The Exercise of Power through Creation of Knowledge: A Narrative of Environmental Change During Colonization in Kiambu, Kenya

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Abstract: Ongoing environmental change is one of the greatest barriers facing programs and policies aiming to achieve sustainable development today. While the concept of sustainable development is relatively new, the threat of environmental change is not. Throughout colonization in Kenya the British colonial government was overly concerned with the quality of soil and increasing possibilities of erosion. Both Victorian ideologies of culture and society as well as the colonial discourse that existed in Kenya lead to a conception of the Africans as environmentally and agriculturally inept. Thus, they were blamed as the greatest threat to soil fertility. These notions together created a colonial environmental narrative based on inaccurate conceptions of the African farmer. International examples of environmental degradation as well as the expertise of Western research were used to support the narrative and further intervention into Kenyan society.

The goal of this thesis is to examine exactly what made up the narrative, what purposes it served and who benefited from it. Through analysing the case of the Kikuyu in Kiambu, the district where Africans came in closest contact with the Europeans, this paper examines how a reorganization of power and control occurred. Specifically, archival research was utilized to gain direct insight into colonial perceptions and departmental reporting. The results show that African farmers were wrongly accused as the main culprits of soil degradation; in fact, changes to cultivation methods during much of colonization such as increased output and forced implementation of European techniques had a detrimental effect on soil fertility. While evidence existed to counter the narrative, it was reinforced as truth by Western research and colonial power. The result for the settlers was prioritized agriculture as well as security over land rights; simultaneously, for the colonial administration the narrative served as justification for their humanitarian mandate, while fostering an amount of social control. The results reveal that the creation of a narrative based on environmental change where the African was labelled as the problem, created a situation where colonial and settler interests triumphed over all others.

Keywords: Environmental narratives, colonization, soil erosion, Kenya, knowledge & power, sustainable development

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The Exercise of Power through Creation of Knowledge: A Narrative of Environmental Change During Colonization in Kiambu, Kenya

K R I S T I N  F O L L I S

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**Summary:** Ongoing environmental change is one of the greatest barriers facing programs and policies aiming to achieve sustainable development today. Even though the concept of sustainable development as defined by the Bruntland Commission is relatively new, the threat of environmental change is not. Therefore looking to cases of the past can offer important lessons to strategies today. This case looks to the Kikuyu of Kiambu during colonization, a population that came in closest contact with both European settlers and the colonial administration, to illustrate how outside powers can create false narratives to benefit their own means.

Pre-colonial Kiambu was characterised by complex Kikuyu social organization based around agricultural systems that were reliant upon several interdependent relationships. After the introduction of the colonial administration into the region, life for the Kikuyu dramatically changed. Many traditional techniques used to ensure productive soil was completely reconditioned by Western knowledge and European technologies. During much of the colonial period the colonial government was primarily concerned with soil conservation and the possibility of widespread erosion. From the beginning of British existence in the region the Africans were viewed as backward and uneducated due to both Victorian ideologies of culture and society as well as the colonial discourse that existed. The result was the creation of a narrative that primarily targeted farmers as unproductive and agriculturally incompetent. African farmers were then labelled as the greatest threat to soil fertility. The narrative was supported by international examples of soil destruction, such as the Dust Bowl that caused significant agricultural damage to North America, in addition to Western research that continually flooded into the region warning of the consequences of soil degradation.

The aim of this thesis is to examine in further detail the colonial environmental narrative that existed and how it could lead to a reorganization of power and control in the country. Archival research was conducted in order to gain primary data and direct insight into departmental reporting and colonial impression in order to grasp what made up the narrative and what purpose it served. The results demonstrate that the farmers were wrongly accused and that soil degradation was a consequence of changes to agricultural techniques promoted by the colonial government as well as increased output that proved detrimental to soil quality. While there were both people and evidence to suggest otherwise, the narrative was continually reinforced as truth by Western research and colonial power. The narrative benefited the settlers as their agricultural outputs were prioritized over African and thus gained further security over land rights. At the same time the colonial government used the narrative to justify their humanitarian mandate as they were working for the better good of the Kikuyu, while conserving land for future generations. It also fostered an amount of social control as the narrative was used as justification for greater intervention into the everyday lives of Africans in Kenya. The results reveal that the creation of a story based on environmental change and destruction, where the African farmer was labelled as the culprit, resulted in a situation in which colonial and settler interests triumphed over all others.

**Keywords:** Environmental narratives, colonization, soil erosion, Kenya, knowledge & power, sustainable development

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1.0 Introduction

Environmental degradation and change continues to be one of the greatest challenges facing developing nations and the search for sustainable development, but is not a new phenomenon. It seems as though recurring strategies to target economic and social development cause or exacerbates environmental changes. In 1987 The Bruntland Commission was specifically created to bring together issues of the environment and development as, “Environment and development are not separate challenges; they are inexorably linked” (World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987, p.37). Out of this commission came Our Common Future, a report that defined the concept of sustainable development that is still referred to today, which states, “Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987). Therefore, any sustainable development entails an equal weighing of economic, environmental and social considerations. Today many development strategies and projects are centered on this idea, whether it be in the form of government policies, international NGOs (non-governmental organizations), or aid agencies. While the concept of sustainable development was defined in 1987 and therefore not present during the time colonization in East Africa, looking to these past events can prove beneficial to comparable programs geared to sustainable development today. There are many similarities between colonial programs and current development plans and a lot of insight that can be gained from analysis into colonial intervention in the name of environmental change.

There is an extensive history of environmental destruction and degradation across Sub-Saharan Africa since the influx of European settlers and colonial interests. From the beginning of colonization concerns of resource conservation arose as many farmers and pastoralists were viewed as destructive in regards to the environment; for example, much of North Africa had been portrayed as a land fraught with deforestation (Davis, 2007), South Africa had been depicted as an area fraught with a general degradation of natural resources (Beinart, 1989), while others have been plagued with issues such as overgrazing, desertification etc. Stories tend to be oversimplified accounts filled with strong images of primitive African producers or pastoralists. In most cases these accounts have even become common knowledge that exist in government texts and policies. These stories of environmental change, or narratives as it is referred to here, tend to create a strict divide between those who are the culprits and those who can offer the solution. They even become formalized through the support of science. These simplified narratives tend to be based on biased sources of information, yet are preserved through power and knowledge networks. While it can be difficult to see directly those who benefit from these narratives at the time, they can be used for specific purposes such as generation of public support or acquiring power.

Through examining the case of Kiambu, this thesis serves to illustrate how the creation of a narrative based on environmental change can lead to a complete reorganization of power and knowledge. This paper discusses the concept of discourse and narratives in addition to Foucault’s theories on power and knowledge to create a
theoretical perspective with which to analyze the case of the Kikuyu. It is through archival research and further analysis that the relationship between a colonial environmental narrative and the reorganization of knowledge and power in the district of Kiambu is examined. More specifically, this paper argues that the reorganization of power and knowledge that occurred between the Kikuyu and the Europeans through the creation of a colonial environmental narrative centered on race benefited colonial and settler interests over Kikuyu.

In East Africa, there existed a widespread narrative of soil degradation and exhaustion that became central to British colonial policy from the 1930s-1950s. A story that started with primitive and uneducated African farmers in addition to images of pristine and fertile environments, led to eventual intervention into the everyday lives of the locals (Mackenzie, 1998). The politicisation of resource degradation in Kenya in particular seemed to be directly connected to a struggle for land and control on the side of the British colonial administration. The goal of this paper is to examine not only how the narrative came about, but also what purposes it served and whom it benefited at the time.

Colonization of East Africa took place under pre-existing notions of the African population as backwards and uneducated. British colonial thinking was directly influenced by the Victorian social and cultural ideologies of the late 19th and early 20th centuries; colonial conquests were supported as civilizing missions with hopes of developing the more primitive populations of East Africa. The colonial discourse in Kenya that emerged created a strict divide between the colonial administration and settlers, and the African population or non-European ‘others’. It was the influence of ideologies in the Victorian era as well as the colonial discourse in Kenya that strongly influenced the views and actions of Europeans in the Colony. This pre-existing notion of superiority over the non-Western ‘other’ affected any relations with Africans in the East Africa Protectorate. It is in this region, as Doty explains, that the ‘native’ was implied to be both idle and lazy, which were characteristics to be reconditioned by colonial administrators (1996, p.52). Any pre-existing notions of the African ‘other’ directly influenced relations between Europeans and Africans, which ultimately lead to policies of segregation. The British imperial mission was one of civilization in an attempt to recondition the African.

The sentiments from the Victorian era as well as the colonial discourse in Kenya directly impacted the way the African farmer was viewed. In fact, many were classified as “unscientific over exploiters” due to their reliance on traditional systems of agriculture (Beinart, 1989). The perception of farmers as primitive and unproductive created a rationale that reinforced support for settlers and Western agricultural practices as solutions over local ecological knowledge and expertise. For many early explorers and settlers during the late 19th and early 20th century, East Africa was described as a fruitful and extremely productive land, a “planters’ frontier” offering both temperate and tropical climates with great potential for production of various crops (Sorrenson, 1968, p.4). The view of the African farmer as unproductive combined with the vision of a fertile land lead to a narrative of African underproduction and destructive land use. While African farmers were viewed as primitive from the beginning of colonization, intervention into their agricultural practices did not really become a focus in colonial policy until the 1930s.
During colonization Western knowledge and technologies were put forward as the solution to all environmental problems. This marked a restructuring of knowledge and expertise from traditional Kikuyu competences to Western precedent within the society. The colonial administration took many measures to direct knowledge production in the protectorate from hiring agricultural officers for every province, to creating experimental fields, to starting agricultural schools (for both Europeans and natives), and undertaking agricultural surveys (Mackenzie, 1998). Local environmental knowledge and any sustainable land use practices were disregarded for Western research and solutions. This knowledge was not only used to strengthen the position of the colonial administration, but it was used as justification for large-scale land alienation and intervention for a protectorate whose core aim was humanitarian.

1.1 Purpose and Research Questions

As this paper strives to illustrate, examining situations of the past can offer important insight into future efforts and programs for sustainable development. The goal of this paper is to examine how a colonial authority can influence knowledge and initiate a reorganization of power. While there is an abundance of research conducted on land grievances in Kiambu, the aim of this analysis is to determine how such great land grievances actually occurred when government policy is one of protection. Thus, the interest here is to examine the discourses and narratives that existed during British colonization and how knowledge was created, influenced and maintained. The purpose is to examine how these are related to exercising of power by outside actors.

More specifically, this paper examines what capacity environmental change played during this period. Much literature has already determined that a colonial discourse existed framing many Africans as primitive and unproductive, but what is interesting for the purposes of this paper is to determine how Western knowledge and technology was used to alienate land, leading to intervention in society. This thesis investigates how a colonial environmental narrative and the use of Western expertise and technologies resulted in a reorganization of knowledge and power in the region. For the district of Kiambu, this thesis strives to determine:

- How were the Kikuyu viewed as environmentalists and agriculturalists and how were they portrayed and discussed in government texts?
- What did the narrative consist of, how was knowledge of it formulated and what could be found in reality during this time?
- What purpose did the environmental narrative serve in Kiambu and how is it related to the exercising of power?

1.2 Relevance

In a complex network of global actors and change, it is not so frequent that researchers look to the past to contribute new perspectives to the concerns of the present. For John Tosh (2002), a prominent scholar and educator in historical research, the issues of today are intertwined and complex; however, historical analysis offers a benefit of hindsight, creating a clearer perspective into the present. Looking into the colonial past and examining the positions of the numerous actors or interests involved can offer insights or simply broadened perspectives concerning modern day situations. Furthermore, obtaining a historical awareness of how outside power and control emerges in a society and how that is affected by discourse can prove
beneficial to understanding similar situations occurring today. Researching and analysing colonialism, in particular, can foster an understanding of current geopolitical and economic processes that exist today.

The problem that much of the world still faces is an overall acceptance of science, especially without any historical or social perspectives taken into account. When it comes to environmental changes there seems to be many case studies where accepted knowledge on the subject becomes verifiably wrong. Challenging perceived scientific knowledge is essential to creating more suitable policy interventions when it comes to environmental change. What Leach and Mearns deem as “challenging received wisdoms” comes from analysis of a combination of fields including history, ecology and social anthropology (1996, p.5). Questioning scientific expertise is not as simple as considering the ecological or sociological aspects, but also considering historical details is essential to gaining a full understanding of environmental change.

1.3 Structure of Thesis
Following this introduction, an introduction of the case is offered as a brief background to the situation as well as the reasoning behind the choice of Kiambu as a case. Thereafter the methodology is discussed in addition to the specific methods selected and the materials to be used. This is followed by the delimitation of the study. Following that, the theoretical foundation is discussed where the concepts of discourse, narratives as well as Foucault’s theories on knowledge and power is examined. Furthermore, a historical background is offered to give context to British colonial thinking as it was influenced by Victorian ideology prior to existence in the East Africa Protectorate. Then, the way of living during the pre-colonial Kiambu in terms of social structure, land tenure systems, land use and agricultural methods are explained. The early years of European settlement are discussed to offer a backdrop to European and Kikuyu relations in addition to an investigation into European settlement and the large-scale land acquisitions that took place in Kiambu. Thereafter, the analysis is presented, which is divided into three sections according to the research questions. The discussion of the results as well as the implications for sustainable development is then offered as a conclusion to the thesis.

2.0 Introduction to the Case
Kiambu is located North of Nairobi and is mostly made up of Kikuyu, with the Maasai to the Northeast of the forest edge. Cooler, densely populated (formerly forested) areas characterize the North, with warmer pastures to the South (Overton, 1988). During the early period of colonization, Kiambu was a region known for it’s fertile soil and warm climate. While droughts often occurred, rainfall typically ranged from 30-50 inches depending on the season; the combination of nutrient-rich, red soils and high altitudes created a perfect environment for agricultural production (Morgan, 1963, p.147). Located in what is called the Central Province, the district was surrounded by farmland and mostly inhabited by Kikuyu. The Kikuyu were for the most part an agricultural people as they relied on crops as their food staple (Leakey, 1977).
For the purpose of this study, Kiambu is an especially interesting case as it was the first place of settlement for many Europeans due to its proximity to Nairobi and the railway, as well as its cultivation potential; it was also one of the areas where Africans came in close contact with both European settlers and the British administration (Overton, 1988). Kiambu is located in the area known as the White Highlands, where land was to be reserved for European settlers alone due to its agricultural suitability (Coldham 1979; Morgan, 1963; Sorrenson, 1968). Land in this region was alienated to settlers through official policy: first it would revert to the Crown and if it was not occupied by Africans then it was made available to settlers through 99-year leases or freehold (Coray, 1978; Morgan, 1963). The immense amount of land that was expropriated during the period of British colonization in this region in particular caused land shortages and grievances and many negative ramifications for the Kikuyu. They were constantly fraught with worries of their insecurity of land rights and the possibility of continued land shortages. The proximity between both Europeans and Africans in Kiambu from the very beginning of colonization makes the area an ideal case for evaluation.

In the 1920s the British administration became more interested in the agricultural production of the natives as the dangers of soil infertility became apparent. It was in the 1930s where the techniques and traditions of African cultivation became an operational concern; in much of the Colony this meant interventionist strategies to target ‘primitive’ methods to combat growing soil erosion (Anderson, 1984). As Anderson describes, “African husbandry was typically stigmatized as wasteful and deleterious to the soil…” with increasing settler concern, “…that soil erosion might spread from African lands” (1984, p. 324). The colonial administration intervened with agricultural officers hired to implement new mandatory agricultural strategies inspired by Western science, such as terracing, cultivation of specific crops, deep ploughing etc. (Mackenzie, 1998). The extent of intervention continued to increase in the region through law and policy in an attempt to reverse the destruction of land. It became evident throughout Kenya that any traditional African agricultural competence was disregarded in favour of Western technology and expertise.

3.0 Methodology

As mentioned above, Kiambu, Kenya was chosen as a site of case study because of the close contact between the Kikuyu, settlers and the colonial administration. It was in this region that land was most sought after for both the climate and fertility of soil; thus, it became very popular for settlers, and with those settlers came the growing authority of the colonial administration. Furthermore, this case proves interesting as the Kikuyu’s role as agricultural cultivators is central to their way of life; their strong cultural ties to the land and what it produces makes them an appropriate case when examining a colonial environmental narrative, that specifically impacted farmers.

This thesis employs a qualitative approach to describe more in-depth understanding of colonial control and power as well as the implications on local populations. A quantitative approach would not allow for the same extensive case study at such a local level. A qualitative investigation allows for in-depth understanding of the context of the case, while an analysis is used to examine what constituted the narrative. More specifically, this thesis was a desk study that used historical analysis
to answer the above mentioned research questions. The use of secondary data offered contextual knowledge of the region and the historical period, while primary sources such as historical narratives, agricultural reports, official sources, organizational records, artefacts, documents, records, letters, photos etc. from The National Archives in London provided direct, empirical data to be analyzed and interpreted (Lewis-Beck, Bryman, Liao, 2004). Overall, this paper utilizes both primary and secondary data through archival research to be analyzed from a historical perspective.

Furthermore, this paper utilizes a problem-oriented approach where a problem is formulated through the reading of secondary sources, followed by a more in-depth study of the relevant sources that are found (Tosh, 2002). The negative of this type of historical study is that it is difficult to determine which sources are relevant when it can be the most unlikely that are helpful (Tosh, 2002). I have attempted to avoid this through having in-depth background knowledge through secondary sources regarding the case from both the pre-colonial and colonial period prior to any archival research.

3.1 Methods

Archival Research

Using archival research in addition to secondary source analysis is beneficial to this research as it adds first-hand communications to understand any prejudices and cultural assumptions that make up a foundation for the narrative. In order to analyze specific intentions of the actors that are directly involved in the region of Kiambu, it is important to analyze primary sources, such as personal communications, protectorate policy documents, agricultural reports, transcripts of interviews, field notes, correspondence, observations etc., to offer insight into colonial perceptions (Lewis-Beck, Bryman, Liao, 2004). It is through an understanding of background information into cultural ideologies of the Victorian era as well as analysis of archival materials that British colonial intentions are better understood. Ultimately, archival analysis creates in-depth and local understanding to gain insight into the environmental narrative that came about during colonization.

Archival research was used to locate and analyze sources of data specifically found in The National Archives of London, The Bodleian Library of Commonwealth and African Studies at Rhodes House and available open sources online. In The National Archives, the Records of the Colonial Office were analyzed; more specifically, administrative reports and papers, original correspondence for the East Africa Protectorate and Kenya, sessional papers and miscellaneous files and reports concerning native agriculture, soil erosion and surveys were analyzed. Through these searches both the annual reports from the Agricultural Department and the Department of Native Affairs for specific years of interest as well as provincial reports proved most beneficial. Furthermore, at the Bodleian Library of Commonwealth and African Studies documents were examined from the special collections containing personal papers of Agricultural Officers and Engineers. These personal papers included diary volumes, agricultural pamphlets, correspondence, and reports.

One of the greatest difficulties associated with this method is the search; the extent and significance of the analysis is dependent on what the researcher finds while probing the archives. Spending a significant amount of time in archives and extending
one’s search beyond the obvious can help to correct this problem. Similarly, it can be
difficult to determine the reliability of an archive according to the author’s intentions,
background, the recipient etc. In order to address this issue there needs to be a deep
background knowledge prior to entering the archives to ensure complete
understanding of what is found. Having a pre-understanding of the circumstances
during the time-period and the key actors involved is essential.

Source Criticism

One of the main concerns with both historical analysis and archival research is the
reliability of sources. Source criticism is a method that allows the researcher to
determine if a source is credible and/or what the intentions of the author are. This
helps to determine if a source of information is more or less valuable according to
some of the key principles of source criticism. Employing this method ensures that the
sources found through archival research are evaluated on both the internal and
external merits.

To analyze both documents validity and reliability it is important to look consider
both the external and internal evaluation. For Tosh this means posing specific
questions to the external of the document that consider the author, place, and date of
writing: can it be traced back to the person writing it, is it a fraud; is the document
consistent with historical data; and, does it comply with a standard form (2002, pp.88-
89). Comparing similar documents of the same time period and structure can help to
determine its authenticity. On the other hand, an internal criticism involves
comprehending the documents content by asking questions like: what were the
authors intentions, what position was he/she in, was the author present, was the
information learned through observation or second hand, was there a time lapse
between the event and the writing, and have they been affected by prejudices (Tosh
2002, p.90-93). For the purpose of this analysis it is most important to discover any
prejudices, pre-existing impressions, cultural assumptions and stereotypes from both
colonial administrators and settlers, while striving to understand any intent with every
correspondence or document.

3.2 Delimitation

Kenya did not become an independent country until the year of 1964, however I have
chosen to limit the analysis to the year 1952. The Mau Mau Uprising was an
important part of Kenyan colonial history, especially for the Kikuyu. While it could
be interesting to incorporate resistance, both from a theoretical and case perspective, I
am unable to do so due to the complexity of the issue and a strict time limitation. For
this reason I have chosen to carryout the analysis from the pre-colonial period to the
year 1952, when the uprising began. At the same time, it would be interesting to
examine the consequences for the Kikuyu during the post-colonial period, but due to a
time limitation it is not possible for this thesis.

4.0 Theoretical Framework

In order to understand how a colonial environmental narrative came about and how
power and control resulted from this creation of knowledge, it is first important to
examine the factors that have shaped subjectivity. In order to do this, a theoretical
framework is utilized by first looking at the concept of discourse and, more specifically, the colonial discourse that existed in Kenya during colonization. Thereafter, an analysis of knowledge and power is provided in order to understand the close relationship between the two concepts. To gain deeper understanding, two different techniques and forms of exercising power is explained. Most importantly, the concept of narratives is examined, particularly narratives of environmental change, to understand how power and knowledge can be utilized. The starting point for this theoretical analysis is Michel Foucault’s work on knowledge and power followed by an analysis of his concepts of bio-power and governmentality.

It becomes apparent through the analysis of Foucault’s work that his theories are applicable to studies of colonization, even though he does not speak of it specifically. Through an analysis of these theories and concepts, a theoretical foundation is set to form the grounds for analysis. While authors such as Robert Young (1995) and Gayatri Spivak (1988) have linked Foucault’s analysis to European imperialism, this thesis utilizes some of his specific concepts to form the base of an analysis on colonial power in the district of Kiambu, Kenya.

4.2 The Concept of Discourse

In order to understand power and social structures within a society, one must gain an understanding of discourses that exists. Here, discourse refers to a group of statements or rules that regulate understanding and language on a subject; these rules, or socially and culturally accepted guidelines, contribute to what is recognized in a society as knowledge, rationality and truth (Hall, 1997; Olssen, 1999). For the purpose of this paper discourse does not necessarily refer to an analysis of text, but instead analysing what exactly is deemed acceptable or not in a situation or group, which is demonstrated through statements or language. Thus, discourses are established and continually demonstrated through language.

Foucault’s early work, The Archaeology of Knowledge and the Discourse on Language (1982), explains this concept of discourse in relation to social theory, although not in the clearest terms. Fairclough explains that, “Discourses do not just reflect or represent social entities and relations, they construct or ‘constitute’ them...” (1992, p.3-4). It is through Foucault’s concept of ‘formation of objects’ that one can see how discourse can contribute to the changing of knowledge within society. Objects of knowledge can be established and transformed in a discourse according to the rules or practices of the discursive formation, specifically the language and communication that makes up discourses (Fairclough, 1992). Discourses are defined and formulated through language that is determined by a set of rules that are socially, culturally, and historically specific; it is through discourse that the fabrication of knowledge can be changed.

For the purposes of this paper, discourse is referred to as a social or culturally specific set of rules or practices that produce and transform knowledge that is demonstrated through language. Discourse concerns a wider social perspective referring to discussions that take place in a society and the rules that govern those discussions. Therefore, discourse affects the way a person views something as ‘true’ in a specific place and period of time.
A Colonial Discourse

During much of colonization, the way many Europeans viewed the non-European ‘other’ was affected by a colonial discourse. In general it can be said that the non-European world was fabricated through a discourse full of overlapping assumptions, questions, and imagery, which created separation on the basis of race. Examining these pre-existing beliefs can help to build insight into the perspectives that existed in the early years of life in the Protectorate. In an attempt to understand the power relations that emerged during a specific period in time, it is important to first understand the effects of discourse in Kenya. It is crucial to understand how the ‘other’ has been characterised and how domination could have emerged as a result. Through understanding the colonial discourse we can further make sense of the impressions and actions of both settlers and the colonial administration in Kiambu.

The ‘other’ referred to above is most popularly illustrated as the orient, described in Edward Said’s *Orientalism* (1978). For Said, orientalism can be described as the depiction of the East by the West, “… as a mode of discourse with supporting institutions, vocabulary, scholarship, imagery, doctrines, even colonial bureaucracies and colonial styles” (1978, p.2). He furthers this by stating, “My contention is that without examining Orientalism as a discourse one cannot possibly understand the enormously systematic disciple by which European culture was able to manage – and even produce – the Orient politically, sociologically, militarily, ideologically, scientifically and imaginatively…” (Said, 1978, p.3). Representation of the ‘other’ or the colonized through discourse, by European culture in this case, is directly connected to domination and authority. Overall, Said illustrates that Western knowledge is based upon social constructions shaped by a discourse that places the ‘other’ in a subordinate position.

Since the beginning of the growth of the British Empire there was a specific language used to describe the colonial conquests and colonial subjects. The production of knowledge concerning the colonizer and the colonized is affected by discourse. For Bahbha a colonial discourse is an “apparatus of power”, structures that preserve or enhance the exercise of power, with an objective, “…to construe the colonized as a population of degenerate types on the basis of racial origin, in order to justify conquest and to establish systems of administration and instruction” (1996, p.92). Bahbha describes the colonial discourse as one that uses racial and cultural differences to create knowledge of the colonized subject as marginal in comparison to their European superior (1996). Escobar further characterises this discourse as one under circumstances of unequal power, which is described through social constructions of the colonial subject through a discourse where power is then employed over said subject (1994, p. 9). The colonial discourse constitutes a view of superiority based on race.

It cannot be said that there is one uniform colonial discourse, as it differs greatly depending on location and time. For instance, in Kenya there was a strict divide between the Europeans (the colonial administration and settlers) and the Africans. As is illustrated further below, much of the colonial administration viewed the Kikuyu as primitive and inept. It was clearly stated from the British government that the goal in East Africa was a humanitarian one—a civilizing mission to bring development to an unfortunate population. At the same time, the white settlers were viewed as the answer to economic crisis to bring not only European human capital and expertise.
The colonial discourse that existed in Kenya affected the way both European settlers and the British administration viewed all aspects of life in the Colony. The coming analysis deals more with these issues to determine how farmers in particular were perceived and portrayed. Understanding the colonial discourse that existed in Kiambu aids in uncovering the intentions and reliability of the authors of the primary data, mainly colonial administrators.

4.2 Knowledge and Power

The relationship between knowledge and power is an important one to understand; particular forms of knowledge can be maintained and enhanced through the exercise of power. Therefore, knowledge is embedded in power. Foucault describes power as something that is exercised on an everyday basis between individuals and collectives; this is significantly different from the popular view of power held by a single individual who has complete domination over others. Specifically, power exists in every aspect of daily social life and is employed constantly from all different levels of society (Fairclough, 1992). In Discipline and Punish Foucault explains that power cannot be owned or in the possession of an individual or social group, but instead it is exercised (1995, pp.26-27). Economic factors or a predominant class does not solely determine power, but instead, according to Foucault, power produces a reality in which a society believes to be true (1995). Therefore, truth does not operate outside of power, but instead, what functions in a society as truth is affected by power. It is also important to note that social relations are power relations as there is no social field that can escape power. Simply put, power is exercised by one individual when their actions affect another’s (Patton, 1998). For Foucault the exercise of power can be positive as well as negative as it is does not solely produce dominance; this paper utilizes Kiambu as a case study to ascertain the relationship between exercise of power and knowledge during colonialism.

As mentioned briefly above, particular forms of knowledge are formed and sustained through an exercise of power. Foucault uses the term power/knowledge to imply the connections between the exercising of power and the production of knowledge and explains that,

“We should admit rather that power produces knowledge (and not simply by encouraging it because it serves power or by applying it because it is useful); that power and knowledge directly imply one another; that there is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time power relations” (1995, p. 27).

Put simply, knowledge is created and sustained through the exercising of power; while at the same time, knowledge encourages and legitimates power (Foucault, 1980). This entails a mutually dependent relationship where power cannot be exercised without knowledge, while knowledge cannot exist without being affected by power (Foucault, 1980). Thus, knowledge is product of society, which is inexorably intertwined with power structures and is never rid of bias. Ultimately, power influences the knowledge systems that exist and therefore discourses, while this knowledge also contributes to existing power structures. Thus, the objects, ideas, and values that are considered to be truth in a society are also created or sustained through power.
Bio-power and Governmentality

While the linkages between power and knowledge have already been considered, it is also important to look into the technologies of power used for managing a population. In *The History of Sexuality* Foucault finds that the most common form of power that is exercised in modern society is bio-power (1978). Bio-power is a technology of power that operates in two phases: first it is used to improve the individual and second to control the population as a whole, both through apparatuses or institutional and administrative mechanisms (Foucault, 1978). Foucault identified specific technologies that could “normalize” modern society including institutions such as schools, mental hospitals and sciences that could be used as apparatuses to construct a notion of what is normal to regulate societies (Olssen, 1999). These technologies of power would help to segregate a society, while reinforcing or supporting structures of domination and hegemony (Foucault, 1978). Bio-power is a technology that strives to regulate a group into what it means to be normal, resulting in segregation and hierarchy that support domination.

According to Foucault, it is through bio-power that modern states regulate all domains of society, including health, customs, family etc., under the pretence of improved well being, also known as governmentality. For Foucault, instead of relying on force it is knowledge that regulates a society through providing what is considered as normal (Olssen, 1999). Foucault coins the term governmentality to refer to the political organization of power to effect changes in the population or to manage individuals (Olssen, 1999). Power is thus expanded to include controlling social conduct through the promotion of certain forms of knowledge. Governmentality uses power/knowledge as political techniques by the state to guide and control the population.

While Foucault did not link these concepts to colonization the connections can be easily made. This paper goes on to argue that it is through what Foucault describes as governmentality and technologies of power that the British colonial administration was able to gain control through regulating the African population through the creation of institutions and promotion of Western knowledge. Colonial power expanded through these political techniques that were put in place in Kenya through many institutions and departments. Bio-power contributed to a gaining of control in the region with a goal of ‘normalizing’ the population to model Western conceptions. Furthermore, this system also influenced what was considered to be true back in the UK; the British government used different mechanism to spread the narrative, which was formulated of specific knowledge to both ward of critics and gain supporters. The colonial administration used specific forms of knowledge to regulate these societies.

Foucault views the effects of bio-power on societies as essential to the growth of capitalism; the managing of the population through bio-power led them to economic processes (Foucault, 1978). He goes on to explain, “The adjustment of the accumulation of men to that of capital, the joining of the growth of human groups to the expansion of productive forces and the differential allocation of profit, were made possible in part by the exercise of bio-power in its many forms and modes of application” (Foucault, 1978, p.141). The same can be said for colonization; one of the factors that moved the Africans into a capitalist mode of production was facilitated through managing the population with technologies of power or
governmentality. Regulating the population through bio-power fostered the maintaining of colonial power without the use of force.

Foucault’s concepts and theories are important to this study as they question the existence of prevalent knowledge and truth. His theories point to the importance of looking at how power relations are constructed and what apparatuses strengthen them. The analysis looks more deeply into the case of Kiambu to determine how knowledge was used to generate and maintain colonial power and how technologies of power were used. Overall, the question then becomes how can the knowledge enveloped in an environmental narrative be created and sustained in district of Kiambu and how is this related to the exercising of colonial power. These questions can be answered by using Foucault’s concepts as a foundation in the coming analysis.

4.3 Environmental Narratives

In order to understand what narratives exactly refer to, this section defines and describes the concept in regards to the environment. When it comes to environmental change, it seems as though there are many myths or exaggerations that are considered to be scientific knowledge, and thus not always questioned. The problem is that this exaggerated or false scientific expertise can become translated into policy and even common knowledge. Furthermore, extremely complex environmental issues tend to be dramatically simplified. This is particularly true in the case of colonialism, as outsiders perceive the practices of locals in comparison to their own pre-existing knowledge. In Kenya administrators and experts silenced many of these local practices, especially in regards to agricultural production, because they were perceived to be backward at the time.

It is what Leach and Mearns refer to as ‘received wisdom’ that makes up the narrative; they describe this as a set of ideas that are understood to be true through social agreement that are rarely challenged (1996, p.6). In the case of a narrative, there exists a set of knowledge that forms a story or scenario that are founded on simplified and biased information. Bureaucrats and administrators can simplify a complex issue or situation through creating a story with the purpose of getting the audience to believe in something (Roe, 1991). As Roe suggests, these narratives have a beginning and an end that imply not what could happen, but a sequence of events that will take place if the current situation is sustained (1991). Narratives tend to fulfill different purposes and prove advantageous to some groups over others, while maybe not appearing so obvious at the time. Narratives exist in complex and ambiguous situations creating a simplified version of what is understood to exist, where claims to truth are not based on actual fact, but instead ideas influenced by outside opinion or even to serve the purpose of specific interest groups.

This becomes very clear when examining issues of environmental change, specifically during colonization. Leach and Mearns (1996) find that in terms of the environment, narratives tend to create a simple divide demonstrating those who are the problem. Hoben describes this clearly:

“The environmental policies promoted by colonial regimes and later by donors in Africa rest on historically grounded, culturally constructed paradigms that at once describe a problem and prescribe its solution. Many of them are rooted in a narrative that tells us how things were in an earlier time when people lived in harmony with nature, how human agency has altered that harmony, and of the
calamities that will plague people and nature if dramatic action is not taken soon.” (Leach & Mearns, 1996 cited Hoben, 1995, p.1008)

The view of these dramatic scenarios that are put forth by environmental narratives offers justification for intervention. The view is that action needs to be taken immediately so to stop any further destruction—destruction which may not have existed in the first place. Roe describes these narratives as “crisis scenarios” that require immediate expert help if damage is to be stopped (1995). These environmental crisis scenarios invoke a need for outside expertise in order to help those who are responsible for damage to gain information, and ultimately to solve the problem. The result is the creation of a story where one party is blamed while another outside party is seen to offer answers to all universal environmental problems.

This ‘received wisdom’ remains even though there may be people or research that challenge it. Narratives tend to persist because of the exercise of power that both sustains and creates these specific forms of knowledge. It is through bio-power and apparatuses described above that allow for narratives to persist. As Leach & Mearns state, “…the embedding of such knowledge/power relations in the institutions of science and of development help account for the persistence of received ideas about African environmental change” (1996, p.17). The creation of environmental narratives allows for the creation of a simplified version of a complex situation promoted to fulfill specific purposes.

5.0 Historical Background

This chapter discusses the historical background to be used as contextual information to set a foundation for the analysis. Firstly, this section looks at British ideology at home during the late 19th and early 20th centuries to gain an understanding of their views towards imperialism. Secondly, this section looks at how Kikuyu society functioned and how agricultural production took place prior to the introduction of the British to understand the changes that took place. The introduction of the colonial administration and settlers into the district is examined along with the circumstances that resulted in land expropriation. Understanding these initial encounters helps to understand the colonial discourse in Kenya as well as how the foundation for a narrative came about.

5.1 The Age of British Imperialism

In order to gain a full understanding of the conditions in much of East Africa during colonization it is important to understand British colonial thinking under the context of late 19th and early 20th century views of imperialism. The development of the ideology of imperialism in Britain had great effects on how colonial rule was carried out in the colony of Kenya. Specifically, it was social and cultural ideologies of the Victorian era that greatly affected the views of the early British administration and settlers, which created the foundation for colonialism is Kenya.

Sociocultural evolutionism was a primary justification for imperialism during the Victorian era. For many of the primary thinkers of the time it was understood that societies and cultures develop through stages, the first stage was considered primitive to a final stage of an advanced capitalist system. Within this view there existed a
hierarchy that included not only industrial Britain, but also the non-European ‘others’ (Stocking, 1987). As Stocking notes, this manifested into a notion of “colonial otherness” where ‘savages’ overseas were viewed as, “Dark-skinned and small of stature, unattractive, unclothed and unclean, promiscuous and brutal with their women…” (1987, p.234). The notion of ‘savages’ was not as evolved in comparison to the European colonizers. Thus, marked the beginning of a “civilising” mission to develop many of the savage populations of the world (Porter, 1968; Stocking, 1987). It is these sociocultural evolutionary arguments that offered ideological support for colonial conquests that commenced at the end of the 19th century.

Generally, it can be said that early colonial expansion was carried out with the hopes of civilization and development. The positive sentiment that surrounded the British Empire had come to its high point at the end of the 19th century (Porter, 1968; Zins, 1998). During this period there were very visible critics to the Empire, yet the debate was not simply polarized between the imperialists and the anti-imperialists. For some it was considered a political and moral duty and for some it was believed imperialism should come to a complete end, while there were many who existed between these two extremes (Porter, 1968). The central argument of the minority against early imperialism was that interests were centered on profits and individual interests as opposed to general welfare and expansion of markets (Owens, 1999). It was in the interest of the British government to maintain positive sentiments towards imperialism to maintain happy taxpayers.

The view of imperialist strategies as harmful to the welfare of the colonized in the beginning of the 20th century was muffled by a new imperial strategy. After 1918 the British Government was forced to re-evaluate their expenditures due to the debt incurred by the First World War and the risk of angering the electorate (Owens, 1999, p.192). A trusteeship was the response to early imperial critics in addition to an option requiring fewer resources from British taxpayers. Under the imperial trusteeship, native rights, racial equality as well as economic and social development were considered central, with eventual self-governing in the future (Owens, 1999). Under this strategy of trusteeship was indirect rule, where native authorities were put in lower-ranking positions to govern locally with of goal of protecting customary rights of natives against settler producers (Owens, 1999). Indirect rule enabled the British Government to keep expenditures low and still continue the breadth of the Empire with a limited number of government administrators; at the same time this new imperial policy offered was based, in theory, on equality and welfare of the colonized. While this was the ideal put forward, it was rarely the case of what was found in practice. However, the colonial administration worked to ensure this was the message put forth back in the UK.

5.2 Pre-Colonial Kiambu

Now that a background has been offered to British thinking concerning imperialism, this paper moves on to examine Kikuyu social organization prior to colonization in Kiambu. This offers a foundation to understanding the changes that took place following colonial introduction.

Kikuyu social structure prior to colonization was complex and based on growth of the individual with mutually dependent, complementary relationships of the social group. The Kikuyu have a patrilineal social organization, meaning that men are central to
basic social structure. Kikuyu society was divided into separate networks of communities and families; several homesteads would be close in proximity to make up a network. Men, who are also connected through networks of age groups and/or councils, are the head of homesteads. Each homestead consisted of an area enclosed by dense shrub, which varied in size (from one to ten huts) depending on the wealth of the owner; each wife would typically have her own hut and cultivation plot with space for livestock (Routledge, 1910, pp.117-118). All members of the sub-clan would descend from one founder (Leakey, 1977, p.7). These family units were central to Kikuyu social structure.

Because the Kikuyu rely almost entirely on land, the land tenure system that existed was important. When the Kikuyu first moved into the Kiambu district land was held communally by the Wandorobo; as the Kikuyu moved into region they negotiated with the Wandorobo and bought forestland through an extensive process of negotiations and ceremonies to set the boundaries (Beech, 1917, pp.50-51; Leakey, 1977). According to Leaky, these sales could range from 20 square miles to 50 acres (1977, p.109). Therefore, land is owned individually by the original purchaser and inherited by the family and apportioned by the eldest son (Beech, 1917). A Kikuyu’s right to land was generally distributed through the mbarĩ or sub-clan, which includes different levels of access and control (Mackenzie, 1998, p.25). Typically, the owner of the land apportions a section to each of his wives, to which the eldest son then becomes the head (Barlow, 1932, pp.60-61). A person who had an abundance of land was required to offer basic rights to a member of the sub-clan who was struggling (Leakey, 1977, p.7). If an area became too crowded it was common for the wealthiest to decide to move to start a separate sub-clan (Leakey, 1977, p.113). Furthermore, if a member purchases a new estate it is assumed that other members could ask to join and cultivate a plot of land if it was available (Leakey, 1977, p.7). Overall, land tenure was held individually and the right to land was decided through membership in the sub-clan, but various complex rights concerning access and control were commonplace.

The immediate and greater family were all part of the extensive Kikuyu organization. The Kikuyu were not ruled by chiefs, but instead had a self-ruling system through a network of committees (Leakey, 1977, p.12). Each cluster of homesteads consisted of a council of elders and councils of initiation warriors representing different age groups (Leakey, 1977, p.12; Routledge & Routledge, 1910, p.196). These networks reached out to other Kikuyu communities through appointed representatives, which then represented the territorial unit (Leakey, 1977, p.13). The appointed representatives were chosen according to exceptional ability and respect (Leakey, 1977, p.13). In addition to appointed representatives, men who owned the estate held a greater amount of power. The man who bought the land and arranged family to help cultivate and create the village held the greatest authority and complete control over the estate (Leakey, 1977, p.13). There was no single authority or power that existed within Kikuyu society, but instead many respected representatives and an original owner of an estate.

Within the community roles were divided among the members of society; for example, young men were responsible for protection of the land from Maasai raids, women were cultivators and traders between regions and the Maasai, while men cleared and turned forest or fallow land for cultivation (Leakey, 1977; Routledge &
Overall, in the pre-colonial period, Kikuyu social organization was based on complementary relationships where people had responsibilities that were dependent upon one-another. These mutual relationships were also true at the household level. While a Kikuyu cannot own or inherit land, they are offered parcels to cultivate under their husband. A family unit usually included a man, his wives and the wives’ children; within the household wives were typically responsible for planting, weeding, harvesting, and any decision-making regarding cultivation and small surpluses, (Leakey, 1977, p.172; Mackenzie, 1998). Men were responsible for clearing and turning of the soil as well as scaring away birds from crops (Leakey, 1977; Routledge & Routledge, 1910). A newly cultivated land was distributed to the man’s wives and a widowed mother for their complete control (Leakey, 1977, p.171). While there typically was a division of labour, the main contributions to household production and cultivation were traditionally done by the women of a household.

The system of cooperation also held true for agricultural production. For the largely vegetarian group, agricultural production was essential to social organization and, ultimately, survival; meat was a luxury that was typically eaten on festivals or for sacrificial rituals (Routledge & Routledge, 1910, p.49). The preparation of a new piece of land for cultivation required the work of many village members. A newly cleared section would first be burned of leftover undergrowth and branches, while land that had been left to fallow would need to be cut with knives and hoed (Leakey, 1977, p.169). The digging up of the ground required the help of family and friends who belonged to a rotation group offering help to one-another (Leakey, 1977, p.170). It was common that during the months of hoeing and weeding women would be more occupied, while men would be responsible for early clearing and protecting ripe crops (Routledge & Routledge, 1910, pp.39-41). When land needed to be dug and harrowed, men and women from the community would always take part, expecting help in return when needed. A similar type of rotation existed for weeding. In order to ensure strong seedlings everyone in the community took part in extensive weeding, moving from homestead to homestead (Leakey, 1977, p.186).

The Kikuyu relied on many traditional agricultural techniques in order to manage irregular rains, manage drought, conserve soil fertility and prevent weed growth. A Kikuyu calendar had no specific seasons, but two rainy periods where the seeds were planted, followed by two harvests in a 12-month period (Routledge & Routledge, 1910, p.40). The Kikuyu method of cultivation allowed for longer periods of cultivation with following fallow periods (Leakey, 1977, p.171). In addition, systems of intercropping allowed for longer growing periods without a decrease in production. Specific choices of crops in every rotation were carefully chosen and choice of different seeds allowed for maintained diversity, which is essential for drought-prone areas (Mackenzie, 1998, p.50-53). Because the rains tended to be so irregular this diversified cropping system proved to protect the seasons yields. The traditional systems of agriculture included methods of advanced crop rotation and intercropping that allowed for crops to be grown on the same piece of land for up to 10 years without a fallow period (Leakey, 1977, p.171; Mackenzie, 1998). Routledge & Routledge find that such a large population could easily support themselves through agricultural production in small spaces (1910, p.119). The combination of these advanced cropping methods allowed for longer and more frequent growing periods because of crop diversity and soil fertility.
The majority of goods produced were for household consumption, but small surpluses were also produced for trade with the surrounding districts, including the Maasai (Leakey, 1977, p.483). Typically, each adult member of the homestead had their own piece of land; therefore, the person that had responsibility over the plot, made appropriate decisions, regardless of gender (Mackenzie, 1998). Women had control over any small surpluses grown, but larger amounts could cause conflict over control (Mackenzie, 1998). Overall, agricultural production was for household consumption, however when surplus was produced it could be traded with surrounding districts.

The pre-colonial system of agriculture proved to be on that encouraged sustainable land usage. Using Kruseman, Ruben, and Kuyvenhaven’s model, the land usage of the Kikuyu proves to be sustainable, especially at the farm level. As these authors describe, “‘sustainability’… refers to the long-term capacity of the farm household to produce and consume” (1996, p. 4); this is furthered to mean the reproduction of the resource base or the long-term capacity of production and maintenance from both a agro-ecological and socio-economic processes (Kruseman, Ruben, and Kuyvenhaven, 1996). From the illustration of the Kikuyu farmers above it can be said the advanced agricultural methods used allowed for both long-term reproduction of produce as well as an optimal allocation of resources. Household production could provide for all because of advanced cultivation methods. Of course there were still times of difficulty with severe weather conditions such as drought, yet they were better prepared to deal with them prior to colonization. Using this definition it can be said that agricultural production during pre-colonial Kenya was based on a system of sustainable land usage.

5.3 European Introduction

Early British interests in the East Africa Protectorate were not very clear; policy arguments made to the public seemed to differ from British intentions and actual action in the country. As Sorrenson notes, in the early stages of British interest, policy was based on other indirect interests including the Indian Ocean, Egypt and the Nile (1968). With a main concern for their overall imperial strategy, specifically Uganda, and a lack of interest in the region now known as Kenya, the men first sent were very inexperienced (Lonsdale & Berman, 1979). Interestingly, the British justified their imperial pursuits for humanitarian reasons or commercial opportunities in the Nile Valley and East Africa (Sorrenson, 1968). It can be said in East Africa and Kenya in particular early interests were not for settlement purposes, but up until the late 1890s was instead for control of the Nile and other territories.

For these reasons, British existence and settlement in the protectorate was slow. Sorrenson finds that in fact many early explorers that came into the region believed that much of East Africa, and Kenya in particular was not suitable for settlement by Europeans (1968). In 1896 only five settlers were living in the highlands (Sorrenson, 1968, p.34). One region that did seem suitable for climatic reasons was the White Highlands (Morgan, 1963). In order to increase financial returns, it was essential to bring in settlers to begin producing where the Kikuyu were not. However, up until this point travel constraints and communication struggles had not resulted in a flourishing European community.

The Imperial British East Africa Company, which was founded in 1888, realized that a prosperous future in East Africa was dependent on the construction of a railway
(Sorrenson, 1968, pp.12-16); yet, without subsidies from the government the project was unfeasible. Thus, in 1984 discussions commenced on a buyout from the British government, resulting in elimination of the Company’s charter (Sorrenson, 1968, p. 17). For a period of 25 years beginning in 1895 Kenya was known as the British East Africa Protectorate. The Foreign Office took responsibility of the Protectorate in the first years, even though it was lacking in experience of African colonial administration and competent personnel (Lonsdale & Berman, 1979); there existed no clear policy, which left action to the will of those on the ground (Berman, 1990).

During this period British policy was based on outside strategies and commercial potential with increasing interest in European settlement after the completion of the railway from the coast of Mombasa to the interior in the early 1890s.

The construction of the Uganda Railway greatly improved means of transportation and communication in the area. While it was initially constructed to connect Uganda and Lake Viktoria to a seaport, it also increased European settlement as the tracks passed through the White Highlands (Morgan, 1963). After the railway had been extended to Nairobi in 1899, settlers slowly started to multiply and first began to settle in the region of Kiambu (Sorrenson, 1968, p.176). Upon completion, the railway had more than tripled initial estimated costs for British taxpayers; this meant that European settlement was essential to provide incoming revenue to cover costs of the project (Morgan, 1963; Sorrenson, 1968, p.19). While the construction of the railway cost the government much more than it initially expected, it was essential to further settlement and colonization for the future of the protectorate. The inflow of settlers was required in order to offset the accumulating costs of the railway, which meant that the availability of land was central to a European settlement strategy. With the increased deficit as a result of the railway, the interests of the protectorate became primarily European settlement.

The first years of the protectorate were the most expensive; between the cost of the railway and the military, the imperial subsidy was tripled in only the first five years (Lonsdale & Berman, 1979, p.496). There occurred great changes to overall protectorate policy as a result of increasing costs and a transfer of responsibility to the Colonial Office in 1905. The overall goal at the time was to gain control over the Africans as a precondition to production and colonial administration (Berman, 1990). The objective was to increase colonial power while eliminating military force, which is described by Lonsdale & Berman as shift from “coexistence to British control” and “coercion” to African consent (1979, p.497). One of the ways to do this was to appoint native chiefs, generally people who were already prominent in society, to help create colonial acceptance and generate supporters, while enforcing colonial policy on the ground.

This transition was made smoother as many of the Africans were still recovering from disasters that occurred at the end of the 19th century. The Rinderpest epidemic wiped out most of herds of the Maasai in the 1880s forcing them to seek assistance from the Kikuyu in Kiambu (Overton, 1988; Sorrenson, 1968). Shortly after the Kikuyu population had been drastically reduced as they suffered from famine in 1899 due to lack of rains the year before, as well as a smallpox epidemic during the same period (Sorrenson, 1968). Sorrenson estimates that the population of the Southern Kikuyu decreased nearly 70 percent (1968, p.28). It was in these damaged areas that the Kikuyu became more open to British control. When higher British officials witnessed
this extent of devastation in the region during the first years of the protectorate, the questioning of the abilities of African producers was cemented. The result was the promotion of European settlers as a solution to the protectorate’s financial problems. This contributed to any feeling of superiority many settlers believe they merited upon arrival.

In the early years of the protectorate policy changed from merely a means to outside interests, to accepted control of the Africans in order to create a foundation for any future production and self-sustaining colonial administration. With a recovering native population, the administration came to focus its hopes on the ability of European settlers to offset the higher than anticipated costs that came about under the Foreign Office. Through the appointment of local chiefs the colonial administration was able to gain control at the state level, while those at the local level felt more independent.

5.4 Land Alienation

Land in Kikuyu Province1 was the first to be alienated and settled by Europeans, with the Kiambu district becoming home to many because of the establishment of the railway. With the need to offset the costs of the railway, the colonial government was focused on introducing settlers to the region to increase production for export. As Lonsdale & Berman discuss, in order to manage this while dealing with fractured social relations within the protectorate, the colonial state had to intervene more than other capitalist states (1979). In Kenya this meant that the colonial state appropriated Kikuyu land, taxed locals, and created a labour force, all to promote surplus production to the benefit of the White settler (Lonsdale & Berman, 1979). This created a multitude of problems for the colonial state, particularly in Kiambu, as relations between settlers and Africans deteriorated.

Early on in the years of the protectorate it was assumed that the Kikuyu had no system of land tenure, which thus caused the foundation of confusion over land in the area as it came to be believed that unused land belonged to the Crown (Sorrenson, 1968; Coray, 1978). The Crown Lands Ordinance of 1902 was the initial policy to which African land could be alienated to European settlers; the policy specified that Africans had no rights to title of land that was unused, uncultivated or waste land, meaning that land had to be physically occupied for Africans to have rights (Coray, 1978, p.179). Any land that fell into the unoccupied category was thus under the ownership of the Crown and eventually made available to Europeans. This policy resulted in Kikuyu land, which was typically used for grazing or fallowing periods, being occupied by Europeans (Overton, 1988). However as Overton notes, the Kikuyu already occupied most of the land that was of interest to settlers. The settlers had the impression that unoccupied land was infertile and therefore preferred Kikuyu land that was already productive (Sorrenson, 1968). Confusion persisted, as the Europeans believed they were purchasing outright land while, from the perspective of the Kikuyu, land was being rented (Sorrenson, 1968). It was under the Crown Lands Ordinance of 1902 that the settler could obtain title to the land once compensation had been paid to the Kikuyu (Sorrenson, 1968). Therefore, in Kiambu from the very beginning of settlement there existed Kikuyu claims to earlier occupation of land.

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1 The Kikuyu Province was later known as the Central Province.
During these early years of settlement land problems including shortages emerged as a growing concern. Sorrenson finds that between 1903 and 1906 nearly 60,000 acres of Kikuyu land in the Kiambu-Limuru district had been alienated to settlers under the Ordinance (1968, p. 180). In 1905 Kikuyu land shortages for both grazing and cultivation became apparent as they people were encroaching on surrounding forest (Overton, 1988, p.112). It was due to these reasons that the colonial administration considered Kikuyu reserves to prevent settlers from infringing on Kikuyu land (Sorrenson, 1968). The uncertainty that existed for the Kikuyu in regards to their land rights lead to the creation of reserves through the Crown Lands Ordinance of 1915 (Coldham, 1979). While the borders may have offered some sort of security for the Kikuyu, it did not relieve the discontent over rights to land, especially as the population density increased in the reserves.

Growing claims to land by the Kikuyu and complaints of settlers over any rights to land that did exist according to the Ordinance lead to creation of the Kenya Land Commission. The overall goal of the Commission was to investigate and resolve any claims to land from the Kikuyu, to offer insights into the future of the reserves, and to define the area known as the White Highlands (Coldham, 1979). Overall, the Commission considered 500 memoranda and heard 726 witnesses, of which 487 were natives and two hundred were Kikuyu of Kiambu (CAB/24/248/47, p.288; Coray, 1978, p.183). The Commission found that alienation in the region of Kiambu had done no harm to Kikuyu and may have even restricted native expansion; and therefore, they were not eligible for compensation (Coray, 1978). It was also advocated that any Kikuyu rights that existed outside the reserve should be terminated (Coldham, 1979). The end result of the Commission was in direct favour of European settlers’ interests. Consequently for the Kikuyu, concerns and anxiety over land rights, food security, and population pressures intensified.

6.0 Analysis

This chapter sets out to answer the three research questions mentioned above by examining the reorganization of power and knowledge during colonization in the district of Kiambu. Now that a historical and theoretical foundation has been established, an analysis can take place of the case study in particular. The analysis draws on all data collected including both the primary sources from archival research and secondary sources.

Prior to the primary research key actors found throughout the secondary research were examined to better understand their credibility and intent based on their position in the Protectorate. Once primary data was collected, the key sources were further examined both internally and externally to understand the position of the author, the intent, and the reliability of the source. After the sources were evaluated the research was then examined and coded according to the research questions.

6.1 How were the Kikuyu viewed in relation to nature as agriculturalists and how were they portrayed and discussed in government texts?

The aim of this section is to determine how the British colonial administration viewed the Kikuyu. As discussed above, many of the British officials would have been
influenced by the logic of the Victorian era in the UK during the 1800s and early 1900s. This section determines how these impressions impacted the colonial administrations views of the Africans, contributing to the creation of a colonial discourse in Kenya. More specifically, through examining how the Kikuyu of Kiambu are portrayed and discussed in colonial government texts, it is possible to determine how this could have contributed to a foundation for an environmental narrative that led to British occupation.

In the early years of the British East Africa Protectorate colonial thinking was already subconsciously affected by ideology that existed at the time in the UK. As discussed above, the sociocultural evolutionism that existed assumed that societies developed through stages ranging from primitive to a developed capitalist system. Many in the early years viewed the region as one in the primitive stages, which established an immediate hierarchy and segregation; this created a social division based on race where the Africans were seen as 'savages' at the bottom, while the developed Europeans were on top. It was this view that created the colonial discourse that existed in Kenya; one that was based on complete segregation based on race between the European and non-European ‘others’. The conception of the African in the British East Africa Protectorate in the eyes of the European was one of a lower status, a primitive people who required civilization.

Upon early introduction to protectorate, the Europeans views of the land had an impact on how they perceived the Africans. The land in the East Africa Protectorate was continually viewed as abundantly fertile and plentiful. For many early European settlers, Kenya was seen as a sanctuary of fertility and beauty that had the potential to yield an array of produce. H.R. Tate’s notes on the Kikuyu Tribe from 1904 illustrate this impression: “From Mount Kenya itself can be traced the extreme fertility of the Province to which it gives its name. From its snowfields and glaciers arise the numerous rivers and streams which water so abundantly the valleys and plains lying around its far-reaching spurs” (Tate, 1904, p. 131). With land that was so fertile and abundant it was also expected that any production should be just as plentiful. This picturesque notion of the country continued into the later years of the Protectorate. In a memorandum by the Director of Agriculture in 1927, Alex Holm describes,

“Both the native reserves and the alienated area extensive areas of land of great fertility are to be found; land which, on account of its physical condition, is easily cultivated and made highly productive at comparatively little expense.... The adequacy of the rainfall coupled with the abundance of sunshine for plant growth and crop harvesting creates a feeling of security in agricultural pursuits” (CO 533/755, p.42).

The British view of the land as highly fertile and ideal for cultivation resulted in land not producing to its potential because of the ‘primitive’ farmers. During this time the Kikuyu were still recuperating in the 1900s from the famine and smallpox epidemics at the turn of the century. Nonetheless, the view of Europeans was that they had an abundant amount of fertile land and were unable to maximize its productivity. With a dramatically reduced population and many still recovering from the epidemics, there was a limited amount of labour input available (Kitching, 1980). Furthermore, there

2 All referenced page numbers of Colonial Office documents are internal reference numbers of the Public Record Office that were detailed on every page of the folio or book.
was no need for a large amount of surplus production due to the decreased population and general subsistence living. From the perspective of the European, this was simply seen as underproduction as a result of unskilled African labour. It becomes evident throughout government texts that the belief was that Africans were inefficient when it came to agricultural production and required education in order to increase production and take advantage of abundant lands. These early views were continued throughout colonization contributing to the colonial discourse and forming the foundation for an environmental narrative.

The view of many colonial administrators was that this fertile land simply required better attending to, which could be solved through education. Thus, the goal during much of the colonial period was to improve not only agricultural techniques, but also to modernize the Africans into a more civilized way of life. In the annual Native Affairs Department report of 1920-21, the Chief Native Commissioner states, “The Native Reserves, no less European areas, are a part of the colony and they are perhaps the most fertile part. With training and encouragement the Native could be brought, is being brought, to abandon his time honoured methods of cultivation in favour of more modern ones” (CO 544/12, p. 415). According to the documents of the colonial office, it was their responsibility to teach the native the ‘proper’ way. Not only did they need to teach the Africans new agricultural methods, but also new attitudes towards production and surpluses. The Agricultural Annual Report from 1936 also discusses how the native needs to be taught how to use his own money (CO 533/480/22, p. 61). The idea of the Africans requiring education of all sorts, from agriculture to social life, is recurrent throughout the colonial office documents.

The common view held by much of the colonial administration towards the character of the Kikuyu was as a slow, traditionalist people who are reluctant to change. In the Annual Report of Kikuyu Province, 1926 the Kikuyu are described as, “… seem less advanced and to be slower in assimilating new ideas. I should say that the Akikuyu are a virile, intelligent race, but a certain ingrained conservatism makes them suspicious of changes and the fertility of the soil has perhaps probably made them somewhat indolent” (CO 544/21, p.187). Here it is even believed that the great fertility has made the Kikuyu producers lazy. Similarly, G.V. Maxwell, the Chief Native Commissioner stated in the 1926 Native Affairs Department Report, “The Akikuyu are rather backward in improving their methods of cultivation and producing crops for export”. The natives are continually referred to as conservative because of their reluctance to embrace change; this is illustrated in the Department of Agriculture Annual Report, 1936 that states, “It is often considered that the native is the most conservative type of farmer in existence, and there has been a certain criticism on the part of many that the advancement of his agriculture has not been sufficiently rapid…” (CO 533/480/22, p.61). When settlers testified for the Native Labour Commission in 1912 and 1913 they deemed the Kikuyu in particular as lazy. Mr. Lushington Cooper of Kaimbu believed that the work of the women from the ‘shambas’ produced enough to “keep the men in idleness” (CO 544/5, p.712).

3 Akikuyu refers to the Kikuyu.
4 Shamba is a cultivated plot that is located in the homestead.
5 Mr. E. G. Lushington was witness no.41 from the Native Labour Commission Evidence and Report from 1912-1913.
reluctance to change and to implement new cultivation techniques supported any British view that the Kikuyu were lazy and traditionalist.

Besides the nature of the Africans as idle or conservative, another recurrent theme throughout the colonial office documents is an underutilization of land and overall poor farming methods of the Kikuyu. Kiambu was one of the most densely populated districts in Kenya and many officials believed that with proper agricultural methods, enough produce could be grown for all: in his notes on Kiambu District, Lord Hailey agrees with the District Commissioner stating, “With better farming methods the existing land could carry a greater population than at present” (CO 1018/22). Mackenzie found through her extensive archival research that the administration of the central province and the Department of Agriculture believed, “…the root cause of the agrarian crisis was identified as the African peasant himself” and, “It was ‘he’ who, ‘through ignorance, incompetence and greed’, had ‘mined’ the soil” (1998, p.98). The Kenya Land Commission report mirrors these thoughts as they describe the Kikuyu as, “not a good farmer, but he is well above the average of East African Tribes” (CAB/24/248/47, p.10). Through examining colonial office correspondence and annual reports it becomes evident that the majority of colonial administration continually trivialized the agricultural capabilities of the Africans; the solution that resulted was a reconditioning of methods to more modern technological techniques.

These ideas of changing the native are very recurrent in many of the colonial office documents. In an application to the Carnegie Corporation for a grant to conduct an anthropological survey, it is stated that, “The major problem in Kenya lies in the Africans’ attitude towards land and livestock” and that environmental destruction, “…can only be met by inducing changes in the Africans’ attitude in these matters” (CO 533/514/14, p.34). Similarly, in Lord Hailey’s An African Survey he explains the problem as a psychological one that must be solved with a change to native attitudes (CO 852/310/3B). The hope was that an anthropological survey would foster great understanding and help the British to encourage changes in attitude. After looking at many of the quotes above, it becomes apparent that the colonial administration viewed the Kikuyu as primitive and uneducated, requiring change through influencing attitudes, altering traditions and agricultural methods, as well as, initiating social progress.

The colonialist’s views of the Africans are evident through their continuous search for a definition of customary law. Firstly, in the early years of the protectorate there existed much confusion about land tenure or property rights that existed among the Kikuyu. For colonial officials who resided in the area during the early years, the fact that the Kikuyu could have a system of land tenure was not at all thought of; it was assumed that they had some sort of basic and traditional system. In 1899 the Sub-Commissioner at Mombasa believed, “…strictly speaking, the conception of freehold does not exist among the primitive savages of the interior, and it is only by carelessness or cunning that such has been pretended to be conveyed in the past” (Sorrenson, 1968, pp.177-178). For Mackenzie perceptions of Kikuyu land tenure were greatly affected by the committees that were filled with British men whose experiences were confined to the English common law example (1998, p.65). Much evidence was given from Europeans and colonial administrators that were living in the Colony. Evidence was offered by Beech, whose study of thousands of witnesses found not only that land been purchased by the Kikuyu, but also that land had been
both individually owned as well as individual mbari owned (1917, pp.50-51); this was a significant finding during the time period as it proved complexity of land tenure for the Kikuyu of Kiambu. While many such accounts were offered explaining the complexity of the land tenure system in Kiambu by both Europeans and Kikuyu, verdicts were made that the Kikuyu had a lack of tribal organization and therefore no definite custom concerning land (Mackenzie, 1998, p.72)⁶. There is no doubt that confusion existed and it is evident that complexity of the Kikuyu system of githaka was not entirely understood or even believed to exist in some cases. Even with statements from colonial officials and other Europeans in the Protectorate proving otherwise, the githaka system was never accepted as the original land tenure system. The continual disregard for the Kikuyu githaka system, even with sufficient evidence proving otherwise, illustrated the general notion of the administration towards Africans as traditional.

Early British thinking that was influenced by social and cultural ideologies in the Victorian era as well as views of a recuperating Kikuyu society as inefficient and lazy lead to the segregation of the population in the British East Africa Protectorate. In the early years of European introduction into Kenya, the images of the country as a fertile and abundant land with potential for ideal crop production filled the minds of many settlers and much of the administration; however, this also facilitated a negative view of the African farmer as traditional and inept because of a their perceived inability to produce great surpluses and take advantage of abundant soils. Portrayals of abundance were usually followed by descriptions of unproductive farmers who were incapable of using land to its fullest potential. The result was a creation of a colonial environmental narrative that painted the peasant farmer as inept and even destructive to the environment, while the British were considered to be the ones with the answers, on a mission of civilization. Specifically, the Kikuyu farmer was construed as conservative, resistant to change, idle and slow. This construction of the image of the African became a problem that needed to be solved by the administration. According to the documents of the colonial office, it was their responsibility to teach the native the proper way in all aspects of life. This resulted in continued intervention in the everyday lives of the African farmer in an attempt to solve the problem of African ineptitude through modernize of their cultivation techniques and agricultural strategies.

6.2 What did the narrative consist of, how was knowledge of it formulated and what could be found in reality during this time?

The environmental narrative that emerged from the introduction of settlers and the British colonial administration continued to be refined throughout the years of the protectorate. As was discussed above, from the beginning the narrative was impacted by a Victorian ideology of culture and society that contributed to segregation. This was also conducive to the colonial discourse in Kenya that emerged as a portrayal of the African as backward and lazy. The negative construction of African farmer that emerged constituted the beginning of the narrative. The creation of the narrative marked the beginning of the transition of knowledge and expertise from the African to the European. The result was the creation of a narrative that put the African in a subordinate position, where Western knowledge and technology were offered as the

⁶ The verdict was made by John Ainsworth, the Chief Native Commissioner of the East Africa Protectorate, quoted in Mackenzie, 1998.
solution to an increasing problem of environmental destruction. The colonial environmental narrative evolved from African inability to productively use land due to a lack of knowledge to a more complex story of extensive soil erosion. Demographic pressures, environmental conditions, experience in the United States, and Western experts directly contributed to a more complex story. In the 1920s the narrative really evolved, with soil erosion strategies becoming central to British policy in the 1930s.

In Kiambu, pressures on land in the Kikuyu reserve contributed to a view of the African farmer as incapable. Firstly, serious droughts took place in much of the East African Protectorate from the mid 1920s to the mid 1930s as rainfall levels were remarkably below average (Anderson, 1984). While the central province was least affected, concerns of food security in the native reserves were still evident (CO 544/20). Furthermore, during this period there was severe demographic pressure in the reserves, which affected the ability of the Kikuyu to produce for themselves. Shortly after the creation of African Reserves it was understood that the size was insufficient for such growing populations; it is estimated that Kenya’s African population grew by 15 million from 1925 to 1940 (Anderson, 1984, p.329). While it was recognized that both problems of population pressure and drought were becoming more severe, the final decision of the Kenya Land Commission declared the problem to be one of land use as opposed to land shortage: “…the population should learn to make a correct use of the land which it has” (CAB/24/248/47, p.362). The environmental and demographic pressures that both supported and sustained the narrative put the question of soil conservation at the forefront of the colonial strategy. The heightened reality of soil conservation issues in Kiambu helped to sustain the idea of the traditional African farmer, ultimately contributing to soil degradation.

The strong images of soil erosion from the ‘Dust Bowl’ crisis in the Southern Planes of the United States strengthened justification for British conservation policies in Kenya. Anderson explains that the information became apparent in much of the East African Protectorate in the 1930s; it was this information that illustrated how rich farmland can become an “agricultural wasteland”, which had confirmed much of the literature that arrived prior to the Dust Bowl warning against the threat of soil erosion (1984, p.326). A.M. Champion, a retired administrative officer, discusses in the Journal of the Royal African Society the information that arrived from the U.S.:

“The striking photographs and alarming statistics which have often accompanied both official reports, scientific contributions, and even articles in a more popular style appearing in the various periodicals and even daily papers, can have left but little doubt in our minds. A campaign has been launched and we stand duly warned of the serious consequences of further neglect.” (CO 852/310/3B, p.18) Champion illustrates much of the apprehension that resulted from images of the Dust Bowl, realizing the “appalling destruction” that was occurring “with ever-increasing rapidity” in the African continent that needs to be resolved (CO 852/310/3B, p.18). The growing anxiety over awareness of the Dust Bowl supported any British strategies regarding soil erosion, which also strengthened the validity of the narrative and further interventionist policies.

In the 1930s the colonial environmental narrative was firmly established, while soil erosion became the most predominant concern. It is very evident throughout colonial documents that the administration believed soil erosion existed. Both settlers and
administration officials began citing the destructive capacity of soil erosion. Mrs. E.H. Ward, a settler in the protectorate, states in the *Journal of the Royal African Society* that,

> “Even in the Kikuyu reserve, the greater part of which is blessed with a great depth of rich red soil, can show hillsides from which all the topsoil has been washed, leaving bare ramparts of subsoil and rock, and in every Kikuyu valley, the rivers bear their tell-tale burden of red silt.” (CO 852/250/6, p.21).

These strong images of destruction at the hand of the African made up the environmental narrative and a growing strategy for conservation. As early as 1929, in the Annual Report of the Agricultural Officer of the South Kikuyu Reserve, it is stated, “The most serious problem at present is soil erosion and loss of fertility, which is very general throughout the whole Reserve…” (CO 544/28, p.317). He goes on to express that efforts are being made to combat the problem through urging natives to change their agricultural techniques (CO 544/28, p.317). It is evident that both the settlers and the colonial administration supported the existence of soil erosion in the country with the African farmer as the main culprit.

Knowledge that made up the colonial environmental narrative and supported the story of soil erosion was formulated primarily from Western sources. However, the fact that Western knowledge and technology was prioritized was not new to the protectorate with the introduction of soil erosion. From the very beginning of colonization European agricultural knowledge was prioritized over the traditional methods of the African farmer. In the Department of Agriculture Annual Report of 1910-1911, the Director expresses a ‘hopeful feeling’ as “… the continual influx of settlers, many being possessed of substantial means, as well as agricultural experience…” (CO 544/4, p.616). The same can be said for the strategy to combat soil erosion, that western research and expertise was relied upon. Colin Maher, an Agricultural Officer who was dedicated to the fight against soil erosion, took a trip to the U.S. to better understand the successes and failures to apply to soil conservation policy back in the colony (CO 852/310/3B, p.70). He was of the belief that techniques could be transferred from the U.S. to the Protectorate with local adaptions (CO 852/310/3B, p.70). As early as 1907 the Department of Agriculture took steps to model their own division to look like the Agricultural Department of the U.S. (CO 544/1). Furthermore, experts from all over the world were brought to the Protectorate to offer insight into the issues associated with soil erosion. Dr. Pole Evans was a pasture expert from South Africa who visited to report on soil erosion and grasslands. The report criticizes the role of the government in preservation of grasslands stating that most agricultural officers have a lack of training and qualifications (CO 852/250/5, p.78). He continues to assert the grave situation and extensive reform measures required (CO 852/250/5). Three agricultural officers from the United States Agricultural Department visited to advise on forage plants useful in modern agriculture (CO 544/23). The continual visits by outside experts allowed the colonial administration to evidence the growing crisis and reinforce the colonial environmental narrative by prioritizing Western knowledge and resources.

The privileging of Western knowledge is illustrated in the report of the Kenya Land Commission. It is made quite clear in the report that the information offered by the Kikuyu evidence could not be considered. The commissioners state, “Our conclusion in regard to the evidence given by the Kikuyu is that what they claim and what they really occupied are two very different things, and we say advisedly that, with very few
exceptions, very little reliance can be placed on their statements” which are further described as, “…wildly inaccurate statements without making any attempt to ascertain the true facts…” (CAB/24/248/47, p.69). The majority of information regarding the Kikuyu of Kiambu that was relied on was instead found from sources such as books, maps, records, evidence of European officials and non-officials (CAB/24/248/47, p.69). The colonial administration continually put Western opinion and expertise above all others, which continually reinforced segregation through labeling the African farmer as environmentally destructive and the Europeans or Westerners as the educated higher class. Western knowledge was consistently privileged over African, whether it is in terms of agricultural expertise or evidence given to land commission.

The creation of knowledge in the Protectorate was very influenced by the research facilities that existed. The colonial administration found research to be an important component in the fight against soil erosion. It was in the many research facilities that experts and agricultural officers could experiment with new crops, test new farming methods, measure production, combat diseases, conduct plant breeding and, most importantly, create schools to disseminate information to both the European and African farmer. In the Department of Agriculture Annual Report from 1926 it is stated that efforts had begun to maintain soil fertility, which was primarily done through education, training farms, and demonstration plots; this was done by two agricultural officers, one part time and 18 native instructors (CO 544/20, pp.11-15). Both solutions offered by outside experts and from international examples were directly enforced into the everyday lives of the Kikuyu through agricultural officers. It was through the centers and schools that the colonial administration could conduct research and use science to support the narrative, while also spreading the knowledge through schools and institutions.

The environmental narrative was founded on the belief that the Kikuyu were uneducated and a destructive force when it came to the environment. Specifically, African farmers were targeted as the perpetrators who had not only created the problem of soil erosion, but who were still contributing to the destruction. What the British controlled to be truth in regards to the environment was established through the backing of science. This narrative then became formalized through British colonial policy. While many officers or administrators on the ground may have disagreed, the narrative was considered truth for many administrators at higher levels and back in the UK.

It is important to have a greater understanding of the actual environmental reality in Kiambu apart from what was influenced by the narrative. While there definitely was an extent of environmental change that occurred in Kenya during colonization, it was heavily misrepresented by much of the British colonial administration. In Kiambu, what existed was not soil destruction from the ineptitude of the African farmer, but instead a loss of fertility due to the commercialization of Kikuyu agriculture and technical changes imposed by the colonial government.

Prior to colonization the Kikuyu had no need for large amounts of surplus; Kitching describes this as a underutilization of labour where both the amount of time spent on labour and the simple methods production (little or no technology) resulted in an underuse of labour power in pre-colonial times (1980). The colonial administration became aware of the great possibility to increase African production based on these
factors and as early as 1910 they were making evident plans to increase native production for trade (CO 533/64). From the early years of colonization the goal was to simply increase labour efficiency and use the surpluses to fill the empty trains, while also stimulating money for tax collection; in Kiambu these massive increases in Kikuyu production could be seen from 1905 to 1918 (Kitching, 1980, p.30). In 1922 the Agricultural Department Annual Report states, “It was realized that the native producer could contribute substantially to increased production on a bulk scale and that the Colony stood to gain considerably inasmuch as the introduction of little additional capital was required” (CO544/15, p.15). In order to accomplish this there was an overall change to improved varieties of seed, particularly maize and beans, amongst the farmers (CO544/4). The use of more modern technologies (such as high yielding seeds), increased intensification, and expanded area of cultivation resulted in a great increase of African goods from 1918 to 1930 (Kitching, 1980, p.57). It can be very difficult to gain actual data before the 1930s on the exact levels of expansion. While the reports of the District Officer do not state any figures or details other than the use and appearance of new crops, the great increase in African production was widely acknowledged.

Even despite the depression, African output continued to increase to include a wider variety of crops. It was during the 1930s and 40s that the settlers were struggling because of higher input costs and lower prices on the market. The colonial administration could not solely rely on African production for fear of settler reaction, so they initiated a plan where settlers were offered a monopoly on local markets while African goods could be moved to export markets (Kitching, 1980). The goal was for the colonial administration to take advantage of African low land and labour costs through facilitating measures for marketing (CO544/28, p.12) At this time African farmers used their increased surplus production through a low-cost cultivation system to be exported. As Bergman states, the project to encourage African production during the 30s can be considered successful as it did increase output and productivity (1980). However, with this growth there was also pressure on officials from settlers to halt further production.

With such intensified production came negative implications with regards to the environment. Any nutrient loss that occurred was primarily due to the decreasing consistency and number of fallow periods. Any increase in surpluses was directly correlated to a decrease in soil fertility. In addition, with increasing colonial intervention into Kiambu there came more mandatory changes that farmers had to make: local maize and millets were replaced, which was more demanding on the soil; there was an introduction of new seeds; strategies such as ‘strip-cropping’ and clean wedding were promoted, which seemed to foster erosion; and, general biodiversity had been dramatically decreased (Mackenzie, 1996, pp.148-149, 160). Most of these changes proved to be detrimental to the soil. As the District Commissioner of Murang’a (Central Province) reflects, “Now we seem to be reaping what was then sown, and it is possible that the efforts of 1929 have led in part to the soil erosion problems of 1939” (quoted in Mackenzie, 1996, p.128). While there is no doubt that some officers on the ground could see the effects that this intensified production had on the environment, the overall belief was that erosion was caused by African incompetence and a failure to implement the suggested changes. With such gains in volume of Kikuyu production there were also evident loses that came in the form of lost soil fertility.
While it is clear that many colonial officials believed that soil erosion and degradation existed prior to European arrival and was primarily caused by Kikuyu ineptitude, in fact it seems to have been significantly exacerbated by European techniques. In order for the Kikuyu to increase the cultivation of surpluses and commodities for export the soil quality had to suffer as they dramatically decreased the length and frequency of fallow periods.

6.3 What purpose did the environmental narrative serve in Kiambu and how is it related to the exercising of power?

From the analysis of the colonial environmental narrative above, it becomes apparent that the colonial administration, as well as settlers, had an interest in the depiction of African farmers as environmentally destructive. For settlers the benefits are clear; not only were they privileged when it came to land access and rights, but European production was also promoted over African. On the other hand, for the colonial administration advantages of the narrative might not have been quite as clear. It can be said that the narrative justified large-scale land acquisitions and interventionist policies while maintaining a humanitarian mandate. This created a level of social control without the use of a great amount of resources or British personnel, which is discussed in greater detail below.

First of all, settlers could benefit from the narrative as they were considered by the colonial administration as, “…men of experience in agricultural pursuits” over the more traditional and inept African farmer (CO 544/5, p.3). In the Annual Report of the East Africa Protectorate of 1911-1912 the Director F.R. Brandt mentioned the importance of the settlers as, “It is to men of this class the Protectorate must look for rapid development and consequence advancement” (CO 544/5, p.350). The early commitment made to settlers by the British colonial administration meant that they could easily access the inputs required for production, as well as a secured superior position in society. For the settlers as long as the narrative was maintained they remained vital to the protectorate because of their knowledge, their inflow of money and their political influence. This put them in an advantageous position with the administration, as there was a level of necessity. For many of the remaining years of colonization the settlers used this influence to pressure the colonial administration into further land security. The colonial environmental narrative was central to the proceedings and outcomes of the Kenya Land Commission; settler pressure was at it’s highest to ensure protection of lands through legislation in addition to putting a halt to reserve expansion (Coldham, 1979; Mackenzie, 1998). It was the portrayal of the African farmers as a “liability” because of the “rapid deterioration and impoverishment” of soils under African occupation that ultimately influenced the resolutions offered by the Commission (Mackenzie, 1998, p.89). It was the negative image of the African farmer as unqualified that offered the settlers an amount of safety in regards to land. For the settler the colonial environmental narrative offered them more security over land as well as an amount of influence with the administration.

Furthermore, in the early years of the protectorate the settlers also benefited from privileged production. Because the African farmers were seen as unable to produce sufficient goods due to primitive methods, the European settlers were looked to as the prime producers. Prior to 1914 peasant agriculture was seen as competitive to settlers
and while the importance of African production was obvious to district commissioners on the ground, higher officials were much less aware and even doubted native productive potential (Berman, 1990). With increasing settler pressure the hut tax went up in order to “increase the native’s cost of living” (Berman, 1990, p.27). This cemented the settlers’ position in society as they were viewed as essential to commodity production. The colonial government had to conform to the wishes of the settlers to a certain extent as they relied on them in an economic sense. The environmental narrative functioned as settler support when it came to land rights and privileged production.

For the colonial administration intentions and benefits were less clearly discernable. The responsibilities of the British are best described in a letter from the Marquess of Lansdowne, or Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, to Sir D. Stewart concerning his new appointment as the Commander-in-chief for the East African Protectorate. The Marquess of Lansdowne describes:

“The general policy of this country and the stipulations of the Act of Brussels make it incumbent upon His Majesty’s Government to watch with the greatest care over the interests of the native Races. How best to harmonize their indisputable rights with the requirements of white settlers is a problem which will require your closet attention.” (CO 519/1, p. 42)

As is illustrated in this quote, the policy concerning the protectorate is one that ensures equal rights and protection of the African population as opposed to over the settlers of the region. He states very clearly that, “…the primary duty of Great Britain in East Africa is the welfare of the native races” (CO 519/1, p. 43). He goes on further to explain that, “Native rights are sufficiently recognized in ‘The Crown Lands Ordinance, 1902’ but it will be your duty, and that of all officers connected with the administration of the land, to see that these rights are respected in reality” (CO 519/1, p. 43). It is through this letter from the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs that the policy of the British Government towards the management of the protectorate is stated: ensure protection of rights and general welfare of the Africans. Similarly, there existed a group of critics in the UK that the colonial government had to be careful not to rouse. It is through a more humanitarian and civilizing colonial mandate that the administration was able to combat critics by claiming to put the rights of Africans first. Therefore, it can be said that the colonial administration required justification for the extent of land alienation that took place. This meant that any large-scale land acquisitions that took place had to be justified in regards to imperial policy. The environmental narrative acted as this justification under the umbrella of conservation; from this perspective, the increasing land degradation that was a result of African misuse was used as justification for land alienation and increased intervention into society. According to this thinking it was the responsibility of the British to ensure conservation of soils for the future of the Colony and well being of the Kikuyu.

The administration then went further to use the colonial environmental narrative to intervene in the everyday lives of the African farmers. The colonial administration deemed it as their responsibility to not only improve the agricultural productivity of the natives through modernization, but also to encourage social progress. A necessary requirement prior to production or a functioning colonial administration was effective control over the African population. With declining economic resources and a small group of personnel, the goal was to gain social control and a
level of African acceptance to British domination. This could be done through a combination of methods including the promotion of local chiefs and intervention into everyday lives of the locals. The colonial officials planned to use “propaganda and education” to invoke change in the Africans (CO 852/250/4, p.16). Intervention into the lives of African farmers was the most extensive of all the population. In the Annual Report of the Department of Agriculture, 1925 it was stated that a bill was put in place to control African agricultural production and livestock: “This bill confers powers upon Government actively to improve the standards of production in the Colony, and to forbid the growth of crops or plans which are known to be deleterious or in other ways undesirable, also to preserve permanent food crops from destruction” (CO 544/18, p.64, 19). The narrative offered the colonial administration control as they intervened more into the daily lives of the Africans.

The continual reproduction of knowledge that was fostered by British power allowed for the continuation and even strengthening of the environmental narrative throughout colonization. The government could easily confirm the narrative within the protectorate as well as at home through the considerable amount of Western literature and reports that supported their position. International scholars and scientists as well as dramatic images of international examples, such as the Dust Bowl, acted as support for the growing crisis of soil erosion both in the Colony and abroad. The colonial administration used the narrative as an apparatus to sustain and increase their power in Kiambu. The narrative invoked a discriminatory account of the African farmer that assisted to formulate power relations in favour of the colonial administration. The refinement of the colonial narrative over the years of colonization is strongly correlated to an increase of power and control for the colonial administration. Throughout the colonial period in Kenya the narrative served three principal purposes: the expropriation of land and resources, the preservation of a humanitarian mandate and silencing of critics, as well as, social control. The overall result of the construction and continuance of mechanisms of power (or production of specific knowledge) is a reinforcement of exercises of power.

7.0 Results and Discussion

This thesis set out to examine the creation of an environmental narrative of soil erosion during colonization and it’s role in justifying land alienation and intervention into the everyday lives of the Kikuyu in Kiambu. The goal was to determine what purpose the narrative served and what actors might have benefited from it. The main aim was to determine how a reorganization of power and control occurred in Kenya. By understanding how Victorian ideologies of culture and society affected thinking of the colonial administration, the foundation for the colonial discourse could become clear. The Kikuyu in particular were seen as a conservative people reluctant to change and in need of education. Even when evidence illustrated a more complex social organization, especially in terms of land tenure, it was disregarded in both the legal and social sense. Through examining how the Kikuyu were portrayed in government texts it became evident that images of great soil fertility were consequently followed by thoughts of African neglect in terms of the environment. The result of these factors was the creation of a colonial environmental narrative in which the African farmer was labelled as uneducated and inept.
It was then important to determine exactly what the colonial environmental narrative was made up of at the time and how it compared to the situation that was really going on in Kiambu. The narrative grew from the primitive African farmer to the culprits of an extensive problem with soil erosion. The African farmer was effectively put in a subordinate position where European agricultural techniques were offered as the only solution. Any stories of environmental degradation were solidified as both droughts and increased pressures on land increased. In addition, images of the Dust Bowl from the U.S. increased worry within the British government. In the 1930s and 40s the narrative became firmly established as it was formalized by Western research and experts. At this time the narrative even began to be institutionalized in British policy. Knowledge of soil erosion during colonization was controlled by the British through the creation of research centers, increased numbers of agricultural officers, schools and the use of Western experts. The colonial environmental narrative represented a reorganization of traditional Kikuyu expertise to Western based knowledge and technologies on the basis of Kikuyu destructive environmental practices.

At the same time, the colonial administration had been pushing for intensification in production from the Kikuyu. This meant that traditional methods to insure soil fertility either completely stopped or were done less frequently. In addition, the imposed changes to techniques offer by the British also negatively affected the quality of soil in Kiambu. In effect, the increasing threats to the soil in the later years of the colony were caused by intensified production for export and the adoption of European agricultural techniques.

The existence of this narrative proved beneficial to settlers; first of all they were looked to as the main producers for the region and their goods were prioritized and secondly, they gained security to land because the Africans were seen as a liability to the soil. The colonial administration could use the narrative as justification for their humanitarian mandate; through helping to ‘civilize’ the Kenyans they could also refute the critics who existed in the UK. The narrative was also used to foster a certain amount of social control. The colonial administration saw it as their responsibility to develop African farmers and this meant further intervention into their everyday lives. The continued strengthening of the narrative, even though there existed evidence to the contrary, increased their exercise of power.

The environmental narrative that existed in Kenya during colonization wrongly blamed Kenyans, and particularly farmers, for the decreasing soil fertility and the creation of soil erosion. Developing from a foundation of images illustrating unlimited fertility, the narrative proved to be useful for both settlers and the British government for different reasons. Ultimately it reinforced segregation and a hierarchy where Europeans were superior to Kenyans. The narrative had a few principal purposes throughout British rule including the expropriation of land and resources as well as a reorganization of power while preserving a humanitarian mandate and silencing critics. The creation of a story based on environmental change where the African was deemed the problem, created a situation where colonial and settler interests triumphed over all others.

It was with the colonial environmental narratives that lead to a renegotiation of power/knowledge ultimately leading to greater social control over the Africans. As
discussed above, knowledge is maintained and enhanced by power; therefore, it is power that creates social reality and what is thought to be truth. Knowledge is never objective as it is impacted by discourses, which is constantly being reproduced through the effects of power in a society. A narrative is based on knowledge that is heavily influenced by power. The specific knowledge that was fostered in the narrative was maintained by the power of the colonial administration. The case of Kiambu during colonization illustrates the strong connections between the exercising of power and the production of knowledge. In the East Africa Protectorate Western knowledge is reproduced through education: education of farmers to change their practices, education of younger generations to change their perspectives, and general education of the population to modernize. Knowledge in this case was continually used and reproduced to regulate the conduct of the Africans, mainly through agricultural production. The creation of an environmental narrative assisted in a reorganization of power and knowledge between the African and the European in Kiambu.

7.1 Implications for Sustainable Development

Looking to historical events can offer important lessons to future projects and programs geared to environmental change, particularly for sustainable development. First of all, as the results of this case have illustrated, the ideal of Western knowledge and outside experts as solutions to extensive environmental issues may not offer better solutions than those that are contextually or locally specific. The use of widespread solutions and schemes cannot be used as a general formula for universal environmental change. More context-specific strategies and programs and prior in-depth analyses are required to avoid simplification. Furthermore, it is important to acknowledge that what is considered to be truth can be obscured and affected by power. This is especially true in regards to environmental change; even today what is assumed to be common knowledge can be demonstrably untrue or even just significantly exaggerated to gain audiences and interest. In many cases what is considered to be science is simply assumed to be true and thus uncontested. With a more globalized world this can mean widespread simplified notions of environmental change. What has been illustrated in this paper is that there are a number of factors that can influence what is considered to be knowledge and truth. It is important that information is questioned in terms of interests or audiences and a wider approach be taken from just ecological science to include historical, cultural and societal factors. What is considered to be common and widely accepted knowledge may in fact be influenced by the exercise of power.


8.0 References


**Primary Data**


