THE SYSTEM OF LAND OWNERSHIP AND CROP PRODUCTION: THE CASE OF EMBU NORTH SUB-COUNTY, 1890 -1963

BY

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AUGUST 2015
DECLARATION

This thesis is my original work and to the best of my knowledge has not been presented for examination in any other university.

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To my wife Margaret Wanthiga, daughter Celine Mukami and son RooneyRay Njuki for their love and encouragement
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DEFINITION OF TERMS

**Adjudication:** The process of determining the rightful owner of a piece of land

**Agriculture:** Refers to both crop and animal husbandry in general. In narrow sense we refer to crop cultivation

**Central Kenya:** Kikuyu land and the adjacent regions of Embu, Chuka and Meru

**Change:** The transitional process of alteration, modification and variation from one form, composition or state to another

**Embu land:** The area occupied by the people who speak Embu language

**Kikuyu land:** Former central province

**Land poor:** People who own small pieces of land

**Land tenure:** The manner in which individuals or groups in society hold or have Access to land

**Litigation:** The process of making a claim of land in court

**Means of production:** The different objects of achieving production like land and Labour

**Mode of production:** A particular way of producing crops or the social relations of Economic production

**Peasant Farmer:** A person who grows crops or keeps animals in a small farm

**System of land ownership:** Socially and culturally accepted way of owning and Using land.
ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AAK</td>
<td>Agrochemical Association of Kenya</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ALDEV</td>
<td>African Land Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CBK</td>
<td>Coffee Board of Kenya</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CMOP</td>
<td>Capitalist Mode of Production</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CGA</td>
<td>Cereals Growers Association</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GDP</td>
<td>Gross Domestic Product</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GMO</td>
<td>Genetically Modified Organisms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ISK</td>
<td>Institute of Surveyors of Kenya</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KARI</td>
<td>Kenya Agricultural Research Institute</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KFA</td>
<td>Kenya Farmers Association</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KNFAP</td>
<td>Kenya National Federation of Agricultural Products</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KPCU</td>
<td>Kenya Planters Co-operative Union</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MoA</td>
<td>Ministry of Agriculture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NCPB</td>
<td>National Cereals and Produce Board</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WFP</td>
<td>World Food Program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WTO</td>
<td>World Trade Organization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KNA</td>
<td>Kenya News Agency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KAR</td>
<td>Kenya African Rifle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PC</td>
<td>Provincial Commissioner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DC</td>
<td>District Commissioner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CP</td>
<td>Crop Production</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LNC</td>
<td>Local Native Council</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ENC</td>
<td>Embu Native Council</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IBEAC</td>
<td>Imperial British East Africa Company</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CLL</td>
<td>Communal Labour Law</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GPO</td>
<td>Game Protection Ordinance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KLC</td>
<td>Kenya Land Commission</td>
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<tr>
<td>English</td>
<td>Swahili</td>
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<td>--------------</td>
<td>------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gucimba</td>
<td>Hoeing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gutuguta</td>
<td>Clearing bush</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ikumbi</td>
<td>Granary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Irima</td>
<td>Working party</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Itura</td>
<td>A village</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kathanwa</td>
<td>Axe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kiama</td>
<td>Council of elders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kugura</td>
<td>To buy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kuvukuria</td>
<td>Harrowing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Matiri</td>
<td>Shrines</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mbari ya</td>
<td>‘House of’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mbari</td>
<td>Sub-clan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miviriga</td>
<td>Home entrance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muciarwa</td>
<td>Blood brother</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mucii</td>
<td>Home</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mugongo</td>
<td>People</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Munyago</td>
<td>Men’s digging stick</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muragi</td>
<td>‘Herding staff’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mutego</td>
<td>Trap</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mwene</td>
<td>Owner of Land</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mwocwa</td>
<td>‘Ritually collected’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ngamba</td>
<td>Piece of land</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nja</td>
<td>Open compound in front of a house</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Njira</td>
<td>Paths</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nyomba</td>
<td>Man wife (wives) and children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nyunjure</td>
<td>Open ground behind the house</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tigu/Tugu</td>
<td>Place for buying and selling of goods ‘market’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wathima</td>
<td>Less severe famine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yura</td>
<td>Severe famine</td>
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</table>
ABSTRACT

This study focused on the system of land ownership and crop production in Embu North Sub-County from 1890 to 1963. It is an attempt to examine the interplay between the system of land ownership and crop production in Embu North Sub-County. In this endeavor the Embu system of acquiring land and how they produced different crops is explored. This is done in order to illustrate that the interaction between the system of land ownership and crop production has been influencing the overall production in crops since the pre-colonial period leading to social differentiation. The pre-capitalist modes of production influenced the whole production process at the time. Thus, those that acquired and cleared large tracks of land were able to produce more crops for consumption and trade, hence accumulating more wealth. As the society developed, new methods of land ownership and crop production were established leading to more production. The system of land and crop production interacted such that the more an individual acquired land, the greater the production, though in some instances the weather conditions influenced the process. Therefore, though colonialism introduced significant changes in the system leading to varied crop production, the study has shown that the interplay between the systems of land ownership and crop production has contributed to the deviations in the overall crop production in Embu North Sub-County. Colonialism added new class formations of the landed, the land poor and the landless. The landed class was able to fit in the new capitalist system while the land poor and the landless acquired new roles of wage earners. The new capitalist system of acquiring land by use of money and mechanization in production significantly changed the whole process of production. Although the pre-capitalist methods of acquiring land and crop production were subordinated by the capitalist mode, some elements of the pre-capitalist mode survived within the land poor and the landless. These, together with the women, continued to produce through the pre-capitalist mode but sold their produce to the capitalists. To exhaustively analyze the interplay between the system of land ownership and crop production, the study employed the theory of articulation of modes of production in analyzing the data. Both primary and secondary data were sourced. The study employed purposive sampling technique to reach out the informants, who together with the archival records were sourced for primary data. Corroboration was done in the two sources for authenticity and validity. Therefore, the study, guided by specific research questions and objectives, has found out that, the relationship between the system of land ownership and crop production has been impacting on production in crops in Embu North Sub-County since the pre-colonial period leading to social differentiation.
CHAPTER ONE

1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background to the Study
Currently, most of Africa’s population and Kenya in particular is being ravaged by poverty. This is happening when the general population of the continent is rapidly rising while arable land for cultivation is decreasing (Angara, 2010). Land is crucial in most African societies as it is the heart of social, political and economic life. Among many African societies, control of land was an important engagement that was instrumental in defining the social, economic and political powers (Maloba, 1993). Indeed land is an important resource around which other aspects of the economy like crop cultivation, livestock rearing, labour and organization of production revolve (Esese 1990: 1-2). Since the pre-colonial period, most Kenyans have been engaged on land for crop production. Therefore, a change in the system of land ownership directly affects the system of crop production.

There has been an enormous change in the system of land ownership especially during the colonial period. According to Leys (1975), colonialism provided a way through which land and other systems of organization were alienated without paying respect to the age-old socio-economic as well as other organizational structures that existed. This was aimed at integrating the African economy into the world capitalist system in which Africa’s role was to supply the Western capitalist world with cheap agricultural raw materials for their industries. In Kenya, many studies have been done on land and agricultural production. Historians such as Zeleza (1986), Maloba (1993), Kanogo (1987), and Sorrenson (1967) assert that alienation of land among many Kenyan societies was the basis of conflicts between the Europeans and the Africans. Many of these studies have focused on the poor agricultural
production and the declining crop production among African societies. They attribute this to the changes imposed on Africa’s agriculture by colonial capitalism, (Omwoyo, 1990; Esese, 1990; Mwaruvie, 1991). In these studies, other factors that may have contributed to the poor performance in Africa’s crop production like the interplay between the system of land ownership and crop production have not been well researched on.

At a time when Africa’s population and Kenya’s in particular is rising, it is important to produce enough food for local consumption and for export purposes. But this can only be achieved if there is an understanding of the interplay between the system of land ownership and crop production. This is important since Kenya and many other African countries have experienced enormous transformations especially as a result of colonialism, which has affected the system of land ownership and crop production. Indeed a historical analysis of how the relationship between the systems affects crop production is crucial if the continent and Kenya in particular will be food secure. Thus, the only way through which Kenya and other food shortage countries in the continent will eradicate abject poverty is by becoming food sufficient.

This study assumes that the relationship between the system of land ownership and crop production influences the overall production and requires a systematic examination. The analysis specifically focuses on the general crop production. The study therefore takes Embu North Sub-County as its focus unit. It aims at tracing historically the interplay between the system of land ownership and crop production from the eve of colonial rule to independence. It highlights land, labour and tax policies introduced by the colonial regime and their impact on the pre-colonial system of land ownership and crop production. Moreover, it indicates how the people of Embu North Sub- County became more stratified and differentiated with some people
who owned large tracts of land accumulating wealth while others were engaged in selling their labour. Conducting such a study in Embu North Sub-County, one of Embu County’s most productive areas will be very significant not only for understanding the socio-economic organization but in assisting policy makers in formulating policies that are relevant and applicable to the people especially those policies that pertain to crop production.

1.2 Statement of the problem

Scholars from various disciplines have examined the economic history of various communities including the Embu. Most of these studies have dwelt on agricultural production in general. However, an analysis of certain aspects in the production process like the interplay between the system of land ownership and crop production is important in understanding the historical changes in crop production. Thus, this study sought to analyze the impact of the interaction between the system of land ownership and crop production among the people of Embu North Sub-County. It therefore takes a historical approach to examine the interaction between the system of land ownership and crop production and its impact on the overall crop production in Embu North Sub-County in the period 1890-1963.

1.3 Objectives of the study

The study sought to:

1. Examine the system of land ownership and crop production in Embu North Sub-County during the pre-colonial period.

2. Examine the initial changes brought by colonial capitalism on the system of land ownership and crop production in Embu North Sub-County before 1920.

3. Examine the interaction between the system of land ownership and crop production during the colonial period from 1920-46.
4. Analyze the effects of land reforms and their influence on the system of land ownership and crop production in Embu North Sub-County in the period 1946-1963.

1.4 Research Questions

1. What was the system of land ownership and crop production in Embu North Sub-County in the pre-colonial period?
2. How did the system of land ownership and crop production in Embu North Sub-County change during the colonial period up to 1920?
3. How did the changes in the system of land ownership and crop production impact on agricultural production in the period 1920-1946?
4. What were the effects of land reforms on the system of land ownership and crop production in Embu North Sub-County in the period 1946-1963?

1.5 Research Assumptions

The study was based on the following assumptions;

1. That the pre-colonial system of land ownership and crop production in Embu North Sub-County was geared towards increased crop production.
2. That the pre-colonial system of land ownership and crop production in Embu North Sub-County was disrupted during the colonial period up to 1920.
3. That the interaction between the changing system of land ownership and crop production changed for the worse between 1920 and 1946.
4. That land reforms adversely affected the system of land ownership and crop production in Embu North Sub-County in the period 1946-1963.
1.6 Justification and Significance of the Study

Land is a major factor in agricultural production. This makes many African societies strive to access and own this important resource. Thus, attachment to land among African societies means identification with social and economic organization that is shaped by land ownership and access. Hence, any change in the system of land ownership is bound to have significant effect on the system of crop production. Agriculture, and specifically crop production is the backbone of Kenya’s economy. Therefore, crop production will continue to be crucial since the country depends on agriculture for her economic growth. Over the years, and in the most recent times, Kenya has been faced with serious food shortages. The country’s production of the staple food crops does not meet the demands of the ever increasing population. There has been an increase in the importation of the staple foods like maize, rice and wheat. The scenario is currently taking a worse turn with millions of Kenyans being faced with starvation.

To sustain the ever growing population the country must increase the production of sufficient and quality food. This will go a long way in eradicating poverty in the country. Most goals of the country’s vision 2030 can only be achieved if people are food secure. Food security cannot be achieved without empowering the small-scale crop producers who make the largest population of agricultural producers. In most cases the focus is on the access to means of production like land and capital. Actually, the acquisition of arable land and its proper utilization leads to increased crop production. But the problem of inadequate food production does not emanate from lack of the means of production only. The overall system of land ownership and crop production plays a major role.
Over the years, and in most of the colonial period, land issues have dominated the political arena. This is as a result of colonial land, labour and tax policies which affected the pre-colonial system of land ownership. Today, land issues have led to loss of lives at both the family and inter-society level. The individual access to the means of production, particularly land, greatly influences crop production. Land is highly valued as the basis of crop production and hence food security which leads to eradication of poverty. For Kenya and in particular, Embu County to be self-reliant in crop production and to achieve the millennium goals, it calls for the historical understanding on the relationship between the system of land ownership and crop production.

Many studies on land and agricultural production tend to address the changes brought by European capitalism on African pre-colonial economies. This study focuses on the interplay between the system of land ownership and crop production from 1890 to 1963 with an aim of creating understanding of Africa’s poor agricultural performance. The present study is, therefore important in that it examines crop production in relation to land ownership. Although there are other factors like the vagaries of weather, failure for the country to be self-reliant in crop production emanates from the interplay between the system of land ownership and crop production. The interaction between the system of land ownership and crop production has therefore been affecting crop production since the pre-colonial period. This interplay needs to be well analyzed and properly documented especially in the smallest units of a society. The present study is, therefore, important in that it examines the interplay between the system of land ownership and crop production from a historical perspective up to 1963.
The periodization in the study is important because it separates important historical events and their effects on the system of land ownership and crop production. Embu North Sub-County is one of the best-fit areas to undertake such a study that focuses on the interaction between the system of land ownership and crop production in Embu County. It is one of the earliest areas where land consolidation took place in the county. Currently it is one of the most densely populated areas in the county as per 2009 National Population Census with 73,841 people. More varieties of crops are grown in the area compared to the other two sub-counties of Embu West and Embu East. Moreover, the sub-county has some of the smallest land holdings in Embu County. To be sufficient in crop production, it requires a historical understanding on the interaction between the system of land ownership and crop production. Such a historical inquiry will help understand how this interplay between the system of land ownership and crop production affect the entire production in crops. This will help in formulating agricultural policies that will enable the country to be sufficient in crop production.

1.7 Scope and Limitations of the Study

The study analyzed the interaction between the system of land ownership and crop production in Embu North Sub-County in the period 1890-1963. It examined how the interplay between the system of land ownership and crop production has been affecting the overall crop production. The study began in 1890, on the eve of colonialism in Kenya. At this time in history, Embu North Sub-County had not come into direct contact with European colonialism. It is therefore an important mark into the turn of event in Kenya’s history. Moreover, 1890 gives a background to investigate the social, economic and political organization of the Embu just before the
advent of colonialism. It also provided a base for the study within which an analysis of the pre-colonial system of land ownership and crop production was undertaken.

The study ended in 1963 in order to examine colonial reforms in Embu land tenure system put in place under the Swynnerton Plan and their effects on the system of land ownership and crop production. The time scope was ample in examining the interaction between the system of land ownership and crop production. The years 1920 to 1954 gave an ample timeframe within which an investigation of how the colonial policies on land ownership influenced the system of crop production. The year 1963 was viewed as an appropriate time to end the study noting that from 1954, land reforms under the Swynnerton Plan were initiated by the colonial government. This period marked a different historical epoch in land tenure system in Kenya.

The study focused on crop production and only reviews livestock production as other agricultural activities that people in Embu North Sub-County engage in. A study of both livestock and crop production could have given more details on Kenya’s agricultural history. Such studies have been carried elsewhere (Omwoyo, 1990, 2000; Esese, 1990; Maxon, 1992; Mwaruvie, 1991). The study also concentrated on the utilization of land, labour and the methods of crop production and only slightly examined marketing. The study therefore, was limited to Embu North Sub-County in order to make the unit of study more manageable.

1.8 Review of Related Literature

This section is divided into two sub-sections of literature on land ownership and that on crop production. This is important because the study examines the system of land ownership and crop production and its impact on the overall production in crops. In the two sections, studies conducted in other areas in Africa and works done in Kenya are reviewed. In Africa and Kenya in particular issues related to land ownership and
crop production have continuously attracted a lot of scholarly attention. Major research work has been done on pre-colonial and colonial land tenure and agricultural production. The number of these studies indicates the importance Kenyans attach to land for agricultural production.

1.8.1 Literature on Land Ownership in Kenya

Land tenure is concerned with the manner of holding rights in land. It deals with rights, restrictions and responsibilities that people have with respect to land (Dale and McLaughlin, 1999). Land reform programmes usually address the issues of effective functioning of the infrastructure, tenure security and equity of ownership.

Prothero (1992) did a geographical study in which he asserts that individual tenure system impacted on other related fields. In this work, he perceives individual ownership of land as giving impetus to rural economic changes where villages acquire additional functions and some villages approach status of a small town. His work is vital to this study as it points issues concerning individual land tenure. Of importance, it notes the economics of such land tenure in relation to other forms of land tenure. This work deals with the dynamics of land privatization and hence it brings out the real picture of economic performance where there is individual tenure. Since his work covers the whole of sub-Saharan Africa, his assertion was subjected to test by an analysis of a more specific area like a sub-county.

Carney and Watts (1991) did their work on rice growing among the Mandinka of Senegambia where they traced subtle and accumulative change in the domestic household relations. The study found out that the expansion of rice growing by the government caused intra-household struggles over access to and control over land and labour. Due to the rising demand of rice as the stable food, most households struggled to get more access to land. The study point out that land is indeed an important
resource that defines the socio-economic standards of the people. This work helps point out various important aspects that are played by the land resource.

Hopkins (1977) studied the pre-colonial economies of West African states and came to a conclusion that African communities had capitalist elements which led to social differentiation due to variation in economic types they undertook such as industrialization, commerce and agriculture. It therefore called for an examination of the system of land ownership and crop production at a local level to ascertain whether the interplay between the two systems led to increased crop production leading to social differentiation.

Iliffe (1983) examined the emergence of African capitalism and indicated that a capitalist commerce took place along the East and West African coasts. He shows that instead of African traders being swept away by capitalistic mechanisms, they prospered in Lagos, while those in Kano in northern Nigeria gained from the construction of the railway that joined the area with the coast and therefore facilitating cotton and groundnut production. He adds that the entrepreneurial spirit drove the merchants who had participated in the Trans-Atlantic slave trade to invest their capital saved in the production of cocoa and palm oil which were in high demand. The study on Embu North Sub-County examines the interplay between the system of land ownership and crop production to establish whether increased crop production led to commerce in terms of local and regional trade. Also, whether this led to some people owning large tracts of land which they later legally owned during the colonial period after land was adjudicated.

In his work Essays on Land Law, Wanjala (2000) asserts that, land tenure in Kenya before the advent of colonialism was fundamentally different from that in feudal England, from which alien law was imported. The most common form of
tenure during the pre-colonial period is what can be termed as “communal tenure” whereby land belonged to no one individual in particular but to the community as a whole. Each person in the community had rights of access to the land dependent upon ones specific needs at the time. He however argues that, tenure did not have similar characteristics in all the ethnic communities then found in Kenya. This study has investigated further the said characteristics of land ownership in Embu North Sub-County in an attempt to understand the changes in crop production.

Kitching (1980) did an analysis of Kenya where he traces the historical creation of classes in the country. He notes that colonialism through land reforms brought about stratification among Africans. There were major changes in customary practices, sexual division of labour and links between farm and off-farm income were created. However, his claim that labour time in pre-colonial Kenya was qualitatively and quantitively under-utilized because men spent their time drinking and in other unproductive undertakings leaving women as bread winners has been investigated in this study.

Leys (1975) points out that Kenya was among the first countries in Africa to carry out a large scale land reform leading to individualized land tenure. His work aims at highlighting the underdevelopment in Kenya. In this study he argues that, land reform was a conscious process designed to affirm colonialism in Kenya. Leys’ study was vital in this work in the sense that it notes the effects of land reforms on indigenous land ownership system. It further notes that, land reform as a process was initiated by the colonial government and affirmed by the post-colonial regime that initiated various settlement schemes that adopted colonial formulae of society’s differentiation in land ownership. However, the present study only analyzed changes in land ownership in relation to crop production.
Sorrenson (1967) did a major analysis of the process of land reform in Kikuyu country. He analyses the land crisis that culminated to the 1954 land adjudication, consolidation and registration. The land reform which came to be known as the Swynnerton Plan of 1954 proposed the creation of landed African gentry that would participate soundly in the intensive and large scale agriculture. The Plan sought to revolutionize African agriculture through consolidating scattered fragments of land held by individuals under the traditional land rights. The land holders were then to be transformed into ‘an African middle class’ that would engage into economic production and at the same time be a source of labour to many others. It also sought to have continuity of large scale farms in many parts of the colony especially in the Rift Valley. Sorrenson’s work was a major guide in this study in that it highlights how the whole process of land reform was carried out giving the colonial rationale as to why it was necessary. However, the current study endeavored to show how the land reforms impacted on the system of land ownership and crop production in Embu North Sub-County.

Cowen (1973) studied Magutu region of Nyeri District, where he found that increased agricultural production led to local and long distance trade and the people who had participated in long distance trade accumulated livestock which they sold to pay fees for their children. These views are applicable in Embu North Sub-County since crop production led to local and later long distance trade which made some people to accumulate wealth. This enabled them to be cultivating more land hence increasing their wealth. When land adjudication was done during the colonial days, they were in a position to claim large tracks of land as their original clan lands.

Githumo (1981) has dealt with the historic aspect of land problems in Kenya. He argues that, the conquest and annexation of Kenya and subsequent rejection of the
African concept of land ownership and land rights by the Europeans served as one of the most effective ingredients, which contributed to the rise of nationalistic ideas in Kenya. The question that dominates his work is whether land was owned communally or individually. He further argues that, political agitation in Kenya was caused by land alienation. His work does not seek to show how the system of land ownership interacted with the system of crop production which this study endeavored to do.

Alila, et al., (2004) examined the dynamics of rural landlessness in Kenya at a national level. Their work focuses on the historic developments that culminated in some Kenyans being landless. In their survey of rural landlessness in Kenya, they contend that socio-economic status of the rural landless is basically a reflection of the fact that the majority belongs to a large group of the poor. They further argue that, poverty blocks access to the most basic necessities of life. Their work was important in assessing whether we have poor people among the study group as a result of landlessness.

Okoth-Ogendo (1991) assessed whether land reform affected agricultural productivity and other economic activities. He notes that, even though individualization was seen as a necessary pre-condition to the planned development of African areas it was also appreciated that it could lead to more difficulties to solve than it was intended to. Thus, title to land does not necessarily mean increased productivity. Okoth-Ogendo’s work was important in this study in that it was used to investigate whether owning land with a title deed led to greater crop production.

Lambert (1956) conducted a study on the Kikuyu Land Unit which included the Embu. Most of the materials in his work were collected during his residence in Kenya as an Administrative officer. His assignment was to explore land tenure in the unit as defined in the Native Lands Trust Ordinance No. 28 of 1938. His work was
conducted in the 1930s during the height of land disputes between the colonial authorities on one hand and the African ethnic groups on the other, spearheaded by the Kikuyu. His deductions based on the Kikuyu were applied wholesale to the other groups. Incidentally, in his work every group has regiments on the Kikuyu model. His failure to examine the Embu as a distinct community with its unique system of land ownership necessitated this study.

Orde-Browne, (1925) did a study on the vanishing tribes of Kenya. His work is based on observations he made as a colonial administrator. In his book he thought of the Embu as one of the vanishing tribes. The others include the Chuka, Tharaka, Mbeere, Muthambi, Gichugu and Ndia, mainly all smaller communities of Mount Kenya. He notes that the recorded materials are ‘observations of the manners and customs of a primitive and interesting group who dwell on the southern slopes of Mount Kenya’ (ibid, 1925:5). Although many of his observations are racially biased and inadequate, for example, by now the Embu would have vanished, the book contains valuable sections that formed the basis of this research. For example, by concurring that these groups of people were the earliest settlers in these lands, the present study was conducted on the system of land ownership and crop production.

Crawford (1913) wrote one of the earliest colonial documents on the people of Embu. As a Christian missionary stationed in Embu she made several observations on the Embu and also the Chuka. She explores little beyond recording impressions on the people that she visited. Her work examines little on the social, economic and political history of the Embu. Moreover, she does not examine the system of land ownership which forms the basis of the current study.

Saberwal (1966, 1969, and 1970) has attempted to discuss the Embu in various contexts like social, economic and political organizations. The works are in-adequate
in that they are general in nature and do not tackle the system of land ownership and crop production in Embu. Nevertheless, his work, ‘Social Control and Cultural Flexibility among the Embu of Central Kenya’ and *The Traditional Political Systems of the Embu of Central Kenya* were useful to this study. Although he does not critically examine land tenure in Embu, at least he concurs that the Embu had occupied their present land by 1900.

Most serious research works on Embu history have been conducted by Mwaniki H.S.K. His M.A Thesis, ‘*A Political History of the Embu: C.A.D., 1500-1906*’ gave the impetus for the current study. Having basically dwelt on the political aspect, there was a gap to fill on the economic history of the people of Embu. The political history though, anchors this study in that the issues concerning land ownership are political in nature. Although he does not critically examine the system of land ownership, his work was a valuable resource for the present study. Mwaniki’s (1973) work on the history of the Embu and their cousins the Mbeere is another serious research work on the Embu community. The information on the origin, migration and settlement of the people is crucial to this study. Also he has dealt with the political organization of the Embu which forms the basis of land ownership in the community. The type of councils discussed and the type of food crops that were produced have anchored this study. Nevertheless, his failure to critically examine the system of land ownership and crop production has occasioned the present study.

In addition, Mwaniki (1974) did a volume which is composed of historical texts which formed part of his interviews held between August 1969 and November 1971 for the requirement of his M.A. dissertation. The information contained in these texts touch on origin, food stuffs, famine, land affairs and all the issues concerning the social organization of the Embu. Although the texts do not examine land tenure
system in Embu, most of the informants claimed that the Embu were the earliest settlers and so the owners of present Embu land. His study therefore forms the basis of the present study which attempts to examine the system of land ownership in Embu.

Moreover, Mwaniki (1982) did a study on the pre-colonial history of the Chuka. This study requires mention here in that it traces the origins and migrations of the three cultural and linguistic groups; Cushitic, Paranilotes and Bantu which interacted and went into Chuka amalgam. These were the earliest groups to occupy the central region according to Mwaniki. During this period of time, their major economic occupation was hunting and gathering. The study therefore gives insight on the origin of the Embu who are related with the Chuka. Moreover, the thesis sought to demolish or clarify a number of half-truths and historical myths about the origins and the migration of Kenyan peoples including the pure tribe theory. In addition, Mwaniki (2010) has reconstructed his 1973 work which gives the roots migrations of the Embu and other Mount Kenya groups. In this work which he says in the preface that “it is not an academic history, rather it is a zealous study in indigenous knowledge in which history was deeply impended”, an examination of the Embu peoples history from their roots is done which formed the basis of arguments in the current study.

Brokensha and Glazier (1973) studied the changing political and social relationships of the Mbeere as they were affected by the pending land tenure reform. They explore the institutional changes brought on, in part, by the impending land reform and, in part, by changing perception of land values encouraged by an increasing population and land scarcity. They argue that these changes left people without the traditional security afforded by long-established kinship relations and a predictable political organization. They have further documented how boundary
disputes increased as land became scarce while its value increased. They chose the number of disputes to be representative of changing perceptions with regard to the value of land. Brokensha and Glazier provided insights into the changes that took place within the kinship groups in pre-capitalist societies that were required to facilitate the development of a land market. Their work did not give a lot of attention to the effects of the impending land reforms on crop production although they mention that the introduction of cash cropping affected the prices of land. However, it was crucial in the present study when dealing with the effects of the change in land ownership on the system of crop production.

Njeru (1978) analyzed the implications of land adjudication on the social organization of the Mbeere. He observes that the Mbeere perceived increasing inequality between the elites and the less influential farmers with the coming of land tenure reform. He also notes that, they also perceived an increase in landlessness and an overall decrease in the quantity of land held by small farmers. Whereas earlier land disputes could be resolved by the kinship authorities, after the reform they required official litigation proceedings. Only those with money could afford to bring their claims to court, and the poor people were often forced to sell some or all of their land to pay their litigation fees. Still others were forced to concede part of their land to avoid adjudication and the chance of losing their entire holdings.

Njeru’s work was vital in the present study in that it offered information on the effects of land adjudication on land ownership. Moreover, he has highlighted the inheritance problem and how it affects the sizes of land. After comparing the number of men in the area, the number of sons per man and the number of plots per man he came to the conclusion that land is already in short supply. How the short supply of
land in Embu North Sub-County influences the system of crop production was investigated in this study.

Haugerud (1983) did a study in Embu in which she assessed the consequences of land reform among smallholders in the Kenya Highlands. The study examined the relationship of formal and informal land tenure systems to the processes of agrarian change. She notes the persistence of fragmentation in the wake of the reform and contends that, the practice of the borrowing and lending of parcels of land has been responsible for the increase in the fragmentation of holdings that she observed in Embu. Her observations indicates that, this parcel exchange is continuing and even accelerating as the population puts strains on scarce land resources. She concludes that, the consolidation administered in Embu was ineffective as fragmentation of the newly consolidated holdings began soon after the reform took place.

Haugerud’s work was crucial in this study in that she has attempted to examine the productivity of the fragments of land in the study area. In her study she examined the number of parcels of land purchased since the beginning of the land reform which were being productively used. Secondly, her research has suggested the reason why people in Embu engage in cultivating multiple holdings. She points out that they do so to protect themselves against the whims of an unpredictable climate and disease. This information was important when examining the interplay between the system of land ownership and crop production in Embu North Sub-County.

1.8.2 Literature on Crop Production

Carney and Watts (1991) did their work on rice growing among the Mandinka of Senegambia where they traced subtle and accumulative change in the domestic household relations. The study found out that the expansion of rice growing by the government caused intra-household struggles over access to and control over land and
labour. Due to the rising demand of rice as the stable food, women were forced to put more labour into its production. Labour was further stressed with the introduction of groundnut as a man’s cash crop since it made men neglect the growth of millet and sorghum. The study offers crucial information on the division of labour after the introduction of new crops by the colonialists. This information was relevant when assessing the impact of new crops on pre-colonial labour relations in Embu North Sub-County.

Bryceson (1980) did a study in Tanzania on changes in peasant food production. In this work the author analyses the dynamic interaction between peasant food production and commodity production under conditions of increasing penetration of capital. The author asserts that increased commodity production had a direct link to the serious food shortage and even famines experienced in colonial Tanzania. This work examines some of the most significant changes that took place in peasant subsistence production and consumption during the study period. Although not entirely, poor crop production was a consequence of colonial economic policies that were aimed at restructuring African economies to boost the colonial economy. The present study benefited from this work when assessing the impact of commodity production of maize on other indigenous crops.

Omwoyo (1990) analyzed the organization and transformation of agriculture among the Gusii of Western Kenya in the colonial period. He demonstrated that the dynamism and innovativeness of Gusii indigenous agriculture showed its efficiency and productiveness. He further demonstrated how the colonial penetration modified and marginalized the Gusii land’s indigenous agriculture. He nonetheless attributes this transformation to colonialism. His work was relevant to this study in that it recognizes the impact of land ownership on crop production.
In addition, Omwoyo (2000) studied the agricultural changes in the Kipsigisland from 1894-1963. He gave a detailed historical analysis of agricultural changes in the Kipsigisland. Further, he documented the Kipsigis pre-colonial methods of crop and animal production as the basis of subsequent changes. By the coming of independence in 1963, he asserts that the Kipsigis agriculture had been radically transformed from its pre-colonial state to become an integral part of the international capitalist economy. The study gives insight on agricultural changes during the colonial period.

Esese (1990) focused on the role of social economic, ecological and political factors in agricultural production among the Wanga. He paid particular attention to the role of land tenure system in agricultural production and change. Further, he also analyzed land ownership, crop production and livestock keeping through an integrated approach. His work although it ends in 1945, was vital in this study in that he has given information on the type of lands in Wanga which were compared to the type of lands in Embu North Sub-County. The interplay between the system of land ownership and crop production cannot be well analyzed while ignoring gender and labour relations in a given society. Since gender relations are the distinctive social relations between men and women, research works in gender relations during the colonial and post-colonial period can therefore not be ignored in this study. For instance, among the Abagusii it is women who were primarily responsible for food production, household management and the nature of children (Stichter, 1982).

Ndeda (1999) has shown how colonialism was discriminatory to the African woman and how women were overburdened in the reserves in the absence of their labour migrant male folk. Women became the sole agricultural producers in the reserves. They planted, weeded, harvested, stored and managed their food harvests in the absence of men. Her work offered insight in gender relations within the people of
Embu North Sub-County on how gender labour relations impacts on the system of crop production.

Bulow (1992) examined changes in gender relations among the Kipsigis of Kenya and points out that both men and women have different cultural ideas about gender, and this subsequently transforms production relations. The author maintains that to understand how gender relations are transformed and how production relations are transformed and how production relations are influenced, there is need to understand the pre-colonial setting. Bulow presents gender as an important category that helped structure production relations among the Kipsigis in the pre-colonial period. For example, in pre-colonial Kipsigis society, the gender division of labour made men and women mutually dependent regarding the exchange of products like labour and other services. Bulow’s work was significant to this study when analyzing the changing gender division of labour in Embu North Sub-County.

Nasimiyu, R (1985) assessed the change in land tenure, innovations and the introduction of cash crops in Bungoma between 1902 and 1960. Her argument is that the changes brought about by agricultural innovations, introduction of cash crops and changes in land tenure and crop production reduced women to a state of dependency on men. She further adds that women ended up becoming the providers of labour with no security. Her work establishes that women continued to perform their traditional agricultural chores and at the same time participated in the new colonial system of production. Although her work tackles pre-colonial and colonial period, she majored on the production process while this study dealt with both the system of land ownership and crop production.

Tanui (2005) studied the impact of differential gender access to resources in agricultural production in Nandi. She investigated the impact of changing relations in
access to resources due to negative political, cultural and social factors which
influenced gender relations of production in Kenya and Nandi district in particular.
Her study has shown that political, social and ideological factors interacted in a
complex manner and over time influenced gender access to land, control over labour
and produce in the Nandi society. This study benefited from her work when
investigating political influence during the land consolidation in the study area.

In addition, on the position of women in agricultural production, Omwoyo
(1997) asserts that they played a central role but the recognition of their importance
decreased with time. In the pre-colonial period he points out, women played an
important role in food production hence enjoying a proportionate measure of
autonomy in agricultural production. His argument is that, colonialism, capitalist
exploitation and European ideas about appropriate economic and domestic roles for
women destroyed the economic independence and traditional forms of social authority
exercised by women. These scholars have shown that the female gender cannot be
ignored especially when investigating the interaction between the systems in pre-
colonial, colonial and post-colonial societies.

Omwoyo (2006) points out that the women in GusiiLand adopted several
approaches to counter the impact of coffee production on labour relations. First, they
deliberately intensified their own labour. As they were forced to undertake duties of
their absent husbands, offer their labour in coffee farms, and perform their own
domestic chores, women had no alternative other than to work a little more and longer
than before. Secondly, they used the working parties more than before. The working
parties went around soliciting for jobs to do in rich farmers’ coffee holdings with an
intention of being paid cash. Thirdly they sought for employment locally in the rich
men’s coffee shambas as individuals. This meant working for their employer in the
morning hours and working on their own holding late in the afternoon. The fourth strategy employed by the women to cope with their continued marginalization from the cash crop economy was to increase production of profitable crops within their reach. Such women established vegetable gardens and were often seen selling vegetables in market places on appointed market days. Lastly women formed small-scale cooperatives or merry-go-rounds to raise the required capital. The study benefited from this work when investigating labour changes during the colonial period.

Kabura (2005) argues that declining living standards and poverty is evident among many rural families that for a long time depended on cash crops as a major source of income. She points out that, what farmers earn from cash crops such as tea has declined due to competition in the global market and changes in consumers tastes among other factors. At the same time population has brought conditions of large family sizes and small farm sizes which impacts negatively on food production. Her work was relevant to this study in that it recognizes the impact of family farm sizes on crop production.

Njogu (2002) points out that most of the farmers in the tea producing areas devoted most of their land to tea production at the expense of food. In this research done in Kirinyaga, she argues that tea producing households gave first priority to food whenever they received their money. The reason is that these households did not get enough food through home production and therefore had to purchase from the market. These changes in crop production that are a result of diminishing sizes of farmland can be understood intensively if the interplay between the system of land ownership and crop production can be put under intense examination.
Runji (1987) researched on the socio-political impact of commodity production in a marginal subsistence rural economy. He examined the systematic incorporation of the Evurori area into capitalist production through the cultivation of cotton. The research indicates that the people in this area found themselves occupying a precarious position: by producing both for consumption and for cash, they were caught up between two competing economies; a subsistence economy and the modern capitalist economy. Thus, the introduction of cotton as a cash crop in Evurori in 1965 occasioned a general shift in emphasis from subsistence farming to production for the market and also a diversification of the sources of income. This study was important in the present research in that it offered information on the effects of cash crops on food crop production. Moreover, it states the reason why we have the persistence of pre-capitalist forms and tools of production, labour process and social formations alongside capitalist forms of production.

In addition, Njiru (1990) dwelt on the effects of tea production on women’s work and labour allocation in Embu district. She examined the sexual division of labour and its impact on gender relations among smallholder tea farming households of Embu district. Her study found out that, agricultural activities before the adoption of commercialized tea production in the area initiated social economic differentiations among households. These differentiations have been intensified by tea production. Consequently, labour prioritization to livestock, food production and other household activities is in acute competition with that directed to tea production. She further found that, although tea production has increased women’s workload generally, it has brought some advantage for some; most tea producing households have relatively more incomes than before, better housing, clothing and other amenities in their houses. Her work was vital when assessing social differentiations after land reform.
Wangari (2010) examined gender relations on food crop production in Kiambu District between 1920 and 1985. She assessed the socio-economic relations between females and males that are characterized often by differential assignments to labour tasks. The study established that changes in land tenure, labour provision as well as promotion of cash crops had affected production of food crops. She noted that, the alienation of Kikuyu land and later consolidation and registration on an individual basis were major in affecting people’s access to productive land. This was, however, gendered with women being the most affected because of the existence of patriarchal system which undermined women’s ownership rights. Her study noted that, though women continued to provide most labour, they did not remain passive victims of patriarchal control but they engaged in productive activities for instance, food-related trades. The study gave insights when assessing labour relations.

Mwaruvie (1991) conducted a study on the economic history of the Mbeere. He examined the evolution of various economic types undertaken by the Mbeere from the period of settlement to 1914. He explored their production mechanisms and how the produce was distributed to ensure self-sufficiency of the household. The study found out that production entails the control, adaptation and manipulation of the environment to meet the needs of the community. This study is crucial to the present study in that it gives insight on production mechanisms and their effect on crop production.

Njoki (2003) did a study on Embu women food production and traditional knowledge. She studied the participation of Embu women in the food cycle, their traditional techniques of food processing and food cycles and how the techniques are informed by indigenous knowledge. Her study basically focuses on the involvement of women in food crop production. The study indicates that, Embu women are
involved in the food cycle all year round. These activities include clearing the land, planting, weeding, harvesting, food preservation (using both natural preservatives and insect repellents), distribution (domestic and export), cooking, and storage. Among the Embu, crop cultivation was organized by gender. Men cultivated cash crops such as sugar cane, yams, and bananas. Women grew several kinds of potatoes, cassava, millet, vegetables, and legumes, such as cowpeas, pigeon peas, garden peas, kidney beans, white beans, and lentils. Women cultivated maize when it was used for home consumption. However, when maize was cultivated as a commercial commodity, it became a "male" (cash) crop and as such, both husband and wife cared for it.

If vegetable was cultivated for commercial purposes, it too becomes "male" crop, although when grown for home use it was considered "female" crop. All fruits (e.g., oranges, mangoes, papayas, avocados, passion fruit, pears, lemons, and strawberries) belonged to the family unless grown in such large quantities that there was a surplus for trade, in which case the fruits became "male" crops. Methods of food preservation included drying and submitting the food to a range of locally prepared preservatives. The local preservatives included ashes, marigold, hot pepper, onions, cow-dung, garlic, and herbs. The preservation procedure depended on the type of herbs and foods involved. Njoki’s study is valuable to the present one in that it deals with the issue of women and pre-colonial food production in Embu. It, however does not deal with the interplay between the system of land ownership and crop production that the present study covers.

The literature so far reviewed shows that there are gaps to be filled inland ownership and crop production. There is need to examine the interplay between the system of land ownership and crop production and what impact this has on agricultural production. For example, the changes that occurred in regard to
mechanization and its impact on the system of crop production. It is clear that the interplay between the system of land ownership and crop production has not been well researched on. Although this is a localized study, it’s hoped that its findings will help in understanding Kenya’s agricultural history.

1.9 Theoretical Framework

African socio-economic studies have for a long time been based on three theories. They include; modernization, dependency and articulation of modes of production theories. Although this study will be anchored on articulation of modes of production theory, the dependency argument cannot be ignored. The dependency perspectives emerged in the late 1950s upon the United Nations Economic Commission of Latin America (ECLA) under the directorship of Paul Baran’s, analysis of the obstacles facing Latin America’s development (Aryes, 1995). The Dependency Theory continued as the central line of Marxist thought regarding the contradictory character of the needs of imperialism and process of industrialization and the general economic development of backward nations. The dependency perspective became widely known and popularized in Africa largely through the writings of Amin (1974) focusing on the historical process of development in Africa. The issues dealt with by the dependency perspective have important relevance for and applicable to African economies. Their concern is to determine the structural causes or historical roots of underdevelopment.

The dependency theorists perceive peripheral economies as part of the capitalist world economy. They assert that, the internal situation of dependency has conditioned not only the international relations between the core and the periphery, but also their internal structures such as land tenure and agricultural development policies, distribution of resources between subsistence and export market agricultural
venture and the general social, economic and political settings. Dependency is therefore a dialectical relationship in which development in the metropolitan countries reproduces poverty or underdevelopment in the Third World countries. The introduction of new cash and food crops for, example maize and coffee is seen as a major step towards underdevelopment and dependency as the pre-colonial food and nutritional patterns were changed and Africans made to rely on vulnerable crops and on unstable marketing system. The growing dependence on western technological innovations in terms of machinery and seeds are seen as major indicators of Africa’s external dependency in agriculture.

Critics of dependency theory argue that it is misleading to look at dependency as a formal theory, and that no general implication for development can be abstracted from its analysis (Seers, 1981). Their argument is that it pays a lot of emphasis to external factors such as trade, while it overlooks internal weaknesses in individual states and therefore this study found the theory relatively not applicable in examining the interplay between the system of land ownership and crop production. Due to the shortcomings of the dependency theory and that the theory in Africa attributes enormous course of events to colonialism; the articulation of modes of production theory as expounded by Meillasoux (1975), was adopted in analyzing the interaction between the system of land ownership and crop production.

The theory asserts that when the Capitalist Mode of Production (CMOP) is introduced in a non-capitalist mode of production, it does not automatically replace the existing mode of production. Rather the CMOP will gradually align with the non-capitalist modes of production and use them to its own benefits. This continuous process of subordination culminates in the domination of the CMOP over the non-capitalist mode. The pre-capitalist mode of production is not completely eliminated
but keeps on reproducing itself diversely in relation to the capitalist mode of production (Esese, 1990:19-20). Goodman and Redcliff (1981:60) thus note, pre-capitalist mode of production may have continued to exist, though subordinated to the capitalist system, through a process of ‘preservation and destruction’ or ‘dissolution and conservation’.

Since articulation is a process by which the CMOP establishes dominance over the non-capitalist mode (s) (Omwoyo 1990:20), this theory was employed to investigate the extent to which the non-capitalist mode of production has survived in Embu North Sub-County. A mode of production is seen here as a system of production or social form of economic organization. It mainly involves itself with the means of production and the attendant social relations of production. Articulation is therefore double-edged concept where certain sectors of the pre-capitalist economy were integrated into the capitalist economy and other sectors were not integrated for some time with a view to achieve certain economic goals.

For instance, the Embu North pre-colonial system of land ownership was able to survive, though subordinated by the European system of title holding on land. The pre-colonial labour system of working parties has survived in Embu North Sub-County though subordinated by wage labour. The theory also explains why men readily embraced the new agricultural technologies including the introduction of coffee and tea. Just as capitalist mode of production preserved the pre-capitalist sector in order to utilize and exploit it, so did the men to women in the study area. Men grew cash crops while women grew food and subsistence crops, but even then men utilized women’s labour in all their endeavors (Njoki 2003). Basing on these examples the articulation of modes of production analysis was taken as the most appropriate theoretical perspective in this study.
1.10 Research Methodology

This area covers research design, target population and sample selection, location of study, research instruments and methods of data analysis.

1.10.1 Research Design

The current study used a survey design to investigate the interplay between the system of land ownership and crop production in an effort to understand the reason for varied crop yields in Embu North Sub-County. This research design is used in preliminary and exploratory studies to allow researchers to gather information, summarize, present and interpret for the purpose of clarification (Orodho, 2002).

1.10.2 Area of Study

This study was conducted in Embu North Sub-County. Currently, it is part of Embu County. Geographically, Embu area is the fertile and well-watered highlands that border the slopes of Mount Kenya at an altitude of 17,058 feet above sea level. The altitude of useful land ranges from about 4000 feet to around 7000 feet. It is situated 150 kilometers north of the capital, Nairobi, and is accessible by tarmac road. Most of Embu land is characterized by ridges and deep valleys except along the Embu-Mbeere border (Njoki, 2003). The total area is 544 sq. km. Area population is 296,992 with 80,138 households as per 2009 national population census.

The study area, Embu North Sub-County is 111.7 sq. km with a population of 73,841 (2009 Census). Most of this population depends on land for their agricultural activities including agro-based factories especially coffee and tea. Others are in businesses and employment sectors including the civil service. To the north it borders the southern slopes of Mt. Kenya, to the east is Embu East Sub-County, to the south and to the west is Embu West Sub-County. The temperatures range between 19.5 degrees Celsius to 21 degrees Celsius. Rainfall in Embu North Sub-County is
adequate, regular and reliable. The area receives between 50 inches and 75 inches of rainfall annually. It has two distinct rainfall seasons. These are the long and short rains. The long rains fall between March and May with a peak in April while the short rains are between October and December. June, July and August are the coldest months while the hottest are January, February and September. The climate in the sub-county favors a diversified agricultural production. The rainfall pattern enables the area to have two planting seasons for food crops. Therefore, land in Embu North Sub-County is optimally utilized. The total area is under smallholding except along the forest where we have the Nyayo Tea Zone. Thus, Embu North Sub-County presents a favorable area of studying the interplay between the system of land ownership and crop production.

1.10.3 Study Population

According to the Kenya population census, Embu North Sub-County had 73,841 people in 2009. Out of these, 37,608 were female while 36,233 were male. This population was distributed in 19,131 households. Most of this population depends on land for their crop production. Others are in businesses, employment sectors including civil service. Cash crops (e.g., tea and coffee) and subsistence crops (e.g., maize, beans, potatoes, arrowroot, cassava, and bananas) are grown on small family farms that may be between one to five hectares of land. Family homesteads are adjacent to family fields. Most homes face toward an open compound, or ‘Nja’, where many family activities take place, such as food processing, eating, playing with children, or receiving visitors (Wanamu, OIL, 2012: Njoki 2003). It was in the ‘Nja’ that most of my interviews took place.

The target population in this study comprised people who are mainly involved in crop production. Local administrators, coffee and tea factory officials, agricultural
extension officers both from county and national government plus individuals who were involved during the land reform process were also included. Others included people who engage in related farm-produce business. Since the study aimed to investigate the interaction between the system of land ownership and crop production, the people involved in crop production formed the largest group. Gender composition within the respondent’s population was put into consideration. However, it proved difficult to achieve the set target number of each category. This is because most of the women involved in crop production do not own land and that not all men who own land are involved in crop production. In spite of this difficulty, the researcher was able to get a comfortable number of both men and women respondents from all the categories.

1.10.4 Sampling Techniques

Purposive sampling technique was used to source out a representative sample from the densely populated Embu North Sub-County. This is because other sampling techniques were not appropriate for this study. Out of all the locations, the researcher purposefully selected Gaturi North location. This is because it is the largest (18.5 sq. km) and has one of the highest populations in the sub-county (12, 892). This population is distributed in Kavutiri, Kianjuki and Itonguri sub locations (2009 Population Census). Local administrators and officials like the chief, assistant chiefs, agricultural officers, coffee factory managers among others were consulted not only as a source of primary data but also in identifying the respondents.

1.10.5 Sample Size

Due to the limitation of time and resources, the researcher sought to interview a total of fifty respondents. These respondents were drawn from the three sub locations of Gaturi North Location in Embu North Sub-County. Respondents involved in
agricultural production and other related farm-produce businesses formed the largest slot of 40 individuals. Local administrators (the chief and assistant chiefs) and officials (agricultural officers, coffee factory managers, tea extension officer and land reform participants) formed a slot of 10 respondents.

1.10.6 Research Instruments

The study was conducted using interviews based on a question guideline. All respondents were asked questions in the same question guideline. The use of interviews based on a question guideline was advantageous in that it saved time and the information could be collected from a large sample.

1.10.7 Data Collection

Two broad categories of data, that is, secondary data and primary data were sourced.

a) Secondary Data

This constituted data from books, articles, unpublished theses, pamphlets, periodicals among others. This category was useful in sourcing information pertaining to the system of land ownership and crop production. To obtain these data, the researcher utilized various libraries notably Post Modern Library of Kenyatta University, Jomo Kenyatta Memorial Library, and Kenya National Archives. The Kenya National Archives was consulted to analyze various documents including district annual reports, handing over reports, political documents, minutes and agricultural reports for the colonial period. These documents provided historical data on land consolidation, land policies, crop production, labour policies, tax and agricultural policies. These were important in highlighting the colonial position on crop production in general and the type of crops grown in Embu North Sub-County. All the data collected was treated with extreme caution because it might be biased. Therefore it was complemented and corroborated with data that was derived from oral interviews.
b) Primary Data

Under this category, data was sourced from the sampled respondents. Information from the respondents was collected with the use of a question guideline, which was orally presented to the respondents. The aim of the questions asked during the sessions was to find the relationship between the system of land ownership and crop production. The interviews were confined to the interaction between the systems of land ownership and crop production. Data from the respondents was documented through note taking in notebooks. A tape recorder was not used to store information because most respondents were reluctant to be recorded.

1.10.8 Data Analysis and Interpretation

In data analysis, qualitative technique was used. The primary data collected was transcribed. Those in vernacular were translated into English and subjected to secondary data. The cumulative data from the primary and secondary sources was synthesized and the resultant data categorized in accordance to the objective of the study. Theoretical probing was adhered to when analyzing both data in order to reach to a logical descriptive analysis. To authenticate the data collected, corroboration of both primary and secondary data was done.

1.10.9 Ethical Considerations

The respondents were not enticed with money or coerced to give information. They were persuaded to co-operate and assured of protection of their rights as it is enshrined in the Bill of Rights. The appointments were given on time through a letter allowing the respondents to schedule their time.

1.10.10 Structure of Thesis

This study has been divided into six chapters. Chapter one comprises the background of the study; statement of the problem; objectives of the study; research questions;
research assumptions; justification and significance and scope and limitation of the study. The review of related literature as well as the theoretical framework used in this study is also captured in this chapter.

In chapter two, land ownership and crop production in pre-colonial Embu North Sub-County before 1890 is examined. Trade and exchange, famines and food shortage are also covered. The chapter starts with an overview of the settlement of the Aembu in Embu. This forms the baseline for understanding the system of land acquisition and crop production in the wider Embu County before the introduction of European colonialism. Moreover, the interaction between land ownership and crop production at the time is examined. The chapter presents an ideal situation when the system was being used by the society to produce enough crops for consumption and trade.

The establishment of colonial rule and its influence on land ownership and crop production to 1920 is covered in chapter three. This is the period when the colonial government conducted various experiments on different crops. Most of the new crops were introduced at this time. The chapter also examines colonial land, labour and tax policies introduced in the area after 1906 in an attempt to analyze their effect on the pre-colonial system of land ownership and crop production. Trade and exchange plus the effects of World War 1 are also covered.

The major changes in the system of land ownership and crop production in Embu North are covered in chapter four. This period is from 1920-1946. The capitalist mode of production that had been introduced earlier through taxes and new crops embarks on its domination of the pre-capitalist modes during this period. Although the community at the time produced using the pre-capitalist mode, they found themselves selling their commodities through the capitalist mode. The World Great Depressions and the effect of World War 2 are also tackled here. Mainly, the chapter examines the
new crops introduced, methods of crop production trade and exchange, famines and labour organization in the said period.

The fifth chapter deals with land reforms. Land consolidation under the Swynnerton Plan is the major focus here. The study examines the influence of colonial land reforms on the system of land ownership and crop production in the area of study between 1946 and 1963. The land betterment programmes under the ALDEV and their influence on labour organization are also examined. Social differentiations that were emerging throughout the colonial period are also re-assessed.

Chapter six concludes the study by giving a summary and conclusion of the major findings. It is argued that the interplay between the system of land ownership and crop production has been influencing agricultural production in Embu North Sub-County since the pre-colonial period.
CHAPTER TWO

2.0 LAND OWNERSHIP AND CROP PRODUCTION IN PRE-COLONIAL EMBU COUNTY

2.1 Introduction

The analysis in this chapter is basically on the pre-colonial system of land ownership and crop production in Embu North Sub-County. It also covers the origin and the social, economic and political organization of the Embu people. It will be shown that the Embu pre-colonial system of land ownership and crop production was efficient in providing enough food for the entire population. During this time land, which is the most important resource in agricultural production was readily available to the whole population. Moreover, it will be shown that the produce from the land was aimed at benefiting the family and the entire population. Although, there were famines during this period, the study will show that there were mechanisms to minimize their severity.

The chapter also examines the pre-colonial methods of acquiring land in Embu society. It is shown that the family and the clan were the most important units in the whole process of land acquisition. An examination of land units in different ecological areas in Embu is also done here. Moreover, the system of solving land disputes is also captured. In the chapter also the types of crops produced and their importance are analyzed. It will be evident from this analysis that the society had both ‘male’ and ‘female’ crops. These crops were used differently and in specific periods. For instance, male crops were mostly utilized during food shortages. Trade and exchange is also covered. The production process of these crops and mainly the system of crop production is examined. Land preparation, planting and the general land utilization is covered here. It will be shown how the produce was stored and how the surplus commodities were exchanged. Labour, which was organized on gender
basis, is also covered. It will be shown that the interaction between the systems of land ownership and crop production influenced the whole crop production process.

2.2 Settlement of the Embu in Embu County

Like in many other Kenyan communities, there are several myths of origin of the Embu. Most informants touched on three main myths of origin which are widely known. These are; the myth of creation, the 'Kebu’ and ‘Werimba,’ and the Mwenendega myths (Wanjuki, OIL, 2013, Mwaniki, 1973: 60). However, the Embu oral tradition has two most popular versions which try to explain the origin of the Embu. These are the Mwenendega version and the Meru direction of origin. Although the origins and movements of Kenyan communities have been a continuous debate among scholars, most of them concur that, the Embu had settled in their present area by 17th century (Mwaniki 1973, Muriuki 1974).

In spite of these myths it is clear from researches done (Mwaniki, 1973, Muriuki, 1974) that the Embu are immigrants of modern Embuland. This is because the Embu oral traditions claim that there were other groups of people already living in the present Embu land. A total of six names are given, namely; Macaria, Gumba, Ndorobo, Thigagi, Maturanthi and Rututu. Nobody seems to have full plausible knowledge of the six of them but many will talk of the Ndorobo, Gumba, Thigagi and Macaria (Mwaniki, 2010:87). These groups, especially the Ndorobo and the Gumba are said to have lived peacefully with the Embu immigrants. However, the Mbeere who are Embu cousins claim to have found the Thigagi and not the Gumba as the original occupiers of their land (Mwaruvie, 1991:29). Although there is this disagreement, one thing is clear from the Embu traditions that the Embu are not the indigenous people in the sub-county. Both primary and secondary data can confirm this.
It is believed that the Gumba lived in Embu for a certain period of time and later withdrew to areas more ideal to their mode of life when the Embu population increased and consequently interfered with their hunting grounds. This was sometime after 1750s because the evidence shows that the immigrants from Ithanga had already settled (Mwaniki, 2010). Indeed, the Ithanga settlers were the ones who increased the pressure and forced the Gumba to retreat. No one knows where they went exactly, but some informants say that the Gumba went through Mbeere lands enroot to their unknown destination (Mwaniki, 1974: 42).

In view of the above and with the knowledge that the Embu neighbours also found people or peoples in their modern lands when they arrived as immigrants, we can deduce that the stories of the Thigagi, Macaria, Ndorobo and Gumba was an Embu attempt to account for the fate of certain stocks of people found in modern Embu County when the Embu arrived. The mysterious disappearance of these people probably means that some were absorbed by the Embu clans through intermarriage and adoption. The rest of these people left Embu County peacefully, while others left through expulsion.

As mentioned earlier, the origins and movements of Kenyan communities is a continuous debate among many scholars. For example, early anthropologists like H.E. Lambert (1956) have tried to link the Kikuyu, Embu, Meru and Mbeere from the Shungwaya dispersion origin while others have opposed that assertion. Muriuki (1974:49) asserts that the Kikuyu, Embu and Mbeere have no traditions of ever migrating from Shungwaya. According to his research only the Meru claim to have originated from the coast. The Embu, Mbeere and the Kikuyu originated either from Northeastern or East of present Mbeere country. He argues that by the 15\textsuperscript{th} century, Kikuyu together with the Chuka, Mbeere, Embu, Ndia and Gichugu had migrated
from Tigania and Igembe in Meru. These groups later migrated south-westwards and settled at Igambang’ombe, north of the confluence of Thuci and Theira rivers. From here these migrating groups dispersed to different areas, the Embu occupying the present Embu land.

However, most informants (Karingi, Kigoro, MweaSuka, et al., 2013) agreed that the Embu originated from a place in Igembe and Tigania area called Mariguuri. They claim to have been driven out by famines and diseases. Together with the Mbeere and the Kikuyu they moved out to Igambang’ombe near modern Ishiara market. The Embu split into two after they arrived at Igambang’ombe. One group moved northwards and the other southwards towards river Tana (Muriuki, 1974). The group that migrated northwards later settled at Mwenendega grove which most informants claimed to be the main dispersal area of the Embu. To these immigrants, this grove was relatively ideal for protection, availability of natural food, both animal and vegetable. The settlement was going to be an important one in Embu history and was made between 1465 and 1500. Being the first undisputed settlement in the land, it created a core of nucleus of what was going to develop as Embu society (Mwaniki, 2010: 82).

According to informants, these early settlers at Mwenendega’s grove were members of Igamuturi, Kina, Igamukiria and later Gicuku clans. These were in Embu just before 1500. Due to overcrowding, exhaustion of natural foodstuffs and existence of other areas, which were more potential than the mother grove they migrated to other places within Embu land. Consequently, a section of Igamuturi and Kina clans left Mwenendega’s grove to make a new settlement at Gikuuri. Some Igamuturi settled further south near the present Embu-Mbeere border about 1560-1590. Some of their Kina colleagues left to settle at Mukuria or Rue, the present day Kevote. From
here they gradually moved northward to Kibogi, Kianjokoma and Kirinyaga area (Karingi, Kigoro, 2013). A second splitter group left Mwenendega’s grove and founded a second sub-settlement at Muthiru, in today’s Nvuvoori comprising of Igamuturi members only. Thus by 1650s, nearly every part of Embu was settled, but by very scattered inhabitants.

The second group of Embu and other immigrants who followed a southerly direction from Igambang’ombe later found themselves on the Tana River valley. They followed the river Tana upstream and later settled at a hill in modern Kiambere. This area might have been chosen because it provided natural defense and plenty of wild animals for food (Karingi, 2013). As the population increased, some moved to Ithanga hills at the confluence of Tana and Thika rivers. These hills not only provided protection from enemies but also plenty of food from the roaming wild animals. According to Muriuki (1974:56), Ithanga is the dispersal area for the Mbeere, the Embu, the Kikuyu, the Gichugu and the Ndia communities. This is in agreement with Mwaniki (2010:99), that the settlers of the sub-settlement or people from Ithanga, later moved to ‘Mukurue wa Gathanga’ as proto-Kikuyu. Others moved out to settle in Murang’a, Ndia/Gichugu and Mwea.

Although it is the general view of many historians that the Bantu speakers were generally cultivators, up to this point all the evidence does not indicate that the Embu and the other groups were cultivators and herders. So far it is evident that, these were hunters and gatherers who lived on wild animals and other wild fruits. The hunting culture among the Embu is confirmed by the fact that these people used wild animals in their most ancient ritual, that of nthuke, during nduiko instead of domestic animals (ibid, 2010:84, Karingi, 2013). Through their interaction with other communities like the Maasai, they might have adapted livestock keeping at a late
stage of their development. Mwaruvie (1991:32) asserts that the Mbeere interaction with the Maasai enabled them to acquire livestock. Apparently, it can be argued here that the Ithanga group had adopted the keeping of livestock just before settling at Ithanga or adopted this after the settlement for they are described as livestock herders in this settlement. Most researchers (Muriuki 1974, Mwaniki 1973, Mwaruvie 1991) have the opinion that the settlers learnt the art of livestock keeping from the Maasai who were grazing in the neighboring area. Consequently, they were introduced to the art of circumcision and cirrhotidectomy (Mwaruvie, 1991:30-33).

After staying at Mwea for some time, some people began trickling out towards lower areas of Mbeere like Mbita and Kirima while others went towards Embu (Mwaruvie, 1991). By 1680s and 1730s many people were arriving in Embu and were described as having come from Mbeere. These were members of such clans like Ngai, Iruma and Andu-a-Njuki (Mwaniki, 2010, Mbogo OIL, 2013). These joined the other Embu immigrants who had entered Embu at Igambang’ombe in Ishiara and spread to all other unoccupied areas. Thus, evidence has it that the migration and settlement in Embu were in form of trickles because they came in small numbers that would not have been noticed. This means that at the same time that the Ithanga refugees were arriving in Embu, other migrants, evidently from Meru side were also arriving on the scene, settling down and gradually getting assimilated. Some of the Kithami and Gicuku clan members arrived at this time. The trickles continued infiltrating Embu land incessantly until the beginning of the twentieth century (Mwaniki, 2010:103, Karingi, OIL, 2013).

The Embu, having migrated from two main directions and at two different periods as we have seen, had a pattern of settlement influenced by the direction from where the immigrants came from. The pattern was such that the clans, which came
from Ithanga, Mwea or Mbeere, owned clan lands in the Weru area, the lower and drier section of Embu land; while the clan lands for those who came and settled from Meru direction were in the upper and wetter section of Embu (Mwaruvie, 1991, Mbogo, OIL, 2013). However, some Ithanga people did not like Mbeti or Weru ‘livestock culture’ and moved into the upper Embu to settle almost in the forest beyond the then existing settlements (ibid, 2010:102). Many informants (Mbogo, Mwea Suka, Karingi, OIL, 2010) believe that the Ithanga group brought iron implements like arrowheads and axes, because Ithanga area had iron sand, which they utilized.

Moreover, they are believed to have brought the livestock culture and also introduced the art of circumcision which they got from the Maasai at Ithanga (Mwaruvie, 1991:32). The migration and settlement of the Embu is traced in this chapter with the aim of highlighting the system of land acquisition and ownership and also to describe the system of crop production. This offers the base of this study’s argument that the interplay between the system of land ownership and crop production has had effects on the overall crop production in the area of study.

2.3 Land Tenure and ownership in Embu

The central question in this section is whether land was owned communally or individually and whether it could change hands. The aim is to understand the interplay between the system of land ownership and crop production. As indicated, land represented the most highly valued properties and since it was a permanent resource, it was the primary source of food for people and livestock. Therefore, being a vital resource it was highly guarded by all and especially the Embu warriors. Land in many African communities was regarded as a comprehensive entity and social glue that held
people together, and through which they related to one another, to the living dead and to the supernatural (Mbiti, 1969).

It has been noted that the migration and subsequent settlements of the Embu was in trickles and not waves. These pioneer immigrants occupied Embu land ridge by ridge. Initially, they lived very close together for security reasons. Due to the small population, it was important to live close together for defense against wild animals and other hostile communities (Karingi, Wanamu OIL., 2013). These villages were enclosed and had gates known as *miviriga*, which were guarded at night by the warriors. Here people would mainly be of one clan or sub-clan but could contain many others who did not belong to the clan or sub-clan living there (Mwaniki, 1973:72-73). It can be argued that at this time, the Embu land tenure can be described as communal. But, this changed after the population increased in the 18\(^{th}\) and 19\(^{th}\) centuries when more immigrants arrived in Embu especially from the Ithanga direction as we have seen. Traditions assert that the system changed after the most famous famine in Embu called *Nvaraganu* (Mbogo, Kigoro, Karingi, OIL, 2013).

The kind of tenure that emerged after the population increased centered on the social grouping of the entire community. The social groups that emerged started at the family level. Newly married men and the new arrivals left their original ‘villages’ and settled in a separate ridge. The land in which such an individual settled was known as *ngamba* (Mbogo, OIL, 2013). Here one started his own *mucii* or home. In this way ridge-organization, rather than village-organization started. When the sons in the family married and built their houses the mucii was referred to as *nyomba ya* or *mbari ya* meaning ‘house of’ and they all traced their origin to a common ancestor. The *nyomba* consisting of a man and his wife (or wives) and their children was the core of the Embu society. The family was also the immediate operative political unit.
apart from being the primary unit in the social framework. Several such families came
together and formed a sub-clan, which traced their ancestry to the original clan
(Nyaga, OI., 2013).

2.4 Methods of Acquiring Land in Embu

After the migration and settlement several types of land ownership evolved. The
earliest known method of acquiring land was through the initial hunting rights
(Mutego), Mwaniki (1974, 2010:105). This was called Ngamba ya Kuuna na Mutego,
‘the land first possessed through the use of a trap’. This method is associated with the
immigrants who left Igambang’ombe and settled at Mwenendega. These, as we have
indicated, were hunters and gatherers and by the time of their settlement had not
acquired the art of animal rearing and crop production. The trapper fixed boundaries of
the area in which he could catch wild animals. The purpose of the boundaries was to
minimize conflicts between him and other trappers and to minimize theft of trapped
animal (Karingi, OI., 2013). Since an individual could trap wild animals in as many
places, there emerged many land parcels located in many parts of Embu but belonging
to the same individual or his relatives. In this way if an individual claimed to have
initial trapping rights, he was free to later cultivate the parcel of land. He had full
rights over his produce except the soil. The soil belonged to the community as a
whole.

The second method of acquiring land was through clearing the bush for the
first time by felling down forest trees with axes. This was termed as Ngamba ya
Kuuna na Kathanwa, ‘land first possessed through the axe.’ This type of land
ownership seems to have been practiced in the upper Embu especially in Embu North
Sub-County (Mbogo, Kigoro, OIL, 2013). This is because the area was thickly
forested and the pioneer immigrants did not settle here due to lack of iron axes. As
usual, after they settled various sub-clans emerged and since the land does not belong to an individual but to all lineage members on a patrilineal kinship, all members descending from the original cultivator had rightful claim to utilize the land (Munyi, Nyaga, OIL, 2013). Through these two methods, land was therefore occupied ridge by ridge by the pioneer families. As indicated, the founder of the nyomba or mbari was technically not the owner of the ngamba (land) but occupied an important position when issues pertaining to that ngamba (land) were concerned. He only acted on behalf of all the other members of the nyomba (mbari) as a mumenyereri (guardian). He was also the nominal head of the mbari or nyomba (Mbogo, Nyaga, Karingi, OIL, 2013). For example, he made sure that every mucii (family) in the mbari had enough land to cultivate. Several mbari lands became clan-lands. Their boundaries were marked by physical features like streams, hills, large trees like migumo, miringa and migaa or rare lilies known as njagai. Whenever there was pressure on land, the mbari tended to divide with some members moving out to acquire new land and thus new mbari or nyomba would be created (Mwaniki, 2010, Mbogo, Kigoro, OIL, 2013).

Moreover, if there were several parcels scattered in as many ridges, each was under the guardianship of the eldest member settled in that place (Mwea Suka, OIL, 2010). This individual acted as the mumenyereri and was responsible for granting rights of use of the land to lineage and non-lineage members and ensuring that boundary marks remained intact (Mbogo, OIL, 2010). Generally all clan members were supposed to be conversant with clan lands boundary marks and the clans with whom they shared boundary. In case of inter-clan dispute, all male clan members were required to contribute beer, goats and food as fees to the elders who arbitrated. These were known as Athamaki (Sing. Muthamaki) (Mwaniki, 1973).
In the lower areas of Embu where mainly the Ithanga immigrants settled, a third type of land ownership emerged. Since the main occupation here was livestock raring, the land was first possessed through the use of ‘herding staff’ or *Ngamba ya Kuuna na Muragi*. Afterwards, the post-1730 immigrants were unable to find ‘empty’ land as their predecessors had done. Some were however adopted by the clans who owned the land in which they went. In turn the immigrants became members of their adopter clans and had rights over the particular clan lands. However, not all late immigrants preferred to be adopted and since most of them had livestock they preferred to buy the land from the pioneers.

This led to the fourth method of acquiring land in Embu commonly known as *Ngamba ya Kugura* an equivalent of the Mbeere *nguri* (Mwaruvie, 1991:125). The land was bought by the late immigrants who found the land having been apportioned to those who arrived earlier. They used animals like goats, sheep, and parts of slaughtered cattle and grains to purchase the land (Wanamu, OI., 2013). The size of the land depended on the item used to buy it and the relationship between the buyer and the seller. Since most of the land sold was not naturally demarcated by streams into ridges or *Ng’ongo*, the sellers and the buyers demarcated and marked the boundaries to prevent other people to claim or enclose into it. This necessity brought the border mark shrubs which remained recognized until the time of land consolidation as we shall see. The shrubs were *Miu* (*markhamia-hildebrandtii*), *Mirigi* (*Kigelia aethiopica, also Kigelia-Moosa*) and *Njagai* (*amaryllis lily also called crinum kirkii*), called *gitoka* in Kikuyu (Mwaniki, 2010:104).

Most informants (Mwea Suka, Kigoro, Mbogo OIL, 2013) said that the above method of land acquisition was not practiced by the individuals without the consent of the sub-clan members as it is done today. If there was need to sell land, the individual
had to seek consent of his immediate family and the sub-clan by convincing them of the need necessitating the sale. The go ahead would only be allowed if the family and the sub-clan members were unable to satisfy his need. Still, he could not be allowed to sell the land to an outsider until it was ascertained that no sub-clan member was willing to acquire the land. After these steps were followed and a willing buyer was found, the seller had to inform his family and the sub-clan once more to witness the transaction. Similarly, in the Mbeere community, an elder was invited to perform the ritual of exchanging land ownership. If land changed hands without the ritual it was unlawful and could be returned to the original owner (Mwaruvie, 1991:126).

Other methods of acquiring land which emerged as the Embu community developed were through fines and land acquired from in-laws. Such crimes like man slaughter and in rare cases murder if committed, the offender could be fined a parcel of land by the highest council in the land known as Kiama Kia Ngome to compensate the family of the murdered person. Still a male child could acquire land from his maternal uncles after providing a he-goat to be feasted on and to bless the land for him (Hosea, OL., 2013).

The foregoing discussion on the methods of land acquisition in the pre-colonial Embu does not imply that there were no common lands in the society. Paths commonly known as Njira cia Mugongo, shrines and open places known as Matiri where people performed dances like Kivata were referred as common lands. Together with these, there were common watering places and salt licks for both livestock and people. Though such land was regarded as common due to its utility it fell under land owned by certain clans although the owners had to conform to the rules of the entire community that governed utilization and preservation of such land (Daniel Mutua, OL., 2013).
An individual who acquired land did not necessarily live in the new *ngamba* with his *mucii* only. Sometimes he could be followed by close relatives and other people who were not his family members (Wanamu, Wanjuki, OIL, 2013). These became tenants at will who did not lack land to cultivate or erect huts for their family since permission for tenancy was seldom denied to anybody. For one to be a tenant sometimes it did not mean the person was landless. An individual could become a tenant when his land was far away or exhausted and used the tenancy to allow it to regain fertility (Daniel Mutua, OIL, 2013). Others would settle as political or social refugees whom the community and the individual concerned considered acceptable to the society. The non-family members settled on the land as *ocwa* (Sing. *Mwocwa*), literally meaning ‘ritually collected’ (Adoptees). These left their original lands because of social, political or economic pressures (Mwaniki, 2010).

However, this type of adoption was different from the popular blood brotherhood. A blood brother was termed as *Muciarwa* (pl. *aciarwa*). The *Muciarwa* was adopted due to friendship or cordial relationship. Unlike the *Mwocwa*, the *Muciarwa* could go back to his motherland and remain such but; the *Mwocwa* once adopted could not go to his motherland (Daniel Mutua, OIL, 2013). In fact, he had to forget all about his motherland and Embu remained his motherland for all purposes. As it were he had cut off all filial relationship with the former motherland. Moreover, if there was a war waged against his former motherland by the Embu, he was supposed to act as a guide and spy. Traditions assert that the *Kithami* sub-clans were formed by *ocwa* and other late immigrants (Mwaniki, 1973:19, KirigiO.I., 2013). This system of *ocwa* was used to increase the number of the mbari members and so many families favored it.
The foregoing discussion indicates that the Embu land tenure system had an element of both individual and group ownership. This means that while at the ethnic group level, land theoretically, belonged to the community, at the clan and homestead levels each had his own plot of land with rights of inheritance and use. Imperialist scholars always generalize all pre-capitalist land tenure systems as having been communally owned, denoting a so-called ‘backward’ and ‘primitive’ form of land tenure. But, this is misleading to assume that such land ownership was ‘backward’ and ‘primitive’ (Hopkins, 1973:38).

In case the original occupier of land died, his land became the joint property of his sons and other male descendants and their families. These formed a new mbaru but even if they divided the land among themselves, the land did not become their own individual property, but remained the property of the sub clan. Indeed, most informants claimed that in Embu traditional society, everybody had access to land (Mbogo, Mutua, Kigoro, 2013). Thus, sometimes even a father-in-law could give land to a landless son-in-law as already stated. Land among the Embu community acted as the glue that bound the people together while it guaranteed continuity of the community members. Basically, as an agricultural community they traced their source of livelihood from land (Mwaniki, 2010).

Land indeed, was regarded as an important factor in the social and economic organization of the people and every mucii was expected to have land for cultivation (Runji, OL., 2013). However, the Embu traditional land laws were effective and they enhanced agricultural development in the whole society. After the original occupier of the land passed away and the parcel fell in the hands of his male descendants, each male in the family had well defined grazing and cultivation rights. He had the right to show his wife (wives) where to cultivate. He had the freedom to clear and cultivate
any portion of the family land. If the land was not enough, he consulted the eldest male in the family (Daniel Mutua, OIL, 2013). As already stated the eldest son after the head of the family died acted as the guardian or Mumenyereri. Sometimes there could be disagreement on the distribution of family land. Although this was rare, there were clear mechanisms to solve them (Joseph Kiura OIL., 2013).

Disputes over land were not very common since land was abundant. The most common land dispute was the extension of one’s plot into another’s without due regard to accepted boundaries. Such disputes were solved at the sub-clan level by elders concerned. Disputes also arose over grazing lands, especially along the boundary with other ethnic groups like the Mbeere and the Chuka. These were solved at the clan level by elders of both sides that border each other (Mwaniki, 1974). Wives and sons sometimes had disputes over the utilization of land which was also amicably resolved by the clan elders. (Daniel Mutua, OL., 2013).

Embu customary laws had laid down mechanisms in solving cultivation disagreements between a land owner and a tenant. The customary regulations not only safeguarded the interests of the ‘owner’ of the land, but also those of the tenant. The land usage regulations give all land ‘owners’ including the tenants unrestricted right to cultivate the portion allocated to them and plant whatever food crops they wished (Wanjuki, Wanamu, O.I, 2013). The tenant was not in any obligation to share his produce with the land owner though he could do it voluntarily. The tenants also could not be unfairly evicted from the land. Even without presenting the case to the elders, the land regulations denied the ‘owner’ advantage of the tenants labour. For example according to informants (Runji, Rucia, Wanamu, O.I, 2013) the land ‘owner’ could not evict a tenant after he had cleared and cultivated a piece of land and use it immediately to plant his own crops. The customary laws provided that the cultivated
land from which a tenant had been evicted had to be allowed to revert to bush once more before the land ‘owner’ could use it.

One can conclude that, the concept of communal and individual ownership of land in African communities reflected the economic as well as the social realities that faced the society. Thus, the tenure arrangements that existed were aimed at easing or solving some of the social-economic problems that faced the people. The land laws and regulations in the traditional Embu society were meant to govern the agricultural production among the society. All the land laws and regulations together with the tenant relationship regulations enhanced agricultural production leading to food security. This was in the sense that they protected the food producers and their produce from unfair exploitation.

2.5 The Pre-Colonial System of Crop Production

Having examined Embu land ownership system it is appropriate to examine land use and crop production. However, this cannot be done without highlighting other pre-colonial economic activities that preceded crop production in the study area. As mentioned earlier, the Embu were hunters and gatherers during their initial settlement in the area. Hunting and gathering, therefore formed an important economic aspect in most of the pre-colonial period. Sheriff (1985:4) notes that the hunting and gathering system of appropriation of substance from nature is universal and was practiced as late as the nineteenth century in Kenya. Under this system, little energy and time is invested in the production of food. Gathering was done by women and as a way of supplementing their cultivation of food. They gathered vegetables and fruits such as nightshade (*solanum nigrum*-locally known as *managu*), *rwoga* or *terere* (*amaranthus lividus*) and *mukengeria* (*commelina benghalensis*) (Wanamu, O.I., 2013).
Boys on the other hand did hunting and young energetic men (Njogu Kamanja, Mutua, OIL, 2013). These formed hunting groups or bands that distributed the spoils of the hunt among them. Young boys trapped or killed with sling shots various types of birds. The young energetic men (Njogu Kamanja, OIL, 2013). Most animal’s hunted rabbits, antelopes, warthogs, monkeys, leopards, elephants and buffaloes and birds were hunted for meat, making hunting one of the means of food appropriation. Leopard and monkeys were hunted for their skins, which were used for ceremonial purposes (Kamatu, OI, 2013). All the hunted food was just a small portion that supplemented animal and food crop production (Wanjuki, OI., 2013).

During the pre-colonial period, crop production was one of the major economic activities of the Embu people. Traditional Embu foodstuffs were not many but increased as foreigners brought more varieties in. During the pre-capitalist period, the original foods though not entirely indigenous were nthoroko, njavi, njugu, millet and sorghum, bananas called mitika, itigi, mitabato, then arrow-roots and sugar canes called ibogo and micore. Beans and maize came very recently (Mwaniki, 1974: 50). In the years preceding colonial rule crop and animal production was the main pre-occupation of the society.

Although they kept livestock, their primary economic activity was crop production and animal products especially meat was rarely consumed apart from during important family functions (Karingi, OI., 2013). The community had a carbohydrate and vegetarian diet mostly of finger millet, sorghum, lablab bean, bananas and sweet potatoes as their staple food and a variety of green vegetables. The growth of these food crops ensured that there was limited food shortage (Sarah Njura, OIL, 2013). That food crop production was an important activity among most communities in central Kenya long before colonial rule is evidenced by the fact that,
before 1887, the Kikuyu supplied large quantities of foodstuffs to the Arab and Swahili trade caravans from the coast (Leakey, 1977:53). The production of these crops was enhanced by the efficient system of land ownership that ensured land was available to all.

Before the onset of colonialism, maize had become one of the grains consumed by the people of Embu. Unlike the other grains like finger millet and sorghum that are credited to the Ethiopian and East African highlands, maize was introduced to Africa before the colonial period. Maize was domesticated in the semi-tropical uplands of Central and North America (Miracle, 1966; Muchoki, 1988). The Portuguese are credited to have introduced maize to the coastal settlements in the sixteenth century and its spread to the interior seems to have followed the trade routes. It was much less common in central Kenya, for example among the Kikuyu, before the colonial period (Miracle, 1966:99). According to Mwaniki (1973:145), maize grains, the so-called “European arrowroots,” the Comba or Arab-Swahili traders brought banana types like miraru, itigi and some varieties of sugarcane at around 1850.

Maize although important to the Embu was not widely grown in the pre-colonial period. The stable cereal and perennial crops among the people during the pre-colonial period were sorghum, yams, bulrush millet, lablab beans, sweet potatoes, finger millet, foxtail millet and later maize (Mwaruvie, 1991; Wanjuki, OIL, 2013). Bulrush millet was not only a favorite dish among the Embu, but also used in all ceremonial occasions such as marriage ceremonies (Agusta Igandu, OIL, 2013). Moreover, according to the Embu traditional community it was the only food crop together with sweet potatoes that was exchanged with goats (Teresia Kinja, OL, 2013). In addition to these food crops, there were several wild vegetables like
mathorokwe, managu, and rwoga that were used as green supplements. There were also several wild fruits that boys and girls enjoyed while herding like: macuca, matunda, mbota and ndare. Bulrush millet and other millets were stored in a special store called mururu (Joyce Kanjovi, OIL, 2013).

Most pre-colonial African communities had their unique systems of crop production. But, most European colonial writers described all traditional African agricultural practices as shifting cultivation. Such generalizations are rooted in the inability of early European travelers and colonial writers to understand and appreciate African agricultural ecology and environmental management due in part to evolutionist assumptions about agricultural development in which European agricultural techniques and practices stood at the pedestal of historical environment. Recent studies have shown that in West Africa for example there no less than seven systems of crop production (Zeleza 1986, 154-157).

Inter-cropping or multiple cropping which Zeleza (1986:174) calls the “heart of African agriculture,” was the norm in pre-colonial Embu. Most scholars in African agricultural history (Mwaruvie, 1991: Omwoyo, 1990: Muchoki, 1988: Njoki, 2003: Esese, 1990) concur that, inter-cropping practiced by many African pre-colonial communities had an element of risk avoidance. In the same breath, according to Richards (1985, 65), the African peasant farmer manipulates three variables in terms of timing; planting date, maturity period and harvest date. Skillful scheduling like planting quick and long maturing varieties together or staggering planting so that different crops ripen together achieves a number of desirable results. These include a supply of foodstuffs during the ‘hungry gap’ prior to the main harvest, minimization of ‘storage losses’ by extending the harvest over a long period as possible, and elimination of labour bottlenecks at planting or harvesting period.
Muchoki (1988: 78) adds that it has been pointed out that the exposure of the soil to erosive rainfall can be minimized. This is especially where quick-growing and slower-maturing varieties are planted together, or sequential planting is practiced. Use of available soil moisture and plant nutrients is maximized; where different plants for example maize and cowpeas have different complementary requirements and roots at different depth. Plants with different growth characteristics and leafing patterns may be able to combine to maximize use of available sunlight, rather than compete, as would be the case where plants of a single species or variety were planted in denser stands.

Moreover, it has been pointed out that risks of crop failure (due for example to drought) are minimized, because farmers mix varieties and species with different speeds of maturation and moisture requirement. The advantages of intercropping are abundant as it has been observed above and there is no doubt that pre-colonial crop producers of Embu were aware of these advantages. Therefore, as Richards (1983:25) has pointed out, rather than see inter-cropping as a crude form of cultivation, it offers significant operational advantages and it should be viewed as one of the glories of African agricultural science. Indeed, inter-cropping helped the Embu community to avoid food shortages and saved their time and labour.

Crop producers had knowledge of a variety of crops which could be intercropped basing on the type of soil. Generally, the people of Embu had a deep knowledge of different kind of soils. Crops cultivated on top of the ridges were different from those grown on the valleys. In Embu people would use different plants as indicators of either fertile or infertile soils. For example mucege (Black jack), rwoga or terere (amaranthus lividus) and mukengeria (commelina benghalensis) if found growing in a certain area; this was recognized as fertile soil (Wanjuki OIL,.
However, most informants said that not all crops could be inter-cropped. For example, bulrush millet could not be inter-cropped with other crops for practical reasons. The crop was planted separately in order to make the work of scaring birds easier when the crop was ripening. It was also not planted during the long rains because it would be fully mature before the dry season and thus rot before it was harvested.

Lablab beans, other varieties of beans, and pigeon peas were mostly intercropped with maize. Although inter-cropping was the practice, all the crops were not planted at the same time. For example, lablab beans and other bean varieties were not planted at the same time with maize. Though, beans matured first, after the onset of rains maize was first to be planted. The idea behind the planting of a particular crop at different times over an extended planting period was to allow some produce to be obtained in either an early or later season (Wanamu, OIL., 2013). Sorghum on the other hand was planted in lines on the edges of cultivated plots. The reason was to make the scaring of birds easier when the crop was ripening. In addition, maize was planted in both seasons so as to avoid crop failure. Thus, even if the long rain maize crop failed, the farmer still could have some maize harvest if the short rains did not fail either.

As indicated earlier, bananas, sugarcane and arrowroots were planted in the valleys. Yams and cassava could be inter-cropped although they were more permanent crops, which were only harvested when there was a famine or severe food shortage. They could also be planted along the edges of the cultivated fields. But, because yams required live supports, they were mostly planted along the fence of the home compound which was usually fenced using special trees called *miururi*. These were mainly grown by men (Njoki, 2003.). Similarly, in Kiambu, Wangari, (2010: 56)
found out that, while women cared for annual crops, men were responsible for perennial crops. These crops included sugarcane, cassava, arrowroots, yam and bananas. She also informs that unlike women’s crops, men’s crops demanded less labour input. On the ridge top where the soil was deep and rich various crops were grown. These included various types of beans and maize which were planted during the long rains. In the short rains of the same year a second crop was planted which comprised of bulrush millet and other types of millets. This was done year after year with sorghum being planted at the edge of the area cultivated. On the slope from the ridge before the valley, different types of sweet potatoes were grown here. Sugarcane, bananas and arrowroots were grown in the valley bottom where the soil was a bit heavy (Kigoro, OI., 2013).

Owing to the different types of soils found on the ridges, people strived to have access to several lands. This as we have mentioned was fueled by the variety of crops grown on the top of the ridge, on the slope and on the valley. It is obvious that if one had land in only one area, the land owner would miss a variety of crops. This is because different crops required different types of soil for their growth. Thus, the difference between the ridge tops downwards along the slope to the valley bottom influenced the system of land use and encouraged individuals to own pieces of land in different areas (Edith Marigu, OI., 2013). The Embu knew almost all the particular needs of different crops. For example, they knew that crops like sweet potatoes could not do well on swampy soils and that the crop could prevent soil erosion due to their vegetative growth which covered the ground. This is the reason why they planted sweet potatoes on the slopes and not on the valley bottom (Mbogo, OI., 2013).
2.6 Land Preparation and Labour Management

Agricultural work calendar in pre-colonial Embu community was concentrated at the beginning of the rainy seasons and during the harvest periods. But, this varied between the highlands (ruguru) and the lowlands (weru) (Mwaruvie, 1991). People ‘rested’ or engaged on other activities like trading, crafts and hunting during the period in between planting and harvesting seasons. Women made sisal baskets while men went out hunting or repaired their fences (Mwasumbi, OIL, 2013). Before the Europeans introduced the lunar calendar, the traditional Embu year was determined by two rainy seasons: the short and the long rains. Normally, the people counted ‘moons’ that resulted from the onset of rains that were used for planting one main crop like millet to the time the crop was harvested. The short rains brought the millet season while the long rains brought the season of njavi (or maize) (Mwaniki, 1973: 174-175).

The preparation of land for cultivation was a joint undertaking between men and women. Both men and women had different obligations, which influenced decision-making and division of labour (Daniel Mutua, OIL, 2013). As already stated, a piece of land was identified for cultivation often by the use of certain plants and grasses as indicators of soil fertility. The owner of the land, usually the husband could then subdivide it among his wives before digging started. Men who were taken to be much stronger than women cleared the bush and burnt the refuse first. They also loosened the soil before the women joined in the land preparation and later planting (Hosea, OIL, 2013). As the head of her own hut, a woman directed her children to work on her assigned portion of land. Initially, most of the tools used were wooden but were effective in cultivation. The most important wooden tool for men was a big
digging stick known as munyago. It was made from hard woods like the mikwego, miringa and migaa (Karingi, Njogu, OL., 2013).

As mentioned earlier, the Ithanga immigrants brought the art of iron making in Embu. Therefore, by 1890 several iron tools like the axe (Ithanwa) were being used in Embu agricultural activities. These were made by blacksmiths called aturi, who were found in a few ridges or acquired through trade. Several informants (Daniel Mutua, Njogu, Mbeere, OIL, 2013) claimed that these implements were in the hands of a few wealthy families who were able to acquire them from the blacksmiths through barter trade. They were in agreement that, these iron tools could only be afforded by families with large herds of livestock like Muthanu family of Gaturi (Karingi, OIL., 2013). These included a two edged knife used for clearing the bush called ruviu rwa mengere and axes for felling trees called mathanwa (sing. ithanwa). These tools were more efficient than the wooden tools and those in possession were able to clear large farms (gutuguta) and hence produce more food. There was also another small two edged tool used for weeding by women called kaviu ga kurima (David Wachira, OIL, 2013).

Labour was organized at the family level and rotated around patriarchy where power was vested in the male gender (Mutua, Mbogo, OIL, 2013). Similarly, Carney and Watts (1990:217) found the existence of power structures within the household while discussing rice growing in Senegambia. In Embu, the family head organized his household to clear as much land as they owned for cultivation. If the family was small, he would join hands with other neighbours and form working groups or work parties commonly known as ‘marima’ (sing. Irima), (Mbeere, OL., 2013). One can compare this system with the ngwatio system among the Kikuyu of Kiambu in which according to Mwangi (2009: 48) was applicable where an individual could not handle
the work all by him/herself or it would have taken an individual a long time to finish it. Both parties had to prepare and according to Embu traditions, it was impolite to inform a person that one was required to assist in any work the following day unless it was very urgent. The host was expected not only to prepare enough food for the working party, but also beer which was taken in the evening after work was satisfactorily done (Wanjuki, OL., 2013).

This method of communal work was applied when a family could not be able to prepare land on their own before the rains set in. This system of coming together as a working group was not only important to the economic benefit of the people but formed an important social group that aimed at promoting one’s economic as well as social welfare and consequently helped to promote harmonious relations among the people (Wangari, 2010). It was an exact opposite of the capitalist relation where work is basically aimed at the economic gain while the social aspect is mostly compromised resulting in tension between the owner of means of production and the worker (Mwangi, 2009:49).

It is difficult to describe the indigenous methods of cultivation in Embu as either rotational or shifting, but all the informants concurred that land was rested after a certain period of tillage. The period was determined by the amount of land that a family had. The rest period depended basically on the area, the type of soil, and the availability of land. For example, in Kianjuki area where the soil was considered more fertile than Kavutiri, soil would be rested for a lesser period of three to four seasons (one and half to two years) (Kinyua Muruagiti OIL., 2013). However, most of the informants concurred that, in Embu the soil was rested for four to five seasons (two to two and half years).
This system of resting agricultural land after a certain period of tillage was suited to the wants of the people of Embu and their fragile tropical environment which helped them cope with food shortages and crop failures. This form of cultivation helped in maintaining soil fertility, checking soil erosion and, above all, ensured high yields. Besides, there was little change in the eco-system as the cultivated land reverted to vegetation (Omwoyo, 2002:22). In addition, the flexibility of the system allowed movement to another plot if adverse environmental or ecological circumstances occurred in the form of pests’ damage, weeds, or unanticipated poor soil performance. By having plots in different micro-environmental and micro-ecological areas, crop producers had the chance of spreading risks.

2.7 Food Shortage and Famines

The pre-colonial system of land ownership and crop production in Embu was aimed at producing enough food for the community. The systems of land ownership and crop production interrelated in such a way that in most of this period food shortages were infrequent. From the informants, it appears that food shortages in most cases affected individual households more than the whole community. Some informants claimed that sometimes the families of un enterprising members had frequent food shortages due to disease or other factors like late preparation of land and poor coordination of the weeding of the crops (Ester Runji, OI., 2013). However, famines sometimes affected the community. According to informants, the people were able to distinguish the severe ones from the occasional and less severe famines. Serious famines were referred to as Yura while the less severe was called Wathima (Elenia, OI., 2013). The famines are said to have been caused by prolonged drought for two or more consecutive seasons, devastation of young crops by locusts and other pests or by a combination of both evils.
One of the severest famines (Yura) in Embu traditions was called Nvaraganu, the ‘destroyer’ or ‘devastator.’ The famine was so devastating in that many people died while others moved to other neighbouring lands. This was caused by draught and locusts that destroyed food crops and wild plants leaving no food for either humans or animals. This was around 1820-25 (Mwaniki, 1973:36). The Kiverio (around 1844), the Kavovo (around 1879), and RiaNwaci (around 1893) famines were because of prolonged drought and animal diseases according to many informants.

However, this period of disasters does not appear to have been unique to Embu County, but was widespread in the East African region. Kjekshus, (1977:126-142) has reported about the great rinderpest of 1890s in many parts of Tanganyika. Similar disasters have been reported among the pastoralists Maasai (Jacobs, 1965:96-99). Moreover, Mwanzi (1977:84) reports the famine of 1890 among the Kipsigis. These famines had devastating consequences to the Embu people. Many were malnourished and sometimes the famines resulted to loss of human beings, livestock and wild animals. Competition for food and grazing pastures led to hatred among the people and many would not help their neighbours and relatives as the traditions required. Livestock was depleted as most households relied solely on cattle as food or exchanged them with those who had some grain reserves. Sometimes people moved to the forest to look for wild fruits (Kamatu, OI. 2013).

The pre-colonial people of Embu had a number of measures to curb food shortages. First, disaster preparedness among the people was embedded in the system of land ownership and crop production. As already mentioned, the possession of several parcels of land in different environmental and ecological areas was aimed at avoiding food shortage. Secondly, intercropping assured the crop producers of harvesting even when there was drought. Yams, cassava, arrowroots and sweet
potatoes were planted not only to be eaten occasionally, but more so in case of a famine. This was the same in Kiambu where cassava and yams grown by men were usually dug out during famines (Wangari, 2010:61). In times of locust invasion, these crops were planted since their tubers could not be affected. Besides, the locusts themselves were killed and eaten as a relish to supplement the meager food resources, especially vegetables (Wanjuki, OIL, 2013).

Moreover, the system of land ownership and crop production allowed the surplus production of grains during this period. The surplus grains were stored in the mururu or ikungi for a hungry day (Muruagiti, OI, 2013). However in most of the times the Embu in this sub-county produced a surplus that they exchanged with their Mbeere and Ndia neighbours (Mwaniki, 2010). It should be noted here that men crops remained in the ground for a long time as a form of storage. Also, in every family, every wife had her own granary the contents of which she used in feeding her household. Finally, individual families that were severely affected would normally go round begging for food from their relatives and sometimes would relocate to food secure areas for that particular famine period (Daniel Mutua, OIL, 2013).

It is evident that the pre-colonial people of Embu experienced food shortages due to locusts and weather variations. However there existed a variety of social mechanisms and ecological reserves to reduce the impact of food shortages in any one family like in most pre-colonial societies (Zeleza, 1986:159). In addition, the organization of the extended homestead, as both a production and consumption unit, reduced the vulnerability of the whole household. The system of helping needy relatives and neighbours in turn reinforced the community’s ability to withstand a crisis of food shortage (Omwoyo, 1990). Elaborate techniques of storage which permitted grain to be stored for long periods insured the community against food
shortages. Some scholars like (Boserup, 1965:36), have recognized the presence of a ‘normal surplus’ in pre-colonial economies and point out the traditional beer party as an indication of this surplus.

2.8 Pre-Colonial Trade in Embu County

Surplus food production as a result of efficient pre-colonial system of land ownership and crop production led to vibrant trade during this period. The produce was not only intended for domestic consumption, but also formed the basis of exchange within the community and with neighbours. Like all other communities in Kenya, the environmental and ecological conditions made it necessary to rely on other people to meet some household requirements. There was an ever-increasing need to exchange surplus food and other goods for those needed but not produced. Hopkins (1973:5) notes, ‘…exchange and subsistence activities were integrated’, it is therefore inaccurate to term societies such as the Embu one as having been subsistent.

Therefore, local trade in most pre-colonial societies arose because of the complementary needs of communities, which were in close proximity to each other, and hence it was a form of production strategy to have access to the required goods. Generally, each household produced for not only subsistence but also surplus to sustain it in case of disasters and if there was no crisis, the surplus was disposed of through exchange to acquire other products (Omwoyo, 1990). In the sub-county local trade mostly involved women who did it on part time basis to secure goods, which their household lacked. The trade was small in volume and numerous people participated especially at the time of food crisis (Elenia, OI., 2013).

The pre-colonial people of Embu participated in both local and regional trade. Most informants (Mutua, Kigoro, Mbogo, OIL, 2013) concurred that the local trade did not have a regular market day. People in need of certain items just went to homes
of those who had what they wanted and exchanged their goods. These included grains, animals and iron tools from the local blacksmiths. There was no standard measure, it was a matter of negotiations until an agreement was reached and transaction completed (Mwaniki, 1973). During famines or times of traditional significance, the clan leaders arranged with those people they wanted to trade with to meet at a particular place and on a particular day and exchange goods. These irregular markets were locally known as Tigu in the larger Embu and Tugu in Mbeere (Mwaruvie, 1991:174). For example, Mwombombori by the boundary of Embu and Mbeere near Riandu (Mwaniki, 1973:148). Like in most of Central Kenya, the inter-regional trade was nonetheless irregular and was significant during famines or other ecological disasters (Presley, 1992:20). During these times, trade was conducted under peace conditions even if the trading communities were at war (Agusta, OIL., 2013).

The contact with the Mbeere, the Kamba and the Swahili traders, made the Embu participate in the caravan trade as foodstuff and ivory suppliers. These foreign traders brought Western and oriental goods like cloth and beads which they exchanged with ivory, while the Kamba and the Mbeere brought bows, arrows, pots, gourds, salt, string bags and grinding stones to trade with mainly foodstuffs (Mwaruvie, 1991:169-170). However, this trade did not lack incidences. For instance, during Dr. Krapf’s journey to Mbeere land under the leadership of Chief Kivoi, all their trade goods were looted and Chief Kivoi lost his live (Krapf, 1968:320-322). Like their Kikuyu neighbours, cultivation in Embu may have expanded as early as the 1860s in response to the demands of the caravan traders (Lonsdale, 1989:17).

The local and the regional trade involved both men and women. Comparatively, women participated more than men owing to the fact that they were more involved in agricultural production. The total management of the produce was
under the control of women. They had the responsibility of storing, decided what amount to eat or give out and if there was any produce to be traded with other essential commodities required at home. They were also the major transporters of trade goods like cereals (Wanamu, OI., 2013). In most of the Central Kenya, it was rightly taken that carrying of goods like cereals to the market was a woman’s role. Men were actively involved in animal, ivory and leopard skin trade. Presley (1992:22) asserts that in Kikuyu land, men could wait for women’s trade caravans at specific points to welcome them and help carry the trade goods the last leg of the journey.

The local blacksmiths were also actively involved in trade whereby they combined their trade with agriculture. As generalized in Kenya; ‘the smith were not full-time craftsmen but depended to some extent also on their own cultivation or cattle (Sherrif, 1985:8). As established earlier, the art of iron-smelting was introduced in Embu by the Ithanga immigrants, though, iron-making in East Africa dates back to the period of Iron-age, and was historically associated with the Bantu linguistic group to which the Embu belong. Thus, by the time the British colonialists arrived in Embu in early 1900, the people were producing surplus crops for local consumptions and for trade. Report on operations by Captain J.W.O. Maycock on July, 19, 1906 supports this argument when he said that, ‘in the Embu County itself the cultivation and huts were continuous and even in the Kenya Province I have never seen such quantity of huts and cultivation’ (Mungeam, 1979:140).

2.9 Summary

The chapter has given a detailed analysis of the origin, social, economic and political organization of the people of Embu. This is done in an attempt to have a clear picture of the people of Embu North Sub-County who are part of the larger Embu community
during the pre-capitalist period. It has been shown that the area was occupied by immigrants from Igambang’ombe and Ithanga. In addition, the system of land ownership and crop production among the Embu traditional society has been analyzed using Embu North Sub-County as the case study. It has been shown that, land played a stabilizing role and at the same time guaranteed continuity, identity and cohesion of the community members. Land was regarded as an important factor in the social and economic organization of the people and every family group was expected to have land. Moreover, it has been shown that, among the Embu several factors governed the way in which land was utilized. The physical setting of land which gave it a unique kind of topography was very important. This is because it offered different types of soils along the slope and this influenced the type of crops that were to be established on certain parts of the sloppy terrain. The difference between the ridge tops downwards along the slope to the valley bottom influenced the system of crop production.

Thus, inter-cropping was applied not only with an aim of surplus production but also for the prevention of soil erosion. Different crops required different types of soil for their growth and this meant that there was a need to have pieces of land at different places if one was to produce a diverse range of crops. It has been noted also that agricultural production in the area of study involved both men and women. Male gender which was regarded to be masculine than the female one was expected to do work that was thought to be hard like clearing of virgin land. Preparation of land could be done by working parties or individually at the family level. Thus, the pre-capitalist modes of production were efficient in the Embu North crop production process.
Finally it has been shown that agricultural produce was the lifeline of the people in Embu North Sub-County. This was as a result of their effective system of land ownership and crop production. Most of their farming was in cereals and grains which were dried and stored. Other crops like yams and cassava were used rarely but mostly during famines. As such, they developed effective ways of preserving various produce since most of their crops were seasonal. Therefore each family was expected to have its own grain store (ikumbi) and millet store (mururu). Local and regional trade that arose as a result of the effective system of landownership and crop production was examined.
CHAPTER THREE

3.0 THE ESTABLISHMENT OF COLONIAL RULE IN EMBU AND ITS IMPACT ON THE SYSTEM OF LAND OWNERSHIP AND CROP PRODUCTION TO 1920

3.1 Introduction

This chapter examines the establishment of colonial rule in Embu and basically the early interaction of the pre-colonial mode of production and the capitalist mode of production in Embu North Sub-County. The period before 1920 can be referred to as the era of primitive accumulation which marks the early stages of colonialism in Embu. This is the time when capitalism came into contact with the non-capitalist modes of production within the Embu North Sub-County. It will be shown that the establishment of colonial rule in 1906 introduced the monetary economy within the Embu community. Land which was communally and individually owned became the property of the British Crown through 1902 and 1915 Ordinances. This, as it will be indicated in this chapter was a gradual process that later culminated in the subordination of the pre-capitalist modes of production.

The experiments done on the new crop varieties are examined with a view of assessing the impact of the new crops on the system of land ownership and crop production. It will be argued that these new crops and especially maize were used to help the capitalist mode of production penetrate the area of study. How the people of Embu North reacted to these new changes is one of the major focuses here. Therefore, the impact of the new technology on the traditional crop varieties is well captured. The development of social differentiations among the people of Embu as a result of the new changes in land ownership and crop production is also examined. The tool of analysis here is the concept of articulation of modes of production. It is relevant at this point when the CMOP comes into contact with the pre-capitalist modes.
The chapter also examines the impact of the new tax regime on the pre-colonial labour organization. Male migrant labour that had significant impact on the pre-capitalist system of crop production is focused here. Moreover, the effect of the First World War and the Great World Depressions on the pre-colonial labour organization is also examined. In addition food shortages, trade and exchanges during this period are also examined. The overall analysis is aimed at assessing the interplay between the system of land ownership and crop production during this period.

3.2 Establishment of Colonial Rule in Embu, 1906-1907

Kenya became a British protectorate on 1 July 1895 after the Imperial British East Africa Company (IBEAC) was unable to effectively administer the territory (Lipscomb, 1972). In the same year, the Uganda railway was commissioned with the aim of connecting Uganda with the Indian Ocean since it was the prime target for Britain since 1862 with the discovery of the source of River Nile (Dilley’ 1966:15). Since the IBEAC Company had already established fortified stations from where military expeditions against resisting people were dispatched, it was time for the new administrators to cover the whole country for effective administration. By 1902 most of the Embu neighbours had been colonized and flourishing caravan trade was taking place in most of Central Kenya (Leakey, 1977). The Embu who were an obstacle to this trade due to their constant raids had to be effectively subdued by the new administration.

Therefore, on May 23, 1906, S.L. Hinde, the Sub-Commissioner Kenya Province gave the following reasons for the need to conquer and occupy the Embu. That, ‘they could not protect friendly peoples from Embu raids or recover raided property and women, or protect traders or their caravans (Mungeam, 1979). Also, the Embu Country was a refugee for all persons fleeing from justice in the rest of the
province. Finally, owing to the impunity from punishment they have enjoyed, the Embu boast they are too strong for the government and will give support to malcontents’ (Mungeam, 1979:139). This report was implemented by Captain J.W.O. Maycock, who led an expedition against the Embu in June, 1906.

By this time, the British had conquered and colonized the whole of Kikuyu land and established Fort Hall at Murang’a (Mbiri). The Fort was built by Captain Fredrick Lugard in 1891 (Tignor, 1976:18-19). By this time the Kikuyu had already collaborated and the Mbeere, Embu neighbours to the south had made several trips to Mbiri (Fort Hall) to ask the Whiteman to establish a fort in Mbeere. Therefore, to the above pressure of settler interests and forest concessionaries necessitating expansion of government control over Embu land, there can be added the pressure from the collaborators. In addition, the government officials envied the Embu livestock wealth, which they looked upon as a potential source of government revenue while the collaborators yearned for a share of the spoils if the Embu were, subdued (Mweasuka, OI., 2013).

The Embu expedition was conducted in June 1906 by the British soldiers under the guidance of Mbeere and Kikuyu war leaders. Rumbia wa Ngotho led the warriors in the forest fridges; Mutabo led the column in the middle while Muthuri led the group to the south to protect the Mbeere from any attack (Mwaruvie, 1991:222). Most of the informants claimed that by the time of the invasion the Embu warriors had gone to attack the Chuka. This information had leaked to the Kikuyu and Mbeere collaborators and consequently the Whiteman (Daniel Mutua, OIL, 2013). The elders and the aged warriors who were found could not offer any meaningful resistance and the European guns and arrows and spears from the reinforcing African warriors easily overpowered them. Also, having experienced the power of the gun earlier at the time
of Gibbons and Meinertzhagen’s swoop’ they knew the futility of resisting it under the circumstances that they were in (Mwaniki, 2010:267). It can be said that the British applied the policy of divide and rule by using the Mbeere and the Kikuyu warriors in defeating the Embu who might have offered great resistance.

After the expedition the Embu lost a lot of property especially livestock and houses which were burnt by the Mbeere and Kikuyu warriors (Mungeam, 1979). This destruction of property was not unique to Embu. The Kikuyu of Kiambu lost property including foodstuffs which were taken forcibly and used to feed the military expedition (Wangari, 2010:68). The colonial political records indicate that ‘in 1906 owing to the ‘truculent’ attitude of the Embu ‘tribes’ a punitive expedition on a large scale was sent against them. A number were killed and large quantities of stock captured, most of which was returned’ (Embu District Record Book). The table below illustrates the loss.

Table 3.1 Embu Loses after the British Conquest

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Cattle</th>
<th>Sheep and Goats</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Column No.1</td>
<td>400</td>
<td>1,150</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Column No.2</td>
<td>1,340</td>
<td>5,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Police</td>
<td>1,440</td>
<td>1,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>3,180</td>
<td>7,150</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


It can be said that the figures quoted above are a gross understatements. From many of the informants, the Embu loss of livestock during the invasion left a lasting mark on the land (Mwaniki, Ol., 2013). All livestock were either hidden in various hideouts or concentrated as spoils in various enemy camps. Foodstuffs had either been burnt
down in granaries or removed and used by the enemy. They were left poor and as many Embu people say, have not recovered from that poverty yet. The captured livestock was taken to Gatituuri where some was issued to the troops as rations. The collaborators like Rumbia also got a large amount of livestock (Mwaruvie, 1991:223). Later the loot was taken to Murinduko or Mugambaciura and finally to Nthithiari, the current Embu County Headquarters (Moses Nyaga, OI., 2013).

After the conquest, one contingent of the British built their first camp at Kariari as they continued combing Ngandori (Karingi, OI., 2013). The next camp was at Gitituuri near the present Kavutiri High School. This camp did not remain here for long for it was moved to Muva after Murue was effectively subdued. Finally the camp was moved to Gatituuri, the present Nguiri Primary School (Mungeam, 1979:146). This is where the Embu are said to have ceremoniously surrendered to the Whiteman by taking their shields and spears. It is also in this camp where the first Embu chiefs were appointed by the Whiteman. It is said that when the Whiteman asked for the leader (Munene) of Embu, the Embu thought of the biggest man in size. Thus, Kiriamiti who was known for his huge size was called from his hiding place in Mount Kenya forest (Ireri, Kamatu, OI., 2013).

Incidentally, without even investigating to find out the political authority that Kiriamiti held, its nature and extent, the Whiteman entered into peace ‘negotiations’ with him, for the Whiteman was eager to establish himself in Embu land and wanted to legalize his rule as quickly as possible (Mwaniki, 2010:278). Most informants declared that before the appointment of Kiriamiti there was no ‘chief’ in Embu as such, but in less than two weeks (after Kiriamiti’s appointment), Embu was full of chiefs (Kamatu, Virginia, OI., 2013). Through Kiriamiti the colonial government gave every small village or ridge a headman. To prove that they had fully surrendered as
their hand-picked representatives had declared on their behalf and that they would be loyal to the Whiteman’s government, the Embu were ordered to surrender their weapons at Gatituuri (Nguiri). They had also to respect the Whiteman by calling him ‘Bwana’ (Karingi, Kigoro, Ol., 2013).

The newly appointed chiefs were charged with the responsibility of appointing headmen who were to assist them in their administration (Kamatu, Ol., 2013). However these new handpicked rulers found it difficult to handle the subjects since as we observed in chapter two, the Embu only respected the customary laws that were laid down by the society. The Whiteman’s authority demanded the chiefs and headmen to be submissive to the colonial administrators and to make their subjects obey all the commands irrespective of whether they contravened the social norms. Consequently, the chiefs and their headmen found it difficult to marry the two types of responsibilities in order to realize the objective of the Whiteman’s rule. Henceforth, force had to be applied to the subjects for them to heed the regulations (Mwaniki, 2010).

As pointed out earlier the interests of the British colonialists to conquer Embu were not to develop its agriculture. Like in many other areas that had already been conquered, the colonial master’s interests were to exploit the natural resources for their own benefits (Omwoyo, 1990). This, as stated earlier was the era of primitive accumulation. Moreover, it was important for the area to be brought under the British rule because of its importance in food provision to the European caravans (Sorrenson, 1968:14). The local administration itself had to be effective, and because the British government advocated colonization with limited costs, tax measures had to be undertaken.
Thus, the advent of colonialism introduced new classes of people among the Embu society who came to wield a lot of power and authority. The principal new centers of power were the chiefs who were instrumental in incorporating the Embu within the colonial system. These were appointed through the Village Headman Ordinance of 1902. The incorporation was mainly in terms of advancing capitalist mode of production through securing labour supply for the administration and in return, they were advanced rewards in various forms. Their powers were enhanced by the Native Authority Laws. Basically, these chiefs were the first beneficiaries of the capitalist system as shall be advanced later. The main characteristic of this class other than their political hold was their enormous land holding which steered them to economic prosperity within the articulated modes of production, thus affecting the pre-colonial system of land ownership and crop production.

3.3 Land Ownership and Crop Production

The successive completion of the Uganda railway in 1901 helped the British colonialists to effectively control the Kenya Protectorate (Zeleza, 1989:37). The railway had removed the hazardous problem of transportation and enabled the extension of the foreign office’s administration to the interior. Officially, it was agreed that the protectorate had to maintain itself through development. By 1901, the foreign office was concerned by the amount of aid sent to Kenya for administration and punitive expeditions. Britain was therefore faced with the problem of how to develop local export production to make “both the protectorate and railway pay” (Zeleza, 1989:39). European immigration was thus encouraged from the premises that they would produce for export. This was supported by Commissioner Charles Eliot who opposed the proposed settlement of the Indians in the highlands (Sorrenson, 1968:36).
The settlement of the European immigrants in the Kenya highlands was made through a number of ordinances which made it possible for the alienation of African land. The Crown Lands Ordinance of 1902 declared all African “unoccupied” land as Crown Land (Mungeam, 1976). This would affect the system of land ownership in Embu after the occupation in 1906 when the British alienated land for the establishment of the headquarters at Murinduko hill, and later at Nthinthiari as already explained (Mwaniki, 2010). Apparently, no land alienation for agricultural production took place in Embu apart from the planned Kanja Dairy scheme which never took off in 1955 (KNA/DC/EMBU/1/14; 1955:17). But, later land was curved for missions, chief’s camps and markets. Although Embu was rich in agricultural land, it was not attractive to the settlers due to its terrain and that it was far from the railway line (Mwaniki, 2010). Therefore, many European settlers favored the areas closer to the railway like Kiambu and areas around Nairobi (Wangari, 2010:73-74).

Although land in Embu North Sub-County was not alienated for the white settler farmers, the Crown Land Ordinance of 1915 impacted on the system of land ownership and crop production. Like all the other Kenyans, the Embu ‘lost’ their lands when the Crown Lands ordinance of 1915 came into force. This explains why land was later alienated for Christian missions, government offices and markets. In its provisions (1, 2, 6 and 33), it declared all Africans land, Crown Land, consequently disinheritating the Africans from their own land (Mungeam, 1979:346-350). In provision 6, the Ordinance empowered the governor 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’, hence, increasing the lease period from 99 to 999 years. Moreover in its provision 2(i), it repealed the 1902 Crown Lands Ordinance and also recognized the existence of African reserves in provisions 46, 47, 48 and 49.
but did not demarcate them therefore, leaving room for further alienation. It was not until 1926 that African reserves were demarcated protecting them from further alienation (Dilley, 1966:249).

The provisions in the above Ordinance meant that the Embu like all the other Africans in the colony were occupying what they called their land on behalf of the Crown. This meant that they lost all legal rights to their land hence becoming the tenants of the crown. The ordinance empowered the governor to alienate African land if it was not “beneficially” occupied (Dilley, 1966:252). The pre-colonial customary laws that regulated the use of land would later be effectively replaced by the European Law. As shall be argued later, it is when they were forced into reserves that some started realizing the impact of this regulation. The people of Embu had in general practiced extensive agriculture before the colonial era, on the assumption that land was in plentiful supply.

The system of land ownership and crop production did not change much after the 1915 Crown Lands Ordinance. By this time not much change had taken place in terms of land utilization in Embu. There was still plenty of unoccupied land in both the highlands (Ruguru) and the lowlands (Weru), which were continually being occupied. The “native boundaries” created by the Ordinance did not immediately cause any overall pressure on land up to 1930s. The people in the sub-county seem to have been spreading freely all over the area as in the pre-colonial period. It was not like in Kiambu where Africans had no more land for expansion as they had previously done in times of population pressure (Wangari, 2010:77). The rights of the individual over land extended over that area which he could effectively till within a period of about four years, while those of the clan were governed by the proportion of the population to the space available (Kigoro, OIL., 2013).
Crop production in this early period saw the indigenous crops still dominate as the new crops introduced had not yet become firmly established. Overall, the people in the area were forced by colonial conditions to start growing crops for sale over and above the level of pre-colonial production. They were gradually introduced into the money economy and found themselves producing not only for subsistence but also for sale (Mwaruvie, 1991:231). Consequently, the pre-colonial practice of selling the surplus was superseded by conscious production of surplus for sale, and the emergence of an Embu peasantry was gradually taking place. This affirms the assertion that the capitalist mode of production gradually asserts itself over the pre-capitalist modes, and the two modes of production are locked in an intricate and sometimes contradictory struggle.

The administration, however, intended to discredit such indigenous crops as bulrush millet (*mwere*) and sorghum and encourage the people to grow exportable crops, particularly maize. Wolf (1974:71) observes that, one of the imperial goals in the protectorate included “producing those commodities whose availability for import into Britain would lessen or remove what British businessmen and authorities deemed a dangerous dependence on foreign sources of supply." Overall, the colonial economic policy encouraged, rather than discouraged the development of peasant commodity production. Capitalist production was restricted to the settler plantations in the colony, although the pre-colonial mode of production adopted aspects of the capitalist mode of production. Therefore, the British administration introduced a new variety of maize, the Hickory King-white maize which replaced the assumed lower-yielding “traditional” maize (Zeleza, 1989).

Unlike other areas in the colony, the people of Embu and generally most of the communities in central Kenya did not readily accept the new variety of maize.
Muchoki (1988:134), points out that, ‘it was resisted because it took longer to mature though the yields of the new variety were heavier’. However, later, maize became popular because maize meal (posho) was the standard food supplied to the African labourer by the colonial government. To the government and the settlers, maize meal was perceived as an ideal food for the labouring class and the cheapest way to feed the workers (Wright, 1977:200). Maize, therefore acquired a higher monetary value than bulrush millet and other crops. What, then, was the rationale of emphasizing maize production at the expense of bulrush millet (mwere)?

First, there was need for planters and settlers in the colony to feed their workers. Second, maize served the dual purpose of being a commercial crop as well as a subsistence crop. Thirdly, maize was easier and cheaper to grow since, despite its low nutritive value in comparison to indigenous crops like sorghum and millet, it provided a greater quantity of food and the necessary energy that was ideal for the vast numbers of workers. Through its provision the workers could feel more satisfied and well-fed, so that they did their work with cheerfulness and vivacity (Bowles, 1979:198-202). Maize was a tool for the penetration of capitalism in the rural areas because it was a more saleable crop. It has been suggested that “maize was introduced in order to assist a change in the mode of production in Kenya as a whole to a capitalist mode” (Bowles, 1979:202; Omwoyo, 1992).

The penetration of colonial capitalism threw the Embu pre-colonial economy into disequilibrium. With the monetization of the rural areas through the introduction saleable commodities like maize, the people in this area found themselves subject to an economy over which they had little control. The farmers started producing surplus for sale in order to pay taxes, but the prices of the produce were determined by the colonialists. Thus, they remained economically and socially oppressed by the colonial
capitalistic system through commodity production. They were, however, able to articulate their pre-capitalist relations within the dominant capitalist system and where these two could not accommodate each other, conflict ensued. Gradually the Embu crop producers were transformed into peasants and commodity producers.

Nyong’o (1981b: 23) argues that, peasant societies have certain features in common. First, the majority of peasants are rural dwellers; secondly, they produce surplus which, through, various mechanisms, is transferred to dominant classes in a particular social formation; thirdly, peasant producers of surplus have little control over the utilization of this surplus; and finally many peasant societies tend to depend on non-peasants for goods and services for which they often pay dearly. The provision of these goods and services is a quite often a mechanism for ferreting surplus out of peasant societies (Wolf, 1974:4). Atieno-Odhiambo (1974:94), observes that, in this connection, it has been observed that the peasantry, as a social category in Kenya is a product of the colonial situation. In Embu, like in many other areas in Kenya, the creation of the peasantry was set in motion with the implantation of the colonial system. The salient point to be made here is that the people of Embu suffered increasing loss of control over the disposal of surplus to the Europeans and Indians as shall be argued later.

3.4 Experiments on New Crops

Commodity production had to be encouraged for the colony to be self-sufficient. As mentioned earlier, this was through the production of agricultural commodities that were sellable locally and also for export. After the new variety of maize was introduced, the administration realized the need of experimenting with other crops. Efforts were made to find other exportables in addition to maize from the sub-county, and the government officials carried out some isolated experiments. These
experiments were not unique in Embu as they were all over the productive areas of the colony. The colonial administration realized that the experiments could not be a success without trained native instructors. The initial step was therefore the training of native agricultural instructors. The Department of Agriculture noted in its annual report in 1920 that, “to succeed in effecting a substantial improvement in native agricultural practice and an increase in production a large number of instructors will be required” (Lipscomb, 1972:43-44). The assumption was that, the native instructors were likely to succeed where their European counterparts would fail. After their training, they would be posted to their native reserves where they would manage a demonstration farm. From these demonstration centers, seeds would be distributed to the natives in the areas around. The natives would also be taught how to grow different crops and how to secure better yields than they obtained under the previous methods.

Increased commodity production was not only aimed for export, but also to incorporate the Africans in the new capitalist mode of production. Crops such as maize, sorghums, millet, groundnuts, simsim, cotton, beans and peas were seen as perfect tools to force the people into money economy. It was also noted that, “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, a proportion of the adult male population would always seek employment elsewhere rather than in the reserve” (Lipscomb, 1972:44). To implement this policy, two training centers were established; one at Bukura in Nyanza and the other one at Scott Agricultural Laboratories at Kabete. Seed farms were later established at various centers around the country.
By 1931, there was a seed farm at Embu and another at Chuka as indicated in that year’s annual report (KNA/DC/EMBU/1/2:17-18). From these centers, suitable seed of good quality were being obtained by farmers from the surrounding areas. At the same time, the Agricultural Department had engaged three instructors on permanent basis who were travelling throughout the reserve, giving instructions and advice. Experiments on beans, mountain rice, wheat, onions, wattie, cassava, peas, potatoes and pyrethrum were conducted in various parts of Embu. Pyrethrum was planted in most of Ruguru Location and in areas around Kianjokoma (Jephat, OI., 2013).

The experiments with most of the crops were successful, but not in all the areas in the county. For instance in Mbeere, the introduction of the new crops failed and by 1928, the government had given up. The president of the Embu Native Council reported that; ‘production in the district was only a fraction of what it might be and that large areas of fertile land were not being utilized in anyway. Implements employed were pre-historic and the possibility of producing highly paying crops such as wheat, groundnuts, simsim and European beans had scarcely been employed’(KNA/PC/C/2/1/2:6-10).

By 1930, maize and some varieties of beans were the most successful in Embu County. In 1931 it was reported that, ‘despite the devastating ravages of locusts the harvests of all crops have been on the whole satisfactory. Over 250 tons of maize has been exported since October on permits’ (KNA/DC/EMBU/1/2/1931:18). This indicates that the experiment with maize was a success and the area people were slowly being swallowed by the capitalist mode of production by producing commodities for sale. The report in 1938 indicated that, ‘the growing of Boston beans is rapidly increasing in the Embu Division, but so far the amount produced has not been sufficient to export, and due to draught the beans themselves were very small.
Therefore, the Boston beans have not fetched better prices than either Rose Coco or Canadian Wonder. However, they appear to be popular with natives, and there is reason to hope that they may prove of considerable value in future’ (KNA/DC/EMBU /1/2/1938:50).

In spite of all these experimental crops, it should be noted that bulrush millet, maize and sorghum remained the most important food crops for consumption and exchange. This affirms the theory that the pre-capitalist mode of production is not completely eliminated but keeps on reproducing itself diversely in relation to the capitalist mode of production. Thus, through their cultivation, the people in this sub-county were gradually incorporated into the colonial capitalist system. The control of the market, the determination of crop prices and the transportation of produce was all controlled by merchant capital dominated by the colonialists and later affluent chiefs and headmen. Embu labour was exploited through the cultivation of these crops, which fetched low prices, and the people in the area had to expand acreage with the consequent ecological degradation as will be evident later.

3.5 Labour and Tax Policies
Large amount of labour was needed by both the settlers and the colonial administration. In the early years of colonialism, the government required infrastructure in form of roads and offices, while the settlers needed large amount of labour for their plantations (Zeleza, 1989). The government also needed adequate revenue and workers to run its activities since the protectorate was supposed to be financially independent from Britain. To achieve this, various taxes were introduced together with labour policies. These labour and tax policies were aimed at forcing the Africans to offer wage labour to the government and the settlers.
For the case of Embu, labour and tax policies were the ones used to force the Africans to seek wage labour both within and outside the county. It should be noted that these new policies on land, labour and taxes were not only meant for the people of Embu, but for the whole protectorate. This is because by this time the foreign office was concerned with the amount of grant-in-aid which was being sent to Kenya Protectorate for administration and punitive expeditions like the one conducted in the area in 1906. Britain was therefore faced with the problem of how to develop local export production to make ‘both the protectorate and the railway pay” (Zeleza, 1989:39).

Therefore, the first policy that was introduced to force the people to work for the government projects was forced labour. This was implemented in line with the 1908 Communal Labour Law which was aimed at raising labour for government projects like building infrastructure like roads, waterways, bridges and railways. The same was often used to force Africans to work for private individuals (Presley, 1992:44). This was not considered as evil even by the missionaries who thought that Africans needed to inculcate a steady and disciplined ‘work ethic’ as a precondition for their advancement (Zeleza, 1989:50).

By 1902, land, labour and tax policies were already effective in Embu, Mbeere, Ndia and Gichugu and many Africans in these areas had already accepted wage labour both within and outside their districts where they were already working for the White settlers (Mwaruvie, 1991:224). Despite the absence of statistics, there are indications that labour mobility was high among the people of Embu. Owing to the demands to pay taxes and other financial obligations created by the new socio-economic situation, more males left the reserves in search of employment. The result was a breakdown of the traditional division of labour between men and women. The
Village Headman Ordinance of 1902 authorized government appointed officials to recruit labour for public work deemed to be in the interest of the village. Consequently, using Native Authority Laws of 1910 and 1912, these headmen were required to compel Africans to suspend their domestic production to work on assigned government projects (Mwaruvie, 1991). All able-bodied males and females in the reserves were required to offer labour in government projects (Presley, 1992:44).

After achieving the complete surrender of the Embu at Ngo-iri, the white man relocated to Murinduko hill an area which was more central for the supervision of Ndia, Gichugu (former Iria-ini), Mbeere and Embu. Murinduko was called Kirimari because of the hill by that name. When the proposed headquarters had to move from Kirimari, it carried the name with it and planted this name ‘Kirimari’ on Embu soil. The local name for the site was ‘Nthithiari’ or where the shrubs called *mithithia* grow. This headquarter was built in 1906-7 using forced labour (Mwaniki, 2010:291). The initial work was done with bare hands after the people were cheated by the local administration to go to Nthithiari to collect their livestock only for them to be surrounded by soldiers and forcefully made to uproot the *mithithia* shrubs (Agusta, OI., 2013).

The road making and the building of the Nthithiari headquarters was not only introducing the Embu into forced labour within their geographical area, but also outside their country as various types of workers and porters later in Kikuyu land and as far as the coast. The chiefs and the headmen were supposed to organize for porters whenever the white administrators were travelling across Embu land (Mwaniki, 2010). This was very humiliating to the people in the sub-county especially the former warriors who were always forcefully recruited to carry the European safari chairs and hammocks on their shoulders. The demand for porters had devastating effect on the
system of crop production since porterage was required when people were busy weeding or harvesting their produce, which interfered with the production cycle (Edith Marigu, OI., 2013). The food required increased the burden to the people who had to produce the best he-goats to be eaten by the Europeans and the chiefs. To avoid this humiliation and later conscription as Carrier Corps during the war, the men were forced to seek waged labour outside the county.

The local chiefs and headmen were also supposed to organize forced labour for the building of chief’s camps, bridges and roads to all chiefs’ quarters. Brutal force had to be applied to the people who refused to heed the regulation. The chiefs would confiscate livestock and grains from the people who failed to offer forced labour for the construction of these projects (Daniel Mutua, Karingi, OI., 2013). This aspect of forced labour was taken very seriously by the chiefs and headmen. For example, it is said that these chiefs ordered that if any person was absent without prior permission, those who were making the ‘roads’ on that day should go through the person’s garden destroying crops (Igoki, OI., 2013).

The construction of the chief’s camps included all sexes for as men constructed the houses; the women looked for grass or were mudding it (Wanjuki, OI., 2013). These labour demands affected the working time of people in their farms hence impacting on crop production. This had devastating effect on the system of land ownership and crop production in Embu North Sub-County. This is because the settlers required labour in the months of March to July and November to January for either weeding or harvesting coffee or cutting sisal. The same period were the peak periods for planting, weeding and harvesting of grains.
By 1911 the local administration had devised an official system of forced labour recruitment. The method adopted was to send a message to the chief concerned and he sends in those of his people who “want” work (KNA/PC/CP/1/1/1/189). Though the record show that only those who “wanted” to be recruited were sought by the chiefs, if the chief missed volunteers force had to be applied to meet the required number (Karingi, OIL., 2013). The settlers waited for the workers recruited at Nthithiari where the headquarters had already been built. The policy of forced labour recruitment for the settler farms had a devastating effect on the system of land ownership and crop production but also on the labourers themselves. These forced immigrant labourers were highly exploited in many cases. For example, the settlers paid them less than the official salary guideline. 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, 1975:36-60).

By 1912, the labour recruitment in the area had reached an alarming situation such that the overall crop production of the district fell. This fall was attributed to the forced labour recruitment. The District Commissioner reported that “there was regrettably noticeable decrease in the area under cultivation in parts of the district, this being probably due to the fact that such a number of large proportions of male population are constantly at work outside the district (KNA/PC/CP/1/5/84). The large numbers of male immigrant workers with poor pay left the women as the sole workers on the farms hence impacting negatively on the system of land ownership and crop production in Embu North.
During the First World War (1914-1918), force was used to conscript Africans as both combatants and Carrier Corps. This was done by the chiefs and headmen all over the colony. The impact of this war on the system of land ownership and crop production was enormous. The abrupt withdrawal of almost all able-bodied males meant that agricultural labour both in African and settler farms fell on women, old men and children. This affected food crop production especially in Embu leading to food shortage. The 1918 Kithioro famine is attributed to this war (Wanamu, OIL., 2013). For the government and the settlers to continue having a constant supply of African labour, ‘the registration system was enacted in 1920 under the 1915 Native Registration Ordinance which made a ‘servant” desertion from his “master” a criminal offence (Zwanenberg, 1975:184). Henceforth, the infamous kipande system started operations in the whole colony. This was an attempt to systemize and control African labour in that; once a worker was registered he could not be deregistered. Moreover, it facilitated the enforcement of labour contracts in that it enabled penal sections to be returned to their former employers. Tracing of runaways employees was possible because local chiefs helped in tracing such deserters. Any African who travelled outside his reserve without his kipande was liable to be arrested by the police.

Zeleza (1989:52) argues that the kipande also led to standardization of low wages. This is because it made it virtually impossible for a worker to bargain with a new employer for a wage that was higher and unrelated to his former wage as recorded on his kipande. Although forced labour was used in Kenya and Embu in particular from the early colonial period to the end of the war, it was not the official British Foreign Office Policy. Forceful recruitment of African labour was done as we stated earlier because the settlers did not have enough capital and so they required the
government to supply them with adequate African labour. Therefore, when the Northey Labour Circular of October, 1919 was issued, ‘it did not fundamentally change the direction of existing policy of recruitment through forcing labour; but it did set out to institutionalize an existing situation’ (Zwanenberg, 1975:126). The circular placed more arbitrary powers in the hands of the chiefs and headmen, and so the African labour situation became worse. With this circular, more Africans were forcefully recruited from the reserves to work for the increasing number of white settlers, hence impacting negatively on the system of land ownership and crop production.

However, although forced labour was the norm, some locals were offered permanent employment by the colonial administration. These included the clerks, police locally known as Askari Kanga, together with the chiefs and the headmen. By 1914, the number of government employees from Mbeere was 12 while from Embu were 40 out of the estimated population of 20,885 and 35,053 in the two regions respectively (Mwaruvie, 1991:242-243). This employment was one of the capitalist methods of creating social classes in the pre-colonial Embu community. Patterns of Embu pre-colonial labour underwent drastic changes with the use of forced labour.

As already observed, the contribution of the people in the area to the colonial labour market must, however, be viewed in the context of the wider settler colonial economy. The Kenyan settlers were inadequately supplied with finance capital and wage labour and the colonial government which was dominated by the imperial policy of self-sufficiency, was unable to provide more than a rudimentary infrastructure. Colonial capital accumulation was therefore based on the appropriation of surplus created by the cheap and lowly paid African labour (Zwanenberg, 1974). There is no doubt that labour migration served to impoverish the rural community. African
peasants were not totally dispossessed of land, and migrant worker’s families continued to feed themselves and often the migrant relatives, who were paid little wages, thus reducing the socially necessary wage in the capitalist accumulation. The withdrawal of migrant workers’ labour from domestic production was compensated for by the self - exploitation of their relatives who stayed at home (Berry, 1984:77).

Imposition of taxes was the second method used to disengage the people of Embu from their land. Various taxes were introduced after conquest. Hut tax was therefore introduced in the area in 1907. These and other taxes which were the main source of revenue for the colonial government had been introduced in the colony by 1901. According to Zeleza, (1989:50), taxation served two purposes: it encouraged wage employment and stimulated peasant commodity production but it also delimited peasant accumulation. A hut tax of three rupees was introduced in 1907 (Mwaruvie, 1991:224-5, Mwaniki, 2010:296). This was paid per hut by all married men who were the heads of each homestead. This was meant to disengage the people from their farms and seek waged labour outside the district.

The collection of this tax impacted negatively on the system of land ownership and crop production due to the manner it was collected. Many brutalities such as canning, raping and confiscation of the property were used by the tax collectors (Kigoro, Ol., 2013). Since the Askaris were the most brutal in tax collecting, in 1910 they were prohibited from collecting taxes and people who could read and write were used in the exercise. The Embu District Commissioner engaged Swahili clerks who wrote the names of tax contributors, therefore minimizing overcharging by the chiefs and other tax collectors (KNA/PC/CP/1/1/1/66-69).
Table 3.2 Consolidated Taxes for Embu District 1907-1914.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>YEAR</th>
<th>AMOUNT IN RUPEES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1907/08</td>
<td>82,564.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1908/09</td>
<td>83,431.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1909/10</td>
<td>81,182.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1910/11</td>
<td>100,212.47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1911/12</td>
<td>109,092.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1912/13</td>
<td>120,267.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1913/14</td>
<td>139,485.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1914/15</td>
<td>123,154.20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: KNA/PC/CP/1/1/1/69
The fall in some years might have been caused by migrant labourers, the drought of 1911 and also defaulting. Consequently, the 1914/15 fall may be attributed to the effects of First World War.

Due to the shortcomings of the hut tax to meet needs in revenue collection, a Poll Tax which had been introduced in 1903 in other parts of the colony became effective in the sub-county. This tax was to be paid by all male adults of over sixteen years (Mwaruvie, 1991). Although it targeted young men who had not yet married it doubled the taxes on married men. By 1910 every married man had to pay his own Poll Tax and also the tax upon his hut (Zwanenberg, 1975:80). This tax forced many young men from Embu to seek wage labour outside Embu County. The introduction of a cash economy led not only to the break-up of extended kinship groups, but to the decline of the forms of collective activity discussed in the last chapter. As with other African communities in Kenya, the Embu were forced by the need to earn tax money and by colonial laws to offer their labour.

Therefore, by using labour and tax policies the colonial government was able to force the people of Embu North into new capitalist mode of production hence impacting negatively on the pre-colonial system of land ownership and crop production. This was done through commodity production and waged labour. Those
who had enough land opted for commodity production since it was more profitable than the low wages offered by the settlers and the colonial government. The realization that commodity production advanced one’s economic status led to increased production and consequently, intensified land utilization.

3.6 Trade and Exchange

The Embu North pre-colonial trade and exchange was adversely affected by the introduction of the capitalist mode of production. The government encouraged trade in food crops such as maize, millet, sorghum and beans together with livestock, hides and skins. The vibrant trade in ivory which could have helped the people to pay taxes and avoid wage labour was banned by the 1909 Game Protection Ordinance (Mwaruvie, 1991). The Ordinance read in part that, “any person who having found ivory either hands the ivory to the government or gives information which results in the government obtaining possession of the ivory. The reward to be paid must not exceed two rupees per pound” (KNA/DC/EMBU/5/5/1909).

Consequently, the colonial government became hostile on any person who gave information on where ivory could be found. It also fixed 31/3/1912 as the date after which no more ivory was to be bought from natives. The natives were also prohibited from killing elephants. The Askaris and other natives would be rewarded for information leading to the capture of elephant poachers and ivory smugglers (KNA/DC/EMBU/5/4/1911). This dealt the last blow to the pre-colonial ivory trade. The established ivory traders not only lost revenue, but also a way of life.

By 1910, the Indians and the Swahili traders had established shops at Nthinthiari, where they were buying produce from the local people (Mwaruvie, 1991). Like in many other parts of the colony, the Indians were allowed to act as middlemen who in the process exploited the people in the area by buying cheaply
while they sold the products dearly. The farm produce was bought at very low rates while the people of Embu bought the important goods expensively. The Swahili and Indians played this middleman’s role so effectively that they were able to undermine the pre-colonial trade with their merchant capital. The result was the extended cultivation of produce for exchange with the highly priced goods like, iron hoes, axe, panga and cloths. This unequal exchange ensured the inferior position of the people of Embu North in the trading system. Moreover, the imported hoe cost less than the ones locally produced. This was the beginning of a slow and gradual elimination of the Embu indigenous hoe as both a tilling implement and a trading item. It was also the start of the elimination of Embu iron-making technology.

Markets were established at chief’s camps in order to facilitate this trade (Mwaniki, 2010). This greatly undermined the pre-colonial barter trade that was initially conducted in designated places during the pre-colonial period. The new markets like Runyenjes, Manyatta and Kianjokoma were officially gazetted from 1915 (KNA/PC/CP/1/5/129-130). These centers later grew to become the present trading centers. Thus, by creating official market centers, the capitalist mode of production became dominant over the pre-capitalist mode but this was not entirely eliminated because barter trade still existed between households. It should be noted that the argument advanced in this section is that colonialism in Embu affected the pre-colonial trade. The idea is not to show how that trade was conducted during the pre-colonial period because many other authors (Omwoyo, 1990; Mwaruvie, 1991; Esese, 1990) have done it in different parts of the country. The colonial government also hindered informal trade between the natives and government employees. This was intended to firmly establish the social classes that had already been created (KNA/DC/EMBU/5/4). The capitalist penetration through formal trade not only
affected the pre-colonial trade but also the Embu North pre-colonial system of land ownership and crop production as it will be argued in chapter four.

3.7 World War 1 and Food Shortage

The declaration of war by Britain on Germany on 4th of August 1914 took East Africa by surprise. East Africa was the only part of British Empire to be invaded throughout the war. In the opening moves, the Germans under Von Let tow gained some advantage by occupying Taveta and part of Kisii making several successive raids on the railway (Bell, 1964:117-121). They were however repulsed by a contingent of British and South African soldiers. The British government later embarked on massive recruitment of Carrier Corps from the whole colony to be used against Von Let tow in Tanganyika. This war had a great effect on all sectors of the economy in both Kenya and Uganda. This is because many able bodied men were recruited to offer their services as Carrier Corps. Bell (1964:119), points out that, “there was no lack of recruits for the new battalions of the K.A.R and more than two hundred thousand Africans from all parts of East Africa joined the Carrier Corps: these men made an outstanding contribution to the final defeat of the Germans, and almost forty thousands of them lost their lives”.

Locally, brutal force was used by the chiefs and the headmen to recruit young men as Carrier Corps. These colonial agents had already the experience of recruiting forced labour for the settlers and government projects. Of course, it was not possible to mobilize all that labour without coercion. Consequently, most areas witnessed the worst form of forced conscription never known before. In Gusii, for example, youths were rounded up during cultural events; others were taken from their huts at night (Omwoyo, 1990).
The chiefs and headmen used all manner of force to produce the required labour under strict orders from the DC at Nthinthiari. The Embu and the Mbeere contributed 1,745 as Carrier Corps in 1914 and by 1917, the number had rose to 9,507 (KNA/PC/CP/1/5/129:1914-17).

The effects of such large numbers of able-bodied men being uprooted from their homes were soon evident. After suffering in the war, they returned to face the Kithioro famine of 1918. According to informants, this severe famine is attributed to both the war and the construction of the Embu/Chuka road, which was constructed using forced labour at the same period (Ndunyu, OI., 2013). In most of the colony, the war years were ones of gloom and despair, partly because of the general upset of markets and partly due to the shortages of able-bodied labour (Gordon, 1946).

In order to meet the war demand for food, the Embu market as mentioned earlier was fixed for every Friday. The Askaris were sent out two or three days ahead to warn the people so that the headmen from each division could send produce for sale in the market (KNA/PC/CP/1/5/129). As a result of the war, trade was upset and restructured, and owing to the famine it was almost at a standstill during the 1918/19 years. The Embu were impoverished, poor and hungry and agricultural produce fetched less money than in the pre-war years. The price of cattle equally dropped. Like in most parts of the colony, the prices of imported goods rose steadily and, to make matters worse, taxes, were raised during the war (Omwoyo, 1990).

3.8 Summary

It can be noted that Embu North Sub-County experienced significant changes from 1906 to 1920. These changes arose from the policies introduced by the colonial government after the area was controlled by the British colonial masters. From this analysis it can be deduced that the colonial labour organization altered the pre-
colonial system of land ownership and crop production in Embu North. Although the system of land ownership did not change up to 1920, the organization in crop production whereby all members produced for the subsistence of the household was disrupted and the people had to adjust to new labour demands to be able to produce for the household. The experiments on new crop varieties in various parts of the sub-county were some of the methods used by the colonialists to help capitalism penetrate the area. This period of primitive accumulation was not unique in Embu North but was a replica in most of the colony. As indicated commodity production was to be encouraged throughout the colony while making sure the Africans were introduced into the money economy. Thus, most of the production was aimed for the market so as to sustain the colonial economy. In addition, taxes were levied with an aim of forcing the Africans out of their lands into wage labour.

In short, the policies pursued by the British colonial government during the early period were not intended to assist in the improvement of African agricultural economy, but to impoverish it in order to maintain and safeguard settler’s economic and political interests (Muchoki, 1988:32). To a certain extent, the expansion of African agriculture during the early colonial period can be attributed to the African initiative and response to the money and market economy rather than an outright result of government support. The colonial government at the period only embarked on primitive accumulation. Forced labour that was introduced in the early years coupled with the labour requirement of First World War, both impacted negatively on the system of land ownership and crop production. The removal of men far away from the household left women and children as the sole producers. Thus, by the close of 1920, the capitalist mode of production had slowly penetrated in Embu North through commodity production but the pre-capitalist mode was still dominant.
CHAPTER FOUR

4.0 CHANGES ON THE SYSTEM OF LAND OWNERSHIP AND CROP PRODUCTION IN EMBU NORTH SUB-COUNTY, 1920-1945

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter the system of land ownership and crop production is discussed mainly in relation to economic and political policies passed during the period. The effect of these policies on land and crop production is the main focus here. This is the time when Kenya changed from a protectorate to a colony in 1920. This in effect placed policy and administrative affairs of the colony in the office of the Secretary of State for Colonies in Britain. The Governor was supposed to be the protector of African rights, especially, land rights, but since the inception of colonial rule the interests of the Europeans were paramount. As Lipscomb (1972:53), states “it was never assumed by even the earliest administrators of the protectorate government that the then accepted policy of paramountcy of European interests meant the superseding of African interests in terms of land and the right of that land”.

This changed after 1923 with the Devonshire Declaration. It officially stated that ‘whenever the interests of the African people were in conflict with European or other immigrants races the African interests should be paramount’. The declaration gave the colonial office exclusive rights to act as the trustee for the Africans (Wangari, 2010:96). This was theoretical power given to the Africans since most of the policies passed this time were influenced by the settlers who had already been involved in policy decisions in their own affairs by the War Council of 1915. Hence, most of the policies passed between 1920 and 1946 were mostly in favor of the settlers, thus impacting negatively on the system of land ownership and crop production.
The changes brought by these political and economic policies together with the two World Depressions of early 1920 and 1930 are discussed here in relation to their effect on the system of land ownership and crop production. The introduction of new crop varieties with their unique systems of production and labour demands of the Second World War impacted negatively on land utilization and the general crop production. Monetization, through increased commodity production for sale, therefore, transformed the Embu pattern of land ownership and crop production. For instance, more land was opened for production of marketable crops such as maize and potatoes. Thus, the period marks the total implantation of the capitalist mode of production in Embu North Sub-County, though not entirely dominant over the pre-capitalist mode. This affirms the theory that the pre-capitalist mode of production is not completely eliminated but keeps on reproducing itself in relation to the capitalist mode of production.

4.2 Effects of Policy Changes on Land Ownership and Crop Production, 1920-1946.

The effects of the First World War were felt greatly in Kenya. This is because the protectorate’s economy before the war relied heavily on settler production. Most of the settlers were involved in the war and some never returned and those who did found their plantations in a poor state. The colonial government needed other sources of finances that would boost the economy of the colony. The settlers who had since been involved in the running of their affairs since the formation of the War Council in 1915 by Governor, Sir Henry Belfield, influenced greatly the post-war economic policies. African agriculture which was almost neglected initially had to be developed together with the settler agriculture (Lipscomp, 1972). Therefore, during this period the economic, political and social factors were consolidated in a pattern that set the
future course for both the European and African sectors of the colony (Lipscomb, 1972:59). Hence, the system of land ownership and crop production in the study area can only be analyzed in view of these political and economic policies laid down during this period. Before 1920, the people of Embu North had expanded their agriculture more as a consequence of their own initiative and response to the money market than as a result of outright government support. Owing to the steady increase in population, the land question was gradually assuming great importance. Though, the indigenous system of land tenure had not changed to accommodate the permanent occupation of part of the clan land by anyone not originally vested with cultivation rights. Therefore, these economic and political policies passed after 1920, would later impact negatively on the system of land ownership and crop production.

After the Devonshire Declaration of 1923, the colonial government came up with the dual policy as the main economic policy which was aimed to begin the long chain of developments leading to a transformation of African agriculture and the economy as a whole. The African peasant farmers had to produce quantities of food stuffs enough for consumption and with a surplus for sale. Moreover, the policy aimed at encouraging men to seek wage employment within and outside the reserve. The Governor, Sir Robert Corydon described the policy as “complementary development of non-native and native production” (Berman, 1990:200). Although, the policy started in 1923, it was not until 1927 when a government circular was issued to District Officers by the administration setting out the importance of promoting the dual policy of economic development (Lipscomb, 1972:62).

This dual policy that encouraged Africans in producing a surplus in the reserves for export had great impact on the system of land ownership and crop production. Increased production required more land that was already beginning to be
scarce. By 1930s, the pre-capitalist system of land ownership was quietly being replaced by the cash payment of land (Daniel Mutua, OI., 2013). At the same time land crisis in most of the colony had become severe leading to the establishment of the Kenya Land Commission of 1932 headed by Morris Carter. The commission was mandated to estimate African land requirements, and recommend, if necessary, the extension of African reserves (Sorrenson, 1967:22; Lipscomb, 1972:59). The increased need for more land for production of marketable crops led to increased land cases between 1929 and 1931 as the table below indicates.

**Table 4.1 Native Tribunals**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Civil Cases</th>
<th>1929</th>
<th>1930</th>
<th>1931</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Embu Kiama</td>
<td>336</td>
<td>330</td>
<td>365</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mbeere Kiama</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>126</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Annual Report (KNA/DC/EMBU/1/2/1931:7-8)

The comparative figures show an increase in civil cases that arose as a result of increased commodity production. The increase in the number of litigation over land led to the upward movement of land prices. Although, prices of land continued to be expressed within the pre-capitalist system, cash payments under the customary arrangements were gradually taking over by 1930s (Karingi, Kigoro, OIL., 2013). Increase in land prices meant that only those with access to additional cash other than cash for payment of taxes and food purchase were able to purchase more land. This happened to be the elite class that was emerging from mission schools in the 1920s and employed in various posts in the colonial system. The Embu had accepted the Christian Missionaries and had already monopolized jobs in teaching, clerical, soldiers and preaching in the Reserve (Mwaruvie, 1991:230-231). Therefore, the learned individuals were also able to accumulate cash by putting large tracts of land under crops for sale while at the same time having some for subsistence.
During the same period, the provision of African agricultural education was also recommended to improve production. Training facilities were therefore established at Scott Agricultural Laboratories, Kabete in 1922 and Bukura Agricultural School in North Kavirondo in 1923 (Lipscomb, 1972:68). However, the colonial government was slow in implementing this and it was not until 1931 when agricultural instructors were posted in the reserve (KNA/DC/EMBU/1/2/1931). The responsibility of the field officers was to distribute seeds and also encourage Africans to grow edible exportable crops. This expansion of the capitalist mode of production in the Embu pre-capitalist agricultural system impacted negatively on the system of crop production as it will be argued later.

The world depression of the early 1920s and the early 1930s had a negative impact on the agricultural development of Embu North as the prices of imported produce dropped. During the depression of the early 1930s, there was a general reduction in the production of cash and food crops. Wage employment was not only scarce but wages paid were too low (Zwanenberg, 1972:219). These depressions of the early twenties and early thirties, and the closing of markets and the scourge of locusts and drought, which swept the Embu Reserve in 1930 and 1931, slowed further penetration of capitalism in the area. In particular, during the depression of the early thirties, the government faced the challenge of restructuring African agriculture to supplement the badly affected settler production and increase state revenue (Kanogo, 1986:1). The posting of agricultural officers to Embu in the 1931 must therefore be seen from the perspective of the government's increased intervention in expanding commodity production. Thus, as the theory asserts that gradually the capitalist mode of production modifies, marginalizes or subordinates the pre-capitalist mode of production, by utilizing it rather than casting it aside.
4.3 Impact of New Crop Varieties on Land and Crop Production

Before 1890, we saw the people of Embu produced crops like bananas, sugarcane, yams, various varieties of millets and sorghum among others. The people’s engagement in production of market-based crops especially maize was a result of interplay of many factors within the colonial regime. The introduction of the tax system required the people to access the monetary economy. This was done through commodity production and wage labour. Those who had enough land opted for commodity production since it was more profitable than the low wages (Mwaniki, 2010). Apart from maize, Rose Coco beans, Boston beans, English potatoes, onions, coffee and wattle were some of the other crops introduced in the area between 1920 and 1946. Of all the crops grown, maize had the greatest impact on the system of land ownership and crop production. Although, extensive production of the new maize variety seems to have started from 1920s, the people of Embu had a traditional variety that was low yielding which was not widely produced (Karingi, OI., 2013).

The new high yielding Hickory King-white maize gradually replaced, but not entirely, the traditional low yielding maize, bulrush millet and sorghum, which were the basic grains in Embu. The people of Embu, like many other communities in Central Kenya embraced the production of the new maize variety reluctantly. They had been used to consuming their traditional foods which had become part of their life. Practically, the major reason was, though the Hickory King variety had heavier yields than the previous traditional maize, it took long to mature and if the rains became less than normal, the farmer missed the harvest that season. In contrast, the yields of the traditional variety was not as heavy as that of the newly introduced Hickory King but the producer was assured of some harvest even if there was less rain
than normal. This made many crop producers in Embu North to reluctantly adopt this new variety (Daniel Mutua, OI., 2013).

Maize became popular among the crop producers in Embu North due to a number of reasons. First, it did not require a lot of labour like bulrush millet and sorghum (Kirigi, Kanjovi, OI., 2013). These two traditional crops needed a lot of labour especially when ripening to protect the crop against birds. It also became difficult to produce millet and sorghum when children were enrolled in the mission schools after 1920s (Mwaruvie, 1991; Wanamu, OIL., 2013). Moreover, after Embu people were colonized agricultural labour went to settler farms in Kikuyu land and other settler areas. Hence, maize which matured much quicker and could also be produced in both long and short seasons became more popular than the traditional grains.

Secondly, the Hickory King-white maize became more popular in Embu North and other colonized areas because, maize meal was the basic food supplied to the African labourers by the government and the settlers (Zwanenberg, 1975:65-80). It seems that the colonial government and the settlers perceived maize meal as an ideal food for the laboring class and the cheapest way to feed the workers (Wright, 1977; 200). Thus, it is the migrant labourers who made maize popular in the county when they visited the villages. Moreover, the swelling of the population in Embu town led to the increased production of maize. It therefore acquired a higher monetary value than millet and other crops in that it served the dual purpose of being commercial crop as well as a subsistence crop. Thirdly, the crop producers in Embu North realized that maize was easier to harvest and that its production distributed the labour required throughout the year than does sorghum or millet, thus reducing time on harvesting and food preparation. Moreover, the possibility of a second crop brought some insurance
against the failure of the long rains crop. The White colonial masters also favored maize because it released both men and women from the burden of millet and sorghum production and enabled them to seek wage labour in the settler farms (Zwanenberg, 1975). Thus, gradually maize replaced the traditional millet and sorghum as the basic food in Embu North.

The new maize crop had the greatest impact on the system of land ownership and crop production in Embu North. The relationship between the system of land ownership and crop production was adversely affected by the introduction of maize both as a subsistence and commercial crop. The pre-colonial land ownership system which was guided by the traditional laws and driven by individual needs for crop production started to experience changes. Most crop producers yearned to increase their area of cultivation totally disregarding the clan elders. This, as already indicated led to land conflicts which led to litigations using the new colonial laws as the following table shows.

Table 4.2: Civil Cases Heard by the Embu and Mbeere Kiama 1933-1945

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Embu</th>
<th>Mbeere</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1933</td>
<td>621</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1934</td>
<td>254</td>
<td>131</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1935</td>
<td>564</td>
<td>202</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1936</td>
<td>375</td>
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<td>1937</td>
<td>644</td>
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<td>1938</td>
<td>767</td>
<td>358</td>
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<tr>
<td>1939</td>
<td>825</td>
<td>250</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1940</td>
<td>745</td>
<td>174</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1941</td>
<td>725</td>
<td>281</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1942</td>
<td>1,710</td>
<td>300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1943</td>
<td>1,774</td>
<td>439</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1944</td>
<td>1,363</td>
<td>414</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1945</td>
<td>1,409</td>
<td>395</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Political Records KNA/DC/EMBU/3/2/1917-1958:167
The rapid increase in civil cases may be attributed to the need for more land for commodity production. It should be noted that after the reserve boundaries were established, there was limited areas of expansion in the Embu Reserve.

Coffee growing had also an impact on the system of land ownership and crop production. For a long time, Kenyan Africans had been barred from producing coffee by the colonial administration. It was claimed that Africans could not master the technical knowledge required in producing such a lucrative crop and, allegedly, there was fear of plant diseases and inadequate quality control (Garst, 1971:125). For districts near settler farms, it was said that the poorly kept African plants would infect settler coffee (Lipscomb, 1972:45). The actual reasons for all these were of course the fear that Africans would become self-sufficient and decline to offer their labour on settler farms. However, in 1934, Africans living in areas far away from settler farms were allowed to grow coffee for experimental purpose under the Native Grown Coffee Rules of 1934 (Lipscomb, 1972:63-64). These areas included Kisii, Embu and Meru regions.

The people of Embu North and especially the chiefs and other elites were all along yearning to grow this crop, and so when they were allowed the impact was great. These groups, through their contacts with European settlers had realized that coffee had higher returns than maize and other crops. But, to the ordinary crop producers, the crop proved unpopular in the initial period. First, the period of care before yields were obtained was too long. Second, the colonial administration permitted that coffee be grown on a cooperative basis only in the hope of controlling quality and diseases. However, without personal commitment, farmers tended their plots irregularly. At times, the distance to the plots was a hindering factor. In fact, such farms had to be maintained under threat of prosecution. This reaction was not unique in the area. For instance, even when it was realized that individual plots near
the farmers’ homes could achieve more success, most Gusii were convinced that the government would confiscate their plots if they planted coffee and consequently, a positive response to the introduction of coffee was forthcoming from only a small number of cultivators (Barnes, 1976; Omwoyo, 1990:149).

Consequently, the chiefs and a significant number of the early-educated members of the society were among the first growers. They were motivated by a combination of reasons, including the expectation of earning greater cash income. By 1938, a total of only 22 acres owned by 88 growers had been planted at Githungururu, about four miles from Embu Boma. In that year’s report, the agricultural officer remarked: “… the planters who have followed the instructions of the agricultural officer, and made box ridges round their trees, using manure have not only kept their trees in very good conditions, but have got very fine crop of beans into the bargain” (KNA/DC/EMBU/1/2/1938:29). At the same period a small factory was built, and by the end of the year 84 growers had delivered 49,521 lbs. of cherry for preparation. However, a maximum acreage had been imposed and most peasants had less than one acre. This was intended to prevent the peasants from becoming self-sufficient in order that they would continue to avail themselves for wage labour on settler plantations in Kikuyu land and the Rift Valley (Barnes, 1976). It was also because of acreage limitations that, most people preferred growing maize and other crops. Thus, due to this reason, coffee had little impact on the system of land ownership and crop production during this period. It also produced minimum social differentiation due to the acreage limit and that most growers were the local elites.

Wattle production also slightly affected the system of land ownership and crop production. By 1938 records there were 2,288 acres under wattle owned by 4,065 farmers who sold 25 tons of dry bark in February and 175 tons in October.
Mostly farmers were encouraged to grow the crop through government propaganda, although the prices of wattle were low all over the colony. This was due to low production as the majority of the people preferred other edible crops like maize and millet. The production of the crop was generally inadequate during this period and its effect on the system of land ownership and crop production was therefore minimal. Generally, owing to the production of these new crops, resting of land that was necessary during the pre-colonial period became outdated. The areas designated for the production of certain crops due to steepness were in most cases planted maize and other commercial crops. Soil fertility was not maintained and this led to low yields from most food crops especially sorghum and millet.

Ground covering crops like sweet potatoes which controlled soil erosion was regarded non profitable and therefore discarded. This led to massive soil erosion, which forced the colonial masters to introduce soil conservation methods through the African Land Development Programme (ALDEV) of 1946 (Hennings, 1972:91). Moreover, the cultivation of the new crop varieties led to the development of individual land tenure in Embu North. Individuals in this case were mainly the chiefs who had used their position to accumulate wealth and an emerging group of western educated Africans. These had knowledge of the Kenya Land Commission of 1932 that was headed by Morris Carter. The commission was mandated to estimate African land requirements and recommend, if necessary, the extension of African reserves (Sorrenson, 1967:22). These individuals especially the chiefs who gave submissions to the commission started to claim individual ownership of land. However, the type of individual ownership that was reflected in the pre-colonial times
did not limit other community member from accessing land that was individually claimed (Sorrenson, 1967).

These chiefs, such as Muruatetu and Arthur who were in their own class and wielded a lot of power and authority, took massive amounts of land for the production of commercial maize and other crops (Karingi, OIL., 2013). They were also instrumental in incorporating the people of Embu North within the colonial system. This incorporation was mainly in terms of advancing capitalist mode of production through securing labour supply for the administration and in turn they were advanced rewards in various forms. For example, as they recruited African labour for the settlers and the administration, they also reserved some labourers who worked in their farms (Wanjuki, OI., 2013). Thus; the realization that commodity production advanced one’s economic status led to increased production and consequently, intensified land utilization. The development towards individual land ownership as a result of commercial production of various crops affected most of the landless and the adoptees in Embu North. These people depended largely on the traditional land tenure arrangement for their access to land as was argued earlier. In case of the land poor, they depended on the customary rights to enlarge their holding. They safeguarded their interest through counter-acting tendency to conserve the pre-capitalist modes of production that was threatened by encroaching capitalist development.

As mentioned earlier, one way of ensuring preservation of the pre-capitalist modes of production was through litigation. However, the colonial government through the chiefs and a new class of educated elites who occupied the colonial structure as low ranking officials supported by the Local Native Council (LNC) diverted the course of African customary law at the expense of the landless and the adoptees. Consequently, the local native council ‘unanimously passed a resolution
with regard to the Registration of Agreements between the people of Embu district and Ahoi (tenants at will) from other districts (KNA/DC/EMBU/1/2/1939:11).

The emerging differentiation as a result of land ownership due to commercial production of new crop varieties, especially maize resulted to degeneration of the social relations among the people. The idea that land could be bought with money was brought by the chiefs and the elites who had some knowledge of the new European law. The chiefs, headmen, tribunal elders, teachers in mission schools and minor government employees bought land of the less fortunate (Leo, 1984:55). This led to rural class formations determined by the individual land holdings. The petty bourgeoisie (chiefs and the local elites) were affirming the capitalist social order that favored them while the land poor and the adoptees were negating this social order advocating for the pre-capitalist social structure. Thus, due to the commercial production of maize and other new crops, land buying was becoming a major method of acquiring land among the elites in Embu North between 1920 and 1946. However, the pre-capitalist methods of acquiring land were dominant within the larger society. This confirms Goodman and Redcliff (1981:60) assertion that pre-capitalist mode of production may have continued to exist, though subordinated to the capitalist system, through a process of ‘preservation and destruction’.

4.4 Changing Methods of Crop Production

In most of the colonized areas in Kenya, the Africans were forced to grow the new commercial crops. Most of their traditional food crops were disregarded in favor of the new crops especially maize, potatoes, beans and wattle. According to Bowles (1977:204), the African peasant who previously produced a large variety of crops with suitable cereals among them was forced to grow new crops due to their market
value. This had a devastating effect on the food security of the people who initially produced for consumption and the surplus stored for future use.

Previously, we saw that the pre-colonial system of crop production was well adapted to the ecological conditions, thus offering the people of Embu North maximum returns for their efforts. This is supported by Kjekshus (1977:81) while writing on the pre-colonial economies of Tanzania states that ‘the pre-colonial economies developed within the ecological situation. A relationship between man and his environment which had grown out of centuries of civilizing work of clearing the ground introducing managed vegetation and controlling the fauna’. He concludes that the introduction of colonialism brought about a crisis that ruined the existing ecosystems in African economies.

Accordingly, the pre-colonial system of land use and crop production in Embu North was affected by the introduction of new methods of production. The introduction of new crops, especially maize changed the traditional system of land use. Maize not only replaced millet and sorghum as the staple food but also occupied the land in which these crops were planted gradually replacing them. Cover crops like sweet potatoes were replaced by new varieties of vegetables like carrots, onions and cabbages, which were planted both on the ridge top, and the valleys (Agusta, OL., 2013). Intercropping method which had many advantages as we saw earlier was discouraged by the agricultural instructors. Also, most of the new crops like carrots and cabbages could not be intercropped. The instructors went into the reserves uprooting the intercropped crops and also making sure that maize was planted using the recommended measurement. According to their instructions, maize had to be planted only a maximum of two seeds per hole and if they found more than two seedlings, they used to uproot the extra seedlings (Wanjuki, OL., 2013). According to
Bowles (1977, 203), maize growing had a disadvantage of exhausting the soil in that its large vegetative growth takes a large amount of fertility out of the soil compared to other cereals, for example sorghum and millet.

The inter-war period saw increase in African agricultural production which led to the people of Embu North increasing land under cultivation. Together with the increased production was the fact that the population was increasing and there was no room for further expansion in the mbari (sub-clans) lands. According to the 1931 census, the population of Embu district had rapidly increased. This meant that the land could not be rested as usual leading to soil erosion as a result of over cultivation. The table below shows the distribution of population in 1931.

**Table 4.3 Population of Embu in 1931**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tribe</th>
<th>Men</th>
<th>Women</th>
<th>Children</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Embu</td>
<td>10450</td>
<td>12621</td>
<td>15553</td>
<td>38624</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mbeere</td>
<td>6676</td>
<td>7321</td>
<td>9263</td>
<td>23260</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: KNA/DC/EMBU/1/2/1931:4

The Embu population census of 1931 indicates that women were more than men. This can be explained by the large number of migrant male labour at the time. As a result the pre-capitalist labour organization was disrupted by the capitalist method of labour acquisition.

Unfortunately, weather conditions during this period also hampered the expansion of commodity production. In 1924 there was a partial failure of the long rains, and the situation worsened in 1927 when, due to rain failures, many crops were almost completely ruined in some of the sub-locations. The irregular rains continued even in 1931. The annual report that year indicated that “though both the long and short rains were above average the majority of the rain fell early on and the harvest would have been well above normal if rain had been distributed and fallen towards the end of the
seasons” (KNA/DC/EMBU/1/2/1931:19). Locust infestation in 1928 and 1931 led to food shortage and necessitated a change from grains to such root crops as sweet potatoes and cassava. The annual report of 1931 indicated that locusts were for many months an ever present annoyance and menace. It was also noted that, “partly owing to propaganda by administrative officers and the agricultural officer, very much larger areas of so called locust immune crops, mainly cassava, potatoes—both sweet and of the European varieties and nduma, have been brought under cultivation” (KNA/DC/EMBU/1/2/1931:19).

Most researchers (Muchoki 1988, Esese 1990 and Omwoyo 1990) have attributed food shortages during the colonial period to the emphasis laid on cash crops. They argue that the incorporation of the indigenous economies into colonial systems resulted into less food being stored as it was the practice before the colonial period. Indeed, the cultivation of maize and the introduction of new crops has been seen to have underdeveloped African agriculture in the sense that they replaced more suitable crops, or are imposed as monoculture where previously a variety of crops were grown (Muchoki, 1988:161-162). According to Zeleza (1986:158), recent studies indicate that famines in Kenya are a colonial phenomenon. It does not mean that pre-colonial Africa did not experience food shortages due to weather or pests, as well as warfare and other forms of social disruptions. Rather, it has been suggested that there existed a variety of social mechanisms and ecological reserves to reduce the impact of food shortages on one family. Colonialism therefore, drastically altered the social and ecological organization of agriculture and responses to famine and food shortages.

The introduction of more effective tools like pangas, axes and jembes which replaced the wooden tools led to massive clearance of virgin land for cultivation. These tools, especially the fork jembe which replaced the munyago exposed the soil to
wind and water erosion leading to massive erosion. This led to the introduction of terracing under the ALDEV program as shall be examined later.

4.5 Labour Organization

The pre-colonial system of labour organization among the people of Embu North was disrupted throughout the colonial period. We have noted that force was used to establish British rule and it continued to be used as a mechanism to bring the transition from pre-capitalist mode of production to the capitalist mode. Therefore, political, economic and social policies which were introduced throughout the British colonial rule had a devastating effect on the system of labour organization. Owing to the demands to pay taxes and other financial obligations created by the new socio-economic situation, many people, especially males left the villages in search of wage labour. In addition, the introduction of new varieties of crops that did not tie a lot of work force on the farms led to increased pursuit of wage labour.

Although, it is not the focus in this work, it’s important to note that the colonial labour demands ended up overworking women. According to Mwaruvie (1991:235), the Mbeere for example, had to adjust to new labour demands and overworking of women to be able to produce for the household. In addition, Muchoki (1988:145) indicates that women in Kiambu shouldered men’s agricultural responsibilities of heavy work like, clearing the bush, planting and harvesting men’s crops, as well as providing food for their families. Thus, the colonial labour system altered the pre-colonial African labour organization whereby all members produced for the sustenance of the household. Constant supply of labour to the government and settler farms was the major interest of the colonial government.
After the First World War, the settlers demand for labour increased due to the post-war boom. Regulations were passed to prevent idleness (White, 1990:52). With the new regulations the chiefs and the headmen got more powers to recruit labour from the villages. The kipande system of labour registration which was introduced ensured that men did not just leave their employment. More coercion was used to recruit more labour from the people of Embu North for the benefit of the government and the white settlers in Kikuyu land. At the same period demand for unskilled labour in Nairobi rose sharply from 1926 when the municipal entered into a construction boom (Presley, 1992). Some male labourers from Embu North who were dissatisfied by the local wages offered moved to Nairobi. Despite that the wages were low compared to the living expenses, they were, however, much better than those given in agricultural labour. This made more people to leave the villages in a bid to seek wage labour in the towns consequently aggravating the labour situation in the reserves. Indeed, as Mwangi (2009:72) argues, ‘apart from education and Christianity, urbanization was also a major player in the transformation of African socio-economic organizations’.

The dual policy of 1923 further disorganized the pre-colonial labour organization. Part of the policy was to encourage African men to seek wage employment outside their reserves. This policy was enhanced by the governor’s conference in 1926 which argued that, “…steady progress cannot be secured in rural areas unless every able-bodied native who shows no tendency to work is given to understand that the Government expects him to do a reasonable amount of work, either in his own Reserve or in labour for wages outside of it” (Lipscomb, 1972:66). In practice, the dual policy meant that any policy that benefited Africans had to be carried out insofar as it did not interfere with European’s interests (Talbot, 1990:23).
Male labour for the government and settler farms denied valuable labour for African agricultural production in Embu North as the settlers required labour in the months of March to July and November to January for either weeding or harvesting coffee or cutting sisal. The same months as we saw earlier were the peak period for planting, weeding and harvesting grains. The 1939 Annual Report indicated that, “efforts were made to persuade natives to go out to work, especially during, October, November and December (KNA/DC/EMBU/1/2/1939:16). Indeed, the large number of male working outside Embu North with poor payment left the women as the sole workers on the fields together with their normal family duties. This might have been the cause of food shortages that frequently plagued the people of Embu North during the colonial period.

Education which was offered by the Christian missionaries and the colonial government also disorganized agricultural labour. The type of education that the Africans received was geared towards technical work in the field of agriculture, carpentry, masonry, brick making, and stone cutting among others. These technical schools existed in the mission stations where religious education was given a higher priority (Mbogo, Mutua, OL., 2013). A few Africans received education that enabled them to be incorporated in the missions and colonial administrative system as low ranking workers (Furred, 1989). The limited agricultural training offered to Africans by the government in Kabete and Bukura from 1920 to the early 1930s favored male gender who graduated as inspectors for the reserves.

The chiefs and the other colonial supporters were able to accumulate more land since they had free labour provided by their subjects. Their farms were well managed since they fitted well in the new capitalistic system of production which embraced mechanization. For instance, they were the first to use manure on their plots.
On the other hand, their subjects who were land poor and mostly employed the traditional methods of production became weak economically since they could not afford to re-invest their small crop production adequately. The inability of the land poor to fit well in the capitalist mode of production forced them to retain some of their pre-capitalist mode of production. In the end there was a broad social as well as economic difference between the landed and the poor. The former were embracing new ideas while the latter were forced by their economic inability to become a conservative group.

Moreover, the development of capitalism in Embu North led to the termination of various customary land rights especially those that catered the ocwa (adoptees). The ocwa who were totally landless and initially depended on the landowners were forced to leave the reserve as the majority of the land owners were expanding their agricultural production. Although the ocwa system of land ownership was threatened from the early colonial period most sub-clans (mbari) continued the pre-colonial land tenure system to 1946. Most respondents concur that, the adoptee system was not entirely eliminated by capitalism but has continued to prevail to-date (Damaris, Wanamu, OI., 2013). But, although the adoptee system existing in Embu North today is entirely different from the pre-colonial customary system, some of the pre-capitalist modes of production have prevailed up to date though with some alteration from their original outlook. This confirms Goodman and Redcliff (1981) argument that, pre-capitalist modes of production may continue to exist though subordinated to the capitalist system through a process of ‘preservation and destruction or dissolution and conservation.

Social and economic differentiation broadened throughout the colonial period in Embu North. Most of the government interventions during this period benefited the
large land owners. For example, most informants pointed out that government demonstration plots for new crops and better farming practices were located in the large holder’s farms such as the chiefs and the headmen. They also benefited from free seeds distributed by the agricultural officers for demonstration purposes (Kamatu, Wanamu, OL, 2013). This class was advancing within the capitalist system while the land poor stagnated.

4.6 Trade and Exchange in the Inter-War Years

As indicated earlier, there was a flourishing trade between the people of Embu North and their neighbours the Mbeere and the Chuka. This trade had evolved from surplus crop production that was as a result of the efficient system of land ownership and crop production. The trade had developed into caravan trade by the time of European colonialism (Mwaniki, 1973). Though, money as a medium of exchange was introduced in the early years of colonial rule, the pre-capitalist form of trade survived throughout the colonial period. Between 1920 and 1930 more men and women were involved in trade. However, trade and exchange activities were adversely affected by the 1918-19 famine and the depression of early 1920. As a consequence, due to the economic hardships that affected the whole colony, hut tax, which had been increased to Rs 8 in 1920, had to be lowered to Rs 6 or Sh. 12 in 1922 (Gordon, 1946:46).

The early 1930 depression negatively affected the colonial economy. Both Africans and European producers suffered from the declined prices of African commodities especially sesame, beans, hides, skins, coffee and maize. By 1931 for instance, maize price fell by 50 percent of its value in 1929. This was a drop from about 11.10 to 5.06 in 1929. By 1933, the maize price stood at Kshs. 3.30 (Kanogo, 1989:116). Although, market instability reduced African prices of sesame, beans, hides and maize, which largely commanded the internal market, they were not
severely affected for they had from the mid-1920s, expanded the area under cultivation.

Despite the drop in prices, rain failure in 1927 and the ravages of locusts in 1929 and early 1930, exports of maize and other crops improved greatly after 1930. By 1931, over 250 tons of maize was exported from the district (KNA/DC/EMBU/1/2/1931). It should be noted that the production of commercial maize was influenced by the taxes that the people had to pay. Money for the payment of these taxes could either come from wage labour or commodity production. Wattle, legumes, potatoes and coffee were the other crops traded at this time though not in large quantities. These crops had by this time occupied areas that were previously being planted bulrush millet and sorghum. Thus, the new crops, and especially maize were used by the colonialists to entrench capitalism in Embu North.

By 1938, people of Embu North had diversified in terms of varieties and techniques that enabled them to market more crops. The intensification of crop production meant more land for cultivation, and because there was no more land for expansion, over-cultivation of the same parcel of land led to soil erosion. This would later affect production and overall trade in agricultural commodities. However, trade improved greatly and in 1938, the DC reported that, 285 produce buying licenses had been issued of which 212 were issued to natives. This improvement in trade can be shown by the following table.
Table 4.5 Produce Exported From Embu District in 1937 and 1938

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Maize Bags</th>
<th>Maize Meal Bags</th>
<th>Legumes Bags</th>
<th>Potatoes Bags</th>
<th>Wattle Tons</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1937</td>
<td>11,260</td>
<td>40,451</td>
<td>13,535</td>
<td>216</td>
<td>105</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1938</td>
<td>23,682</td>
<td>62,335</td>
<td>28,252</td>
<td>1,099</td>
<td>195</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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

From the above table, a few conclusions may be made. It is certain that the Embu people were quick to accept new crop varieties and farming methods. The production of maize and maize meal was high. This would mean that maize consumption was increasingly replacing the reliance on legumes and therefore occupying more land.

Capital accumulation on the part of some people enabled them to start small trade and industry, hitherto entirely in Indian or European hands. Such people included the market–oriented peasantry who produced agricultural surplus and accumulated capital, some workers, and such colonial functionaries as chiefs and headmen. This group of early capitalists accumulated wealth in different forms. From the money earned through the sale of agricultural produce and from wage labour, a group of wealthy people was emerging. They used their accumulated wealth in various ways. Some of them invested in small *dukas*, which were springing up throughout the district (Kigoro, OI., 2013).

4.7 Effect of World War Two on Land and Crop Production

The Second World War continued the destabilization of agricultural labour in Embu North. The colonial masters targeted all high productive areas for war recruitment and other essential duties. Policies were derived purposely to legalize labour acquisition. Through the Emergence Power (Defense) Acts passed by the British government at the break of the war, the government was given broad powers of requisition, control of movements and censorship (Zeleza, 1989: 147). In particular, the 1940 Defense
(Native Personnel) Regulations gave the governor power to order Provincial Commissioners to produce quotas of workers for the military and essential services. Essential services were defined by the state and therefore, private contractors working for the state benefited from recruited African labour (Zeleza, 1992:175).

In this recruitment all sorts of methods were used consequently disrupting the system of crop production that relied on the same labour supply. These methods ranged from armed raids to such devious ploys as holding women hosts in recruiting camps until their male relatives substituted them (Sticher, 1982:27-38). It appears that both force and propaganda were used. It has been shown that those who joined the war fell prey to rumors that military service would exempt them from paying taxes (Zeleza, 1989b: 147). Rumors (most probably started by the colonial administration) had it, too that those who did not join the army voluntarily but waited to be conscripted were always sent to the frontline where fighting was fiercest (Njogu, OL., 2013).

Sometimes, private recruits often misrepresented themselves as government agents, and chiefs would take the DC’s ‘requests’ to provide labour as an order to forcefully seize parties of young men and dispatch them as virtual prisoners. The chiefs of the time included Arthur of Gaturi, Njagi Muthang’ato of Ngandori, and Muguchu of Kagaari among others (Muta, Njogu, Karingi, OL., 2013). However, the administration was against the kidnapping of children. Mr. I.R. Gillespie, the DC, while handing over to Mr. D.W. Hall, indicated that, ‘constant watch against the kidnapping of juveniles is still only too necessary’ (KNA/DC/EMBU/2/2/1946).

Apart from the use of force, African men were cheated that they were being taken to work only to find themselves in military camps. Africans were also recruited for other works considered important like construction and extension of airfields,
roads, harbors and military camps. Agricultural labour was disrupted by the orders given on idlers in 1946. These orders were given “for the making of the proper idlers lists…and the immediate prosecution of any persons returned as idlers” (KNA/DC/EMBU/2/2/1946:5). Given that movement was restricted during the war; African labourers were forced to remain in their workstations for longer periods than was the case previously largely affecting the system of crop production.

Generally, the Second World War had significant impact on crop production in the whole colony. Of important, there was a general expansion of commodity production as a result of the good prices during the war and also because government encouraged increased production to meet the war demands (White, 1990:152). Therefore, the need to satisfy the war requirements and cope with the economy that was increasingly being monetized made the people of Embu North expand their commodity production. Subsequently, any production was aimed for the market. This impacted negatively on the pre-capitalist system of land ownership and crop production in that competition for land became stiff leading to court cases.

The pre-capitalist division of labour and trade that were experiencing changes since the inception of colonial rule suffered greatly during this period. The male migrant labour increased as a result of the war. Men were not only required in the army but also as domestic servants by the military officers and other non-African civilians. For instance, the number of domestic workers in Kenya in 1941 was 22,054 and rose to about 30,000 at the end of the war (White, 1990:148). This left women and children as the sole crop producers who could not cope with both female and male crops as was the case in the pre-capitalist period. Although there is absence of statistics, it is evident that the production of millet, sorghum and other root crops like
cassava and yams was affected by the war. The war had affirmed the importance of cash forcing Africans to produce commodities for sale or join wage labour.

Trade flourished due to the demand of the war. Although the Asians were the major traders, the few Africans (petty bourgeoisie) who had accumulated capital since the 1920s joined in the trade. These Africans had joined and bought lorries that they used to transport foodstuffs from Embu to Nairobi (Karingi, Kigoro, Ol., 2013). The increased population due to the influx of military labour provided ready market for African foodstuffs. This trade was however curtailed by the restrictions put under the control of movement to and from Nairobi from 1940-1958 (Robertson, 1997, 102). Trade during this time also contributed in the reduction of agricultural labour as many men and women became traders.

Labour migrations continued after the war as the colonial economy developed. This continued to hinder the growth of African agriculture in the reserves. But, the post-World War Two period saw a change in the capitalist system. The world economy began to shift towards increased production of industrial goods rather than raw materials (Wallerstein, 1976:33). This period saw a rise of large multi-national corporations, through which some of industrial production, especially processing, packaging and low technology enterprises began to be shifted to the world periphery. This was aimed to avoid dangers of German attacks in the high seas. In addition, core economies and multinationals became increasingly interested in servicing an expanding internal market in peripheral areas (Stichter, 1982:134). These changes had profound impact in Kenya. More migrant workers left the reserves after 1945 to seek wages in the light industries that were established after the war impacting negatively on the system of crop production.
Despite official acknowledgement of the negative impact the withdrawal of mostly male labour had on rural production, nothing was ever done to rectify the situation. In fact, the situation became worse as more individuals both men and women moved out of the reserves for wage employment and formal education (Robertson, 1976; Stichter, 1982). The war brought great social and economic changes that eventually affected both the social relations in African households and the rural economy. Rural urban migration stepped up due to rural hardships. Although more men migrated to urban centers in search of employment, women took part in this mobility but in a smaller number comparatively. Therefore, the food shortage experienced in the early 1940s was both as a result of the war demands and the cumulative effects of discriminatory agricultural policies (Zeleza, 1989:150).

4.8 Summary

Colonial period between 1920 and 1946 brought far reaching changes in Embu North Sub-County, causing significant impact on the system of land ownership and crop production. Through policies and regulations, the colonial government directly interfered with the pre-colonial system of land ownership and crop production among the people of Embu North. The transition from the pre-capitalist mode to capitalist modes of production through the introduction of new crop varieties led to the breakdown of the traditional socio-economic organizations that cemented people’s relations. But, although capitalism was successfully established in the society, various pre-capitalist socio-economic organizations continued to exist or transformed within the dominant mode.

Social differentiation emerged through land holding status and trade which was especially controlled by the local elites. These continued to accumulate while the poor peasants were forced to offer wage labour on their farms. The unavailability of
sufficient land for the poor was one of the major factors that led to wage labour. In the same period, the diminishing land base made ownership of land and not access the major determinant factor whether an individual would produce crops or not. Previously, as long as one accessed land, the issue of ownership was not critical. Conflicts over land between the landed and the landless became evident in the 1930s as many cases landed in the Tribunal Courts. Moreover, the World War Two labour demands adversely affected the crop production process.

During the same period social class formation was taking a distinct shape within the society. Significant consequence of this social stratification was the development of peasant consciousness. The dynamics of rural class formation determined by the land holding status shaped the different types consciousness within the rural class. The petty bourgeoisie (chiefs and the local elites) were affirming the capitalist social order that favored them while the poor peasants were negating this social order advocating for pre-capitalist social structure. As shall be seen in the next chapter, these classes were to be widely divided when the peasant class staged their revolt through the Mau Mau War.

The period marks the modification in crop production in the sub-county that was aimed at serving the capitalist regime and not the society. This was further intensified by the capitalist system that steadily set up in the society. Thus, a new form of social stratification based on land ownership and land access was taking shape. The theory has been used here to assess capitalist penetration and how this has impacted on the social relations when the two modes are articulated within Embu North. Since the chapter has examined land and crop production which are factors of production then the concept of articulation here was most relevant.
CHAPTER FIVE

5.0 LAND REFORM AND ITS IMPACT ON THE SYSTEM OF LAND OWNERSHIP AND CROP PRODUCTION IN EMBU NORTH SUB-COUNTY, 1946-1963

5.1 Introduction

This chapter examines the land reform carried out in Embu North and its impact on the system of land ownership and crop production. These reforms involved several stages that included litigation, consolidation, registration and issuance of title deed. It gives a background on the issues that led to these reforms and the major stages that governed the reform process. It further examines the interplay between the system of land ownership and crop production in relation to the changes that were brought by land reforms. In addition, the chapter analyses how this exercise broadened the socio-economic differences that had developed throughout the colonial period in Embu North Sub-County.

The reorganization of crop production under the ALDEV programme and the new agricultural techniques introduced prior to this period are also examined. The major focus here is the land reforms initiated through the Swynnerton Plan which led to land consolidation in Kenya. After the Second World War, the colonial administration started a gradual process of agricultural reorganization of African areas, culminating in the Swynnerton Plan of 1954. The plan allowed African peasants to grow cash crops and engage in small-holder farming. Cash crop production led to further social differentiation and stratification in the Sub-County.

After enclosure, the people of the region embarked on individual development of their portions. The landless found themselves in a confusing situation where they had no one on lean to since the customary laws that guaranteed them land could no longer be applied. The land disputes that arose after the reforms could only be solved
under the British property law. Consequently, the system of land ownership and crop production was drastically changed as the capitalist mode of production dominated.

5.2 The Effects of African Land Development Programme (ALDEV)

During the Second World War, the African peasants increased their commodity production as a result of war demands. This led to massive soil erosion in most of Embu North Sub-County. Towards the end of the war, soil erosion had become a problem in many reserves in the colony and the colonial government had to take action. The erosion was as a result of the growing population, over-cultivation and over-grazing without allowing the necessary periods of fallow as was the case during the pre-colonial period. After the war, the colonial government stepped in to prevent further soil destruction arguing that through ignorance, incompetence and greed, African peasant had “mined” the land and destroyed it (Mackenzie, 1998:227).

Consequently, the African Land Development Committee was appointed in 1945. It published its report in 1946 and adopted a ten year plan from 1946-1955 (Hennings, 1972:91). The programme aimed at reconditioning of the African lands to restore fertility and increase production and to avoid a recurrence of food shortage that had been experienced during the war. It also aimed at encouraging Africans to produce to not only meet their subsistence needs but also service the newly created low-technology industry, which could help Britain in the reconstruction efforts at home. Central Kenya was the most degraded area because of commodity production. As a result, the then governor, Philip Mitchell identified soil conservation, land consolidation, development of cash crops, and introduction of dairy grade cattle and irrigation projects as the major needs in the degraded areas of Central Province (Lipscomb and Winston, 1972:93). Bench terracing was taken as the major way of reducing soil erosion in these areas. In Embu North, this reconditioning in order to
control soil erosion, mainly involved terracing and construction of live wash-stops (KNA/DC/EMBU/1/2/1938:50; Karingi, OI., 2013). This was done on every piece of land claimed by an individual.

The claimant of the land was expected to dig terraces three days in a week on both cultivated and uncultivated land. Being a communal undertaking, both men and women were required to devote two mornings a week to the task. The work under this program had no pay and any absentees were liable to fines (Mbeere, Wanamu, OI., 2013). The chiefs and the headmen were required to meet a specific target of workers hence they could have used force to meet their goal. The programme disrupted day-to-day agricultural activities. The effects of terracing were severely felt by persons who had small land, as most of it was lost in the course of terracing. Similarly in Kiambu, Wangari (2010:164) points out that, the whole exercise was back breaking especially for women who were majority in the exercise in the absence of men.

The ALDEV programme was meant to generally encourage agricultural development in the Embu reserve. According to the 1956 circular the chiefs and headmen were to realize that one of their most important duties was to supervise and encourage agricultural development in close collaboration with the officers of the agricultural department. They had to ensure that every village had a cattle boma which was in good repair and drainage. It was also their duty to make sure that grass and other litter was brought regularly to the boma to make manure. This manure was to be taken before every rain season to the shambas (KNA/DC/EMBU/2/16/1956:13).The manure which was later highly commoditized, limited the production capacity of the land poor who could not afford it. The produce from their farms was of low quality than that of the landed and so it fetched low prices. Since articulation is a double-edged concept where certain sectors of the pre-
capitalist economy were integrated into the capitalist economy, the inability of the land poor to fit well in the capitalist mode of production forced them to retain some of their pre-capitalist modes of production. During the pre-capitalist period use of manure was discouraged. The people believed that manure affected the growth of crops as it decomposed (Wanamu, OI., 2013). As a result there was a broad social as well as economic difference between the landed who embraced the use of manure and the land poor. In addition the ALDEV programme in Embu North encouraged the planting of Napier grass.

The chiefs had to ensure that every village had at least one Napier grass plot near the cattle boma. The regulation required the plots to be regularly weeded and the grass cut at three feet high to feed the cattle. However, communal Napier grass was not allowed to be used for mulching coffee on private land. The coffee growers had to plant their own mulch (KNA/DC/EMBU/1956). Line planting was also encouraged while cultivation was not allowed on steep slopes unless the slopes were benched or alternative lateral strips of grass and cultivation each 15 feet wide were made. Besides, cultivation was not allowed near any river or spring.

The ALDEV conservation programme in other reserves around the country involved terracing, digging drainage channels, de-stocking, and dam construction among other practices (KNA/Ag/4/448, 1940-47). However, de-stocking program was resisted in Machakos where the locals were supposed to dispose of their livestock. To many Africans owning livestock not only carried with it some important social roles but it was also a sign of prestige among many African communities. The ALDEV programme was enhanced by the Native Land Trust Improvement of Framing Rules which gave the chiefs powers to forbid individuals from cutting down or destroying trees, bush or other vegetation. These rules also forbade Africans from cultivating the
land or destroying vegetation within ten yards of riverbanks, set fire to live grass, bush, undergrowth forest clear weeds or crop produce (KNA/Ag/4/381, 1948).

The ALDEV programme had a devastating effect on labour organization among the people of Embu North. Compulsory terracing which was done three mornings a week consumed a lot of time that was initially used in agricultural production. This significantly affected the system of crop production. In addition, since migrant labour was largely composed of young and energetic males, the ALDEV programme forced women to undertake men’s work. Women who provided almost all the agricultural labour after the male folk went to seek wage labour were compelled to work on communal terracing. Compulsory terracing was carried out three mornings every week. In addition, they had to neglect their own plots in order to provide the unpaid labour on the holdings of their chiefs and other wealthy colonial supporters. This was disliked by the people and had far reaching effect on the Embu community.

Thus, although some scholars like Huntington, (1975) have argued that the pre-colonial African woman was oppressed; capitalist development in African societies further oppressed the woman due to the migration of male gender. Colonialism fundamentally changed the sexual division of labour and the position of women in the society (Ndeda, 2002:233). To ensure that the terracing program was a success, the colonial government enticed the people of Embu North towards terracing. Those who co-operated were granted permission to grow cash crops such as pyrethrum and pineapples (Throup, 1988; Kigoro, OIL, 2013). Indeed, the land rehabilitation programme under the ALDEV did not only alienate the people of Embu North from their small land holding but also alienated the use of the long established communal labour. The implementation of this programme led to the replacement of
pre-capitalist communal labour with wage labour. Those with little land were opposed to communal terracing since it largely benefited the large land holders. Thus, capitalism and its tendency to create class division had finally shaped up the Embu society. Thus, the ALDEV firmly placed the people of Embu North into the capitalist system but with some pre-capitalist mode being preserved as long as they served the dominant capitalist mode.

In spite of the above shortcomings, the ALDEV Programme solved the problem of soil erosion and helped increase productivity among the people of Embu North Sub-County. Though, the land betterment programme achievement was double edged. Some individuals like the chiefs and the headmen benefited from the programme while the others like the land poor suffered loss of land due to the increased commodity production. Thus, by 1950s, Embu North had undergone significant transformations where new social differentiations were shaping up. There was marked difference in economic production in the sub-county that favored the colonial sympathizers and not the whole society.

The capitalist system that steadily developed in the society further intensified these socio-economic differences. Social stratification based on land ownership rather than access to land was rapidly forming in the area. But, although capitalism was successfully established within the Embu society, various pre-capitalist social-economic organizations continued to exist or transformed within the dominant mode. For instance, the newly created class of African capitalist farmers was forced by the pre-capitalist mode of production to accepting a mixed mode of production where the old method prevailed to a certain extent. This change however integrated the African peasant into the capitalist mode of production and increasingly defined his place within the metropolitan capitalist economy (Leys, 1975).
5.3 Background to Land Reforms in Kenya

Agitation for land reforms in Kenya started in Central Province especially in Kiambu. A number of factors necessitated this agitation. First massive land alienation had taken place in Kiambu. By as early as 1930s, land scarcity among the Kikuyu of Kiambu was an issue of great concern. Indeed after the demarcation of African reserves in 1926, there was no more land for expansion (Sorrenson, 1968). Since then, Africans had to do with the available land in the designated reserves. This situation continued and by 1940s individuals were requesting for land reforms that would usher in individual ownership of land. Secondly, by the early 1930s the customary law that guaranteed free access to land was untenable. Individualism rather than collective ownership of land was taking root in most of central Kenya. In some instances, mbari elders and aramati (custodians) were assuming power in land negotiations by virtue of their position in the sub-clan, thus denying sons of junior wives and the descendants of ahoi (tenants-at-will) and ndungata (servant) security offered in land tenure (Tignor, 1976:78). In addition, the young educated mbari members favored individual land ownership which was advantageous to them as it enabled commercial production.

Some of the Kikuyu ahoi had crossed over to Embu and by 1951; the district had a problem with them. These people came to the district over a long period from 1930 up to the beginning of emergency (KNA/DC/EMBU/2/16/1956. The local leaders were against the influx of the ahoi to Embu arguing that the district had a large number of landless people. It was thus, noted, “the attitude of the district leaders to the advent of the ahoi is to condemn it in general while giving assistance to newcomers in particular cases” (KNA/DC/EMBU/1/1951). While the colonial government was for the settlement of the ahoi in Embu, most of the locals were
against the programme. The chiefs were forced to present applications of the Kikuyu and Kamba ahoi to the DC. Due to pressure, the chiefs would present large batches of applications for the acceptance of new-comers, but shortly afterwards; the same chiefs would be presenting the problem of the ahoi to the local ADC.

Consequently, due to increase in population, individualized land ownership had started in Central Kenya after the Second World War. Recruits from the region had joined the war on the side of their colonizer and fought in the Middle East and Burma (Parsons, 1999). The war brought massive changes in Kenya that exposed the inequalities of British colonial rule. After they came back they were not treated the same as their European counterparts. The landless who during the war had served the Kings African Rifles earned remuneration packages that enabled them to purchase individual land holdings (Throp, 1988).

With a growing population and no more frontiers to expand, people who occupied land under various traditional rights other than ownership found their position more and more precarious especially if it was based simply on friendship as in the case of ahoi (Leo, 1984:55). The majority of the land poor were forced to seek wage labour in the towns. Others who felt that their kinsmen had deprived them of land sought to file their cases to the tribunal court which was very expensive and time consuming (Throup, 1988). The process of litigation was long and costly and a majority failed to access the services of the otherwise corrupt system. Sorrenson (1967:176) has pointed out that it was possible to re-open a case that had been settled many years ago. Given this, litigation inhibited development, as winners would not engage in long-term development of land for fear of the same case being re-opened.

By 1945, a class of landed people was increasingly becoming visible as only individuals who had access to state power within the Local Native Councils, Tribunal
members, Chiefs and those with Western education were able to manipulate the prevailing situation to their benefit (Karingi, OI., 2013). Likewise in Kiambu, there were a significant number of better-off individuals who had managed to expand their acreage by 1950s (Wangari, 2010:159). Thus, the move towards land reforms was an idea propelled by the emerging large land owners who had realized the gains that accompanied capital accumulation. This explains why the call for land reforms came from the landed class not only in Kiambu but also in Embu North Sub-County. This landed class wanted to preserve their holding and lock out the dependent class and the land poor who were seen as an obstacle to maximum economic gains. Chiefs and most of the tribunal members who were among the first individuals to embrace capitalist system were in favor of land reforms.

As mentioned earlier the reforms led to land litigation between the land accumulators and the land poor with both the claimants having legitimate cases. But while the emerging class of land accumulators justified their acquisition in terms of English property law, the land poor sought to defend their rights according to pre-colonial customs (Throup, 1988:9). These land litigations were all over the central province where the chiefs who were part of the tribunal were corrupting the system for their own interests (Njeru, 1978). In Murang’a, for example chiefs like Kimani wa Thuo and Karanja wa Kibarabara were dismissed from the service after it was discovered that they were holding unauthorized land hearings (Mwangi, 2009). Hence, capitalism and its tendency to create class division had finally shaped up in most African communities in central Kenya. Indeed, only a few of the Africans were able to have the means of production. The large landowners were put in a special class and found it easy to exploit their fellow kinsmen who had no land or little of it. The
chiefs and the few western educated graduates emerged as a powerful class with capital and this easily transformed them into an important influential class.

The political tension caused by the Mau Mau War presented the final kick needed by the authorities to change the land tenure system in Kenya. This was led by the African war veterans who felt isolated from post war rewards. The White ex-servicemen were rewarded under the Soldier Settlement Scheme, an act that left the veterans dismayed (Ogot, 1995). Their participation in the war gave them global awareness that implanted nationalistic seeds like those of India as well as genuine belief that they had fought for principals of self-determination against the forces of fascism (Mwangi wa Githumo, 1980). The experience also gave them an upper hand in the local issues since they came to command some degree of status and respect. They expected a homecoming different from the status quo but on the contrary, they found their fortune and those of their fellow Africans largely remained unchanged and if anything continued to worsen (Elkins, 2005). This caught their attention especially on the issues of land that was fast changing hands (Maloba, 1993).

In the sub-county as well as many other areas in the colony, the economic and social hardship that had been introduced by the capitalist economy was increasingly becoming intolerable. These hardships became a catalyst to politicization of various aspects of colonial regime by the war veterans, notably the issue of land. Trade unions, political parties, underground movements became the major channels through which they aired their grievances (Ogot, 1995). In the major towns, workers started industrial strikes. In 1947, they easily went on strikes paralyzing colonial economy especially in Mombasa and Nairobi (Zeleza, 1989). This was one of the very first tests of African unity and capability in demanding their rights forcefully. These protests later spread in the rural areas where there was massive resistance on the part of the
peasants who were opposed to the soil conservation measures. In Murang’a, the women led in these revolts (Mackenzie, 1986).

The politicization of land issues by the African ex-servicemen and the domination of pre-capitalist system by the capitalist system, which led to class-consciousness among the people, led to the Mau Mau rebellion. The pre-colonial social solidarity that was reflected through land distribution and access within the moral economy had been replaced by the individualistic capitalist system. Oath taking, therefore was perceived as one way of bringing back the eroded solidarity by the leaders of the movement. Kubukubu and others led the movement in Embu (Karingi, OI., 2013). The origin of the Mau Mau movement is traced by a number of scholars to have started in the Rift Valley (Throup, 1988:129; Furred, 1989:82; Githumo, 1980). Mau Mau oath taking reached a climax in 1950s to a point that the government declared it an illegal society and some oath takers arrested (Leakey, 1954). Daniel Mutua (OI., 2013) note that, although many people took the oath the chiefs, the elites and some Christian converts such as Francis Mwaririe condemned the oath since it was against their faith.

However, the social differentiation and class conflict among the people prevented the formation of a united movement against the government. The majority of the land poor and the landless supported change through violent means since they had nothing to lose while the landed and the elites favored a constitutional means to political change. Sorrenson (1967:237) points out that it was this class conflict, which made it easier for the colonial government to suppress the Mau Mau War and implement the land tenure changes in the 1950s. However, the state of emergency declared by the governor, Sir Evelyn Baring on the evening of 20 October 1952 crippled the movement. This was after the killing of the most senior chief Waruhiu
who was seen as a moderate striving for interracial harmony within the confines of colonialism (Elkins, 2005). This declaration was followed by a ruthless operation ‘John Scott’ which was responsible for the arrest of Kenyatta, Paul Ngei, Fred Kubai, Bildad Kagia, Achieng’ Oneko among other 180 persons who were rounded up during the operation (Elkins, 2005). Although, Kenyatta was arrested as one of the Mau Mau leaders, he was a moderate who favored other methods other than militant aspect of the struggle (Trench, 1993; Murry-Brown, 1972:249).

After the government realized that the arrests of main political readers could not defeat the Mau Mau movement, it started ambitious arrests of thousands of people who had taken the oath. By the end of 1954, 77,000 individuals from Central Kenya were in detention (Majdalany, 1962:112). The detention camps were divided into special and open camps. Special camps were for those who were perceived as radicals while the open camps contained those who had a lesser role in the movement. Some of the special camps were; Manyani, MacKinnon Road, Simba Hill, Lamu and Hola (Karingi, OI., 2013). In the detention camps, screening was done and individuals who were able prove their innocence were released. In Embu-North sub-county many people were detained in the special camps. Some of these individuals were; Ngai wa Kamwana, Njeru Gachivi, Kiarago wa Kathambo, Karingi Kamau, Nathan Kabiru, Peter wa Mwaririe, Njiru wa Ndugu among others (Mbogo, Karingi, Wanjuki, OIL., 2013).

The women were also actively involved in the struggle for Land and Freedom which the movement was fighting for (Kershaw, 1997; Likimani, 1985). These fought in the forest along with their male counterparts. In the study area, Wamiti (sister to Kubukubu), Gichimu wa Kanjama (Jones), Lillian Wanjuki, Kagimbi wa Kagane, Mutindi, Teresia Kinja among others fought in the forest (Wanjuki, OI., 2013).
Majority of the women in the reserve supported the movement being used as suppliers of food, carriers of arms and informants (Kershaw, 1997: 253). Some members of the Embu society joined the loyalist group and were later recruited as the home guards.

Consequently, the villagization policy that was introduced later, not only helped to suppress Mau Mau movement in Embu North but also give way to land reforms. It entailed the removal of all Embu settlement from their farms into one designated area. These villages were established in convenient places for easy access by the government. The land on which the villages were established in came from percentage deduction of all landowners who were to form a certain village (Daniel Mutua, OI., 2013). Some of these villages in the study area were; Kibogi, Kianjuki, Kianjokoma, Manyatta and Kirigi among others. The villages were under a headman who had assistants commonly known as warurungana (Wanamu, OI., 2013). Thus, in 1953 and 1954, the chief preoccupation of the colonial government was the eradication of the Mau Mau menace. This is the time that the forest ditch (munyutu) was constructed through forced labour (Kamatu, Kigoro, OI., 2013). Throughout the year 1955, the enormous task continued of housing properly every member of the population in the new villages (Karingi, OI., 2013). By October 1955, 1,077,500 Agikuyu and Embu had been moved into 854 villages (Sorrenson, 1967:110). The village policy had a number of advantages according to the local colonial administration.

‘Firstly, the policy enabled the government to impose close control over the population in a way which could never before have been contemplated. Secondly, it provided an atmosphere of security in which the growth of anti-terrorist has prospered. Thirdly, and as a result of this anti-terrorist spirit, Mau Mau gangs had not only lost the support of the population but had been made to fear the consequences of
raiding villages for arms and supplies. Fourthly, a golden opportunity had been presented, and seized, of inculcating in the inhabitants sociological, agricultural and other aspects of adult education, 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/EMBU/1/14/1955:3).

Thus, the villagization policy was a positive development on the side of the government but negative on the Embu-North society. While the policy was effective in barricading the supporters in the reserves from the military wing in the forest, it impacted negatively on the system of land ownership and crop production. The people were not allowed to freely continue engaging in crop production. They were given specific time to go to the farms while they were guarded by the warurungana (Elenia, OIL., 2013). The villages were in serious shortage of the male labour since it was lost in the camps, government services such as home guards, in the forest as Mau Mau fighters impacting negatively on the system of land ownership and crop production. 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 villages were used by the colonial government to spread propaganda that was aimed at making the people accept land reform. To further reinforce land consolidation propaganda, mobile cinemas especially those agriculturally oriented were introduced. Most of them showed well-arranged farms with grade cows and beautiful farm houses. They were told that land consolidation would make their land look exactly like those in the cinemas (Kamatu, OI., 2013). The land reforms that were carried by the colonial government in Embu North involved various processes starting with the litigation exercise, then consolidation, registration and finally issuance of title deed. The process of land reform was designed and guided by a plan commonly
known as the Swynnerton Plan. This was conceived by Swynnerton, the assistant director of agriculture who had previously been instrumental in encouraging peasant agriculture in Tanganyika (Mackenzie, 1998:168).

5.4 The Swynnerton Plan and its influence on Land Ownership

After the then Governor Sir Evelyn Baring declared a State of Emergency in the colony in 1952, the government acquired wide powers that enabled it to carry out brutal war against the Mau Mau supporters alongside land reforms which were meant to minimize African support for the Mau Mau. To change the tenure arrangement, the government convened a number of meetings and conferences to discuss the issue. The Arusha Conference of 8-22 February 1956 was the most significant. The conference argued against the applicability of the traditional African land tenure and that “in communally owned land, permanent crops and better farming practices were inconceivable” (KNA LAND/32/1/1226).

The conference recognized individual tenure as the most applicable form of tenure. Further, it pointed out that this form of tenure “provides adequate incentive to the individual in putting effort and capital to increase productivity and to make measures on soil conservation” (KNA LAND/32/1/1226). To affirm individual land ownership, the conference also advocated for individual land tenure and issuance of title deeds. The title was seen as providing security to the individual landowner against members of the community, central and local government. It was also seen as an essential document that would protect the land owner against litigation that was costly. Government services like farm equipment, loan advancement and farm planning were some of the benefits the title holder would get (KNA LAND 32/1/IV/1226). In addition, the conference advised the colonial government that,
individual land tenure should be established where mounting pressure on population and competition for land had already set in (KNA LAND 32/1/IV/1226b).

Most parts of Western Province, Central and Nyanza met these conditions. However in most of central Kenya the majority of the political leaders were already in detention following the declaration of emergency, leaving a political vacuum in the area. In Nyanza, the politicians successfully mobilized the people against the implementation of the land reform since they were in touch (Ogot, 1995:49). Due to the political vacuum and the need to weaken the Mau Mau War, Central Kenya became the suitable place to start implementing the reform. However, this study has established that the main reason for the reforms to be started here was the land problem which was the major grievance in the Mau Mau movement.

The colonial government, having decided on the necessity to change the African land tenure directed the department of agriculture to make a comprehensive plan for the development of African reserves in consideration of tenure changes. The plan was conceived by the assistant director of agriculture, Roger Swynnerton, who had previously been instrumental in encouraging peasant agriculture in Tanganyika. The Swynnerton Plan, or “a Plan to intensify the development of African agriculture policy in Kenya”, published in 1954 gave comprehensive change of African agriculture from what the government termed a “circle of subsistence or near subsistence agriculture” (Lipscomb & Cone 1972:26).

The Plan was devised and implemented in great haste, to avoid possible resurgence of militant politics from the incoming ex-Mau Mau detainees (Harbeson, 1973:34). Hence, a plan on how agricultural sector should progressively develop was drawn. Unlike the 1946 Worthington Plan, which had recommended a reversal to traditional land tenure, the Swynnerton Plan recommended individual tenure of land
in agricultural areas. It also recommended the growth of cash crops by the landowners, which were hitherto preserved for white farmers. The Plan assumed twenty years would be needed to implement it. Coffee was to expand by 5000 new acres per year reaching 71000 acres in 1968; tea was to reach 70000 acres by 1968 and pyrethrum 48300 acres (Swynnerton, 1954:23). Indeed, the Plan was intended to revolutionize agriculture completely changing the pre-capitalist mode of production in Kenya into a model of capitalist production.

The process of land adjudication, consolidation, registration and issuance of title deed began in earnest in Central Kenya as per the Plan. Access to land was now governed by a codified law that favored men who were “highly placed” in society at the expense of the “poor or bad farmers” as they were referred to by Swynnerton (Elkins, 2005:127). The Plan argued that, by creating the class of landed and landless, it was opening up the possibility that both groups might be reintegrated not within their traditional defined ethnic communities but with their counterparts in the society at large (Swynnerton, 1954:10). Thus, the Swynnerton Policy on land became the benchmark for all future land policies. Indeed, the Plan clearly advocated for class differentiation where a landed class composed of a few individuals would absorb the landless but in the confines of the capitalistic system. Traditional institutions, for example, the family and the clan were sidelined completely in settling land disputes with courts taking the final arbitration in land matters (Kigoro, Ol., 2013).

In Embu North Sub-County, the land reforms started in 1956 after the suppression of the Mau Mau in the area (Karingi, Kamatu, Ol., 2013). This is confirmed by the then DC, R.H. Symes while handing over to H.C.F. Wilks in 1956. He notes, “Another problem you will inherit from the emergency is that of the returning detainees…otherwise, the main feature of the district is agrarian reform,
with irrigation schemes, land consolidation, farm planning, cash crops and so on... Mau Mau is apparently dead, until a link is established with the existing political organization in Nairobi” (KNA/DC/EMBU/2/16/1956:1-2). The consolidation was headed by the Land Plan Committee. Njiri wa Mwara and Nathan Kabiru were members of that committee in Embu. This committee also planned for public places like schools, towns, water points, coffee factories and forests. Consequently, land consolidation began in the district and by 1959 large areas had been demarcated as the table below shows.

Table 5.1 Land Consolidation in Embu Division

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Area Surveyed</th>
<th>Area Demarcated</th>
<th>Towns Demarcated</th>
<th>Revenue Collected-Pounds</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1959</td>
<td>94,697</td>
<td>65,581</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6,985</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1958</td>
<td>70,366</td>
<td>61,762</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>9,812</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1957</td>
<td>70,857</td>
<td>30,741</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1,026</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prior to 1957</td>
<td>36,231</td>
<td>4,787</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source (KNA/DC/EMBU/1/1/18/1959:9)

The table shows a continuous increase in both surveyed land and actual demarcated since 1957. This can be attributed by the continued awareness of the benefits of individual ownership over communal one. Also it can be attributed to the number of detainees returning in the district and who were aware of the benefits of the whole process.

However, land consolidation in Embu North was found to be highly complicated as a result of the apparently indiscriminative planting of coffee not only by those who had cultivation rights in the coffee zone but by most others who had obtained rights there for the specific purpose of planting coffee. This resulted in a mass of tiny but closely adjacent holdings which were against the idea of demarcating single holdings of about an average of five acres in size. This necessitated the demarcation of dual holdings.
Consequently, coffee planting was dis-allowed until the demarcation of a certain area was completed (Daniel Mutua, OI., 2013). Many informants claimed that their coffee stems were inherited by their brothers because of the demarcation (Moses, Jephat, OI., 2013). However, the process of land consolidation was completed in Embu North by 1961 (KNA/DC/ EMBU/1/20/1961:2).

Although land reform in Embu County confirmed the social differentiation that had been shaping up throughout the colonial period, the reform process was characterized by contradiction and continuity of the socio-economic differentiations in the society. For example, some of the former landless individuals who became home guards found themselves owning land while some former landed individuals who were Mau Mau adhere rants had their holdings reduced significantly and worse, some were rendered landless (Karingi OIL, 2013). Hence, there was class formation during this period with some landless becoming landed while some formerly landed class lost their former holdings. Indeed, there was a conspicuous class formation of the landed gently; land poor and the landless. These classes were founded on the basis of economic necessity as argued by the Swynnerton plan. The argument as already noted was, for an agricultural revolution to be achieved, it was necessary to have such differentiation. Thus, the Swynnerton Plan set precedent for post-colonial land tenure policy that legitimized differential access to land and paved way for economic disparities among the Kenya peasantry (Davison, 1988:164).

After adjudication, consolidation and registration were done, an individual was supposed to pay ten shillings per acre for the issuance of title deed (Nyaga Munene OIL, 2013). The certificate of title was issued under the Land Tenure Rules. Once a title was issued that particular land was not subject to litigation. However, the new landowner could not sell or sub-divide his holding without permission. It is
important to note that, during the registration women were not approved as rightful owners of the land. Land registration was a male domain as per the customary law. Even land belonging to a detained or dead man could not be put under the jurisdiction of their wives despite being present (Joyce Kanjovi OIL, 2013). Such land was registered to a brother or to first born son in trust. In rare occasions, the colonial authority visited the detention camps allowing the detainees to ascertain their wishes on who should represent them.

5.5 Crop Production and Labour Relations after the Land Reform

The institutionalization of individual land tenure consolidated capitalistic expansion in the rural areas of Embu North Sub-County. The pre-colonial system of land ownership was irrevocably eroded. The survival of pre-colonial pre-capitalist system in the highly individualized pre-reform period had in a way kept a small number of landless in the unproductive land. This land was no longer available after the institutionalization of the capitalist system of land tenure. Since articulation is a process by which the CMOP establishes dominance over the non-capitalist mode, the pre-capitalist economy that catered for all in the community was undermined and subordinated by the capitalist system.

Henceforth, the British capitalist property law replaced the traditional system of land tenure (Wanjala, 2000). Thus, the capitalist mode of production had from 1920s progressively managed to bring out individual land holding among the people of Embu North and the reform process simply affirmed this individualism. This was followed by a farm layout that served to advance the course of peasantisation among the people of Embu North disregarding the social arrangement of the society. By 1959, a total of 904 lay-outs and 442 farm plans were completed (KNA/DC/EMBU/1/18/1959:15). After the enclosure, commodity production and the
adoption of modern and intensive methods of cultivation deepened rural class differentiation, and it was the rich peasants and not the poor ones who were more likely to purchases the necessary inputs for increased agricultural production. The new crops grown by the people during the period included maize, coffee, tea, pyrethrum, pineapples, vegetables and potatoes. By 1955, the total acreage of coffee was 1279, divided amongst some 5,500 growers and nine factories had been established (KNA/DC/EMBU/1/14/1955:15). At the same period, the short rains potato crop produced 9,000 bags, all of which had been sold through the new Mount Kenya Produce Marketing Society.

It is important to note that during this period, coffee had the greatest impact on the system of land ownership in Embu North Sub-County. In the 1959 report, it was noted that, “coffee continues to exercise a rather disconcerting degree of influence on the African farmer who tends to rely on this sole crop for his improved standard of living to the exclusion of any other consideration” (KNA/DC/EMBU/1/18/1959:17). Many informants concurred and said that at this period they rarely planted bulrush millet and maize just because they could easily buy these grains from the coffee proceeds (Nathan, OIL., 2013). For a long period the district, coffee sales had regularly headed the colony’s sales. The total value of the 1958/59 crop was 422,426 pounds, with prices to growers varying between 37 cents and 52 cents per pound cherry (KNA/DC/EMBU/1959).

Coffee continued to impact negatively on the system of land ownership and crop production with additional factories being built in the district. By the end of 1959, there were 23 factories and a further 958 acres was planted, introducing a further 1,880 growers to this crop (KNA/DC/EMBU/1959). This increased the revenue of the District Council which was receiving 20,471 pounds from its 5% cess
while the net return to coffee growers after the deductions of all cesses and commissions amounted to 292,509 pounds compared with 124,000 for the 1957/58 crop. However due to low standards of cultivation the prices of the crop fell in 1961 compared with the 1959 prices (KNA/DC/EMBU/1/20/1961:3).

In this regard therefore, land reforms in Embu North had a great impact in the system of crop production. Having drastically changed the pre-colonial system of land ownership by introducing individual land tenure system, the system of crop production was obviously affected. Reforms enabled the people of Embu North to grow cash crops like coffee and tea after the ban on the same was lifted. The production of these crops was done on the lands initially preserved for food crops and since consolidation, involved bringing fragments of land held by an individual into one holding, some individuals lost valuable pieces of land conducive for certain food crops as we saw earlier. Most people in this Sub-County had rushed to get licenses for growing coffee after enclosure with an aim of improving their social standards. They placed a lot of economic hopes on the crop with a firm belief that planting coffee would open new economic opportunities (Kershaw, 1997:167). They henceforth neglected the food crops and doubled their efforts on coffee production (Niceta, OIL, 2013). However, their expectations of economic prosperity that would come along with capitalist farming especially coffee did not materialize. In 1962, the slump in coffee prices set in when most of the small producers were marketing their crop for the first time (Kershaw, 1997:293).

Tea was the other crop that was embraced reluctantly by the people of Embu North. This, therefore, did not have a greater impact on the system of land ownership and crop production. However, the crop also replaced some of the crops grown in the pre-colonial period. By 1959 there were 360 acres under tea which did not have
controlled marketing like coffee (KNA/DC/EMBU/1959:17). This made the Africans in the district reluctant to grow the crop. These producers wished to have the same say in the marketing of tea as they had achieved through co-operative in marketing of coffee. This situation remained the same in 1961 as it was observed that, “…tea planting remained suspect despite every encouragement and there now exists a danger that insufficient will be planted to warrant the Special Cash Crops Authority erecting a factory in 1963” (KNA/DC/EMBU/1/20/1961:3).

Table 5.2: Value of Exports in Bags-1955

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PRODUCE</th>
<th>SALES (BAGS)</th>
<th>VALUE SHS.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Beans-Wonder</td>
<td>425</td>
<td>19,337.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beans-Rosecoco</td>
<td>413</td>
<td>18,791.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coffee (Buni)</td>
<td>257,240</td>
<td>318,415.87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coffee (Clean)</td>
<td>Lbs. 192,492</td>
<td>792,415.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Millet-Bulrush</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>2,166.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Millet-Finger</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>70.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Potatoes</td>
<td>1,131</td>
<td>35,061</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pyrethrum</td>
<td>Ibs 205</td>
<td>464</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wattle Bark</td>
<td>Tons 4,196</td>
<td>1,193,048.54</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: KNA/DC/EMBU/1955

The table shows an increase in the production and sale of the new crops. This can be attributed to their favorable prices compared to the traditional millet. Generally the increase shows that land initially planted traditional crops was being planted the new crops hence affecting the system of crop production.

It has been noted in the previous chapters that the people of Embu North maintained several parcels of land in different ecological zones to guarantee a harvest of diverse food crops. This was done as we saw earlier for cushioning the family against food shortage or actual famine. The consolidation and registration automatically denied food crop producers access to different soils consequently reducing the variety of food crops an individual could grow. This might explain the reasons for the food shortage in the region in 1960-61. According to the annual report, “1961 will probably be
remembered as a year in which serious drought was followed by excessive rains during October and November...with the Mbeere already receiving large amounts of famine relief as a hangover from 1960 the drought spread up the mountain until in December, 1600 people were being fed (KNA/DC/EMBU/1961).

Consolidation and registration legalized a European ideology of exclusive rights in Kenya and gave prevalence to household heads who were mostly men. Hence, women who had land cultivation rights safeguarded in Embu land tenure system automatically lost all rights on the consolidated land. Consequently, the food crops that were initially being produced by women like millet and the sweet potatoes became irrelevant as men who had exclusive land rights embarked on the lucrative cash crop production. In addition, since many individuals and Mbari land holding units were moved from distant places during the process, it was difficult for an individual to occupy perfect land for certain food crops (Wanjuki OIL., 2013).

Although, consolidation stage aimed at allocating an individual with one piece of land approximately the same acreage as he had under customary law, the consolidation team deducted points from every consolidated holding for public purposes like schools, dispensaries, water points, coffee factories and roads. Some informants claimed that they lost some of their productive lands on which they were growing sweet potatoes and arrowroots. Indeed a majority of the respondents felt that consolidation process led to the loss of acreage of land meant for specific food crops. Wanamu (OIL, 2013), for example, claimed that their family lost a large massy area where they were producing arrowroots and sugarcane after it became a public water point.

Crop production was also compromised by the African consolidation officials who corruptly determined who would own land where and sometimes determined
who should not own land. The amount of land available dictated what a family would grow. Karingi (OIL, 2013), claimed that some individuals who were already working as clerks with the colonial government would collude with the land officials to get larger and productive pieces of land that they never cultivated while hard working individuals would be allocated unproductive land. The dis-satisfied individual’s then hastily left their lands and went to look for wage labour in the towns. The 1961 report indicated that, “…many farms marked out in the Weru areas have been abandoned as useless by their owners with the danger that the boundaries may be obliterated (KNA/DC/EMBU/1/20/1961:2).

Land planning which was advocated by the department of agriculture after land consolidation also affected food crop production. Coffee and tea which were the major cash crops in Embu North were allocated the largest and most fertile areas. In addition, while the Swynnerton Plan had an outlined plan for growing cash crops, it had none for food crops. For example, there were specific procedures of advancing agricultural credit to cash crop growers and an elaborated marketing for the same. This greatly affected the production of food crops especially maize, which had already become the stable food in Embu North. Indeed, most women informants claimed that they were unable to grow all the types of food crop they would have wished to produce because land was not sufficient due to mandatory land planning. Most male informants, for example Ndwiga (OIL, 2013), claimed that they did away with the male crops like yams and sugarcane in favor of the more lucrative cash crops.

The Embu customary law allowed women married by political detainees to access land initially occupied by their husbands. Since most of the Mau Mau adherents in the forest and in detention lost all or most of their land, their wives and children lacked land for cultivation after the consolidation. A majority of them came
out of the detention or forest only to find their land had been confiscated and redistributed to the loyalists (Ogot & Ochieng’, 1995). This significantly affected food crop production in Embu North. Land conflicts which arose after consolidation, greatly affected food crop production in Embu North. The conflicts were engineered by land registration as women and men on one hand and brothers disagreed on land ownership. Though, women had less chances of owning land because of the traditions, there were also men, who because of their social class, got small parcels of land or none at all leading to family conflicts hence affecting crop production. Even today, some individuals in the study area have bitter memories of how they lost their land to influential people in Embu North (Ireri, Ol., 2013).

However, as the theory asserts that when the CMOP is introduced in a non-capitalist mode of production, it does not automatically replace the existing mode of production, the shift from subsistence to commercial farming was not radical and neither did it result to adoption of pure capitalist modes of production among the people of Embu North. There was continued integration between the capitalist mode of production and the pre-capitalist mode of production. Consequently, the shift towards cash crop production among the majority peasants led to further subordination of pre-capitalist relations of production. For example, from the consolidation period, various aspects of pre-capitalist mode of production like the communal system were abolished within the social class formation.

5.6 Summary

The discussion in this chapter has majored on land reforms in Embu North Sub-County. It notes that the process had adverse effect on the system of land ownership and crop production. Land enclosure marked the end of clan expansion in unoccupied clan lands which was taking place throughout the colonial period. It also marked the
replacement of customary law by the British law. Henceforth, any land dispute had to be solved using the European property law. The chapter also examines the effects of the ALDEV programme. It has been pointed out that the ALDEV programme did not aim at uplifting the economic and social conditions of the Embu through crop production. It was aimed at increasing the colony’s production in order to help the colonial government reach the demand for agricultural goods that increased after the war. The Embu as well as other Africans only happened to enjoy part of this widened market. The programme impacted on crop production as agriculture shifted towards market based crops. The increased production led to social differentiations within the Embu society.

The impact of the Mau Mau war and the villagization policy on crop production was also assessed. During this period male labour that was vital in crop production was diverted to the war. Men were fighting in the forests and also offering services as home guards while a large group had been detained. The village policy curtailed the movement of the people into their farms hence reducing the production. The situation got worse when women were directly involved in the war as food and weapon transporters. The construction of the villages also took a large chunk of the labour that was meant for crop production.

After the reforms, farm planning and farm layouts were conducted allowing the individual land owners to increase their production of the new crops. The people of Embu North like their counterparts in the colony embraced coffee growing after the ban was lifted. In particular, coffee had the greatest impact on the system of crop production. This was as a result of its value internationally. Coffee indeed entrenched capitalism within the people of Embu North. Large areas that were reserved for various types of food crops were planted with coffee and other exotic crops like the
new maize variety but some individuals reserved some land for the traditional food crops. This aspect confirms the assertion of the theory that, when the CMOP is introduced in a non-capitalist mode of production, it does not automatically replace the existing mode of production. Consequently, the post reform relations among the people of Embu North took a new dimension. The land poor and the landless that during the pre-capitalist period relied on the landed for the right of cultivation, found the capitalist inclined landed class unwilling to give them land but too willing to exploit their labour for low wage.
CHAPTER SIX

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 Summary of Major Findings

The analysis in the foregoing chapters was an attempt to examine the interplay between the system of land ownership and crop production in Embu North Sub-County since the pre-colonial period to independence. Although, communities all over the world have been engaged in the process of change, we have shown that the changes effected in the system of land ownership and crop production impacted on the overall production in crops. The changes in the system were triggered by several factors such as climatic changes, new technology and external influence in the form of European capitalism. Most changes in land and crop production took place during the colonial period. The articulation of modes of production was the major tool of examination into the interaction between land ownership and crop production. The analysis has established that the system of land ownership and crop production has been significantly changed since the pre-colonial period.

The economic and social organization of the people of Embu North Sub-County significantly relied on the system of land ownership and crop production. As agriculturalists, land was the major factor of production which enabled the society to grow various types of crops. There was both individual and communal ownership of land where everybody had easy access. Acquisition and distribution of land was controlled by the clan. The land tenure system was based on the people’s conviction that, every member of the society had to get access to the most basic resource in the society’s economy. Access to more land led to increase in crop production and therefore surplus for trade. The society had social mechanisms that were used to prevent food shortage. These included storage of surplus produce and the planting of
drought resistant crops like yams and arrowroots. For the system to be efficient, they relied heavily on the pre-capitalist labour organization that was gendered. There were different roles for men, women and children that prevented any form of exploitation. Labour in this society was organized to satisfy the various social needs. It was socially harnessed and directed at production of commodities with the use value by exploiting the means of production in the form of nature and the raw materials deriving there from. Indeed, labour organization allowed surplus production of crops and therefore the society participated in local and regional trade. The pre-colonial period was therefore the ideal period when the system of land ownership and crop production interacted in a complementary manner.

The advent of colonialism established foreign economic structures aimed towards the exploitation of the African resources for the benefit of the colonialists. It led to various changes in the social and economic organization of the people of Embu North. The 1902 and 1915 land ordinances were the first instruments used by the colonial masters to effect radical changes in the pre-colonial system of land ownership. Hut and Poll taxes that followed not only entrenched the capitalist mode of production within the Embu society but also led to increased production in order to pay these taxes. These taxes, plus administrative coercion gave the new capitalist mode of production advantage over the pre-capitalist modes. Thus, production for the market and not for the general consumption as was the case before, led to over utilization of land. Trade, which was conducted in case of surplus or need, came under the control of European capitalism. Money was henceforth needed to pay for the taxes and to buy the other exotic commodities since currency trade was increasingly replacing barter trade. The use of money therefore strengthened the foundation of capitalism at the expense of the pre-capitalist modes.
The changes introduced by the colonialists led to structural re-organization of the people of Embu North. The changes considerably transformed the system of land ownership in Embu North. However, customary land rights continued although subordinated by the capitalist system until significant changes later occurred in the system of land tenure. The First World War labour demands had a negative impact on the social economic organization of the people of Embu North. Male labour that was vital in the production process was diverted forcefully into the war as both combatants and carrier corps. Women were overburdened in the management of the crop production process. They had to produce enough for family consumption and war demands. The Great World Depressions that followed worsened the situation.

The introduction of new crops in the 1920s had a major effect on the pre-capitalist system of crop production. The crops that had a market value introduced the society into the international capitalist world. These crops had different systems of production which were alien to the people. Their production led to the peasantisation of the society whereby almost all production was geared for sale, the overall production being guided by the European merchant capital. Since trade and exchange was conducted on equal terms, the people of this area ended up being exploited. Thus, the changes brought by colonial capitalism on the system of land ownership and crop production in Embu North before 1920 were aimed at entrenching the capitalist mode of production in the area.

Labour organization that was the driving force in crop production was disrupted during the colonial period. The need to build the infrastructure and the settler economy made the colonial administration force the people of Embu North out of their production system. Initially a lot of force was used to get labour, but after the introduction of taxes, Africans had no alternative other than engage in wage labour.
Wage employment had a devastating effect on the system of crop production because it made it difficult to have adequate labour provision especially during agricultural peak periods. Since men were the greatest participants in wage labour, women had to shoulder their roles in crop production. This led to overburdening of women which was not the case during the pre-colonial period when labour roles were well defined. Hence, it is argued that the colonial capitalist mode of production could not establish itself in the predominantly pre-capitalist society without manipulating the existing modes of production.

The Second World War had a devastating effect on the system of land ownership and crop production. People were forcefully recruited to offer services both as carrier corps and combatants. Commodity production had to be increased to meet the war demands. The war had a greater impact on the social-economic organization of the people of Embu North who had not recovered from the effects of the Second Great World Depression. After the war the world economy began a shift towards increased production of industrial goods rather than raw materials. Post-war light industries that were established called for increased production not only from the settlers but also from the Africans. However, the depleted condition of the African areas could not have facilitated increased production. It is this fact that the post-war saw immense input from the colonial government in a process that aimed to recondition the African lands for increased production.

The colonial period witnessed the continued subordination of the pre-capitalist mode of production. The production of traditional crops like bulrush millet, yams and sorghum was curtailed by the commercial production of coffee, maize, wattle, potatoes and various vegetables. Nevertheless, the people of Embu North continued to produce the traditional crops using their pre-colonial system of crop production. The
introduction of these new crops was another way of entrenching the capitalist mode of production among the Embu people, although the society produced them through the pre-capitalist mode and sold to the capitalist market. As a result of the subordination of the traditional crops, the people of Embu North became dependent on the capitalist controlled market for food crops. However, they incorporated their pre-capitalist mode of production into the new system bringing out a unique system of production that incorporated both the capitalist and the pre-capitalist modes of production. Thus during this period 1920-1946, the system of land ownership and crop production continued to interrelate in a complementary manner. This confirms the assertion by the theory that when the CMOP is introduced, the pre-capitalist mode of production is not completely eliminated but keeps on reproducing itself diversely in relation to the capitalist mode of production.

Consequently, social differentiations occurred whereby those who were able to accumulate and mechanize their land became rich. The process of articulation of colonial capitalism within the indigenous economy and the dynamic mechanism of social change accruing from this process led to the deepening stratification and differentiation of the local population. The chiefs and others in civil employment formed the early group of wealth accumulators. The educated elite, the landed peasants and some rural wageworkers later joined them. These were able to buy more land thus increasing their production. They also engaged in trade in agricultural commodities hence accumulating more wealth. However, during this period 1920-1946 land continued being held under the Embu customary law.

The African Land Development Programme (ALDEV) which was aimed at reconditioning the reserves also impacted on the system of land ownership and crop production. The ALDEV programme was initiated to fight erosion and recondition the
African land in order to achieve maximum production. The main reason behind the need for increased production was partly to service the newly created low-technology industry and partly to benefit from the world market that was created by the war. This productivity however called for reconditioning of the depleted African lands. In Embu North the reconditioning mainly involved bench terracing and the construction of live wash-stops. The work under this programme had no pay and any absentees were liable to fines. Since migrant labour was largely composed of young and energetic males, the ALDEV programme forced women to undertake work that would have otherwise been done by men.

Women became the major source of labour supply offering labour to the farms and at the same time being involved in the compulsory land conservation exercise. This affected the pre-colonial labour organization hence impacting negatively on the system of crop production. From 1948, the results of ALDEV were clearly noticeable in the society. The reality of African capitalist agriculture started to manifest itself. It was recognized that buying and selling of land in the Embu community had gone too far to be reversed. Thus, although the ALDEV helped in the control of soil erosion it ended up firmly entrenching the people of Embu North into the capitalist system but with some pre-capitalist mode being preserved as long as they served the dominant capitalist mode. Thus, the newly created class of African capitalist farmers was forced by the pre-capitalist mode of production to accepting a mixed mode of production where the old method prevailed to a certain extent.

The Second World War brought massive changes in Kenya that exposed inequalities of British colonial rule and the increased African discontent. The African participants in the war were isolated from post war rewards. The white ex-service men, with whom the Africans veterans had brushed shoulders at war fronts, were
rewarded under the Soldier Settlement Scheme, an act that left the veterans dismayed. This discontent and the deteriorating conditions in the African areas led to the formation of the Mau Mau movement. The struggle for Land and Freedom, which the movement was fighting for culminated into the Mau Mau War. Since both men and women were involved in the war, the system of crop production was adversely affected. The declaration of emergency in 1952 which was followed by massive arrests and detention of Mau Mau sympathizers complicated the already worse situation. The villagization policy that followed which entailed the removal of all Embu settlement from their farms into one designated area largely disorganized the system of land ownership and crop production.

The system of land ownership and crop production drastically changed with the introduction and the implementation of the Swynnerton Plan in 1954. Individual land ownership using the European property law was institutionalized. This meant that all land issues were henceforth supposed to be addressed using the alien law. The pre-capitalist system of crop production was disrupted since land was registered with men who abruptly engaged in the production of commercial crops like coffee and tea. Most of these crops could not be inter-cropped therefore slowly eliminating intercropping as a system of crop production. Women, who initially co-owned land with men by being actively involved in the production process found themselves outsiders in both land ownership and crop production.

Although by independence in 1963, the capitalist mode of production was fully entrenched within the production system of the people of Embu North, some elements of the pre-capitalist modes still prevailed. Women, for instance, continued to grow their food crops on the edges of the cash crop farms. Some landless still managed to access land through the preservation of pre-capitalist mode while new
forms of relationship between the landless and the land poor emerged. This confirms the theory’s assertion that when the Capitalist Mode of Production (CMOP) is introduced in a non-capitalist mode of production, it does not automatically replace the existing mode of production. Rather the CMOP will gradually align with the non-capitalist modes of production and use them to its own benefit. Thus, as was the case during the pre-colonial period, the system of land ownership and crop production continued to interact in harmony.

6.2 Conclusion

The study has found out that the system of land ownership and crop production remains the major driving force in the crop production process in Embu North Sub-County. Land continues to be an important resource for crop production in the area. Therefore, any change on land tenure has significant impact on the system of crop production. The system had a complementary relationship during the pre-colonial period, since the manner in which land was owned dictated the manner in which it was utilized. The society was able to accommodate the changes that were occurring during the period since they were gradual. Moreover, the customary law was effective in addressing land issues to avert a situation of landlessness or labour exploitation in the society.

This interaction changed significantly during the colonial period. The new capitalist mode of production competed unfairly with the pre-capitalist mode leading to significant changes in the system of land ownership and crop production. As a consequence, class formation as a result of new methods of land ownership brought a distinct class of landed, land poor and a landless group. Consequently, unfair competition ensued in the crop production process, with the landed mechanizing, their lands while the land poor and the landless became wage earners. The new crop
varieties of maize, coffee and tea with their unique system of production gradually replaced the traditional varieties of millets and other drought resistant crops. Moreover, land reforms that were introduced and implemented under the Swynnerton Plan resulted to land consolidation, but people in Embu North started sub-dividing their land leading to fragmentations. The existence of small land holdings immediately after the reforms impacted negatively on the system of crop production. Under these reforms, the customary law was replaced by the European property law resulting to uncomplimentary relationship between the system of land ownership and crop production. The new landed class increased the production of commercial crops while significantly cutting down the production of traditional food crops.

Although historically change had been taking place in the system of land ownership and crop production since the pre-capitalist period, the changes brought about by European colonialism significantly affected the complementarities of the system. Therefore, the study has laid bare the fact that an analysis of the interplay between the system of land ownership and crop production is important in understanding the historical changes in agricultural production in general and crop production specifically. This has been achieved by examining Embu North Sub-County as a case study.

6.3 Recommendations

In view of the findings of the study, it is recommended that for increased crop production, the National Government together with the County Government of Embu should review the current system of land ownership and crop production. The study is informed that land continues to be the major factor in crop production. Due to this fact, it is important to examine continuous land sub-divisions that have been taking place after the implementation of the Swynnerton Plan. This is because, continuous
fragmentation of land impacts negatively on the system of crop production leading to the general decline in the overall production. The study recommends that the Ministry of Lands together with the National Land Commission and the County Government of Embu should enact laws regarding land sub-division and utilization to prevent declining crop production especially the production of traditional food crops. This will help the county to be food secure and also assist the national government in achieving the vision 2030. Further study should be conducted on the economic impact of the declining prices of cash crops like coffee and tea in the international market on the society. Moreover, a study is necessary on the impact of continued land sub-divisions on animal production.
REFERENCES

PRIMARY SOURCES

(A) List of Informants

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APPENDIX 1

Question Guideline

Name……………………………………
Age………………………………………….
Gender……………………………….
Sub-location………………………………

(A) System of Land Ownership: Pre-Colonial Period
1. Before the coming of the White Man, who owned the land?
2. Could an individual own land? Yes_______No._________ If Yes, how?
3. Was it possible for an individual to acquire more land?
   Yes________No________If Yes, How?
4. How was the acquired land used? Who organized and patterned out the use of land?
5. Could one lose land after acquiring it? Yes_________ No__________ If Yes, Why? How?
6. Did both women and men have equal rights to land? Yes _____________ No _______ Give reasons for answer.
7. Could an outsider acquire land? Yes ____ No ________ Give reasons.
8. How were an individual’s right to land protected?
9. Could land change ownership? Yes ________ No __________ If Yes, How?
10. What factors necessitated this change?
11. Did we have conflicts in land ownership? Yes ________ No ________ If Yes, How were they resolved?

(B) Colonial Period
12. Did the White man take any land from your family? ________
13. Did you have right to use land during the colonial period? ______________
14. Did the system of land ownership change during the colonial period? Yes ________ No __________ If Yes, Did it affect the system of crop production? Yes ________ No ________ Reasons for answer: __________
15. How did the colonial government acquire land to build its offices at Embu and in other chief’s headquarters? ________________

16. Who provided the labour to build the offices? _______________________

17. Was the labour provision voluntary? _____________________________

18. Did the First World War affect the People of Embu North? __________If yes, how? _______

19. After the reserve boundaries were laid was the reserve land enough for all the clans? ______

20. Was land owned communally or individually in the reserve? ______________

21. Did the White man introduce soil erosion measures? _____________________
If yes, how were they implemented? ______________________

18. Did the Second World War affect the people of Embu North? ____________If yes, how? _

19. Were the people of Embu North involved in the Mau Mau rebellion? _______If yes, why? _______

20. Was land sub-divided during the colonial period? __________ If yes, when? ___

21. How was the process conducted? ___________ did any dispute arise? __________ If yes, how were they solved? ______________

22. Were the women allowed to own land? ________________ If yes, did they receive the title to the land? __________

23. What were the relations of the people after the land sub-division process? ______

(C) System of Crop Production: Pre-colonial Period

1. Before the White Man came, which food crops were people growing? _________
Which crop was the most important? _________________

2. What system was used to grow the crops? Was it changing? Yes ______ No _______ If Yes, How? __________

3. How could one acquire the crops to grow?

4. Were there different locations for different crops? ______ If yes, how were they identified? ________________

5. What type of tools were used in crop production? ______________

6. Did both men and women grow the same crops? Yes _____ No _______ If No, Give reasons: ________

7. To whom did the crops grown belong to?
8. What system was used to harvest the crops? Was it changing? Yes _____ No _________ If Yes, How?
9. What was the harvest put to?
10. Did you ever have food shortages? Yes ___________ No ___________ If Yes, What caused the shortage? How was the problem solved?

(D) Colonial Period
11. Were there any new crops introduced during the colonial period? Yes__________
   No _______ If Yes Name them: _______
12. Did the people of Embu North embrace the new crops? __________. If yes, which crops were particularly grown and why? _________
13. Did they affect the system of land ownership and crop production? Yes _____ No _______ If Yes, How?
14. Did they interfere with diet of the people? Yes _______ No ________ Explain: __
15. Was the traditional labour organization affected? __________
16. Were there food shortages during the colonial period? ______If yes, how were they addressed? ______________
17. Was there taxation during the colonial period. __If yes, how were the taxes paid?
18. Did trade continue normally during the colonial period? ________________
19. Were the people of Embu North involved in the Second World War? ______ If yes, did the war affect the system of crop production? _________________
20. During the Period of Emergency, the colonial government came up with a plan that spearheaded the sub-division and registration of land within the country. What impacts did the plan have on crop production in Embu North Sub-County?
21. Did the Emergency Period affect crop production? ___________
Source: Mwaniki 2010; Pg. 54
Source: Mwaniki; 2010 pg 49
MAP 4. LOCATION OF STUDY AREA IN EMBU COUNTY.

Source: own source