

## Exploring the Relationship Between Colonial Governance and Nandi Leadership in Kenya, 1905-1918.

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### Abstract.

The relationship between colonial governance and Nandi leadership in Kenya has received significant scholarly attention, particularly their dual roles in serving both colonial administrations and their communities. While there are limited studies on the Nandi colonial chiefs in this context, this research critically examines their roles in the Nandi's social, economic, and political transformation from 1905 to 1918. Grounded in the 'Principal-Agent' Theory, the study utilised a historical research design, incorporating oral interviews and archival document analysis. Purposive and Snowball sampling methods were used to identify knowledgeable respondents. Validity and reliability were ensured through expert review of the data collection tools. Findings indicate that the introduction of colonial chiefs represented an alien form of governance initially met with rejection by the Nandi. However, these chiefs fostered social, economic, and political developments as acceptance grew. The study concludes that the Nandi chiefs faced a principal-agent problem, navigating conflicting interests of their communities and the colonial administration, leading them to be seen as both agents for the Nandi and loyal members of the colonial system.

**Keywords:** Colonial Governance, Indigenous Chiefs in Kenya, Nandi Community.

### Introduction:

This article examines the nuanced relationship between colonial governance and the leadership of the Nandi people in Kenya during the critical years from 1905 to 1918. It provides a comprehensive analysis of the consequences following the British defeat of the Nandi in 1905. This significant event enabled the British to strengthen their administrative reach within Nandi society. This transition was not merely a top-down approach; it illuminated local chiefs' vital role in facilitating a connection between indigenous governance structures and the emerging colonial

administration. The study highlights how these leaders contributed to this transformation, demonstrating their influential and adaptive responses to the evolving political landscape.

Moreover, the article reflects on the substantial contributions of these chiefs during the challenging period of the First World War. Their involvement was significant and diverse, ultimately supporting Kenya's evolution from a protectorate to a fully recognised colony in 1920, as evidenced by the enactment of the Kenya Protectorate Order-in-Council. This transition not only redefined the political framework of Kenya but also had enduring

implications for the social and cultural dynamics within Nandi society and beyond.

### **Theoretical Framework:**

This article employs the principal-agent theory. PA theory serves as a practical tool to identify contracts that align the goals of both parties. It also allows agents to act against principals if their interests are harmful (Ross, 1973). For instance, colonial chiefs could negotiate on behalf of the Nandi people, illustrating how agents can advocate for beneficiaries within this framework. It is rooted in 1970s discussions and focuses on the issues arising when principals (those in control) and agents (those who act on their behalf) have differing interests (Mitnick, 1974). The 'Principal-Agent' theory assumes a fair relationship between the principal and the agent, but in this study, the relationship between the colonial administration and the chiefs was not equitable. The British recognised the chiefs as untrustworthy and limited their powers, impacting their effectiveness (Jensen & Meckling, 1976). The PA theory helps analyse the colonial chiefs' roles in the Nandi people's political, economic, and social welfare through the concepts of political and moral legitimacy. While the chiefs had political legitimacy from their appointments, their moral legitimacy was influenced by their alignment with Nandi societal norms. Conflicting interests between the British and the Nandi sometimes led the chiefs to act against colonial directives, allowing them to exert power that could drive transformation within the Nandi community (Iyer, 2010).

### **Methodology:**

This article employs a historical research design to investigate the relationship between colonial governance and Nandi leadership in Kenya. It involves identifying the research problem, collecting data through oral interviews and archival texts, and evaluating source reliability. The study focuses on Nandi elders and historians knowledgeable about colonial chiefs. Forty respondents aged 60 to 90 were selected through purposive and Snowball sampling. Primary data from interviews explored the roles of colonial

chiefs, supported by secondary data from academic sources. This approach validated findings on the influence of colonial chiefs in the Nandi community from 1905.

Oral interviews were conducted to gather data on the role of Nandi chiefs during the colonial period, using standardised open-ended and closed-ended questions. Informants shared their experiences and compared them with those of their grandparents. The oral interviews supported historical data from the Kenya National Archives and written accounts and reports. The research analysed the role of colonial chiefs during the colonial era using theoretical frameworks. Field trips investigated the state's impact on human rights violations and the influence of colonial chiefs on the Nandi Community. Findings were drawn from field themes and archival data in a historical context. Archival materials, including annual reports and correspondence, were organised to obtain critical information about colonial chiefs. This data was categorised and presented to support insights from participant interviews.

### **Results and Discussion:**

#### **The Collaborative Dynamics Between the Nandi Community and the Colonial Administration.**

The pre-colonial Nandi were known for their strength as warriors and their deep connection to their land. The imposition of colonial authority significantly disrupted their ancient cultures and traditions, particularly their leadership structures. According to Lagat, early responses to colonial rule were crucial in shaping British policies towards the Nandi. After a violent confrontation that led to a punitive expedition, the Nandi were subdued in 1905. This event created lasting mistrust among the British. As in other colonial regions, a series of ordinances were enacted to alienate land from the Nandi, notably exemplified by the Crown Lands Bill of 1908, which empowered the colonial governor to reserve "crown land" deemed necessary for the native population's use and support (East African Protectorate 1908).

The study found that land alienation and displacement in Nandi began after 1905, following the defeat of the Nandi Resistance (OI Samson Kebenei, 2/7/2024). This defeat supports Ngeny's claim that the Nandi were defeated soon after Koitaleel Samoei's death. Under their land alienation policies, the colonial authorities then pursued efforts to relocate the Nandi from fertile areas (Ngeny, 1972). Due to colonial policies, the Nandi community experienced a significant loss of land in the southern Uasin Gishu plateau and various other regions subsequently allocated to European settlers. On 1 October 1907, the boundaries of the Nandi reserve were officially gazetted (KNA PC/NZA/3/1). In a subsequent commitment, the colonial government assured Nandi elders that the alienated land would remain under their stewardship indefinitely (KNA/DC/NDI/1/1/20. 1919-20). By 1912, the Nandi reserve had expanded to encompass 17 ½ square miles in the Kaimosi area. This land was designated for the Friends African Mission, and its centre was established there.

The alienation of Nandi land marked a pivotal transformation for the community. The Nandi lost a substantial portion of their grazing land in the regions now known as Southern Uasin Gishu Plateau and Trans Nzoia. This loss disrupted the traditional practice of collective land ownership among the Nandi community, while the imposition of taxes exacerbated the situation. Ultimately, the efforts of the colonial administration, which included the involvement of local chiefs in land delineation and alienation, resulted in the loss of both land and autonomy for the Nandi people.

According to Lagat, by 1917 and into early 1918, a significant number of men from the Nandi community had embraced the Squatter System by entering into labour contracts with white settlers (Lagat, 1995). This perspective is further supported by Zeleza, who contends that the emergence of colonial labour led to establishing a working class during Kenya's colonial period (Zeleza, 1982). Additionally, Van Zwanenberg connects the rise of capitalism to colonial labour systems in Kenya

between 1919 and 1939. He observes that Africans who had lost much of their land were compelled to become squatters and labourers on white settler farms. Over time, these individuals evolved into the elite members of the working class in post-independence Kenya.

The decision of the Nandi people to adopt squatting as a strategy was not solely a means of survival; it was also a response to the significant economic transformations instigated by colonial control. They navigated the new economic conditions imposed by colonisation while preserving some aspects of their ancient pastoral way of life by entering into labour contracts with European immigrants. This dual identity as both labourers and pastoralists illustrates the complexity of their social evolution during this period, as they endeavoured to maintain facets of their cultural identity in the face of the challenges posed by colonial oppression. During this period, British colonialists established the institution of chieftaincy among the Nandi people while maintaining the office of the Orkoiyot. The British appointed many colonial chiefs at the onset of colonial rule (OI Kipsugut Kiror, 17/8/2024). However, it became apparent that most of these chiefs lacked the traditional powers and authority associated with their roles. Many were unpopular, notably because they assisted the British in advancing their interests, especially regarding tax collection. This initial resistance to colonial chiefs illustrated the agency problem that the system of indirect rule faced in Kenya from its inception.

According to tax records from the Kenya National Archives (KNA), several chiefs who facilitated the British in tax collection during this period included Kipeles, Barsirian arap Manyei, Kabellen Arap Cheno, Arap Chirchir, Arap Chepsiror, Arap Viatol, Arap Kursoi, Arap Kiamen, Arap Siswa, Arap Segoo, Arap Sirma, Arap Kitongot, and Arap Narya (KNA/DC/NDI/1/1/20). Between 1910 and 1919, they recorded 10,116 huts, which generated 40,806 rupees from 1910 to 1912 alone. In recognition of their efforts to enforce tax laws,

some chiefs received personal gifts and official promotions. As a result, they gradually formed a new elite class within the Nandi community, acquiring greater social, economic, and political power. This change represented a departure from the pre-colonial Nandi social structure, which was based on traditional institutions like the Orkoiyot and included a more dispersed allocation of power and authority. The emergence of a new class of colonial chiefs who attained power by collaboration with the British signalled a shift toward a more hierarchical and stratified social structure that aligned with colonial goals.

British imposed taxes to finance government operations and depended on local chiefs to help. The District Commissioner (DC) was charged with collecting taxes to cover the salaries of his staff. These chiefs collected taxes per household, and failure to pay could result in imprisonment. As a result, many individuals opted to work to generate the funds necessary for their tax payments (DO Kapsabet FW Isaac, Nandi Quarterly Reports, 1905). The chiefs played a dual role, especially concerning land alienation, which earned them fame and disdain. They were crucial for the British in enforcing the laws related to land alienation and the squatter system (KNA/DC/NDI/1/1/20), 1902-1963). As a result, they were disliked because they were seen as agents of the British, facilitating actions that the Nandi viewed as harmful to their community, including land dispossession and reporting potential protests that led to severe retaliations.

Additionally, the chiefs were resented for their role in recruiting Nandi individuals for forced labour for the Europeans. They also played a significant part in persuading the Nandi to adopt a labour-oriented lifestyle under the squatter system. Thus, from the beginning, colonial chiefs represented the agency problem inherent in the British system of indirect rule. The conflicting interests of the Nandi and the British created a dilemma for the chiefs, which they had to navigate throughout much of the colonial period. The chiefs often managed this dilemma by renegotiating and adapting

their roles over time.

Therefore, the chiefs helped maintain the Nandi *pororiet* (clan) system to assuage their guilt. For example, they tried to ensure that every clan had land despite having to implement colonial policies. Some of the chiefs who played this critical role in restricting this land included Chief Arap Cheno alias Kibeles. He managed to demarcate the land between Lesoss Hill and Keiyo Hills (OI Kimeli Maritim, 10/7/2024). The chiefs also worked to ensure an order regarding land subdivision at the family level. They would ensure that land and cattle were divided equally to avoid disputes. To this end, the chiefs were social agents who helped to ensure that, despite the changes that the colonialists imposed, the social ties that existed in the society were maintained. It ensured that society was not fragmented due to the introduction of capitalism.

During colonial control, the chiefs' function as social agents markedly changed from the pre-colonial period, when authority was firmly ingrained in customs and group decision-making. The efforts of these colonial leaders to preserve the clan structure, despite the limitations imposed by colonial rule, were vital in averting the disintegration of Nandi society, which was under threat from the forces of capitalism and colonial policy. Therefore, these chiefs reflected a complicated link between resistance to colonial influence and adaptation to change, as they attempted to preserve important facets of Nandi's social cohesion even as they were integrated into a newly constructed hierarchical system imposed by colonialism. Berman and Lonsdale contend that colonial chiefs were agents of capitalist exploitation in Africa (Berman & Lonsdale, 1992). They argue that capitalism, colonialism's dominant ideology, was fundamentally at odds with indigenous peasant economies. To address this conflict, the colonial administration established a class of capitalist African elites—primarily the chiefs—who represented their communities in adapting to capitalism's demands.



During the colonial period, the local chiefs played a crucial role in ensuring that the Nandi people benefited from the technological advancements introduced by the colonialists, particularly in farming. One significant development was the introduction of the ox-drawn plough. In the early years of colonialism, the District Commissioner (DC) worked to teach the Nandi how to use this new technology. Initially, he faced disdain and rebuke from the community, but over time, he successfully encouraged them to adopt the ox-drawn plough (KNA/DC/NDI/1/2., 1901-20). The Local Native Councils, responsible for promoting local development, also played a crucial role in this process. They ensured that the ploughs were distributed to the Nandi and put into use. The chiefs actively directed the community to cultivate cash crops to prevent food shortages. Those who refused to participate in farming were often punished through whipping and caning. These actions highlight the general roles that the chiefs held within the colonial framework.

Colonialism significantly altered the Nandi people's social structure and power dynamics, impacting their pre-colonial economic independence. Chiefs played a crucial role by promoting modern technology and agricultural practices while acting as intermediaries between the colonial administration and the community. Their efforts aimed to preserve traditional social structures amidst the challenges posed by colonial rule.

### **Appointment and the Influence of Colonial Chiefs on the Nandi Community:**

The British colonial government appointed local chiefs to support governance in Kenya, aligning their efforts with the broader aims of the British Empire. The colonial state was responsible for executing British imperial objectives. Still, it did not have complete control, operating instead under directives from the metropole (Berman, 1992). The governor and other officials were accountable for British law and the constitution. Berman notes that this limitation in authority posed challenges for

administrators in asserting dominance over the colony.

Leadership and authority in pre-colonial Nandi culture were firmly rooted in ancient institutions, particularly the role of the Orkoiyot, who held considerable spiritual and political influence. However, the British colonial administration significantly disrupted these traditional governance structures by introducing the position of colonial chief. The District Commissioner (DC) was chiefly responsible for evaluating and appointing candidates for these chief positions, as outlined in the Annual Reports for 1904-1912 and 1905-1920 (KNA DC/NDI/I/I).

The colonial authorities required the Nandi community to propose individuals for the chief role. Nonetheless, many community members were hesitant to nominate their sons, perceiving the position of the colonial chief as foreign to their traditions. When the Nandi complied, the community selected nominees through a voting process (OI Peter Koei 12/8/2024). The colonial government created an illusion of autonomy and choice by allowing the Nandi to choose candidates for the colonial chieftaincy. This approach was part of a broader indirect control strategy employed by the British (Berman, 1992). In the end, while Nandi elders convened to elect a leader for recommendation as chief, this process undermined traditional authority, replacing it with a system that primarily served colonial interests. Even when chiefs were chosen from within the Nandi community, their legitimacy often relied more on collaboration with the British than on the customary authority of pre-colonial leaders.

Findings derived from oral interviews indicate that colonial chiefs among the Nandi were appointed between 1903 and the 1940s, with each chief supported by a headman or assistant chief. The assistant chief assisted the chief in decision-making processes and consulted with the council of elders to provide informed guidance. This governance structure assigned headmen and chiefs to specific locations, typically corresponding to individual clans. Nevertheless, the colonial administration

frequently disregarded clan affiliations during location boundaries, resulting in significant political disruption within the Nandi community.

The introduction of colonial chieftaincy effectively replaced customary authority with a system aligned with colonial objectives, undermining traditional social structures. Initially, under the Village Headman's Ordinance of 1902, native chiefs and headmen held no formal powers, but subsequent limited authority was conferred under the Courts Ordinance No. 16 of 1907. The colonial administration sought to integrate chieftaincy into Nandi governance; however, the appointment process often overlooked traditional hierarchies, leading to a sense of alienation among the Nandi people, who perceived these chiefs as representatives of a foreign power. District Commissioners favoured candidates who demonstrated knowledge, loyalty, and adherence to Christianity. The selection process, called *mlolongo* (lining up), frequently prioritised clans that aligned early with the colonial administration. Although the selection process appeared impartial, archival evidence suggests that a candidate's character played a significant role in their nomination, contrasting with traditional Nandi practices that emphasised clan affiliation. Additionally, over time, wealth became an increasingly important factor in gaining favour with the elders.

Afigbo notes that the warrant chief system emerged in areas lacking established chieftaincy traditions. In some British territories, such as the Igbo region of eastern Nigeria, the British appointed willing collaborators as local representatives. Other colonial powers, such as the French and Belgians, adopted this approach. The pre-colonial Nandi governance model conflicted with colonial indirect control strategies, making it difficult for newly appointed chiefs to win the community's trust. This model highlights the challenges faced by the British in achieving regional control, as the robust pre-colonial leadership structure fostered dissatisfaction and resistance among the Nandi people.

### **Nandi's Perspective on the Appointment of Colonial Chiefs:**

The study revealed that during the colonial period, the Nandi equated the colonial chief with the Laibon, the supreme chief before colonisation (OI Kiplimo Mugun on 22/03/2024). The Laibon's position was hereditary, chosen from the deceased or retiring Laibon's sons by a general assembly of elders and warriors. As such, the Nandi also expected the colonial chief's position to be hereditary. Typically, the elders selected the most successful son in predicting raid outcomes to become the Laibon, who derived power from their traditional healing practices and prophesy. In contrast, the colonial chief's authority came primarily from the colonial government. However, chiefs who earned the Nandi's respect wielded more influence. The British generally opposed the Laibon's position, so no members of the Laibon clan (Talai) were appointed chief. The assistant chief role replaced that of the traditional headmen, who were chosen from the elders of the 'pororiosiek' clans (KNA DC/NDI/I/I. Annual Reports of 1904-1912 and 1905-1920). Overall, the Nandi tried to understand the new political system by viewing the colonial chief as a new Laibon and the assistant chief as a modern village elder, navigating their shifting socio-political landscape.

The above sentiment concurs with Isichei's: In their appointment of chiefs, the British failed to realise that some parts of Africa were unfamiliar with the idea of 'chiefs' or 'kings' (Isichei, 1976). Isichei cites that, among the Igbo, decisions were made by protracted debate and consensus. The new powers given to the warrant chiefs and enhanced by the native court system led to an exercise of power and authority unprecedented in pre-colonial times. Warrant chiefs also used their power to accumulate wealth at the expense of their subjects. Therefore, their economic aggrandisement elevated their status to that of elites who would later take over as political leaders at independence. Through this process, colonial officials tended to create or recreate a patriarchal society because only men were appointed as warrant chiefs. The appointment

of warrant chiefs created significant problems and engendered large-scale resentment among African people. The warrant chiefs were hated because they were corrupt and arrogant.

Though fundamentally distinct from the warrant chief system, Isichei's opinions regarding the British selection of chiefs reflect the pre-colonial Nandi leadership structure. Isichei points out that the British appointed people who lacked power and legitimacy because there was no chieftaincy tradition in some parts of Africa, such as the Igbo region. On the other hand, the Nandi had a well-established political organisation based on clan systems, in which leaders naturally arose because of their knowledge and capacity to promote social cohesiveness. The findings further revealed that the position of a chief among the Nandi during the colonial period was primarily unpopular because the authority of that office was imposed on the people. Therefore, at the time, the Nandi colonial chiefs volunteered to work in the community office. These people comprised mainly those most active in social activities (OI Samuel Biwott on 16/3/2024). One such chief was Arap Cheno, who came from the Aldai. The Nandi feared being chosen for the office of chiefs because they believed the office bore some curses. It was reported that the community also volunteered people from other neighbouring tribes and Kalenjin sub-tribes.

The Nandi feared to volunteer their sons because they thought the office of the colonial chief invited curses from the community. This view agreed with the work of Berman, who observes that, for many reasons, African communities tended to resist leadership forms imposed on them by the colonialists (Berman, 1992). So, most often, they volunteered the members of the Tiriki community. Other chiefs were also chosen from households that were considered unpopular. This scenario contrasted the criteria used to elect traditional leaders, emphasising character and clan as critical considerations. One such chief was Arap Chepkiyeng from among the Keiyo who lived in Nandi (Kilibwoni), Kaptalamek. The colonial

administration appointed chiefs from other tribes when the Nandi refused to provide their candidates. The Nandi referred to such chiefs as *bunyot* or foreigner chiefs, and they came from the neighbouring communities of Keiyo, Tiriki, Luo and Luhya (OI Pius Kapkiyai on 4/4/2024).

The appointment of outsiders as chiefs increased political disharmony and agency problems in the Nandi. Afigbo has echoed the same sentiments regarding appointing chiefs in colonial Nigeria (Afigbo, 1972). First, the Nandi largely rejected the chiefs imposed on them by the colonial administration. Second, this rejection rendered the roles of the chiefs difficult due to a lack of community cooperation and support. For example, Arap Chepkiyeng was rejected by the majority of the Nandi. For this reason, he tended to be harsher to the community and often supported the government's agenda without much regard for the welfare of the Nandi people (OI Daudi Maritim 21/3/2024). This partly contributed to prolonging the Nandi resistance to colonial rule even after the death of Koitaleel Samoei, a sentiment shared by Ngeny (Ngeny, 1972).

In pre-colonial Nandi society, people were chosen for leadership roles based on their courage, wisdom, and ability to promote social peace within the group. Respect was owed to the Orkoiyot and clan elders, and established conventions and group decision-making were the foundation of governance. This methodology contrasts sharply with the colonial practice of selecting leaders, sometimes from outside the Nandi community, which led to significant political unrest and hostility. The study noted that no women were appointed as chiefs among the Nandi people. Furthermore, most of the chiefs were from the Tiriki community, indicating that the colonial authorities disrupted the traditional Nandi leadership system, where specific leaders were expected to come from particular clans. As the study highlighted, some chiefs did not originate from the Nandi community.

One interviewee mentioned Chief Arap Chepkiyeng from Keiyo, stating that many Keiyo

men married Nandi women during his reign. Additionally, leaders such as Arap Marigi and Kemwori initiated boys in Nandi. During his leadership, Arap Marigi played a significant role in encouraging many Keiyos to migrate to Nandi. This influx of Keiyo individuals contributed to their prominence as chiefs in Nandi. Moreover, Prophet Arap Turugat, who was Maasai, also migrated the Maasai people to Nandi during his time. According to the respondent, Koitaleel Samoei was similarly a descendant of the Maasai. Magut has reiterated this assertion in his work, *The Rise and Fall of the Nandi Orkoiyot* (Magut, 1969). The colonial government's disregard for the traditional Nandi clan system of appointing chiefs significantly disrupted the community's social structure and leadership hierarchy. This disruption led to considerable resistance from the Nandi people, who perceived it as an infringement on their autonomy and cultural identity. According to one respondent, when a portrait did not voluntarily present a chief, the District Commissioner would convene a *baraza* (a community meeting) to appoint one (OI Samuel Biwott on 16/3/2024). The chief selection was based on age sets, but it required approval from the candidate's father or grandfather. If consent was given, the son was designated to lead the livestock, while sub-chiefs were appointed from different clans.

Findings indicate that the Nandi people harboured a profound distrust of colonial chiefs, often refraining from volunteering their sons for leadership roles. Ashton characterised these chiefs as internal leaders operating as external brokers (Ashton, 1947). Many studies portray them as unaccountable figures who contributed to rural economic challenges by distorting Indigenous political institutions. In Sierra Leone, for instance, such behaviours were deemed significant factors that led to civil unrest, culminating in the civil war in 1991. Although colonial chiefs occasionally responded to local needs, they frequently prioritised their interests. The Nandi people's distrust of these chiefs was primarily rooted in their robust pre-colonial governance structures. This complex legacy continues to influence

contemporary perspectives on government and leadership in the region, as Nandi's socio-economic struggles illustrate the enduring impact of colonial policies on Indigenous political systems.

### **The Impact and Popularity of Colonial Chiefs in Nandi:**

A respondent indicated that the Nandi people held negative views of their chiefs for two primary reasons (OI Mariko Kurgaton, 20/3/2024). First, the chiefs were appointed by colonial authorities, leading the Nandi to perceive them as complicit in appropriating their land. As a result, they were regarded as agents of colonial power. This perspective aligns with Afigbo's findings regarding the unpopularity of colonial chiefs among the Igbo of Nigeria (Afigbo, 1972). The chief acted as an intermediary between the Nandi people and the white settlers, underscoring their significant role in fostering relationships with colonial authorities. Archival sources indicate that colonial chiefs primarily collected and transmitted information between the colonial government and the local community (Colony and Protectorate of Kenya, 1902; The Headman Ordinance, 1902). This role positioned them as important diplomatic bridges between both groups.

Although colonial influences disrupted the Nandi's pre-colonial social structure, colonial chiefs—often perceived as tools of oppression—also advocated for their people's rights. This complex dynamic illustrates the interplay of resistance, power, and adaptation that defined the Nandi experience during the colonial era. The chief served as a local advisor to colonial authorities, addressing community concerns, listening to elder grievances, and facilitating meetings with the District Commissioner (DC). This role positioned the chiefs as essential intermediaries between the colonial government and the Nandi people. Scholars such as Edward and Richards have noted that dominant chiefs often leveraged their power for personal benefit.

Ochieng observed that local communities expected their chiefs to advocate for their interests,



especially political freedom and socio-economic emancipation. However, many chiefs failed to meet these expectations, leading to perceptions of them as collaborators with colonial powers. Atieno-Odhiambo highlighted instances of chiefs like Karuri and Kinyanjui, who allied with colonisers for personal gain and aided in suppressing regions like Murang'a and Nyeri between 1902 and 1905, often exploiting local peasants. Initially, no specific laws governing chiefs' properties existed, enabling some to seize wealth from their communities. Notably, none of the appointed chiefs had formal education at the outset, as missionary societies recruited many for schooling at minimal costs. Nonetheless, a report indicated that the Nandi chiefs maintained a favourable stance toward the government, even as their authority faced challenges from an emerging independent youth. This historical context illustrates the complex relationship between authority, property rights, and education among Nandi chiefs before colonial rule, highlighting significant governance gaps during their appointments.

### **The Transformative Roles of Colonial Chiefs during the Initial Phases of Colonialism**

To ensure alignment with their mandates, colonial chiefs were assigned specific tasks under supervision (Colony and Protectorate of Kenya, 1902). Their responsibilities included promoting peace, encouraging school attendance, collecting taxes, and enforcing laws (OI Pius Kapkiyai, 4/4/2024). These roles were outlined in the Head Man Ordinance of 1902, which positioned chiefs as state agents tasked with controlling the local population. In contrast, pre-colonial Nandi society was characterised by a decentralised leadership structure in which elders and councils collectively managed governance. This communal approach starkly contrasted the hierarchical model imposed by the colonial state.

The preceding remarks indicate that colonial chiefs functioned as intermediaries between the government and the Nandi community. The findings of the study further demonstrate that while

the initial groups of chiefs had limited responsibilities, the District Commissioner observed in his quarterly report of 1910 that there had been notable developments in their roles:

The chiefs and 'Kaptainik' elders have performed their duties reasonably well. However, they all require constant supervision and reminding of that work (KNA DC/NDI/30/9/1910. Nandi District Quarterly Report, 31 March 1910).

The colonialists did not fully trust the chiefs to perform their roles without supervision. As a result, oversight was necessary to address the agency problem under British indirect rule. Supervisors ensured the chiefs remained loyal to the government and met their responsibilities. The District Commissioner's report also showed evidence of cooperation between the chiefs, Laibons, and the British:

Arap Cheno and the Laibon have been told to move about amongst the headmen. They have done this, and meeting me has given me much information. Arap Shembai continues to do good work. I asked him if he might be made a headman in my last quarterly report. His name, I believe, was forwarded to his Excellency. Nothing has come yet about it (KNA DC/NDI/30/9/1910).

The study revealed that the Nandi people still faced restrictions on their movement. For example, they were not allowed to interact with white settlers without the permission of the District Commissioner (DC). The chiefs were responsible for ensuring that the Nandi adhered to these limitations. However, as indicated in the report below, there were instances where the settlers collaborated directly with locals, undermining the authority of the colonial chiefs. The collaboration is evident in the following passage from the DC's report of 1910:

A Mr Carvie, living at Kipsigak near the reserve's western boundary, has invited many Nandi to graze on his land, taking

payment for it. Mr. Carvie did this without consulting me, and I was obliged to inform him that I could not allow the Nandi to leave the reserve. The headmen on the border were told not to let the people out of the reserve. I believe, however, that some Nandi went to Mr Carvie and asked him to allow them to graze their cattle (KNA DC/NDI/30/9/1910. *Nandi District Quarterly Report*).

Colonial land appropriation profoundly impacted the Nandi people's traditional practices and social structures. The colonial government appointed chiefs to oversee the Nandi and exert control, implementing policies that benefited the settlers. Recognising this historical context is vital for appreciating the resilience and adaptability demonstrated by the Nandi community today.

### **The Framework of Colonial Taxation Policies and Their Impact on the Nandi Community, 1901-1912:**

Tax payment was compulsory during the colonial period in Kenya. The Kenya Revenue Authority (KRA) attributes the direct taxation of Kenyans to Sir Arthur Hardinge, who proposed a gradual levy system in conjunction with the development of the Uganda Railway.

One of the earliest forms of taxation was the Native Hut Tax, introduced in 1901. This tax mandated that each dwelling hut pay an annual fee of 1 rupee. This amount varied by region; in some areas, the tax was 2 rupees, and by 1903, it increased to 3 rupees. The Nandi created efficient pre-colonial institutions to manage their resources and societal requirements. However, individuals like Sir Arthur Hardinge introduced colonial taxes, drastically altering their way of life and causing social upheaval and economic hardship.

The subsequent tax implemented was the Poll Tax, introduced through the Poll Tax Ordinance 1910. This tax was designed to enhance the effective collection of Hut taxes by addressing the needs of individuals excluded from the Hut Tax policy. The

Poll Tax required African individuals aged 25 and older to remit an individual tax payment. During this period, taxation served a dual purpose: it reinforced the authority of the colonial administration while undermining established social structures and providing a critical source of revenue. The agents of the colonial government, primarily the chiefs, played an essential role in collecting taxes. This requirement often entailed coercion and intimidation to ensure compliance from those not fulfilling their tax obligations.

The study demonstrated that taxation exerted a substantial influence on Nandi society that extended beyond economic factors. Since the taxation system was predicated on the number of huts, some individuals engaged in tax evasion by restricting the construction of huts, which resulted in marriage postponements. These delays were often attributable to the disruptive impacts of colonial encroachment, as many men were preoccupied with labour obligations, and a significant number of young Nandi warriors had either been killed or conscripted into the British army during World War I. In response to tax evasion, the chiefs undertook investigations and imposed penalties on the offenders, which led to their perception as harsh enforcers of the British colonial regime.

The study underscores that taxation significantly affected the Nandi community, with repercussions beyond mere economic consequences. Due to the tax system based on the number of huts and households, some men constructed fewer huts to minimise their tax burden. This decision often resulted in delays in marriage. Additionally, work commitments and disruptions caused by colonial authorities further complicated these delays. Many young Nandi warriors faced considerable casualties during their efforts to resist, and by 1918, a significant number had been drafted into the British army for World War I. Despite these challenges, the chiefs actively pursued tax evasion, thereby projecting an image of stringent governance.

Hut tax records from 1910 to 1912 reveal that some chiefs excelled in their roles as tax collectors (KNA

DC/NDI/30/9/1910, Nandi District Quarterly Report, 31 March 1910). In various regions, tax revenues increased, suggesting the successful registration of new huts. However, other areas experienced a decline in tax collections over that period, as indicated in the archival data.

Tax collection data from various Nandi colonial chiefs between 1910 and 1912 shed light on their economic responsibilities and challenges during the colonial era. From 1910 to 1911, 116 huts were recorded, dramatically increasing to 10,422 huts from 1911 to 1912. This significant rise indicates an increase in the number of households subject to taxation. Consequently, the total tax revenue collected also rose, from 30,384 rupees to 31,489 rupees, marking an increase of 1,536 rupees overall. While huts increased, certain chiefs experienced notable differences in tax collection outcomes. For example, Arap Chepsiror increased 387 rupees in tax revenue. In contrast, chiefs such as Arap Segoo and Kapkeresin exhibited minimal changes in their collections. Additionally, Arap Kiamaen and Kibellas, among others, reported a decline in tax collection, which may indicate challenges in tax compliance or the effectiveness of tax collection methods during this period (KNA DC/NDI/30/9/1910).

The British policy of indirect rule involved local leaders being charged with implementing colonial regulations and generating revenue. This policy is exemplified by the reliance on colonial chiefs for tax collection. However, appointing chiefs who were not indigenous to the Nandi community engendered mistrust and hatred among the populace, as many perceived these leaders as representatives of colonial power rather than capable and legitimate authorities. This dynamic accentuates the challenges associated with tax collection within the Nandi community, where chiefs were tasked with balancing the need for community support against colonial demands.

A significant disconnect existed between the appointed leaders and the local population, as evidenced by the fact that certain chiefs originated from the Terik community, and the Nandi people

exhibited reluctance to allow their sons to assume leadership positions. These observations are consistent with historical narratives indicating that resistance emerged when taxes were imposed during the colonial era. For instance, the introduction of poll taxes in 1931 highlighted the difficulties faced by the Nandi people in fulfilling their tax obligations, often resulting in labour migration to settler farms to generate income. Additionally, the colonial administration's insistence on regular audits and supervision of tax collection procedures illustrated the challenges encountered by colonial chiefs in managing their fiscal responsibilities while maintaining integrity in their offices. The community's resistance to imposed leadership and reliance on chiefs for tax collection highlights the complexities of colonial administration. While some leaders may have positively influenced the economy, the overall impact of colonial rule led to significant challenges and discontent among the Nandi people.

Data from the Kenya National Archives (KNA) indicates that the British colonial administration implemented a taxation system primarily to facilitate government operations. This system compelled many Africans to seek wage labour on white settler farms (Anderson, 1993). Following the Crown Lands Ordinance of 1902, which stipulated that the British government owned all land in the Kenyan Protectorate, Africans faced restrictions on utilising the land to generate income for tax payments. Consequently, their primary revenue source was labour on settler farms (Kenya Revenue Authority, 2018). This taxation framework also subsidised funding from Britain and placed an obligation on District Commissioners (DCs) to ensure sufficient tax revenue to cover the salaries of government personnel.

This taxation strategy was integral to the colonial administration. It bolstered the British economy, reinforced settler-missionary partnerships, and limited the land rights and movements of the

African population. The ramifications of this framework have persisted even after the colonial period. In the Nandi community, colonial chiefs were designated as principal tax collectors on behalf of British authorities. This dual role complicated their identities as community members and representatives of colonial governance. To mitigate community resentment, some chiefs advocated for directing tax revenues toward improving local welfare and helping to establish educational and healthcare facilities.

The impact of taxation extended beyond economic challenges; for instance, the structure of tax assessments based on hut numbers led some men to construct fewer huts to avoid additional taxation. This avoidance strategy often resulted in delayed marriages. The disruptions caused by colonial rule further complicated these social dynamics, as the demands of tax collection created additional strains between the chiefs and the Nandi community.

### **The First World War and the Contributions of Nandi Governance:**

Greenstein emphasises that World War I significantly impacted Nandi society, with 1,197 individuals forcibly recruited to fight for the British from a population of approximately 50,000 (Greenstein, 1978). Most recruits were sent to Tanganyika and Mozambique, and while veterans returned with some pay, many Nandi hesitated to work for the British. This reluctance was illustrated by Sir E. Northey's directive to conscript labourers for road construction. Europeans feared that these veterans might rebel due to their experiences in the war (Shiroya, 1992 & Ellis, 1976). Furthermore, labour migration from the Luo, Luyia, and Kikuyu communities into the Rift Valley resulted from the colonial administration's difficulties securing local labour from the Kalenjin and Maasai communities (Stichter, 1982).

The First World War had a notable impact on Nandi civilisation, much like its effects on various African communities. Records from the King's African Rifles indicate that 1,197 Nandi individuals were compelled to enlist with the British, while the Nandi population ranged from

40,000 to 50,000 people. Most recruits were from the Nyongi age group, which had been established before the conflict, and many were sent to engage German forces in Tanganyika and Mozambique. In response to negative perceptions during tax collection, some chiefs sought to enhance their image while still complying with colonial demands, advocating that tax revenues be used to benefit the Nandi community.

This situation prompted the chiefs to proactively inform the District Commissioner (DC) about local developments. Many of them had participated in recruitment efforts and understood the concerns of the service members. The DC appointed chiefs from each clan, specifically targeting ex-soldiers and ex-police officers for two primary reasons: to diminish the potential threat posed by these veterans by keeping them occupied and under surveillance and to utilise their wartime experience and familiarity with European expectations.

The colonial authorities strategically appointed individuals with military and policing backgrounds as chiefs to maintain control over the Nandi people. This strategy aimed to stabilise British governance while reducing the risk of rebellion, although it cultivated resentment within local communities.

Colonialism significantly disrupted the livelihoods of the Nandi, resulting in a ban on hunting and gathering and imposing restrictions on movement to mitigate potential insurrections. The chiefs were tasked with limiting access to nearby forests and utilised informants for enforcement. While they permitted beekeeping and granted limited access to gathering firewood and medicinal plants, bribery became prevalent, as some chiefs sought payments for access to the forests, reflecting elements of Western capitalist exploitation.

Furthermore, the colonial government launched soil conservation campaigns, assigning the chiefs to oversee the construction of gabions and terraces to combat soil erosion caused by intensified agricultural practices. Agricultural Extension Officers regularly reported progress to the chiefs, who conducted follow-up visits to ensure adherence to recommended practices after voicing



concerns about the officers' engagement with African farmers.

The Nandi people lived mostly as pastoralists until the British arrived, depending mainly on herding cattle for their food. In addition, they engaged in hunting and gathering, which was an essential component of their food. The Nandi were known for their formidable defence against outside threats, having successfully repelled raids by Arab traders and other nearby tribes. Additionally, the Nandi colonial chiefs at this time also regulated the cutting down of trees by Africans, particularly in restricted areas. In so doing, the chiefs, who included Arap Nyatita, continued with the work of the traditional pre-colonial practice of environmental protection. When the colonial government gazetted areas as government lands, the chiefs sensitised the Africans against violating government laws and ensuring ecological conservation.

Even during the enormous social upheaval and change caused by colonial control, the Nandi colonial rulers carefully balanced ecological preservation and human activity. Their deeds revealed a profound appreciation for the value of environmental conservation and a readiness to modify long-standing customs to address the demands of a changing global environment. In the pre-colonial era, the Nandi people primarily depended on livestock for their livelihood, with large herds of cattle serving as a symbol of wealth. However, the arrival of European settlers brought regulations that restricted cattle management to help prevent livestock diseases.

During this period, the Nandi colonial chiefs played a vital role in disease control by educating the community about veterinary services and supervising livestock management activities, supported by headmen and agricultural extension officers. They advocated for establishing cattle dips to combat tick infestations, particularly in Kapchepkendi and Kamelilo. During outbreaks like anthrax, the chiefs organised dipping and vaccination initiatives, ensuring community compliance and taking necessary actions against

those who resisted. Additionally, they implemented branding to facilitate the easy identification of livestock.

The transition of the Nandi people from pre-colonial to colonial cattle management signifies a notable change in customs brought on by external laws. While cattle continued to be central to their economy and culture, colonial rule disrupted traditional practices and introduced new challenges in livestock care. During this period, Nandi chiefs played a crucial role in guiding their communities through these changes while striving to uphold their traditional values.

In 1912, the Nandi voiced concerns over the declining cattle population in their reserve, a situation exacerbated by their migration to neighbouring settler farms. Furthermore, a labour shortage complicated the efforts of chiefs to meet government demands for labour recruitment. Chief Arap Koitaleel, for instance, mentioned that settlers in Uasin Gishu frequently requested his assistance in supplying labour (Lagat, 1995). This situation resulted in complaints from settlers regarding tribal restrictions that barred Nandi squatters from bringing their cattle onto the farms in 1916.

Pre-colonial Nandi society valued cattle wealth and communal land ownership, but colonisation disrupted this stability by seizing land and diminishing cattle numbers. Despite their resistance, the Nandi faced significant changes. Ochieng notes that the Nandi chiefs genuinely cared for their people, even when implementing the indirect rule system (Ochieng, 1975). These chiefs encouraged livestock breeding and coordinated efforts to manage animal diseases. A 1913 editorial remarked that "the Nandi are the only neighbouring people from whom cattle can be procured," facilitating the emergence of squatterdom. This arrangement allowed the Nandi to return to their land and retain some aspects of their traditional practices despite the challenges posed by land alienation (KNA/PC/AZA/2/2/2).

Despite operating under indirect authority, the Nandi chiefs were instrumental in advancing their communities' interests by managing livestock and

promoting agricultural innovations. These efforts significantly influenced the socio-economic changes experienced during the colonial era. Ainsworth notes that squatting helped maintain the pre-colonial herd management system, with chiefs combating epidemics in the Nandi reserve and linking squatters to the political economy. The First World War intensified this movement; however, many soldiers returned with grievances against the colonial government, having been denied promised pensions (Greenstein, 1978). By 1920, frustration grew over the loss of 64,000 acres of grazing land, accounting for 16% of the area's total. This alienation was enforced by the same government they had served, using colonial chiefs as intermediaries. Restrictions on cattle movement due to a rinderpest epidemic further complicated matters, leaving some chiefs—who had been soldiers—struggling to balance their expectations with those of their colonial superiors (Huntingford, 2012).

The Nandi people revolted against colonial control in 1895 and again in 1905–06. Eventually subdued, they were compelled to work as labourers in the colonial economy, leading to significant changes in their pre-colonial society. Many chiefs aligned with the colonial administration and enforced strict measures against cattle rustling during this time. Although some Nandi individuals stole cattle from white settlers, resulting in severe penalties, the chiefs worked diligently to combat this issue. Following a ban on cattle raiding, a notable increase in livestock theft emerged, prompting chiefs to propose stringent punishments for offenders despite difficulties in identifying the culprits.

As cattle theft threatened their authority, the chiefs engaged their communities to help reveal the thieves' identities, often resorting to interrogations and imprisonment of suspects. These actions ultimately transformed the chiefs into agents of social change, guiding their community to comply with legal standards and significantly reducing instances of cattle rustling. During the colonial era, the Nandi chiefs played a crucial role in changing

their community's view of cattle rustling. Despite challenges, they enforced the law and prosecuted offenders. While this helped reduce the practice, it negatively impacted Nandi's pastoral economy, as cattle raiding was often the only way to replenish dwindling herds.

### **The Responsibilities of the Nandi Colonist Chiefs, 1905-1918:**

The study reveals that colonial chiefs primarily acted as administrative representatives for the British, a key element of indirect rule. They often faced difficulties due to local resistance and internal conflicts regarding their roles (OI Daudi Maritim on 21/3/2024). When communities rejected their authority, the British forced the chiefs to lead efforts to secure the Nandi people's acceptance. These chiefs relied on the kanga, armed with rifles from the District Commissioner's office, instilling fear among the Nandi, who had learned of the dangers posed by firearms during earlier resistance efforts. The British initially established their administration by appointing a District Commissioner and District Officer in Kapsabet, with the District Commissioner overseeing chiefs' appointments following the colonial agenda.

British colonial control significantly influenced colonial chiefs' relationship with the pre-colonial Nandi community. Before colonisation, the Orkoiyot held considerable authority within Nandi society, guiding cultural, spiritual, and governance matters. During the colonial era, chiefs acted as local advisors to the Nandi concerning the colonial government. However, they often struggled to align this role with the Headman's Ordinance, which required them to relay government information to the local populace (Colony and Protectorate of Kenya, 1902). In their interactions with colonial authorities, chiefs sought advice from respected elders and women in the community (OI Kiplimo Mugun, 22/03/2024).

Colonial chiefs also mediated conflicts between white settlers and the Nandi. When responsibilities to the colonial government conflicted with their duties to the community, many chiefs, including

Chief Arap Chirchir, discreetly supported the Nandi. Others, such as Arap Katonon Mosop and Chief Arap Malel, also provided covert assistance (OI Kimase Kirwa, 05/07/2024). This dynamic illustrates that Nandi chiefs acknowledged their elite status and exercised a degree of autonomy from colonial authorities, aligning with Berman's insights on power relations in colonial Kenya (Berman, 1992).

Nandi chiefs managed their responsibilities to the colonial government and their people, maintaining a certain amount of independence and power despite the colonial administration's efforts to include them in their system. Throughout the colonial era, the traditional Nandi system of chief power and community involvement persisted, albeit in altered ways. The study also found that the chiefs were mandated to summon the Nandi to meetings. They also passed crucial information to the people and relayed information from the people to the white settlers and the DC (OI Joseph Keter on 27/7/2024). The chiefs took reports to the DC and then to the PC, relaying the report to the Governor (Colony and Protectorate of Kenya, 1902). The governor directly contacted Her Majesty, the Queen of England.

Colonial chiefs played a pivotal role in the indirect governance of the Nandi, undermining traditional power structures while facilitating colonial policies that transformed Nandi society.

These chiefs were part of a three-tiered system of local leadership established by the British to ensure the success of indirect rule alongside local native councils and tribunals. Although they represented British interests across various sectors, their presence had positive and negative consequences for African natives. The introduction of colonial chiefs disrupted established customs. While some chiefs tried to incorporate local norms, the colonial system aimed to impose foreign governance models. This setup led to tensions between colonial chiefs and traditional authorities within communities.

According to insights from a respondent, the Nandi were relocated to reserved regions due to their prolonged resistance (OI Sawe Mengich on 20/5/2024). Much of their fertile land was allocated to white settler farmers, and in response to resistance, colonial authorities used chiefs and kangas to appease the community. Many Nandi men were requisitioned for labour, and colonial chiefs were often recruited from other Kalenjin sub-tribes and ethnic groups, recognising Nandi's reluctance to work as labourers. Colonial authorities also imposed restrictions on the livestock the Nandi could maintain, which contributed to the protests of 1923 (Ellis, 1976). Notably, Nandi chiefs had no role in resettlement decision-making, undermining their authority. During the colonial period, they significantly disrupted Nandi's traditional way of life, leading to solid opposition against foreign governance rooted in their identity as proud and self-governing people.

Research indicates that the District Officer (DO) employed the kanga, or 'spies,' under the chiefs' supervision (KNA/DC/ND1/1/2). Each chief was assigned four kangas, per the Village Headman's Ordinance (Colony and Protectorate of Kenya, 1902). The *Kangas* gathered intelligence for the DO and District Commissioner (DC), which served as a strategy for implementing the indirect rule. Although the Nandi resistance concluded with their assimilation into the British East Africa Protectorate in 1905, their guerrilla tactics had challenged British forces significantly, maintaining a formidable opposition to colonial authority. Kangas also acted as bodyguards for the chiefs, known as 'Buda guards.' The British selected agents based on loyalty, with educational opportunities limited to those deemed essential (Geschiera, 1993). Chiefs and Colonial Rule in Cameroon). Most *kangas*, often retired Kenya African Rifles soldiers, were typically uneducated. (OI Daudi Kosgei on 10/1/2024).

Pre-colonial Nandi leaders relied on a network of loyal followers, including warriors and elders, for community protection and governance. The

introduction of colonial influence significantly transformed these traditional roles. The social structure of the Nandi people changed, especially in the selection of bodyguards known as kangas, whose loyalty to the British government became essential. Research indicates that Nandi colonial chiefs primarily advocated the imperialist ideologies introduced by their colonial rulers while acting as spokespersons for their communities. These leaders gained authority through their official roles and were among the first Africans to embrace Christianity and Western formal education, further legitimising their power.

This section explores the roles of colonial chiefs, highlighting their function as political agents during the colonial period in Nandi. The British established these chiefs as part of their indirect rule policy, entrusting them with the responsibility of promoting colonial objectives and securing the local population's support. Before colonisation, Nandi ethics were based on taboos that acted as unwritten laws (Chelimo & Chelelgo, 2016). For instance, older women were prohibited from sleeping with boys, and vice versa (OI Malakwen Ruto, 10/7/2024). During colonial times, chiefs enforced colonial laws that often disregarded traditional ethics and focused on maintaining order. They held community meetings to relay colonial messages and strictly enforced compliance (KNA/Nandi District, 1911). With support from local police, chiefs resolved disputes at the regional level but escalated serious issues like cattle raids and land disputes as needed (Colony and Protectorate of Kenya, 1902).

The study examines the conflict between Nandi customs and colonial authority, focusing on the community's mistrust of colonial leaders. This tension often obstructed colonial governance as the Nandi sought to preserve their cultural identity and self-determination. Colonial chiefs, such as Chief Arap Basi, served as intermediaries between the Nandi and the colonial administration, consolidating power and facilitating land acquisition. Basi's efforts led to significant land ownership among Nandi elites, who became vital

political leaders after independence, promoting coexistence with settlers and initiating agricultural programs.

The interplay of pre-colonial traditions and colonial influences significantly shaped Nandi politics, with leaders like Basi laying the groundwork for enduring structures that continue to impact contemporary Nandi society. Chief Arap Tulel was a notable Nandi colonial chief recognised for strictly enforcing tax collection, often involving local brews or chickens. He led raids against villages to respond to livestock thefts allegedly committed by Nandi youths, highlighting the role of colonial chiefs in implementing taxation (Irungu, 2019). Chief Arap Titi centralised authority in Aldai, while Chief Joseph Arap Chepseba managed tax collection and organised barazas, where those who did not attend faced penalties. These actions signified a significant shift from traditional Nandi governance and have continued influencing their political and social dynamics today.

Colonial authorities favoured working with chiefs rather than Laibons due to the latter's association with traditional beliefs, which the British held in contempt. This preference resulted in a shift in leadership dynamics, where converting to Christianity became a strategic move for chiefs seeking power. For instance, Headman Arap Kessio was replaced by Elijah Cheruiyot Arap Chepkwony, a Christian, underscoring the colonial preference for Christian leaders. The District Commissioner noted that this transition was essential for stabilising authority among the Nandi, whom he described as "headstrong."

The Nandi pre-colonial political structure was characterised by centralised authority, which led to accountability issues during and after colonialism. The transition from traditional to colonial chiefs, such as headman Arap Chepsiror and Chief Katono, demonstrated the influence of external pressures. These leaders regulated local customs, enforced security, and resolved disputes. Before colonial rule, elders often administered justice during community ceremonies. While many



traditional practices continued during the colonial era, unresolved cases could escalate to the chiefs if elders' advice was disregarded. The trial process typically progressed from community levels to the chief, then to the district officer, and ultimately to the court.

The colonial dispute resolution system incorporated elements of the pre-colonial Nandi approach, including community involvement and the roles of chiefs, while implementing a more organised court structure. In some cases, colonial chiefs allowed traditional practices such as curses and divination in criminal investigations. If a suspect denied wrongdoing, curses could be invoked, and reconciliation meetings would be held for those seeking forgiveness. Additionally, chiefs facilitated binding agreements for borrowing and lending livestock, which helped ensure repayment and reduced reliance on curses for debt collection. The Nandi maintains a strong awareness of the power of curses and often investigate past wrongs when faced with illness or misfortunes.

Colonial chiefs' involvement in cattle trade and conflict resolution marked a significant shift from the Nandi community's pre-colonial practices. This change enhanced the chiefs' power and introduced new legal frameworks that undermined traditional conflict resolution methods, ultimately altering the Nandi people's collective identity. During the colonial era, clan boundary disputes became common, increasing tension. Such conflicts were rare before colonisation due to abundant arable land and well-defined clan territories (Lagat, 1995). However, colonial land demarcation resulted in some clan members encroaching on others' land, compounded by the government's confiscation of arable land for white settlers.

To resolve disputes, each clan, led by its headman, summoned elders from the opposing clan. If disagreements persisted, the matter was escalated to a court of appeal, such as Kilibwoni or Kabiyet. Disputes arose from witchcraft, fighting, and trespassing on white settler farms, leading chiefs to mediate and present cases in colonial courts (OI Sephania Rongoei, 2/8/2024). The introduction of

the Kipande system required passes for movement, which the Nandi found unsettling.

Despite these changes, colonial chiefs retained some traditional authority by integrating local customs, as Logan (2013) and Odinkalu (2005) noted, highlighted the efficiency and low cost of chief courts for resolving disputes. Ultimately, European powers utilised African leaders as chiefs to maintain control while giving an illusion of local authority. Power contends that while colonial chiefs were tasked with maintaining law and order, they were prohibited from conducting court cases (Power, 1992). Nonetheless, in the Shire Highlands of Malawi, chiefs and village headmen began to exceed their formal authority by acting as judges, imposing fines, and collecting labour from villagers. In response, colonial authorities implemented repressive measures in 1917, making it an offence not to report criminal activity to District Commissioners (DCs) and imposing fines or jail sentences for noncompliance (Erik, 2011)

This disruption of traditional governance created complex dynamics between indigenous leaders and colonial authorities in the Nandi region and the Shire Highlands. Irungu's research on colonial chiefs in Kenya supports this observation, revealing their vital role in ensuring security for social and economic advancement. The chiefs reduced crime, resolved disputes, educated communities on law and order, and fostered peace with neighbouring groups. They also assisted DCs in recruiting men to serve as kangas for security purposes. In the Nandi community, established traditional governance structures significantly influenced the roles and effectiveness of colonial chiefs, affecting their acceptance even as the British assigned them responsibilities for maintaining security and enforcing colonial laws.

### **The Progression of Colonial Policies, 1905-1918:**

Between 1905 and 1918, Kenya's colonial policies underwent significant changes, particularly concerning land use, taxation, and governance, which profoundly affected the Nandi chiefs. During this period, the imposition of direct taxes—especially hut and poll taxes—became a central

element of colonial politics. Many Africans were compelled to seek wage labour on settler farms to fulfil these financial obligations, which aimed to integrate them into a cash economy. The Nandi people deeply resented these taxes, perceiving them as exploitative. The reliance on selected chiefs to collect these taxes complicated their relationships with the local population.

During the colonial era, significant unrest emerged within the Nandi community. British reforms dramatically altered their long-established pastoral economy and social structure, leading to pushback from the community in response to the complex role of colonial chiefs in enforcing these changes. In 1906, the colonial government enacted the Diseases of Animals Ordinance. This ordinance remained in effect as a demonstration of the government's focus on controlling agricultural output and protecting the interests of settler farmers. Regular announcements regarding animal health were made to contain outbreaks that could threaten livestock, which were vital to the settlement economy (Government of Kenya, The Official Gazette of the Colony and Protectorate of Kenya).

Research findings indicated that the Nandi colonial chiefs were leading in enforcing the 1906 Diseases of Animals Ordinance. They were responsible for ensuring that all animals under their jurisdiction received necessary treatment by overseeing immunisation against diseases such as anthrax. The chiefs also carried out orders from the colonial government to quarantine animals during illness outbreaks. Additionally, they encouraged residents to bring their animals for dipping to eliminate ticks and other parasites. The chiefs communicated illness outbreaks to veterinary officers and colonial authorities and penalised violators of the ordinance by bringing them before local tribunals or seizing their animals. The Diseases of Animals Ordinance was crucial to the colonial government's efforts to control agriculture and protect settler interests. Still, they significantly impacted the Nandi people's traditional livestock practices and social structures. This ordinance became a tool for

colonial dominance, undermining the Nandi's traditional knowledge and way of life.

The Land Ordinance 1915 and similar regulations accelerated land appropriation from local communities and granted leases to European settlers, creating a land-use monopoly. These regulations led to the establishment of native reserves, often in less fertile areas, further marginalising the local population. All land was classified as Crown land, reducing Africans to "tenants at will" on their historically held land (Okoth-Ogendo, 1991). Moreover, the 1918 Kenyan Resident Native Laborers Ordinance shaped work relations between European colonisers and African labourers, significantly impacting the Nandi. This law required African labourers to work for lodging and wages, linking them to European farmers (Anderson, 2000). This shift eroded the authority of Nandi chiefs as colonial policies prioritised European agricultural needs over local customs (Berman, 1990).

The 1918 Kenyan Resident Native Labourers Ordinance significantly altered the traditional way of life for the Nandi community. The colonial government diminished the authority of Nandi leaders and implemented a forced labour system, disrupting the social and economic structures that had long supported the community. This legislation dismantled pre-colonial Nandi society and established an exploitative framework that prioritised the rights and welfare of European settlers over those of the Indigenous population.

### **Conclusion:**

This article provides a thorough examination of the intricate relationship between colonial governance and Nandi leadership in Kenya during the period from 1905 to 1918. It delves into the complex process through which colonial rule was established among the Nandi people, emphasising the pivotal introduction of chieftaincy as a new form of leadership.

The narrative highlights the role of colonial chiefs as transitional figures tasked with navigating a

significant cultural and governance shift from traditional leadership systems to those imposed by colonial powers. These chiefs faced a formidable challenge, balancing the aspirations and needs of their communities with the often rigid demands of their colonial superiors, frequently resulting in the prioritisation of colonial interests over local concerns. The analysis intricately explores the specific economic, political, and social responsibilities these chiefs assumed under colonial governance. It illustrates how the transition from pre-colonial to colonial authority among the Nandi was not merely a power change but a profound transformation in the community's social structures and governance practices.

While colonial chiefs are often viewed as mere extensions of colonial authority, this article reveals their multifaceted roles in attempting to mediate between the ambitions of the colonial regime and the requirements of the Indigenous population. Understanding this complex dynamic is essential for appreciating the enduring legacy of leadership in post-colonial Kenya. Furthermore, it uncovers the broader implications of colonialism for Indigenous governance systems, illustrating how historical transformations continue to influence contemporary social and political contexts.

### Recommendations:

This article emphasises the need for more in-depth research into the evolving role of chiefs in Kenya, particularly in the post-independence era. As the nation has navigated significant political, social, and economic changes, understanding how the responsibilities and influence of chiefs have transformed is crucial.

The findings from this research are expected to provide valuable insights for various stakeholders, including historians who seek to document and analyse the historical context of governance and administrators who manage public affairs. Furthermore, the information will be particularly relevant to the Ministry of Interior and Coordination of National Government as it strives to enhance its administrative structures and processes.

This study aims to identify critical factors that can drive meaningful social change, stimulate economic growth, and facilitate political transformation in Kenya by shedding light on various dimensions of leadership and governance. Ultimately, a detailed understanding of the chiefs' role could help inform policy decisions and strategies that promote effective management in the country.

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