined the response of Africans to colonial rule in Kenya. The first, was land alienation which saw many Africans lose their land to European farmers. The second, was the supply of cheap African labour of European farms and the last was the introduction of taxes which were meant to force Africans to seek paid work on Europeans farms. In the colonial establishment, Africans were not passive actors who always responded in conformity to government laws, policies, expectations, schemes and propaganda. It is in view of this, that themes of collaboration, resistance and compromise underlie African response to colonial administration. Based on secondary and archival data, this chapter interrogates the response of Africans towards European coffee growing in Kiambu County.

Keywords: Collaboration, Resistance, African, European, coffee-growing, Kenya.

1. INTRODUCTION

Coffee growing in colonial Kenya took a lot of land away from African use. By 1930, European coffee planters in Kenya numbered 931, which was forty-four percent of the total European farm-owning population (Barnes 1976). The alienation of African lands for European coffee growing was resisted by people of Kikuyudescent in places like Kiambu County. This resentment was further fueled by the colonial policy which barred Africans from growing coffee (Frankem, Green and Hillbom 2015, Thurston 1987).

Apart from taking away of African land, coffee growing in Kiambu remained a preserve for European farmers until 1951, when Githunguri Division, in Kiambu County, was officially sanctioned by the government to become a coffee growing area. Until then, Africans who had shown interest to grow coffee, had been prevented from doing so by the colonial government (Kenyanjui 1992). Even when permission was granted for Africans to grow coffee in Kiambu, there were additional restrictions with regard to how many trees of coffee an African could grow and how far the trees were supposed to be located from the nearest European coffee farm (Thurston 1987).

Africans were restricted to grow coffee as a scheme to force them to supply labour on European coffee farms (Hyde 2009). By supplying their labour, Africans would be able to raise money and pay taxes to the colonial government. As Mungeam (1966) has observed, the colonial scheme to force Africans to offer cheap labour on Europeans farms had already been worked out. John Ainsworth remarked in 1905 that Europeans will not do manual labour in a country inhabited by black races (Mungeam 1966). In 1912, a Native Labour Commission was appointed to find ways and means of inducing Africans to come out and work (Bennet 1963). Africans were squeezed into native reserves thereby generating land scarcity for them (Mosley 1983). This had been achieved in Kiambu County through alienation of large chunks of land for European coffee growers.

Having been denied a chance to grow coffee and having lost their land to European farmers, Africans in Kiambu County had very few options of raising money for government taxes. According to the scheme of colonial government, Africans could only raise money by supplying labour on European farms. This chapter examines how Africans, in Kiambu County, responded to European coffee-growers.

2. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Two forms of African response to European invasion of African territories have been identified namely resistance and collaboration. These forms of African responses are problematic. In being used to explain African response to European invasion of African territories, Resistance and collaboration are concepts which have been used to overly-simplify a very complex issue into two, admittedly broad and ambiguous, but still misleading categories. Use of these concepts leads to the acceptance of the European superiority as having been the most influential factor in African responses (Breilly 1993).

In almost all communities, people were not completely united, as the social and cultural differences between groups often meant their potential gains depended on different allegiances (Berman and Lonsdale 1992). Also, the problem with the resistance-collaboration theory stems from the fact that both terms suggest that communities were one or the other, unchanging. In fact, most societies were, and still are, in perpetual state of change (Iliffe 2005).

From the foregoing, the notion of an African' response is itself questionable. It points to a single overall response which is ridiculous when applied to a continent of variations, and is certainly not discernable within two misleading and unspecific terms. To be at all useful, these concepts need to be elaborated on and used in explicit reference to a particular area or peoples. Doing so will make sense of peoples' individual response. This chapter takes the position that European invasion of Africa was a negotiated terrain (Parker and Rathbone 2007).

African responses to European invasion of their territories were not indifferent or passive. Collaboration was not normally submission but rather a response to European invasion using an active policy of cooperation and compromise. Thus, collaboration was as good as resistance because it was mainly adopted by those African rulers who felt that the best way to recover territory lost to enemies or rivals was to cooperate. This study seeks to contribute to the debate of resistance and collaboration as dominant forms of African response to European invasion of Africa by taking European coffee growing in Kenya as a case study. The chapter begins by documenting social, economic and political situation of Kiambu County during the period of land alienation for European settlement.

3. METHODOLOGY

Data which was used to write this chapter was obtained from oral, secondary and archival data which the author collected and used to write a postgraduate thesis.

Socio-economic and political situation in Kiambu County on the eve of European settlement

What is today called Kiambu County was a thick forest which was once inhabited by a hunting and gathering people called the Dorobo. Forced by population pressure in the north, people of Kikuyu descent migrated southwards from a place called Mukurwea Gathanga (in the present day Murang'a County) into the present day Kiambu County (Muriuki 1974, Leakey 1977, Wanyoike 2002). The Kikuyu bought out the Dorobo from the forested area that is now Kiambu County (Kenya National Archives, PC/CP.1/4/2). Before the arrival of the European farmers in Kiambu, the Kikuyu people had occupied most parts of Kiambu County such as Muguga, Kikuyu station, Uthiru, Limuru and Gatundu, where *mbari* (clans) established clusters of homesteads in the areas they claimed (Muriuki 1974, Leakey 1977).

Unlike some Kenyan communities which openly resisted European settlement in their county, the Kikuyu did not put up an open resistance, perhaps due to their lack of a centralized system of political organization (Sorrenson 1967). Politically, the Kikuyu had a decentralized system of government (Leakey 1977). Lacking the political and military prowess to prevent the government-backed European settlers in their country, the Kiambu Kikuyu suffered huge land losses upon colonial land alienation.

Economically, the Kikuyu were mainly farmers and agricultural products were the core sources of their food. The Kikuyu diet was mainly grains and a variety of green vegetables like sorghum, millet, beans, bananas and sweet potatoes (Leakey 1977, Musalia 2010). Sweet potatoes and other perennial crops like arrowroots, cassava and yams acted as suitable substitute in times of drought due to their capacity to withstand drought under minimal weeding (Musalia 2010).

In addition, the Kikuyu of Kiambu owned many cattle, goats and sheep which were very crucial to their life as they were used during religious ceremonies. Most of the life activities of the Kikuyu people were accompanied by various ceremonies such as planting ceremony, ceremony of purifying crops and harvesting ceremony. They believed these sacrifices would calm down the ancestral spirits from bringing pests and insects that would affect their crops and livestock. Cattle rearing and ownership was a display of wealth and part of Kikuyu economic life (Musalia 2010, Leakey 1977).

Trade was also an important economic activity of the Kikuyu people of Kiambu County. Before European settlement in Kiambu, the Kikuyu people had produced surplus food which they exchanged with traders from the coast who traversed the distance between the Kenyan coast and Uganda. The food crops produced and sold to the caravans included sugarcane, millet, sorghum, maize, a variety of beans and bananas. Through barter trade, the Kikuyu traded what they had with what they lacked. The sweet potatoes were exchanged for goats and hence served as an important means of increasing wealth. Various other crops which were grown for commercial purposes included castor oil, tobacco, gourd plant, thatching grass, and a creeping plant used in purification ceremonies called *notoniapetreae* (*ng'onduyakiondo*) (Leakey 1977, Muchoki 1988, Musalia, 2010).

Thus, from the foregoing, it can be concluded that the Kikuyu of Kiambu County were in need of more land on which to grow their crops. However, the arrival of European farmers generated competition for farmland and Africans in Kiambu County responded in various ways. The next section examines migration out of Kiambu County as a response to European coffee growing.

Settlement of European coffee-growers in Kiambu County

As part of their colonizing mission, the colonial administration built a railway line that ran across the Kenyan territory (Ogonda 1992, Obudho and Obudho 1992). When the colonial government finished building a railway line from the Kenyan coast all the way to Uganda, settler farming was promoted in order to make the railway pay for itself (Maxon 1992, Talbott 1992).

Fertile lands were marked for European settlement and Kiambu County was one of them. In particular, Kiambu area was found to be suitable for coffee growing around 1911. The area had favourable weather conditions and soil types. Other factors which stimulated coffee growing in Kiambu County were reliable rainfall and high coffee prices on the world market (Kenya National Archives, MA1/12/2 Kiambu District Annual Report 1911). By 1915, the chief industries in Kiambu were coffee planting at the lower altitudes while, on the other hand, there was market gardening and wattle growing in the higher altitudes. In spite of the First World War outbreak in 1914, coffee plantation continued being extended rapidly in the district. Coffee production in the Kenya colony progressed over the years in comparison to citrus, wattle, maize, beans, peas, vegetables and orchards (Barnes 1976). Coffee expanded acreages yearly, in the lower Limuru, Kabete and Mbagathi (Kenya National Archives, MA1/12/13 Kiambu District Annual Report 1917-1918:18).

Suitable soils and climate conditions aside, coffee growing in Kiambu county was adversely affected by coffee diseases which hampered its production. In 1918, for instance, the coffee crop was almost entirely ruined by thrips. This, nonetheless, did not hinder continued production as the area under coffee continued to expand exponentially. This expansion was triggered by the high coffee prices on the world market (Kenya National Archives, MA1/12/14 Kiambu District Annual Report 1917-1918:18). The expansion of coffee growing in terms of land area also called for a steady supply of labour which only Africans would supply at the time. A lot of labour was required during weeding and picking of coffee berries. To trigger steady supply of African labour for European settler farms, the colonial government squeezed Africans in what was called Native Reserves which served to limit African access to land as well as the free movement of people, thereby accommodating settlers' interests in steady supply of landless labourers (Mosley 1983).

Unfortunately, Africans who were supposed to supply the labour were, at the time, still deeply involved in practising their precolonial agricultural practices. Faced with shortage of farmland, the Kikuyu people, instead of offering their labour as an economic option, decided to migrate out of Kiambu County in large numbers. The next section examines migration as a response to European coffee-growing in Kiambu County

Migration as a response to European coffee-growing in Kiambu County

As had been expected, the colonial government thought that European coffee-growers would secure cheap labour from the African residents of Kiambu County. Instead of supplying the much-needed labour, the Kikuyu people migrated to areas occupied by people of Kamba descent. Most of the Kamba people had been involved in long distance trade (Ochieng' 1992) and, as such, most of the land in their territory was not cultivated. The Kamba obtained beans, yams, bananas, maize and arrowroot from the Kikuyu (Ochieng' 1985). Thus, the scheme of the colonial government to force Africans to supply cheap labour on European farms did not succeed in Kiambu County. By 1911, for example, many Kikuyu were migrating from the Kiambu to other areas in search of land for farming. Indeed, a survey carried in 1911 noted that:

There was a constant stream of emigration from the district to up country districts. As long as this did not seriously reduce the population of the reserves it did not seem to need checking but if it became excessive the reserves would cease to be a reservoir for casual labour and would lose much of their usefulness (Kenya National Archives, MA1/12/9 Kiambu District Annual Report 1911-1912:7).

Initially, the migration of the Kikuyu people from Kiambu County was heavily triggered by the the alienation of land for European settlement. The reason which the Kikuyu gave for their migration out of the County was that “there was unlimited agricultural and grazing land available there and that life was generally easier in Ukambani than in Kikuyu” (Kenya National Archives, MA1/12/3 Kiambu District Annual Report 1911-1912). Kenyanjui (1992) has correctly observed that the Kikuyu were in the habit of migrating when they were faced with calamities. Shortage of land presented one such calamity.

The Kikuyu people from Kiambu County did not only migrate to far areas. Some of them migrated to Nairobi city. Nairobi had developed rapidly since being chosen as the headquarters of the Kenya-Uganda Railway. Kiambu County lay a few kilometers from Nairobi and the lure of urban growth did not escape the attention of Africans. As a result, there was some form of rural-urban migration between rural Kiambu county and Nairobi city. Those who migrated to Nairobi were driven by trading opportunities which enabled them to raise money with which to pay government taxes (Kenya National Archives, MA1/12/2 Kiambu District Annual Report 1911:3). There was a link between the Kiambu Kikuyu who had settled in Nairobi and their rural forks. While those who remained in rural Kiambu cultivated food crops, those who settled in Nairobi provided a link through which food from Kiambu County was sold to residents of Nairobi. Ogonde and Ochieng’ (1992) have correctly observed that the Kikuyu produced agricultural surpluses for exchange. However, it was during the penetration of indigenous economies by capitalism that Africans stepped up production of surplus food for trade (Maxon 1992, Zeleza 1989, Ochieng’ 1992).

Indeed, trade in food products generated more money for the Kikuyu people than working on white-owned coffee farms. The District Commissioner for Kiambu County noted in the period 1914-1915 that “dairy farming near Nairobi was flourishing owing to the high price and great demand for milk which had led to the natives making a profit (Kenya National Archives, MAI 1/12/10 Kiambu District Annual Report 1914-1915:46). African farmers in Kiambu County also carried out fowl keeping destined for the Nairobi market. The Kikuyu of Kiambu also benefited by trading in maize. The outbreak of the First World War also witnessed an increase in the harvest of a large amount of maize which was being disposed of by the natives in order to obtain the money for the hut and poll tax (Kenya National Archives, MAI/12/17 Kiambu District Annual Report 1922:19).

The colonial government, even when faced with a crisis of labour whose magnitude continued to severely affect the settlers and coffee growing, failed to change the colonial policies that would have been pro-Africans and in so doing contributed to the problem of labour shortage. Talbot (1992) observes that Africans had to be administratively confined in their specific localities by their chiefs and local councils.

By insisting on restriction of African movement, the government failed to address the real reasons which were triggering migration of Africans from Kiambu County. Instead, it blamed migration on the spread of a weed called “*Karigei*” and its terrible handicap to cultivation. According to the Kiambu District Commissioner, the Kikuyu were “migrating away from land infested with this weed” (Kenya National Archives, MA1/12/12 Kiambu District Annual Report 1916-1917:4). The real reasons which led to migration of Kikuyu from Kiambu were land shortage and poor pay for farm laborers; all of which had been occasioned by the invasion of European coffee-farmers.

However, there were a few Kikuyu labourers who offered their labor on European farms but they did so “for fear of being recruited into the First World War as carrier corps” (Kenya National Archives, MA1/12/12 Kiambu District Annual Report 1916-1917:41). The colonial government employed force to ensure steady supply of African labour on settler farms (Frankem, Green and Hillbom 2015). Indeed, force was used on the Kikuyu of Kiambu in the period 1916-1917, to ensure that practically every able-bodied man who was not in regular employment on the farm or elsewhere was employed in the army (KNA/ MA1/12/13 Kiambu District Annual Report 1917/1918). But even as efforts were being made to make the Kiambu Kikuyu work for the colonial government in one way or another, the labour situation, for both the army and coffee farms, was made worse by a surge in beer brewing and drinking. It is during this time that “illicit huts known as “*Wangure*” to which girls were taken rather against their will for the night sprang up and drunkenness was more marked than ever” (Kenya National Archives, MA1/12/13 Kiambu District Annual Report 1917/1918:2).

Generally, the period up to the end of the First World War witnessed the failure of government schemes to force Africans to work on European coffee farms. This, among other reasons such as a drop in coffee prices on the world market due to the war, led European coffee farms to fail to realize profit from their farming enterprises. As a result, several coffee estates were sold, by the original owners of land of which they had failed to make a complete success, to new owners who were willing to pay handsomely for it. According to the Kiambu District Commissioner, “near Kiambu 900 acres bearing coffee and wheat fetched \$38,000 and an instance was quoted of underdeveloped land having fetched \$15 an acre” (Kenya National Archives, MA1/12/14 Kiambu District Annual Report 1918-1919:6).

European coffee-growing in the era of Political agitation in Kiambu County

The First World War had created, in its wake, an economic recession which saw prices of all farm produce fall heavily and the market remained in a state of depression thereafter (Kenya National Archives, MA1/12/16 Kiambu District Annual Report 1920-1921:44). The situation was worsened by the drought of 1920 which almost brought coffee production to its knees. Several coffee estates were wholly or partially sold and good prices were realized (Kenya National Archives, MA1/12/16 Kiambu District Annual Report 1920-1921:44). Due to the challenges witnessed in producing coffee, alternative crops began to be planted as reported at the time by the Kiambu District Commissioner.

Recently in the district experiments have been made in the cultivation of sugar cane and some planters go so far as to say it may eventually prove a rival to coffee. Market gardening and dairying were found to be profitable and were being increasingly undertaken (Kenya National Archives, MA1/12/16 Kiambu District Annual Report 1920-1921:44).

The fall in coffee prices, the drought and experiments with other crops all combined to kill European coffee production in Kiambu in 1921. On the whole the period after 1921 was one of the most difficult and disappointing results compared with previous 15 years of coffee growing in Kiambu County (Kenya National Archives, MA1/12/16 Kiambu District Annual Report 1920-1921:44). The primacy of coffee rose again in 1922. But the rise was not occasioned by acceptance of the Kiambu Kikuyu to offer farm labour to European coffee farms because anti-European feelings had risen among the Africans. The feelings were fuelled by government taxation and the introduction of the *Kipande* system (a system of registering natives with a view to checking their movements). These schemes failed, yet again, to yield the expected results. The District Commissioner for Kiambu commented on this stating “that the feeling in the Kiambu Native Reserve at the time was one of unrest and it was not easy to combat propaganda which was skillfully organized” (Kenya National Archives, MA1/12/17 Kiambu District Annual Report 1921:1).

Anti-colonial resentment was first directed at colonial African chiefs. Chiefs were the implementers of government policies at the grassroot level. The administrators’ direct contact with Africans, especially while recruiting labour for coffee plantations and collecting taxes, was bound to cause conflicts. The District Commissioner, of Kiambu district, at the time remarked:

My own opinion is that a path of the chiefs and elders together with their incessant victimization of their people has produced feelings of resentment coupled with the fact that there is an ever increasing young population gradually becoming educated, which is beginning to insist on a fuller share of representation (Kenya National Archives, MA1/12/17 Kiambu District Annual Report 1921:1).

In 1922, the failure of the colonial government to resolve the underlying economic deprivation of Africans led to emergence of more radical Africans in Kiambu County ready to change the course of history. The outstanding incident during the year 1922 had been the sedition agitation conducted by a Kikuyu native called Harry Thuku who led a riot in Nairobi, and which had to be dealt with by force of arms. Thuku was deported to Kismayu and his associates Waiganjo and Mugekenyi to Lamu and Wanya respectively. This affair formed the subject of a white paper in the British parliament (Kenya National Archives, MA1/12/17 Kiambu District Annual Report 1922:17).

Political agitation created shortage in labour supply by Africans even further. This was at a time when more African labor was needed as a result of continued experimentation for new crops by Europeans in Kiambu County. European farmers in Kiambu had began, in 1921, experimenting with flax, alongside planting coffee. This placed a huge burden on securing African labourers.

The large increase in coffee and flax are especially noticeable. Satisfactory as these developments are, it must not be forgotten that they add considerably to the administration burden of endeavoring to arrange for an adequate supply of native labour. (Kenya National Archives, MA1/12/16 Kiambu District Annual report 1919-1920)

The problem of labour supply was worsened by yet another problem which Europeans had occasioned. Some of them had started experimenting with sugar cane farming and several of them had erected sugar crushing mills thereby making it easier for the natives to manufacture native beer (*tembo* as it was referred to) thereby contributing greatly to the difficulties of administration in dealing with drinking in reserves. The problem of alcoholism became worse in 1923 when a brewing industry was opened at Ruarakain the neighborhood of Kiambu County (Kenya National Archives, MA1/12/13 Kiambu District Annual Report 1922:8).

Alcoholism did not only affect potential African labourers, colonial administrators such as headmen were also drowned in alcoholism. This made it very hard for them to exercise their authority as required under the Native Authority Ordinance. Under this Ordinance, headmen would affect forced supply of African labour. The problem continued in spite of stringent measures to curb it by the council of elders (*Kiama*) who had under stimulation imposed heavy fines for drunkenness (Kenya National Archives, MA1/12/13 Kiambu District Annual Report 1924:5).

By mid-1920s, the problem of short supply of African labour on European farms had hit the roof. The situation was worsened by reduced wages. The result, as earlier on, was closure of a number of coffee states (Kenya National Archives, MA1/12/13 Kiambu District Annual Report 1921:7). Reduction in wages was justified on ground that market prices for coffee on the world market had dropped yet when coffee prices shot up, wages were not increased correspondingly. Zeleza (1992: 171) has correctly observed that “colonialism was ultimately about exploitation, and labour is the source of all exploitation”. While the colonial government knew well that poor wages hindered the steady supply of African labour, it chose to side with and support settler interests.

Thus, Ndege (1992:203) has correctly observed that “the colonial state was forced to heed the interests of classes and capital which mattered most”. This time saw extreme cases of African resistance being dealt with by colonial courts and the offenders being adequately punished (Kenya National Archives, MA1/12/13 Kiambu District Annual Report 1921:9). In fact, colonial Kenya fit the definition of a settler economy because the colonial government appropriated and reallocated productive resources to colonial settlers on a significant scale (Mosley 1983, Frankem, Green and Hilbom 2015).

A lot of resistance was witnessed in spite of court-sanctioned punishments. Indeed, more Africans migrated from Kiambu County and the only supply of African labour was from outside the county, mainly from Nyeri, Murang’a (then called Forthall), Embu and Meru Counties. It was not long before labour supply from these counties was curtailed when professional recruiters had taken all those available for railway work. As a result, the problem of obtaining labour to pick coffee persisted (Kenya National Archives, MA1/12/13 Kiambu District Annual Report 1924:8).

The government responded to the challenge occasioned by shortage of African labour supply by issuing an Order to all Government headmen in Kiambu County to prevent any further emigration from their respective locations. This, also, proved ineffective (Kenya National Archives, MA1/12/13 Kiambu District Annual Report 1922:17). An additional measure of raising taxes was resorted to. The thinking within government at the time was the hope that “by gradually bringing hut tax collection nearer to the beginning of the year, it was possible to stimulate the natives to go out to labour about the time of the coffee picking season” (Kenya National Archives, MA1/12/13 Kiambu District Annual Report 1924:9). This did not yield the intended hope.

As a result, European coffee farmers began to make improvements regarding the welfare of the workers through provision of higher wages, schools and recreational facilities. These improvements did not impress women of Kiambu County, as it had been hoped (Kenya National Archives, MA1/12/13 Kiambu District Annual Report 1925:12). Men, on the other hand, were equally not impressed with either the introduction of inter-farm sports or the building of a large meeting place where natives met after work hours as they listened to a gramophone (Kenya National Archives, MA1/12/13 Kiambu District Annual Report 1924:9).

Acquisition of formal education by young Kikuyu men from Kiambu further complicated the possibility of recruiting them as coffee farm laborers. In about 1924, the District Commissioner announced the position of a hut counter and his office was crowded with applicants. As a result, the DC doubted if the applicants “would demean themselves with manual labour.” (Kenya National Archives, MA1/12/13 Kiambu District Annual Report 1924:10).

As time went by, African colonial chiefs joined their subjects to frustrate government schemes to supply African labourers on European coffee farms. By 1932, for instance, Chief Josiah, stated his displeasure with the presence of European coffee farming in Kiambu County stating that “the fact that worries us is that many Europeans have obtained land which was ours and on which they now plant coffee and make themselves rich at the expense of the Kikuyu owners” (Colony and Protectorate of Kenya 1933, See also Kenya National Archives, MA1/12/30 Kiambu District Annual Report 1936:2). The problem of labour supply thus persisted throughout the 1930s. During these years, the Kikuyu of Kiambu continued to eke a living and raising money for their government taxes by selling their food crops in the ever-expanding town of Nairobi.

The natives of this district are remarkably fortunate in having such a great variety of marketable produce with such close marketing in Nairobi and the thickly populated settled area around their reserve. Apart from the greater revenue producing commodities such as maize, beans, wattle bark and potatoes a very useful source of revenue is made from the sale of vegetables, charcoal, maize stalks, firewood, bananas and dairy produce including poultry (KNA/Kiambu District Annual Report 1934).

Migration out of Kiambu County persisted and, consequently, labour supply problems persisted on the eve of the outbreak of the Second World War and during the period of decolonization as examined in the next section.

Persistence of shortage of African coffee-farm labourers towards and during the period of decolonization

The period between 1939 and 1950 saw the reinforcement of bad feelings and attitudes towards European coffee farming in Kiambu County. Indeed, the Second World War broke out amid acute shortage of African labour on European coffee farms. By 1941 many Africans had been able to officially analyse the economic options they could take given their productivity. This led to the growth of the number of Africans opting out of farm employment for trading activities. As a result, the settlers' labour supply demand became inadequate. The Kiambu District Commissioner in his annual report for the 1941 notes that:

...many difficulties abound in recruiting labour locally for the less remunerative and more prolonged work on their farms particularly weeding. Much local labour, that is, male labour has not, in fact been available for weeding (Kenya National Archives, MA1/12/).

The Second World War had occasioned severe inflation and due to poor pay the Kikuyu of Kiambu did not see anything lucrative or congenial in pruning or weeding coffee for 50 cents a day. Furthermore, there was more freedom and prestige in one having a business enterprise. In any case, the colonial period increased opportunities for survival for the Kikuyu people of Kiambu county. In particular, there were many trades to which the Kikuyu people could turn his hand on which did give him quick returns more inviting than a settled wage and there was less bodily sweat mingled in it. The young men had grown up much quicker than their parents and the temptation to be their own bosses was too great for them to turn down. Thus, they grabbed any opportunity that came their way, and with both hands, made the best of it (Kenya National Archives, MA1/12/38 Kiambu District Annual Report 1944:2).

The enterprising behavior of the Kiambu Kikuyu got a boost towards the end of the First World War when banks started offering loans to Africans. In 1945, the first African from Kiambu sought financial help from a bank to expand his business (Kenya National Archives, MA1/12/39 Kiambu District Annual Report 1945:13). Increasingly, the Kikuyu sense of capitalism and individualism continued to grow and the District Commissioner felt that this was “the most serious threat to the structure of a society” (Kenya National Archives, MA1/12/36 Kiambu District Annual Report 1942:2).

As years of colonialism progressed, the African population kept on growing and putting pressure on land. It became increasingly clear that the large number of instituted land cases sprouted from economic want felt largely among the younger members of families who found that their heritage was not sufficient for their ever-growing family needs (Kenya National Archives, MA1/12/37 Kiambu District Annual Report 1943:1). This led to heightened bad feelings against the Europeans whom they saw as having grabbed their ancestral land.

Despite the introduction of wage labour, the overdependence on land among the Kikuyu remained unchanged. Land still remained the beginning and end of everything for many Kikuyu, and, like before, their tendency to demand more land outside the native land unit increased (Kenya National Archives, MA1/12/39 Kiambu District Annual Report 1945:7). However, the over-dependency on land for the production of produce for trade in Nairobi, in the face growing land

scarcity, led to many land conflicts and anti-colonial agitation. Land on which European coffee was grown by the settlers seemed to be the genesis of all the tribulations that the Kikuyu were facing according to their perspective. The political aspirations of the Kiambu Kikuyu had been and always remained to be centered on land (Kenya National Archives, MA1/12/38 Kiambu District Annual Report 1944:1). Land matters were made worse when more Kikuyu people were expelled from areas where they had migrated.

There was no doubt that despite the introduction of special legislation designed to achieve more effective control of alcohol, illicit traffic in Nubian gin was on the increase in Kiambu County in the 1940s. So serious was the alcohol problem in Kiambu that the District Commissioner feared that "even though prosecutions and convictions continued, and heavy sentences administered, the forces of law and order were fighting a losing battle on this particular front" (Kenya National Archives, MAI/12/35 Kiambu District Annual Report 1941:2). Alcoholism and poor pay during the post-WWII period worsened the situation of labour supply on European coffee farms (Kenya National Archives, MAI/12/36) Kiambu District Annual Report 1942:11).

Faced with acute shortage of labour, Europeans started a number of social gatherings generally in the form of tea parties, both on European farms and in the native areas. These appeared to be very popular, although some of the younger and more irresponsible members of the tribe maintained that they were merely a form of bribery on the part of Europeans to allow labourers to go to their farms. The coffee farmers of Kiambu had put forward to government a suggestion that they would help, benefit the local natives in some way and cease when the last berry was off the tree (Kenya National Archives, MA1/12/13 Kiambu District Annual Report 1945:8). But every time some measures were introduced to lure Africans to supply their labour of European coffee farms such efforts were too little, too late.

Between the two World wars, a class of progressive Kikuyu farmers had emerged in Kiambu and they were offering better pay to African labourers than were doing their European counterparts. Africans preferred to work for their fellow African farmers even though, according to the Kiambu District commissioner, "the labourers were expected to do about twice as much work for a fellow Kikuyu" (KNA/ MA1/12/13 Kiambu District Annual Report 1945:9). The problem of landlessness among Africans was compounded in the late 1940s when a wealthy class of Kikuyu bought land from those whose land holdings were uneconomic either by size or poor cultivation (Kenya National Archives, MA1/12/41 Kiambu District Annual Report 1947:6). The result of this practice was that more Kikuyu landless or poor, resorted to work on farms of their fellow Kikuyu who were rich by virtue of better farming of their enlarged land holdings.

In order to compete with progressive Kikuyu farmers for African labour, European farmers organized labour liaison committees, consisting of production sub-committee members and chiefs, with the District Commissioner as chairman. They provided a valuable opportunity for mutual understanding as well as facilitating the flow of coffee pickers to the areas most in need and for a discussion on any difficulties that arose in connection with labour. At both Ruiru and Thika the planters entertained the African members to tea. It was agreed at these meetings to raise the picking price per debe from 20 cents to 25 cents and in all probability if prices were sustained it would have been fair to raise this price again to 30 cents the following year (Kenya National Archives, MA1/12/13 Kiambu District Annual Report 1947:7).

A rise in pay for laborers was, once again, too little too late. Political agitation had been rising steadily and political agitators were all over the district organizing meetings aimed at fomenting and inflaming ill feeling against government, its employees and activities. The government responded to these activities by banning such meetings and also by banning the collection of money by agitators for such activities.

In spite of the government measures, political agitators were successful in stirring up strikes in factories and on farms in Kiambu. The government resorted to dictatorial measures, which angered the Africans even more. Many were arrested and deported. Notable among those deported was Chege Kibachia. Before the dust settled, a strike of coffee pickers was organized by women only and roads were picketed. Although not proven, there was every indication that this strike was organized by a member of the Local Native Council called Solomon Memia and another person called Lawson Mbugua (Kenya National Archives, MA1/12/41 Kiambu District Annual Report: 1947:3).

By the year 1951, when the government allowed Africans in Kiambu to start growing coffee, European coffee growing had been negatively impacted by resistance from resident Africans who refused to offer their labour as required and expected. On a conclusive note, this chapter agrees with Ndege (1992) who states that the colonial state had to cope with contradictions and crises in its role of articulating pre-capitalist social formations with capitalism.

4. CONCLUSION

Three things, namely loss of land, supply of cheap labour and payment of government taxes determined the manner of African response to European coffee growing in Kiambu County, Kenya. Generally, the three things generated bad feelings among the Africans of Kiambu towards colonial establishment. As a result, and contrary to the expectation of the colonial government, the introduction of taxes did not generate the much-needed supply of labour on European farms. Instead of supplying cheap labor, Africans adopted four main ways of resisting European coffee growing. The first was migration out of Kiambu. Most of them preferred to continue with their precolonial farming activities and, since they needed more land, they migrated out of Kiambu in search of farmland. A lot of them migrated to the Rift valley and in areas occupied by the Kamba people. The second mode of response was involvement in trade. The emergence, growth and development of Nairobi as a capital city of the Kenya colony generated demand for farm products most of which were supplied by Africans of Kiambu County. Thirdly, the Kikuyu resorted to anti-colonial agitation with a view to claiming their ancestral lands which European farmers had snatched from them. Lastly, many Africans became alcoholic and this prevented them from supplying the much-needed labour on European coffee farms. Thus, Africans resisted European coffee growing in Kiambu in great measure.

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