

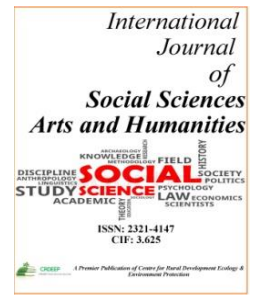
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**Full Length Research Paper**

# The Contribution of the Colonialism on Cottage Industry in Tharaka South Sub-County, Tharaka-Nithi County, Kenya from 1907 to 1963

David Kiania Mugao<sup>1</sup> and Dr. Caroline M. Kithinji<sup>2\*</sup><sup>1</sup>Masters Student, Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, Chuka University, Kenya.<sup>2\*</sup>Senior Lecturer, Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, Chuka University, Chuka, Kenya.

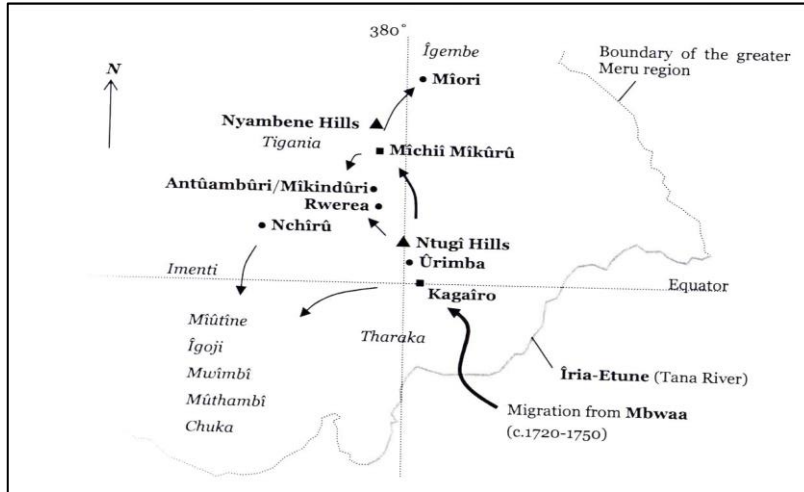
ARTICLE INFORMATION	ABSTRACT
<p><b>Corresponding Author:</b> Caroline M. Kithinji</p> <p><b>Article history:</b> Received: 06-11-2021 Revised: 15-11-2021 Accepted: 24-11-2021 Published: 26-11-2021</p> <p><b>Key words:</b> Cottage industry, colonialism, indigenous products, traditional crafts and Tharaka</p>	<p><i>The Tharaka people had various forms of cottage industries which they used to produce myriad traditional items and weapons to sustain their livelihood during the pre-European period. Such articles and weapons are boats, pots, baskets, mats, bee hives, swords, spears and hoes. These cottage industries were negatively impacted by the arrival of the European colonialists, consequently affecting the socio-cultural and economic life of the Tharaka people. However, the aspect of contribution of colonial rule on the Tharaka cottage industry has not been adequately researched by the economic historians. This gave the impetus to this study that sought to investigate the contribution of the colonialism on the traditional cottage industries in Tharaka South Sub-County. The colonial rule was extended to Tharaka in 1907 when the British colonialists arrived in the area. The study was carried out in Tharaka South Sub-County in Tharaka-Nithi County. The study was anchored on the articulation of modes of production theory. The data was collected from oral, archival and secondary sources. Fifty respondents for oral interview were sampled through purposive and snowballing techniques. Research instruments employed comprised the interview schedules and focus group discussions. The study found that colonialism had far-reaching negative consequences on the Tharaka traditional cottage industries. It was noted that there was decline in production in cottage industries, abject poverty among the traditional crafts, majority of the artisans lost their employment, change in social roles and mass emigrations of the traditional technologists in search for alternative source of livelihood. This research contributes to the wider comprehension of the cottage industry in the pre-colonial Kenya and Africa in general. The study contributes to Tharaka historiography.</i></p>

**Introduction**

The Tharaka are a group of people residing in the lower part of Meru South and Meru County. Historically, Tharaka is one the nine Meru sub-ethnic groups. Other Meru Sub-ethnic tribes are the Igembe, Tigania, Imenti, Chuka, Mwimbi, Igoji, Muthambi and Miutini. Although Lambert (1959), claims that the Tharaka people are the aggregate offshoots of Chuka, Mbeere and Kamba sub-tribes, an oral source refutes such claims by pointing out that Tharaka people are a Meru sub-ethnic group who speaks Kitharaka language. According to Icheria (2015), all the Meru sub-tribes originated from Mbwa; a place at the coast and settled in Tharaka at a place known as Igaironi. Owing to population pressure in the area, there was scarcity of natural resources the situation that led to the migration of all other Meru sub-tribes with the exception of Tharaka.

The same sentiments are expressed by Gichere and Ishida (2007), who state that Tharaka and other Meru sub-groups migrated from Mbwa where they were under the slavery of Nguu Ntune for many years. The above data is corroborated by KNA/MSS/7/1/1937 which indicates that the Meru originally lived on the other side of the Tana river, somewhere towards the East. The reason for the movement from this region was that they were forced to work for brown-skinned overlords who ill-treated them. Majority of Tharaka people resides in Tharaka South and Tharaka North Sub-Counties. Kabete (O.I, 2020) points out that a handful of Tharaka people live in Meru South Sub-County and Kitui County; the Thagichu. All the Tharaka people irrespective of their location share common socio-cultural and economic practices such as exogamous marriage, initiation ceremonies, clan system, age units, patriarchal inheritance, peasantry and marriage ceremonies. According to Mbiti (O.I, 2020), a former colonial counsellor notes that Tharaka came under colonial rule in 1907 after the arrival of the first European colonialist, Horne Butler who came to be nicknamed Kiuno because of his

preemie appearance. Butler first reached at a place known as Chiakariga riding on a horse. The area was so interior such that there was no any means of transport and communication. Horne entrenched colonial rule by appointing various African colonial agents such as the chiefs and police. Among the functions performed by the African chiefs are: recruiting labor for European farms and camps, collection of taxes from the subjects, maintaining law and order and linking the colonialists with the indigenous people. Traditional cottage industry was widely practiced by majority of the Tharaka people during the pre-colonial period. However, colonialism furthered destructive policies that saw majority of the indigenous sectors collapse to a level that up to date they have not yet recovered. It is against this background the study sought to investigate the contribution of colonialism on cottage industry in Tharaka South Sub-County in Tharaka-Nithi County from 1907 to 1963.



**Fig. 1** The Migration and Settlement of the Tharaka people. *Source: Gichere and Ishida (2007).*

The study aims to identify the contribution of colonialism on cottage industry in Tharaka South Sub-County, Tharaka-Nithi County in Kenya from 1907 to 1963. The research also investigated the impacts of colonialism on cottage industry in Tharaka South Sub-County; Tharaka-Nithi County from 1907 to 1963. The research contributes immensely to historiography of the Tharaka people as well as preserving their cultural heritage. Further, the study is of great use to researchers and scholars of economic history globally.

## Materials and methods

### Study area

The study was carried out in Tharaka South Sub-County, Tharaka-Nithi County specifically in Marimanti, Karocho, Gituma and Chiakariga locations. The area experienced a lot of local manufacturing during the pre-colonial period leading to mass production of tools and weapons for domestic use and sale. This state of affairs was quickly disrupted by the arrival of the colonialist in Tharaka in 1907. However, the area has not attracted any scholarly attention in regard to local production making it a suitable location for study.

### Sampling method and size determination

The study used purposive and snowballing techniques to sample fifty respondents. According to Kathuri and Pals (1993), the sample size is determined by the size of the group under the study. In case of a major sub-group the minimum sample size should be 100 cases and 50 for a minor sub-group. Tharaka South Sub-County is a minor sub-group hence the choice of 50 informants. The time period of the study is between 1907 and 1963.

### Research Methodology

This research employed the descriptive research design which enabled the researcher to collect data from various sources as well as analyzing it thematically. The main purpose of this research design is description of the state of the affairs as it exists (Kombo and Tromp, 2006). The data was collected from oral, archival and secondary sources. The research instruments used were the focus group discussions and interview schedules.

### Theoretical Framework

In analyzing data, the study employed the modernization theory from the ideas of German sociologist Max Weber (1864-1920). It incorporates the full spectrum of transition and drastic transformation that a traditional society has to undergo in order to become modern.

The theory looks at the internal factors of a country while assuming that with assistance, the developing countries can be brought to development in the same manner more developed countries have been. It demanded that Africa's development was to follow the developmental footsteps of Europe. The proponents of modernization claim that traditional societies will develop as they adopt more modern practices. The theory demands the traditional societies to adopt the new developments such as new data technology and the need to update traditional methods in transport, communication and production as road to greatness.

## **Results**

Much of the data was collected from oral and secondary sources. For example, oral data from Kauma (O.I, 2020) noted that before the arrival of colonial capitalism in Tharaka, the Tharaka people were famous technologists who made a number of traditional tools and weapons. However, activities of colonial rulers and Christian missionaries played a great role in the decline of the traditional cottage industry, for instance, European missionaries directed Christian converts to put on western manufactured clothes at the expense of the locally produced clothes. Furthermore, the colonial capitalists furthered oppressive policies geared towards the collapse of the indigenous industry in Tharaka South Sub-County. The colonial socio-economic policies such as transformation of the natives into primary product producers and high taxation largely contributed to the underperformance of the cottage industry among the Tharaka people. Consequently, several traditional professions like pottery and blacksmithing were negatively impacted as evidenced by reduced production.

The decline in the production of the traditional goods and weapons in Tharaka cottage industries paved the way for mass importation of the manufactured items from Europe. In addition, traditional African goods could not match with the western made goods since imported ones were sold at a relatively low price. As result, the local markets were flooded with European goods hence obliterating the traditional items from the local markets. Moreover, there was high demand for western goods among the Tharaka residents who felt that the imported goods were of high quality compared to the locally produced goods. This in turn contributed to an acute unemployment among the traditional crafts. In spite the fact that the European capitalists succeeded in slowing down the production in the cottage industries in Tharaka South Sub-County, they were not able to completely ruin it (Nyaga, O.I, 2020).

According to Mugiira (O.I, 2020), the traditional cottage industry in Tharaka flourished exceedingly during the pre-colonial period. It is during the colonial period when the industry experienced a lot of destruction due to unfavorable economic policies such as high taxation. African made products were subjected to unreasonable taxes that made them too expensive such that they were hardly sold. This is because European imported goods were exempted from import duty and therefore were sold at a low price. In consequence the locally made goods were highly disregarded by the consumers who preferred western goods. This further motivated the decline of the indigenous industry. As a result, many traditional artisans suffered a major blow because majority of them were transformed into paupers. In fact, the situation worsened to an extent that even the basic needs were almost impossible to satisfy. This called for an alternative source of livelihood; most of the technologists pursued other economic activities.

Before the arrival of the British colonialists, the Tharaka had a well-coordinated and organized economic structure that sustained their life. They had diverse economic pursuits like peasantry, pastoralism and local manufacturing (Kabete, O.I, 2020). These economic activities complimented each other since time immemorial. Local industries supplied the community members with vital products necessary for carrying out day to day operations. The colonial rule caused a lot of havoc that interfered greatly with the operations of the industry. Writing on the pottery production among the Ameru, Langankamp (1999) noted that the decline in the production of the pots in the region led to over importation of pottery-related items such as pots not only from the neighboring communities but also other regions. Modern cooking pots, machetes and plates were imported from Europe. This in turn negatively affected the living standard of the Tharaka people. In fact, majority of the cottage industries completely came to an end.

The establishment of colonialism in Tharaka South Sub-County promoted the creation of wage labor among the Tharaka traditional crafts (Kiraithe and Mugure, O.I, 2020). Land alienation and forced labor adopted by the colonial capitalists created untold suffering to traditional technologists. Basically, land alienation led to a state of landlessness among the natives, peasantry and pastoralism were highly disrupted after a large number of residents lost their ancestral land to the European colonizers. Owing to the fact that cottage industry was mainly anchored on these two economic sectors, there was a great shortage of raw materials for the industry. This forced majority of the traditional crafts to move from the rural areas to urban centers to look for new jobs for the sustainability of their livelihood. Forced labor on the other hand, denied the traditional cottage industry the very vital labor required for its prosperity.

Both men and women were active participants in different practices of production in Tharaka South Sub-County. However, males dominated the pre-colonial Tharaka economy. Some aspects of local manufacturing such as iron working and woodwork, men suited most because of their strenuous nature. Traditionally, especially in a patriarchal society like Tharaka, women were deemed to be naturally weak and therefore lack the strength and endurance needed in the production in the cottage industry. In contrary, women produced various items in iron working and woodwork during the colonial period. Although colonialism is blamed for the decline of the traditional cottage industry, it worthwhile to note that it helped women realize their potential and exploited it to maximum. The European agents in most cases arrested men and forced them to provide free labor to European farms and camps while women were left behind to take over the positions previously held by their husbands. Some women rose to be the heads of their families, prominent carvers and blacksmiths. This helped to water down all sort of prejudices associated with women in Tharaka South Sub-County (Mbiti, O.I, 2020).

## **Conclusion**

From the above discussion, it is no doubt that the pre-colonial Tharaka was characterized by heterogeneous economy ranging from local manufacturing, peasantry and pastoralism. The study noted that these economic practices complimented each other for their sustainability. It is the colonial capitalists who disrupted this orderly traditional economic structure among the Tharaka people. With principal aim of securing reliable source of raw materials for their modern industries and to secure readily markets for their surplus

goods, the English colonialists imposed ruinous measures that negatively affected the traditional cottage industry greatly. The study established that the colonial destruction on the cottage industry was unexplainable because its impacts were felt in other sectors of economy and all aspects of life at large. It is reported that the major contribution of the colonial rule on the cottage industry was the decline in its performance. This is because the demand of the locally made products dropped drastically simply because they could not compete favorably with the European manufactured goods. It was also noted that the Tharaka local manufacturers experienced serious unemployment due to the decline in production in the field of traditional manufacturing. Other contributions found by this study are widespread poverty among the traditional crafts owing to the fact that majority of them had no any other economic activity that could cater for their needs. This period also witnessed mass exodus of local artisans to urban centers in search for alternative economic pursuits that could give them earning to satisfy their basic needs. The paper reports that there was change in social roles among the Tharaka people during the entire period of colonialism. A sizeable number of women became famous crafts taking up duties formerly performed by men. It is also believed that the period following the decline of cottage industry experienced influx of western manufactured goods, a clear indication that the colonialists accomplished their mission.

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