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WOMEN AND THE LABOR FORCE IN KENYA, 1895-1964

by

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ABSTRACT

In this paper the author examines the economic role of women in the labour system in Kenya from 1895 to 1964, showing how this role changed as the economy moved into a new phase after 1945, and how it was affected by the Mau Mau Emergency and the transition to independence.

During the precolonial period, women's contribution to subsistence farming and herding was substantial, and there is considerable evidence that this contribution increased during the period of British colonial rule as the number of men leaving subsistence farming steadily increased. Prior to World War II, the few women engaged in formal wage employment worked largely in agriculture, and also as children's nurses and in the towns as prostitutes and beer brewers.

The move away from the use of migrant labour, which began after World War II, was accompanied by a steady rise in the number of women in formal employment, though most of these were still in the agricultural sector. The employment of women outside of agriculture increased after the war and particularly during the Emergency, but by 1956 this trend has slackened off.

Up until independence in 1963, there was no great advance in the female rate of participation in formal employment. The bulk of female labour remained self-employed in small-scale agriculture, and in all branches of the economy women's earnings were uniformly less than men's. It remains to be seen whether independent Kenya will continue to follow this pattern, or whether its commitment to African socialism will really afford women an equal role in development.

The productive role of women in the colonial economy of Kenya can be understood in terms of the various kinds of productive systems which were present in the colonial social formation, and the position of women within each of these systems. The colonial period in Africa was one in which the expanding capitalist system of world-wide market exchange, entailing in the core industrial economies a form of production based mainly on wage-labour, established its dominance over the precapitalist African economies. This process led to the evolution of a variety of peripheral systems of production which were oriented toward the export of commodities to larger world markets.[1] In Kenya three major systems of using African and immigrant Indian labour grew up: semi-proletarianised migrant labour on European agricultural, commercial and industrial undertakings; 'squatter' or resident labour on European estates; and independent peasant cash-crop production. These systems were within the new capitalist order, yet they incorporated and depended upon the subsistence labour still performed in many African reserves. Over time there also emerged from the migrant labour system a stratum of full-time wage labourers deriving nearly the whole of their livelihood from wage employment.[2]

Within each of these colonial labour systems, African women performed integral functions. Much of their work was the same as that which they had performed in the traditional subsistence economy, but it had now become part of the new colonial systems of production, and was critical in enabling European and Asian entrepreneurs in Kenya to derive a profit. In the migrant and non-migrant wage-earning systems, woman's role was both direct and indirect, the indirect role arising from the relationship between male wage-earning and the family. As a number of writers have pointed out,[3] the labour migration system in Africa was one in which the wage paid to the (usually male) worker was barely sufficient to cover the cost of maintaining the worker from day to day during the period of his employment, with perhaps a small surplus to purchase additional commodities for himself or his family at the end of a six-month to two-year working period. The long-term

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1. Recent works from which this analysis derives include Frank (1967), Wallerstein (1975), Amin (1973) and Rey (1972).

2. On the rise of the migrant labour system and its transformation, see Stichter (1972) and (1976).

3. Among others, Meillassoux (1972) and Wolpe (1973).

cost of maintaining the worker in childhood and old age, and the cost of reproducing the next generation of labourers, was borne by the still existent tribal system of production (the 'traditional' economy, albeit in a changed form), and more specifically by the worker's wife.[4] Both traditional and modern forms of the sexual division of labour combined to determine that the African woman would usually be the one who remained at home, subsidising her husband's wage through traditional or expanded agricultural and trading activities. In addition to agricultural production, women also continued to perform the arduous tasks of food preparation, child bearing and child rearing. Boserup (1970, pp. 160-167) has commented on how time-consuming and burdensome these tasks were for African women.

Even under a non-migrant system of wage earning, such as that which gradually developed in Kenya especially after 1955 and which prevails in advanced capitalist nations today, there is still a portion of total social production performed by women in the domestic or household unit, and though they are not directly paid for their labour, their portion is essential in the total costs of reproduction of labour. It has been recently argued that if housewives were paid for these domestic services at their prevailing market rates, the total cost given the present organisation of domestic labour would greatly increase.[5] Under the migrant labour system it is only that an even greater share of production costs is transferred to the household unit,making migrant labour even cheaper by comparison to fully stablised labour.

Large-scale entry of women into the paid labour force was thus precluded under the migrant and resident labour systems because the low wages depended on the continuance of women's subsistence production. The small amount of female labour prior to 1945 was concentrated in European agriculture and in legalised compulsory labour on public works in the tribal reserves. It was only when the peripheral economy began to move toward a more fully proletarianised[6] labour force after World II

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4. In core capitalist societies these costs would be partly met out of profits — through higher wages, social security payments, unemployment compensation, subsidised health and educational services and the like.

5. By Gardiner (1975), among others.

6. As used here, proletarianisation refers to the degree to which the worker derives his livelihood from wage labour as opposed to peasant farming. This criterion is somewhat different from the question of whether or not the worker owns some land, or whether or not he is employed full time.

that women could join in wage labour to any great extent. But as in many societies, they remained concentrated in the lower paid and less skilled occupations, and the occupational distribution of women in the colonial period showed striking differences from that in the core industrial societies. By the end of the colonial period, such differences had narrowed to some extent.

The sections which follow will examine in more detail the economic role of women in the migrant labour, resident labour and stabilised labour systems in Kenya from 1895 to 1964, showing how this role changed as the economy moved into a new phase after 1945, and how it was affected by the Mau Mau Emergency and the transition to independence.

THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN THE LABOUR MIGRATION SYSTEM

Studies of the traditional division of labour between sexes in Kenyan tribes have demonstrated that women's actual contribution to subsistence before the colonial period was great, immeasurably larger than her inferior social status might indicate.[7] Though the common white settler's opinion that the native 'lolled about watching his women slaving for his'[8] was far from the truth, and though contributions to subsistence in terms of labour-time units have yet to be quantified, still, a heavy share of the work of subsistence fell to women. Among the Luhia, women did 'the greater and more strenuous part of the garden labour', since hoeing was almost entirely women's work;

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7. For a discussion of women's traditionally inferior status in Kenyan tribes, and of contemporary movements to change it, see the important work of Audrey Wipper (1971, pp. 429-442). Additional evidence on traditional status comes from Wagner (1939, pp. 11-14) and Cagnolo (1933, pp. 285-290). Cagnolo, a missionary, relates that Kikuyu elders opposed schooling for women because, as one member of the Local Native Council stated: 'The women are Ngombo - slaves - there is no need to send them to school, because their duty is to work in the fields.' Cagnolo also records a Kikuyu proverb which says: Mondo moka ndare igweta (No one bothers about a woman). This implies, he says, that a woman must not reason but only obey like a docile beast of burden. Not infrequently, he reports, two Kikuyu men meeting in the road would exchange the following bit of witty conversation: 'Why, Njoroge, have you finished all your work in the fields, that I see you idling?' 'No, no! Do you not know that I am married? Do you imagine that an European signs on a black to do his work, and then works himself?

8. Evidence presented by A.R. Barlow to the East Africa Protectorate, Native Labour Commission (1913?, p. 207). I am grateful to Barbara Ayres for pointing out that an index of the relative contribution of women to subsistence in Kenyan tribes could be prepared using the data provided in Murdock (1967).

in addition, the household tasks of daily grinding of grain, cooking, building the fire, carrying water, gathering firewood and edible wild plants, procuring salt and cooking pots, cleaning, sweeping the hut and cleaning out the cattle partition fell to women. Men looked after the cattle, sheep and goats, laid out the wives' gardens, cut grass, aided the hut thatchers, built the rest of the hut, carried on all cattle transactions, and helped with the planting and harvesting. (Wagner, 1939, pp. 8-14). Among the Kikuyu the arrangements were rather similar: The man's role in agricultural work was to clear the fields and begin to break up the surface of the ground, to cut drains and water furrows, to plant certain special crops such as bananas, yams, sweet potatoes, sugar-cane and tobacco, to scare birds, prune bananas and harvest sugar cane. To the woman was left the preparation of the soil, the sowing of staple crops such as maize, beans and millet, hoeing, weeding and the main part of harvesting, storing and preparing the food, cooking, fetching water and firewood, grinding grain, pounding sugar cane for beer, carrying all heavy loads, and numerous other household tasks. Men tended cattle and livestock and traded them, while women carried and sold the grains.[9] A similar division prevailed among the Luo (Hay, 1975 and Fearn, 1961, p. 84) and other predominantly agricultural tribes; among pastoral tribes, while women's agricultural role was reduced, they assumed other tasks in relation to caring for cattle.[10]

Even where the advent of migrant labour at the beginning of colonial rule represented only a new and intermittent burden on the men, perhaps substituting for traditional warfare or raiding, and did not greatly affect the sexual division of work, women's contribution would still have been great. This was most probably the case in at least the first decade of colonial rule in Kenya. But the number of males leaving subsistence farming steadily increased through the years, as did the average time spent in wage employment. The primary tribes supplying labour from the beginning were the Kikuyu, the Luhya, the Luo of North and Central Kavirondo and the small Teita tribe; later these were joined by increasing numbers of Nandi and Kipsigis (as resident labourers on European farms), Luo of South Kavirondo, Meru, Embu, coastal

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9. Middleton and Kershaw (1965) and further references cited there; also Kenyatta (1938, pp. 52-54).

10. Huntingford (1953 a), drawing on field material from the 1920s and 1930s, says that Kipsigi. women milked and did a larger share of the cultivation than men (p. 42). Describing what is probably the Masai traditional system, he says that 'the greater part of the work thus falls on the older women' (p. 109). For the Kamba, see Middleton and Kershaw (1965, p. 71).

tribes, Kamba and Gusii. Pastoral tribes such as the Masai, Turkana and Somali entered the labour market hardly at all. By the end of the 1920s, the Native Affairs Department estimated that some 69 to 77 per cent of the able-bodied Kikuyu males of Kiambu, 35 to 45 per cent of the Kikuyu of Fort Hall and Nyeri, 60 to 75 per cent of the Nandi, 44 to 54 per cent of the Kipsigis, 35 to 45 per cent of the Luhya, about 36 per cent of the Luo in Central Kavirondo, and 26 to 36 per cent of the Taita were employed in any given month.[11] The total numbers of African males in employment climbed from about 119,000 in 1922 to about 162,000 in 1936 and 265,514 in 1947.[12] Periods in employment varied in the 1920s from one month to two years at a time, but by 1945 there was a substantial number of Africans in towns who spent nearly all of their working lives in employment. (Kenya, Phillips Report, 1945, pp. 37, 53) Wages earned in the 1920s started from Shs. 12 a month (one shilling presently equals about 14 U.S. cents) for unskilled labour plus poor rations and sometimes housing. Since this was the rate most Africans received, it took a month's work just to pay the hut tax. As late as 1954, the Carpenter Committee reported that approximately one-half of all urban workers in private industry and one-fourth of those in public services were not receiving wages sufficient to provide for their basic needs, and that it was virtually impossible for a married man to support a family on such a wage. And rural wages were lower still. (Kenya, Report of the Committee on African Wages, 1954, p. 32).

Moreover, at the same time that this massive amount of labour was being withdrawn from the tribal economies, an impressive increase was taking place in African agricultural production for domestic and foreign markets. Since Africans were not completely deprived of their land, cash crop production remained a viable option, even though it could never fully compete with settler agriculture.[13] In the first decade of colonial rule the total

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11. Native Affairs Department, Reports (hereafter NADARs), 1928-1931. These figures are based on rough population estimates, which were probably too low, and a yearly average from employers' monthly labour returns, which may also be too low since coverage was poor. They should therefore be interpreted with caution but can be used for rough tribal comparisons.

12. Monthly Labour Returns, 1922, found in NADAR, 1925; Special Labour Census, 1936; Report on African Labour Census, 1947.

13. E.A. Brett (1973) has recently argued that the reason African agriculture could not provide a livelihood for all the population was not the shortage of fertile land in the early years, but the effect of the heavy bias in government support services in favour of the Europeans.

African-growth produce exported from Nyanza Province rose from 3,080 tons in 1909 to 16,949 tons in 1914, dropping somewhat during the dislocations of World War I, but reaching 21,067 tons in 1917.[14] During the 1920s the estimated value of all native exports rose from £176,000 in 1922 to a peak of £564,665 in 1925, dropping back to £470,750 in 1926 but again reaching £500,740 in 1929.[15] During the Depression prices fell, although production did not fall as much; thereafter the value of African grown exports rose from a low of £222,220 in 1931 to £488,309 in 1938.[16] African production for the domestic market was also substantial, and although we do not have precise figures, in general the greatest increases per head in agricultural production came from precisely the same tribes that supplied the largest amounts of labour.

In sum, the first three decades of colonial rule brought a great increase in the total productive effort expended by Africans. The absence of any substantial change in African agricultural technology or organisation in this period, coupled with the high level of male absenteeism, points to the conclusion that the bulk of the increased agricultural labour fell to the women.

There is in fact a good deal of more direct evidence that this was the case. For the main tribes supplying labour and crops, the division of labour in the rural economy had by the end of the colonial period shifted in the direction of women doing more 'men's work'. Wagner reports for the Luhya in the 1930s that 'in families where the increasing demand for a cash income is met by a more intense cultivation of the soil for the production of commercial crops, the female members of the household often have to bear the brunt of the extra work while the men go comparatively idle.' (1939, pp. 33-34) Humphrey, who studied Maragoli and Marama locations in North Nyanza in the mid-1940s, came to the same conclusion: '... there is

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14. Totals from data compiled in Fearn (1961), Table 7, p. 79).

15. Agriculture Department, Annual Reports (hereafter ADARs), 1922-29. Actual tonnages of maize railed from Kisumu rose from 11,617 in 1925 (a peak year for the 1920s) to 17,534 in 1933, according to Nyanza Province, Annual Reports, 1925-33.

16. ADARs, 1930-1939; see also figures in NADAR 1936, 1937 and 1938 for maize, cotton, potatoes, wattle bark and extract, and hides and skins, the total of which rose from 193,525 in 1931 to 606,963 in 1937.

a tendency for the men of today to take the easy way and let the women shoulder the burden to an increasing extent'. He compiled a typical daily timetable of male and female work, which showed that the man's main work, when he was at home, was over by mid-day, while his wife worked for the full day. (1947, p. 39) Fisher (1954), whose research was done at Fort Hall and Kiambu between 1950 and 1952, noted that more women could be seen doing 'men's work' because of the absence of men in employment, the negative effects of European education on men's attitudes to agriculture, and the arrest of men during Mau Mau. Wills (1967) has noted a similar disruption of the pre-colonial division of labour in Embu where women were making more decisions in agricultural production and marketing, but also doing more physical work. For the Luo, Hay (1975) has demonstrated the increasing burden borne by the women of the Seme location during the 1930s, and suggests that before that time the absence of males was only seasonal so that their precolonial agricultural role could be maintained. During the 1930s and 1940s, agricultural production was kept up largely by the women through the adoption of new techniques and new markets. The LeVines report for the Gusii in 1955-57 that though in the past women and middle-aged men had worked in the fields and young men had herded cattle, the movement of men into wage labour meant that 'children now herd cattle as well as sheep and goats, and women are burdened more than ever with agricultural activities in addition to their domestic chores'. The LeVines report that women now do all the milking, although traditionally they were not even permitted to enter the cattle villages. Men, when they are home, do the non-routine tasks of agriculture such as clearing bush, ploughing and building fences, houses and granaries, but women do all the hoeing, sowing, weeding and harvesting. Weeding elusine, a difficult and time-consuming task, is now done exclusively by women. (LeVine and LeVine, 1966 and LeVine, 1966)

There are two kinds of situations in which men increased their role in agriculture during the colonial period, though it is unlikely that this led to any diminution in the quantity of female labour. One is where new methods of farming such as the European plough,[17] or a particularly lucrative cash crop such as cotton, were introduced by the administration. Where men took up such opportunities they were sometimes enabled to avoid the labour

17. Baumann (1937) has called attention to the correlation in Africa of hoe culture and female predominance in agricultural work, and plough agriculture and male predominance.

market; there were some of these 'better farmers' in each of the main agricultural tribes, and they were almost always men. The Kipsigis, for example, under administrative encouragement, changed from depending primarily on cattle-keeping to depending primarily on the sale of maize. The plough began to replace the hoe in the 1920s, and all Kipsigi 'better farmers' by 1958 were men. Trade and marketing were dominated by men, while women were minor hawkers.[18] Official reports of the mid-1930s complained that the Kipsigis were not taking full advantage of the employment opportunities on nearby tea estates (NADAR, 1933, p. 127; 1934, p. 172; 1935; p. 182), although large numbers of them did move onto European farms as resident labourers where they could continue keeping large herds of cattle. Other tribes also took up the plough in the interwar years, but its use represented little labour saving for the women. Its main advantage over the hoe was that more land could be put under crops, but once the field was ploughed the subsequent work was left largely to the women.

In many tribes, maize was the staple cash crops which women grew and sold. But besides maize, other cash crops were cotton and, for one tribe, coffee. As an experiment, coffee-growing was introduced to the Gusii in the 1930s, and the LeVines (1966, p. 14) report that it was the men who took charge of the coffee plots. In Nyanza, where cotton cultivation became an important source of income in the 1930s, its cultivation was carried out entirely by males. (Fearn, 1961, p. 210)

The other situation is typified by the Nandi, a pastoral tribe which suffered an economic reversal at the beginning of the colonial period, and, like the Kipsigis, turned to agriculture more than to wage-earning. The tribe was subdued and confined to a reserve by 1906. The prohibition on cattle-raiding deprived them of a source of income as well as curtailing a male economic role, and rinderpest further decimated their herds. By the 1920s the herds had increased, but quarantine regulations and competition from European grade cattle prohibited the tribe from realising the full economic value of their animals. The land began to deteriorate through overstocking even though a safety valve of migration onto European farms had opened up. (Huntingford, 1932, pp. 2045 - 2060; and 1950, p. 30) The growing of grain became increasingly important for subsistence purposes alone, and Huntingford reported in 1948 that

18. Manners, (1965, pp. 214 - 249). Peristany noted in 1938, however, that the economic value of women was still greater than their social status. (1964, p. 95)

though 'twenty-five years ago Nandi men very seldom used a hoe', men 'do a good deal of agricultural work nowadays'. (1950, p. 61). They cleared bushes, ploughed, tilled and participated in seeding and harvesting even though agriculture was still considered 'women's work'. In earlier days, however, Nandi men had refused to cut roads for the administration, since this mainly involved removing topsoil and was similar to agricultural work. Hence Nandi women had to be hired. Neither would the Nandi carry loads for the government - - for this too was women's work. (p. 35) The change in men's work did not necessarily mean less work for women however, for Huntingford suggested that by the mid-1920s grain shortages were one reason why Nandi women turned to prostitution and other forms of wage-earning. (p.65; see also Gold, 1974).

Thus, except for important cash crops which made full-time agricultural work a possibility for the fortunate few with enough land, and except for the case of pastoral tribes forced to take up agriculture, women's contribution to peasant and subsistence agriculture increased in the colonial period, though they were seldom accorded a corresponding increase in status and authority. Most families could neither leave the rural area entirely because wages were not high enough, nor derive a living solely from the land because of population pressure and competition from European agriculture. A new sexual division of labour grew up embodied in the system of male labour migration.

FEMALE PARTICIPATION IN WAGE-EARNING

The earliest female participation in wage-earning was through prostitution in which women sold sexual rights to a ready market among European, Asian and a growing number of African townsmen. Predominant among early prostitutes were Nandi and Masai, both pastoral tribes in which women had traditionally experienced a great deal of sexual freedom.[19] The number of Masai prostitutes declined after a while, but the Somali, Baganda and Coastal tribes also participated, and later the Kikuyu and Luhya. Prostitution flourished in Mombasa from the time of the early explorers and among the railway camps in the 1890s. Every railway official in Nairobi in 1902, according to Meinertzhagen, 'keeps a native girl, usually a Masai, and there is a regular trade in these

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19. Huntingford (1953b, pp. 70-71, 74-75 and 106-7) and Fosbrooke (1948). Several other tribes such as the Kipsigis had similar traditional customs but did not experience the same economic pressures as did the Nandi and Masai at the turn of the century, and did not participate in prostitution. Thus participation in prostitution cannot be ascribed simply to traditional patterns of male-female relationships. The Masai also had a tenuous political alliance with the British at this time, of which the 'trade' reported by Meinertzhagen may have been an outgrowth.

girls with the local Masai villages'.[20] Foran describes an attempt to 'clean up' Nairobi between 1907 and 1909 by arresting and repatriating some 300 Masai and other prosititutes. Nearly all were found to be suffering from venereal disease. This effort met with little success since there were 'thousands of other native women eager to take their place' (Foran, 1936, pp. 315-317), and the 'swamp' area behind Government Road remained occupied largely by prostitutes.(Kenya Colony and Protectorate, 1909 and 1910, p. 20). Kisumu in 1905 had 'large numbers of native prostitutes' whom the administration also tried to move out. (Foran, 1936, p. 218) By 1909 Nandi prostitutes were said to be 'notorious from Mombasa to Kisumu' (Stigand, 1913, p. 277), but a District Officer in 1913 implied a different assessment when he referred to them as 'the most enlightened members of the tribe'. (Nandi District, Annual Report, 1913) On European farms, Nandi women often formed semi-permanent relationships with male settlers acting as domestic servants and sometimes as 'virtual farm managers'.[21]

Throughout the colonial period, prostitution provided an income which enabled African women to live independently in towns - - to buy clothes,[22] lodging, and to support children either in the town or in the reserve. A 1958 survey of Mombasa prostitutes, for example, concluded that ' these women live fairly comfortably and more extravagantly than they would have done had they stayed in the locations or in the type of employment which is available to African women'. (Wilson, 1958, p. 575)[23] And in Nairobi and other towns, prostitutes illegally brewed and sold beer to supplement their incomes.

There were few occupations open to women in towns in the 1920s other than prostitution and beer-brewing. A few positions as ayahs or children's nurses were held mostly by the Ganda, Nandi and Kikuyu. One good source of

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20. Meinertzhagen (1957, p. 12). Strictly speaking such concubinage which is not free paid labour should be distinguished from prostitution. Many government officials also kept African women; for some 1908 references see Clayton and Savage (1974, p. 69, note 22).

21. For examples, see Meinertzhagen (1957, p. 192 and pp. 231-2) and Clayton and Savage (1974, pp. 67-68, note 9).

22. Wagner (1939, pp. 42-43) reports for the Luhya in 1938 that prostitutes were better dressed than the wives of wage earners.

23. Three-quarters of the prostitutes interviewed were African. About one-third of the total were Baganda, 15 per cent Kenya Africans from outside Coast Province, and 16 per cent Arab.

income, however, was the renting of lodging space to men. In 1926 in Nairobi's African section of Pumwani, there were some 250 houses of wattle and daub and half of these were owned by women, many of whom had purchased them with funds gained through prostitution. Of the 316 such houses in the old location of Pangani, some 260 were used as lodging houses, 134 of them owned by women. (NADAR, 1926, p. 55)[24]

The bulk of female wage labour at this time was concentrated in European agriculture where traditional skills could be utilised in a new setting. A few African women, but significantly an even larger number of male children, were hired for light agricultural work — hoeing, weeding and harvesting, but particularly for the harvesting of coffee and maize. The small number involved, compared to the number of adult and juvenile males, and their slow increase can be seen in Table 1. The apparent falling-off in 1926-27 is due only to the introduction of the 'casual' (paid on a daily basis) category, and reveals that some 4,800 women were employed on the more permanent monthly basis. Other fluctuations may be attributed largely to variations in the coffee crop until 1930 - 31 when the effect of the Depression is apparent. Most of the women were either wives or relatives of squatters, or labourers paid daily from the Kikuyu reserves where these adjoined European farms. They all usually returned home at night. A good number of the children, however, were Luo who accompanied their male relatives on one- to two-year contracts to the sisal plantations near the coast.

Skilled work in agriculture - plowing, driving, pruning, dairying, operating coffee pulping or husking machinery - was done by the men, while women did the unskilled work. In addition, women's wages - Shs. 10 to 12 for a 30-day 'ticket' in 1925 - were even lower than those of unskilled male farm hands who were paid Shs. 12 to 14 a month. (NADAR, 1925, Appendix C, p. 71, and 1927, Appendix B). Other unskilled males at the time were earning Shs. 14 to 16 a month on sisal plantations, railway construction or maintenance, or as fuel cutters or non-farm labourers, while semi-skilled workers earned Shs. 16 to 20 per month. (NADAR 1925, Appendix C, p 71 and 1927, Appendix B) At the missions, at the government-sponsored Native Industrial Training Depot opened in 1925, and at the Jeanes School for teacher training, all those receiving technical training were men. Additionally, most government departments had small training programmes for Africans, but they too were only for men.

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24. See also the important work of Bujra (1975, pp. 213 - 234).

Table 1. Average number of Africans employed on a monthly basis in agriculture.

Year	Men	Women	Children	Casual	Total
1919-20	45,005	3,917	4,787		53,709
1920-21	55,939	4,911	6,539		67,388
1921-22	51,753	4,261	5,935		61,649
1922-23	54,406	6,609	9,942		70,957
1923-24	66,993	8,316	11,784		87,093
1924-25	61,735	5,477	11,315		78,527
1925-26	64,875	6,021	13,717		84,611
1926-27[a]	76,838	4,802	15,428	5,006	102,074
1927-28	83,000	4,654	17,295	9,371	114,320
1928-29	85,082	4,249	15,304	6,862	110,697
1929-30	90,633	3,971	18,124	13,157	125,885
1930-31	89,856	3,387	19,393	7,574	120,210
1931-32	76,604	3,260	15,330	5,926	104,120
1932-33	79,749	3,506	14,610	7,160	105,025
1933-34	81,883	3,536	14,771	6,685	106,875

a. Thirteen-month period.

Source: 'Agricultural Census', in Agriculture Department. Annual Reports, 1925-1933.

An exodus of Africans and their families from the Kikuyu, Kamba, Nandi, Kipsigis and Luhya reserves to unused portions of settlers' farms began early in the twentieth century. The farmers at first welcomed them as cheap and ready labour. In many cases they actually worked very little each year or not at all, since Europeans could not afford to develop their holdings. But in the 1920s their labour was increasingly needed, and administrative foresight led in 1918 to the passage of the Resident Natives Ordinance, under which 'squatters' could only reside on farms if they did so on a contract which provided that they work for the farmer not less than 180 days per year. Half a squatter's time was thus to be spent in wage employment, at rates lower than those among regular labour, in return for cultivation and grazing rights. Under these conditions the squatter's stock increased, but he ended up working for the settler for almost as much time as a wage labourer. His wife's workload, therefore, like that of the wife of a migrant labourer, increased since she was left to cultivate the family gardens and help care for the increased stock. The husband was not absent from home at night, however, so family life was preserved to a greater extent than in the Kikuyu reserve.

The resident labour system grew rapidly throughout the 1920s and by the end of the decade some 119,000 squatters were reported, of whom 35,000 were women and 34,000 men. (NADAR, 1930, p. 11)[25] The number of women was larger because male squatters could afford several wives. But the number of squatter women employed for wages was, by contrast, smaller than the number of men. That the number was not negligible, however, is indicated by the statistics for squatters 'at work' in 1943 (Table 2).

With the increase of squatters and their stock, and the settlers' need for land, especially for dairy farming, the system by the 1930s began to prove unprofitable and was slowly curtailed. Large numbers of evicted squatters were sent back to the reserves or were settled in the Masai Reserve, where they suffered a marked decline in their standard of living.

It is significant that in the first two decades of colonial rule, when labour shortage was a prevailing condition which periodically limited the development of settler agriculture, more women were not pressured into wage-earning. A host of government measures were adopted — taxation, forced labour, propaganda, restrictions on African cash crop production, the kipande (the registration of African males over sixteen years of age), and limiting the size of the reserves — to increase the supply of male labour, yet female labour remained largely untapped. Why? Because of the critical importance under the low-wage migrant and resident labour systems of maintaining subsistence agricultural production.

During the period of forced labour the use of women was not at all uncommon, although it is difficult to gauge its full extent. Evidence given to the Native Labour Commission of 1912-13 revealed the widespread use of forced labour, and one witness stated that women and children 'were constantly commandeered'.[26] During World War I, as the male labour supply dwindled, more women were used for compulsory labour.[27] Compulsion continued after the war, but provoked a good deal of public reaction. Chiefs and elders at a government baraza (meeting) in Kiambu in 1921 were quoted in the press to the effect that the practice of forcing women and girls to work on plantations was 'still in vogue'.[28] Harry Thuku's organisation, at a large meeting at Dagoretti in

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25. The actual number of squatters was probably much higher because of the illegal squatting and poor enumeration.

26. Evidence given by Dr. H. R.A. Philp, Native Labour Commission, 1912-13.

27. Compare Clayton and Savage (1974, p. 96 and note 62).

28. The chiefs quoted one instance and intimated that there were others. (East African Standard, 15 July 1921; also cited in Leys, 1924, p. 219) McGregor Ross (1927, pp. 110-111) also related a case of a group of girls compelled to draw water at a government station in 1922.

June 1921, protested low wages, high taxes and the forced labour of women and girls, citing a case in which a large number had been taken to a farm to work and had been raped. These and other cases led in 1923 to the issuance of new rules under the Masters and Servants Ordinance for the proper treatment of female workers: they were not to remain on farms overnight unless accompanied by a relative and proper accomodation was to be provided for single women. By the end of the decade, forced labour had declined, but its use on public works in the tribal areas, particularly the use of women, did not disappear, as the protests of Embu women against compulsory terracing in 1938 (Embu District, Annual Report, 1938), and of Kikuyu and Kamba women against terracing after the war,[29] make clear.

During the 1930s there was little change in the status of women in the labour force. In the Depression years there was a decline in employment of all kinds, including that of women (Table 1). After the Depression there was an expansion of tea and pyrethrum estates. About half of all tea workers were juveniles (NADAR, 1936, p. 117), but in contrast to Asian countries there were hardly any women employed on these estates. (NADAR, 1933, p. 128) Both women and male children were employed on pyrethrum estates, but it was reported in 1937 that male juveniles were preferred to women, since they did not have to bend over so far to pick the low-growing flowers. (NADAR, 1937, p. 201) Yet the great expansion in this crop still allowed some women to be employed. The main sphere of employment for women continued to be coffee, where they did weeding and were thought to make the best pickers. It was estimated in 1934 that at the height of the picking season some 14,000 women and 10,000 children were employed. (NADAR, 1934, p. 174) When coffee estates were not situated next to the Kikuyu reserves, wives of resident labourers were employed. No women were employed on the sugar estates, though they were reported to be coming to live with the men there. (NADAR, 1933, p. 129)

A few experiments with female factory labour took place in the 1930s, perhaps because of the increasing availability of women in the towns. In Mombasa 350 African women were hired on a daily basis at a coffee curing works at Kilindini in 1936 and were found to be adept at hand-sorting coffee. (NADAR, 1936, p. 184) In 1938 in Nyanza a new Asian-owned cigarette factory employed '38 adults, 48 juveniles, and 17 girls', the latter two groups being

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29. Sorrenson (1967, p. 75) and Clayton and Savage (1974, p. 312) both contain brief accounts of the important role of women in the Kenya African Union campaign against compulsory terracing after the war.

engaged in packing and boxing. All were able to return home at night. (NADAR, 1938, p. 108)

The female population continued to grow in the towns, and Nairobi by 1938 was estimated to have some 48,500 Africans, of whom approximately 15,000 were women. (Nairobi District, Annual Report, 1938) In that year another of the periodic campaigns against 'idle and unemployed natives' and 'undesirable females', many of whom were said to be Fort Hall Kikuyu, took place. Women were drawn to the towns for a variety of reasons, but once there were apt to 'quickly exhaust their slender means' and turn to prostitution. (Nairobi District, Annual Report, 1938) The Luo Union began to make strenuous efforts to keep Luo women out of prostitution, and after the war even forcibly sent them home. In the 1950s the Kikuyu General Union made similar efforts but with little success.[30] So numerous were townswomen that the native tribunal dealt with many marriages among town dwellers and African women enrolled in the Church Missionary Society school and in the Pumwani Girls' School in Nairobi.[31]

Since most domestic workers were still male, the only relatively well-paid and legal occupation open to townswomen at that time was still that of a children's nurse. Ayahs earned an average of Shs. 34 a month in 1934. Among domestic workers only motor car drivers earned more (Shs. 50 a month), while cooks and dhobis (laundry men) earned Shs. 28 and Shs. 25 respectively, and shop or office 'boys', kitchen and garden 'boys', and general house servants all earned less. (NADAR, 1934, p. 165) Consequently, ayahs were almost the only women to participate in the African labour organising which began during World War II. In 1947, the African Workers Federation in Mombasa had a women's section which put forward wage demands for many types of labour including that of ayahs. The Domestic and Hotel Workers' Union in Nairobi had ayahs in its membership from at least 1947, and employed women as union dues collectors in the 1950s.[32] In Mombasa in 1953, the Domestic and Hotel Workers' Union had an Ayah's Section chaired by Elizabeth Wambui and Dorah Simeon, though participation by other women appeared to be small.[33]

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30. 'Native Associations', Kenya National Archives, PC/CP 3/54.
31. Nairobi, Municipal Native Affairs Department, Annual Report, 1938.
32. Kenya National Archives, LAB 9/911, March-August, 1947.
33. Kenya National Archives, LAB 9/913/6, 24, 91A.

WOMEN IN THE LABOUR FORCE DURING AND AFTER THE WAR

The striking contrast between the rapid absorption of men and the slow progress of women into wage labour may be explained by the need, under the migrant labour system, for women to continue subsistence agricultural production and to secure each family's access to land. Significantly, the move away from migrant labour which began after World War II was accompanied by a steady rise in the number of women in paid labour (Table 2). The number of employed women, excluding resident labourers, rose markedly at the outset of the war in 1941, declined as the war progressed, but rose quickly after the end of the war in 1946. A steady increase in the number of women in monthly-paid or relatively regular employment is noticeable from 1945. Overall, the proportion of women in the African paid labour force rose from about 8.0 per cent in 1948 to 10.9 per cent in 1953 and 11.6 per cent in 1954.[34]

The majority of employed women were still in large-scale agriculture as casual, and increasingly, monthly-paid labourers. The number of female casual labourers tended to fluctuate according to the size of the coffee crop - 1947, for example, was a bumper crop year. Similarly the noticeable decline in the employment of children as casual labourers in 1948 is due mainly to a decrease in pyrethrum acreage, although the long-term decline in casual and regular child labour reflects administrative controls enacted during the war and the increasing supply of adults.

The postwar advance of women into non-agricultural employment can be seen in Table 3. (No figures are available before 1944.) The trend revealed here, which reflects the growth of secondary industry after the war, was then given a further boost by the special conditions of the Emergency in the following years. (The Emergency refers to the years 1952-56 when Kenya was governed by emergency regulations because of the Mau Mau rebellion.)

The distribution of employed African women by tribe and occupation in 1947 is shown in Table 4. For all tribal groups except those of the Coast Province at least 50 per cent of the employed women were in agriculture. The Kikuyu were employed primarily as coffee pickers and they formed a high proportion of all pyrethrum labourers. The Kamba were mainly in coffee, while the coastal women worked in family groups on sisal estates and mixed farms near the coast. The Kipsigis (Lumbwa) and Nandi were in stock farming while the Luhya (Kavirondo), Luo and Gusii were found in all kinds of farming, forming a high proportion of tea and sisal labourers.

34. Labour Department, *Annual Report*, 1954, Table 1 (f) (hereafter LDAR).

Table 2. African employment in Kenya, 1936-1956, public and private sectors, agriculture and non-agriculture.

	1936	1941	1942	1943	1944	1945	1946	1947
Full-Time								
Adult Males	155,000[a]	208,008	247,401	248,426	250,407	255,543	248,386	260,227
Adult Females					1,645[b]	7,930	11,133	11,355
Juveniles		48,729	45,463	44,077	43,915	40,085	43,568	41,369
Total				292,503	295,967	303,558	303,087	312,941
Casual Labour								
Men	11,178	18,435	8,881	9,918	4,417	6,054	7,862	11,103
Women	10,904	16,429	14,624	11,349	10,150	6,882	9,577	13,417
Children	8,769	11,066	5,571	3,938	3,111	2,694	3,469	4,922
Total	30,851	45,930	29,256	25,205	17,678	15,630	20,908	29,442
Resident Labour								
Men		24,896	25,155	28,449	37,245	34,188	31,137	29,503
Women				16,116	16,392	13,524	14,045	9,087
Children				16,273	15,827	13,152	7,855	7,888
Total				60,838	69,464	60,864	53,037	46,478

	1948	1949	1950	1951	1952	1953	1954	1956
Full-Time								
Adult Males	272,464	283,783	309,925	298,108	319,519	332,414	365,490	404,004
Adult Females	12,859	14,568	24,202	31,491	30,365	40,979	45,980	64,335
Juveniles	35,412	30,143	35,711	36,775	35,727	36,564	36,111	39,375
Total	320,735	328,494	369,838	366,374	385,611	409,957	447,581	508,714
Casual Labour								
Men	9,696	8,694						
Women	8,991	8,703						
Children	2,795	2,073						
Total	21,482	19,470						
Resident Labour								
Men	27,914	31,390	31,138	29,293	31,849	26,951		
Women	8,739	9,470	10,277	9,911	9,989	8,582		
Children	6,697	6,094	10,953	6,838	7,090	7,430		
Total	43,350	46,954	52,368	46,042	48,928	42,963		

Table 2, cont.

Notes: a. Approximate.
b. Excluding those in agriculture.

Figures refer to all those 'at work', excluding those 'sick' or 'on leave'. 'Full-time' includes those on monthly contracts or salaried, while 'casual labour' was paid by the day.

In the early years women and children were often not enumerated. Before 1945 many women actually in monthly employ were shown under the 'casual' heading since there was no other category for women. Figures for juveniles include only males, since the great majority of child labour was male.

No labour enumeration was made in 1955 and no figures are available.

After 1949, totals for regular employees do not distinguish between 'full-time' and 'casual' workers.

Table 3. Women in non-agricultural employment, 1944-1953, private and public sectors, monthly and casual labour.

Year	Total
1944	2,218
1945	2,371
1946	2,424
1947	2,405
1948	2,663
1949	2,390
1950	3,561
1951	3,246
1952	3,453
1953	3,726

Sources: Special Labour Census, 1943-1948, and Labour Department Annual Reports, 1949-53, especially 1951, p. 14 and 1952, p. 24. Figures for 1949-50 and 1953 are derived from Tables 1(e) and 1(f), 1951 and 1952, and Tables 1(g) and 1(h), 1953.

The largest number of women in non-agricultural pursuits were Kikuyu, most of whom were domestic servants. Considering all domestic servants, the Kikuyu, Embu and Meru were by far the most numerous. Coastal women, including the Swahili, although a small segment of the paid labour force, were proportionately more concentrated in non-agricultural occupations.

A comparison of the occupational distribution of African women and men[35] confirms Boserup's observations about the tendency for women in peripheral societies to be concentrated in low-paying jobs. (1970, Chapter 8) While this was also true for African men in racially stratified Kenya, it was even more so for the women. In 1947 there were 21,917 male domestic workers compared to only 976 women. No women were employed as clerks or as shop, office or store assistants as far as we can tell, whereas there were some 7,000 and 11,500 men in these positions respectively. Men had acquired new marketable skills at a faster rate than women, leaving them concentrated in the agricultural and unskilled sectors.

The effect of the Mau Mau Emergency on African female employment provides a classic example of women being drawn into wage earning when an exceptional need occurs, then displaced by returning male workers when the need has passed. The rise in female employment, shown in Table 2, is proportionately greater than the rise which occurred in male employment from 1952

35. The figures for males which follow are found in the 1947 African Labour Census, Table 9.

Table 4. African women in employment: tribal and occupational distribution, 1947.

Occupation	Kavirondo, Luo, Kisii & Maragoli	Lumbwa and Nandi	Kikuyu, Embu, Meru	Mkamba	Coast Province Natives	Other Kenya Natives	Non-Kenya Natives	Total
Non-Agricultural								
Domestic Servants	118	149	373	22	94	32	188	976
Others	303	19	250	11	22	16	8	629
Total	421	168	623	33	116	48	196	1605
Agricultural								
Domestic Servants	33	67	59	2		17	12	190
Labourers								
Sisal	137	4	68	61	76	4	188	538
Sugar	45	-	13	12		7	39	116
Tea	574	70	51	-			177	872
Coffee	455	8	3076	171		45	16	3771
Pyrethrum	201	78	731	14		30	24	1078
Stock & Mixed	746	545	751	28	61	327	170	2628
Total	2191	772	4749	288	137	430	626	9193
Public Services								
Domestics	67	56	198	18	36	30	22	427
Office Boys	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Teachers	1	-	4	4	4	2	-	15
Midwives	6	3	7	1	9	-	2	28
Wardresses	3	4	6	1	1	1	1	17
Brewers	2	15	5	3	-	-	4	29
Labourers	15		14	-	-	-	2	31
Total	94	78	234	27	50	33	31	547
Grand Total	2706	1018	5606	348	303	511	853	11345

Note: Tribal names and classifications have changed somewhat since 1947. The Kavirondo are now known as the Luhya, and the Maragoli as a sub-section of the Luhya. The Lumbwa are now referred to as the Kipsigis, and the Kisii are also known as Gusii.

Source: African Labour Census, 1947, Table 10.

to 1954. By 1954 women formed about 12 per cent of all employed Africans. The Emergency led to the increased employment of women in secondary industry, an expanding sector which had hitherto been a male preserve. The proportion of women in commerce and industry rose from 1.5 per cent in 1953 to 3.7 per cent in 1954. (LDAR, 1954, Table 1(f), p. 42) Employers found that there were many factory operations which 'women performed more adeptly than men' and that in general women showed 'greater diligence' and were 'more amenable to factory discipline' than their male counterparts. (LDAR, 1954, p. 30) The new occupations in which women were employed included automatic wool winding, dressmaking, the manufacture of glass, the packing of tea, the canning of fruit and vegetables and the assembly of wooden crates. They even worked as general labourers in quarrying and building, although employers only took them on reluctantly as a temporary expedient. As the percentage of women in industry increased, the percentage in agriculture decreased, from 89.6 per cent in 1953 to 81.3 per cent in 1956. (LDAR, 1954, Table 1 (g) and LDAR, 1956, Table 1 (g)).

By 1955, though the industrial trend for women continued, there were indications that employers were becoming 'more cautious' as they faced the prospect of having to provide separate sanitary and welfare facilities, separate housing for unmarried women and day care for children. (LDAR, 1955, p. 24) By 1956 with the return of male labour, the trend slackened off. (LDAR, 1956, p. 25) In 1957 the percentage of women employed in non-agricultural occupations had declined because of the 'plentiful supply of male labour', although it did not return to its pre-Emergency level. (LDAR, 1957, p. 23 and Table 1 (g).).

During the Emergency, African women also moved into domestic employment because of the shortage and 'deteriorating quality' of Kikuyu male domestics. The percentage of female domestics rose slowly from 5.7 per cent in 1953 to 6.7 per cent in 1956 (LDAR, 1954, Table 1 (f) and 1956, Table 1 (f)), and continued to increase thereafter. The Labour Department reported an increasing demand for females between 1955 and 1957, and there was no shortage of women willing to take the jobs, but the main difficulty lay in the fact that so few had any experience. (LDAR, 1955, p. 25 and 1957, p. 23) By 1957 various voluntary bodies and one municipal authority provided short training courses for women.

Despite a new administrative concern for the education and training of women in the 1950s, women's earnings were uniformly less than those of men in all branches of industry and in domestic service, while in agriculture they were about half.[36] Though wages for Africans in general rose in the towns during

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36. Kenya Colony and Protectorate, Ministry of Economic Planning and Development (1955, Table 161; 1956/57, Table 177; and 1958, Table 177).

these years, women's wages continued to be lower than men's.[37]

From the Emergency to independence in 1963, female employment remained important, but there was no great advance in their rate of participation. The bulk of female labour remained self-employed in small-scale agriculture or other enterprise largely outside the growing modern or formal sector. In 1964 there were about 67,000 African women employed in the formal sector and 462,100 men, giving a total of 529,100, of which some 12.7 per cent were women. (Ray, 1967, Appendix, Table 1) This was little change from the 11.6 per cent of 1954. Despite the slowing down and sometimes decline in the growth of total formal sector employment between 1956 and 1964, and the similar trends in the number of working women, women made some advances on the occupational ladder. By 1964 a few had moved into the professional and technical spheres, although not to any extent into administrative, executive or managerial positions. One-fifth of the teachers were women, and women had entered into clerical and sales work (Ray, 1967, Appendix, Tables 2-4), a contrast with 1974 when there had been virtually no women in any of these occupations. The expansion of the educational system and its opening to women, as well as the Africanisation of higher level jobs as independence approached, largely accounted for these developments.

CONCLUSION

Kenya's peripheral economy began to assume a different character after 1945, as the increase in local and especially foreign capital in the commercial and industrial sectors led to labour stabilisation for a segment of the work force. At the same time, population increase and a land shortage in the reserves meant that not all Africans could be accommodated in the agricultural sector. Under these conditions, female participation in wage-earning could increase and could assume more permanency. Since the late 1950s, however, the rate of increase which marked the postwar period has not been maintained.[38]

In the colonial period the occupational distribution of African women was in some respects different from that in advanced industrial societies, being more similar to that found in European societies in the early stages of

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37. East Africa High Commission (1957, Table 11) showing average wages in Nairobi for 1955 to 1957.

38. The percentage of women in the total employed population of all races was still only 14.8 per cent in 1972. (Ministry of Labour, 1972, p.4)

capitalist industrialisation. The history of male dominance in the paid labour force and the relative lack of industrialisation meant that many white-collar jobs which in industrial societies now tend to be women's domain - - domestic workers, clerks, shop assistants, teachers and health workers - - remained predominantly male, much as they were in eighteenth century Europe. Only in the post-colonial period has this pattern begun to change.

But in general, like women in Western societies at both early and late stages of industrialisation, Kenyan women have remained concentrated in the lowest-paying and least-skilled occupations. We have seen how in the colonial period women played a vital but largely unrecognised and poorly rewarded role in their nation's development. It remains to be seen whether Kenya will continue to follow this Western pattern, or whether its commitment to African socialism will really afford women an equal role in development and an equal share of its rewards and opportunities.

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