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The Swynerton Plan And Political Economy Of Land In Kenya: A Historical Perspective

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Abstract: ***One of the enduring legacies of colonial policies was the placement of patriarchal factor in the determination of African economies. This notion about the normative roles of women and men occupied the forces behind the formation and perpetuation of colonial policies relating to agricultural and environmental development. These policies not only dispossessed women from inheritance but also changed the farmer's attitudes on land and its resources and how they managed it to the detriment of the environment and food security. In particular, the introduction of cash crops that was accompanied by changes in land tenure increasingly resulted even in greater gender differentiations. Cash cropping precipitated and, often, rested on changes in gendered divisions of rights over land, labour and products and in the nature of the domestic unit. This brought about commoditization and the introduction of private rights in land and labour and adversely affected women's access to and rights in the means of production. In this paper therefore, we examine historical and some contemporary policy discourses on land tenure and reform in Kenya and their implications for women's interests in land. We pay particular attention to the effects of the Swynnerton plan land policy and introduction of cash cropping in post-war era. The paper calls for a stronger focus on gender equity – on securing equal land rights for both women and men – in order to achieve sustainable positive change in broader social and political relations.***

Keywords: Land, Labour, Economy, Gender, Policy, Women

I. INTRODUCTION

The Swynnerton Plan which was initiated in Kenya between 1954 and 1959, was the most comprehensive of all the post-war colonial development policies in Kenya. It was aimed at increasing colonial production of goods and raw materials through state intervention. It saw the implementation of plan for intensification of agriculture and introductions of numerous cash crops. The plan was drawn up in response to a crisis in land use in Central Province which stemmed from political decisions taken earlier in the century about land tenure and forms of production as well as from increasing pressures of peasant producers after the Second World War when real wages fell and African households became poorer. This was the most influential and decisive plan that had far reaching implication on post-war developments in land tenure and cash production.

Roger Swynnerton arrived in Kenya in January 1951 on transfer from the Tanyanyika Agricultural Department. In his seventeen years there he had been closely involved in African coffee and cotton development and had helped design the Sukumaland scheme, which aimed to encourage African cash crop cultivation and was the most significant integrated development plan in East Africa to date. The Swynnerton plan had initiated a shift in emphasis in Kenya's agrarian policy from large-scale European farming with subsistence African agriculture to commercial peasant agriculture; its programmes have continued to form the basis of policy for Kenya's small farm sector.

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Comparatively and off course Ironically, for the first two years of the effects of the Swynnerton Plan, Nyanza province earned more than central province, but by 1956 when political control have been established in Central Province, cash crop production began to increase rapidly, and by 1962 when the harvest of coffee and tea planted during the plan period began to be reflected in the increased figures, the overall central province incomes was nearly twice that of Nyanza Province. See table below:

Year	Central Province	Nyanza Province
1953	1,349,487	1,427,675
1954	1,820,314	2,728,173
1955	1,877,744	2,506,442
1956	2,030,944	1,750,862
1957	2,109,195	2,032,478
1958	2,580,565	1,997,331
1959	3,138,120	2,406,977
1960	3,433,302	2,665,989
1961	4,038,057	2,607,273
1962	4,134,041	2,209,749

Source: *Agricultural Department Report,* 1948, p. 39

Table 1: Total Value of £'S of More Important Marketed Products

Moreover, these trends have continued. While maize yields have remained far higher in the western region, central province has produced the highest yields of smallholder coffee, tea and pyrethrum, as illustrated by the acreages on small farms by province for 1969-1970, ten years after the end of the plan.

	Central	Nyanza	Western	Rift Valley	Coast	Eastern
Coffee	27.0	10.4		4.2	0.3	1.6
Tea	6.6	3.8		4.2	3.9	-
Pyrethrum	16.3	6.9	-	0.4	-	4.5

Source: Statistics Division, Ministry of Finance and Planning, quoted in Kenya into the second decade: World Bank Country Economic report, 1975, p. 513.

Table 2: Cash Crop Production in Nyanza

In Nyanza Province the social circumstances and experiences had been quite different. Grayburn recalled that it was a 'nasty' shock to be transferred there:

One had been behaving like a little Hitler, but you were getting something done, and apparently people wanted to do it. The only thing they didn't like was bench terracing. But whereas in Kikukuland you'd almost infallibly get someone saying "I'LL try"' with the Luo, [and with no doubt the Kuria] you'd have to bribe them practically to try. I mean, even if there was a cast-iron certainty. There wasn't the same sort of drive to do something.

The circumstances which engendered directed development in Central Province were unique but could not serve as a model for development policy elsewhere. Nevertheless, its agricultural history over a 30-year period illustrates aspects of colonial development and development generally. While the broad line of policy was discussed in London and Nairobi, the content of development in Central Province was evolved from within the field. When political restrictions at the center prevented them from being able to either extend the land unit or offer economic benefits, they were unable to work effectively. When they could offer incentives, with technical and administrative backup, they achieved high standards rapidly. Though it has been argued that equivalent or better results could have been achieved with less control, the yields in Central Province and in Kenya generally compared to those in the neighbouring territories do not support the claim.

II. SECURING A TITLE: THE SWYNERTON PLAN, GENDER AND LAND TENURE

While the Plan was being drafted, armed struggle against the British rule had been underway for nearly two years. As the policies discussed earlier show, the colonial intent was to confine Africans in very limited land reserves and leave the rest of the land for settlers and the Crown. As if confinement was not enough, if a settler or the Crown needed reserve land, the governor had the right to relocate the Africans from their reserve to another location without their consent under Outlying District Ordinance 1902 and Native Land Trust Ordinance of 1930.

Thus, when the freedom fighters retreated back into the forest and resulted into armed struggle, land consolidation was enacted as an Emergency measure, closely related to the system of rewards and punishments used by the colonial administration from the beginning. It was carried out at great speed before the African politicians were released from detention and the revolutionaries came out of the forests. Like the previous colonial policies that, according to Cheru (1987), still remains as the principle of Kenya's political economic organization today. The objectives stated in the plan were inter alia to provide the African with "sound agricultural development which was dependent upon a system of land tenure which would make available to the African farmer a unit of land and a system of farming whose production would support his family at a level,...comparable with other occupations" and to solve African development problems which included over-population, low standards of cultivation and incomes were caused by "African customary land tenure of several fragmented land holdings scattered all over the place, and inheritance which was under women's control.

As such, the plan embarked on responding to the African's demand for land through consolidation of fragmented holdings into single economic farming units under individual male ownership; Restructure the system of property rights in the reserves to confirm "security of tenure through an indefeasible title" to the "good" men and; Intensify African agriculture to make sufficient returns on their small plots and stop demanding redistribution of "stolen land" held by Europeans. Africans were demanding land reform, but the plan ignored their agenda and declared that it was tenure rather than land redistribution and access to all, that was required to meet African grievances. This was portrayed by the choice of the areas where the plan was to be implemented first, which were the Mau Mau invested districts namely Nyeri, Kirinyaga, Kiambu, Muranga, Embu and Meru.

The plan was implemented from 1957 in Nyeri district and this resulted in rights of access to land and resources for all members of the society and thus balanced relationships

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between gender was ensured. Balance was titled to advantage of few and disadvantage of many as *The Swynnerton Plan* was implemented from one locality to the other. What the plan was able to achieve successfully was to give most of the land to the collaborating, educated and the rich male individuals most of whom were recruited as surveyors and clerks in the implementation process. Women, children, poor and/or uncooperative men, were all left out in the process. These included the freedom fighters and most of their sympathizers.

However, as argued earlier, the aim to give security of tenure to men was a measure to ensure that African men do not demand the land that settlers occupied. Thus, women's land was transferred to the men in the society leaving the women with nothing but their labor. This way, the colonial government was able to distract the men's interest in pursuing the access to all the forests grazing lands and other commons they lost to the crown, as they pursued land registration to own land in the British way. This meant that they had a property they could dispose of if they wished. This also gave them the upper hand in the family affairs because the women could grow and where to grow it on his land. Women were no longer lay any claims over this land.

As a result, men became propertied individuals while women became propertyless. The men were now in position to dictate what women could grow and where to grow it on his land. Women were no longer in control of their labour which men could now control as the new owners of land on which women's labour was made productive. With male ownership, inheritance patterns also changed. It was men’s land from then on. Women had no more say in how land was passed over to the younger generation. Inheritance shifted to father and sons from mother and daughters in law.

With ensuing land privatization and the expansion of monetary relations, a deeper division of labor was slowly emerging in agriculture that separated food production for profit from food production for direct consumption, devalued reproductive work, beginning from subsistence farming, and men appointed as chief agricultural producers, whereas women were relegated to the rank of “helpers,” field hands, or domestic workers. Consequently, daughters were automatically denied right to a home on maturity especially if their father's land was already subdivided among her brothers. Women had to access land through marriage at a subordinate position within the family and not on equal and complementary one as in the indigenous society. The only resource women were left with was their labour which they had to give freely within the family holdings or sell it outside the family unit. With such limited access to land, womens economic independence was severely tampered with especially if they were married.

Under such arrangements, male child became more important than the female child because he became the heir of his father's properties and especially land. Okeyo (1980) reckons that," where traditionally it has been the wife's prerogative to decide how parcels and livestock are to be divided among her sons, the land tenure reform has *given men that responsibility....*thus affecting the natural development cycle of the households, and diminishing women's political and economic authority" in both the domestic and the public spheres. The security of tenure was only accessible to some men, many others were left out, and the majority of women and children. Thus, it created insecurity of tenure to those who did not get title to land.

The Plan goals were intended first and foremost to consolidate fragmented plots controlled and managed by women because, such kind of tenure, it was argued was an impediment to agricultural development. In the African Traditional land tenure and inheritance system, a family had*....10 to 29 or more small to minute fields scattered at wide intervals so that they cannot be developed economically either to the system of farming best suited to the area or to the inclinations for the farmer himself.* It is impossible under such circumstances to develop sound farming rotations, to cart and apply manure, to establish and manage grass, to improve the management and feeding of livestock or to tend cash crops in any satisfactory manner. Therefore, through suitable reforms...these fragments can be amalgamated...into economic farming units, and by applying sound and intensified farming methods, these are the lands which will yield the greatest returns to the economy of Kenya....

Given the ecosystem of the East African Highlands, amalgamating the fragmented plots meant that families were confined to one or two niches on which to grow a variety of tropical crops which respond well to different niches in the ecosystem. This resulted in poor yields for crops in the not so suitable locations. Of late, amalgamation of fragmented plots has currently proved to be self-defeating objective given that the current holdings are being sub-divided as fathers pass on land to their sons and grandsons. This condition has made it impossible to have "economical" land sizes as intended in the plan. A condition that the Kenyan Government has viewed as one of the two major factors hindering economic development in the country and one which need to be addressed immediately. This is hard to determine in ancestral lands with sentimental value.

According to the *Swynnerton Plan,* traditional land tenure had the problem of time wasted walking to the different plots and those farmers were not able to protect their crops and/or use new scientific farming methods. These arguments failed to recognize that the scattered plots were owned and managed by women; that it was women who walked to those plots; that it was women who carted manure to the fields, and; that women as the main tillers of the land might have a lot of influence in implementing new scientific agricultural methods. It is common knowledge now that the actual farmers in Africa are the women and not the men.

The argument that the new tenure was to ensure intense farming was ironic, because as early as 1934, the carter commission had found that the Kikuyu reserves were overpopulated and badly eroded. The commission then recommended that more land be available for the ruriri"to provide breathing space till agricultural development was advanced enough to accommodate the excess population". By 1945, Norman Humphrey, who was then, the Nyeri District Agricultural Officer had noticed the overpopulation problem in his jurisdiction and recommended to the colonial government that excess population in the area be relocated to some other areas. These two observations meant that, intensive farming in already overpopulated areas would not have been a sane alternative by 1954 when Swynnerton

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drafted the plan, nor by 1957 when the plan was implemented in Nyeri.

Nevertheless, if the credit is obtained, it is solely for the man who owns the land. How the money so obtained is used remains his decision alone. Nzioki's study in 1993 on the effects of land tenure reform on women, cites several cases where credit obtained was misused by the man and the land was auctioned by the creditors rendering the whole family homeless. This also means that even marriage to a landed man is no guarantee of access to land for the wife and her children because the title holder could decide to get credit with it and not pay back or even sell it directly without informing the rest of the family. He is protected by the law on private property.

Discussing agricultural extension work in Kenya. Ham Rothenberg noted that its serious handicap "was and still is, the fact that the extension officers have to approach the man, while much or even most of the work is done by women, who-according to custom have to grow most of the food used in the household, who have the established right to organize their own affairs as they please, and, as they are largely illiterate, stick to traditional patterns of cultivation, which leads to a large acreage for substinence while little land is left for the men to grow cash crops on." Unfortunately, however, documents do not differentiate between the part played by men and women except that it is known that women were about as much involved as their men. The DC, Kiambu, put the average degree of involvement at around five per cent of adult males with a "slightly smaller percentage of females" in 1958. Women were treated like their men, in that some of them were detained. In July 1959, T.J.F. Gavaghan recommended to F.P.B. Derrick, his successor as DC, Kiambu, that "there need not be any sustained objection to the return towards the end of the year of the less important women KKM members whose sentences were converted to detention without references to the administration."

Certain social practices and prejudices also combined to make consolidation unattractive. The scheme involved the abolition of boundaries between clan areas where the requirements of consolidation made this desirable. It was not only that it was "almost, if not quite, unheard of" for a kikuyu to sell his land to a person of another race or even a fellow African of another ethnic group, Pedraza noted, but it was also "unusual for land to be sold outside the clan unless other members of the clan have first had chance to buy it." If this was the situation, then the dictates of consolidation could not always comply with it. For consolidation to be effectively implemented, some kikuyu had to be suddenly moved from where they had been living for years to new areas allocated to them. This raised a number of problems. Some kikuyu were naturally reluctant to part with land containing their ancestral graves. As Jomo Kenyatta pointed out, "communion with the ancestral spirit is perpetuated through contact with the soil in which the ancestors of the tribe lie buried." Also, as Pedraza further noted, one had to reckon with the "conservatism of the peasant farmer who was accustomed to the traditional method of agriculture, which had been unchanged for many years." Agriculture in the new plots was to be planned according to the directives of agricultural officers.

A move to new land also might mean giving up crops and improvements on the old acreage. Although compensation had been effected, it is doubtful that the settlement was always entirely satisfactory to the receiver. For example, how is it possible to adequately compensate for such things as tree crops that keep on bearing year after year? "If you give sh.10 a tree or sh.20 a tree you never can tell how long the tree will bear, and for this reason," Kiano further explained, "the question of compensation has created a lot of dissatisfaction again in the application of land consolidation, and…. has not really been solved fully to the satisfaction of the people." Perhaps one of the greatest difficulties was the fear resulting from superstition and suspicion. In Fort Hall District, the reluctance of some Kikuyu to move to new areas arose, Wilson pointed out, from their belief that the new land "was bewitched and if they and their families moved all would die in a short time." Suspicion itself was a product of a perceived lack of identity of interests between the government and those who feared that consolidation might result in loss of part of their land.

Added to these threats of disruption posed by land consolidation was the problem posed by the ahoi (tenants). At the beginning of the emergency several families had been repatriated to the reserves from Tanganyika, Uganda, and Rift Valley. Some had been removed from European farms because they were considered security risks; others had chosen to leave because they would not comply with the others had chosen to leave because they would not comply with the Government's demand that they be photographed for identification purposes. By January 1954 the emergency had already "cast back into the reserves over 35,000 men, women, and children." Some writers have even put this figure at 100,000. When these repatriates were added to an existing population, close on 200,000 in 300 sq. miles, the situation became intolerable. It is not surprising, therefore, that the governor, Sir Evelyn Baring, said on arrival in London in May 1956 that "the Mau Mau system has placed on our shoulders something like a displaced persons problem." Writing in 1957, Mary Shannon noted that "in places the population is over 700-800 or even more to the square mile, as compared with a rural population in Denmark of 42 and in Britain between 50 and 60 per square mile."

Many of these ahoi had left the reserve several years before, and any land they possessed had been taken over by those left behind, while some had never before set foot on the reserves to which they were now repatriated. Many of them played active roles in Mau Mau and were also involved in KKM. As the Embu District Commissioner reported in 1955. "It fell on the 'ahoi' in the district to gain ill-fame for themselves as the originators of the first post-Mau Mau secret society." Their role in KKM is important. Of them Sorenson has written with regard to Mau Mau: "The return of the repatriates reviewed old disputes, particularly land disputes, with the residents of the reserve. Some repatriates formed gangs of their own to settle long-standing feuds. The Mau Mau rebellion, instead of spreading outwards, to embrace the other tribes turned inwards to consume its own supporters- to become a Kikuyu civil war." Since land consolidation was started during the Mau Mau emergency, it is very probable that as far as some members are concerned, KKM was a movement to continue the struggle or fight to gain or regain land for themselves in the Reserves. In This regard, KKM

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activities may be regarded as a carry-over of the disputes over property common in kikuyu land, which had been continued during the Mau Mau emergency, when attempts had been made to solve some of them physical elimination. KKM, therefore, could have been an organization of "have-nots" against "haves": the landless versus the settled middle class of landed gentry, as the "progressive farmers" were called. Although land consolidation did not create landlessness, it was to accentuate the internal differences of Kikuyu society. Thus, KKM was probably a last-ditch effort not only to lay claim to land but to prevent any attempt to legalize once and for all claims to land over which it was felt there were disputes and grievances.

This view is borne out by the reported activities of KKM. The Government claimed that KKM sought "to undermine and subvert established authority, to drive Europeans from their land, and stir up racial hatred." Moreover, KKM is said to have "compiled a list of kikuyu loyalists and their families, causing them to fear some kind of revenge or reprisals." The Kiambu DC reported in 1957 that KKM's objectives included compensation either from the loyalists or the government for losses suffered by Mau Mau adherents, e.g., fines imposed on them, revenge on loyalists, and a continuing fight for Mau Mau goals without resort to violence. A consideration of the relationship between the loyalists, and the land shows why they were the focus of attack by some KKM members: to KKM members loyalists were landowners, and according to a government announcement following the discovery of widespread corruption in the Fort Hall District in 1960, some of them had "obtained more than their rightful allocations of land the expense of others." The KKM attack on them may not have had anything to do with the question of which side they had supported during Mau Mau fighting, or whether KKM were continuing "the fight for Mau Mau"- except in so far as some Mau Mau fights were attempts to settle land disputes, and KKM was in part a continuation of this. Perhaps the clearest documentation of the relationship between loyalists, Mau Mau, and land is the one provided by the DO for Kiharu, C.A. Gardener, in his handing-over notes to H.M. Burton in May 1961. Expressing his fears about what might happen to the "progressive farmers" following the government's decision to carry out rechecking and redemarcating investigations into land consolidation in Fort Hall District, he wrote:

Where redemarcating has to be done it is essential that those progressive farmers, who have developed their holdings since consolidation, believing in the permanence of their title, should not be victimized. Although provision is made in the ordinance for their protection, there have been systematic efforts by the ungodly majority. This is partly out of envy and party because the progressive emergency loans and who usually dominated the old and now unpopular consolidation committees.

In summary, *The Swynnerton Plan* was implemented at the expense of the traditional rights to land for every member of the society and especially women. It was also at the expense of the local highland ecosystem which is not fit for continuous cultivation for long periods of time without abandonment or fallowing. Consolidating the fragmented land increased the risk of food deficiency by reducing the risk spread mechanisms that fragmented indigenous offered. The reform in combination with the other changes that colonialism introduced in the community changed negatively the socio-political and economic positions of women. It was successful in refining the African patriarchy to a higher standard, where women have no rights to land except through marriage to landed males, and even then, their spouses' whims and moods.

In spite of all the criticisms on Kenya's land reform, titling of land under the men's names and making it their personal and private property have been maintained, by the African government with no changes. Instead, the subsequent plans have reinforced and continued to implement the plan.

III. SWYNNERTON, WOMEN AND CASH CROPPING

As we have seen above, the Swynnerton Plan changes in land tenure was accompanied by the introduction and increased cash cropping. Perhaps for the first time Africans were allowed to cultivate coffee, tea, and pyrethrum, lucrative crops which the British had initially not considered suitable for African farmers. To ease the transition to new crops, European agricultural specialists sought out especially "able, energetic or rich" farmers to help them achieve maximum production while avoiding soil erosion. The stated goal of all these measures was to enable each African household to feed itself and earn at least 100 annually. This goal was clearly unattainable in regions such as North Nyanza, however, where the land was already seriously depleted. Hence the government, rather than providing universal assistance, concentrated its efforts on the proven "better farmers."

The effects of the Swynnerton plan in Kuria, as elsewhere, were significant, if not immediately evident. Ruel reported that "the movement to enclosure was sanctioned by the local councils of senior men, who were called in to decide upon boundaries and settle disputes arising from them." (Once started, enclosure proceeded relatively quickly, leaving little arable land unclaimed by 1957 and leaving a few unfortunate Kuria, who had been away during the procedure, with no plots at all. Practices concerning transfer of land rights took longer to crystallize. In 1958 elders still declare that land in Kuria could not be sold, even though state-registered titles granted an owner "absolute proprietorship" over his holding. At that time land was usually exchanged for a goat or cow rather than money. Ruel does not explain why the elders did not consider this transaction a "sale" but probably the livestock given were considered more a show of appreciation than a precise reflection of the monetary value of the land, which at that point was still low.

Generally, therefore, by the end of the colonial period, however, even those people who, by and large, had accepted commodity production and exchange, frequently returned to subsistence economy when it suited them. Naturally, peasants generally produce their subsistence needs outside the production of commodities and, if cash crop production endangers subsistence, then more and more resources was transferred to subsistence production. Price incentives play a key role in the movement between cash crop and subsistence production. Thus, colonial rulers had the problem of maintaining low prices for raw materials while simultaneously

ensuring their maximum production; this problem remains unsolved by independent governments.

Cash crops are known to possess a multitude of virtues. Labour intensity, high income, displacement of food crops, the crop provides ground for the exploitation of women and child labour reservoir. Consequently, an important advance in the understanding of agrarian change in Africa has been the growing realisation that the transformation of regions through their incorporation into the international economy has rested on changes in key domestic relationships. Gender relations-in particular, divisions of labour and rights over resources-are critically important arenas in which economic change has been registered, acted out and, often, struggled over. Cash cropping has precipitated and, often, rested on changes in gendered divisions of rights over land, labour and products and in the nature of the domestic unit.

A number of recent studies of Kenya have examined the impact of agrarian change on gender relations (Thomas, 1988; Mackenzie, 1990; von Billow, 1992; Sorensen, 1992). The work of Dorthe von Billow and Anne Sorensen has shown the detrimental effects of commercial farming on women's power and authority. Von Billow argues that the growth of commercial maize and tea production in Kipsigis society (in Kericho District), bringing in its wake commoditization and the introduction of private rights in land and labour, has adversely affected women's access to and rights in the means of production.

However, discussions of commercial agriculture often fail to appreciate the profound cultural differences that may separate cash crops, grown exclusively for an export commodity market, from subsistence crops that are consistently or even occasionally sold for cash. Whereas the latter tend to be multifunctional and polyvalent, having many social uses and diverse meanings in their local contexts, cash crops are often unifunctional and univalent; they mean money, pure and simple. They are frequently foreign in origin, politically alien, and ritually neutral. Cash crops also tend to increase the overall sexual division of labor in agriculture. Their very lack of domestic association, of social relevance within particular kinship contexts, facilitates processes of sexual and social separation. In this respect we shall see how tobacco in particular crop fits such description.

Having been introduced under the Swynerton plan as a cash crop in Nyanza, we demonstrate that tobacco, however alien, acquired very strong cultural and social institutional connections in Kuria such as polygamy, marriage and circumcision impinging on certain economic policies. These policies were highly conflictive and contradictory when it came to promoting introduced cash crops such as tobacco at the expense of indigenous crops such as millet and cassava among the Kuria. We argue that tobacco indirectly increased stratification in Kuria hierarchy so that women were to be subordinated with it but in other terms, they mediated through several loopholes to access to tobacco resources and income in return to labour them provided. Ironically, therefore women were not complete victims of whims of tobacco farming but competitors and rivals. In order to understand these relations, it will be better if we first examined the social organization of tobacco production in the District.

As early as 1970s, tobacco was slowly replacing millet and cattle in social significance. For instance, tobacco harvest played an important role in the timing of marriages. A young man would start timidly to court a local girl. When his prospects were good, he built a small house with the help of his father and family and cleared a piece of land. Tobacco was sown and harvested after a few months. Selling his tobacco gave the man his first private money and enabled him to marry. In the middle of the harvest, abundant or not, marriages were frequent, as one woman replied: ‘when our rural people receive money, they feel only one primeval and immediate desire, the formation of a household. Because of the surplus of women, many men had more than one wife at one time. A favourable tobacco harvest enabled a man to give a mistress a small house and some possessions. One Keraka admitted that:

You know these days we do not have enough cattle to marry, so when we get the boom from Migori, we use the money to get wives, and when the money is more, we marry two or more. Some of my friends buy cattle instead of paying money. The more women you have the easier to attend to the tobacco labour because you have more hands.

Labour being the main expenses in tobacco production, with the new tobacco crop, obviously more labour intensive than maize or millet production, the Kuria had curved up four ways of obtaining labour for their peculiar crop: they could share or swap labour with neighbours; they could hire people or have some or use the pre-existing *ad hoc* labour bands of cooperative described in chapter two. Two were commonly preferred: *ikiginga* and *ekegonyo.* After the introduction of tobacco, loss of labour was for the first time keenly felt because of labour intensive steps of the production of tobacco especially with the flue cured type.

All in all, tobacco agriculture became essentially a family affair *eka* not only because he labour demands of the crop made it possible, the BAT policy demanded that the crop had to be cultivated under the supervision of a male head of a household. In this case, the male head of the family was in charge of its organization, but all family members were actively involved in agricultural labor. As one man had to say:

Everyone had to go to attend the crop, women children, old men and wives of the sons in the family had that responsibility, this was is not a problem because we even do that when we cultivate and harvest millet. Once my father wakes up at 5 in the morning ecveryone has to get up to go to the shamba.

Curiously, in areas such as Masaba, Kegoga, Kurutiange where the crop was cultivated first, schooling hardly existed until 1980s; as soon as children could walk, they were put into work at daily chores. They carried water from the river or well to the house, swabbed the floor, fed the chicken and goats. When older, they had to help in agricultural tasks. The boys helped to clear the forest, took care of the cattle and accompanied their fathers on errands. The girls helped their mother in her domestic work, washing clothes, cooking and cleaning the house. Agriculture was also predominantly a household activity. All family members performed agricultural tasks as needed.

Access to sufficient hands to take care of the agricultural chores was an essential precondition of peasant agriculture. Larger families-more family labor- meant more land cultivated

and could mean greater prosperity. Control over labor became more important with the increasing dominance of the market and in the twentieth century this control began to play a more important role in the organization of rural families. The economic fortunes of the family depended on the control that the male head of the family exercised over the labor of his family members. His ability to deploy that labor determined his possibilities for accumulation.

Tobacco production, as indicated earlier, is a very labour-intensive process at all stages. Eight to ten weeks before the rainy season, seed beds are prepared in nurseries near river banks. Grass and dried cattle manure are burnt on the seedbeds to destroy weeds in the soil. Where eel worms (popularly known as *ochiki*) were present, the seed beds were treated with insecticide. Culturally, fertilizer is added to the seed beds before the seeds are sown. After sowing, shade shelters are constructed over the seed beds to protect the seedlings from burning in the early stages. At six to seven weeks the seedlings are transferred to fields. They are thinned after the first rains. Application of insecticides and fertilizer are applied, followed by hoeing and weeding. Five weeks after transplanting, the plants are topped and the suckers removed. The process of suckering is carried out weekly up to the time of harvesting. Two to three months after planting, the tobacco is harvested.

Consequently, a definite allocation of labour by gender existed in Kuria tobacco production. Men were responsible for planting the seed beds. Women watered the seed beds, did the transplanting of seedlings and fertilize the young tobacco plants once transplanted. (See table below). Women assisted in hoeing and weeding the seedlings, and were solely responsible for the constant process of suckering. At a later stage, women harvested the tobacco leaves. Men were responsible for burning the seed beds after harvest, ploughing, hoeing and weeding of mature plants. They did the curing of the leaves, which women then sort and graded (see table below). Negotiations with BAT field instructors and marketing of tobacco were carried out by male heads of households.

Crops grown	Female tasks	Male tasks
Millet	Planting, weeding, harvesting, transporting crops, processing crops	Clearing fields, harvesting, marketing
Maize	Planting, weeding, harvesting, transporting, processing	Clearing fields, weeding, harvesting
Tobacco	Clearing fields, planting, weeding, harvesting, transporting, curing	Clearing fields, harvesting, marketing

Source: Fieldwork, 2006

Table 21: Division of Farm Labour Among the Kuria: Tobacco, Maize and Millet

While the main labour force in a household consisted of the tobacco farmer, his wife or wives, and children (who may be withdrawn from school when the demand for labour is acute), tobacco farmers also drew on hired female labour, usually the wives of food crop farmers, to supplement the work of their wives. In the mid-1980s, farmers were increasingly hiring male labourers seasonally to assist in hoeing and curing the tobacco leaves from the famine-stricken areas of Sukuma of Tanzania. Male labourers and female hired labourers were paid set wages at the end of the harvest while wives were paid an unspecified sum from the husband's proceeds after the tobacco has been sold.

For the wives of food crop farmers, working for tobacco became a source of independent income, while for the wives of tobacco farmers, the same tasks were compensated as part of household labour. Tobacco farmers needed to have a reliable, permanent source of family labour which meant that their wives were not unable to supplement their income by working for other tobacco farmers on a wage basis nor did time allow them to pursue alternative sources of income generation to the extent they desire. In this sense, tobacco production further tied women to a system of household production that incorporated women's social obligation to assist their husbands when their labour would be demanded.

By the late 1990s, Kuria control over labor became important principle of tobacco agriculture. This led to increased differentiation among the peasantry: Men strove to accumulate wives and children when their material resources permitted it. Multiple households then became instruments in a process of accumulation and differentiation. Not surprisingly, richer planters tended to have large number of children. In Kuria for example, most men had children with more than one woman. Several men had more than twenty living children.

The need to control family labor reinforced patriarchal tendencies that already existed in rural Kuria culture. Children were kept under close control until an advanced age. Many elderly men recount how they could only change their shorts for long pants when they were eighteen; even then, the father watched his son’s behavior. Referring to a different society, Grasmuck and Pessar suggest that:

Such tactics postponed the moment when the sons’ labor had to be shared with another household. The “honor” of daughters was guarded even more jealously. Courting could be a tedious affair when done according to parental rules. Prospective candidates (male and female) were severely scrutinized, and a young man was expected to visit the house of his beloved many times before her parents would approve the engagement.

Many elderly people recall that young people had to wait a long time before they could become involved with the opposite sex or establish a separate household. The paradoxical result was that many young couples fled (often making it appear that the girl had been abducted) as by sleeping together formed a consensual union that could not be dissolved by the parents.

Socially, and as opposed to other cash crops experimented in Kuria before 1969, tobacco agriculture made it possible that a wife had to take a subservient role. It was the man’s duty to generate income to feed and clothe his family and to guarantee the safety of his wife and children. As long as he complied with these obligations, he could do what he liked. Even when he had relations with other women-often hardly concealed- or went off drinking and stayed away from home without any

explanation, his was not to complain. As one woman lamented:

He! I cannot ask my husband anything concerning the whereabout of the tobacco money, here in mabera, women always obey our husbands, you do not question him on money, but we persuade them to share with us.

In addition, she did her share of the agricultural work. It was not improbable that her responsibility for the cultivation of food crops in general constituted a kind of subsistence guarantee in case her husband left her. There was one important condition in the matrimonial “contracts” in peasant society. When a husband failed to take care of his family as custom dictated, he should, the wife had the fullest right to go her own way and secure the survival of herself and her children as she saw fit.

Tobacco farming equally dictated that women have very few opportunities for a life outside marriage. They could return to their parents, but in the case, they just exchanged one type of patriarchal control for another. Female-headed households, such as existed in other parts of Kenya, were uncommon in the Kuria. Public opinion and women themselves looked down upon this alternative, not least of all because peasant society had no ideological place for women in such an unprotected position. The only liaisons approaching such a construction were the households existing separately in a polygamous situation. Here the woman lived alone with her children, but the man was expected to guarantee their subsistence. Therefore, tobacco agriculture seems to have collapsed the authority of women and such erosion of women's authority and the transformation of the basis of the household economy from the farm to cash income changed expectations and deepened conflicts between men and women over spheres of domestic authority and responsibility. It also provided the context of differentiation between rural households. In other crops such as banana, maize or even rice, the position was different because these crops were purely ‘women’s crops and men had little if no interest in their mechanization.

We have already indicated that tobacco was designated by the Kuria as a "male crop." It was cultivated by men, but with female assistance. This pattern of tobacco cultivation persists today. Production of tobacco for BAT and or MTK in Kuria characteristically has been organized around barn sites. The barns served as the initial storage and curing centers for the tobacco from nearby farms. Initially, each barn site served from one to twenty producers. It is here that the farmer's tobacco was merchandised, piled fermented, rope-tied, cured weighed and a value determined. The number of barn sites in Kuria increased from ten to 300 between 1970 and 1982, testifying to the increase in local tobacco production. At that time BAT and Mastermind Kenya controlled tobacco production in Kuria through contract farming.

Growing of the leaves, processing and marketing were all directly supervised by the the government and BAT technical staff. BAT contracted with individual farmers who were allocated tobacco quotas on the basis of land holdings and access to sufficient quality and quantity of labour. It also controlled inputs to production, including seedlings, the provision of fertilizers and insecticides, sacks for transporting the leaves to the barn sites, and watering cans which could be purchased on credit.

By 1977, about 544 hectares of tobacco were cultivated by 556 farmers, roughly one hectare per farmer and by 1981, production had risen to 820 hectares cultivated by 668 farmers, or 1.39 hectares per farmer, reflecting a greater concentration of production in the hands of those with claims to more land, or, even more important, to more labour. By 1982, BAT would organize farmers into family production units, consisting minimally of a man, his wife or wives, his children, and other relatives who were members of the family production unit. In some cases, large units were formed, consisting of two or three related male heads of households, their wives, children and other "productive" relatives. All Kuria tobacco farmers became members of a local tobacco association which does not have an officially recognized role in production and marketing but sends representatives to observe marketing procedures of the company. Kuria Omogango Tobacco Growers Association (KOTGA) had been formed by Samsom Mwita Maroa to this effect.

As discussed before, tobacco was introduced among the Kuria as a new crop after land consolidation and the adoption of private, predominantly male, ownership to land. These circumstances together with the fact that tobacco was a pure cash crop made the identification of the crop as a male-controlled crop almost indisputable. As we have already seen different modes of entering commercial maize production had different consequences for women regarding their access to land and their control over production. In contrast, all small holders who entered tobacco production had to set their production according to rules and restrictions dictated by BAT. Thus, tobacco licenses were issued to male household heads on the basis of title deeds in land. Consequently, women’s “bargaining power’ on entering tobacco production and their decision-making power concerning land allocation to tobacco was very weak, and their access to the income from was even more of ‘a grace-and-favour basis’ than commercialized maize production.

Oral sources reveal that in most tobacco-growing households the wife or wives participated in tobacco production without being guaranteed any share in the returns from tobacco. One Robi O’marwa agreed that:

When BAT staff approached my husband requesting him to grow tobacco, he agreed but he asked me if we could do it together with wangenyi (my co-wife), we met and agreed and told him we have no problem provided he bought clothes and took our children to school...

The few independent women who started their own tobacco production, and widows who usually the tobacco registered in their own names after the death of their husbands, were the only exceptions to this male-dominated pattern of decision-making within tobacco production (see next subtopic). Such women-controlled income from tobacco in name and indeed. Women’s basic lack of control in matters of tobacco production does not, however, mean that they passively accepted all the decisions made by their husbands concerning spending the income from tobacco and the allocation of labour to tobacco production. Their possibilities to withdraw their labour from their husbands’ tobacco field in favour of other work, in particular work related to major food production, were great.

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Concerning women's access to land for the cultivation of food crops, the introduction of tobacco seems to have caused serious reductions in the area grown with maize. This had a gendered effect since chiefly women were concerned with food production and women informers sited tobacco intensification as a chief source of their food problems. One Robi Magaigwa for example held that:

We grew all sort of food in this plot, on the other side, my husband always wanted me to grow cassava, and the other one, maize, and millet, just like that…but when we started growing tobacco, we forgot how everything about food and thought of cash. Unfortunately, it was only him who knows where the money goes.

As shown in the previous chapter, tobacco growing households cultivated on average smaller areas with maize and other food crops these being more oriented towards home consumption. In contrast, non-tobacco-growing households rely much more on the sale of part of their maize. Furthermore, in oral sources indicate that, tobacco affected negatively the size of women's finger millet fields and vegetable gardens. There was significant difference between tobacco-growing households and non-tobacco-growing households in this respect. Areas grown with finger millet have been reduced gradually over a longer time period; this development has more to do with the introduction of tobacco, and also more to do with the development of maize as staple crop. As one informant put it:

It was unfortunate millet and sorghum has since disappeared in our gardens, I saw it coming, tobacco and maize would not allow us to grow these crops because they were extremely difficult to grow and tobacco gives us quick money, who buys millet here!

This leads us to another important change, which seems more directly related to the introduction of tobacco and which has had an important impact on women's control over the staple crop-maize. Comparing sample women from tobacco-growing households with women from non-tobacco-growing household in matters of decision-making in general, and of access to income from maize in particular, it was striking that wives in tobacco-growing households have in general much more say in decision-making concerning the income from the sale of maize. This is chiefly because, men are busier in tobacco which tends to bring more income than maize.

Although their husbands also participate in decision-making and may have dominate the decision-making process, in those household where maize is sold on a relatively large scale, almost all the cases where wives alone decide on the income from the sale of maize were found among tobacco-growing households. Ironically, non-tobacco-growing households, however, husbands were in almost total control of all sale of maize, and if wives have to sell part of the maize harvest in order to cover their daily expenses, they were often forced to do so without their husbands knowing about it. Such secret sales of women's own maize were said to occur more frequently among poorer women who have no other sources of income.

For the majority of the tobacco-growing households, income from tobacco was the major sources of income in many cases supplemented by incomes from milk and employment. Consequently, male tobacco growers' major expenditures related to domestic consumption and the running of the farm were covered through sources of income other than the sale of maize. Therefore, in general, they begin to take less interest in matters concerning maize production than they used to do, and much less interest than their non-tobacco-growing neighbors. Furthermore, many tobacco farmers were increasingly becoming busy in activities other than maize production – farm as well as off-farm activities- and their participation in maize production was more restricted than before the household economy started to diversify. These changes with tobacco-growing households have therefore led to both a decrease in male participation in maize production in physical terms and to men's withdrawal from decision-making within maize production in general.

Although women's increased influence within maize production in tobacco-growing households was thus related to a decrease in the economic importance of maize among tobacco growers, the net result is, nevertheless, an improvement of women's economic and social position. To women from tobacco-growing households, the development described above has meant that they have gained influence not only in terms of how the income from maize should be spent, but also in terms of increased control over the production of food. Furthermore, the fact that maize production within the survey area was highly commercialized facilitates women's potential for sale of surplus maize. Among other things, this helps to impede but not completely diminish women's marginalization in subsistence agriculture as a result of the development of cash crop production and of pure cash crop production in particular.

The effects of such a development on women was well-known from other parts of Africa and has been well documented by several authors. Thus, together with other factors within the process of commercialization, the development of tobacco production among Kuria small-holders seems to have had little positive impact on certain groups of women, both in terms of their increased influence on the kind of expenditures, covered through the cash crop part of the maize harvest, and in terms of a certain revival of women's control over the staple crop, i.e. the food crop part of the maize harvest.

In summary, the trend towards women's increased influence within food production in household is mainly explained by the introduction of tobacco. Although by the year 2000 this crop had benefited only a small percentage of women, this development has ironically led to a revival of a former field of female influence and a strengthening of women's decision power within an area of crucial importance, *vis a vis* the production of food. Faced with increasingly stressful economic circumstances and pressures in the process of tobacco cultivation, Kuria women diversified their opportunities and enhanced their capacity to cope by investing in a combination of diverse social institutions, social organizations, and non-sanctioned social relations. Kinship relations, women's groups, informal social networks, friendships, and other social organizations were key to farmers' complex economic and social lives. They provided women with an invaluable means of negotiating and accessing resources such as land, labour, credit, cash, capital, and knowledge as we are going to see next.

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IV. CONCLUSION

In this paper we have argued from a historical perspective that gendered land tenure systems contributed to shaping, and have in turn been shaped by, agrarian production and reproduction systems and that his has worked to the disadvantage of women in terms of their livelihood choices and outcomes and their position in agrarian societies. The challenges in the livelihoods of female small-scale farmers are multiple, and they have deep historical social roots in power relations between men and women both in the domestic sphere and at the level of the public domain. Thus, power relations between men and women tend to lie at the basis of many of the challenges of female subsistence farmers, which appear and re-appear in a cyclical movement within communities and households. Unfortunately, the post-colonial states in Africa have made these practices embodied in the legal system and administrative structures of Government making discrimination against women firmly anchored in the customs, traditions and usages of various ethnic communities in the country. Despite the fact that women constitute over seventy percent of the productive land-based labour force in this country, land relations in particular are based on laws, customs and practices which marginalize and disempower women in terms of their right and capacity to own, manage and transfer land.

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