



VARIATION AND CHANGE AMONGST THE KITUI AKAMBA:

A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF TWO VICINAGES

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ABSTRACT

The study is a comprehensive analysis of aspects of the economic and social organisation of two vicinages (motui) inhabited by the Kitui Akamba, but located in different ecological niches. Kitui District, Kenya can be divided into two distinct physical regions, the highland and lowland regions. The major environmental features of the district, in particular the contrast between the climates of the lowlands and the highlands, and the occurrence of periodic drought in both regions, are described in Chapter 1, sections A, B and C.

Demographic growth in the district resulted in the pouring of the Akamba from mountains and hills onto the plains and lower ground during the colonial period: the cultivator began occupying pastoral rangelands, the pastoralist wild life rangelands. The higher population densities are found in the highlands, and the lower densities in the lowlands. Population density influences the extent to which pastoralism is practised. (Chapter 1, sections D and E.)

Chapter 2 describes briefly traditions relating to Akamba migration into Kitui District, and migrations within the district in pre-colonial years; features of the economy and social organisation of the Kitui Akamba before colonial influence took root; and responses to famine in pre-colonial years.

The establishment of colonial administration and the implementation of its policies in Kitui had profound effects on the economy of the district.

Originally pacification enabled the Akamba to either settle or use (for cultivation and grazing) previously unoccupied areas of the district. During the early colonial period their economy was expanding, and there was a reluctance to work outside the district. In the face of, amongst other factors, an increasing population and rising standards of living labour migrancy became a major element in the district economy from the mid-1930s onwards. Gradually the district economy lost its self-sufficiency and became more linked with a national economy which purchased its pastoral and agricultural products, supplied it with trade goods and food in famine time, and provided a substantial number of its males with wage employment. In this process of increasing dependency the development of the transport, road and commercial network of the district was vital. The colonial administration also introduced a school system. (Chapter 3, part I and II.) Famine was and is still a fact of life in Kitui. The strategies of coping with it changed during the colonial period. (Chapter 3, Part III.) Commitment to education and involvement in wage employment and the market system have extended and intensified since Independence. (Chapter 3, part IV.)

The vicinage located in the lowlands is called Ngangani. Its demographic profile, settlement and residential pattern are described in Chapter 4. Chapter 5 outlines the major sectors of its economy. The decline and growth of household herds, and the categorisation of households in the vicinage according to the size of their herds are treated in Chapter 6. The major consumption requirements of households and ways of meeting these are the subject of inquiry in Chapter 7. Chapter 8

describes the principal categories of kin; the clan composition of Ngangani vicinage; the composition of kin networks of household heads who belong to the same ward; the influence of women in forging affinal ties and the nature of ties which join married women of the vicinage; and the geographical expanse of ego-centric kin networks of Ngangani residents. The chapter is a lead up to Chapter 9, which focuses mainly on the role neighbours and kin play in providing ploughing services, in forming weeding parties and herding partnerships.

* Chapters 10-12 deal with Syoyua the vicinage located in the highland region of the district. Chapter 10 describes the environment of Syoyua; its accessibility to schools and the commercial and road systems of the district; its demography and features of its settlement and residence patterns. Chapter 11 examines the extent to which houses of the vicinage depend on cultivation, animal husbandry, commerce and wage employment for their livelihood; and the ways houses of different economic strata provide subsistence and education for their members. A striking feature of the economy of the vicinage is the high dependence on non-farm sources of income, and the limited opportunities for investment in farming because of land shortage. Chapter 12 describes the clan composition of Syoyua; aspects of the composition of kin networks linking household heads belonging to common homestead sets; the demographic ramifications of population movement from the hills and its partial influence in the location of an individual's close kin. Also examined are the lack of co-operation in herd management, and how kin and neighbours join in weeding work parties in Syoyua.

Chapter 13 is a summary and compares features of the demography, and economic and social organisation of Ngangani and Syoyua vicinages against a historical background. Land shortage is only a problem in Syoyua. Over the years the economies of both vicinages have shifted from a state of relative self-sustenance to reliance on a wider economic system. This shift precipitated an increasing differentiation between those who have access to non-farm sources of income and those who have not. Both processes of increasing dependency and differentiation are at more advanced stages at Syoyua, and there also their influence on certain aspects of family and social life are more prominent.