

A History of Machakos Town (1887-1963)

David Musyimi Kiio¹, Melvine C. Lilechi², Samuel A. Nyanhoga³

The Catholic University of Eastern Africa (CUEA) P. O. BOX 62157-00200, Nairobi, Kenya

Corresponding author E-mail: [musyimime2018\[at\]gmail.com](mailto:musyimime2018[at]gmail.com)

Abstract: *This article was about the history of Machakos town between (1887-1963). This article sought to examine evolution of Machakos town prior colonization. Also this study sought to analyze the factors that conditioned the colonial government to establish its administrative activities in Machakos town. The town served as an economic and administrative center before and during the colonial period. Machakos town was used as satellite center for the actualization of colonial governance in the Kenyan protectorate. This included the control of the hinterland of Kenyan colony. These were key functions of Machakos town up to 1907 which are discussed in this article.*

Keywords: administration, colonialism, British, Trade

1. Introduction

In the 1890s, Machakos town experienced the first significant contact with the colonial administration. By 1895 IBEACo had divided Kenya into provinces. After the collapse of IBEACo in 1896 the British government took direct control of Kenya, they began by securing areas IBEACo had established as bases of administration. These areas were used as springboards to expand control in the colony. The establishment of Machakos Station began to shift the weight of the government away from Mombasa into the interior. Urbanization was influenced by white settlement.

1) Machakos town served as Administration center

The British colonialist used the administrative centers which sprang up in the early phase of colonial rule were due to the construction of railway lines and settlement states (Ochieng', 1990). The chief of Iveti, MboleMathambio signed a treaty in 1906 with IBEACo which enabled the British colonialists to claim that the Akamba had given their consent to become ruled by the British. The Machakos name was conceived after the British were unable to pronounce the name Masaku states (Ndambuki 2016). In 1907 the colonial government created native courts in the Machakos council of elders, which were to assist chiefs in settling disputes in villages. The Appeal courts also headed by *Musili* (chief) were responsible for deciding disputes that arose in the areas of jurisdiction. The chiefs also held *barazas* to discuss important matters that the colonial government demanded the Africans to do. The council of elders (*Utui council*) served as electoral colleges in electing a chief. They also advised *Musili* in solving disputes and addressing important challenges facing the community. The advisory council consisted of one elder from a village who was involved in setting disputes & blessing the community. The disputes that African chiefs solved included land cases and marriage disputes. The protectorate courts were more advanced than native tribunal courts since they handled inter-community conflicts. The views of elders from native tribunals were to be quoted in a case judgment that ended up in acquittal or conviction. Any judgment passed wasn't purposed to affect native reburial rulings. Superior cases such as murder were dealt with by the European courts. The Lawbreakers were fined or put in jail after the native tribunal convicted them. .

The jail was located on Machakos station which was the capital in the early colonial period. (KNA/DC/MKS.4/1 Machakos District Political Record Book up to 1910)).

To control Machakos town effectively, the colonial administration imposed compulsory taxes for traders and Africans. This decree was passed in 1907. The traders had to have trade permits valid for between one month to 3 months. The revenues collected from trading activities and the natives enabled the colonialists in Machakos town to run administrative activities effectively such as payment of officials and also aimed at putting under control trade and Africans. Taxation in Machakos town was necessary for the colonial government to control the population and minimize economic competition. All economic activities carried out by non-European individuals were subject to taxation. Various taxes were imposed on traders and Machakos town natives included the cattle pound fee for each cow, donkey, camel, or horse was 50 cents per day and had to be paid per head. Sheep, goat, pig, and any other animal tax fee was 25 cents per day and had to be paid per head. A rupee was charged for each cattle slaughtered. A family occupying a hut had to pay 25 cents per menses. The level of taxation varied in different periods as the colonial government in Machakos town used taxation to control non-Europeans in the Machakos town. This was a result of the increase of Indian traders who had occupied Machakos Township for trading purposes. (KNA/DC/MKS.4/1 Machakos District Political Record Book up to 1910).

The colonial administration brought a formalized and centralized governance system that governed Machakos town and the Akamba people in general. The British colonial government was based on a hierarchical system with various personnel based in different locations in Kenya working together under one authority from London. This was different from the pre-colonial times especially during the pre-colonial era whereby governance was decentralized and lacked any formal structures to govern the town and its people while Masaku was assumed as a leader because of his popularity. The coming of British colonial rule brought a structured formal mode of governance with appointed individuals in various administrative positions that ensured the British colonialists controlled Akamba without any strong uprising against them.

2) Machakos town was a major trading center

Ndambuki (2016) states that during the pre-colonial period, the Akamba of Machakos town were long-distance traders. Together with the Mijikenda and the Swahili, they traded in ivory, slaves, gum copra, beads, honey, bee wax, and skins with the Arabs along the coast. They organized weekly caravans that traveled to the coast, where they obtained goods such as beads, iron hoes, cotton cloth, red dyes, and brass wires. They also traded with neighboring communities like the Kikuyu, Maasai, and Embu. The colonial government allowed trading to be carried out in the reserves but according to the guidelines that they stated. The Indians had a strong influence on trading and this was seen as a threat by European colonial officials.

The colonial administration brought regulations to control the rising monopoly of Indians in trade. For a trader to be allowed to conduct business they were to apply for permits from the government via the district commissioner. The district commissioner gave out the general design layout and materials suitable to be sold. This ensured trading took place at the designated points and order was maintained. The chiefs themselves were key individuals at the trading points located in reserves since they traded with scarce goods that local individuals and were administrators of the trade. Though the colonial settlers didn't trade with the local traders, the government laid out measures to control the trading activities in Machakos town that protected the interests of settlers. Later the Akamba adopted agriculture, growing food crops such as maize, millet, sorghum, and cassava. The Akamba were also known for making and selling creative wood carvings and ornaments. They sold medicinal products known to them as '*miti*', meaning herbs, obtained from different plant species. (KNA/DC/MKS.4/1 Machakos District Political Record Book up to 1910).

During the colonial era trading activities at Machakos town were lucrative. In the year 1906-1907, the summary of export from Machakos district was 2, 585 Ghee tins, 40, 380 goats' skins pieces, 657 bags of grains, 22, 380 pieces of sheepskins, 401 LBS of tobacco, and 279 bags of sugar. These figures indicate that commerce in Machakos district was profitable although the trade reports figures obtained by the colonial government were not exact since the Indian traders didn't keep data of revenue they collected correctly. The data collected relied mostly on approximation. (KNA/DC/MKS.4/1 Machakos District Political Record Book up to 1910).

The shops located in African reserves were owned by Indians who had shops in Machakos town. Indians who carried out trade in Machakos town during the colonial period were key individuals for the ongoing activity. In the years of 1905-1907, the number of shops in Machakos town increased as follows; native reserve shops were 44, along the Kenya Uganda railways 36, and in Machakos Township 30. The most imported goods were blankets, wire, brass, iron, and copper as of 1907-1908. (KNA/DC/MKS.10A/24. /1Machakos commerce 1920).

Machakos station was the epitome of trading activities in the Ukambani Province. Major trading acts were carried out in Machakos town which also acted as colonial Headquarters.

The trade was mostly carried out by Indians Arabs and Kamba. The British administered the ongoing trade which led to indigenous trade declining with the presence of British colonial rule in Machakos town.

3) Machakos town being a residential center

Ogot (1974) argues that the present site of the Machakos town was at first occupied by the Akamba in the 16th century. They allegedly later spread to the surrounding hills due to the constant raids by the Maasai. In 1903 Machakos was gazetted as a township under the East African Township Ordinance of the same year with a boundary of 2.8 Kilometers radius from the fort. Some Swahili cattle traders settled in the town. Other Swahili from the surrounding European farms also settled in the town after being granted some plots. (KNA/DC/MKS.4/1 Machakos District Political Record Book up to 1910).

Machakos town was a residential area during the colonial period; The Europeans lived in Machakos station while Indians and Swahili who were traders rented plots at the station to carry out trading. The permanent population of Machakos station as of 1907 consisted of 6 Europeans 47 Indians and 140 Africans. All other communities except Europeans paid rent to land officers, 140.22 rupees a year. This made colonialists invest in building more plots for renting. The colonial government imposed strict decrees to control overcrowding in Machakos station. This involved the demolishing of houses owned by African natives who were forced to vacate into reserves. Township plots leased to Indians were closely located and were subdivided into 40 shops which they rented to Indians at a monthly rental of between 12-14 rupees per shop. The residential areas in Machakos station were categorized as follows residential apartments, government offices of stores, offices residential authorities' public gardens. The residents of the town comprised of Europeans mostly as other communities of such as Wanyamwezi, Akamba, and Indians were limited from residing in the station. (KNA/DC/MKS.4/1 Machakos District Political Record Book up to 1910).

The creation of reserves due to land alienation by the colonial administration in Machakos town was a strategy to compel Africans to provide labor. This was achieved through the introduction of numerous taxes that were compulsory to be paid. The Africans in reserves located in Machakos district were forced to participate in wage labor. Reserves in Machakos district during the colonial period included Katelembo, Matuu, and Kilungu. The colonial administration ensured that Africans lived in these localities whereby the climatic conditions were adverse and couldn't support any prosperous economic activity. This weakened any attempt for revolt by the Africans in Machakos hence the British occupied the area successfully and made it their first Capital of the Kenyan colony. (KNA/DC/MKS.4/1 Machakos District Political Record Book up to 1910).

4) Machakos town served as agricultural center

Ogendo (1991) states that the presence of British Colonial rule differed from the traditional land tenure systems which they viewed to be inconsistent and an obstacle towards development and modernization. They advocated for the removal of the traditional land ownership system. This was

taken care of by declaring all land to be crown land and establishing a tenure system that only accorded recognition to land rights secured by individual freehold title. In 1902, the Crown land ordinance was passed which meant all Africans lost their rights to own land. This meant that the colonial administration of Machakos town owned all land in the town and district. This led to the creation of reserves whereby the Africans were forced to stay. The land ordinances in Machakos town had a goal of encouraging European settlement in the district. For example, Europeans could buy a piece of land at a cheap price as 2 ropes per acre or 15 ropes to own rent 100 acres. The land ordinance was a means that the administration used to obtain and maintain laborers who were Africans. Africans who didn't own land were made to live as squatters in European plantations while providing labor to settlers. This proved to be successful as many settlers occupied the fertile regions of the district. (KNA/DC/MKS.4/1 Machakos District Political Record Book up to 1910).

The British imposed several changes in crop production and agrarian techniques, claiming to promote conservation and "betterment" of farming in the African reserves. The growing of coffee was extensively encouraged by the colonial administration in Machakos town. African farmers from Mua hills tried planting cash crops though this wasn't successful due to inadequate rainfall and drought. Sisal, coffee, and fruits were the staple crops that were grown. Athi River had 1400 acres of land planted sisal. The planting of sisal in this plantation was carried out by the Akamba laborers supplied from the reserves. The colonial government introduced coffee seeds to the African farmers and timber production to encourage the Akamba to concentrate on growing these cash crops. However, these efforts were curtailed due to the drought and famine experienced in the year 1907. In 1899, the colonial power declared that all land, irrespective of whether it was occupied or unoccupied, had accrued to the imperial power simply because of assumption of jurisdiction, making all land available for alienation to white settlers. (KNA/DC/MKS.4/1 Machakos District Political Record Book up to 1910).

2. Conclusion

The Machakostown served as a key administrative center towards having control of the colony by the British. It also served as a commercial center whereby trading activities with control of the British colonial government took place. This brought a sense of modernity to Machakos town. After the coming of British rule, governance was carried out formally and based on the principle of subordination that controlled all activities in the society. The presence of colonial rule influenced the transformation of Machakos town from being a traditional town to a developed and modern town.

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