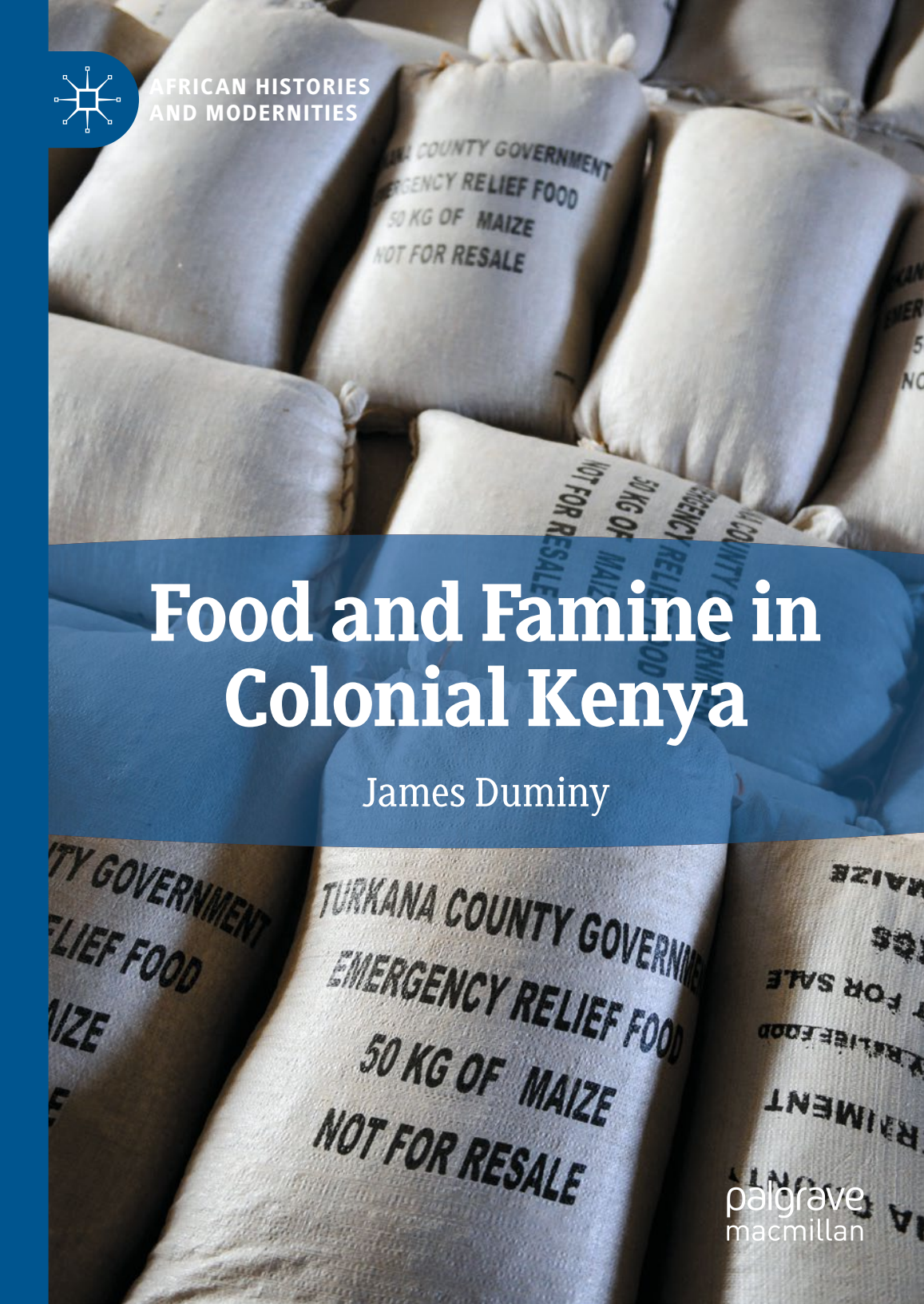
AFRICAN HISTORIES
AND MODERNITIES
Food and Famine in
Colonial Kenya
James Duminy
TURKANA COUNTY GOVERNMENT
EMERGENCY RELIEF FOOD
50 KG OF MAIZE
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James Duminy

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Foreword

This book reflects a major contribution emerging from my long and wonderfully stimulating association with author James Duminy. Having first worked with James over a decade ago, when he joined the African Centre for Cities (ACC) at the University of Cape Town to help build the Association of African Planning Schools, I was fortunate enough to engage him as part of my research team on a large urban food security project and at the same time to supervise his doctoral work. Located in an office just a few metres from mine, there was plenty of opportunity for me to benefit from his dry sense of humour and to consult him on any matters related to Foucault. James's recent move to the University of Bristol brought an end to our corridor banter, but offered a next step in his progress to becoming a well-known and respected scholar.

This book discusses food security from a perspective not to be found in related texts. In 2014, the ACC secured a large grant from the United Kingdom's Economic and Social Research Council to explore urban poverty in African secondary cities through the lens of food. The research aimed to bring together the issues of food security and urban policy, two areas of investigation which have traditionally been disconnected. We argued that debates on urbanization in sub-Saharan Africa, the nature of urban poverty and the relationship between governance, poverty and the spatial characteristics of cities and towns in the region can be engaged through a focus on urban food systems and the dynamics of urban food poverty. More specifically we aimed to counter the long-held 'productionist' approach to addressing food security promoted by international development agencies and many national governments. This approach assumes

that achieving food security requires increasing food production, sidelining questions of how urban household food insecurity relates to the wider food system; to urban governance, services and infrastructure; to spatial change; and to changing systems of food retail. James's work on the project involved an exploration of the history of the colonial Kenyan state and how it had engaged with urban food problems.[1] This deep and careful research formed the basis of his doctoral work and subsequently this book.

This book deals with the historical nexus of food security and colonial government in Kenya. Importantly, however, it shows how contemporary food security policies (still grounded in a productionist logic and approach) have their roots in a colonial history of dealing with the problem of food scarcity. In writing a 'history of the present', James shows the importance of understanding how ideas and practices dealing with food scarcity unfolded over time in Kenya and how the issue became a responsibility of the state, as it did in many other colonized territories. Many of these policies, ideas and practices persist today and serve to limit and constrain an urban food security policy capable of addressing the multifaceted nature of the food system. Making a convincing critique of current food security policy is greatly strengthened by being able to show that it is based not just on current scientific analysis of the issue but also on a path-dependent and contextualized shaping of interpretations and ideas.

There are a number of other key texts on the issue of food security in Africa, many having emerged in the 1980s and thereafter. The book makes a careful analysis of these, locating them within dominant epistemologies of the time. It then goes on to explain how the approach in this book is different. James explains: 'I am concerned less with explaining *why* colonial famines occurred, and more with the ways that governing actors—including, but extending beyond, the state—thought about and responded to scarcity, and how these modes of thinking and acting shifted in conjunction with broader historical dynamics. Put differently, I am interested in the origins, dynamics and effects of food scarcities in so far as these realities helped shape the changing nature and institutionalization of the governmental responses addressed to these realities. This accords with my particular historiographical approach, which is to understand the rationalities and practices of government as emerging through situated events, conditions and problems' (page 7). Unlike other texts, therefore,

[1] See chapter 5 in J. Battersby and V. Watson, eds., *Urban Food Systems Governance and Poverty in African Cities* (London and New York: Routledge, 2019).

the approach in this book examines food problems and famine in colonial Kenya through an 'analysis of government' inspired by the work of Michel Foucault. Following Mitchell Dean, the book is concerned with the practice and thought underpinning how people govern, in other words 'the means of calculation, both qualitative and quantitative, the type of governing authority or agency, the forms of knowledge, techniques and other means employed, the entity to be governed and how it is conceived, the ends sought and the outcomes and consequences' (page 12).

This book will therefore be of interest to readers from a range of different perspectives. For adherents to Foucauldian analytics, this offers a fascinating example of using this methodology to understand the unfolding of the present. For those interested in African colonial history, it fills a research gap on food security and its government in Kenya and explains how food scarcity became governmentalized. And for those interested in current food security policy, it offers a strong critique of production-oriented approaches and an explanation of why they persist: it shows how these strategies did not simply 'trickle down' from forces of global capitalism or from the persuasiveness of international development institutions. Situations, practices and arguments emerging from the problems confronting those tasked with governing have created undeclared assumptions in current policy which urgently need to be revealed.

This beautifully crafted work will undoubtedly gain the attention it deserves.

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Vanessa Watson

Preface and Acknowledgements

The research for this book was undertaken with the support of the ESRC/DFID Joint Fund for Poverty Alleviation Research (grant number ES/L008610/1) through the Governing Food Systems to Alleviate Poverty in Secondary Cities in Africa (Consuming Urban Poverty) project. Additional support was provided through the PEAK Urban programme, funded by UKRI's Global Challenges Research Fund (grant reference ES/P011055/1).

This book is the outcome of long-running intellectual engagements with many individuals and institutions. These are too numerous to be done justice here. My gratitude is due to Vanessa Watson, Jane Battersby and other academic and administrative staff at the University of Cape Town (alongside partner institutions) for their leadership and management of the Consuming Urban Poverty project. It was a privilege to work with Vanessa for over a decade, and I owe her much, intellectually and professionally. Sadly, she passed away in late 2021 before she could see this book published.

My thanks are due to Russell Martin for his invaluable editorial assistance. Philip Stickler developed the maps, and Christopher Merrett created the index. The mistakes are my own.

Bristol, UK
May 2022

James Duminy

Contents

Abbreviations

APSB	Agricultural Production and Settlement Board
EAPSC	East African Production and Supply Council
GOK	Government of Kenya
ILO	International Labour Organization
KCDB	Kenya Commodity Distribution Board
KFA	Kenya Farmers Association
KSB	Kenya Supply Board
Legco	Legislative Council
LNC	local native council
MPC	Maize and Produce Control
NA	native authority
NCPB	National Cereals and Produce Board

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Map 1 Colonial provincial and district map of Kenya, c.1933

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

This is a story about the problems of food and famine in a colonial African setting. The story centres on how officials and other colonial actors thought about and responded to the threat and consequences of food scarcity and famine, and how that thought and action changed over time. It begins in the late nineteenth century, when the East Africa Protectorate (later renamed the Colony and Protectorate of Kenya) was declared and when, for the first time, famine became a matter for colonial state intervention.[1] It ends with the advent of Kenyan independence from British rule in the early 1960s. The objective is to contribute to our knowledge of the historical nexus of food scarcity and colonial government in Kenya as well as in Africa more generally. In doing so, the book aims to enhance our critical understanding of contemporary food governance practices.

In this period, spanning over half a century of colonial rule and white settlement, preventing and managing food scarcity emerged as an important responsibility and function of state administration. The means used to do so differed in time and space, as did the arguments advanced to justify

[1] The colonial territory that would later become independent Kenya was founded as the East Africa Protectorate in 1895. In 1920, it was reconstituted as the Colony and Protectorate of Kenya. It remained so until Kenya achieved independence from British rule in 1963. For the sake of consistency, in this book I will refer to 'Kenya' throughout. For other colonial African territories, I have preferred to use the original colonial names including 'Tanganyika' and 'Zanzibar' (for Tanzania), 'Northern Rhodesia' (Zambia) and 'Southern Rhodesia' (Zimbabwe).

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those means. Many colonial-era practices and their objects—sacks of famine relief, food-for-work programmes, government price controls, supply–demand calculations, consumer subsidies and 'objective' minimum wage calculations—continue to feature as part of food security strategies pursued by African governments. I argue that examining the situated emergence of these practices can aid our understanding of why food problems are thought about and addressed in the ways that they are. This understanding can, in turn, enhance our capacity to critique problematic arrangements of knowledge and practice. In this way, this book seeks to provide a 'history of the present'.

A History of the Present

'Food security' is a major global development challenge.[2] It is estimated that 820 million people worldwide suffer from hunger or are undernourished. Since 2015 that figure has been rising, particularly in regions of the global South such as sub-Saharan Africa.[3] Millions of Africans experience the effects of food scarcity, whether in the form of absolute hunger or, more commonly, the 'triple burden' of undernutrition, obesity and micronutrient deficiency.[4] The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) reports that 239 million sub-Saharan Africans suffered from hunger in 2018—the greatest prevalence of any world region—alongside an additional 399 million who experienced 'moderate' food insecurity.[5] Kenya is no exception to these trends. In 2017, the government declared a major drought a national disaster.[6] In April 2021, the combined effects of the

[2] The 1996 World Food Summit defined 'food security' as a state that exists 'when all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient safe and nutritious food that meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life'. Food security therefore consists of three main dimensions: availability, access and utilization; Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), 'World Food Summit: Rome Declaration on World Food Security', accessed 9 August 2017, http://www.fao.org/WFS/.

[3] Independent Expert Group of the Global Nutrition Report, *2020 Global Nutrition Report: Action on Equity to End Malnutrition* (Bristol: Global Nutrition Report, 2020), 21.

[4] FAO, *Africa Regional Overview of Food Security and Nutrition 2019* (Accra: FAO, 2020), 9.

[5] Moderate food insecurity describes a situation in which people do not enjoy 'regular access to nutritious and sufficient food' even if they do not necessarily suffer from hunger; ibid., vii.

[6] Food Security Information Network, *Global Report on Food Crises 2017* (Rome: UN World Food Programme, 2017), 20.

Covid-19 pandemic and swarms of desert locusts invading from the north-east left 1.4 million Kenyans in a 'crisis' state of food insecurity.[7]

The National Food and Nutrition Security Policy Implementation Framework, published in 2017, outlines the Kenyan government's main policy objective with respect to 'food availability and access'. This is to 'increase the quantity and quality of food available, accessible and affordable to all Kenyans at all times'. The implicit aim is to promote national and household self-sufficiency, and to ensure that food production keeps pace with 'population growth'.[8] The policy framework thus expresses a 'production-oriented' perspective on food problems. This assumes a state of resource scarcity and emphasizes the need to increase total production as the principal strategy to achieve food security. It is not a perspective or approach that is unique to Kenya. Indeed, promoting food availability is the dominant response to food problems in Africa more generally. As Gareth Haysom argues, 'productionist' framings of food security tend to result in national-scale policies and strategies that are preoccupied with 'ensuring a positive food trade balance'.[9]

Why should this be the way in which contemporary food problems are understood? Why is food something to be 'secured' and made 'sufficient'? Why is this a domain of central state responsibility? From where did this notion of food security emerge as a calculative, state-driven, market-mediated balance of availability and demand, measured on a territory-wide scale? Answering these questions is of more than academic interest. Numerous critiques have been made of production-oriented food strategies that function against a background assumption of scarcity. Sometimes these are enrolled within wider critiques of 'neo-Malthusian' framings of African developmental and environmental 'crises', framings that have persisted since at least the 1970s, when they were enthusiastically endorsed by

[7] A 'crisis' state is equivalent to Phase Three of the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) Acute Food Insecurity classification; Famine Early Warning System Network, *Kenya Food Security Outlook Update, February 2021 to September 2021* (Nairobi, 2021), 1.

[8] Government of Kenya (GOK), *National Food and Nutrition Security Policy Implementation Framework 2017–2022* (Nairobi, 2011), ix.

[9] G. Haysom, 'Food System Governance for Urban Sustainability in the Global South' (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Cape Town, 2014), 5–8; also G. Haysom, 'Food and the City: Urban Scale Food System Governance', *Urban Forum* 26 (2015): 266.

organizations like the Club of Rome.[10] In policy terms, a totalizing focus on population growth and production tends to underplay the specific cultural, political and economic factors that affect processes of food supply, distribution, access and utilization. Moreover, Mehta reminds us that the 'scare of scarcity', when naturalized within academic and policy debates, has profound implications at a political-economic level. Powerful interests may use the threat of scarcity, and the figure of imminent Malthusian crisis, as a strategy to secure control over vital and valuable resources.[11]

Scholars writing from an urban perspective have articulated further critiques of the 'received wisdom' of African food security thought and policy. Here production-oriented strategies are charged with overlooking the precise food security challenges arising subnationally and in urban settings.[12] Productionism, they argue, as a strategic food security approach vested at a macro-governance level, is poorly equipped to respond to the various urban transitions driving contemporary social, economic and political dynamics on the continent.[13]

Given the strength of these critiques, we require an accurate diagnosis of why and how production-oriented modes of conceiving and addressing food problems exist, and retain such dominance, in African contexts. To gain this understanding, we might look to standard histories of the

[10] G. Djurfeldt, 'Global Perspectives on Agricultural Development', in *African Food Crisis: Lessons from the Asian Green Revolution*, ed. G. Djurfeldt, H. Holmen, R. Jirström and M. Larsson (Wallingford: CABI Publications, 2005), 10; W. T. S. Gould, 'Reverend Thomas Robert Malthus', in *Fifty Key Thinkers on Development*, ed. D. Simon (London and New York: Routledge, 2006), 155–60; M. Leach and R. Mearns, 'Environmental Change and Policy', in *The Lie of the Land: Challenging Received Wisdom on the African Environment*, ed. M. Leach and R. Mearns (Oxford: IAI and James Currey, 1996), 1–33.

[11] L. Mehta, 'The Scare, Naturalization and Politicization of Scarcity', in *The Limits to Scarcity: Contesting the Politics of Allocation*, ed. L. Mehta (London and Washington, DC: Earthscan, 2010), 13–30.

[12] J. Battersby, 'MDGs to SDGs—New Goals, Same Gaps: The Continued Absence of Urban Food Security in the Post-2015 Global Development Agenda', *African Geographical Review* 36 (2017): 115–29; J. Battersby and V. Watson, eds., *Urban Food Systems Governance and Poverty in African Cities* (London and New York: Routledge, 2019); J. Crush and B. Frayne, 'The Invisible Crisis: Urban Food Security in Southern Africa', *Urban Food Security Series* 1 (Kingston and Cape Town: AFSUN, 2010); Haysom, 'Food System Governance'.

[13] On urban transformations in Africa generally, see the contributions to S. Parnell and E. Pieterse, eds., *Africa's Urban Revolution* (London and New York: Zed Books, 2014).

concept of 'food security'. This kind of history might outline the origins and early efforts of the FAO following the Hot Springs Conference of 1943.[14] It might identify the 1974 World Food Conference as the origin of 'food security' as a formal concept, with its neo-Malthusian emphasis on food availability, on boosting worldwide cereal stocks to meet global population growth, and on national food production and reserve programmes.[15] 'Food security' might then be traced through its various definitions, noting shifts in emphasis between the poles of production and, from the 1980s, access.[16] It might also identify changes in the scale of food security analyses and objectives, for example, from global or national self-sufficiency to household access.[17]

These kinds of histories focus on the articulation and evolution of food-related discourses and programmes at the global level. The implicit assumption is that these ideas and techniques have subsequently diffused to various African contexts to structure food policies and interventions.[18] Such a perspective leaves little room for more localized forces and

[14] N. McKeon, *Food Security Governance: Empowering Communities, Regulating Corporations* (London and New York: Routledge, 2015), chapter 1; D. J. Shaw, *World Food Security: A History since 1945* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), chapter 1.

[15] FAO, 'Implementation of the International Undertaking on World Food Security', accessed 19 October 2014, http://www.fao.org/docrep/x5589e/x5589e00.htm#Contents.

[16] S. Maxwell, 'The Evolution of Thinking about Food Security', in *Food Security in Sub-Saharan Africa*, ed. S. Devereaux and S. Maxwell (London: ITDG, 2001), 13–31.

[17] L. Jarosz, 'Comparing Food Security and Food Sovereignty Discourses', *Dialogues in Human Geography* 4 (2014): 168–81.

[18] For a general critique of 'diffusionist' models of historical writing, and their links to the ideologies of colonialism, see J. M. Blaut, *The Colonizer's Model of the World: Geographic Diffusionism and Eurocentric History* (New York and London: Guilford Press, 1993).

dynamics in giving rise to contemporary food governance thought and practice.[19] African settings are seen as passive stages for the travelling band of international developmentalism. Moreover, and perhaps more significantly, explanations of food security's conceptual origins and evolution fail to account for the conditions under which a state-driven, market-based and calculative notion of 'food security' was possible in the first place. In assuming these realities, they take as the explanation that which needs to be explained.[20]

In this book, I will show that this kind of market-based calculus of food production versus demand, and a set of practices for managing that relationship, emerged as a responsibility and mode of government in Kenya well before the 1974 World Food Conference, and even prior to the formation of the FAO in October 1945. In doing so, I will demonstrate that we require a deeper historical understanding of how food-related practices have emerged and been established in context. Such a project stands to draw upon, and contribute to, a rich tradition of historical scholarship on African food issues and crises.

[19] A similar point can be made about some works examining the roots and emergence of arch-discourses such as 'development', or the discursive framing of colonial and African development problems. For example, Leach and Mearns look to dynamics in the sociologies of science and development to explain 'the origins and persistence of received wisdom about environmental change in Africa'; 'Environmental Change', 463. Cowen and Shenton focus on the genesis and intellectual roots of 'development' discourse as a European phenomenon without devoting significant attention to the role of colonial settings; M. P. Cowen and R. W. Shenton, *Doctrines of Development* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996). Authors like Hodge focus on these dynamics on an imperial scale but ultimately emphasize metropolitan events and debates; J. M. Hodge, *Triumph of the Expert: Agrarian Doctrines of Development and the Legacies of British Colonialism* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2007). A more localized perspective on the emergence and application of 'colonial development' in African contexts is provided by the various contributions to J. M. Hodge, G. Hödl and M. Kopf, eds., *Developing Africa: Concepts and Practices in Twentieth-Century Colonialism* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2014). Moore has critiqued the 'discursive determinism' found in poststructuralist studies of development—they rely on textual representations, reinforcing the notion of a single monolithic discourse without giving due attention to local dynamics and political struggles as well as older patterns of more recent developmental interventions; D. S. Moore, 'The Crucible of Cultural Politics: Reworking "Development" in Zimbabwe's Eastern Highlands', *American Ethnologist* 26 (1999): 654–89.

[20] S. Elden, *The Birth of Territory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013), 3.

African Famine History and Colonial Government

Much existing historical work on African famine was written in the context of the so-called African food crisis of the 1980s. That decade witnessed the publication of a number of important studies testing academic and policy interpretations of the nature and causes of that crisis.[21] Moreover, a series of scholars writing from a range of disciplinary perspectives, recognizing the ambiguities inherent in competing crisis narratives, employed critical historical perspectives to shed light on more contemporary dynamics of food supply, insecurity and governance.[22] Historians of African famine like Michael Watts positioned their work within a wider critique of neo-Malthusian theories and their framing of human hunger within the causal bounds of resource scarcity, population pressure and ecological degradation.[23] Amartya Sen's work on famine as a form of 'entitlement failure', for one, can been seen as an early volley in a critical broadside against the notion that the chief cause of famine is a decline in the total availability of food.[24]

What, then, can histories of African famine and food insecurity tell us about the dynamics of colonial government? The 1980s saw the publication of several important studies recognizing the mutual constitution of dearth, famine and processes of colonization. Scholars of African famine, like those of Ireland and India, examined how colonial policies and the extension of capitalist market processes—forms of structural and 'political violence'—acted to generate and drive 'the violence of hunger'.[25] To date, the 'sociopolitical production' of African famine has been approached

[21] For a critical review of work postulating the 1980s African 'food crisis', see S. Berry, 'The Food Crisis and Agrarian Change in Africa: A Review Essay', *African Studies Review* 27 (1984): 59–112.

[22] Contributors to J. I. Guyer, ed., *Feeding African Cities: Studies in Regional Social History* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1987), for example, strove to enhance our knowledge of how African food supply systems have functioned historically, while overcoming the tendency to analytically separate African material and economic life from the domain of government plans and policies. See Guyer, 'Introduction'.

[23] M. J. Watts, *Silent Violence: Food, Famine, and Peasantry in Northern Nigeria*, 2nd edition (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2013), lxxiv.

[24] A. Sen, *Poverty and Famines: An Essay on Entitlement and Deprivation* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981).

[25] D. P. Nally, *Human Encumbrances: Political Violence and the Great Irish Famine* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2011), viii, x. See also M. Davis, *Late Victorian Holocausts: El Niño Famines and the Making of the Third World* (London: Verso, 2001), 8–11.

from a range of perspectives. To illustrate, I will briefly discuss three significant works by Michael Watts, Deborah Bryceson and Megan Vaughan.

Influenced by the tide of 1970s 'peasant studies' and debates on dependency theory and structural Marxism, Michael Watts's *Silent Violence* rooted the genesis and character of food crises in northern Nigeria in the history of colonial rule and capitalist expansion in the region. This study was path-breaking in linking the causes and effects of individual famine events to a longer historical process of rural transformation as a means to explain more recent dynamics. Watts's specific concern was to see how the 'contradictions embodied in the colonial state'—the fact that state exactions depended on, yet undermined, peasant production—ultimately acted to jeopardize 'the simple reproduction of rural producers'. The imbrications of capital, state and famine ensure that colonial food crises provide 'useful instruments' to understand both the historical conditions of rural poverty, and 'the evolution and penetration of capitalist relations under the aegis of the imperial state'.[26] This reflects Watts's analytical focus on the historical drivers and character of famine and vulnerability in northern Nigeria.[27]

Watts's emphasis on the dialectic of famine and food subsistence, on the one hand, and the changing priorities and strategies of colonial political economy, on the other, is salutary. John Iliffe took a similar approach in his longitudinal study of famine in colonial Zimbabwe.[28] However, my analytical focus and objectives are somewhat different. I am concerned less with explaining *why* colonial famines occurred, and more with the ways that governing actors—including, but extending beyond, the state—thought about and responded to scarcity, and how these modes of thinking and acting shifted in conjunction with broader historical dynamics. Put differently, I am interested in the origins, dynamics and effects of food scarcities insofar as these realities helped shape the changing nature and institutionalization of the governmental responses addressed to these

[26] Watts, *Silent Violence*, 272–3.

[27] Ibid., 274.

[28] J. Iliffe, *Famine in Zimbabwe, 1890–1960* (Gweru: Mambo Press, 1990). Also see Watts, *Silent Violence*, especially chapter 6. In a shorter and more recent study, Logan has drawn upon archaeological evidence to surface the long-run operations of 'slow violence'—the generation of modern food insecurity through the gradual consolidation of market relations and colonial rule—in Banda, Ghana; A. L. Logan, '"Why Can't People Feed Themselves?": Archaeology as Alternative Archive of Food Security in Banda, Ghana', *American Anthropologist* 118 (2016): 508–24.

realities. This accords with my particular historiographical approach, which is to understand the rationalities and practices of government as emerging through situated events, conditions and problems, rather than through their formal relation to capitalism. Following Mitchell Dean, I believe that it is thus possible to understand the historical government of food 'in terms of the measures and the goals of the specific programmes and policies in which it is embodied, rather than its relation … to capitalism'.[29]

Consider a second historical study of the nexus between food insecurity and government in an African context: Deborah Bryceson's analysis of colonial Tanganyika and post-colonial Tanzania.[30] Bryceson's approach, rooted in historical sociology, sought to explain why the state and market were not as effective in promoting household food sufficiency as, in theory, they should have been. She explains how food insecurity was produced in cyclical fashion in the tension between clientage networks and household strategies, on the one hand, and state and market functions, on the other. The analysis is cognizant of how government actions—including famine relief practices, efforts to feed labour, and food policies devised during the Second World War—influenced the longer-term dynamics of household food security in Tanzania. Food insecurity, in turn, affected the social division of labour. Eventually, it undermined relations between society, state and market, leading to increasing reliance on household and clientage networks.[31]

Bryceson's formalistic approach defines the state in Weberian terms of bureaucratic action and accountability determined by 'fixed legal norms'.[32] In the Tanzanian context, the state acted as one of four main social institutions alongside clientage, household and market. Agents of the state operated in a manner according to their training, within the bounds set by established norms, just as market actors expressed a unitary profit-maximizing rationality, while the 'peasant household' sought to avert risk. Moreover, colonial officials worked with reference to an external context and paternalistic ideology that made them 'relatively impervious' to

[29] M. Dean, *The Constitution of Poverty: Toward a Genealogy of Liberal Governance*, 2nd edition (London and New York: Routledge, 2011), 22.

[30] D. F. Bryceson, 'Food Insecurity and the Social Division of Labour in Tanzania, 1919–1985' (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Oxford, 1988).

[31] Ibid., 301.

[32] Ibid., 61.

surrounding social realities and relationships.[33] Where Watts understands official action within the broader logic of capitalist function, Bryceson sees the expression of social rules and habitus. By contrast, in this book I aim to move beyond the formal facade of accountability and ideology, to see the specificities of anti-scarcity thought and action with their relations to problems emerging in the Kenyan political field.

A third key work is Megan Vaughan's interdisciplinary analysis of a major famine that beset Nyasaland, now Malawi, in 1949.[34] Incorporating ethnographic research, she aimed to develop a 'total picture' of the famine event. To do so, she drew the famine within a much longer time frame of household, gender and official dynamics—changes that destabilized rural food availability and access in a gradual and uneven manner.[35] Vaughan assessed the veracity of competing theories used by contemporaries to explain the 1949 famine's causes, each of which has an equivalent in present-day theories of food insecurity: neo-Malthusian, 'food versus cash crop', and state mismanagement. Moreover, she drew on Sen's entitlement theory to highlight the specific ways in which socioeconomic and institutional relations led to some groups of people, particularly unemployed women, suffering more than others.[36]

Vaughan's conjunctural analysis of the coproduction of famine, economic forces, household accumulation, gender relations, coping strategies and the colonial state remains an invaluable contribution to the field.[37] By contrast, this book is more concerned with the broader drivers of the actions and entitlements tied into the colonial government of food. I examine why food entitlements in the form of relief supplies were heavily biased towards African males in the employ of settlers; why such

[33] Ibid., 64.

[34] M. Vaughan, *The Story of an African Famine: Gender and Famine in Twentieth-Century Malawi* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987).

[35] A similar approach was taken in a later study, co-authored by Vaughan, focusing on food supply problems in northern Zambia; H. L. Moore and M. Vaughan, *Cutting Down Trees: Gender, Nutrition, and Agricultural Change in the Northern Province of Zambia, 1890–1990* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1994).

[36] Vaughan, *Story of an African Famine*, chapters 4 and 5.

[37] For similar approaches, see G. H. Maddox, 'Gender and Famine in Central Tanzania: 1916–1961', *African Studies Review* 39 (1996): 83–101; G. H. Maddox, 'Mtunya: Famine in Central Tanzania, 1917–1920', *Journal of African History* 31 (1990): 181–97; Moore and Vaughan, *Cutting Down Trees.*

'class-based entitlements' arose and changed.[38] Moreover, rather than studying the historical forces that drove and shaped a single event, my focus is on how different events fitted within, and affected, a longer history of colonial transformation and government in Kenya.

All three studies I have mentioned focus on the generators and drivers of African food insecurity or famine. In this respect, they are all interested in the transformation of social relations wrought by colonization and foreign rule.[39] Their emphasis is on the *effects* of state action and market dynamics for food supply and access, rather than on how scarcity *has been governed*. By contrast, other famine scholars have focused more closely on the anti-scarcity interventions of African colonial states. In Tanganyika, a relatively 'progressive' case, these were assembled within a policy of local food self-sufficiency that formed the basis and priority of colonial administration.[40] In some British African settings, officials drew up 'famine codes', like those of nineteenth-century India, to guide administrative relief functions in times of dearth.[41] That colonial officials were willing to provide famine relief or pursue anti-famine strategies is usually depicted as being motivated by a combination of paternalistic ideology and a sense of administrative duty.[42] However, in many cases, official will to relieve suffering was tempered by a reluctance to interfere with the 'invisible hand' of the market or, in the case of settler contexts, by local political and public

[38] For a general critique of Sen's entitlement theory along these lines, see M. J. Watts, 'Black Acts', *New Left Review*, 9 (2001), https://newleftreview.org/II/9/michael-watts-black-acts; M. J. Watts and H. G. Bohle, 'The Space of Vulnerability: The Causal Structure of Hunger and Famine', *Progress in Human Geography* 17 (1993): 43–67.

[39] McCann provides a 'contrastive perspective' for this work when examining the historical emergence of modern food crises in Wallo, Ethiopia—a region relatively isolated from the world economy and foreign colonial rule. McCann finds that 'many of the social and economic effects often attributed to the impact of the metropole on the colonial state also appear in the policies of the Ethiopian imperial state as it expanded to its northern periphery', thus inviting scholars to 'reexamine the relative effects of the world economy on rural society in Africa'; J. McCann, *From Poverty to Famine in Northeast Ethiopia: A Rural History 1900–1935* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1987), 6.

[40] Bryceson, 'Food Insecurity'.

[41] Davis, *Late Victorian Holocausts*, 58–9; A. de Waal, *Famine Crimes: Politics and the Disaster Relief Industry in Africa* (Oxford: James Currey, 1997), 28–9; Iliffe, *Famine in Zimbabwe*, chapters 6 and 7; Watts, *Silent Violence*, 312–14.

[42] Bryceson, 'Food Insecurity', chapter 3; D. Wylie, *Starving on a Full Stomach: Hunger and the Triumph of Cultural Racism in Modern South Africa* (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 2001), chapters 3 and 4; Iliffe, *Famine in Zimbabwe*, 62.

opposition.[43] As a result, official anti-famine interventions commonly took the more ad hoc form of emergency famine relief.

Alexander de Waal emphasizes the limitations of colonial anti-famine efforts for alleviating African mortality and suffering.[44] For the most part, he suggests, these efforts 'remained at best an administrative obligation'.[45] David Anderson argues that 'it was only when drought became famine that the colonial administration generally concerned itself with the consequences'.[46] John Iliffe, by contrast, sees the technologies, infrastructures and distributive operations of colonial governments and markets as becoming increasingly effective in driving down massive famine mortality.[47] In Southern Rhodesia, now Zimbabwe, as in most of colonial Africa, 'famines that kill' had practically ceased prior to the outbreak of the Second World War. However, as capitalist development and social stratification intensified, with market relations becoming more generalized across the territory, the nature and geography of both scarcity and state relief shifted. A new kind of dearth emerged: more widespread, lingering patterns of scarcity, and hunger suffered mainly by the poor in the form of malnutrition.[48] Increasingly, the people and regions that suffered acutely from scarcity were those most affected by poverty and the exactions of white settlement, and the settler-dominated statutory marketing system was increasingly called upon to provide and manage famine relief.[49]

Rather than examining the nature and effects of official responses to crises of scarcity, other scholars of African history and political economy

[43] Iliffe, *Famine in Zimbabwe*, 87, also chapters 4–6; Watts, *Silent Violence*, 302–4.

[44] De Waal, *Famine Crimes*, chapter 2; Watts, *Silent Violence*, chapter 6.

[45] De Waal, *Famine Crimes*, 30–1.

[46] D. Anderson, 'Depression, Dust Bowl, Demography, and Drought: The Colonial State and Soil Conservation in East Africa during the 1930s', *African Affairs* 83 (1984): 331.

[47] Iliffe argues that more effective government, improved transportation and expanded markets acted alongside general increases in wealth, income diversification and improved health outcomes as the 'chief reasons' for food shortages ceasing to 'kill great numbers' in twentieth-century Africa; J. Iliffe, *The African Poor: A History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 6, 157–8. For an earlier version of this argument in the case of Tanganyika, see J. Iliffe, *A Modern History of Tanganyika* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 471–2, 351–2. For a similar argument with respect to colonial India, see M. B. McAlpin, *Subject to Famine: Food Crisis and Economic Change in Western India, 1860–1920* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983).

[48] Iliffe, *Famine in Zimbabwe*, 79.

[49] On the manner in which emerging patterns of wage labour and social differentiation shaped patterns of food supply and generated problems of food scarcity and malnutrition, see Iliffe, *The African Poor*, chapter 9.

have focused on those crises as significant drivers of transformation. Famines and food shortages impelled wide-reaching changes in African social and political systems, patterns of production and trade, and socio-ecological relations. Likewise, they often generated profound effects for systems of colonial authority.[50] Scarcities could destabilize indigenous structures of authority, presenting colonial officials with opportunities to extend and secure control over territorial, societal and economic issues, including labour and agricultural production.[51]

Yet food problems could play a significant political role even in times of relative colonial comfort. Paul Mosley argues that in African settler colonies the question of who grew and supplied food sat at the centre of rivalries between indigenous and foreign farmers competing for control over local markets and state support.[52] Officials and other interest groups regularly mobilized concerns over the security of food supplies as arguments in favour of increased state intervention in areas such as agricultural

[50] See, for example, B. J. Berman and J. M. Lonsdale, *Unhappy Valley: Conflict in Kenya and Africa* (London: James Currey; Nairobi: East African Educational Publishers; and Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 1992), chapters 2 and 12; R. M. A. van Zwanenberg and A. King, *An Economic History of Kenya and Uganda, 1800–1970* (London: Macmillan, 1975), 6. The socio-ecological effects of famine are noted by Iliffe in *Modern History* and *Africans*, both *passim*. On precolonial trading patterns in East Africa, see D. W. Cohen, 'Food Production and Exchange in the Precolonial Lakes Plateau Region', in *Imperialism, Colonialism and Hunger: East and Central Africa*, ed. R. I. Rotberg (Lexington, MD: Lexington Books, 1983), 1–18. On famines, generally, as 'powerful engines of historical transformation', see D. Arnold, *Famine: Social Crisis and Historical Change* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1988), 5.

[51] That famines could provide opportunities to secure control over labour is noted in A. Clayton and D. C. Savage, *Government and Labour in Kenya, 1895–1963* (London: Cass, 1974); F. Cooper, *On the African Waterfront: Urban Disorder and the Transformation of Work in Colonial Mombasa* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1987); Iliffe, *Famine in Zimbabwe*. Ambler notes the importance of famine in enabling the establishment of British rule and white settlement in Kenya; C. H. Ambler, *Kenyan Communities in the Age of Imperialism: The Central Region in the Late Nineteenth Century* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988). Also see R. L. Tignor, *Colonial Transformation of Kenya: The Kamba, Kikuyu, and Maasai from 1900–1939* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976), 11, 16.

[52] P. Mosley, *The Settler Economies: Studies in the Economic History of Kenya and Southern Rhodesia 1900–1963* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 5–8.

marketing, environmental conservation and demographic planning.[53] These interventions, in turn, affected the nature and operation of local food systems. Government control over production and marketing invariably favoured settler interests and inhibited the development of systems of African cash cropping that might otherwise have provided a more regular food supply.[54] In colonial settings, then, food was often a critical axis of conflict and change.

In sum, histories of African famine and food insecurity emphasize the role of official colonial interventions in driving and reproducing the realities of scarcity. However, in certain respects the *government* of scarcity has been underexamined. We tend to hear little of the specific motivations, contingencies, conflicts and strategies that informed anti-scarcity responsibilities and techniques of government. Put differently, the 'tensions of empire' that underlay acts of governing food problems are not stressed.[55] Moreover, when compared with the existing scholarship on African colonies such as Southern Rhodesia, Nigeria, Nyasaland and Tanganyika, colonial Kenya has not been studied extensively. To date, no work has documented the specifically Kenyan problems of food scarcity and governance in a longitudinal manner or on a territorial scale. This book addresses that gap and, in doing so, applies a novel conceptual-analytical approach to the study of African food and famine history.

[53] Scarcity-related arguments for marketing control are noted by D. Anderson and D. Throup, 'Africans and Agricultural Production in Colonial Kenya: The Myth of the War as a Watershed', *Journal of African History* 26 (1985): 327–45; J. M. Lonsdale, 'The Depression and the Second World War in the Transformation of Kenya', in *Africa and the Second World War*, ed. D. Killingray and R. Rathbone (London: Macmillan, 1986), 97–142; J. McCann, *Maize and Grace: Africa's Encounter with a New World Crop* (Cambridge, MA, and London: Harvard University Press, 2005); Van Zwanenberg and King, *Economic History*. For food scarcity problems as an impetus to colonial demographic planning, see K. Ittmann, 'The Colonial Office and the Population Question in the British Empire, 1918–1962', *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 27 (1999): 68–70.

[54] For variations on this central argument, see the contributions to Rotberg, *Imperialism, Colonialism, and Hunger*.

[55] F. Cooper and A. L. Stoler, eds., *Tensions of Empire: Colonial Cultures in a Bourgeois World* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 1997).

An Analysis of Government

My particular approach to examining food problems and famine in colonial Kenya has been informed by an 'analysis of government' inspired by the work of Michel Foucault. This approach is primarily concerned with 'the means of calculation, both qualitative and quantitative, the type of governing authority or agency, the forms of knowledge, techniques and other means employed, the entity to be governed and how it is conceived, the ends sought and the outcomes and consequences'.[56] This kind of analysis seeks to examine two main aspects of how people govern: practice and thought. The practice of governing is seen as intimately concerned with conduct, with influencing the ways that individuals behave in order to secure the well-being of the population at large.[57] The point is to examine 'the conditions under which regimes of practices come into being, are maintained and are transformed'.[58] Regimes of practices are, in turn, embedded in and shaped by programmes of thought employing various types of knowledge. Thought and practice are thus mutually constitutive. From this understanding, the analysis strives to uncover the overall 'strategic logic' expressed by a regime of practices—an intentional, non-subjective logic constituted as a sum of that regime's total constituent parts—and how it has shifted over time.[59] It therefore 'takes as its central concern' the ways in which 'we govern and are governed within different regimes, and the conditions under which such regimes emerge, continue to operate, and are transformed'.[60]

An approach informed by the 'analytics of government' differs from conventional social scientific analyses that tend to envisage the state as a more or less 'unified actor', or at least a 'relatively unified set of institutions', and that proceed to debate the source of state power, who holds it, and how that power is legitimized.[61] Rather, I seek to examine the multiplicity of actors and institutions involved in governing. My emphasis is on the various technical aspects of how people govern, and how these

[56] M. Dean, *Governmentality: Power and Rule in Modern Society*, 2nd edition (London: Sage Publications, 2010), 18.

[57] T. M. Li, *The Will to Improve: Governmentality, Development, and the Practice of Politics* (Durham, NC, and London: Duke University Press, 2007), 5–6.

[58] Dean, *Governmentality*, 31.

[59] Ibid., 32.

[60] Ibid., 33.

[61] Ibid., 33–4.

practices in turn form the basis upon which emerging problems are elaborated and addressed.[62] Moreover, I am interested in the politics of conduct, or the ways in which subjects are 'differently formed and differently positioned' in relation to governmental programmes and techniques, being allocated particular possibilities and capacities for 'action and critique'.[63] In taking such an approach, I draw upon extensive archival evidence giving insight into the nature and transformation of colonial food governance in Kenya.

Sources

Primary and secondary data sources were consulted for this study. Details of the primary sources are provided in an Appendix. These records, like all official archives, provide an incomplete picture of colonial problems.[64] The primary research underpinning the study is inevitably biased towards the ways in which officials thought about and responded to scarcity, and how they chose to represent those ideas and actions to themselves and their superiors. The perspectives and experiences of the people affected by food shortages and famines, like those of other actors involved in the food trade or relief efforts, receive less emphasis, and I have relied on secondary sources to shed light on those dynamics. The official and archival focus is warranted given the central objective of the study in providing a historical analysis of government.

[62] C. Barnett, 'On Problematization: Elaborations on a Theme in "Late Foucault"', *Nonsite.org* 16 (2015), http://nonsite.org/article/on-problematization.

[63] T. M. Li, 'Governmentality', *Anthropologica* 49 (2007): 276.

[64] That the colonial archive is inherently limited, plural, open-ended, invested, fantastical, fictitious and, in a sense, violent is a point made and remade forcefully by postcolonial scholars. See A. Arondekar, *For the Record: On Sexuality and the Colonial Archive in India* (Durham, NC, and London: Duke University Press, 2009); S. Hartman, 'Venus in Two Acts', *Small Axe* 26 (2008): 1–14; P. Lalu, *The Deaths of Hintsa: Post-Apartheid South Africa and the Shape of Recurring Pasts* (Cape Town: HSRC Press, 2009); A. Mbembe 'The Power of the Archive and Its Limits', in *Refiguring the Archive*, ed. C. Hamilton, V. Harris, J. Taylor, M. Pickover, G. Reid and R. Saleh (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2002), 19–27; G. C. Spivak, 'The Rani of Sirmur: An Essay in Reading the Archives', *History and Theory* 24 (1985): 247–72. Debates over the appropriate ways to conceptualize and approach the colonial archive are well-established and wide-ranging. My own approach has been influenced by Stoler's invitation to 'read along the archival grain': to examine colonial archives as sites of knowledge production and to attend to the conditions of possibility of what could or could not be said therein; A. L. Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain: Epistemic Anxieties and Colonial Common Sense* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2009), 20.

The archival sources consulted, located primarily in the United Kingdom and consisting largely of correspondence between Nairobi and London, illuminate a particular set of official dynamics. Dick Cashmore notes that this correspondence was doubly limited. The British government, answerable both to Parliament and public opinion for the acts of officials serving in distant colonial territories, mainly worried about political embarrassment. Dispatches from London were therefore 'largely directed to relieving the troubled conscience of England'.[65] Communications from Kenya, on the other hand, tended to 'give the minimum of local administrative information', perhaps for 'brevity', or perhaps to 'deny Whitehall opportunities to interfere with local action'. Moreover, the interest and intensity with which the British government kept records of colonial famines varied. Sometimes this intensity appears to have been linked to an event's potential to 'embarrass'. It might also arise if a local food shortage was perceived as a threat to security, or if the British imperial state sought a tighter grip over international food trade and supply. This was the case during the Second World War. As such, files were kept on colonial food problems inconsistently, and secondary sources have been used to make up gaps in the historical record.

The archival records consulted give greatest insight into official ideas and practices at the level of central colonial government. An empirical focus on central dynamics accords with the specific objectives of the study. In the chapters that follow, we will see that the responsibility to address food scarcity emerged increasingly, if unevenly, as a domain of the central administration. Even if central officials expressed a desire to rely on provincial authorities, the statutory marketing system, or the responsibility of individuals, families and communities to manage episodes of scarcity, it was at the central level that the most heated ideological and political debates surrounding food issues took place, and where the influences of external political pressure were felt most. It is by looking at the centre that we can appreciate the full variety of practices used to manage scarcities, their relations to one another and the spatiality of the problems to which they were posed. Examining dynamics at a more localized level, in a manner more akin to social history, would tell us very little about how food scarcity came to be grasped as a territory-wide problem calling for centralized coordination. Accordingly, research focusing on local responses and

[65] T. H. R. Cashmore, 'Studies in District Administration in the East Africa Protectorate' (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Cambridge, 1965), 10–11.

the everyday tensions and stresses facing officials and members of the public should be read as a complement to this work.[66]

Outline

The chapters of the book are arranged chronologically. Each chapter explains changes in the dynamics and government of scarcity along several axes. These axes include the causes of scarcity, the emerging ways in which scarcity was conceived as a problem, the role and duty of the state in relation to that problem, and the techniques used in its redress.

Chapter 2 describes how food shortages affected East African peoples prior to and during the colonial conquest of the region. Chapter 3 considers how anti-scarcity practices started to shift as colonial rule was consolidated and the capacity of the state to manage food problems grew in step. Chapter 4 considers how, during the 1920s, the nature and problem of food scarcity started to change in accordance with the development of the capitalist economy, the spread of market relations, new state policies targeting settler and African production, and the influence of wider colonial discourses like that of 'trusteeship'. Chapter 5 deals with the transformations brought about by the economic depression of the 1930s. Chapter 6 focuses on the Second World War, when state control over the food marketing system was firmly established and a calculative and dualistic (productionist and welfarist) mode of seeing and addressing food scarcity, on a territory-wide scale, emerged as a result of specific wartime conditions. Chapter 7 discusses how this wartime rationale and practice set the agenda for the state's anti-scarcity functions after the war's end. In an epilogue I reflect on the last severe food scarcity of the colonial era as a harbinger of the food-related problems and responses of a new independent Kenya.

[66] See, for example, work on African coping strategies: K. C. Flynn, *Food, Culture and Survival in an African City* (New York and Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005); A. K. Nangulu, *Food Security and Coping Mechanisms in Marginal Areas: The Case of West Pokot, Kenya, 1920–1995* (Leiden: African Studies Centre, 2009). Scholars like Maddox have emphasized the interdependence of official policy and local coping strategies; 'Mtunya'. See also E. C. Mandala, *The End of Chidyerano: A History of Food and Everyday Life in Malawi, 1860–2004* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2005); Vaughan, *Story of an African Famine*. For Gabon, Rich examines how residents of Libreville struggled to secure food and how French colonial governance affected those struggles; J. Rich, *A Workman Is Worthy of His Meat: Food and Colonialism in the Gabon Estuary* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2007).

In the book's conclusion, I consider the value of the research in contributing to our historical understanding of the nexus between food scarcity and colonial government, both in Kenya and in Africa more generally. I end by reflecting on how this history may help us understand and critique contemporary modes of food governance in Africa.

CHAPTER 2

Famine and Colonial Conquest

When famine visited East Africa in the final years of the nineteenth century, it did so with horrific consequences for mortality. The 'Great Famine', the most severe of a series of late-century food scarcities, would have lasting implications for the colonial settlement and development of Kenya. While that crisis was the immediate result of drought and pestilence, it was also fundamentally linked to the longer-run dynamics of European conquest and the increasing colonial presence in the region. Attempts to relieve the worst of the suffering were largely left to the initiative of the newly appointed officials of the fledgling East Africa Protectorate, or members of an inchoate civil society. John Ainsworth was one such official—a figure who would go on to play a key role in the territory's colonial future, including by shaping its specific modes of famine response. Indeed, even once the rains and harvests had returned to a more familiar rhythm, the Great Famine remained etched in the minds of officials, politicians and the public as a reminder of what could happen. It was a memory that would motivate and guide state action in the decades to come.

J. Duminy, *Food and Famine in Colonial Kenya*, African Histories and Modernities, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-10964-5_2

Colonialism and the Transformation of Food Scarcity

In the 1880s, prior to the official establishment of Britain's sphere of colonial influence in the region, the inland areas of what is now modern Kenya comprised 'a web of subsistence economies' exploiting ecological conditions that were variably suited to pastoral or agricultural production.[1] Symbiotic commodity exchange and population adjustments occurred between these cultivator and pastoral communities, and such patterns intensified when drought and pestilence brought on hard times.[2] East Africa experienced particularly intense periods of scarcity and famine in at least 1884–1885, 1889–1890 and 1897–1901. Droughts and locust invasions gave rise to famines, and in turn to epidemics of smallpox.[3] Further, a new lethal threat—rinderpest or cattle plague, imported from Russia and India—visited at the start and end of the 1890s, decimating the herds of highland pastoralists like the Maasai. With the decline in cattle herds, sleeping sickness spread along the Victoria lakeshore as tsetse-friendly bush grew over formerly well-stocked grazing grounds.[4] Deadly successions of scarcity, epidemic and sociopolitical breakdown weakened African

[1] J. M. Lonsdale and B. J. Berman, 'Coping with the Contradictions: The Development of the Colonial State in Kenya, 1895–1914', *Journal of African History* 20 (1979): 494.

[2] Ibid.; J. F. Munro, *Colonial Rule and the Kamba: Social Change in the Kenya Highlands 1889–1939* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), 20–3. For a description of the ecological history of famines in Kenya and Uganda, from ancient times to the late twentieth century, see C. A. Spinage, *African Ecology: Benchmarks and Historical Perspectives* (Berlin: Springer, 2012), 132–7. For a critique of the notion that precolonial African food systems were marked by 'ecological complementarity', see J. P. Pottier, 'The Politics of Famine Prevention: Ecology, Regional Production and Food Complementarity in Western Rwanda', *African Affairs* 85 (1986): 208.

[3] B. J. Berman and J. M. Lonsdale, *Unhappy Valley: Conflict in Kenya and Africa* (London: James Currey; Nairobi: East African Educational Publishers; and Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 1992), 23.

[4] Ibid.; W. R. Ochieng', 'Reconstructing the History of the Jo-Kisumo: c.1600–1906', in *Historical Studies and Social Change in Western Kenya: Essays in Memory of Professor Gideon S. Were*, ed. W. R. Ochieng' (Nairobi: East African Educational Publishers, 2002), 47. Other scholars date these events rather differently. Lane, for example, describes widespread famine in 1890–1891, outbreaks of smallpox in 1883–1890 and problems associated with rinderpest and bovine pleuropneumonia in the 1880s; P. Lane, 'An Outline of the Later Holocene Archaeology and Precolonial History of the Ewaso Basin, Kenya', *Smithsonian Contributions to Zoology* 632 (2010): 23.

communities on the eve of European conquest, in the process creating 'a highly misleading baseline for later colonial thinking'.[5]

While it is difficult to estimate the scale of mortality from these disasters, it is possible that in some cases up to four of every ten people died in certain Maasai, Kikuyu and Kamba communities.[6] European travellers depicted 'harrowing' scenes of starvation and destitution in their written accounts.[7] Yet scarcity affected groups—and individuals within those groups—differently. More successful agriculturists could be less vulnerable during times of hunger and dearth. Those without access to productive agricultural land with regular rainfall might rely on their trading and political networks.[8] Likewise, individuals could be more or less vulnerable. 'In hard times', Bruce Berman and John Lonsdale remind us, death 'visited the weak more than the strong'. With ecological crises and famine, 'a strong man's dependants ceased to be his extra hands; they became extra mouths instead'.[9] Normal claims to protection might have to be disavowed.[10] As a result, the old and young died most easily.[11]

The region's vulnerability to food scarcities and famines was, and remains, in part a function of its particular environmental and climatic characteristics. Less than one-tenth of the total land area in what is now modern Kenya is suitable for agriculture, with that land concentrated principally in the higher-rainfall vicinities of Mount Kenya and the Lake Victoria basin.[12] Historically, those areas have been the most densely populated. In areas with more arid and marginal environments, communities tended to practise pastoral livelihoods less capable of supporting dense settlement. Climatically, the region experiences a bimodal equatorial rainfall pattern in which what are termed the 'long rains' usually stretch from

[5] R. Waller, 'Pastoral Production in Colonial Kenya: Lessons from the Past?', *African Studies Review* 55 (2012): 4.

[6] Berman and Lonsdale, *Unhappy Valley*, 23.

[7] Ibid.

[8] For example, the coastal Giriama people—living in proximity to Arab and Swahili traders as well as British representatives in Mombasa—were able to secure famine relief supplies more easily than other groups living further inland, such as the Kamba and Taita; C. L. Brantley, *The Giriama and Colonial Resistance in Kenya, 1800–1920* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1981), 53.

[9] Berman and Lonsdale, *Unhappy Valley*, 14.

[10] Ibid., 342.

[11] Ibid., 23.

[12] M. Ntarangwi, S. H. Ominde and K. Ingham, 'Kenya', *Encyclopedia Britannica* (20 March 2020), accessed 2 April 2021, https://www.britannica.com/place/Kenya.

March to May, and 'short rains' fall in October and November.[13] However, those patterns are vulnerable to upset by extreme meteorological events, linked to the oscillations of the Indian Ocean dipole, which generate periodically both extreme drought and rainfall—both of which can serve to produce or aggravate food scarcities. Moreover, the late nineteenth century saw a sudden climatic shift from wetter to drier conditions in East Africa.[14] The multiple interlinked crises of the last two decades of the nineteenth century fell directly within that climatic conjuncture.

Political and economic variables were overlaid on these broader environmental patterns. Ultimately, the character of food scarcities would begin to change dramatically with increasing colonial interest and influence in East Africa—an interest that escalated over the course of the 1880s. It was an interest driven by broader imperial concerns, as officials in London fretted over the British occupation and entangled imperial control of Egypt, a morass which threatened their supremacy over the Eastern Mediterranean and Suez Canal. As a remedy, Lord Salisbury and the Foreign Office looked to push British control southwards from Cairo, along the course of the White Nile to the river's source in Lake Victoria. That strategic imperative mirrored a desired northward reach of supremacy from the Cape Colony towards the equator to shore-up control of Southern Africa and the sea route to the East. In a third movement, British control would drive westwards from Mombasa towards the Nile, severing the head of the regional slave trade, creating new markets for British goods, and preventing the inland territories of Uganda and Equatoria falling into German hands, which already held tenuously a young protectorate to the south-east.[15] Kenya fell squarely within these imperial ambitions.

In 1888, Queen Victoria granted a charter to William Mackinnon's Imperial British East Africa Company, handing the Scottish shipping magnate's company the responsibility to administer a vast swathe of territory connecting the Indian Ocean seaboard with the vibrant inland economies of the Great Lakes region. Soon British trading caravans joined their Swahili predecessors in stimulating increased commercial food production

[13] S. E. Nicholson, C. Funk and A. H. Fink, 'Rainfall over the African Continent from the 19th through the 21st Century', *Global and Planetary Change* 165 (2018): 119.

[14] A. Thielke and T. Mölg, 'Observed and Simulated Indian Ocean Dipole Activity since the Mid-19th Century and Its Relation to East African Short Rains', *International Journal of Climatology* 39 (2019): 4468.

[15] T. Pakenham, *The Scramble for Africa, 1876–1912* (Johannesburg and Cape Town: Jonathan Ball Publishers, 1997), 338–46.

along their routes from the coast to the Lake Victoria area.[16] A series of trading systems emerged, centred on the major food-buying areas along the road (and later railway) to Uganda.[17] The use of currency became more widespread in these areas. Demand for food was high enough to cause grain prices in the Kikuyu caravan market to increase at least 30-fold over the course of the 1890s.[18]

Company authority in East Africa soon faltered from financial insecurity, itself resulting from a limited availability of the connective infrastructures necessary for trade and a lack of commodities that could be extracted profitably from the region, save perhaps for ivory. In 1895, the imperial government terminated the East Africa Company's charter and proclaimed an area, roughly coterminous with modern Kenya, as the East Africa Protectorate. The Foreign Office would provide administrative direction until April 1905, when the Colonial Office assumed responsibility.

The advent of protectorate status saw officials strive to introduce and consolidate a limited system of governance designed to secure British territorial authority and to effect some degree of territorial management. The idealized structure was as follows. A prefectural administration was established comprising political officers, stationed in all of the territory's various subdivisions, who acted as direct agents of the central state (that is, as representatives of the governor). These officers held wide powers over local activities, notably over taxation and property. As the 'front line' of the administration, they were tasked with encouraging production and trade, as well as maintaining public order.[19] A governor presided over the system. As the 'direct local representative of the Crown', the governor held a 'monopoly of executive authority' over all local matters. However, he was required to defer certain decisions and approvals (such as legislative or budgetary changes) to the secretary of state in the Colonial Office. All correspondence between colony and Colonial Office passed through the

[16] Lonsdale and Berman, 'Coping', 495.

[17] C. S. Nicholls, *Red Strangers: The White Tribe of Kenya* (London: Timewell Press, 2005), 19–20.

[18] Berman and Lonsdale, *Unhappy Valley*, 25–6.

[19] B. J. Berman, *Control and Crisis in Colonial Kenya: The Dialectic of Domination* (London: James Currey; Nairobi: East African Educational Publishers; and Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 1990), 73–4.

governor.[20] The basic prefectural chain of command was as follows: The governor held authority over a series of provincial and district commissioners stationed throughout the territory. The commissioners, in turn, oversaw the work of their more junior district officers, as well as the African chiefs who had been appointed as government agents. All correspondence to the governor passed through the chief secretary, who, as head of the local colonial secretariat, oversaw the organization of administration throughout the entire country.[21]

The establishment of the East Africa Protectorate directly coincided with a new era of British imperial logic, ambition and enthusiasm. Joseph Chamberlain embodied this 'new imperialism' from his position of secretary of state for the colonies, which he assumed following the 1895 election victory enjoyed by a Conservative and Liberal Unionist alliance. Chamberlain evinced a more interventionist ethic than his laissez-faire Victorian predecessors, who had in the 1880s issued company charters to assert British charge of vast African regions while avoiding the risks of 'direct political and financial responsibility'.[22] Chamberlain's vision was one of strengthening British industry and competitiveness by harnessing the resources and untapped markets of the colonial territories, in the process securing a symbiotic imperial economy supported by tariff reforms. It was a vision that called for the modernization of an expanded Colonial Office engaging closely with scientific and technical expertise in domains such as agriculture and tropical medicine, a vision fed by faith in the power of the state to manage and direct social and economic change in the name of the common good, both home and abroad.[23] Chamberlain imagined a revitalized British trading system that necessitated substantial investments in colonial development, particularly in the transportation infrastructures necessary to 'open up' the 'undeveloped estates' of the British Crown for 'imperial commerce'.[24]

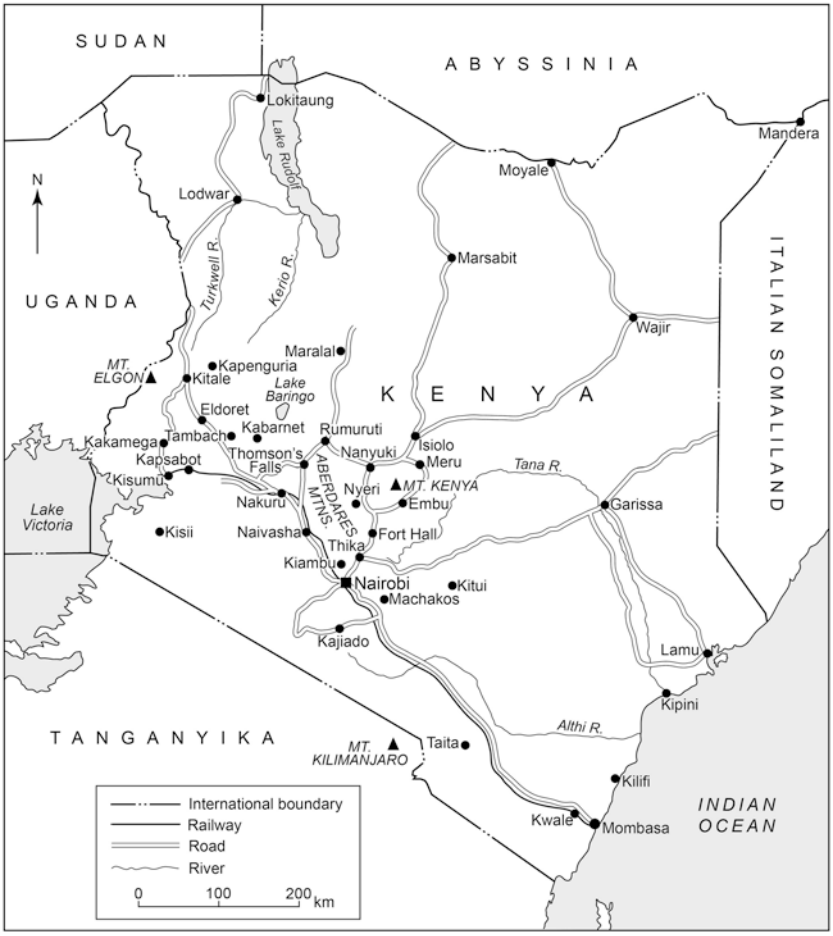
[20] These roles were fulfilled by a commissioner until 1906; ibid., 2; T. H. R. Cashmore, 'Studies in District Administration in the East Africa Protectorate' (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Cambridge, 1965), 10.

[21] M. R. Dilley, *British Policy in Kenya Colony*, 2nd edition (London: Frank Cass, 1966), 21; P. Stamp, 'Local Government in Kenya: Ideology and Political Practice, 1895–1974', *African Studies Review* 29 (1986): 23.

[22] P. T. Marsh, *Joseph Chamberlain: Entrepreneur in Politics* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1994): 427.

[23] J. M. Hodge, *Triumph of the Expert: Agrarian Doctrines of Development and the Legacies of British Colonialism* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2007), 44–5.

[24] Marsh, *Joseph Chamberlain*, 408.



Map 2.1 Map of key transport routes and towns in Kenya, c.1925 © C. C. Trench, 1993, *Men Who Ruled Kenya: The Kenya Administration, 1982–1963*, Radcliffe Press, used by permission of Bloomsbury Publishing Plc

East Africa was one beneficiary of these new ambitions. Soon after the Protectorate's proclamation, construction began on the railway leading from Mombasa to the northern shores of Lake Victoria (Map 2.1). Thousands of indentured labourers were brought from India to work on the railway, joining other Indians who had already immigrated to trade or

find employment as artisans. The demand for food grew in step with the increasing labour force and urban population. As the foreign presence increased in the interior of the country, violent conflict escalated. The 1890s saw a number of British military actions against African groups living inland, intensifying towards the time of the Protectorate's declaration.[25] Meanwhile, relations within and between Maasai, Kikuyu and Kamba groups were deteriorating, and bands of young raiders became more active in the interior.[26] Such violence and the associated 'politics of conquest' had profound effects for food crises, aggravating famine and epidemic disease when they inevitably struck. The decade's upheavals left central Kenya particularly vulnerable to climatic catastrophe.[27] This much was clear when a major drought beset the region before the turn of the century.

The 'Great Famine'

The 1897–1901 famine of East Africa, often remembered as the Great Famine, illustrates how the nature of dearth had begun to shift with the increasing colonial presence. A principal cause was serious and widespread drought, reportedly lasting nearly 18 months, following in the wake of huge locust swarms and outbreaks of rinderpest.[28] Market purchases, disease and violence aggravated the problems of pestilence and poor rainfall. Some of the worst affected were groups of people living alongside the inland trading routes, including around Machakos and in southern Kikuyuland. Food purchases and exactions for railway construction crews, trade caravans and a military expedition sent to relieve a Ugandan mutiny

[25] The conflicts of colonial conquest would continue through the first decade of the next century. For a comprehensive list of these events, see Berman and Lonsdale, *Unhappy Valley*, Table 2.2.

[26] C. Coquery-Vidrovitch, *Africa and the Africans in the Nineteenth Century: A Turbulent History*, trans. M. Baker (London and New York: M. E. Sharpe, 2009), 122.

[27] C. H. Ambler, *Kenyan Communities in the Age of Imperialism: The Central Region in the Late Nineteenth Century* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), 122.

[28] W. McGregor Ross, *Kenya from Within: A Short Political History* (London: G. Allen and Unwin, 1927), 62; F. H. Goldsmith, *John Ainsworth: Pioneer Kenya Administrator, 1864–1946* (London: Macmillan, 1955), 47.

had helped deplete Kamba and Kikuyu supplies, depriving households of their reserve stocks and driving up grain prices.[29]

Drought and hunger were quickly followed by outbreaks of smallpox, as well as the spread of a new pest—sand fleas or jiggers. These natural threats were accentuated by major sociopolitical unrest and violence, including raiding by Kikuyu *thabaris*, widespread banditry and theft, and attacks on railroad construction camps. Armed police often retaliated against these incursions.[30] Without adequate supplies coming onto the market voluntarily, caravans used various tactics to secure necessary provisions, such as by holding local leaders hostage, seizing foodstuffs with force and stealing livestock.[31] The mortality resulting from the confluence of drought, disease and violence was extreme—it was found that as many as two of every three people living in a single Kikuyu *mbari* perished.[32] The spread of smallpox was particularly devastating. 'Corpses and skeletons lay along the caravan route from Nairobi and Fort Smith, while natives in the eruptive stages of the disease knelt by the roadside mumbling appeals for help', one veterinary officer remembered.[33] Few people and places were unaffected by the famine's reach. In the Kitui District, east

[29] Ambler, *Kenyan Communities*, 125–6; Berman and Lonsdale, *Unhappy Valley*, 346; C. C. Trench, *Men Who Ruled Kenya: The Kenya Administration, 1982–1963* (London and New York: Radcliffe Press, 1993), 13–17; E. N. Wamagatta, *Controversial Chiefs in Colonial Kenya: The Untold Story of Senior Chief Waruhiu Wa Kung'u, 1890–1952* (Lanham, MD, and London: Lexington Books, 2016), 16.

[30] Ambler, *Kenyan Communities*, 145–6; Berman and Lonsdale, *Unhappy Valley*, 30, 349; Goldsmith, *John Ainsworth*, 47; Nicholls, *Red Strangers*, 21; M. P. K. Sorrensen, *Origins of European Settlement in Kenya* (Nairobi: Oxford University Press, 1968), 21.

[31] C. C. Robertson, *Trouble Showed the Way: Women, Men, and Trade in the Nairobi Area, 1890–1990* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1997), 74.

[32] J. Iliffe, *Africans: The History of a Continent*, 2nd edition (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 216. On reports of the high mortality and disruptive sociopolitical effects of the famine, see Berman and Lonsdale, *Unhappy Valley*, 30, 349; Brantley, *Giriama and Colonial Resistance*, 51; M. Davis, *Late Victorian Holocausts: El Niño Famines and the Making of the Third World* (London: Verso, 2001), 201–3; Goldsmith, *John Ainsworth*, 47; J. Iliffe, *The African Poor: A History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 156; McGregor Ross, *Kenya from Within*, 62; Munro, *Colonial Rule*, 47; M. Osborne, *Ethnicity and Empire in Kenya: Loyalty and Martial Race among the Kamba, c.1800 to the Present* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 45–6; C. G. Rosberg and J. Nottingham, *The Myth of 'Mau Mau': Nationalism in Kenya* (New York: Praeger, 1966), 152; Wamagatta, *Controversial Chiefs*, 16–17. The most comprehensive description of the famine, including African experiences of the event, is that of Ambler, *Kenyan Communities*, chapter 6.

[33] Quoted in Iliffe, *The African Poor*, 156.

of Nairobi, the event was remembered as *Yũa ya Ngomanisye* (the famine that went everywhere).[34]

Ambler argues that the scale and intensity of the crisis led Protectorate officials to shake off their 'antipathy to the free distribution of food' and institute a relief programme—the first coordinated efforts by the fledgling administration to provide emergency food supplies.[35] They established relief camps at key centres including Ndi, Kibwezi, Machakos, Nairobi and Kikuyu. People were vaccinated against and treated for smallpox at quarantine camps. The administration granted a 'considerable sum of money' for these purposes, but it was by no means sufficient.[36] Local officials started collecting 'subscriptions' among better-off Africans; European and Indian residents of Mombasa also contributed funds towards relief.[37] Many hungry people did not survive the journey to the relief camps. Others were more fortunate; by late 1899, over 5000 were surviving on relief supplies in central Kenya. For some Akamba, the (as yet incomplete) railway helped save many lives by allowing missionaries and authorities to transport sacks of rice from the coast for distribution among starving people around Machakos.[38]

Like railheads, mission stations became important centres of refuge and relief, as happened in other African colonial settings.[39] They also emerged as places of conversion. For famine not only called upon missionaries to

[34] Ambler, *Kenyan Communities*, 122.

[35] Ibid., 139; Trench, *Men Who Ruled Kenya*, 16–17.

[36] Goldsmith, *John Ainsworth*, 47–8.

[37] Munro, *Colonial Rule*, 48; Trench, *Men Who Ruled Kenya*, 16–17.

[38] R. Ellis, *Vertical Margins: Mountaineering and the Landscapes of Neoimperialism* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 2002), 90; R. T. Ogonda, 'Transport and Communications in the Colonial Economy', in *An Economic History of Kenya*, ed. W. R. Ochieng' and R. M. Maxon (Nairobi: East African Educational Publishers, 1992), 138.

[39] Extra-governmental institutions including missionaries, philanthropists and families bore the bulk of responsibility for providing welfare services to the poor in the precolonial and early colonial period in Africa; see L. A. Gardner, *Taxing Colonial Africa: The Political Economy of British Imperialism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 38; Iliffe, *The African Poor*, chapters 1 and 11. Sundkler and Steed note that missionary stations often became refuges during African famines of the nineteenth century; B. Sundkler and C. Steed, *A History of the Church in Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 132, 143, 546. Missionaries were also involved in distributing famine relief in Southern Rhodesia and Gabon; J. Iliffe, *Famine in Zimbabwe, 1890–1960* (Gweru: Mambo Press, 1990), chapter 3; J. Rich, *A Workman Is Worthy of His Meat: Food and Colonialism in the Gabon Estuary* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2007), chapter 4.

carry out their spiritual duty to relieve suffering but also presented opportunities to proselytize to the hungry and newly dependent.[40] To some extent, the colonial state inherited this kind of proselytizing logic: famine relief constituted a kind of sacrament and communion, a chance to enact colonial beneficence and an opportunity to change beliefs and behaviour. At a broad level, official willingness to provide relief should be located within the moralistic imperatives and strategic values expressed through the acts of food provisioning.

Members of the administration went to various lengths—some greater than others—to relieve the suffering. Some tried to encourage the circulation of food by facilitating (or coercing) trade—one officer personally led a caravan from Kitui to Mount Kenya.[41] Another, the son of a merchant and missionary's daughter who grew up in Manchester, and who later would himself marry the daughter of an American missionary, embodied the humane, if paternalistic, care shown by some administrators towards suffering African subjects. John Ainsworth ultimately contributed ₨ 1000 of his own salary towards the relief of famine in Ukambani, one of the more densely populated provinces, particularly in the vicinities of Kitui that had been hardest hit.[42] He ordered seed maize from England and distributed this 'as widely as possible' in the Ukamba region.[43]

Ainsworth had lived and worked in East Africa since the late 1880s, originally in East Africa Company employ. He had begun his career at Machakos, the first station to be established in the Highlands, before moving the provincial headquarters to the new railway centre of Nairobi shortly before the turn of the century.[44] He was perhaps the most able of the first generation of field administrators in East Africa, and far too 'pro-African' for the later liking of Kenya's white settlers, so it would be an error to project his principles and actions onto those of his colleagues.[45]

[40] For an example of this sense of the Great Famine as an opportunity to convert Africans, see Ambler, *Kenyan Communities*, 148–9.

[41] Ambler argues that such interventions likely weakened pre-existing networks and means of survival; ibid., 141.

[42] Cashmore, 'District Administration', 25; Munro, *Colonial Rule*, 47; Trench, *Men Who Ruled Kenya*, 16–17; S. H. Fazan, *Colonial Kenya Observed: British Rule, Mau Mau and the Wind of Change* (London and New York: I. B. Tauris, 2015), 32.

[43] Maxon, *John Ainsworth*, 73.

[44] M. Thomason, 'Little Tin Gods: The District Officer in British East Africa', *Albion* 7 (1975): 145–60.

[45] Maxon, *John Ainsworth.*

Nonetheless, Ainsworth's movements and dispositions are worth highlighting, for in later years he would play a central role in shaping official famine responses in Kenya, with the memory of the Great Famine remaining a constant reminder and motivator.

The relief actions pursued by the minute number of administrators, missionaries and other private agencies then present in East Africa were inevitably highly limited and localized in relation to the overall scale of the famine. For the most part, people looked to more established practices, institutions and exchange networks for survival, or tried to fend for themselves. Some anti-famine practices were principally preventive rather than ameliorative in nature. Communities such as the Marakwet and Pokot in north-west Kenya had already in precolonial times developed extensive networks of irrigation that acted as a bulwark against famines.[46] Moreover, archaeological evidence shows that communities such as these had gradually introduced and adopted new food crops—some of them anti-famine foods—into their agricultural regimes over successive decades and centuries.[47]

For many Africans without access to such preventive means, livestock offered a critical resource for survival in times of dearth, providing milk and blood to eat in addition to being a source of payment.[48] Cattle were

[46] W. M. Adams, 'Irrigation, Erosion and Famine: Visions of Environmental Change in Marakwet, Kenya', in *The Lie of the Land: Challenging Received Wisdom on the African Environment*, ed. M. Leach and R. Mearns (Oxford: IAI and James Currey, 1996), 155–67; M. I. J. Davies, 'The Irrigation System of the Pokot, Northwest Kenya', *Azania: Journal of the British Institute in Eastern Africa* 43 (2008): 50–76; E. E. Watson, W. M. Adams and S. K. Mutiso, 'Indigenous Irrigation, Agriculture and Development, Marakwet, Kenya', *Geographical Journal* 164 (1998): 82.

[47] M. I. J. Davies and H. L. Moore, 'Landscape, Time and Cultural Resilience: A Brief History of Agriculture in Pokot and Marakwet, Kenya', *Journal of Eastern African Studies* 10 (2016): 74.

[48] On keeping cattle as an insurance against famine, often in preference to cash reserves, see I. R. G. Spencer, 'Pastoralism and Colonial Policy in Kenya, 1895–1929', in *Imperialism, Colonialism and Hunger: East and Central Africa*, ed. R. I. Rotberg (Lexington, MD: Lexington Books, 1983), 118; R. M. A. van Zwanenberg and A. King, *An Economic History of Kenya and Uganda, 1800–1970* (London: Macmillan, 1975), 86–7. Cattle were not only a reserve against crop failure but also 'a way of controlling labour'. Their ownership 'brought labour into the cattle wealthy household', often to the benefit of men; G. H. Maddox, 'Gender and Famine in Central Tanzania: 1916–1961', *African Studies Review* 39 (1996): 86–7. Such reluctance to eat livestock, even during times of famine, contributed to the colonial perception of what would later be termed the 'cattle complex'. Ambler depicts this as a rational means to avoid the ruination of entire families through complete asset disposal; *Kenyan Communities*, 126.

rarely slaughtered for meat, although Ainsworth reported that some people did indeed slaughter their stock to supplement their food supply, or ate animals that had been infected with rinderpest.[49] Others turned to litigation, requesting payments or refunds on bridewealth obligations.[50] However, it was the poor, without recourse to such reserves, who bore the first and most severe brunt of hunger. Many resorted to hunting and foraging.[51] Some communities found recourse in their regular trading or political relationships. The Giriama living near the Sabaki River, for example, provided food to Mijikenda and other nearby groups along the coast.[52] Also on the coast, Arabs and Swahilis with access to commercial grain imports were often willing to provide relief to their political and trading allies.[53] Meanwhile, many from the Kitui region sought refuge in their long-standing trade connections with those living in highland areas.[54]

Coping strategies like these meant that certain kinds of food might only be obtained and consumed in times of hardship, thus assuming the status of 'famine foods'. For pastoralists like the Samburu in north-central Kenya, for example, grains were considered famine foods that would be acquired through trade with agriculturists such as the Dassanetch to the north and Meru to the south and east.[55] During drought or famine, the Samburu could also resort to a wider variety of foodstuffs that were considered undesirable in more conventional times. Blood and stored fat offered one option, prepared in ways such as *mpupoi*—boiled blood with added fat—a meal high in calorific content yet dehydrating.[56] Non-pastoral foods could also be eaten without stigma during times of hardship and need. These included not only traded grains but also wild foods such as tubers, acacia seeds, wild greens and berries. While their consumption would ordinarily be associated with poverty and non-ownership of cattle, such foods could be legitimately consumed or traded from Dorobo (foragers) in hard

[49] Goldsmith, *John Ainsworth*, 47.

[50] Ambler, *Kenyan Communities*, 126.

[51] Ibid., 127; Wamagatta, *Controversial Chiefs*, 16.

[52] D. Porter, B. Allen and G. Thompson, *Development in Practice: Paved with Good Intentions*, 2nd edition (London and New York: Routledge, 2011), 46.

[53] Brantley, *Giriama and Colonial Resistance*, 12.

[54] Ambler, *Kenyan Communities*, 134–5.

[55] J. Holtzman, *Uncertain Tastes: Memory, Ambivalence, and the Politics of Eating in Samburu, Northern Kenya* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 2009), 119.

[56] Holtzman, *Uncertain Tastes*, 106.

times.[57] Hunting was different. Eland, buffalo and antelope might be consumed without strong stigma. However, times of crisis could also force people to set aside far stricter taboos. In the grip of the multiple intersecting disasters of the 1890s, for instance, some Samburu resorted to eating elephants, overcoming a strong supernatural proscription linked to the animal's perceived similarity to humans, and there were also accounts of cannibalism.[58]

Migration and mobility were another key coping strategy pursued by African groups. Yet, as parties of the hungry and impoverished, animated by the urgency of the Great Famine, roved about the countryside looking to purchase or work for food, their searches cast the famine's net over an ever-widening area.[59] In this way, the crisis led to major population displacements as thousands of refugees moved out of drier areas towards highland regions or market and relief centres, leaving some areas practically uninhabited. Many Kamba people travelled to Kikuyu territory, for example, where some remained, but mainly they journeyed towards the coast, with many settling in the vicinity of Rabai in the immediate hinterland of Mombasa.[60] Widespread population movements across the region led to the growth and concentration of African settlements adjacent to market centres like Nairobi.[61] For many, survival was a grim battle of subsistence in the face of rapidly eroding moral economies and the disavowal of even the closest of kinship ties.[62]

Trade also took on particular importance as a means to secure food during the crisis. Makeshift caravans made repeated journeys from dry lowlands to less-affected highlands to trade for provisions. Initially, these followed regular trading routes but later, as conditions worsened, people ventured towards any district where they might rummage for supplies.[63]

[57] Ibid., 111.

[58] Ibid., 113. Ogoye-Ndegwa and Aagaard-Hansen also make the point that a gradual erosion of a sufficient food base among the Luo people of Kenya has led to certain dietary observances and taboos (such as the eating of eggs) being overlooked; C. Ogoye-Ndegwa and J. Aagaard-Hansen, 'Famines and Famished Bodies in a Food Deficit Locality among the Luo of Kenya', *Food and Foodways* 14 (2006): 233–4.

[59] Ambler, *Kenyan Communities*, 129–30.

[60] C. Dundas, 'History of Kitui', *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland* 43 (1913): 485.

[61] Ambler, *Kenyan Communities*, 134, 139–40.

[62] Ibid., 144–5.

[63] For a description of interregional trading relationships, and how they were mobilized in Ulu, Kitui, Meru and Kikuyuland during the famine, see ibid., 130–1.

Most trade was carried out directly between producers and consumers, although some acted as professional traders, bringing supplies into areas of dearth.[64] Yet, as more people came to depend on purchased food, prices rose, and increasingly they were forced to survive by pledging their own labour or that of their dependants.[65] Pawning women became commonplace, in some places turning into outright coercion and trading in dependent female labour.[66] As Gregory Maddox noted, such famines brought a fall in the relative 'value of labour'.[67] Among the Kikuyu, escalating conditions of violence, alongside an increasing resort to pawning, had particularly deleterious effects on women, interrupting their regular patterns of large-scale trade and livelihood.[68]

If strategies of coping with hardship are not limited to physical acts, but extend to the psychological, ideological and symbolic domains, then the naming of famine events comes into view as a form of coping practice. The distribution of rice as relief supplies, for example, accounts for why the Great Famine is remembered as *Mũvunga* (rice) among some Kamba people.[69] Giriama people referred to the famine as *Ndzala ya Magunia* (famine of sacks), and a similar name was used in parts of Ulu—possibly a reference to bags of imported famine relief or to hessian sacks sold by the Giriama to Arabs in exchange for food.[70] One Kiswahili name for the crisis is *Ulaya* (European)[71]; likewise, among some Gikuyu speakers it is recalled as *Ng'aragu ya Ruraya* (the famine of Europe) owing to its association with the presence of white traders, missionaries and officials.[72]

[64] Ibid., 130.

[65] Ibid., 131–2.

[66] Ibid., 132–3. Dundas reported that Kamba men 'sold' women to Kikuyus in exchange for food, redeemable for a 'ransom' price, although it is unclear whether this represents a European misunderstanding of pawning or a more coercive act; C. Dundas, 'The Organization and Laws of Some Bantu Tribes in East Africa', *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland* 45 (1915): 290.

[67] G. H. Maddox, 'Mtunya: Famine in Central Tanzania, 1917–1920', *Journal of African History* 31 (1990): 192.

[68] Robertson, *Trouble Showed the Way*, 76.

[69] Osborne, *Ethnicity and Empire*, 45.

[70] Brantley suggests it referred to famine relief; *Giriama and Colonial Resistance*, 51. Porter, Allen and Thompson suggest it referred to hessian sacks sold by the Giriama to Arabs; *Development in Practice*, 214.

[71] Robertson, *Trouble Showed the Way*, 74.

[72] Wamagatta, *Controversial Chiefs*, 16.

James Ambler argues that famine names referring to unfamiliar items (such as rice and sacks) reflected a perception that 'external forces' played a role in causing the event, whether through external trade, the presence of outsiders such as Europeans, or some other means.[73] In naming an association between Europeans and the famine, Kenyans referenced more than the historical presence of Europeans and their activities. Those names included a sense of 'cosmological imbalance', a notion that 'the growing power of Europeans, however vaguely understood, lay behind these destructive forces'.[74] Naming thus formed part of a larger collective process of remembering famine events, of developing explanations for their causes and effects, and of managing their longer-run implications for Kenyan communal and psychological lifeworlds.[75]

Ultimately, the events of 1897–1901 had significant long-term economic and political consequences. As Ambler has argued, it proved 'a critical element' in the 'rapid advance of imperial authority and the early evolution of colonial society'.[76] On one level, it played a key role in driving complex reformations of the distributions of authority and wealth within African societies, both undermining and enabling the extension of customary authority in new ways.[77] This promoted political fragmentation at the same time as consolidating the status of patrons better positioned to recover from adversity.[78] Many trading 'middlemen' and brokers were able to accumulate wealth and influence during the famine; others did so by forging new links with institutions, including missions and the fledgling British administration.[79] Indeed, the famine enabled European administrative, mission and trading centres—through their access to and distribution of imported supplies—to extend considerably their local political and commercial influence, albeit from a low base.[80]

[73] Ambler, *Kenyan Communities*, 137.
[74] Ibid., 124.
[75] Maddox, 'Mtunya', 188–9.
[76] Ambler, *Kenyan Communities*, 123.
[77] Berman and Lonsdale, *Unhappy Valley*, 349.
[78] Ibid., 30–1, 364.
[79] Ambler, *Kenyan Communities*, 148–9. Lonsdale argues that, for many elders and groups of Maasai, 'British force' represented an 'ally in this next, colonial reconstruction of social order after disaster'; J. M. Lonsdale, 'Race and Ethnicity in Colonial Kenya', in *The Oxford Handbook of Kenyan Politics*, ed. N. Cheeseman, K. Kanyinga and G. Lynch (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), 127.
[80] Ibid., 138–40.

The Great Famine led to the decline of Arab and Swahili economic dominance along the coast.[81] Moreover, high mortality and population dispersion in the interior opened the door for the alienation and allotment of settler farms in fertile, well-watered lands, adjacent to the new railway, previously cultivated by the Kikuyu or grazed by weakened pastoral tribes like the Maasai and Akamba.[82] The event was thus a critical condition for the policy of 'white settlement' that the Kenyan administration pursued in earnest from 1902, and that in turn drove a significant elaboration of the colonial state apparatus.[83] Ultimately, this set in motion a lasting political problem and a focus for anti-colonial agitation.

Conclusion

In the latter half of the nineteenth century, food scarcity visited East Africa in cyclical fashion, primarily affecting areas with marginal environments and irregular climates. During major food crises, mortality was mainly the result of disease, and could be staggering in its scale. Yet these crises were increasingly and integrally linked to the politics of colonial conquest and violence.[84] By the last decade of the century, food purchases for external markets had started to affect these dynamics. This much was clear during Kenya's fin-de-siècle Great Famine.

By the start of the twentieth century, responses to the problem of food scarcity comprised basic disaster relief functions performed by a variety of actors, including missionaries, philanthropists and administrators. Often such actions appear to have been motivated by a moral notion of duty. As such, hunger and starvation were a *problem* mainly for the suffering they caused the colonial subjects of the Crown. What we find, then, is a politics

[81] Davis, *Late Victorian Holocausts*, 203.

[82] McGregor Ross, *Kenya from Within*, 62; Munro, *Colonial Rule*, 77–80; Sorrensen, *Origins of European Settlement*, 28; Spencer, 'Pastoralism', 113–14.

[83] For example, a state agricultural department was established in the early 1900s to provide assistance to white settler farmers. The functional and technical departments of agriculture, public works, education and medicine were grafted on the basic structural and spatial framework of the prefectural administration. These agencies provided services throughout the territory, for both urban and rural areas. Departmental heads advised, and answered to, the governor; Dilley, *British Policy*, 21.

[84] De Waal notes that colonial violence, particularly that directed against local insurrections, continued to act as a proximate cause of famine well into the twentieth century, being particularly notable during the First World War; A. de Waal, *Famine Crimes: Politics and the Disaster Relief Industry in Africa* (Oxford: James Currey, 1997), 27.

of mortality—a moral politics concerned with preventing individuals from suffering and perishing from the sudden and temporary scourges of famine and epidemic.[85] For the most part, this was a politics centred on the paternalistic relation between the sovereign and the individual subject. At the same time, the historical evidence suggests that some missionaries and administrators may have seen the provision of famine relief as a means to extend their local influence and control, and to shepherd the beliefs and behaviours of African peoples.[86] Whatever their underlying motivation, the relief efforts co-staged by Protectorate administrators covered only a few key areas around the coast and railway-serviced hinterland, and largely depended on the initiative of local officials rather than legislative control or bureaucratized operations. This would soon change.

The Great Famine was more severe than any event in living memory.[87] Its significance as a historical event is evinced by its use as a dating device, with officials later using it as a historical marker to discuss trends relating to African custom and law.[88] In the early 1930s, the Kenyan Land Commission would repeatedly refer to estimated population sizes and patterns of occupation before and after the famine, particularly in Kikuyu Province, to consider the legitimacy of various historical claims to land.[89] Moreover, the worst of the suffering may have passed by 1901, but memory of the Great Famine retained a powerful political force. In future years, officials and politicians would remobilize this memory during times of acute scarcity as a way to legitimate government intervention. Although

[85] M. Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended: Lectures at the Collège de France 1975–1976*, trans. D. Macey (London: Penguin, 2004), 243.

[86] Rich notes that famine conditions facilitated the rapid uptake of Christianity in the Gabon Estuary in the period from the start of the First World War to 1930—missionaries had 'greater ease in finding converts seeking material as well as spiritual aid'. This reflects a broader point that famines and other major crises may pose an 'existential challenge' to communities, encouraging the assimilation and adoption of new cultural ideas and practices; *A Workman Is Worthy*, 83–4.

[87] Ambler, *Kenyan Communities*, 122.

[88] Dundas, 'Organization and Laws', 265; also pointed out in Osborne, *Ethnicity and Empire*, 45. African peoples like the Embu also used famines as dating devices to remember how certain 'descent groups' came to be present in Embuland, explained in terms of 'immigration myths'; S. C. Saberwal, 'Historical Notes on the Embu of Central Kenya', *Journal of African History* 8 (1967): 29–38. Lonsdale notes, generally of Kenya, that 'drought-induced famine was the timekeeper of social change and inter-ethnic relations'; 'Race and Ethnicity', 127.

[89] M. Carter, R. W. Hemsted, F. O. Wilson and S. H. Fazan, *Report of the Kenya Land Commission* (London: HMSO, 1934), part 1, chapters 1–10.

state-led relief efforts were highly circumscribed, they established a precedent for the administration's role in future times of dearth.[90] They laid the foundations of an official 'duty' to relieve hunger and suffering in times of crisis. Yet how administrators responded to food scarcity would start to take on a far more bureaucratic and coordinated form. In part, it was a response to the onset of war in Europe and Africa.

[90] Munro argues that these anti-famine efforts heralded 'a colonial government with some interest in the welfare of the people it ruled'; *Colonial Rule*, 4.

CHAPTER 3

Scarcity, State Control and the First World War

The Great Famine may have left a lasting mark on Kenya's social, political and economic dynamics, but it appears that the early years of the twentieth century offered some respite to African communities and Protectorate officials alike. The colonial annual reports from this period mention few episodes of dearth. From 1907, however, local officials did report anticipated, potential and actual scarcities in various districts for practically every year until 1918.[1] The chief causes were cited as drought, followed sometimes by epidemic disease.[2] Some local scarcities were intimately connected to market factors and the effects of state economic policies.[3] African

[1] East Africa Protectorate (EAP), *Annual Reports 1906–1918*.

[2] In 1908–1909, for example, scarcities in Kitui and Machakos districts were linked to outbreaks of East Coast Fever; EAP, *Annual Report for 1908–1909*, 32.

[3] Maxon notes that a food shortage in 1910 in Vihiga, for example, was partly the result of an official campaign to increase the planting of sesame as a cash crop. After households had sold large portions of their sorghum supplies at the end of 1909, and subsequently planted sesame at the expense of food crops, inadequate rainfall during the course of the following year left people with little either to trade or to consume; R. M. Maxon, '"Fantastic Prices" in the Midst of "an Acute Food Shortage": Market, Environment, and the Colonial State in the 1943 Vihiga (Western Kenya) Famine', *African Economic History* 28 (2000): 32–3.

J. Duminy, *Food and Famine in Colonial Kenya*, African Histories and Modernities, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-10964-5_3

uprisings and state retributions, including those against the coastal Giriama people between 1914 and 1916, also led to localized famines.[4]

Prior to the First World War, official responses to food shortages took several forms. One of the more common strategies was to distribute emergency relief supplies, either for immediate repayment or on credit. Broadly speaking, the volume of supplies distributed by the state was limited.[5] Loans of food supplies could be made to specific communities, and, in less severe cases, the collection of taxes might be postponed.[6] Relief works, like those devised in nineteenth-century India, might also be organized.[7] Such works were arranged in Nyanza and Lumbwa as early as 1907, roughly coinciding with a considerable expansion in settler estate production as well as an extensive programme of public works and railway construction.[8] Road- and rail-building projects were often favoured—they had the benefit of concentrating hungry people in areas where they could be fed more easily.[9] They also ensured some form of repayment for the supplies distributed, and the resulting infrastructure helped to 'open up' the

[4] C. L. Brantley, *The Giriama and Colonial Resistance in Kenya, 1800–1920* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1981), 132; F. Cooper, 'Subsistence and Agrarian Conflict: The Coast of Kenya after Slavery', in *Imperialism, Colonialism and Hunger: East and Central Africa*, ed. R. I. Rotberg (Lexington, MA: Lexington Books, 1983), 27; D. Porter, B. Allen and G. Thompson, *Development in Practice: Paved with Good Intentions*, 2nd edition (London and New York: Routledge, 2011), 214; D. C. Savage and J. F. Munro, 'Carrier Corps Recruitment in the British East Africa Protectorate 1914–1918', *Journal of African History* 7 (1966): 318.

[5] M. O'Leary, 'Responses to Drought in Kitui District, Kenya', *Disasters* 4 (1980): 320.

[6] In 1908–1909, 16 tons of foodstuffs were loaned to inhabitants of Kibwezi, who had 'suffered severely from famine', and tax collections were postponed in Rabai 'owing to threatened famine'; EAP, *Annual Report for 1908–1909*, 27, 32.

[7] In the late 1870s, Viceroy of India Lord Lytton laid out a famine policy emphasizing free trade and the distribution of relief in return for hard labour. The latter principle was inspired by the writings of Turgot, the eighteenth-century French economist, on famine; R. M. Stahl, 'The Economics of Starvation: Laissez-Faire Ideology and Famine in Colonial India', in *Intellectual History of Economic Normativities*, ed. M. Thorup (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 169–84.

[8] EAP, *Annual Reports 1905–1907*; B. J. Berman, *Control and Crisis in Colonial Kenya: The Dialectic of Domination* (London: James Currey; Nairobi: East African Educational Publishers; and Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 1990), 61.

[9] This logic was evident in famine relief works organized in 1929. A railway extension was motivated as a relief work as a means to 'effect an economy in the famine relief, inasmuch as it will bring both the natives towards the source of supply of famine relief, and also give them work'; (E. M. V. Kenealy) CPK, *Kenya Legislative Council Debates [KLC Debates] 1929*, vol. 1, 22 February 1929, 40.

country. During future scarcities, the argument went, relief supplies could be transported more easily to the area. And, as I will show later, they avoided the possibility of corrupting the working 'morale' of African men, which officials and settlers assumed was the inevitable result of the free distribution of state relief.

Following the outbreak of war in 1914, food scarcities resulted from a variety of factors. In 1916–1917, enemy activities along the Tanganyikan border led to a food shortage in Vanga, while the abandonment of homes due to recruitment efforts reportedly led to scarcity along the Tana River.[10] The worst, however, was yet to come. Over the course of the war, thousands of Africans had been conscripted to serve as soldiers or as porters in the infamously ill-fated Carrier Corps, in which large numbers would ultimately suffer and perish from disease.[11] African women assumed more responsibility to clear land and grow food; many switched to labour-saving crops such as maize.[12] Similarly, many settlers were absent from their farms on military service. Kenya generally faced a lack of veterinary staff and farm animals, while import restrictions meant fewer agricultural implements were available. By the latter part of 1917, such conditions combined with unfavourable rainfall, outbreaks of stock diseases, government pressure to market all available supplies for military purposes, and the spread of insect, plant and fungal menaces.[13] The result was Kenya's first major famine under Colonial Office administration, which by year's end had gripped many districts in the territory, spilling southwards over the border into Tanganyika.[14] Food prices spiked, undermining, for instance, the local pig farming industry.[15] Diseases like influenza,

[10] EAP, *Annual Report for 1916–1917*, 21. German recruitment of African men and requisitions of food and cattle also led to people abandoning their homes in Tanganyika, thereby aggravating famine conditions; G. H. Maddox, 'Mtunya: Famine in Central Tanzania, 1917–1920', *Journal of African History* 31 (1990): 183–4.

[11] Savage and Munro, 'Carrier Corps'.

[12] A. F. D. Mackenzie, *Land, Ecology and Resistance in Kenya, 1880–1952* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1998), 132.

[13] EAP, *Annual Report for 1917–1918*. On state pressure to increase marketing of supplies for military purposes, thereby contributing to food shortages, see Maxon, 'Fantastic Prices', 33.

[14] G. H. Maddox, 'Gender and Famine in Central Tanzania: 1916–1961', *African Studies Review* 39 (1996): 89; Maddox, 'Mtunya'; R. M. Maxon, *Struggle for Kenya: The Loss and Reassertion of Imperial Initiative, 1912–1923* (London and Toronto: Associated University Presses, 1993), 108.

[15] EAP, *Annual Report for 1917–1918*.

tuberculosis and malaria spread rapidly throughout populations already weakened from famine, with horrifying mortal effect.[16]

Official Responses

The crises materializing towards the end of 1917 revealed a growing interest and concern on the part of central officials, and in particular Charles Calvert Bowring, the acting governor. Bowring had ascended rapidly through the administrative ranks following his appointment as an auditor for the East Africa Protectorate and railway authority in the late nineteenth century. Designated treasurer in 1901 and chief secretary in 1911, Bowring was not always accepting of settler political tactics during his tenure in East Africa and as a result earned little respect from that community.[17] As governor of Nyasaland from 1924, Bowring would enthusiastically pursue a policy seeking to force Africans to work on settler enterprises or public works.[18] His experiences in East Africa, and with the famine of 1917–1919, foreshadowed those later actions.

Aware of the danger of a possible food scarcity due to the failure of the 'short rains' (preceded, in some areas, by exceptionally heavy rainfall), in early December 1917 the acting governor requested all provincial commissioners to provide assessments of 'the food prospects throughout the Protectorate'.[19] The replies generally indicated that 'a sufficiency of food' was to be expected if decent rains fell in December and January. Such rains did not materialize. By the end of December of 1917, Bowring had appointed a Famine Committee chaired by John Ainsworth to investigate 'the question of the native food supply and to make recommendations'.[20] It is worth noting that Ainsworth, who had been nominated as military commissioner of labour in March 1917, in charge of recruiting labour for the Carrier Corps, and who would later be the Protectorate's founding chief native commissioner (1918–1920), was consistently deprecated by

[16] EAP, *Annual Reports 1917–1919*. The influenza epidemic took more than 1000 lives in Vihiga district alone; Maxon, 'Fantastic Prices', 33–4.

[17] Maxon, *Struggle for Kenya*, 111.

[18] J. McCracken, *A History of Malawi 1859–1966* (Woodbridge: James Currey, 2012), 221.

[19] EAP, *Minutes of the Proceedings of the Legislative Council of East Africa [EAPLC Mins] 1918*, First Session, 18 February 1918, 5.

[20] Ibid., 6; F. H. Goldsmith, *John Ainsworth: Pioneer Kenya Administrator, 1864–1946* (London: Macmillan, 1955).

settlers for his apparently 'pro-native tendencies'.[21] In January 1918, as the Famine Committee chair, Ainsworth seized the opportunity to act on some of these 'tendencies', directing administrative officers 'to develop reserves to the maximum' both as a response to the immediate conditions of famine and to provide for 'future policy needs'.[22]

After working to obtain 'all possible information from all parts of the Protectorate', the Famine Committee reported to the governor that serious shortages were expected in the Nyika reserve and areas of Kenya Province (later part of Central Province). Bowring, in turn, reported the threatened famine to the secretary of state in the Colonial Office, and requested assistance in arranging shipments of emergency food supplies from South Africa. Such arrangements were made through the Royal Commission on Wheat Supplies, and a vessel was dispatched from 'the Union' with 3500 tons of grain, with further requirements to be met by monthly shipments. The committee also considered how best to receive and distribute supplies through the railway system, including via a depot in Nairobi.[23]

In February 1918, Bowring explained to the Legislative Council (Legco) that the grain was to be distributed along four lines: to employers requiring food for their labour, to African people (through district

[21] W. McGregor Ross, *Kenya from Within: A Short Political History* (London: G. Allen and Unwin, 1927); I. K. Tarus, 'A History of the Direct Taxation of the African People of Kenya, 1895–1973' (Ph.D. dissertation, Rhodes University, 2004), 21. In large part, this notoriety stemmed from Ainsworth's energetic encouragement of African agriculture and cash cropping during his tenure as commissioner of Nyanza. Settlers saw this as obstructing the flow of labour to the settled highlands; Goldsmith, *John Ainsworth*, 101, 103.

[22] A. Clayton and D. C. Savage, *Government and Labour in Kenya, 1895–1963* (London: Cass, 1974), 94. However, the strength of Ainsworth's efforts to boost African production was short-lived. The onset of economic depression shortly after the end of the war, coupled with vocal political pressure to discourage what was correctly perceived as a competitor and threat to the settler economy, ensured that administrative efforts in the reserves were kept at a skeletal level, largely becoming a matter of the individual initiative of local officers; Berman, *Control and Crisis*, 218–19.

[23] EAP, *EAPLC Mins 1918*, First Session, 18 February 1918, 6.

commissioners), to private traders and to mission stations.[24] Supplies were to be sold at the cost price of landing the food at the nearest station or point of distribution. For traders, this was conditional on their being 'limited in the amount of profit they shall make in retailing [the] same'.[25] Although the government's intention was to issue grain only on payment, officials recognized that it would be necessary to devise special famine relief works if drought conditions continued. The director of public works drew up a schedule of projects in case, and made arrangements so that labourers not only would be fed but also could 'draw food in payment of services for the use of themselves or their families'.[26] By the end of February, some district commissioners had already started irrigation relief works.

Officials imported and distributed 17,000 tons of food from South Africa and elsewhere.[27] The supplies were mainly sold, and the principal customers were Africans, government departments and employers requiring food for their workers.[28] The Famine Committee later reported that the Kamba people alone bought over 1900 tons of rice, 53 tons of maize and 73 tons of other grains.[29] Local settler farmers were also urged to proffer supplies to distribute as relief. Much of the imported food was shipped to the new railhead at Thika (opened in 1913), where thousands

[24] Kenyan executive and legislative councils were established in 1906, with the former acting as the governor's advisory body. Legco enjoyed the power to make ordinances, as well as to constitute and regulate courts and officials. All ordinances proposed by Legco had to have the assent of the governor, who also held the original and casting vote. At the time of these discussions, in 1918, unofficial members were still appointed by the governor. However, settlers had long agitated for an elective franchise to secure their representation on the Legco. This was granted in 1919; M. R. Dilley, *British Policy in Kenya Colony*, 2nd edition (London: Frank Cass, 1966), 17–23.

[25] EAP, *EAPLC Mins 1918*, First Session, 18 February 1918, 6.

[26] Ibid.

[27] McGregor Ross, *Kenya from Within*, 152.

[28] Goldsmith, *John Ainsworth*, 107.

[29] V. Simiyu, 'Land and Politics in Ukambani from the End of the 19th Century up to 1933', *Présence Africaine* 89 (1974): 121.

of Kikuyu, Embu and Meru people arrived in search of food.[30] Many southern Kikuyu and Kamba journeyed to Nairobi for the same reason.[31] Although this relief helped to prevent many more deaths from starvation and smallpox, mortality was nonetheless severe—'the roads to all government centres', it was reported, 'were lined with corpses'.[32] Few had the option to rely on government relief. Migration and trade once again took on particular importance as a means to survive. Some families were able to secure surplus food supplies from their less harshly affected friends and neighbours,[33] although officials attempted to prevent major population movements.[34] Cattle were bartered for food or exchanged for cash.[35] Some earned food by working in settlements, on European farms, on public works or by signing up for military service.[36] When desperate, many resorted to strategies of foraging, pawning children or becoming dependants themselves, as well as to banditry and violence.[37]

Officials also pursued other strategies. One was to halt and retain all exports of grain and other foodstuffs to provide for local consumption—a measure lamented by Bowring.[38] However, the most significant feature of

[30] M. H. Dawson, 'Health, Nutrition, and Population in Central Kenya, 1890–1945', in *African Population and Capitalism: Historical Perspectives*, ed. D. D. Cordell and J. W. Gregory (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1987), 211; E. W. Soja, *The Geography of Modernization in Kenya: A Spatial Analysis of Social, Economic, and Political Change* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1968), 29.

[31] M. H. Dawson, 'Socioeconomic Change and Disease: Smallpox in Colonial Kenya, 1880–1920', in *The Social Basis of Health and Healing in Africa*, ed. S. Feierman and J. M. Janzen (Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 1992), 101.

[32] Ibid.

[33] For example, the Gusii sold grain to worse-affected Luos, leading to the economic benefit of the former; R. M. Maxon, *Conflict and Accommodation in Western Kenya: The Gusii and the British, 1907–1963* (London and Toronto: Associated University Presses, 1989), 72.

[34] Dawson, 'Socioeconomic Change', 101.

[35] Although Maddox notes that, at least in Tanganyika, the cash prices for cattle fell so low that people preferred to barter; Maddox, 'Mtunya', 187.

[36] Savage and Munro, 'Carrier Corps', 329–30.

[37] Maddox describes how people in the central region of Tanganyika pursued such strategies. It is likely that similar dynamics would have been found north of the Kenyan border; 'Mtunya', 186–92.

[38] As Bowring stated in Legco: 'The existing shortage of native foodstuffs, notably maize and beans … has for the time being completely obliterated this Protectorate as an exporting proposition. I trust however that in a few months' time the position will have changed and that an excess of local production above local consumption will provide a source of supply to the world's markets'; EAP, *EAPLC Mins 1918*, First Session, 18 February 1918, 4.

the state's response was its resort to legislative and coercive measures. In February 1918, Legco passed the Food Preservation Ordinance to prohibit costal people (who had 'shown themselves improvident') from felling mango trees to make charcoal.[39] But Ainsworth sought further powers. In April, building on his earlier instructions for officials to encourage development in the reserves, he introduced two additional pieces of legislation obliging Africans to work for famine relief and to grow more food.[40] The first was the Native Authority Amendment Ordinance. This allowed the authority to compel Africans 'to make better use of the lands set aside for their occupation'. 'Better use' involved extending cultivated areas as well as greater use of manure and crop rotation techniques, which Ainsworth hoped to promote over the longer term by 'a system of agricultural education'. As he explained: 'The present shortage of food would undoubtedly have been much less severe had the natives generally been more industrious in this connection.'[41]

The second piece of legislation was the Native Authority (Famine Relief) Ordinance. This sought to compel African people 'who are in danger of starvation' to work on 'relief and other public works'.[42] In Legco, Ainsworth justified the legislation in relation to the 'peculiarities of the African', who 'becomes apathetic and indifferent to his fate' when threatened by scarcity:

> Under famine conditions an ordered idea or concentration on work in return for food is just what these people will not do unless ordered and compelled. It is for these reasons that powers are sought so that it shall not be left to the native to follow his own inclination which if allowed will result in his deterioration and numerous deaths.[43]

Consequently, 'drastic measures' were necessary for Africans 'to be saved from the results of their own indifference'.[44] These measures proved to be highly unpopular among the Kenyan settler public. Their animosity

[39] Ibid., 14.
[40] Maxon, *Struggle for Kenya*, 108.
[41] EAP, *EAPLC Mins 1918*, First Session, 11 April 1918, 40.
[42] Ibid., 42.
[43] Ibid.
[44] Ibid.

was driven in part by a sense of moral outrage that 'idle' Africans could potentially be fed by the state. Many argued that food should be provided only to those working for Europeans.[45] But there was also a more economic aspect to this dissent, particularly in relation to the Native Authority Amendment Ordinance. In Legco, P. H. Clarke, the first white merchant in Kisumu, argued that it was 'wrong in principle to encourage compulsion within the reserves, without equally encouraging the production of labour for the more important industries of the country'.[46] This reflected a wider current of settler opinion that increasing food production in the reserves would only serve to undermine settler industries.[47] Later in the year, the state tabled its financial estimates, including a nominal allocation of under £2000 for technical assistance to African agriculture. This brazen endorsement of African production was a step too far for many settlers. In response to fiery criticism lodged by unofficial Legco members and the local press, officials withdrew the ordinance.[48] This appears to have been something of a 'rubicon moment' in Kenyan political history. Cashmore depicts the episode as a clear statement of growing settler political influence over the official affairs of the Protectorate.[49]

If one leaves aside this opposition for the time being, what do the foregoing statements and actions reflect about how officials viewed the problem of food scarcity? In Ainsworth's statements, one finds a combination of two imperatives. First, they evince a liberal or Malthusian tendency to blame hunger on the improvidence and lack of industry ('idleness') shown by the hungry, which took on a particularly racialized and gendered form

[45] Clayton and Savage, *Government and Labour*, 87; Savage and Munro, 'Carrier Corps', 334–5.

[46] EAP, *EAPLC Mins 1918*, First Session, 25 April 1918, 57; C. S. Nicholls, *Red Strangers: The White Tribe of Kenya* (London: Timewell Press, 2005), 111.

[47] Clayton and Savage, *Government and Labour*, 87.

[48] Ibid., 94; EAP, *EAPLC Mins 1918*, First Session, 12 April 1918, 46.

[49] T. H. R. Cashmore, 'Studies in District Administration in the East Africa Protectorate' (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Cambridge, 1965), 199.

in colonial African settings.[50] And, second, one sees a paternalistic sense of duty that motivated officials to 'act for the native's good in spite of himself' in averting mass starvation.[51] Related to this point, officials like Ainsworth did not conceptualize hunger as a purely natural function of climatic variables. Rather, natural realities, as the chief cause of famine, were fundamentally linked to and aggravated by human factors. Specifically, scarcities were linked to a Malthusian notion of improvident and hopeless 'savage life' as a danger to society. This notion of African improvidence as catastrophic is an important element of the paternalism shown by officials during food crises. In the basic Malthusian view, scarcity can act as a kind of 'regulatory device', forcing people to generate a sense of futurity

[50] On the Malthusian attitudes active in nineteenth-century Britain, prior to the 'humanitarian discovery of hunger', see J. Vernon, *Hunger: A Modern History* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), chapters 1 and 2; also M. Dean, *The Constitution of Poverty: Toward a Genealogy of Liberal Governance*, 2nd edition (London and New York: Routledge, 2011), chapter 5. For such attitudes during the Indian famines of the same century, see M. Davis, *Late Victorian Holocausts: El Niño Famines and the Making of the Third World* (London: Verso, 2001), chapter 1. On the prominent Kenyan settler and official view of the male African as 'idle', and as a specific motivation for Kenyan state compulsion and discipline of labour during and following the First World War, see B. J. Berman and J. M. Lonsdale, 'Crises of Accumulation, Coercion and the Colonial State: The Development of the Labor Control System in Kenya, 1919–1929', *Canadian Journal of African Studies* 14 (1980): 63–4; O. Okia, 'The Northey Forced Labor Crisis, 1920–1921: A Symptomatic Reading', *International Journal of African Historical Studies* 41 (2008): 263–93; Savage and Munro, 'Carrier Corps', 319–20. Rimmer writes generally of British settler colonialism in Africa: 'The need for labour by the administrations and European employers was made sharper by a sense of outrage that young African men could be maintained in idleness by their womenfolk'; D. Rimmer, 'The Economic Imprint of Colonialism and Domestic Food Supplies in British Tropical Africa', in *Imperialism, Colonialism and Hunger: East and Central Africa*, ed. R. I. Rotberg (Lexington, MA: Lexington Books, 1983), 147. On the underutilization of labour time in colonial Kenya as a rational response to the threats of disease, drought and locusts, see G. Kitching, *Class and Economic Change in Kenya: The Making of an African Petite-Bourgeoisie* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1980), 14–16.

[51] EAP, *EAPLC Mins 1918*, First Session, 11 April 1918, 42. Bryceson writes of Tanganyika: 'Famine prevention and relief epitomized the paternalism of the colonial government and struck a deep responsive chord in officers. Most officers saw themselves as superior in intellect and culture to the African peasant populace. Their duty to the peasantry was defined by the British Empire's civilizing mission'; D. F. Bryceson, 'Food Insecurity and the Social Division of Labour in Tanzania, 1919–1985' (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Oxford, 1988), 75. On paternalism around famine-related food provisioning in rural and urban South Africa in the early twentieth century, see D. Wylie, *Starving on a Full Stomach: Hunger and the Triumph of Cultural Racism in Modern South Africa* (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 2001), chapters 3 and 4.

beyond the more immediate facts of their existence.[52] However, for Ainsworth, there was little hope that famines would inculcate any such foresight in the absence of outright state compulsion.

It is worthwhile, too, reflecting further on the 'native authority' legislation introduced by Ainsworth. These ordinances illustrate an important dynamic in the economy of colonial state power, particularly in the inter-war period. That dynamic relates to the way that officials attempted to graft state practices onto existing African sociopolitical systems in order to ease the exercise of colonial power. In this case, it worked by drawing state-appointed chiefs—along with their 'traditional' powers and responsibilities—into the governmental system of famine relief. The colonial state sought to utilize the chiefs' customary rights to call out labour, and to control juniors and women, to order the planting of food crops and to prohibit the brewing of alcohol. The effect was to leave the chiefs with the power and responsibility to mobilize the people and punish wrongdoers, but not to distribute rewards. Instead, the act of providing relief supplies was bureaucratized, controlled by district officers and withheld according to the state's interests.[53]

Above all, the major problems facing Kenyan officials in 1918 were increasing food production, inducing all available supplies to be put on the market, and importing and distributing emergency supplies for the destitute. There is little evidence to suggest that authorities sought to decrease public food consumption, as with the drives for 'food economy' seen in wartime South Africa.[54] In all likelihood, this was unnecessary owing to the small size of the non-producing population,[55] combined with limited state capacity to effect significant control over distribution and public consumption. In any case, Kenyan officials could limit food

[52] U. Tellman, 'Catastrophic Populations and the Fear of the Future: Malthus and the Genealogy of Liberal Economy', *Theory, Culture and Society* 30 (2013): 136–7.

[53] An almost identical approach was followed by the Tanganyikan state with its 1921 Native Authority Ordinance; Bryceson, 'Food Insecurity', 96–8; Maddox, 'Gender and Famine', 89–90.

[54] As evident, for example, in the pamphlet produced by M. Higham and R. A. Davis, *A Plea for War Time Economy in South Africa* (Johannesburg, 1917).

[55] The 1911 census returned the European population as 3175 and 'Asiatics' as 11,886. The African population was estimated (from 'hut tax returns and other indications') at around three million. At the same time, the population of Nairobi was reported as just over 16,000, including 995 Europeans and 3361 Asians; EAP, *Annual Report for 1911–1912*, 39, 48.

demand by way of more coercive methods: for example, by controlling migration and 'repatriating' Africans to the rural reserves.[56]

However, food consumption did become a point of significant official interest in relation to the nutrition and health of the Carrier Corps. The high proportion of African conscripts who perished from malnutrition and disease, or who were rejected from service on medical grounds, highlighted the importance of providing military porters with an adequate diet.[57] Medical officers, many of whom were from South Africa, introduced their knowledge of human dietary requirements (forged on the mines of the Witwatersrand) to reform military rationing practices.[58] Indeed, the nutrition and productivity of African labour would remain a key problem for officials in future years, as I will show.

Long-Term Effects

The combinations of famine, disease and war affecting Kenya between 1917 and 1919 would have a lasting effect on the territory's political economy. The shock suffered by African agriculture—the 'mainstay of the prewar colonial economy'[59]—opened the door for settler farmers to assume a dominant position in Kenya's export industry. It further emboldened settlers and some officials to affirm settler-led production as the path to economic prosperity and growth.[60] They duly looked to a highlands

[56] Cashmore notes that during the First World War officials attempted to repatriate Giriama people to their rural reserve following their earlier uprising; 'District Administration', 130. On the use of vagrancy legislation and repatriation of juveniles in Kenya, and the limits to such measures, see P. Ocobock, '"Joy Rides for Juveniles": Vagrant Youth and Colonial Control in Nairobi, Kenya, 1901–1952', *Social History* 31 (2006): 39–59.

[57] D. Anderson, 'Master and Servant in Colonial Kenya', *Journal of African History* 41 (2000): 463.

[58] G. W. T. Hodges, 'African Manpower Statistics for the British Forces in East Africa, 1914–1918', *Journal of African History* 19 (1978): 111; G. W. T. Hodges, *Kariakor: The Carrier Corps; The Story of the Military Labour Forces in the Conquest of German East Africa, 1914–1918*, 2nd edition (Nairobi: Nairobi University Press, 1999), 15. On early twentieth-century interest in the nutrition of mine labour in South Africa, see G. Davie, *Poverty Knowledge in South Africa: A Social History of Human Science, 1855–2005* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015), chapter 1.

[59] Maxon, *Struggle for Kenya*, 108. Robertson notes that before and during the First World War, two-thirds of all Kenyan export earnings were from African production; C. C. Robertson, *Trouble Showed the Way: Women, Men, and Trade in the Nairobi Area, 1890–1990* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1997), 87.

[60] Maxon, *Struggle for Kenya*, 109; Robertson, *Trouble Showed the Way*, 87.

settlement scheme for ex-soldiers as a basis for Kenya's anticipated post-war revival.[61] Accordingly, in 1919 the Land Settlement Commission advocated the alienation of certain reserve areas for European settlement: these included portions of the Kamba and Kikuyu reserves located close to the railway.[62] Although there were several attempts to direct modest state support to African agriculture in the immediate post-war period and over the depression-strapped years of the early 1920s, the amounts of capital allocated were paltry compared with those provided in support of settler industries.[63]

The 1918–1919 famine was thus integral in shaping official economic policy for the following decade. Nowhere was this more obvious than in labour policy. By the latter part of 1918, the decrease in labour availability for private and government works had become a serious problem.[64] Even prior to the war, settlers had pushed for a labour policy more favourable to their interests and for the administration to play a more active role in securing a cheap supply of workers for their farms and plantations.[65] Post-war conditions reinforced the pre-existing obstacles to extracting labour from the reserves.[66] For many, it was clear that the previous administrative

[61] On the Soldier Settlement Scheme, see E. A. Brett, *Colonialism and Underdevelopment in East Africa: The Politics of Economic Change 1919–1939* (London: Heinemann, 1973), 177–8; Maxon, *Struggle for Kenya*, 140–5. As part of the scheme, the Nandi and Lumbwa reserves lost 28,000 and 5600 acres, respectively.

[62] Cashmore, 'District Administration', 199.

[63] Berman and Lonsdale, 'Crises', 77 n. 77; Maxon, *Struggle for Kenya*, 109. Sir Robert Coryndon, the governor from August 1922, initially sought to encourage African production as a mainstay of the economy and a key source of customs revenue. However, once world prices started to recover, he leant towards a more pro-settler stance. This pattern of encouraging African agriculture during periods of low prices would be repeated during the 1930s depression. Brett argues that these efforts did lead to large increases in production; *Colonialism and Underdevelopment*, 179, 183, 205–6. Van Zwanenberg and King note that Coryndon's policy included an effort to develop African maize for export, lasting from 1922 to 1923; R. M. A. van Zwanenberg and A. King, *An Economic History of Kenya and Uganda, 1800–1970* (London: Macmillan, 1975), 206.

[64] Maxon, *Struggle for Kenya*, 108.

[65] Brett, *Colonialism and Underdevelopment*, 187.

[66] For example, the general shortage of capital and growing debt burden (necessary for continued estate operation) meant that settlers had to reduce the costs of labour (as variable capital) in order to operate profitably. Further, Kenyan settlers had to compete with African commodity and subsistence production for its labour supply; Berman and Lonsdale, 'Crises', 62.

policy of 'encouraging' labour would not suffice.[67] Settler pressure intensified.[68] The state's response was fundamentally conditioned by its wartime experiences and techniques. In October 1919, the government issued a special circular instructing all district officials to 'exercise every possible lawful influence to induce able-bodied male natives to go into the labour field'.[69] Moreover, the *kipande* system of labour registration was instituted, and African hut and poll taxes were raised.[70] In early 1920, moreover, officials passed a new Native Authority Amendment Ordinance empowering African chiefs and headmen to order compulsory 'communal labour' for public purposes at low wage rates.[71] Together, these measures constituted a 'new massive and coordinated application of state power' to secure a steady labour supply.[72] They offered a salient spectacle of 'the efficacy of "total" pressure and systematic organization' when applied to the 'labour problem'.[73]

The state's recourse to coercive methods of labour control would be short-lived. By 1920, the issue of forced labour had erupted into a major political controversy, drawing strong attacks from humanitarian and political lobbies both in East Africa and in Britain.[74] The matter was finally put to rest by a 1921 dispatch from Winston Churchill, then colonial secretary, which forbade colonial officers to recruit for private employers, while still leaving the door open for the use of 'traditional compulsory labour'.[75] Nevertheless, damage had been done. The forced labour crisis upset the fragile politics of collaboration on which official coercion and extraction

[67] The policy of 'encouragement' had led to the use of coercion by chiefs and their followers in any case. Berman quotes Normal Leys in describing the system of recruitment prior to the First World War: '"Encouragement" by district officers means compulsion in practice'; *Control and Crisis*, 61.

[68] Savage and Munro, 'Carrier Corps', 319–20.

[69] Berman and Lonsdale, 'Crises', 68.

[70] The *kipande* was a registration certificate issued to all male Africans over 15 years of age, recording their employment history and personal details; Berman, *Control and Crisis*, 147.

[71] Ibid.; Bryceson, 'Food Insecurity', 90.

[72] Berman and Lonsdale, 'Crises', 68.

[73] Ibid., 62.

[74] On this opposition, see Brett, *Colonialism and Underdevelopment*, 188–9.

[75] Ibid., 187–8; Okia, 'Forced Labour Crisis', 264. The dispatch indicated that compulsory labour could be used for 'essential' public purposes, which was seen as a justifiable continuation of African practices of 'communal labour'. Indeed, such coercive powers, used for public purposes, would be secured in subsequent food crises in Kenya as well as in other settler colonies (see Chap. 6).

had previously rested.[76] Officials, in turn, began to assert for themselves a more paternalistic, supposedly autonomous role as protectors of African rights from what they perceived to be 'unreasonable and overly harsh oppression' by settlers.[77] This role would soon be encompassed by the capacious notion of 'trusteeship'. Moreover, it would depend, among other things, on sustaining African commodity production and accumulation to secure general welfare and content among rural populations and to provide a material basis for the patronage system of chieftainship.[78]

The 'labour problem' would remain a key political and economic issue in Kenya throughout the 1920s—one that preceded the war, yet was intimately linked to its famine-fuelled aftershocks.[79] Aside from these general political-economic dynamics, the events of 1918–1919 had specific implications for the state's future anti-famine practices. Like the Great Famine, these events helped establish a precedent for anti-scarcity practice. As I will show, by the end of the decade officials and settler politicians alike saw the prevention of starvation as an explicit aspect of the state's 'duty' to its African subjects. At the same time, they continued to face settler political pressure demanding that the 'able-bodied' work as a means to access food. Yet, beyond an ideological sense of duty, we also find the roots of a different official rationale: one that saw the state's anti-famine role as necessary to safeguard the security of the state and the people as a whole. In 1918, this had a military meaning—sustaining the productive industries and armed forces of the territory to help defend British East Africa from the German threat. Subsequently, during peacetime, it would assume a more economic inflection. Scarcity would, in part, be managed to secure vital settler industries. The means would again be legislative and bureaucratic. In fact, memories of the damage wrought by food shortages and price inflation in 1918 and 1919—etched in the minds of officials and politicians—returned to shape the state's response to a major famine that hit Kenya before the end of the decade and the onset of the Great Depression.

[76] J. M. Lonsdale, 'The Depression and the Second World War in the Transformation of Kenya', in *Africa and the Second World War*, ed. D. Killingray and R. Rathbone (London: Macmillan, 1986), 99–100.

[77] Berman and Lonsdale, 'Crises', 78.

[78] Ibid.

[79] On contemporary thinking around the 'labour problem' in Kenya and East Africa more generally, see W. Ormsby-Gore, A. G. Church, F. C. Linfield and J. A. Calder, *Report of the East Africa Commission* (London: HMSO, 1925), chapter 3.

Conclusion

The drivers and dynamics of food scarcity were increasingly shaped by the expanding and consolidating colonial presence in East Africa. While drought was the chief cause of the major famine of 1918–1919, the scale of hunger was integrally linked to wartime conditions, including military violence, conscription drives and state exactions.[80] Mortality was extremely high, and largely the result of epidemic disease ravaging a malnourished population.

When set against the Great Famine, the events of 1918–1919 reveal several significant changes to the state's anti-famine response. As a corollary of the wartime development of the state's bureaucratic apparatus, the central administration was able to assume a far more systematic role in organizing anti-scarcity measures. This role rested on legislative measures and bureaucratic techniques coordinated from Nairobi. It included controlling the movement and export of goods, inducing the marketing of all available supplies, and importing and distributing food relief, either at cost or in exchange for labour on public relief works. Here the distribution of emergency supplies prioritized the demand from employers of labour and the estate economy. Moreover, the state's expanded anti-scarcity role now involved securing legal powers to coerce African production and labour.

These kinds of measures suggest several significant points about the emergence of food scarcity as a problem of government in colonial Kenya. First, as with the Great Famine, one finds a politics of mortality, a moral question of keeping British subjects alive in the face of 'imminent death'.[81] But things were changing. The crisis of 1918–1919 marked the first concerted entry of a Malthusian thematic of scarcity into the logic of government. This thematic stemmed from the broad conviction that humans and nature, trapped within a confined space, were locked in a fundamental conflict that, if left unchecked, would lead inexorably to the miseries of

[80] For a discussion of how French colonial officials aggravated conditions of food scarcity in the Gabon Estuary during the First World War and 1920s through increasing resort to government control over labour, food supply and trade (including by requisitioning food for the military, fixing prices and banning trade outside official markets), see J. Rich, *A Workman Is Worthy of His Meat: Food and Colonialism in the Gabon Estuary* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2007), chapter 4.

[81] M. Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended: Lectures at the Collège de France 1975–1976*, trans. D. Macey (London: Penguin, 2004), 243.

famine.[82] In the context of colonial Kenya, it was specifically linked to a notion of 'idle' and 'improvident' African life as catastrophic, as a danger to society and 'civilized life'. The government of food shortages, then, was not simply a matter of mitigating the suffering of individuals through relief, as with a paternalistic politics of mortality, but of controlling African people so that their actions (or inaction) would not lead to death and disaster on a grander scale.

Second, we have seen that this Malthusian thematic could be versatile. On the one hand, it was used to argue for coercive and disciplinary intervention from the state in individual African lives. This was seen as necessary to compel the 'improvident' African subject to move beyond the immediacy of his or her temporal horizons. On the other hand, it underwrote an argument against the provision of state relief to those who showed a lack of 'industry'.

Third, within this emerging Malthusian problematic, we find that the state's response to scarcity no longer centred on providing disaster relief at a few key centres, as during the Great Famine, but also aimed to increase local food production. Accordingly, the temporal horizon of anti-scarcity intervention began to move beyond the immediate, reactive relief of emergency events, to include more anticipatory measures that might alleviate episodes of hunger in the longer term. Indeed, having to import emergency supplies from South Africa at high cost raised, for the first time, the necessity of officials holding a reserve stock of maize as a famine safeguard.[83]

Fourth, the findings indicate that conducting and disciplining the attitudes, habits and behaviours of African subjects were becoming a key part of the official understanding of, and rationale of responding to, the problem of scarcity. Yet they were becoming so in an ambiguous way—Africans were to be sympathized with, as subjects of paternalistic charity, as well as to be scorned, as the irresponsible subjects of disciplinary control.

Fifth, we saw that while colonial administrators and settler politicians were starting to assume a greater degree of overarching responsibility to address food scarcity, at the same time they were eager to allocate some of this responsibility to African leaders and communities. This was to be

[82] M. Dean, 'The Malthus Effect: Population and the Liberal Government of Life', *Economy and Society* 44 (2015): 21.

[83] C. Singh, J. Nyamweya and J. K. Gecau, *Report of the Maize Commission of Inquiry* (Nairobi, 1966), 2.

accomplished through the state-sponsored system of 'native administration'.

Sixth, we can see that the African reserves were emerging as a particular kind of 'governable space', one through which scarcity could and should be managed by means of legal compulsion, the threat of punishment, and supervision from field officers. But such measures, imposed by the central administration, placed the pre-existing politics of local collaboration in jeopardy, and provoked resistance from Kenyan field officers, laying bare some of the contradictions that riddled the colonial district administration.

Finally, it is worth noting, for we will return to this theme in later chapters, that the question of the health and productivity of those involved in fighting the war in East Africa led to official interest (at least within the military) in regulating the diet and nutrition of African troops and porters. Here the concern was not so much with preventing suffering and death from starvation so as to forgo a Malthusian catastrophe as with the reproduction of labour power in the context of a migrant labour system. Rationing interventions aimed to reduce mortality, but more specifically they sought to increase the longevity and power of the worker's body in order to broaden, as much as possible, its total window and intensity of work. Put differently, they attempted to economize on the reproduction and conversion of potential labour power into actual labour power.[84] To boost this total output of work, at the least possible cost, military authorities sought to shape the molecular and biological constitution of the bodies of African labourers, and did so in a disciplinary and normative sense, by imposing an ideal model of 'diet'.

I have argued that the First World War and the famine of 1918–1919 provided the conditions for settlers to secure greater control over the state's economic policy. Over the course of the 1920s, the dynamics of food shortages would be increasingly shaped by the spread of commercial market relations within the territory. In the process, the threat of food scarcity assumed even more of an economic and political charge. It served, among other things, to justify comprehensive state control of the grain market—something unprecedented during times of peace. It also led officials to tap into the settler economy as a key source of relief supplies in times of dearth.

[84] A. Mukherjee, *Hunger: Theory, Perspectives and Reality: Assessment through Participatory Methods* (Abingdon and New York: Routledge, 2018).

CHAPTER 4

Scarcity and Settler Consolidation

Following the economic and political turbulence of the First World War period, the 1920s in Kenya were marked by concerted state interventions in two key domains. First, officials sought to promote settler economic recovery by re-establishing the Kenyan export trade and by continued efforts to secure a steady and cheap labour supply for the estate sector (see Chap. 3).[1] Second, they hoped to restore and maintain political control over the African population—something, in the era of the 'dual mandate', thought to depend on the preservation of tribal ethnicity and territory.[2] At the same time, Kenyan administrators faced the challenge of responding to newly elaborated principles of colonial policy. One was the imperial assertion of the 'paramountcy' of African interests in Kenya, carried in the Devonshire Declaration of 1923. Another was the principle of

[1] The 1922 Bowring Committee recommended efforts to rapidly increase maize production in African and European areas, including by offering a special low rail rate for maize exports; C. Singh, J. Nyamweya and J. K. Gecau, *Report of the Maize Commission of Inquiry* (Nairobi, 1966), 2; R. M. A. van Zwanenberg and A. King, *An Economic History of Kenya and Uganda, 1800–1970* (London: Macmillan, 1975), 205.

[2] On the limits to the 'tribal geographies' of colonial Kenya, see T. Parsons, 'Being Kikuyu in Meru: Challenging the Tribal Geography of Colonial Kenya', *Journal of African History* 53 (2012): 65–86.

J. Duminy, *Food and Famine in Colonial Kenya*, African Histories and Modernities, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-10964-5_4

'trusteeship'—a banner under which the colonial state attempted to secure its position as the prime protector of African interests.[3]

The state's response was the so-called Dual Policy, elaborated in the wake of the 1923 Declaration. Seeking the development of African production as a complement to settler production, the Dual Policy built on a growing tide of official post-war pressure for the state to support African production for commercial sale and export. Indeed, it had strong precedents in the thought and work of officers like Ainsworth.[4] Some contemporary observers saw only contradictions in the policy—Africans were expected to be self-sustaining in food, to produce for export and to provide a labour supply for settler estates.[5] Fiona Mackenzie notes that these 'contradictory' readings ignore the fact that it was mainly women's labour that produced food crops for subsistence or export. When this is considered, the objectives and modalities of the Dual Policy become clearer: the export of male labour could proceed alongside the intensification of women's labour power in agriculture.[6]

Dilley presents the Dual Policy as a means for settlers to avoid 'the full effects of paramountcy' following their overzealous efforts to quash the political interests of the colony's Indian population.[7] Accordingly, in practice the state committed few resources to African production. Assistance from the Agriculture Department (specifically from a dedicated 'native' section of the department established in 1922) took the form of a

[3] M. R. Dilley, *British Policy in Kenya Colony*, 2nd edition (London: Frank Cass, 1966), 186, 214; J. M. Lonsdale, 'The Depression and the Second World War in the Transformation of Kenya', in *Africa and the Second World War*, ed. D. Killingray and R. Rathbone (London: Macmillan, 1986), 101. A full exposition of what 'trusteeship' implied in East Africa is given in W. Ormsby-Gore, A. G. Church, F. C. Linfield and J. A. Calder, *Report of the East Africa Commission* (London: HMSO, 1925), 21–3. Cowen and Shenton note that a theory and conviction of 'trusteeship' were built into the idea of development from the nineteenth century; M. P. Cowen and R. W. Shenton, *Doctrines of Development* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), 25–8.

[4] F. H. Goldsmith, *John Ainsworth: Pioneer Kenya Administrator, 1864–1946* (London: Macmillan, 1955), 104.

[5] B. J. Berman, *Control and Crisis in Colonial Kenya: The Dialectic of Domination* (London: James Currey; Nairobi: East African Educational Publishers; and Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 1990), 201.

[6] A. F. D. Mackenzie, *Land, Ecology and Resistance in Kenya, 1880–1952* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1998), 127, 131.

[7] Dilley, *British Policy*, 186.

low-capital policy of instruction and demonstration.[8] Seeds for 'improved' (that is, more marketable) varieties of crops—especially high-yielding, 'flat white' strains of maize like Hickory King—were also issued to African farmers as part of a wider strategy of agricultural 'betterment'.[9] Gradually, the emphasis on export production fell away during the early to mid-1920s, so that the Dual Policy came to focus on promoting subsistence and production of food crops for the domestic market.[10] Nevertheless, the policy reinforced the tendency for certain Kenyan reserves to act as the greatest sources of both labour and cash crop production.[11] This set up a conflict: settlers had to compete against other activities for African labour, including cash crop and subsistence production.[12]

Despite increasing pressure from settlers for the state to dedicate its support to estate production, the 1920s saw Kenyan officials pass several pieces of legislation motivated by the need to manage food shortages in African areas.[13] The 1922 Kenyan Native Foodstuffs Ordinance was one.

[8] P. A. Memon, 'Colonial Marketing and Urban Development in the African Reserves', *Journal of Eastern African Research and Development* 6 (1976): 202. This work was done by distributing printed instructions on how to prepare goods such as ghee, hides and beeswax, as well as by training a 'nucleus of paid agricultural supervisors, instructors and apprentices' at two schools established for the purpose in the early 1920s. The latter were responsible for interpreting 'by practical demonstration the advice offered in the pamphlets and in the Government newspaper *Habari*'. CPK, *Annual Report for 1922*, 5.

[9] Mackenzie, *Land, Ecology and Resistance*, 128–9; J. McCann, *Maize and Grace: Africa's Encounter with a New World Crop* (Cambridge, MA, and London: Harvard University Press, 2005), 170; L. S. B. Leakey, 'Colonial Administration in East Africa from the Native Point of View', in *The Government and Administration of Africa, 1880–1939*, vol. 1: *Recruitment and Training*, ed. C. Andersen and A. Cohen (London and New York: Routledge, 2016), 311–12.

[10] Van Zwanenberg and King, *Economic History*, 206.

[11] Berman, *Control and Crisis*, 201.

[12] B. J. Berman and J. M. Lonsdale, 'Crises of Accumulation, Coercion and the Colonial State: The Development of the Labor Control System in Kenya, 1919–1929', *Canadian Journal of African Studies* 14 (1980): 62.

[13] R. M. Maxon, *Struggle for Kenya: The Loss and Reassertion of Imperial Initiative, 1912–1923* (London and Toronto: Associated University Presses, 1993), 109.

Closely based on legislative precedents from other African colonies,[14] the ordinance can be seen as a pragmatic response to the problem of how to manage scarcity, food supplies and the expanding commercial food market without devoting significant state resources to the task of boosting production.[15] Its basic object was to enable officials to restrict the trade and movement of 'African foodstuffs' within any district or area suffering from food shortage. The idea, broadly speaking, was to prevent Africans from selling their food supplies in order to pay their taxes (or to spend otherwise)[16] and to stop traders from buying up and moving scarce food supplies away from centres of demand. Seen together with the programme of limited support for expanded African agriculture, the ordinance's rationale was clear: increase local food production and keep it local to promote district food self-sufficiency.[17] This strategy was partly motivated by the

[14] The ordinance was passed soon after the arrival of Sir Robert Coryndon as Kenyan governor. Coryndon had just served a term as governor of Uganda, during which time a similar ordinance had been passed. A Native Foodstuffs Ordinance was passed in Nyasaland in 1912 to prevent settlers and other bulk purchasers of food supplies from cornering the market and inducing 'improvident' Africans to sell their food supplies for quick cash returns; M. O. J. Chipeta, 'Labour in Colonial Malawi: A Study of the Growth and Development of the Malawian Working Class, c.1891–1961' (Ph.D. dissertation, Dalhousie University, 1986), 39; C. Ng'ong'ola, 'Malawi's Agricultural Economy and the Evolution of Legislation on the Production and Marketing of Peasant Economic Crops', *Journal of Southern African Studies* 12 (1986): 243–5. A Tanganyikan version was passed in 1924; D. F. Bryceson, 'Food Insecurity and the Social Division of Labour in Tanzania, 1919–1985' (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Oxford, 1988), 68. The Kenyan ordinance secured fewer powers than most of these other examples. The 1919 Ugandan Native Foodstuffs Ordinance, for example, also reserved powers to fix the prices of any foodstuffs. Carswell suggests that Ugandan marketing controls were partly motivated by the desire to protect African farmers from greedy (predominantly Indian) 'middlemen'; G. Carswell, *Cultivating Success in Uganda: Kigezi Farmers and Colonial Policies* (London: James Currey, 2007), 39; G. Carswell, 'Food Crops as Cash Crops: The Case of Colonial Kigezi, Uganda', *Journal of Agrarian Change* 3 (2003): 544.

[15] CPK, *Official Gazette*, 8 November 1922, 679. The legislation coincided with a drive for economy in government expenditure related to the economic depression; CPK, *Annual Report for 1922.*

[16] I. K. Tarus, 'A History of the Direct Taxation of the African People of Kenya, 1895–1973' (Ph.D. dissertation, Rhodes University, 2004), 141.

[17] Carswell, 'Food Crops', 544.

desire to secure the food supplies of growing towns such as Nairobi.[18] The 1920s saw a number of proclamations issued under the ordinance, including at least four over the course of 1925 and 1926, targeting districts along the coast and in Nyanza.[19] This strategy of restricting the movement of food within and between administrative areas, thereby designating and limiting the space of the market, would remain a mainstay of the Kenyan state's anti-famine response, as well as its future efforts to control agricultural marketing (discussed in Chap. 5).

Another piece of legislation specifically motivated by concerns around food scarcity was the 1926 Kenyan Crop Production and Livestock Ordinance. Like the Native Foodstuffs Ordinance, it was not associated with any particular programme of investment or extension of services—it took the form of an 'enabling ordinance', effective only through rules made by the governor. As the name implies, it addressed both crop and stock farming. For the former, it allowed 'cultural methods' to be employed to improve and increase production. Through the ordinance, officials hoped to facilitate the marketing of African goods by fixing the dates of produce sales, and by limiting crop varieties—both means to promote uniform output. The legislation was also explicitly motivated as a means to prevent famine.

For livestock, the problem was overstocking in certain reserves, particularly those occupied by the Kamba people to the east of Nairobi (Machakos and Kitui). This, in turn, linked with issues around meat prices and nutrition. The problem was broadly as follows: too many animals were being kept in the reserves, without being slaughtered for meat. This was typically

[18] Robertson argues that by the early 1920s Nairobi was dependent on Kiambu produce, so that in 1923 'attempts were made to stop local movement of maize in other directions and to stop all hawking'. Agricultural officers were tasked with implementing these rules, among other duties. When Kikuyus continued to sell maize to the Kamba along their older trading routes, this trade was classified as a 'black market'. 'Because of the proximate necessity of feeding Nairobi, Kiambu was closely scrutinized regarding supply conditions and subjected to more bans on the export of maize and beans'; C. C. Robertson, *Trouble Showed the Way: Women, Men, and Trade in the Nairobi Area, 1890–1990* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1997), 88, 90.

[19] CPK, *Official Gazette*, 6 May 1925, 362; 3 June 1925, 485; 12 August 1925, 772–3; 10 March 1926, 333.

blamed on the pervasive African 'cattle complex'.[20] Yet finding a commercial market for these cattle was practically impossible, given the almost continuous imposition of quarantine regulations on districts like Machakos since the beginning of the century.[21] Above all, settlers and officials were opposed to any possible extension of African pastoral lands.[22]

At the same time, officials wanted more Africans to eat 'the most nutritious food in the shape of meat', which required that it be available at a cheap price.[23] However, demand for livestock products was increasing, owing to rising levels of African prosperity, as well as the inclusion of meat in the rations of workers employed on the railway and farming estates. Supply could not keep pace. Taken together, this meant that Africans in overstocked reserves were likely to become increasingly malnourished, just as the 'man-carrying capacity' of the land was gradually being 'destroyed'.[24] Consequently, the primary problem at this stage was not human overpopulation leading to famine per se. Rather, it was that by keeping cattle above their subsistence requirements, people accelerate soil erosion and

[20] On contemporary thought around the 'cattle complex', see M. J. Herskovits, 'The Cattle Complex in East Africa', *American Anthropologist* 28 (1926): 230–72; I. R. G. Spencer, 'Pastoralism and Colonial Policy in Kenya, 1895–1929', in *Imperialism, Colonialism and Hunger: East and Central Africa*, ed. R. I. Rotberg (Lexington, MA: Lexington Books, 1983), 118.

[21] On the effects of the demarcation of the reserves and quarantine regulations leading to overstocking in Machakos, see Spencer, 'Pastoralism', 117–18; R. L. Tignor, 'Kamba Political Protest: The Destocking Controversy of 1938', *African Historical Studies* 4 (1971): 240–1. The extension of cultivated areas in Machakos to capitalize on the growing market for cash crops like white maize also decreased the area available for grazing, thereby intensifying stock congestion. Also see Berman, *Control and Crisis*, 221; G. Kitching, *Class and Economic Change in Kenya: The Making of an African Petite-Bourgeoisie* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1980), 53–4.

[22] Spencer, 'Pastoralism', 130.

[23] The official and expert bias towards meat and dairy products as a source of nutrition was borne through the Orr and Gilks study of tribal nutrition in Kenya; C. L. Brantley, 'Kikuyu-Maasai Nutrition and Colonial Science: The Orr and Gilks Study in Late 1920s Kenya Revisited', *International Journal of African Historical Studies* 30 (1997): 49–86.

[24] (Director of agriculture) CPK, *KLC Debates 1926*, vol. 1, 18 March 1926, 39.

cause African population growth (and hence the labour supply) to stagnate.[25]

The upshot was that the ordinance secured official powers of compulsion to cull excess stock in the reserves.[26] In principle, this would allow animal products to be distributed, cheaply, to malnourished Africans. It thereby represented a 'systemic' vision of agricultural and economic problems: forcibly reducing stock density in some areas could both safeguard the soil and provide cheap nutrition for those elsewhere. Compulsion, officials argued, was necessary 'in the interests of these improvident owners' who were 'bereft of reasoning power'. The government had to 'act in a manner calculated to enable them to help themselves'.[27] The chief native commissioner even cited the need for 'benevolent despotism' in the matter.[28] Under the ordinance, in 1928 the government attempted to pass rules limiting the ages and quality of cattle to be kept in the Machakos reserve.[29] This effort coincided with growing Kamba demands for larger grazing areas. The Colonial Office once again declined to approve the rules, believing that such efforts should proceed more gradually.[30] The matter was laid to rest for the time being. Powers to forcibly cull stock would not be used until the late 1930s.[31]

Despite the setback over compulsory destocking, the Crop Production and Livestock Ordinance signals several key shifts in how officials thought about problems related to food scarcity. First, it shows how spatial and territorial issues concerning land, soil deterioration and 'carrying capacity'

[25] For example, the 1925 East Africa Commission report noted: 'There is a real danger in East Africa lest pastoral tribes should stagnate, and lest the actual fertility of the soil should deteriorate by overstocking.' It specifically mentioned the Kamba reserves; Ormsby-Gore et al., *Report of the East Africa Commission*, 32. The report was one of the first official documents to raise concerns over soil erosion in East Africa; D. Anderson, 'Depression, Dust Bowl, Demography, and Drought: The Colonial State and Soil Conservation in East Africa during the 1930s', *African Affairs* 83 (1984): 340 n. 71.

[26] While previous proposals to implement forced cattle sales had been vetoed by the Colonial Office, Kenyan officials were emboldened by the recommendations of the 1925 report of the East Africa Commission, which looked on forced destocking in a more favourable light; Ormsby-Gore et al., *Report of the East Africa Commission*, 32; Spencer, 'Pastoralism', 127.

[27] (Director of agriculture) CPK, *KLC Debates 1926*, vol. 1, 18 March 1926, 39.

[28] Ibid., 43.

[29] CPK, *Official Gazette*, 15 May 1928, 598–9.

[30] Spencer, 'Pastoralism', 131.

[31] M. Osborne, *Ethnicity and Empire in Kenya: Loyalty and Martial Race among the Kamba, c.1800 to the Present* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 105.

were being linked with food problems, and together were emerging as areas of concerted governmental interest.[32] Second, it reveals that officials were starting to think about scarcity and famine in a different way. The problem called not only for distributing emergency relief, 'encouraging' or coercing people to work, and limiting the circulation of goods in space but also for longer-term economic measures to control the risk of scarcity. The question was now linked to a wider range of problems around increasing and improving African agricultural production, facilitating marketing and protecting the land from overgrazing. Averting food shortages was one of several motivations for doing so.

Third, the ordinance indicates that some officials were starting to look beyond pure compulsion and coercion as the means to control scarcity, and towards governmental techniques such as instruction and education. While the desire to safeguard 'the native against himself' evinced a still-strong paternalistic attitude, 'benevolent despotism' was not the only means of achieving the ordinance's objectives.[33] The chief native commissioner suggested that its application 'should go hand in hand with a policy of instruction'.[34] This was a technical question of training. But there was also a slightly different question of education. Several members of the Legislative Council (Legco) pointed out that the legislation would be unsuccessful if its purpose was not properly explained to those affected by its provisions, if African people did not believe it was for their benefit.[35] While it would be mistaken to generalize from these (minority) statements, they do suggest the emergence of a different rationale of government: one that (at least in part) sought to influence the practices, beliefs and desires of people—even if in a disciplinary manner—rather than to simply force, constrain and punish. In this sense, the reference to 'cultural methods' as the object of the ordinance is significant. In 1918, the only recourse to managing the 'indifference' and 'improvidence' of African people had been compulsion. Now, a decade later, inculcating 'habits of industry' and training in 'proper' land husbandry would produce the

[32] On the genealogy and various political uses of the notion of 'carrying capacity' within eco-Malthusian arguments, see M. Dean, 'The Malthus Effect: Population and the Liberal Government of Life', *Economy and Society* 44 (2015): 30–1. In its original formulation, the concept referred to 'the maximum population a specific area could maintain under given conditions'.

[33] (G. V. Maxwell) CPK, *KLC Debates 1926*, vol. 1, 18 March 1926, 44.

[34] Ibid., 43.

[35] (M. A. Desai, J. W. Arthur, J. B. Pandya) ibid., 40–5.

desired results.[36] The state could act through the malleable surface of culture.

Fourth, the ordinance reflects the manner in which Kenyan officials were considering how best to implement the Dual Policy within the general overlay of colonial 'trusteeship'. One unofficial member of Legco specifically supported the ordinance as a key instrument for the government to discharge its responsibilities of trusteeship.[37] It served as further endorsement of the measured state support given to African agriculture from the early 1920s. Accordingly, its passage was soon followed by an invigorated, 'direct' policy of instruction in the reserves, accompanied by more widespread dissemination of higher-grade crop seeds.[38]

Finally, it is important to note that the Crop Production and Livestock Ordinance fitted within a wider, shifting context of scientific research on colonial problems. As the legislation was being debated in Legco, the Rowett Research Institute for Animal Nutrition (based in Aberdeen, Scotland) was undertaking its path-breaking experimental research into the nutrition of animals and African tribes in Kenya.[39] Meanwhile, Sir Edward Grigg, the Kenyan governor, was expressing his enthusiasm for anthropological research into 'native life and mind' as a basis for better colonial government.[40] Grigg and other officials were also showing a keen interest in enhancing statistical work on issues related to African population and economy.[41] In this way, the 1926 ordinance fitted within, and contributed to, a groundswell of interest in rational, scientific knowledge

[36] From a speech delivered by Governor Sir Edward Grigg to the Royal African Society, as reported in *The Spectator*, 19 March 1927, 2, accessed 20 July 2017, http://archive.spectator.co.uk/article/19th-march-1927/2/sir-edward-grigg-the-governor-of-kenya-speaking-to.

[37] (J. E. Coney) CPK, *KLC Debates 1926*, vol. 1, 18 March 1926, 41.

[38] CPK, *Annual Report for 1927*, 26.

[39] Brantley, 'Kikuyu-Maasai Nutrition'.

[40] CPK, *KLC Debates 1926*, vol. 2, 12 October 1926, 329–31. Grigg's interest was part of a wider imperial trend. The mid-1920s heard numerous calls for further research into the human aspects of colonial problems. Individuals linked to the International Institute of African Languages and Cultures, including Lord Lugard and the anthropologist Bronisław Malinowski, saw the ethnographic study of African social change as a means to put a political system of indirect rule into proper effect; A. Kuper, 'Social Anthropology', in *The History of the Social Sciences since 1945*, ed. R. Backhouse and P. Fontane (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 136–45; H. Tilley, *Africa as a Living Laboratory: Empire, Development, and the Problem of Scientific Knowledge, 1870–1950* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011), 101, 231.

[41] CPK, *KLC Debates 1926*, vol. 2, 12 October 1926, 329–31.

of African cultural and economic processes as a route to more informed, calculative modes of colonial government.

We have seen that in the 1920s food scarcity was emerging as a concerted area of governmental interest and regulation. This interest was shaped by multiple influences and motivations. In the following section, I use the example of a particular scarcity event to illustrate more precisely how the dynamics of Kenyan food shortages, alongside the state's view of and response to such problems, shifted in the interwar period.

The 1929–1930 Famine

For Kenya, the middle and later years of the 1920s were a period of recovery and growth in productivity. The settler economy and export trade expanded under a regime of statutory supports and barriers. Locally, Africans were prohibited from growing high-value cash crops such as coffee, and recurrent quarantines effectively stifled their cattle market. For external trade, settlers were buoyed by protective import tariffs and the abolition of export duties.[42] Settler maize growers, specifically, were assisted through special reductions in railway freight charges.[43] Moreover, the Kenya Farmers Association (KFA) provided them with a unified political voice to influence legislation and with a single bargaining agent to negotiate forward contracts. This helped to extend settler control over maize marketing, particularly the higher-priced export market. By 1930, the KFA handled nearly all of the colony's maize exports.[44] Meanwhile,

[42] Kenya introduced customs tariffs on imported goods in the early 1920s as a way to compensate for revenue shortfalls due to decreasing commodity prices and the refusal of European settlers to pay income tax, at the same time as protecting young industries in the colony from foreign competition. These tariffs included heavy rates on luxury goods such as alcohol and tobacco, as well as protective rates on important temperate-climate foodstuffs that could be produced within the colony such as rice, wheat, wheat flour, tea, sugar, ghee, butter, cheese, ham and beer. See L. A. Gardner, *Taxing Colonial Africa: The Political Economy of British Imperialism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 79–80; also E. A. Brett, *Colonialism and Underdevelopment in East Africa: The Politics of Economic Change 1919–1939* (London: Heinemann, 1973), 203.

[43] This was effected through a government subsidy to the railway; CPK, *Annual Report for 1922*, 9.

[44] Brett, *Colonialism and Underdevelopment*, 204; Van Zwanenberg and King, *Economic History*, 205–6.

export controls (including the introduction of produce-grading standards for maize) effectively excluded Africans from this trade.[45]

Marketed output of African produce also grew through the decade. This expansion was due more to the individual efforts of local administrators than the transient, limited support offered by the central state.[46] But it was also an independent African response to meet new consumption needs and markers of prestige, such as schooling and imported clothing.[47] Much of this output was used to supply food for the burgeoning labour market of coffee and sisal plantations.[48] The presence of large settler estates to the north of Nairobi, for example, stimulated the increased production of cash crops in the nearby Kikuyu reserves.[49] African cultivators came to dominate this growing internal trade in maize. Moreover, Africans were able to secure a large part of the urban market for vegetable and meat supplies. Originally, settlers had hoped to capture the domestic market as a step towards export production. In practice, the only local trade that white farmers were able to secure was the 'meagre pickings' of the 'quality trade': specialized goods consumed by other settlers and townsfolk.[50] In this way, the development of estate and African commodity production in Kenya was both segregated and tied together.[51] However, just as they were linked through flows of labour and food production, they were forced to compete—farm wages doubled in real terms during the 1920s owing to the competing demands for labour.[52]

These dynamics of structural division, functional interdependence and competition would be of lasting political and economic consequence, as I will show in the chapters that follow. Critically, the articulation and penetration of capital into the African reserves drove complex processes of local accumulation and class differentiation.[53] Fiona Mackenzie and Gavin Kitching have shown how these processes involved a quantitative expansion

[45] Berman, *Control and Crisis*, 169; Lonsdale, 'Depression', 103.

[46] Berman, *Control and Crisis*, 218–19.

[47] Lonsdale, 'Depression', 104.

[48] Berman and Lonsdale, 'Crises', 77; CPK, *Annual Report for 1928*, 33. African producers also sold food to the railways, or exported to Uganda and Tanganyika to compensate for seasonal scarcities in those territories; Memon, 'Marketing', 202.

[49] Memon, 'Marketing', 204.

[50] Lonsdale, 'Depression', 103–4.

[51] Berman, *Control and Crisis*, 218.

[52] Lonsdale, 'Depression', 104.

[53] Berman, *Control and Crisis*, 39–40, 60–1, 222–6.

and qualitative intensification of women's labour power. Female labour propelled the commercialization of African agriculture, and helped to keep wages and commodity prices relatively low.[54] Maize, in particular, was a crop suitable for women farmers. It was far less demanding to grow than millet, for example—a fact that helps to explain why maize production underwent such rapid growth during and following the First World War (see Chap. 3).[55] As men increased their involvement in crop marketing, intra-household contests over access to the proceeds of female agricultural labour intensified.[56]

Increased marketed production during the 1920s was aided by the steady expansion of transport and communications networks.[57] The decade saw the construction of several new railway branch lines, concentrated in the White Highlands but running adjacent to reserve areas in some places.[58] A modernized space economy developed around the major railway routes in the south-western quadrant of the territory.[59] Meanwhile, the construction of new roads and the upgrading of road surfaces greatly increased the volume of motor traffic, both in settled areas and in the reserves.[60] With these developments, more African farmers and stockkeepers were physically connected to the market, and able to receive a profitable cash return for their goods. This provided an added stimulus for production.[61] Commercial activities in the reserves centred on Indian traders operating at various government-gazetted trading centres. A

[54] Kitching, *Class and Economic Change*, 14–16, 20, 93; Mackenzie, *Land, Ecology and Resistance*, 127.

[55] Mackenzie, *Land, Ecology and Resistance*, 132–3.

[56] Ibid.; Kitching, *Class and Economic Change*, 20–1, 89–91.

[57] Ogonda notes the significant increase in the coverage of Kenya's total road and rail network in the interwar period. Most of this infrastructure served the white settled areas and industries, although feeder roads were constructed in the reserves; R. T. Ogonda, 'Transport and Communications in the Colonial Economy', in *An Economic History of Kenya*, ed. W. R. Ochieng' and R. M. Maxon (Nairobi: East African Educational Publishers, 1992), 130–3.

[58] E. W. Soja, *The Geography of Modernization in Kenya: A Spatial Analysis of Social, Economic, and Political Change* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1968), 29. On the political dominance of settlers in determining the location of branch line extensions in the 1920s, see Brett, *Colonialism and Underdevelopment*, 200–1.

[59] Soja, *Geography of Modernization*, 29.

[60] Soja notes that after 1923 there was a rapid increase in the road coverage of the reserves due to official efforts to 'open up the districts for labour supplies and more effective administrative control'; *Geography of Modernization*, 31.

[61] Memon, 'Marketing', 202–3.

number of 'traditional' or state-established African markets also developed into important sites of exchange and African entrepreneurship. The areas around these markets were serviced by smaller shops and 'itinerant' African traders who usually purchased goods directly from women farmers before selling them on at local markets or to Indian traders (for export beyond the district).[62] These African traders increased in number and economic power through the decade.[63] In all these ways, a hierarchical marketing and trading system emerged, clustering around the boundaries of the more populous reserves, as well as around the major transport routes of central and western Kenya.[64]

With African maize production assuming central importance for the domestic food market, and being most advanced in highly populated areas located in proximity to transport facilities and trading centres, Kenyan food scarcities began to take on new dynamics. For, even if drought and harvest failure beset a relatively remote rural area, the effect would be to draw supplies away from the most productive areas within the regular marketing system. As this marketing system was relatively integrated and concentrated around the major centres of production and demand, inflation in one part of the system could simultaneously affect a great number of people and places across the board. Consequently, drought and harvest failure were no longer simply localized problems affecting particular African groups, who were to be relieved by a paternalistic state despite their 'improvidence'. Rather, scarcities increasingly affected the supply of food to employing industries and acted to drive up prices across the domestic market, thereby boosting the costs of production.

Moreover, the fact that the majority of the domestic food trade was handled by small-scale private traders created a particular kind of threat during times of scarcity. In the view of officials, the maligned 'middlemen', engaged as they were in 'cut-throat competition', aggravated scarcities by hoarding supplies for their own profit and by moving food away from poorer areas and groups suffering from hunger.[65] That such traders

[62] Ibid., 209.

[63] Ibid., 211.

[64] Mackenzie, *Land, Ecology and Resistance*, 133.

[65] In Legco debates surrounding the 1935 Marketing of Native Produce Bill, the phrase 'cut-throat competition' was repeatedly used with reference to private traders; CPK, *KLC Debates 1935*, vol. 1, 2–3 July 1935, 170–93.

were often Indian gave these ideas a racialized force.[66] As we shall see, these ideas and dynamics called for new kinds of governmental techniques to manage food shortages. By the end of the decade, comprehensive state control was seen as necessary to control supplies, prices and distribution, both to prevent mass starvation and to protect certain economic interests.

The Kenyan famine of 1929–1930 represents the culmination of these trends in marketing and official action. Yet central state intervention took some time to materialize. The process unfolded as follows: In the early part of 1928, the Baringo and Turkana districts had been threatened with famine owing 'to conditions of drought and to the consequent failure of crops'.[67] When conditions did not improve, administrative officers responded by organizing local 'relief measures'. However, by the end of the year it was clear that similar conditions were likely to occur in other reserves. The rains had fallen more lightly than expected throughout the year; African households had been unable to build up reserve stocks of grain. Meanwhile, massive swarms of locusts descended and devoured entire crops. Maize and wheat fields—the acreages of which had steadily increased through the 1920s—provided the insects with a ready source of favoured foods.[68] At the end of January 1929, Alex Holm, the Kenyan director of agriculture, reported to the governor on the 'havoc' wreaked by the swarms. He considered the scale of crop destruction so extensive that a serious economic problem loomed: it threatened not only the farming industry but also trade and commerce more generally, including the finances of the railway and harbour administration.[69] With the outlook 'ominous', Holm alerted the government to the need to 'mobilize financial resources which may be required to meet an unforeseen situation', and to monitor the 'food position', which could change at short notice. Meanwhile, the commissioner of Meru District had reported that 120,000 people were affected by food shortages in his district, with only one month's food supplies remaining. Later reports, however, put these figures

[66] Similar official antipathy towards Indian traders was found in Tanganyika. See Bryceson, 'Food Insecurity', chapter 3.

[67] TNA: CO 533/384/2, Barth to Amery (letter), 9 March 1929.

[68] M. S. Shanguhyia, *Population, Tradition, and Environmental Control in Colonial Kenya* (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2015), 76; Singh, Nyamweya and Gecau, *Report*, 2. Apart from maize, locusts also had a taste for sorghum and rice; Bryceson, 'Food Insecurity', 71.

[69] TNA: CO 533/384/2, Holm to Acting colonial secretary of Kenya (letter), 30 January 1929.

at 90,000 and two months' supplies.[70] It is likely that deaths from starvation and disease numbered in the thousands.[71]

In relation to previous events, the 1929–1930 famine reveals several key transformations. Officials saw its chief causes as prolonged drought, leading to a cumulative decrease in African food stores, combined with pestilence. But the evidence suggests that the dynamics of this famine were closely linked to the expansion of the commercial economy, wage employment and the growth of the domestic and export trades in cash crops. Accordingly, it appears to be an example of a 'transitional' famine—reflecting both 'traditional' and 'capitalist' elements and drivers.[72]

The 1929–1930 famine shows the increasing influence of the commercial economy and settlement in at least six ways. First, the colony actually produced enough maize in 1929 to feed its inhabitants, and some was even exported during the year. Second, settler farmers provided most of the famine relief supplies through commercial channels. Third, the shortage primarily affected groups who were vulnerable both to drought and to disruptions in their systems of trading and social protection. They included people in the Meru and Embu districts in Kikuyuland, and Kitui District in Ukambani.[73] Those living in these areas had been permanently affected by land alienation and white settlement; many would have sought wage labour as a means to subsist. It appears that more populous areas were not necessarily the worst affected. Rather, those that were least accessible bore the brunt of the suffering. People living in Tharaka—a remote, relatively unfertile area in the eastern lowlands of Meru District—suffered the most in late 1929, with numerous deaths occurring from starvation and dysentery.[74] These were people who, historically, were poor compared with their

[70] TNA: CO 533/384/2, Barth to Amery (letter), 9 March 1929.

[71] In reporting the famine to the Colonial Office, Kenyan officials estimated that less than 1000 people died from disease and starvation, and were confident that 'no able-bodied native' died from the latter cause. This represented the typical tendency for local officials to downplay the scale and intensities of famines when communicating with London, and theirs is likely to have been a low estimate; TNA: CO 533/392/15, Grigg to Passfield (letter), 11 January 1930.

[72] Similar kinds of 'transitional' famines include the 1927 food crisis in northern Nigeria, and the 1922 famine in Southern Rhodesia. See J. Iliffe, *Famine in Zimbabwe, 1890–1960* (Gweru: Mambo Press, 1990), chapter 7; M. J. Watts, *Silent Violence: Food, Famine, and Peasantry in Northern Nigeria*, 2nd edition (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2013), 305–12.

[73] CPK, *Annual Report for 1929*.

[74] TNA: CO 533/392/15, Grigg to Passfield (letter), 7 December 1929.

neighbours.[75] Their regular coping strategies relied on trade with surrounding areas.[76] They competed with other groups for wage labour opportunities in Nairobi and on nearby estates, and generally received little assistance from officials.[77] During times of famine, they were difficult to reach to provide with relief.[78]

Fourth, while officials had assumed that the hungry would be able to access food surpluses from neighbouring districts through market exchange, a major reason why many Meru people suffered in late 1929 was the collapse of goat prices. This undermined their power to outbid other groups for available supplies from more fertile districts to the south and west.[79] Thus, exchange and the relative terms of trade were important drivers of hunger. Fifth, as in previous years, the people who suffered most and counted the greatest mortality were the poor and weak, including the elderly, small children and the sick.[80] This was partly due to market forces (such as collapsed stock prices), geography (the weak were unable to travel to places where food was available) and biology (the weak were more vulnerable to killer diseases like dysentery). Moreover, government relief efforts channelled supplies through a system of entitlements favouring

[75] In 1913, Dundas wrote of the Tharaka: 'In stock [they] are very poor compared to the Akamba; a large number possess no stock at all, and only the richest have any cattle. Their main stock are sheep and goats, but even of these a wealthy man has not more than the average Mkamba'; C. Dundas, 'History of Kitui', *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland* 43 (1913): 545.

[76] As early as 1909 Meru District was reported as having 'several large markets … established by the natives, where they barter and sell their produce'; EAP, *Annual Report for 1908–1909*, 32.

[77] T. A. Smucker and B. Wisner, 'Changing Household Responses to Drought in Tharaka, Kenya: Vulnerability, Persistence and Challenge', *Disasters* 32 (2008): 190–215.

[78] The name by which the famine of 1930 was remembered by some in the area, *yuura ria Kikuyu* (drought of the search for maize in Kikuyuland), indicates the extent to which they relied on migration and trade as a survival strategy. Reported and translated by B. Wisner, 'Constriction of a Livelihood System: The Peasants of Tharaka Division, Meru District, Kenya', *Economic Geography* 53 (1977): 355.

[79] The collapse of goat prices was reportedly due to the market being flooded by goats owned by Kamba people, who, short of food themselves, had crossed the Tana River in large numbers into Kikuyu Province to barter their stock for grain. The Akamba purchased much of the food supplies available from Embu and South Nyeri districts that officials had thought would supply the Meru; TNA: CO 533/392/15, Grigg to Passfield (letter), 7 December 1929.

[80] Horne, senior commissioner of Kikuyu Province, reported that among the Meru, 'it is the poorer part of the population, those with little or no stock, who are suffering'; TNA: CO 533/392/15, Grigg to Passfield (letter), 11 January 1930.

wage labour, as in 1918 (see Chap. 3).[81] Yet the social distribution of hunger was also a function of inequality and poverty. The processes of class differentiation, linked to the expansion of African agricultural production in the 1920s (mentioned above), had created a larger class of poor people who were more vulnerable to the effects of famine. The better-off, meanwhile, could not only withstand food shortages and prices fluctuations, but might actually stand to benefit from the changing terms of trade fostered by drought and dearth. In a cash market context, these terms tended to lean towards cereal growers rather than stock owners.[82] This, in turn, could aggravate social differentiation and inequality.[83]

Sixth, and finally, officials saw the scale of the 1929–1930 scarcity and famine as presenting a particular kind of economic risk. Harvest failure and profiteering threatened to increase staple food prices across Kenya and generally hurt consumers and employers of labour (including plantations, the railways and government departments). These threats were seen to require extraordinary state control of the market. Thus, in 1929 there was a sense, not apparent previously during peacetime, of scarcity affecting the colony as a collective economic problem. This sense cannot be put down only to the scale of drought and harvest failure. Rather, as I will show, it should be understood as a function of the general and increasing reliance on the cash crop trade (through a more integrated domestic market) and the existence of a system of food entitlements built up through the industrial and exchange economy.

[81] Ibid.

[82] The loss of stock value relative to that of grain during times of drought and famine, within the context of a cash economy, has been noted for various African contexts. Prior to the cash market, the exchange of stock was bound up with a range of social relationships and obligations that extended their utility beyond the immediate time of drought and scarcity. In a cash market, cattle are simply underpriced owing to oversupply, and their sale implies a permanent loss of utility. See, for example, D. Anderson and D. Throup, 'The Agrarian Economy of Central Province, Kenya, 1918 to 1939', in *The Economies of Africa and Asia in the Inter-war Depression*, ed. I. Brown, 2nd edition (London and New York: Routledge, 2015), 19; Iliffe, *Famine in Zimbabwe*, 60–1; Mackenzie, *Land, Ecology and Resistance*, 131; G. H. Maddox, 'Mtunya: Famine in Central Tanzania, 1917–1920', *Journal of African History* 31 (1990): 186–7.

[83] For example, wealthier Kikuyu men (rather than women) were able to reap rewards from the depressed stock prices in 1928 and 1929. They could buy up large numbers of stock from their drought-stricken neighbours in the Rift Valley and Ukambani, which could then be used to repay debts or make bridewealth payments. This, in turn, expanded their capacity for agricultural production and accumulation, and aggravated social inequality; Mackenzie, *Land, Ecology and Resistance*, 131.

Government Responses

Official responses to the famine took various forms: some well known, some novel. Initially, in the earlier stages of the drought, officials employed the familiar method of controlling the movement and trade of food in African areas. In 1927, proclamations under the Native Foodstuffs Ordinance were made for Kitui as well as various districts in Nyanza and along the coast.[84] In 1928, these targeted Dagoretti subdistrict (close to Nairobi) and Machakos.[85] However, once conditions had deteriorated by the start of 1929, the state intensified its efforts. In early February, the acting governor, Sir Jacob Barth, appointed a committee, chaired by the director of agriculture, to look into the food problem. That this resembled the actions taken by Kenya's acting governor in late 1917 and early 1918 is no coincidence—in 1918, Barth had been the governor's deputy and, from August of that year, acting chief secretary.[86] The committee immediately convened a conference 'representative of commercial and producing interests',[87] before reporting back to the governor.

Some of the committee's recommendations were legislative; others were more practical. A special government gazette was published on 5 February to give effect to the former. The Customs Management Ordinance was used to prevent food exports from the territory, except under licence.[88] The Native Foodstuffs Ordinance was invoked to prohibit the movement and export of supplies from districts including Meru, Embu, South Nyeri, Fort Hall and Kiambu.[89] However, these efforts went beyond previous measures. The famine saw officials pursue the first systematic attempts to manage the movement of foodstuffs, which drew in

[84] CPK, *Official Gazette*, 16 March 1927, 306; 23 August 1927, 1011–13.

[85] Ibid., 24 January 1928, 58; 4 September 1928, 1319–20; Robertson, *Trouble Showed the Way*, 87.

[86] EAP, *Official Gazette*, 14 August 1918, 674.

[87] These 'interests' included the Nairobi and Mombasa chambers of commerce, the Convention of Associations, and the Coffee Planters' Union, plus exporting firms and the Kenya Farmers Association. TNA: CO 533/384/2, Holm to Barth (letter), 13 February 1929.

[88] CPK, *Official Gazette*, 5 February 1929.

[89] Ibid., 225.

the relatively new local native councils (LNCs).[90] Coordinated efforts were made to prevent the movement of supplies southwards from Nyeri, while movements northwards from Fort Hall were 'consistently encouraged'.[91] Whereas in 1918 officials had tried to control famine by managing movements of people, a decade later they sought to regulate the circulation of goods within the market.

With respect to relief, Barth's committee advised that since 'some of the native tribes' had access to funds, the relief should be issued on payment 'so long as the recipients are in possession of funds to meet the cost'.[92] LNCs would cover the remaining costs. Seeds were also to be issued to relieve famine conditions and 'secure increased production', also funded by LNCs.[93] These efforts marked the start of a major official campaign to encourage Africans to grow 'improved' (that is, higher-yielding and quickly maturing) varieties of maize. Some of these varieties were planted on reclaimed swampland in drought-hit regions of South Nyeri and Embu, prepared by using communal labour.[94]

Government relief supplies were 'primarily intended' for women and children in the famine area.[95] The official line was to 'encourage' able-bodied men to seek employment on public and private works.[96] This would enable the men to access food supplies, while reducing the burden of hunger in the reserves. Accordingly, officials took precautionary steps to secure food supplies for settler farms, to prevent the forced return to the reserves of labourers discharged by employers unable to feed them.[97]

[90] Robertson, *Trouble Showed the Way*, 87. The first of the LNCs had been formed in more 'advanced' districts (notably the highly populated areas of Central and Nyanza provinces) in 1924 to help assuage African grievances over the unfair allocation of direct taxes towards services. Dominated by the district commissioner, the LNCs generally consisted of official chiefs and 'other government employees who could be counted on to be cooperative'; Berman, *Control and Crisis*, 216–18; Maxon, *Struggle for Kenya*, 94. Tarus notes that the Kenyan LNCs were based on 'the South African model'; 'Direct Taxation', 176.

[91] TNA: CO 533/392/15, Grigg to Passfield (letter), 11 January 1930.

[92] TNA: CO 533/384/2, Holm to Barth (letter), 13 February 1929.

[93] Ultimately, officials arranged for seed worth £6000 to be purchased and distributed; CPK, *KLC Debates 1929*, vol. 1, 21 February 1929, 21.

[94] Anderson and Throup, 'Agrarian Economy', 17.

[95] TNA: CO 533/392/15, Grigg to Passfield (letter), 27 March 1930.

[96] TNA: CO 533/384/2, Colonial Office to Barth (telegram), 25 February 1929; CO 533/384/2, Barth to Amery (telegram), 1 March 1929; CO 533/392/15, Grigg to Passfield (letter), 11 January 1930; CPK, *KLC Debates 1929*, vol. 1, 21 February 1929, 21.

[97] TNA: CO 533/384/2, Barth to Amery (telegram), 1 March 1929; CPK, *KLC Debates 1929*, vol. 1, 21 February 1929, 20.

Relief works were quickly organized, and officials mobilized the Native Authority Ordinance so that people of Meru and Embu districts could be compelled to work in return for relief.[98]

Yet the most significant aspect of the state's response lay elsewhere. Recognizing that no comprehensive statutory powers existed that allowed the state to control food stocks, fix prices, pay compensation or requisition transport, Barth's committee recommended the preparation of new, emergency legislation, restricted in operation until the end of 1929. The resulting Food Control Ordinance shared the name, and some of the functions, of a Nigerian ordinance passed two years previously. The Kenyan edition consolidated the central government's powers to prohibit food exports and control the movement and trade of essential 'native foodstuffs'.[99] The legislation was novel in that it established a Food Control Board with 'comprehensive' powers and duties. 'Among the most important', explained the director of agriculture in Legco, 'are the submission of returns of foodstuffs held and controlled by traders and producers'. These data would allow the food availability position to be assessed so that trade licences could be granted safely. The board was given the power to acquire foodstuffs for famine relief and to arrange for their distribution, for example by requisitioning transport at fixed rates. It could also purchase and import foodstuffs, more specifically the assumed staple of maize, to supplement local supplies. Generally, the board's role was to procure and distribute supplies to key centres—'last mile' distribution by rail and road transport was left to the Native Affairs Department.[100] Finally, the board was tasked with fixing maximum prices for the purchase and sale of food staples. Legco voted £200,000 to cover its functions.

[98] CPK, *KLC Debates 1929*, vol. 1, 21 February 1929, 20.

[99] The Nigerian Food Control Ordinance was part of a wider famine relief strategy developed in response to a food crisis in 1927. The strategy was similar to the Kenyan approach in that it relied on 'native authorities' (NAs) to make their 'own arrangements' to confront local shortages; central government only intervened when shortage escalated into famine. But the Nigerian strategy (although never implemented) went much further than the more ad hoc Kenyan policy by setting out a precise monthly timetable to structure the import and distribution of relief. The more established Nigerian NA structures held far greater responsibility to keep local food reserves, as well as organize and distribute relief supplies, than Kenya's fledgling and relatively incapacitated LNCs. In Kenya, distribution was handled by the Native Affairs Department. The Nigerian ordinance also differed from the Kenyan version by empowering a 'food controller' (rather than a board) to prohibit imports and exports; Watts, *Silent Violence*, 312–14, 565 n. 63.

[100] CPK, *KLC Debates 1929*, vol. 1, 22 February 1929, 55.

What was the rationale for this degree of investment and control? First, it was needed to ensure that food supplies could reach remote areas that might be unprofitable for private traders to service. This became particularly important in late 1929, by which time famine conditions had worsened in Kikuyuland, partly because premature and heavy 'short rains' had washed away numerous bridges and rendered many roads impassable, thereby blocking the distribution of relief.[101] The Colonial Office suggested, to no avail, that the Kenyan government use aircraft to deliver the supplies instead.[102]

Second, state control was necessary to set maximum prices. This was done ostensibly 'in the interests of trade': to prevent some producers and retailers, from whom food was not purchased at prices set by the board, from gaining an unfair advantage over others.[103] Further, fixing prices would prevent inflation and limit costs to consumers and employers. Such willingness to engage in the 'un-British' practice of price control has to be understood against the backdrop of emerging Kenyan state interest in

[101] The senior commissioner for Kikuyu Province had been able to collect supplies at the railhead but experienced difficulty getting food to the starving population 150 miles away; TNA: CO 533/392/15, Grigg to Passfield (letter), 7 December 1929. Food destined for Meru was transported to the railhead at Naro Moru, then by motor transport to Meru, and again by lorry to nine distributing centres in the district; TNA: CO 533/392/15, Grigg to Passfield (letter), 11 January 1930.

[102] The governor replied and explained that there were 'still only three or four aeroplanes in this Colony, the carrying capacity of which would be approximately one or two bags of maize meal at the most'. Whether these figures were accurate or not, the Colonial Office did not pursue the issue; TNA: CO 533/392/15, Grigg to Passfield (letter), 27 March 1930. The Royal Air Force did, however, use aeroplanes to drop food relief during a Kenyan famine in the early 1960s, when once again heavy rain followed drought, rendering roads and rivers impassable; C. C. Trench, *Men Who Ruled Kenya: The Kenya Administration, 1982–1963* (London and New York: Radcliffe Press, 1993), 288; also see Chap. 8 of this book.

[103] CPK, *KLC Debates 1929*, vol. 1, 21 February 1929, 5.

managing food prices and cost of living during the mid-1920s.[104] Moreover, restriction of trade and price regulation took on particular importance during times of scarcity as a means to prevent hoarding, speculation and profiteering by 'unscrupulous' middlemen. Indeed, the Food Control Ordinance was explicitly motivated by the need to combat the formation of 'rings'. Here, memories of previous scarcities and relief efforts—notably the 1918 famine—played an important part in justifying this regulation.[105] Yet liberal market ideology still held some ground—in Legco, officials were at pains to point out that the functions of the Food Control Board would not interfere with the normal trade of the colony. And they confidently, albeit incorrectly, predicted that emergency imports would not be required.[106] Self-sufficiency was the key goal.[107] As Douglas Rimmer notes generally of British colonial officials in Africa, imports of food were more than costly embarrassments: they were 'an indication of

[104] A Cost of Living Commission had been appointed in 1924 in response to protestations from Kenya's white 'petty bourgeoisie', who had started to feel their standard of living was being pinched by retail price increases; N. Swainson, *The Development of Corporate Capitalism in Kenya, 1918–1977* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 1980), 41. Cost of living became part of Kenyan political rhetoric: in the mid-1920s, for example, Indian representatives in Legco protested against the effects of protective duties on ghee, noting their effect on the community's cost of living; CPK, *KLC Debates 1926*, vol. 1, 18 March 1926, 27–31. The commission's 1929 report recommended that some manner of protection should continue for key Kenyan products, but left the door open for price control: 'both wholesale and retail prices for local consumption should be periodically reviewed and, if necessary, controlled'; CPK, *Cost of Living Commission Report of Enquiry* (Nairobi, 1929), xiv.

[105] In Legco, Lord Francis Scott (elected member for Ukamba) reminded other members that 'in 1918 terrible scandals arose in this country in regard to the distribution of famine relief and I do trust that every effort will be taken this time to see that unscrupulous and other people will not have an opportunity to make vast profits for themselves at the expense of the natives'; CPK, *KLC Debates 1929*, vol. 1, 22 February 1929, 34.

[106] Maize and other food exports were prohibited by the government, but after its formation the Food Control Board granted special licences for export in early 1929, taking care 'to disturb trade and trade conditions as little as possible'. Licences were granted to fulfil existing overseas contracts and to satisfy regular requirements to neighbouring territories including East African ports; TNA: CO 533/384/2, Barth to Amery (letter), 9 March 1929. When, by year end, weather conditions had not improved, it became necessary to import significant amounts of maize from South Africa.

[107] (Holm) 'We felt that it would be a credit to the Colony if, during this period of difficulty, the Colony was able to feed itself and maintain its trade connections with neighbouring territories'; CPK, *KLC Debates 1929*, vol. 1, 17 July 1929, 254.

administrative failure', or worse. In the strict Malthusian view, relying on food imports amounted to 'a threat to national security'.[108]

Political Controversy

The Kenyan government's actions of early 1929 immediately created controversy. Upon hearing of the emergency measures, Sir Humphrey Leggett, chair of the East African section of the London Chamber of Commerce, a long-time advocate of 'trusteeship' in East Africa, and a business person with interests in Kenyan sisal plantations,[109] immediately wrote to William Cecil Bottomley, the assistant undersecretary of state in the Colonial Office.[110] Leggett railed against Kenya's settler maize growers who were, he claimed, holding the country 'to ransom' under an 'extreme form' of protectionism.[111] Settlers had been exporting maize, assisted by low rail rates, long after it was safe for the colony's food supply. However, employers of labour were powerless to import their own supplies owing to heavy customs duties and high freight charges for imported grain. Leggett's concern was that expensive maize imports would become necessary, thereby driving up the general cost of living, the operational costs of government departments, and, most importantly from his perspective, the costs of labour and production on plantations. He enquired whether the Kenyan government proposed to admit such imports free of duties.[112] The question was delicately forwarded to Nairobi. The governor simply reiterated that he did not expect imports to be necessary. While little came of Leggett's protestations, the exchange indicates how, by this stage, questions of scarcity and food prices were starting to involve

[108] Bryceson, 'Food Insecurity', 5; D. Rimmer, 'The Economic Imprint of Colonialism and Domestic Food Supplies in British Tropical Africa', in *Imperialism, Colonialism and Hunger: East and Central Africa*, ed. R. I. Rotberg (Lexington, MA: Lexington Books, 1983), 151.

[109] Leggett was also managing director of the British East Africa Corporation; Maxon, *Struggle for Kenya*, 232.

[110] TNA: CO 533/384/2, Leggett to Bottomley (letter), 24 February 1929.

[111] TNA: CO 533/384/2, minute by Bottomley, 4 March 1929; CO 533/384/2, Leggett to Bottomley (letter), 6 March 1929.

[112] TNA: CO 533/384/2, Leggett to Bottomley (letter), 24 February 1929. When, later in the year, the Food Control Board imported 30,000 bags of maize from South Africa, the board was forced to pay £9000 in duties; CPK, *KLC Debates 1929*, vol. 1, 17 July 1929, 254.

contestations between different producer and consumer interests, which demanded a certain 'balancing act' to be performed by the state.[113]

Meanwhile, officials in London had themselves been alarmed by a news article published in *The Times* reporting that Kenyan officials had made 'arrangements' to 'encourage able-bodied people to seek employment in public and private work'.[114] This, once again, raised the politically charged issue of compulsory labour in Kenya (see Chap. **3**). A telegram was promptly prepared and sent to Nairobi requesting further details of the nature of the government's proposals for private works.[115] Barth replied, explaining that none were in place, and that they would require his approval in any case. But he only proceeded to cause more alarm by suggesting, 'I do not consider recourse to compulsory work for private employers at all *probable*' (emphasis added).[116] Such concern only intensified following the election of a British Labour Party government in June 1929. At the time, Kenya and other East African territories were being subjected to considerable international scrutiny over their forced labour practices.[117]

The Food Control Bill was no less controversial domestically, and here one sees more clearly the strength of the settler political pressure that bore on Kenyan officials around their anti-scarcity practices. The bill was introduced in the Legislative Council at a special sitting called for 21 February

[113] Caught in a difficult position, Bottomley opted to let the situation ease itself out. Eventually, he minuted: 'I see nothing to be done. After all, we cannot interfere in a question of maize growers versus sisal planters, and the latter, with their employers who have to buy rations, are well able to make their voice heard'; TNA: CO 533/384/2, minute by Bottomley, 22 March 1929.

[114] TNA: CO 533/384/2, *The Times*, 25 February 1929.

[115] TNA: CO 533/384/2, Amery to Barth (telegram), 25 February 1929.

[116] TNA: CO 533/384/2, Barth to Amery (telegram), 1 March 1929.

[117] The International Labour Organization's report on forced labour, published in time for the International Labour Conference sessions in June of 1929 and 1930 respectively, focused on the question of forced and 'native labour', and dealt extensively with African settler colonies; International Labour Organization (ILO), *Forced Labour: Report and Draft Questionnaire* (Geneva: ILO, 1929); J. Goudal, 'The Question of Forced Labour before the International Labour Conference', *International Labour Review* 19 (1929): 621–38. A little over two years later, the question of forced labour again became a source of Colonial Office anxiety during a famine in Northern Rhodesia. On this occasion, the concern was whether the colonial government's measures satisfied the terms of the Forced Labour Convention; TNA: CO 795/47/13, minute by Vernon, 13 July 1931; minute by Parkin, 15 July 1931; minute by Green, 16 July 1931; Passfield to Maxwell (letter), 23 July 1931; Maxwell to Thomas (letter), 21 September 1931.

1929 to deal with this 'emergency legislation'. It lit a heated debate. In some ways, these arguments reveal the extent of antagonism between Kenyan officials and settlers, which peaked towards the end of the 1920s.[118] In other ways, they speak to the tensions at the heart of food provisioning and colonial 'liberal' government in the interwar period.

The opposition came from (mainly European) elected members.[119] Their antagonism was not necessarily directed at the principle of providing relief or controlling prices. Many supported it, but took issue with certain aspects of the state's proposals. There were differences of opinion, for example, between farming and non-farming representatives. The former constituted the majority of elected members.[120] They worried that the prices offered to farmers would be 'fair', that is, profitable. On the other hand, those representing consumers fretted more about the costs of food and labour.

One of the ways in which unofficial members expressed their differences of opinion was through their particular framing of the state's 'duty'. Replying to the second reading of the bill, Lord Francis Scott, a farmer himself, argued 'that it is the government's duty to see that none of the subjects of this country die of starvation', and that pre-emptive steps should be taken.[121] T. J. O'Shea, a business person and 'autodidact economist' from Eldoret, agreed 'that when there is a scarcity of food it is the bounden duty of Government to provide citizens with food'.[122] Yet there was a further, more economic aspect to this 'duty'. Echoing memories of unfair trading practices seen during past scarcities, Conway Harvey (a

[118] Berman, *Control and Crisis*, 109.

[119] Europeans were approved a franchise to elect Legco representatives in 1919, with the first elections held the following year. European men and women over 25 years of age and 'of sound mind' were permitted to vote for a representative of their local constituency. At this stage, several Indian and Arab members were appointed to Legco on the basis of nominations made to the governor. However, by the early 1920s, following considerable campaigning in favour of Indian political interests, provision was made for British subjects drawn from these communities to elect their own representatives. The seats allocated to Indians and Arabs were, however, far outnumbered by those reserved for their settler counterparts. As noted previously, from 1924 African interests were represented on Legco by an appointed missionary. Despite settler protestations to the contrary, official members held a majority in Legco until an elected majority was granted in 1948; Dilley, *British Policy*, 24.

[120] Brett, *Colonialism and Underdevelopment*, 57.

[121] CPK, *KLC Debates 1929*, vol. 1, 21 February 1929, 15.

[122] Ibid., 12; C. S. Nicholls, *Red Strangers: The White Tribe of Kenya* (London: Timewell Press, 2005), 157.

coffee planter) considered the government's 'bounden duty' to include stopping 'certain unscrupulous individuals' from attempting to 'corner the available supplies of foodstuffs'.[123] T. A. Wood, a prominent Nairobi merchant, agreed that averting cornering was the 'first duty' of the state. His concern, however, was less with rural African hunger than securing 'relief for the ratepayers of Nairobi', who faced rising labour costs.[124] In this way, a sense of government 'duty' was expressed in both the moral terms of hunger and the economic terms of inflation. Representatives of 'consuming interests', like Conway Harvey and Wood, emphasized the latter point, and supported the principle of price control. Here they attempted to frame food scarcity in terms of its collective economic effects on the well-being of the population at large. Conway Harvey summarized this attitude:

> It is essential that the broadest possible view should be taken of this matter. Particularly we must remember that this colony… is a co-operative concern. We have natives, we have Europeans, we have a score of industries—maize, sisal, coffee, and a dozen others; each one is very largely dependent on the other, and I do think, in the interests of the Colony as a whole… the prices of essential foodstuffs should be stabilized so far as possible in order to avoid serious dislocation of people's budgets, and in order to create a feeling of confidence in all and sundry.[125]

Elected members were unanimous in urging officials to issue relief only upon payment, either in cash or in kind. This, Scott argued, was 'a matter of principle' that should not apply to any particular race.[126] Most Africans were not destitute; providing free food would be little more than a

[123] CPK, *KLC Debates 1929*, vol. 1, 21 February 1929, 8.

[124] Ibid., 17; Nicholls, *Red Strangers*, 64. Wood was also involved in the 1920s Cost of Living Commission; CPK, *Cost of Living Commission Report of Enquiry*.

[125] CPK, *KLC Debates 1929*, vol. 1, 21 February 1929, 8.

[126] Ibid., 16.

'dole'.[127] The chief native commissioner reassured Legco that 'so far as we can possibly manage it, we do not want to feed any able-bodied man for nothing at all'.[128] These points strengthened the argument for relief works to enable the hungry and poor to access food. Accordingly, a motion to construct a proposed railway extension from Naro Moru to Nanyuki (running towards the areas suffering most from scarcity, albeit on the far side of Mount Kenya) was fast-tracked and introduced to Legco the following day.[129]

Later, the acting governor cited the example of the 1928 Ugandan famine as a precedent for the approach taken to distributing relief.[130] In places where people had neither cash nor access to relief works, as in some parts of Meru District, special measures were required. There, maize and maize meal were supplied for cash or on credit at subsidized prices.[131] For credit issues, it was necessary to keep accounts charged against district subdivisions (rather than individuals).[132] Kenyan officials seemed concerned to make this process as 'fair' as possible. One of the main principles adopted in Uganda in 1928, and endorsed by their eastern counterparts

[127] The term 'dole' was used to denigrate free famine relief by C. G. Durham (elected member for Kikuyu); ibid., 17. The Reverend H. Leakey, the nominated member representing African interests, also used the term, albeit in a more sympathetic sense. While disputing the notion that 'Africans are all well-to-do', Leakey endorsed the plan to ensure able-bodied men worked for their relief: 'I deprecate anything in the shape of a dole, such as we had some years ago, and although this may be necessary sometimes it must have the effect of demoralizing the people.' For this reason, he supported the organization of relief works; CPK, *KLC Debates 1929*, vol. 1, 22 February 1929, 43.

[128] (J. E. S. Merrick) CPK, *KLC Debates 1929*, vol. 1, 21 February 1929, 21.

[129] CPK, *KLC Debates 1929*, vol. 1, 22 February 1929, 39–40. The line was completed in October 1930; CPK, *Annual Report for 1930*, 9.

[130] TNA: CO 533/384/2, Barth to Amery (letter), 9 March 1929.

[131] In Legco, J. G. Kirkwood argued that the prices charged for relief (five shillings per load of maize and six shillings for maize meal—the same rates charged to the Meru during the previous famine in the area) amounted to approximately 50 per cent of the total cost of purchase and delivery. The acting chief native commissioner indicated that the loss would be met from the state's general revenue. The full cost of the supplies was charged in coastal areas; CPK, *KLC Debates 1929*, vol. 1, 18 June 1929, 146; TNA: CO 533/392/15, Grigg to Passfield (letter), 11 January 1930.

[132] The governor explained the approach as follows: '[The food] is issued in kerosene tins and at the end of the day the amount of bags issued is registered against the receiving locations.' The plan was to recover the balance through a series of cesses extending over several years, although it was noted that the Meru still owed the government around £20,000 for relief provided on previous occasions; TNA: CO 533/392/15, Grigg to Passfield (letter), 11 January 1930.

the following year, was to ensure that 'no person who had not received relief should be obliged to pay for that received by anyone else'.[133]

Elected members of Legco did not necessarily doubt the need for extraordinary measures to combat famine and profiteering. Rather, some of their harshest criticism focused on the intelligence used to develop the legislation and grant its 'wide-ranging powers'. Lord Francis Scott questioned whether such measures interfering 'with the liberty of the subject and with all the trade of the country' were the only means of addressing the situation.[134] He was one of several who rebuked the government for failing to provide 'definite figures' to justify the necessity of these measures and the existence of a board with such powers. The lack of 'definite figures' encompassed where exactly famine had occurred, what ratio the shortage held to normal food supplies in the affected districts, the total supplies available in Kenya, the number of people requiring famine relief and the monthly rate at which supplies were being consumed, among other issues.[135] Why bother them with this emergency sitting and proposed legislation—which promised to interfere with 'all the trade of the country'—when sufficient supplies could have been more easily secured through government contracts with the KFA and other large grain traders?[136] One of those making this argument was J. G. Kirkwood, a hotel owner from Kitale, who took a particularly dim view of the vision of state control expressed by the bill.[137]

Holm, the director of agriculture, accepted the lack of justifying statistics and information, defending the bill's measures as being necessary in the 'judgement' of experienced administrative officers in the various

[133] CPK, *KLC Debates 1929*, vol. 1, 22 February 1929, 57.

[134] CPK, *KLC Debates 1929*, vol. 1, 21 February 1929, 16.

[135] Ibid., 12, 16.

[136] Ibid., 15–17. The director of agriculture later revealed that this approach had been considered by the food shortage committee, but was rejected by representatives of large stockholding organizations. For, if they were obliged to supply grain at a low price, individual traders would be able to 'reap an advantage out of the situation'. Fixing maximum prices through a central board was therefore the only 'fair' means of managing the situation; ibid., 25–6.

[137] Ibid., 14–15; Nicholls, *Red Strangers*, 157.

districts.[138] Most of these concerns seem to have been appeased in the end by a district-by-district review of 'the food position' presented by the acting chief native commissioner, as well as a comprehensive reply from Holm.[139] Nevertheless, a degree of ambivalence surrounded the bill. It was motivated by the need for control and certainty of the 'food position' (through, for example, collecting returns and statistics on stocks held by farmers and traders), yet at the same time appeals had to be made to local official 'judgement' and 'experience' to justify both its necessity and the process by which it was devised.

The tension between demands for numerical certainty and official trust in local experience was reflected in another aspect of the Legco debate. This related to how maize prices would be set and how suppliers would be compensated for the restriction of exports. More specifically, how would the proposed Food Control Board ensure that maize suppliers received a 'fair price'?[140] This was a particular concern for grain producers whose profits had been hurt by the drought conditions of the preceding two years.[141] The original proposal was for prices to be determined by using the export price ruling in London in early February 1929. Several members complained that this might disadvantage some producers and dealers who could otherwise realize a better profit.[142] In the light of these criticisms, the governor proposed to adjourn the meeting to allow elected members to consult further with 'those interested in the maize trade' to

[138] The director explained: 'Now I wish I were in a position to supply that information, but under the conditions obtaining in this country it is quite impracticable to obtain information of that sort in the native reserves. It is not possible for anyone to say that there are so many hundred thousand bags of maize and tens of thousands of bags of beans and so forth in the native reserves. One should in that regard rely upon the information obtained by and the advice given by Administrative Officers who are well acquainted with the conditions in the native reserves.' He noted that the measures taken to prevent the movement of food from the reserves (under the Native Foodstuffs Ordinance) had been based on information received from these officers. An attempt was made to secure statistics on available maize stocks in settler areas, but no legislation existed to enforce these returns; CPK, *KLC Debates 1929*, vol. 1, 21 February 1929, 24–5.

[139] Ibid., 16–20.

[140] Ibid., 9, 27.

[141] This concern was specifically raised by Lord Francis Scott in relation to his constituents in Ukamba; ibid., 16.

[142] J. G. Kirkwood, for example, described the bill as 'legalized robbery' that took 'away the initiative from produce dealers to obtain the best advantage for their produce irrespective of all other considerations'; ibid., 15.

discuss the problem.[143] The following morning a slightly revised version of the bill was read. The most significant change was the removal of the clause referring to the London export price, so that price setting was now left entirely in the hands of the board. As the attorney general explained, 'in a matter of this kind you have got to trust the board to use its powers with due discretion'.[144] Both statistical and calculative certainty were important, but mainly as part of the rhetorical armature of settler political and economic interests.[145]

Following its third reading, the bill was passed and the all-European board established, consisting of three *ex officio* and three unofficial members alike, plus a secretary.[146] It continued to be a highly unpopular entity among unofficial members. When, in July 1929, the board requested permission to import 30,000 bags of maize into the colony, several members once again protested against the entire arrangement implied by the Food Control Ordinance. Measures taken by the board, Kirkwood railed, had merely created 'artificial conditions' that accentuated the shortage.[147] It was the board which had compromised Kenya's self-sufficiency and created the need for importation—that index of administrative failure. In any case, officials had once again failed to provide adequate substantiating figures for the current and future status of territorial food supplies, to prove

[143] Ibid., 28.

[144] Ibid., 23.

[145] I have elaborated on this point elsewhere; see J. Duminy, 'A Piecemeal Avalanche: The Uneven Topography of Statistics in Colonial Kenya, c.1900 to 1952', *Urban Forum* 28 (2017): 403–20.

[146] The official members were the director of agriculture (chair), treasurer (deputy chair) and chief native commissioner. The Department of Agriculture's statistical officer was appointed as secretary; TNA: CO 533/384/2, Barth to Amery (letter), 9 March 1929. Unofficial members included W. K. Tucker (elected member for Nairobi North), C. R. Maynard and W. Tyson (both professionals or business people based in Nairobi); CPK, *Official Gazette*, 1 March 1929, 415.

[147] CPK, *KLC Debates 1929*, vol. 1, 17 July 1929, 256. Foucault notes that the question of the artificiality of the state and political intervention was a key aspect of the critique of raison d'état and the 'police system', which distinguished disciplinary mechanisms from those techniques of security founded on the 'naturalness' of the population; M. Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population: Lectures at the Collège de France 1977–1978*, trans. G. Burchell (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 73, 349.

the need for food imports.[148] Outside Legco, the state's interference in the free market also attracted considerable criticism from Africans who found their ability to take advantage of high famine prices curtailed. This was particularly so for the traders and emerging commercial grain farmers represented by the Kikuyu Central Association.[149] Ultimately, the board was dissolved at the end of 1929, as originally envisaged. Perhaps its harshest indictment came from a former board member, W. K. Tucker (representative of Nairobi North). Speaking some years after its disbandment, he expressed his hope that such an institution (controlling maize distribution and pricing) would 'never exist again'.[150] Tucker was to be disappointed—as we will see, government maize control would come into existence in little over a decade later.

As this section has shown, officials in settler contexts, especially Kenya, often found themselves in a bind when confronted with the threat of famine. They could be caught between a paternalistic duty and desire to prevent suffering and ensure order, aggressive political demands from settlers to 'encourage' job-seeking and recover the costs of relief, and the economic interests of urban residents, planters and metropolitan capital. All this unfolded under the worried legal gaze of London. These competing agendas were reflected in the ways in which the government responded to food scarcities like that of 1929–1930. Kenyan officials trod a fine line between moral duty and political expediency.

Reframing the Problem

Despite the notoriety of the Food Control Ordinance, its contents and debates reveal several key features and trends relating to the conceptualization and redress of food scarcity problems. Here I reflect on these features and trends, linking the dynamics of 1929 with the preceding discussion of anti-scarcity policy and legislation.

[148] E. M. V. Kenealy (elected member for Kenya Province) stated: 'Also we should have had figures provided showing the shortage that exists today, and the shortage that will exist in a fortnight's time, and in a month's time, and so on, so that we could have a real view of the situation. We are thrown a few figures, as a bone is thrown to a dog, and we are told to get our teeth into them and satisfy ourselves on the small quantity of meat upon them; they are empty—there is nothing in them'; CPK, *KLC Debates 1929*, vol. 1, 17 July 1929, 258–9.

[149] Anderson and Throup, 'Agrarian Economy', 22.

[150] CPK, *KLC Debates 1931*, vol. 1, 17 June 1931, 190.

First, officials no longer saw scarcity as the simple result of local harvest failure. Rather, it was a complex phenomenon driven by natural, economic and cultural factors. Natural factors, including drought, pestilence and heavy rainfall, were the chief causes. These were mostly unpredictable, aside from broad climatological patterns and rudimentary meteorological forecasts. Such natural factors produced economic effects, notably price inflation, which in turn led to social responses, including asset disposal, cornering, hoarding and speculation. The result was a form of 'market failure': an inefficient distribution of goods calling for state intervention to promote a moral agenda of equity and an economic agenda of price stabilization. Cultural factors, by contrast, related to issues such as the gendered division of labour in African societies, land cultivation methods, tenure arrangements, marketing activity and stock-keeping habits. These factors shaped the way that land resources were used, and how food shortages affected people in their social relations. Whereas 'failure of the rains' was a matter of misfortune, economic and cultural behaviours were probable risks that could and should be anticipated and managed.

Second, as a 'hybrid' natural and economic phenomenon, food shortage manifested at two levels: scarcity and famine. With the development of commercial food markets in the territory, food shortages started to take on a cumulative nature. Unfavourable weather conditions amplified regular periods of seasonal hunger; prolonged drought gradually eroded household and community food reserves. Scarcity, on one level, referred to such a general decrease in availability and had an economic inflection: price increases hurt consumers and employers. It had the nature of a collective economic problem. When this problem was left unchecked, famine happened—scarcity could generate a cycle of market reactions as staple prices rose in response to increased demand and livestock prices fell as a function of oversupply.[151] Cornering and hoarding by producers and traders diverted supplies from the market, and so prices rose even further. Famine and large-scale starvation occurred when poorer people could no longer afford the elevated prices to support their dependants. This was, of course, more of a problem for those in remote rural areas, because the costs of transporting supplies to these places were inevitably higher. In

[151] Foucault notes that for economists and governments in the late eighteenth century, 'scarcity is a state of food shortage that has the property of engendering a process that renews it and, in the absence of another mechanism halting it, tends to extend it and make it more acute'. Scarcity is therefore 'not exactly famine'; *Security, Territory, Population*, 30.

ways like this, in the context of a more developed market system, food shortages started to assume this sort of cumulative and self-aggravating character.

Third, officials saw this problem as calling for certain kinds of responses. For many, the state had a 'duty' to intervene and prevent scarcity from snowballing into a crisis of outright famine. There were urgent responses as well as more long-term factors to be considered. One of the more urgent was ensuring adequate distribution and accessibility, especially physical access—getting relief to remote areas and preventing supplies from leaving local districts. Moreover, famine was partly a result of economic inaccessibility, which required encouraging the 'able-bodied' poor to seek wage labour or, if necessary, providing relief at subsidized rates, on credit, or in the form of loans. The latter interventions targeted specific areas and groups of people, as with the Meru in 1929. Price control was another economic intervention, but one that was less directly tied to the urgency of preventing famine. Rather, it had a wider, more medium-term logic: in 1929, price fixing was more a safeguard of the revenue of employing industries and government departments than of individual access to food. It sought to manage and regulate the spatial-economic effects of scarcity, not at the level of individuals or specific groups (that is, in order to save lives), but for the sake of the welfare of key communities and industries.

Accordingly, the official response was partly one of limiting and controlling the market: designating who could trade, where and how. The Food Control Ordinance signalled a growing official confidence and capacity to do so. Yet there were also longer-term measures that could be pursued to manage the risk of scarcity. In 1929, for example, improving 'communications' emerged as a central strategy of the state's long-term anti-famine measures. In correspondence between Governor Grigg and the Colonial Office in early 1930, improving the road network was the primary measure discussed in relation to 'precautions against the

possibility of a recurrence'.[152] Scarcity had, in the form of transportation, a technical fix.[153]

Another technical domain of anti-scarcity intervention was presented by agriculture. Issuing seeds of 'flat white' maize as an anti-famine measure in 1929 continued the more general policy of boosting African production that had been pursued after the First World War—as the 1926 Crop Production and Livestock Ordinance confirmed. If 1929 marked any change to this policy, it was to intensify official efforts towards the 'betterment' of African agriculture: improving methods of land and stock husbandry, and encouraging the cultivation of a greater variety of crops, including canna, cassava, sweet potato (all less susceptible to locust depredations) and beans.[154] Unlike in 1918, these efforts relied less on coercion and more on instruction, demonstration and education. The main objective was still promoting subsistence and local self-sufficiency: African farmers should only market their surplus crops. These sorts of interventions closely followed the recommendations of the 1929 Agricultural Commission; the 1929–1930 famine merely strengthened the case for the colonial discipline of African production in the reserves.[155]

Conclusion

The emergence of food scarcity as a problem of government shifted in line with the political and economic dynamics of the 1920s. Scarcity and its management were increasingly a function of capitalist market relations, even if the chief cause was still prolonged drought. Aside from fulfilling their (now well-established) 'duty' to provide emergency relief to the weak and helpless, the definition of officials' anti-scarcity role had grown significantly since the events of 1918–1919. Many considered that this

[152] TNA: CO 533/392/15, minute by Bottomley, 23 April 1930.

[153] Iliffe argues that the growing availability and use of motor vehicles, particularly during and after the 1920s, did indeed play a significant role in regulating famine mortality in colonial Africa. Roads and motor vehicles not only helped to transport relief and create extended grain markets but also freed up 'immense quantities of labour hitherto consumed by human porterage'; J. Iliffe, *The African Poor: A History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 158–9.

[154] Anderson and Throup, 'Agrarian Economy', 17; CPK, *KLC Debates 1931*, vol. 1, 17 June 1931, 193. Iliffe argues that a similar shift in agricultural policy was catalysed by the 1922 famine in Southern Rhodesia; *Famine in Zimbabwe*, chapter 7.

[155] A. D. Hall, *Report of the Agricultural Commission* (Nairobi, 1929).

role should encompass regulating the economic effects of food crises by securing comprehensive control of the market. In addition, just as the responsibility of officials to manage scarcity was growing, so was the tendency to 'responsibilize' African subjects in several key respects.

In the 1920s, officials and politicians continued to see African cultural attitudes and behaviour (particularly with respect to pastoral and agricultural activities) as fundamentally linked to the drivers of scarcity. In so doing, they cast food scarcity within a range of different political, economic and social problems, including the emerging problems of land allocation, population, soil degradation and malnutrition. The decade saw the elaboration of a notion of population that was inextricably linked to questions of economic development, land and territory. Specifically, population was enrolled within a problematic of how to manage subsistence communities so as to increase the rate of African population growth (and thus reproduce a cheap source of migrant labour power for settler industries) while preserving the carrying capacity of the land.[156] Food scarcity was thus emerging as a component of a wider Malthusian triad of reproduction, resource scarcity and confined space.[157] At the same time, governmental interventions, at least in part, sought to prevent scarcity by shaping African attitudes and behaviours through training and education, rather than simply coercing, supervising and punishing. Such points illustrate how the nature of the rural reserve, as a particular kind of governable space, was shifting in the interwar period under the objectives and coordinates of indirect rule.

Overall, the chapter has described the emerging outlines of a bifurcated politics of food. One mode was closely linked to the governable space of the reserve, tending to employ more 'direct' methods of government intervention and control. It worked to stave off scarcity by specifying and modifying African beliefs and behaviours in order to safeguard the soil and subsistence production, thereby improving health, promoting population growth, and economizing on the reproduction of migrant labour power for the settler economy. Here the concern was not simply keeping people alive on a basic biological level (that is, preventing their suffering and death) but also producing or encouraging specific kinds of productive life by shaping their nutritional constitution at a bodily and, indeed, molecular

[156] For an elaboration of how subsistence agricultural communities may be used for the reproduction of labour power in a modern wage-labour economy, see C. Meillassoux, 'From Reproduction to Production', *Economy and Society* 1 (1972): 93–105.

[157] Dean, 'Malthus Effect', 23.

level.[158] This was a politics with a relatively long-term temporal and anticipatory purview, one targeted at the rural African population.

The second mode of politics was linked to the 'governable space' of the market. It aimed to regulate the economic drivers and effects of scarcity events as they manifested at a wider, more territorial scale. This entailed a more calculative approach to conceiving and managing food scarcity, as can be seen in the efforts of 1929–1930 to gather intelligence on rates of food supply versus demand, both in particular districts and in the territory as a whole. Here, too, officials used economic techniques like price controls to alleviate the risk of economic collapse and outright famine. These acts speak to the emergence of a more 'indirect' mode of anti-scarcity practice that acted, within the domain of the market, on the interests and incentives of economic subjects. However, this politics was highly limited in its range, techniques and duration. It served the economic interests of certain groups (notably, settler employers and government agencies) rather than seeking to foster and secure the life of the wider population. What is more, the impulse to enumerate and calculate food crises, described above, was tempered by the trust that colonial administrators placed in the judgement and experience of local officers.[159] At this point, moreover, the market was enrolled within a politics of emergency only. Market interventions were part of the response to a particular scarcity event, rather than a permanent rationale and activity of governing.

October 1929 marked a key point in global economic history. Over the course of the 1930s, once the Great Depression had begun to cast its deep shadows over the colonial Kenyan economy, the aims of economic development and anti-scarcity methods would be increasingly aligned and imbricated with pressing issues such as agricultural marketing, rural poverty and environmental conservation. In making these connections, officials and other actors framed scarcity more and more as a long-term risk requiring longer-term investments and interventions, particularly in the domain of production and marketing. As a result, scarcity would assume a new kind of political charge—one bound up with settler demands for support and protection.

[158] On the genealogy of forms of 'molecular biopower', or biopolitics targeting the molecular constitution of the body, specifically with reference to pharmacology, see R. Camargo and N. Ried, 'Towards a Genealogy of Pharmacological Practice', *Medicine, Health Care and Philosophy* 19 (2016): 85–94.

[159] Duminy, 'Piecemeal Avalanche'.

CHAPTER 5

Depression and Dearth

The global slump in commodity prices hit the Kenyan settler economy with force in the early 1930s. Prices for Kenyan exports plummeted, dragging profits and purchasing power behind them. Ultimately, one in five settler farmers gave up and left the land. The state's revenue streams—particularly from duties on wine and spirits—dried into a trickle. Yet its huge debt obligations, notably for the railway, remained.[1] Natural disasters coincided calamitously with economic recession, leading to several successive food scarcities in various parts of the territory.[2]

As with the 1929–1930 famine, the effects of these scarcities were often felt in rural areas prone to irregular rainfall, as well as to disruptions of regular food entitlements and social insurance relationships. These were generally districts where labour was recruited, cash crops were grown and population pressure was starting to be felt more acutely. Unlike in 1929 and 1930, it does not appear that the districts suffering the most were

[1] J. M. Lonsdale, 'The Depression and the Second World War in the Transformation of Kenya', in *Africa and the Second World War*, ed. D. Killingray and R. Rathbone (London: Macmillan, 1986), 104.

[2] The term 'calamity' was specifically used by the Kenyan colonial secretary and future governor, H. Moore, to describe the coincidence of locust invasion with the collapse of global market prices in the early 1930s. It implies the degree of uncertainty with which officials thought about such risks and disasters; CPK, *KLC Debates 1932*, 19 December 1932, 454.

J. Duminy, *Food and Famine in Colonial Kenya*, African Histories and Modernities, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-10964-5_5

remote areas, located far from cash-earning opportunities or potential depots of relief supplies. Rather, it is noticeable that several of the most serious scarcities of the early 1930s occurred in highly populated districts located near white settled areas. Here people often suffered as a result of the lack of opportunities for wage employment outside the reserves. There is little evidence to suggest that urban areas experienced any significant food supply problems in this period.[3] Few of these scarcities appear to have turned into outright famine, involving large-scale mortality, although some deaths certainly resulted from starvation and malnutrition-related factors in more marginal or remote areas.[4]

The immediate causes of these scarcities were, as in 1929–1930, prolonged drought and locust depredations. Yet a new dimension to the problem was emerging. This related to depressed prices for agricultural produce, as well as a contraction in labour demand (see Fig. 5.1). Both factors were intimately related to the collapse of global trade which began to affect Kenya in earnest in 1930.[5] Take one example: the 1931 scarcity that affected South Nyanza, particularly the low-lying, Luo-inhabited areas falling between the fertile Kisii highlands (inhabited mainly by the Gusii people) and the Nyanza lakeshore, south of Kisumu. This was a highly populated area (the number of people ultimately affected by food shortages was estimated at 200,000), lying close to settled areas that ordinarily provided a ready source of wage employment.[6] Already by 1930, and for the first time since British administration had been extended over Gusiiland, officials found that the local supply of labour surpassed demand.[7] Indeed, it was estimated that the 'output' of contracted labourers from Kisii station had fallen from an average monthly rate of between 600 and 700, to less than 20 in May 1931.[8] This trend in depressed labour

[3] Some concern over the security of Nairobi's food supply was, however, raised in 1931, when it was feared that locusts might invade Kikuyuland from western and northern districts. It appears that this did not materialize; CPK, *KLC Debates 1931*, vol. 1, 17 June 1931, 182.

[4] For example, famine-related deaths were confirmed for the coastal Kilifi and Digo districts in early 1934; CPK, *KLC Debates 1934*, vol. 1, 15 February 1934, 61.

[5] R. M. Maxon, *Struggle for Kenya: The Loss and Reassertion of Imperial Initiative, 1912–1923* (London and Toronto: Associated University Presses, 1993), 93.

[6] T. Parsons, 'Local Responses to the Ethnic Geography of Colonialism in the Gusii Highlands of British-Ruled Kenya', *Ethnohistory* 58 (2011): 491–523. The estimate of the affected population was provided by the acting chief native commissioner in Legco; CPK, *KLC Debates 1931*, vol. 1, 17 June 1931, 178.

[7] Maxon, *Struggle for Kenya*, 93.

[8] CPK, *KLC Debates 1931*, vol. 1, 17 June 1931, 179.

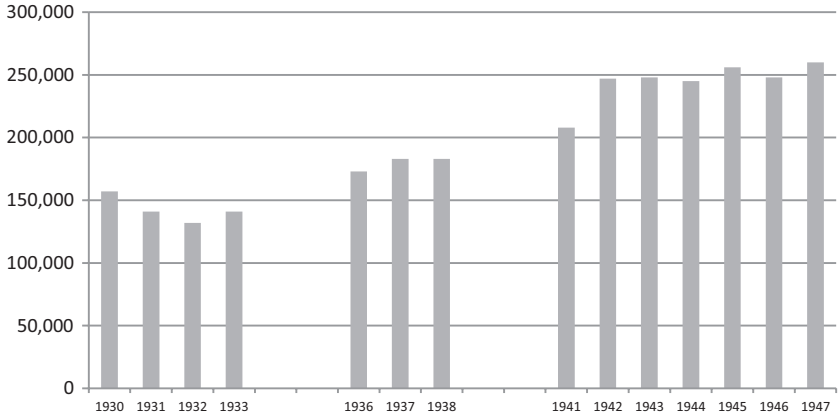


Fig. 5.1 Registered adult male Africans reported in employment, Kenya, 1930–1947 (*Source*: Cooper, *African Waterfront*, Table 3.1)

demand would continue over the following years, before eventually picking up in 1934.[9]

As with labour, agricultural exports from Gusiiland fell markedly in the early part of the decade. After 'considerable quantities' of maize and cattle hides had been exported in 1929, the following year saw practically no exports as a result of falling prices.[10] Further reductions in trade activity resulted from natural forces. Heavy rains at the beginning of 1930 washed away the first plantings; the second then received inadequate rainfall.[11] Early the following year, a swarm of locusts (reportedly 'stretching on a front of three miles to a depth of fifteen miles') swept across South Nyanza and devoured crops, particularly in Luo areas.[12]

This acridid invasion resulted in scarcity, forcing many Luos to exchange their livestock for food grown by their Gusii neighbours, who had avoided the worst of the locust damage and saw prices for their maize increase as a result.[13] However, it was estimated that even in these fertile highland areas up to 50 per cent of the crops had been consumed by pests. With this

[9] Maxon, *Struggle for Kenya*, 93.
[10] Ibid., 93–4.
[11] CPK, *KLC Debates 1931*, vol. 1, 17 June 1931, 179.
[12] Ibid.
[13] Maxon, *Struggle for Kenya*, 94.

depletion of their assets, Gusii farmers were less inclined to trade their reserve supplies with their regular Luo trading partners.

Officials were well aware of the interrelated nature of these natural and economic problems and their effects on food availability and accessibility. Presenting a Legislative Council (Legco) motion for famine relief in June of 1931, the acting chief native commissioner summarized the conditions leading to food shortage in South Nyanza: bad harvests, locust destruction, low prices for cattle and lack of demand for labour.[14] In the acting commissioner's motivation, one finds clear continuities with the problem of scarcity as it was framed in the late 1920s (discussed in the previous chapter). First, it was seen as an aggravation of regular seasonal scarcities.[15] Second, it was a cumulative and self-aggravating phenomenon that was distinguishable from famine, and state intervention was necessary to halt the progress of the first to the second.[16] Third, one again finds an emphasis on avoiding the distribution of food without charge (to safeguard the people's 'self-respect' as much as the colony's tight-strapped revenue).[17] At the same time, uneven asset distribution within local societies, combined with cultural factors, necessitated government relief.[18] The approach proposed by the acting commissioner was tried and tested: relief works would be arranged for the able-bodied to earn cash or receive food in

[14] (A. de Vins Wade) CPK, *KLC Debates 1931*, vol. 1, 17 June 1931, 178. Low cattle prices were probably a partial reflection of generally depressed prices due to veterinary quarantines imposed on pastoral districts in the 1920s and 1930s; P. Mosley, *The Settler Economies: Studies in the Economic History of Kenya and Southern Rhodesia 1900–1963* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 107. A more immediate causal factor could have been flooding of the market by Luos in need of food, although the acting chief native commissioner indicated that prices were so low (between 12 and 20 shillings for a bull, and around 20 shillings for a heifer), owing to lack of demand, that stock owners were reluctant to sell in any case; CPK, *KLC Debates 1931*, vol. 1, 17 June 1931, 192–3.

[15] 'It is normal in this part of the world for the people to be short of grain food at this particular time. The rainfall in this low-lying land is spasmodic and unreliable, and the crops are therefore usually precarious, and at this particular time the situation is rather worse than usual'; ibid., 178–9.

[16] '[The local people] are not destitute. They have certain resources; they have a large number of stock; and they have certain supplies in the way of potatoes and *muhogo* and a few bananas; but they are already beginning to feel a certain shortage, and that shortage must develop into famine unless the government comes to their assistance'; ibid., 178.

[17] Ibid., 179–80.

[18] 'Unfortunately, native communities do not always realize the necessity of feeding the aged and the women and the children before they feed their own able-bodied, and it is chiefly for them that this government assistance is asked'; ibid., 180.

kind. The motion in Legco was for £20,000 to assist women, children and the elderly.[19]

In this way, the problem of food access began to change as the depressed wage economy contracted in the early 1930s, removing a major source of cash and food entitlements for African people. For, although not mentioned by officials at the time, the converse of their usual anti-scarcity strategy of 'encouraging' labour now applied: fewer people had access to rations provided by employers (and secured by the state), and there were more mouths to feed within the reserves. They were the mouths of the poorer African men who, generally, would be forced to seek wage labour—people without significant land access or resources to tide them over times of scarcity. The problem, then, was not scarcity-linked inflation leading to an increase in the real cost of living, or the fact that wages had dropped sharply, but rather a shortage of work.[20] In fact, the evidence suggests that the urban cost of living decreased in the early 1930s (see Fig. 5.2). Consequently, there was no question of government price control, as in 1929. Besides, the wastage of public funds represented by the Food Control Board was a recent unpleasant memory, invoked by more than one Legco member as a principle of 'worst practice'.[21]

These dynamics forced officials to modify aspects of their relief practices. Since 'encouraging' men to find work on settler estates was not a feasible option, relief works took on increased importance.[22] In 1931, officials could still use the argument that the people 'are not destitute', and

[19] £20,000 to assist an estimated 200,000 people in 1931 can be compared with the £200,000 voted to support around 130,000 people in 1929 (see Chap. 4).

[20] Mackenzie notes that wages for unskilled labour in Kenya dropped sharply in the early 1930s, with those working on wheat farms and sisal plantations being worst affected; A. F. D. Mackenzie, *Land, Ecology and Resistance in Kenya, 1880–1952* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1998), 135. However, Cooper argues that despite wage reductions, the real income of Nairobi workers rose during the Depression; F. Cooper, *On the African Waterfront: Urban Disorder and the Transformation of Work in Colonial Mombasa* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1987), 59. Iliffe also argues that real wages probably maintained their value during the same period in Southern Rhodesia and Tanganyika; J. Iliffe, *Famine in Zimbabwe, 1890–1960* (Gweru: Mambo Press, 1990), 84; J. Iliffe, *A Modern History of Tanganyika* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 352–3.

[21] CPK, *KLC Debates 1931*, vol. 1, 17 June 1931, 188–90.

[22] An approach centred on organizing public relief works (for the able-bodied), with free issues made only to 'old men and women and others unable to support themselves', was also taken during a 1931 famine in Gwembe, Northern Rhodesia; TNA: CO 795/55/6, Read, 'Report on Famine Relief: Gwembe, 1931–1932', 1932, 17–25.

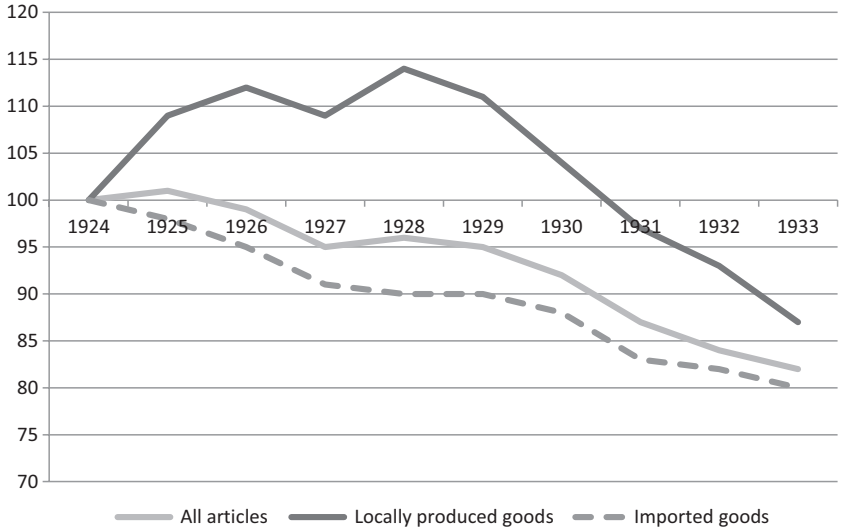


Fig. 5.2 Cost of living index, Kenya, 1924–1933 (100 = 1924 level) (*Source*: CPK, *Annual Reports 1924–1933*)

that free issues of relief were only necessary for the poor and weak.[23] But in the context of a severe economic trough, as well as a general drive for administrative economy, even this policy was contested by settler interests. In Legco, Lord Delamere—the political leader of the settler community—suggested that funds motivated for famine relief should rather be put towards loans to support struggling settler industries. This, he argued, would help alleviate scarcity by providing Africans with employment and cash income with which to buy food. Such an 'indirect method' of addressing famine would also maintain government revenue over the medium term.[24] Most Legco members, however, supported the motion as proposed by the chief commissioner, and it was duly carried.

As economic depression wore on, officials would not radically change their anti-famine measures. There would, however, be some minor adjustments in strategy. Take a second example, this time from early 1934, when a severe scarcity beset the coastal Digo and Kilifi districts. These areas had

[23] CPK, *KLC Debates 1931*, vol. 1, 17 June 1931, 178.

[24] Delamere 'diplomatically' suggested that such loans could be provided to support the sisal industry; ibid., 183. He would pass away within half a year.

suffered from the cumulative effects of four years of drought. By the end of January 1934, in Digo District, the 'short rains' had failed, and locusts had reportedly 'wiped out all the food in the hinterland without exception'.[25] Of a total district population of around 31,000, nearly half migrated to the coastal strip in the hopes of securing food from the better crops available there, leaving around 17,000 to be provided for.[26] Although less worse off, a small-scale famine had developed in Kilifi District, with deaths recorded in the Mangea area north of Mombasa.[27] In early February, an informal committee of local politicians, officials and farmers met and considered the best options for relief. These included importing supplies and selling them for full payment, distributing them at subsidized rates, providing food on credit or initiating road-building relief works where the hungry would be paid in kind. The problem with providing food on credit was that 'in a sense the native has no credit'. As a result, 'he has not been able to pay his taxes properly in full for many years past'.[28] The only option, then, was to organize relief works. Legco thus voted £3000 for these purposes, to be supplemented with local native council (LNC) funds.[29] Although this amount represented almost one-third of Kenya's total estimated surplus for the year, few elected members contested the motion in any way.

The year 1934 was also an annus horribilis for many Maasai groups. Over the course of the year, over 100,000 cattle died in the Kajiado area from the drought. Outbreaks of influenza and dysentery caused 'much mortality' among 'people already enfeebled by hunger and an unsuitable diet'.[30] Over 300 Maasai men reportedly left the district to find refuge among the Kikuyu, using their cattle for bridewealth payments—a reversal of the migratory trends seen during the 1920s. Moreover, the lack of demand and low prices for cattle meant that many Maasai struggled to secure cash to pay their taxes. Communities amassed large debts on taxes and other fees owed to the state.[31]

[25] CPK, *KLC Debates 1934*, vol. 1, 15 February 1934, 61.
[26] Ibid.
[27] Ibid.
[28] Ibid., 62.
[29] Ibid., 60.
[30] E. Watkins, *Jomo's Jailor: Grand Warrior of Kenya; The Life of Leslie Whitehouse*, 2nd edition (Watlington: Britwell, 1996), 102.
[31] Ibid.

In such circumstances, remitting and reducing taxation emerged as a last resort in the management of food shortages. It was not necessarily a new idea. Delaying tax collection to relieve the burden of drought and famine had been implemented as early as 1909 (see Chap. 3). One letter writer to the *East African Standard* had already suggested tax remission as potential redress for the damage wrought by locusts in Nyanza during 1931.[32] The administration, however, was reluctant to cut a key remaining source of its already-depleted revenue in this way. Officials did not remit taxes in Gusiiland, which experienced significant financial hardships (as a result of depressed agricultural prices and locust damage) until at least 1935. There, tax rates remained at the same level charged in the late 1920s. The upshot was that collecting taxes became 'harder' and total collections dropped.[33] Similar dynamics were seen in Fort Hall District. In fact, far from considering widespread remission, the authorities went to great lengths to collect tax in this period of hardship, provoking 'profound discontent' among many Africans.[34] By the end of 1934, however, the administration had started to relent, at least in special cases. At that time, significant remission or reduction of taxation was deemed necessary for certain coastal areas and the Maasai District.[35]

Concerns surrounding overtaxation, coupled with the use of tax reduction as an anti-scarcity measure, formed part of a groundswell of interest in and dispute over methods of direct taxation in the early 1930s.[36] Across British Africa, colonial officials searched for ways to compensate for decreased customs revenues through adjusted rates of direct tax. In Kenya, some argued strongly for a change from collecting hut and poll taxes to a

[32] TNA: CO 533/392/15, Orchardson, 'Native Taxation', *East African Standard*, 22 August 1931.

[33] Maxon, *Struggle for Kenya*, 94.

[34] Mackenzie, *Land, Ecology and Resistance*, 137.

[35] CPK, *KLC Debates 1934*, Fourth Session, 20 November 1934, 741.

[36] L. A. Gardner, *Taxing Colonial Africa: The Political Economy of British Imperialism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), chapter 5; I. K. Tarus, 'A History of the Direct Taxation of the African People of Kenya, 1895–1973' (Ph.D. dissertation, Rhodes University, 2004), chapter 1.

system of income tax.[37] Indeed, tax remission and reduction as a famine response reflected a wider trend to consider and use taxation to manage the welfare of the population. Tax policy was emerging as one way to regulate colonial poverty and its effects.[38]

Official approaches to addressing scarcity during the 1930s should be set against two significant political trends of the decade. The first was the centralization of the state apparatus from its 'segmentary' forms of the 1920s.[39] As I will show, surviving the Depression was seen by officials as requiring an increase in both African and settler production. This, in turn, entailed an attempt to develop a 'corporatist' state apparatus as a means to cast cohesion over Kenya's profound internal social divisions, now laid barer by economic hardship. For officials, centralization of economic interest called for the concentration of political interest.[40] The second trend entailed efforts to develop and 'modernize' local government, involving the strengthening of LNCs and settler district councils.[41] During the 1930s, state anti-famine functions were increasingly caught up in the latter trend, as officials actively sought to 'decentralize' their fiscal and

[37] Lord Moyne's 1932 report on financial questions in Kenya argued that Africans had been taxed to or beyond their capacity; Lord Moyne, *Report by the Financial Commissioner on Certain Questions in Kenya* (London: HMSO, 1932). The adoption of income taxation was an unequivocal recommendation of Sir Alan Pim's 1936 report on finances and taxation in Kenya; A. Pim, *Report of the Commission Appointed to Enquire into and Report on the Financial Position and System of Taxation of Kenya* (London: HMSO, 1936).

[38] Lord Moyne, for example, 'called for a lenient policy to exempt the old, the infirm and destitute' from the payment of taxes; Tarus, 'Direct Taxation', 7.

[39] Lonsdale describes the 'segmentation' of the Kenyan state in terms of both institutions and political conventions, involving attempts to sequester Kenya's interest groups by race and tribe and to convert their internal divisions into competing 'claims upon different levels of the state'. The creation of LNCs, for example, was one means of circumscribing African ambitions around claims on local government; 'Depression', 100–1.

[40] Lonsdale defines corporatism in Kenya as 'the attempt to coopt into state institutions the representatives of organized sectional interests which cut across the gross divisions of race and, if it should ever come to that, of class'. Governor Grigg was a particular enthusiast, and held a vision of Kenya run by practical, competent 'men of capacity' of all races rather than politicians likely to play on racial divisions in the country. In reality, corporatist efforts were hardly extended to Africans, and settler dominance remained clear for all to see; ibid., 107–8, 115–18.

[41] Ibid., 129–30. On the rationale and implementation of local government reform at the time, see CPK, *Report of the Local Government Commission*, vol. 1 (London: HMSO, 1927); also P. Stamp, 'Local Government in Kenya: Ideology and Political Practice, 1895–1974', *African Studies Review*, 29 (1986): 17–42.

administrative responsibility to provide relief following the experiences of 1929 and 1930.

We can see how a 'decentralized' system of famine relief worked by considering the example of Baringo District in the early 1930s. Here local officials acted to supplement and control the functions of the commercial system during times of scarcity. Officers imported settler-grown maize as famine relief to be distributed through relief works or a 'subsidized barter' system. Price controls were enforced, and government retail outlets and reserve stocks were used to limit inflation.[42] Most of these supplies were sourced from the Kenya Farmers Association (KFA) or directly from European farmers in Nakuru and Ravine districts.[43] District administrators arranged the imports, occasionally signing contracts with producers to supply grain at fixed prices, and contracted transport companies to move the supplies.[44] Similar trends were seen elsewhere. During 1935, food to the value of £50,000 was imported into Kitui through the commercial system. This was paid for with African livestock, which was in turn exported through official channels.[45] Here the KFA or private producers and traders, acting in concert with local officers, conducted the distribution of relief—a function that had been handled by the Native Affairs Department in 1929.

In Baringo, direct aid (in the form of famine relief) appears to have been necessary only for relatively remote, under-serviced areas (such as the rugged 'Tugen fringe') which traders were unable or unwilling to supply.[46] In fact, the commercial grain trade constituted a far greater source of food access than state relief. In the early 1930s, Baringo residents purchased around six times more food through commercial channels than the amount distributed under relief programmes. This commercial-centred system of grain imports was greatly stimulated and facilitated by the construction of roads, themselves often built as part of relief works. By the late 1920s, the travel time from Nakuru to the Baringo District headquarters at Kabarnet had been halved, from ten to five hours. Grain traders were thus able to traverse the district to an unprecedented extent.[47]

[42] P. D. Little, *The Elusive Granary: Herder, Farmer, and State in Northern Kenya* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 43–4.

[43] Ibid.

[44] Ibid.

[45] M. O'Leary, 'Responses to Drought in Kitui District, Kenya', *Disasters* 4 (1980): 321.

[46] For a similar situation in Southern Rhodesia, see Iliffe, *Famine in Zimbabwe*, 87.

[47] Little, *Elusive Granary*, 45.

It is worth noting—for this would be an important factor in future years—that this kind of system provided a major market for settler-grown grain. Many large-scale settler farmers in Nakuru, who had lost their export market during the Depression, benefited greatly from the trade in relief supplies to Baringo. As Little has noted, providing food to drought victims was 'good business' for some commercial producers and traders.[48] Settler maize growers, supported by state subsidies, were able to outcompete African farmers, who in any case suffered restrictions on their produce sales to local Indian traders. These factors combined to disrupt local production and trade in Baringo, and contributed to the development of a food system that was highly dependent on maize imports.[49]

The elaboration of more localized anti-scarcity systems was possible largely due to the decentralization of local revenue collection and expenditure in the form of the LNCs. Indeed, the early 1930s continued and intensified the trend for officials to rely on LNCs to bear some of the costs for relief measures (also see Chap. 4). The amounts that individual councils allocated for these purposes varied according to their capacity to raise funds through local rates, which in turn reflected their proximity to marketing and employment opportunities.[50] In some cases, the amounts were substantial. In South Nyanza, for example, the LNC in the area worst affected by the 1931 scarcity handed over almost its entire surplus budget of £5000 to the district commissioner to help relieve distress. This, in turn, was supplemented by a vote of £2350 from the Kisii LNC.[51] In 1934, the LNC in Digo set aside one-third of its available funds of £1500, and was prepared to contribute more.[52]

Figure 5.3 indicates that, generally speaking, LNC expenditure on famine relief rose rapidly in the early 1930s and in some years compared favourably with spending on other key services. LNC budget votes could also be supplemented by treasury grants if they were considered

[48] Ibid., 44.

[49] Ibid., 44–5.

[50] Gardner, *Taxing Colonial Africa*, 174.

[51] Officials used these funds to order 1000 tons of maize: 500 from Kisumu and the remainder from the KFA office at Nakuru; CPK, *KLC Debates 1931*, vol. 1, 17 June 1931, 180.

[52] CPK, *KLC Debates 1934*, vol. 1, 15 February 1934, 62. In Kitui, the local council's famine relief budget was over £1700 for famine relief in 1934, and over £20,000 the following year. This money was used to supply food to those working on famine relief works such as roads and seed farms; O'Leary, 'Responses', 321.

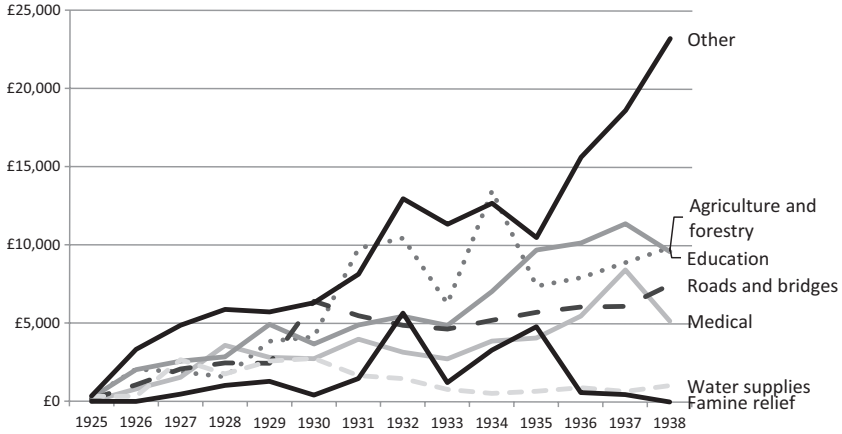


Fig. 5.3 Local Native Council expenditure, Kenya, 1925–1938 (1913 prices) (*Source*: Gardner, *Taxing Colonial Africa*, Table 7.2)

inadequate.[53] Generally, until the 1940s, LNC expenditure was capped, the idea being that one-quarter of their funds should be kept as a famine reserve.[54] In this way, administrators, strapped by the 1930s drive for government austerity, sought to pass on the unpredictable financial burden of famine relief. At the same time, they looked to LNCs to take over greater responsibility and administrative authority for road construction as an anti-famine precaution.[55] As I discuss below, they were increasingly prone to consider the state's anti-scarcity role as falling within the improvement

[53] For example, when famine threatened Tharaka in April 1930, the LNC allocated £150 towards relief. Administrative officers advised the governor to supplement this amount by a further monthly payment of £250 until crops were ready to be reaped; TNA: CO 533/392/15, Grigg to Passfield (letter), 12 April 1930.

[54] A. Clayton and D. C. Savage, *Government and Labour in Kenya, 1895–1963* (London: Cass, 1974), 202 n. 26.

[55] TNA: CO 533/517/6, Rennie to MacDonald (letter), 15 February 1940.

and regulation of agricultural production and marketing, as a facet of economic development more generally.[56]

Arguably, however, such trends represented more than an interest in decentralizing pecuniary functions. In addition to delegating financial responsibility, central officials also increasingly relied upon LNCs to inform and advise the government on the local food situation and the responses required in times of scarcity.[57] A degree of political responsibility for famine could be decentralized in this way. Indeed, the 1930s also saw officials extend the powers of 'native authorities' within the system of famine relief (see Chap. 3). This was expressed by the 1937 Native Authority Ordinance, which enabled provincial or district officials to direct local 'headmen' to issue orders in conjunction with the Native Foodstuffs Ordinance. These orders could include making people work on relief schemes or moving them to places where they could be fed. Headmen could also enforce the cultivation of land and prevent food exports. They faced stiff penalties if they neglected to enforce any orders issued to them by administrative officials.[58]

What we find, then, is that the Depression of the early 1930s saw officials resort to 'decentralized' forms of state control over the financing and distribution of famine relief. This entailed relying on local administrators and LNCs to manage and finance relief functions, with the central state only providing support when local capacity was exhausted. It also meant

[56] This argument was made by Conway Harvey (elected member for Nyanza) as a response to the famine relief funds voted for coastal districts in 1934: 'I consider it is the duty of government to do everything humanly possible to concentrate on the production of foodstuffs and crops suitable to native agriculture in the various districts'; CPK, *KLC Debates 1934*, vol. 1, 15 February 1934, 63. It appears to have been a more general trend of settler political pressure. Later in the year, A. C. Hoey blamed the consistent need for famine relief expenditure and tax remissions on the lack of a government policy for the economic development of the reserves, particularly around produce marketing; CPK, *KLC Debates 1934*, Fourth Session, 19 October 1934, 615.

[57] For example, describing the steps taken to deal with famine conditions in Kitui District in early 1930, the governor wrote: 'The possibility of a famine was first foreshadowed at a meeting of the Kitui Local Native Council on 23rd February … On May the 17th, the Local Native Council met again to discuss the situation resulting from the failure of the April rains over a great portion of the district, and on the advice of that body steps were taken in June through the Central Food Board and the Kenya Farmers Association to meet the shortage expected in July'; TNA: CO 533/392/15, Grigg to Passfield (letter), 12 April 1930.

[58] People disobeying an order from a headman were liable for a fine of 30 shillings, while a disobedient headman would face a maximum fine of 600 shillings or six months' imprisonment; CPK, *Official Gazette*, 22 December 1936, 1509–10.

continuing to rely on, and indeed enhancing, the bureaucratized 'native authority' system of famine response.

While this localized relief system increasingly looked to the commercial market to supply and distribute food supplies, many, if not most, African people pursued other coping strategies during the Depression. One strategy was to boost agricultural production to secure greater cash income. Anderson and Throup have characterized the African response to the Depression as 'aggressive', involving rapid expansion of maize acreages in order to compensate for the low profits realizable per unit.[59] Women did most of this work.[60] Moreover, the process of expansion was made possible and was shaped by ongoing processes of African social differentiation: wealthier households were able to employ additional labour to rapidly expand plough cultivation of maize (often aided by male migrant labour remittances); poorer households could only expand production to a lesser extent or mainly practised subsistence.[61] An intensified government programme of agricultural 'betterment' also facilitated this expansion. I will return to this point in the following section.

A different kind of coping strategy available to poorer households—one that was more survivalist than accumulative, and largely bypassed official channels—was to rely on older patterns of migration and trade. In 1935, as much as a quarter of the Kamba population of Kitui District was estimated to have migrated to neighbouring districts to secure food. The majority of food supplies were sourced by people working, trading and bartering for food across the Tana River.[62] Kikuyu farmers traded significant amounts of maize with their hungry Kamba neighbours. Many of the former were once again in a position to benefit substantially from the drop in stock prices, and accumulated large animal herds.[63] The precipitous drop in livestock prices meant that vast numbers of animals had to be

[59] D. Anderson, 'Depression, Dust Bowl, Demography, and Drought: The Colonial State and Soil Conservation in East Africa during the 1930s', *African Affairs* 83 (1984): 325.

[60] Mackenzie, *Land, Ecology and Resistance*, 140–2.

[61] D. Anderson and D. Throup, 'The Agrarian Economy of Central Province, Kenya, 1918 to 1939', in *The Economies of Africa and Asia in the Inter-war Depression*, ed. I. Brown, 2nd edition (London and New York: Routledge, 2015), 21–2; G. Kitching, *Class and Economic Change in Kenya: The Making of an African Petite-Bourgeoisie* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1980), 90–1.

[62] O'Leary, 'Responses', 321.

[63] Mackenzie, *Land, Ecology and Resistance*, 140.

driven to markets and sold.[64] In the six months from June to December 1932, Kitui residents (officially) sold over 15,000 head of cattle.[65] The balance of these coping strategies would soon shift, however. From about 1935, reduced livestock herds, coupled with a recovery of labour demand, encouraged more Kamba people to seek urban employment. As a result, wage labour and cash trade would become more central to household subsistence strategies, particularly for those lacking land resources.

Overall, it seems that in Kenya 'famines that kill' became less common and severe towards the latter years of the 1930s. Why should this have been so? Better rainfall and the retreat of the worst of the locust swarms from 1934 onwards played a role, just as improvements in medical services may have reduced disease-related mortality in times of scarcity.[66] We can also look to biological and ecological factors. Marc Dawson, for example, argues that the 1930s saw the achievement of a new 'ecological balance' between humans and their disease-causing parasites. This homeostatic relation was reached after an initial period of disruption driven by colonial policies and practices, including forest clearing and agricultural expansion.[67] Such natural explanations can be considered alongside the effects of an improved system of rail and road transport, which helped to detect and manage scarcities in a more responsive and effective manner, as we saw in the case of Baringo District, where improved means of transportation played a vital enabling role.[68]

[64] Simiyu reports that the price of an ox fell from between 60 and 100 shillings to 10 shillings; that of a goat from 10 to 2 shillings; V. Simiyu, 'Land and Politics in Ukambani from the End of the 19th Century up to 1933', *Présence Africaine* 89 (1974): 126.

[65] Ibid.

[66] Iliffe argues, speaking of colonial Africa generally, that a reduction in famine mortality was due to factors such as the increased use of motor transport, the spread of anti-famine crops such as cassava, the prevalence of wage employment and the development of colonial medical services (which separated dearth from mortality by controlling famine-related epidemic diseases such as smallpox); J. Iliffe, *Africans: The History of a Continent*, 2nd edition (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 247; J. Iliffe, *The African Poor: A History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 157–9.

[67] For example, the incidence of bubonic plague in the Kikuyu reserves lessened as a new balance was reached among the (plague-carrying) wild rodent population. This corrected the advantage these animals had gained during the initial period of colonial agricultural development; M. H. Dawson, 'Health, Nutrition, and Population in Central Kenya, 1890–1945', in *African Population and Capitalism: Historical Perspectives*, ed. D. D. Cordell and J. W. Gregory (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1987), 211.

[68] J. F. Munro, *Colonial Rule and the Kamba: Social Change in the Kenya Highlands 1889–1939* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), 191–2.

As a result of a combination of all these factors, there was a general reduction in the scale of famine mortality. Regardless of causality, the evidence suggests that a different pattern of scarcity was emerging in Kenya by the end of the 1930s. Acute, localized famine in remote areas appeared to be yielding to more 'widespread and lingering scarcity' that affected remote regions as well as those areas experiencing more intensive pressure from European settlement.[69] As John Iliffe notes of Southern Rhodesia, the cycles of dearth and abundance characteristic of earlier colonial times were giving way to a more geographically and temporally even distribution of food. However, reliance on cash purchases most likely fostered a less equal *social* distribution, as those with fewer cash resources would be left more vulnerable to regular scarcities. Furthermore, it seems probable that scarcity was starting to take the form of endemic malnutrition, primarily affecting the poor and weak, rather than massive mortal famine.[70]

We have seen that the early 1930s—the period of most acute economic depression in Kenya—witnessed considerable changes in the way that food shortages manifested. These, in turn, drove important shifts in the state provision of relief. The techniques employed were not radically different from those seen previously. The effect of economic depression was rather to consolidate certain official understandings of the problem of scarcity. The dynamics of depression further helped reframe food scarcity as being, in part, a matter of income and economic access, responses to which included remission and reduction of tax. Moreover, as I will show in the following section, it accelerated thinking around the need to improve and increase African agricultural production, for instance by extending state control over marketing, as a means to both boost incomes and secure food supplies.

Production and Marketing Policy

As a result of the adverse economic and environmental conditions described in the previous section, in the 1930s anti-scarcity thought and practice were increasingly tied up with the politics of agriculture and marketing in Kenya.

[69] Iliffe, *Famine in Zimbabwe*, 88.

[70] Iliffe, *Africans*, 247. For a discussion of this trend in Southern Rhodesia during the Depression years, see Iliffe, *Famine in Zimbabwe*, chapter 8.

There were two main aspects to this. The first was a continuation and intensification of state efforts towards the 'betterment' of African production (discussed in Chap. 4). Officials devoted more attention to altering the practice and substance of African agriculture to help manage the risk of food scarcity. This typically involved encouraging African farmers to plant a greater variety of crops, as well as 'improved' varieties of each.[71] More widespread cultivation of drought-resistant and higher-yielding crops would mean more food being available locally, thereby increasing the chances of household and district self-sufficiency.

For these purposes, the Kenyan Agriculture Department initiated a programme in the early 1930s to select and breed crop varieties suitable to African conditions.[72] In Fort Hall, the efforts of agricultural officers came to rest on issuing large quantities of seed for 'flat white' and quickly maturing maize varieties to noteworthy individuals or 'progressive farmers'.[73] Officials continued to try to 'improve' African agricultural methods through an invigorated programme of rural education and practical instruction.[74] The Agriculture Department also set about attempting to calculate the potential for expanded cash crop cultivation in the reserves while keeping an eye trained on the need to maintain food sufficiency.[75] Thus, the early 1930s saw the previous decade's policy of agricultural 'betterment' being consolidated and extended with an explicit anti-scarcity motivation.

Secondly, other fundamental changes in economic and agricultural policy were afoot. In the midst of economic depression, many African colonial governments, including that of Kenya, had to urgently rebalance their treasury revenues. By November 1934, for example, the revised estimates of government revenue indicated that Kenya was facing a budget deficit for the sixth straight year. This was owing both to a shortfall in revenue

[71] Other official strategies included planting drought-resistant crops such as *muhogo* (cassava), planting a greater diversity of crops (e.g. potatoes, beans, peas and other pulses, legumes, sorghums and roots besides staple cereals), planting quickly maturing crops or quickly maturing varieties of staple crops, and planting tree crops; TNA: CO 533/517/6, Rennie to MacDonald (letter), 15 February 1940.

[72] Kitching, *Class and Economic Change*, 62.

[73] Mackenzie, *Land, Ecology and Resistance*, 137, 140.

[74] Again in Fort Hall, the number of African agricultural instructors increased from 12 in 1933 to 36 in 1936, with the LNC covering all the costs of employment by the latter date; ibid., 140.

[75] Anderson and Throup, 'Myth', 330.

resulting from drought and successive harvest failures and to emergency expenditure on famine relief and anti-locust campaigns.[76] At the same time, the state faced growing settler demands for support and protection, particularly as export prices for staple commodities such as maize and wheat dropped below their domestic market value. Administrators had to devise mechanisms of support that moved beyond protective customs tariffs.[77] As discussed above, tax reform was a potential way to boost government revenue while providing relief from poverty. Yet supporting settler farmers, particularly cereal growers, was a different matter.

One means was to directly support farmers through statutory marketing boards. A Maize Control Board had been established in Southern Rhodesia in 1931; another was founded in Northern Rhodesia soon after.[78] These had various purposes. Nominally, they sought to stabilize the food supply of towns and mines.[79] Doing so apparently depended on providing guaranteed minimum prices to producers, using profits from better years to compensate for harder times.[80] Farmers thus insulated from price fluctuations on the global market would, so the argument went, maintain their levels of cereal production at a consistent and adequate level. This required controlling who could make bulk purchases of maize, to prevent some producers and traders from undercutting the system.[81]

Stabilizing the food supply also required the pooling of all marketed maize, so that every producer could take a proportionate share of low export prices as well as higher domestic prices. In reality, however, statutory marketing boards acted as a means to guarantee a market for settler farmers, and to cross-subsidize their production. In Northern Rhodesia, for example, the Maize Control Board was established in 1936 to allow settler producers to secure a section of the domestic market at a time of

[76] CPK, *KLC Debates 1934*, Fourth Session, 20 November 1934, 742.

[77] The heavy import tariffs that Kenyan authorities introduced on imported goods in the early 1920s were an important source of treasury income. Falling revenue from imports in the 1920s and 1930s indicated that the tariffs were indeed curbing imports. This limited the scope for further tariff protection. See Gardner, *Taxing Colonial Africa*, 79–80.

[78] The Northern Rhodesian Maize Control Board was established in 1936; S. M. Makings, 'Agricultural Change in Northern Rhodesia/Zambia: 1945–1965', *Food Research Institute Studies* 6 (1966): 200; K. P. Vickery, 'Saving Settlers: Maize Control in Northern Rhodesia', *Journal of Southern African Studies* 11 (1985): 228.

[79] J. McCann, *Maize and Grace: Africa's Encounter with a New World Crop* (Cambridge, MA, and London: Harvard University Press, 2005), 147.

[80] Gardner, *Taxing Colonial Africa*, 81.

[81] McCann, *Maize and Grace*, 147.

low export prices and concerns over possible overproduction.[82] By enforcing a dual pricing scheme for white and African growers, or imposing levies on locally sold goods, these boards attempted to ensure that the costs of subsidizing settler farmers would be passed on to African producers and consumers, rather than borne by the state.[83]

Similarly, settler farmers in Kenya pushed for state assistance when the ravages of global economic depression started to be felt. Protecting the Kenyan wheat industry was a relatively simple matter, as wheat was a crop produced by a small number of farmers and consumed mainly by immigrant communities. Consequently, the 1930 Sale of Wheat Ordinance established a Wheat Advisory Board, with the KFA appointed as sole agent for local produce as well as imports.[84] Settler maize growers, again through the KFA, also pressed for support. In response, the government, railway and harbours granted a reduction in freight and storage charges for maize exports in 1930. In the same year, the state paid a subsidy of £81,000 to the maize industry.[85]

More generally, a central Agricultural Advances Board was established in 1930 to assist poorer settlers without sufficient access to credit to help repay their mortgages. A Land Bank was also formed to provide long-term credit to settler estates at well below prevailing commercial credit rates.[86] It was hoped to use this lending as a basis to pursue a programme of agricultural diversification. Monoculture maize farms (practising what by now was pejoratively termed 'maize-mining', and largely decimated by economic depression) would be reformed in the direction of 'mixed farming'.[87] Unfortunately for the farmers, the Land Bank spent nearly all of its capital

[82] R. E. Baldwin, *Economic Development and Export Growth: A Study of Northern Rhodesia, 1920–1960* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: California University Press, 1966), 155; D. Rimmer, 'The Economic Imprint of Colonialism and Domestic Food Supplies in British Tropical Africa', in *Imperialism, Colonialism and Hunger: East and Central Africa*, ed. R. I. Rotberg (Lexington, MA: Lexington Books, 1983), 150, 152.

[83] McCann, *Maize and Grace*, 148.

[84] B. J. Berman, *Control and Crisis in Colonial Kenya: The Dialectic of Domination* (London: James Currey; Nairobi: East African Educational Publishers; and Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 1990), 168; E. A. Brett, *Colonialism and Underdevelopment in East Africa: The Politics of Economic Change 1919–1939* (London: Heinemann, 1973), 204.

[85] CPK, *Annual Report for 1930*, 7. Subsidies to a total value of £143,000 were provided in 1931–1932; Berman, *Control and Crisis*, 169.

[86] However, many settlers were already so embroiled in debt that they were unable to provide sufficient security to secure loans from the bank; ibid., 167.

[87] Kitching, *Class and Economic Change*, 57.

on buying out settler mortgage debt; scarcely anything remained to implement the comforting dream of mixed farming.[88]

These forms of support would not suffice as the Depression ground on. The KFA sought longer-term solutions targeting maize growers. In particular, they wanted to ensure higher prices for settler maize, which in turn meant securing control over the better-priced domestic market.[89] They proposed several plans for state maize control, each of which was rebuffed—but not because of official opposition. In 1933, the KFA submitted a scheme, similar to the Southern Rhodesian system, whereby all settler and African maize would be directed to a central pool.[90] Exporting some of this pool, and then sharing out the losses, would sustain high internal prices. Another effort was made in 1936, when a draft Maize Control Bill was introduced in Legco. This bill was justified by three principles: one, that the only maize exported would be that surplus to the colony's internal requirements; two, that all growers should share the 'burden' of export; and, three, that controls to maintain a high internal maize price were necessary because of the unpredictable marketing behaviour of African maize farmers.[91] During the 1920s, the KFA had effectively excluded African producers from the relatively lucrative export market. Now that export prices had fallen well below domestic rates, they courted the internal market and wanted Africans to share 'the burden of export'.[92]

However, a central maize control board would not be established in Kenya until 1942 (discussed in Chap. 6). In large part this was due to political factors or, more accurately, to conflicts between different factions of settler capital. 'Consuming interests' such as Kenyan sisal and coffee growers (in addition to urban consumers more generally) still commanded considerable economic and political clout. Planters contributed a greater share of Kenyan trade than did maize farmers, and their costs of labour (which included maize rations) were a key determinant of their profitability.[93] Essentially, the schemes put forward by the KFA rested on the

[88] Lonsdale, 'Depression', 105–6.

[89] Berman, *Control and Crisis*, 169–70.

[90] R. M. A. van Zwanenberg and A. King, *An Economic History of Kenya and Uganda, 1800–1970* (London: Macmillan, 1975), 211.

[91] Ibid.

[92] P. A. Memon, 'Colonial Marketing and Urban Development in the African Reserves', *Journal of Eastern African Research and Development* 6 (1976): 213; Mosley, *Settler Economies*, 47.

[93] Lonsdale, 'Depression', 106.

argument that African maize growers would be unable to satisfy the colony's domestic demand. Settler maize was therefore presented as an 'essential' industry deserving of 'a national effort to assist it and safeguard its interests'.[94] This was necessary both to prevent famine (maize being the key African staple) and to sustain other important local industries. Consumers, however, feared that a greater export surplus (stimulated by subsidies or the prospect of higher domestic prices) would have to be compensated for by pushing up domestic prices even further.

The KFA was unable to settle the argument that a higher supply price was justified or that consuming interests would be sufficiently compensated by exemptions or concessions, as ultimately had been a necessary condition of maize control in Southern Rhodesia. Plantation lobbies mobilized against any measure that could possibly raise the price of food staples and hence their production costs (see Chap. 4). After all, they had also suffered a sharp drop in export earnings after 1929 (see Fig. 5.4). Officials were unable to bridge the divide, and this opposition seems to have been responsible for the withdrawal of the 1936 Maize Control Bill.[95] As a result, the KFA was unable to control the internal maize market—a necessary step to securing higher domestic prices.[96] Maize was thus one crucial failure of the Kenyan state's Depression-era strategy of corporatism.[97]

The problem for Kenyan officials was twofold. On the one hand, they had to fend off a powerful and increasingly radical block of non-creditworthy settler farmers who blamed a prodigal and incompetent government for their woes.[98] Unlike its southern colonial counterparts, Kenya lacked the mineral industry and wealth that could potentially shoulder the costs of agricultural subsidy and protection. Only the state could carry

[94] The quote is from the 1935 interim report of the Agricultural Indebtedness Committee, cited in H. C. Willan, W. H. Billington and J. L. Riddoch, *Report of the Food Shortage Commission of Enquiry* (Nairobi, 1943), 9; also see 46.

[95] Berman, *Control and Crisis*, 170; Mosley, *Settler Economies*, 47–50; Van Zwanenberg and King, *Economic History*, 211–12. Gardner notes the Kenya Coffee Board's opposition to proposals for a minimum maize price. The Colonial Office agreed that sacrificing the coffee trade would be of greater loss to the colony than the maize export industry; Gardner, *Taxing Colonial Africa*, 82.

[96] Mosley, *Settler Economies*, 47–50.

[97] Lonsdale, 'Depression', 110–11.

[98] C. S. Nicholls, *Red Strangers: The White Tribe of Kenya* (London: Timewell Press, 2005), 187.

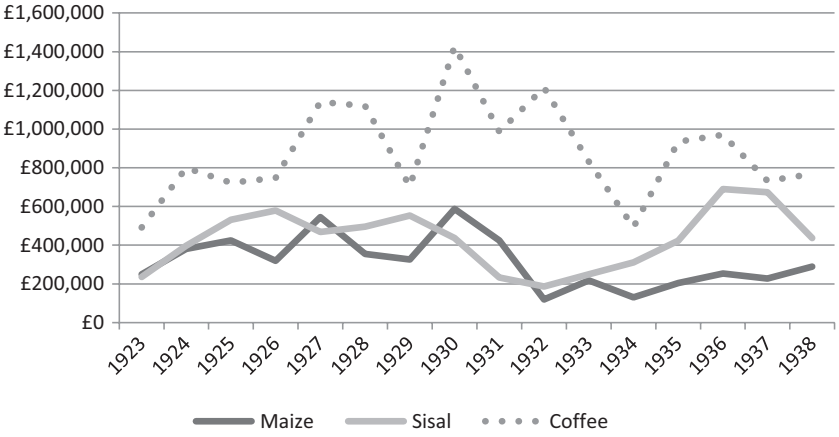


Fig. 5.4 Settler export earnings for key crops, Kenya, 1923–1938 (*Source*: Anderson and Throup, 'Agrarian Economy', appendix 1)

that burden.[99] Yet, ridden with debt, it had few (if any) surplus funds to prop up floundering settler farmers. And even if administrators had access to the capital, there was no guarantee that this assistance would be successful or repayable. Nor was the necessary degree of political will assured.[100] Nevertheless, through credit provided by the Land Bank, the state now had a vested interest in maintaining settler land values through increased production.[101] Statutory maize control might have offered a solution to

[99] Lonsdale, 'Depression', 105.

[100] Ibid., also 108. Speaking of the government support that had been given to the maize industry up to the end of 1932, Governor Sir Joseph Byrne stated in Legco: 'The view may also be advanced as to whether it would be right or economically sound to continue to make further grants to the maize industry, having regard to the Colony's depleted financial resources, the absence of any assurance that the money advanced would be repaid within a reasonable time, and the likelihood that such a policy of assistance would not be confined to the present crop'; CPK, *KLC Debates 1932*, 14 December 1932, 310. When contrasted with settler demands, Byrne took a somewhat 'laissez-faire' view of the country's agricultural crisis. Indeed, perceptions of his incompetence, his hard-line stance against settler politics, his reluctance to support white farmers and his favouring the imposition of income tax earned him significant notoriety among Kenya's white population; Nicholls, *Red Strangers*, 187; Lonsdale, 'Depression', 106–7.

[101] Lonsdale, 'Depression', 112.

this dilemma, but all proposals seemed doomed in the face of Kenya's political and economic factionalism.

On the other hand, Africans had few employment opportunities to earn cash income. This not only left people vulnerable to scarcities (by removing the food entitlements of wage labour) but also undermined state revenue in a cyclical manner.[102] It threatened the entire fiscal basis of the colony, as around half of all African tax revenue was used to subsidize settler industries.[103] Meanwhile, the rapidly decreasing demand for labour on settler estates weakened the strength of arguments against encouraging African commercial production.[104] In any case, from some officials it was already becoming clear that African producers were weathering the Depression more successfully than settlers, and therefore deserved greater support.[105]

In the light of these problems, something that both settler maize producers and officials could agree on was a strategy of boosting African production for export. For settler producers, this would open up part of the more lucrative (and politically malleable) domestic market, enabling them to export more economically and share any losses with African farmers. For the state, expanded production would offset low export prices and compensate for their falling customs revenue.[106] Administrators could either spend this income directly or, indirectly, use it to borrow capital and support settler farmers through the Land Bank.[107] Unlike in Southern Rhodesia, then, Kenyan officials 'intervened to prevent the destruction of the peasant option' as the basis for economic solvency.[108] A comprehensive

[102] Not only might the unemployed not be able to pay taxes, but their increased vulnerability to scarcity might make tax remissions and reductions, or even relief expenditure, more common and necessary. So there was a 'vicious cycle' of scarcity and revenue reduction.

[103] Anderson and Throup, 'Myth', 329.

[104] N. Swainson, *The Development of Corporate Capitalism in Kenya, 1918–1977* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 1980), 35.

[105] This notion was based 'on the grounds that [Africans'] lower costs of production would allow them to cope better with falling export prices'; Gardner, *Taxing Colonial Africa*, 82–3; also Anderson and Throup, 'Myth', 329; Lonsdale, 'Depression', 106.

[106] For the same reasons, the logic and objective of increasing African production were also adopted in Tanganyika during the early years of the Depression; C. C. Fourshey, '"The Remedy for Hunger Is Bending the Back": Maize and British Agricultural Policy in Southwestern Tanzania 1920–1960', *International Journal of African Historical Studies* 41 (2008): 237; Iliffe, *Modern History*, 349.

[107] Kitching, *Class and Economic Change*, 60.

[108] Anderson and Throup, 'Myth', 329.

agrarian strategy emerged as a necessity and as a compromise: both settler and African production would be maximized. Combined production was the only way Kenyan goods could be exported competitively; it was the only means to fill the freight carriages and coffers of the railway. But the problem also required a delicate touch. African production would have to be released onto the export market, but in a restrained way, so that it 'floated settler production rather than swamped it'.[109] The key means to do so was a strategy familiar to many other colonial African contexts: 'organized marketing'.[110]

Increasing African production for export was the primary objective of the 1935 Marketing of Native Produce Ordinance. Based on similar legislation from Uganda and Tanganyika,[111] the bill was originally gazetted in 1934.[112] However, it suffered delays as the result of concerted opposition launched by Indian interests, who feared that it expressed a setter motive to squeeze small traders out of the economy and Indians from the country more generally.[113] In fact, interest in controlling and facilitating the marketing of produce from the African reserves long predated the bill, stretching back to the early 1920s, but successive efforts by unofficial Legco members to push for a concerted state policy on the matter had proven fruitless.[114] In some respects, the ordinance was an elaboration of earlier

[109] Lonsdale, 'Depression', 110.

[110] Ibid., 107–8.

[111] The Ugandan precedent was the 1932 Native Produce Marketing Ordinance. Jørgensen argues that it was designed to protect established (predominantly Asian) traders from the competition of smaller-scale (mainly African) traders; J. J. Jørgensen, *Structural Dependence and Economic Nationalism in Uganda, 1888–1974* (Ottawa: McGill University Press, 1977), 165 n. 107. Van Zwanenberg and King, by contrast, argue that in Uganda, as in Kenya, 'part of the scheme was to offer European traders privileged trading positions in order to oust the Asians and Africans from an area where they had the monopoly'; *Economic History*, 212.

[112] CPK, *Official Gazette*, 10 July 1934, 893–9.

[113] See the opposition presented to the bill in Legco by Indian elected members Shams-ud-Deen and J. B. Pandya; CPK, *KLC Debates 1935*, vol. 1, 3 July 1935, 183–215; 8 July 1935, 223–9. The Government of India commissioned a study into the effects of the proposed legislation, and made repeated representations to the India Office to express their concern; see TNA: CO 533/447/3 and CO 852/12/2, both passim. The fears of Kenyan Indians were justified to an extent. White elected members did not hide their animosity towards 'unscrupulous' Indian traders. J. G. Kirkwood, for example, claimed that they 'have been exploiting the natives ever since they have traded among them'; CPK, *KLC Debates 1935*, vol. 1, 8 July 1935, 238.

[114] See the historical summary of African produce marketing as an issue presented to Legco by H. F. Ward (Nairobi North); CPK, *KLC Debates 1932*, 9 May 1932, 101–2, 104.

efforts seeking to facilitate agricultural cooperation, centralize markets, license traders and extend and make compulsory a system of crop inspection and grading.[115] But it also went further than previous efforts: it was more comprehensive, in principle covering any sort of African produce, and provided for a wider range of controls and regulations.[116]

What did this ordinance seek to do? The main argument, presented in Legco by the acting chief native commissioner, was summarized as follows: improved methods of marketing would boost production, raise rural income levels (and, with them, tax and customs revenues), facilitate trade, and in turn help to 'promote the general welfare of Kenya'.[117] Although this was not explicitly stated, officials also hoped that higher incomes would create an African market for highly priced foods produced by settlers, such as wheat, butter and cheese.[118] 'Organization', the acting commissioner stated with the authority of someone reciting a truism, was 'a vital need for every trading and producing interest'. It was a need that had been met in other British colonies and in Kenya by settler industries. Yet Africans lacked access to the education, 'time-honoured commercial traditions' and business experience (enjoyed by Europeans) to organize themselves properly. Consequently, assisting Africans to market their produce was a 'duty which the government can no longer neglect'.[119] Settlers would have to organize and save themselves 'industry by industry'. Africans, by contrast, 'had to be organized by the state for its own salvation'.[120]

More specifically, the 1935 ordinance sought to stabilize and centralize production and trade. Stabilizing producer incomes was necessary to ensure a stable output of goods for export. This required something of a balancing act. Producer prices had to be high enough to incentivize the production of more and better-quality goods. But prices should not be

[115] Lonsdale, 'Depression', 109; C. C. Robertson, *Trouble Showed the Way: Women, Men, and Trade in the Nairobi Area, 1890–1990* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1997), 88.

[116] CPK, *Official Gazette*, 10 July 1934, 893.

[117] (S. H. La Fontaine) CPK, *KLC Debates 1935*, vol. 1, 2 July 1935, 179.

[118] Kitching, *Class and Economic Change*, 60–1.

[119] CPK, *KLC Debates 1935*, vol. 1, 2 July 1935, 174. The director of agriculture, H. B. Waters, later echoed this interpretation of public responsibility: 'Government would be lacking in its duty if it failed to take the necessary steps to ensure that the native gets the highest possible price for the produce he is advised to produce, a result which can be achieved only by organized marketing'; CPK, *KLC Debates 1935*, vol. 1, 8 July 1935, 255.

[120] Lonsdale, 'Depression', 108.

too high so as to make exporting uneconomic. In short, African farmers should receive a 'fair deal' for their produce. 'Fair' meant being paid in cash and according to quality (at rates determined relative to the costs of transport and prices ruling in global markets).[121] At the same time, produce would have to satisfy certain quality standards to gain the confidence of overseas consumers.[122] These objectives called for two things. The first was a system of restriction, control and inspection over the buying of produce, in particular to eliminate bartering, predatory trading, 'cheating' practices (such as short weighing) and inadequate packaging. The second was a means to circumvent the 'cut-throat competition' of small-scale dealers, and to put trade exclusively in the hands of large produce dealers with access to capital and 'knowledge' of markets.[123]

How should this be done? The ordinance basically operated according to three main logics, each of which entailed spatial elements. First, it enclosed trade. Echoing the Native Foodstuffs Ordinance, it granted the governor the power to declare areas (administrative districts or parts thereof) in which the purchase and sale of African produce should be controlled and regulated. Second, it concentrated commercial activity. Granting exclusive licences and controlling the establishment and operation of produce markets would serve to reduce both the total number of selling points and the number of traders. These effects were seen as

[121] CPK, *KLC Debates 1935*, vol. 1, 2 July 1935, 170.

[122] TNA: CO 852/12/2, Acting governor's deputy to Cunliffe-Lister (letter), 18 May 1935.

[123] As H. Harragin, the attorney general, explained, excessive and aggressive competition between traders increased producer prices to an unwarranted extent, thereby nullifying 'the prospects of making the produce a paying concern, which is the only way that you build up an export market'; CPK, *KLC Debates 1935*, vol. 1, 2 July 1935, 170. The acting chief native commissioner elaborated: there were more traders in African produce than was 'justified by the economic circumstances of the reserves and by the amount of available trade', so the bill sought to 'restrict the number of such licences to an economic level'; ibid., 177.

advantageous.[124] Spatial concentration also facilitated government inspection and lowered handling and transport costs. Third, it separated the retail and produce trade in markets and trading centres, thereby isolating African farmers from the financial precarity of 'the small retail shopkeeper'.[125] In these ways, the market was re-created as a particular kind of governable space.

What were the ordinance's effects? Firstly, setting aside the inevitable financial exclusion and hardships of many small-scale traders, it appears that it did indeed help stimulate African agriculture through enhanced producer prices.[126] Prices paid to farmers in Nyanza jumped from less than two shillings per bag in 1935 to between five and seven shillings from 1937 to 1940. There, the volume of maize rose by threefold over the course of the decade.[127] Land values and trade in agricultural implements rose in conjunction.[128] More and more African farmers were earning cash incomes from their produce—particularly those located near marketing facilities. Before the end of the decade, it could be said of the Vihiga area of western Kenya that 'the sale of maize in colonial markets characterized

[124] The vision of trade and wealth expressed by the Marketing of Native Produce Ordinance was that of a zero-sum game: there was a limit to the total wealth obtainable in the territory. More traders would reduce the total profit to be made from a crop. Higher producer prices would have to be compensated for by an increase in the cost of retail goods. There was no sense of small-scale traders as producers of wealth. This reflected a widespread observance (by settlers and officials) of a modified physiocratic or Ricardian doctrine 'that land was the source of all value'. As Lonsdale noted: 'They thought that production was best increased by investing the surplus retained by farmers and the state rather than through the redistributed profits of trade'; 'Depression', 108–9. However, many, if not most, did not strictly observe the physiocratic doctrine that 'freedom of commerce and of the circulation of grain' should be 'the fundamental principle of economic government'; M. Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population: Lectures at the Collège de France 1977–1978*, trans. G. Burchell (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 33.

[125] TNA: CO 852/12/2, Acting governor's deputy to Cunliffe-Lister (letter), 18 May 1935; CPK, *KLC Debates 1935*, vol. 1, 2 July 1935, 177. A significant proportion of the trade in African produce was conducted by Indian dealers performing a dual role of retailer and produce merchant. Government officials saw this as encouraging barter and unfair prices paid for produce; Memon, 'Marketing', 205.

[126] Anderson and Throup, 'Myth', 329; Berman, *Control and Crisis*, 170; Lonsdale, 'Depression', 111.

[127] Lonsdale, 'Depression', 111–12.

[128] Ibid., 111.

the experience of the majority of households'.[129] For more households, subsistence was a matter of balancing cash income with expenditure. Secondly, the centralization and concentration of the marketing system opened the door for large, established firms and cooperatives (including the KFA) to buy in the reserves and gain control over a larger proportion of the African maize market.[130] By 1941, the KFA handled around 60 per cent of the total marketed output of African maize.[131] This did not, however, result in a significant increase in the internal maize price for settlers. Settlers were indeed swamped, rather than floated, by African production. Domestic prices and planted acreages of settler maize continued to decrease through the 1930s.[132]

Even if the system of inspection implied by the Marketing of Native Produce Ordinance was never completely realized owing to a lack of state

[129] R. M. Maxon, '"Fantastic Prices" in the Midst of "an Acute Food Shortage": Market, Environment, and the Colonial State in the 1943 Vihiga (Western Kenya) Famine', *African Economic History* 28 (2000): 30.

[130] Robertson, *Trouble Showed the Way*, 88. Whether assisting the KFA to monopolize the domestic market, given its troubles in securing statutory maize control, was part of the official intention behind the ordinance is unclear. Many studies depict the ordinance as a deliberate state effort to legalize a KFA monopoly and exclude either Indians or Africans (or both) from commercial trade. For example: Berman, *Control and Crisis*, 170; P. O. Ndege, 'Internal Trade in Kenya, 1895–1963', in *An Economic History of Kenya*, ed. W. R. Ochieng' and R. M. Maxon (Nairobi: East African Educational Publishers, 1992), 214; F. Cheru, 'External Dependence and National Urban Development Policy: A Structural Analysis of Graduate Unemployment in Nairobi, Kenya' (Ph.D. dissertation, Portland State University, 1983), 38. Others have seen the ordinance as part of a wider strategy to rescue settler agriculture, without a direct monopolistic objective. See Kitching, *Class and Economic Change*, 60–1; Lonsdale, 'Depression', 111; Van Zwanenberg and King, *Economic History*, 212. However, the actual justifications given for the ordinance suggest that increasing African production and income was a motivation equal to, if not greater than, restricting trade. Restriction of competition and the centralization of trade were part of the general official rationale of how wealth was generated and distributed.

[131] Lonsdale, 'Depression', 111; In Fort Hall District, the KFA took over operation of the LNC warehouse facilities from a private company in 1936; Mackenzie, *Land, Ecology and Resistance*, 135.

[132] I. R. G. Spencer, 'Settler Dominance, Agricultural Production and the Second World War in Kenya', *Journal of African History* 21 (1980): 505; Willan, Billington and Riddoch, *Report*, 67. Kitching argues that this failure was due to the KFA lacking the capital and capacity to secure enough physical possession of maize stocks in order to lift prices; *Class and Economic Change*, 61. Lonsdale sees it as a result of the intense degree of competition between the KFA and Indian traders (meaning smaller white farmers could not compete with Africans) coupled with the rapid growth of African production; 'Depression', 112.

resources and widespread evasion by producers and wholesalers through parallel markets,[133] the extension of marketing control which it facilitated would be critical for later efforts to implement statutory maize control. It enabled African traders and farmers to organize themselves and develop commercial and political links.[134] The centralization of commercial activity also encouraged urban primacy and polarization within the Kenyan space economy.[135] The marketing legislation thus helped consolidate the spatial and institutional nature of the Kenyan food market. Under its provisions, more supplies tended to pass through centralized channels of commerce and government, just as more people were starting to depend on this market for their food access.

How did this marketing legislation specifically relate to the problem of food scarcity? At this point, the link was not necessarily explicit. Averting or alleviating scarcity was not used as a major argument for marketing reforms. There was a connection, however, and this would become clearer during the Second World War (see Chap. 6). Essentially, marketing legislation represented the consolidation of a rationale that sought to ensure the production of an 'exportable surplus' of maize as insurance against internal food shortages. In other words, we see a logic whereby, in the event of a local shortage, the KFA or large firms would be able to divert supplies from the export market to the domestic market. This strategy had already been employed in the 1920s, particularly during the 1929–1930 famine (see Chap. 4). It became more attractive during the Depression, when domestic prices were considerably higher than international rates. Officials saw state intervention as necessary to guarantee this exportable surplus—one that must not be too large (because, if so, either producers would have to take a greater share of the 'burden of export' or domestic prices would rise), but equally it should not be too small (otherwise imports might be necessary). A balance needed to be performed: total maize production had to fall within a 'Goldilocks zone'.

With this kind of rationale and system, then, one can note at least three factors. First, the system consolidated the position of maize as Kenya's chief staple—the principal measure of the safety of the colony's food supply. Second, it represented a more calculative approach to food

[133] Berman, *Control and Crisis*, 170; Kitching, *Class and Economic Change*, 60–1; Robertson, *Trouble Showed the Way*, 88–9.

[134] Lonsdale, 'Depression', 111–12.

[135] Memon, 'Marketing', 215–16. The quote is from Lonsdale, 'Depression', 109.

self-sufficiency. Balancing food production and supply between the margins of domestic demand and exportable reserves required statistics and 'definite figures' to assess the food situation, and a set of techniques to help meet that assessment with accuracy. Failure to do so could spell human or fiscal catastrophe. And, third, it invoked a figure of the African farmer as an economic subject. Far from the stubborn incorrigible for whom compulsion was a necessary evil (as we have seen in Chap. 3), one now finds a subject constituted of (and governable through) desires, incentives and motivations. In fact, part of the argument in favour of the Marketing of Native Produce Ordinance was its potential to 'have a definite psychological effect on the native producers'.[136] What was this desired effect? Ultimately, it consisted in instigating a capacity for autonomous choice in the market, driven by price and income incentives—a capacity that could be calculated and predicted.[137] However, as I will show, this vision of the African as economic subject would remain circumscribed in all sorts of ways.

Scarcity, Soil and Population

The trends discussed previously in this chapter helped undermine arguments that 'idle' Africans bore responsibility for their own hunger and suffering. Complaints about African unwillingness to work in times of famine became less common, not least because the option of work was seldom available even if it was desired.[138] Instead, these complaints would increasingly be directed towards African agricultural and land management practices. In the 1930s, in the midst of increasingly politicized concerns over soil degradation and population pressure, the threat of scarcity became a rhetorical tool used to justify settler land claims and to extend state control over the African reserves. In this section, I discuss precisely how the problems of food, soil and population intersected—the role scarcity played in highlighting these issues and justifying intervention—and how the problem of food scarcity was transformed as a result.

[136] (Director of agriculture) CPK, *KLC Debates 1935*, vol. 1, 8 July 1935, 255. Sir Frank Stockdale later praised the ordinance's benefits for progressing the 'economic outlook' of many Africans; TNA: CAB 58/202, *Report by Frank Stockdale on His Visit to East Africa, January–March 1937*, 73–4.

[137] W. O. Jones, 'Economic Man in Africa', *Food Research Institute Studies* 1 (1960): 107.

[138] This trend was also notable in Southern Rhodesia during the 1930s; Iliffe, *Famine in Zimbabwe*, 84.

In the 1920s, as I showed in Chap. 4, the problem of scarcity was linked to those of soil degradation and population through the specific issue of overstocking, as it manifested in particular reserves. For colonial officials such as W. Ormsby-Gore, chair of the East Africa Commission in the mid-1920s, the problem was that overstocking increased the likelihood and effects of food scarcity, and thereby limited population growth. Population growth was an objective of colonial policy—a guarantee for the labour supply of European industries.[139] At the time, officials had started to think about systemic solutions to the problems of underpopulation, labour and welfare, for example destocking or grazing improvement programmes that would simultaneously raise human and animal nutrition, increase fertility and life expectancy, conserve the soil, and satisfy growing market demand for animal products. Thus, the problems of overstocking, soil, food and population were interconnected. This relation represented a modified Malthusianism: scarcity of land, fertile topsoil and food acted as a check on desirable population growth. To some extent, this perspective had started to displace an earlier attitude, held by some officials, that saw population pressure as being not necessarily negative, in the sense that it might force Africans to progressively adopt better agricultural techniques.[140]

In the early 1930s, overstocking and soil degradation would emerge as even more concerted political issues. This was partly because the droughts and famines of the late 1920s and early 1930s focused official attention on environmental crises, heightening concerns that the entire East African region might be becoming progressively and permanently more arid.[141] Moreover, the food shortages of the early 1930s laid bare the links between the collapse of the estate economy and food scarcity in former

[139] On African underpopulation as a major concern of interwar colonial policy, and the later shift towards overpopulation as a principal source of colonial anxiety, see K. Ittmann, '"Where Nature Dominates Man": Demographic Ideas and Policy in British Colonial Africa, 1890–1970', in *The Demographics of Empire*, ed. K. Ittmann, D. D. Gregory and G. H. Maddox (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2010), 59–88.

[140] John Ainsworth and D. Storrs Fox (a district officer at Machakos) were two Kenyan officials who considered that restrictions on grazing areas were justified so that Africans would be 'practically compelled to take to mixed agriculture', abandoning pastoralism and generally making 'the most effective use of the land they already occupied'; I. R. G. Spencer, 'Pastoralism and Colonial Policy in Kenya, 1895–1929', in *Imperialism, Colonialism and Hunger: East and Central Africa*, ed. R. I. Rotberg (Lexington, MA: Lexington Books, 1983), 114, 133.

[141] Anderson, 'Depression', 331–3.

labour-exporting reserves. They introduced a notion of surplus human population to the problem of scarcity.

The problems of overstocking, soil degradation and population pressure were brought into direct communication around the central political issue of land. This link was demonstrated in the 1934 report of the Kenya Land Commission.[142] The commission both challenged Kenya's settlers to justify their holdings in the territory and presented them with an opportunity to entrench that position.[143] Settlers responded by rallying under the flag of soil conservation. They presented African land husbandry practices as exploitative, causing soil degradation not only in the reserves but also potentially in settled areas through the large contingent of squatter labour, as well as through the movement of Africans onto lands left vacant by Depression-strapped white farmers. They did not fret over the issue of the soil per se. Rather, they drove home the point that it would be regressive to increase the size of African areas by reappropriating sections of the White Highlands.[144]

The Land Commission's report recognized two different sets of problems, each corresponding to specific population groups and areas (or, more accurately, specific areas within reserves). On the one hand, the old problem of overstocking had appeared in the more arid, less-populated regions of the territory, and was now linked more explicitly to the risks of soil erosion. In certain areas, notably Machakos and other parts of Ukambani, there had been 'a progressive degeneration of cattle and land, threatening a degeneration of the people'. The main cause was familiar: the 'semi-religious attitude towards cattle' that excluded meat from the diet. Once African pastoralists learned to see their cattle as a food supply, 'they will begin to grow in numbers and skill'.[145] Here was the old problem of soil, scarcity and malnutrition acting as a brake on population growth and a rising standard of living (see Chap. 4). The solutions included better education, forced destocking and the opening of a market for animals thus culled. The commission further recommended that steps be

[142] M. Dörnemann, 'Seeing Population as a Problem: Influences of the Construction of Population Knowledge on Kenyan Politics (1940s to 1980s)', in *A World of Populations: Transnational Perspectives on Demography in the Twentieth Century*, ed. C. R. Unger and H. Hartmann (New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2014), 204.

[143] Anderson, 'Depression', 323.

[144] Ibid., 324.

[145] M. Carter, R. W. Hemsted, F. O. Wilson and S. H. Fazan, *Report of the Kenya Land Commission* (London: HMSO, 1934), 362.

taken to correlate stock numbers with available grazing areas—in other words, to calculate the land's 'carrying capacity' (see Chap. 4).[146]

On the other hand, the Land Commission highlighted the relatively new problem of overpopulation in more fertile areas, particularly in the Kikuyu reserves. The cause of the problem was neither overstocking nor population congestion due to a lack of land, but rather the customary system of land tenure, 'maldistribution of population', and a lack of agricultural skill. Here, solutions could target agricultural 'betterment' or specifically an 'increase of skill'. This would allow standards of living (including better nutrition) to rise despite population growth.[147] Accordingly, the danger was twofold, and regionally specific: in some places, overstocking was leading to soil erosion and scarcity, thereby limiting population growth. Elsewhere, inappropriate land tenure and agricultural technique prevented improvements in the material standard of living, so that people were kept in a state of poverty and malnutrition as population pressure inevitably increased.[148] In this way, some officials and experts were starting to see these problems—population change, public health, climate, soil and food supply—as systemic.[149] They tended to have cyclical, cumulative and mutually reinforcing effects. In enabling this kind of perspective, ecologists played a critical role—they were quickly providing officials with a way to study colonial problems through the multiscalar relations between economic, geophysical, climatic and biological systems.[150]

[146] The commissioners noted that any policy of destocking 'must have as its main consideration the fact that there is a definite relation between the area of the land and the stock which it can support'; ibid., 500, 508.

[147] Ibid., 141–2.

[148] The Land Commission report made several references to a concern with rural poverty, particularly among pastoral people; a state of 'semi-starvation' was considered one aspect of the condition; ibid., 264, 495.

[149] Sir Daniel Hall, the Kenyan agricultural commissioner of 1929, was a proponent of this kind of systemic perspective: 'The improvement of native agriculture is closely bound up with the general problem of raising the physique, the health and the education of the natives … Better food, better housing, better personal hygiene, are all bound up in one cycle with better agriculture and it is impossible to say that improvement should begin at any one point rather than another'; Willan, Billington and Riddoch, *Report*, 37.

[150] P. Anker, *Imperial Ecology: Environmental Order in the British Empire, 1895–1945* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001), chapter 4; J. Duminy, 'Ecologizing Regions; Securing Food: Governing Scarcity, Population and Territory in British East and Southern Africa', *Territory, Politics, Governance* 6 (2018): 429–46; H. Tilley, *Africa as a Living Laboratory: Empire, Development, and the Problem of Scientific Knowledge, 1870–1950* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011), chapter 3.

The systemic threats of soil degradation and food scarcity presented a powerful justification for greater intervention in African agriculture, both to promote social welfare and, at the same time, to defend settler land claims as sacrosanct. Indeed, the commission recommended that the legal status of the settled highland areas be safeguarded through an Order in Council.[151] Yet the use of soil deterioration as a justification for state intervention would change further during the remainder of the 1930s. In those years, however, the issue was not overstocking, but rather increased maize production by African farmers. And the primary concern was no longer soil erosion but included also exhaustion or the loss of soil fertility.

By the mid-1930s, the opinion that the drive for African export production (discussed above) was depleting the fertility of Kenya's soil—her 'chief national asset'—was gaining momentum in expert and official circles.[152] Some of these concerns fell from the imperial level, from experts like Sir Frank Stockdale, agricultural advisor to the Colonial Office.[153] Similar points were also being voiced locally, by officers of the Kenyan Agriculture Department, members of the public and soil conservation experts.[154] For senior administrators who started to rally under the standard of soil conservation, their worries expressed more than just the fate of the earth and land—they were alarmed by the ascendancy of wealthy and influential African men who disrupted their relations of patronage with African societies. Soil degradation was a material manifestation of social and moral decay, of the 'selfish individualism' that increased cash cropping had fostered at the expense of social cohesion.[155] Accordingly, a soil conservation campaign targeting African areas served all these interests. It appeared to provide the means to maintain social and political control.

[151] Carter et al., *Report of the Kenya Land Commission*, 533.

[152] Willan, Billington and Riddoch, *Report*, 46.

[153] For example, in 1936, Sir Alan Pim, in his report on financial issues and taxation in Kenya, had expressed concern over the effects of increased African export production on soil fertility. Pim warned that equivalent results might be seen in Tanganyika and Uganda as a result of similar drives for cash crop production. Stockdale concurred with these opinions; TNA: CO 533/471/2, Stockdale to Flood (minute), 19 September 1936; CO 533/471/2, Ormsby-Gore to Byrne (letter), 19 October 1936; CAB 58/202, *Report by Frank Stockdale on His Visit to East Africa, January–March 1937*, 5.

[154] Anderson and Throup, 'Myth', 330–1; C. Maher, *A Visit to the United States of America to Study Soil Conservation* (Nairobi, 1940). At the same time, observers in Tanganyika were making almost identical arguments over the erosion-related effects of a 'plant more crops' campaign initiated in late 1931 as a means to boost state revenue; Iliffe, *Modern History*, 349.

[155] Mackenzie, *Land, Ecology and Resistance*, 142; Lonsdale, 'Depression', 114–15.

John Lonsdale notes that 'soil conservation split the official mind'. In one corner sat the 'old school', thinking in terms of 'heroic state action', seeing hope only in compulsion, whether in the form of farm planning or forced destocking in the reserves, as the means to 'defend peasant traditionalism'. Many in this group balked at the prospect of aggressive reforms to land tenure.[156] In the other corner, a 'new school' was growing in voice and number—a cadre of agricultural and ecological experts who 'thought in terms of state encouragement for peasant innovation' and within the broader terms of planning and development.[157] Nearly all of the solutions proposed for the soil and congestion problem agreed that some compulsory reduction of stock numbers would be necessary. Official and scientific support for forced destocking gained momentum and consensus throughout the 1930s.[158] Once again, attention focused on the Kamba reserves.[159] The state devised a vigorous destocking programme to be launched in Machakos and later extended to other areas.[160] Rapid assessments of subdistrict carrying capacities were carried out before destocking commenced.[161] But intense local resistance to the programme forced the state to backtrack.[162] Instead, official efforts focused on reconditioning: encouraging enclosure and seeding of grazing lands.[163] Over 400,000 acres of Kamba land had been enclosed before the end of 1939.[164]

Worries about the ecological and social effects of cash cropping and African accumulation were pressing enough to cause a definitive policy change before the end of the decade. By 1939, the Agriculture

[156] Mackenzie, *Land, Ecology and Resistance*, 119–20; Lonsdale, 'Depression', 115.

[157] Lonsdale, 'Depression', 115; also Dörnemann, 'Seeing Population', 206.

[158] Anderson, 'Depression', 337. Lord Hailey's *African Survey*, for example, endorsed the 'judicious use of culling and other methods' to reduce overstocking; Lord Hailey, *An African Survey: A Study of Problems Arising in Africa South of the Sahara* (London: Oxford University Press, 1938), 812.

[159] Osborne credits Colin Maher with focusing official attention on the seriousness of the soil problems in Machakos; M. Osborne, *Ethnicity and Empire in Kenya: Loyalty and Martial Race among the Kamba, c.1800 to the Present* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 105–6.

[160] Ibid., 106–7.

[161] R. L. Tignor, 'Kamba Political Protest: The Destocking Controversy of 1938', *African Historical Studies* 4 (1971): 242–3.

[162] Ibid., 243–8; Osborne, *Ethnicity and Empire*, 108–12.

[163] Tignor, 'Kamba Political Protest', 248.

[164] D. E. Rocheleau, P. E. Steinberg and P. A. Benjamin, 'Environment, Development, Crisis, and Crusade: Ukambani, Kenya, 1890–1990', *World Development* 23 (1995): 1042.

Department's policy towards 'native agriculture' had returned to the emphasis of the 1920s and the Dual Policy. Its first priority would be ensuring food self-sufficiency, followed by maintaining soil fertility, and then providing adequate nutrition 'to ensure a healthy and energetic population'. Only after these imperatives had been met should produce sales be encouraged 'to enable [the African farmer] to make money for his small needs'. The technical approach to be adopted was as follows: 'mixed farming' consisting of a variety of food crops, planted on a rotational basis, combined with stock husbandry (wherever possible). Also, land conservation measures would be implemented, including contour ridging, rotational grazing and protection of sensitive areas.[165] However, the momentum of this shift would be temporarily interrupted by the outbreak of war—only to return with renewed conviction and vigour following 1945. I discuss these dynamics in the following chapter.

In this section, we have seen that one of the main reasons experts, officials and settlers worried about soil degradation—aside from diminishing the 'capital value of the land' and threatening the long-term viability of commercial agriculture—was its links to food scarcity.[166] The 'greening' of colonial and Kenyan policy was part of a wider Malthusian perspective that saw socioeconomic problems against a backdrop of limited soil and food systems needing to be secured in the longer term.[167] Here the threat of scarcity held a remarkable degree of rhetorical versatility: it inhibited desirable population growth and also reproduced poverty amid inevitable population growth. It justified marketing control as well as coercive conservation in the reserves. Food scarcity was thus tied up within a system of problems in a way that helped nurture a growing interventionist ethic among officials, and provided the case for the defence of settler interests.

Soil and population issues helped reframe food scarcity as, in part, a spatial and territorial problem. Officials were starting to see the risks and drivers of scarcity as spatially distributed within the territory: concentrated

[165] Willan, Billington and Riddoch, *Report*, 55.

[166] Anderson and Throup, 'Myth', 331; Maher, *Visit*, 70.

[167] For an example of this view, see E. B. Worthington, 'Food and Nutrition of African Natives', *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute* 9 (1936): 150; also A. D. Hall, *The Improvement of Native Agriculture in Relation to Population and Public Health* (London: Oxford University Press, 1936). Bashford discusses the specific links between soil and food problems, as they were conceptualized in the interwar period by a range of international actors and institutions; A. Bashford, *Global Population: History, Geopolitics, and Life on Earth* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014), chapter 7.

in some areas, less of a problem in others. The distribution of risk and potential depended on cultural and ecological variables. Some of the responses posed to these risks built on the approach suggested by the Land Commission: calculating carrying capacities and population densities on a district-by-district basis, under a normative notion of 'optimum density'.[168] These kinds of practices would be central to future projects of farm planning (see Chap. 7). In this way, calculative and territorial practices were becoming key to alleviating the long-term and imminent dangers of scarcity.[169] Moreover, the need to manage that threat was becoming a key part of the rationale and practice of conservation, development and welfare.

Conclusion

The 1930s and economic depression brought various changes to the dynamics of food scarcity, as well as to official understandings of and responses to the problem. Although these were not radical changes, they were nonetheless significant. The decade saw the consolidation of several key trends that predated the Great Depression and that would continue until the outbreak of war in 1939.

How did the dynamics of Kenyan food shortages shift in this period? In the early 1930s, food shortages were still primarily driven by drought, pestilence and harvest failure. However, many suffered through forms of 'indirect' or 'exchange' entitlement failure resulting from unemployment or revised terms of trade.[170] During the decade there was an acceleration of African socioeconomic differentiation. As a result, for a growing number of people, food access was mediated through wage labour and the market—those facing hunger and starvation were those who lacked the means of subsistence, let alone control over cash income and accumulation.

How did the governmentalization of food scarcity change? Conditions of economic depression acted to consolidate and extend the view of scarcity as an economic phenomenon entailing problems of both supply and access. As a matter of income and economic access, it could be managed by the state through forms of tax remission and subsidization. However,

[168] Willan, Billington and Riddoch, *Report*, 11–12, 142.

[169] For an elaboration of this argument, see Duminy, 'Ecologizing Regions'.

[170] A. Sen, *Poverty and Famines: An Essay on Entitlement and Deprivation* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981), 3–4.

this 'welfarist' impulse, targeted at specific groups, was set against the more fundamental problem of supply. Maize production and marketing became an increasingly salient political issue, located at the centre of conflicts and competition between different factions of settler capital, and between African and settler production. The threat of scarcity was enrolled in this politics. The security and price of maize supplies were key issues at stake in the arguments used to justify or oppose statutory marketing control. At the same time, increasing maize production was a means for officials to boost rural incomes and material standards of living alongside state revenue. In this sense, productionism—understood, at this point, as the task of securing an exportable maize surplus—emerged as an expedient response to the conditions and policy imperatives of the time.

These points indicate that the state was assuming greater responsibility for the prevention and redress of scarcity, across a greater variety of domains (that is, production and access), and on an increasingly consistent and long-term basis. Put differently, we find an emerging notion that it was the state's responsibility not only to regulate the economic effects of specific scarcity events (as discussed in Chap. 4) but also to regulate and guarantee sufficient food supply and access at all times.

We have also seen that the behaviour of Africans remained a key part of the problem of scarcity, but in novel ways. Building on the trends seen in the late 1920s (described in Chap. 4), the threat of scarcity was increasingly enrolled alongside environmental, population and poverty problems to justify an increased degree of official intervention within the African reserves. This reinforced the status of the rural reserve as a particular kind of governable space: one animated by a Malthusian anxiety around surplus population and resource limitations, and encompassing efforts to preserve the carrying capacity of the land. It was a space characterized by the official use of compulsion, instruction and supervision, at least where and when the conventional politics of district collaboration would not suffice.

However, the events and problems of the 1930s also saw important changes to the status of the African reserve as a kind of governable space. For one matter, anti-scarcity techniques were starting to take on more territorial and calculative forms through, for example, official assessments and planning of carrying capacity and 'optimal density'. These were interventions seeking to ensure sufficient space and resources for human subsistence and procreation. For another matter, marketing legislation acted to extend the governmental techniques of the market (those targeting the incentives of African producers) into the space of the reserve: a measure

designed to boost rural incomes and stave off food scarcities. Such practices corresponded to a notion of African farmers as a kind of economic subject, to be governed through their pursuit of profit and self-interest, their aspiration to better their condition. This view of the African economic subject, in turn, corresponded to a certain definition of the role of the state. 'Improvident' or 'idle' Africans were no longer the central problem of government, to be coerced away from their Malthusian fate. For, now, rural poverty became indicative of officials' failure to fulfil their 'duty' to promote and secure the economic development of the reserves, and to raise the standard of living of the rural population through 'better' agricultural production and land management. Previously, they had attempted to discipline their African subjects (through a combination of force and threat, education and training) to be capable of foresight and planning. Now they would also provide the conditions for the incentives and lessons of the capitalist market to be felt and learnt.

Such dynamics speak to the emergence and consolidation of a multimodal anti-scarcity politics. It operated both through the spaces and techniques of the capitalist market and through the techniques of coercion and discipline targeted at rural African communities. Taken together, these modalities constituted a structure and mode of government that, it was hoped, would alleviate the risk of a Malthusian crisis of population, poverty and scarcity. When set against past initiatives, it was an approach that was more calculative, more permanent and more anticipatory (that is, less reactive or palliative) in its operation. It aimed to secure the life and welfare of a far greater number of people than previously, yet it was still patchy and inconsistent in its reach—certain people, spaces and problems were addressed with far greater intensity than others.

The Second World War would accentuate these trends. The perceived African threat to soil fertility would become a major justification for allocating unequal state support to settler maize growers—not only by 'putting a lid on African capitalist production in the reserves' but also through direct support for white farmers in the form of high guaranteed prices.[171] A calculative, state-centred marketing system emerged in order to boost levels of supply above those of demand. With it, a territory-wide perspective on food scarcity would be institutionalized.

[171] Mackenzie, *Land, Ecology and Resistance*, 142.

CHAPTER 6

Scarcity, State Control and War: Redux

For Kenya and other African colonies, the imperative of ensuring self-sufficiency in food had been established even before the outbreak of war. Already in February 1939, East African governments worried about planning for the development and production of 'economic' and food crops in the event of 'emergency'.[1] The British government, in turn, emphasized the strategic defence importance of colonial territories being self-sufficient in essential foods.[2] For Kenya, the authorities in London decreed, increased production should only be targeted at goods that were 'essential' for the war effort, including gold, sisal, flax and pyrethrum.[3] Current levels of butter, tea and coffee production should be maintained.

Moreover, the surplus production of cereals for export from East Africa was discouraged owing to the correctly anticipated shortage of freight facilities. Maize, in any case, was more cheaply available from North America or Argentina.[4] If any surplus were to result from a local crop, this should be used to satisfy cereal deficits in nearby territories, such as food-importing Northern Rhodesia, with its large mining labour force. It was, however, noted that small amounts of grain might possibly be

[1] TNA: CO 323/1657/101, Richards to Undersecretary of state for the colonies (telegram), 21 February 1939.

[2] TNA: CO 323/1657/101, *passim*.

[3] TNA: CO 323/1657/101, Brooke-Popham to MacDonald (telegram), 2 February 1939.

[4] D. Anderson and D. Throup, 'Africans and Agricultural Production in Colonial Kenya: The Myth of the War as a Watershed', *Journal of African History* 26 (1985): 335; I. R. G. Spencer, 'Settler Dominance, Agricultural Production and the Second World War in Kenya', *Journal of African History* 21 (1980): 499.

J. Duminy, *Food and Famine in Colonial Kenya*, African Histories and Modernities, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-10964-5_6

required in Egypt and Palestine.[5] In turn, representatives from the British East African territories (which in normal times were interdependent in respect of food supplies) agreed that food production efforts should be coordinated along complementary lines through the Governors' Conference and the Standing Conference of Directors of Agriculture.[6]

In fact, the push for East African self-sufficiency was really an extension of pre-war policy (also see Chaps. 4 and 5). Conditions of war would only make dependence on imported supplies even more of a weakness than it was in peacetime.[7] Colonies were urged to consider increased food production for self-sufficiency as a long-term measure and objective—a part of permanent agricultural policy rather than a wartime exigency.[8] At the outbreak of war, Kenya's governor saw it as part of the colony's duty and contribution to the war to continue to be self-sufficient in all essential foodstuffs.[9] This emphasis on self-sufficiency, with its corresponding aversion to surplus production, would reverse during the course of the war, only to return when the imperative of self-sufficiency was crystallized in Kenya's long-term food and maize production policy.

In Kenya, officials reacted to Germany's invasion of Poland by taking immediate and proactive efforts to secure control over the food system. On 1 September 1939, they promulgated defence regulations and established the Kenya Supply Board (KSB). This board enjoyed extensive powers. It could implement controls on various products through defence orders, and held authority over price control.[10] The regulations also

[5] TNA: CO 323/1657/101, minute by Clauson, 6 April 1939.

[6] TNA: DO 35/848/6, Lord Moyne, Colonial Office circular (enclosure), 29 September 1941.

[7] As explained by Lord Moyne, the colonial secretary, in late 1941, dependence on food imports was 'a source of weakness'. 'Apart altogether from war conditions the extent to which a territory can render itself independent of imported food supplies is a measure of its ability to withstand the effects of the low prices for export staples which have been productive of so much hardship and difficulty in the past. It is, therefore, of the greatest importance that the advances which have been achieved as a result of war conditions should not be allowed to recede when peace once more returns'; ibid.

[8] Ibid.

[9] T. Zeleza, 'Kenya and the Second World War, 1939–1950', in *A Modern History of Kenya, 1895–1980*, ed. W. R. Ochieng' (Nairobi: East African Educational Publishers, 1989), 145.

[10] An example of a control established under defence order was the Potato Control; H. C. Willan, W. H. Billington and J. L. Riddoch, *Report of the Food Shortage Commission of Enquiry* (Nairobi, 1943), 17.

secured wide powers of compulsion to increase production. However, by the end of 1940 they had largely gone unused.[11] Likewise, price control functions had also been nominal up to that point, as most goods were not noticeably in short supply.[12] The major problem for the Kenya Farmers Association (KFA) and Kenyan officials during 1941 was actually how to dispose of a maize surplus overseas.[13] The initial wartime food problem was thus one of distribution rather than production. This was reflected in the Kenyan state's response to food scarcities experienced in the early part of the war, as discussed below.

Famine Relief

Prolonged drought conditions over the course of 1939 led, by the end of the year, to localized grain scarcities in various parts of Kenya. The affected areas included low-lying regions of Central Province, the immediate vicinity of Nairobi, parts of Meru District and places in Rift Valley Province.[14] In response, officials announced a systematic famine relief policy in January 1940. The policy codified the approach that had been developed and employed over the previous half-century. There would be three forms of relief: providing foodstuffs for sale, arranging relief works and distributing free food for the infirm or destitute.[15] Officials in London lauded the Kenyan government's proactive and systematic efforts; one minuted that 'a generation ago the natives would have died like flies in a drought like this'.[16]

The relief policy also clarified the basic principle of distribution: 'that no man, woman or child, must be allowed to die of starvation'. This principle found support in the *East African Standard*, which argued that it should be met 'whatever may be the cost of preservation of human life'.[17] State care, however, should not come without obligations: 'An important part of the official statement is that which lays stress on the individual's

[11] TNA: DO 35/848/6, Lord Moyne, Colonial Office circular (enclosure), 29 September 1941. Quote is from Anderson and Throup, 'Myth', 335.

[12] TNA: CO 852/500/2, Rennie to Stanley (enclosed report by Grazebrook), 10 July 1943, 10.

[13] Willan, Billington and Riddoch, *Report*, 11–12.

[14] TNA: CO 533/517/6, Rennie to MacDonald (letter), 15 February 1940.

[15] Ibid.

[16] TNA: CO 533/517/6, Colonial Office minute (author unknown), 12 March 1944.

[17] TNA: CO 533/517/6, *East African Standard*, 'Famine Relief', 26 January 1940.

responsibility for his own salvation … Stress is laid on the fact that the individual must play his part.' In practice, this meant the state should use 'its propaganda and publicity agencies to impress on the African peoples the lessons of famine and the duty resting on them to use their livestock reserves before they can qualify for relief'.[18] A codified policy of relief enjoined codified obligations on the individual subject.

There was a clear-cut process to be followed when food shortage threatened. First, a notice was published in the government gazette under the Native Foodstuffs Ordinance, regulating food exports. Second, funds were voted by local native councils (LNCs) to pay for immediate relief measures and food imports. Finally, and only if necessary, the local commissioner applied to the state for additional assistance.[19] In dealing with the threatened food shortage in early 1940, the expense of providing food proved more of a problem than its availability. Officials approached the railway authority to request a reduced maximum rate for the internal transport of maize. This was reluctantly granted: rates were halved until 31 August 1940.[20]

In early 1940, the government purchased 8000 bags of maize from African farmers in North Nyanza, and sold these supplies at cost price in areas of Kiambu District 'owing to the abnormal demand there which the local trading organization was unable to meet'. The costs were reimbursed from sales or, in the case of free issues to the destitute, from the funds of the Kiambu LNC.[21] More relief supplies were purchased for Kiambu a few months later, and were distributed along identical lines. At the same time, a small sum was spent on relief for the coastal Lamu District. As the people here were 'exceedingly poor' and without an LNC, the state bore the full price.[22] Officials also imported seeds so that farmers would be able to sow before the new rains—LNCs again undertook to bear the cost of any shortfall in resale.

As a result, although various parts of Kenya suffered from localized food scarcity in the early part of 1940, as far as officials were concerned there was no great alarm. They were confident that their long-range anti-famine precautions of previous years (promoting crop diversification, use

[18] Ibid.

[19] TNA: CO 533/517/6, Rennie to MacDonald (letter), 15 February 1940.

[20] TNA: CO 533/517/6, 'Minutes of Kenya and Uganda Railway Advisory Council Meeting', 28 February 1940.

[21] TNA: CO 533/517/6, Rennie to MacDonald (letter), 15 February 1940.

[22] TNA: CO 533/517/6, Moore to Lloyd (letter), 12 July 1940.

of better crop varieties, developing communications and building up LNC funds) would be able to prevent scarcity from turning into widespread famine. Maize supplies appeared to be ample. Prices were still within reason, having not yet reached the maximum controlled price.[23] On the other hand, settler farmers were not so easily satisfied, and they would soon bring their political pressure to bear in pushing for a radical change to state policy.

The Path to Maize Control

Italy's entry into the war in June 1940 raised the threat of British East Africa being invaded from Abyssinia to the north. West African and South African troops were promptly dispatched to Kenya, and the market for local food produce rose in step. In late 1941, demand expanded further with the arrival of Italian prisoners of war and European refugees. Moreover, the African labour force had grown rapidly during the war (see Fig. 5.1).[24] Production on settler farms—often managed by women owing to the absence of men on military service—increased in response. African farmers located near Nairobi also extended their cultivation, particularly of vegetables.[25] Much of this produce supplied the new vegetable-drying factories established by the military at Kerugoya and Karatina.[26] Yet there was still no urgent need for officials to take extraordinary measures to increase food availability.[27]

[23] TNA: CO 533/517/6, Rennie to MacDonald (letter), 15 February 1940.

[24] From January 1940 to July 1942, the number of registered Africans in employment increased by almost 60,000 or 33 per cent; Willan, Billington and Riddoch, *Report*, 24; also see F. Cooper, *On the African Waterfront: Urban Disorder and the Transformation of Work in Colonial Mombasa* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1987), 57–9. By February 1943 East Africa was providing for 62,000 prisoners of war and 11,500 refugees—with a further 7000 Poles and Greeks still expected to arrive; TNA: CO 852/428/5, Moore to Stanley (telegram), 6 February 1943.

[25] Farmers in Kiambu doubled their acreages of vegetables between 1940 and 1943, reaching a total area of some 10,000 acres; Willan, Billington and Riddoch, *Report*, 42.

[26] These factories processed the produce of 11,000 smallholders, with seeds issued and crop rotations planned by the Department of Agriculture. In the main they supplied troops stationed in the Middle East; Anderson and Throup, 'Myth', 338; J. M. Lonsdale, 'The Depression and the Second World War in the Transformation of Kenya', in *Africa and the Second World War*, ed. D. Killingray and R. Rathbone (London: Macmillan, 1986), 125. Correspondence regarding the establishment of the factories, including Colonial Office concern over the imports of the machinery required, is available in TNA: CO 852/469/15, *passim*.

[27] Lonsdale, 'Depression', 120; Willan, Billington and Riddoch, *Report*, 11.

The realities of the early 'phoney war' proved sorely disappointing to Kenya's agricultural officials and settler farmers. Initially, at the outbreak of war, they had sensed a decisive opportunity to develop settler agriculture in the colony. In particular, major global hostilities appeared to promise a reversal of the decade-long woes of the white maize farmer.[28] However, the dream was deferred—shipping was not available for Kenyan exports, and the prices demanded by settlers were too high for foreign buyers.[29] Imperial authorities were by no means encouraging of settler ambitions. In early 1940, Major F. W. Cavendish-Bentinck (the new political leader of Kenya's settlers) and G. C. Griffiths (managing director of the KFA) travelled to London in a bid to secure contracts for surplus Kenyan maize, bacon and butter. They were greeted with little enthusiasm.[30]

With no ready market available, it made little sense for the Kenyan state to increase production by means of a guaranteed maize price, which was precisely what settlers were once again campaigning for (see Chap. 5). Nevertheless, by May 1941, Kenyan officials and representatives of key agricultural cooperative associations were meeting to discuss the advisability of introducing some form of 'maize control' scheme. But the argument for control had little to do with the potential contribution that Kenyan agriculture could make to the war effort. Nor did it rest on cornering the market in African produce so as to make Kenyan exports more competitive. In fact, settler advocates resorted to the familiar 1930s arguments around soil degradation—as a threat to maize production and the overall food supply—to push for 'some measure' to ensure that a quota of internal maize requirements came from settler farmers.[31] Their appeals were unsuccessful, for the time being.

Overall, far from an opportunity to reassert settler prosperity, 1939–1941 was a period of 'continuing stagnation and economic depression' in the East African region, one that 'merely rubbed salt in the half-healed wound of the Depression'.[32] The first major impetus to boost Kenyan production only arrived in late 1941, with the call to help supply the Middle East. German U-boat wolf packs had been devastating Allied

[28] Anderson and Throup, 'Myth', 334–5.

[29] Ibid., 335.

[30] Spencer, 'Settler Dominance', 499–500; Lonsdale, 'Depression', 120; Willan, Billington and Riddoch, *Report*, 11.

[31] Willan, Billington and Riddoch, *Report*, 13.

[32] The first quote is from Anderson and Throup, 'Myth', 336; the second from Lonsdale, 'Depression', 120.

shipping lines across the Atlantic. Fighting in North Africa had intensified over the course of 1941 with the arrival of German troops. Allied authorities in the Middle East grew increasingly anxious over the fate of their supply lines, and began to look south, to their mainland and coastal connection with East Africa, as a more reliable source. In October 1941, the Kenyan Supply Board entered into a contract to supply the Middle East with 40,000 tons of maize.[33] The following month, the minister of state in the Middle East assured an East African delegation that their food exports were urgently needed to supply the troops and civilian populations of the region.[34] Finally sensing the opportunity they had been hoping for, Kenya's white farmers rallied. They demanded that they be allowed to expand their production rapidly as part of their patriotic call of duty.

Meanwhile, the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor brought the United States into the war, just as Japan was making large inroads into key Allied supply areas such as Burma, the Philippines and Java. Demand for Kenyan sisal and pyrethrum rocketed. These dynamics would decisively alter the terms of trade for Kenyan farmers and planters, ushering in an era of high demand and high commodity prices that would last until the 1950s.[35] Together, these events were enough to lead officials to embark on an increased production campaign. At first, maize was not a central emphasis, but it would come to play a key part in the drama of wartime scarcity.

Following the call to supply the Middle East, in December 1941 the Kenyan government duly announced a guaranteed price for settler maize of 8/50 (all prices are given in shillings and cents) per bag. The aim was to encourage the production of an exportable surplus. For the KFA, this price was revised upwards to 9 shillings per bag for the 1942 planting season. At the same time, the director of agriculture put together a programme for increased food production by African farmers, focused on maize cultivation in Nyanza and Central provinces.[36] But a guaranteed price was not enough for settler farmers—they wanted the state to bear the risks of increased agricultural investment. Many, after all, were still ridden with debt, and for them patriotic duty could hardly be expected to

[33] Only around 6000 tons were actually delivered under this contract; Willan, Billington and Riddoch, *Report*, 11, 30.

[34] Anderson and Throup, 'Myth', 335.

[35] Ibid., 335; Lonsdale, 'Depression', 121.

[36] Anderson and Throup, 'Myth', 335; Willan, Billington and Riddoch, *Report*, 12.

include financial self-ruin. In January 1942, some farmers threatened to hoard their maize harvest, while others refused to extend cultivation.[37]

The state's first major legislative response to this pressure was the Defence (Increased Production of Crops) Regulations, passed on 28 February. Under these regulations, the Agricultural Production and Settlement Board (APSB) was reconstituted from an advisory body into one with executive powers to plan and boost settler production for civilian and military requirements.[38] The APSB was headquartered in Nairobi, with Cavendish-Bentinck as chair. It would sit at the centre of a web of committees controlling agriculture throughout the territory. Lonsdale later called it 'the corporatist planner's heaven'. Cavendish-Bentinck himself described it as 'practical farmers sitting round a table'.[39] The regulations gave settlers the security they sought. In April, the governor approved warrants providing grants to farmers for breaking new land, including to plant with maize, and guaranteeing minimum returns per acre in the event of harvest failure.[40] The director of agriculture remained in charge of African production.

These financial commitments from the state, coupled with the imperative of boosting production for the imperial war effort, finally settled the issue of maize control—it would indeed happen.[41] On one hand, this was a matter of trade logistics. The centralized system of bulk commodity purchasing that had been set up in Britain to secure civilian and military supplies required a local apparatus to handle buying and selling in bulk.[42]

[37] Lonsdale, 'Depression', 121.

[38] Willan, Billington and Riddoch, *Report*, 16.

[39] Lonsdale, 'Depression', 123.

[40] TNA: CO 852/469/3, Moore to Cranbourne (telegram), 15 April 1942; Willan, Billington and Riddoch, *Report*, 23.

[41] Later, the Food Shortage Commission would conclude that this decision was made in the interests of increasing production to help supply the Middle East, rather than to offer a guaranteed price to settler farmers, as some had testified to the commissioners; Willan, Billington and Riddoch, *Report*, 67–8.

[42] Berman notes that by 1941 a system of 'monopoly state trading' by British central ministries had largely replaced the pre-war system of private commercial trading; B. J. Berman, *Control and Crisis in Colonial Kenya: The Dialectic of Domination* (London: James Currey; Nairobi: East African Educational Publishers; and Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 1990), 258. Likewise, in East Africa the private commercial concerns still involved in marketing by the end of the 1930s were replaced during the war by marketing organizations with statutory authority and powers of monopoly; R. M. A. van Zwanenberg and A. King, *An Economic History of Kenya and Uganda, 1800–1970* (London: Macmillan, 1975), 214.

On the other hand, it was a matter of protecting the state's investments. The government had to stake out and protect the maize market, as its financial survival was now invested in it. The credit given to settler growers could only be recouped if consumers bought through official channels. Direct purchasing from cheaper African suppliers would, however, undermine the system and thus the investments of the state.[43] Control was the solution at hand.

Accordingly, in March 1942 a committee (including two directors of the KFA) was appointed to determine the best means of implementing maize control, 'working, if possible, through existing trade channels'.[44] As with the debate over African marketing legislation in the mid-1930s (see Chap. 5), Indian representatives protested, citing the possible negative effects for commercial traders. But they agreed to discuss the terms, on the understanding that control would endure only under war conditions.[45]

The urgency of boosting production intensified as the Japanese advanced across Burma, threatening to cut off an important source of Kenyan rice imports.[46] By May 1942, this conquest had been decided. On 1 May, the state passed the Defence (Control of Maize) Regulations. This brought the Kenyan Maize Board into existence as an advisory body.[47] On the 4th, officials passed the Increased Production of Crops Ordinance, consolidating the state's powers over planning and enforcing programmes of settler production for various key crops.[48] The APSB now controlled production through a series of district production and manpower subcommittees (composed of local farmers) located throughout the

[43] Lonsdale, 'Depression', 121–2.
[44] Willan, Billington and Riddoch, *Report*, 68.
[45] Ibid.
[46] L. Collingham, *Taste of War: World War Two and the Battle for Food* (London: Penguin, 2011), 67.
[47] Willan, Billington and Riddoch, *Report*, 72, 76.
[48] Ibid., 51–2.

territory.[49] The following day, Griffiths was appointed as maize controller, while still holding the position of managing director of the KFA. He immediately set about signing another contract to supply the Middle East with Kenya's entire exportable surplus of maize, up to a ceiling of 100,000 tons.[50]

In July 1942, the Kenyan Maize and Produce Control (MPC) was finally established to take over marketing of the whole territory's supplies. The objective, as implied in the failed 1930s proposals for control, was to ensure that the MPC secured physical possession of all marketed maize (see Chap. 5).[51] African farmers were required to sell their produce to the control at a fixed price (4/90 per bag versus the 9 shillings offered to settlers) through traders licensed under the Marketing of Native Produce Ordinance. A single 'transport pool' was devised to subsidize the transport costs of producers located far away from the MPC's marketing centres.[52]

The differential pricing system offered to settler and African farmers generated immediate controversy, both locally and in Britain. Kenyan officials were forced to justify the scheme retrospectively. Here, one finds more evidence of the ambivalence that colonial officials held towards what they perceived as African economic rationality. The lower price paid to African farmers was justified because, on the one hand, higher prices would disincentivize production as a function of the 'backward-bending supply curve'.[53] High cash earnings might also possibly undermine African character and discipline. At the same time, better prices could result in too much production, thereby giving the MPC the headache of having to

[49] The scheduled produce included wheat, maize, rye, flax, oats, rice, rubber, barley, potatoes, pyrethrum and vegetables; A. F. D. Mackenzie, *Land, Ecology and Resistance in Kenya, 1880–1952* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1998), 249 n. 121. The procedure for developing production programmes was as follows: settler farmers were required to submit their production plans to their relevant subcommittee, to be forwarded to the district committee, and in turn passed on to the central board with any recommendations. After the plans were revised, if necessary, the farmer would be served with a planting order. The ordinance enabled committee or subcommittee members to enter farms to check that farmers were complying with the orders; Willan, Billington and Riddoch, *Report*, 51–2.

[50] Ibid., 80–1.

[51] Ibid., 70.

[52] G. Kitching, *Class and Economic Change in Kenya: The Making of an African Petite-Bourgeoisie* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1980), 109.

[53] P. Mosley, *The Settler Economies: Studies in the Economic History of Kenya and Southern Rhodesia 1900–1963* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 256 n. 17.

dispose of a surplus, while potentially degrading soil fertility in the reserves even further.[54] This form of colonial doublethink saw Africans as being both too responsive to prices and not responsive enough. Or, if they were responsive, they were so in a 'perverse' way.[55] In response to criticism, the new regulations of October raised the African maize price to 6/20 per bag.[56]

Maize control benefited settler farmers almost universally. Once control had been instigated, the KFA acted both as an agent of the state and as the marketing organization for settler farmers. It began to manage state credit finance given to farmers through the Land Bank and private banks. It operated marketing functions at the same time as recommending producer prices to the government. It was thus 'firmly established as a parastatal organization' that represented both state and producer.[57] The guaranteed prices paid through the state marketing system gave settler farmers an unprecedented degree of economic protection and security. It was the start of a prosperous era for the White Highlands. However, the settler battle was not yet won. These measures were still a wartime exigency, a response to emergency. To become permanent policy, a stronger argument was needed. I return to this point in Chap. 7.

By contrast, maize control had various effects on African production. On the one hand, guaranteed prices encouraged 'black-market' trade in produce from Central Province, where the difference between official and unofficial prices was relatively great. Kikuyu farmers often preferred to sell their maize in centres of black-market demand, including Ukambani.[58] For officials, it soon became clear that only a small fraction of maize supplies grown in some areas of Central Province were being sold through controlled channels. That proportion dropped further as the rains continued to fail in the Kamba reserves over the course of 1943, diverting more

[54] To compensate for the increased risk to the soil, some of the difference between the price paid to African producers and the official retail price was designated as a cess, allocated to LNCs to be spent on conservation measures in the reserves; Lonsdale, 'Depression', 126; Spencer, 'Settler Dominance', 505–7.

[55] Jones illustrates the ostensible perversity of African subjects: 'when prices rise, less is produced, when wages rise, fewer hours are worked'; W. O. Jones, 'Economic Man in Africa', *Food Research Institute Studies* 1 (1960): 108.

[56] Willan, Billington and Riddoch, *Report*, 49.

[57] Van Zwanenberg and King, *Economic History*, 214–15.

[58] Anderson and Throup, 'Myth', 338.

Kikuyu maize to the hungry, remittance-flush Kamba market.[59] On the other hand, guaranteed prices and the single transport pool worked to boost maize production in Nyanza. Most of this produce was traded through official channels.[60] Maize grown in North Nyanza thus assumed particular importance for the supply and stability of the official market.[61]

Wartime conditions were advantageous for some African farmers, whether producing for the official or the black market. Yet the benefits were unevenly spread. Many rural people, particularly the poor, faced greater strain on their resources; landlessness increased; and social differentiations widened and stabilized. The war thus accelerated the onset of a 'profound agrarian crisis' that would come to a head in the early 1950s.[62]

This section has indicated how officials and settler interests mobilized the threat of scarcity to justify state control over the food market and to secure unequal state support for white farmers. In the process, the seeds of an anti-scarcity rationale and institutional apparatus—oriented towards increasing food production through state control and financial guarantees—were sown. Yet at the time of the formation of maize control, in July 1942, the object of increased production was still to supply the export market. This would soon change, as by the end of the year Kenya and East Africa faced formidable scarcities of their own.

Scarcity Worsens

In Kenya, the 'long rains' of 1942 had been excessively heavy in some areas, while the 'short rains' between October and December were less than expected. Nyanza and Central provinces were the worst affected by the erratic rainfall—regions that ordinarily produced two maize crops every year, and where the harvest usually took place before other parts of Kenya.[63] This served to reduce the total harvest coming onto the market in January and February 1943, particularly of maize and fresh vegetables.[64] Nyanza, as described above, was a large producer of maize, and the

[59] Ibid., 340–1.
[60] Kitching, *Class and Economic Change*, 108–9.
[61] Ibid., 134–40.
[62] Berman, *Control and Crisis*, 256.
[63] Willan, Billington and Riddoch, *Report*, 7.
[64] Ibid., 6–7, 11.

smaller crop harvested there was of serious consequence for food supplies in the colony more generally.[65]

By this point, rises in the real cost of living were starting to affect Kenya's working poor acutely. Those in the towns bore the brunt most immediately. There, prices of staple foods had risen to the controlled price, and black-marketeers happily supplied those willing to take the risk of illegal trading. Shortages of imported goods also acted to drive up prices more generally.[66] A committee appointed to look into the cost of living reported that, between the end of 1940 and April 1942, the prices of local goods had increased by 31 per cent, while those of imports had shot up by over half.[67] At the same time, housing costs were atypically high owing to heightened demand and the slow rate of supply. Overcrowding was common, living conditions were deplorable and diseases spread easily. Wages generally failed to keep pace.[68]

The introduction of maize control coincided with efforts to reform the system of price fixing. Up to this point, the KSB had been responsible for commodity pricing. Officials, realizing 'the strength of the conflicting interests affected', decided that the price controller should be given 'as independent a position as possible' while remaining under the governor's oversight.[69] This independence would ensure that questions of increased production and supply could be balanced against the need to check the rise in cost of living.[70] A new set of defence regulations introduced a

[65] Nyanza was expected to produce 165,000 bags of maize between February and April 1943, versus 69,000 from Central Province and other African areas, and 95,000 from settler areas; ibid., 114.

[66] Reduced imports directly raised the costs of key goods for workers, and further acted indirectly to disincentivize food production by making commodities ordinarily bought by food growers unavailable; Cooper, *African Waterfront*, 60.

[67] A. Clayton and D. C. Savage, *Government and Labour in Kenya, 1895–1963* (London: Cass, 1974), 266.

[68] Lonsdale, 'Depression', 122; Zeleza, 'Second World War', 154–5.

[69] TNA: CO 852/500/2, Rennie to Stanley (letter), 10 July 1943.

[70] In particular, W. Grazebrook, the price controller, disapproved of the arrangement of having the Supply Board act as the price control authority: 'I had realized for some time that the position was far from satisfactory and that it was fundamentally wrong for a department—which is not dissimilar to an audit department—to be under the control of, and derive its powers from, a body whose members were principally commercial men vitally interested in the extent to which control was exercised.' He therefore took 'every opportunity' to 'advocate the separation of price control from the Supply Board', concurring with the growing opinion in the press and among the public to that effect; TNA: CO 852/500/2, Rennie to Stanley (enclosed report by Grazebrook), 10 July 1943, 10–11.

range of comprehensive price control regulations with heavy penalties for those buying or selling illicitly. However, the price controller could do little to prevent a general rise in the cost of living, having authority over the maximum prices of around 150 local items, and no powers over the landed costs of imports. Staff shortages made the task so much more difficult.[71]

As shortages of food and consumer goods became more acute in the latter part of 1942, the relatively low fixed prices of key goods encouraged black-marketing. By October, the *East African Standard* was highlighting the plight of the black market in Nairobi. Local business people claimed that the austerity of the regulations, combined with the lack of price control staff to enforce them, was forcing smaller dealers to enter parallel markets. In response, they called for distribution, price and import control to come under one administrative head, as well as the creation of state shops to act as a 'vent' to undermine illicit trade.[72] For its part, the Colonial Office considered that only a comprehensive rationing scheme could ensure the proper distribution of goods under circumstances where prices were being controlled.[73]

In Mombasa, the situation was far more urgent than members of the Nairobi public or press appreciated. A few days after these reports appeared in the *Standard*, the combination of food shortages, decreased real wages and housing grievances triggered rolling strikes, practically closing the port for several days in October. The unrest spread rapidly from railway to other public and private employees, and from Mombasa to Nairobi and Eldoret.[74] These events forced the state's hand. Commodity distribution boards were quickly established in Nairobi and Mombasa in October 1942 to plan food allocations. Maize was rationed by means of controlled distribution through selected wholesalers and retailers and by imposing volume limits on sales to individuals.[75] Officials also appointed a committee to investigate the workers' claims. Eventually, they responded by factoring

[71] Ibid., 33.

[72] TNA: CO 852/500/14, 'Black Market Scandal', *East African Standard*, 12 October 1942; 'A Terrible Racket', *East African Standard*, 12 October 1942.

[73] TNA: CO 852/500/14, minute by Carstairs, 11 December 1942; minute by McClyde, 14 December 1942.

[74] Clayton and Savage, *Government and Labour*, 266–7; Cooper, *African Waterfront*, 60–5.

[75] TNA: CO 852/428/4, Moore to Cranbourne (telegram), 16 November 1942.

food price and rent inflation into revised wage levels and by providing a special war bonus for railway and government workers.[76]

By the end of 1942, Kenyan officials and members of the public faced the combined effects of maize control, the black market, population increase and, finally, bad weather. Urban worker unrest drove home the point that further, intensified efforts were needed to guarantee food supplies for productive and essential services. In addition, it was rapidly becoming clear that Kenya was not the only colony severely affected by drought and harvest shortfall—all countries in the region, from South Africa to Uganda, appeared to be facing poor harvests and major maize deficits. In December, the East African Governors' Conference formed the East African Production and Supply Council (EAPSC). It was responsible for pooling and allocating essential supplies between the various regional territories, the railway and harbour authorities, and military forces stationed locally.[77] The director of produce disposal, R. E. Norton, was in charge of allocating supplies according to demand.[78] His task was not easy. Accurate and uniform statistics on food production and demand in each territory were seldom, if ever, available.[79]

Once it had become clear that Kenya might face an internal maize deficit, the export contract to supply the Middle East was hurriedly cancelled.[80] But officials gradually realized that more drastic measures were needed. One option was to reduce or substitute labour rations. However, as I discuss below, this invariably provoked 'labour difficulties', and became a last resort.[81] The other option was to request imports through the Colonial Office and Ministry of Food in London. In December 1942, Kenya requested 10,000 tons of maize imports per month from March to May 1943. This was on top of a separate request from the military for 16,000 tons. By early January, a growing degree of panic was evident in

[76] TNA: CO 852/428/3, Colonial Office to Greenridge (letter), 8 April 1943; Cooper, *African Waterfront*, 62–3.

[77] Willan, Billington and Riddoch, *Report*, 16.

[78] Norton was also chair of the East African War Supplies Board, formed in late 1940 to control supplies for military forces; ibid., 15.

[79] TNA: CO 533/530/7, Norton to chief secretary of Kenya (letter), 8 February 1944. The lack of accurate statistics was also a problem faced by the Kenyan Maize Control; Willan, Billington and Riddoch, *Report*, 73.

[80] TNA: CO 852/428/8, Moore to Cranbourne (telegram), 30 October 1942; Willan, Billington and Riddoch, *Report*, 81.

[81] TNA: CO 852/428/4, Moore to Cranbourne (telegram), 16 November 1942.

the governor's telegrams to London. Unless imports could be arranged, he said, 'widespread starvation and labour unrest will be inevitable'. Officials were also considering 'returning labour to native reserves', plus the culling of pigs being raised to supply the army.[82]

Initially, imperial authorities were reluctant to grant any colonial requests for food imports. At the start of February 1943, Oliver Stanley, the colonial secretary, informed Moore that shipping allocations, 'dictated by overriding strategic necessities', meant that East African authorities and populations would have to set about handling the shortages locally, without imports transported on British ships from beyond the Indian Ocean.[83] Moore did not back down so easily, noting in his reply that people were already starving in Tanganyika.[84] He reminded Stanley that the maize problem was East African in scope—the Kenyan Maize Control was responsible for feeding employed labour in the mainland territories, as well as providing for Zanzibar and the Seychelles. Moore warned that the maize shortage threatened to bring agricultural and industrial production across East Africa to a 'standstill' once large-scale retrenchments of workers became unavoidable. In particular, the production of 'priority materials' such as sisal and pyrethrum was at risk. Railway and port functions (vital for military operations) would also have to be curtailed. Apart from this threat to the war effort, there would be serious local ramifications: 'To turn large numbers of employed natives adrift without food would produce consequences, both economic and political, of the gravest kind.' The whole of East Africa could run out of food for employed labour as soon as April 1943.[85] Moreover, knowledge that their families at home were facing food shortages was undermining 'the morale of the troops'. 'Nothing would do more to restore confidence', he wrote, 'than a statement that imported food had actually arrived.'[86]

For imperial and colonial authorities, the problem boiled down to a balance between economy in consumption (thus saving British shipping space), on the one hand, and maintaining essential East African industry

[82] TNA: CO 852/428/4, Moore to Stanley (telegram), 23 December 1942; Governor's deputy to Stanley (telegram), 9 January 1943.

[83] TNA: CO 852/428/5, Stanley to Moore (telegram), 1 February 1943.

[84] Tanganyikan officials estimated that 1000 starved during this famine. Around 100,000 people received famine relief; G. H. Maddox, 'Gender and Famine in Central Tanzania: 1916–1961', *African Studies Review* 39 (1996): 96.

[85] TNA: CO 852/428/5, Moore to Stanley (telegram), 6 February 1943.

[86] TNA: CO 852/428/5, Moore to Stanley (telegram), 11 February 1943.

through food imports, on the other. At first, as indicated above, the Colonial Office and Ministry of Food were reluctant to follow the latter path for East Africa. The military perspective was different. After the end of the Abyssinian campaign, and especially following the fall of Singapore to Japan in February 1942, Kenya had become an important strategic base for Allied operations, as well as a key source of sisal fibre and pyrethrum. The latter was needed to manufacture pesticides—a critical requirement for troops to fight in Asia and the Pacific. The War Office therefore intervened on behalf of East African food security. The Ministry of Food was warned that the 'military repercussions' of the food shortage in East Africa needed 'no iteration'. 'Exceptional measures' were justified to guarantee the region's cereal supplies.[87] On top of this pressure, authorities in the United States were growing nervous about their sisal and pyrethrum supplies being threatened by food shortages and possible cutbacks in labour and production.[88] The British Ministry of Supply was equally worried.[89] Thus, by the beginning of April 1943, the Ministry of Food faced pressure from several angles to arrange imports and shipping space for East Africa. At the same time, Kenyan officials faced pressure to prioritize food allocations to the sisal and pyrethrum industries.

These events fomented a flurry of organizational activity in London, with the Ministry of Food, Ministry of War Transport and Colonial Office attempting to balance allotments of different foodstuffs between territories and scarce shipping space.[90] Meanwhile, local officials desperately made calculations of minimum possible food requirements, based on possible reductions in rationing and labour retrenchments (discussed below). The arrangements eventually made by authorities reveal the difficulties they faced. A Swedish ship, the SS *Colombia*, originally chartered to carry maize from Argentina to Northern Rhodesia, was diverted to Mombasa.[91]

[87] TNA: CO 852/428/5, Longden to Gent (letter), 17 March 1943; CO 852/428/6, Franklin to Hobley (letter), 1 April 1943.

[88] The Americans had relayed their concern to the British Food Mission in Washington, DC, which in turn passed the message on to the Ministry of Food and Colonial Office.

[89] TNA: CO 852/428/5, Moore to Stanley (telegram), 24 February 1943; CO 852/428/5, Hobley to Deuber (letter), 5 March 1943.

[90] For correspondence on import arrangements relating to Kenya and East Africa, see TNA: CO 852/428/4; CO 852/428/5; CO 852/428/6; CO 852/428/7, all *passim*.

[91] It carried 3000 tons of maize and the same quantity of wheat. This was only possible because maize harvested in the Belgian Congo had become available earlier than expected, which was then used to satisfy Northern Rhodesian demand.

Two shipments of wheat from Australia were redirected to East Africa from their supply route to India.[92] The military was able to secure some maize from Eritrea and Ethiopia, as well as tapioca, beans and cassava from Madagascar.[93] By May 1943, over 46,000 tons of foodstuffs had landed at Mombasa or were on order for the East African pool.[94]

By September 1943, C. R. Lockhart, chair of the EAPSC, was anxious about the long-term food situation. Together with officials in London, he was already anticipating a worldwide cereal shortage, and doubted the region could 'face the risk of carrying on for several years on the present close balance between food production and consumption'. Food demand was not expected to abate until demobilization. Increasing food production would require compromising other forms of industry, but was ultimately a fate that had to be accepted. The planning of a cereal reserve of at least 50,000 tons was also 'imperative'.[95] Prospects for 1944 were not favourable either, and he anticipated that the East African region could be 'in a mess' before the end of that year.[96] As the minutes of an EAPSC meeting put it: the 'continuing responsibility for feeding employed labour … presented the chief problem'.[97] By November, Kenyan authorities had placed a firm order with London for 100,000 tons of imports to cover all requirements until September 1944—double the estimated requirements that had been submitted three weeks earlier. The request later went up to 130,000 tons.[98]

These dynamics reveal how the governmental response to food scarcity was starting to take a highly calculative form—officials were thinking about the 'food situation' as a function of expected supplies, available stocks and effective demand. The urgency of these calculations and the sense of crisis they helped to create provided the context and rationale for emergency efforts to boost the local availability of food. These are briefly discussed in the following section.

[92] One was forced to call at Mauritius to offload some of its stocks and help resolve a crisis that had appeared there.

[93] TNA: CO 852/428/5, Ministry of Food to British Food Mission (telegram), 6 March 1943; CO 852/428/6, Colonial Office to Winterton (letter), 20 April 1943.

[94] TNA: CO 852/428/6, Moore to Stanley (telegram), 15 May 1943.

[95] TNA: CO 852/428/7, Lockhart to Creasy (letter), 2 September 1943.

[96] TNA: CO 852/428/7, Lockhart to Creasy (letter), 7 October 1943.

[97] TNA: CO 852/428/7, 'Minutes of East African Supply Council Meeting', 25 November 1943.

[98] TNA: CO 852/428/7, Moore to Stanley (telegram), 18 November 1943.

Production and Marketing

Apart from lodging emergency import requests with imperial authorities, Kenyan authorities also took steps to increase local food availability. These measures are already well documented in the existing historical literature, and will not be described in great detail here.[99] One key response was to raise the controlled producer prices for maize (keeping, of course, the differential between white and African prices) to encourage planting and the marketing of all available supplies.[100] This was done in January 1943. Grants payable for breaking and clearing land, as well as guaranteed minimum returns per acre, were also increased.[101] Meanwhile, Africans were exhorted to plant and eat alternative foodstuffs in order to release maize supplies to feed labour.[102] Officials organized a drive to extract all available maize from African areas.[103] White maize growers were similarly ordered to surrender their surplus maize stocks.[104] It seems that the combination of official pressure and raised producer prices were effective enough to entice many farmers to sell their maize, even as drought and scarcity seemed increasingly likely.[105]

Another response was the resort to forced labour. Defence regulations passed in 1940 were used to secure labour for private employers in 'essential' industries like sisal, sugar, pyrethrum, rubber and flax.[106] Settlers soon agitated for conscription for agricultural purposes. This was granted, and white farmers came to rely heavily on conscript labour.[107] Northern and

[99] See Anderson and Throup, 'Myth'; Lonsdale, 'Depression'; Spencer, 'Settler Dominance'.

[100] MPC officials raised the African maize price from 6/20 to 8/96 per bag in January 1943; Anderson and Throup, 'Myth', 339. In the same month, the settler rate was increased to 12 shillings per bag, later lifted to 13 shillings; TNA: CO 852/428/5, Moore to Stanley (telegram), 28 January 1943; also N. K. Githuku, *Mau Mau Crucible of War: Statehood, National Identity, and Politics of Postcolonial Kenya* (London: Lexington Books, 2016), 104; Spencer, 'Settler Dominance', 507; Willan, Billington and Riddoch, *Report*, 49.

[101] Willan, Billington and Riddoch, *Report*, 23.

[102] R. M. Maxon, '"Fantastic Prices" in the Midst of "an Acute Food Shortage": Market, Environment, and the Colonial State in the 1943 Vihiga (Western Kenya) Famine', *African Economic History* 28 (2000): 37–9.

[103] Githuku, *Mau Mau Crucible*, 105.

[104] TNA: CO 852/428/5, Moore to Stanley (telegram), 6 February 1943.

[105] Maxon, 'Fantastic Prices', 44–5.

[106] Zeleza, 'Second World War', 147.

[107] Clayton and Savage, *Government and Labour*, 235–47; Zeleza, 'Second World War', 148–9.

Southern Rhodesia followed suit.[108] In all cases, it is probable that agricultural conscription exacerbated food shortages by diverting labour away from food production towards other 'essential' commodities.[109] Moreover, in Kenya, communal labour was used for soil conservation work, further diverting scarce labour time from the tasks of subsistence.[110]

Unlike previous events, the immediate official reaction to food scarcity in late 1942 was not to make a series of proclamations under the Native Foodstuffs Ordinance to limit the movements and prohibit local exports of food supplies. In fact, it seems that a proclamation under the ordinance—covering the whole of Kenya aside from the Northern Frontier and Turkana districts—was only gazetted on 25 March 1943, well after authorities had started to take other emergency measures to boost production and limit consumption.[111] Authorities in Nyanza had only tried to stop the movement of foodstuffs from February onwards.[112] Why this late reaction? The key variable here was the existence of maize control. The Native Foodstuffs Ordinance had previously been a means to promote district self-sufficiency. Now, it had become a way to stop the torrent of produce passing through unofficial channels and to ensure that the maximum amount of maize flowed into the official market. A new version of the ordinance was enacted in 1944 to reflect this newfound role.[113]

[108] On the wartime use of compulsory labour in Northern Rhodesia, and Colonial Office discomfort on the issue, seeing it as an opportunistic effort by settler farmers to develop their capacity to produce maize and other cereals, see K. Datta, 'Farm Labour, Agrarian Capital and the State in Colonial Zambia: The African Labour Corps, 1942–1952', *Journal of Southern African Studies* 14 (1988): 371–92; D. Johnson, 'Settler Farmers and Coerced African Labour in Southern Rhodesia, 1936–1946', *Journal of African History* 33 (1992): 111–28; R. Palmer, 'Land Alienation and Agricultural Conflict in Colonial Zambia', in *Imperialism, Colonialism and Hunger: East and Central Africa*, ed. R. I. Rotberg (Lexington, MA: Lexington Books, 1983), 89–112; A. Tembo, 'Coerced African Labour for Food Production in Northern Rhodesia (Zambia) during the Second World War, 1942–1945', *South African Historical Journal* 68 (2016): 50–69; K. P. Vickery, 'The Second World War Revival of Forced Labour in the Rhodesias', *International Journal of African Historical Studies* 22 (1989): 423–37.

[109] J. A. Byfield, 'Producing for the War', in *Africa and World War II*, ed. J. A. Byfield, C. A. Brown, T. Parsons and A. A. Sikainga (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 38; Clayton and Savage, *Government and Labour*, 243.

[110] Maxon, 'Fantastic Prices', 39–40.

[111] Willan, Billington and Riddoch, *Report*, 30.

[112] Maxon, 'Fantastic Prices', 40.

[113] The 1944 Ordinance was amended in 1950 to, among other things, strengthen the penalties for contravention of official controls; CPK, *Official Gazette*, 2 May 1950, 334.

Likewise, Ugandan officials tightened their control of marketing and food circulation under defence regulations passed in 1943.[114]

As in the First World War, a shortage of agricultural equipment presented an obstacle to food production. Farmers did benefit, however, from the availability of agricultural equipment through Lend-Lease schemes, following their inception in March 1941.[115] Some machinery also became available as part of war booty secured from Ethiopia and Somaliland. This would prove critical in driving the mechanization of Kenyan agriculture. Meanwhile, the use of artificial fertilizers increased through government subsidies. Storage facilities were developed with state assistance, and, as mentioned, the state provided credit finance to farmers through the KFA. Buoyed by this unprecedented degree of support, many settlers moved into mixed farming.[116]

Evidence suggests that the exceptional measures taken by the state to boost wartime food production and marketing acted to aggravate the effects of scarcity, particularly for rural households.[117] Yet even these efforts were insufficient to meet local demand. Officials grew increasingly desperate over the course of 1943. Caught up in the wartime enthusiasm for industrial development and technological solutions for civilian and military problems, they even started investigating the prospects of growing food yeast on an industrial scale to make up for the food deficit.[118] More importantly, some of the state's most concerted efforts would involve attempting to control food access and consumption. This, in turn,

[114] However, rigorous policing was required to prevent the leakage of food supplies southwards into famine-hit Ruanda; G. Carswell, *Cultivating Success in Uganda: Kigezi Farmers and Colonial Policies* (London: James Currey, 2007), 40.

[115] M. P. Cowen and N. Westcott, 'British Imperial Economic Policy during the War', in *Africa and the Second World War*, ed. D. Killingray and R. Rathbone (London: Macmillan, 1986), 22; Lonsdale, 'Depression', 124.

[116] Van Zwanenberg and King, *Economic History*, 44; Spencer, 'Settler Dominance', 504; Zeleza, 'Second World War', 149.

[117] Maddox, 'Gender and Famine', 96; Maxon, 'Fantastic Prices', 38–9.

[118] On plans for food yeast production, see TNA: CO 852/522/7, Storey to Carstairs, 24 August 1943; CPK, *Department of Agriculture Annual Report for 1945*, 85. The war definitively shifted colonial industrial policy: industrial development in Kenya was now to be encouraged to produce locally and save shipping space. New factories were soon established to produce goods such as margarine, beer and biscuits to supply the East African market. See M. P. Cowen, 'Early Years of the Colonial Development Corporation: British State Enterprise Overseas during Late Colonialism', *African Affairs* 83 (1984): 65; Van Zwanenberg and King, *Economic History*, 125–6; Zeleza, 'Second World War', 152–3.

required a delicate political balancing act between appeasing labour and conserving supplies. The following section discusses these dynamics.

Rationing, Distribution and Pricing

Once it became clear towards the end of 1942 that several African colonies were facing major food deficits, and that imports would be difficult to arrange, local officials set about reducing demand by economizing on consumption. Reducing or substituting labour rations was one option. In principle, this would allow existing stocks to last longer, thereby limiting import requirements. A cut of 25 per cent in the maize ration, to be substituted by cassava from the Belgian Congo, was proposed in Northern Rhodesia as early as November 1942.[119] However, officials worried about the repercussions of these reductions for labour unrest. After all, the role that disgruntlement over food rations had played in the 1935 Copperbelt strikes was a recent memory.[120]

Similar measures and concerns applied to Kenya, although here rationing schemes were more comprehensive than in Northern Rhodesia. Initially, rationing in Kenya was undertaken for individual commodities. As mentioned previously, maize meal was rationed to Africans in Nairobi and Mombasa from October 1942. European and Indian populations, with their ostensibly different dietary habits, were another matter. Authorities introduced individual rationing for rice supplies at the beginning of December 1942, for butter later in the month and for ghee from the start of the new year. The rationed quotas of rice and ghee were both subsequently reduced. Initially, Africans were not entitled to rice rations, even if it was a staple in their diet.[121] Wheat flour rationing throughout East Africa would begin in March 1943.[122] Meanwhile, reports of the poor supply position led the Maize Board to prepare for maize rationing from early December 1942.

Prior to the establishment of the EAPSC in December 1942, East African officials had already decided that controls over pricing and distribution of essential goods should be coordinated so as to prevent runaway

[119] TNA: CO 852/428/8, Waddington to Cranbourne (telegram), 2 November 1942.

[120] B. Dandule, 'Women and Mineworkers' Struggles on the Zambian Copperbelt, 1926–1964' (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Zambia, 2012), 56.

[121] This policy was changed once the Food Shortage Commission submitted an interim recommendation to this effect in mid-1943; Willan, Billington and Riddoch, *Report*, 109–11.

[122] TNA: CO 852/428/5, Moore to Stanley (telegram), 11 February 1943.

inflation and inequitable allocations of scarce goods.[123] In addition, there was now the prospect of handling the reception and distribution of anticipated maize imports. Accordingly, on 16 January 1943 the Kenya Commodity Distribution Board (KCDB) was set up to advise the governor on the establishment of local boards and to coordinate the activities of these boards as required by the EAPSC. This included collecting statistics on consumption for the EAPSC's director of produce disposal.[124] W. Grazebrook, the Kenyan price controller, was invited to be chair of the KCDB. Initially, he was resistant owing to the expected work demands of fulfilling two important official roles. Ultimately, Grazebrook accepted the position mainly, he claimed, as a form of official protest—to prevent the manipulation of prices by 'certain commercial interests'.[125] This, however, did not solve the problems of price control (discussed above), and Grazebrook's powers remained limited. Part of the difficulty was that fixing prices in one context could have major repercussions for the other East African territories. Eventually, midway through 1943 officials decided to establish a committee (headed by the EAPSC chair) to fix the prices of plant and animal produce on a regional basis.[126]

The establishment of the KCDB coincided with the period when the effects of food shortages had started to grow more acute. This left the board in a 'quagmire'. Rationing and distribution on a coordinated, countrywide basis could not be attempted until decentralized bodies were formed capable of implementing these functions and collecting statistics. Further, a census of the non-African population was required—something for which 'no figures of any value existed'. The KCDB was forced to devise a 'hastily conceived' rationing scheme for starch foods, as existing and potential supplies appeared to be dangerously below the estimated rate of consumption, 'which was in any case a nebulous reckoning'.[127]

Prior to the KCDB's creation, the maize controller had already started collecting data on consumers in early January 1943. There was a poor public response to the returns, and the process took longer than expected.

[123] TNA: CO 852/500/14, 'Minutes of the 10th Meeting of the East African Civil Supplies Board', 2 and 5 October 1942.

[124] Willan, Billington and Riddoch, *Report*, 17, 19.

[125] TNA: CO 852/500/2, Rennie to Stanley (enclosed report by Grazebrook), 10 July 1943, 34.

[126] TNA: CO 852/500/2, Rennie to Stanley (letter), 10 July 1943.

[127] TNA: CO 852/500/2, Rennie to Stanley (enclosed report by Grazebrook), 10 July 1943, 34.

Moreover, while these data were being collected the maize supply position deteriorated rapidly. 'Drastic steps' were now necessary, involving far more detailed registration work. Authorities decided to implement a complete rationing scheme for Europeans and Indians covering wheat, flour, rice, butter and ghee.[128] Local distribution boards were quickly appointed throughout the territory at the end of January 1943, and started to register individual consumers and collect census data. Towards the end of the year, regional distribution boards, operating under the direct control of a central board, replaced the local versions.

From the start of February, normal Kenyan labour rations were cut by a quarter in mass, to 1.5 lb of maize meal per working male.[129] Workers were assured that the measure was temporary. Officials issued a circular to employers listing suitable foodstuffs that could be substituted for maize meal.[130] In addition, mixed meal was made by blending maize with other foodstuffs such as finger millet, sorghum and cassava. This was distributed as labour rations, with the approval of medical authorities who noted the improved nutritional value of the admixture over that of straight maize meal.[131]

The crisis escalated further before the end of February. The MPC now held no reserve of wheat, and was forced to distribute incoming maize supplies on a day-to-day basis.[132] They had to prioritize. The policy they adopted was to provide, as far as possible, supplies essential for employed labour and employed Africans residing in urban areas. All food allocations to traders without registered labour-employing customers were stopped, and no supplies were available to help relieve the African reserves. Distribution instead prioritized essential sisal-producing functions (excluding planting and development work). Labour for other farming activities (including tea, coffee and pyrethrum) would continue to receive food

[128] TNA: CO 852/428/5, Moore to Stanley (telegram), 6 February 1943.

[129] TNA: CO 852/428/5, Moore to Stanley (telegram), 28 January 1943. Defence regulations enacted on 5 February 1943 made it an offence for employers to issue maize meal rations exceeding 1.5 lb per day to any employee. Further, only the employee, and not their family members, were entitled to such issues; Willan, Billington and Riddoch, *Report*, 61, 83.

[130] Githuku, *Mau Mau Crucible*, 104.

[131] TNA: CO 852/428/7, Lockhart, 'EAPSC Memorandum on Maize Ration for Employed Labour and Townships', 30 August 1943. Prior to this, authorities had also attempted to economize on wheat consumption by 'adulterating' flour with maize meal; TNA: CO 852/428/4, Moore to Cranbourne (telegram), 11 June 1942; Willan, Billington and Riddoch, *Report*, 112.

[132] TNA: CO 852/428/5, Moore to Stanley (telegram), 24 February 1943.

supplies, but on a 'severely' reduced basis, to allow for current levels of production to be maintained only. Ration issues were stopped or heavily curtailed for construction industries, gold mines, beer halls and domestic workers.[133] Despite these steps, many employers retrenched parts of their labour force, while some workers 'voluntarily' returned to the reserves.[134] Officials also introduced a revised ration scale, based on medical nutritional standards, initially for railway and government employees. This scale included further reductions in cereals, but more meat.[135] The military had already reduced their rations.[136] Efforts were taken to reduce maize allocations for stock feed, and to gradually reduce the pig population by half.[137]

Forced migration was another drastic option. The government made plans to 'repatriate' urban Africans and discharged labour to rural reserves, and these efforts commenced in February. On the surface, officials thought that people would have a greater chance of obtaining food in the reserves. But repatriation also appeared to provide the opportunity to finally rid Kenyan towns of large numbers of 'idlers and stiffs'.[138] The approach followed, initially, was to entice people to leave the towns by appealing to 'consciousness of the shortage'. The approach changed in March, once a coupon-based system of rationing had been introduced for Africans in Nairobi. The Nairobi Commodity Distribution Board registered some 30,000 employed males in two weeks, using the *kipande* system (see Chap.

[133] Willan, Billington and Riddoch, *Report*, 60–1.

[134] Ibid. Sisal planters asked the state for assistance with labour repatriation, but it is unclear whether they did resort to retrenchment; Githuku, *Mau Mau Crucible*, 106.

[135] TNA: CO 852/428/5, Moore to Stanley (telegram), 24 February 1943.

[136] TNA: CO 852/428/11, Dundas to Stanley (enclosed conference report), 11 March 1943.

[137] TNA: CO 852/428/5, Moore to Stanley (telegram), 28 January 1943; 'Food Shortage in East Africa', *East African Standard*, 29 January 1943; Moore to Stanley (telegram), 24 February 1943. Kenyan officials had considered the question of whether to cull pigs as early as January; TNA: CO 852/428/4, Governor's deputy to Stanley (telegram), 9 January 1943.

[138] More rigorous registration and repatriation 'of the unemployable and unregistered' were recommended by the Willan Commission, which reported on labour conditions and the causes of the Mombasa strike of 1939. This endorsed the growing public opinion that the state should take a more active approach in managing African urban populations and improving living conditions. Willan would later chair the Kenyan Food Shortage Commission of 1943 (see Chap. 7). Unsurprisingly, the commission's report approved of the state's wartime resort to repatriation; Clayton and Savage, *Government and Labour*, 224, 229 n. 58; Willan, Billington and Riddoch, *Report*, 61–2. The state continued to repatriate 'unemployed and idle workers' over the course of 1944 through defence regulations; Cooper, *African Waterfront*, 76.

3). Only those holding a *kipande* and ration coupon were entitled to receive food from a registered supplier. Women and children were excluded.[139] This made the work of repatriation far easier. Officials could simply 'pick and choose' whom they would ration. Those left over would be forced to 'return' to the reserves.

In all, about 10,000 people (including the families of workers) were sent from Nairobi to rural areas. Free railway tickets were issued to those travelling to Nyanza, but Kikuyu people had to bear their own travel costs.[140] The Mombasa Distribution Board considered registration impracticable, and central officials agreed—Mombasa was a 'native town' where registration could not possibly work.[141] There the board preferred to sell maize rations through 20 controlled wholesalers and retailers. Each customer was allowed to purchase 1.5 lb of maize meal per day. However, without registering individual consumers the system was more than inconvenient—every day long queues snaked away from controlled shops—and easily abused. Casual workers only received rations on the days they worked, and their families were not entitled to any issues.[142]

The East African territories managed to scrape through 1943 with their limited supplies and emergency imports. Their fortunes did not improve as the drought extended through the 'long rains' of that year. As a result, reduced rations—originally announced as temporary—remained in force in Kenya. By late September 1943, Governor Moore and other officials were showing 'serious concern' over the 'labour outlook in Kenya' as a result of the rationing problem.[143] Continuing with reduced rations indefinitely, they worried, would amount to a 'breach of faith' and lead to further strike action. Moore decided to start issuing full rations (of mixed meal) in October, keeping open the option of restoring a cut in the new year if the 'short rains' proved unfavourable. At that stage, a decision

[139] Willan, Billington and Riddoch, *Report*, 20–1, 62; Zeleza, 'Second World War', 153.

[140] Willan, Billington and Riddoch, *Report*, 61–2.

[141] Cooper notes the repeated use of the phrase 'native town' to justify the lack of any attempt to implement registration in Mombasa in the 1930s and 1940s. Registration of casual workers was eventually started in August 1944, largely as a means to facilitate expulsions of Mombasa's famously large population of 'idlers and stiffs'; *African Waterfront*, 71.

[142] TNA: CO 852/428/4, Moore to Cranbourne (telegram), 16 November 1942; Willan, Billington and Riddoch, *Report*, 17, 20–1. Eventually, registration was introduced in Mombasa in 1944; Clayton and Savage, *Government and Labour*, 268–9.

[143] Zeleza notes that ration reductions had indeed triggered strikes in Kenyan towns; 'Second World War', 154.

could be taken over whether the risk of imports was justified by the need to maintain production.[144] That risk was indeed justified—as noted above, Kenyan authorities ordered 130,000 tons of imported foodstuffs to tide them over 1944.[145]

In all these ways, the wartime scarcity and the functions of food distribution were closely tied up with an emerging politics of urban labour in Kenya. On one hand, officials preferred to request expensive imports than cut or substitute labour rations, for fear of the unrest and underproduction these acts might entail. On the other hand, labour mobilization made claims on the state that effectively secured entitlements in the form of priority distribution and wage subsidization. These wartime concessions meant that food emerged as an important component of a political contract formed between the Kenyan state and urban labour. As part of this kind of politics, officials used quantitative nutritional knowledge as the basis to manage worker demands and entitlements. As I will discuss in the following chapter, the state's nutritional interventions after the war effectively concentrated on the problem of 'stabilizing' an emerging urban working class.

Conditions of war enabled the problems of distribution and pricing to be considered in concert, and on an inter-territorial scale. Officials became overtly concerned with ensuring 'fair' and 'equitable' distribution. This was part of the motivation for introducing individual rationing. Equally it applied to how food supplies were collected, pooled, allocated and priced on a wider scale, between districts, race groups, provinces and territories. All these functions depended on the availability of accurate statistics.[146] This approach marks a profound change from the localized problems of food scarcity and famine relief that occupied officials in previous years. Even the Food Control Board of 1929 was primarily concerned with allocating famine relief to drought-stricken rural districts, rather than coordinating the entire system of production and distribution according to human need (see Chap. 4).

[144] TNA: CO 852/428/7, Moore to Stanley (telegram), 23 September 1943; Lockhart, 'EAPSC Memorandum on Maize Ration for Employed Labour and Townships', 30 August 1943.

[145] TNA: CO 852/428/7, Moore to Stanley (telegram), 18 November 1943.

[146] Willan, Billington and Riddoch, *Report*, 18, 93; TNA: CO 852/428/5, Moore to Stanley (telegram), 6 February 1943; CO 852/428/11, Dundas to Stanley (enclosed conference report), 11 March 1943.

Given the repeated official references to 'fairness' and 'equity', it is possible that the war provided the seeds of a rationale whereby the state, through its centralized marketing system, sought to limit and regulate the operations of the market so as to fulfil an economic and moral agenda of equity and fairness between different groups and spaces.[147] However, as I have shown, the nominal emphasis on equitable distribution was limited in practice—as in previous famines, wage labour was prioritized for government food relief. Even then, some industries, workforces and districts were 'more equal' than others, according to their ranking within local and imperial priorities. Rural relief, for instance, was low on the list. Consequently, people had to cope in a range of ways, most of them extra-governmental. Some of these strategies are briefly discussed in the following section.

Further Relief and Coping Strategies

With the worsening food situation in early 1943, the Kenyan state was forced to ramp up its famine relief efforts. Officials established a Reserve Foodstuffs Committee in early January 1943. This had the power to purchase food supplies, either locally or abroad, and distribute them to the hungry.[148] The committee was also able to secure some supplies of cassava, dried bananas and finger millet. These were allocated to district commissioners in the areas most affected by food shortage on the advice of the chief native commissioner.[149] Moreover, large amounts were spent on

[147] Bryceson makes the point that the Tanzanian government's maize pricing policy pursued between 1973 and 1986 was primarily concerned with achieving such 'spatial egalitarianism', affording 'spatially equitable prices to producers and affordable prices to consumers'. She notes that the history of statutory food marketing was closely related to urban development and experiences of urban food shortages and inflation similar to those of the Second World War; D. F. Bryceson, 'Urban Bias Revisited: Staple Food Pricing in Tanzania', *European Journal of Development Research* 4 (1992): 88, 99.

[148] Zeleza, 'Second World War', 150.

[149] Willan, Billington and Riddoch, *Report*, 4. Some 30,000 bags of cassava and banana products were imported from Uganda. These were sold at the cost of importation, at the same points from which mixed meal was being distributed; TNA: CO 533/532/9, Moore to Stanley (telegram no. 213), 1 June 1944.

famine relief in Machakos and other districts in 1943 and 1944.[150] Support from central government was not targeted equally at all areas, however. In some cases, like Vihiga, north of Kisumu, local officials had to make their own arrangements to secure and transport relief.[151]

Even though the government spent considerable sums on distributing famine relief during the war, African people handed over far larger amounts in cash purchases. For the most part, there was considerable money in the reserves, whether from agricultural sales or military and labour remittances. Some Kikuyu farmers, located close to centres of demand, were making tidy profits from the official or the urban black market. Others were able to sell their maize to their remittance-rich Kamba neighbours.[152] Some of this maize was smuggled by motor vehicles at night, to avoid controls. Some was transported along the old trading routes that had linked tribal groups in the past.[153] Moreover, as in previous scarcities, Kamba people migrated north and west to fetch supplies in Kikuyuland. In Vihiga too, Robert Maxon describes how control regulations coupled with heightened demand quickly led to the formation of non-official trading networks importing food from other parts of North Nyanza for sale at highly inflated prices. Local officials invariably saw this trade as harmful

[150] The amounts spent on famine relief reflected price inflation. During 1943, the state spent £110,300 on relief for parts of Machakos alone. The aim was to recover as much of these costs as possible but, once again, free issues were necessary for the destitute, and sales were subsidized in areas where famine conditions had been protracted; TNA: CO 533/532/9, Moore to Stanley (telegram no. 213), 1 June 1944. For the first nine months of 1944, the state spent over £230,000 on purchasing relief supplies for Machakos, Kitui and marginal northern and coastal districts. The same policy of distribution applied; TNA: CO 533/532/9, Moore to Stanley (telegram no. 214), 1 June 1944.

[151] The district officer in Vihiga managed to procure some cassava to distribute as famine relief in May 1943. The provincial commissioner also used LNC funds to purchase maize from African farmers, directly, and from settlers, via official channels. These were then sold below black-market rates. Up to 5000 people arrived daily at local marketplaces to obtain relief in the second week of May. This figure soon dropped to around 2000. Not everyone was able to secure supplies—Maxon indicates that perhaps less than one-third of those seeking food actually received any, depending on how the urgency of their needs was judged by those distributing the supplies; 'Fantastic Prices', 48–50.

[152] Anderson and Throup note that maize sold by Kikuyu farmers to Kamba people on the black market could fetch seven times the controlled price for African produce, and over four times that paid to settlers, 'Myth', 339–41.

[153] Ibid., 338.

and exploitative. They attempted to shut down local exports, as well as to undercut the black market with imports, often with little success.[154]

People pursued a range of strategies to cope with the food shortage. Some farmers in Vihiga shifted cropping strategies and planted more root crops when drought threatened towards the end of 1942. Others planted maize early, tried to hide their supplies from the official market, or ate cobs that were still green. Migration to find short-term employment in neighbouring reserves appears to have been a less common strategy, arguably because the labour supply was already depleted, with many working-age men having been recruited outside the reserves.[155] However, the evidence suggests that the market was becoming more important as a means of access and survival. Prices may have been high, but many people preferred to use cash to purchase food. The increased availability and circulation of money led to further inflation.[156] As a result, poor households, especially in marginal areas, without access to subsistence resources, suffered the most.[157]

Conclusion

The local and international events of the Second World War consolidated and advanced some of the dynamics of food scarcity and government seen in the 1920s and 1930s. The marked trend was towards centralization of governmental responsibility around food issues, while still relying on local institutions to provide basic relief functions. However, the war also introduced novel developments to the nature of food scarcity and its government.

How did war alter the nature of food scarcity? The food shortages of 1942 and thereafter were primarily caused by drought, but were fundamentally linked to wartime conditions, including increased food demand, and the effects of the state marketing system. All consumers were hurt by inflation in both official and unofficial markets. Urban residents also suffered from erratic supply through the official market. In both rural and urban areas, it was the poor who felt the effects of scarcity most acutely.

[154] Kitching, *Class and Economic Change*, 109.

[155] Maxon, 'Fantastic Prices', 37–8, 45–6.

[156] Anderson and Throup, 'Myth', 341.

[157] Maxon, 'Fantastic Prices', 41, 43, 51; A. K. Nangulu, *Food Security and Coping Mechanisms in Marginal Areas: The Case of West Pokot, Kenya, 1920–1995* (Leiden: African Studies Centre, 2009), 215.

While people mainly suffered from hunger in the form of malnutrition, some rural deaths from starvation also occurred, but not on the scale seen in previous events. Famine was now a minority phenomenon, while scarcity was more 'widespread and lingering'.[158]

How did the understanding of the problem of food scarcity change? For officials, scarcity had become less a natural calamity, to be confronted and 'muddled through' as it appeared, and more a risk calling for extensive state intervention in social and economic life and in the operations of the market. This intervention sought to moderate the longer-term risks and effects of dearth and to reduce social vulnerability, rather than simply treat the symptoms of scarcity by distributing relief. Moreover, scarcity was becoming less a problem of localized rural famine and more a matter of the balance between levels of supply and demand on multiple scales, from the district, to the territorial, to the regional.

Official efforts to manage the wartime scarcity encompassed processes of both access and supply. War conditions, including urban labour mobilization, called for and made possible an unprecedented degree of state control over how people accessed food. These conditions further highlighted the importance of seeing food pricing, distribution and consumption as part of an integrated system. Here the key problem for officials—thrust to the forefront by urban strike action—was managing economic access and the risks of indirect entitlement failure. To do so, the state acted to guarantee access through targeted subsidization and price control. Moreover, officials invoked a nominal policy of 'equitable' distribution to determine how food should be allocated between different groups and places. In practice, however, the notion of 'equity' was defined in relation to key industries and groups, rather than the territorial population as a whole. Urban labour mobilization secured key entitlements from the state while 'essential' rural industries were also prioritized for distribution. At the same time, officials sought (within limits imposed by the politics of labour) to control food access and demand, not only by restraining consumption through rationing but also by regulating how and what workers ate through the specification of dietary scales.

Alongside promoting food access, the supply problem—the urgent need to boost food production—was an equal, if not greater, area of state interest and intervention. Originally designed to increase export production to assist the wider war effort, statutory control ultimately focused on

[158] J. Iliffe, *Famine in Zimbabwe, 1890–1960* (Gweru: Mambo Press, 1990), 88.

supplying the domestic and regional labour markets, as well as urban and other non-producing populations. In one move, Kenya's settlers were able to create and 'capture' the corporatist state apparatus of production committees and boards surrounding maize and other key products.[159] In the process, the rationale of state-guaranteed prices as a means to secure adequate territorial food supplies was institutionalized.

Taken together, these efforts and developments constituted a state apparatus and mode of government that worked along two closely interrelated seams. The first addressed the balance between food supply and demand manifesting on multiple scales, and broadly aimed to 'secure' the food supplies of certain sections of the population against the risk of scarcity. What techniques were applied to manage this risk and balance? Anti-scarcity practices were now, far more so than previously, calculative. They enrolled statistics and quantitative nutritional knowledge to plan production and distribution. They also encompassed spatial techniques and calculations, with the development of local production plans being one key example. Within the limits imposed by the woeful lack of accurate statistics on production and demand, scarcity now had a 'technical fix'. Anti-scarcity practices were also increasingly economic, functioning through the governable space of the market. Subsidies and guaranteed prices, for example, were techniques that worked through incentives, and by acting on the income-cost calculations of consumers and producers. In this way, this mode of anti-scarcity practice functioned through the 'free' economic subject of interest.[160] The target 'population' for such a market-based approach was, however, highly circumscribed, practically limited to the labour force and a few key non-producing groups. The vast majority of rural Kenyans were expected to feed themselves.

It was largely to this majority of poor, rural African smallholder producers that the second rationale and mode of governing could be addressed. This mode, as previously, was closely associated with the governable space of the reserve, and with a resort to coercive methods to implement tasks like soil conservation. However, the wartime 'state of exception' also justified the extension of coercive and disciplinary techniques to other people

[159] Lonsdale, 'Depression', 123; Zeleza, 'Second World War', 146–7.

[160] M. Dean, 'The Malthus Effect: Population and the Liberal Government of Life', *Economy and Society* 44 (2015): 23.

and places, beyond the confines of the rural reserve.[161] Africans were conscripted to work on settler farms, maize stocks were forcibly extracted from the White Highlands, urban residents were repatriated to rural areas and rationing was instituted all over the territory. It was as if the war had turned the entire territory into a kind of reserve; the suspension of liberal techniques and ordinary legal rights became a general juridico-political state, even if Africans continued to suffer disproportionately. Moreover, wartime conditions meant the urgency of increasing food production overtook, in policy and practice, the related eco-Malthusian concerns around population, land scarcity and soil degradation. The latter problems would, however, return to the political stage with renewed rhetorical force before the war had come to a close.

Overall, the Second World War helped to foster the emergence of a market-based, state-centred and supply-oriented approach to managing the threat and risk of scarcity. This approach ultimately persisted beyond the end of hostilities. However, maize control—with its system of corporatist boards and high guaranteed prices—was specifically motivated as an emergency wartime measure. In 1943, in the context of intense public criticism of its handling of the food shortage, there was no certainty that state control would continue once peace returned. Moreover, there were competing visions of how a Kenyan food policy should be designed. Some were using the 'new science of nutrition' to argue for an approach to agricultural planning centred on human nutritional needs. Others were calling for a return to African communalism and rural subsistence as the key objectives of 'colonial development and welfare'. Nonetheless, despite those alternative visions and arguments, a 'productionist' anti-scarcity strategy was able to persist in Kenya well beyond 1945.

[161] G. Agamben, *State of Exception*, trans. K. Attell (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005).

CHAPTER 7

Setting the Agenda

Historians have emphasized the critical role that the Second World War and its aftermath played in shaping the contours of African political and economic history. The tensions created by wartime policies helped forge 'the social base of political nationalism' which came to dominate post-war politics in numerous African contexts.[1] In Kenya, specifically, the war promoted the development of African and settler interests competing for control of the economy, and sharpened the effects of differentiation within local African societies. In doing so, it accelerated the trends in political economy and state already seen during the Depression (see Chap. 5).[2] The early 1940s thus brought into focus the dynamics that would fire

[1] J. A. Byfield, 'Producing for the War', in *Africa and World War II*, ed. J. A. Byfield, C. A. Brown, T. Parsons and A. A. Sikainga (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 41–2.

[2] B. J. Berman, *Control and Crisis in Colonial Kenya: The Dialectic of Domination* (London: James Currey; Nairobi: East African Educational Publishers; and Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 1990), 256.

J. Duminy, *Food and Famine in Colonial Kenya*, African Histories and Modernities, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-10964-5_7

nationalist struggle and culminate in the Mau Mau conflicts of the following decade.[3]

We have seen that the war enabled settlers to win a temporary and incomplete 'capture' of state corporate institutions. They seized that opportunity to claim unequal support from the state. Moreover, as John Lonsdale argues, they were able to develop a reputation for 'productive efficiency', becoming officially 'respectable' in ways that they had not been previously.[4] They were also developing a united political voice after the factionalism that trumped plans for maize control during the mid-1930s (see Chap. 5). Now planters had little to complain about (in respect of high internal maize prices) when they faced the prospect of paying vastly more for imports or, when these were not available, retrenching workers.[5] Although conflict remained between the system of settler boards and Kenyan elective institutions, there was enough unity and influence to enable settler maize farmers to finally make their point and be heard: they were an 'essential' industry. Even if they had not completely commandeered the state executive, they were in a position to shift policy decisively in their favour.

The food shortages of 1942 and 1943 led to 'severe' criticism of the government and maize control from 'unofficial quarters'. This pressure forced the governor to accede to a Legislative Council (Legco) motion to appoint a commission of inquiry into the causes of the scarcity.[6] The all-white Food Shortage Commission—chaired by H. C. Willan, a former attorney general of Kenya—considered a wide variety of causes leading to the scarcity, but ultimately agreed with the settler view: maize prices had

[3] This basic point is made by D. Anderson and D. Throup, 'Africans and Agricultural Production in Colonial Kenya: The Myth of the War as a Watershed', *Journal of African History* 26 (1985): 327–45; J. M. Lonsdale, 'The Depression and the Second World War in the Transformation of Kenya', in *Africa and the Second World War*, ed. D. Killingray and R. Rathbone (London: Macmillan, 1986), 97–142; D. W. Throup, *Economic and Social Origins of Mau Mau, 1945–1953* (London: James Currey; Nairobi: East African Educational Publishers; and Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 1987); T. Zeleza, 'Kenya and the Second World War, 1939–1950', in *A Modern History of Kenya, 1895–1980*, ed. W. R. Ochieng' (Nairobi: East African Educational Publishers, 1989), 144–72.

[4] Lonsdale, 'Depression', 123.

[5] Ibid., 123–4.

[6] TNA: CO 533/530/7, Moore to Stanley (telegram), 19 April 1943.

been too low to maintain adequate levels of supply.[7] Settler maize was essential to war requirements. It would still be essential once peace returned, ostensibly because 'optimum production' had been reached in the African reserves. Those making such arguments were careful to hedge their bets: declining African yields would result either from poor farming methods and soil degradation or, alternatively, from the uptake of 'better' mixed farming methods.[8] In any case, relying on African-grown maize to satisfy domestic demand would constitute a 'grave risk' because of the inherent unpredictability of African marketing behaviour.[9]

The report of the Food Shortage Commission, published in 1943, duly recommended that maize control continue after the war. Moreover, it argued, the government should undertake to buy 400,000 bags of settler maize from the Kenya Farmers Association (KFA) annually, at special high prices so as to incentivize greater production.[10] Both settler and African producer prices should be fixed before the start of each planting.[11] Production for export should not be encouraged; territorial self-sufficiency

[7] Feeling that the interests and food needs of their community had been largely ignored by the European-controlled production and distribution agencies, the East African Indian National Congress argued strongly for one of the commissioners to be Indian. The government declined, supposedly because the candidates put forward by the Congress were not 'well known enough' or held commercial interests in food distribution and supply. Apart from Willan, the commissioners were W. H. Billington, general manager of the Magadi Soda Company, and J. L. Riddoch, a Kisumu businessman. They were selected on the grounds of 'impartiality' with respect to racial and sectional interests, as well as their 'standing in the community'; TNA: CO 533/530/7, Moore to Stanley (telegrams no. 261 and 282), 14 May 1943; Moore to Stanley (telegram), 24 May 1943.

[8] No statistical evidence was given to substantiate the argument that African maize yields were declining and would be unable to satisfy domestic demand. The assertion appears to have been based on anecdotal evidence from various KFA representatives and officials, including the director of agriculture, D. L. Blunt; H. C. Willan, W. H. Billington and J. L. Riddoch, *Report of the Food Shortage Commission of Enquiry* (Nairobi, 1943), 13–15, 54–5.

[9] Ibid., 45–6. The common official perception was that the 'psychological factors' of African producers—notably 'fear of a possible famine and consequent holding back of supplies'—ensured a degree of indeterminacy in their marketed output. Consequently, they argued that it was practically 'impossible' to estimate African production; TNA: CO 533/530/7, Lockhart to Seel (letter), 24 February 1944; Surridge to Seel (letter), 25 February 1944.

[10] Willan, Billington and Riddoch, *Report*, 94.

[11] Ibid., 92; Lonsdale, 'Depression', 122.

would now be the object of maize policy.[12] To help achieve this, centrally coordinated storage facilities should be developed from public funds to provide a famine reserve.[13] The commission thus confirmed the white farmers' ambitions of the 1930s: the security of their maize was now a 'national problem' deserving of special measures and attention. Accordingly, the war initiated a n extended period of rapid state-supported growth in the settler farming economy, as well as in commerce and secondary industry. African agriculture, by contrast, was to be reoriented away from cash cropping towards mixed farming and the growth of adequate food crops to ensure health and nutrition—in short, a return to the subsistence-oriented policies of 1939 (see Chap. 5).[14]

Several authors have argued that the Food Shortage Commission set the agenda for government maize and marketing policy in Kenya and East Africa until at least the coming of independence in the mid-1960s.[15] They point to the post-war (and post-independence) persistence of a centralized maize marketing system pivoting on the payment of high guaranteed prices to producers, noting that this had been a key recommendation of the commissioners. Such arguments, however, tend to overlook other proposals made by Willan and his colleagues. In particular, they elide a key aspect of the commission's report that ultimately failed to influence government policy significantly. This was its emphasis on nutrition, on the need to change African diets, as well as its calls to develop cross-sectoral approaches to agricultural and food planning.

[12] Bryceson notes a similar shift towards territorial (rather than household or district) self-sufficiency in Tanganyikan food policy following the war; D. F. Bryceson, 'Food Insecurity and the Social Division of Labour in Tanzania, 1919–1985' (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Oxford, 1988), 147–8.

[13] The commission recommended that part of the reserve should consist of finger millet owing to its easier storage capacity and nutritional value; Willan, Billington and Riddoch, *Report*, 43–5, 59, 94.

[14] Ibid., 55–6.

[15] G. W. Llewellyn, 'Government Marketing Control: The Case of the Maize Industry in East Africa', *EDRP* 144 (Kampala, 1968); R. M. A. van Zwanenberg and A. King, *An Economic History of Kenya and Uganda, 1800–1970* (London: Macmillan, 1975), 216; M. Yoshida, 'The Historical Background to Maize Marketing in Kenya and Its Implications for Future Marketing Reorganization', *EDRP* 91 (Kampala, 1966).

Nutrition and the Failure of a Needs-Based Policy

Prior to the outbreak of war, nutritional knowledge and practice in Kenya had been tied up with the objectives of improving health and productivity. The experiences of malnutrition among African porters during the First World War, for example, had demonstrated the economies of labour power afforded by providing rations of better quality (see Chap. 3). Moreover, in the 1920s the Orr and Gilks study of diet and nutrition among the Maasai and Kikuyu peoples was directly concerned with the Kenyan 'labour problem'. This 'problem' had two main aspects: rates of African population growth and individual worker productivity.[16] In this section, I will argue that nutritional work in Kenya remained closely wedded to the problems of labour, even if the reasons for and the nature of this focus changed. This was despite significant wartime interest in developing interdepartmental planning and coordination as a means to improve the nutritional status of the wider Kenyan population. I start by giving some background to the emergence of nutrition as a governmental problem in Kenya, before explaining why neither this population-wide perspective nor a food and agricultural policy based on 'human needs' materialized following the end of the war.

Guided by the Orr and Gilks study, the anthropological work of Audrey Richards, and the strength of the emerging 'international food movement', the 'new science of nutrition' was increasingly applied during the 1930s to study the problems of colonial peoples.[17] Some experts and officials drew upon this knowledge in arguing for economic policy reform in Kenya. Sir Daniel Hall, the former agricultural commissioner, for example, used nutritional research to argue for a 'system' of African agriculture

[16] C. L. Brantley, 'Kikuyu-Maasai Nutrition and Colonial Science: The Orr and Gilks Study in Late 1920s Kenya Revisited', *International Journal of African Historical Studies* 30 (1997): 49–86.

[17] D. Rimmer, '"Basic Needs" and the Origins of the Development Ethos', *Journal of Developing Areas* 15 (1981): 217; M. Worboys, 'The Discovery of Colonial Malnutrition between the Wars', in *Imperial Medicine and Indigenous Societies*, ed. D. Arnold (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988), 208–25; A. I. Richards, *Land, Labour and Diet in Northern Rhodesia: An Economic Study of the Bemba Tribe* (London: IAI, 1939), 2. Iliffe suggests that a growing colonial interest in problems of African malnutrition mirrored the transition away from famine mortality as 'the chief problem of subsistence'; J. Iliffe, *The African Poor: A History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 160.

oriented towards improving the welfare of the Kenyan population.[18] By the end of the decade, Dr A. R. Paterson, Gilks's successor as Kenyan director of medical services, was referring directly to the work of Orr and Hall when discussing, in Legco, the need for coordinated interdepartmental policies to raise the African standard of living. For Paterson, like Orr, proper coordination of services would enable agricultural-economic problems and public health problems to 'cancel each other out'.[19] Nutrition was a key part of this vision of state development policy centred on human needs.

However, executive authority did not necessarily back up the nutritional interest of medical officers like Paterson. In 1939, for example, a proposal to appoint a Kenyan nutrition officer—in line with the general recommendations of an earlier Colonial Office report—was 'summarily dismissed' by Brooke-Popham, the governor.[20] Once war had been declared, however, the new scientific knowledge of nutrition did come to play an important role in the government and security of Kenya and East Africa. As discussed in the previous chapter, officials used nutritional standards to calculate and plan production, distribution and rationing programmes. They were able to develop ration scales to maintain and improve the physical efficiency of labour in mines, the military and agricultural industries and on government works.[21] Moreover, I have mentioned how dietary standards were used to respond to urban labour grievances, by putting calculations of poverty and wage levels on a supposedly scientific

[18] A. D. Hall, *The Improvement of Native Agriculture in Relation to Population and Public Health* (London: Oxford University Press, 1936), chapter 4.

[19] CPK, *KLC Debates 1937*, vol. 3, 22 November 1937, 535–40. Paterson drew a systemic link between nutrition, agriculture, housing and labour problems: if people aspired to a higher standard of living, they would necessarily grow more crops alongside grazing cattle, practise better farming, eat a more varied diet and conserve the soil. For Foucault, this emphasis on governing through incentives, within a milieu of natural elements, and of setting certain natural processes on course to 'cancel each other out', is characteristic of mechanisms of security; M. Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population: Lectures at the Collège de France 1977–1978*, trans. G. Burchell (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 37, 47, 65.

[20] TNA: CO 859/164/2, Harvey to Undersecretary of state (letter), 20 January 1949. The recommendation was from the 1939 report of the Colonial Office's Committee on Nutrition in the Colonial Empire.

[21] Mention of wartime experiments by the military in creating new ration scales and 'mixed meal' (including adding red millet, bonemeal and calcium carbonate to maize meal) is made in Willan, Billington and Riddoch, *Report*, 59.

footing, thereby 'objectively assessing basic needs'.[22] Aside from its technical aspects, nutrition also confronted officials as a profound wartime health problem. The lingering nature of the food shortages in the early 1940s, while not resulting in major famine mortality, did lead officials to worry about evidence of rising malnutrition among the African population.[23]

The Food Shortage Commission heard evidence from medical officials including Paterson. Ten days after the commissioners met for the first time in Nairobi, in May 1943, the Hot Springs Conference—which would ultimately give rise to the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO)—began proceedings in Virginia.[24] The commissioners' report made no reference to the conference, but it echoed international thought by seeing food planning, and the prevention of future food shortages in the colony, as closely tied up with both agricultural policy and the question of nutrition. The commissioners proposed that a long-term agricultural policy for Kenya be developed around the basic objective of meeting the nutritional needs of the African population.[25]

In February 1944, the Colonial Office distributed the results of the Hot Springs Conference in a circular, urging colonial governments to consider a nutritional approach to economic policy. Rennie, the Kenyan acting governor, replied. Little progress had been made on nutritional issues owing to war conditions, he explained, apart from work on developing new minimum ration scales for labour. He saw hope in nutritional surveys and field experiments being combined with the work of soil conservation officers who had been employed through a grant linked to the Colonial Development and Welfare Act. This would entail calculating local carrying capacities, as well as the proportions of stock and crops needed to provide an adequate income and diet.[26] Rennie enclosed a joint memorandum from the Kenyan Agriculture and Medical departments. It

[22] F. Cooper, *On the African Waterfront: Urban Disorder and the Transformation of Work in Colonial Mombasa* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1987), 63.

[23] TNA: CO 859/116/5, *passim*.

[24] D. J. Shaw, *World Food Security: A History since 1945* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), chapter 1.

[25] Willan, Billington and Riddoch, *Report*, 54–60.

[26] Rennie noted that one such survey/experiment was being undertaken in Central Province, although a lack of 'manpower' was likely to hamper a quick start.

expressed a clear understanding of the need to balance farm planning with nutritional needs and education within the wider frame of 'native policy'.[27]

Why was Rennie interested in such nutritional work? At least part of the urgency arose from the problem of demobilization and its social and political impacts—what would happen when military recruits returned to their rural homes, to a diet, 'physique' and standard of living below that to which they had become accustomed?[28] African agriculture, it was reasoned, should continue to provide ex-soldiers with an adequate diet and material standard of living. Moreover, officials were all too aware of the role that food and rationing had played in urban labour grievances and strike action during the war.[29] They wanted to pre-empt unrest and stabilize an urban working class through dietary change. While labour had been 'very disturbed' by any alteration to the established ration during the war, the opportunity was there, in the shape of the compromised maize supply position, to introduce a change.[30] Yet the question of African nutrition, at that stage, was not in the hands of a single agency. The Native Welfare Committee was meant to help coordinate agricultural, veterinary and medical policy. Like the Agriculture and Medical departments, it handled many other pressing issues with a skeleton staff.[31] Nonetheless, Kenyan officials were vocally interested in improving African diet and nutrition through better agriculture and education. They thought, too, about using nutritional needs as a definite target and starting point for broader economic policy.

However, such enthusiasm appears to have been concentrated in officials like Rennie and Paterson. Sir Henry Moore, Kenya's governor from early 1940, appeared as unconvinced as Brooke-Popham by the need for nutritional research and planning during a time of war. This much was clear when, in March 1944, Seel in the Colonial Office wrote to Moore expressing his confidence that the colonial government would consider closely the recommendations of the Food Shortage Commission regarding

[27] TNA: CO 859/116/5, Rennie to Stanley (letter), 10 November 1944.

[28] Willan, Billington and Riddoch, *Report*, 59. On Kenyan official hopes and fears around African demobilization, see J. Lewis, *Empire State-Building: War and Welfare in Kenya, 1925–1952* (Oxford: James Currey; Nairobi: East African Educational Publishers; and Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2000), chapter 4.

[29] TNA: CO 859/164/2, Rennie to Blaxter (enclosure), 16 October 1946; Harvey to Undersecretary of state (letter), 20 January 1949.

[30] TNA: CO 859/164/2, Rennie to Blaxter (enclosure), 16 October 1946.

[31] TNA: CO 859/116/5, Rennie to Stanley (letter), 10 November 1944.

African nutrition and dietetics. The governor's reply did not brim with enthusiasm. His Executive Council had approved

> most of the long-term recommendations dealing with nutrition and so on, but we have not thought it necessary to go into them in any detail because there is in fact very little that is new about them so far is Kenya is concerned. Paterson seized the opportunity of the Commission to appear before it and spread himself on these and cognate subjects, on most of which he had already written at considerable length before.[32]

Moore did not think it necessary to enlarge upon Paterson's inputs 'as heralding the advent of a new heaven and a new earth'.[33] Rennie, however, personally continued to push a nutritional agenda after the war. The 1946 report of the Kenyan Development Committee, which he chaired, recommended the formation of a central nutrition board to coordinate interdepartmental efforts around food supply, access and education.[34] In February 1946, officials formed a Medical and Nutrition Subcommittee to work out a five-year programme. However, the only step taken was to establish an Interim Provisioning Committee, which in practice focused on coordinating the food supply for employed labour.[35] At the time, it was still hoped that a nutrition board would be established in the future. The Colonial Office even offered to help engage a young nutrition expert—one of several women recently given 'special training in colonial nutrition'—to act as secretary of the proposed board.[36] But Maclennan, the new Kenyan director of medical services, turned down the offer. He preferred to appoint Dr D. Harvey, the government biochemist, who had trained at Aberdeen University and the Rowett Institute with John Boyd Orr, as the board's

[32] TNA: CO 533/535/13, Seel to Moore (letter), 1 March 1944; Moore to Seel (letter), 21 March 1944.

[33] TNA: CO 533/535/13, Moore to Seel (letter), 21 March 1944.

[34] CPK, *Report of the Development Committee*, vol. 2 (Nairobi, 1946), 144.

[35] TNA: CO 859/164/2, Harvey to Undersecretary of state (letter), 20 January 1949. Appointed by the chair of the Kenya Supply Board, the Interim Provisioning Committee consisted of the various food control agencies, the APSB and the labour commissioner. It investigated and advised on 'best variations in diet and the means of obtaining the ingredients of the new diets'. Moreover, it considered how the planting programme for 1947 should incorporate a variety of crops in order to promote a 'more balanced' diet for the African worker; TNA: CO 859/164/2, Rennie to Blaxter (enclosure), 16 October 1946.

[36] TNA: CO 859/164/2, Maclennan to Culwick (letter), 19 February 1946; Blaxter to Rennie (letter), 5 October 1946.

executive officer. Harvey was apparently 'the right man for the job'. It was a demanding task, after all, calling for 'a first class man'.[37]

Unfortunately for Harvey, no nutrition organization or large-scale investigations existed by the end of the 1940s. He did not try to hide his frustration at this in later correspondence with the Colonial Office. Repeated proposals for organized nutritional work made to the Kenyan Medical Department had not even been acknowledged.[38] Why was no nutrition board ever formed? There were several reasons. One was that Rennie, Harvey's nutritional ally in the administration, left to become governor of Northern Rhodesia in 1948. Another set of issues was financial. Through the late 1940s officials and politicians consistently balked at funding nutritional work. Harvey suspected this was because new dietary scales threatened to increase the costs of feeding labour.[39] More directly, the Medical Department faced political pressure to increase its curative services, and could not provide the necessary specialized staff. A post for a government nutritional officer was included in the 1950 budget estimates, but was deleted by a majority vote of Legco.[40]

A further factor relates to the framing of the problem of malnutrition as a matter of economic access. More specifically, some Kenyan officials tended to see the basic problem as that of boosting African income in order to raise the standard of living. This was a continuation of the colonial policies of the 1930s.[41] Moreover, the gamut of nutritional studies and reports released by institutions like the International Labour Organization (ILO) during that decade invariably recommended increasing food production, boosting purchasing power, reducing prices and planning distribution as the means to tackle malnutrition.[42] Increased real income, it was reasoned, would be accompanied by efforts to shift market

[37] TNA: CO 859/164/2, Rennie to Blaxter (letter and enclosure), 21 November 1946.

[38] TNA: CO 859/164/2, Harvey to Undersecretary of state (letter), 20 January 1949.

[39] Ibid.

[40] TNA: CO 892/6/2, Farnworth Anderson, 'Replies to the Royal Commission Questionnaire No. 22', 15 January 1954.

[41] For an indication of how, during the Depression, improving nutrition was framed as a problem of raising the 'economic status' of African people, see J. L. Gilks, 'The Relation of Economic Development to Public Health in Rural Africa', *Journal of the Royal African Society* 34 (1935): 31–40. For an indication of this framing in colonial thought more generally, see Worboys, 'Discovery', 217–19.

[42] Rimmer, 'Basic Needs', 221–4.

choices and consumption habits through education.[43] With this view, and in a context where most people earned their income from agriculture, as in Kenya, both nutritional and income issues boiled down to the basic object of increasing productivity. This sense would only have been enhanced by the urgent need, faced both during and after the war, to boost the total food supply to satisfy territorial market demand (discussed below). By 1953, the rationale that increasing production was the primary means to improve African nutrition was sufficiently established for the Kenyan director of medical services to write: 'An improvement in the nutritional state of the African can only be brought about by an increase in agricultural production or an increase in wealth which will make possible a diet for the population as a whole which is more ample in quantity and better balanced in regard to essential food factors.'[44]

Given this kind of view, many officials probably saw little need for a nutritional board over and above the more fundamental challenge of boosting productivity. Whatever the reason for the failure of Rennie's proposal, most of the Kenyan state's nutritional initiatives in the post-war period concentrated on labour issues, which in turn centred on wage and income problems. Why this focus on labour? At least three points can be noted. First, labour grievances and strike action during and after the war had shown the problems of food and diet to be urgent matters of security.[45] Second, labour was one domain where the state could intervene to shift patterns of consumption effectively. Labour regulations, combined with the statutory marketing system's responsibility to supply employers and workers, were an opportunity to reduce maize dependence by changing ration scales. In this way, labour-focused interventions provided the opportunity to narrow down the nutrition problem into a more manageable form.[46] And, third, nutritional work enabled the perceived problem

[43] For one effort to integrate nutritional concerns into practical African education—at a school established in Turkana Province in the early 1930s—see H. S. Scott, 'Education and Nutrition in the Colonies', *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute* 10 (1937): 458–71.

[44] TNA: CO 892/6/2, Farnworth Anderson, 'Certain Aspects of the Public Health', 9 January 1953.

[45] On official concern over urban strike action towards the end of, and following, the war, see Cooper, *African Waterfront*, 66–76.

[46] In this respect, the focus on labour was similar to post-war social welfare interventions focusing on African ex-soldiers—the *askari* provided the 'intellectual link between the metropolitan solution to welfare based on macro state intervention and self-help coping strategies within the colonial reality'; Lewis, *Empire State-Building*, 187.

of labour productivity to be addressed simultaneously. Wartime experience had shown that more balanced rations for the army and government labour conscripts fostered an improved physique, meaning individuals could potentially work harder for longer. In 1946, Rennie could write that the Kenyan 'labour problem' was now the low 'output per man', rather than a shortage in the overall supply of workers. Improving food and diet was one key step on the path to boosting worker output.[47]

What did officials do to address these issues? We saw that officials used nutritional knowledge to calculate the ratio between income and cost of living. This, in turn, was used to plan minimum wage scales. The 1945 report of the Phillips Committee, appointed to look into further labour grievances in Mombasa, built on this earlier interest in minimum household budgets by using the latest South African scientific research into 'poverty datum lines'.[48] It recommended that a 'permanent machinery for assessment and constant review of cost of living' for African workers be formed. It also called for a food rationing scheme. The proposals around monitoring living costs were accepted by the state, but not carried out, supposedly because of a lack of 'reliable data' and qualified staff. A central advisory board was, however, formed to help calculate minimum wages.[49] The rationing scheme was rejected outright, not least because of opposition from short-term and regular workers themselves. The latter group feared that any official provision of food would strengthen employers' opposition to demands for increased wages.[50] Practice instead focused on strengthening price controls and establishing government-approved shops and 'municipal canteens'. Officials were far more inclined to simply regulate the rations provided by employers. Accordingly, in 1946 the newly formed Labour Department developed a series of minimum dietary scales for labour. These were endorsed by the administration, but not given 'legislative sanction' owing to the precarity of the food supply position.[51]

The logic and objectives of the nutritional focus on labour were captured by a study carried out the following year, 1947. It was a 'labour

[47] TNA: CO 859/164/2, Rennie to Blaxter (enclosure), 16 October 1946.

[48] Cooper, *African Waterfront*, 71. On the South African research, see G. Davie, *Poverty Knowledge in South Africa: A Social History of Human Science, 1855–2005* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015), chapter 3.

[49] TNA: CO 859/164/2, Governor's deputy to Jones (telegram), 31 March 1947.

[50] TNA: CO 859/164/2, Grant, 'Nutrition Sub-committee Notes on Visit to East Africa', 26 June 1947.

[51] TNA: CO 859/164/2, Mitchell to Jones (telegram), 12 January 1949.

efficiency survey' conducted on at least 6000 railway employees in Nairobi. The survey report framed the problem of urban labour productivity as intimately connected to the entire social world of the African worker—including conditions in the rural reserves. The analysis tied into a wider current of thought that saw the creation of a 'more differentiated, respectable working class' as an imperative of government policy.[52] Diet and nutrition were critical pieces of this puzzle of 'decasualization'. They enabled three birds to be killed with one stone: labour grievances and wider urban unrest could be pre-empted; good and tasty food could help retain labour by making conditions of work more attractive; and better nutrition would improve efficiency and productivity.

Ultimately, a major emphasis of the Food Shortage Commission report—that on developing an agricultural and food policy based on African needs—failed to materialize following the war. The Medical and Labour departments instead focused their nutritional efforts on urban labour issues. This work involved interventions in the form of poverty and minimum wage calculations, as well as defining balanced ration scales, and was tied directly into the emerging, pressing agenda of producing and stabilizing an 'urbanized working class'.[53] As the problem of African nutrition was medicalized and oriented towards the new Kenyan 'labour problem', the focus of governmental attention shifted away from rural poverty, malnutrition and population stagnation (as described in Chaps. 4 and 5) to the body and productivity of the individual urban worker.

Essentially, the failed proposal for a Kenyan nutrition board removed any potential obstacle to the 'productionist' anti-scarcity rationale, embedded within the maize marketing system, which focused on securing total levels of supply against market demand. Maize control could basically get on with the job, without any disciplinary oversight from a nutritional board or other such agency. By the end of the war, the state was fully committed to two sets of obligations. Officials could neither disincentivize maize production nor renege on their responsibility to feed labour and prescribe scientific remedies for poverty and productivity. White farmers would have to be paid high prices for their maize. Workers would just have to be educated on how to have a better diet and be paid sufficiently well to afford it. A food and agricultural policy based on the population's 'human needs' became yet another casualty of Kenya's political corporatism.

[52] Cooper, *African Waterfront*, 88.
[53] Ibid., 72.

However, these factors do not yet explain why maize control itself was able to persist in Kenya beyond 1945. To understand this, we need to consider the changing nature of food supply and consumption in the colony—changes closely linked to the war's events and aftershocks.

Post-War Kenyan Food Systems and Policy

The Second World War set certain trends and developments in motion that would be of lasting consequence for Kenyan food systems and their government. Here, I describe some of the key social and economic dynamics set in train by the war. The object is to indicate how these dynamics provided the conditions and demand for the continuation and stabilization of an anti-scarcity system geared towards securing sufficient aggregate food supply on a territory-wide scale.

The first key trend relates to widening socioeconomic inequality. As indicated in Chap. 6, wartime conditions helped to accelerate processes of social differentiation within rural African societies.[54] Wealthy producers located near centres of demand or well served by marketing facilities could capitalize on favourable market trends to earn and invest more in land, labour or education. The poor, meanwhile, bore the brunt of food price inflation, with few means to cope with the inevitable rise in land values. Moreover, school fees and taxes had to be paid, and clothing bought. Furthermore, population growth encouraged land fragmentation and exploitation in the reserves. The post-war years saw a decline in the real wages and household income levels of smallholders.[55] Proletarianization continued: by 1950, around half of the population of Kikuyu reserves was 'landless'.[56] Even households with some access to land increasingly supplemented their income by means of employment, either within or outside the reserves.[57] Pressing conditions of poverty provided fertile ground for political discontent.

[54] Zeleza, 'Second World War', 151.

[55] A. Thurston, *Smallholder Agriculture in Colonial Kenya: The Official Mind and the Swynnerton Plan*, Cambridge African Monographs 8 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 2.

[56] Zeleza, 'Second World War', 160–1.

[57] This trend would have been most pronounced in densely populated reserves such as Kiambu and Central Nyanza; G. Kitching, *Class and Economic Change in Kenya: The Making of an African Petite-Bourgeoisie* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1980), 119–20, 130–3.

Second, the total number of employed labourers in Kenya remained high after the end of the war, even increasing slightly (see Fig. 5.1). Moreover, increasing rural landlessness, coupled with the growing demand for labour in the towns during and after the war, drove rapid urbanization. The size of the non-producing population grew in accordance. However, the proportions of the urban population should not be exaggerated—in 1948, even after wartime growth, the urban population constituted only around five per cent of the Kenyan total, rising to eight per cent by 1962.[58] Nonetheless, these dynamics constituted a significant increase in market demand over the pre-war level.

Third, the war helped to shift tastes and consumption habits. Africans on military service and those living in towns were exposed to and became acquainted with new needs. In concert with the wartime impetus to industrialization and the development of a consumption-goods industry in Kenya, new items appeared in household budgets as 'socially necessary consumption needs' that could only be secured through cash purchases.[59]

Fourth, and related to all these factors, war conditions encouraged changes in modes of food access. They continued and intensified the trend whereby, for a larger proportion of the population, household subsistence was obtained through the market. This applied not only to urban and rural wage labour. In districts like Kiambu, poorer households increasingly switched to higher-risk strategies biased towards cash cropping and market purchases rather than direct consumption.[60] The terms of trade were also shifting for livestock: in Ukambani during the war, people used cash to purchase food at inflated prices in preference to trading cattle. Beasts were becoming less valuable as a resource for long-term security. This reflected a more general process of rural transformation: cash-earning activities like commodity production, wage labour and trading were becoming more attractive as a basis of subsistence and accumulation than grazing herds of livestock on congested land. So too were household investments like education.[61] By the end of the war, a gulf had opened up

[58] R. T. Ogonda, 'Transport and Communications in the Colonial Economy', in *An Economic History of Kenya*, ed. W. R. Ochieng' and R. M. Maxon (Nairobi: East African Educational Publishers, 1992), 143.

[59] M. P. Cowen, 'Commercialization of Food Production in Kenya after 1945', in *Imperialism, Colonialism and Hunger: East and Central Africa*, ed. R. I. Rotberg (Lexington, MA: Lexington Books, 1983), 199.

[60] Kitching, *Class and Economic Change*, 111.

[61] Lonsdale, 'Depression', 125.

between the general prosperity of agricultural and pastoral districts.[62] For both rural and urban populations, then, food scarcity was increasingly a problem of balancing cash income and expenditure.

Fifth, the geography of rural scarcity and relief increasingly focused on congested areas where processes of commercialization and differentiation were most advanced. In the late 1940s and early 1950s, aside from ecologically marginal coastal areas, it was central, highly populated districts such as Machakos, Kitui, Meru, Nyeri, Fort Hall and Kiambu that regularly required substantial amounts of famine relief.[63] The maize control continued to provide this relief through networks of 'established traders'.[64] This constituted an additional source of demand.

In their combined effects, these trends ensured that the high wartime levels of food demand on the domestic market continued well after demobilization. In the context of the global post-war food shortage, which made imports near impossible, this meant Kenyan agricultural policy was forced to focus on maximizing cereal production until at least the end of 1948 (see Fig. 7.1).[65] This domestic policy dovetailed with a wider imperial shift towards production-led development in the colonies—an approach embraced by Britain's post-war Labour government, now presiding over a country and empire starved of resources and dollar reserves.[66]

In Kenya, this productionist conviction served to justify the continued existence of state marketing controls as a means to boost the food supply to meet demand both in Kenya and within the wider East African Cereals Pool, which remained in operation until 1952.[67] In that year, the Ibbotson Commission reported that 'in the interests of stability' the controlled marketing of maize 'must continue'. The commissioners' report, noting 'the government's duty to ensure the stability of the colony's food supplies',

[62] Ibid., 127.

[63] CPK, *Department of Agriculture Annual Reports 1946–1952*; J. English, M. Tiffen and M. Mortimore, 'Land Resource Management in Machakos District, Kenya, 1930–1990', World Bank Environment Series 5 (London and Washington, DC: World Bank, 1994), 17–19, 39.

[64] CPK, *Department of Agriculture Annual Reports 1951–1952*.

[65] CPK, *Department of Agriculture Annual Reports 1945–1948*.

[66] F. Cooper, 'Modernizing Bureaucrats, Backward Africans, and the Development Concept', in *International Development and the Social Sciences: Essays on the History and Politics of Knowledge*, ed. F. Cooper and R. M. Packard (Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 1997), 70.

[67] The Cereals Pool was replaced by an inter-territorial mutual supply agreement; TNA: CO 822/668, *passim*.

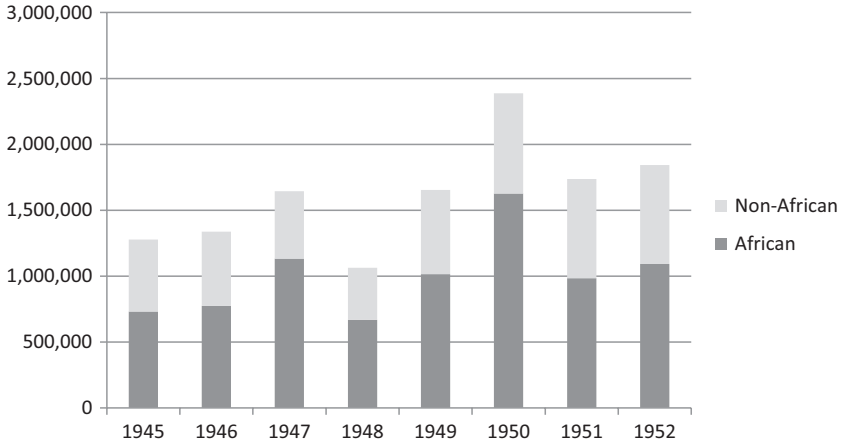


Fig. 7.1 Total deliveries to Maize Control, Kenya, 1945–1952 (number of bags) (*Source*: CPK, *Department of Agriculture Annual Reports 1946–1952*)

rehearsed the standard argument that this could 'only be done by some system of price fixation in advance of planting'. However, it did recommend that maize control operate under the provisions of an ordinance rather than emergency regulations, and in the hands of a statutory board or corporation.[68]

In the context of the global commodity boom that lasted until the mid-1950s, there appeared to be little ground to challenge the commission's recommendations. High food prices on the international market meant maize control could continue to support settler growers by paying them above export prices, while selling to consumers below import parity. Consequently, no basis existed for political conflicts between producers and consumers as there had been in the 1920s and 1930s.[69] Yet centralized marketing persisted in Kenya even after high global commodity prices began to falter in the mid-1950s. At that point, by contrast, it fulfilled a useful purpose in protecting producers under conditions of falling

[68] A. W. Ibbotson, C. H. Williams, J. Mackay, W. A. C. Bouwer, C. D. Hill, A. J. Don Small and W. Padley, *Report of the Board under the Chairmanship of Sir William Ibbotson on the Marketing of Maize and Other Produce* (Nairobi, 1952), 14–15.

[69] Lonsdale, 'Depression', 123–4.

international prices, much as in the pre-war years of economic depression.[70] Moreover, the 1950s State of Emergency—a response to the Mau Mau Uprising—provided sufficient justification for maize control to persist under defence regulations and for officials to maintain tight coercive controls over reserve agriculture.[71] Indeed, the maize control system was a vehicle through which the state attempted to quell rural unrest, as a key aspect of larger programmes of rural resettlement and development implemented with the cooperation of the landed 'incipient gentry' of the central Kikuyu reserves.[72]

Ultimately, despite numerous critiques levelled at the statutory marketing system,[73] Kenyan maize control continued to operate under emergency regulations until 1959, when it was eventually replaced by the Maize and Produce Board—a central statutory board that inherited and continued the policy of maize self-sufficiency and that had instructions to operate a maize reserve.[74] That board would play a key role in relieving a severe famine in 1961–1962. The independent Kenyan government, like its colonial forebear, thus continued to evince a 'commitment to increase producer prices' to achieve self-sufficiency in maize, often to the detriment

[70] The degree of favouritism and protection directed to producers was specific to Kenya. Organized marketing in other settings tended to serve the more important political groupings in those contexts: processors and exporters in Uganda; urban consumers in Northern Rhodesia and Tanganyika; R. H. Bates, *Beyond the Miracle of the Market: The Political Economy of Agrarian Development in Kenya*, 2nd edition (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005); D. F. Bryceson, 'Urban Bias Revisited: Staple Food Pricing in Tanzania', *European Journal of Development Research* 4 (1992): 82–106; Van Zwanenberg and King, *Economic History*, 218–19.

[71] A. P. Castro and K. Ettenger, 'Counterinsurgency and Socioeconomic Change: The Mau Mau War in Kirinyaga, Kenya', *Research in Economic Anthropology* 15 (1994): 63–101.

[72] Bates argues that the Mau Mau conflict enabled the 'aggressive elites of the Kikuyu reserves' to enjoy even greater access to the 'coercive power and economic resources of the colonial government'. This would have profound effects for Kenya's political future, as it was this conservative elite that was poised to seize power in an independent Kenya; *Beyond the Miracle*, 39.

[73] For a major contemporary critique of African statutory marketing systems, see H. Dow, S. H. Frankel, A. Gaitskell, R. S. Hudson, D. T. Jack, K. Makwaia and F. Sykes, *East Africa Royal Commission 1953–1955 Report* (London: HMSO, 1955), chapter 7. For an overview of the problems created by a system of guaranteed producer prices, see Van Zwanenberg and King, *Economic History*, 220–1.

[74] Llewellyn, 'Government Marketing Control', 2; Yoshida, 'Maize Marketing', 4–5.

of consumers.[75] Likewise, it inherited and retained a system for marketing the output of large farms following the Africanization of the White Highlands.[76] Indeed, in an era of independence, the Maize and Produce Board became a vehicle to expand smallholder production and integrate more African farmers into the formal economy—a key part of the 'social contract' forged between the national government and its subjects.[77]

The proportion of Kenya's total agricultural output represented by the official marketed supply was highly limited. Roger van Zwanenberg and Anne King report that throughout the post-war period (up to the mid-1970s) only around half of the produce sold by the Kenyan maize control was sourced from African smallholders, representing around five to ten per cent of their total output. Around 80 to 90 per cent of Kenya's total crop did not pass through the official system at all. The vast majority of maize was consumed directly, traded locally or else channelled through black markets.[78] These markets—still designated 'illegal'—continued to take on particular importance during times of drought. Nevertheless, a lack of adequate and accurate statistics on the entire territory's maize production and demand remained a significant obstacle to maize control's efforts to predict and respond to food scarcities.[79]

After 1945, successive government commissions recommended some curtailment of state controls over maize marketing in order to reduce consumer prices, to encourage regional specialization in production and to eliminate the black market.[80] Each argument was unsuccessful. One reason was that the persistence of controls tended to favour powerful groups of large-scale maize growers; their possession of trading licences enabled substantial profits to be made by transferring food supplies from surplus to deficit regions during episodes of scarcity. Another was the politically influential notion that decontrol of the maize marketing system would

[75] C. Hornsby, *Kenya: A History since Independence* (London and New York: I. B. Tauris, 2012), 363–4.

[76] C. Leys, *Underdevelopment in Kenya: The Political Economy of Neo-colonialism* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 1974), chapter 3.

[77] T. S. Jayne and S. Jones, 'Food Marketing and Pricing Policy in Eastern and Southern Africa: A Survey', *World Development* 25 (1997): 1510–12.

[78] C. Singh, J. Nyamweya and J. K. Gecau, *Report of the Maize Commission of Inquiry* (Nairobi, 1966), 6–7; Van Zwanenberg and King, *Economic History*, 220–1.

[79] Singh, Nyamweya and Gecau, *Report*, 7–11.

[80] Mosley notes that the system of maize marketing was subject to inquiries in 1946, 1952, 1955, 1958, 1963, 1966 and 1972; P. Mosley, 'The Politics of Economic Liberalization: USAID and the World Bank in Kenya, 1980–1984', *African Affairs* 85 (1986): 110.

undermine food security.[81] Moreover, a reforming interest in gradually reducing the prices paid to producers (as a means to avoid large surpluses and ultimately ensure maize could be exported without any loss) was vitiated by the onset of droughts and food crises in 1965 and 1970.[82]

High levels of domestic food demand—and the ever-present threat of sudden scarcity—thus remained effective arguments for the persistence of a state monopoly over the marketing of staple foods, as well as draconian practices of market segmentation that favoured particular groups of maize growers over others.[83] Indeed, in 1979 the Maize and Produce Board merged with the Wheat Board to form the National Cereals and Produce Board (NCPB), which, like its predecessors, aimed to manage price fluctuations and maintain a storage buffer to mediate the annual balance of surpluses and shortages. Again, food self-sufficiency remained a key plank of state agricultural policy.[84] The NCPB itself became an important tool in the cultural and geographical patronage networks established by President Daniel arap Moi.[85] The food marketing system was thus a key mechanism within the 'politics of the belly' pursued by the post-colonial Kenyan state.[86]

Sustained high levels of post-war domestic food demand not only provided one justification for continued statutory control but also shaped

[81] Ibid.

[82] Leys, *Underdevelopment*, 106–7. Part of the optimism that producer prices could gradually be reduced to ultimately enable an export market in maize was driven by the potential of new hybrid strains of maize to boost crop yields and lower the costs of production; Singh, Nyamweya and Gecau, *Report*, 4.

[83] Mosley, 'Politics of Economic Liberalization', 110.

[84] Cowen discusses how post-independence Kenyan food policy geared towards ensuring national self-sufficiency had the effect of undermining both national and household self-sufficiency, failing to expand the internal market for food and hence limiting opportunities for the development of 'indigenous accumulation'; M. P. Cowen, 'Change in State Power, International Conditions and Peasant Producers: The Case of Kenya', *Journal of Development Studies* 22 (1986): 357.

[85] N. J. Sitko, J. Chamberlin, B. Cunguara, M. Muyanga and J. Mangisoni, 'A Comparative Political Economic Analysis of Maize Sector Policies in Eastern and Southern Africa', *Food Policy* 69 (2017): 248. For a discussion of the effects of the Moi presidency, which worked to politically exclude an 'indigenous class of capital' that had gained access to state power under Kenyatta, and which ultimately worked to reduce the supply of marketed food and to boost food imports, see Cowen, 'Change in State Power'.

[86] J. Bayart, *The State in Africa: The Politics of the Belly* (London and New York: Longman, 1993). On the significance of food and food self-sufficiency as legitimating factors within political and cultural discourses of middle Africa, see M. G. Schatzberg, *Political Legitimacy in Middle Africa: Father, Family, Food* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2001).

official policy concerning development in the African reserves. The need to maximize cereal production largely prevented the implementation of 'mixed farming' and rotational cropping policies as recommended, for example, by the Food Shortage Commission (see above). In principle, post-war development plans for African areas invoked the subsistence-oriented ideas of the late 1930s. Here the 1946 Worthington Plan was the government's major effort, designed to 'arrest the physical and social deterioration of the reserves'.[87] The problems and remedies identified by the plan were familiar, having already been defined prior to the war: manage surplus population, ensure adequate food supplies, and conserve soil fertility. Its latent objectives were to restrain African competition with the now-profitable settler farming sector and to maintain 'the localized containment and control of the African population'.[88]

In practice, the aims of the Worthington Plan entailed a denial of private property ownership by Africans and proscribed their cultivation of higher-valued export crops.[89] Officials hoped that mixed farming could slow down and cap the spread of African commodity production and 'excessive individualism', which they continued to blame for a growing ecological and social crisis.[90] The key aims were household and district self-sufficiency. Cash cropping was not to be discouraged per se. African standard of living had to be raised, and this required some cash income. Commodity production was necessary and acceptable provided the fertility of the soil did not suffer and nutritional needs were met from direct consumption.[91] As in the 1920s and 1930s, it was thought that only surplus crops (above household subsistence needs) should be marketed.[92]

However, given the urgent demand to maximize cereal production after 1945, in practice development efforts focused on ameliorative conservation measures in the reserves—especially contour ridging, terracing

[87] The Worthington Plan was a ten-year scheme financed by the Colonial Development Corporation with £11 million. Half of these funds were dedicated to the African Land Development Programme, which focused on soil conservation projects. In part, the plan was motivated by the need for 'food security'; Zeleza, 'Second World War', 160.

[88] Berman, *Control and Crisis*, 256–7.

[89] Van Zwanenberg and King, *Economic History*, 47–8.

[90] A. F. D. Mackenzie, *Land, Ecology and Resistance in Kenya, 1880–1952* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1998), 161.

[91] CPK, *Department of Agriculture Annual Report for 1945*, 22.

[92] Van Zwanenberg and King, *Economic History*, 47–8.

and enclosures.[93] To ease implementation, officials hoped to revive 'traditional' systems of authority and communal solidarity to function alongside state powers of coercion.[94] They combined conservationist interventions within large-scale 'betterment schemes'—projects that provoked concerted bitterness and resistance, particularly from women, who were corralled into the compulsory hard labour of terracing.[95] Officials also hoped to relieve land congestion through settlement schemes, and halt fragmentation by means of group farming projects. Some small-scale projects were devised, but ultimately both resettlement and group farming lost momentum by the early 1950s.[96]

The basic policy of encouraging food sufficiency remained the nominal foundation of state policy for African agriculture through to the early 1950s. By 1952, this was common sense enough for the Agriculture Department's annual report to state: 'The first duty of this department is to ensure the food supplies of the people.'[97] Yet there were changes in emphasis within these objectives. By the end of the 1940s, a different view of the soil problem had started to gain traction in official debates. The 'new school' of agricultural officers, linking soil degradation with the long-standing restrictions imposed on the growth of high-value cash crops by Africans, began to win over.[98]

For officials of the 'new school', forcing African farmers to terrace their fields and grow large yields of low-value cereal crops was the problem; crops such as coffee and tea could produce more income, on less land, while being lighter on the soil. By 1950, Africans were both allowed and encouraged to grow high-priced cash crops—a measure motivated by the need to raise the general standard of living.[99] Moreover, the hope of relying on 'traditional' communitarian systems was rapidly giving way to a

[93] CPK, *Department of Agriculture Annual Report for 1945*, 4; *Department of Agriculture Annual Report for 1948*, 15; Throup, *Origins of Mau Mau*, 141–3.

[94] Thurston, *Smallholder Agriculture*, chapter 2.

[95] Mackenzie, *Land, Ecology and Resistance*, 161–7.

[96] Some small-scale resettlement schemes were devised, but in practice the focus fell on communalism. Planned group farming was implemented in Nyanza between 1948 and 1952; Throup, *Origins of Mau Mau*, 70–1; Thurston, *Smallholder Agriculture*, 24; Van Zwanenberg and King, *Economic History*, 48.

[97] CPK, *Department of Agriculture Annual Report for 1952*, 2.

[98] Mackenzie, *Land, Ecology and Resistance*, 167; Throup, *Origins of Mau Mau*, 69–70.

[99] CPK, *Department of Agriculture Annual Report for 1951*, 2; Thurston, *Smallholder Agriculture*, 31–2.

more favourable view of African economic individualism.[100] Some officials and experts argued that only the individualization of land tenure could solve the problems of land fragmentation in the reserves.[101]

Building on these shifts, the early 1950s saw a push for farm planning. Land use in each Kenyan province was to be planned according to distinct ecological zones corresponding to differing agricultural potentials, as determined by the relations between climate, vegetation and topography.[102] Within these zones, the normative spatial and economic notion of the 'farming unit' was deployed to plan mixed farms and appropriate conservation measures.[103] These kinds of practices formed a key part of the state's rejoinder to growing rural poverty and the Mau Mau Uprising.

The Swynnerton Plan of 1954 encapsulated this response. The plan materialized the policy shift towards promoting individualization of land tenure, survey and consolidation of high-potential African lands, as well as high-value cash cropping—all framed within the broader objectives of

[100] CPK, *Department of Agriculture Annual Report for 1949*, 16; Mackenzie, *Land, Ecology and Resistance*, 165, 167.

[101] 'The natural evolution seems to be that the more progressive will slowly accumulate more land and more wealth and that the eventual pattern of development will be a landowning class employing paid labour.' Individual title would enable credit to be obtained and invested in development, and would prevent land fragmentation; CPK, *Department of Agriculture Annual Report for 1950*, 17.

[102] For a discussion of the history of ecological survey and planning for purposes of promoting colonial African development, see P. Anker, *Imperial Ecology: Environmental Order in the British Empire, 1895–1945* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001); J. Duminy, 'Ecologizing Regions; Securing Food: Governing Scarcity, Population and Territory in British East and Southern Africa', *Territory, Politics, Governance* 6 (2018): 429–46.

[103] The 'farming unit' was defined as 'the minimum unit of land necessary for the average family to grow its food requirements and obtain a cash income from surplus crop and stock products and from appropriate cash crops which will enable the standard of living to be raised well above the present level'; CPK, *Department of Agriculture Annual Report for 1952*, 1.

promoting mixed farming and food availability.[104] Now, however, the emphasis fell on territorial sufficiency more than household subsistence. Food production in key areas would be stimulated to help feed growing urban populations and the labour force and, to some extent, to supply the export market.[105] The market was officially becoming more acceptable as a strategy for rural production and food access. For officials, this commercialization brought certain scarcity-related risks into play.[106] Maintaining state control of the food market as a means to secure an adequate territorial supply therefore had a further rationale.

Ultimately, the Second World War brought about a policy outlook towards both settler and African development that was sustained by conditions after 1945. Central to this outlook was the imperative of managing food scarcity. While soil degradation may have provided 'the language of retentive white control, the closure of options',[107] food scarcity proved a key deciding factor in post-war development practice. After 1945, officials had hoped to develop a two-track anti-scarcity system: one securing adequate supply for the official market and the other focusing on promoting rural subsistence. But they were unable to implement the latter: the urgent need to meet food demand trumped the longer-term dream of mixed farming and direct consumption. By the time the domestic and international food supply position started to stabilize, at the end of the 1940s (see

[104] R. J. M. Swynnerton, *A Plan to Intensify the Development of African Agriculture in Kenya* (Nairobi, 1954). Records and interviews related to the development and implementation of the Swynnerton Plan are available in the Bodleian Library, University of Oxford: MSS Afr. s. 1717, *passim*. Also see N. E. Makana, 'Peasant Response to Agricultural Innovations: Land Consolidation, Agrarian Diversification and Technical Change; The Case of Bungoma District in Western Kenya, 1954–1960', *Ufahamu: A Journal of African Studies* 35 (2009); C. C. Trench, *Men Who Ruled Kenya: The Kenya Administration, 1982–1963* (London and New York: Radcliffe Press, 1993), chapter 21. On land reform and agricultural development in late colonial Kenya as a response to Mau Mau, population pressure, rural poverty and landlessness, see J. W. Harbeson, *Nation-Building in Kenya: The Role of Land Reform* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1970); C. Leo, *Land and Class in Kenya* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1984); C. G. Rosberg and J. Nottingham, *The Myth of 'Mau Mau': Nationalism in Kenya* (New York: Praeger, 1966); M. P. K. Sorrensen, *Land Reform in the Kikuyu Country: A Study in Government Policy* (Nairobi: Oxford University Press, 1967).

[105] Swynnerton, *Plan to Intensify*, 10.

[106] According to the traditional colonial 'food versus cash crop' theory of famine. See M. Vaughan, *The Story of an African Famine: Gender and Famine in Twentieth-Century Malawi* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 8–11 and chapter 3.

[107] Lonsdale, 'Depression', 119–20.

Fig. 7.1), officials were already looking towards commercialized production as the route to African welfare (including improved nutrition) and environmental conservation. As rural local subsistence receded as a policy objective, a market-based strategy of boosting productivity remained on centre stage. Post-war conditions thus allowed the wartime mode of anti-scarcity practice to persist. The report of the Food Shortage Commission, while sometimes credited with setting the agenda for post-war marketing control, was in practice a relatively negligible factor in making possible the existence and persistence of the latter.

Conclusion

Developments associated with the Second World War persisted beyond the end of hostilities. Post-war conditions entrenched the rationale, structure and techniques of an anti-scarcity system that, in many respects, had outlived the institutions of statutory marketing. This was a market-based mode of government that sought to balance levels of territorial supply with demand—a rationale and mode originally established as part of the state's wartime responsibility to feed labour and other non-producing populations, as discussed in Chap. 6.

The persistence of this system was by no means straightforward. The rationale of state marketing control offering high guaranteed prices as a means to boost food availability was originally motivated as an emergency wartime measure. Although the Food Shortage Commission recommended that maize control continue after the war, it also advocated steps to reorient agricultural policy towards the nutritional needs of the population and towards mixed farming. Post-war political and economic conditions meant that these objectives were significantly curtailed. The comforting official ideals of rural subsistence, mixed farming and, to some extent, soil conservation were sacrificed for the sake of food production and sufficiency. Meanwhile, official interventions in the realm of nutrition came to focus on pressing urban labour problems, and acquired a medical inflection. In this way, despite interest from officials and experts in developing a Kenyan food policy based on human need and demand, a supply-oriented anti-scarcity system was able to continue and consolidate. Arguably, its echoes can still be heard in the framing of contemporary food problems, and in the way that Kenyan 'food and nutrition security' is governed through the priority of productivity. We return to these points in the book's conclusion.

What do these dynamics reveal about the emergence of food scarcity as a problem of government? On the one hand, this chapter has shed light on the rise of a politics of food that targeted labour, specifically the increase and reproduction of labour power, to an extent not seen before. This involved ensuring the availability of food supplies for labour on the official market and regulating the molecular-nutritional content of both food and body to increase the total labour power of the workforce. It was a politics that acted on the market calculations and consumer decisions of workers and their families, or that sought control over what workers ate through direct rationing and the creation of recommended ration scales. It aimed to secure the productivity of the (increasingly urban) labour force for economic and security objectives. It operated alongside, and in some respects superseded, a politics interested in food from the perspective of managing the reproduction of rural populations (and hence the total supply of migrant labour) within the bounds imposed by land and resource scarcity. Food and nutrition thus emerged at the centre of the post-war vision to foster a stable and productive urban working class.

On the other hand, the chapter has also depicted a political failure. This was the failure of Kenyan officials to realize one of the great ideals of liberal government—that is, to arrange natural processes and circulations so that certain problems (in this case, issues like hunger, malnutrition, population pressure, soil erosion and income) might 'cancel each other out'. Such ideas were certainly proposed for the colonial Kenyan context, and they garnered some support both within and beyond the state. However, this kind of anti-scarcity model failed to materialize because of a range of contextual factors—some of the more important being the exigencies of wartime and post-conflict food shortages, the politics and vested interests of maize production and marketing, and the economics of labour. The end result was the persistence of a mode of anti-scarcity practice that operated through the processes and mechanisms of the official market, and within the tight bounds of bureaucratic surveillance and control. This degree of state intervention in the market, far from being the expression of some essential colonial logic of control and coercion, is better understood as the outcome of a conjunction of events, interests, reflexive interventions and their effects.

CHAPTER 8

Epilogue

A severe food shortage struck Kenya in 1960 and 1961. In its aftermath, a report from the World Bank deemed it the result of 'exceptional climatic conditions'.[1] Drought scorched the country in 1960 before 'disastrous floods' made distributing famine relief almost impossible in 1961, the year that colonial authorities released Jomo Kenyatta from detention.[2] In that heady political context, it was all too easy for officials in Nairobi and London to contrast their actions to relieve the famine with the supposed lack of care ostensibly shown by nationalist politicians and African communities.[3] An official Kenyan government investigation claimed that 'no deaths directly attributable to famine' were reported by district

[1] World Bank, *The Economic Development of Kenya* (Baltimore: World Bank, 1963), 18.

[2] Conway reviews and describes the anomalous and extreme hydrometeorological conditions leading to the 1961 flood events; D. Conway, 'Extreme Rainfall Events and Lake Level Changes in East Africa: Recent Events and Historical Precedents', in *The East African Great Lakes: Limnology, Palaeolimnology and Biodiversity*, ed. E. O. Odada and D. O. Olago (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2002), 63–92.

[3] In response to a statement from the colonial secretary outlining efforts taken to address the crisis in Kenya, one Conservative member of Parliament remarked: 'I am sure that the House would wish to congratulate the Services in Kenya on the fantastic job which they have been doing under the most trying conditions. Surely it is not unfair to remark how well that compares with the lack of example, apparently, given by Africans and Asians there, and notably the lack of example given by Kenyatta'; (A. Fell) Government of the United Kingdom (GUK), *HC Debates 1961*, 16 November 1961, col. 661.

J. Duminy, *Food and Famine in Colonial Kenya*, African Histories and Modernities, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-10964-5_8

officials.[4] The relief of African suffering, and efforts to bring an end to 'famines that kill', now expressed the care of the colonial state in the face of the politics of anti-colonialism.

The organizational mode of the official response was familiar. Officials appointed a National Food Relief Committee under the chair of H. Slade, the speaker of the Legislative Council, to oversee the distribution of relief. That committee ultimately dissolved in 1962. Similar to that of the Food Control Board in 1929, the committee's appointment had been somewhat reluctant. It was the 'unprecedented scale' of drought and flooding that necessitated centralized control over and above the efforts of provincial administrators acting in concert with the statutory marketing boards.[5] These efforts were actions themselves deemed necessary by officials only once the 'self-reliance' of the people had been tested and exhausted.[6] The risks of fostering a 'pauper mentality' and widespread 'improvidence' through the provision of famine relief remained a key source of official anxiety.[7]

One novelty of this crisis and its response was technological. Officials of Kenya—some two years before the country would formally achieve independence—whose predecessors had instructed the loading of sacks of supplies onto rail and road trucks, now resorted to a new method of distributing relief: air transport. The governor, Sir Patrick Renison, had appealed to the Royal Air Force for transport aircraft and to the British Army for helicopters and reconnaissance aircraft to help distribute food for an estimated 250,000 Kenyans suffering from the double blows of famine and flood. For some remote rural communities, those supplies had to be dropped from the air. In the end, a combined air distribution effort was launched involving the British, Rhodesian and US air forces.[8] The aircraft carrier HMS *Victorious* was dispatched to Mombasa so that its helicopters might be used in relief operations.[9]

[4] T. Neil, *Report on Famine Relief in Kenya, 1962* (Nairobi, 1963), 11.

[5] Much of the responsibility for organizing and supervising relief work fell to individuals like C. M. Munro, a community development officer in Kwale District along the coast, who 'for many months carried the very heavy burden' of relief efforts 'among a people who have shown no token of thanks'; ibid., 11.

[6] Ibid., 16.

[7] Ibid., 27.

[8] Ibid., 5.

[9] (R. Maudling) GUK, *HC Debates 1961*, 16 November 1961, col. 660.

Ultimately, food supplies to the value of 7 million shillings were purchased from the Maize and Produce Board, with another 5.5 million shillings spent on transportation costs.[10] An amount of £1.4 million of grant-in-aid from the British government was used to cover the costs of flood and famine relief.[11] The United States covered costs amounting to over £2 million more.[12] A portion of the US maize surplus (a 'free gift' from the Agency for International Development to the value of £3,206,000) was distributed as relief. Dietary supplements such as edible oil and dried milk were also received from 'a number of countries'.[13] Famine and its relief had long been a device with which to legitimate colonial rule. Now it was a surface along which Kenya was drawn into a Cold War politics centred on the Horn of Africa.[14] That said, the 'political considerations' of relying on food aid were well understood locally—'practical ideas of nationhood', wrote one civil servant, 'must take account of the need to feed ourselves independently of foreign benevolence'.[15] Self-sufficiency in food was emerging as a standard of post-colonial nationhood.

If a hefty bill was an immediate outcome, a less obvious effect of the crisis was to reinforce a particular view of the causes of food scarcity. In its aftermath, officials highlighted population growth in the territory as a critical and immanent risk. Kenya was seen as representing 'the world picture in microcosm': a neo-Malthusian image—propounded by international organizations like the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO)—of global population growth outstripping food supply.[16] Population growth, once a metric of the success or failure of colonialism in East Africa, was now an existential and catastrophic threat to the future of the nation. As in 1943, officials and commentators recognized that population growth not only raised a risk of supply shortfall and famine but also strained the limits of economic growth to drive widespread malnutrition. Upon the National Food Relief Committee's recommendation, the

[10] P. M. Mbithi and B. Wisner, 'Drought and Famine in Kenya: Magnitude and Attempted Solutions', *Journal of Eastern African Research and Development* 3 (1973): 116.

[11] World Bank, *Economic Development*, 18.

[12] H. Ruthenberg, *African Agricultural Production Development Policy in Kenya 1952–1965* (Berlin and Heidelberg: Springer, 1966), 48.

[13] Neil, *Report on Famine Relief*, ii, 5–6.

[14] N. Cullather, 'The Foreign Policy of the Calorie', *American Historical Review* 112 (2007): 337–64.

[15] Neil, *Report on Famine Relief*, ii.

[16] Ibid., ii.

government appointed a permanent Advisory Council on Nutrition to advise the minister for health and housing on 'long-term measures required to eliminate malnutrition'—something calling for a rise in the general standard of living and education throughout the community.[17] Soon a national nutritional survey would be undertaken with the assistance of the World Health Organization, the FAO and the United Nations Children's Fund.[18]

In various ways, then, the early 1960s food crisis and its redress consolidated what had come before while also speaking of things to come. It reflected a 'command and control' approach that would characterize later political responses to food shortages in Kenya.[19] It revealed a view of the problem of food scarcity defined on the scale of the territory and population as a whole, located within a neo-Malthusian concern with boosting global agricultural production above rates of population growth. It demonstrated food's role as a tool of foreign policy in an emerging international political order. It showed, moreover, how Kenya was being drawn into an international system of aid and technical assistance centred on the connections between food security, population growth, public health and economic growth. Food was now a domain of development.

[17] (Minister for health and housing) GOK, *KLC Debates 1963*, Second Session, 13 March 1963, 34.

[18] M. Bohdal, N. E. Gibbs and W. K. Simmons, *Nutrition Survey and Campaign against Malnutrition in Kenya, 1964–1968* (Nairobi, 1968).

[19] R. H. Bates, 'The Politics of Food Crises in Kenya', in *The Political Economy of Kenya*, ed. M. G. Schatzberg (New York: Praeger, 1987), 90.

CHAPTER 9

Conclusion

This book had two main aims. The first was to address the lack of historical research on food scarcity and its government in Kenya. The second was to present this history in a way that enhanced our understanding of present-day 'food security' practice, both in Kenya and elsewhere in Africa.

The main arguments of the book can be recounted through a brief synopsis of the preceding chapters. Chapter 2 showed how scarcity in Kenya—while primarily driven by natural disasters such as drought, disease and pestilence—was also linked to the politics of colonial conquest, and the increasing presence of both market and state in the region. Massive episodes of hunger like the Great Famine saw the colonial state play a limited role in providing relief—one largely relying on the initiative of local administrators plus other actors, like missionaries. In Chap. 3, I discussed the major scarcity of 1918–1819: one driven by drought and aggravated by disease, but fundamentally linked to the conditions and state exactions of the First World War. For the first time, the state's response took the form of a centrally coordinated production and relief programme involving legislative, bureaucratic and coercive measures. These relief efforts faced concerted opposition from some corners of the settler public, who were generally starting to find their voice in demanding greater official support for settler agriculture, particularly with respect to labour control. Food distribution by the state favoured the entitlements of employed labour.

J. Duminy, *Food and Famine in Colonial Kenya*, African Histories and Modernities, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-10964-5_9

That scarcities and their responses were increasingly linked to wider political dynamics and the development of the capitalist market was demonstrated in Chap. 4, focusing on the 1920s. By 1929, following extended drought and pestilence, a major episode of scarcity presented the formidable risks of inflation and speculation. Officials saw scarcity as a collective economic problem requiring emergency intervention by the central state to control market processes and prices. The official response included reducing the longer-term risk of scarcity by promoting rural self-sufficiency and developing transport infrastructure. Chapter 5 indicated that scarcities of the 1930s were still driven by drought and pests, but were also linked to the contraction of the settler economy and wage employment stemming from the global economic depression. Scarcity was increasingly seen as a problem of rural poverty to be met by raising peasant productivity and cash income. Forced to defend their privileged position in the midst of patent economic failure, settlers and their official advocates began to frame the threat of food scarcity within an eco-Malthusian triptych that saw food scarcity as systemically linked to dynamic soil and population problems. Meanwhile, the imperative of fiscal austerity meant central officials were increasingly keen for 'local native councils' to shoulder the costs of famine relief.

Chapters 6 and 7 focused on the changes wrought by the Second World War. During this time, a major food shortage resulted from drought, but the scale and urgency of the shortage was fundamentally determined by war conditions and the nature of the statutory marketing system. Urban populations suffered as much as, if not more than, those in the countryside. Officials saw food scarcity as a threat to security, and a risk to be managed through marketing control. Their responses involved calculative and economic techniques to an extent not seen previously. At the same time, arguments around soil and scarcity were successfully deployed to secure unequal state support for settler farmers, and drove a short-lived post-war revival of rural subsistence policy. Wartime dynamics established the basic outlines of an anti-scarcity system that, given the failure to develop a food policy based on human nutritional needs, persisted through to the 1950s State of Emergency and beyond. In the build-up to Kenyan independence, that system found support in the emerging institutional regime of international development, animated by neo-Malthusian anxieties over population growth, food supply and public health.

Below I will argue that we continue to see traces of this anti-scarcity system in contemporary 'food security' thought and practice. First,

however, I reflect on the processes of historical transformation depicted by the book with reference to several key themes. Those include how notions of responsibility surrounding food shifted, and how such responsibility became increasingly, if unevenly, centralized as the relationships between government, food and marketing systems emerged and evolved.

The Coproduction of State, Scarcity and Market

In colonial Kenya, the problem of food scarcity, the definition of the state's role and duty, and the techniques used to respond to that problem, all shifted in conjunction with the changing realities of the food system and patterns of dearth. For a growing proportion of the Kenyan population, hunger was experienced through the market in the form of indirect entitlement failure. Income, food prices and a person's capacity to secure goods through trade grew in significance as a cause of and response to suffering.[1] At the same time, scarcities were increasingly governed through the market, notably through forms of producer support, consumer subsidization and price control. Yet this process was not quite so straightforward. Commercialized production and marketized access offered their own political and economic risks for Africans, settlers and administrators alike. One result of this ambivalence was that Kenyan state policy towards African agriculture, like many household strategies,[2] tended to swing between the objectives of direct consumption and commercialization, according to what was fiscally and politically expedient.

The ways in which the problem of food scarcity was conceptualized in relation to the practices and rationalities of government underwent broad changes. While famine was always seen as fundamentally linked to the misfortunes of nature, scarcity was increasingly understood as a problem involving human drivers, which encompassed both cultural factors and market reactions. By the close of the Second World War, food scarcity was less a natural calamity than a probable risk calling for long-term mitigating measures. For Kenya, scarcity had ceased to be a matter of 'bad luck'. Food sufficiency had indeed become a domain of 'governmentality'.[3]

[1] M. J. Watts, *Silent Violence: Food, Famine, and Peasantry in Northern Nigeria*, 2nd edition (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2013), 310.

[2] M. P. Cowen, 'Commercialization of Food Production in Kenya after 1945', in *Imperialism, Colonialism and Hunger: East and Central Africa*, ed. R. I. Rotberg (Lexington, MA: Lexington Books, 1983), 199–223.

[3] Watts, *Silent Violence*, lxxvi.

The duty and role of the state shifted in conjunction with these changes. We find a gradual transition from scarcity as a domain of 'duty' (implying a moral commitment of sorts) to one of 'responsibility' (in the sense of an institutionalized state of being accountable for, or required to do, something). Initially, state relief functions were framed in moral terms: the duty to prevent the indigent from starving, to stop market speculation and cornering, or to provide Africans with marketing facilities and the means of earning cash incomes. But, over time, the state's role was increasingly regarded as a matter of administrative responsibility, without any significant moral injunction. During the Second World War, officials talked about the state's responsibility to 'feed labour' and ensure adequate production for local and territorial self-sufficiency. In this sense, one can say that the state's role was progressively responsibilized—driven by a combination of moral notions, practical precedents and political-economic expedients.

Moreover, state responsibility to manage food scarcity was increasingly, if unevenly, centralized. It was the central state and marketing system that assumed more functions in relation to the food system, even if local authorities and institutions remained important for the day-to-day operational aspects of famine relief. The involvement of central officials grew in concert with the recognition of scarcity as a collective economic and political problem, whether in the form of inflation hurting consumers or that of labour strike action shutting down essential industries. The process was 'uneven' in at least three ways. First, in the sense that the centralization of control was often highly contested, which meant that initial experiments (like the 1929 Food Control Board) could quickly lead to reversals in policy and strategy, and that central coordination was often seen as only a final resort in times of severe and potentially overwhelming crisis.

Second, the process was uneven in that state responsibilities were directed asymmetrically at different groups and places. In Chap. 7, we saw that the specific nature of the post-Second World War food system in Kenya was marked by two, often conflicting, domains of responsibility, each progressively established over the preceding years: the first entailed supporting settler maize growers to guarantee adequate supply and the second to feed labour and ensure their economic access to food. Neither could take priority over the other. Officials were committed both to paying high prices to producers and to subsidizing consumption. If the dynamics of post-war Kenyan politics were marked by the hapless pursuit of the 'irreconcilable' objectives of 'intensified production and social

order', then it is important to recognize how the politics of food was central to both aims.[4]

These processes of centralization were uneven in a third sense: one relating to the delegation of responsibility. As central officials and statutory institutions assumed more responsibility over particular food-related functions, they simultaneously attempted to delegate certain functions to individuals and other institutions. This included relying on 'native authorities' and local native councils (LNCs) to help coordinate and finance relief in addition to local anti-famine and conservation efforts. It meant continuing to trust in the capacity of local administrators to arrange relief supplies, calling on central assistance only when absolutely necessary. By the Second World War, it also encompassed the assignment to individual subjects of responsibility for their 'own salvation', to display 'self-reliance', to 'play their part' in alleviating food shortages.

In sum, the findings presented in this book depict a broad narrative of transformation, centring on the mutual production of scarcity, market and government. Those dynamics and interrelationships took forms that were in some ways specific to Kenya. In other ways, they were similar to developments found elsewhere in colonial Africa. It therefore remains for us to consider the political-economic specificities of Kenyan history as a way to understand its place within a wider history of famine and anti-scarcity government on the continent.

Kenya and the History of African Food and Famine

What does this study of a particular colonial context, Kenya, contribute to historical knowledge of African famine and food scarcity? For the most part, the existing literature has neglected Kenya as a specific empirical context. It has also provided an incomplete analysis of government for problems related to food. Recognizing what this particular history adds to our empirical knowledge means identifying areas where Kenyan experiences were similar to or different from those of other African colonial contexts. Here these specificities will be explored along three thematic axes: political, economic and spatial.

At a broad level, the specificity of Kenyan political economy has to be seen in relation to its status as a settler colony. The presence of a

[4] F. Cooper, *On the African Waterfront: Urban Disorder and the Transformation of Work in Colonial Mombasa* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1987), 264.

food-growing settler community, with aspirations to self-government, profoundly shaped the history of land allocation, food production, famine relief, agricultural policy and marketing control.[5] Likewise, colonial rule in Kenya involved high degrees of coercive and discriminatory state intervention in African societies and operations of the market—more so than 'peasant export economies' like Nigeria, Ghana or Uganda.[6] But Kenya's specificity goes deeper than this. As Bruce Berman argues, Kenya, unlike other settler colonies to the south, saw the development of 'unusually strong' forms of African capitalist production that, despite discriminatory state policy, were able to compete effectively with the estate economy.[7] The Kenyan state thus operated within two 'internal and conflicting capitalist projects': the clash between settler and metropolitan interests, and that between white and African producers.[8]

These processes of production and accumulation shaped how scarcities manifested in Kenya, both in spatial and social terms. Over time, it was the areas most affected by European settlement and capitalist development that started to experience the effects of food shortages most consistently and acutely. By 1945, it was not only remote rural regions that regularly required state relief but also and often those, like parts of Kiambu and Ukambani, where cash cropping was more specialized. These Kenyan dynamics resemble those that John Iliffe has described for Southern Rhodesia, but with important differences.[9] In Kenya, rural development could proceed in such a way that the same reserve areas tended to supply the most labour and the most cash crops. Rural economies in parts of Kikuyu, Kamba and Nyanza provinces were gradually, if unevenly, monetized, with food access strategies increasingly working in and through market exchange. Complex and gradated processes of social and household differentiation meant food shortages increasingly hurt the growing

[5] P. Mosley, *The Settler Economies: Studies in the Economic History of Kenya and Southern Rhodesia 1900–1963* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

[6] Ibid., 5–8, 236; B. J. Berman, *Control and Crisis in Colonial Kenya: The Dialectic of Domination* (London: James Currey; Nairobi: East African Educational Publishers; and Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 1990), 40.

[7] Berman, *Control and Crisis*, 40.

[8] Ibid.; also J. M. Lonsdale and B. J. Berman, 'Coping with the Contradictions: The Development of the Colonial State in Kenya, 1895–1914', *Journal of African History* 20 (1979): 487–505.

[9] J. Iliffe, *Famine in Zimbabwe, 1890–1960* (Gweru: Mambo Press, 1990).

numbers of landless poor most acutely.[10] Those dynamics were linked to the specific nature and effects of land alienation and customary practices found in parts of Kenya. By contrast with some African groups in Southern Rhodesia, for example, the Kikuyu lost access to only a small proportion of their territory to European settlement. Yet the spatial structure of that settlement—which girdled Kikuyu lands and prevented the expansion of the reserves to accommodate growing populations—in concert with the distributional effects of family-controlled systems of land tenure and the existence of few official restrictions on land accumulation by wealthy individuals, meant the Kikuyu experienced greater degrees of socioeconomic differentiation than their southern counterparts.[11] The geographic and social distributions of rural suffering in Kenya thus differed from those seen in the settler states of southern Africa, where state intervention 'generally destroyed any possibility of capitalist transition within indigenous societies'.[12] In Kenya, the weight of food poverty thus fell on an exceptionally large cohort of the unprivileged, lacking both land and familial support.[13]

The strength of the competing forces within Kenya's agrarian economy also had important implications for official responses to scarcity. Each 'mode of production' entailed demands on colonial officials that profoundly shaped their interventions in food systems. This was clearly seen in the domain of agricultural production, the persistent focus and outspoken priority of Kenyan state policy. The question of how to 'develop' the colony was always caught in the tension and rivalry between African and settler. When economic depression struck, the 'peasant option' could be pursued.[14] When growth seemed possible or likely, 'subsistence' production supplemented by wage income could be invoked as the chief objectives of African development.[15]

The availability of these policy options meant the Kenyan domestic food market was a particularly contested terrain, more so from the start of

[10] Watts, *Silent Violence*, 273.

[11] J. Iliffe, *The African Poor: A History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 148.

[12] Berman, *Control and Crisis*, 40.

[13] Iliffe, *The African Poor*, 148.

[14] D. Anderson and D. Throup, 'Africans and Agricultural Production in Colonial Kenya: The Myth of the War as a Watershed', *Journal of African History* 26 (1985): 329.

[15] Cowen has made this point about the concept of 'subsistence agriculture'; 'Commercialization', 199–200.

the 1930s when settler farmers enviously eyed the higher prices available to Africans through their established local markets. Settler appeals for state support posited the unpredictability of production in the reserves, recounting the threat it offered both to long-term food availability and to soil fertility. During the Second World War, the need to boost production provided them with the argument and means to secure a share of that market; those means were quickly secured through the state marketing system. The idea that African maize growers were unreliable and harmful emerged as an important aspect of Kenyan political economy, and framed the ways in which officials and settlers legitimized their privileged claims to land and market shares. Kenya's settler interests knew the political value of the 'scare of scarcity' all too well.[16] More so than their counterparts to the south, they were forced to use it effectively.

One further outcome of these dynamics was that policies of the Kenyan state aiming to promote rural food subsistence and sufficiency had a particular political and economic inflection. Deborah Bryceson has argued that preventing famine emerged as the focus of district administration in Tanganyika owing to a combination of existing peasant household strategies, ecological and economic realities (a lack of valuable export crops that could be grown by Africans), and a widely shared official ideology of paternalism.[17] In Kenya, by contrast, policies interested in promoting local self-sufficiency in food emerged from a different confluence of forces. These included settler demands for support and protection, growing concerns over soil erosion and malnutrition, and rising settler influence within the state apparatus. Briefly, this is how it happened: During the 1920s, promoting rural subsistence and food sufficiency was part of the rationale to exclude Africans from the export market. In the 1930s, officials encouraged Africans to cultivate maize to ensure local sufficiency as well as revive rural income and state revenue. In the 1940s, wartime worries over scarcity and soil erosion enabled settler farmers to secure a share of the lucrative domestic maize market. In each case, the objective of local food sufficiency expressed a certain political rationale and economic agenda.

[16] L. Mehta, 'The Scare, Naturalization and Politicization of Scarcity', in *The Limits to Scarcity: Contesting the Politics of Allocation*, ed. L. Mehta (London and Washington, DC: Earthscan, 2010), 13–30.

[17] D. F. Bryceson, 'Food Insecurity and the Social Division of Labour in Tanzania, 1919–1985' (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Oxford, 1988), 68–75 and *passim*.

As for the influence of paternalistic ideology, possibly the most remarkable aspect of Kenyan famine history is the extent to which a perceived administrative duty to prevent African starvation was tempered by liberal market ideology and opposition (or, at least, an official desire to avoid provoking such opposition) from powerful elements of the settler public, who saw in scarcities the opportunity to boost the labour supply and make tidy profits from higher maize prices. For officials, moral commitments, economic prescripts and political expedience came hard upon each other. Generally, they were forced to frame anti-famine efforts as developmental opportunities—chances to build new communications infrastructure, for example—rather than as paternal moral commitments.

Such factors help, in part, to explain the Kenyan preference for public relief works programmes. These projects fulfilled multiple objectives. They resulted in valuable infrastructure that helped to 'open up' the countryside, and they provided a moral compromise by both instilling a will to work in the African male and saving helpless African souls from the 'ancient wrong' of famine.[18] In India, such programmes were generally employed as a 'last resort', only once the doctrine of liberal political economy had truly failed, and thus they could attract stinging criticism in Britain for their supposed 'extravagance' in saving 'a lot of black fellows'.[19] They were relatively uncommon in Southern Rhodesia, only appearing in the 1920s.[20] In Kenya, public relief works were often the first response of the state. They effectively appeased a vocal source of internal political pressure while assisting with the tricky business of colonial and official legitimation. For this reason, the nature and shape of Kenyan anti-scarcity policies cannot be understood without referring to the specific political and economic conditions through which they emerged.

Other specificities of the Kenyan experience and government of scarcity can be identified through the specific historical and geographical dynamics of the food market. In Kenya, industries, administrative offices, labour and

[18] A. D. Hall, *The Improvement of Native Agriculture in Relation to Population and Public Health* (London: Oxford University Press, 1936), 60.

[19] M. Davis, *Late Victorian Holocausts: El Niño Famines and the Making of the Third World* (London: Verso, 2001), 36–7, chapters 1 and 5; R. M. Stahl, 'The Economics of Starvation: Laissez-Faire Ideology and Famine in Colonial India', in *Intellectual History of Economic Normativities*, ed. M. Thorup (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 169–84.

[20] Iliffe argues that the persistent demand for labour for private enterprises works made relief works an unattractive option in the early years of colonial rule; *Famine in Zimbabwe*, chapter 7.

communications infrastructure concentrated around the railway and its urban nodes in the south-western quadrant of the country.[21] All goods and capital were funnelled through these 'narrow channels'.[22] One result was a market food system in which disruptions in one key part could create immediate and serious consequences for many others. Localized drought and crop failure in a specific area, for example, could drastically reduce the total maize supply coming onto the private or official market. This could quickly drive up prices across the territory, hurting a broad range of 'consumer interests', which in turn might demand state intervention to curb speculation and inflation.

The clustered and relatively integrated make-up of this space economy and food system helped give Kenyan food crises a particular immediacy and a particular kind of economic and political charge. When considered in relation to the territory's agrarian political economy, these realities shed some light on the specific tendencies of the colonial state. In Kenya, times of scarcity often forced the state to intervene to perform a delicate balancing act between different interest groups, not least between competing settler factions. Officials tried to ensure producers received a 'fair price', while also attempting to protect the household and labour costs of consumers. Unlike in the Rhodesias or South Africa, where mineral wealth enabled employers to pay high prices for protected settler maize, there was no clear path for Kenyan officials to follow.

These factors begin to explain why Kenyan responses to scarcity tended to be far more ad hoc and fulminatory affairs than those of other British African governments, which often developed relatively sophisticated (if unimplemented) anti-famine codes and plans.[23] In Kenya, the central administration would spring into action only when conditions were acute: when food shortages, as in 1929, threatened to derail the entire economic balance between producers and consumers. When this happened, its intervention could provoke such heated opposition (from those interests perceiving themselves to have been disadvantaged in some way) that any further effort along these lines could be quickly and effectively discouraged.

[21] E. W. Soja, *The Geography of Modernization in Kenya: A Spatial Analysis of Social, Economic, and Political Change* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1968), 29.

[22] Cooper, *African Waterfront*, 61.

[23] For the case of Nigeria, see Watts, *Silent Violence*, chapter 6; for Sudan, see A. de Waal, *Famine Crimes: Politics and the Disaster Relief Industry in Africa* (Oxford: James Currey, 1997), chapter 2; for Tanganyika, see Bryceson, 'Food Insecurity', chapter 3; for Southern Rhodesia, see Iliffe, *Famine in Zimbabwe*, chapter 7.

As a result, preventing and addressing food scarcity was just one of the domains in which Kenya's political 'stalemate' was felt, and in which the state preferred to 'muddle through' periodic crises rather than developing any sort of overall policy.[24] Comprehensive and targeted interventions were only possible on the rare occasions when settler and official interests aligned, as with African marketing control during the 1930s.

The divided nature of the Kenyan political economy had specific implications for the government of scarcity. The Kenyan state's 'cooptive corporatist' strategy (or, rather, non-strategy) to deal with the colonial society's sharp internal tensions came to mark its functions in relation to famine relief and food production.[25] Not only that, but arguments and practices around food scarcity played a key role in constituting this corporatist agenda. In this respect, the 1929 Food Control Board was an early (if unsuccessful) experiment in political corporatism. Moreover, during the Second World War, it was food problems that enabled the 'corporatist planner's heaven' to be designed and implemented in the form of institutions like the Agricultural Production and Settlement Board.[26] In Kenya, food control was invariably invested in such boards rather than in specific individuals. The choice of an individual 'famine controller' held too many political risks in relation to the strength of the competing economic interests affected by scarcity.

Political and economic factionalism came to bear on food problems in other ways. One was that Kenyan responses to scarcity tended to consist of fragmented sectoral interventions pursued without any coherent strategic oversight. This was clear in the anti-scarcity system that emerged and stabilized during the Second World War: maize production would have to be increased through high guaranteed prices, and at the same time adequate food access would have to be ensured through subsidization. Both settler maize growers and urban labour were appeased: the first through a corporatist coterie of production committees operating with state financial guarantees; the second through a more 'welfarist' domain, managed by Labour and Native Affairs departments. Kenyan officials, consequently, could never take the steps called for by the Food Shortage Commission,

[24] Berman, *Control and Crisis*, 185–6.

[25] Ibid.

[26] J. M. Lonsdale, 'The Depression and the Second World War in the Transformation of Kenya', in *Africa and the Second World War*, ed. D. Killingray and R. Rathbone (London: Macmillan, 1986), 123.

to intervene to significantly shift consumer demand away from maize. The state was too invested in the maize industry, financially and politically, to let it falter. Settlers, for their part, were too reliant on state support to allow a biochemist 'nutrition officer' free rein to set their economic fate with agricultural policies centred on 'human needs'. Kenyan food policy was, in more ways than one, designed by committee.

The picture that emerges of Kenya's experiences with food scarcity and government suggests that it shared in many of the trends seen elsewhere in British Africa, fitting between some of the more extreme cases. Kenyan political dynamics were similar to those of settler colonies to the south—marketing boards, 'powerful farm lobbies', price supports for European growers—but the country lacked significant reserves of mineral wealth, and the political and economic power of its settler community was more curtailed, complicated by the strength of African commercial production.[27] Many Kenyan food and marketing policies resembled those of peasant-led economies like Tanganyika, but with more state control and settler bias.[28] Against this backdrop, Kenyan famine history appears as a bricolage of forces and effects: similar in many respects, uniquely Kenyan in others.

Up to this point we have discussed the specificity of Kenyan experiences of scarcity and government in relation to those of other African settings. We can now reflect on how an approach informed by the 'analysis of government' can contribute to the history of food scarcity in Africa. The principal point is that a perspective that sees food scarcity as governmentalized allows us to understand precisely the relationship between the colonial state, in its emerging forms, and the wider field of strategies and means employed to govern food problems. We can also see how this relationship changed in space and time. Take famine relief as an example. At the start of the twentieth century, relief practices involved a whole range of actors and institutions, including missionaries, philanthropists, private traders and, increasingly, the state. Even when the state was involved, actual efforts often relied on local initiative rather than central coordination.

Ultimately, such practices were intended as much as a way of 'breaking the corner' and managing inflation as of saving the rural indigent. Similar

[27] T. S. Jayne, 'Managing Food Price Instability in East and Southern Africa', *Global Food Security* 1 (2012): 143.

[28] T. S. Jayne and S. Jones, 'Food Marketing and Pricing Policy in Eastern and Southern Africa: A Survey', *World Development* 25 (1997): 1506.

points can be made of state marketing control, a system built upon pre-existing networks of producers, traders, marketing organizations and infrastructures. State responsibilities and entitlements emerged from within this wider field of governmental practices in an uneven way, as certain aspects of the food system became more or less problematic. They came to concern the conduct of people and arrangements of space in different ways, at different times, for different aims. Labour control, 'better' African agriculture, communications development, increased maize production, soil conservation, wartime wage bonuses, nutritionally informed consumption—scarcity, as a kind of political discourse and technology, circulated between all these fields, plus others.

Anti-scarcity practices in Kenya therefore took shape under specific discursive, political, economic and cultural conditions. Certain ideas and ways of responding to food problems informed subsequent responses to the same or related issues. This study has captured at least three dynamics in this process. The first relates to the importance of memory and reflexivity. I have described moments when governing actors recounted memories of past scarcities, as well as the results of previous interventions, and used these recollections to justify their contemporary actions.[29] Second, we have seen that many of the practices and objects used to control food scarcity had been borrowed from other domains of government, and repurposed. This included customs duties and import-export controls, the 'native authority' system, labour rationing, Kenya Farmers Association marketing facilities and so on. Third, I have argued that scarcity-related techniques helped to constitute some of the practices applied in other domains of government. Anti-scarcity movement controls and 'betterment' programmes, for example, laid the foundation for later production and marketing policies. Problems of food and soil scarcity were central to the strategies and objectives formulated for schemes of post-war 'development'. Moreover, such problems played a critical role in the emergence of relatively capacitated state institutions capable of planning and implementing those schemes.

Given these kinds of dynamics, the government of food problems in Kenya cannot be seen only as the functions of a state determined by the

[29] For a discussion of the place and study of reflexivity within governmentality, see T. M. Li, 'Governmentality', *Anthropologica* 49 (2007): 277.

contradictory articulation of competing 'capitalist projects'.[30] Neither were they simply the expressions of grand ideological or political visions of planning and social transformation.[31] Both perspectives would fail to account adequately for the origins or development of certain kinds of governmental rationalities, practices and subjectivities surrounding food problems. Rather, a historical analysis of government calls our attention to the ways in which governing arrangements may be 'pulled together from an existing repertoire, a matter of habit, accretion and bricolage'.[32] It enjoins us to recognize the events and cyclical processes through which issues become problems, problems enjoin practices and practices produce effects. It means, too, that we can take food scarcities and practices seriously as problems through which the objects, institutions, rationalities and practices of governing were, and are, constituted.[33] In accounting for these dynamics, we can avoid writing a history of colonial government that takes the state as an a priori subject. Instead, we may understand the precise ways in which different actors and agencies—states, markets and subjects included—have been unevenly and differentially governmentalized.[34]

Critical History and Food Security

In the book's introduction, I outlined various critiques of the 'productionist' orientations of African food governance strategies. I noted, too, that explanations for the origins and persistence of this agrarian bias have tended to highlight the dynamics and influence of overarching discursive trends, capitalist processes and international development or humanitarian agencies. However, the specific history of Kenya presented in this book

[30] For this basic argument, see Berman, *Control and Crisis*; B. J. Berman and J. M. Lonsdale, *Unhappy Valley: Conflict in Kenya and Africa* (London: James Currey; Nairobi: East African Educational Publishers; and Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 1992); Watts, *Silent Violence*. My problem does not lie with the core argument that the actions of colonial officials were caught within conflicting and contradictory forces. Rather, I am concerned with the implications of a rigid theoretical definition of the state and political power for how we think about the historical government of something like food.

[31] Li makes this critique with particular reference to the work of J. C. Scott; 'Governmentality', 276.

[32] Ibid.

[33] For a similar argument, see J. Vernon, *Hunger: A Modern History* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), chapter 9, here p. 273.

[34] Carl Death, 'Governmentality at the Limits of the International: African Politics and Foucauldian Theory', *Review of International Studies* 39, no. 3 (2013): 785.

has shown that a calculative, market-based and state-driven approach to food problems, centred on increasing agricultural production (and supplemented by reactive, targeted welfare interventions), precipitated within a specific array of existing conditions and problems. Production-oriented food strategies did not simply 'trickle down' from the forces of global capitalism, or from the dispositions of international institutions and discourses. Rather, they emerged from situations, practices and arguments resulting from the intensification of problems confronting those tasked with governing.

Take one example of how local and broader dynamics intersected to give rise to a specific policy objective: that of territorial self-sufficiency. Ideologies and techniques of food sufficiency—like those of fiscal sufficiency—were built into government anti-scarcity practices from the beginning of colonial rule in Kenya and East Africa.[35] They were a key part of colonial 'common sense'.[36] Imports were expensive and unreliable, and to be avoided. Gradually these ideas and techniques were rescaled from an emphasis on local or district sufficiency, to encompass a more territory-wide and inter-territorial perspective (or, at least, one concerned with the topology of the capitalist market). How sufficiency was scaled and understood played an important role in driving the emergence of specific forms of government intervention in agricultural production and marketing. That international institutions like the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) championed policies geared towards boosting agricultural production for territorial self-sufficiency in the 1970s,[37] and that this objective was reflected in Kenya's national food strategies of the early 1980s,[38] seems to indicate less the diffusion and influence of global 'food security'

[35] On the origins of policies of colonial financial self-sufficiency, see L. A. Gardner, *Taxing Colonial Africa: The Political Economy of British Imperialism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 23–6.

[36] N. Plageman, 'Colonial Ambition, Common Sense Thinking, and the Making of Takoradi Harbour', *History in Africa* 40 (2013): 317–52; A. L. Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain: Epistemic Anxieties and Colonial Common Sense* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2009).

[37] D. J. Shaw, *World Food Security: A History since 1945* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), chapter 17.

[38] The first Kenyan National Food Policy of 1981, for example, aimed to maintain 'broad self-sufficiency in major foodstuffs' through government control of prices and inputs; GOK, *National Food and Nutrition Security Policy Implementation Framework 2017–2022* (Nairobi, 2011); also C. Hornsby, *Kenya: A History since Independence* (London and New York: I. B. Tauris, 2012), 363–4.

discourse and more that international thought aligned with a pre-existing infrastructure and way of thinking and acting on the problem. The question then remains as to the precise pathways through which international influence came to bear on this pre-existing understanding.

Uncovering these historical pathways is of more than academic interest. That is so because contemporary policies and strategies continue to express ways of thinking about and addressing food problems that have roots in colonial conditions, priorities and problems—not least the objective of food self-sufficiency.[39] If we are to understand the persistence of certain ways of thinking about and addressing food problems, including 'productionist' framings, we must understand their particular histories and geographies. Only by recognizing the specific conditions under which policies and practices have emerged will we have an adequate sense of how and why the residues of the past remain in the present. Then, too, we will have a more informed basis to critique aspects of knowledge and practice that continue to have harmful effects for millions of Africans.

In historicizing the problem of food, the object would not necessarily be to show that a practice has a colonial precedent and is therefore inherently violent or invalid. Neither would it be to attribute the causes of contemporary social, political and economic problems to the institutions and structures of an increasingly distant colonial past.[40] Rather, thinking historically about the problematizations surrounding food may help us question the 'self-evidence' of certain food planning interventions and their 'implicit assumptions'. Put differently, we will be better placed to assess whether the questions we continue to ask of 'food security' are still relevant, and whether 'currently taken-for-granted rationales and practices still serve as adequate answers'.[41] In doing so, the neat relation between 'what is' and 'what ought to be' expressed within conventional framings of 'food security' can be prised open, creating new opportunities for research, critical debate and practice.[42]

[39] Even if national self-sufficiency is no longer a formal objective of most African food security strategies, we continue to see its influence. Many food strategies of African states are still preoccupied with ensuring a 'positive food trade balance'; G. Haysom, 'Food System Governance for Urban Sustainability in the Global South' (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Cape Town, 2014), 6.

[40] Gardner, *Taxing Colonial Africa*, 11.

[41] M. Huxley, 'Historicizing Planning, Problematizing Participation', *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 37 (2013): 1529.

[42] Ibid., 1531.

Such a task seems all the more urgent given recent global events. At the time of completing this manuscript, the world had been in the grip of the Covid-19 pandemic for well over a year. Most governments had enforced 'lockdowns' to prevent the spread of the disease. Millions of people had at times battled to obtain their usual food supplies in the face of panic buying and disrupted supply chains. Many others lost their employment and income, relying on emergency supplies distributed by governments, development organizations and food banks. In the early uncertain stages of the pandemic, some governments resorted to restricting exports of staple foods as a means to safeguard domestic availability.[43] That happened despite warnings from the FAO that such 'protectionist measures' might lead to market distortions and 'provoke food shortages around the world'.[44] Some commentators worried about retailers engaging in 'price gouging' to the detriment of consumers, and called for governments to intervene accordingly.[45] In Kenya, as in many other African contexts, the state was forced to intervene through food and income support programmes to ensure that citizens could afford to purchase adequate food.

What was striking was the familiarity of so many of these concerns, debates and practices. Many, as we have seen, featured in the colonial history of Kenya. The pandemic has thus provided a timely reminder of the importance of refining our historical understanding of the present, of the conceptual and practical frames through which we think about and respond to crises. Through such a historical awareness, we are well positioned to avoid the repetition of past biases, debates and mistakes and to escape falling foul of the 'scare of scarcity'.

[43] T. Falkendal, C. Otto, J. Schewe, J. Jägermeyr, M. Konar, M. Kummu, B. Watkins and M. J. Puma, 'Grain Export Restrictions during Covid-19 Risk Food Insecurity in Many Low- and Middle-Income Countries', *Nature Food* 2 (2021): 11–14; M. Koppenberg, M. Bozzola, T. Dalhaus and S. Hirsch, 'Mapping Potential Implications of Temporary Covid-19 Export Bans for the Food Supply in Importing Countries Using Precrisis Trade Flows', *Agribusiness* 37 (2021): 25–43.

[44] F. Harvey, 'Coronavirus Measures Could Cause Global Food Shortage, UN Warns', *The Guardian*, 26 March 2020, accessed 28 March 2020, https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2020/mar/26/coronavirus-measures-could-cause-global-food-shortage-un-warns?CMP=fb_gu&utm_medium=Social&utm_source=Facebook&fbclid=IwAR2hfD2LiE-muvLdn0fDZC-rV7V21jxdnbAJe1ya1kyW4LQcXRDWupOEkEM#Echobox=1585206312.

[45] C. Krippahl, 'Price Hikes in Africa Aggravate the Coronavirus Crisis', *Deutsche Welle*, 18 March 2020, accessed 28 March 2020, https://www.dw.com/en/price-hikes-in-africa-aggravate-the-coronavirus-crisis/a-52820553.

To end on a final, more theoretical, point on the benefits of taking a historical approach to 'food security': critical historical studies of food are well placed to ask new questions around the presence of the term 'security' in 'food security'. Studies like this invite a more careful consideration of the work of security that food does, and how this work has changed over time. This could relate, in a relatively straightforward sense, to preventing rural or urban unrest, or securing rations for fighting troops. But thinking about food security also encompasses the place and importance of food within wider 'mechanisms of security' deployed to regulate and shape the life of populations or to govern territories. Moreover, one is led to ask how food governance has been increasingly securitized as part of a wider process of securitizing state and society.[46] There remain, therefore, important questions to be asked about the precise imbrications of food and security within historical and contemporary regimes of government. It is my hope that this book provides a starting point for research in that direction.

[46] P. Owens, 'Human Security and the Rise of the Social', *Review of International Studies* 38 (2012): 549.

Appendix: Note on Primary Sources

The primary sources for this study came from archives in the United Kingdom and from online repositories. The main archival documentation was found at the National Archives of the United Kingdom (TNA) in Kew. This included official documents of and correspondence between the Kenyan government, the Colonial Office and other British government departments. The main records used were the files of the Colonial Office relating to Kenya (especially CO 533), to food supply, agriculture and marketing issues (CO 852, Economic General Department) and to nutrition (CO 859, Social Services Department). The files concern the period from the late 1920s to the early 1950s. They are particularly rich for the Second World War. Those related to the Ministry of Food and wartime food supply issues are available in the MAF 83 series. CAB 58 provided Cabinet committee records dealing with various colonial food issues, especially nutrition. Primary sources were also consulted at Weston Library, Oxford University, where the personal papers of many colonial officials, as well as records of food-related African development initiatives, are held as part of the University's Commonwealth and African collections.

The British Library was the source of several of the government documents included in the bibliography. Others were secured at the Wellcome Library (London), the University of Cape Town Library (Government Publications Section) and the National Library of South Africa. Numerous

J. Duminy, *Food and Famine in Colonial Kenya*, African Histories and Modernities, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-10964-5

documents relating to the history of the Kenyan colonial government are freely available online. This includes the complete set of colonial annual reports spanning the period from 1905 to 1938, available on the website of the University of Illinois Library. A near-complete collection of Kenyan Legislative Council debates is also available through Google Books.

I had scheduled, and secured funding for, further research in the Kenya National Archives over the course of 2020 and 2021. The plan was to consult a broader range of local sources on food and famine. As for many researchers around the world, my plans were interrupted by the outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic, the imposition of international and local travel restrictions, and the closure of public buildings. The pressures facing early career scholars and publishing contracts do not halt for such calamities, and I decided to make peace with the value of what I had already discovered by using archival material housed elsewhere. That circumscription of source material has been reflected in the design of the study. As we all hope for the return of more healthy and mobile times, I too hope to deliver on my original research plans and to discover new and challenging insights in the archives of central Nairobi.

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