

The study examined the origin and the transformation of the *jua kali* sector of Nairobi from 1899 to 1998, and its consequences on the African communities in the town.

A case study research design based on qualitative procedures was adopted employing three types of data, namely: Archival data, oral interviews and library research.

Among the *jua kali* sites identified and examined in the study included: Gikomba, Kamukunji, Ziwani, Kawangware, Kariobangi Githurai and Roysambu. 90 knowledgeable informants on the history of Nairobi and *jua kali* sector were interviewed from 2001 to 2005. These included *jua kali* operators, Non- Governmental Organisations' personnel, civil servants, and Asian business people.

In order to analyse the complex relations in the *jua kali* sector of Nairobi, the study adopted an integrated theoretical approach comprising the dependency and underdevelopment approach, the articulation of modes of production and the concept of neo-patrimonialism.

It is argued here that the city of Nairobi emerged as a colonial urban centre along the Uganda railway and was, therefore, the product of international capitalism, which creates a global division of labour that consigns the periphery to primary production. The prime motive behind the construction of the Uganda Railway was to facilitate British colonial authority, and transportation of resources to the East Coast enroute to the metropole in London. As the colonial headquarters in Kenya, Nairobi was strategic to the British. It served as the administrative, commercial and transport centre for organising the drainage of resources and surplus to the metropole.

A number of Christian Missionaries, Asians and white settlers settled in the country, particularly near Nairobi, after the completion of the railway in 1901.

The three groups were by the First World War socialising the African communities to serve the colonial system, through western education, apprenticeship and wage labour. Moreover, the alienation of land, forced many Africans to migrate to the White settler farms, Nairobi and other urban centres, in search of wage labour. Those who failed to secure wage labour in Nairobi turned to hawking, prostitution and other marginal activities such as the brewing of illegal liquor.

It is further argued that although a number of Africans acquired artisanal skills from the government departments and mission schools by the inter war period, very few of them practised artisanal businesses in Nairobi. Rather, most of them acquired jobs in the formal sector. Therefore, the African pioneer *jua kali* artisans were those who acquired their skills informally from the Asian artisans.

The Second World War marked the increased exploitation of the Kenyan economy. Desperate for more labour, financial and agricultural resources to support the war effort, the British recruited more Africans into the war and even allowed for a small number of manufacturing enterprises to be set up in Nairobi. The war also led to an influx of Africans into Nairobi in search of wage-employment opportunities. Many of them turned to the informal sector particularly after the War. The demobilized soldiers and the African squatters evicted from white settler farms after the mechanization of agriculture also flocked into the city. Consequently, many Africans turned to petty theft, illegal brewing of liquor, and prostitution in Nairobi as a way of survival. Others turned to artisanal trades in Burma, Kariokor market and in the Nairobi African locations such as Kibera, Pumwani and Mathare. They engaged in carpentry, metal work, woodwork, bicycle and motor vehicle repair, as well as shoe repair. Evidently, these *jua*

kali trades, were a direct consequence of the inadequate job opportunities in the waged sector of the economy.

Unhappy with the illegal activities of the African entrepreneurs, the colonial authorities in Nairobi resorted to constant harassment and arrests of the African street traders and artisans. This contrasted sharply with the granting of business premises and licenses to the African elite, viewed as loyalists by the rest in Nairobi. It is argued here that the harassment subjected to the unemployed Africans and *jua kali* artisans resulted in the emergence of the Mau Mau guerrilla movement in Nairobi. This could explain why the Mau Mau activity in Nairobi involved frequent murders and other forms of violence against the Europeans, Asians and the African loyalists who enjoyed colonial patronage.

At independence in 1963, the influx control measures against African movement into Nairobi were lifted. This in turn accelerated the influx of thousands of the ex-detainees and other Africans who had been repatriated from Nairobi during the Emergency. These were soon followed by thousands of school leavers who sought better employment opportunities and higher wages available in Nairobi. Evidently, the capitalist-oriented policies of the Kenyatta government privileged the small group of Western investors and African elite. Educated individuals in official positions acquired patronage resources, including the best arable land. Consequently, the landless resorted to the *jua kali* sector for a means of livelihood.

The Moi government inherited its predecessor's economic policies, at a time when the oil prices were high and the cash crops from Kenya were performing dismally at the international market. In the meantime, the international political environment also took a new dimension especially after the collapse of the former Soviet Union in 1989. Multilateral and the bilateral donors began to enforce strict lending terms, including the Structural Adjustment Programmes, on the country. It is against this background that many Kenyans were pushed into the *jua kali* sector in the 1980s and 1990s. Although the Moi regime recognised the important role played by the sector in the face of the economic crisis facing the formal sector of the economy, economic mismanagement due to political patronage worsened the economic situation of the *jua kali* operators. This was evident in the grabbing of *jua kali* plots and the subsequent demolition of their sheds by politicians and government officials. Conclusively, the *jua kali* sector produced several innovators and entrepreneurs but these could not succeed fully without the strategic and active support of the state.