THE IMPACT OF THE COLONIAL SOCIO-ECONOMIC POLICIES AND
PRACTICES ON FEMALE-HEADED HOUSEHOLDS IN KENYA: THE CASE OF
KOMBWEWA DIVISION, KISUMU DISTRICT, 1894–1963

BY

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DECLARATION

This thesis is my original work and has not been presented for a degree in any other university.

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To my late mother, Rosebela Orwa Okuro, late auntie, Mama Meresia Owuor and my son, Lenn Okuro.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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<tr>
<td>ADC</td>
<td>African District Council</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ADCCN</td>
<td>African District Council of Central Nyanza</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AG</td>
<td>Attorney General</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CJAS</td>
<td>Canadian Journal of African Studies</td>
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<tr>
<td>CKLNC</td>
<td>Central Kavirondo Local Native Council</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CMOP</td>
<td>Capitalist Mode of Production</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CMS</td>
<td>Church Mission Society</td>
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<td>CN</td>
<td>Central Nyanza</td>
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<tr>
<td>CNC</td>
<td>Chief Native Commissioner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CND</td>
<td>Central Nyanza District</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CNDAR</td>
<td>Central Nyanza District Annual Report</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DC</td>
<td>District Commissioner</td>
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<tr>
<td>DOA</td>
<td>Department of Agriculture</td>
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<tr>
<td>KNA</td>
<td>Kenya National Archives</td>
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<tr>
<td>KRA</td>
<td>Kings African Rifles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KSM</td>
<td>Kisumu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LNC</td>
<td>Local Native Council</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MYW</td>
<td>Maendeleo Ya Wanawake</td>
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My discussion with Doctor Nyorora of Kenyatta University Health Unit indicated that this was a form of penicillin given to those suffering from syphilis during the colonial period.
DEFINITION OF TERMS

Household: refers to persons or groups of related and unrelated persons who live together in the same dwelling unit(s) who acknowledge one adult male or female as a head of household, who share the same housekeeping arrangements, and are considered as one unit (Kenya Demographic and Health Survey, 1999).

Female-headed household: These are households without the regular presence and/or support of adult male and thus depend on a woman who is economically active household member. In this work the female-headed households are referred to as widows, independent women, women married to migrant men, abandoned wives, women with marriage difficulties, lone women and runaway women.

Feminist: Is someone who holds that women suffer discrimination because of their sex, that they have specific, needs, which remain negated and unsatisfied, and that the satisfaction of these needs requires a radical change in the socio-political order.

Third World and First World: Although their usage is problematic both in suggesting oversimplified similarities between and amongst countries labeled Third World or First World, as well as implicitly reinforcing existing economic, cultural and ideological hierarchies. In this work, Third World will imply countries comprising Africa, Pacific, Latin America and Asia,
while First World will imply Western Europe and North America. In other cases Third World countries have been referred to as developing countries (Mohanty, 1994:216).

**Modernism**: Is a blanket term applied to European intellectual phenomenon or movement that is usually traced back to ideas of enlightenment, associated with the seventieth and eightieth centuries or even further back to European renaissance. The rationalist ideas and post-Kantian thinkers influenced it. In this work, modernism refers to that revolt against realism and romanticism, characterized by esthetics self-consciousness, simultaneity, ambiguity, dehumanization and demise of integrated individual subjects or personality (Mojola, 2000:3).

**Post-modernism**: Is born on the ashes of modernity project and involves changes that lead to fragmentation on a number of different levels, from substantive social reality to modes of social analysis. Apart from being incredulous towards metanarratives, it’s a movement which is anti-foundation, anti-totalizing and demystifying (Walby, 1994:226).

**Modes of Production**: Can be defined as the economic foundation encompassing the interaction of the forces of production and their corresponding social relations of production. It constitutes the superstructure elements of life in various aspects, such as the social, economic, political and educational structures (Cokumu, 2001).

**Relations of production**: Constitute the relations that producers enter with one another in the process of production. The relations can be changed or get changed in the mode of production.
**Forces of Production:** Includes human's laboring activities, the objects of his or her labor and the instrument of his or her labor and with which he/she reproduces the conditions of his or her existence.
ABSTRACT

This study focuses on the impact of colonial socio-economic policies on female-headed households in Kombewa division, Kisumu District, 1894-1963. It argues that the colonial and missionary penetration of Kombewa invariably transformed the existing patterns of social organization in which gender roles were clearly defined and women of different categories had social and economic security. It did this in several ways, for instance, it created situations that led to the expansion of female-headed households. These situations included violent introduction of colonialism, the transformation of the marriage institution, and forceful encouragement of male labour migration, male recruitment into the military service and the establishment of social welfare system.

It is demonstrated that the colonial administration and missionary activities transformed the traditional marriage system and family relations by targeting features, such as bridewealth exchange, widow guardianship and polygamy. These transformations not only expanded female-headed households but also curtailed some of their traditional social and economic securities.

The integration of the subsistence production and subsistence producers into the process of capital accumulation in Kombewa was not a peaceful affair, but was accompanied by violence, compulsion and extra-economic coercion. This was followed by labour demands, taxation, production for exchange and war. The consequence of these was a gradual and systematic pauperisation, over-burdening and eventually impoverishment of female-headed households in Kombewa. Women of different categories devised several survival strategies. Those who could not withstand these changes drifted to townships, such as Kisumu to seek employment. Equally, others became traders within the emerging local markets centres. Female migration had a number of constraints, particularly from the older men who created institutions basically meant to deal with female migrants. Such institutions had far-reaching consequences on female-headed households.
Map of Kenya showing Kisumu District

Legend
- Major rivers
- Kisumu District
- Lakes
- Provincial boundaries

0 0.6 Kilometers
Map of Kisumu District showing Kombewa Division

Legend

- Township
- Administrative boundaries
- Primary roads
- Kombewa Division

Maseno

Kisumu

Scale: 0 - 0.07 - 0.14 Kilometers
CHAPTER ONE

1.0 INTRODUCTION AND THE CONTEXT OF THE PROBLEM

Household studies are increasingly becoming popular, with the realization that the household is the society's most commonplace and basic socio-economic unit (Netting et al., 1984). It has also been observed that the household is a common form of social and economic organization in most regions in the developing world, and often represents the primary site for the structuring of gender relations and women's specific experience (Harris, 1981).

It has been argued that the household is the arena of social and economic subordination, particularly of women. The concept of household is thus relevant because it is both the point of origin and destination for the labour and resources of its component members. The household is the point at which the reproductive and productive relations meet. It is critical point for the analysis of gender roles and relations, and is usually the focal point of sexual division of labour (Rrydon and Chant, 1989). At the rural level, the household has been identified as a crucial feature of social organization. It is a site of biological and social reproduction, of socialization, of nurturing and of fundamental decision-making, particularly considering what to produce, how to produce it and what to store for the future consumption.

However, despite its usefulness, the household is increasingly becoming a complex phenomenon to come to grips with. The concept is difficult to define not only in the context of Kombewa, but also in Africa as a whole. This is because the concept of the
household still includes tenacity of old social and cultural forms in a situation where a number of influences are simultaneously at work in opposite directions (Hart, 1974/78 cited in Guyer, 1981:88), and also because of the permeability of the boundaries of African households. Whether defined in terms of residential units or production/consumption groups, a household should be focused around the management of the resources of its head, together with those of spouse where one exists, and the care and the maintenance of any children (Guyer, 1981). Within the household, there is usually division of labour among adult men, adult women and children, signifying mutual dependence and complementarily.

Given the above arguments, several scholars have attempted to define the word household in different ways, depending on the situation, the time period, the circumstance and the topic under study. Silberschmidt, studying gender relations in Kisii District in 1991 defined household as places where different activities, involved in survival and reproduction, are concentrated. In 1999, a household welfare monitoring and evaluation survey in Kwale District defined a household as people who live within the same compound, fenced or unfenced, and share meals, have a common major source of income and have a common provision for other essentials of general livelihood.

Households have thus performed multiple functions overtime depending on the way marriages are constituted. In this study, a household will refer to persons or groups of related and unrelated persons who live together in the same dwelling unit(s), who
acknowledge one adult male or female as a head of household, who share the same housekeeping arrangements, and are considered as one unit (cf. Kenya Demographic and Health Survey, 1999).

The Western patriarchal societies have influenced our thinking, that men have particular roles and functions as household heads (the key decision maker in the household, whose authority is acknowledged by other household members). However, since the First World War, it has been realized that, there are a considerable variety and range of household forms and that the nuclear family is by no means preponderant as was formerly assumed (Brydon and Chant, 1989).

It has been identified that women are increasingly assuming greater responsibilities for the household organization. One factor which is common in most developing countries, particularly in Africa, has been the increasing frequency of female-headed households. These are households without the regular presence and/or support of adult male and thus depend on a woman who is an economically active household member. These are the households this study set out to study. In this work the female headed households are referred to as widows, independent women, women married to migrant men abandoned wives, women with marriage difficulties, lone women and runaway women.

It has been estimated that one-third of the households worldwide are female headed, and ten percent to forty-eight percent of households in developing countries are female
headed (Bovinic, Youssef and Barbara, 1978). For the Third World as a whole estimates vary between one sixth and a third of all households being female headed (Momsen, 1991:25). Clarke (1984) estimated that in Kenya, female-headed households constituted between twenty-two to forty percent in rural areas. Similarly, the Kenya Demographic and Health Survey (1999), estimated that one in three Kenyan households is headed by a female and that there is a larger proportion of female-headed households in rural areas (34%) than in urban areas (23%). But everywhere this is a common phenomenon which is rapidly increasing, with evidence that such groups have a long history (Smith R.T, 1956; Clarke, 1957 and Smith M.G, 1962). These assessments have not only challenged the traditional notion of the male-headed household but also intensified policy and research interest in female-headed households as a special social and economic category in developing countries. This interest has intensified recently due to concern with poverty, the socio-economic effects of micro-economic restructuring and growing disparity between the rich and the poor.

At the level of research, scholars in the field of development in Africa are increasingly recognizing the important role of women's work in agriculture, trade and other community services. They have also paid attention to the particular constraints under which women operate, noting their contribution to economic development strategies, making of public policies, of development projects and on relations between women and men (Boserup, 1970; Guyer, 1980; Bay, 1982; Fortman, 1982; Mbilinyi, 1985). At the same time, research on women and the state in Africa has addressed the effects of
colonial and post-colonial institutions on women. Significant part of the studies have noted how the colonial state enhanced male power over women and the ways in which colonial and post-colonial state has acted as a vehicle of male elite interest (Parpart and Staut 1989). These works have observed that the colonial social and economic policies and practices transformed the pre-capitalist systems and promoted the production of export crops. These policies also created a migrant labour force by involving men through taxation, labour conscription and forced cultivation. Thus, there is abundant evidence to support the fact that colonialism actually worsened the position of the African women in many societies (Ufomata, 2000).

Similarly, other studies have examined how women have struggled to defend and advance their individual and collective interests under changing conditions of colonialism and post colonialism (Amadiume 1987; Mba 1989, Tsikata 1990). In the same literature there is the recognition that the spread of Christianity was integral part of the extension of European influence in Africa, although missionaries were often at odds with colonial government over the treatment of the "native". In going about their activities, the missionaries introduced Christian marriage practices, impacting on the whole system of traditional marriage systems (Strobel, 1984).

However, these works are hardly particular when addressing women. They have homogenized women as if for example all women had the same experiences under the colonial rule in Africa. During colonial period women were in different categories. These
may have included women married to migrant labourers, wives, "independent" women and widows among others. So far, researches on African women have neglected this categorization to the extent that the experiences of those women not staying with their husbands because of various reasons are hardly treated in the studies. These are some of the gaps which this study is undertaking to bridge.

Since 1970s, several studies focusing on Female-headed households have been undertaken by sociologists, anthropologists and ethnographers but a few by historians. In fact emphasis has been on provision of contemporary data on cross-sectional information on the numbers, characteristics of these households in urban centres (Brydon and Chant, 1993). Yet comprehensive assessment of female-headed households over time, especially their experiences during the colonial period and the efforts which they made to escape discriminative colonial policies and practices are still lacking. Historical researches that have examined women lives overtime, have either considered women experience generally or as wives to migrant labourers. (Hay, 1972; 1976; Ayot, 1990; Jalan’go-Ndeda, 1991).

Similarly, there is inadequate historical information on the genesis of female-headed households at the local level and how they interacted with emerging colonial institutions such as townships, market centres and municipalities. The image of African women, in relation to emerging colonial towns, has been negative, marked by shifts from responsible women who had clear roles in the society to prostitutes (White, 1983 and 1986; Hay,
1988). One wonders if prostitution was the only option available for not only women but also female-headed households in the townships.

Despite frequent reference to missionary attitudes towards the proper role of African women and the tendency of the colonial officials to overlook their political and productive roles, (Strobel, 1984), hardly there is detailed historical studies of missionary activities and their official attitude towards female-headed households. Even more important, few studies in Kombewa have examined women migration during this period and how the colonial administration together with male elders reacted to exodus of women. These are some of the gaps that this study is attempting to investigate. In order to research on this broad problem, this study focuses on female-headed households in Kombewa Division, an area where such a study has not been undertaken at all.

1.1 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

It is against the above background that this study investigates the social and economic impact of colonial policies, practices, and missionary activities on female-headed households in Kombewa, between 1894 and 1963. It focuses on the impact of colonial labour, agricultural and taxation policies on female-headed households. Further, it examines the impact of emerging colonial institutions, such as township, missionary stations and market centres on these households. Similarly, the study investigates the various strategies these households took to survive.
This study addressed the following research questions:

(a) What were the various categories of households in Kombewa on the eve of the colonialism?

(b) To what extent did the colonial policies, practices and missionary activities disturb the social relations of production, especially the performance of various households during this period?

(c) What were the forms of interaction between the people of Kombewa and the emerging colonial institutions such as Kisumu Township and Maseno missionary centre?

(d) What were the responses of the colonial administrators and male elders in Kombewa to women's mobility?

1.2 OBJECTIVES OF STUDY

The study

(1) outlines the pre-colonial family structures in Kombewa and analyse their initial encounter with colonialism.

(2) analyses the contribution of the colonial and missionary activities to the emergence and expansion of female-headed households in Kombewa Division.
investigates the impact of the proximity of Kombewa to Kisumu town and other centres on female-headed households.

(4) investigates how female-headed households responded to the colonial policies, practices and missionary activities.

(5) examines the response of the colonial administrators and traditional Luo males to female-headed households mobility.

1.3 RESEARCH PREMISES:

The study was premised on the following propositions. That:

1. The advent of the colonialism transformed the pre-colonial family structures in Kombewa.

2. The colonial and missionary activities increased the numbers of female-headed households in Kombewa and thus made them susceptible to the colonial policies and practices.

3. The proximity of Kombewa to Kisumu town and Maseno missionary centre impacted on female-headed households positively.

4. As colonialism entrenched itself female-headed households established survival strategies, such as petty trade and prostitution.
5. The Luo males together with the colonial agents restricted female-headed household's mobility to towns and other places, hence hindering them from taking advantage of new situations.

1.4 AREA OF THE STUDY.

Kombewa Division is one of the administrative divisions of Kisumu District, Nyanza province. It was originally called Central Seme Location. It has four locations and borders the Lake Victoria towards the eastern side and Maseno division to the north-eastern side. It was curved from the former Maseno division in 1987. It is inhabited by one of the sections of Luo community called Joseme and a few immigrants [Jodak] from neighbouring clans, such as Jo-Asembo, Jo-Gem, Jo-Kisumo and Abaluyia, especially the Banyore. It lies within Longitudes 33\(^\circ\) 20'E and 35\(^\circ\) 20'E and Latitudes 0\(^\circ\) 20' South and 0\(^\circ\) 50' South.

Low ridges, seasonal rivers, and scalps characterize the division's topography. There are also hill slopes and granite rocks in most places—for example, granite rocks in Kisian and legendary Kit Mikayi. These granite rocks are exploited by local population to produce ballast while the varying types of soils and river bed sand deposits are mined for construction and for making bricks.

The division has shorelines to the east. Consequently fishing takes the greatest part of the people's time. Other economic activities include subsistence farming and rearing cattle.
Some of the crops grown here include maize, millet, cassava, groundnuts and cow-peas. The mean annual rainfall is about 1,630 mm. The mean annual maximum temperature ranges from 25 degrees centigrade to 30 degrees centigrade and the mean annual minimum temperature ranges from 9 degrees centigrade to 18 degrees centigrade.

1.5 LITERATURE REVIEW

The dearth of historical literature on female-headed households during the colonial period makes the review in such an area almost very difficult. Brydon and Chant (1993) associate the post Second World War economic development with the worldwide increase in female-headed households. They attribute to be a by-product of increase in labour mobility in the contemporary developing world – a phenomenon that has resulted directly or indirectly from the twin process of industrial and urban development. They hold that in rural areas female-headed households have resulted from male labour migration and civil wars. Consequently, they have concluded that, female-headed households are common in a number of rural areas in the western countries and in many Third world countries and have a long history stretching even up to the colonial period.

In Africa, the late 1960s and even 1970s were marked by a tremendous sense of excitement in rediscovering the African past, a strong feeling of African nationalism and a pride in African historical achievement. Among the historians, this excitement helped motivate a search for queens – a search for glorious past with particular emphasis on the
role of African women and especially in the traditional political structures (Hay, 1988).
The thrust of these works was to demonstrate women’s social and economic autonomy
within the household and the existence of separate and nearly equal political and
economic roles in the broader society. It is also within this literature that it has been
acknowledged that colonialism and especially the development of wage labour led to the
increase in women’s burden or workload (Kiwanuka, 1973; Zeleza, 1982; Stitcher, 1982;
Potash 1984; Koopman, 1984; Staudt, 1984; Mama, 1996). Yet despite their various
categories, these works have depicted African women as a homogeneous group laying
emphasis on women in general, women with absent migrant husbands and labour
policies. But when it comes to widows and abandoned women, the works do not tackle
their problem at all.

In southern African countries, such as Botswana and Lesotho, there are sociological and
anthropological data on female-headed households arising from male labour migration to
South Africa (Molapo, 1987; Wilkinson, 1987). On the East African coast the emergence
of female-headed households is attributed to high divorce rates, (Caplan, 1984). The
same is true of West Africa (Bledsoe, 1980). In other cases, some women have chosen to
set up houses on their own (Wilson, 1985). While most of these researches have
examined the contemporary situation of female-headed households, there is a need to
historically analyse their expansion and experience during the colonial period. Similarly,
there is a need to find out how the colonial administrators or planners neglected
alternative family units that existed and assumed that the vast majority of households are
nuclear households headed by men. In Kenya most of the existing literature lays emphasis on male-stream history and also tends to invisibilize or misrepresent women. Women are either not present at all or they are depicted as naturally inferior or subordinate, as victims of male operation (Zeleza, 1993).

These works were influenced by the colonial anthropology and ethnography of social studies disciplines that facilitated the creation of myths, stereotypes and warped images that came to dominate in penalist discourses on Kenya, as was the case with Africa in general. But the declaration of the 1975 as Women’s Year and local initiatives towards gender equity have led to the emergence of scattered studies which attempt to examine the changing roles of women during the colonial and post-colonial periods (Ochwada, 1995).

In central Kenya, for example, Kanogo (1987) explains the role of women in the Mau Mau struggle. Stamp (1986) also explains the extent to which the colonialism had transformed sex gender system especially bridewealth system in Kikuyu ethnic group. At the same time, White (1983 and 1986) discusses the history of prostitution in Nairobi, explaining the extent to which prostitution was a major occupation of the Kikuyu women living to the proximity of Nairobi. These works are very important to this study in terms of the colonial policies, practices and impacts on female-headed households and the initiative which they took to survive.
In Nyanza scattered works exist on colonialism and women. Richards (1956) provides valuable historical accounts on the history of Church Missionary Society [CMS] and the Anglican Church in Nyanza province, between 1906 and 1956. This text deals with the efforts of missionaries to provide education to girls so as to make them intelligent companions to their husbands and to "share with them their whole life". This work was informative to the study as far as missionary activities are concerned. Similarly Fearn (1961) studied the economic development of Nyanza province of Kenya from 1903 and 1953 and note that the use of cash in Nyanza economy affected indigenous customs and arrangement of the Nyanza society. This work recognized the various influences in Nyanza economy brought about by the colonialism, such as male labour migration. Fearn's study was useful guide to our study as far the applications and the effects of colonial policies in Nyanza are concerned.

Lonsdale (1964) also gives a very useful outline of a political history of Nyanza and a socio-economic study of the Luo community. Lonsdale analyses the Luo community of Nyanza from the colonial rule to the rise of nationalistic sentiments among the Joluo. Although he gives an extensive survey on the colonial policies he did not relate their impacts on female-headed households. Whisson (1964) attempted to give a general anthropological survey of the social changes among the Luo of Kenya. In his work he describes the traditional Luo social system and social consequences of European administration, especially the case of male labour migration, mission stations and the development of social services. Despite being more anthropological, his work is very
useful to the study more particularly in considering aspects touching on the changing Luo family structures and social values.

Hay (1972) conducted a research among the Luo community of Kowe, 1890 – 1945. This work was not intended to examine women but gives necessary hints about the colonialism and women. In her work in Hafkin and Bay (eds. 1976), Hay discusses Luo women during the colonial period using her previous data. Hay explains that the punitive expedition led by some British officials in 1899 left more than hundred men dead leading to the creation and expansion of female-headed households in Kombewa. Moreover Hay recounts of how certain women like Elizabeth Loye used the conditions provided by the colonialism and the missionary activities to be wealthy through trade. This however was not the major response to the colonialism in the whole of Kombewa as this work argues.

This is the story Claire Robertson (1997) continues with. Employing a variety of approaches, Claire Robertson provides an extensive case study of the historical transformations in gender, agriculture, residence and civil society. She breaks new ground by looking at women commodities traders and comparing and contrasting the evolution of that trade with men's trade. She suggests that the women's involvement with the trade not only changes their conception of themselves, but also their abilities and physical well-being. Robertson particularly advances a head of Hay and stress the integration of Nairobi trade into the East African Economy and explores the relationship between trade and the family structures. She illustrates the way men and the state sought
to control women traders and the efforts of the women traders to carve out their own place in the Kenyan political economy.

Bookman (1973) attempts to reconstruct the economic role of women in the Luo society from about A.D 1000 to the present, using historical and anthropological work. He argues that the capitalist economic system thus imposed was perpetuated through complex political and legal institutions which ensured that different sectors of the African population fulfilled the economic roles they had, in a sense, been assigned. The essence of the colonialism in Kenya was the domination, transformation and incorporation of the traditional economies of “primitive” cultivators, like the Luo into international capitalist economy. The generality in this work on the context of women in the Luo society makes the study inadequate to capture the complexities of interaction between the colonial policies, practices and missionary activities of female-headed households. This work lacks detailed analysis of specific relationship of the colonial policies on labour and land to the change at local level.

Butterman (1979) examines the Luo social formation in change: Karachuonyo and Kanyamkago, at about between 1800 and 1945, giving valuable hints on the way women were recruited by force to work for the colonial chiefs and that in some cases women paid taxes. She concludes that the major social change during the colonial period was the elimination of the maximal lineage as the largest functional unit of social organization. At the time Pala 1974, 1975 and 1980 gives very valuable general accounts on the status of
the Luo women amidst colonialism, using anthropological and sociological approaches. She looks at division of labour in agricultural production, women’s access to land, and constraints to women in development process, among others. These works were useful in developing a historical account of how socio-economic changes brought about by the colonialism affected female-headed households over time and how they responded to these changes.

Schiller (1982) describes the effects of both natural and man-made stresses which affected the Joluo of Gem and Kano between 1880 and 1914. It also looks at the opinions and actual responses to these stresses. Equally Herring (1977), analysing the Joluo before 1900, states that as was the case with other East African societies, the last decade of the nineteenth century was troubled period for the Joluo. After the British had established an effective administration during the two decades or so after 1895 the heroic age of the Luo history came to an end. These works elucidated the various social and economic changes taking place in the whole of western Kenya. Yet Oboler (1982) presents a very useful study on the impact of the colonialism and cash economy on the Nandi — a patrilineal, semi-pastoral people of western Kenya, concentrating on the changes in women and men economic roles and rights in property. She argues that sexual stratification increased due to the colonial policy and commoditization of economic resources. This work is quite informative on Kombewa widows. Nzioki (1986) attempts to critically survey the development of Anglican Church in Nyanza Province within the period of 1905-1970. She acknowledges that from 1905 Maseno missionary station had
become a very important centre as far as missionary activities are concerned. She further notes the extent to which missionary activities affected the Luo rights, particularly those concerning women in polygamous families and widows. However, she did not examine how these women were affected by the colonial policies, given that they had no husbands to pay the colonial taxes or to perform compulsory communal labour. However this piece of work is informative when it comes to missionary activities.

Cohen and Atieno Odhiambo (1989) have given a very interesting historical and anthropological analysis of the Joluo in Siaya, beginning with the arrival of Luo in Siaya up to 1989. One very important aspect of this study is the aspect of the abandoned women. While noticing the tensions and the dynamics between Siaya countryside and the opportunities in Kenyan cities, for example Kisumu, they also point out what almost missed in approaches to Siaya past and that of larger western Kenya (p. 47). Today the Luo call it run-away husbands or run-away fathers adult males who rose one morning and disappeared from the household. This work is very informative when it came to the creation of female-headed households. Ayot (1990) looks at the position of women in the Luo community, the case of Jok’Onyango 1750 –1920 A.D. She examines changes that were brought about by the colonialism and how they affected women, noting the key roles which the women performed during the pre-colonial period. Ayot concludes that the burden of taxation also fell upon some of the women as tax was levied on the houses, which the colonial government came to realize were properties of the women. It was after reading this work that the study conceptualized on how the colonial taxation policy
impacted on widows. Similarly Jalang'o-Ndeda (1991) makes an attempt to examine a section of female-headed households, taking Siaya District in Kenya as a case study. She analyses the impact of the labour policies on women as it drew male labour from the household, agriculture and other economic activities. She notes the extent to which women’s responsibilities increased as energetic males left the homesteads for work in the colonial plantations and urban centres.

From the literature it has been established that a gap exists which could be filled using historical data on how the colonial policies, practices and missionary activities impacted on the various categories of female-headed households. Most studies have been very general on the economic and social issues touching on these women or glossed over them in passing. Moreover, there have been limited studies that recognize the changes that took place at household levels arising from colonial policies and practices and how women responded to them. It was these gaps that the research envisaged to fill using Kombewa Division as a case study.

This study thus investigates a variety of female-headed households in Kombewa. These included women with absent migrant husbands, "independent women" and widows. It also analysed the impacts of missionary activities on these women, evaluating the relationship between these women and the emerging colonial institutions, such as township and missionary stations.
1.6 JUSTIFICATIONS AND SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

Kombewa female-headed households during the colonial period have not been studied. What exist in Kombewa are general sociological and anthropological works (Hay, 1972), but even in these studies no attempt has been made to examine social and economic impacts arising from the interaction between female-headed households and locally emerging colonial institutions, such as townships, market centres and missionary centres. The proximity of Kisumu Township and Maseno missionary station provided adequate conditions to study these interactions. Moreover the people of Kombewa resisted the colonial intrusion such that the punitive expeditions led by British officials left more than hundred of men dead, depicting an increase in female-headed households, especially those women who lost their husbands through these expeditions. This area also supplied labour to most of the colonial plantations in the Rift Valley and beyond. Ochieng' (1992) posited that "it is generally accepted that independent Kenya did not effect a major ideological structural break with colonial state and all she did was to expand the former colonial administrative and economic infrastructure. This has often led to Kenya being labelled a neo-colonial state in economic, political and cultural fields". Therefore, to investigate the impact of the current government policies on female-headed households there is a need to start from the colonial period.

Apart from providing invaluable empirical data and knowledge on the colonialism and female headed households in Kombewa, this work will also give some solutions to the
current public outcry that enormous efforts have been made on gender awareness campaigns and yet women still form the bulk of the poor in Kenyan society. Currently fingers are pointing at the government policies as a hindrance to exploitation of women's (may be female headed households) potentials and the challenge is to translate this awareness into public policy (See Daily Nations, Dec., 1987: Kenya Times, Aug. 8, 1991: Daily Nation, Dec. 12, 1993: Daily Nation, Aug. 3, 1995). This study has provided some information and guidance that are currently needed by development experts and policy makers to come up with gendered policies and practices.

1. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Theorizing on women or gender is one of the debatable areas in academia today (Harding 1986; Mohanty 1994; Hutchful, 1997). This arises from the declaration by traditional Marxists that:

All politics is immediately or ultimately class politics; that only class politics is real, that behind ethnic, communal or religious politics necessarily lies false consciousness, that the solution to all non-class conflict is contingent upon or necessarily follows solutions to class questions (Hutchful, 1997:191).

The issues have been to define class in every society, including the Third World and in Africa in particular. It was this long struggle (in making women visible in our analytical tools), that it was realised that the gender issue has been treated dismissively or with nuanced irritation by African Marxists (Hutchful 1997). In fact they have argued that including gender in Marxism may erode or blunt the conceptual categories of Marxism.
Over the past quarter of a century or so, feminist thought has had a major impact upon social theory, its subject matter has been addressing the invisibility of women in social theoretical thinking and with theorising gender. Feminists and gender theoreticians have argued that it does not look as though modernism was a movement in which women participated very actively such that modernism is in fact primarily a masculine phenomenon (Wolff, 1994).

It is with this realisation that two things have happened when it comes to theorizing gender. In the first case feminists have tended to extend and reinterpret the categories of various theoretical precepts associated with modernism so that women's activities and their social relations become analytically visible. They have reinterpreted the central claims of these analytical tools, borrowed their concepts and categories to make visible women's lives and feminist views of gender relations (Harding, 1986). The other was feminists' association with post-modernist fragmentation of macro-analytic concepts in theorizing of race, gender and class. Within each of these fields has been a move towards arguing that the central category is too internally differentiated to be utilised as a significant unitary concept (Walby, 1994).

This study borrowed from the former. This it did in recognition of the argument that, extending and reinterpreting the central claims of these analytical tools may lead to distortion of discourses to the extent that they may not resemble what their non-feminist creators and users had in mind. The study noted that components of some of these
theories might be used to illuminate our subject matter the female-headed households of Kombewa Division. But in order to adequately capture the totality and complexity of experiences of female-headed households under the colonialism, the study will utilize articulation of modes of production. The mode of production theory is an orientation that has emerged as an alternative approach to and a critique of the dependency perspective, the world system theory and the modernization perspective (Jalang'o-Ndeda, 1991). It has been articulated as a self-conscious effort to reinterpret the Marxist analysis of capitalist development more particularly the notion of progressive nature of capitalism. One of its assumptions is that specific modes of production within a given social formation constitute the unit of analysis. Each national economy is seen as a concrete, historically created social formation comprising different modes of production which are articulated with another, thus various modes of production co-exist within a given social formation. Yet the articulation perspective rejects the notion that there is only one mode of production and that is capitalism. Instead, it argues that the world economy is a totality of relatively autonomous modes of production, which are in different stages of development.

Generally, the theory asserts that when the capitalist mode of production is introduced in non-capitalist or pre-capitalist social formation, it does not directly or immediately displace the existing modes of production. Rather the capitalist mode of production (CMOP) will gradually align with non-capitalist modes of production and use them to its own advantage or benefit. This continuous process of subordination culminates in the

Clarence-Smith (1985: 19) contends that modes of production do not exist and to escape the malady of confusion resulting from the concept, they should be perceived in terms of models, abstractions and heuristic devices on condition that one does not assert that they exist out there. He does the same with the concept “articulation” which to him is unsuitable in the analysis of slave mode of production or lineage, feudal or capitalist modes of production. He extends this to the application of the concept in relation to the colonial period in particular, to migrant labour (p.21ff). Yet in the same debate the mode of production concept has been accused of creating typologies (Klein 1985; Alpers 1985) and that the concept is a mere abstract and formal specification of relations that do not
have any concrete existence in its pure form (Berman (1984:408). However, Freund (1985) believes that the modes of production exist in Africa and are an important tool in the analysis of historical process in African societies (Newbury, 1985:40; Harries 1985:34-36). The same belief is shared by Berman and Lonsdale (1980) who identified the centrality of “articulation” and the mode of production concepts in the analysis of capitalist establishment in a pre-capitalist or non-capitalist social formation. They have applied this concept very effectively in the analysis of the colonial capitalism, labour and accumulation in, Kenya, between 1919 and 1920 (Esese, 1990:19).

Despite the shortcomings, the concept of mode of production and articulation can best be applied to analyse the establishment and entrenchment of capitalist production within a pre-capitalist or peasant social formation and the resultant changes in gender relations of productions. Articulation should then be perceived as a linkage of or between two societies exemplified by dynamism and change (Esese, 1990; Ayot, 1990; Jalang’o-Ndeda, 1991). Thus scholars should not endeavour to look for a pure mode of productions. Nothing idealistic as that exists. The central issue here is then the analysis of the establishment and entrenchment of capitalist production within a pre-capitalist or peasant social formation; the nature and form of penetration providing the basis of explaining the articulation process (Esese 1990).

The initial break in the household self-sufficiency of the Luo community of Kombewa, like any other place in Africa, was achieved through European expansion in the sixteenth
century and eventual transition to capitalism. Before the late twentieth century, virtually no society remained unchanged by these historical processes. It was at the household level that the impact of colonialism with its demand for labour, taxes and marketable crops fell most. It was these historical processes that caused shifts in household duties and responsibilities as the need for maintenance of prior relations of production took the centre stage. Female-headed households became common and took initiatives to maintain the Luo community of Kombewa and also satisfy the colonial capitalism.

The above make this concept applicable to this study for it is argued that the pre-capitalist Luo community was self-sustaining as far as labour and other social and economic demands are concerned. Women, men and children had specific roles to play in economic production. These roles were subjugated, subordinated and partially restructured as the colonial capitalism took to stage in the later parts of nineteenth century. As the colonial state withdrew more productive labour it was the female-headed households that maintained household production and reproduction in the area under investigation.

1.8.1 DATA COLLECTION

The study used both primary and secondary sources. Secondary sources included books, journals, magazines, articles, unpublished theses, seminar papers, periodicals, reports, and pamphlets among others. Information concerning colonial policies practices, missionary activities regarding the Luo community in general and Kombewa in particular
was obtained. The study also consulted anthropological, historical and sociological information on pre-colonial and colonial Luo community.

These data was obtained from Moi Library, Jomo Kenyatta Memorial Library, Institute of Development Studies, Institute of African Studies, and The Macmillan Library, Kenya National Library Services, Kenya National Archives and Church Society of Kenya Archives. Constant and rigorous corroboration and scrutiny was done to reduce subjectivity on these sources.

Primary sources included, archival data covering provincial and district reports, native council reports, native affairs reports, municipal reports, colonial government publications, confidential reports, diaries, early accounts of colonial agents, missionary reports, settler reports, intelligence reports, colonial land, labour and taxation reports, old journals, The East Africa and Uganda Mail, East African Standards and the Ramogi welfare reports and The Daily and Sunday Nation Newspapers.

These were obtained from National Archives, Provincial Archives, Individual Archives, Church Archives, Court Archives and Macmillan Library. From them, information regarding the subject was collected, especially those concerning the Luo of Central Nyanza during the colonial period. Efforts were made to narrow down these sources to the area under study. The weaknesses of primary and secondary sources were taken into consideration especially regarding their unreliability, level of bias, and subjectivity. It
was through corroboration that such biases were eliminated. This was done through counter checking the information gathered from oral sources, with that obtained from secondary sources.

Although oral interviews are faced with content invalidity and subjectivity in some places, they were very useful to this study. Purposive sampling was employed. Informants were selected from a cross-section of the entire community in the division considering:

(a) If the person was mentioned by either documentary or oral informants

(b) If the persons was recognised by local administrators and researcher.

(c) Elderly people who were knowledgeable on matters of people's history

(d) The prior involvement of that person with colonial administration e.g. taxes collector, court interpreter, colonial agent etc.

The population-sampling frame included men and women, village elders and surviving colonial agents. The women included those who headed households, those who participated as colonial agents and those who are elderly for instance fifty years and over.

Due to the nature of the study and information expected seventy (70) informants were interviewed, drawn from the four locations in the division. Using a question guideline the researcher gathered data until the information received started repeating. Information was recorded from the conversation and transcribed later.
During the interviews, question guideline was used, as informants were allowed to talk freely after introduction of the topic. The researcher and his/her assistants were only to guide the informants on sub topics. Recording of information using a tape recorder was done as informants gave their oral testimonies.

1.8.2 DATA ANALYSIS

Data was analysed using three methods. The first one involved theoretical reflection in which the data collected were examined against the theory used. Secondly, the extensive field notes gathered during oral interviews were corroborated with archival and secondary data. This was done to remove any bias and to ensure accuracy and reliability.

Since I was interested in general patterns and dominant themes as set on the objectives, repetition of data was looked for. Careful re-reading of the colonial records, field records and other secondary data was very useful in unearthing significant patterns. Issues or aspects that seemed to fit together and reinforce each other were considered to be more significant than the isolated ones. Lastly, I was able to go through necessary sources and then extracting excerpts or relevant information. In most instances, I quoted verbatim to make strong arguments.

After accomplishing the above, I divided the study into six chapters. These included: - the context of the problem, the people of Kombewa and their socio-economic structures at
the eve of colonialism. Chapter three examined establishment of colonial rule, the missionary factor and Seme women 1894-1963, while chapter four looked at female-headed households in Kombewa during the inter-war period. The last chapter, apart from the conclusion, investigates the post war social and economic changes and their impacts on female-headed households in Kombewa.

1.8 SCOPE AND LIMITATION OF THE STUDY

The year 1894 has been chosen because it was at this date that the British declared a protectorate over the Buganda and this included the areas covered by the present day Kombewa Division. Moreover, by that time, a considerable degree of administrative control had been established all over the most densely populated parts of the Luo land. It was also at about the same time that the number of settlers had grown to a point at which their presence and political demands began seriously to impinge on at least those African people spatially adjacent to them (Kitching, 1981). While towards 1963 the colonial institutions had been weakened by the nationalistic movements’ calumniating into political independence in 1963.

The territorial extent was not rigidly confined within administrative limits of the current Kombewa Division. It was extended to gather adequate examples. However concern was with the colonial economic and social policies and practices together with missionary activities applied in Kombewa and their effect on female-headed households outlined
above. Sources beyond the geographical limits of Kenya were consulted particularly literature from Southern Africa. The study's primarily concern was with female-headed households and not women who had regular husbands. Similarly, the study did not examine migration and settlement of the Luo community or investigate the role of Luo women in the decolonisation process. It was also not possible for the study to get the precise numerical data on women who migrated from Kombewa to Kisumu Township.

Some problems were experienced during archival and field data collection. During the archival data collection some document could not provide precise dates particularly due to the fact that the dates were not written or could not be read easily or conflicting. I was shocked to realise that some critical information were tempered with especially when I visited the CMS archive in Kisumu. During oral data collection most informants were not precise when it came to remembering dates and a number asked for some token to offer information. But after identifying myself as one from the community, they quickly offered the information. In other instances I found it difficult to resist given the state of poverty. But on most instances information were offered freely without asking for a token.
CHAPTER TWO

2.0 THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC STRUCTURES OF THE JO-SEME\(^1\) ON THE EVE OF COLONIALISM.

2.1. INTRODUCTION.

In this chapter the pre-colonial Luo social and economic structures on the eve of colonialism\(^2\) are analysed. The various lineages that constitute the peopling of Kombewa, their social and economic organization together with individual responsibilities are discussed. Details are given on features relating to female-headed households in Kombewa.

2.2. THE POLITICAL AND RELIGIOUS ORGANIZATION OF KOMBEWA PEOPLE

The socio-economic and political organization of the people of Kombewa constitutes a segmentary lineage system in which patrilineal exogamous groups were organised politically by territory (Butterman, 1976:22). There is a substantial literature on such systems which forms a useful framework for comparison with the one of the Luo in

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\(^1\) The word Jo-Seme refers to one and the dominant sub-ethnic group that occupies Kombewa division today. It is this group that this study is interested in. In a more a detailed analysis the group is also referred to as Oganda.

\(^2\) Details on this can be found in many works, including Ominde, 1952; Southall, 1952; Whisson, 1964; Ogot, 1967; Hay, 1972; Ochieng' 1974; Butterman, 1979; Schiller, 1982; Obudho, 1985; Ayot, 1990; Jalang'o-Ndeda, 1991). Kombewa and the Luo will be used interchangeably in this chapter and specificity will be given only where necessary.
Kombewa (Fortes, 1945; Southall, 1952; Fortes and Evans Pritchard, 1958; Middleton and Tait, 1967; Evans Pritchard, 1969). Most of these studies agree in considering the following features characteristic of the segmentary lineage system (Butterman Ibid). That the recruitment into the lineage is by unilineal descent, the real or fictional kinship acts as the political cement of the group and members of the group trace their descent to a common ancestor. They also agree that genealogical reckoning provides a code of behaviour and etiquette while anteriority and seniority serve as a source of authority and this authority is diffused. Middleton and Tait (1967) further illustrates that the basic features of the segmentary lineage system were its nesting attributes—a smaller segment being contained in a larger social grouping and its complementary opposition. At every level of genealogical depth there existed potential for competition and cooperation over resources. At each coordinate level, cooperation over some of these resources and in some activities was characteristic. At the next ordinate of segmentation these activities and resources might become a matter of overt competition. The same observations were made by Evans-Pritchard (1969:6) among the Nuer segmentary lineage in the following words: A man can be a member of a group and yet not be a member of it...political values are thus always, structurally speaking, in conflict. However Southall (Ibid. 6) locates this contradiction within the primary unit of social organization, the family in which groups of brothers compete with one another.

A classic study of a segmentary lineage system is that of the Nuer by Evans-Pritchard. This study is important, because in Evans-Pritchard's own words, the Nuer "constitution is representative of East Africa (Nilotic groups) it provides us with an extreme political
type (Middleton and Tait, Ibid. 272). The Nuer traces their descent from one ancestor and were segmented into several "tribes". A tribe is that unit of segmentation in which compensation is paid for homicide. Clans are system of exogamous lineage. Subordinate to the clan level the units of segmentation were described as maximal, major, minor and minimal lineage. In the context of the Nuer lineage segmentation is territorially expressed, but this pattern was modified by the Nuer transhumant habits imposed by the ecological conditions of the southern Sudan.

The segmentary lineage system is sufficiently flexible to adapt to specific environmental and historical conditions. It has been described as an equilibrium system although Fortes and Evans Pritchard (op cit.) emphasised that this social structure is not to be though of as static, but as a condition of equilibrium that only persists by being continually renewed. Evans-Pritchard considered that ecological and demographic factors influenced when and where the Nuer segmentation occurred. Sahlins (1968:20) however attributes the stages of segmentation to certain technological base.

The Luo of Kombewa exhibits many of the features of the segmentary lineage system as described. They were organized in territorial maximal lineages. Below the maximal lineage several levels of segmentation are discernible. The people who live in the present day Kombewa division constitute one of the major groups of the Luo called Joka-Jok. Joka-Jok represents the first wave of the Luo migration into Nyanza and comprised of the following people: Chwanya, Nyikal and Rado (dominant clans in modern Seme location)
By 1900 the people of the present day Kombewa had occupied most of the regions where they are today (Ogot 1967; Jalang'o-Ndeda 1989).

The Luo were divided into twelve or thirteen Ogendini\(^3\) (Maximal Lineages) of varying in size from about 10,000 to 70,000 persons (Ogot, 1963). The largest political unit to which a Luo could belong was oganda (Maximal Lineage) made up of gwenge [semi-autonomous political units]. The territory of oganda was called piny; each oganda is a gathering of many clans. It is composed of a dominant clan to which others attached themselves for security and protection against neighbouring alliances (Whisson, 1964:22; Jalang'o-Ndeda, 1991:55)

The people of Kombewa are thus apart of maximal lineage called Seme whose members cooperated for military and political purposes and are strictly exogamous groups. They are descendants of the founder of the lineage called Nyikal. Below the maximal lineage are major lineages whose members trace their genealogical relationships six to eight generations to a common ancestor. Within Seme, the major lineages are the primary corporate landholding units and the largest important political, judicial and economic unit (Ogot 1963; Hay, 1972: 93; Hay, 1976:88). Examples of some of the major clans in Kombewa include-Joka-Dinga, Joka-Ombwa, Joka-Katieno, Joka-Okello, Joka-Akello, Joka-Adero, Joka-Ura, Jokobita, Joka-Ombija, Konywera. (Joyce Ogundi, Joseph Nyamwanda, and Samuel Wajango Adari, O.I, 2000).
The Jo-Seme are an independent economic, political and ritual unit. Politically, they had their own *ruoth* (chief). The *ruoth* was the jural-political leader of the sub-ethnic group. In some sub-ethnic groups he was also a prophet or a spiritual leader. As in the whole of the Luo community, each *ruoth* had a council (*buch piny*) consisting of clan elders (*jodong dhoot*), the peace-maker (*ogaye*), and the tribal war leader (*osumba mirwayi*). The council dealt with matters affecting the whole 'tribe', such as famine, rain, war, tribal sacrifices and prayers and peace. It acted as the final court of appeal for the *ruoth* (Whisson, 1964:22; Ochieng', 1974; Jalango'-Ndeda, 1991; Cokumu, 2001:33).

Within the area of jurisdiction of the *ruoth* a hierarchy of *ruothi* had developed. Each *gweng* had an assistant *ruoth* appointed by ruoth himself. Such assistant ruoth had their own council's *doho*, and their own peacemakers. The *doho* deals with local matters and it also acts as a local law court. All cases are brought first before *doho*. These included such cases as those of robbery, homicide, witchcraft, land, arson and adultery. Appeals could then be made to *buch-piny*. *Doho* is composed of the *jodong gweng* (county elders) and local *ogaye*. The assistant *ruoth* had a peacemaker (*ogulmama*) whose job is to enforce decisions reached at the *doho* meetings.

Religion plays a very significant role in the day-to-day life of a Luo. It is generally practiced at the *dala* level. The Luo believes in life after death which gives rise to the idea that though a man or a woman might die physically he or she would all the same continue to protect and care for his or her family, relatives and friends. The dead guarded

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3 This is what Evans Pritchard (1949) calls 'tribes' and Ochieng' (1974:46-49) calls 'sub-tribal' divisions and Butterman, 1976 call maximal lineage. In this work the word sub-ethnic group will be used.
the living as they are invoked to keep evil forces away and their wrath is held responsible for misfortunes. The dead manifests themselves in dreams and use diviners as their intermediaries. Sacrifices could be offered to him or his name given to a baby. The dead until recently were buried in shallow graves or in houses for communication (Jalang’o-Ndeda, 1991:60-61). Within the marriages the dead could only be consulted through diviners on specific cases, such as failure to get a baby, incurable sickness on the couples and their children as well as bewitchment among other home problems. Religion among the Jo-Seme did not at any time dictate the number of women one could marry. It is through the religion that marriages could be blessed. The Luo also recognized a supreme God, Nyasaye as the only dispenser of life, health and wealth to them who are obedient to the customs (Odaga, 1980).

2.3. SOCIAL ORGANIZATION AND DIVISION OF LABOR

From the time the Jo-Seme settled in their present day locality, they have intermarried with and absorbed other people, particularly from the Bantu communities weakening their lineage relationship as a main form of social and political organization (Ogot, 1967:8, Wilson, 1968). This makes the Jo-Seme lineage relationship problematic. In this study we would adopt kinship as a major unit of social organization. The social formation or evolution of the people of Kombewa involved absorption basically based on friendship and widow "inheritance". Hila and Olunje who were Nyikal friends married among Jo-Seme. Hila, for instance, married Amollo, the daughter of Nyikal. Till today some clans in Kombewa division intermarry with Joka-Hila. The same applies to Joko-Olunje. interchangeably with the words oganda or Joseme.
Moreover Hila and Olunje who were Nyikal’s friends happened to have come from Luhya communities bordering the Jo-Seme and had inherited some women in Seme (Samwel Wanjango Adari, O.I, 2000).

Although lineage formation embraces groups of related people who can trace their family tree to one eponymous founder (Ominde, 1953:29; Ayot, 1990), the evolution of the Luo was characterized by intermarriages between them and non-Luo groups. This involved absorption of non-Luo groups, jodak (tenants) and many other groups who were not in anyway members of a particular Luo lineage (Ayot, 1990:93; Jalang’o-Ndeda, 1991). But Kinship is a complex concept of social relation. It includes not only those who are related genealogically through blood and marriage, but also people who share no blood connection yet somehow come to be identified as kinsmen in a particular community Spradley and McCurdy (1974:90). It is this that makes this study to embrace it. Kinship among Jo-Seme was the determining factor of one's place or residence as well as land ownership rights. Kinship played a multi-functional social and political role which embraces economic infrastructure as well as other political and cultural functions (Godelier, 1974:10). It functioned simultaneously as infrastructure and superstructure and in effect controlled the access of groups and individuals to the conditions of production and to resources. Kinship regulated marriages and provided the social framework of politico-ritual activities. Equally, it also functioned as an ideology, a symbolic code for expressing relations between men and women and nature.
The Luo size of the family depended on the number of wives a man may have. In certain instances, the wealth of an individual also swelled the size of his family. It was rare to find a wealthy monogamous man in Luo society (Ogutu, 1975:18). Ayot illustrates that:

But this does not mean that the man depended solely on the labour of the women to achieve his status. The establishment of the homestead was characterized by patrilineal and matrilineal control in so far as operational activities within the society were concerned. The patrilineal and matrilineal dominance complemented each other, thus emphasizing the importance of interdependence in running the affairs of the family as well as the community as a whole. The position of the male and that of the female, as far as the activities of the society are concerned, was well defined (Ayot, 1990:78).

During the field interviews, the respondents stated clearly that no father could allow his daughter to marry in a poor home. Acquisition of enough wealth of livestock is what made a man aspire to marry particularly many women (Canon. Hesbon Nyongo, Monica Orogno, Josephat Danga, O.I, 2000). Equally, Luo women aspired to be married to hard-working men from wealthy families who would provide economic help to them (Potash, 1984:85). The patrilineal nature of the Luo social organization gave the man a complete authority and responsibility for running of the homestead. The woman was however regarded as the owner of the house. In relation to the houses, the man ceased to feature since it was the women who had full control of the house and the activities therein, be they economic or social (Ayot, 1990:84).

\footnote{This was because the man depended on the daughters to provide him with livestock so as to give as bridewealth for his own sons and other relatives.}
The homestead forms the basic unit of social organization. Territorially, it forms the part of the larger homestead and has arable land assigned to it. The wife was *wuon ot*, [the owner of the house] as the husband was the *wuon dala* or *wuon pacho*, [owner of the homestead]. Even in polygamous families the husband was the head of the many households (*udi*). The Luo live in homesteads housing several families who are often connected by kinship. It is the homestead (*dala*) which forms the primary religious, social and economic unit. Each individual homestead could be occupied by the nuclear family consisting of father, his wife or wives, unmarried children, married sons families and sometimes servants (Jalang’o-Ndeda 1991:65). In some homesteads the head of the home (*wuon dala*) may even invite his brothers and cousins to stay with him. *Dala* thus served as the basic political, productive, reproductive and socialization unit. On the basic level, political decisions are made by *wuon dala*. This *wuon dala* is in theory the primary authority in his compound and makes all the major decisions in the household. These included settlement of disputes, relations between his *dala* and other *mier*, distribution of crops and land. Kinship, seniority and territoriality are important political determinants in a Luo community.

Each household (*ot*) was charged with all the activities required for the maintenance and the needs of its members, including production, deployment and use of labour power and the determination of economic objectives, for instance, what to produce and how to go about it. People might cooperate at a higher level but the basic aims of the household are paramount (Jalang’o-Ndeda, 1991: 67). In a polygamous home, each co-wife is *wuon ot* meaning that she is the head of the household and the leader of its domestic and
economic activities. The women do this to provide for their own children. The co-wife relationship has important implications for women.

Among the Jo-Seme for example, this relationship is reflected in the language, where the term co-wife has its roots in words meaning jealousy (*nyiego* or *nyieka*). In this, is a continuous competition for the husband's favour. This is evident in the rate of bearing many children and efforts to out do each other in performance of domestic and economic activities. They also compete over land and other resources particularly for advancement of children (Herbich; 1981:20; Potash, 1984:75; Jalang'o-Ndeda, 1991:66). This competition for the husband's favour has been highly misunderstood by many authors such as Hay, (1972) Butterman, (1979), Schiller, (1982). It has been taken to mean that women form a pool of labour for production of surplus to be appropriated by men, either for their own consumption or for use by the sons during bridewealth payment. Husbands do not control women's labour because they do not solely control the means and instrument of production, which includes, land, seeds, technology, food and livestock. Thus, for agricultural supply to be realized, both men and women compliment each other.

The division of labour among the Jo-Seme was no different from that of the other Luo sections. Every gender had a role to play for the maintenance and smooth running of the whole community. The division of labour within the Luo home was done according to sexes—thus there were duties to be performed by women and others by men. However it was not a rigid division of labour. While there were specific duties performed by women
and others by men, at times depending on the task and the circumstances the roles could shift, more particularly during war).

Within the homestead, the men constructed houses and granaries [godero], whose roofs they thatched. After men had built houses, the women plastered the walls including those of the granaries, which they smeared with a particular type of soil, mixed with cow-dung. The men fenced the homesteads, and in most instances, they milked the cows and goats. Both men and women performed some labour, a case in point was weaving. While minor weaving fell in the province of women, the production of hoes, knives and handles as well as large baskets fell on the province of men (Jalang'o-Ndeda, 1991). The women also processed and traded in milk products (Ayot, 1990:168). No matter how involved homestead heads were in the household operation, women were in control of the domestic economy. Production skills of women covered the whole sphere of domestic care (Ominde, 1952).

Outside the homesteads, men did other duties such as hunting, herding and fishing; they cleared the virgin fields in preparation for cultivation after the elders had given a signal to plant and for procuring a rainmaker if necessary. Both men and women participated in tilling, sowing, weeding and harvesting (Ayot, 1990; Jalang'o-Ndeda, 1991). Apart from farming activities, the women were also involved in trade, pottery, herbal medicine, transmission of knowledge, attitudes and value systems to the youth, especially girls. They could also be consulted on intriguing issues affecting the whole community. The
household served dual purposes; it was both a unit of production and of consumption (Ominde, 1952).

The pre-colonial society did not in any way over burden the woman. Each gender had specific roles to play. The withdrawal or absence of one could have a considerable impact on the other. On death of the owner of the homestead, the widow or widows were ‘inherited’ and this was a very important cultural aspect of the Luo community. In the case of a man who died when his wife had not passed childbearing age, it was the duty of the man’s brother to cohabit with the widow in order to raise children on behalf of the diseased. The widow remained permanently the wife of the dead man and the children born out of such relationship remained the children of the dead man for whom the brother was a surrogate and thus not strictly speaking her husband (Nyaruath, 1994, Radcliff, et al. 1975).

The Luo community has a protocol and pattern for everything in the homestead. These involve performance of rituals, which in most instances are realized through sexual act\(^5\). This is required by the society for its proper function (Ayot, 1990:85). It was thus impossible for a widow or a woman to be in the homestead without a man for this could result in a break down on the whole social, economic and political setting of the Luo community (Nyaruath, 1994). The Luo have an economic system that is closely

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\(^5\) This is not compulsory in all cases. For example if a widow has passed childbearing age, or sick sexual activities are not performed. In such instances there are procedures to ensure the rituals are accomplished (O.I. Joseph Nyamwanda, 2000).
intertwined with the social system and really cannot be analysed separately from the society as a whole (Jalang’o-Ndeda 1991:64)

The expression ‘wife inheritance’ was coined by the colonial judicial system, which treated most of the established African practices as ‘repugnant’. They did this in order to make them sound morally intolerable and hence unacceptable to any reasonable person. This was done by Western religion in an attempt to sell European customs (Odera Oruka 1994). Oruka continues to explain that "the Luo term for ‘wife inheritance’ is *lako* or *ter*, which literally in Luo means *rito*. And *rito* in English means protection. This means that the man we refer to as ‘inheritor’ assumes the protective role of the deceased husband. He is a guardian (*honorific guardianship*) of the family, but has no right whatsoever to help himself to any of the properties belonging to the deceased or to any member of the bereaved family" (Odera, 1994).

It is against this background that many people, like Nzomo (1994), seem to have misconstrued the concept to mean a violation of human rights\(^6\) of the widows. Obudho (1985:124) further states that,

In the Luo concept of leviratic (this word comes from the Latin word *Levir* meaning husband’s brother, so the leviratical marriage pertains the levirate-husband’s brother for instance husband dies his wife is inherited by his living brother) marriage was a convenient arrangement to protect and give support to the widow and their children. The wife belonged to the individual and to the kinship group and when the husband died, she remained in the kinship group in the husband’s lineage and other duties of

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\(^6\) Several scholars including Shivji, 1989, have questioned the universality of human rights. Shivji noted that traditional African society was grounded on obligation not rights. This has diluted this concept making it not only western in origin but also colonial in application.
the deceased husband were taken over by a brother. The widow could not marry. In no case can such arrangement be called a new marriage.

On the whole, the levirate was a form of social security, safety and protection for a widow and her children. It was a way of catering for the unsupported women and for ensuring the continuation of the kinship line. It was a custom inspired by desire to fulfil the primary purpose of marriage, that is, procreation and protection of widows and her children. Any attempt by anybody to eradicate it without any alternative definitely affected not only the widows but also the whole community.

In this way we have seen that, the members of the homestead are like that of the state and the individual. Whereas the state provides protection for the individual, the individual in turn makes it possible for the state to function by recognizing its existence. And just as the state remains stable only as a result of the co-operation between the leader and the people, each recognizing their rights, obligations, responsibilities, authority and limitations and therefore striking a compromise for the smooth running of the state, likewise the home remains stable only when the man and members of his homestead work co-operatively. Just as the solidarity of the state is determined by that of the people, so solidarity of the members of a particular homestead tended to be a dominant factor of the solidarity of that family (Ayot, 1990:88).
2.4 THE PRE-COLONIAL MARRIAGE SYSTEMS AMONG THE JO-SEME.

The preamble of all the marriages was *sero* (courtship) which generally took place between late afternoon and midnight when all duties were done. Young men from adjacent villages got into the home through the small opening on the fence [*rot* or *rath*] to gather in the *simba* for the evening chat. The young men met with girls to chat or court each other. Sometimes the boys invited girls from a distant clan to spend the night with them. This was known as *wuowo*. Before the girl went to *wuowo*, they were instructed *pim* (a woman past child rearing age), on safe sex to avoid pregnancy. Sexual intercourse was restricted and the girl had to ensure that she was not deflowered (Ochieng-Othieno, 1968).

When a man reached the age of marriage, his father gave him freedom to look for a suitable girl. If he had no choice among his friends he made contacts with married sisters-in-law or cousins to help get a suitable girl. When he got a suitable girl, he reported back to his parents and between them, they looked for a contact that was related to the girl and also known to them as an upright person. He was the mediator between the two young people and between the two families and the two clans. He gave information on the integrity among of the girl, fertility among the girl's clan and family and clan. *Jagam* [go between] also gave information to the girl's family concerning the boy, his family and clan. The young man and his group then made arrangements for the visit to the girl's home.
However, it was usually the father of the boy who began to talk of a wife for his son. The senior wife and the father must agree that it was time their son got married and together they planned where the cattle could be found before the boy was encouraged to go out and look for a wife [manyo nyako]. This was a major event in a man's life and the young man solicited the advice from his relatives and friends. It was not unusual that his father and paternal uncles had someone in mind. It was felt improper for a young man to talk publicly to prospective young lady by himself without the services of Jagam. This person played a very important role not only in the marriage ceremonies but also in the consequent negotiations (Wilson Gordon, 1968:96). During the first visits to the girl place, negotiations took place and soon after the young man began to exchange marriage tokens (bridewealth). He gave cattle as agreed upon and then began to make arrangements on how to acquire the bride. This they did with the secret arrangement with pim to pull the girl away. Ceremonies to mark the marriage began (Jalang'o-Ndeda, 1991).

These ceremonies involve the exchange of bridewealth. The term bridewealth has been referred to in different names, these include: dowry, brideservice, gift exchange, token payment, sister exchange, presence of gift among others (Goody, et al 1973). It is this that makes problematization of this concept unavoidable. While complete problematic of this concept is beyond the scope of this work, we will attempt to give some general observation to enable us understand bridewealth system among the Jo-Seme. The bridewealth relations have provided the foundation of most analysis in gender relations with a fairly rigid definition of bridewealth transaction-the 'wives cattle equation'. It is
this which will lead us to critiquing the gender element in the classical Marxist theorization of class. One thing that comes out on this theoretical landscape is that the gender element was hard to detect. Instead the emphasis was on labour power and control over means and relations of production (Jeater, 1993:8). It is such analysis that has led to inadequate claims that, such payments establish the husband’s rights to his wife’s labour and sometimes also to the children she may bear (Potash, P.83).

Many structuralists have fallen into elementary errors of reductionism and decontextualisation by treating the marriage exchanges as if they constituted a totality, rather than being encompassed in one. The bridewealth exchanges should be discussed, not in terms of the rights exchanged, but in terms of other organizational elements within the social system. We need to examine the context in which the bridewealth exchange takes place and the meaning which the actors ascribe to these exchanges. The exchange of prestations, in this view, is a moment in which the people live or manifest the organizational principles underlying their socio-cultural system (Comaroff 1980:31). In other words, the bridewealth exchange is not only about rights and property, but also about the people and the ways in which the social identity is constructed. Whereas the capitalist relationships alienate the worker from the worker’s labour power, bridewealth relationships deal with the whole person. The bridewealth exchange, then, is not only a moment in which certain economic relationships are constructed. It is a moment in which ‘persons’ are confirmed in a complex social identity. It does not only give the man rights over women’s labour, in fact it is after marriage that a man could aspire for social and economic leadership (Jeater, 1993; Potash, 1984). This is the context in which the Luo
and particularly the Jo-Seme, bridewealth exchange is based. Obudho captures this in details. He observed:

The livestock that were given to the bride's parents had been called variably by western anthropologists as bribeprice, dowry. But in the thinking of the Luo, the livestock given to the parent of the girl were seen as bridewealth. The giving of livestock in form of bridewealth (mwandu), to obtain a wife was actually the basis of a whole network of interpersonal relations an expression of gratitude from the husband to the family members of his wife. It was a symbolic gift of gratitude. It had an important social, economic and even religious significance. Among the Luo, even if a man had given full bridewealth, which had been fixed by the kinsmen, exchange of gifts between the two families continued throughout their married life. Bridewealth was real symbolic gift of exchange legalizing a marriage, legitimising children of the union, indemnifying the brides family, stabilizing the marriage to a limited extent and propitiating the lineage spirit.

The bridewealth exchange among the Jo-Seme was very elaborate, expensive and ended with Riso. This was the final stage in the marriage ceremonies. Here, the girls brothers-in-law gave her a general welcome into the clan. She received many presents including her own chieno [tussle]. Chieno made of fibbers was fastened by a string round her waist. This was important attire and she could not serve a meal to her husband without wearing one. The whole process of the bridewealth exchange included the following: -

(a) *Dher gonyo chip*-literally it would mean a cow for removing pubic cover.
(b) *Diend dwe*-a goat for timing the moon.
(c) *Dho ikeny*-father share (as many as ten cows).
(d) *Dho choke or Dho miluhini*-relatives share.
(e) *Dher maro*-milch cow and its calf for the mother -in-law.
(f) *Dher wuoro*-milch cow and its calf for the bride's father.
(g) *Dher omin won nyako* or *dher atung*-a heifer for the bride's father's brother.

(h) *Dher omin nyako*-a milk cow or heifer and a bullock for the half brother of the girl.

(i) *Dher ner nyako*-a heifer or a bull for the bride's mother's brother.

(j) Shs.60 to 100 for entering the house of the bride's mother. This practice is said to have come from the Samia.

(k) *Riso nyako*-this is the final "payment" after which no legal payment can be demanded. But in a successful marriage or union the transference of gifts until the death of both parties continues (Wilson, 1968). Wilson concluded by saying that *dho miluhini*, together with *dher chip and dho keny*, constituted the legal bridewealth [*nyombo*] and with the exclusion of the one given for fertility. It was considered to be most efficacious if the groom was able to pay all of these animals (Wilson, 1968:115).

What lessons can we learn from this arrangement? It is quite evident that, the marriage system among Jo-Seme, was an expensive exercise. Most of the respondents indicated that one had to give more than ten cows (Ester Ombewa, Obinda Martin, and Obadha Ochalla, O.I, 2000). The whole process was communal as illustrated by Potash (1984:82) when she observed that:

> Many African marriages are still arranged. Luo turn to a father’s sister or mother does brothers who reside in other kinship to find a suitable mate. They either know the family personally or can vouch for them or they inquire into their reputation and family history. It’s therefore the desire for a successful union, security and protection that is a major consideration governing marriage arrangement in Luo community.
The Luo marriage is a social and communal affair which united a woman and a man and further united the families and the clans of married couple. The union of the husband and wife in traditional society generates relationships with a larger pattern of social relationships. The social system determines the nature of the marriage, which operates within the social system and becomes a societal obligation in which all have to participate. If one failed to partake in it, such a person was considered an under-man, a lawbreaker and a rebel (Obudho, 1985).

Among the Jo-Seme, marriage is processional and is not an individual matter. Its arrangement attracts the participation of the whole family and clan. Prior to the mission influences it made little difference to a man if his wife went away with someone else, because he knew that she must some day come back to him for her father would not dare to accept second bridewealth animals. Moreover, if the marriage failed, calculation of bridewealth return was done these included the animals killed on the man’s honour, those for virginity, for children and food eaten during negotiations. The traditional ground for divorce included: witchcraft, drunkenness, impotency, sterility, incest, sodomy, bestiality, homosexuality, premeditated murder of a tribesman, continuous miscarriages based on habitual adultery, failure to meet full obligation of the bridewealth contract, wife beating, food measuring, laziness and barrenness (Wilson, 1984; Obudho, 1985).

Cattle play a significant role in the Luo marriage arrangement. It has been observed that the number of cattle to be exchanged would be liable to purposeful manipulation by the
family heads or kinship heads enable it to serve its purpose. This is because all the marriage processes depend on it. In fact Goody (1973:5) explained that "bridewealth is not to be consumed in the course of celebrations nor is it handed to the wife; it goes to the bride's male kin (typically brothers) in order that they can themselves take a wife". Indeed it involves a kind of rationing system. Equally Wilson (1968) observed that, the wealth received by the bride's side by virtue of giving away a daughter or a sister enable the girl's father or better still her brother's to use that wealth to secure wives for themselves. As a result we have a phenomena of cattle-linked brothers and sisters found for instance among the Abagusii and the Luo. It made virginity a very important aspect in the Luo community as it enabled the girl to fetch more bridewealth.

Among the Luyia the transfer of marriage cattle primarily serves as a regulator of marriages and not as a means of increasing father-in-law's wealth (Wagner, 1949). The father even obtained permission from the girl's mother and brothers before using dho ikeny to liquidate debts (Wilson, op cit. P.113). To achieve this the important aim was not to let the amount fall below the effective rate (Goody, op cit. P.5). Among the Gusii, Mayer observed that:

Every father fears being left in the lurch by finding that the bridewealth which he has accepted for his daughter will not suffice to get him a daughter-in-law. He was always on the look out for any sign of a rise in the rate, and tends to raise his demand whenever he hears of other fathers doing so (Mayer, 1950:19).

The role of the father and other kin heads was clear. The authority of the older generation was linked to the extent to which the young were dependent on them for marriage cattle
or its equivalent. The dependent extended in some measure to all contributing kinsfolk which included maternal as well as paternal kin (Goody, op cit. p 5).

Therefore, during the bridewealth negotiations, the bridegroom’s family and kin transfer to the bride’s family and kin certain goods in return, to which certain rights are transferred. After riso (marriage ceremony) in Luo marriage arrangement, the woman was given her garden. She could also have her own granary and begin to cook in her own hut. A truly married woman in Luo community had her own hut. In other words she now assumed all the womanly duties without assistance from anybody. The woman then became responsible as a wife. She become a mother and provided of food for the entire family (Jalang’o-Ndeda, op cit.p.83). Among the Jo-Seme and the Luo in general, if the bridewealth was not forthcoming the bride's father or his kin might try to persuade the woman to return home until the husband met full obligation. Equally should marriage fail, bridewealth was to be returned upon calculations. But a poor man, who probably eloped with a woman and could not exchange full bridewealth through misfortune waited until his daughters marry. Both parties prior to contact often agreed on this. This form of marriage is called *nyodo okonyo omboga*, (the seeds of the plant come up to aid or a replace the old). If however the bridewealth of the mother is not paid when the bridewealth of the daughter has been received, the parents or the relatives of the mother can take the cattle by force without retribution. It was also a curse of a high degree for a woman to die after her daughter got married before full bridewealth was exchanged. It

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7 While the application of the word huts refer to dwelling places or houses in Kombewa, its derogatory usage by colonial officials is questioned.
was therefore through the exchange of bridewealth that marriages were legitimated and women incorporated into the family.

2.5. THE PRE-COLONIAL ECONOMY OF KOMBEWA.

The pre-colonial Luo economy was predominantly subsistence one. The major part of Luo production system was geared to food production. They had a multi-faceted food economy which included agriculture, pastoralism, fishing, hunting and gathering (Jalang’o-Ndeda, 1991). However Hay (1976:90-91), explained that:

Before Apamo [the great rinderpest epidemic of the early 1890s] had decimated the Luo herds, the Jo-Seme were predominantly pastoralists. Pastoralism "was superior to agriculture, as men are superior to women". For the Luo community, cattle were the source of milk, blood and meat that supplemented their vegetable diet. Their skin, urine, bones, tail and cow-dung, also provided for many basic needs of a household as well as being a key part of the exchange network especially in bad times when cattle could be traded for grain to feed the family. Cattle meant everything to a Luo. To the men, it was not only a sign of respect but also a capability to marry many wives. Cattle were indispensable in marriage transactions, as considerable wealth in ties between owners and tenants in kinship relations and in payments for homicide (also see Schiller, op cit. P.39).

However, between 1880 and 1890 the economic importance of agriculture was overtaking pastoralism among the Jo-Seme. This was due to Apamo and greater the agricultural potential of new environment. Among the Luo land was the most easily acquired factor of production. By customs, a man would apportion plots of land to his sons as they married and established household of their own- the remainder being distributed to them at his death. This would be given to the sons depending on which one
the mother farmed. The man assigned specific fields to each of his wives, according to their abilities and needs, this was largely determined by the number of her children. The women never held permanent rights to land, since a husband could reassign garden plots if he saw it fit to do so (Hay, op cit. p.93). Nevertheless as Ayot, (1991:187), rightly points out that ‘but even then, once the land had been given to a particular woman it could never be given to another wife. Such an act would provoke hatred between the members of one’s family’. No right thinking Luo man would attempt such a misnomer. Land was abundant in Seme at the turn of the twentieth century, and most men acquired fields simply by clearing virgin tracts rather than by inheritance. In fact, many men moved their homesteads from place to place within a radius of a few miles to exploit the fertility of the virgin soil and the best pastures. A given field was planted only two or three years in succession and then was left fallow for eight to ten years. This gave land an important role to play in the Jo-Seme economy. From land people grew crops that they supplemented with products from their cattle. Agricultural system comprised of rudimentary hoe agriculture, shifting cultivation and rotation of crops.

Both men and women had specific roles to play in agricultural production. Each wife had strips of land in different places which helped to prevent the loss of all crops in case of a localized crop failure (Hay, op cit. P.90, Jalang’o-Ndeda, op cit. P.68). The agricultural production was not women’s responsibility. Economically, a man needed the wife in order to acquire land, cattle and to establish a homestead. He also needed the wife in order to break the ground (golo pur) to weed, (doyo) to eat greens from the field, (guel ruok) and to harvest (keyo) (SNHT.Vol.II.16). The non-observance of these practices was
a taboo. Evidently, therefore, there was interdependence between the man and his wife or wives in terms of agricultural production.

The pre-colonial crops planted included, sorghum, the traditional staple of the Luo, finger millet, barley, sesame, sweet potatoes, yams, pumpkins, beans, green gram, and a number of vegetables. Maize was a recent introduction around 1900 and had limited use. Equally, the Jo-Seme acquired some of these crops through trade and other interactions with their neighbours, such as the Luyia, the Sakwa, the Yimbo and the Kisumo. These included crops, such as bananas, maize, beans and varieties of sweet potatoes (Hay, 1976; Jalang’o-Ndeda, 1991; Schiller, 1982).

The inter-regional trade was stimulated by contacts between the people from distinct ecological regions. The bulk of local trade consisted of foodstuffs, iron implements, soapstone, pots and baskets, salts, medicines, poisons, livestock and animal skins, fishing and slaves in the second half of the nineteenth century. Trade involved the Luo, the Luyia and the Gusii who surrounded the Lake Victoria. Until the arrival of the British this trade was essentially barter (Ochieng’ 1974; Hay 1976).

Women were great traders during the pre-colonial period. This was due to their safe passage in times of war. In Seme, the women traded grains, flour, pots, fish and other foodstuffs including chicken. This trade basically expanded towards the Sakwa, the Asembo, the Gem, the Uyoma and the Luyia. They could exchange crops for goats and sheep. Indeed most market centres in Kombewa today were pre-colonial in origin (Hay,
Beer brewing was also one of the sole social and economic activities in which women were involved. This was not previously meant for sale but to grace certain social, economic and political occasions. The grain originally used was finger millet (kal). It was at the advent of colonialism that traditional beer began be sold basically to meet tax obligations.

As the women worked on their own pieces of land, the man also busied himself on his own farm. From this farm he produced grains to feed his relatives and as a safety valve during excessive rainy days or famine. This kind of activity was common in polygamous households basically to avoid conflicts and jealousy should the man’s relatives seek food aid from him. In cultivation, sowing, weeding and harvesting, his wife or wives and children assisted him. The produce from this field was kept in a specific granary or granaries, depending on the strength of the man and the amount of harvest. The granary was referred to as mondo, which the woman had no obligations over (Ayot, 1990:180; Jalang’o-Ndeda, 1991:70; Wilson, 1953:13).

If a woman needed help for farming she called upon her sisters, husband’s kin members and other relatives. This was called saga and was also used for building houses and other large cooperative projects. The saga system helped the household accomplish ritual and economic goals and at the same time reinforced political and social ties between a women (and therefore the husband and his group) and her relatives and thus between the larger political groups (Potash, 1984:71; Jalang’o-Ndeda, 1990:71).
2.6.0 SUMMARY.

In this chapter, we have discussed the nature of gender relations, kinship relations, division of labour, bridewealth exchange, widow guardianship and the pre-colonial Jo-Seme economy. It has been observed that these institutions were very important within the Jo-Seme social and economic settings. The social and economic organization of the Jo-Seme was couched within the kinship relationship. It was here that everybody had a role to play depending on gender, age and the activity to be performed. There was interdependence hence nobody was subordinated. The family heads and the kinship members had a considerable influence on matters pertaining to bridewealth exchange forcing them to exert pressure on aspects of women's sexuality, especially virginity. This they did to acquire enough bridewealth exchange for their sons to get to marry and to expand the kinship group. The marriage arrangements involved kinship members rather than individuals. Divorce was rare although there were provisions for it. Among Jo-Seme therefore female-headed households were difficult to come by. In the next chapter we examine the introduction of colonialism in Kombewa and its impact on these social structures.
CHAPTER THREE


3.1 INTRODUCTION:

While the previous chapter examined the Jo-Seme before the establishment of colonial rule this chapter will focus the introduction of colonialism and the gradual process of subjugation subordination in Kombewa. During this process Kombewa was drawn into the world capitalist system with its major characteristics of exploitation, subordination, unequal exchange and impoverishment. New forces of the colonial rule generally conflicted with and undermined traditional practice (also see Brett, 1973:1). The chapter thus explores the various explanations behind the British occupation of the present day Kombewa division. In addition, it analyses the impact of the colonial capitalism on the women of Kombewa. It is argues that, colonialism was a major impetus of change, given that it introduced new mechanisms of change within highly dynamic social and economic systems of Kombewa. Consequently, the process of articulation began. This process was characterised by subjugation, subordination, exploitation, destruction, restructuring, modification, and marginalization of the indigenous economic systems in Kombewa (also see Omwoyo and Nychogha, 2000:40). Thus the establishment of colonialism was responsible for the creation, expansion and impoverishment of female-headed households in Kombewa.
3.2 THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE COLONIAL RULE IN KOMBEWA.

Before the establishment of colonialism in Kombewa, the Jo-Seme experienced a number of important changes in all spheres of life. It will be important to summarize them briefly because they provide the context within which the impact of the establishment of colonialism can best be understood. Before 1894, the Jo-Seme, migrated to their present location and thus came to have their own territory. The Jo-Seme warriors were frequently called upon to fight in order to defend their land claims. Because of emphasis on military organization and the need to absorb outsiders into local communities, by 1890 the Jo-Seme had become a distinct group with political and social institutions based on territory (Hay, 1976:94). Their settlement saw the marking of boundaries of land for themselves and their families. In so doing they expanded their boundaries and brought a greater degree of contact and interaction with the other Luo, Luyia and the Kalenjin neighbours. Apart from pastoralism, these contacts opened up new possibilities in agriculture, hunting and trade. Thus, the late 19th century was particularly a dynamic period for the economy of Kombewa.

Natural and man-made catastrophes had hit the Jo-Seme economy by the time the colonial administration was entrenching itself in Kombewa. By 1890, Apamo [the great Rinderpest epidemic] devastated cattle in the Seme country requiring both immediate and long-term adjustments in balance between pastoralism and agriculture (Hay, 1976:90). Also between 1891 and 1892 a famine hit the entire Luo area including Seme, demanding urgent recovery and reorganization (Lonsdale, 1986:23). In less than five years span, Odila famine, which was caused by a prolonged drought became widespread in East
Africa and had a devastating impact in Seme economy. This famine was accompanied by severe natural calamities and diseases, including sleeping sickness, pleura-pneumonia, jiggers, small pox and malaria (Ochieng, 1987:4). Thus, the establishment of colonialism in Kombewa found the Jo-Seme adjusting to several social and economic stresses. A numbers of studies have focussed on the establishment of colonialism among the Luo of Central Nyanza (Ogot, 1963; Lonsdale, 1964; Hay, 1976; Ogutu, 1978; Schiller, 1983 Ochieng', 1985; Stitcher, 1985). They all agree that this process started on June 1894 when the British government finally declared protectorate over Uganda.

Between 1894 and 1902, the region between Mombasa and Busoga was merely viewed as a supply route to Uganda to be protected from "wild tribes". In other words, it was within the strategic thinking, that dominated the Whitehall with regard to its oversea possessions of British India, its interest in Egypt, the River Nile and its sources as well as Lake Victoria (Ogot, 1963:249; Barly, 1989:123-141). It was in pursuit of this policy that, C.W Hobley, a former servant of Imperial British East Africa Company arrived at Mumias\(^1\)-Nyanza in February 1895 as a sub-commissioner. His task was to occupy, pacify and open up ‘Kavirondo’ as the Nyanza province was called by the Swahili and Arab traders (Ogot, 1963; Jalang'o-Ndeda, 1991).

It was from Mumias that the influence of the British, hitherto confined largely to Uganda, slowly began to be felt almost in the whole of Western Kenya. It was in this arrangement that Hobley became responsible for creating the relationships between the British

\(^{1}\) This was a calling station for the Europeans and Swahili traders as they traveled between the Coast and Uganda.
administration and the people of Nyanza. Originally, he was charged with the responsibility of establishing an administration base but he gradually expanded his base of operation and extended his authority and power throughout Nyanza. It was during his tenure in Nyanza that Hobley convened meetings of selected leaders, such as Kitoto of Kano and Odera Ulalo of Gem in an effort to diversify his alliance system in order not to overly identified with Mumias and the Wanga. Food buying markets and depots were also set up outside Mumias in order to extend British influence in the area (Lonsdale, 1977:868).

In these meetings, Hobley acquired other allies and these included the Maasai, Gem, and Asembo. He forcefully demanded labour and porters from these allies. In a period of eighteen months, Hobley had managed seven punitive military expeditions to convince the recalcitrant clan leaders of British ability to press for their demands. These clans included the Kitosh (Babukusu and the Batachoni) the Nandi, the Abanyala, the Nabokholo, the Idakho, the Isukha the Tiriki, the Uyoma and the Sakwa (Lonsdale, 1977:868). It was in this drama that two British officials led a punitive expedition against the Jo-Seme on December 23, 1899 (Whisson, 1961; Hay, 1976), after which he demanded labour as a proof of submission (Stichter, 1985:12).

Among the "wild tribes" [tribes that refused to comply with British demands] were the Jo-Seme, the Uyoma and the Sakwa. In 1899, Hobley reported that the Ganda [Baganda] canoe of petty traders on the way to Kisumu had been cut up by Seme people as they camped on the Lake shore. This was extremely upsetting because Hobley was
encouraging the Ganda to trade with the people of Nyanza. He felt that this outrage was in part caused by lack of punitive expedition against the Sakwa who had in the same year driven away and killed one policeman. The Uyoma also had attacked all European boats passing between Kisumu and Uganda. As if this was not enough the Uyoma massacred a further party of the Ganda a month later. Hobley was finally given permission to send punitive expeditions against the three offending areas (Lonsdale, 1964:724; Jalango'-Ndèda, 1991). In Kombewa, as in the whole of western Kenya, the establishment of the colonial rule was achieved through the application of violence, though the people of Kombewa stiffly resisted it. It was force in the main that persuaded African population in Kombèwa to surrender (Ochieng', 1985:88). Available oral tradition among the Jo-Sème tallies with works of Lonsdale (1982, 1977) and Schiller (1982:275). They explain the establishment of the colonial rule in Sème in terms of the pre-colonial relations between the Jo-Sème and the Jo-Gem. These relations were marked by outright hostility as the Gem attempted to extend and expand her hegemony over the Jo-Sème. Schiller (1982) explains that Olóo Ramoya, the son of Rading Omolo was the ruoth of Gem in 1880. He was remembered as a powerful Jabilo (magician) whose skills enabled the Jo-Gem to occupy their present homes and defeat the Sème, the Banyore and Kisa. Thus 1880 was a time of power consolidation for the Jo-Gem in their homeland areas.

Upon Olóo Ramoya’s death, Odera Ulalo assumed power because of his magical power and the fact that he led in the sharp defeat of the Jo-Sème in 1890. But it was not until 1895 when Hobley accepted him as his ally that he emerged as a paramount ruoth of Gem. It was in this alliance that Ulalo consolidated his position as ruoth. He developed
friendship with the Bantu-Banyore and ruoth of the Asembo who helped him against the Jo-Seme. This was a good opportunity for Hobley to deal with the people of Central Nyanza where Hobley demanded for more labour and porters. He gave presents of cattle and cloths to Odera and demanded of him peace, labour, askaris and eventually tax collection (Schiller, 1982:275). In November 1896, Hobley went to initiate peace between the Gem and the Jo-Seme as Jo-Seme continued to raid Gem. Despite Hobley's initiatives Odera continued to complain of raids by the Jo-Seme and the Jo-Uyoma, Hobley eventually mounted a punitive expedition against these locations in December 1899 (Schiller, 1982).

On December 15, 1899 Hobley left the newly established Port Ugoye [now Kisumu] with a column of troops meeting with a second column from Mumias the following day. The troops included four Europeans, part of a company of Uganda rifles, one hundred Africans armed with muzzleloaders and some 600 spear toting African auxiliaries provided by Odera Ulalo, Adhola of Asembo, Nganyi and Nabongo Mumia amongst others.

After the military expedition in Sakwa and Uyoma the two columns entered Seme on December 23, 1899. They captured a great number of livestock and destroyed several lakeshore villages. Operations were concluded on December 24 with peace being made and the army dispersed. Harry Johnston the colonial secretary reported to Lord Salisbury that about 2,589 cattle were captured along with about 18,700 sheep and goats. Ulalo and his policemen received a proportion of these as booty, thus rewarding his earlier patience.
Ulalo thus greatly enjoyed helping the British destroy his old enemies (Whisson, 1961:9; Lonsdale, 1964:121; Hay, 1972:77). This is what Stichter (1985) refers to as the use of pre-capitalist conflicts by the British during the pioneering periods of colonialism.

Most of the respondents pointed at either Gem or Uyoma, when asked from which direction the colonialists entered Seme. Naboth Obola, Washington Abong, and Zablon Omoso Wasonga observed:

The Jo-Seme heard of the coming of abogno (Whitemen), from the Wanga and later Gem. Upon receiving this information, Nyagudi wuon ogambi the Seme warrior set out to meet them and strike a peace deal with them. This meeting was not realized until the military expedition in Uyoma. To convince the colonial administration of their seeking for peace, Nyagudi and his accomplices had to put on a goat skin (traditional women cloth suggesting peace). As they reached Uyoma, the scene was not conducive for seeking peace and after seeing Molo (a great Uyoma warrior) slain by Odera Ulalo (Gem warrior) using a gun (oluth kuon), Nyagudi decided to retreat. But this was not until the Jo-Uyoma identified Nyagudi as the great Seme warrior who had killed many of their relatives. Agutu, also Uyoma warrior particularly took Nyagudi head on and eventually killed him. After getting information of Nyagudi’s death, the Jo-Seme set out to fight with Uyoma who now had the support of the colonial administration. It was therefore the killing of Nyagudi together with the hatred between Uyoma and Seme that saw the Whitemen entering Seme punitively (O.I, Dec 2000).

Josephat Ondinjo and Stephen Ojino had a different point to tell. They observed that:

Two abogno were responsible for the coming of the colonialist in Seme. One came from Uganda and the other from wuok chieng’ (towards the East). The one from Uganda went to Mumia, (then to Wanga), then Kodera (Gem) lastly to Maseno. The one from the East first reached Reru (one of the locations in present day Seme) where they forced every home to provide flour to railway workers. But Seme refused. They argued that they could not provide flour to men like them. Later, Jo-Seme were asked
by *abogno* to go and meet Wadegu who had been appointed as their headmen but refused. The colonial administration was left with no alternative but to organize a punitive expedition against the Jo-Seme, who did not show the flag as a sign of peace (O.I, Dec 2000).

It was the testimony by Obinda Martin Pleto and Jaines Nyagudi that reconciled the previous two observations. They explained that:

To Seme, the Whitemen came from chief Odera of Gem. Odera then left with them to Uyoma, then to Seme. People shouted all over. The Jo-Uyoma followed the Whitemen after their defeat and later joined by Asembo to Seme. This was interpreted by Seme to mean an alliance between the two to confiscate their animals. This is what became a punitive clash between the Jo-Seme, the Asembo, the Uyoma and the colonialists. It is in this clash that Nyagudi was burnt inside the house (O.I, Dec.12, 2000).

While Seme had raided Gem and at times Uyoma of cattle, the coming of colonialism was a favourable opportunity for Gem, particularly to deal a blow on Seme. They used Odera Ulalo’s alliance with the colonial administration and Asembo who accompanied them into Seme to share the loot. Odera first dealt with Uyoma and then to Seme. These pre-colonial hostilities between these Luo sub-ethnic groups accelerated the establishment of colonialism in Seme. The Seme refusal to supply flour to railway workers as depicted by Josephat Odinjo may be treated as a later phenomenon that saw the Jo-Seme clash further with the colonial administration. Given the time period this evidence is not sufficient enough to explain the establishment of colonialism in Kombewa. The establishment of colonialism in Kombewa thus fell in that irreversible period of European expansion which began in the 16th century and accompanying transition of African societies to capitalism, such that, by the late 20th century virtually no
society remained unchanged by these historical processes. In East Africa, it may be said that, the critical period was the late 19th century when European powers scrambled to take social and political control of specific places of the African continent. This drama saw, colonial administration being imposed, taxes levied, wage labour introduced, exchange commodity for cash established in a way that resisters had to be dealt with punitively.

3.3 THE NATURE OF THE COLONIAL RULE IN KOMBEWA TO 1918

After defeating Seme, Uyoma and Sakwa, the British administration further faced other problems. The first problem was the establishment of a sound system of administration with adequate personnel to handle administrative duties, such as tax collection and labour mobilization. The hut tax -based on any *hut* used as a place for human habitation was imposed on the people of Seme in 1899. It was usually collected at the rate of Rs.2 (Indian Rupees). For effectiveness, collectors and sub-collectors were required to do the work on behalf of the colonial government. Up to 1906 and beyond these people were still lacking, a draw back which weakened the British administration among the Luo and the Jo-Seme in particular (Ogot, 1963; Hay, 1976:89). In 1905, the Provincial Commissioner (PC) of Nyanza acknowledged this problem when he observed that:

> In charge of the above districts (Elgon, Kisumu and Ugaya) are collectors or as in the case in many instances assistant collectors who are responsible for law and order, the collection of hut tax, the development of trade and many other duties too numerous to mention (P.C/NZA/1/1, 1905, KNA).
The PC attributed the difficulty in administration particularly due to weak chieftaincies and acknowledged that efforts were being made at increasing their authority and influence. Due to lack of personnel, in 1902 the British decided to use the indigenous authorities who exercised power over a wide area to consolidate their administration between the Luo and the Jo-Seme in particular (Ogot, 1963). This was also in observance of the policy of indirect rule as was espoused by Fredrick Lugard. And so under the Village Headmen Ordinance, in 1907, the chiefs and headmen were selected for ultimate appointment (NPAP, 1907/8, KNA). Nyangaga became the chief of Seme, while Ongago and Kola served as headmen. They were charged with the duties of keeping law and order, collecting tax and supplying labour for public works. They were no longer custodians ‘of tribal’ laws and customs but civil servants appointed by the Provincial Commissioner and paid by the Central Government (Ogot, 1963).

The other problem the British faced was that of subduing the Nandi, which was finally achieved in 1906. Up to 1905, administration and military efforts had been concentrated on securing the caravan routes, on making roads, organizing and protecting the transport services across the province, trying to give some protection to those communities who had accepted Hobley’s regime, and, finally pushing through the telegraph and railway with the least possible interference from the neighbouring tribes. With all these responsibilities, the few officers found little time to organize their districts, to get to know the people, their customs and languages, or to extend the area of effective jurisdiction (Ogot, 1963). Thus by 1906 some sort of positive administration had been established that could have initial impact on the Jo-Seme.
Before the end of this period two developments were taking place in the vicinity of Kombewa division. These included the building of Kenya Uganda railway and the development of Kisumu town. In order to extend the British presence towards the Lake Victoria in 1886, R.J.D. Macallister opened a sub-station at Port Victoria (present Busia district). This port was originally to be the railhead but due to poor facilities Port Ugowe (the future Kisumu) was chosen instead. Thus towards 1899, the acting commissioner for Uganda, Colonel Ternan, ordered the headquarters of the province to be gradually removed to Kisumu from Mumias in anticipation of the arrival of Uganda railway at the Lake.

Subsequently, the railway line was built from Mombasa in 1896 and reached Kisumu in December 1901 (NPAR, 1907-1908, KNA). Captain Whitehouse of Uganda Railways laid its colonial foundation in 1896 by declaring Kisumu as its western end. However, its actual establishment was in 1901 as the port terminus of Uganda railway. From then Kisumu operated as a major port connecting the British East Africa Protectorate and the German East Africa to the outside world, a fact amplified by trade connections from about 1905 onwards. Kisumu was from the initial period an important collecting and contribution centre of tax revenues for the protectorate. Kisumu operated as the provincial administration, commercial, transport, business and service hub of western Kenya (NPAR, 1907/8, KNA; Anyumba, 1995). Apart from the establishment of colonialism in Kombewa, the development of the railway and the town determined the
extent and magnitude of social and economic impact that affected women particularly the female headed households as will be seen later in the study.

The colonial administration in Kombewa acted as an instrument of primitive accumulation on the settlers behalf by appropriating African land (for example building churches and administrative posts), confiscating livestock, introducing taxation, building rail and transport networks and creating marketing and financial structures highly favourable to settlers, and, finally through imposition and institutionalisation of forced labour.

The period between 1907 and 1918 were characterized by certain historical processes that were responsible for creation and expansion of the female-headed households in Kombewa. The significant ones were the need for labour in European farms, the First World War mobilization and the need to raise taxes. To obtain labour and taxes the British government depended on chiefs and headmen. In other cases they developed contract-labour systems with penalties for infringement. They also provided official support to private recruiters (Hay, 1976:97).

White settlement was to be the backbone of Kenyan economy and the Kenyan Africans were to be discouraged from developing their own areas through labour laws which compelled government officials to recruit labour for public works by high taxation. After the establishment of colonialism in Kombewa, the Jo-Seme were compelled first to provide labour and later to pay taxes. Aware of the difficulties of securing African labour,
the Colonial Secretary, Joseph Chamberlain envisioned British task in the protectorate in these words:

I think that something in the nature of inducement, stimulus or pressure is absolutely necessary if you are to secure a result which is desirable in the interest of humanity and civilization' (Wolff, 1974:91).

Such sentiments were to determine the fate of Africans living in Luo Nyanza and particularly the Jo-Seme. In 1906, a leading British official could write with certainty that the development path for the protectorate would definitely emerge from planters overseeing natives doing work of development (Wolff, 1974:92). The labour problems of the pre-war period in the protectorate created difficulty and complex task for European settlers and officials. The obstacles in their way were huge. Methodically, they moved to establish institutions and laws intended to ensure a steady flow of cheap African labour (Wolff, 1974:96). The solution was on raising taxes. But in 1907, the long list of settlers' complaints resulted in the formal establishment of Native Affairs Department (NAD), to deal with the labour supply, particularly to private farmers. Moreover, settlers demanded and obtained a legislative council in 1907 and in 1911 the Convention of Association (the settlers' Parliament) was formed to fight for the rights of European and for self-government (Ogot, 1963). The British colonial administration in Central Nyanza was not free of this inflammatory atmosphere. In fact Central Nyanza, including Seme was regarded as a reservoir of cheap labour. Soon the Headmen and District Officers and other government officials were busied erecting government labour camps and collecting the hated hut tax. By 1905 when the rate of hut tax was Rs.3 per hut, the administration noted that the introduction of hut tax had undoubtedly stimulated industry and production
which in turn saw the natives generally cultivating considerably more land than formally (NPAR, 1906/7, KNA). Instead of selling their animals to pay tax, most people from Seme opted for cultivation so as to use the produce in paying taxes.

Thus, the development of labour intensive plantation agriculture in the White Highlands after 1908, the construction of roads and railway together with the need for African soldiers and porters in the First World War all accelerated the demand for male labour from Seme. Hay (1976) explains that when a private employer needed labour from Nyanza province, he obtained a note of authorization from the local District Commissioner (DC) A recruiting agent then entered the reserves and presented his credentials to the chief or headman who in turn provided the required number of men. Uncooperative chiefs or headmen were reprimanded, fined or even dismissed.

Since there were a few settlers in Kavirondo, the main demand for labour force came from the railways and public works department. The railway employed about 650 Luos while Public Works Department (PWD) had between 800 and 1450 Luo employees (NPAR, 1905/6:8, KNA). It was their proximity to the railway that enabled the Jo-Seme to be employed in large numbers in these departments. Examining the railway reports during this period, the P.C Nyanza noted:

The railway report vary favourably on labour, though they prefer men from Mumias instead of Kisumu, the former being better workers and of better physique. A fair number of labourers have worked for the railway for over two years (NPAR, 1905/6, KNA).
By 1907, the Luo had entered employment as soldiers, sailors, policemen, mason, carpenters, sawyers and blacksmiths (G.A.S Narthcote, 1907:66). They became popular as labourers and were sought after as waiters by the Lake Victoria steamers, stevedores at Kisumu port and recruits to Uganda police (Nyanza Province Annual Reports 1905/06; J.J. Willis Letter November 30, 1909. CMS Annual Report: 272). This they did basically to acquire food supply as scarcity of food had hit Nyanza province due to failure of November rains (NPAP 1906/7). The Luo named this food scarcity Nyamgori famine and it killed hundreds of people as food could only be bought from Kakamega. It was the scarcity of food, taxation, need for food that pushed many men from Seme to go for work in Kisumu town and. Between, 1907-1912, the powers of the colonial chiefs were increased by a further legal promulgation. The 1907 Courts Ordinance created native courts and recognized Tribunals under direct authority of the chief (Ogot, 1963). This considerably enlarged the chiefs’ powers. In 1908 compulsory labour was made legal only for government purposes; portage of government provisions, construction and maintenance of roads, bridges, harbours and communication lines. Conscription under these conditions was allowed where voluntary labour was not forthcoming. Before 1909 the government officers recruited labour both for government and private enterprises. Usually the chiefs were simply informed that a certain number of labourers were needed and that they were required to produce them. As a result, a chief was viewed as effective and efficient if he could turn up labour and inept if the record of turning up labour was poor (Jalang’o-Ndeda, 1991:99).
From 1910 professional recruiters in Central Nyanza increased. This was because the colonial administration started registering labour shortage. They blamed this on natives who complained of being busy cultivating on their farms. This complaint witnessed the supply of labour being confined almost entirely to the district of Kisumu and North Kavirondo. A system of identification for natives leaving the province was also introduced to help in tracing deserters. As from 1914 large numbers of men were leaving the province for work either as temporary workers or en route to work in other parts of the protectorate (NPAR, 1914, KNA). In the same period the Native Authority intensified the use of force. Compulsory labour made all African liable to for up to 60 days per annum forced unpaid labour for public purposes. The legislation empowered district officers and chiefs to recruit labour from reserves both for public purpose and settler agriculture. Accompanied by the burden of Poll tax\(^2\), a larger number of Luo particularly from Seme, went to work in places like Magadi, Molo and Naivasha. Commenting on the intricacies of labour among the Luo, the P.C Nyanza wrote:

Kavirondo are timid and desert in large numbers. If the Kavirondo are taken away from their own country, they work better, and the railway employ men as far down the line as Molo and Naivasha. And by 1905, the railway had employed a total of 1450 men from Kavirondo.

The exigencies of World War I heightened immensely the official sense about the labour problem in Kenya as a British colony. This was imposed on the African population, by far, the most severe burden witnessed since the arrival of the Europeans in the colony. Most military conscripts died on the way as pressures to provide labour for war efforts

\(^2\) Poll tax was introduced in 1910 against the wish of the PC Nyanza who suggested that its introduction could retard development that was already taking place in the province.
intensified (Clayton, 1985:239). Recruitment for Carrier corps or porters for the military were major issues that faced Nyanza administration (Ogot, 1963:258; Jalang’o-Ndeda, 1991:113). Chiefs and headmen were bribed to recruit labour and this was seen in the prevalence of old men in gangs who went down to railway line. It was obvious that many took to this without any otherwise. It was estimated that about 14,287 left through Kisumu between 1914 and 1915 (Jalang’o-Ndeda, 1991:114).

The First World War thus provided the first real test for the new administration machinery in Central Nyanza district. The Africans were required not only to fight a foreign war but also to make heavy sacrifices for it. There was a continual demand for men for carrier corps and other military activities. In one year alone (1917-1918), about 9000 men were recruited from the district.

The people from Central Nyanza including the Jo-Seme provided slaughter cattle for supply. Between 1917 and 1918 over 2000 heads of cattle were provided by the inhabitants of Central Nyanza district. As a consequence in 1916 the hut tax and poll tax were increased making a heavier demand on the stay-at-home. All these hardships were patiently endured by Central Nyanza as both the chiefs, headmen and the people showed unflinching loyalty to the administration throughout the war (Ogot, 1963). Ainsworth referring to labour recruitment wrote that a larger portion of the responsibility for producing porters fell on Nyanza province. The Kavirondo porter became a well-known feature in the German East Africa during the war. He was usually referred to as *omera* [a Luo word meaning brother] (Ogot, 1963). Of the about 165,000 African porters employed
during the war, over 50,000 died with a high number from Central Nyanza. It is no surprise that among the dead were Luos from Kombewa.

3.4 THE MISSIONARY ESTABLISHMENT AND KOMBEWA WOMEN 1904-1918.

In the nineteenth century, three different groups of Europeans came to East Africa. They included travellers, missionaries, who came to extend the benefits of their Christian faith to the Africans who were until then untouched by the Lords' blessing and it may be added in parenthesis, western civilization (Temu 1979:1). Another group included the colonial administrators whose mission was to establish control over Africans on behalf of their respective home governments (Nzioki, 1986).

Although the groups were different, they were complementary in nature and had a unity of purpose because they were all agents of imperial rule and bringers of western "civilization" (Nzioki, 1986:19). They had to a considerable extent acted as catalyst for the advancement of the British administration in Central Nyanza. In Kombewa the Christians missions included mainly Catholics and Protestants. Of the two only CMS deserves a critical observation during this period in Central Nyanza. By 1907 the CMS at Maseno had exerted itself to be the most important and the most influential of all missions in the region.

The establishment of Christianity in Kombewa was couched within the broad process of Christian missionary expansion in East Africa dating as far back as 1844 when the CMS
sent J.L. Krapf to East African coast and the eventual establishment of a missionary station at Rabai. It was not until the arrival of Stanley and a Frenchman Ernest and the establishment of Christian mission in Uganda that Christian missionary found their way into Kombewa. As Nzioki (1986:19-25) observes:

It was the mission expansion from Buganda into Eastern Uganda which led to the missionary occupation of western Kenya...the beginning of this expansion was against the background of Christian rivalry in Buganda which partly influenced the decision to extend missionary work towards the East into Busoga, Bukedi and Nyanza.

It was in this process that the CMS started its work at Maseno in the vicinity of Kombewa. The Maseno mission was started by a missionary called Willis who settled there in 1905. Later in January 14, 1906 the first CMS missionaries John Savile and his wife who took up residence at Maseno. With the help of some Africans, the Savile and the wife began to lay the foundation for the establishment of the station. They first cleared the surrounding bushes, planted fruits, made roads and laid the foundation for classroom and mission houses. The connection between the school and the church in the early days was very close. At first the church building served for both the worship and school. As the school grew so did the church services and later the classes of baptism. This is what culminated into formal education in Nyanza. The mission got the name from a tree called ‘oseno’ that had formed a shelter for the first missionaries. Apart from evangelism, the missionaries were thus involved in education and agriculture (Ogot, 1963:255; Hay, 1976:99). From Maseno the CMS activities spread to almost the whole of Nyanza, for instance Kisumu 1909, Butere 1912 and Ngiya 1919.
At Maseno Willis adopted the method which he had learnt in Uganda. He visited Luo Chiefs, asking them to send their sons to Maseno school (Anderson, 1977:69). Just as he visited other areas of Central Nyanza, he also visited Nyangaga son of Kweto of Kombewa. Nyangaga gave him Joel Jager, Samwel Olaka, Abraham Ogila, Meshack Wasonga, Benjamin Owuor and Elijah Amollo. These boys were the ones who became the first Christians in Kombewa (Nzioki, op.cit). However, it is important to observe that Maseno school grew from initial four pupils in 1906 to one hundred and twenty in 1911. From Maseno station Christian teachings spread to villages. Many groups of men, boys, women and girls began asking for instruction in Christian faith. The Maseno boys were usually sent to the villages fortnightly to teach Christian faith. They would go back to school for a period of a month for further instruction. Later on the boys were sent back to their home areas for a longer period and were then followed up by Willis so that he could assess the progress of their teaching. It was during these sessions that Olaka Samwel founded Ndiru church in Kombewa. Between 1910 and 1939 a total of about 30,514 adults were baptized and about 13,979 adults were confirmed (CMS archives, Kisumu).

As the colonial administration was entrenching itself in Kombewa, the missionaries also advanced considerable influence on the life of Africans living in their vicinity such that by 1909, the CMS relationship with the colonial administration could be regarded as close and subservient. In fact the mission was nothing more than an arm of the colonial administration (Temu, 1972:132). They made themselves available in many ways to assist in the articulation of the colonial state and became part of its mechanism of
communication with and control of the African population (MacPherson, 1982:39). That was why between 1905 and 1906 Nyanza Province Annual Report, acknowledged that:

Several missions have lately located themselves amongst the various ‘tribes’, and nearly all with the expressed intention of encouraging the natives to learn trade (PC/NZA/1/1, 1905, KNA), (something Hobley had admired and tried to advance).

The relationship between the colonial government and the mission is captured clearly by Godfrey Anyumba (1995:6-10) when he noted that "certain missions were exceedingly helpful to the administration. There's was all round mutual understanding that they were all working for something, that although the method may be different, yet the objective were same". Likewise, in 1907-08, Ainsworth observed, ‘I have found practically all the missionaries most sympathetic with government efforts, and they are always willing to help us to the extent of their power, and it is most pleasing matter to me to work with many of them. I think that the missionaries and our self have arrived at an apt of mutual understanding to the extent of realizing that it is quite possible for government officers and missionaries to work together to a greater extent where native interest are concerned" (NPAR, 1907/08, KNA).

Despite the amicable relations, the missionaries and the colonialists had conflicts. These were over goals, mode of allocating resources and the dangers which the settlers' aspirations posed to African interests for whom the missionaries presumed to speak. The colonial administrators further complained over the schoolboys. They claimed that the mission failed to train their students to be faithful and obedient servants. However, looking at the general relations between the two it was clear that common interest
ultimately outweighed particular differences and the very existence of a significant missionary presence gave legitimacy to continuing colonial domination (MacPherson, 1982).

With the inception of CMS in Kombewa there were at least three significant cultural conflicts. First, the gospel message whose core teaching was based on Jesus Christ was in conflict with the local beliefs and practices. Secondly, the attitude which the missionaries had towards Africans traditional values and beliefs. Third was the impact of these attitudes on the African converts and others (Nzioki, op.cit). The CMS attacked some of the African institutions, such as marriage system, polygamy and 'wife inheritance'. However, these were some of the African institutions the Europeans did not understand.

In a letter to the Chief Secretary, on the issue of marriages contracted in the "native reserves" in accordance with tribal laws and customs, the PC of Nyanza stated as follows:

> Amongst all the tribes polygamy is the rule. Mahari [Bridewealth] is in all cases the basis of contract. The mahari practically represents payment for the woman in her transfer from her father or brother to the man who takes away from the service of such father... the girl is practically a free agent provided the prospective husband is prepared to pay mahari demanded, but the tribal custom frequently prohibits marriage by girls to men of another distinct tribe (PC/NZA/1/1, July 5, 1916, KNA).

Bridewealth was one of the most misunderstood aspects of African marriage customs. It involves giving to the bride's parent's gifts in form of cattle, goats and beer. It was after this that the Africans regarded marriage completed. It also gave surety and stability to the marriage. This cultural activity shocked the missionaries a great deal.
To the missionaries and other colonialists the marriage process, particularly the exchange of bridewealth was like purchasing a wife for cash. They assumed that the Luo considered a man’s wife an indication of his wealth. Equally, they thought that fathers value their daughters for the bridewealth for which they will one-day fetch (Welbourn, 1965:120). This practice was extremely affected by the introduction of cash economy. For the missionaries, the Luo bridewealth system was a mere mercantile transaction. In 1907 the CMS missionaries resolved to discourage the practice. However, as observed by Nzioki (op. cit.), the missionaries in Kombewa failed to recognize that:

Marriage among the Luo was a social affair. It was an arrangement involving not only the bride and the bridegroom, but also both families of the bride and the bridegroom. The elders and women from both families were fully involved in discussing marriage arrangements. There was always a transfer of wealth in the form of bridewealth from the parents of the bridegroom to the family of the bride. The bridewealth was given to different members of the family. For example, some cows were given to the fathers, mothers, uncles and brothers. Bridewealth acted as a guarantee that marriage would last. If divorce became inevitable then the wife's parents would return the bridewealth to the parents of the husband. The marriage rites included a big feast at the bridegroom's home where guests from the bride's home came to participate in the ceremonies. There was music and dancing, all done to initiate the woman into her new home.

Both the colonial government and the missionaries had no hesitation in attacking the African marriage system. To their disgust, the African marriage system did not resemble Section 33 of The East African Marriage Ordinance of 1902. This Ordinance allowed for a 'civilized' form of marriage under monogamous conditions between individuals married according to the native law and customs. While the Luo marriage involves families of both the bride and bridegroom who ensure that the couple stay together and
honour their marriage contract, the Christian marriage emphasizes wide latitude of
freedom of individual action. Divorce in the Luo society is something almost unheard of,
since it is not a matter of individual decision but a clan affair. A woman could not be
dismissed by her husband without the consent of his family (Nzioki, op cit.). Among the
Luo in Kombewa, a man could marry as many wives as he could afford to maintain.
Polygamy was considered an "economic investment" because the wife was seen as a
potential child bearing member of the community, a matter of prestige, and a status
symbol. The practice of polygamy offended the very strict western Christian views about
monogamy and was ranked high on the list of native customs to be deprecated. All efforts
were made to eradicate it. The CMS played a leading role in efforts to eradicate the
practice in areas occupied by the indigenous people. As a consequence, they demanded:

The registration of the first marriage not only to teach the indigenous
communities, that the administration did not recognize polygamous
contracts as valid according Protectorate Laws, but also to mean the
protection for the first wife in any of the protectorate Courts, and a
dissolution of such marriage could only be obtained by a man in a legal
divorce (DC/KSM/1/15/201:1916, KNA)... [The P.C Nyanza further
explained that] as matter stands at present I believe a marriage contracted
in the reserves according with the native law and custom is not a marriage
according to the law of East African Protectorate, and cannot be made
such unless there is a legislation to allow its validity
(DC/KSM/1/15/201:1916, KNA).

The impact of the CMS missionaries had on the Luo family system in Kombewa was
alarming. It showed that the missionaries had not given the family system much thought.
Wives in polygamous marriages were sent away by husbands who wanted to become
Christians, but how about their children who were forced to leave with them? (Also see
Nzioki, op cit).
Most of these wives who had no alternative after being sent away by their husbands easily joined the African independent churches which did not discriminate against them. This issue came out clearly in the letter written by the PC of Nyanza to the DC of Kisumu regarding John Owalo and his teaching in Asembo. He acknowledged that "a pagan on accepting Christianity should be required to divest himself of his surplus women (wives) as a condition of baptism". The PC particularly informed Owalo through the DC of Central Nyanza, that "he must at once refrain from such preaching (preaching that a pagan on accepting Christianity, should not be required to divest of his surplus wives as a condition for baptism) as it is not only contrary to the Christian religion but is opposed to the laws of the protectorate. No person can by the law of the protectorate legally possess more wives than one" (DC/KSM/1/15/201, 1916, KNA).

Some wives were sent back to their husbands after the husband had received baptism. In other cases some men became polygamists even after baptism. In Kombewa some form of mobility to town had been noticed among these women. This practice resulted into several cases of bridewealth return, which was captured by the PC of Nyanza when he wrote:

Upon native divorce, the husband is demanding the return from the father the stock (cattle and goats) paid or requires the return of the original animals. This meant that the original recipient has parted with any of the stock, he is expected, if they are alive, to repose himself of them and hand over to the original owner (DC/KSM/1/15/201, 1916, KNA).
Section 13 of East African Ordinance together with the African Marriage Ordinance of 1904 put the practice of polygamy in a precarious position. It required that, any native who failed to register his marriage with the provision of this ordinance will not be liable to court assistance should any case be preferred. But if certain flexibility born of experience was evidence on the question of dowry\(^3\) and mixed marriages, no such tolerance was extended to practice that the missionaries called 'inheritance of wives'. This was where a widow was to be taken as "a wife" of another male member of a husband's family, often his brother (Strayer, 1978:80). Nzioki, 1986:78) adequately describes this institution. When she observed that:

The other type of marriage involved the widower or the widow. In the case of a widow, she would automatically be inherited by the younger brother or cousin of the deceased husband. This was a socially approved system of family organization in which a bereaved wife was taken care of and in which the children continued to be cared for by someone closer to them in terms of family relationship.

To the missionaries, this institution, instead of offering social and economic support to widows, was a suggestion that women were in the same category as material possession. As explained in chapter one, this custom ensures that widows and their children have their rights to a secure home. This was a point of tension which had to be solved if Africa was to come to terms with the Christian West (Welbourn, 1965:122). The view of the colonial administration was captured when the PC of Nyanza responded that "in cases of widows our own sense of morality must object to the enforcement of tribal customs in

\(^3\) The British called *bridewealth exchange dowry* because of their first contact with Indians before East Africa
cases where the widow refuses to conform to customs, whether she resides in the natives area or not" (DC/KSM/1/15/201, 1916, KNA).

This was reinforced by The Native Christian Marriage Ordinance of 1904, relevant only to marriages of natives who professed Christian religion (DC/KSM/1/15/201, 1916, KNA). In practice, the ordinance put African marriage system in areas close to Maseno in a complete flux. When it came to the practice of 'widow inheritance', the ordinance depicted a total Christian view. It contended that the practice not only viewed widows as movable property but also represented such a marriage as a mean by which a Christian woman and her children could pass into heathenism and thus be lost to the mission community.

The practical alternatives open to the CMS, in such cases were limited and generally involved attempting both to strengthen the resolve of the widow in resisting incorporation into her husband's brother family and to enlist the support of local district officers in ensuring the rights of Christian widows with due regard to English Law (Strayer, 1978:80). That was why by 1916, the PC of Nyanza reported that:

Cases have also arisen in which young widows who in preference to not conforming to tribal custom also leave the reserve to areas outside the tribal jurisdiction where native law and custom did not apply particularly townships (DC/KSM/1/15/201, 1916, KNA).

The missionary establishment among the Jo-Seme witnessed several impacts on institutions such as polygamy, wife inheritance and bridewealth exchange. These institutions served a purpose as far as marriage was concerned. The missionary attempts
to eradicate them resulted in the creation and expansion of female-headed households as will be seen in the next section.

3.5 COLONIALISM, MISSIONARY ACTIVITIES AND THE CREATION OF FEMALE HEADED HOUSEHOLDS IN KOMBEWA, 1894-1918.

The establishment of colonialism among the Jo-Seme was characterized by many important events. These included the 1899 British military expedition, the eventual establishment of the colonial rule accompanied by the imposition of taxation 1899, and the appointment of chiefs 1902 (Ogot, 1963:253; Hay, 1972:89). These aspects involved dramatic as well as subtle changes on the social structures and relationships within the Jo-Seme. The division of labour based on sex, age and the task to be performed acquired new forms as the household articulated with the emerging capitalist economy.

It was during these expeditions that colonialism ushered in what may be referred to as demographic disaster in Kombewa. Among the Jo-Seme, this was realized between 1899 and 1906. The punitive British expeditions led by two British officials in 1899, not only made clear the fact of British rule in Seme, but it was equally a demonstration of British military strength and a retaliation for certain ‘outrages’ committed by the Seme people. The expedition was a very traumatic one and left hundreds of men dead since it was not the wish of the British officials, soldiers and auxiliaries to kill women and children (Meinertzhagen, Kenya Diary, 14-29 February, 1904).
Angoga, Got-nyatigo and Wang’arot are place names without favourable memories among the Jo-Seme. The discussion about the 1899 British military expedition started with Got-nyatigo. It was observed that ‘angoga kod Got-nyatigo emane onegi eji ma thoth. Mon be ne inego to katakamano chuo no tho ma thoth, nike ch kane oneni gi law dhako to ok negi-oge ni i duaro kwe. [Many people were killed at Angoga and Got-nyatigo. Although women were killed, the majority of the dead were men. They tried not to kill women because when one was wearing a woman’s cloth it was considered a sign of peace] (O.I, Naboth Obola and Zablon Omoso December 2000).

Responses of John Robert Apat, Josephat Ondinjo and Obinda Martin Pleto (O.I, 2000), indicated that, to avoid a bloody clash between the Jo-Seme and the colonialists many people moved eastwards to Got-Nyatigo and hid in hyena holes. To their disappointment, the whitemen fired into these holes killing several people. Initially these hills were called Got-Rabuor but after the expedition people visited the hills to collect beads [tigo], there after the hills were renamed as Nyatigo.

Immediately after the establishment of colonialism in Kombewa, labour and taxation became critical. In most cases labour shortages could be noticed. This was unaccepted, given that the colony was to be developed agriculturally. Consequently, to compel the people to leave their rural districts to work in the plantations and generate revenue for the government between 1902 to 1906, the British administration in Kenya developed certain changes that were to affect most African men and women in the localities. During this period an African worker could work for less than two months for which he received an
average wage of Rs.4-6. These jobs were unpopular because they involved difficult work and low wages which was why European farmers found it necessary to rely on forced recruitment to fill their labour needs (Hay, 1976). At the same time, Regulation of 1901 empowered the Native Commissioner to impose a tax on all huts used as dwelling places by the natives. In fact this tax had been introduced in 1899 and repealed in 1902 to 3 rupees. Later, it was supplemented by the poll tax in 1910 for African adults other than hut owners. It, thus, touched the lives of an increasing number of Africans because it was not until the ordinance Number.2 of 1910 that women were exempted from the taxes (Wolff, 1974:170). Consequently, to improve labour and tax collection, the chiefs were appointed to assist in tax collection in 1902. The tax collectors in many ways worked when they were accompanied by the chiefs and headmen. To meet their tax obligation, two possibilities were open to the Jo-Seme; one was to offer their labour for sale so as to pay tax and to build the colonial infrastructure. The other was to sell their properties, the most valuable being livestock, to raise tax money.

Since its inception, the payment of taxes affected women in many ways. Most female respondents said that they had to spend a lot of time hunting for rats so as to use their tails in paying taxes. As if this was not enough most women collected sand during road preparations that accompanied the colonial establishment using odheru [traditionally stick woven tray] (O.I, Joyce Ongudi and Esther Ombewa, December 10, 2000). Despite the Ordinance Number.2 of 1910, most women started to experience tax obligations as the First World War progressed. Some lost their property, such as cattle and crops for failure to pay tax promptly. The P.C of Nyanza, observed that:
Somali, Swahili, and Indian cattle traders buy up all times a considerable number of livestock, mostly butcher stock, the trade is comparatively brisk at about the time hut tax is being collected owing to natives finding it necessary to raise money with which to pay the tax, they having at present no other commodity of any particular value to dispose off (NPAR, 1906/07, KNA).

To avoid using many of their animals in tax payment, many people from Seme learnt that they could expand their farms so as to use the produce to pay taxes. That was why the 1910 Annual Report mentioned that "many Kavirondo and the Kisii, are all workers in the field, men and women work during certain seasons, so in these districts where this custom prevail and it is fairly common and is on the increase now that the natives find they can raise money for their taxes by means of cultivation". Food production no longer served household demand only but also the colonial demands. Agricultural fields had to be expanded as women spent most of the time weeding crops. During the same period the issue of women and juvenile mobility also coursed concern. In 1911 the P.C of Nyanza directed that:

The passes should not be issued to juveniles nor to women except in the case of a juvenile who is going to direct employment and with the sanction of his father or legal guardian, and in the case of a woman that she is the recognized wife of a man who has a pass. In fact he further advised all the natives that, they must not leave their reserves for down country unless they have passes.

In the same year women and girls started responding to the emergence of colonial institutions such as townships. In fact the colonial administration as early as this started
getting concerned. The PC of Nyanza, feeling perturbed by the remarkable trend of women and girls mobility to townships especially to Kisumu noted that:

The question of natives belonging to the reserves coming into the township and stations, and thus cutting themselves a drift from community control was becoming a serious matter that required dealing with without further delay. [The PC, did not hesitate to give the following instructions]... chiefs, headmen and elders should be invited regularly to visit the locations in such townships, and if they find any of their people unemployed, they should be allowed to take such people back with them to the reserves. Juveniles and women living without their husbands should be sent back with the chiefs (PC/NZA/2/3, 1911, KNA).

Men’s mobility for work during this period increased. Maseno Limited company employed about 1000 men on verbal contract, the men living in their villages and returning to work each day. A few had taken to work away from home down the railway but this movement later intensified towards the World War One. Kisumu Township was not an exception either. In fact the African population in Kisumu rose almost every day. For example, in 1909 there were a total of about 2639 Africans in Kisumu Township but by 1914 the number hiked to nearly 6000 Africans resident in Kisumu district (NPAR, 1912, KNA).

When it came to agricultural land preparation, each adult worked out and tilled his own piece, the married women being helped by their daughters and younger sons (NPAR, 1905/06, KNA). However, the approach changed a great deal as settlers and colonial administrators discovered that Africans chose only to go to work during those months when sowing and harvesting chores were not pressing them to work on their lands. Culturally, it was in order for a man to be present during planting, sowing and harvesting
time. But since sowing and harvesting time for Africans and Europeans coincided, the needs of European farmers had to be realized using the powers of chiefs and headmen. This further relegated household food production to women, particularly during the month of January, March, September and October during which time they were either tilling the land or reaping crops.

From 1908, cotton seeds were also distributed in Seme. It was required by the administration that every home to own cotton plot. The introduction of cotton production and its continuous attempts for cultivation without success further increased women’s work load in agriculture. The pressure for cotton cultivation increased as the colonial administration realized that none of the communities in Luo Nyanza had produced any commodity for export.

Trade in livestock for tax payment and later for military purposes did not only lead to impoverishment of the Jo-Seme, but also worked to the detriment of bridewealth exchange. This eventually affected kinship hierarchies. In 1907 the PC of Nyanza acknowledged that most people had used their animals in payment of taxes. This decreased the number of cattle considerably such that by 1908 most natives according to (NPAR 1908, KNA) had to trade so as to get money to pay tax. It was even worse in 1914 when payment of taxes could no longer be made in kind but in cash as most people sold their animals. Men had to sell their labour as women resorted to trade mostly in foodstuffs, such as fish, flour and grains.
Bridewealth exchange also witnessed a downward trend. The 1906 annual report estimated the number of cattle to be exchanged was barely seven. In 1909 bridewealth exchange was very fluid contrasting with the traditional one. Kinship heads, fathers or guardians got shocked during 1916 as they noticed that bridewealth exchange no longer depended on them. Migrants in most cases worked to raise bridewealth. Equally during the period, there were reports to the extent that no regulated rate of bridewealth exchange prevailed among the locals (DC/KSM/I/15/201, 1916, KNA).

Bridewealth exchange no longer depended on collective arrangement of the clan but on individual arrangements. The experience of widows up to 1918 was equally not favourable, their belongings were not spared during taxation so long as they had hut. The issue became intense as war mobilization progressed. Between 1910 and 1911 there was a marked decrease in the number of huts in Seme location by 428. The situation became even more worse towards the end of this period as huts belonging to widows were demolished by tax collectors. (NPAR, 1917, KNA). It also saw the Simba [hut in which big boys slept] and siwindhe [huts in which young girls slept with the grand mothers] being pulled down. By 1918 it was estimated that almost 14 persons occupied a hut.

While the introduction of colonialism coincided with the introduction of colonial diseases, such as smallpox, venereal diseases, influenza, rinderpest, cholera and food shortages, deaths resulting from the above epidemics were out weighed by deaths that resulted from the expeditions. While at work some men contacted these diseases. Some died when still serving either as plantation workers or as corps in the First World War.
Consequently returning men introduced several such diseases in Kombewa. Their impact on their wives was remarkable. The PC of Nyanza captured this fairly when he indicated that:

A fairly large number of able-bodied men proceed down country for work, they do not take their women with them and contact the diseases while they are away from their districts. On their return they spread it. The Kavirondo women are as a rule extremely moral as regards strangers but the reverse as regards their own people, the matter is a serious one and requires a very serious consideration (NPAR, 1912, KNA).

It was unfortunate that the Luo who have been deemed to attach a very great importance to the virginity of his woman before marriage had no objection to their having the most intimate relations with men always provided that they were not deflowered (PC/NZA/3/31/7, 1917, KNA) were now described as immoral. The influence of missionaries also made some women from Kombewa to disregard conforming to "tribal" customs as many started demanding to be clothed. In fact the period towards 1918 was remarkable for the high demand for European consumer goods (NPAR, 1918, KNA). This was short lived as women in 1916, "started asking for individual identity and individual freedom as there was no doubt but that such claims were to increase" (NPAR, 1918, KNA). As will be seen later, this demand affected African families, particularly married ones.

3.5.0 SUMMARY

This chapter has demonstrated that the actual men removed from their localities for labour were married and so significantly affected the local economies or sexual division
of labour. Apart from the evidence presented some respondents acknowledged labour conscription [go yawuoyi] from the initial years and towards the war, every dhoot was just informed by the headmen that they were to provide wuoyi or yawuoyi [a young man or young men]. It did not matter if one was married or not. In fact, some married men just volunteered from their dhoot so as to allow newly married couples to enjoy their earlier married lives if no man were forthcoming. Therefore, the establishment of colonialism in Kombewa affected many households, particularly women as they took to heading households in which they were not prepared to. Several processes were to achieve these, but basically they revolved around the military expedition of 1899 and the colonial demand for labour taxes.

Thus between 1894 and 1918 many women entered a new world with a number staying without husbands as some had died during military expeditions. Others had their husbands removed from the localities to provide labour to meet the capitalist demands. For the Jo-Seme, their labour was first demanded in the building of the colonial infrastructure, such as the Kenya-Uganda railway and porting. For the women they provided flour, food to the railway workers. In fact refusal by Seme people to render services to the colonial administration led to further clashes between the Jo-Seme and the colonial administration in Kombewa

With their already weak economy, the Jo-Seme had to start meeting two demands, one for household production and the other for the capitalist. The burden of household production started falling solely on women. Women in one way served the incoming
colonial production system by providing food to railway workers and payment of taxes. Production for household was increasingly being relegated to secondary position, undermining the collective responses to food shortages which set the stage for growth and recurrence of famines in Seme.

The expansion of the capitalist mode of production and its initial encounter with the Jo-Seme led to noticeable changes in the pre-capitalist social structure in terms of social differentiation, sexual division of labour and kinship hierarchies. Gender interdependence and complementarity started vanishing as women started taking male roles in the homestead. They had to take charge of other roles left by men in the day to day running of the homestead. This was short lived as women realized that culturally they need men to accomplish other food and homestead demands. Kinship hierarchies also began to scramble as they started losing cattle, either to pay taxes, to Rinderpest or being confiscated such that by 1918 noticeable households had started being impacted negatively by the colonial demands and activities. The fate of the Luo women changed only with the coming whiteman and the subsequent imposition of alien rule over them when it come to Kombewa. This is what forms the next section which will focus on female-headed households in Kombewa after the First World War to the end of Second World War period.
CHAPTER FOUR


4.1. INTRODUCTION.

This chapter examines the female headed-households in Kombewa during the inter-war and the Second World War period. Of particular interest here will be the colonial economic policies and missionary practices between 1919 and 1945. This section will also evaluate the impact of these alien policies and practices on the female-headed households and how these women responded to their impacts.

Several issues characterized the intermediate post World War One. Wartime experiences strongly influenced the settlers' conception of proper organization of African population for the supply cheap labour. In fact victory in the war to settlers was a show in the effort to make the protectorate a prosperous member of the British Empire. Hence the techniques of mobilization which had proved so successful in wartime had to be applied in peace time to provide adequate cheap labour for settlers (Wolff, 1974). As a result the colonial administration resorted to far more complete, systematic and fully coordinated measures with each strengthening and complimenting one another to produce adequate labour. In the years immediately after the war the colonial agricultural export expanded a great deal (see Department of Agriculture Annual Report, 1922; Overton, 1986 and Maxon, 1989:71). Apart from land settlement commission, 1918-1919, which proposed the establishment of special government operated African labour camps in October 1919
the Governor Northey's Special Labour Circular proposed new and stringent labour laws. Taking up his appointment as the Kenya post war governor in January 1919, Northey showed extreme favouritism for the settlers' mode of production right from the start and was bent on ensuring that the state helped in supplying African workers for the settler estates through the issuance of a circular to administrative officers as from October 23, 1919. This patronage almost to the complete exclusion of the African mode of production/pre-capitalist mode of production was clearly seen in the actions he undertook to assist settlers in dealing with the shortages of labour which they previously had experienced in 1919. He ensured that the old policy of labour coercion was given a new name 'encouragement'. The government liberally defined services for which compulsory labour was legal. They included public services and private contractors working for the state, which under the circumstances could mean everybody (Zeleza, 1989). Furthermore he stressed that the colonial administrators, together with chiefs and headmen had to exercise every possible lawful influence to induce able-bodied male "natives" to go into labour fields (East African Standard November 1, 1919; Maxon, 1980:73). The colonial state was to directly favour settlers through provision of labour by what amounted to coercion by African and British administrative officials (Maxon, 1989:73).

The chiefs and the headmen in African reserves were pressured to use forced labour for public works. In fact the Northey circulars had specifically instructed the British officials that, headmen and chiefs were to be repeatedly reminded that it was part of their duty to advice and encourage all unemployed men to go out and work. Under such pressure, the
headmen did use both the threat and the reality of forced labour to aid the ‘encouragement’ process (Wolff, 1974:124).

As a consequence, these Circulars\(^1\) became liable to the abuse and misinterpretation (Van Zwanenberg: 1975:154). Originally, communal labour was supposed to be undertaken voluntarily by people to build and improve services in their community. But, as with everything else under the colonial capitalism, African institutions were distorted in order to serve wider colonial objectives. They were emptied of their social and cultural meanings and remoulded into vehicles of naked extortion and exploitation by the colonial state.

Communal labour was compulsory for everybody, including men who had passed marriage age, women and children. The Ordinances allowed specific forms of forced labour for work that was intended for the benefit of the community to which the labourer belonged. The Secretary of State did not have to give approval for such conditions. A schedule was drawn up illustrating what was allowed. It was after this that the Native Affairs Department advocated the use of forced communal labour. It was defined as labour which was compulsory but used on public works within the reserves (Van Zwanenberg, 1975). This period also witnessed communal labour falling on women married to migrant labourers, widows, independent women, run-away women and children. This was because almost all able-bodied men became liable for labour recruitment. Kombewa was almost becoming a community of women and children. The

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\(^1\) The Roads in Native Reserves Ordinance of 1910, The Native Authority Ordinance of 1922 and The Native Authority Ordinance of 1922
labour of women and children became increasingly widespread and important throughout the post World War One. Forced labour and forced recruitment became extremely sensitive areas of policy in Kenya.

As from 1920s the Labour Bureau Commission was in place to overcome the problem of shortages in labour supply. This indicated direct government intervention in the form of a bureau to recruit and transport the African labour for employment by Europeans (Report of the Native Labour commission 1921). Thus in addition to its proposal to squeeze more labour out of the existing sources, the commission endorsed as a corollary of the necessity of a systematic campaign to increase the number of source areas. It was intended to bring more of African population within the range of the complex of pressures which could result in Africans providing wage labour for Europeans. According to official estimates from 1920s, about 1500 people were called upon each year to serve under compulsory labour program. But the official figures are a gross underestimation. For one thing, those conscripted for railway construction were excluded from the count. So were those engaged in communal labour. The correct figures were certainly much and higher than the official estimates (Clayton and Savage, 1974:37).

Labour demand was not the only preoccupation of the colonial administration during this period. The tax system was the basic element in the complex pressures driving the Africans into wage labour. Ordinance No.2 of 1910, the Native Hut and Poll Tax Ordinance remained in force throughout the 1920s until 1934 (Walsh and Montgomery, Report on Native Taxation). Its provisions made every male over 16 years of age liable to
tax. It prescribed alternatives to cash payments: either payment in kind or labour on public works at the rate of one month's labour for each three rupees due. Most of the time the value of payment in kind exceeded the cash tax due while one month's labour for a private employer returned more than 3 rupees. Refusal to pay taxes in any form was punishable by confiscation of an African "hut", other property and imprisonment for unspecified number of days.

The period also witnessed an ad hoc increase in the rate of tax payment such that by 1919 the rate for almost all Africans was 5 rupees. In 1920 the maximum was again raised this time to ten rupees equivalent to 12 shilling while fixed penalty of two months labour for non payment (Wolff, 1974:117). The colonial taxes thus rose drastically after the World War One and provided the largest proportion of internal revenue in Kenya. This in a way increased the burden of taxation on Africans, hence reducing their purchasing power. In the labour commission report of 1927 it was observed that

The total money earning of a typical African family living in a reserve varied from 90 to 110 shillings per annum. The average direct tax payable by the head of such a family for all its members amounted to about 28 shillings with a direct tax bill in the neighbourhood of 30% of earning and indirect taxes on imported goods averaging 20% ad valorem, it is safe that African labourers only very rarely had anything left of their earnings after outlays for taxes and minimal living expenses (Parker, 1948).

However since previously the men worked for highly specific purposes and only for a short period of time, their behaviour remained that of community impressed into the service of the industry. Their attachment was to their rural villages and was expressed in terms of remittances sent back to their families and kinsmen. They did not bring their
womenfolk to the labour camps which were largely male reserves. However, during this period, migrant labour became more and more institutionalised as rural areas' principal mode of involvement in the money economy, interaction between villages and town correspondingly increased and migrants stayed for even longer periods in the colonial plantations. These occasionally made them call their wives to live with them. The condition was coupled with the worst drought and disease epidemic while wage labour for Europeans remained the chief and almost the sole source of earning money. Taxation thus deprived Africans of their means of production and forced them to enter into wage employment. Taxation was of course a double-edged sword, it encouraged wage labour and African commodity production for tax payment purposes.

The other issue that characterized this period was the introduction of the "Pass System". This was contained in the original enactment of 1915 and implemented after July 1920 and formally promulgated in the native registration ordinance no.56 of 1921. In a way, it forced every adult male African to carry a certificate called a Pass [Kipande]. In this pass each employer recorded the time worked, kind of work performed, the wages earned, and the general comments on a individual African employee. Exemption from the obligation to carry it was extremely difficult to obtain. The police were empowered to arrest without warrant any African apprehended without any visible means of support (Clayton and Savage, 1971; Wolff, 1974; Maxon, 1989). That is why, Wolff (1974) observed that 'what the tax system made necessary, the pass system organized and regulated'.
The colonial government intensified the supply of African labour in several ways. They raised taxes, made taxes more comprehensive and efficient and firmly established the pass system that required all African males to carry a certificate of registration as an outright recruitment and 'encouragement' of Africans to work for private and public European employers continued throughout the 1920s. In the 1925 the governor of Kenya was quite emphatic on matters of labour compelled by looming shortages, he remarked that "some measure of compulsion is necessary, as the only alternative in letting matters drift until the natives consider that they require more money" (Wolff, 1974:121).

Before the end of the period under discussion, an economic catastrophe—the great depression of 1929, had hit the Kenya colony. It was caused by a collapse of the world market system. Although the centre of the catastrophe was in the American capital, New York where the Wall Street stock tumbled, this economic collapse affected the capitalist market system all over the world wherever its tentacles were spread. This included the colonies (Kanogo, 1989:112). Depression was characterized by sharp drop in the prices of the primary commodities in the world market. The colonial trade was equally reduced. In the Kenya colony the depression greatly dislocated the primary commodities export trade which was dominated by settlers. This was in no way good news for settlers who in the previous years were concerned by the consolidation of their economy such that by 1929 the settlers could be said to have been at the strongest and the most productive point of the history in the colony (Kanogo, 1989:112). The collapse of world market thus set the settlers a decade behind. In Kenya the fall in the prices for export commodities resulted in a parallel fall in government revenue, especially its foreign exchange reserves.
To the settlers there was a reduction in the acreage under cultivation as some became bankrupt. Others found temporary relief in Kakamega ‘gold rush’ where prospecting promised quick returns. To the African the colonial government did not adjust the tax obligation of the Africans. Between 1929 and 1932 about 40,000 people lost their jobs. Wages were reduced from an average of 14 shillings to 8 shillings a month.

The period between 1920 and 1939 was thus beset with intensification of the colonial policies and practices that continued to restructure and modify Kombewa economy and community as a whole. Moreover the imposition of the colonial rule facilitated systematic penetration of the Kombewa traditional economy by capitalism. Colonialism thus provided the articulation of indigenous modes of production with the capitalist mode of production and the integration of African economies into western capitalist system (Amin, 1974; Zeleza, 1989:35; Omwoyo, 2000).

4.2 THE FEMALE-HEADED HOUSEHOLDS DURING THE INTER-WAR PERIOD.

With the end of hostilities, practically all the settlers’ demands were granted (Ogot, 1963). Their capital accumulation was to be based on the appropriation of surplus from cheap and lowly paid African labour (Van Zwanenberg, 1974). Among the people of Kombewa, the colonial demand for labour after the war saw men being sent to European sisal and coffee plantations in the highlands under the compulsion of chief Enoch Nyawara accompanied by other professional labour recruiters (NPAR, KNA; Hay,
1976:97). In fact forced labour and compulsory labour became difficult to separate due to institutionalisation by the Northey Circulars of 1919. Both targeted all men and women in the reserves. The whole of Central Nyanza with Kombewa included, witnessed further abuses of labour and taxation policies.

To show how things had moved from better to worse in 1921, a political pressure group known as the Young Kavirondo Association emerged and protested against increased taxation, government labour camps and Kipande system (Ogot, 1963). Practically the association was concerned with the three issues throughout its existence despite changing names. As the colonial administration was putting a determined effort to force men to employment, another unique phenomenon arose. This was the issue of juveniles going down country to work. In 1926 the colonial medical officer at Kisumu admitted having examined and passed juvenile labour. He even noted that juvenile labour was required and in most cases for tea picking on the various estates throughout the country (PC/NZA/3/9/1/1, 1926, KNA). To the colonial administration so long as the juveniles were with their parents or had their parents' consent, there was hardly any objection to them going out (NPAR, 1926, KNA).

The whole period after the First World War was marked by several amendments of the Native Authority Ordinance, Employment of the Natives ordinance and Registration Ordinance Amendment to meet the continuous complaints of labour shortages in the colony. This implied an endless out flow of male labour from the "native" regions and the continuous creation and over burdening of the female-headed households. In Kombewa
women of different categories felt the impact of labour and taxation in several ways. Considering the drain of males from the "reserves" of Kombewa, it was the women who were instrumental in carrying out local communal labour. The need for communal labour varied in different regions depending on the problem at hand and its impact on efforts to the colonial administration. Communal labour in Kombewa, for that reason, targeted road sides in the reserves, development of water supplies, conservation of soil erosion, maintenance of the government camps or stations, building police stations, bridges and dispensaries. In Maseno, communal labour was used to build Maseno mission station teachers' houses and also harnessed to construct and maintain football and sports-ground (PC/NZA/2/20/28, 1920, KNA). This was to be done regularly so as to allow people, in most cases women, to know when they will next be required (PC/NZA/2/12/76, KNA).

For this reason, Section 8 (h) of the Native Authority Ordinance allowed orders to be made by chiefs for able-bodied men to work on construction and maintenance of camps. It even became very oppressive and generally excessive on those who went against its provisions. By 1930s it was actually subjected to attack by those whom the colonial government branded as 'critics of Kenya administration' both in England and in Kenya. To counter these claims for example, the 1247 criminal convictions in 1930s, for offences against the provision were deemed excessive and severe by the Governor. For example a fine of 50 shillings, one imprisonment of three months and a few sentences of two months. On instructions of the Governor, the acting Chief Native Commissioner A.de.V. Wade advised the District Commissioner concerning the claims that the chiefs were abusing their authority. He observed,
You will agree that it is of utmost importance to secure the good will of the communities concerned, if we are to continue to compel them to work for their own benefit and that every effort should be made to secure, so far as is humanly as possible; that work done for the benefit of the community should be done willingly by members of that community without the necessity of recourse to the criminal courts (PC/NZA/3/13/28, 1930, KNA).

This was a difficult time for most women in Kombewa. In many instances they had to be away from home, either working in their own farms or in minor communal labour. Alarming rate of children burning and other getting lost thus marked the years after 1930. This depicts the difficult situation women were undergoing. Many women did not even have the time to take care of their children. Equally, older children who could assist taking care of younger ones got occupied as well. In 1930 the senior medical officer complained of the rising numbers of reported cases of children who were either burning or getting lost (PC/NZA/3/13/28, 19330, KNA).

The colonial administration attempted in many circumstances to "cover its face". That was why the PC of Nyanza could not admit any form of female labour in the province as had been envisaged by Women Workers Protection Rules (PC/NZA/3/20/17/2, 1931, KNA). To the contrary Archdeacon W.E Owen who lived in the African "reserves" had witnessed women and child labour being used. He even raised complaints concerning the same (Van Zwanenberg, 1974). In 1931 the PC of Nyanza acknowledged that "the question of communal labour is a difficult one and it must be admitted that abuses sometimes occur and they would be no less likely to occur if the labour was paid for. Natives given a little authority are often apt to be bullies" (PC/NZA/3/13/28, 1931, KNA).
This was the reality in Kombewa. It was abuse of women and children as there were insufficient men to do the work. A number of resolutions in Central Kavirondo Local Native (CKLNC) during the period were very particular on communal labour. For example, resolution No. 2 of 1933 read:

That this council approves the employment of unpaid communal labour on the maintenance of local roads, tracks and bridges and on establishment and maintenance of camps for administration purposes in native reserves and for the construction and maintenance of such buildings of local materials as may be necessary at such camps (PC/NZA/4/1/1/1, 1933, KNA).

On the lower parts of Kombewa communal reclamation work on badly eroded sections did not escape the memory of many women in Kombewa. The work consisted of digging of contour trenches and the planting of contour lines of grasses 'ojuok', sisal and 'ogaka' with a view of arresting the flow of collected water silting up eroded patches and promoting the return of plant cover on the ground. Most Local Native Councils (LNC) proposed that Thursday be the day throughout the district for this work (Central Kavirondo Annual Report, 1937). According to Native Affairs Department (NAD) communal labour conferred the greatest benefit on the communities who supplied the lobar. To the colonial administration, communal labour was to promote economic production, trade, transportation, and mobility of labour and to limit 'idleness' on the part of Africans.
Apart from communal labour, Poll and Hut tax remained the most hated aspects of colonial administration in Kombewa as with the whole of Central Nyanza (Ogot, 1963). Immediately after the war the two remained some of the strongest grievances of YKA. On the 8th July 1922, the officials of the association managed to see Sir Edward Northey, the governor of Kenya and successfully registered their disavowal of hut and poll taxes. The burden of these taxes had made many men even juveniles go out without much compulsion to look for jobs. This was done to raise money for taxes considering that many people had fewer livestock. But for the female-headed households in Kombewa, the 1920s stood out as a decade of fluidity and experimentation with a number of different economic possibilities, including the growing of cotton and other cash crops, long distance trade and a regular occupation, and wage labour outside Kombewa. The leaders of this process were often the first Christians in the area, the sons of lineage leaders who dominated Seme politics around the turn of the century and their wives and mothers (Hay, 1994:13). The history of Kombewa during this period seems to have been more complex than what is envisaged by Hay. In fact this period is a precursor to the enhanced migration of women from Kombewa to take advantage of the new economic possibilities. Hay, rightly observed this when she noted "perhaps because of their travel outside Western Kenya and their interaction with other Africans as well as their closer contacts with British Missionaries, administrative officials, and private employers, that these early innovators became conscious of their potential role as pioneers and innovators and committed themselves to the notion of economic and social progress" (1994:13). However, it seems inaccurate to suggest that these early innovators were basically Christians as all women in Kombewa were impacted on equally by the colonial policies.
As the question of taxation came up for discussion, members of the LNC in Kombewa were in favour of universal poll instead of paying two taxes. (PC/NZA/3/33/8/25, 1926, KNA). In fact, in 1927 amidst looming food shortages in Central Kavirondo, the LNC acknowledged that it was unfair to force old women and widows to pay taxes given, that some hardship had been suffered by them (PC/NZA/3/33/8/24, 1927, KNA). Despite the complaints, CKLNC meeting in Marenyo only extended exemption to the permanently sick and very old people (PC/NZA/3/33/8/25, 1927, KNA). No particular mention was made concerning widows, old women who had "huts" and had been compelled before to pay taxes. In 1929 it was identified that very old women, the blind, and the lame, and the lepers were included in the hut and poll registers. Defaulters were punished by being put on tax camps (PC/NZA/3/33/28, 1929, KNA).

In Nyanza, Kombewa included, the PC was forced to consider some provision for widows' exemption. In 1932 he listed the following as grounds for exempting widows from tax payment. These included; if a man 'inherits' a widow after she has passed child bearing age he, the man, should not be called upon to pay tax. If a widow is young and capable of bearing children her inheritor should pay tax on her behalf. The last conditions considered those widows now old and were inherited when of child bearing age, the inheritor should pay tax (PC/NZA/2/19/12, 1932, KNA). According to Safari Reports of 1932, many women in Kombewa were relying on the newly introduced crops to meet tax obligations. Other people asked for tax exemption as they lacked cattle, which they could sell to raise money for taxes. Several huts were confiscated and none was supposed to
reside in them, some destroyed and others were burnt to ashes as defaulters got themselves jailed (PC/NZA/2/1/2, 1938, KNA). In 1938 total of, 16 huts were destroyed in Kombewa location alone. In 1932 the Vice-President of LNC, on occasion of the visit of His Excellency the Governor of Kenya in the company of the Secretary of State for Colonies, took the chance to put forward the plea of widows to the governor. In his speech before the duo, he observed that, "it is also desired to draw your attention to the fact that no special exemption from hut tax is given to widows of those who died during the war despite the exemptions given by the PC" (DC/KSM/1/1/43, 1933, KNA)

Migrant men equally had difficulties when paying taxes. In 1934 wages and employment were greatly cut down but taxes remained the same. Cattle, which were the African source of capital also, had decreased greatly not only in quantity but also in price. In this poor state of affairs caused by depression, tax defaulters found themselves imprisoned (see minutes to Central Kavirondo LNC-Marenyo, 1930-1935, KNA). Equally, those under the age of 18 years were also compelled to pay poll tax which was quite unacceptable to the missionaries, particularly the CMS. They thus reacted to the PC of Nyanza noting that:

We the members of Kavirondo Ruridecanal council of the native Anglican Church, feeling very keenly the hardship suffered by African youths who must pay tax while under 18 years of age and convinced that many of the imprisonment of African youths are a direct outcome of this taxation, welcome very warmly the recommendation made by Sir Alan Pim that the minimum tax paying age be raised from 16 to 18, and wish to petition His Excellency the governor that this recommendation be now carried forward as rapidly as possible into the taxation laws of the colony' (DC/KSM/1/4/7, 1938, KNA).
As a consequence of this petition, the following years witnessed various complaints by the female-headed households. For instance in 1936, Mlango Ndinya of Seme wrote a letter through the DC to Agol Dianga asking him on behalf of his wife Olwenj to return to the reserve or at least send her money to support her. Ndede Otogo, Obonyo Akuom and Pande Onyango all got lost to unknown places despite their fathers sending for them transport to come home. Some men even refused to come back home where they had a lot of debts to clear. In Seme Agak Wando could not come back because of un-cleared debts (DC/KSM/1/191124, 1936, KNA). Additionally, in 1937 the debate on taxation involving plural huts came up. Sir Allan Pim who unleashed attack on what he referred to as "taxation of plural huts" of which he considered there should be a tax reduction initiated the debate. He also proposed to extend this to independent women, lone women and women not inherited. As the matter was being debated the DC acknowledged that "the continuation of tax on inherited wives would probably foster individualism and a break down of typically African spirit of communal responsibilities" (PC/NZA/3/10/153, 1937, KNA). Considering the debate in 1937 the PC of Nyanza give a break down of men and women liable to taxation in the province on the request of Hon. Colonial secretary. The figure below contains the main features of his report concerning direct taxation schedule in Central Nyanza (PC/NZA/3/10/153, 1937, KNA).
Table I: Taxation Schedule

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SCHEDULE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PROVINCE-NYANZA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Rate of tax paid.......... Shs. 12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Total No. of registered male tax payers (whether poll or hut).... 117236</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Total No. of registered assessable huts.... 125146</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. No. Of registered married male taxpayers and in the case of polygamy No. of wives:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monogamists- 78434</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Polygamists: Two wives- 12434</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Three wives- 2959</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Four wives- 836</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Five wives- 246</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Six- 100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seven- 32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eight wives- 14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nine wives- 8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ten or more wives- 18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total- 95081</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. of registered extra huts (taxable huts in excess of one in respect to which a male taxpayer accepts liability) ............... 22860</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. of registered huts in respect to which it is estimated that exemption will be granted ......... 19590</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. of registered independent women ........ 7205</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. of registered independent women in respect of whom it is estimated that exemption will be granted .......... 7000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source PC/NZA/3/10/153 Native Tax Revision 21 Sept 1937, KNA.

From the schedule, several observations could be made. It can be estimated that, in 1937, Central Nyanza had about 19,590 widows. To be granted exemption, the widow avoided “inheritance”. Additionally, there were a total of approximately 7,205 women referred to as independent. Out of the some 7,205, the colonial administration preferred exemptions on roughly 7000 independent women. Meaning that the rest had to pay taxes. It can also be observed that men married to more than one wife were compelled to pay hut tax and poll tax for additional wives. Given that exemptions were difficult to be given, it was not
surprising that taxes were levied on many women without regular presence and or support of a man. Despite gross underestimation, a larger number of independent women liable for taxation were registered. These independent women comprised of those women with marriage problems and were staying with their relatives or in their natal home or runaway women. The schedule indicates that while it was the responsibility of the men to pay taxes, the 1930s witnessed taxes levied on a majority of the female-headed households. The PCs report to the Colonial secretary in the same year made it even much clear when he observed that:

Tax on plural huts or wives would be an incentive to monogamy with unfortunate results. One such results was that natives were increasingly refusing to inherit and accept the guardianship of widowed women, and they were no longer prepared to as it used to be to take charge of its destitute persons (PC/NZA/3/10/153, 1937, KNA).

As a consequence the Central Nyanza District Annual Report (CNDAR) of 1938, registered very many tax defaulters because many men left without paying and the women were unable pay the required taxes. The PC however had a different story to tell. He acknowledged in his report the extent to which capitalist mode of production had crippled the African societal fabrics of social responsibilities. He wrote that "another feature of the tax position is that, where previously tax was paid by the head of the family in a lump sum, today with the scarcity of money and growth of individualism, payments are made by individuals each of whom has to be sought out for his (her) tax" (CKDAR, 1938, KNA).
This observation was likely considering that by 1938 the Kombewa economy was on the downward trend. There was limited trade, money was scarce owing to the low prices of primary products, a reduction in wages and lack of work. The purchasing power of the Africans remained at very low level compared with more prosperous previous years. Retail prices on manufactured goods also shown marked decline (CNDAR, 1938, KNA).

As labour and taxation remained major aspects of the colonial administration in Kombewa, other antecedent factors also got into the interplay. These were social, economic and even touched on the health status of women. One such impact goes right from the end of the First World War. That was the demobilization of men to the reserves. Available colonial documents after the war elaborate wide spread of diseases, key amongst them are yaws and syphilis in Central Nyanza. The spread of these two diseases was remarkable considering that by 1920s there was no established dispensary in Kombewa (PC/NZA/3/9/1/1, KNA). It even forced the colonial administration to review fortnightly health report in Central Nyanza. In most cases these reports registered large and increasing numbers of yaws and syphilis cases. In fact these two diseases were predominant after the war in Kombewa as elsewhere in Central Nyanza either due to returning soldiers or returning labourers.

In 1926 the LNC compelled people suffering from yaws and syphilis to report to government dispensaries either in Maseno or in Kisumu, for treatment (PC/NZA/1/21, 1926, KNA). This was done as the LNC Central Kavirondo was passing a resolution to curtail the spread of the diseases. They observed that:
As venereal diseases is increasing among the natives of the district and as natives often fail to obtain medical attention or neglect to complete a course laid down by a medical officer, it is ordered that every native, of either sex, suffering from venereal disease shall report to a medical officer and there after attend for treatment at such time and place as the medical officer shall direct...failure of which a fine of Shs. 50 shall be given (PC/3/33/8/24, 1926, KNA).

Between 1927 and 1928 alone, the Seme location registered a total of about 62 and 31 cases of yaws and syphilis respectively (PC/NZA/3/33/8/24, 1928, KNA). Oral data indicated that these diseases were among those people of Kombewa associate with jonanga [Migrant men] (Naboth Obola, John Robert Apat, Sofia Ochanda, O.I, 18-21 Dec, 2000.) Medical reports of 1927, 1928, and 1929 all indicate that yaws and syphilis were still the two chief causes for which patients applied for treatment in the dispensaries (see CNDAR, 1927-29, KNA).

But in 1928 attempts were focused beyond the demobilized men to social customs of the people of Central Nyanza as syphilis had marked the highest cases of miscarriages and infant mortality rate in the district. The CNDAR of 1928 indicated that the promiscuous sexual customs of the natives, especially the tugo [gathering of young men and women to celebrate special occasions such as funerals and public holidays] were responsible for the spread of syphilis. In the same year, a total of about 13,995 NAB injections were given at the rate of Shs. 10 each.

In 1932 the Mwaranda [a traditional dance among the natives] came under scrutiny. In the PCs opinion, this dance was responsible for the rise in the spread of venereal diseases in the province and thus was to be investigated by the DCs. This was among the best
reports produced by the colonial administration in Nyanza. The DC appended on the report a summary of reports sent to him by the chiefs and African interpreter called Jairo Owino in order to supplement his information. The report questioned the origin of Mwranda dances and the extent to which they have been polluted by European dances. It critiqued the various categories of Luo dances with a view to finding a solution to the spread of yaws and syphilis. A section of the report observed that:

Originally Jaluo dances only took place on special occasions for example, funerals, and marriages ... and were subject to strict regulations as to time and procedure. Briefly speaking, the present trouble has arisen from the breakdown of such regulations and the introduction of new ideas for example European dancing by youth returning from work in Nairobi and other such places. The old funeral dance uch was generally held during the daytime and perhaps lasted two days or so. The marriage dance budho was held on similar lines except that it was for a longer duration, perhaps six days, and of rather a more riotous nature. From uch arises the modern development nyaguesso, and from budho, the Mwranda dance. Both nyaguesso and Mwranda find their origin in Samia, Alego and Ugenya. Both are similar, perhaps nyaguesso is more abandoned in character. It appears that, the people of these three locations are rather more sexually minded than other locations, the women appear more promiscuous and of easy virtue. Perhaps the reason may be found in the fact that these locations provide the majority of those who go out to work, these youth then return with new diseases and vices, new ideas and novelties and find ready encouragement from their women folk to put them in practice. In Samia, these dances may last for the whole one-day and night and after and during the dancing the pairs enjoy the pleasures of sexual intercourse. The girl receives a small present of 50 cents or so. [Referring to venereal diseases, the DC further noted] in the old days, a person having yaws [nyach] was made a social outcaste, such a person spat a part, he had his latrine apart, he ate, drunk and slept a part and dwelt in the bush, if he married, he married a woman similarly diseased and was forbidden to shave his hair. With the advent of the Swahili to Mumia came 'tego' [syphilis] and later still perhaps 'Kisonono' [gonorrhoea]. I think it would be correct to say that venereal diseases are not so apparent superficially as yaws, especially in these days of 'trousers'. Also a person with such disease often goes to the local dispensary, has a couple of injections and deems himself a free man. These days therefore, a man can conceal a loathsome disease much more easily and with correspondingly greater danger to the general public (PC/NZA/2/1/68, 1932, KNA).
On migrant labour, the DC emphasized the Jaluo go out to work more than any other communities perhaps and return with every manner of disease, especially given the fact that many are being turned away from work (due to depression). It was the dance and the Mwranda festivities that contributed very largely to the spread of such diseases among those who remained at home particularly women and girls (PC/NZA/2/1/68, 1932, KNA).

Several observations can be made from this report. This report depicts the Luo society at a complete flux as far as morality is concerned. It shows how easy it was for youth to be involved in sexual activities without any penalty. It showed how traditional dances were corrupted by the European life-style and how this corruption had a remarkable negative impact on the Luo, particularly Kombewa in our case. The role of the old men in regulating unwanted social behaviour was equally undermined. The report showed the extent to which immoral dances were taking place while the "big men" were doing nothing to curtail them. The report also depicts the impact of migrant men on women as far as diseases are concerned. The European values were constantly undermining the traditional Luo culture.

The chief's Report showed several variations on "Mwranda machezo". These variations can only be explained in terms of the extent to which the traditional community was transformed. Some locations registered no mwranda, others depicted it as a funeral ceremony, others saw it as a newly introduced dance, and the Tiriki saw it confined to the Luo while among the Sagam mwranda michezo was an old custom which was not disapproved by the wazee [old men]. But the real harm to the country was done by the
youth that imitated European dances. In Asembo, this dance saw the youth off with their partners to the Simba [hut] while in Gem it was a sport and fun dance. In Kombewa, the chief described mwanda as an old custom, which was not disapproved by the wazee. It took place in the funerals and lasted for two days. The real cause of the spread of diseases was the fact that so many youth returned from work with diseases which they introduce into the reserve. The real problem arose from the youth that returned from the towns and started the business of European dancing, for it was on such occasions that the girls were seduced and infected as a result.

But 1939 more favourable explanation was put forward as it was rightly predicted that women did not attend dispensaries for treatment. That was because in many cases suffered no inconvenience and there was no female dresser to attend to them and no privacy afforded. Thus danger of re-infection was always present (CNDAR, 1937, KNA). Thus it was not only colonial policies, such as taxation and communal labour that impacted on women of Kombewa. Colonialism was accompanied by several repercussions to women. Migrant men upon their return infected not only married women but also girls with different types of diseases. The notable ones in Kombewa were syphilis and yaws. As there was no adequate form of treatment for women and girls, several of them suffered secretly. These diseases weakened many women and men, such that the health status of the Jo-Seme deteriorated remarkably during the same period.
4.3 MARRIAGE RELATIONS, THE MISSIONARY ACTIVITIES AND COLONIAL ADMINISTRATION IN KOMBEWA, 1919-1939.

After the First World War the missionaries and the colonial administration renewed their relations under the Alliance of Protestant Mission which declared that:

The settler can help the missionary. As a fellow European, he can make friends with him. As one concerned in the development of the country, he can show an interest in the work of the greatest factors in development, Christian education ...He can act as a father and not merely as a critic of a Christian boy who has passed beyond the care of the mission and are now in his employment...He can, by example if not by word help young convert to keep straight' (The policy of the Alliance; Paragraph 58 in J.W Arther Papers, GEN. 764/3, Edinburgh University Library).

The two "partners at convenience" illustrated how far they could go to help each other. These relations, however, could not be realized as missionaries discovered that the lifestyle of settlers was incompatible with that of missionary work. Hasting (1979:20) noted that:

The degree of social identification between mission and the administration or mission and white settler society greatly varied. Many missionaries held themselves firmly a loof, never joined the local white club and might hardly have been considered sufficiently respectable to be offered a place on the veranda for a sundowners.

While missionaries considered their work as beneficial to the settlers in that mission trained their labourers, the settlers often criticized the mission for not producing faithful servants and for lobbying British public opinion on defence of "native" interests (Githige,
The major concern of missionaries in Nyanza, particularly among the Luo, varied during this period. This made it possible for the missionaries in Nyanza, notwithstanding their different lifestyles to utilize their ambiguous relation (Githige, 1982) to attack the colonial administration on matters concerning forced communal labour and taxation.

The man who spearheaded this was none other than W.E Owen of the CMS Nyanza. Owen lived in African "reserves" himself. He succeeded in keeping the whole forced communal labour issue alive in the British politics. In an attempt to put a stop to what he saw as abuses of African labour, taxation and land, he wrote constantly to the local officials later to the British press and finally to the Labour government of 1930. Old men, women and children, according to Owen, were widely used in forced labour. His complaints about abuses reawakened the sensitivities among the informed British public. The "increasing pressure" which missionaries were against was the coercive method upon women and children. Ainsworth had encouraged the use of women and children as labour in situations in which their work place was "contiguous to reserves". Ainsworth suggested that "there was nothing so civil if women and children were willing to work and could readily go back to reserves" (see Ainsworth in van Zwanenberg, 1975:125-143). Owen however, asserted that women and children were made to work against their will. He suggested that from the last months of 1920 right through 1921, women and children were being forced into road works and into farms. Owen shared with persons like A.S Cripps and Oldham the view that "colonialism should as far as possible be benevolent and that it should have as its primary task the development of natives" (Githige, 1982:119). It was at this stage that the relations between the mission and the
colonial state in Kenya seem to have moved from ambivalence, cooperation, to conflict and these phases overlapped (Githige, op cit.).

Owen's accounts of women and children being forced to work touched on the colonial feeling of morality. He argued in his letter to MacGregor Ross that "in 1920, old women and girls were being turned out to work far from their homes and were not allowed to go back to them at night, with the result that the young women were being forced into immorality and older ones became exhausted. The chiefs were unable to find able-bodied men for public works since such large drafts were taken out of the "reserves", chief's had therefore recourse to compelling women and girls to undertake the work exhausted" (van Zwanenberg, 1975).

To show his dislike for the colonial system of taxation, Owen likened the taxes to the degradation of women since women according to tax law were regarded as property and not as responsible actual or potential property owners (Owen Papers Acc. 83/031). Headmen, he asserted, were apt to force the same individuals to pay twice or were known to seize goats or other property for payment. Owen recommended that tax revenue be used to pay labour on public projects. Forced labour for public and private use was, Owen contended, arousing colony-wide antagonism to the British rule in the colony. He was especially irked by the derisory nature of payment given to women and children to work on public projects. He cited one case concerning a group of girls who were hauling thatching grass from ninety miles away. After making the trip three times they were only given thirty cents each, Owen complained to the DC of Central Nyanza, "if something
more could be found for them" (Owen to DC, 02 Oct 1928, Acc. 83/08/4; Also see Murray, 1980).

It is difficult to exaggerate Owen's influence on the Luo. He entered fully into the social life of the people and became every-man's lawyer, solicitor, doctor and midwife. He stood for Christian principle of the sacredness of human personality; even in so far as it involved the right of others to differ from him. First he set himself to defend and champion the cause of the weak and ignorant Africans. Time and again he took up with the government individual cases of wrong or careless interpretation of the law as it was administered to the Africans (Ogot, 1963:264). People refereed to him as orego [whisk].

The missionary activities were not limited to Owen. Before the end of the war, they had unleashed attacks on several African institutions, such as bridewealth exchange, polygamy and widow 'inheritance'. This time, some of the impacts of these attacks were realized in Kombewa on a larger scale. These institutions were further weakened by the colonial administration considering payment of taxes and forced communal labour.

The case of bridewealth exchange as had been explained was very problematic to the missionaries. To them bridewealth made marriage a mere mercantile transaction and in 1907 the mission resolved to discourage the practice among baptized Christians as far as possible. In this effort, however, they were not very successful for the Christians continued to give and receive bridewealth, given the important symbolic role placed on it by the people of Kombewa and other African communities in Nyanza.
Immediately after the war, problems arose in terms of bridewealth exchange. This was due to economic stresses suffered by the people of Kombewa when it came to using their cattle to pay taxes. After the war taxes were in most cases paid in cash as most people in Kombewa had reduced stock. A number of migrant labour who had gone to work with hope of raising bridewealth were disappointed as they realized that their wages could not adequately sustain their needs, leave alone the needs of their families back at home. The exchange of bridewealth involving cattle became a problem as the "big men" refused to relent on the rates. Some kept on confining their daughters until some exchange took place. Some even removed their daughters from marriages so as to receive adequate bridewealth. By 1924 this mounting pressure reached the LNC in Central Nyanza. A debate ensued on what came to be called bridewealth stabilization or 'reduction of dowry'. The minutes of the Luo Council- the mouthpiece of the Luo community on matters affecting them was very particular on this. It decided that five heads of cattle were a sufficient 'dowry' but the bridegroom was also to provide one bull for slaughter at the marriage feast (PC/NZA/3/33/8/4:1924, KNA).

Three years after its formation, the Central Kavirondo Local Native Council (CKLNC), had to settle this problem. Without hesitation in 1927, the issue was taken from the Luo council and put for discussion. Among other items for discussion the issue of "stabilization of brideprice" did not appear to have adequate support (PC/NZA/3/33/8/25, 1927, KNA). Canon Hesbon Nyong'o (O.I, 12 Dec 2000) observed that:
When the matter first came up in Piny Owacho at Ludha Gem, the response was negative. No old man could allow his daughter to get married on as low as five cattle in exchange. It forced the meeting to be rescheduled for Nyahera where there were more Christians than anywhere else in Luo Nyanza. In Nyahera things turned unexpectedly. Instead of a reduction, the meeting resolved to increase the amount of bridewealth to 16 cows instead. Realizing this, many girls decided to elope with men. In other cases father-in-laws demanded bridewealth pledges to be paid in full.

In the same meeting, however, another issue came up for discussion in the LNC. This concerned marriage of premature girls, girls who had not reached fifteen years of age. It is difficult to come up with a conclusive explanation about the origin of the practice. The Native Affairs Department (NAD) referring to this practice noted that "this practice had become common among the Kavirondo for avaricious parents to sell or marry off, their very young and immature daughters in marriage" (AG/23/293:1927, KNA). Why would parents give their daughters as young as fifteen for marriage?

It seems that, the remarkable fall on bridewealth exchange had caused a lot of panic to many parents such that giving away a daughter for marriage at any exchange value could suffice. This notwithstanding, moral values had collapsed considerably in Kombewa. LNCs in Central Nyanza had even proposed to ban all forms of dances wherein the participants had bodily contact throughout the dance. This was on suspicion that they were responsible for the rising immorality. Such dance known as nduma were generally imitation of European forms of dances. They were suggested to be harmful to the local "natives" because they resulted in promiscuous sexual intercourse, loss of bridewealth, lowering standards, result in unwarranted children, led to murder, seduction, adultery and assault (PC/NZA/2/1/68, 1928, KNA). In these dances girls could elope with no
bridewealth exchange. This may have influenced many girls and parents to admire entry into marriage even at a limited bridewealth. If this failed some girls even went into marriage institution without bridewealth exchange.

Capitalist penetration into Kombewa during this period was also remarkable. Its results could not be avoided. Owen had believed that according to the way capitalism was introduced in Nyanza as elsewhere, it could have two opposing tendencies; if the state tilted in favour of European settlers, if they were freely allowed their way on land, labour and taxation: - then the system would merely exploit and impoverish the African population and sooner or later lead to a break down of social cohesion and traditional rules without putting anything later in their place. However if properly regulated, capitalism could, Owen maintained, serve as the agent of economic and moral uplift of the African people.

The latter was the case in Kombewa. Bridewealth totally collapsed. It was not what was traditionally accepted. Bridewealth started serving capital. Before the onslaught of capitalism, the bridegrooms' families often presented livestock to the brides' families and in this way tangible relationships between different kinship groups were established. Cattle were exchanged for women, though before the penetration of capitalism neither was regarded as merchandise. They had a use-value but not an exchange value, because cattle were not traditionally offered for sale in the market. Cattle in Kombewa provided people with meat and blood. Cattle in marriage legitimised children and guaranteed marriage stability.
The return of bridewealth in many cases posed difficulties to many families. Bridewealth was generally transferred soon after it had been received for marriage of junior members of the woman's kinship. But if no man intended to marry at the time, the cattle were divided among other elder relatives in the kinship who may transfer them for marriage of their juniors. Thus parents put pressure on their daughters to stay with their husbands unless it was quite clear that the husband had grossly transgressed the limits of their authority and therefore lost the right to reclaim their cattle.

The entrenchment of capitalism in Kombewa has brought about the most important changes which occurred in the bridewealth system. The money used basically to acquire almost everything acquainted the people with new forms of property and totally transformed pre-capitalist societies. The transformation of bridewealth system into commercial transaction is a natural consequence of these changes. Cattle payment began to be replaced partially by cash payments. Whereas in the past women were exchanged for cattle which had use-value, with the capitalist entrenchment, women were exchanged for money, a medium of exchange which had no social value in itself, but excellently suited to accumulation. Commercialisation has occurred whenever marriage payment have been used for purposes other than obtaining wives in exchange for sisters or daughters (Weinrich, 1979). Cattle used for marriage purposes were kin properties and intended for the perpetuation of the kin. This time, the big men were unfortunate. They lost relevance as cattle ceased to be the most important factor in marriage 'transaction'. For the few lucky men who could use their earnings to buy cattle further realized that
they could also negotiate for the girl with the parents not the kin elders or more badly elope with the girl. This meant a total loss of bridewealth. Taxation, cattle diseases, and the difficulty in meeting daily needs reduced people's livestock and so hastened the replacement of bridewealth exchange in cattle with money. This did not mean that cattle were not used at all in marriage negotiations but the number of cattle exchanged greatly reduced.

By implication, therefore, some unscrupulous fathers or parents could give out young daughters in marriage after receiving little tokens in form of money to cut other kin members from the negotiation and to use this for tax obligations among other pressing needs. This kind of negotiation affected many marriages as many girls started complaining that they were being forced to marry against their wish and to men they did not love. This was something the missionaries had previously spoken against with a hope of abolishing. Equally in 1927 NAD wrote to the Attorney General (AG) of Nairobi complaining about marriage of premature girls in Central Nyanza. A section of the letter observed that:

> It is felt by the local natives that the marriage of such girls is against the interest of the 'tribe' from an eugenic point of view and it appears to be very desirable in the public interest to put a stop to the practice (AG/23/293, 1927, KNA).

Earlier in Feb 1927 the LNC had resolved without much success that "it is an offence for anyone to allow his daughter to be married until she is fifteen years of age. The punishment in Baraza for such an offence to be a fine of Shs. 150 with three months
rigorous imprisonment in default" (PC/NZA/3/33/8/25). As the problem escalated the Chief Native Commissioner, G.V. Maxwell asked to be briefed on the whole issue of bridewealth stabilization which was debated in the LNCs. On his report, the Senior Commissioner of Nyanza reported that:

Even the young men are in favour of decreased marriage price and I am given to understand that the high price prevents many young men from getting married leading to a lot of immorality (PC/NZA/3/33/8/25, 1927, KNA).

In the same period, the position of widows who the PC of Nyanza had likened to be of European morality became problematic. This was especially concerning the widows who had refused to conform to traditional customs. In July 1927 the senior commissioner made his position clear as pertains to Christian widows. He stated that "the position in regard to Christian widows in my opinion is that they are in a position to marry whom they please under the East African Marriage Ordinance" (PC/NZA/3/33/8/25, 1927, KNA). The LNC in Central Nyanza at Marenyo on July 21-22, 1927 further reinforced the proposal by passing a resolution that "a widow should be free to marry again a small marriage price being paid to the inheritor" (PC/NZA/3/33/8/25, 1927, KNA). These seem to have freed the widows a great deal from the traditional obligations that required the elders to get for them suitors. This freedom culminated in their mobility to townships, particularly Kisumu in our case. This was in order to search for jobs and trading opportunities.
In 1929 the world depression hit the colony, this included Kombewa. During depression, things turned from bad to worse. It is difficult to trace when exactly the people of Kombewa started feeling the impact of depression but the first years of 1920s were ones of severe economic hardship for Africans brought about by depression (Maxon, 1989:79). Africans involved in the production of crops for sale were hard hit by the collapse of prices which made production for external and internal market unprofitable. Trade in most African areas of Kenya collapsed during the period. The colonies annual report for 1921 noted that "trade throughout the reserves was dull and articles of "native" produce were practically unsaleable" (Colony and Protectorate of Kenya Report for 1921, 5; Also see Maxon, 1989:79).

As with the collapse of trade, cuts in wages and declining opportunities for wage labour caused hardships for many people even in Kombewa. Often men suffered from both disabilities, as it became difficult to meet the tax exaction of the colonial state, which were not relaxed. The great depression affected the economic life of Seme people through the loss of jobs as European employers tried to cut their losses. Prices of primary commodities dropped, wages were reduced, as colonial employment became difficult to come-by. The devastations caused by swarms of locust led to a prolonged famine in 1931 and 1932, known locally as Nyangweso [the Luo word for hoppers, locusts that have not yet grown wing]. Drought caused a further, localized famine in 1934 (Hay, 1976:103). Wage labour also dwindled at the time everybody in Kombewa needed it to meet tax obligations which the district officials adamantly refused to postpone despite the famine. This was the time when one could dispose of by selling anything at her or his disposal.
To make things even more difficult in Kombewa, officials turned their attention to cotton production by Africans. In Nyanza, African cotton out-puts in 1930 and 1931 measured about 918,967 pounds of seed cotton. By 1935 and 1936 after intensive government assistance (by demanding that everybody must have a piece of land set aside for cotton production) out-put stood at 15,701,756 pounds of seed cotton—a sixteen-fold increase (Department of Agriculture Annual Report, 1935; see also Wolff, 1974). It was no wonder that this production realized extreme devastation's of soil erosion which required an argent attention by use of forced communal labour.

The coming of depression worsened the issue of bridewealth. Gathering of bridewealth even became very complicated. It surfaced very strongly in the 1930s LNC Meetings in Marenyo under the title stabilization of "marriage price". It was suggested that bridewealth should be fixed in all locations at five heads of cattle, one bull and one goat (PC/NZA/4/1/1/1, 1930, KNA). It was supported by the argument that, "several young men were unable to obtain wives as a result of lack of cows and there was a tendency to run away with girls to farms in the Coast. The girls are in favour of a reduction of Mahari [bridewealth] (PC/NZA/4/1/1/1, 1930, KNA). This scenario was further connected to the rise in venereal diseases in Seme location (PC/NZA/3/33/8/25, 1930, KNA). An extract from Kenya Confidential Dispatch No. 151 of October 20, 1931 described the extent to which the traditional bridewealth exchange had been transformed during depression. The dispatch noted that:
It is recognized that in many ways, the payment of brideprice... (With its attendant complication in the way of perpetual contractual obligation) is one of the greatest obstacles in the way of advancement of the "native" people. It is responsible for the overstocking of the native reserves as also for the fact that many natives waste a large proportion of their time and substance in unending law suits. An even worse evil is that the payment of bridewealth tends to degenerate into sale and purchase with the result that the father is apt to 'sell' his daughter to the highest bidder rather than marry her to a suitable husband.

However this dispatch was criticized by the DC of Kisii by giving example of the Zulu which had experienced attempts to abolish the custom of bridewealth exchange. The critique observed that "any attempt, however, to abolish the custom by arbitrary legislation would not only be doomed to complete failure but also would result in chaos. Bride price among pagan polygamists is a fundamental condition of regularized union, is a sign of responsibility and to some extent a guarantee of infidelity. Without it there would be promiscuity. The custom must therefore be tolerated and recognized until with the progress of education and "civilization" it becomes obsolete. On bridewealth stabilization, the report noted:

Young men certainly complain that they cannot collect enough property to obtain a wife, but that is no new complaint. It is true that rich old men collect wives and like to collect young ones. It is also true, however, that, if a rich old man can now afford ten wives at ten head of cattle per wife he would afford (and would collect) thirty three if the price were reduced to three head and the position of the young men would be worse rather than better (PC/NZA/3/1/1/1, 1931, KNA)

The fact that girls were in favour of a reduction of bridewealth gives a very problematic suggestion. It seems that the big men were holding on them against their wish. Either they wanted to join the trail of labour migrants or they wanted to get married. The former
preposition looks attractive because of several reasons. Famine had strongly hit the localities without much remedy from the colonial administration. The intensification of cotton production demanded extra labour only to be supplied by women and unmarried girls. But equally worse, their labour as had been suggested by Owen was urgently needed in soil reclamation as the soils were badly damaged by intensified cotton production. Coupled with the need to assist in acquiring money to pay taxes, the search for wage labour seemed attractive.

In Kombewa women who had been forced into marriages without their consent felt cheated. They started rejecting these marriages and were running away. The issue of run away wives thus became much prevalent during this period. While every woman had her own reason for refusing to go for marriage during this period, several explanations can be put forward to explain the situation. Some fathers could remove their daughters from marriages under the contention that not enough bridewealth had been given. Even more pressing on the part of women was the demand to be "clothed". A tussle only was not important as a husband who could not provide clothes for a woman risked the woman running away. The 1930s thus witnessed very many Jo-Seme adopting Western forms of clothing; quarrels over the quality and the amount of clothing provided to co-wives had become one of the principle items of conflict within the homesteads. Men felt they lost control over women in dresses and the elders felt they lost control over young men who were now in shirts and trousers (Hay, 1994:12).
The colonial administration thus impoverished the Jo-Seme in different ways. They introduced taxation, forced communal labour, male labour conscription and cotton production. The localities were made unattractive to anybody not even the men. All social and economic security system had collapsed, exposing men and women to any eventuality. This explains the famine that hit Kombewa economy during this period. Wage labour was the only opening to all. The women had learnt a lesson from men. The women particularly those referred to as "independent women" started seeking for wages to feed their children or ran away from not only commitments of tax but also traditional obligations. In Central Kavirondo, the women were employed in the mining camps in Kakamega, crushing rocks, padding department of Kenya industries, cigarette factory and as female domestic workers in Kisumu Township (PC/NZA/3/15/143, 1938, KNA). According to Jairo Owino, it was the position of women that was changing. This was due to their encounter with new novelties. During the meeting of Central Nyanza LNC, he observed that:

The position of women was changing. They are no-longer porters; the bridegroom now had to buy her cloths instead of presenting her with marriage tail. On stabilization of bridewealth he observed that it cut both ways if the elder received fewer cattle for mahari; they had to assist their sons with fewer animals (PC/NZA/4/1/1/1).

As the problem of runaway women intensified, the president of LNC Central Nyanza was put to task by the PC of Nyanza to explain its origin. The president surprisingly explained this phenomenon in terms of the difficulty arising from advance of education and communication which had brought about a partial breakdown of traditional customs. He noted that women were not so easily forced to cohabit with men they disliked. There was
however the case of the seducer who was unable to pay bridewealth and who enticed away-married women. He even blamed the colonial government for it lacked any drastic measure to deal with the problem. (PC/NZA/4/1/1/1, 1930, KNA).

Between 1930 and 1935 the question of bridewealth stabilization reached the church, particularly CMS. Previously, bridewealth exchange was one of the most emotional issues between the people of Kombewa and the incoming Christian missionaries. The policy was to preach and plant Christianity. This meant to make frontal attacks on the beliefs, the customs, the apprehensions of life and the World, and by implication on the social structures and bases of "primitive" society (Ajayi, 1965; Ayandele, 1966). But when it came to bridewealth the Christian missionaries did not seem to be very successful for converts continued to receive bridewealth in Kombewa (see Canon Nyong'o O.I, 12, Dec 2000).

When this issue came up in the meetings of the LNC, the missionary representative had no hesitation but to blame it on failure in instituting voluntary registration of marriages and advocated that registration of marriages be made compulsory (LNC Minutes, 1930, KNA). Archdeacon Owen in 1936 also considered registration of marriages on the same ground. He said that "the chief purpose of compulsory registration was that no marriage should be compelled if the girl refused and although at first she might not have the courage to do so when she could soon gain it (PC/NZA/2/1/104, 1930, KNA).
While the DC of Central Nyanza argued that registration of marriages even if acceptable within the colonial administration docket would ultimately cause the whole bridewealth system to break (PC/NZA/2/1/104, 1930, KNA). Unfortunately the impact of Christianity during this period was not that remarkable, considering the number of celebrated marriages. The total numbers of Christian celebrated marriages at Butere, Ngiya and Maseno all within the vicinity of Kombewa were shocking. The Nyanza Province Annual Report (NPAR) of 1934 to 1938 indicated that a total of about 4,539 Christian marriages were celebrated. CMS, at Ngiya, Butere and Maseno registering about 1136 marriages, showing a decrease on the impact of Christianity among the people of Kombewa. The number of marriages occurring annually in the province was approximately 7000-12000 or just 9000. It appeared that one marriage in every ten would be Christian marriage (DC/KSM/1/4/7, 1938, KNA).

As the previous proposals on bridewealth stabilization were defeated, a more elaborate one came up for discussion on LNC meeting of 5th December 1935. It was proposed that bridewealth exchange should be in three categories. (a) For unmarried girls, 3 cows, 2 bulls, Shs. 60, 1 goat or 5, 1 ox to be slaughtered for eating. (b) For an 'ogogo' I or a woman who had already had 1 or 2 children, 2 cows, 2 bulls. (c) For 'ogogo' II, a woman who had more than 2 children, 2 cows, a bull (DC/KSM/1/1/118, 1935, KNA). Unfortunately this proposal also passed with no resolution. In 1936 the Nyanza Provincial Commissioner tabled the missionary suggestion of compulsory registration of marriages to the Colonial Secretary. In support of compulsory registration of marriages, the PC recommended that:
Now with the increasing emancipation of men and women, tribal authority has broken down their sanctions, of parents and fathers. Native tribunals find at every turn that they are unable to enforce the old law and there are limits to the extent to which government is willing to support them. In consequence girls too complain when they are forced to marry against their will; lovers begin to set up house together without exchanging bridewealth, the wives begin to desert from the husbands whom they never chose or of whom they are tired of. We are dealing with a stage where the family group system is decaying while a fully individualized system has not yet come into being...a compulsory marriage register is recommended principally to prevent forced marriages but also because it will be valuable as a record (PC/NZA/2/9/21, 1935, KNA).

In 1936 Chief Outa Saulo of Seme also provided a report in support of the PCs recommendations detailing the extent to which social transformation had taken place on the whole processes of marriages in Kombewa. His report entitled "Forced Marriage of African Girls in Seme" noted that:

There are no cases of forced marriage to my knowledge nowadays. In the past the custom was for an arrangement to be made between the father of the bride and the bridegroom to be. It was then possible for the father of the girl to enforce the marriage. This does not happen to day. What happens is that an arrangement is first made between the man and the girl. They meet at dances ... and take a fancy to each other. They then go to the father of the girl and the matter of bride price is settled and preliminary payment made. After this the father of the girl can force her to keep her promise to the man of her choice (DC/KSM/1/21/21, 1936, KNA).

It should however be observed that the issue of whether to adopt a voluntary or compulsory marriage registration still remained unresolved almost throughout the colonial period. As the World War II approached, the number of women referred to as 'independent' increased tremendously (PC/NZA/3/10/153, 1938, KNA). Due to several
reasons, they had started drifting in large numbers into the emerging townships, such as Kisumu, whose growth was explained in terms of air port, mining and African development (NPAR, 1938, KNA). But towards 1938, the Provincial Commissioners were forced to review and come up with some recommendations on how the issue passes to "native" girls and women entering Municipalities and Townships could be put into operation. They observed that the DCs had envisaged the necessity and the urgency of control. They recognized and appreciated those responsible "natives" parents' and elders in the "reserves" were perturbed by the situation and would welcome control. The PCs without hesitation endorsed the recommendation of the sub-committee of the district commissioners' meeting of 22nd March, 1938, Minute No. 20, and recommend that the Native Pass Laws be amended as proposed, namely:

That no female native, whose lawful guardian is normally resident in the native reserves shall, except within the boundaries of such native reserve, or municipality or township, travel or be transported by any motor vehicle as defined under the Traffic Ordinance No.26 of 1928, unless she shall be in a possession of a pass duly authorizing her to do so, endorsed by such guardian and issued by a district officer, or other duly authorized agent stating the points between which such pass is valid and the period of such validity. Any such female so travelling and any person so transporting any such female shall on conviction be liable to a penalty on default (PC/NZA/2/1/104, 1938, KNA).

By 1938 a lone, a total of about one thousand one hundred and two women of different categories were in Kisumu town. (NPAR, 1938, KNA). This mobility had to be curtailed. Big men, clan elders and family heads, could not raise bridewealth for their sons nor were sons able to raise adequate cattle for the same. They tried successfully to enter individualized negotiations as girls became difficult to tame using traditional obligations
or customs. Capitalist goods and luxuries in towns had lured many girls and women either within the localities or into the townships. They could only enter into marriage to men who could offer them these luxuries. The tribal authority was under transformation. The colonial administration on the other side drove able men out of the localities. Starvation, forced labour, famines, and taxation became the only words to describe localities of Kombewa during this period. To the big men time was ripe for putting something in place to control women mobility.

A year to the start of hostilities, the Luo Union (an organization whose main concern was the betterment of the Luo community socially and economically), through their chairman Solomon Owango made it clear their intention about women. They stated that, "the Union would try to stop or check out the native girls who play prostitution in the township and which impair our customs" (PC/NZA/2/1/118, 1938, KNA). This Union became irrelevant as more elaborate one called Ramogi African Welfare Association emerged in Luo Nyanza, specifically to deal with women as will be seen in the next chapter.

It should be observed at this point that once the redistributive economy of traditional society, in which there was communal assistance to those under privileged like the one of Kombewa was undermined, little security was offered to the young, the old, the disadvantaged, women, and those without next of kins. And the standard of living in the rural areas dropped, women who were not seriously or wholly part of family production unit became increasingly vulnerable. Many who lost their sources of livelihood were forced by circumstances into the urban areas to seek cash to fend for themselves.
4.4 THE FEMALE HEADED HOUSEHOLDS IN KOMBWEWA DURING THE SECOND WORLD WAR.

Harold Macmillan, best summarized the colonial preoccupations at the outbreak of the war when he said that the immediate task of the colonial government [was] mobilization of all potential resources of the colonial empire, both men and materials for the purpose of war...we therefore needed to increase colonial production for war purposes on an immense scale (Harold, 1967; Zeleza, 1989:45; Jalango-Ndeda, 1991).

Obtaining recruitment and supplies for the army became essential as the colonial economy was to play a complementary role to the British economy during the war. In pursuit of this food sufficiency in all essential foodstuffs, able-bodied men for all undertakings, including private and army recruits were to be intensified. At the outbreak of the war, the colonial government acquired broad powers of coercion over labour. New regulations which gave the governor powers to order the PCs to produce quotas of men fit for military and essential services were introduced (Zeleza, 1989). All these regulations emanated from the Emergency Power Defense Acts passed by the British Parliament when the war broke-out (Jalango-Ndeda, 1991:177). The regulations were relevant in the mobilization and recruitment of labour for the army and services designated as essential as well as ensure that private farmers and employers received sufficient labour for production of food and other essential commodities (Kiruthu, 1997:179).
Many of the Africans who joined Kings African Rifles (KAR) were conscripted. Apart from recruitment into the army, the military authorities and the government required recruited labour for work of urgent operational necessity, for example, construction and extension of airfields, roads, harbours and military training camps. By the end of the war about 98,000 Kenyans had served in the armed forces in one capacity or another, at home or in the military campaigns away from Kenya (Clayton and Savage, 1974:232).

In Nyanza province, wartime agricultural policy was dubbed "farming as usual plus". In 1939 this became the guiding document to food production. It demanded agricultural production to be increased particularly by intensification of production (Zeleza, op.cit). In Nyanza, food production was to be increased in the following order of priority; legumes, particularly the pulses and especially grams, cereals, oil seeds, millet, cotton, and perishable foods (PC/NZA/2/12/76, 1939, KNA). The chiefs and headmen were to be notified of the need for increasing the crops mentioned no wonder their occurred several abuses under Native Authority Ordinance (NAO). In the same year, another circular came from the department of agriculture (DOA), Nairobi to all PCs and agricultural officers. It stated that:

It is now definitely established that there will be an increasing demand for green grams, black grams, Bengal grams, rose coco and Boston beans. The production of green grams should be maintained, the production of black and Bengal grams should be increased up to five times the present production, while the production of rose coco and Boston beans can be increased up to unlimited extent' (PC/NZA/2/12/76, 1939, KNA).

In response to this circular the DC of Central Nyanza observed that:
Everything possible will be done by way of propaganda to increase the production of the crops named, but I feel that some emergency powers should be granted for the purpose of obtaining that end. It is difficult to suggest which form such powers should take, but they may require every head of family or man, every unemployed male to have an area of say a half of an acre under cultivation, also conferring powers on the agricultural officers to decide to what extent the land should be planted. This might be in addition to land customarily tilted for family's own maintenance (PC/NZA/2/12/76, 1939 KNA).

However, the PC objected to the DCs request despite this being the reality in most cases in Kombewa (Joyce Ongudi, Obadha Ochola, O.I, 18th Dec 2000). The need for increased food production demanded additional labour and land. As with the situation at the start of the war, few men were available for such undertaking. It was the women who played a pivotal role in food production demanded for the war and for household consumption. In 1940, the PC of Londiani became quite articulate on the role the "native" could play to help British defeat the Germans. Mr. R.W Lambert observed that "natives" could only help the British in four ways namely paying his hut tax promptly, working like a man and leaving the playing and lazing to those who are still children, good behaviour to lessen the work of the police and turning out regularly to work and not to waste precious time (PC/NZA/2/3/61, 1940, KNA). It was in this regard that the PC of Nyanza described the Nilotic Kavirondo as follows "in the normal time they provide about half of the colony's labour. They also provide a large proportion of the police force and considerable proportion of KAR" (PC/NZA/2/3/61, KNA).

As the war progressed so did the demand for food production. Between 1941 and 1942 several crops were identified by the agricultural officers for increased production. In
1941-42 for Nyanza province, maize, groundnuts, rice and Simsim were considered most essential. Cotton production was also to be maintained. But as from 1942 food production estimates for Nyanza came out, Nyanza was asked to increase her production of crops to sent overseas as war supplies in the following order:

(a) Maize-715,000 bags
(b) Mtama-110,000 bags
(c) Rice-15,000 bags
(d) Groundnuts-35,000 bags
(e) Simsim-35,000 bags
(f) Cotton-15,000 bales (PC/NZA/2/3/61, 1942, KNA).

Kombewa was to produce groundnuts and cotton specifically. These demands were reinforced under the NAO and the failure to provide required products led to prosecution before the Native Tribunal. If a chief failed to take the requisite action, the instructor was supposed to report to the agricultural officer then to the DC. In 1943 additional demand was made on Kombewa. The governor through the Chief Secretary GM Rennie directed the PC of Nyanza that:

In view of the colony, His Excellency the governor directs that the director of agriculture and the PC should take concerted action for planting quick growing food crops, such as beans and Simsim crops as well as sweet potatoes and cassava in native areas as soon as the long rains begin. It is emphasized that the above planting should be in addition to and not in any way substitution for planting of other cereal crops, such as maize, Mtama and Wimbi (PC/NZA/2/12/76, 1943, KNA).
Two days after this directive, the DC of Central Nyanza could not run away from the reality when it came to increasing food production. On January 24, 1943 he acknowledged to the PC of Nyanza that:

Apart from the fact that Central Kavirondo has produced a lot of men for military and civil duties under the conscription laws...and the fact that call on native authorities are many...I cannot without dislocating my whole program of tax collection, of cattle sales and recruiting ... produce increased production (PC/NZA/2/12/76, 1943, KNA).

Without hesitation the PC took up the matter with the chief secretary to explain to him the reality on the ground. He noted that:

In particular where areas of thick bush have to be cleared before cultivation can be started, extension of land to be put under crops is making very slow progress for the simple reason that not enough men remain to do this work and the women cannot attempt it. In addition, if any increase in cropping is attained, when it comes to cotton planting the women will be so taken up with weeding any fresh land for cotton, and unless the manpower is there to do the necessary cultivation, it seems very likely that the cotton crop will be negligible.

The locations where cultivation was to be improved, such as Kombewa, did not have adequate manpower than womanpower (PC/NZA/2/12/76, 1943, KNA). Mr. Anderson, agricultural officer in Nyanza, made the same observations. Looking at the scarcity of men in Central Nyanza he indicated that:

It is becoming increasingly obvious that if the increased production campaign planned for Central Kavirondo this year is to take full effect, no further drain on available manpower can be made... as many men as possible from these areas should be allowed to return to the reserve on two
or three months leave to enable them assist in the cultivation and planting of long rain crops (PC/NZA/2/12/76, 1944, KNA).

The above state of affairs made famine unavoidable. Between 1943 and 1944 Nyanza was plunged into one of the grimmest famines it had never experienced (see East African Standard 21-2-1944, KNA). It was the reaction of the acting Nyanza Provincial Commissioner to the Editor E.A. Standard that summarized the whole situation when it came to Nyanza. He observed that:

It does not seem possible to believe that so fertile a country as Uganda, for instance, and other parts of East Africa especially around Lake Victoria, where nature is as a rule most bounteous, should today be in such a desolate state that not only do they not provide any major contribution to the common food pool, but are themselves suffering from famine. Nyanza supplies more than half the total labour force and more than half the attested soldiers in addition to producing almost half in total production of fast African Native Food staff, this from a population of just over one third of total African population of Kenya. Out of 5000,000 bags exported surplus, we are asking to retain 16,000 bags to meet our requirements in localities where the long rain as well as short rain failed (PC/NZA/2/12/76, 1944, KNA).

Alongside increased food production, men were further required for army recruitment and for settler demands. By the end of 1944 some 91,218 men from Nyanza were working outside the province. In the same year some 5,131 young men from Nyanza were recruited to the army (Stichter, 1975: 97). In the same year some 200 men left Kombewa location for work in Nanyuki Aerodrome. Nyanza Labour Agency in their report further acknowledged that from Nyanza, they normally entrain more than 1000 persons a month (PC/NZA/3/13/6, 1944, KNA). During the same year almost 12,679
cattle were exported from Nyanza to meet war efforts. The following year, NPAR indicated that some 95,000 young men from Nyanza were working outside the province.

Between 1942 and 1943 things became worse. It was being reported that, the colonial administration had relented by suspending the conscription of African labour for civil undertakings. The suspension did not improve the situation any better. On November 25, 1943, Her Majesty's letters indicated no objection in principle to the continued use of conscription for the production of sisal and approved the extension of conscription for the production of essential foodstuffs and certain war products, urgently required by the ministry of supply (DC/KSM/1/17/19, 1943, KNA). In Central Kavirondo the DC reported:

The young men as soon as they hear that the Native Authorities are picking on people for the next civil batch, immediately start to run away, sometimes to hide, sometimes to work, sometimes to Uganda and so on. There is almost a free fight to get into the military batches in order to avoid being caught for civil work. Obviously, therefore, home production, is bound to suffer. It is not only statistics that matter in a subject of this kind. There are many repercussions, which you know and appreciate even better than I do (PC/NZA/2/12/76, 1944, KNA).

For women, there was another side of labour which was too difficult for them to avoid as men were away. Communal labour was called upon regularly for undertaking considered essential, such as harvesting, construction and extension of roads and soil conservation. As from 1942 African District Council (ADC) had approved the employment of unpaid labour for the purposes of establishment and maintenance of camps for administration
purposes in the "reserves" and for construction and maintenance of such buildings of local materials as may be necessary at the camps (PC/NZA/3/13/21, 1944, KNA).

At the meeting of Labour Advisory Board held on 11th January, 1944, the chief Native commissioner, due to heavy calls then made on man power on the reserves, was requested to discuss with PCs at the provincial commissioner's meeting the possibility of encouraging women from the Nyanza Province and other areas by propaganda and other means to work on European farms in the same way as the Kikuyu women did (PC/NZA/2/20/20, 1944, KNA). These attempts were unnecessary, given that many women were already occupied.

The haphazard increase of food production in Central Nyanza to meet the war demand automatically led to unprecedented overuse of land considering the ever-increasing human population. This resulted in excessive soil erosion in most parts of the district. To arrest this colonial administration moved to LNC. As from 1939, the Central Nyanza Local Native Council passed a resolution No. 7 to that effect that:

Measures dealing with soil erosion are hereby declared to be a minor communal service and for the purpose of preventing soil erosion all able-bodied men shall carry out any of the measures specified in the schedule hereto and headmen are hereby empowered to require such able bodied men to take any of the solid measures (PC/NZA/3/2/113, 1939, KNA). The governor approved this resolution on 11th October 1940.

In response to this resolution the 1940s saw a large-scale soil conservation using communal labour and individual Shambas [cultivated land] soil conservation, using
individual labour. In his report to the Director of Agriculture in Nairobi, the PC explained that:

Apart from communal works of soil reclamation, there has been in all districts a great deal of individual works of natives in their own *Shambas.* This has taken the form of live wash-stops, stone bounds, stone terraces and narrow based terraces.

To intensify the need for permanent measures to arrest escalating soil erosion in many districts, the Director of Agriculture in Nairobi further gave the following suggestion:

In the first place chiefs or headmen, agricultural instructors and all leaders of natives throughout must be persuaded to have their land protected against erosion... if this is not so and stubborn resistance is encountered compulsion under the Land and Water Ordinance or under the Local Resolutions will have to be considered communal gangs, with the assistance and cooperation of local administration officers, may be used for such purposes of protection or reclamation of common grazing land, constructing outlets serving a number of occupiers, protecting roads sides and stream bank' (PC/NZA/3/2/113, 1944, KNA).

Land was excessively damaged that even the kind of reclamation put in place could not reverse the situation. The central Nyanza was hard hit. In fact, after all, these efforts of the acting Agricultural Officer in Nyanza had no better words for the district when it came to soil erosion. He acknowledged that:

This is by far the worst district in Nyanza. There are three really bad locations namely Alego, North and South Ugenya where erosion is the major problem. Three others where it is rapidly assuming those proportions are Sakwa, Asembo and Seme (Kombewa) and two more where it is bad are Kisumu and Nyakach (PC/NCA/3/2/113, 1944, KNA).
He even described the Luo in these districts as the most backward of all "tribes" in the province for not seeing the necessity of the work (soil reclamation). By implication adequate labour had to be found to help solve the problem. Unfortunately there were insufficient men to do the work and so it had to be done basically by women and children alone.

As the demand for increased production of food crops and labour intensified, the colonial administration did not do any noticeable adjustments on "native" direct taxes. As a consequence, the most seriously affected persons became the women in the localities, more particularly widows. A year after the start of the war, the widows started complaining to the PC of Nyanza to be exempted from native hut tax. A section of some of these complaint letters read that:

The reason for asking for the concession was in order to ease the burden, often very heavy one, on the deceased husband's family, of providing extra female dependant in cases where loss of life occurred on account of a member of that family serving his king and country (PC/NCA/2/19/12, 1944, KNA).

After putting the matter for consideration, the colonial government, through the Chief Secretary of state G.M Rennie, recommended that, "the first wife of an African who died on active service should be exempted from payment of native hut tax until she bears another child" (PCNZA/2/19/12, 1944, KNA). This implied that widows and those who lost their husbands after they had served in the war may be due to ill health in the war, did not qualify for any exemption and so had to pay taxes. As from 1941, evidence is available to indicate that these exemptions were difficult to get. For women, one had to
be of old age, infirmity and extreme poor. Further, the women had to appear before the DC and tribunal elders on an exemption parade (DC/KSM/1/12/90, 1944, KNA).

During the Second World War, therefore, Kombewa as in the whole of the colony had to meet the following requirements. They had to send their men to serve in the King's African Rifles, The African Auxiliary Pioneer Corps and East African Military Labour Services. In the same way they had to produce foodstuffs as dictated by 'farming as usual plus and also supply labour for settler production (Zeleza op.cit). Further taxes, particularly hut tax and later uniform poll tax had to be paid, the later falling heavily on female-headed households, particularly the widows. This scenario depicts a reduction of population, especially that of men who were serving in various capacities in the war. Given this state of affairs, it was the female headed-households who met the capitalist demand for food production during the war.

The women were further involved in soil reclamation under minor communal labour, leave alone payment of taxes for men who due to low wages, were not able to pay. The women did not stop at this point either, they went even further to produce food for their own household consumption. The women of Kombewa even had a song to show the extent to which they hated the colonial administration. The song went "Nyapara dioworuok Nyapara nyamin ruoth x2", [Foreman exaggerate foreman brother to king](Oral Interview by Canon Nyong'o, Dec 2000). This song depicted the cruelty of the foreman when it came to communal labour.
4.5 THE COLONIAL ADMINISTRATION AND MARRIAGE RELATIONS DURING THE SECOND WORLD WAR

This was a period of social and economic crisis. That men who proceeded to work in the European Plantations and within the townships overstayed away from home which was evident from the tax records showing large numbers of men who had been away for three or more years. The ability of some of these men to come back on leave was unknown. (Jalango' - Ndeda, 1991: 208). For many women, this was the time that they had to stay for a longer time without their husbands. Some of these runaway husbands could not be traced. They had to meet the capitalist and household demands during the war. Other women, mostly widows who lost their husbands in the war, and could bear children, had to pay taxes. Column for tax exemption for widow in most cases registered a negligible number and at times nil. But as there were limited men in the African regions, Kombewa included, women's labour was continuously demanded for communal work like soil reclamation. This was as a result of Kombewa being one of the badly eroded locations in Central Nyanza. To the elders as explained in the previous section, registered unexpected reduction of bridewealth exchange because some girls went to marriage without bridewealth. Among the people of Kombewa, bridewealth is what brought stability in marriages and ensures its posterity. It is bridewealth that strengthens a woman's position and gives her status in her new household. Because of the Second World War and the increased demand for cattle exportation, it was more difficult than before to adequately accomplish this customary requirement.
The employed men, particularly those in the civil labour found it difficult to make some savings to meet bridewealth demands. The wages were generally considered much lower than before in view of the very high cost of living. A larger portion of the labourers wage was spent on clothing and they, therefore, had next to nothing to bring home (Jalango-Ndeda, 1991:210). In Kombewa, the case between Mathews Onyango Mitere and his wife Wilfrida Otinde served to illustrate the whole situation in Kombewa. The District commissioner of Central Nyanza after listening to Wilfrida Otinde reported that:

I have interviewed Wilfrida Otinde, the young wife of the above named who is attached to H.Q. Coy. 51 East Africa. E.A. Eng. Bn., E.A.E. S.E.A.C. They were married in 1943. She has been living with Mitere, the father of her husband and Atet his mother. They are both oldish people. She asked me why her husband cannot come home to build her a house. I explained to her that he was overseas. She then replied that as her husband was unable to return home to build her a house, she would leave his village and look for another husband. She is young and, no doubt, misses her husband. This is a very common story, and causes a great number of inquiries from units. I do not know whether this girl will carry out her threat and leave her husband. If she does, she may either return to her father's village or she may have already picked out a man to whom she wishes to go to. I suggested to the girl that if she received a special remittance, she could hire labour with which to build her hut. She refused this suggestion, and gave the common Luo reply—that it was contrary to the customs, but I learnt that this girl was not receiving a family allotment, and I would suggest that if this man wishes to attempt to keep his wife, he starts a family allotment payable to herself, but I would also suggest that the allotment should not be large (DC/KSM/1/22/88, General instructions, 1945, KNA).

Two to three years after the war, the women who were waiting to receive remittances became disappointed. The procedure for getting the remittances was highly bureaucratic. There were times when such remittances did not even reach the recipients. Many women
had to walk a long distance to get paid. In Kombewa, payments were most of the time
done in Kisumu town. In 1943 remittances for Seme according to remittance officer was
'vibaya Sana' (very bad). There was a lot of bureaucracy involved for one to be paid. For
example the woman had to be paid in the presence of Miruka [assistant chief] and if
Miruka was not available or sick such a recipient had to present herself to the DC
personally for identification. Cases were witnessed where remittances were made to
brothers who failed to pass them to the recipients as in some cases remittances took as
many as three months (DC/KSM/12/186:1944, KNA). In the same file are several letters
sent to migrant men by their wives through the DC, asking them to send remittances.
Those women who could not wait deserted to other men.

While it is true that the issue of runaway wives featured prominently during this period
(Jalango-Ndeda, 1991:209), it seems simplistic and inconclusive to argue that women
were leaving their marital homes and running away with other men when it comes to
Kombewa. For due to decreased cattle, it was difficult to attempt bridewealth claims by
the deserted husband's kin. A more complex phenomenon a rose as women became
migrant labourers on their own, struggling just as men. The central Nyanza Native
Council on their part considered the issue of runaway women to forced marriages, high
bridewealth and unscrupulous fathers. In 1943-44, they lauded that:

The father of the girl regards his daughter as an investment and quite
naturally wishes her to marry a man he knows will be able to pay bride
price. An unscrupulous father will have no hesitation in marrying his
daughter to a rich man, whether he is repugnant or not, which is now how
the abuses of the law and custom of marriages creep in (DC/1/2/23, KNA).
The letter written by the acting PC of Nyanza to the inspector of schools containing the views of the administrative officers in the province on the subject of education added another dimension to explaining the issue of runaway women. The administrative officers seemed to have thrown their weight behind the missionaries when it came to bridewealth. Unsurprisingly they further argued that:

A few females that have been educated, on lines similar to those recorded in connection with females have created a superior class which is becoming unpopular in society, for they claim that by reason of their education, they have been removed from working class. Many of them lounge in markets and small trading centres expecting their less fortunate brethren to provide their withal. They are becoming increasingly unpopular wives (PC/NZA/3/1/1).

A wealth of evidence is available in the file DC/KSM/1/2/6, KNA; Marriage, Divorce and Registration of marriages, explaining what may have been responsible for runaway married women and girls. These evidence are further encountered in the field. For women the reasons spun from overstaying migrant husbands, increased workload, forced marriages, lack of care, case of cloths, loneliness and some just got bored in marriage. For men, runaway women and girls were caused by inadequate bridewealth, high bridewealth demanded by the big men and new novelties leading women to prostitution in towns. The denominator of all these was the extensive impoverishment of "natives" regions of Kombewa and increased social and economic burdens on women and girls.

In Seme location, Oluoch Akulo complained on October 12, 1940 that, "his father is dead and no one is available to look after the old mother". In the same file, Mlango Oganda and Omondi Pande complained that their widowed mothers' huts were in bad shape and
there was no one to assist in mending them. Odulo of Seme location, who was also in labour Corp, complained "he had no hut and needs to finish the hut for the wife before he gets recruited for labour". Ogada's complaints were numerous. For him he further wanted permission to go and build house for the wife, which was in bad shape. While Okwaro Alwanji's complaint resembles other complaints, Mango Migoya of Seme location forwarded a more complex complaint when he said, "he has a young wife and not yet performed all rites" (DC/KSM/1/22/35, KNA). In the same year the DC of Central Nyanza wrote to DC of Dar-es-Salaam on behalf of a widow called Ada Midhuri who lost track of her son Ogutu Awuor. She asked whether he could be traced and if so persuaded to return to his mother who was a widow needing his assistance (DC/KSM/1/19/124, 1944, KNA).

This seemed to have been a very challenging complaint because it touched on the very aspect of the Luo culture. In 1943 the same issues came up. The DC Central Nyanza wrote on January 5, 1943 to the officer commanding 75 East Africa Coy, Nairobi on behalf of Jeremiah Omoth whose father had died and his house was in need of repair. The response was quite contrary to the Luo custom. It was suggested "he sends his wife a sum of money for repairs to the house and the DC would tell the chief to get someone to effect the repairs" (DC/KSM/1/22/89, KNA).

This response was against the Luo culture and custom considering that a man's presence is culturally necessary if a major repair is required in a Luo hut [house]. Looked at in this way, as explained earlier, the presence of the man was equally necessary during planting
and harvesting seasons. In Kombewa as in the entire Luo ethnic group, economic activities were tightly embedded in culture. This was exemplified by the customs that were to be accomplished before certain economic activities could take place. Failure to accomplish these customs impacted on agricultural activities in Kombewa (Joseph Nyamwanda, O.I, Dec 2000).

For the soldiers, the years 1939-1945 were not favourable years for them. Many lost their wives, especially if they had not paid adequate bridewealth. This was a time that fathers-in-law could settle old marriage disputes particularly when a girl was taken against her consent or if bridewealth was not paid (DC/KSM/1/22/89, KNA). In Seme location, Odongo Ohoro, (a soldier) complained that "my wife went to another man a month ago. I did nothing about the matter but now I want the government to get her back" (DC/KSM/1/22/35, KNA),

This was because he could not come back to settle the case himself. In 1940, the commanding No.1 Light Repairs Section responding to wife No. 7539 illustrated the fate of the soldiers during the war. He said that:

As no doubt you are aware, it is very difficult to give leave to Askaris (police men or soldiers), in order to fix up their private affairs and the only means of righting these matters is through the DCs. A number of cases have come to my notice of civilian Africans taking advantage of the fact that a man is away on military services and I think you will agree that everything possible should be done to assist those who have joined up (DC/KSM/2/22/16, KNA).

The Second World War had several repercussions in the social formation in Kombewa. Men of working age and below were transformed into labourers who were not paid
enough money to support their own families. Likewise, women of working age and below were equally transformed into labourers who supported families without pay. Women also had to work under communal labour and pay direct taxes. Many women dissented from this new economic subservience which was imposed upon them by the colonial administration. Their dissent took the form of mobility in most instances. This mobility targeted locally emerging towns, such as Kisumu Township despite legislation passed against it by the LNC in 1938 (PC/NZA/2/1/104, KNA). The Kombewa women were spurred to seek urban employment by economic problems, but social motives had begun to operate as well. For example, the women who had gone to school, particularly become problematic in Kombewa. Attempts by the colonial government to stop women's mobility in Kombewa failed. And as the elders continued to complain of girls and women who ran away from homes to escape arranged marriages, and women who had acquired a new lifestyle for themselves in Kisumu Township. Consequently in October 1945, the big men or the clan elders sat down to chart out a program that was to determine the whole of the post war era for women and girls who attempted to migrate to townships and mines in Kombewa and the whole of the Luo Nyanza. In this meeting, Ramogi African Welfare Association (RAWA) came up. Unlike the Luo Union, this association was formed specifically "to prevent and prosecute all girls and women who are at present time running away from their husbands, parents ... and are engaged in prostitution business in townships, at European and Indian farms, railway stations, mining companies and at trading centres at the native reserves. To stop prostitution or illegal marriages between African girls and European men. To stop illegal marriages between Luo and Asians or other races (PC/NZA/3/1/376, KNA).
4.6.0 SUMMARY

The chapter has discussed in details and evaluated the extent to which, the colonial policies and practices impacted on different categories of women in Kombewa during the inter war and the Second World War period. It has noted the extent to which European commercialisation or capitalist economy attracted African labour, either through encouragement or coercion. The households and the areas from which men migrated as indicated experienced economic disruptions as there own agriculture became neglected.

The chapter has also identified that the withdrawal of male labour and the heavy burden for foodstuff production particularly, during the Second World War placed extra load on women who did not have their husbands in Kombewa. This did not spare widows and the children. Two things happened. Food consumption declined among most people in Kombewa as crops were sold externally. Care for crops and cropland deteriorated in the absence of adequate labour and over use of the land. Secondly, colonial administration demanded reclamation of land, because it formed the economic foundation of the colony. This was only possible by the use of unpaid minor communal labour falling basically on women. Many households abandoned storage of grains that guarded them against seasonal shortfalls. Weeding of crops for family consumption became sporadic in the absence of sufficient labour.
The period also witnessed taxes falling on not only women who did not have husbands but also the means to pay. These included widows, women married to migrant men and women the colonial administration branded 'independent'. To these women, exemptions were difficult to get. As a result, many women and youths complained of being forced to pay taxes. Women who defaulted had their houses confiscated, burnt or punished by imprisonment. Evident also in the chapter was the extent to which socio-economic and cultural structures collapsed in Kombewa. This collapse witnessed new structures emerging to control those women who were responding to stresses caused by the colonial administration in the "native" areas of Kombewa. The colonial administration, through its mechanisms such as taxation, communal labour, male and female labour migration, poor wages saw rampant collapse of marriages, bridewealth system and morality transformed the traditional Luo cultural and economic structures in Kombewa and this was attributed to the contact of Kombewa women and men with colonialists.

During food shortages the colonial administration in Kombewa advised many people to plant root crops, such as cassava and potatoes (PC/NZA/2/12/76, 1943-44, KNA). Without the labour of men, often away for military and other colonial reasons, cassava production, became an alternative to be managed exclusively by women. Ironically, cassava was less nutritious compared to millet and sorghum, the traditional food crops in Kombewa (Rau, 1991). The consequence was the declining of the health standard in Kombewa. Moreover the European presence brought new diseases in Kombewa, such as yaws and syphilis. The movement of people, European traders, military caravans and African migrant labourers, greatly increased the spread of the risk of these diseases. In
fact, it could be concluded that this was the unhealthiest period in the history of the Central Nyanza. Besides diseases, poverty became acute among women. By the end of the war, Kombewa comprised of weak emaciated and incapable population.

The multiple task of clearing and preparing land for plantation, assisting from protection of crops from pests and diseases, harvesting, storage, household maintenance, child care in addition to provision of labour and taxes placed an impossible burden on female headed-households in Kombewa. This impoverishment occasioned the break up of integral economic and social systems and the introduction of difficult and highly exploitative work. It also occasioned break ups in marriages as women could no longer hold these heavy burdens. This necessitated the rise and the development of a body whose concern was to control the mobility of women as women searched for new ways of survival. This body, the Ramogi African Welfare Association, felt that women and girls should not be migrant labourers as men. This issue forms the next chapter when mobility of women as a response to hard and unbearable economic and social conditions in Kombewa will be put into perspective.
CHAPTER FIVE


5.1.1 INTRODUCTION.

While the previous chapter focused on female-headed households during the inter war and Second World War years, this chapter will examine the social and economic factors pushing these women away from Kombewa, particularly in the post World War two era. It evaluates the actions taken by the colonial administration, male elders, family heads and other actors as they attempted to re-assert and maintain patriarchal authority over women in Kombewa. Hence, it will cast light on the changing social and economic environment in Kombewa and how these changed relationship between men and women of different categories and children in terms of work and work place.

Immediatley after the war, certain women in Kombewa became dissatisfied with the traditional local authorities and began to respond to their plight in various ways. Marriage was affected as significant number of women in Kombewa left unsatisfactory marriages and fled their homes to settle within the emerging colonial towns. A majority found their way to Kisumu Township. These women were stigmatised by the colonial administration and male elders. They were variously referred to as wicked women, wayward wives, misfit mothers, disobedient daughters and prostitutes (Hodgson and McCurdy, 1996). The actions of these women reflected and produced contradictions and contestations of power within
their local communities and between the communities and the colonial state, missionaries and other actors on the ground in Kombewa. They were in most cases accused of adultery, abandonment, infanticide, insubordination or prostitution. This chapter will form a suitable climax for this study.

5.2.0 THE MALE LABOR MIGRATION, SOIL EROSION AND CONSERVATION.

In the post war years, the number of employed Africans increased considerably in Nyanza province. The labour force census of 1946 revealed that out of about 254,757 labourers for the whole of Kenya, roughly 106,460 workers were from Nyanza province alone. After the war, those who were attracted by money-making possibilities outside Kenya travelled by boat or on foot to Uganda or Tanganyika to seek wage employment. The journey from Nyanza was generally too long and often took many days. There is an exceptional account that only one man made the journey in three days, but parties of women and children had taken eleven or so days to reach the border (Hailey, 1948:55, Jalango-Ndeda, 1991:222)

The end of the World War Two ushered in a completely different society in Kombewa. There was irresistible fluidity in all aspects of life in Kombewa. Men, women and children entered the period a changed group with different expectations. The colonial government too was not left behind. Its greatest problem was the demobilized soldiers and the African women. The Christian missionaries also felt the need to improve the
standard of living of African women and to a lesser extent men. As the war ended, the household food production in Kombewa declined great deal following the "Otonglo Famine" (the ten-cent piece) of 1943-1944. This famine was named so because the shortage of food and resulting inflation of prices meant that the smallest unit of money accepted in the market went from the two or three-cent piece up to the ten-cent piece (Cokumu, 2001:131). The social and economic statuses of the "native" regions in Kombewa were thus not attractive enough for any African man leave alone women. For African men in Kombewa, the trend had been established as the urge to seek wage employment outside their homes intensified after the war. In 1949, the colonial government felt that the Luo still had "a large reservoir of labour" due to their tendency to return periodically to their localities, their dislike for permanent jobs, their inherent family links and property and their apparent dislike for career and incentives (Jalango-Ndeda, 1991:222).

In this belief, therefore, labour recruitment private and public was intensified among the Luo. This resulted in heavy demand by the rest of the colony for the adult Luo manpower (CN/DAR, 1948-1949, KNA). Despite the weak economy after the war, the Luo man found himself in a difficult situation. Various factors impelled him to take up employment outside his home region. These included pressure of land scarcity, the urge towards a higher living standard, preference for industrial employment, craving for advantage or at least the trapping of western civilization, need to pay taxes or bridewealth and the desire to purchase trade goods (Ramogi, April 15, 1948). With this burden married individuals and bachelors from Kombewa travelled as far as Uganda and
Tanzania searching for means of survival (Jalango-Ndeda, 1991:222). In fact a majority of the Central Nyanza District Annual Reports after the war often contained phrases "the district is denuded of its adult male population by recruiters" who exported them as far as Uganda". But social and economic demands were putting African men in a complex web of wage labour, the study of adequate wages done by the Regulation of Wages and Board Conditions of Employment Ordinance \(^1\) No.1 of 1951 concluded that the wages could not provide adequately for the physiological and sociological needs of the workers, taking into account the needs of the wife and children, and that the African received inadequate returns for his labour. Richard Omollo of Headquarters Millers Records East Africa Command captured this so well when he petitioned the Secretary of Local Native Council in Nyanza Province. He observed:

Secondly the price of cattle, this has come to be the worst point and it is a great loss of Nyanza province. It means that so many Nyanza boys roam about in the towns' unmarried. This has made some boys not to consider their future at all. When they are in the towns, you know very well that in the towns there are prostitutes who only depend on their kind. This has made so many young men to go astray. When they are asked to go home and get married they fear going home because what they are having is not even one tenth of what should get them married. Comparing what they get as monthly pay with the price of one head of cattle, the pay itself may only be half the price. Thinking of this and how the present life should be treated, this makes many young boys fail to marry (DC/KSM/1/12/6, 1947, KNA).

This explains why the majority of migrant labourers preferred leaving their wives back at home. But this did not mean a continuous support from the men as the money or wages they received did not even cater for their basic needs. This was a period when family remittances dwindled as tax collection improved. The Carpenter Report of 1954 on

\(^1\) This was a part of post war policy on improvement of African wages. Also see Jalang'o-Ndeda, 1991.
African Family Housing also depicted a similar picture (for details see Jalango-Ndeda, 1991). Male labour migration thus left a considerable number of women without male company for extended period than had been experienced before. In Kombewa women's labour involved hoeing; weeding, general gathering and vegetable production as well as trade. The workload of women steadily increased both in acreage under cultivation and due to the absence of men on wage labour contracts. Women produced food for household consumption and for war demands. The Kombewa chief's monthly reports for 1953-54 depicted a very gloomy picture of the food situation. The chief acknowledged that "njaa imeshinda watu sana, chakula na maji hakipatiki, kisonono pia imeshidi".  

[Food, water shortage and venereal diseases is on the increase]

Male labour migration continuously worsened the economic status of Kombewa. The Central Nyanza District Annual Report for 1950s equally did not fail to capture the same. A section of the reports read:

The principal source of wealth of CND, and therefore the fundamental basis of any lasting development is its agricultural and animal husbandry. A subsidiary source of wealth is fish and waters around the lakeshore locations. The other main source of the district wealth is the labour, skilled and unskilled of its people. Labour department statistics show that a steady average of at least 45,000 of the adult males are at work outside the district. This source of wealth is potentially an increasing asset...

The extent to which male labour migration impacted on agriculture and later on betterment schemes started by the colonial administration limits the conclusion that it was "a major source of wealth" to the localities but to the colonial government. In 1954 the

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2 The literal meaning is: Food, water shortage and venereal diseases is on the increase.
absence of males was so acute that the CND had to rely on the Mau Mau convicts to carry out soil conservation and Tsetse fly bush clearing schemes in areas with limited number of adult males remaining (CN/DAR, 1954, KNA). In 1956 the absence of male labour had remarkable and detrimental effects on progress forcing the DC to furnish the PC of Nyanza about the phenomenon. The DC explained the situation as follows:

It is fair to say that the ordinary average inhabitants of the Central Nyanza does not regard the farming of the land as anything more than a modest support for his wife and family. He therefore goes out to find work. This attitude is one of the main stumbling blocks to instituting a better system of agriculture (CNDAR, 1957, KNA).

The cyclical crisis of rural food production which had left many women destitute without men to support them coupled with long absence of men due to wage labour made the social and economic condition of Kombewa unbearable for many women. Huts were falling without men to repair them. In Kombewa, for example, Jordan Obuny had to be called by chief Melkizedek Nindo to come from Mombasa and build for his wife a house that he had neglected for a long time (DC/KSM/I/19/235; General Correspondence 1956-58). Agricultural labour fell mainly on women because many men considered agricultural work less rewarding as compared to wage labour. Men who wanted their wives to visit them found their wives too occupied. In Kombewa certain wives did not visit their husbands due to heavy agricultural duties at home. For example, Enoka Ojuang's wife could not visit him because she had to wait and harvest her crops. Even later when Enoka's father was moving to a new home, the wife could not move with him because according to traditional customs Julia could only do so if her husband was present, as this involved the building of new houses (DC/KSM/I/21/12, 1950, KNA).
The day-to-day solution of domestic disputes also fell on women because some husbands did not visit home for as many as twelve years. Yongo Masongo, for example, could not come back home to solve a long-standing problem, between the wife and a neighbour on the issue of a goat. The situation was even worse for widows. They lost a number of their sons to migrant labour who provided little assistance to them. In 1950s, for example, the DC of Central Nyanza wrote to officer commanding Headquarter Coy, 2/3k Bn Kenya African Rifles Nairobi to allow Bernado Otengi to come and build for the mother a house because she was a widow and there was nobody to do it for her (DC/KSM/1/22/202 Family Affairs Department, 1950-58, KNA). This indicated that the traditional social support for widows had collapsed. Few men preferred to take care of widows due to difficult economic times and particularly of the fear to pay Hut tax. Considering the stress of being lonely and over burdened in the case of women married to migrant men and lack of social and economic support on the part of the widows, some women started thinking of means for survival beyond the boundaries of Kombewa.

Male labour migration altered traditional gender relations. It removed men from performing their duties within the households. The women thus assumed the heading of most households in Kombewa as Kombewa men became increasingly involved in labour migration. Females were increasingly involved even with those duties traditionally meant for men. Despite this, migrant men still kept a watchful eye on their wives. Fearful of misbehaviour, migrant men relied on the social constraints provided by the watchful eyes of their neighbours and relatives as well as cultural restrictions maintained by traditional
notions of respect and obedience (Hodgson and MaCurdy, 1996:48). A few migrant men, who managed to come home after sometime, relied on this information gathered by the relatives about their wives. This brought a lot of tensions in most marriages after the war (Ominde, 1952:51; Mutongi, 1991). In Kombewa most of these marriages could not survive the storm. Equally the women in Kombewa became disheartened by their heavy workload and lack of companionship and sought ways to increase their economic control and social autonomy by renegotiating the terms of their labour obligations, marital and household relationships.

Agriculture and agricultural production were very important to the colonial administration that its collapse could never be imagined by the colonial administration. After the war, Nyanza province was viewed as an important productive area of the colony. Compared with other parts of Kenya, the fertility of land with a few exceptions had been so irretrievably lost that no remedial measure could economically be undertaken. Every effort had to be made to place agriculture on a sound footing (Jalango-Ndeda, 1991:243). Deterioration of land due to soil erosion, overuse, and population pressure thus formed part of consideration in the post war agricultural policy in Kombewa as in the whole of the Nyanza province.

The colonial agricultural policy after the war was contained in The "Ten-Year Development Plan" for African Agriculture in 1946. The plan emphasised on the need to increase food production. This was to be achieved by reclaiming of exhausted soils. This made soil conservation and reforms in land tenure system paramount. Land cases were to
be sorted out in the map with visible demarcation of developed of markets, roads in the "native" areas, the developed of minerals mining and industries among others (PC/NZA/3/1/358; Post war development Plan 1942-1945, KNA). Thus as soil deterioration continued in Nyanza the Senior Agricultural officer J.T.Moon had the following advice to the PC Nyanza:

We are all convinced that if soil deterioration is not to continue, very radical changes in the system of agriculture practiced in the native land units must take place...that unless the agriculture of the native reserves is placed on a sounder and more permanent basis the future of those reserves and their ability to support even their present population is doomed. If reserves are to proceed in an organized system referred to ... soil conservation measures will be applied in entirely and not piecemeal as at present. You will remember that in my post war development plans I showed one of the principal advantages of such a system of development was that only this method could sound, effective soil control measures be planned...I realise that this assistance under present circumstances must largely take the form of the co-operation of chiefs, elders ...I fully agree that wherever possible the whole hearted effort of the local population for soil conservation measures is desirable but I am convinced where this support is not forthcoming we have now reached a stage when compulsion is essential if land is to be saved (PC/NZA/3/2/113; 1945, KNA).

Despite the remarkable absence of men from the localities, the establishment put a considerable pressure on the local administration after the war to conserve the already depleted soils. CNDARs blamed the absence of men from the localities for the retardation of agriculture in the district. But this did not interfere with soil conservation campaign. In 1950 it was reported that:

There is too some evidence of increased awareness on the part of those who remain in the district of the importance of preserving fertility of their soil. Measures of physical soil control, in the form of contour terracing carried by communal labour, although not popular, have continued steadily in every
location throughout the year. The work is done by free communal labour. Each adult male is supposed to turn out once a week to do four-yard tasks, which involve having about 90 cubic feet of earth (CN/DAR, 1950, KNA).

On the following year, the DC was more precise when it came to soil conservation. He noted "a constant pressure from all members of the administration, as well as the agricultural department is being brought against the chiefs and headmen to step up this work to maximum capacity" (CNDAR, 1951, KNA). Considering the fact that women and children were the majority in the rural areas, soil conservation using communal labour must have included them. In fact between 1952 and 1956 the declining soil fertility and standards of agriculture, unpredictable climatic conditions coupled with the absence of so many young men from the district, led to the slow response to agricultural production (CN/DAR, 1952-56, KNA). It was the female-headed households in the Women left in these localities who participated in local soil conservation. The acceptable policy was that no woman was compelled to do soil conservation and certainly could not be prosecuted for failing to do it; on the other hand they were not discouraged from helping provided they worked only within their own 'gweng' (locality) and did only half of the man's task. How this was achieved was difficult but the contention here is that force must have been used on women (Jalango-Ndeda, 1991:255 and Canon Hesbon Nyon'go O.I, 2002). The African District Council of Central Nyanza (ADCCN) by-laws of 1959 under orders for the prevention of soil erosion and maintenance of soil fertility after land consolidation exerted a heavier demand on the women left at home. These included widows and women, who due to marriage problems, went back to stay within their natal homes (ogogo). A section of the by-laws stated:
In respect of any land used or intended to be used for cultivation, the authority of the chief or the chief on advice of the authority, may order the owner or owners to carry out measures for the conservation of the soil and the maintenance of soil fertility, and in particular with regard to terracing, strip cropping, contour ploughing, stone walling, banking, lining with plant residues, planting and maintaining grass, plants, trees or live wash-stops, the application of manure or compost and resting of arable land under suitable grass" (DC/KSM/1/3/6, Land consolidation, 1956-59, KNA).

Soil conservation added another burden on already overburdened women. The women in Kombewa who were overburdened by household demands, time and energy was not available for extra communal labour to conserve the soil. As observed by Hay (1994) the women in Kombewa had resisted the ravages of capitalist encroachment in different ways. Local and emerging colonial institutions, such as Kisumu town started offering options to Kombewa women. First, Kisumu provided a permanent market place where goods and services were routinely exchanged and where the much needed cash predominated. Equally, the much-needed manufactured goods, such as clothing, soups, jembes (western imported iron hoe), hand cultivators, foods could easily and cheaply be obtained (Hay, 1994).

Two reasons seem to explain women's mobility to Kisumu during this period. The women in Kombewa got involved in petty trade within the emerging, markets such as Lwanda, Rata, Asembo Bay, Akala, Kowe and Kisumu. The trade was basically in foodstuffs and local brews. During these trading activities, women came to learn of very many things, especially in Kisumu. This was the time when the Kisumu town was expanding to a fully-fledged trading and commercial centre. The Kombewa women came
to meet with other women fully resident in the town, either trading or on wage employment within the residential areas occupied by the Europeans or Asians. Others were on wage employment in the hotels, restaurants and within the medical departments. These town novelties started to attract Kombewa women who were already overburdened by household requirements and the involvement in soil conservation. Secondly women acquired a measure of freedom outside the "reserves". They were free from tribal obligations, particularly for widows, women married to migrant men and women with marriage problems. Thus in Kisumu women tended to seek and in most cases received sanctuaries from customary obligations and traditional authorities as well as legal permission to dissolve unwanted relationships and legitimised newly desired relationships. From colonial legal point of view, women could not be forced to marry against their wish and they were, while in the town, freer to dissolve marriages, which they were no longer interested in.

It can be observed that two processes succeeded in denying the people of Kombewa their means of production. This was achieved in two ways. The worker in this case was not physically alienated from much of his land. But the capitalist development policies ensured that land, which was a major means of production, became impoverished. Secondly the capitalists forcefully recruited almost all-able bodied-men for public or private enterprises. The latter case was violent and forceful suggesting that the process of articulation was not devoid of violence and exploitation of the pre-capitalist mode of production. The pre-capitalist mode of production became partially operational in most cases. This put those who had depended on it in a precarious position. Women were most
affected as before the introduction of money economy, the garden formed the basis of economic life of women. Their transactions depended on garden produce, which they bartered in exchange for animal (Ominde, 1952). The pre-capitalist mode of production in Kombewa could not function in its own right as it was being relegated to status of labour "reserves" and welfare institutions for the capitalist. Women of different categories, children and the old were left behind, un-waged and as invisible rural subsidy on migrant wages and satisfying other capitalist demands, such as soil conservation and tax payment. It was these women, children and the old that made it comfortable for the capitalist to pay those who labour for them paltry wages. These women enabled the capitalists to raise more capital, produce more food and reproduce labour. Women and children's labour, no longer defined as work, became a subsidy to men and capital (Staudt, 1987:124), the labourer was thus not guaranteed a wage adequate for the social reproduction.

However, the capitalist hegemony and patriarchy did not go unchallenged by the women of different categories in Kombewa. As men, these women took advantage of the opportunities which resulted from the social and economic changes in their lives. They manoeuvred with their friends, rivals, family, clans, mission and the colonial state in order to leverage for changes and continuities in their realms. In Kombewa the response was in a form of migration to the colonial institutions particularly Kisumu town, this time as wage labourers. In addition to soil conservation and the absence of male labour other social developments particularly the rise of Maendeleo ya wanawake became part of the
factors pushing women away from Kombewa. This is what the next sub-section examines.

5.2.1 THE DEVELOPMENT OF SOCIAL WELFARE SYSTEM AND THE EMANCIPATION OF KOMBEWA WOMEN

Male labour migration and the burden of soil conservation were not the only issues enhancing women mobility from Kombewa to Kisumu Township after 1945. Other factors also came into the interplay. These included the rise and development of social welfare, which culminated into the community development and the emancipation of African women particularly those in the localities. In Great Britain, this process started by the growing recognition that the community is an organic whole whose health and vitality depended upon the well-being of all its constituent members and on the good relations between them. Efforts were geared towards improvement of state social services and integration of the community into official state organization. It involved a steady and continuous and rather intimate co-operation between the amateur and the professional in a wide range of social welfare activities and between volunteer groups, organized societies and the public departments. There was no elimination of traditional and voluntary efforts (the Social Welfare in the Colonies Memorandum 1945: DC/KSM/1/1/194: KNA).

Similarly, in Kenya, social welfare activities were part of the post war development, branded an "after thought" (Ndeda, 1999). They arose out of the realization that the
contact of African people with industrial civilization has in many cases, tended to break down a sense of communal obligation. The introduction of wage employment had inevitably led to individualism and caused a break down in marriages as women tended to avoid their duties in the communities. The supernatural sanctions which enforced communal moral rules have generally ceased to be effective in areas where European contacts had been pronounced and this had caused the collapse of ethical systems which often had genuine social value. With these it was further acknowledged that in any case moral codes, which served to regulate the conduct of members of small kinship units, were no longer adequate in the case of people living in the large mixed communities that congregated in the new towns. Furthermore the growth of these towns, and cities especially in the case of seaports and the spread of "civilization" inevitably gave rise to new social problems such as destitution, child vagrancy, prostitution, housing shortages and delinquency with which traditional machinery were unequipped to cope with (Social Welfare in the Colonies Memo, 1945, KNA). Although the historical causes differ widely, Kenya's social problems were said to be in need of the application of new techniques of social welfare which were worked out in more advanced countries.

The history of the rise and development of social welfare and community development is acceptably beyond the scope of this dissertation. Suffice it to say that that in 1946 a committee on social welfare information and mass education outlined the duties of welfare office as follows: promotion of economic prosperity, social contentment, creative power and health, prevention of poverty, social discontent, moral and mental lethargy and ill-health; care or alleviation of moral delinquency and mental and physical
diseases and injury; and the rehabilitation of all who are for any cause disabled. Promotion of personal health meant adequate wages, nutrition, general education, physical exercise and recreation, industrial welfare and hygienic adult education. In a broader sense welfare was to embrace practically every branch of amenity services which were designed to produce a better "civilization". But in the restricted sense that it was introduced, its application only meant education and propaganda as means of acquiring an improved standard of living both physically and mentally (Jalango-Ndeda, 1991:265).

How then did the women component find its way into the social welfare initiatives? In the early 1940s the colonialists began to show concern for the African women due to pressure from international community as well as the European women in Kenya. The only body fighting for African women at this time was the East African Women's League (Ndeda, 1999:5). In 1945, Major H. Sharper European woman living in Kenya, expressed his concern that, in a study of the magnitude by Major Orde Brown (1946) that no mention of the African women had been made either by Orde Brown or Mr. Wynn Harris. He stated "one could not expect a sense of responsibility in the African male unless and until the woman's side was improved" (East African Standard, February 23, 1945, and Ndeda, 1999). The colonial government could only salvage the situation of African women since her policies had ignored women. The European male administrators had forgotten that any society depended on their women for progress so did Africa (Ndeda, 1999). The inclusion of women into social welfare programs was even made strongly by the Jeanes School, Lower Kabete Handout of November 26, 1951 which stated:
Probably one of the best courses is that of women. One of the reasons Africa is backward is because African women are backward. On the other hand, agriculture is largely in their hands, and the upbringing of children entirely so. The future of the land and the coming generation is therefore gloomy unless African women are trained (Community Development Handout, 1951; PC/NZA/3/1/548, 1951, KNA).

As a consequence, on March 22, 1946 a course of training for African social welfare workers was started at the Jeanes schools. Ex-service men were trained first, but there was hope that eventually civilians would be trained. The establishment of community centres followed this where there was none. In these centres, spinning and weaving classes as well as literary classes were introduced for African women. Also offered was a simple course on domestic duties under the few in most cases unmarried European ladies. Although the work was sporadic, such was the enthusiasm that the government stepped in to control and assist the movement. The purpose of these was to raise the standard of living of African women by showing them how to become better house wives and mothers and giving them the opportunity of becoming literate, either in their own language or Kiswahili and English language (Ndeda, 1999:6). The organizational structure of these centres were best captured by the July Issue of Maendeleo Ya Wanawake (MYW) Report Central Nyanza 1952. It observed that:

It is all rather like a tree, though the tree is not yet very large one. At the trunk of the tree there is Jeanes School at Kabete, and then there is district training centres as at Kericho- which grew from a small scheme initiated by the DC and his wife Mrs. Gregory Smith became a valuable training centre and had 48 trainees from Central Nyanza (PC/NZA/2/17/15; Industries 1942-1947) and a new one that is to be built soon in Kisumu, they are the big branches of the tree; and then the little branches and twigs are the

women institutes out in the district. The good homes and the healthy children are the leaves of the tree (AB/14/52, MYW General 1952-55, KNA).

The centres were created to help people think and act for themselves through adult literacy classes, lecture discussions and debates, information, radio, film, reading facilities, writing, indoor games, plays concerts and tea canteens. The spinning and weaving classes were for the purpose of teaching women so as to start their own industries. The course took approximately twelve months and at the end of it each woman was to receive a complete set of equipment (Jalang'o-Ndeda, 1991:265). To be effective Jeanes school in Kabete only took between 4-6 women from Central Nyanza. After their training these women were to return to instruct in the women institutes, clubs and similar institutes in their own districts and thus pass on their knowledge to an ever-widening circle of women. The subjects included in the course were needlework, knitting, cookery, hygiene, childcare, simple housewifery and agriculture (Community Development Handout, 1951: PC/NZA/3/1/548, KNA). It was clear that this one institution could not educate the adults of a country of five million people. However, projections of activities of Jeanes School were taking place in the districts. Thus before the opening up of the Kisumu centre, Kericho had trained a number of women from Central Nyanza. Later the number rose drastically to a level the institution was unable to manage. From 1950s most students were encouraged to go for weaving and spinning facilities where they could be found closer to them. In fact as early 1950s, Kericho centre was not accepting women students from Central and North Nyanza unless a certificate is given stating that the candidate should not be trained at one or other of the local spinning and weaving centres or that it was desired to train her as a teacher (PC/NZA/2/17/15, 1942-1952, KNA).
However this move did not deter students from seeking training in Kericho centre as there was a belief that a trainee given a teacher certificate after completion were to be offered employment. A more elaborate strategy was mooted in the mid 1950s to change the type of instruction given at Kericho centre to focus not on spinning and weaving but on domestic science where women in addition to spinning and weaving would be taught cooking, sewing and hygiene. The graduates of these schools transmitted their acquired knowledge to the women institutes, clubs and other similar institutions in the localities, Kombewa in our case.

This change was very important. It was clear that those women were not going to be trained for employment but for their own betterment in the localities. Placement was not by then possible. The number of trained women had increased tremendously. Very few women graduates accepted this in Kombewa. Women wanted to be trained for employment (Joyce Akeyo, O.I, Dec.20, 2000). Equally unique was the proposed Course Syllabus for Kericho Home craft students on September 14, 1951-2. The syllabus was comprehensive and elaborate. It was approved to be used in all training institutions. It thus impacted on all aspects of African woman. It was this syllabus that was adopted for use in all Jeanes schools and other institutes so as to meet the local conditions. Theoretically the syllabus emphased the us of the hand as opposed to treadle sewing machines (PC/NZA/2/17/15, 1942-1952, KNA). Initially, the syllabus was divided into six sections. The first section included cooking of the following- soup, meat, poultry, vegetables, fish, eggs, fruits cereals, bread baking, simple cakes, pastry, beverages, butter
and cheese making. Housewifery formed the second section and included aspects like cleaning, furniture, beds and bedding and utensils. The third section was needlework. Under needlework were hand sewing, machine sewing, patchwork, quilting and knitting. The other section was laundry which had washing, pressing, and removal of stains, dying, hygiene and child welfare. Agriculture formed the second last section with care of livestock coming last (PC/NZA/2/17/15, 1942-1952, KNA).

Despite limited spaces for employment in the 1950s, Rural Industries could enquire about the Jeanes School graduates, especially those trained in Kericho, particularly about their personal and home cleanliness for eventual placement in limited positions they could offer (see letter by Nyanza Provincial supervisor, Kericho, to all DCs in Nyanza, Dated August 14, 1951). In the same year the African District Council sent Sara Ogumbo from Kombewa to Kericho Centre. She later came back with encouraging results (PC/NZA/2/17/15, 1942-1952, KNA).

It can be deduced at this point that while the colonial government's efforts to improve the status of African women were remarkable, they seem to have failed to answer a very critical question. Training for what? Were there enough positions to absorb all the trained women? How were they going to meet the expectations of trained women? Faced with this problem, Mrs. Chilson, Head Spinning and Weaving Centre, Kericho, encouraged trained women to return to their homes with the necessary equipment and carry on their work at spare time, either using the goods or selling them wherever she could find a market (PC/NZA/2/17/15, 1942-1952, KNA). It was the social welfare activities that
made many women in Kombewa acquire the necessary skills that could help them not only in their homes but also outside. Those who failed to get employed within the emerging institutes and clubs had, either to stay at home or look for jobs elsewhere. Similarly other institutions initiated by colonialism started impacting on a number of women in Kombewa. Small market centres had developed to big towns. Some of these emerging towns particularly Kisumu Municipality, started attracting this trained labour. In fact time was ripe for women, particularly trained women, to start replacing men in domestic employment. This was true, considering the emerging domestic work within the homes settled by the colonial administrators, other Europeans, Asians, including Indian traders.

During this period the training of women also took a more co-ordinated approach than before. By 1951 the Commissioner for Community Development acknowledged that the development of clubs, women institutes and other organizations for promotion of home craft among African women was growing rapidly necessitating co-ordinating bodies at the district, provincial and at the colony level (PC/NZA/2/17/15, 1942-1952, KNA). In the same year suggestions arose for the formation of societies for African women on a colony wide basis and on uniform lines. They were to be run on the line of English women's institutes but would work in towns as well as in the countryside. These institutes were to be based on ideals of truth, tolerance and fellowship with the aims of developing and improving conditions of African and in particular through social intercourse by bringing women together, encouraging neighbourliness and cooperation. This was to be achieved largely by education, informal and practical in scope. Membership of these
institutes was to be confined to women and girls over sixteen years and without distinction of religious beliefs (PC/NZA/2/17/15, 1942-1952 KNA).

With the assistance of female students at Jeanes school, groups of African women students and members of groups in the localities, it was decided that women's institutes be formalized and the movement be called *Maendeleo Ya Wanawake*-Women's Development (MYW) and the motto to be *Umoja Na Uaminifu*-unity in progress (DC/KSM/1/1/225, 1952, KNA). They were to be a replica of women's institutes in England (Ndeda, 1999:8). What then were the practical aims of MYW? Articles for MYW 1952 explained:

> A lot of people do not understand the reason why we are trying to build the MYW. Some think the object is to teach women to sew or to weave or to obtain cheap materials. These are not the main reasons however. What we are trying to do is to raise the living standards of Africans. But what do we mean by standard of living? Surely it is clear that we want Africans to live better. Living better means living in a better and cleaner house and village so that you are not so likely to get ill; cooking food in a better way so that it is more nourishing for your children, your husband and yourself, looking after your family in a proper way when they get sick, so that they recover quickly. Planting the right crops in the right way so that they benefit your family, not only with money, but with good food; looking after your cattle properly so that they produce as much milk as possible for your family, and seeing that their manure is put back into the land to produce better crops next year (PC/NZA/2/17/15, 1942-1952, KNA).

Sewing, spinning and knitting were notably not the most important part of training. This meant that the above courses were simply superior to spinning, weaving and knitting. Realizing a few women and girls had been to school, the same report observed that:
Now we have found that, African women are very ignorant about these things. They do not often understand the importance of cleanliness and how dirt brings sickness. They do not realize that some foods build up the body and others just make the stomach swell. It is not the women's fault, for so few have been to school, so what we are trying to do is to form schools for grown-up women. That's what women's institutes really are. But in a school you need teachers and there are so few African women who understand the important truth we are trying to pass on. So we are making big efforts to train women who are ready to help others improve their way of living (PC/NZA/2/17/15, 1942-1952, KNA).

About women in Nyanza, the report observed that, "the Kericho Home Craft is training teachers for Nyanza Province and soon the Kisumu Centre will be paid for by the Central Nyanza District Council and the Kisumu Municipality Board will be doing the same for that district" (PC/NZA/2/17/15, 1942-1952, KNA).

A few months after the establishment of MYW, Kombewa stood out to be unique in the whole of the Central Nyanza District. This uniqueness was attributed to the remarkable progress made in the location, particularly for the training of African women. In May 1952 the MYW report noted that the new women's institutes at Kombewa and Kisumu were now established. At Kombewa, the women are very keen and they plan to build a small shelter in which to do cooking which they are eager to learn (AB/14/52, 1952, KNA). The DC of the Central Nyanza District made the same observations on his annual report in 1952. He noted that:

Mrs. Weinwright continued in charge of home craftwork and organization and running of women's institutes throughout the year. Miss Riddoch assisted up to the end of April. Nine new institutes or clubs were started making a total of twelve. The keenest were those at Kombewa and Manyasi with average attendance of 100 and 86 respectively. The intention at all these institutes is to teach all home craft subjects and also agriculture. But
the women all much prefer sewing to any other subject, and it is difficult to get them to take sufficient interest in other subjects. A total of nine women went to Kericho Training Centre and six to Jeanes School. The prestige of the later is extremely high and there was intense competition to be sent there. This was so because the graduates of the later could find employment as trainers with the institutes. This employment offered these women wages and made them less dependent on not only migrant men but on all men. Despite the popularity of sewing and spinning among women, home-craft work later became extremely popular as one woman from Kombewa was further sent to Bukura to learn agricultural skills. Mr. Glenn, Marketing Officer was also reported to be very aggressive in teaching Kombewa women about marketing of their produce (MYW Report CNDAR June 1952, KNA).

The uniqueness of Kombewa from 1952 may also be explained in terms of its almost being sandwiched between two emerging and very important training centres to its vicinity. These were Kisumu Home Craft Centre and Maseno Home Craft and later Jeanes School. In 1952 there were 49 girls from CND attending Kisumu Home Craft Training under Miss Asbury (DC/CN/1/1/6, CNDAR 1953, KNA). While as from 1948 Maseno Centre with only 2 women one from Seme and One from Gem, in a 23-member social welfare committee had managed classes on five days basis. Instructions were given voluntarily by trained African nurse in the following subjects; literacy, sewing, knitting, child welfare, spinning, weaving and other domestic work with 67 girls and 31 women in attendance (DC/KSM/1/1/19/6, 1953, KNA). Similarly, the Kisumu Home craft centre on the other side had along waiting list as Jeanes trainees who were trying to assist with the training. Between 1953 and 1959 the MYW became very popular with women and men. Men were also reported to be keen in seeing their wives learnt improved methods of living and care of their families (DC/KSM/1/1/256:Training of African women 1953-1959, KNA).
From 1954 a different picture emerged within the Kombewa Institutes. A declining trend was noticed even though the Propaganda News Paper of these initiatives the MYW Central Nyanza Annual Report 1953-4, described the trend as satisfactory. It noted:

The women here [Kombewa] are very keen and there is an average attendance of 40. At present Kizia Nyanjom of Kisumu Home Craft Centre is teaching cooking until Rosa Abidha returns from Jeanes School at the end of the year. Dorca Awino is in charge of sewing and does all cutting out (DC/KSM/1/1/256: Training of African women 1953-1959, KNA).

Thus the year 1955 marked a turning point in the colonial administration attempts at improving the Standard of Living of African women in Kombewa. Things were never the same again. The trend might have started declining earlier than the official records indicate. Kinship heads and married men did not seem to like these initiatives despite reports to the contrary. Joyce Akeyo explained "the mobility of women during training sessions started to worry men. Some men thought their wives were becoming prostitutes and were involved sexually with other men. Other than training, other men were of opinion that the kind of skills offered to women were not practical to their every day life as reports of women becoming difficult were also reported. A change was thus necessary particularly of courses offered and where they are offered" (O.I by Akeyo, 2000).

The previous enthusiasm was no longer there. The total attendance at Kombewa club stood at twelve women who concentrated on baking cakes, scones, doughnuts and selling tea and sodas (MYW Report June/July 1955, KNA). In 1956 the downward trend could not be explained in any favourable language in the MYW propaganda report. The report depicted Maseno and Kombewa as the most unsatisfactory areas. In 1957 the clubs
expanded to Ngere as the MYW annual report had no better words to describe Maseno and Kombewa institutes. The report was too particular in pointing out that the two institutes continued to be difficult given that a few good leaders existed and consequently the women were unenthusiastic. It appeared that many of the councillors of the two locations were yet to be convinced of the value of women's club (MYW Annual Report, 1957, KNA).

How do we explain the decline? Jalang'o-Ndeda (1991) explains this in terms of too much work on the part of married women as women and men did not know their position within the organization. She also attributes the failure of this program on negative attitude of men and the lack of money on women's part to buy the materials for the work. The failure did not mean that the social welfare initiatives had no impact on women when it came to the case of Kombewa. In Kombewa it was the rapid and unexpected impacts of these institutes that explain their failure. This is what Ndeda (1999) captures in passing. She mentions that the women leaders seem to have been handmaiden of the colonial patriarchs whose goal was to prevent women from getting out of control.

The interest of the government was to halt the perceived trend of social disintegration already taking place and to restore organic unity of the community. Thus self-help was seen as one of the concrete plans towards this direction. Ironically the initiatives were marred with numerous weaknesses which came out to be strengths and opportunities to Kombewa women. First the program seemed to have been implemented rather too
abruptly without proper planning. The colonial state was aware that the advance of African women could come as rapidly and as sporadically as had happened with men.

In reality, social welfare developed and thrived on several contradictions. At its inception, it was agreed that the welfare of a society must be promoted by the society itself. Unless social welfare activities were intimately related to the life of the people and have their roots firmly embedded in the soil of the country, they proved to be transient and ineffective. It was therefore of importance both to make use of any spontaneously formed local associations and organizations which may exist and to ensure that to the utmost possible extent the social welfare services at all level were staffed by members of the community which they serve. The staffs therefore were to be one of the right kinds with the right outlook and the right training. This was the first and essential requirement (Social Welfare in the colonies Memo, 1945, KNA).

A closer examination of Kericho syllabus that became useful in almost all centres or institutes in Kombewa shows the contrary. The social welfare activities, needless to say, were European in outlook and alien to Kombewa women. Inexperienced and unmarried European women who deeply adored European values, customs, character and tastes offered the trainings at the Jeanes schools. Any graduate of these centres could serve Europeans in everything when it came to domestic work. Mrs Phoebe Asiyo, the first MYW African President indicated that "things like queen cake baking and other European dishes, which provided the bulk of MYW syllabus, were not the answers to our problems. African children still had less than enough to eat. True, the white ladies tried
hard and they were sympathetic but they did not understand the African women's needs" (As quoted in Aubrey, 1997:52). And so as men were taking up hard labour, it was the women whom the colonialists seem to have embarked on to provide domestic duties hitherto under men. Under the guise of social welfare, the colonialists for their own benefit, improved on traditional roles of women at home. A clash, as competition for such jobs intensified, was unavoidable. The men had to fight back. But this they could only do with the support of the old men. Moreover the traditional Luo society was in disarray as training proceeded. In Kombewa Joyce Akeyo, a Kabete Jeanes school graduate and an experienced trainer who trained women in Ahero club, Maseno club and lastly in Kombewa, explains this societal disintegration. She observed:

When we started training women many came forward but later things changed. Men started complaining because women started demanding to be provided with what they had learnt. In other cases when a woman found out that the husband could not afford what they had learnt she had no alternative but to leave such a man and go to the man who could provide them. Many women deserted their legal husbands. It forced us out of complaints not to provide a detailed training to women and girls to enable them after training to go back to their husbands. Apart from that we did not recommend young married women to join trainings because they could easily be lured. We wanted a woman who was a mother of so and so who would go back after training to help members of her village. Widows were most appropriate in many cases; even the local administration could clear them very fast. Because after opening their eyes they opted for another marriage, or left to look for jobs in towns. After getting the certificate, these spoilt women went to Kisumu under the guise that they had the certificate for employment. Their activities led men to disliking the programs. In fact men stated stopping women and girls from attending classes. Later the whole thing collapsed and I myself went for a job as a dresser in Maseno. This training ranged from spreading the bed, taking care of the sick, cooking various types of foods, baking cakes, arranging photographs to please the eyes, particularly the eyes of children, playing with children, making things children use for play, drawing, making stools and giving instructions on simple agriculture at home (Oral information by Joyce Akeyo, 2000).
The Kombewa women who prior to the training saw their life horizon within villages had their horizons widened as training progressed. The women no longer respected the traditional sanctions that had tied them at home. They had, without knowing, been prepared for another role in a larger capitalist economy. Social welfare activities came up basically to subsidize capital and wages given to men by teaching women to be "better wives". The purpose of social welfare was to raise the standard of living among African women by showing them how to become better house wives and mothers and giving them the opportunity of becoming literate, either in their own languages or Kiswahili and English. The subordinate role of women in cinematography of the time was hardly challenged-painted as a beast of burden, passive in the face of abuse; her respectability was in labouring for the maintenance of a stable marriage and family (Ndeda, 1999). But as women were resisting heavy workload which was put on them by men and the colonial administration, social welfare came up to halt the perceived trend of social disintegration and to restore the organic unit of community. Women leaders thus became the handmaiden of not only the colonial patriarchs but also the colonial capitalists whose goal was to prevent women from getting out of control. The availability of women at home ensured that male labourers could not often ask for permission to go and settle cases at home since the woman was there. The woman was also an economic shock absorber to the worker. This enabled the capitalist system to pay the labourers a wage below minimum rate.

Ironically, social welfare disintegrated many families in Kombewa and other areas around Kisumu Township. The training offered to women strained many marriages.
Some marriages even got dissolved. Those women who could not get employment within the local institutes opted to migrate to Kisumu. Unmarried girls and widows thus became beneficiaries as the former were most preferred by the colonial administrators and Asian employers in the township. Given the rural difficulties, the social welfare systems seem to have offered economic solutions to many women particularly those with some training. The acquired skills could enable them cope favourably well in the urban centres, such as Kisumu. The other factor was the difficulties, in bridewealth gathering and exchange as will be examined in the next sub-section.

5.2.2 THE COLLAPSE OF BRIDWEALTH EXCHANGE AND ITS IMPACT ON KOMBewA WOMEN

In the previous chapter the centrality of bridewealth exchange in Kombewa was discussed. We identified that, the substantial rights of the women in the pre-colonial Africa to control the means of production and own the products of their labour indicated the power and the central position of the bridewealth system. The powerful position of women in Kombewa was attributed to the rich, complex kinship organization based on bridewealth. It is bridewealth exchange which legitimised the marriage and secured kinship membership to the offspring's. Bridewealth was not just a means of exchange but a symbolic exchange of gifts between families. It was not a means of accumulating cash to pay taxes or any other financial obligations. It had a stabilizing function as far as marriage was concerned. When the man had handed over the cattle to his father in-law, his wife had no right to leave him. If after sometime she wanted a divorce, the man had a
traditional right to claim back from her parents the bridewealth exchanged. Her parents will of course try to avoid this because returning the heads of cattle will in most cases mean a great decrease in their wealth (Hauge Hans-Egil, 1974:11) and ability to acquire many sisters-in-law. At this point in time, it must be acknowledged that marriageable daughters constituted a good source of income to kin members at marriage age. This indicated that transformation on this practice occurred. The onslaught of capitalism in Kombewa and its continuous warping of the traditional society had a considerable impact on marriage institution. The bridewealth exchange was the first to be shaken. In Kombewa, it all started by the introduction of monetary system which transformed bridewealth exchange into a commercial transaction.

After the Second World War cattle exchange was to a great extent replaced by cash payment when it came to bridewealth exchange. This development made bridewealth exchange excellently suited to accumulation. It suited those working in the towns and could enable the recipients to acquire other commodities. But the new bridewealth arrangements undermined the position of fathers, elder men and kinship heads. After the war, therefore, a totally new system of bridewealth exchange was in operation in Kombewa as items acquired during bridewealth exchange were used for purposes other than exchange of sisters or daughters. Bridewealth thus collapsed as commercialisation occurred.

This transformation made marriage institutions to be bleak. The first casualties were migrant men. The rising numbers of independent women illustrated this (See population
of Seme or Kombewa Location from the CN/DAR, 1946-1959, KNA). Immediately after the war and this was blamed on adultery—in European form since there was no such word in the traditional Luo community. The Europeans and African leaders put several suggestions forward on how to deal with the issue. One such suggestion wanted to treat adultery as a Penal Code Offence in the case of males. The suitable penalty was the option of a fine or imprisonment in default of payment, (PC/NZA/3/15/88, 1945, KNA). This in itself was a clear indication that adultery had caused unforgettable social harm in the African society. It had to be fought whatever the cost. The Native tribunals and Town tribunals co-operated on the matter.

Considering the wilderness the migrant men were going to before they were recruited in the KAR, they tried as much as they could to marry before leaving home or came back to do so during holidays. The parents shared this opinion. It was in this situation that most migrant men contracted hasty marriages before they left (also see Mutongo, 1999). These men found it easy to enter such marriages since they either earned higher salaries or were in a stable income from their military duties and thus could pledge in cases where minimum bridewealth could not be paid in full. While away some of these marriages were often plagued with problems. When these men left, for instance, many of the new brides experienced a great deal of personal freedom, some of the women were too impatient for companionship to wait for their husband's return. Some women claimed to have heard rumours that their newly acquired husbands had died in the military duties. As such, they were lured by other men into casual sexual relationships. Predictably, these clandestine relationships strained their marriages when their husbands returned from war
thus a decade and a half after the war there were increased customary cases in the Native Courts of CND (see the number of cases reported and tried in CND 1946-59, a majority of the cases were customary).

To many Europeans and Africans, the focus was on the rising or uncontrolled bridewealth amidst rising costs of living. In 1946 the colonialists and the missionaries were of opinion that the bridewealth system in general was undesirable exchange and in particular, what they branded as excessive high scale of bridewealth. They claimed that high bridewealth obtaining was deplorable inasmuch as it made it difficult for young men to marry at a reasonably early age. Circumstances like these were conducive to adultery and seduction of girls (PC/NZA/3/15/85, 1946, KNA). While issues of bridewealth stabilization are not new at this point in time, the high cost of living particularly considering the unaffordable prices of cattle—a commodity used in bridewealth exchange, made it difficult for unmarried young men to get brides. While the colonial administration had several reasons for destroying the institution of bridewealth exchange within the African community, in Kombewa it was the local situation that necessitated the question of bridewealth reduction. That was why the DC of Kakamega moved in very fast to advise the DC of Central Nyanza in 1946 that "bridewealth wealth system is actually a social cement of African family life," meaning that any attempt to destroy, modify, reform or otherwise to suit modern times could affect family life in a manner not seen before.

In this unpredictable state of affairs, the colonial administration did not do much. They sought the advice from DC of Central Nyanza who found himself torn apart. On one hand
he had to lawfully protect the women from what he considered their molestation, maintaining that no woman could be forced or compelled to live with her husband she had no love for. The best that could be done according to the DC was to advice the man to sue for return of bridewealth. On the other hand the DC had to listen to the Christian missionaries who wanted to defend their faith and the rights and freedom of married and registered Christians. The missionaries were of the opinion of settling marriages in which registration was duly done apart from referring the cases to the LNC. The missionaries felt competent enough to handle marital cases -in any case they did not consider marriage as a purely civil matter. The DC further found himself in more confusion as he realized that he had to protect the interest of "native" custom, particularly the wishes of the kinship heads that depended on the custom as a source of wealth. That is why it was very difficult for the LNCs to agree on the modality of reducing bridewealth (DC/KSM/1/21/23, Native Compulsory Marriage: Baraza June 3, 1944, KNA).

The denominator was the Law governing the colony. It was clear that should customary law come into conflict with the laws of the colony, the latter superseded the former. Arguably, it seemed that the application of Native Christian Marriage and Divorce Ordinance of 1931 made women legal subjects in adultery courts. They could assert themselves more than before when it came to rejecting marriages.

The letter written by J.L Richard Omolo of Headquarter 2nd, Ech and Mill Records, East Africa on March 29, 1947 to the secretary the LNC in Nyanza Province best summarizes the situation in Kombewa. In the letter Mr. Omolo explained how the high prices of cattle
was a hindrance to many from getting married and warned that "if this persisted regularly and gradually, at the end we shall find out that fifty-percent of Nyanza province people are lost. This was due to unfixed prices of what should be real cost of marriage. Members should kindly see to this point and discuss it properly and fix the necessary price of one head of cattle. Some may think that this is mere talking on, it is a true fact. You know very well that all people are not equal under the globe, which means that, some have enough riches but some do not. They who have can help their children to get married, but they who do not must find it difficult which will lead them to poverty unless this is brought out thoroughly, Nyanza province will have to leave out her best people" (DC/KSM/1/12/6' 1947, KNA).

Within this difficult situation, women and men became losers. For women the situation changed. In Kombewa, several reports indicated an increase in what the PC of Nyanza referred to as molestation of women in the localities that is runaway wives who are arrested without a warrant or other authority, and girls who are unwilling to proceed to their chosen husbands, who are carried to him by force (DC/KSM/1/36/37, KNA). This molestation could not be avoided, because bridewealth return, considering hard economic situation, was beset with difficulties. Equally, men were in away attempting to assert their authority on women and girls. Little did they know that women and girls had become legal subjects on their own right. The 1950s further witnessed increased cases of runaway women in Kombewa. While it is true that women were running away because they could not cope with the general deprivation in rural areas, one cannot, however, wholly blame husbands and relatives. The procedure of getting leave, normal or emergency, was too
long. An employer had to write to the employee's local DC who contacted the chief and so the process went. By the time it was over, three to six months had elapsed. And if it was a case of death the dead had been buried. If it was the case of sickness, the sick had either recovered or died (Jalango-Ndeda, 1991:237).

In Kombewa a bad phenomenon came up in which daughters were made expensive by their parents. While traditionally a man had to exchange more than ten cows, some fathers-in-law demanded more than what was traditionally acceptable. The case of Owiti Hongo of Kombewa illustrated this. He attached an expensive price on her daughter who had been married to Olewe. Olewe had paid seven cows in terms of money, but still had to pay nine more at the cost of 160 shilling per cow (DC/KSM/1/21/11, 1952, KNA). When this case was put before the DC of Central Nyanza in November 11, 1952 he acknowledged that he could do nothing as there was no fixed number of heads of cattle to be paid as 'dowry' for a wife". This was also a time when a father in law could settle old marriage problems. This was mostly in cases where the man had not paid adequate bridewealth. In such a case the girl's father could refuse her travelling to go and visit the husband in town and even could marry her off to another man of his choice and who could pay adequate bridewealth. In Kombewa, for example, Joseph Ngeso who was employed in Mombasa had wanted to get his wife to stay with him and to his surprise, the DC informed him that "I have to inform you that your father-in-law does not wish to let his daughter join you before you pay him 4 cows as you only paid 6". At the same time in May 1956 Moses Laban Onyango of Kombewa was rejected by the wife, Mary Akoth for
not paying enough bridewealth. (DC/KSM/1/22/202, 1956, KNA). Consequently women
who did not accept such arrangements deserted their marriages.

Bridewealth was not the only thing straining marriages in Kombewa. With the adoption
of western forms of clothing, quarrels over quality and amount of clothing provided to
co-wives had become one of the principal items of conflicts within the homesteads. Men
equally felt that they had lost control over women in dresses and the elders thought they
had lost control over young men in shirts and trousers (Hay, 1994:12). Evaluating the
grounds for divorce among the Luo, Wilson Gordon (1953) concurs that the modern
Jaluo woman demands as a right European type of dresses and that her children, or at
least one of them, should have schooling. They also expect modern foods which must be
bought at traders, such as sugar, tea, bread and other modern wares, such as tables, chairs,
cups, knives, forks, cooking pots of iron and so on. Divorce is only granted if in the
opinion of the court, the husband has been completely unreasonable and if the woman is
determined to leave him.

The end of the Second World War also witnessed the expansion of widows in Kombewa
as the locality remained the hunting ground for KRA and labour recruiters. Male recruits
were transported to other parts of the world where they were exposed to foreign diseases
from which they often died. The war itself had remarkable casualties. The burden of tax
payment discouraged many men from taking care of widows. This meant that many
widows lost social status and economic security. With the breakdown of traditional
welfare system of taking care of widows, most widows had no where to turn to as their
incomes disappeared, their control over their children and their place in a wider society became ambiguous (Mutongi, 1999:68). With lack of adequate compensation for these widows, it is evident that many faced considerable difficulties. These difficulties included raising children, generating income, and other domestic labour. For the first time daughters rather than sons provided a valuable source of income for their widowed mothers and equally to fathers in terms of bridewealth (Mutongi, 1999:69).

In Kombewa the situation was a little bit different. Bridewealth itself was not forthcoming as fathers and kinship heads forged an alliance, either to tactfully acquire it or delay their daughters into going for marriages. The widows in such cases looked for alternative means of survival. Such initiatives included petty trade within the emerging markets, such as Lwanda, Rata, Kowe, Asembo Bay, Akala and Kisumu. The trade was basically in foodstuffs and local brews (Hay, 1994). Some widows migrated to towns, such as Kisumu or Nairobi and even Mombasa to visit relatives never to be seen back again (O.I, Helena Muga, 2000). But for widows who had some training, this was the time they could exploit their potentials for wage in the towns and Mission centres. For some it was in the towns where they could get other men to take care of them. The current Obunga, Kaloleni and Bandani are some of the known areas widows or just spoilt women occupied, either selling local brews, trading or as claimed by members of the RAWA prostituting (see Oral Information by, Hellena Muga Dec.15, Selina Abongo Dec.2, Ester Ombeva Dec.2, and Awuor Ochoro Decl4, 2000).
The changing social and economic environment in Kombewa was not in any way favourable to different categories of women. It gave women an opportunity to think for themselves in new ways. Tensions of forced marriages, dwindling bridewealth exchange, extended male absences and soil conservation campaign added workload on women in Kombewa. It forced them to make very difficult decisions. To reject kinship control and seek other options. Equally the training of women enlarged their perception about themselves and about the environment in which they lived. Kombewa women thus thought of their sexuality outside the context of kinship authority. The impact of Kisumu town was being felt in the whole of Kombewa. The development of Kisumu was guarded under European cultural ideas about how men and women could live and work together. Kinship heads and fathers remained to answer one and the most important question- that could women make independent choices of their sexual behaviour? The answering of this question determines the rest of this chapter.


In Chapter Two we examined the pre-colonial community in Kombewa, noting among other things, issues concerning sexual matters, bridewealth exchange, widow guardianship and the social and economic roles of women. Similarly, in chapter four we evaluated the extent to which Second World War impacted on marriage relationships in Kombewa. The start of hostilities saw the recruitment of African men into the war. Apart from that, it also witnessed male labour migration, enhanced agricultural production, and
breakdown of social institutions, such as that of widow guardianship. All these changes impacted negatively on women. Things were changing so rapidly before and during the war that, in most cases necessitated some form of social control. The emerging institutions, particularly the development of Kisumu town not only as commercial and industrial town, but also as a town where employment opportunities could be found, not only for men but also for female-headed households.

After the war things did not change for the better as the colonial administrators embarked on a program whose impact they least knew. Social welfare initiatives made women, particularly in Kombewa, to think of themselves outside kinship obligations. The power and authority of kinship heads were, during this time, seriously undermined if not usurped. The colonial efforts after the war opened up new options for women and reduced their degree of control and severity of sanctions which the family heads had applied on them. Family heads needed cash and wealth. Bridewealth that to many was a basic source of wealth had diminished as men and girls engaged in marriage negotiations without consulting their families. Consequently the family heads were unable to build their stock, marry more daughters-in-law and accumulate wealth. Clandestine relationships that developed during the war threatened many marriages after the war. Fathers-in-law were not left behind. They also demanded to adequately receive bridewealth. From 1945 the family heads started responding to marriage problems and the usurping of their traditional authority. They started imagining on how to restore their authority by controlling women and girls. Migration of women to townships, particularly to Kisumu, after the war was newfound. It provoked the development of various
strategies to control women and girls in Kombewa. This urban-bound mobility angered old men in different ways and was explained in terms of the morality. In Kombewa the old men branded these women who went to townships as prostitutes or wicked. It probably lowered the bridewealth, limited the role old men could play in marriage processes, threatened tradition and removed female labour from households. Women and girls, according to the old men were in towns for a different purpose other than selling foodstuffs.

The Luo Union [Riwruok Luo] whose main focus was on the general socio-economic development of the Luo community in Nairobi started reorganizing. This time, to focus on Kisumu town and particularly on women and girls. From 1945 the Union was transferred to Luo countryside, basically to deal with unmanageable Luo women and girls (PC/NZA/3/1/368, 1945, KNA). In March 3, 1945, the Luo union successfully managed to shift offices to Luoland Kisumu Town with revised rules and regulations which could enable the Union to deal with "wayward" women and girls. The aims of the Union were broadened and now touched on every aspect of the Luo men and women in towns. Aim (d) and (e) thus enabled the Union to deal with women. The two aims stated that the "Luo Union shall study and then offer a united resistance against any unprogressive modern influence and to promote the welfare of the Luo individually or collectively in their places of residence" (PC/NZA/3/1/368: Institutions Associations, Luo Union 1945, KNA). The Union's revised rules and regulations became by-laws in Kisumu branch. They looked broad and seemed capable of containing the already worsening situation. A section of the rules and regulations read:
Any Luo girl or woman who shall be known to be practicing prostitution in this town shall be prosecuted in an African court for breaking the Luo custom, this applied also to a Luo person practicing prostitution with a relative. When it came to marriage the by laws stated, any Luo girl or woman who shall be known to have married a European an Asiatic, an Arab or a Somali shall be prosecuted for having broken Luo marriage custom. This included a Luo man marrying a relative". The by-laws on marriage further stated that "any Luo man, woman or girl who shall marry an African other than the Luo, whose marriage shall not be in accordance with the Luo marriage custom shall be warned to devolve the marriage, failing to do so, they shall be prosecuted. On employment of women and girls, the by-laws stated that no Luo woman or girl shall be allowed to work in non-native beer shop and that no Luo woman or girl whose age is under thirty years shall be employed as an Ayah [female domestic workers] provided that those over thirty years may be so employed on production of a written permit issued by the Luo union. (PC/NZA/3/1/316, 1945, KNA).

The Luo Union branch further did not expect Luo women or girls to be employed in Kisumu Township unless they obtained a permit from the Union. Frequenting township was also not permitted for women with no proper dwelling places in town. Apart from prosecuting agents of prostitution trade, the Union further stated that "any Luo girl or woman found smoking cigarettes with the lit end inside the mouth and drawing money from the underwear, pocket will be liable to prosecution" (PC/NZA/3/1/316, 1945KNA).

On August 11, 1945 the Union wrote to the DC of Central Nyanza through the then secretary of the Union about women and girls. A section of this letter read:

I have been requested to approach you with a view of helping this union by making arrangements that no woman or girl who are employed as Ayahs [female domestic workers] are brought to this town without the consent of their parents or guardians" (PC/NZA/3/1/316). Referring to Nairobi, the letter further stated that "I am directed to state that, it has been brought to the notice of this union that the Europeans or Asians who employ Luo women and girls as Ayahs in Kisumu, when transferred to Nairobi make
arrangements to bring these women with them to Nairobi...that this will bring them into contact with bad influence and that the Luo community is strongly against their women becoming prostitutes (PC/NZA/3/1/316, 1945, KNA).

Among the Luo of Kombewa, sex had never been a commodity that could be offered for sale in the market. Sexual matters were not personal or individual, but matters in which all members of the kinship were involved. The family group has a say over its use. That was why any Luo girl who lost her virginity attracted less bridewealth. Moreover the institution of widow guardianship ensured that all women, with few specific cases such as sickness or extreme disability, found husbands and thus were under family heads. Consequently, there were no loose women unattached who may be available for commercial sex (also see Jeater, 1993:67). In Kombewa prostitution was a colonial creation. It resulted from the development of townships, market and mission centres to its vicinity.

Within these initiatives, a more specialized welfare association emerged in the same year to focus basically on women and girls. It is difficult to trace when exactly the association that came to be called Ramogi African Welfare Association (RAWA) emerged. But it can safely be said that around October 1945 this group was already engaged in attempts to convince the colonial administration, particularly the PC of Nyanza to approve and support their initiatives in tackling the problem of migrating women. They argued that migrating women and girls had created a harm that could never be repaired in the areas around Kisumu (Secretary RAWA letters to PC Nyanza on October 19, 1945). RAWA stated objectives as was attached to the PC of Nyanza noted that the association was to
prevent and prosecute all girls and women who were by then running away from husbands, parents and were engaged in prostitutional business in townships, European and Indian farms, railway stations, mining companies and at trading centres in the "native reserves". That RAWA wanted to stop prostitution and/or illegal marriages between African girls and Europeans, Asian and other races. They demanded that the association be allowed to repatriate back migrating girls and women to their husbands and parents (PC/NZA/3/1/376, 1945, KNA). Object (b) of the association further indicated that:

This association demands the discharge of women and girls, at present employed in the medical department and various races residence in the town, as nursing sisters and Ayah, since these women are notorious for their prostitutional activities, and are therefore a danger to the native community and a constant source of bad example to others in the reserves. RAWA thinks that girls exclusively trained for nursing should be employed by the medical department with strict orders and proper supervision which will ensure their not following such a practice. It, however, deplores the fact that up to the moment women and girls leave their husbands and parents and are taken on by the aforesaid department. Such action has caused much resentment on the part of husbands and parents concerned. The association saw nothing but a discharge en masse of those women and girls would satisfy it. It however hopes that, in future women and girls should not be employed by any department or race prior to consulting RAWA.

While the rest of the objectives resembled but not similar to those of the Luo Union, some were even more particular. RAWA in its objective (g), (h) and (k) detailed how prosecution would be "entered" against women refusing to join their husbands on transfer or retirement. It further included prosecution and repatriation all adults and juveniles wandering in town or near it. Its objective (k) that appeared punitive and outrageous on women and girls found guilty demanding that all women and girls prosecuted in a township or near it should have their haircut and dressed in gunny bag before repatriation
Since its formation, RAWA got involved in endless correspondence with the colonial administration; missionaries and those opposed to their intentions. It became a tool for family heads who could use it against women and girls usurping their authority. They termed women going for employment in town as prostitutes threatening the very foundation of the Luo customs and traditions. Emancipated women did not seem to enjoy the fruits of their emancipation as men, so to use Schmidt (1991) words:- came up with deliberate connivance between African patriarchs who felt that women were getting out of control and the colonial authorities to whom the control of women and children's labour by African men was necessary for both the establishment and consolidation of the colonial rule. African men and European seem to have been disturbed by the growing tendency of women and girls to exercise greater mobility and to flee the tyranny and drudgery of life in the homesteads during and after the Second World War.

The position of the colonial administration seemed very dismal and vague when it came to RAWA. It is difficult to understand how associations like this operated throughout the whole of the post war period without any legality, despite its impact on women and girls. It was therefore, true that in many instances, women's labour was serving capital. When men were away, it was the women who were involved in agricultural production, both for home consumption and for capital. To avoid constant return of African men into the rural areas, the colonial government had to ensure that all was well at home. This was because the constant mobility of men to rural areas in away affected their labour output. But the workers also needed some sexual satisfaction. If this was not provided, the labour had in
most cases to move to the rural areas to find it. This complicated the issue further. In fact the colonial administration without knowing found themselves in the struggle over location of women's labour. They had all the reasons to act with caution.

The dismal action of the colonial administration supports the extent to which they depended on the integrity of the African family. The colonial administration wanted to resist as far as possible what they considered "detribalisation" of the Africans. It was ostensibly on the foundation of "tribal" authority and the family that the British built Kenya's colonial administration (Spencer, 1975:139). The British colonial administration in Kombewa was thus interested in restoring the status quo. Without being fully involved, they seem to have supported the traditional authority so as to keep women and girls under control. These they did despite the available evidence that things were not well for the women as well as for the men. The DC of Central Nyanza accepted RAWA's concerns when he indicated that "I believe that there is much truth in the contestation that Ayah are, in a majority of instances, women of loose morals. There is no doubt that the Luo in the locations around Kisumu are very worried about the influx of girls into the municipality and it would seem that much might be done by the police to get prosecution under section 149 of the penal code (keeping brothels), with perhaps the help of the association" (PC/NZA/3/1/376, 1945, KNA). The association blamed prostitution on, lack of supervision over Ayah both in private employment and medical department. They contended that women employed in the two sectors were the backbone of prostitution. And that this had encouraged other young women to take up life of immorality. They thus demanded that "only early action would obviate the position, or else the harm already
done will never be repaired. The women in municipalities have become advanced to the extent that they are inserting the lit end of the cigarettes into their mouth as a sign to show that they are prostitutes on hire" (PC/NZA/3/1/376, 1945, KNA).

But after interviewing many Luo the DC of Kisumu, Londiani rejected this petition. He argued that the practice of smoking cigarette by reversal had been among the Luo for the last thirty years. He however accepted seeing several prostitutes smoking cigarettes in a normal way. More important in the PCs letter seems to support my own impression from Oral interviews when he stated "I visualize the employment of women in place of men in domestic service in the not far distant future and this will complicate thing still further" (PC/NZA/3/1/376, 1945, KNA).

Gathered oral evidence indicates that the association was obsessed with three issues. Since the establishment of colonialism in Kombewa men, in most cases, took up domestic labour. These men were commonly refereed to as boys or boyi [domestic male workers]. After the introduction of social welfare activities in which women of Kombewa took leading roles, some of them on receiving training felt qualified enough to take up jobs as Ayah [domestic female workers] within the European homes and within the Kisumu Township. These were jobs men had occupied. A clash over these jobs was unavoidable. But women had a much stronger case as some of these domestic duties were traditionally theirs. It was shocking to women that urbanized men took their traditional duties.
Secondly some of the *shamba* boys felt that women were getting into their privacy. These women could watch them perform duties that were traditionally for them. Some of the migrant men in Kisumu had also developed clandestine relationships when in the town. These men feared that migrating women could convey this unwarranted behaviour to their wives. By all means they had to fight this attempt. It was evident that migrating men from Kombewa got into sexual relationships with women and girls from other communities while they resisted the same on part of their women (O.I, Hesbon Nyongo, 2000).

The third contestation concerned safe guarding the community's purity against pollution by people from other communities or races. It also meant the removal of undesired competition for Luo daughter when it came to marriage. The people of Kombewa did not accept their daughters to be married to people from other communities as this could lead to "a community of mixed blood or mulattos amongst them. Equally losing their daughters and women to towns without fetching adequate bridewealth mesmerized the people of Kombewa. It was a great disappointment to family heads since they could not build their stock, marry more daughters-in-law and improve their wealth (see Joyce Akeyo, Hesbon Nyongo, and Joyce Odoyo, 2000).

Apart from inferences during oral interviews, available correspondence between RAWA and the colonial administration proved useful in demonstrating the impact of the association on women of different categories in Kombewa. On November 30, 1945 the then head of divisional police in Kisumu wrote to the Provincial Superintendent of Police
explaining that the association has already succeeded in sending Luo women who have
gone astray back to their reserves, that about ten girls have run out of town by members
of RAWA. Some of these women were dressed in gunny bags. This officer further
observed that "it is well known that many girls are running away from their husbands and
their homes to resist forced marriages- such resistance is being encouraged by the
missionaries. The male local African wishes to retain his power over his woman. This
RAWA may well be designed for that purpose. The secretary John Odera has admitted to
me that this is one of the reasons for wanting to form an association" (PC/NZA/3/1/376,
1945, KNA). The Provincial Superintendent likewise referred RAWA members to
various laws relevant to their intentions. The sections he found relevant included section
177(1), 177(8), 146 to 149 of the Penal Codes, Government Notices 800/45, 5671931,
Immigration Ordinance and Vagrancy Ordinance. The officer, however demanded, an
active and wholehearted co-operation of the association in bringing information and
evidence to the colonial administration.

In 1945 some Italian co-operators entered into the villages to get women. This activity
gave RAWA adequate reasons to convince the PC of their intentions. Using this excuse,
members of the association caused a lot of panic to trained and qualified African women
and girls migrating to search for employment in Kisumu Town. In the same year the
inspector of schools suggested that trained women be registered as professionals to safe
guard them from the fear of being returned to the "reserves" (PC/NZA/3/1/376, 1945,
KNA).
The colonial administration was not prepared in any way to fight this problem. They found their hands tied by the British law and the capitalist demands of the colony. In many instances, they preferred members of RAWA to raise the same issues in the "native" tribunals. The colonial demands were to be met at any cost. And it was in achieving these that the British law had to be protected. It was made clear by the PC of Nyanza that when a native law and custom come into conflict with the British law, the later superseded. He further referred members of RAWA to section 13(a) ordinance 39 of 1930 which read that "the native law and custom should only prevail in the area of jurisdiction of the tribunal, so far as it is not repugnant to justice or morality or inconsistent with the provisions of any order of the King in council or with any other law in force in the colony" (PC/NZA/3/1/376, 1945, KNA). This section governed the actions of any association which interested itself with the maintenance of law and order. Unfortunately most of the RAWA proposals were repugnant to justice and morality of the laws in force in Kenya colony. This response was a great disappointment to RAWA. Thus as from 1946 the association went outright to attacking the very foundation of the British law in Kenya. RAWA secretary, John Odera's letter to the PC explains it all. He notified the PC that:

Prostitution was not taking place between Ramogi women and other "tribes" irrespective of caste (hence its absence from the tribal custom). It, however, originated from Europeans and Asians settlement in the colony and whose racial custom it seems has need. It should be remembered that many pioneers of this colonies, as well as other colony had not their wives with them on arrival, as the country was wild and risky. They naturally depended on African women with or without consent with reward promised as bwana [Mr.] always do. This practice obviously enticed African men, women, girls and boys after sometime, to follow this non-African practice. It must be recalled that, the then customary habit was between boys and girls, who
were confined to native co-habitation and depended on mutual consent according to tribal law. It would be great discouragement to which in the past and the present, is their only source of unity in the every day village life is being replaced by a British law-a law of a race with a thousand years of civilisation...who would allow a virulent to flood his dwelling, if he can divert or stop it? Surely, people would be free without any such practices and roguery would diminish" (PC/NZA/3/1/376, 1945, KNA).

In Kombewa no communal custom supported prostitution and all were looking forward to its obliteration by RAWA. By 1946 Kisumu was a place where women, girls and boys could roam about by day and reside in the nearby localities at night proving Government Notice No.567/31 ineffective. Likewise the association felt that the prohibition on immigration of prostitutes into the colony could not be stopped considering the presence in large numbers of Tanganyika and Uganda women into the colony. The association confirmed that it was the imposition of the British rule in Kenya colony and particularly in Kombewa that was responsible for the rising cases of prostitution.

On July 31, 1946 RAWA resented various laws applied in the Kenya colony and asked for the integration of old laws and customs into those of the colony. Among the sections of resented laws included Laws of Kenya 1930 part II page 701, Native Tribunal Ordinance section 13(a), arguing that the provisions of this ordinance does not recognize the right and the importance of "tribal laws" and customs in the areas concerned. That the Laws of Kenya volume X. page 242, Native Christian Marriage and Divorce Ordinance 1931 section 10 was also opposed on grounds that it deprives the parents and the relatives powers to direct their daughter. Whereas under the native laws and customs women and girls of what ever age, whether married or not, just as well as men or boys are subject to parents or relatives directions.
The existence of this law was responsible for the destruction of the community's unity due to moral decadence. On marriage, the association demanded that any dispute arising from respect to marriage contracts should, in the first place, be left in the hands of local elders known as "jodong ragwar" for decision with an option to appeal against any order made by the said local elders to the chiefs court and then to the tribunal courts (PC/NZA/3/1/376, 1946, KNA).

As the arguments on which law should prevail should native law and custom come to conflict with the laws of the colony ranged, the PC of Nyanza referring to widows observed that he had received information that complaints had been preferred against a number of women in towns, including widows and young women who were employed. He insisted that the native law and customs could only prevail so long as it did not come into conflict with the laws of the colony. He indicated to the association that within the laws of the colony, a widow or a girl, after attaining majority was no longer subject to her father's direction (vide native Christian marriages ordinance 1931 and cap.167, section 19). He then listed areas on which prosecution could be taken to include "girls not being widows who have not yet attained the age of 18 years (contrary to native law and custom, leaving her parents home without consent), married women on complaint of the husband (adultery according to native laws and customs), women who keep a house, room or who let rooms or place of any kind whatsoever for purposes of prostitution" (PC/NZA/3/1/376, 1946, KNA). On September 16, 1946 the Kenya Confidential acknowledged the impacts of RAWA. It indicated that the association's members had
managed to follow a European who accompanied a married African woman to the native location. The European and the woman entered a room in which children of a family would ordinarily have slept and occupied the room with the African woman. Because police were called, no nasty incidence was reported and the woman openly boasted to the members of the association that she habitually co-habits with Europeans as she finds it lucrative (see Kenya Confidential, PC/NZA/3/1/376, 1946, KNA).

The association then proceeded to Kaloleni in Kisumu. Here they arrested four women, punished them severely and sent them back to their rural homes. They at the same time invited fathers and husbands to look for their girls and wives in the township and prosecute them before township tribunal for leaving their father's homes without being married or having their father's permission contrary to native law and custom. In case of a married woman, she was to be accused for adultery (see minutes of RAWA and PC Nyanza meetings 1946). RAWA in the same year arrested women and girls found in the township for more than 48 hours without identification pass or work. Debating society who constantly opposed the Association reported that RAWA had arrested many women and children. These women stayed for the whole day without food had their hair shaved and dressed in a gunny bag. RAWA dismissed PCs advice that girls and women over 18 were ultra parents and capable of looking after themselves. They declared that "Native" customs hold that girls and women, even when fifty and over are simple- remain at homes as it would be madness to drive them away just because they are over 18 years or when daughter is married, father and husband must combine together in order to direct the girl along proper lines and it would be a folly to let her go her own way simply
because she happens to be over 18 years" (Jakobo Nyamita Amimo contribution during RAWA meeting with PC in Kisumu Resting house, 1946, KNA). That the "allegation by women that they were not being properly cared for by their husbands was totally untrue" (Eliakim Ndola as above, 1946).

To strongly consolidate its powers, between 1947 and 48, the Association came up with supplementary rules and regulations arguing that it was hard to think of eradicating such evils, but the future looks darker for the Ramogi people with this state of affairs in progress. That the future looked bleak unless drastic steps are taken by the Association in assisting the authorities to combat the menace of evils according to the will of the people and for the well being of the present and the future Ramogi generation. The additional rules and regulations included distillation of Nubian gin, livestock trade licensing, and disrespect for males, child neglect with regard to education and roaming in the township. Part four of the regulations basically focussed on marriage. Section 4 of RAWA laws and regulations demanded that, any one who intends to marry should fulfil the usual tribal obligation of marriage before the girl or woman's parents or relatives with liaison [Jagam] who has personal knowledge of both the bridegroom and the bride's parents for reasons that, marriage without liaison often leads to dissatisfaction and trouble between the married couple and becomes difficult for elders to settle. RAWA in recognition of this concept sought to bring action against the following offences contrary to "tribal" customs through or before the authorities for contravening the marriage laws and customs:
Anyone who shall divorce his wife with whom he had been in union before he placed the case before the woman's or girls parents or relatives, liaison and RAWA of the area concerned to prove reason necessitating a divorce. The same was to apply to women or girls aspiring to divorce husbands. No man or boy should get married to another girl or woman until dissolution of the bounds of her previous marriage is effected. The same was to apply to women and girls. No man shall take a girl without her parents or relative's consent. Any one who is not a member of Luo tribe, found having intercourse with Luo or other African tribe's girl or woman is guilty of offence and will be reported before the court by the above association. The RAWA is emphatic against producing a community of mixed blood or mulattos amongst Luo tribe and its members and the whole community is determined to arrest any Luo girl or woman found loitering in the township in the township without proper means of livelihood (PC/NZA/3/1/376, 1948, KNA).

On October 19, 1948 RAWA wrote to the PC of Nyanza this time on Christian missionaries, mission centres and medical department. To the missionaries the letter was very particular about women who ran away from their husbands and stayed within missions. RAWA demanded that "the practice should stop as it creates a lot of bad feeling between missionaries and Africans. It is being looked at by old men and young alike with abhorrence. Suppose the husband of the woman who stays with the mission dies, the consequence are always very difficult to settle according to customs. The worst offenders in this case were the Roman Catholic missionaries (PC/NZA/3/1/376, 1948, KNA). RAWA demanded that the medical department refuse to engage the women or girls without first obtaining the permission from husbands or father of the girl. This practice was also creating a lot of problems in the country. The Association managed to make it difficult for women to acquire jobs or employment at the medical departments where they seem to have lost when it came to the issue of missions. The PC of Nyanza demanded that the medical department was only to engage women and girls as hospital
dressers after their application had been sent to the DC for approval. The DC in such a case consulted with his staff and if necessary would refer the matter to the girl's home for opinion before replying to the medical department. In Kombewa locational elders became notorious in turning down applicants arguing that either they were married and committed in their marriages or bridewealth had been paid for them or they were just waiting to join their husbands (O.I, Monica Orogno and Joyce Akeyo, 2000).

Referring to the subject of women running away from their homes whether married or not and proceeding to missions, the DC advised the association that "I cannot issue general instruction in the matter as women like men must be free to join missions to study religion, if such was their wish. In a case in which the woman had quarrelled with her parents or her husband and taken refuge in a mission, the parents or the husband had to approach the mission and explain the circumstances. After this the man could ask for the woman to be ordered to return to her home. If satisfaction is not obtained, the aggrieved party was to report in the first instance to his chief and if necessary to the DC" (PC/NZA/3/1/376, 1948, KNA). This was a time when women and girls in the eyes of the colonial administration were full legal subjects and they could no longer be tossed around as RAWA had anticipated. However, the association became a powerful body impacting on the life of every woman staying in the vicinity of Kisumu township and aspiring to go for employment in Arab hotels, medical departments, European homes and to trade in foodstuffs as before.
The association thus limited Kombewa women's responsibility of taking care of their welfare. They were not free as they thought. They could not take up opportunities in Kisumu Township despite their training. The family heads branded them names either wicked women, disobedient daughters or prostitutes. The association caused a lot of panic to women, particularly those married to migrant men, widows, runaway women and women with marriage difficulties seeking to survive. It undertook to stop, inspect, arrest and detain any African woman or girls visiting relatives in the town, attending church services or going about their lawful business to bazaar or market. They further shaved the hair of any woman or girls they arrested (PC/NZA/2/3/1/376, 1951, KNA).

Inferences from oral information are quite elaborate on the impact of the association on Kombewa women. A number of women interviewed seem to agree that a Luo woman or girl could not go to town on her own wish because this was tantamount to prostitution [chodo] and men, particularly older men, strongly condemned it. To most respondents the association was established to deal with women and girls migrating to Kisumu and other townships without a clear reason. But even those with reasons fell victim. RAWA investigated women in town right from their clans, family, and chief. This was to ensure that they left procedurally (Joshua Suku, Dec.15, 2000). When found guilty, they were to put on a sack and their hair shaved for identification and to embarrass them before the whole community (Obolla O.I, 2000). Ayah were also put under strict scrutiny by kinship members to find out if they were involved in prostitution activities and to repatriate them to the "reserves". According to John Robert Apat Dongo:
RAWA was there to look after the Luo welfare and tradition. The Luo did not like embarrassing things, they did not like seeing their girls prostituting, they did not like marrying from a different ethnic groups and so on. If a man wanted to marry he had to come back to his kinship group to find for him the right girl to marry. The Luo did not like unmarried old men and all men of marriageable age were to come back for suitors. But these women whom RAWA targeted were spoilt, less intelligent, left their husbands and widows pretending to be trading in town. Jaluo (Luo), loved working in domestic duties within European homes because they loved cleanliness, but women could not do the work they were not that clean and it would be bad to hear that somebody's wife was also employed as a domestic worker (O.I, John Robert Apat Dongo, 2000).

One gets the impression that domestic work had become male domain in the colonial institutions, the opposite of what was traditionally expected. It can, therefore, be concluded that trained and migrating women were, to some extent, aspiring for jobs men had occupied. Alternatively it was a shame for men to be seen by women performing duties traditionally meant for women. Consequently women realised that domestic work could be paid for and thus they did not need to do it for free. This was a good alternative for unguarded widows. But later women and girls started asserting themselves too. They also wanted freedom to go to towns just as men. The prevailing situation, needless to say provided adequate impetus for women to migrate.

The results of these were disastrous on the old men or family heads. Girls could get married without the old men involvement, women with marriage problems could get other suitors in the towns and men needed not to come home for suitors as widows neglected their traditional duties. Bridewealth, the basic source of wealth for family heads, collapsed; their authority and power undermined by not only men and women but also girls. They had to fight back to maintain it. Women responded to RAWA demands in
different ways. Some women asked, "How they could wash outside the guard and leave inside?" (O.I Canon Nyong’o, 2000). How could they punish women and leave the men? Archdeacon L.J Beecher who wrote to RAWA secretary in November 1945 also observed the same. He noted to RAWA that "but why not do something about the men who insist on using prostitutes? Why not make them shave and wear sack cloth? If men stopped using them their trade would disappear" (PC/NZA/3/1/376, 1945, KNA). Equally some of the RAWA members fell into women traps and became part of their prostitution activities. Some women even bribed RAWA officials for their survival as some migrated and stayed in the interior parts of Kisumu town. Other women took to trade in safe areas, like Luanda and Butere (O.I, Hesbon Nyongo, 2000). Privileged women married to educated persons and members of the debating club in Kisumu joined together to attack RAWA, arguing that its demands were repugnant, uncivilized and outdated. They petitioned the colonial government through their wives to put a stop to the activities of the association. They claimed that the association had made it difficult for married women to visit their husbands in town (Joshua Suku O.I, 2000). Unfortunately the colonial administration was on a difficult trap. It was their intention not to interfere with customary life of Africans. They too wanted to preserve the superiority of the British law as it was applied in Kenya.

A more pressing need arose requiring women to be at home. In the whole of the Central Nyanza, Kombewa was taken as a pilot scheme for land consolidation as from May 8, 1956. The project was inaugurated by the DC E.H Risley, who argued that "the present system of land holding among the Luo was evolved when the tribe was much smaller in
every way that it is now, and when they were constantly pressing forward to new lands. This system is now not suitable to a people now static. It prevents profitable farming, results in more poverty, than is necessary, and is steadily ruining the land. Some location has been chosen as a pilot scheme since it contains examples of almost every type of soil formation found in the district as well it had a considerable element of progressive minded people" (DC/KSM/1/3/61, Land Consolidation, 1956, KNA).

As had been observed women were very central in agriculture strictly because there were no men in the villages to do it. The district agricultural officer of Central Nyanza put the situation in a clear perspective when he noted that "the Central Nyanza has been in the past and is still a hunting ground of labour recruiters who entice away a very large proportion of young and strong men, leaving nothing but old men, women and boys to cultivate the land. The Luo woman lives a life very apart from her husband. She is in matters connected with the running of the home and shamba, the executive partner" (DC/KSM/1/3/61, 1956, KNA). Like any colonial project, land consolidation had certain shortcomings. The assistant agricultural officer at Siriba acknowledged several problems arising from land consolidation. He argued that some had to be move their houses, a clan could lose land to be set aside for new road access, some men lost their fertile lands. Also there was the possibility of a man being asked to leave a certain area in which he had been tenant farmer and return to his own, possibly full of tsetse-flies or lacked water or both. The other problem identified by the officer, concerned landowners away from home and tenant farmers (DC/KSM/1/3/61, 1956, KNA).
Most of the respondents agreed that land consolidation in Kombewa saw rising cases of boundary disputes requiring men to be at home most of the time. Since this was not possible the women were to stay at home not only to protect the crops but also to protect land rights. During consolidation one could only acquire land if he had cultivated it or was cultivating it. Women and widows could only be given land to cultivate on behalf of the male children. To safeguard land rights, therefore, men had to keep their wives at home as the colonial government did not like seeing idle land. Consequently from 1957 to independence the need to protect land rights after land consolidation in Kombewa gave RAWA a new and favourable justification to take action on women and girls who resisted staying at home. In fact land right became one of the strongest points which RAWA could cling on to repatriate women and girls to the "reserves" since the argument favoured agricultural officers and the colonial administration alike.

5.4 SUMMARY

This chapter has demonstrated how difficulties in the rural economy of Kombewa after 1945 set many women migrating to towns, particularly Kisumu Township. In the first case, the demand on labour drew more men out of Kombewa than the previous years, particularly to European farms. Rural subsistence economy of Kombewa thus suffered. Equally in certain instances the tax payment fell heavily on women, particularly widows who lacked the ability to pay. The departure of Kombewa men also witnessed the use of women and children's labour on soil conservation and other communal labour as was demanded by the local administration. It was inevitable that the burden of the day-to-day
running of the households fell on the rural subsistence sector, headed by the women. Women had, therefore, to redouble their labour in both agriculture and in domestic tasks. This was particularly difficult for women and their families to work on land which was rugged, heavily congested and whose fertility was declining year by year.

The use of cash, particularly when it came to tax payment and the burden of supporting the households, made many women in Kombewa to turn to petty commodity production and/or petty commerce to generate income. Apart from petty trade within the local markets, male labour migration intensified women's burden of work and limited their mobility without enlarging their freedoms to make decisions. Marriages were strained as the colonial administration attempted to tie women to their rural households and forcing them to perform a subsidizing function for the male labour which was increasingly employed in many parts of the colony. Women rejected this by drifting to Kisumu Township to look for survival strategies.

Secondly the chapter has also identified other transformative socio-economic developments in the colony after the war which had considerable impact on Kombewa women. The development of a social welfare system with its contradictions enabled many women and girls who had been tied up by traditional authorities to think of their lives outside the boundaries of Kombewa. This posed a great challenge to kinship/ family heads power and authority. To restore their power and authority an association (RAWA) emerged particularly to deal with women and girls who had migrated to the towns for trade, work and prostitution. This association had a far-reaching consequences on the
social and economic well-being of women and girls, especially those who had some training and capable of employment in the townships.
CHAPTER SIX

6.0 CONCLUSION

Using the articulation of modes of production as a theoretical framework this study set out to investigate the impact of the colonial social and economic policies, practices and missionary activities on female-headed households in Kombewa, between 1894 and 1963. It also investigated the interaction between these households and the emerging colonial institutions, particularly, market centres and Kisumu Township. Equally the study outlined some of the critical survival strategies advanced by these household members to cope with the ravages of colonialism. In undertaking the above, the study relied on several sources of information. These included primary sources, such as archival and oral information and secondary sources including published works on the subject.

The study has indicated that among the Jo-Seme marriage was one of the most important social institutions. It was in marriage that gender ideology was produced and reproduced. In Kombewa, a marriage process was initiated by the exchange of bridewealth. Bridewealth had an important social, economic and even religious significance. It stabilized marriages and legitimised children. It was after exchange of bridewealth that marriage was completed. It was not culturally in order for a girl to be married without exchange of bridewealth. Divorce was rare, although there were traditional grounds for it. The study has demonstrated that, in marriage, every gender had a specific role to play for the maintenance and the smooth running of the whole household unit, which was the
centre of production and reproduction. There was, thus, a clear gender interdependence and complementarity. When a married woman lost the husband, the widow was entitled to a leviratic arrangement, which was a form of social and economic security, safety and protection for the widow and her children. The study has established that this arrangement ensured that, household requirements were provided despite the loss of the "legal husband". Thus female-headed households did not exist in Kombewa before the coming of colonialism.

The study has established that the people of Kombewa or the Jo-Seme formally came under the British colonialism in 1899 after a bloody military expedition. This invasion undermined the pre-colonial social and economic structures of the Jo-Seme. Whatever their prior status, the fate of Kombewa women worsened under the colonial rule. It upset the balance between dependence and autonomy in relation between sexes in work at all levels of social and economic organization. In Kombewa this was affected in several ways. Firstly, the violent nature in which colonialism was introduced saw more men than women die. This was because the Jo-Seme stiffly resisted the British invasion and force was used to persuade them. Secondly, immediately after defeating the Jo-Seme the colonial administration started demanding labour. The imposition of hut tax in 1899 and later poll tax in 1910 followed this. Thus the incorporation of the Jo-Seme into the colonial economy partially transformed the pre-existing forces and relations of production. Three factors were key to this when it came to Kombewa. These included the imposition of taxes, labour demands and missionary activities.
After defeating the Jo-Seme, C.W Hobley who was the first colonial officer in Central Nyanza, demanded labour as a sign of defeat and compliance. To achieve his objectives in 1907 the colonial administration in Kombewa selected chiefs and their headmen. These chiefs were charged with the duty of keeping law and order and supplying labour for public works and settler farms. Between 1907 and 1912 the powers of the chiefs were extraordinarily increased giving them sweeping powers when it came to issues of labour and taxation. By 1908 compulsory labour was in place for government purposes and forceful conscription was allowed when voluntary labour was not forthcoming. The experiences of the First World War saw the institutionalisation of forced labour by the Northey Circulars in 1919. According to the circulars the colonial administration was enjoined to exert every possible lawful influence to encourage the Africans to work outside their districts. It was this circular that drove as many men as possible from Kombewa since the chiefs and headmen abused it in interpretation and implementation. Thus communal labour that was intended for the building and improvement of services in the community became compulsory for everybody, including women and children.

The practice of involving women and children in communal labour in Kenya was enshrined in the 1912 Native Authority Ordinance which in effect amounted to forced labour for government purposes within the "reserves". Despite the opposition from Africans and their sympathizers, the practice became more widespread in the 1920s and 1930s, especially whenever the spectre of labour shortage reared its dreaded head (Zeleza, 1987:6). Demand for labour from Kombewa came from railway department, public works department, work on construction and maintenance of camps. But
afterwards, able-bodied men and even children were recruited as soldiers, sailors, police, masons, carpenters, sawyers and blacksmiths.

During the First World War able-bodied men were recruited as carrier corps and other military duties. The Jo-Seme also provided animals for slaughters as others were recruited on settler plantations. In fact after the war the phrase "the district was denuded of its adult male workers" was common on the colonial annual reports. Given the situation it was the women who mobilized the resources for the day-to-day running of the households. Women thus headed many households in Kombewa. These women had to redouble their labour as they were charged with the responsibility of subsidizing the colonial economy. In Kombewa such households redoubled their labour in peasant-subsistence agriculture. They were also actively involved in petty commodity production and commerce.

These households were forcefully being involved in communal labour, as there were no males to do it in the localities. In Kombewa these households maintained roadside, water supplies, government camps or stations, police stations, schools, bridges and dispensaries. They were also actively involved in soil conservation. This kind of labour, which the study has demonstrated had the repercussion of destabilizing peasant life particularly that of women in Kombewa. It brought overwhelming hardships on women, and in fact, forced many of them out of the villages to Kisumu and other towns in the country.
The preoccupation of the colonial administration during the Second World War particularly agricultural policy of "farming as usual plus" further increased workload on these households already headed by women. The state required increase in food production and the chiefs were to be notified of specific needs. It was also during this time that the DC of Central Nyanza reported the unavailability of male labour and stated that women were to be engaged in farm work. Apart from communal labour Kombewa households were to redouble their labour on farms to satisfy war requirements and household demands. Not many women accepted the hardship.

Secondly the transformation of the pre-existing forces and relations of production in Kombewa was achieved by the colonial demands for taxes. Hut tax was imposed in 1899. It was based on any hut used as a place of human habitation. It was collected initially at the rate of Rs.2 (Indian Rupees) however this tax was adjusted upwards even during times of food shortages or famines in 1932-1934 and 1943. Chiefs were effective in tax collection. They thus exerted considerable pressure on the people of Kombewa to pay their taxes fully and in time.

In 1910 hut tax was accompanied by poll tax. The latter brought every adult male who did not own a hut into the tax structure. Most people in Kombewa paid their taxes in cash after selling their property particularly cattle. But as cattle population decreased, the payment was generally met by provision of labour. In fact if labour was not forthcoming, taxes were adjusted. Ainsworth, for example, pointed out that between 1905/06 and 19010/11, direct taxation on Africans increased nearly four hundred percent while
taxation from all other sources, including customs, increased only twenty two percent between 1905/06 and 1906/07 and actually decreased around seventeen percent between 1906/07 and 1909/10 (Spencer, 1975:322).

The absence of men from Kombewa during and after the two World Wars, saw the application of taxes falling on women, particularly widows and the very old women. In 1915, for example, the colonial administration established that tax compensation to be paid to widows and children of men in carrier corps, yet not only were wives not told about compensation and consequently not paid, but taxes were collected on the diseased man's huts. Cases also occurred in which men, paying their own poll tax were forced to pay for their widowed mothers' hut. In 1924 sons who paid hut tax for the widowed mothers, secured a court judgement that the mothers owned the huts (Spencer, 1975:338).

The study has further indicated that from 1932 many women from Seme relied on newly introduced crops to meet tax obligations. Equally the women who defaulted had their huts destroyed and burnt by tax collectors. Some women complained in vain to the colonial administration, asking to be granted exemption. Many women, thus, felt the absence of men from villages. Throughout the colonial period taxation and compulsory labour stood out to be the most disliked aspects of colonialism. The two made married women to stay lonely for a long time. It also exposed widows from the traditional social and economic securities. It witnessed several huts falling without anybody to repair them. Even worse, colonialism forced women to head households. Given the colonial demands, this was a
much heavier responsibility for many women. Marriages started to crumble as village hardships escalated during this period.

The Christian missions accompanied colonialism in Kombewa. The study has established that among other missions, the Church Missionary Society had a leading influence on the people of Kombewa. The CMS, like other missions attached the ultimate value upon the individual. They argued that the journey of the Christian was conspicuously the journey of an individual. Heavily burdened, the Christians, quest for the fulfilment of his faith required abandonment of his family and his neighbours; he encountered such characters as pliable, obstinate, timorous, ignorant, hypocritical and worldly wise men. The awesome reward that Christians secured resulted from his individual success in avoiding pitfalls these characters projected. It was this individuality that the missionaries demanded from the converted Christians. This was not congruent to the African view of his place in the universe. It called for serious departure from traditional African society (Spencer, 1975:3).

The study has established that the CMS, particularly was culturally intolerant of the African traditions. In Kombewa the missions challenged traditional customs that maintained cohesion and encouraged collective participation, such as exchange of bridewealth, polygamy, and widow guardianship. Consequently the study has argued that colonialism and missionary activities were responsible for the emergence, expansion and impoverishment of female-headed households in Kombewa.
The study has further established that the colonial administration and missionaries did not relent when it came to the traditional marriage institution. Bridewealth exchange that traditionally ensured stability of marriages was transformed since it looked like buying a woman or a wife. The colonialists and missionaries alike regarded bridewealth exchange as a mere economic transaction and discouraged it. Polygamy suffered the same fate, as extra women whose husbands got converted were required to leave. Equally what the missionaries referred to as "wife inheritance" ranked high on the list of African customs to be abolished. This lack of understanding, the study has observed, threatened the social and economic security of the widows, particularly those in Christian homes. The CMS urged all missionaries to act quickly in widows' cases so that neither a widow nor her children would pass into heathenism or as property of heathen relatives (Spencer, 1975:132). Thus any native law and custom that did not conform with the European justice and morality were repressed for good.

Given the difficulties of the colonial policies, particularly on female-headed households, marriages did not fail to respond. Bridewealth became difficult to procure and those men who could not get enough bridewealth found it difficult to convince the would be father-in-law to accept less value. The powers and authority of the kinship elders, which depended on bridewealth exchange, deteriorated and eventually collapsed. Women who had taken to heading households equally started responding to those marriages in which they had been forced to enter as the colonial government also insisted on improving their status. The colonial period in Kombewa was thus characterised by a higher number of runaway women or independent women; women resisting arranged marriages, either
instigated by rural difficulties or by fathers-in-law, demanding completion of bridewealth.

The study has observed that migration of women, first to the market centres and after to Kisumu was a major recourse to overwhelming rural difficulties within the households. It was first noticed in 1911 when the PC-Nyanza instructed that passes be issued to women and girls migrating to Kisumu. Women ran away from Kombewa in reaction to task of clearing and preparing land for plantation, assisting in protection of crops from pests and diseases, harvesting, storage, household maintenance, childcare, provision of labour and payment of taxes. Some women just reacted negatively to marriages, which they were not happy with while others just got bored and were seeking for happiness. The township offered new hopes not only for the men but also women. For the women it was in Kisumu where they could get employment opportunities. Thus despite the multiplicity of causal factors, economic factors dominated the whole process.

However, the study has also established that old men or kinship heads also reacted to the erosion of their traditional power and authority. Immediately after the war these old men came up with RAWA basically to deal with women and girls eroding or undermining their authority. They argued that their migration to township had several consequences not only for them but also for the whole Luo society. This association impacted on several women who were resisting cultural subordination within the villages. They arrested, detained and repatriated many women and girls seeking wage employment in Kisumu Township.
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### 2. DOCUMENTARY SOURCES

**KENYA NATIONAL ARCHIVES.**

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**Others**

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APPENDIX II: SAMPLE QUESTION

Date __________ Name ____________ Place of interview ______________
Location __________ Sub-location __________ Occupation ______________
Sex _____ Age ______ Previous involvement with colonial government __________

**Introduction to the topic of study:**

1. Comment on the coming of colonialism to this area?
2. Which activities were colonialists involved in?
3. What were the people's reactions towards them?
4. Comment on the nature of familial structure in this area before the coming of colonialism?
5. Comment on the various categories of women in this region before the advent of colonialism?
6. Were there certain communal support systems for widows?
7. How was this affected by colonialism?

**Colonial policies and practices**

**A. Taxation**

1. Comment on the various taxes levied on the people of this area?
2. What was the means and mode of payment?
3. Were there difficulties faced by the people in paying these taxes?
4. How were tax defaulters dealt with?
5. Were widows paying taxes?
6. What were some of the initiatives taken by men and women to survive during this period?
B. Labour policies.

1. Were men from this locality conscripted for labour in the colonial plantations and towns? If so where? And how did this affect food production?
2. While away, who took care of their wives?
3. Comment on remittances?
4. Are there men who left never to be seen again?
5. Comment on the migration of women to towns and colonial plantations?
6. Were their restrictions to this migration? What was its nature and impact on women?
7. Were their some forms of labour that the colonial administration only required women, girls and children?
8. If so, how did this affect women and girls?
9. To what extent did the absence of men for a long time affect the whole process of food production?

C. Land policies

1. Comments on the whole process of land consolidation in this region?
2. Who took care of the plots belonging to migrant labourers?
3. How did the whole process affect women?
4. Comment on the famines that befell this community during the colonial period?
5. What was the response of women to this?

D. Marriage

1. Comment on the marriage processes in this region before the coming of colonialism?
2. How was it affected by colonial administration?
3. Which factors were responsible for the rising bridewealth in this area during the colonial period? Were there attempts to stabilise bridewealth?
4. Comment on run-away women and divorce cases in this area before the establishment of colonialism?

5. Comment on some of the traditional dances in this area? How were they responsible for the rising cases of venereal diseases during colonialism?

6. Comment on the response of women and father-in-laws to these changes?

E. Women mobility

1. Comment on women mobility during the colonial period?

2. What were some of the reasons for the mobility of women?

3. Which kind of women migrated to townships?

4. Comment on the reaction of colonial administrators, male elders and kinship heads to this mobility?

5. Which strategies did women take to survive?

F. Missionary activities

1. Comment on some of the missions in this region during the colonial period?

2. What kind of activities were they involved in?

3. How did their activities affect women?

4. Was their special assistance the mission gave to women? What about widows?

5. Were there women leaving within the mission centres? If so for what reasons?

6. What were the mission attitudes towards traditional African marriage customs like polygamy, wife inheritance, forced or arranged marriages and baptism?

7. Did mission provide some special training for women and girls? Comment on the nature and the impacts of these trainings?

8. What was the perception of men to the women training?

9. What about colonial administration?
G. Ramogi African Welfare Association

1. Comment on some of the activities of this organization?
2. What was its impact on women?
3. How did women respond to its activities?
4. What about colonial administrators?
5. Did people support its activities? If so why?