



African Journal of History and Geography

ajhg.eanso.org

Volume 4, Issue 1, 2025

Print ISSN: 2790-7589 | Online ISSN: 2790-7597

Title DOI: <https://doi.org/10.37284/2790-7597>



EAST AFRICAN
NATURE &
SCIENCE
ORGANIZATION

Original Article

Indigenous Food Production Practices Vis-a-Vis Western Culture: A Historical Study of Livestock Production Among the Abagusii of Kenya, 1904-1920

Ogora Felix^{1*}, Prof. Herman Kiriama, PhD¹ & Dr. Evans Nyamwaka, PhD¹

¹ Kisii University, P. O. BOX 408-40200, Kisii, Kenya.

* Author's ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0004-7477-5551>; Email: ogorafelix187@gmail.com

Article DOI: <https://doi.org/10.37284/ajhg.4.1.2720>

Date Published: **ABSTRACT**

24 February 2025

Keywords:

*Indigenous Livestock
Production,
Colonialism,
Missionary Work,
Marginalization,
Taxation.*

This paper examines how the Abagusii navigated through the imposition of Western culture on their indigenous livestock production practices. Pre-colonial livestock production among the Abagusii was embedded within their economic, social and cultural structures. However, the advent of British colonial rule and the influence of Christian missionaries precipitated profound transformations in livestock production disrupting its indigenous significance and functions. Drawing upon the frameworks of the Articulation of Modes of Production and Agency theories, this paper traces the historical evolution of livestock production among the Abagusii, delineating the trajectory from an indigenous socioeconomic pillar to a marginalized sector under Western culture. The study explores the impact of colonial taxation policies, land alienation, forced labour and the promotion of cash crop farming, which collectively undermined the indigenous livestock economy. Missionary influences further reshaped social and economic structures, as missionary education and religious conversion redirected labour away from livestock farming. Using a historical research design, data was methodically collected from archival sources, oral interviews, and secondary sources. Through thematic analysis, patterns emerged, illuminating how external forces gradually reshaped livestock production in Gusiiland. The study reveals that despite colonial disruptions, the Abagusii community exhibited resilience by adapting their livestock practices to the evolving economic landscape, integrating aspects of capitalist agriculture while striving to maintain elements of indigenous livestock rearing. Furthermore, the research uncovers how the introduction of missionary work altered Abagusii indigenous knowledge through the acquiring of missionary education pushing younger generations away from livestock farming toward wage labour and administrative roles. Despite these shifts, livestock continued to hold cultural significance, albeit in a diminished economic capacity. In essence, the transformation of livestock production among the Abagusii of Kenya epitomizes the complex interaction between indigenous, colonial economic policies and missionary interventions. While colonial capitalism and missionary efforts sought to restructure

indigenous agricultural systems, the Abagusii community employed adaptive strategies that ensured the partial retention and modification of their livestock economy. The study advocates for contemporary policies aimed at revitalizing livestock farming among marginalized communities to incorporate historical insights, cultural sensitivity, and community-driven development approaches.

APA CITATION

Felix, O., Kiriama, H. & Nyamwaka, E. (2025). Indigenous Food Production Practices Vis-a-Vis Western Culture: A Historical Study of Livestock Production Among the Abagusii of Kenya, 1904-1920. *African Journal of History and Geography*, 4(1), 75-87. <https://doi.org/10.37284/ajhg.4.1.2720>.

CHICAGO CITATION

Felix, Ogora, Herman Kiriama and Evans Nyamwaka. "Indigenous Food Production Practices Vis-a-Vis Western Culture: A Historical Study of Livestock Production Among the Abagusii of Kenya, 1904-1920". *African Journal of History and Geography* 4 (1), 75-87. <https://doi.org/10.37284/ajhg.4.1.2720>

HARVARD CITATION

Felix, O., Kiriama, H. & Nyamwaka, E. (2025) "Indigenous Food Production Practices Vis-a-Vis Western Culture: A Historical Study of Livestock Production Among the Abagusii of Kenya, 1904-1920", *African Journal of History and Geography*, 4 (1), pp. 75-87. doi: 10.37284/ajhg.4.1.2720.

IEEE CITATION

O. Felix, H. Kiriama & E. Nyamwaka "Indigenous Food Production Practices Vis-a-Vis Western Culture: A Historical Study of Livestock Production Among the Abagusii of Kenya, 1904-1920", *AJHG*, vol. 4, no. 1, pp. 75-87, Feb. 2025.

MLA CITATION

Felix, Ogora, Herman Kiriama & Evans Nyamwaka "Indigenous Food Production Practices Vis-a-Vis Western Culture: A Historical Study of Livestock Production Among the Abagusii of Kenya, 1904-1920". *African Journal of History and Geography*, Vol. 4, no. 1, Feb. 2025, pp. 75-87, doi:10.37284/ajhg.4.1.2720.

INTRODUCTION

Food production including crop cultivation and livestock farming is essential for global food security and economic stability. In recent years, agricultural outputs have declined with livestock production particularly affected. This trend has impacted rural livelihoods and worsened nutritional health, especially in vulnerable communities. The causes are diverse which include climate change, environmental degradation, economic mismanagement, and socio-political instability (Kuhanen, 2005). To address these challenges, the United Nations has introduced Sustainable Development Goal 2 (SDG 2): Zero Hunger, aiming to end hunger, achieve food security, improve nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture by 2030. Despite these efforts, food insecurity has worsened since driven by the COVID-19 pandemic, conflicts, climate disruptions and growing inequalities. By 2022, 9.2% of the global population were undernourished showcasing the urgent need for comprehensive solutions (United Nations, 2023).

Livestock production in pre-colonial Africa was integral to both the economy and social structure,

providing essential resources such as food, labour for farming and manure to enhance soil fertility. Livestock symbolized wealth and status, often used in marriage practices such as bride wealth, serving as a form of currency and wealth storage. This significantly influenced family dynamics and labour roles, with ownership affecting social standing and household organization. Environmental challenges such as disease, droughts and soil erosion impacted livestock management. Communities adapted through strategies such as pastoral mobility, communal herding and combining livestock with crop cultivation. Despite these obstacles, livestock remained a cornerstone of agricultural productivity and trade, deeply embedded in the cultural and economic fabric of pre-colonial African societies (Green, 2013).

In pre-colonial South Pare, Tanzania, livestock production was central to the economy and social structure, with cattle serving as both a source of food and a symbol of wealth, integrated into trade networks with neighbouring pastoralist communities such as the Maasai. The introduction of colonial rule disrupted indigenous trade

systems, confined pastoralists and shifted the livestock economy towards market-based exchanges. This made cattle more expensive and harder to acquire through barter. Despite these changes, the expansion of irrigation and rice cultivation in the colonial period allowed farmers to reinvest profits into livestock, maintaining cattle as a key form of wealth. However, colonial policies and market fluctuations also led to environmental degradation and challenges in sustaining livestock production (Hakansson, 2008).

The colonial transformation of livestock economies among the Nandi, Akamba of Machakos, and Rongo in South Nyanza illustrates both overarching and localized impacts of British colonial policies. Among the Nandi, colonial interventions displaced indigenous cattle farmers, restricted their ability to keep exotic breeds until the 1950s, and forced many into squatter settlements and wage labour, significantly altering indigenous cattle production systems (Ng'isirei et al., 2017). Similarly, in Machakos, the Akamba experienced land alienation, overstocking, and over-cultivation due to being pushed into reserves, while taxation policies and quarantine measures further suppressed their livestock economy, shifting their reliance from cattle to other forms of subsistence (Mwikali, 2022). In Rongo, South Nyanza, British colonial policies, including labour demands, taxation, and the promotion of cash crop agriculture, redirected resources away from cattle production, leading to a decline in the once-thriving cattle economy, exacerbated by inadequate breeding facilities and demographic shifts (Ndege, 1989). These studies reveal patterns of colonial disruption across diverse regions, though each community's response and adaptation varied according to local socio-economic and environmental contexts.

Livestock production in Gusiiland experienced notable shifts during the colonial and post-colonial periods, shaped by evolving agricultural policies and socio-economic changes. During the colonial period, the importance of livestock among Abagusii diminished due to reduced grazing areas, outbreaks of livestock diseases, and

the introduction of cash crops like tea, coffee, and pyrethrum. This shift was partly influenced by colonial policies that prioritized export-oriented agriculture over indigenous livestock practices (Motanya, 2019). The colonial administration sought to improve livestock production through initiatives such as establishing ghee industries, model dairies in Kisii, as well as introducing improved Sahiwal bulls, however, access to these resources was limited to wealthier farmers (Omwoyo, 1990). Post-independence, livestock remained integral to rural livelihoods in Kisii, playing a crucial role in food security strategies. However, the growing emphasis on cash crops and urban expansion increasingly constrained livestock farming, necessitating its integration with modern agricultural practices to sustain rural livelihoods (Omosa, 1998).

Much of the scholarly work on colonial agriculture in Gusiiland has focused on the cultivation and export of cash crops such as tea, coffee, and pyrethrum (Omosa, 1998; Motanya, 2019; Omwoyo, 1990). This focus has marginalized livestock production, creating a narrative that suggests British colonial policies primarily exploited crop farmers while livestock producers were unaffected. The limited research on livestock often emphasizes pastoralist societies, overlooking its role in mixed farming communities such as Abagusii. Therefore, this study aims to examine the transformation of livestock production in Gusiiland during the colonial period, highlighting its overlooked role in the region's agricultural history.

Statement of the Problem

During the pre-colonial period, livestock represented prosperity among African societies. In Kenya Abagusii to be specific, the livestock economy experienced a decline during the colonial period. Livestock production no longer inspired the same widespread sense of honour and status among the Abagusii as it had been occasioned in the pre-colonial period. Generally, the pre-colonial prominence of livestock keeping in Gusii was entirely disrupted. Today, livestock production among the Abagusii remains

marginalized facing social and economic struggles. Therefore, a historical inquiry into the influence of Western culture on the systematic neglect and marginalization of the Gusii livestock sector is imperative. The necessity of this analysis is further underscored by the limited scholarly discourse on indigenous livestock production among the Abagusii.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Empirical Review

Schneider (1957) investigates the contribution of cattle to the cultural and economic lives of the Pakot in Kenya and other East African societies. The study reveals that cattle were deeply embedded in their subsistence practices, serving as symbols of rituals and essential resources for survival. He emphasizes that cattle provide milk and meat and are key in trade and social exchanges, such as in acquiring grain or as part of marriage transactions. For instance, cattle were often exchanged for food or used in ceremonies that double as communal feasts, ensuring both cultural continuity and nutritional sustenance (Schneider, 1957). The work demonstrates the dual role of cattle in maintaining both the social structure and everyday livelihood an important theme in this study.

Barber's (1962) examines livestock production in Uganda's Karamoja District and explains the role of cattle in the economic, social, and cultural fabric of the Karamojong people. He argues that the Karamojong's dependence on cattle for both livelihood and societal functions was systematically undermined by colonial neglect due to the absence of adequate veterinary services. Epizootic diseases such as rinderpest and pleuropneumonia devastated cattle populations in the early 20th century, yet colonial authorities failed to respond effectively, delaying substantive veterinary intervention until 1948. He attributes the inability to establish a robust cattle trade to inadequate disease management and the arbitrary imposition of colonial boundaries, which disrupted indigenous transhumant grazing practices and precipitated overgrazing. Barber

concludes that these colonial interventions not only eroded the Karamojong's capacity to maintain a resilient livestock economy but also exacerbated ecological degradation, resulting in enduring structural challenges for pastoral production in the region.

Mwikali (2022) discusses the historical trajectory of the livestock economy and its transformation among the Akamba of Machakos, Kenya, between 1895 and 1963. She explains that colonial policies significantly influenced the decline of livestock as a predominant economic activity among the Akamba. This study presents the impact of colonial capitalism on indigenous pastoral practices, emphasizing how land alienation, taxation, and labour demands marginalized the livestock sector. For instance, Mwikali illustrates that while the colonial administration imposed restrictive policies, the Akamba community selectively integrated beneficial colonial practices into their livestock economy (Mwikali, 2022). Further, the study illustrates that although the colonial state aimed to subordinate the Akamba economy to capitalist interests, the Akamba responded adaptively, retaining aspects of their indigenous practices while embracing new methods. Although this study presents important literature on the transformation of the livestock economy under colonial rule, it primarily focuses on the Akamba of Machakos. A study on the Abagusii is yet to be conducted.

Cokumu (2001) has written on the colonial transformation of agriculture in Siaya from 1894 to 1945, which was a multifaceted process that fundamentally altered the region's socio-economic structure. Prior to colonial rule, the Luo had developed a dynamic and efficient agricultural system, deeply rooted in their environmental knowledge and indigenous practices. However, with the advent of British colonialism, these indigenous systems were gradually subordinated to the colonial capitalist economy through a combination of political conquest, land alienation and the imposition of repressive administrative structures. In a similar vein, Ndege (1989) notes the transformation of the cattle economy in Rongo Division, South Nyanza,

between 1900 and 1960. He observes that it was driven by colonial policies that introduced taxation, labour demands and commercialization. This shift forced cattle owners to engage in wage labour or sell livestock to meet tax obligations, disrupting indigenous livestock practices. Their work illustrates the colonial interventions in agriculture and livestock production subordination of indigenous practices to the demands of the colonial capitalist economy. This led to environmental degradation food shortages and socio-economic dependency.

Omwoyo (1990) explains the colonial transformation of Gusii agriculture and illustrates how the introduction of cash crops like maize and tea, the imposition of taxes and the mobilization of labour integrate the Gusii into the colonial capitalist economy. He emphasizes that Gusii's agricultural practices remained dynamic, efficient and deeply rooted in environmental knowledge. However, the advent of colonial policies marginalized these indigenous systems. The shift towards commodity production led to soil degradation, food shortages, and a reorganization of labour, as many Gusii were drawn into migrant labour markets to meet tax obligations, leaving insufficient labour for subsistence farming. Omwoyo's work suggests that while colonial capitalism creates opportunities for some Gusii to accumulate wealth and expand agricultural output, it simultaneously pauperizes other segments of the population, fostering economic dependency and disrupting the indigenous agricultural balance.

Motanya (2019) explores the transition from subsistence farming to commercial crop production from 1945 to 2002, emphasizing the adaptability of Gusii farmers in navigating changing agricultural landscapes. His study highlights factors driving this transformation including colonial policies that promoted cash crops such as tea, coffee and pyrethrum. In the post-independence government initiatives supported smallholder farmers through cooperatives and the influence of technological advancements and population growth on farming practices. He points out that while these changes

boosted rural incomes and created employment opportunities, they introduced challenges such as reduced food security, environmental degradation, and economic reliance on fluctuating global markets. Furthermore, issues such as cooperative mismanagement and inadequate farmer support systems undermined the full potential of agricultural development. Motanya's work demonstrates that although agricultural transformation in Nyamira brought some positive socio-economic outcomes, it also exposed farmers to structural vulnerabilities that limited sustainable growth in the sector.

Arising from the literature reviewed, there are limited studies examining the livestock economy in Gusii during the colonial era. Existing research has primarily focused on the transformation of agriculture from the colonial to the post-colonial period, with minimal scholarly attention given to the role and significance of livestock in the pre-colonial period and the changes brought about by British occupation. A gap that this study sought to fill.

Theoretical Framework

The study utilized articulate mode of production and agency theories. The key tenet of the articulate mode of production theory includes capitalism coexists with pre-capitalist models and reshapes them. The process involves fragmentation, conservation, and adaptation rather than outright elimination (William & Sewell, 1992). According to Rey and Becker (1992), the Articulation of Modes of Production Theory posits that capitalism interacts with older economic systems in three stages. First, in the reinforcement stage, capitalism builds on indigenous ways of production, using them for labour and resources rather than replacing them outright. In the subordination stage, capitalism starts taking control, shaping these systems to fit its needs while still depending on them. Finally, in the elimination stage, capitalism pushes out the old economic structures, fully absorbing them into its system and making indigenous ways of production obsolete. Mafeje (1981) critiques the theory arguing that political agency and resistance

play a significant role in shaping these economic transformations. While the theory has been critiqued for its structuralist approach, its application to contemporary economic systems suggests that capitalism continues to interact with and reshape indigenous economies in complex ways. On the other hand, the Agency Theory helps to examine the ability of individuals to exercise influence over their social and economic conditions, particularly within the context of colonial rule. The theory is used to gain insights into how the Abagusii actively responded to colonial policies rather than being passive subjects of colonial rule. The theory examines the strategies employed by the Abagusii, the factors that influenced their responses and the outcomes of their adaptation innovations and economic restructuring in response to colonial policies and missionary work.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study utilized a historical research design, which enabled the researcher to describe the nature of livestock production in chronology from the pre-colonial era colonial and post-colonial periods. The researcher employed both primary and secondary data to understand livestock production across the period. Prior to conducting oral interviews, the researcher examined materials available at the Kenya National Archives (KNA). Oral interviews were then conducted in Kisii and Nyamira counties. The study purposively sampled eight key informants who possessed specific knowledge about livestock production. These key informants referred the researcher to thirty general informants, all above sixty years of age, through the snowballing technique. The interviews continued until data saturation was achieved, indicating that no new information was emerging. The final sample size consisted of thirty-eight informants. Once collected, the data was promptly transcribed, thematically organized, and described. Secondary sources, including e-books, magazines, newspapers, theses, and dissertations, were corroborated to eliminate any inconsistencies present in the primary sources. Before commencing the study, the researcher obtained an introductory letter from Kisii

University and applied for a research license from the National Commission for Science, Technology, and Innovation in Kenya (License No: NACOSTI/P/24/38379).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The Place of Livestock in Social Political and Economic Organization

In the pre-colonial period, the Abagusii were involved in both livestock rearing and subsistence farming. However, cattle rearing, acquisition, and management held a more prominent role compared to other Bantu communities, as noted by Maxon. This strong focus on cattle may have been influenced by neighbouring pastoralist groups like the Maasai and Kipsigis, who viewed cattle as a symbol of prestige and authority (Haring, 1974). Labour organization in livestock production was structured along gender and age lines, with initiated young men primarily responsible for herding cattle and ensuring their protection from external threats in *ebisarate* (cattle bomas) (Levine, 1966). Boys and young girls were assigned the task of herding goats, sheep and calves within the vicinity of homesteads. In instances where male children were absent, female members of the household assumed these responsibilities. One key informant recounted that her grandmother, raised in a household dominated by women had to engage in livestock grazing (Jerusha, O.I.,4 /09/2024). Women's involvement in livestock management was generally secondary, limited to tasks such as delivering food to cattle bomas. Similarly, Omwoyo (1990) explains that the Abagusii practised *ekerisio* (communal herding) in which multiple households combined their livestock under the supervision of designated herders, ensuring an equitable distribution of labour and collective protection against natural and external threats.

Livestock production was central to the social, economic, and political structures of Gusii society. At the family level, livestock was a measure of wealth and played a significant role in transactions such as marriage. The male head of

the household controlled livestock ownership and had the authority to transfer animals, particularly to pay the bride's wealth during marriage arrangements. One key informant explained:

Marriage saw the need to acquire cows that would be used as bride prizes over 10 heads of cattle okomaana. People lived in harmony if you did not have cows, the neighbours and relatives would come together and give you at least one cow each in kind so that you could be averted from poverty. Goats were also important in the process as they would be used in the second round of giving in the marriage rights obokima. (Nyanaro, O.I., 2 /09/2024).

His words indicate that livestock held significant importance in Abagusii marriage practices. The requirement of cattle in paying dowry known as *okomaana* demonstrates their central role in fulfilling marital obligations, while goats were equally integral to marriage ceremonies. Young men who lacked livestock to enable them to marry were expected to produce substantial quantities of finger millet *obori*, which they could exchange for cattle to facilitate marriage. (Mumbo, O.I., 6 /09/2024). In support, Orera et al. (2023) agree that livestock played a crucial role in Abagusii marriage rituals, symbolizing economic wealth and social bonds. Goats were slaughtered during pre- and post-wedding ceremonies to signify the union of families, while *enyameni* (wrestling matches) between the groom's and bride's families fostered camaraderie and often concluded with the winning team receiving a bull.

Livestock held a spiritual significance among the Abagusii, playing a central role in religious sacrifices and ancestral veneration. They were offered as sacrifices during important communal rituals such as planting seasons, drought, and purification ceremonies. The choice of animal for sacrifice depended on the nature of the ceremony. Osiemo asserted:

There was a Luo man who came to our homestead during my great grandfather's times to ask for food however, he was sent

away thereby passing on before reaching Luo land. After some period, our homestead received thunderstorms that broke into our houses. Our family was directed to seers, oboragori. Members of our homestead were sent to different to come up with different words which were to be combined to enable creating a meaning. The results which were obtained had a close association with the Luo who was sent away because of hunger. We were asked to take to the omoragori the food obtained from the Luo, we bought a sheep, emingichi which was a male because the aggrieved was a male. We had to look for a cooking pot egetega from the Luo we went and built at the river and took with us the sheep. Also, with us, we had to carry on a person who knew how to speak in the Luo dialect. The food obtained was put in egetega and subjected to fire. The sheep was then strangled while uttering, 'We have given you the food that you wanted, receive the food graciously and leave us in peace.' The food was not carried with us on our way home which marked the end of the thunderstorms in our homestead (Osiemo, O.I., 2 /09/2024).

The above assertion implies the role of livestock in the reconciliation of spiritual appeasement, as well as its function as a medium for addressing supernatural disturbances among the Abagusii. Similarly, Ayuka (2018) corroborates this noting that Livestock played a central role in Gusii burial ceremonies, symbolizing mourning, social status and purification. After the burial, a male goat from the deceased's herd was slaughtered and shared among those who dug the grave, signifying respect and closure. If the deceased lacked livestock, relatives provided one, reinforcing communal support. The widow received the hide as bedding, marking her mourning period, which ended after two months when she discarded the skin given at marriage. For prominent individuals *eng'ombe yogo tindeka* (a burial cow) was gifted to the eldest grandson, ensuring continuity of wealth and inheritance. The mourning period concluded with the slaughter of a bull or cow referred to *eng'ombe gosungwa geita* at the cattle

enclosure's gate, signifying the family's return to normalcy.

Livestock in Exchange and Trade Networks

Abagusii produced a steady food crop supply in excess which facilitated local trade with the neighboring communities. As observed by Ochieng (1974), the Luo would refer to the Abagusii as their granary because they were acquiring food crops during periods of scarcity. In exchange, the Abagusii would acquire blacksmith goods which include the *ekoyo* (indigenous hoe), *chinyongo* (pots), dried fish and meat among other valuables. Mong'are had this to say:

In the pre-colonial period, the Abagusii produced a large quantity of food crops, primarily finger millet. In neighbouring Luoland, when the Luo experienced poor harvests, they were forced to seek food in Gusiiland. They exchanged goods for finger millet, with livestock being among the notable items. For instance, a granary of husked finger millet was equivalent to two cows. (Mon'gare, O.I., 5 /09/2024).

His words suggest that among the Abagusii, livestock acquisition during the pre-colonial period was primarily achieved through the exchange of surplus grains with the neighbouring Luo. This system enabled the Abagusii to accumulate livestock. Similarly, Hakansson (1994) notes that women played a key role in market trade, as they could move freely across territories without being affected by male-dominated clan conflicts. However, cattle exchanges typically took place at large Gusii homesteads where surplus grain was stored. These transactions were facilitated by personal connections, with Luo traders being guided by friends to wealthy homesteads that produced large quantities of finger millet and beans. The accumulation of cattle through trade contributed to social stratification within the Gusii community, as families with more livestock attained greater social and political influence.

The Establishment of Colonial Rule in Gusiiland

The British colonial establishment in Gusiiland was met with both resistance and collaboration. In 1904, Sir Donald Stewart used military action against the neighboring Sotik to intimidate the Gusii. In a letter to the Secretary of State for the Colonies, Stewart noted that while some Gusii clans were open to the establishment of a colonial post, others resisted. He further observed that the expedition in Sotik would likely reduce resistance among the Abagusii (Haring, 1974). In September 1905, the British, aided by collaborators, including the Mogisero clan led by Ombati, launched an expedition into Gusii territory. The invasion aimed to collect fines for Gusii raids on Luoland. Through barazas, the Abagusii were informed of the required cattle fines, but they did not comply. As a result, 400 cattle were confiscated by the third day, and by the sixth day, 1,000 cattle had been forcibly taken as payment (Maxon, 1989). This marked the first colonial intervention in the livestock production of the Abagusii.

In 1907, Northcote was appointed Assistant District Commissioner of Kisii, where he was nicknamed *Nyarigoti* by the Abagusii, who viewed him as their enemy. In May of that year, he initiated the construction of permanent buildings in Getembe, present-day Kisii town, marking the formal establishment of British colonial rule in Gusiiland. In December 1907, Northcote introduced the collection of hut taxes, aiming to generate revenue and promote the production of surplus goods for the capitalist market (Githethwa, 2021). To enforce this system, the colonial government required that the tax be paid in cash, forcing the Abagusii to sell their cattle, goats, and sheep to acquire the necessary currency. This led to a decline in livestock production. Similarly, Nyamwaka (2011) notes that hut taxation extended to *ebisarate* (cattle bomas), which had long provided security for livestock. Consequently, the youths who traditionally stayed in the cattle bomas to tend cattle were forced to return to their homes. This shift disrupted indigenous gender roles, as milking, which was previously performed by men, became exclusively assigned to women.

Under Northcote's command, the British regularly raided ebisarate, seizing livestock, with over 8,000 cattle confiscated in the Kitutu region in January 1908. This provoked Moraa Ng'iti, a respected Gusii prophetess, who rebuked the young men for their passivity, likening their inaction to women allowing their cattle to be taken. On January 12, 1908, driven by the loss of livestock and Moraa's influence, Otenyo Nyamaterere took decisive action. He ambushed Assistant District Commissioner Northcote, striking him in the neck with a spear and causing severe bleeding. Believing he had delivered a fatal blow, Otenyo withdrew into the dense bush, and news of the attack spread swiftly across Gusiiland (Meria, 2023). Otenyo's bold defiance against a colonial officer notorious for oppression made him a symbol of resistance, and his bravery was immortalized in Gusii war songs. His act inspired further resistance, prompting colonial authorities to send a messenger to Kisumu to report the rebellion. In retaliation, the British launched a brutal crackdown, burning villages and destroying crops. The Mogusero sub-clan suffered the heaviest losses, with over 160 people killed and thousands of cattle seized (Maangi & Rotumoi, 2024). This escalation of violence marked one of the confrontations illustrating deep resentment toward colonial rule and the critical role of livestock in both economic and social structures.

By 1909, the impact of the hut tax and continuous raids had severely disrupted the livestock economy in Gusiiland. This is evident in the District Commissioner's report, which stated:

In my report of last year, I mentioned that I consider it important that the cattle villages should be broken up and the young men who inhabit them forced to return to their parents' villages until married. This has to a great extent come about automatically through my having them counted for hut tax and informing the natives that every hut in a cattle village must pay (KNA/DC/KSI/I/I/1909).

This clearly indicates that the colonial imposition of hut taxes forced the dispersal of young men from cattle villages, significantly altering

Abagusii's social structures. This disruption led to a transformation of cultural practices that were once central to livestock production. Similarly, the District Commissioner observed that the Abagusii were not significantly impacted by the loss of their livestock, as they did not rely on cattle for their livelihood to the same extent as the Kipsigis, Maasai, and Luo. He estimated that approximately one-fifth of the livestock in the Kitutu region had been confiscated (KNA/DC/KSI/I/I/1909). By 1911, the District Commissioner reported that cattle villages had ceased to exist (KNA/DC/KSI/I/I/1911). A key informant narrated:

During this period, cattle raiding became more widespread in Gusii due to the destruction of ebisarate. Many locals were compelled to sell their livestock in order to raise the currency needed to pay their taxes. As a result, there was a notable increase in cattle theft within the Abagusii community, as neighbouring Kipsigis and Maasai sought to replenish their herds, which had been significantly reduced by the punitive expeditions (Nyanaro, O.I., 05/10/2024).

The findings indicate that colonial policies weakened the Abagusii's ability to maintain and expand their herds, diminishing the economic role of cattle and disrupting the indigenous structure of livestock production. In support, Omwoyo (1990) observes that colonial chiefs, comprising Chief Agwata and Chief Ndubi, capitalized on their authority during tax collection to accumulate substantial livestock holdings. Following the above developments, it is clear that the Abagusii had coincided with the British colonial rule leading to the destruction of livestock production through punitive colonial policies which included taxation and abolishment of the cattle bomas.

Missionary Work and Livestock Production

On October 13 1911, Father Brandsma and his assistant, Father Jack de Wall, arrived in Nyabururu, marking the beginning of Catholic missionary work in Gusii with the establishment of the first mission. The Seventh-day Adventist

(SDA) Church followed in 1913, with Pastor Carscallen setting up a mission at Nyanchwa. Missionary efforts introduced Christian teachings to Abagusii aiming to transform their cultural practices to the Western standard (Maxon, 1989). This was evident in Pastor Baker's report from Wire Hill Mission, which stated:

For furthering of the same, we couple the educational and industrial line. The educational so far, the native may be fitted to help in evangelizing his people. (Sic) the industrial because we believe gospel of work" hand in hand with the "gospel of salvation (KNA DC/KSI/1/1).

Missionary education served as a tool to equip the Abagusii with knowledge and skills to radicalize them against their indigenous way of life. The Gusii showed minimal interest in education. To many, schooling seemed unfamiliar and irrelevant much like the white man himself. They questioned its value, wondering if it would offer any practical benefits, such as increasing their livestock (Maangi & Rotumoi, 2024). For the Christian converts were expected to follow the "good news." They were stationed at mission stations leading to the loss of young men who had previously stayed in cattle bomas taking care of livestock. (Onchoke, O.I., 09/10/2024). Meanwhile, in 1913, the Kisii Agricultural Scheme farm attempted to train thirty herds of cattle in the use of the ox plough with the help of colonial chiefs (KNA/DC/KSI/1/1/1913). This should be viewed as a colonial attempt to introduce profitable crop production. Missionary work continued to face resistance, central to the resistance was the cult of Mumbo. Mumbo's declaration to Onyango Dunde stated:

I am the God Mumbo whose two homes are in the Sun and in the Lake. I have chosen you to be my mouth-piece. Go out and tell all Africans-and more especially the people of Alego-that from henceforth I am their God. Those whom I chose personally, and also those who acknowledge me, will live forever in plenty. Their crops will grow of themselves and there will be no longer need to work. I will cause cattle, sheep, and goats to come up out of the lake in great numbers to those who

believe in me, but all unbelievers and their families and cattle will die out (Shadle, 2002).

The emergence of the cult marked a profound shift in the traditional beliefs of its followers. Mumboets rejected colonialism and missionary work advocating for the restoration of African cultural identity and independence. In support, Nyamwaka (2011) explains that its teachings predicted the collapse of British authority and missionary influence paving the way for a revival of indigenous African culture. Furthermore, the movement gained support from the Sakawa prophecy, which had earlier foretold the departure of the white man.

Resistance intensified during the First World War, particularly during the German invasion of Kisii town leading missionary work to come to a halt. The British withdrawal from Kisii town on September 12, 1914, led to the vandalism of police lines, Swahili settlements and missionary centres. The revolt also resulted in the confiscation of 3,000 cattle significantly reducing the indigenous livestock production (KNA/DC/KSI/1/2/1914). Resistance against missionary work continued in 1915 with the arrival of Father Stam alias Mogaka, who faced strong opposition. Despite multiple threats to his life, he remained undeterred however, the locals eventually devised a plan to outsmart him. At one point, natives living near the mission station denied him access to food (Kareithi, 2021). Clearly, Abagusii had associated missionaries with British colonial rule who had made an attempt on their indigenous livestock production through punitive expeditions and taxation policies.

Between 1914 and 1918, colonial authorities forcibly recruited 34,053 as carrier corps in the First World War and 8,835 recruited to meet the labour quota often abducting them from public gatherings or their homes at night (KNA DC/KSI/1/2/1914-1918). This mass conscription left women and the elderly to manage livestock production under extreme strain (Maxon, 1986). Livestock, a key source of food and economic stability, suffered neglect, disease outbreaks and

reduced productivity. Further, colonial taxation forced many families to sell their livestock further depleting herds. The situation worsened as World War I diverted essential supplies and disrupted local economies. It should be noted that this crisis accelerated the shift from livestock production to profitable crop production in reshaping the Abagusii economy.

The end of the First World War in 1918 marked the revival of missionary activities in Gusiiland. The Nyanchwa Mission Station was reopened by Yakobo Olwa and Barnabas Okumu, while the same year saw the arrival of Musa Nyandusi, Samuel Omoke and Johanna Kiyondi from Narok to further their training as teachers (Maangi, 2024). In 1919, Father Jack de Wall also returned to Nyabururu, where the mission had expanded to include 26 baptized members, 112 individuals preparing for baptism, and 12 catechists supporting evangelization efforts (Magoma, 2014). During this period, the first cohort of trained teachers graduated from Nyanchwa Mission Station. Among them, Paulo Nyamweya remained at Nyanchwa, Musa Nyandusi was posted to Omaobe, and Samwel Omoke began teaching at Gesembe (Maangi, 2024). Those who received missionary education, commonly referred to as *abasomi* (readers), were often employed as clerks in mission stations, colonial offices, or as teachers (Okari, O.I., 10/10/2024). This shift towards formal employment reduced labour availability for indigenous livestock production, as the educated aligned themselves with administrative and educational roles. As noted, earlier, the primary motivation for seeking employment was to earn currency necessary for paying colonial taxes. Hence there was reduced agency of practicing indigenous livestock production since the Abagusii had been integrated into Western economic models.

CONCLUSION

From the above findings, it can be concluded that Western culture significantly disrupted livestock production among the Abagusii of Kenya. The introduction of hut tax and forced labour pushed the Abagusii away from their indigenous livestock

economy, making them more dependent on cash crop farming and wage labour. Further, missionary work played a role in reshaping social structures as missionary education and religious conversion reduced the focus on indigenous livestock production. Despite these challenges, the Abagusii adapted to the changing economic environment balancing new opportunities with their indigenous cultural practices. However, the decline of livestock production had lasting effects as it weakened economic independence and indigenous systems that had long sustained the Abagusii. The experience of Abagusii showcases the broader impact of western culture on indigenous livelihoods thereby marginalizing them in favour of policies that served the interests of the colonial administration.

Recommendations

This study recommends that efforts should be focused on revitalizing indigenous livestock production by integrating indigenous knowledge with modern agricultural practices ensuring sustainability while preserving cultural significance. Future policy interventions should be culturally sensitive and informed by historical insights, addressing disruptions caused by colonial rule and missionary influence while promoting community-driven approaches to sustain livestock farming. Furthermore, educational programs should incorporate livestock production training to engage younger generations, balancing indigenous practices with modern agricultural advancements to ensure long-term sustainability.

Further Research

Building upon the findings of the study, this paper recommends further research on related studies done on the role of indigenous livestock production in shaping modern agricultural economies in Kenya since independence. Given that indigenous livestock production practices have been largely marginalized due to colonial capitalism and the expansion of cash crop farming, and that the government is currently focused on modernizing agriculture through

commercialized agribusiness, a historical study on the contribution of indigenous livestock farming towards economic transformation and rural livelihoods will help bridge a significant historical research gap.

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