Emergence and Growth of Kisii Town, Kenya
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Abstract: The paper attempts to examine the development of Kisii town by the end of First World War. Previously, studies have been done to understand the urban phenomenon and historians have not been left out in this field. The major aim in this paper is to understand how far Kisii town had developed by the end of First World War. This will help to provide the historiography of Kisii town in the past, in order to be able to understand the effects of urban environment currently witnessed in this urban center. The study adopted historical research design technique and used purposive sampling and snowball techniques respectively. The choice of the sample size was primarily based on age and experience of colonial rule. Colonial city theory by Anthony King was applied to help analyze data on the development of Kisii town in this period. The findings revealed that Kisii town evolved from a traditional background and transformed remarkably due to the colonial influence. The presence of colonial administration in Nyanza and finally GusiiLand laid a foundation upon which Kisii town developed by the end of First World War.

Key words: urban, town, emergence

1.0 INTRODUCTION

In this paper, the development of Kisii town was discussed. The main areas addressed included the Early Days of Kisii Town in which the Location of Kisii town, naming of the town, establishment and formal operation of colonial rule in the town; building of the town, the Gusii resistance and the Military expeditions in Gusii land were discussed. The impact of Mumbo religion in Kisii was also discussed.

1.1 Background to the Problem

The historical approach to the study of towns is significant and deserves emphasis since history has long been an important component of urban studies (Harris and Smith, 2011). The growth and development of towns and cities is quite dynamic since the process does not occur in a uniform manner and this makes each town to have a unique manner in which it evolves (Ochieng’ and Maxon, 1992). However, the process of urban development is better understood by considering the location, roles and functions performed by these centers (Murunga, 1998). In order to understand how current towns or cities emerged, it is important to investigate the early histories of towns to give them more relevance.

The growing urban population in most African areas has led to the demand of more resources to be able to meet the basic needs for man. This however has attracted several infrastructures within the residential areas. This implies that resources have to be set aside by governments to enable provision of such important infrastructure such as houses, health facilities, roads, schools, and services such as security among others. Despite the provision of essential services, the growing population has led to increased demand of natural and man-made resources. This situation further has created competition in social, political and economic opportunities in these areas (Potts, 2013). As asserted by Oucho (1996) towns are areas of enormous political, social, economic and cultural importance to the areas where they are located hence they deserve to be approached and studied using empirical information.

A number of factors determined the emergence and growth of towns all over the World. According to some global studies most towns in Europe emerged as a result of the Industrial Revolution that led to the movement of people to the towns in search of jobs (Tetty, 2005, Macharia, 2003). Among the oldest towns in Europe is Athens that grew as a result of Trade and Commerce. In the United States, cities such as New York, Los Angeles and Chicago were the first to emerge due to a network of activities such as trade. London emerged as a result of trading engagements, industrialization, transportation and the shipping activities at the port of London.
In Africa, the first towns emerged in fertile regions where the ecology favored farming and raising of crops (Philips, 1989). Cairo, the capital city of Egypt for instance, emerged along the River Nile due to the fertile soils along the Nile valley that provided good atmosphere for agricultural activities. Trade also enhanced the development of towns especially along trade routes (Backer and Morrison, 1965). Kilwa is another oldest town that emerged along the East African coast due to the Persian influence. Its strategic position and trade greatly influenced its growth.

According to Obudho (1988) in Kenya the first towns emerged along the coast influenced by the Arab settlements. However, most Kenyan towns emerged in core areas where agricultural activities and trade were carried out. As Ochieng' and Maxon (1992) state, Kenya has one of the highest rates of urbanization in Eastern Africa caused by natural increase and rural urban migration.

1.2 Research Objective
This study was guided by the following objective;
(i) To examine the emergence of Kisii town by 1919.

1.3 The Research Question.
The study attempted to answer the following research question:
(i) What influenced the emergence of Kisii town by 1919?

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW
The issues that come forth as a result of the agglomeration of population in a central place have driven many scholars to investigate and give answers to the problems. In this paper, literature from various scholars in different disciplines was used to draw the understanding of the emergence and growth of towns. The study of urban centers is one of the expanding fields of research in various disciplines such as geography, sociology, environment, urban planning and many more. Scholars here have studied towns and cities and given varying findings on the areas studied Tetty,2005 ,Otiso and Owusu, 2008, Olima 2001,Ochieng’1992, Cohen,2006, Obudho1981) among others. In a study by Kasarda and Creshaw (1991), it is indicated that Third World countries are experiencing high rate of urban development. However, they are challenged with a high rate of urban settlement as argued by (Cohen, 2006).

Towns throughout the world exhibit an incredible diversity of characteristics, economic structures, levels of infrastructure, historic origins, patterns of growth and degrees of formal planning (Cohen, 2006).

According to Murunga (1998) a number of factors operate to give rise to an urban center. Each town therefore has certain reasons that triggered its existence and growth over time. As argued by Satterthwaite (2005), the most important cause of urbanization was the movement of people from rural to urban areas in response to new investment and economic opportunities that pulled them to those centers. Towns have unique reasons for their emergence and growth all over the world. Pirenne (1925) noted that Medieval European cities developed because of trade. In Africa, development patterns of African cities were interrupted with the Berlin conference of 1884/85 and its instrument of colonialism and imperialism. African cities and emerging urban centers were apportioned among the European powers. The European powers created urban centers either in the existing African centers or at a completely new site (Ozden, 2012).

In Kenya, the European occupation in different parts of the country led to the growth of towns and this is evident in the manner in which most towns emerged and grew. European political, economic and social-cultural activities influenced the growth of most towns in Kenya. Be it as it may, the growth of towns in Kenya is quite overwhelming and this has and continues to attract scholarly attention. Indeed, Otiso and Owusu (2008), confirms that Kenya is rapidly urbanizing. Some scholars in Kenya have demonstrated that urban development has been a cause of natural increase and rural urban migration. The concentration of people in a given place attracts social-economic and political factors and all these lead to the growth of a given town. However, urban scholars have given an appraisal to European imperialism to have greatly determined the existence of urban centers in the country (Obudho, 1981, 1983, Macharia, 2003 Ochieng 1972, Maxon, 1989) among others.

2.1 Urbanization in Pre-colonial Period
According to Hull (1976), towns existed even during the pre-colonial period. Similar studies on origin of urbanization indicate that there was pre-colonial urbanism in the region (Owour , 2006). In this study, the location of the site for Kisii town was investigated and further the spatial relevance of the site was also considered.
These were specific centers that were used for various reasons. According to Africa’s pre-colonial history, towns and cities were used as centers for economic activities (Anderson, 1957). Further, these centers were identified to have been used as administrative units (Memon, 1973, Ogot, 1967 and Obudho, 1981). In Kenya, past studies indicate that there was pre-colonial urbanism (Obudho, 1981, Ochieng’, 1992). Along the coast, trading centers existed but the opening up of the country by commercial activities, missionaries and the imposition of the colonial administration led to the complete transformation of existing centers into new towns (Gugler, 1970). The study was also intended to explore how commercial activities and the Missionary input enhanced the growth of Kisii town. Pre-colonial urban centers were areas that were associated with a series of functions. The choice of these centers was determined by the geographical locality, Kinship organization hence the family and tribal structure, religious, political and economic institutions were reflected in the design of buildings, and the final territorial extent of towns (Ochieng’, 1990). The significance of the site in pre-colonial time was discussed in the light of roles performed in important centers.

### 2.2 Colonial Urbanization

The paper sought to establish the social-economic and political roles by the colonial government and the related infrastructure developments that spurred the growth of Kisii town. Therefore the literature materials for the study relates to the colonial activities and their impacts to the growth of towns.

The growth of many urban centers can be traced to the pre-independence period when they were used as centers of administrative and political control by the colonial authorities (UNCHS, 1985). Therefore administration and the general political function by the colonial authorities influenced growth of many towns. These administrative centers became the main focus upon arrival of Europeans and traditional set up of African political, economic became a basis upon which colonial administration was achieved.

Indeed, colonial government provided the pattern of towns throughout the country as argued by (Blacker, 1965 and Obudho, 1983). They set up administrative structures and centers and developed supportive infrastructure such as urban centers and communication linkages in form of railway lines, roads and telegram lines (Wekwete, 1992). Maxon (1980) confirms that the construction of roads and the railway line in Nyanza led to the emergence of towns. As argued by Cecelia (1985), the construction of the railway line facilitated transportation of natural resources for export. However, Kisii is not directly linked with the railway line but its proximity in the rich highlands became vital in transporting agricultural produce that were highly a dependant factor from the interior parts of Gusiiland. This further enhanced the development of the road network in the entire Nyanza region. The paper therefore sought to establish how the railway line to Nyanza influenced the development of the town and the fact that the town is situated in the fertile highlands of Gusiiland.

### 2.3 Theoretical Framework

Economists and some sociologists have examined third World urbanization from the standpoint of modernization theory (Bradshaw, 1987). Modernization theory whose key proponent is Walter Rostow was developed in the mid 20th century. The theory refers to the transition from the traditional society of the past to modern society as found in the west. According to this theory, modern methods of production such as the use of advanced technology for industries in under-developed countries will boost their economies and this will lead to development (Tetty, 2003). According to the school, modernization of states through Economic development encourages other forms of development like social and political developments. As indicated by Berliner (1977), there cannot be urbanization without industrialization hence the more industrialized a society is the more urbanized it is. Therefore, it is worth to note that technology and industrialization-based economic growth becomes engines of growth of urban centers as pointed out by (Karsada and Creshaw, 1991).

In this paper, the colonial city theory by Anthony King was applied in an attempt to understand the genesis of cities and towns. As argued by King (2004), all cities are described as colonially linked. The theory further suggests that cities were first created by the exercise of power by some groups over others. The theory was relevant in relating the presence of Europeans in Africa and subsequent involvement in the social-economic development, political activities, influence of European culture and advancement in technology to urbanization in Africa. The
Industrial Revolution in Europe caused urbanization in the African continent, due to the economic growth brought by Europeans to Africa. Towns and cities in Africa are largely associated with the influence of colonial government as presented by King.

3.0 Research Methodology

3.1 The Study Research Design
A research design is a technique of making choices, organizing and developing the research in search a way that the requisite data can be gathered with easy and analyzed to arrive at a solution (Sekaran, 2009). This helps the researcher to collect and analyze data conveniently. Historical research design technique was adopted because it is deemed to be the most suitable and convenient for this study (Koul, 1993). Historical research design is the exploration, explanation and understanding of past phenomenon from data already available. It helps the researcher to arrive at conclusions about causes, trends and effects of past phenomenon in order to explain the present, predict and control the future (Oso and Onen, 2008).

3.2 Target Population
Target population refers to the total number of subjects of interest to the researcher (Oso and Onen, 2008). A population of 30 key informants was targeted and this aimed at reaching at those who had Knowledge and experience on colonial activities in Kisii. However, due to a number of challenges, a total of 20 key informants were successively interviewed. The study was conducted in Kisii town targeting residents of Gusiiland who were elderly or who might have had an experience with the colonial administration. The target population consisted of the identified key informants from either gender who were perceived to have knowledge or was informed of the changes that took place in the growth of this particular town within the colonial period. Above all age was a crucial factor in trying to identify the targeted population. Based on this, informants aged 70 years and above were targeted owing to the fact that they could have knowledge and experience of what had happened during the study period.

3.3 Data Collection
3.3.1 Collection of Primary Data
Archival sources remained to be the main source of primary data. Some of the main documents that were sourced from the Kenya National Archives included Provincial and District Annual Reports, colonial Government publications and diaries. The other source of primary data was acquired through oral interviews targeting key informants through an interview guide. The researcher successfully interviewed 20 informants. This helped the researcher to obtain information in greater depth without being limited. Among those targeted were ex-soldiers, messengers who worked in colonial administration office, elites especially teachers, prominent people pastors, traders, former workers in the Nyanchwa missionary and retired Chiefs.

3.3.2 Collection of Secondary Data
Collection of secondary data involved written sources such as books, magazines, published journal articles and reports, seminar papers, theses and periodicals that have relevant information in the area of study. The researcher accessed library materials from the British Institute of East Africa Library at Kileleshwa, Universities and most important e-library resources were appropriately utilized.

3.4 Data Analysis and Processing
Two analytical frames were used to analyze data, these included documentary review and content analysis. Documentary review and content analysis entailed corroborating both the documented data and oral data. Through this, a detailed account of the genesis of Kisii town was arrived at. Data was analyzed thematically to obtain relevance to the paper. The colonial city theory helped in the analysis of data concerning the genesis of towns or cities. Based on literature review the theory presented a city as an instrument of colonialism. This formed a basis under which data was analyzed to arrive at the genesis of Kisii town that is rapidly growing in terms of population and the challenges it attracts.

4.0 DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 The Early Days of Kisii Town
The town owes its history back in pre-colonial period when a prominent prophet named Sakawa had a vision on the town. Sakawa was one of the greatest diviner in the Gusii community and was highly respected for his prophesies. As it was in other communities through their diviners that “Strangers” would visit their country so did the Gusii through their famous prophet. He identified the site for the town as a significant place. (O.I.Gichana, 2014, O.I. Onyoni, 2014, O.I. Ondieki, 2015).
Sakawa often assembled his admirers at the site of the present day Kisii town and would tell where the police lines, the hospital, the administrative offices and churches would later be erected. Indeed all his prophecies were believed to have come true (Ochieng’, 1973). According to him, someday strangers were to come and settle there and only a few people would benefit as a result of their settlement (egetemu abanto nga bateme amandegere, ore na momura nateme amoba). Meaning, one who had sons will benefit in reference to education (O.I Omwoyo,2015, Ondieki,2015 Gichana, 2014 and Nyoriro 2014).

He further prophesied the use of a new transport means. The use of vehicles and horses were likened to this prophecy-eggento ngeche something that looks like a cow that a person will get into it and it moves. Most important, Sakawa had strongly warned against any hostility to the strangers to come what was evident with the reasons behind the military expeditions to Gusiioland as it shall be seen in this paper (O.I. Gichana, 2014).

According to Sir Donald, Gusiioland was a potential area for European settlement as the region had ideal ecological conditions (cool temperatures and fertile soils). Stewart referred the area inhabited by the Gusii as potential for European settlement. Following the 1905 expedition, he wrote to the colonial office stating that; ‘it is important to open this part of the protectorate which is well adapted for European settlement, some of the Kisii are friendly and want us to establish Government post in their country, but a large portion of this tribe is likely to give trouble. I have however great hopes that the punishment of the Sotik will bring them to reason’ (Stewart to Lyttleton, 8th June 1905).

In a move to identify a suitable site for administrative purposes, Mr. Northcorte and the District Commissioner then went for a preliminary tour through the Kisii country in April and May 1907. The main objective was to establish a station in Kisii since operating from Karungu was seen to be difficult for the district commissioner to give attention to the Kisii country. Besides Karungu was a very busy district situated in a malaria and permanently famine stricken area (Ochieng’, 1974). It was said that by the end of 1906, two European employees had died of malaria. According to Northcorte, Karungu became ‘a white man’s grave’ hence not suitable for European settlement (K.N.A DC/KSI/1/1).

This made the British administration to look for a suitable area that could be conducive for them. The only place in Ugaya district that was good for them was Gusii country. Northcorte and R.W Hemsted who had been appointed District Commissioner of Ugaya District within which Gusiioland was to be included, visited the Gusii highlands and chose a site in an area known to the Gusii as Getembe (current Kisii town). The area lay very close to the borders of the lands inhabited by the Abanyaribari, the Abanchari and the Abagetutu. The area was also centrally located in the Gusii highlands as a whole (Nyanza Report, 1905-06, PC/NZA/1/1).

By 1907, the British Administration in the district had become convinced that to bring the whole of South Nyanza under control, the administrative Boma would have to be removed from Karungu to Getembe. Northcorte named it ‘Kisii Boma’ (DC/KSI/1/1).

For the government to keep close watch over the Gusii people, the establishment of the colonial office there was necessary. Given its proximity, the site became convenient for the government to easily access the entire Ugaya district for administration purpose. The site they chose was known lay close to the boarders of the lands inhabited by Nyaribari, Wanjare and Kitutu (O.I Onyoni, 2014).

As indicated by O.I. Gichana (2014) and O.I. Onyoni (2014), what later came to be called as Kisii town was initially known as Getembe or Bogendi because the British had chased the Germans from that place. The area was centrally located in the Gusii highlands as a whole. It was well supplied with water by two streams. The two streams formed the entry and exit points to the town from the North and South respectively. Gradually, these points acquired the names “daraja moja” and “daraja mbili” respectively (O.I. Omwoyo 2015). Later, the name of this place changed to Getembe Kia Gasuku when a Luo man from Suba called Gasuku brought the Whiteman to the place (O.I. Onyoni, 2014).

According to (O.I. Gichana, 2014), the man from Suba was a translator between the Gusii people and the white man. His mother having come from Gusii enabled him to understand Ekegusii. Having witnessed how the whites killed people, the center was named by the indigenous as ‘Bosongo’ meaning a place where the whites resided (O.I. Nyoriro, 2014, Onyoni, 2014).
The Place was centrally located in the highlands. It was considered to be at a more strategic position within the District hence, it was to increase efficiency and at the same time be more economical in running the administrative affairs of the district (Maxon, 1989 and Ochieng, 1974).

This was pointed out in the District Commissioner’s report to the Provincial Commissioner, the DC who stated that ‘the choice for the administrative offices to be centered at Kisii would increase efficiency and was more economical since the whole country of Kisii is perfectly quiet and with limited crime to theft principally amongst Kisii’. According to the DC statement on health, there were no cases of sickness among the Europeans or clerical staff and Kisii was regarded as a health station (DC/KSI/1/1 31st December, 1909).

4.2 Colonial Administration

There was a strong relationship by Kings Theory on colonial city and the emerging cities or towns in Africa. Availability of certain infrastructure on areas where Europeans settled established the centers to towns as it was revealed in this paper. After the establishment of the Imperial capitalism which started the development of towns in East Africa and Kenya, Imperialists needed protection and have their influence of power felt by the new conquered natives. This led to the establishment of colonial administration in the interior parts thereby developing urban centers throughout the colony (Kinuthia, 2003).

According to Kowino (1962), Kavirondo remained part of Uganda protectorate up to 1902 when all the territory East of Victoria Nyanza was transferred to the East African protectorate. Permanent administration in Nyanza was set up in 1894 with Mr C.W. Hobley as the first Provincial Commissioner. However, due to financial constraints, the company withdrew and the British Government assumed a protectorate over the country on 8th July, 1895.

When the British took over the administration, their first priority was to construct the Uganda Railway. Kisumu was selected as the railhead and Provincial capital. The railway reached Kisumu in 1901 and the presence of this important means of communication in Nyanza then greatly facilitated the efficiency of the colonial administration (Backer, 1975).

The railway line made it easy for other races to conveniently penetrate into the interior parts of Kenya. Amongst these groups included the Europeans who came as adventurers, missionaries, traders and settlers (O.I. Onyoni, 2014). Incidentally, many of them entered into uncontrolled districts. This therefore suggests the possibility of other British settlers and traders who found themselves in Gusii in pursuit of their interests (Ogot, 1968).

Having identified the location of the administrative office in Gusii as early established, colonial objective to establish an office in Gusii country had been achieved and immediate administration began. Plans for building the town to accommodate the colonial government strategies in Gusiland commenced and immediately it became a center of interest within the colony (O.I. Gichana, 2014). What had appeared as mere prophecy as predicted by Sakawa a local diviner finally became true (O.I. Gichana and Onyoni, 2014).

In order to start formal operation, there was need for infrastructure development to serve the Europeans and their staff. A scheme of work was laid by the government on how Kisii was to be set up (SKD DC/KSI/ 1/1). Owing to the fact that European officials were few in number, the need to incorporate the natives in administration was paramount and this called for appointment of chiefs.

Having established the colonial administration office, Northcote appointed seven chiefs among the seven clans of the Gusii people to help in administering the Gusii people who seemed to be hostile towards the colonial government (O.I. Omwoyo, 2015, Gichana, 2014). These chiefs were; Oyugi of Wanjare, Angwenyi of Kitutu, Chore of Bassi, Nyamosi of Machoge, Ndubi of North Mugirango and Sotik, Nyamwamu of Nyaribari, Okech of South Mugirango while Ombati became the chief of Muksero (Ochieng’ 1973, O.I. Gichana, 2014).

Upon the appointment of chiefs and elders the collection of hut tax was started and intensified gradually. The appointment of chiefs was significant to the colonial administration since chiefs started mobilizing natives to assist in the building of the town. They worked closely with the colonial administrators (O.I. Oigara 2015, Omwoyo, 2015).

Northcorte, the Assistant District Commissioner in charge began to construct temporary buildings in February, 1907. He constructed the
town buildings on a permanent basis in an elevated area between two streams. It is said that by July in the same year, an assistant District Commissioner’s house and office, dwelling place for the porters and police had been constructed. Northcorte elected the flag pole and laid out a market and parade ground (Maxon, 1989).

The choice of the site as the administrative office for the entire South Kavirondo District was a great impetus towards the establishment of this vibrant town. Hence, its administrative functions being the head office of the district that comprised of four communities that is Luo, Kuria, Abagusii and Abasuba, enhanced the growth of the town remarkably (Ochieng’, 1974).

According to (O.I, Oigara, 2015), upon establishment of the administrative office, it called for the establishment of roads in and out of the boma for easy communication in executing the colonial obligations in this end of Nyanza region. It called for more infrastructure development within the new station and this further attracted people to the boma.

4.3 Building of the town

Until 1907, Kisii had a government station that was to serve as the headquarters for the entire region of Ugaya District. Among the first buildings to be constructed were the Assistant District Commissioner’s house, his office, porters’ houses, houses for the police, and a flag pole was elected. Therefore the station had been built and the former Karungu sub-station was closed down, Ugaya and Kisii were merged to form one District called South Kavirondo with its headquarters at Kisii town (Kowino, 1962).

The new headquarters of the district were moved to Kisii in March 1908. It became the center of administration of a district which comprised of the Kisii, Kuria, Luo and Suba until almost the end of the colonial period. By September 1909, the new district was named South Kavirondo, Commenting on annual report 1908-09, the District Commissioner confirmed “The Kisii who in the past were hostile and troublesome, settled down in surprising manner and give promise to become available asset to the country” (SKD, DC/KSI/1/11908-09).

Northcorte became the first District Commissioner and he continued to establish the administrative offices for the South Kavirondo district, he named the station as Kisii Boma. He began to construct the station buildings in February although temporarily until May in the same year when permanent buildings were elected. Therefore, he initiated the construction of an administrative station. All the buildings were constructed with mud walls due to scarcity of timber. The station acquired the name Kisii, which has existed up to the present times (ibid).

Having established the administrative post in Getembe, the Gusii men were employed by the British to assist in cutting down the trees “emetembe” that were dominant on the site so as to build the town as early foretold by Sakawa. His words became true in that the natives benefited with the coming of the colonial administration. It was the Gusii custom that sons were highly valued and as for the girls they were to be married and bring in wealth in terms of dowry as it were with the Gusii culture (O.I. Gichana, 2014).

The building of the town called for a large number of porters and this created a good market for Gusii grain. Salt or cattle were traded to the Gusii in exchange. Cattle auctions were even held at the new station; payment was made in grain. By the time of Dr. Handerson’s visit, two Indian shopkeepers had opened stores in Kisii (History of Kisii District, DC/KSI/4/1).

At the break of the First World War, the town had realized minimal growth. There existed three government houses and four dukas. According to the Provincial Commissioner report during inspection of the station, it is indicated that there was no hospital except a very old looking store with a native in charge. There was no European who owned ‘dukas’ (D.C/KSI/3/4).

Later a medical officer’s house was started and preparation for building the hospital began. A strong room was built and a registration office was put up. A house for a 3rd A.D.C and a new house for the head interpreter was constructed. A headquarter camp and Baraza Hall was built at Kisii in 1921 (S.K.D Annual Reports DC/KSI/2/3).

A local Native council office was built in 1927 and a Forester’s house, the following year an Agriculture Officer’s banda, police huts were put up at the station. Before the onset of World War 11, the following offices had been established. District Commissioner, Senior Assistant District Commissioner, Junior Assistant District Commissioner, Clerk’s house, Hospital and Dispensary, District
Commissioner’s office, police office, cells and store, camp, Chief’s and Local Native Council members rest house, Tribal police men’s houses in burnt brick and thatch was completed (S.K.D Handing Over Reports, 1941).

4.4 The Gusii Under Colonial Rule

Regarding the view that European power in Africa enhanced the emergence of towns as held by the colonial city theory, there was a strong link on the presence of colonial administration in Gusii and the establishment of Kisii town. Similar argument emerged considering the fact that the presence of European power in the country led to emergence of towns as indicated below.

Kenya became a Consular District in July, 1895 answerable to the British Government as per the Anglo German treaty of 1890; as per the agreement, the country therefore fell under the British sphere of influence. This lasted for a period of ten years, ending in April, 1905 (Ogot, 1968).

On July, 1895, the British government formally took over the administration from the Imperial British East Africa Company foreign office assumed responsibility for its administration. The territory formally known as Imperial East Africa Company was now called the East African Protectorate Administrative (Fearn, 1961).

As a result of the British involvement in Uganda and Zanzibar, the region between Mombasa and Rift Valley in Kenya became of much interest to the East Africa Protectorate. By 1894, permanent administration was set up in Nyanza with Mr C.W Hobly as the first Provincial Commissioner (ibid).

According to Woodward (1902), the declaration of a protectorate over Uganda in July 1984, the area east of Lake Victoria as far as Naivasha was formally brought under the control of the British. This was meant to access the Coastal regions from Uganda which was their main interest hence, the significance of bringing the area under their control. Having achieved this, the British gradually entered into the interior parts of Kenya.

So far Gusiland had little been known to the British but was included in the eastern province of Uganda protectorate. This province was formally divided into four districts; Mau, Baringo, Suk and Nandi. Gusii highlands fell within Nandi District, the three divisions of which were Nandi proper, South Kavirondo, and Ugaya (Woodward, 1902).

As pointed out by both Omwoyo (2008), and Akama and Maxon (2008) by 1903, an administrative post had been established at Karungu on the shores of Lake Victoria, with an acting District Commissioner in charge. Some representatives of the East Africa syndicate were already prospecting for gold. Despite that Karungu was to act as a base from which to bring the entire South Nyanza which included Gusiland under firm control (Ochieng’, 1973). However, it was during the period that initial contact between the British and Gusii was made. According to the officer C.W. Hobley he described the ‘Kisii’ as Bantu and listed 21 divisions of Gusiland with their headmen (Hobley, 1902).

According to Ombati, the leader of the smaller Abagisero clan the ruler of Abagetutu, Nyakundi attempted to over-run the people of Bogisero and on realizing that their position was being threatened, Ombati had no option but to seek support from the British administration at Kisumu, (ibid).

According to (Ochieng’ 1974), it was Ombati who initiated contacts with the British in Kisumu rather than the Europeans seeking contacts in Gusiland. This enhanced the closer move of the colonial administration to the Gusii. Having established an administrative post among the Luo at Karungu on the Lake shore, the British officials were in a better position to visit Gusiland and come to closer contact with the Gusii (Akama and Maxon, 2006).

Omwoyo (2008) argues that Gusiland which was then independent was finally subdued in 1905 punitive expedition thereafter an administrative post established in the present day Kisii town. British were first reported to have reached Gusii in 1904, when Kenya was transforming itself from a Consular District to a British colony. At this time, the Headquarters of the Protectorate was being moved from Mombasa to Nairobi, which was perceived to be more central.

The establishment of the colonial office here was a challenge to the colonial government not only in Gusii country but also in Nandi country. This was agitated by the fact that the locals had never accepted the British rule in their local territories. The administration in turn organized a number of military expeditions, with that in
Gusii carried out in 1905 and 1908 (Maxon, 1971).

As indicated above, the first contacts between British and Gusii were the result of appeals by some prominent elders of the Mugusero one of the seven Gusii tribes for aid. Mogusero at this time were the smallest clan and occupied the tenuous position between the Nilotic speaking Luo who inhabited the lowlands closer to the Lake and the largest most powerful Gusii tribe, the Getutu (Ochieng’, 1974).

In Hobley’s words, the Getutu attacks on the Mogusero became increasingly severe. Their numbers reduced and scattered for protection. The Mogusero became quite desperate hence they sought to seek for aid. They sent envoys under the leadership of a prominent elder, Ombati, to Kisumu to ask for the assistance of the British in 1900 (ibid).

Through this, both the British and Mogusero made an alliance for the future. Ombati proved most useful when the British later established themselves in Gusiland, serving as a guide and interpreter to the British and keeping his people friendly towards the British until after colonial rule had been established. Alliance with the British seemed to be the only chance of survival for Mogusero (O.I., Mases e, 2014). As a result of their favor and aid, the small tribe was able to maintain an independent existence (Hobley, 1902).

The transfer of Uganda’s Eastern province within which Gusiland lay to the East Africa protectorate in 1902 did not result in the beginning of British rule over the Gusii. However, their neighbors to the east, Kipsigis, and to the west, the Luo were already been brought under British rule with the establishment of administrative stations in 1902 and 1903 respectively (History of the District DC/KIS/3/4). From this perspective, the British were able to make contact with the Gusii country and the actual British administration in Gusiland was being formatted.

4.5 The Gusii Resistance

Despite the resistance witnessed by the locals against the British, the administrative officials exploited the divisions and differences amongst the African communities to further their interests. The following discussion presents the Gusii response to the British.

The Africans had two ways in which they responded towards the British: There are those who resisted and others collaborated with the British. The British had come to rely on punitive measures as the surest means of bringing natives under their control. Between 1895 and1907, such expeditions were sent to Kikuyu, the Wakamba, the Marakwet and many others (Singh, 1970). The British administration was involved in armed conflict with various sections of the Gusii people in 1905, 1908 and 1914 (Maxon, 1971).

As pointed out by Were (1986), not all Abagusii resisted the British. The first attempt by the British officials to enter Gusiland and make contacts with the Gusii was met with widespread Gusii resistance (O.I. Onyon, 2014). For instance, an attempt by F.W. Isaac, the colonial administrator in charge of Karungu in South Nyanza to enter Gusiland in early 1905 was impossible by the resistance from the people (Partington, 1905).

The initial resistance of 1905 was as a result of the colonial intention to obtain compensation for Gusii thefts of 28 livestock belonging to Luo and the killing of a Luo person under British protection (Intelligence Report, 1905). Following the unfriendly relations that seemed to dominate then as reported by G.A.S. Northcote, Assistant Collector later District Officer) in charge of Karungu 1904-1906 ‘the Gusii were daily raiding the Kavirondo (Luo) along their borders and had terrorized their western neighbors’ (Kisero clan of the Kitutu) that was under Ombati (Maxon, 2003 and O.I.Gichana, 2014).

This according to the colonial government was enough to attack the Gusii country. However, the main objective was to conquer and subdue the Gusii hence the first military expedition was aimed at selecting a suitable site to establish a colonial administrative post in Gusii country (Intelligence Report, 1905).

4.6 Military Expedition

Colonial city theory was linked to the power to conquer and administer territories in African areas by European officials. Following the foregoing discussion, once the European power to administer a given place was guaranteed, a central position was identified and established for administration purposes. As illustrated below, the established military posts in most parts in Kenya later developed to towns.

Early colonial military expeditions were sent out to subdue different African tribes and bring
them under colonial rule. As a result of this, a number of military posts were established that later became District headquarters which formed the nuclei for the diffusion of trading centers in the African areas of the country. The result of the expedition was reflected in the establishment of military posts such as Fort Hall, Nyeri, Embu, Meru, Kitui, Kisii among others (Working paper No.78, Memon, 1973).

Before the choice of Kisii as an administrative center, the colonial attempts to enter Gusiland were met by resistances. Real colonial administration was not possible due to these challenges until 1907. According to the Intelligence Report (1905) the first military patrol was dispatched to Kisii in order to compensate for the stolen cattle and the Killing of a Luo person who was under the British protection. The patrol was first reported in Gusiland on September 20, 1905, it took six days collecting fines for purported Gusii attacks in Luo land (Jenkins, 1905).

The severity of the expedition in the entire Gusii people was enough to teach the people a lesson and ensure acceptance of British rule. At the end of the military activity, Angwenyi, who had not taken up arms against the colonial government, was made chief of Getutu. With the appointment of a single chief for every Gusii tribe, the British settled down to begin a systematic form of administration in all parts of Gusiland. Wiper puts it that with the punitive expedition clear in the memory of both Getutu and non-Getutu there was no open challenge to the colonial authorities (Wiper, 1966:384).

The colonial military expeditions facilitated the quick establishment of their territories compared to the friendly methods that never worked especially in Kenya. The first instance of armed conflict between the Gusii and the British was significant in the manner in which later Kisii town emerged. The punitive expedition led to the fulfillment of the official ambition to establish administration over the Gusii (ibid).

This was agitated by the wish by both Sir Charles Eliot (1966) and his successor Sir Donald Stewart who wished to see the Gusii brought under control. The first military expedition took place in 1905 and this led to a strong resistance to the British rule. It was as a result of attempts by some Gusii men to stop British penetration to their homeland and seizure of their herds following news that some Kavirondo tribesmen had been murdered by the Kisii (Maxon,1989).

According to Northcote, the Gusii were raiding the Kavirondo (Luo) on a daily basis and had terrorized their neighbors. On the same not Ombati leader of Mogusero had early brought complains and sought for the British aid. As a result, the British could not ignore attacks on people who were under their administration and control. Thus the government dispatched a punitive force against Gusiland. This as indicated by (Mungeam, 1966), was the main poison on the relationship between the Gusii and the British administration throughout the colonial period.

The second phase of the resistance took place after the establishment of colonial rule in January, 1908. This as indicated by Maxon (1971), marked the highest level of hostility among the Gusii against the British. In this incident, the Assistant Commissioner had begun tax collection in Gusiland in December 1907. This necessitated the Gusii men to sell cattle, goats and Sheep to obtain rupees with which to pay tax. Hence, Swahili and Somali cattle traders had come to the District to trade. In the course money was stolen from the Swahili traders by a man named Otenyo. On reporting the matter to Northcote, he decided to investigate the incident. On this occasion, the British official Northcorte was speared (Foran, 1968).

With the assumption that he was dead; the Gusii rejoiced and further took arms to attack and destroy the town, a move that was however short lived. Indeed it is reported that the Nyaribari, Wanjare and Kitutu broke into open revolt in which two Indians and one Luo in the Boma were killed (Maxon, 1971).

Upon reporting this incident to the British official security was intensified with more personnel being sent to Kisii, Report by John Ainsworth, P.C. to H.E. the Governor March 1908, (C.O.533/42). It is this aftermath that saw the Gusii defeated through the loss of lives and property (Ochieng’, 1974). Although the Gusii had earlier been heavily punished, in another occasion, September 1914 when the Germans invaded the station, many Gusii showed their hostility towards the colonial domination (Maxon, 1989).

4.7 The Mumbo Religion
Upon the arrival of missionaries in the country and the start of their activities, they were opposed by Africans who felt that they had the right to choose to accept the new faith in their own terms. Remarkably, as part of the Gusii resistance, the Mumbo cult is reported to have agitated the locals against the establishment of the British rule. The teachings of the cult emphasized that the Europeans would leave Gusiland at one time. Actually, the Gusii remained suspicious of the European intention after the 1905 and 1908 military expeditions especially with the spread of Mumboism from Luo Nyanza to Gusiland (Wiper, 1966).

The Mumbo cult was implicated with responsibility for the looting of the station in 1914 when the first war broke out. In a letter by Father Scheffer of the Roman Catholic mission at Asumbi to the District Commissioner in 1918 he said that, “Mumbo people were responsible for the looting of September 1914” (DC/KSI/3/1).

Later, it was revealed that the cult had little to do with the looting of the station following a letter of the District Commissioner in 1918. During the year 1914-15, a new religion “Mumbo” made its appearance in this district, having its chief attraction of the doctrine that all White men would leave the protectorate. Indeed it was documented accordingly. “Recently the religion made its appearance among the Kisii and a number of teachers began instructing the people” (DC/KSI/3/2).

However the adoption of the teachings and doctrines of this cult were outrightly anti-European and were deemed to have boosted the Gusii resistance against the British. Their relationship continued to be bad however the Gusii people had started to appreciate the introduction of cash economy and were willing to cultivate more and even purchase from the Indian shops in town (O.I. Onyoni, 2014).

Despite the efforts put by the British government in laying firm administration, the onset of the War disrupted the input and led to almost a complete destruction of the few infrastructures that had been put up. The German are said to have occupied the Kisii boma on 12th of September, 1914. The British fought with the German and the later suffered heavy causalities. Some Gusii men are said to have participated in the War armed with spears and shields as the other people watched on the Hills adjacent to the town (Maxon, 1989).

The outbreak of the war between Britain and German in 1914 was realized in Kisii when the German’s attempt to advance through Kisii to Kisumu in order to gain control of the railway and cut communication between the British East Africa and Uganda. The Germans occupied the Kisii Government station briefly on 12th September, 1914. Two companies of the fourth Battalion, Kings African Rifles, commanded by Major Thorncroft were sent to Kisii and found the station occupied by the Germans (DC KSI/1/2).

Indeed, the outbreak of the First World War brought a set back to the town following the attempt to occupy the station by both the British and German in 12th September 1914 and in an attempt to safeguard it, the two groups fought and it is said that a British commander was killed during this raid. As a result of this both sides withdrew leaving the station unoccupied until 14th September, 1914 when normal administration formally resumed (DC/KSI/1/2).

The aftermath of the War had serious repercussions to the community that had long resisted and refused to accept the colonial rule. Following the evacuation of the British officials from the town, a group of Gusii men influenced by a religious cult called Mumbo looted the town rejoicing that the long awaited time for the British to depart from the town as taught in their religion had come (DC/KSI/1/2).

According to Maxon (1989), punitive measures were taken against the areas of Wanjare, Kitutu, and Nyaribari. Instead, more men were ordered to work in town as a punishment. However by 23rd September, the British had re-established the station. The colonial government continued to intensify its activities to regain (O.I. Onyoni, 2014). There was demand for more infrastructures in the station in the various departments.

This called for the Gusii resources both human and material. Hut tax was raised and Kisii alone, the hut tax in 1914 amounted to twenty thousand rupees in cash. Importantly, the town had fully established by the end of the First World War. The town served as the office for the entire District (S.K Administration and Political Annual Report, 31.3.1915).

Africans took active role in the war since it was reported that large numbers of Nyanza tribesmen were recruited both as soldiers and as porters. As indicated by Mr. Ainsworth, P.C Nyanza from 1907-17, and then military
Commissioner for labor in charge of labor estimated that a total of 162,000 men served the army and that a large proportion of them were Nyanza men. Among them were Kisii tribesmen and as argued by (O.I. Ombasa, 2014). He further pointed out that Kisii town was their base.

The African’s collective experience during the 1914 to 1918 war was significant. A number of Africans were enrolled in the regular military units. About 165,000, were employed as porters in the carrier corps (Ogot, 1968). The government in Kisii carried out usual patrols and towards the end of August 1914, a company of K.A.R. arrived with a lieutenant in command. Kisii was used as a security base during the world War. It was indicated by Gethin, in the Battle of Kisii that many troops passed through Kisii on the way to the border and Karungu in 1925.

Security was improved following what had happened previously. It is indicated that the town had no police officer who was stationed there. The unit is said to have been in charge under an Africa and Grade sergeant under the District Commissioner who carried out surveillance and township patrols outpost duty at trading centers and escorts.

In some occasions, police would be sent into the native Reserve to investigate into offences and make arrests with the assistance of the chiefs. Prison is said to have had a staff of 7 warders. This was a small number compared to the number of prisoners. The daily average number of prisoners was 50 that strained the resources. The number of criminal cases tried in Kisii continued to increase since 329 persons were persecuted and 208 convicted. A special prison was put up on Kisii Farmers Training Center land to take care of long-term prisoners (Annual reports, 31-3-1914).

The insecurity conditions which had earlier prevailed owing to the activities of Mumbo were calmed. Because there was inadequate police force, it called for employment of officers. A large number of people were employed on a daily basis to effect arrests and serving summonses (DC/KSI/3/).

The number of police at the station increased by 1915, there was a large force of about 250 who were stationed at Kisii after the re-occupation by the British. The number of police officers increased gradually and by the end of 1917, Captain Gethin started recruiting for K.A.R and succeeded in obtaining about 170 recruits (Gethin, 1953). Employment continued to recruit gourds in Kisii Township who served as escort officers (SKD Annual reports, 31.3.18). This intensified security situation in the town and administration of the entire district was improved.

The aftermath of this incident led to a firm foundation of the British administration on the entire Gusiland that had proved difficult in relenting to the demands of the colonial rule. The hut tax in Kisii alone in 1914 is said to have risen as it amounted to twenty thousand rupees in cash (Barker, 1975). All tax collected were brought to the District Commissioner’s office that had earlier been established in Kisii town.

The study established that the emergence of Kisii town was achieved partly as a result of the presence of the railway in Kisumu. This important infrastructure enhanced movement of new races into the entire region. The presence of Europeans in Nyanza enhanced the emergence of Kisii town as an administration head office for Ugaya District.

Having established their office in Kisii as already discussed, it called for construction of offices and important infrastructures such as roads which in the end facilitated movement of people and goods in and out of the town. The construction of residential houses, offices for the government remained a pull factor towards the settlement of new migrants and finally the progressive growth of Kisii town.

Despite the many challenges faced by the British administration, the town was founded by the end of World War 1 and formal administration by the government was in place. Hence, the colonial city theory that was applied indeed was relevant in analyzing how the presence of European power in Gusiland particularly enhanced the emergence and growth of Kisii town.

Indeed the town served as the headquarter for the South Kavirondo country and given the diverse roles that it performed, its growth during the inter-War period was an achievement to the colonial government and the locals since more social and economic developments were realized as it shall be seen in the next chapter.

5.0 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

5.1 Summary
The paper aimed at establishing the emergence of Kisii town in the early days of colonial occupation. The paper, therefore attempted to answer the question ‘what influenced the emergence of Kisii town by 1919?’ A strong link to the colonial city theory was attributed to in explaining the emergence of Kisii town. Indeed the paper shows that Kisii town owes its history to pre-colonial time when a Gusii prophet Sakawa prophesied on the existence of the town. The initial name for the town was Getembe because of the many trees that were present. The presence of British administration in Nyanza enhanced the emergence of Kisii town.

5.2 Conclusion

The paper was aimed at investigating the emergence of Kisii town. The paper revealed that Kisii town had spatial relevance in pre-colonial time. The site had relevance to the communities that surrounded it. As demonstrated by the colonial city theory, the social-cultural, economic, political, technological advancement that were put in place by the colonial administration explained the emergence of Kisii town.

Key among the factors that influenced growth of Kisii town included administration, agriculture, infrastructure, role of Native councils, security, availability of food, increase in population, the role of missionaries in education, the emergence of elites and trade. It was established that Political, Social and Economic organizations of the Gusii people lay a foundation upon which colonial rule was achieved in Gusiland and the eventual genesis of Kisii town.

5.3 Recommendations for further Research

Based on the summary and conclusion given above, the following areas were identified for further research;

(i) Considering the emergence of Kisii town in pre-independence, further study can be done on social-economic transformations among the Gusii.
(ii) In addition to further research area identified above, it will be ideal to conduct a research on the history of administration among the Gusii.

REFERENCES


