

Resentment of Kenyan Colonial Chiefs

Why Colonial Era Chiefs in Kenya Were Highly Resented

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Abstract:

The current essay reviews the reasons why local communities highly resented the colonial era chiefs. It offers the background of the chief rule in Kenya, wherein some communities such as the Agikuyu people had few chiefs as a council of elders ruled them. To such communities, the concept of chief administration was alien, influencing their opposition to colonial administration that used chiefs to administer to the local communities. To ensure the main cases for the colonial-era chief resentment by locals are understood, the essay utilizes the cases of five chiefs that include Nabongo wa Mumia, Njiiri wa Karanja, Lenana wa Laibon, Waruhiu wa Kung'u and Nindo who were senior chiefs under the colonial governments. Through their cases, the essay shows how their implementation of colonial rule contributed to the local community hating them as they were viewed as the traitors of their community. Most of the chiefs used as cases in the current essay were also hated as they pursued personal richness rather than using their leadership position to uplift the welfare of their communities. They also engaged in the recruitment of community members who were used in forced labor and the forceful recruitment of young men to fight in the first and second world war leading to an increase in resentment among the local communities.

Introduction

The review of colonial rule in Kenya indicates that it could not have been possible without the contribution made by local chiefs. The chiefs were also the ones who were tasked in implementing most of the colonial government policies, such as policies on local taxes and recruitment of employees who were working on settlers' farms. As residents later killed some of the chiefs such as Chief Nderi Wang'ombe due to their support and implementation of colonial government policies, the current research aims to identify the key reasons why the colonial era chiefs were highly resented in Kenya.

The Establishment of Colonial Era Chief Rule in Kenya

An authoritative study carried out by Branch (2005) reveals that a lot of societies in Kenya were stateless, and governed by a council of elders and lineage heads before the British powers colonized Kenya. In order for the British to take full control over the Kenyan territory, they used the indirect rule method, which involved the appointment of chiefs who could easily link them to the members of the society (Ndege, 2009). To support this, the study carried out by Maloba (2017) explained that through the chief leadership, the British effectively carried out their plans in Kenya. However, the appointed chiefs viewed the British governance differently as some resisted, others collaborated, and others had mixed reactions. As a result of this, it's essential to realize that the

roles the different chiefs played helped in building sustainable development in Kenya in sectors such as Security, Education, Environmental conservation, transport and infrastructure, and so on (Branch, 2005). In addition, the good governance of the colonial chiefs played a pivotal role in enhancing a moral and ethical society.

Despite the positive results associated with the governance of the colonial chiefs, there were also negative results in relation to their various roles and responsibilities (Maloba,2017). This was commonly observed among the chiefs who collaborated with the British such as Chief Waruhiu Wa kungu, paramount chief Nabongo wa Mumia, and so on. It should be noted that their self-interests catapulted most of the colonial chiefs who collaborated with the British colony, and this suggests that the colonial chiefs were the biggest beneficiaries of colonial rule.

For the chiefs to benefit from the governance, they had to fulfill the expectations of the British and, as a result, ruled with strictness and firmness (Branch, 2005). On the other hand, the study by Ndege (2009) shows that the colonial chiefs did not want to lose their jobs either hence had to govern effectively. For example, the roles that were played by the chiefs included tax collection, supplying forced labor among others were opposed by many of their subjects as some chiefs used brutal force while carrying out these roles through the review of different authoritative studies on specific colonial chiefs such as Chief Nabongo Wa Mumia, Chief Waruhiu was kungu, this essay broadly explains the reasons behind the resentment of Colonial-era chiefs in Kenya.

Chief Nabongo Wa Mumia

The study carried out by Hoehler-Fatton (2016) indicates that Chief Nabongo Wa Mumia was a paramount chief in the Wanga kingdom and was considered as the last great ruler in the kingdom. This is because of his interaction with and management of the British colonial transition. Nabongo Mumia collaborated with the British for some reason, which included the need to have more power and hence becoming the paramount chief. He wanted assistance to defeat his brother, who wanted Kingship, and also he wanted military assistance to defeat his enemies (Murenga et al. 2013). Due to the need for support from the colonial government, he performed many tasks to impress the British. His enthusiastic support of the colonial government policies explains why many members of his kingdom resented him.

Following a study by Hoehler-Fatton (2016), it's revealed that community-based civil organizations at that time accused Chief Nabongo Mumia of not addressing the issues related to the community that is economical, political and socio-cultural issues. His focus on gaining support from Britain disoriented him from his kingdom roles, where he absconds his duty of helping the local communities. Before becoming a paramount chief, issues such as forced labor did not exist within the Wanga Kingdom. After Nabongo collaborated with the British, he took part in forcing his subjects to engage in forced labor leading to an increase in the hatred that the local communities had against him. His case shows how the work of the colonial chief in serving the colonial government was among the major source of conflict between them and their local communities.

The hatred against Nabongo Mumias has significantly influenced the claims that he took donations from local, national, and international leaders for his benefits. Before British rule, Nabongo as the king of Wanga people was required to share the resources that the Kingdom had with his subjects

who were loyal to him. However, after the rise of the colonial government rule, Nabongo focused on accumulating wealth leading to him exploiting the community wealth for his personal gain. An example was how the chief was also accused of converting the Mumias Sugar Company into a family business. Yet, it was to help the community by promoting the growth of Wanga culture as well as showcasing the Kingdom's economic ability. His case is also similar to other colonial chiefs who used their leadership position in accumulating personal wealth rather than working on meeting the local needs of their communities.

From the explanations above, it's important to note that Chief Nabongo Wa Mumia used different techniques so as to collaborate with the British (Hoehler-Fatton 2016). Among the many ways that Chief Nabongo wa Mumia used to collaborate with the British is by giving his men to fight alongside the British in their expeditions against other communities. Members of the community did not appreciate this as those engaged in the fights suffered injuries, and others lost their lives in the cause of the war. Besides participation in wars, Nabongo's close interaction with the British led to enmity between the Wanga people and some sections of the Abaluhya community as they viewed the Wanga people as traitors. Also, Nabongo's loyalty to the British administration, the media warriors became agents of the British and were taken to fight Luo, Bukusu, Nandi, and this enhanced enmity between Wanga and these communities. In conclusion, he was also highly resented by his subjects as he provided critical information towards the appointment of chiefs and headmen in Western Kenya (Murenga et al. 2013).

Chief Njiiri Wa Karanja

Chief Njiiri was a senior chief of fort hall Muranga who agreed to rule under the British Colony. Chief Njiiri wa Karanja was one of the wealthy landowners before the British had arrived to colonize Kenya following a study done by (Odhiambo, 2000). In order to carry out his interests, he ruled effectively so as to impress the British administrators. Besides protecting the personal land interests, Chief Njiiri wanted to acquire the privileges that came as a result of serving the British government, such as education, religion, and many others. In connection to this, due to his effective governance, he became a beneficiary of the Crossroads Africa education program. Through this, his son got the chance to study at Lincoln University with the likes of Kwame Nkrumah (Stephens, 2014). His focus on personal gain angered his subjects leading to hatred among the people he was leading.

Other than the economic interests, the establishment of Fort hall in Muranga by the British in order to enhance political control over the Kenyan territory angered the subjects. This is because, through the operational base, the British were able to implement their colonial policies effectively with the help of the colonial chiefs. As chief Njiiri played a significant role in working with the colonial government to set their operations in Murang'a, most locals despised him as they show him as the source of the British colonization within their area. Such a case explains how local communities in Kenya associated their suffering from the colonial government as being influenced by the work of the colonial chiefs.

Following a study carried out by Githuku (2019), it's important to note that Chief Njiiri was awarded a member of the British Empire because of his loyalty towards the British colonial government. A pioneered study carried out by Mackenzie (1991) reveals that chiefs took advantage of their position to accumulate land at the expense of their subjects. Besides, the chiefs employed force to facilitate land alienation. As a result of this, some chiefs become the despised local leaders of the colonial regime. Odhiambo (2000) clearly brings the fact that all chiefs were in a tough position as they had obeyed the British demands as well as maintaining some degree of respect among their people. Land is an important aspect and is a measure of wealth to any person, community and so on. Agriculture is one of the major economic activities in Central Kenya. And among the roles of the colonial chiefs was to control agricultural activities. As stated earlier, the biggest beneficiaries of the colonial rule were the colonial chiefs. In relation to this, Chief Njiiri emerged as one of the ideal capitalist farmers due to his supply of wage labor in farms for production and market use. This discouraged a lot of his subjects since he used them for his own success. Last but not least, Chief Njiiri was also regarded as a relic of the British colony because his favorite newspaper was delivered by a Kenyan reserve spotter plane that dropped a copy of the East African Standard.

Chief Lenana Loibon

Chief Lenana Loibon was a colonial chief in the Maasai community and collaborated with the British colonial government. The review of a study carried out by Biella (2009) shows that the Maasai community was already weakened in terms of military superiority before the arrival of the British powers. The military issue was as a result of fights between the communities he ruled and the communities from Tanganyika that His brother Senteu ruled (Filetti, 2007). Not only did they suffer weak military superiority but also were faced with drought and natural calamities of cattle and livestock diseases. Among the ways the British used to conquer the Kenyan territory was by establishing operational bases. Lenana, who wanted to defeat his brother Senteu, entered in agreements with a British agent who had established a fort at Kabete for political control. There were negative effects that were attributed to his collaboration with the British government (Biella 2009).

First, as a result of his collaboration, Maasai mercenaries were taken to fight the communities such as Kikuyu, who had resisted the British for some time, and this affected the warriors as some lost their lives among other negative effects. Secondly, Filetti (2007) explains that the British administrators took control of the Maasai through Lenana and deprived the communities of its wealth as they took a large part of their land through the agreements. The further point is that due to Maasai's collaboration with the British, there was massive land alienation, and most members of the community were moved to Laikipia and Ngong reserves hence the members resenting the chief Oloibon Lenana. Thirdly, the British affairs affected the cultural way of life of many communities, for instance, Purko Maasai in the Maasai community were divided into Loita and Ngong Maasai; these negatively affected the members of this community (Biella, 2009). In addition, also, the agreement that Leanne got into with the British was not important as it continued

to turn the two brothers (Lenana and Senteu) against each other hence more fights and wars, which led to massive destruction.

Chief Waruhiu Wa Kungu

Chief Waruhiu kungu was a colonial chief in kiambaa, Kiambu County, who collaborated with the British. Chief Waruhiu was known to be among the most controversial chiefs in Kenya as he raised admiration from the colonial government and strong hatred from the local community. Wamagatta (2008) explains that the reasons why individuals such as Waruhiu was kungu aspired to be chief were because of wealth, power, and prestige that were gained as a result of the chief leadership. Chief Waruhiu, who greatly collaborated with the British presence in Kenya, was highly resented amongst many Kikuyu chiefs because he ruled for his own personal interests. From this viewpoint, he was regarded as a traitor who had sold his country to the British colonizers as he served them fully.

To further support his character as a traitor, he also went a step ahead of condemning the Mau, who opposed the British colonial presence in Kenya. Due to this, Chief Waruhiu was assassinated on October 9th, 1952, and this is believed to be caused by the Mau fighters. He was directly involved in operations to eradicate Mau-mau in Kiambu and Nairobi region, accelerating the level of hatred that people had against him. Before his death, he was involved in colonial government public campaigns against Mau-mau, where he condemned their activities, making him a target as a community traitor.

It's further claimed that Chief Waruhiu exploited the colonial governance and attained advancements in both economic and social sectors. As far as the economic sector is concerned, Chief Waruhiu obtained several ownerships of land as he alienated land from his subjects for British settlement and occupation. According to Filetti (2007) Chief Waruhiu, loyalty to the British was due to the fact that he believed that the Kenyans were not yet ready to make their own government and thus was opposed to his subject's ideas and aspirations (Wamagatta 2008). To end with is a resourceful study that was carried out by Wamagatta (2008), which clearly indicates that the wealth that Chief Waruhiu accumulated resulted in the formation of social classes that were disliked by the other members of the society.

Chief Nindo

Chief Nindo was a colonial chief in seme location, which greatly collaborated with the British colony. The study carried out by Okuro (2010), shows that Chief Nindo was a firm and effective administrator. However, his duties impressed the British more rather than serving his subjects and hence were resented. A study carried out by Wadende (2011) reveals that all colonial subjects opposed the collection of taxes that is hut and poll tax. It's further explained that some chiefs used brutal force to levy taxes from their subjects. Due to this, Chief Nindo of Seme location, who carried out this role with the help of the headmen, was disliked by the people of the society and was also rendered unpopular due to his effective collection of taxes. Among the various roles of the colonial chiefs, they were responsible for supplying labor to settle farms, communities, or public purposes. The labor was necessary for accomplishing a great number of European innovations. Chief Nindo, who was quick to accept the British economic innovations hence had to

force people to carry out the different tasks in accomplishing the innovations. Being a powerful agent of the British colonial government, he was awarded a certificate because of tireless efforts in supplying labor towards the British investments (Githuku 2019). Due to his ability to encourage people's participation in the British economy, he was regarded to be the wealthiest in the whole society. As far as Chief Nindo is concerned, not only did he awarded certificates but also privileges of acquiring gifts such as a car from the British. This is very significant as it directly explains he was loyal to satisfy the colonial interests at all costs even though the British disrespected the Kenyan races.

Conclusion

Following the various studies as explained above, it's evident that the Colonial era chiefs were highly resented even though they carried out a big role in developing the growth of the country. It's further proven that the reason for the resentment is because the colonial chiefs who collaborated were after the privileges acquired from the British Colonial government. These privileges included wealth, power, education, gifts, and many others. This further illustrates that they had to implement the colonial policies in order to have the privileges, and furthermore, they feared losing their jobs.

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