

BRITISH COLONIALISM AND THE GROWTH OF ELDAMA RAVINE TOWN IN BARINGO COUNTY, KENYA, 1895-1963

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Abstract

Eldama Ravine is one of the rich hubs and commercial towns in Baringo County. Its historical background and development dates back to the initial establishment of an administrative and garrison station in 1894 by the nascent British administration. In 1895 the building of the Sclator's caravan road from Mombasa to Uganda passed through this town. It is situated in a place that was formerly a hilly pasture land occupied by the Lembus sub-section inhabitants of Tugen. The study seeks to examine the initial Tugen response to British invasion from 1892 up to 1900, to investigate how colonialism changed Tugen ways of life from 1901 to the end of the First World War in 1918, to assess ways in which the Tugen were affected by colonial rule during inter-war period from 1919 up to 1945 and to analyze how the Tugen contributed to decolonization process from 1946 to 1963. The study is based on the articulation of modes of production theory which examines the interactions between settler farmers, the British rule and the Tugen wage labourers. This paper analyses the main contributions of colonial administration and security activities sourced from reports brought by caravan landings to and from Mombasa to Entebbe respectively. The Lembus as administered subjects, were the local inhabitants and the Nubians who majored in providing security contributed greatly to its development from a small market into a big town in 1963. The study integrated the historical method concerning qualitative research for data collection and research design. This methodology used purposive sampling which led into the snowballing. Primary sources required use of oral interviews, archival sources, newspapers, theses and reports. Secondary sources involved articles, relics and books. Collected data were compiled and analyzed. The study contributes to the historical analysis of British colonialism, its legacies and its significance in Kenya.

Keywords: *British invasion, colonialism, colonial rule, inter-war period, decolonization*

Introduction

Eldama derives its name from Uasin Gishu Maasai meaning late sunrise, who had formerly settled in the town earlier before the arrival of the Tugen. Ravine is an English name given by the British colonialists meaning deep Valley. It is situated next to a river valley by-passed by river Perkerra which is one of the largest rivers in the county. Since colonial times to the current days it's still used as an administrative town.

According to Matson, Martin returned to take charge of Ravine, where George Wilson had left a token garrison to guard the fort. He had built it in October 1894 where one of his headmen had made blood brother-hood with the "Kamasia" (Tugen).¹ On 15 December 1894, the troops were mustered and sent behind to where the food loads were an hour behind. Mr. Hobley the Provincial Commissioner [P.C] came on from where he had camped the day before. At 4:00 pm the cattle were sent across the river to Kabonyoony.

At 5:00 pm, the bridge construction was ready, and the donkey with their loads were sent across. During 18th December 1894, the drum beats were performed at 5:00 pm and the caravan started arriving at 6:00 pm and camped at the station until 9:15 am. A few Kamasia were in the camp selling food to the men.²

The sick men who had been sent to the station at night of 20th December made a bright fire and the result was that one of the huts accidentally caught fire. It was put out at once though with a good deal of trouble. Notwithstanding, an elder remarked that Chemakisich Arap Tallam during one evening on his retaliatory attack, hid himself on top of the bushy hill top of Kabonyoony and lit charcoal fire. Thereof, he burned to red hot several winged shape arrow heads after tying round each with dry cedar barks. With his archery skill, he hit the rooftop of the grass thatched large dwelling of the camp hence, burning it down to ashes. Afterwards, the station officer with his Garrison transferred the fort to another hill eastwards, of the former across the river. This was a strategic position for viewing enemies from. This was after the binoculars were brought from abroad. The current place was better other than a hollow position of the latter. On 21st December 1894 at the old camp, when it reached 6.00 am, men began crossing the river with their loads to the new camp.³

In May 1895, it was Martin who supervised the building of the Boma at Eldama Ravine. On top of the hill according to Jackson's instructions as the latter considered it more prudent to build these rather than in a hollow. The old camp was surrounded by hostile tribes. Martin became the second District Commissioner after Fredrick Jackson. The Imperial British East African Company found Ravine as a suitable mid-point to Entebe from the coast and as a District Commissioner's headquarters. Goods and food could be moved more speedily and regularly to the road stations. Likewise more satisfactory arrangements could be made to overcome the chronic food scarcity at the Ravine headquarters.⁴

The Kerkwoony treaty of May 1897 found a few women taken prisoners and Ternan estimated that the 307 cattle and 8000 sheep and goats were captured. These accounted for fifteen percent of the Kamasia herds. All the war remnants including women, young ladies, old women, cattle, sheep and goats had been driven to Ravine and enclosed to a place where the Eldama Ravine Catholic church was later built⁵. The women prisoners were sent home with a message to their men folk that if they wanted peace, responsible leaders should come to the fort and make their submission. Ternan could not wait for a reply to the summons and he left the station officials to make peace with the Kamasia when they came in.⁶

No sooner had the women prisoners had gone to sent for their men folk than they came by themselves to Irraaja river gorge. On reaching the gorge they stopped there and sent a person called Chesumet to inquire if the Station Officers would allow the release of their women and children. They needed to go and feed them, claiming the station may lack what to feed them with. An Officer replied and asked him, where the rest were and he replied that they were waiting in the valley. He was told to go and beckon them to come without their weapons we make peace.⁷

Lembus people had sent selected council of elders excluding their chief (Arap Barkalia) to the station. They met the Ravine Station Officer led by Foaker and made the peace treaty with them. The Officer in Charge Mr. Foaker asked the elders if they wanted to be friends with them. Therefore, he asked them, “what would you like to give us and what wouldn’t you give us?” In return the elders replied that, we never usually give out land or a son. We are used to giving out ladies or livestock. At that time all elders summoned themselves besides the congregation to deliberate on what to give out and how. After their agreement, they returned to the congregation.⁸ An elder belonging to Kabkeino Kimeittee of Teriki clan gave out a lady “kwoony” who her daughter was called Teriki Kabkimeito who was seated amongst the remnants. A white blemishless bull among the remnants was given out by an elder from Kibetu family of Tungo clan. A cowries shelled milk calabash which the women remnants had carried was given out to the officers by Tabunei Talaai the wife of Arap Kiyaii Soliilmet.⁹

Immediately thereafter, traditional prayers were offered by two people to conceal the treaty agreement. The first elder came from Kibetu family of Tungo clan to cast the spell curse prayers called “Chubissieet”. He did this while facing westwards to the sunset direction. The second elder came from Kipkuugoi family of Mooi clan who prayed for blessings to reach the congregation, the government and the Lembus people at large. He did this while facing eastwards where the sun rises from to bring blessings. These prayers were called blessings, “Berurto”. Sir Martin the Ravine station garrison commander had married the sister to the aunt of Joseph Murumbi called Tabunei Soliilmet. She was the one who translated Lembus to Maasai and likewise translated Maasai to English for Martin to understand. She was present during the Kerkwoony treaty concealment to offer translation services for Station Officers.¹⁰

The formation of the new district of Baringo in August 1898 saw areas under the new district still under the jurisdiction of Eldama Ravine district for ten years up to 1908. By 1902, Major Erick Smith was in charge of Ravine district which was under Naivasha Province when for the first time Hut and Poll taxes were being collected and brought to Eldama Ravine administration office. One adult used to pay one and two rupees for Poll and Hut taxes respectively. By 1911, the Swahili people were moved away from the Arab and Indian “Bazaar” market place, to a near site and given 43 plots occupied on temporary licenses sold at 3 rupees each. The Nubians were also given 26 plots near police lines while Indian applicants were to be given plots near the “Bazaar” market on the basis of 99 years lease.¹¹

The land alienation process in the Uplands began in 1902 and, one of the first shopkeepers who arrived in 1905 and opened a shop in Eldama Ravine was called Juma Hajee. The Indian and Arab shopkeepers regulated trade in goods such as salt, clothes and sugar. No one in Tugen is remembered to have been involved in shop keeping during this period. The available records show that however, some Petty Tugen Traders sold items that could also be found in the Indian shops. By 1908, the available records show trade activities in Eldama Ravine on the selling prices of goods and Items. The total exports are as shown:

<u>Goat skins</u>	<u>Sheep skins</u>	<u>Ox hides</u>
27,125	835	448 ¹²

As records reveal, from 1915 the Lembus natives produce sold in Eldama Ravine were little as compared by these prices. Food items were sold at one rupee.¹³

<u>Items</u>	<u>Market Price</u>
Wimbi	2/= per load
Bullock	25/=
Cow	60/=
Sheep/ Goat	3/=
Male donkey	45/=
Female donkey	65/=

The DCs record in 1916 writes,

Transport is at present very difficult, owing to the severe gradients on the roads leading up to the station in Kabarnet. Most of the transport was by headload and through other considerable portion was carried by donkeys.

By 1917, business premises at Eldama Ravine had increased to eight business “Bazaar” shops as well unlike the Lembus who had no shops or plots. The Swahili businessmen like Suleiman Bin Kilundi was one of the rich famous in Ravine centre, recognized by the L.N.C for purpose of taxing including one Lembus Lakwait Arap Kibet. Most of the transport in Ravine Centre was by head load and through other considerable portion was carried by donkeys. Eldama Ravine as an auction market centre by 1917-1918. According to the records it showed that there was a very low sale of sheep and goats. There were only 6000 sold through Eldama Ravine in comparison to 30,000 sheep and goats sold and exported from Baringo district at the beginning of 1914.¹⁴

The DCs annual report of 1917 writes, “The native prices for livestock and crops showed an increase in prices than in 1915, which were as follows.”

<u>Items</u>	<u>Market Price</u>
Bullock	30/=
Cow /	60/=
Sheep/Goat	4/=
Male donkey	50/=
Female donkey	75/=

The existing records showed that in Eldama Ravine between 1914 -1918 trade and marketing in selling and buying of livestock, skins, hides and grains were interrupted. This was due to the Turkana expedition and British involvement in the First World War 1. As a result, trade in livestock especially at the government station in Kabarnet and Eldama Ravine was hit by lack of capital. The Tugen from Kakimor location used to come to Ravine on several issues including the buying of agricultural farm tools.¹⁵

By 1917 as per the records, Eldama Ravine got a facelift by the A.I.M missionaries installing their primary school. The administrative officer in charge of Eldama Ravine District, who was the D.C Mr. E.C Crewe Read, recalled AIM in Kabarnet to come into Ravine and build a mission station which they did. The Ravine centre this time acquired the status of an Education centre. The African Inland Mission responded by building their station of the school, health centre and the church. The workmanship was done by none other than an American Missionary Albert Barnet. He played a significant role in education development as his vision was in a way whereby locals had their children in school. By this they later came to develop the area after their studies. The Tugen inhabitants at this time gave Ravine a name and called it Rerentee.¹⁶

After 1918 the record shows that trade was still the major flourishing business in Ravine. The retired Nubian military servicemen settled in the substantial Nubian village at Eldama Ravine which greatly swelled the number of traders involved. In 1920 as the record states, there was heavy mortality throughout Ravine and Baringo District from the influenza (the Spanish flu). The same disease had ravaged Europe after the 1914-1918 war, and was now sweeping through Africa. The District Commissioner in charge of Ravine recorded this medical information and filed it, he was called E.C Crewe Read.¹⁷

The District of Eldama Ravine ceased to be a district in 1922 when the D.C, E.C Crewe Read became the last District Commissioner. He was then promoted to be the first Provincial Commissioner of Naivasha Province. Instead Eldama Ravine was engulfed by Baringo District up to 1963. The records existed that Naivasha Province became the Kerio Province in February 1922. It had the headquarters at Eldama Ravine which became the Provincial headquarters for five years before it was moved to Nakuru in 1928. The expansion of Ravine this time to accommodate

Provincial headquarters was inevitable as the garrison soldiers were increased and so to several other services. The first Provincial Commissioner to be stationed in Nakuru was E.C Crewe Read who remained for two years from 1922 to 1924. Mr. G.H Asborne was the second Provincial Commissioner, followed by Mr. Field Jones in April 1926.¹⁸

In 1924 Koitaba Arap Mibei remarried Anna Kabon in the Africa Inland Mission at Eldama Ravine. Their Christian contemporaries during that period included Mr. and Mrs. Reuben Bomett, Mr. and Mrs. Paul Bomett, Mr. Daudi Kibet, Mr. Benjamin Kipchumba, Mrs. Esther Chemirmir, Mr. Samuel Martin Abdalla, Leah Bomett, Mrs. Naomi Kipchumba, Mr. Philip Chemnjor and Mr. Joel Chemirmir among others. They became Christians courtesy of the missionary work of Rev. Albert Barnet.¹⁹

Among the first converts like Reuben Bomett, Joel Chemirmir and others, grew and became church elders. The A.I.M. station of Eldama Ravine was nicknamed “Kabwana” (the master’s place) by the Lembus people. The reason was because they resented education locally, calling it “Kapmesken” (the mission’s place) relating it with the issues of “Kabwana”. They also called the learners “cheluuminik” the clothed ones because they wore khaki pair of shorts and shirts called “murtukuu” and the hide’s made slippers “kweyoonik” These Lembus locals themselves who nicknamed them, wore wrapped cloth sheets and strapped blankets.²⁰

Other feeder roads leading to Eldama Ravine were constructed by the Nyongi age group elders using hand tools in 1920s. One road left Ravine through Poror into Torongo centre and beyond. The second one left Ravine through Saos to Emining trading centre down to the lowlands. The third road left westwards through Arama, Boito into Kipture the next fort after Ravine, which was in Nandi. The fourth road branched to Londiani through Maji Mazuri centre. The fifth one joined Ravine centre along the Sclater road from Naivasha fort via Nakuru.²¹

Between 1920s up to 1930s the administrative affairs, the garrison security matters and trade, were dominant and other continuous activities in Eldama Ravine centre. In Lembus people like Eric Bomett, William Bomett, Chumba and Ngulat had attended school by 1930s at Eldama Ravine Mission. In the D.C’S letter of 20th December 1936 about education in Baringo mentions, “At present the Africa Inland Mission has a school at Ravine, probably it teaches a few pupils outside the reserve. In 1937 there were a few natives of Lembus and Njemps who were adherents of the Africa Africa Inland Mission in Ravine Township, which had out schools at any rate in the reserve. The place of Eldama Ravine Mission was too cold with high mortality rate for infants where most of them died of pneumonia. Most of them were buried in graves behind the Mission Dispensary cemetery. This chilly weather prevented most Lembus students from coming to learn in the station.”²²

An oral informant narrates, “Though I was among the A.I.M converts in 1941 I did not proceed to school as lineage people with my age mates despised my Christian faith.” By this time the Nubian people still refused their children to go to Eldama Ravine Mission school. They claimed that unless

the Christian run school of A.I.M at Ravine will change to their Islamic faith. In July 1944, complaints were received due to the general lack of educational and medical services in South Tugen. In 1944, the few natives capable of holding responsible positions in the district were educated by the A.I.M at Eldama Ravine. By 1945 the initial converts of 1924 at this time like Reuben Bomett, Elijah Cheptoo, Joel Chemirmir and others had started to take their children to the Mission station.²³

In 1940s auction trade in livestock by Nubians in Ravine included flour selling to which they extended the same to Emining and Marigat market centres. Existing in records from 1930s towards 1940 was the auction trade in Ravine which had become an institution unlike other centres where it was short-lived. Asian traders had trade monopoly for a long time but from 1945 a few Tugen Africans volunteered in retail trade. A few Lembus Tugen of Ravine began to buy a few owned Indian shops for example Joseph Sadalla, who built a duka in Eldama Ravine and became the first Lembus with a lorry doing business. In 1947 six plots were demarcated for Lembus people as a business expansion of the town.²⁴

In addition, the prominent Indian traders like Jumaa Hajee was joined by others like Allidina Visram and C.B Patel therefore made this town to grow. The six Lembus native plots with eight Indian “Bazaars” were in addition to the 1911 temporary issued plots to Swahili and Nubians. These totalled to eighty-three plots. Expansion to health services in this town was experienced including soldier increase in their quarters caused by Mau Mau insurgence and emergency period of the early 1950s. By this time the town had piped water emanating from the settler farms around.²⁵

In 1947, Lembus men in Eldama Ravine fought the Nubian Askaris, on about the impromptu cattle who roamed in the town which were arrested by being put in a quarantine during one day’s afternoon. The cattle shepherd Mr. Haron Bomet had abandoned them by two o’clock in order to attend classes in Eldama Ravine Mission Primary School. From then an ultimatum was reached that cattle were to be prohibited from grazing in the town or driven through. The elder’s allegations of being segregated in the issuing of town plots reached the government administration. This therefore prompted the issuing of the same to them as they had none. After the ultimatum, those who were issued plots by the government included Elijah Cheptoo, Arap Londien, Hamisi Abdala, Gathenya, Ndegwa, Rachwaya, amongst others. From 1955 Eldama Ravine was the only centre people sold eggs of which they had a demand in Kampala Uganda. From Ravine they were exported through Maji Mazuri railway station.²⁶

As a recorded information in 1947 the District Commissioner of Baringo granted twenty eight new licenses to the people of Ravine. Though in the same year the people of Ravine were among the fifty plot applicants who applied with those from other neighbouring centres. According to the records by 1953, the Indians still dominated trading business like earlier on in clothes and food stuff. At Ravine there existed other famous Indian traders like Tayapai, Cheberege, Judu, Juma

Hajee, Patel and Lalu among the eight. The cattle stock bought from Ravine by Nyanza traders used to be taken to Rongai and Maji Mazuri railway stations to be ferried.²⁷

Throughout 1950s up to 1963 the same types of businesses continued to be realized All these increased in the town as more Africans volunteered venturing into business. Such businesses were majorly led by livestock auction with foodstuff. Shop keeping for accessories like clothes, sugar, salt, with farm implements and milk vending flourished. Thereof from 1956 towards independence the District Education Office had an office branch for South Baringo in Ravine town next to the DOs office. This used to be operated by William Bomet as an Assistant Schools' Supervisor of A.I.M schools and he likewise hailed from the vicinity of Eldama Ravine. One time in 1950s, Fortherningham was requested by the colonial government to build permanent structures in one of the town's plot for the purpose of exempting him tax. Until 1963 the town did not get any supply of electricity. The first township school in Eldama Ravine was Eldama Ravine Mission Primary sponsored by A.I.M. Several classrooms in the school were constructed with the aid of Africa Inland Mission in 1950s until 1963. This motivated many Swahili, Nubian and Lembus parents to take their children for learning and set base in the town.²⁸

Conclusion

This paper discusses the towns' growth as contributed by initial inhabitants and the British colonizers as visitors. The town establishment in 1894 by the colonial government brought in several changes as discussed. Insecurity to the station was formally a major concern in the area but was tamed with the introduction of, first the garrison station and secondly the colonial police. Residential areas cropped up due to those who carried out the business premises, health workers, education concerns and livestock traders. As a government administrative Centre, the road infrastructure passing through this town made it a transport Centre.

The first time the British stepped in with their administration, their invention which was the first military influence was a surprise to the Tugen. This was because they used their new superior arms against their inferior weapons. Their earlier social and economic practices had to change in welcoming the victor's new social and economic practices as the defeated.

This period brought in the first developmental issues of British rule. They got the appointment of their first chief to rule them from the British rule that enabled all types of social and economic development functions to be implemented in order. The chief collaborated with his people and the District officer above him. A lot of cattle raids had been committed against Tugen neighbours but the government had to restrain them later. Though the chiefs were cautioned and warned, this became a discipline measure, even after using them as well to be mercenaries against the Nandi. For the first time Lembus people got into wage employment and entered into the peasant commodity production in both the settler farms and in the concessionnaires' Lembus Forest Saw Mills. They experienced the mandatory payments of Poll and Hut taxes to the British rule for their first time.

The administration chiefs participated in labour recruitment for settler farming and road construction as well as collecting Poll and Hut taxes. The forest concessionaire's taxes that he paid

did not benefit the education sector or built roads and other social amenities. The government was hellbent on labour recruitments than recruitment of children to schools showing an injustice done to the natives as opposed to their loyalty on settler farmers and the forest concessionaire.

The various experiences of employees of the settler farms benefited their families and their local areas back home. They went to their reserves with new seeds and new farm tools which they used to teach people how to use them in the reserves. Instead, the right-holders who lived in the forest claimed for their rights from the government as they were infringed at the same time by the government using Forest Department. Education this time deteriorated in progress as there was no planting of more schools or student recruitment by the government.

Lembus people as forest right-holders benefited in their rights to own land in 1950s and towards independence. The emergence of the Tugen rural Bourgeoisie and rural capitalists were due to freedom to do trade under trade decolonization. Education decolonization was seen through an increase of schools led by A.I.M and D.E.B sponsorship. KAU as pre-independence party got reawakened in 1960 as KANU and KADU which spearheaded in gaining independence. Mau Mau itself was a KAU's wing and combat force, which was associated with Kenyatta, had its leader Dedan Kimathi. His blood during execution was the colonial government's sacrifice to pave way for independence to Kenyan citizens which became blessings in disguise.

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