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## Assessing the Impact of Coffee Production on Abagusii Women in Western Kenya: A Historical Analysis (1900–1963)

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### **Introduction**

African agriculture has experienced drastic changes in its organisation and form, thus affecting women, the key players, in diverse ways. Both internal and external factors have contributed to this transformation, including the introduction of technologies and innovations, such as new crops. Nevertheless, agricultural performance on the continent has worsened, and, although this generalisation tends to ignore changes in specific and small units of analysis, Africa is largely portrayed as a continent plagued with endemic food shortages and famines. Women, especially in rural districts, who spend much of their time and labour on agriculture, have suffered greatly from such poor performance.

This chapter takes a small unit of study, the Abagusii community in western Kenya, and sets out to analyse historically the changes in agriculture over a fairly long period of time, from 1900 up to 1963, when Kenya attained independence. It is evident that Kenya's poor agricultural performance has been a culmination of processes and changes brought about by colonial capitalism. The internationalisation of division of labour relegated Africa to the role of supplier of cheap agricultural raw materials to the Western capitalist world. The integration of Africa's economy in general, and Kenya's in particular, into the world capitalist system elicited a process of transformation that gradually modified, marginalised and subordinated the region's agriculture, with severe implications for women, who are the key players in the sector. Thus, colonialism effected structural changes in African agriculture that have weakened both African food production and the role women play in it. This chapter takes one agricultural innovation, coffee farming, and analyses the effects it

had on women's role in agricultural production among the Abagusii of western Kenya during the colonial period.

Women have always been an integral and crucial component in agricultural production in Kenya. However, up to the 1980s, most studies on Kenyan agriculture either totally ignored or dealt scantily with women's role. African peasant farmers were not differentiated along gender lines, thus subsuming and obscuring female agricultural producers. Yet, for example, women in Kenya comprise about 52 percent of most Kenyan communities, the Abagusii included, and most of them live in rural areas where agriculture is the predominant occupation. Thus, studies concerning agriculture and food production that do not relate to women are incomplete. Moreover, among the Abagusii, it is women who have been primarily responsible for food production, household management and the nurture of children (Stichter 1982).

Since the 1980s, however, studies have begun to pay serious attention to how socio-cultural and economic changes in agriculture affect women as well as men in Africa (Johnson and Kelb 1985; Meillassoux 1981; Boserup 1970). The role of women has generated much interest and research, and an enormous literature on gender has emerged focusing on the role of women in society generally. Nevertheless, numerous gaps remain to be filled, especially in historical studies. Moreover, due to the patriarchal nature of Kenyan society, most women neither own the means of production nor control the proceeds from their labour. The exploitative nature of gender relations in agriculture has survived from the pre-colonial era. Historical analysis can therefore elucidate the precarious position women have had to endure over time, while also showing that they were agents of their own destinies as they struggled to cope with the new changes (Olson 1994).

This chapter blends two important themes with a view to critically analysing the changing role of women in agricultural production in the face of agricultural innovations, in particular, the introduction of coffee among the Abagusii. My premise is that the role of women in agricultural production was disadvantaged in the pre-colonial period, given male dominance of the factors and relations of production. Men used the prevailing patriarchal social and economic relations to appropriate women's surplus, but this exploitative relationship was amplified by the technological innovations accompanying the introduction of coffee in the area. The lucrative cash crop was often the preserve of male farmers, while female farmers were relegated to subsistence farming. Ongoing research into high-yielding varieties of coffee, along with the use of pesticides and fertilisers, benefited the male farmers most, thus entrenching their dominant role in 'modern' agriculture, often using female labour for the benefit of men. Where labour migrancy occurred, usually to the neighbouring tea estates in Kericho area, female farmers were further burdened, as they had to take up roles formerly performed by men.

Such changes to women's participation in agricultural production, occasioned by the introduction of coffee in Gusiland, are the concern of this chapter. The response of women in coping with their continued marginalisation, and their methods

of survival will be analysed taking into account the fact that Gusii women do not constitute a homogenous class. Nor were they equally and uniformly affected by the changes. They had different amounts of land, different levels of education, different family sizes and different numbers and ages of children. Local climatic and soil conditions, and many other specific conditions, differed from area to area or farm to farm. Nevertheless, the key point is that women's efforts to resist and change their marginal position in coffee-farming portray them as agents of their own destiny rather than victims of male patriarchy and dominance.

This chapter, therefore, endeavours to achieve several objectives. First, it examines the impact of patriarchal relations on the role of women and men in agricultural production in pre-colonial Gusiland. Secondly, it analyses the impact of colonialism and the introduction of coffee on the role of women and men in agricultural production in Gusiland. Thirdly, it investigates the responses of women to their continued marginalisation; and, finally, it tries to identify the factors that influenced these responses and impacted on the role of women in agricultural production.

### **Capitalism in Patriarchal Relations**

The approach of analysing capitalism in the context of patriarchy has been used as an important way of examining women's participation in agricultural production in Kenya. This approach encompasses patriarchal relations, the articulation of modes of production and feminist standpoint theories. Patriarchy basically denotes the role of the father as the 'head' of the family (Lerner 1986), but it also describes the political, economic and social control of women by men. Men are thus perceived as decision-makers, especially at the public level, while women are relegated to the periphery and viewed as inferior and subordinate to men. At the household level, men are branded the 'breadwinners', while women are seen as mere recipients together with other members of the family. The male head of the household during the colonial era paid the hut and poll taxes for every member of the homestead. This patriarchal ideology solidified during the colonial era, as the colonialists relied on the Victorian ideology of the woman as good/responsible housewife/lady while providing jobs to male loyalists. Over the years, patriarchy has valorised the dominance of men over women and empowered men to exercise male authority absolutely, to the extent that they come to be perceived as 'natural' leaders, both in the household and in the wider society. In the realm of agriculture, women are often the sole producers, but the proceeds go to the men in their role as heads of the families. Again, some new technologies that came in the agricultural fields are mostly taught to women, as they do the bulk of the agricultural work. Despite this, the land in which these technologies are used belongs to men, as they are the inheritors of ancestral land. The profits that accrue from the new technologies thus go to the men, to the detriment of the women.

On the other hand, a mode of production is seen here as a system of production or social form of economic organisation. It mainly involves itself with the means of production and the attendant social relations of production. The main argument in

this theory is that, when the capitalist mode of production is introduced, it does not automatically and immediately replace the pre-capitalist modes of production but, rather, reinforces them. With time, the capitalist mode of production gradually asserts itself over the pre-capitalist mode of production, and the two modes of production are then locked in a complex and sometimes contradictory struggle. Gradually, the capitalist mode of production modifies, marginalises, or subordinates the pre-capitalist mode of production, but by utilising it rather than casting it aside. The pre-capitalist mode of production is not completely eliminated but keeps on reproducing itself diversely in relation to the capitalist mode of production. Goodman and Redcliff (1981:60) thus observe that pre-capitalist modes of production may have continued to exist, though subordinated to the capitalist system, through a process of 'preservation and destruction' or 'dissolution and conservation', by which they were articulated in their diverse relations with capitalist system, particularly through unequal exchange relations.

Articulation is therefore a double-edged concept where certain sectors of the pre-capitalist economy were integrated into the capitalist economy and other sectors were not integrated for some time, with a view to achieve certain economic goals. This explains why men readily embraced the new agricultural technologies, including the introduction of coffee, and thus belonged to the 'modern' sector while relegating women to the backwaters of the economic realm in the name of the pre-capitalist sector, also called the subsistence sector. Just as the capitalist mode of production preserved the pre-capitalist sector in order to utilise and exploit it, so did men in relation to women. Through patriarchal relations, men kept women in the pre-capitalist sector so as to use and exploit them. Men grew cash crops, while women grew subsistence crops, but even then men utilised women's labour in all their endeavours. Thus, the theory of articulation of modes of production can aptly be applied to explain why women's participation in agricultural production has been hampered and thwarted to meet men's capitalist objectives.

However, women were not passive recipients of the changes affecting them. Nor did they all respond in the same way or get affected uniformly. To appreciate such variations, I use feminist standpoint theory. This theory seeks to interrogate different situations under different conditions so as to arrive at results that are differently conceptualised. It assumes that phenomena are differently located materially, socially, politically, economically and culturally according to the interplay of various factors. Thus, by taking into account the multiplicity of factors affecting a phenomenon, one arrives at conclusions that are only tenable to the particular condition. In other words, one expects different results from common stimuli depending on the specific conditions on the ground. Universalisation and homogenisation are thus eliminated (Harding 1998; Olson 1994; Goonatilake 1984). This theory proves useful in discerning why and how women responded differently to the agricultural changes.

The research for this paper was based on documentary sources of information. Primary information was obtained from archival records, which yielded useful in-

formation on the colonial era. Secondary information was sourced from various libraries in Kenya and from the internet. The data obtained was corroborated to ensure validity, then analysed qualitatively and descriptively. The findings are presented below.

### Pre-Colonial Patriarchal Relations

The pre-colonial Gusii were mixed farmers, herding animals such as cattle, sheep and goats, as well as cultivating crops such as *wimbi* (finger millet) maize, *mtama* (sorghum), pumpkins, sweet potatoes and cassava. Women played a crucial role in the agricultural process. For example, land that was the fundamental resources for crop cultivation and animal production was designated into different uses with women in mind. The arable land was basically divided into three main parts. The first was land on which a family homestead was located and on which the wife, or wives) the Abagusii being largely polygamous) carried out farming. The second was the land the patriarch cultivated for his private use or as security in case of food shortage. This, too, was divided out for each wife, although the produce was considered the patriarch's. The third portion, consisting of all the remaining land, was communal and belonged to the clan. Women could gather fruits, firewood, vegetables and medicinal plants here as they wished. It has been found that the survival of humankind has been due much more to 'woman-the-gatherer' than to 'man-the-hunter' activities, thus making women's productivity the precondition of all human productivity (Mies 1998:58).

Women were vitally involved in agriculture, but, either as individual households or group parties, they participated in what emerged as a vertical, unequal and hierarchical sexual division of labour (Mies 1998:48). In the preparation of land for cultivation, for example, women did the digging in two stages: first, just tilling or breaking the ground and, second, pulverisation, involving the collection of all vegetative matter, which was then heaped in moulds called *amatuta*. The sowing of *wimbi* and planting of many food crops was the preserve of women. Women and their dependants largely did the weeding and harvesting of *wimbi* and other crops. In all these processes, women exhibited a mastery of agricultural knowledge, including identifying fertile areas to be cultivated, selecting good seeds for sowing and inter-cropping to minimise labour and maximise output. Their expertise even extended to designing ideal storage devices that minimised wastage and loss through rotting or exposure to moisture, pest infestation or attack from animals.

Women were also the household custodians of food. All the food requirements within their households were their concern. However, although they were in charge of the food they produced and were free to sell or exchange any surplus, these were limited areas of semi-autonomy; on the whole, they were still subjected to patriarchal dominance and exploitative relations by men (Mies 1998:61). The enterprising women among the Gusii, for they were not a homogeneous and undifferentiated lot (Olson 1994), acquired livestock of their own besides what was apportioned to them by the head of the homestead. One cardinal principle among the pre-capitalist

Gusii was that there was no direct payment for labour contributed in many domestic or agricultural activities. Labour was mainly compensated for in kind, for it was held that to pay meant that one had not been truly assisted. It is in this vein that women's participation in agricultural activities should be seen. They variously participated, from the household level to the communal level, through such forms of cooperative labour parties as the *egesangio*, *ekebasono* and *risaga*. These were inter-household forms of group labour by women and girls who helped one another in tasks, such as weeding, on a rotational basis. The parties were seasonally formed and dissolved after the need for them was over. Due to the ongoing subsistence production of women, the men were free to go from time to time on hunting expeditions, which were sporting and political activities rather than an economic one. Mies (1998:58) calls hunting 'an economy of risk' and argues that 'the various forms of productivity which men developed in the course of history could not have emerged if they could not have used and subordinated the various historic forms of female productivity'. It is evident, therefore, that women played a crucial role in agricultural production among the pre-colonial Gusii.

### Imposition of Colonial Rule on Gusiiland

By the Anglo-German Treaty of 1890, Gusiiland fell under the British 'sphere of influence'. By 1903, an administrative post had been established at Karungu on the shores of Lake Victoria, with an Acting District Commissioner in charge. The otherwise 'independent' Gusii eventually had to be subdued in a 1905 punitive expedition, and a permanent administrative post was then established in the present-day Kisii town. Soon the Gusii started paying taxes and offering their labour to the colonial order. Any lingering resistance to the colonial order was quashed with the defeat of the 1907 and 1914 uprisings.

Colonialism is a system of administration, a process of exploitation and a production system geared towards the creation of capitalist relations and the economic and socio-cultural aggrandisement of the coloniser. It involves covert and overt psychological, legal and military mechanisms (Emeagwali 2003). Thus, the penetration of colonial capitalism threw the Gusii pre-colonial economy into disequilibrium, and the Gusii found themselves subject to an economy over which they had little control (Omwoyo 1992:65). Gusii farmers, many of them women, started producing surplus for sale in order to pay taxes imposed on the male patriarchs. Obviously, the definition of what is 'necessary' and what is 'surplus' is not a purely economic question, for, as Mies points out, colonial exploitation is not only the one-sided appropriation of the surplus produced over and above the necessary requirements of other communities. This concept of exploitation, therefore, always implies a relationship created and maintained, in the last resort, by coercion or violence. Gradually then, the role of women as agricultural commodity producers was intensified through coercive and compelling circumstances, as the Gusii were forced by the colonial system to start growing crops for sale over and above the level of pre-colonial production. They were gradually introduced into the money economy and

found themselves producing increasingly for sale (Ochieng' 1974:86). Consequently, the pre-colonial practice of selling the surplus was superseded by conscious production of surplus for sale, and a Gusii peasantry began to emerge.

Although, at first, production was mainly of indigenous crops such as *wimbi*, the colonial government was soon experimenting with other commodities. Gradually *wimbi* was replaced with improved hickory maize as the major crop, and maize soon became the major cash crop among the Gusii, as it had a ready market among white planters and settlers who needed to feed their workers. Maize was also easier and cheaper to grow; despite its low nutritive value in comparison to indigenous crops like sorghum and millet, it provided a greater quantity of food and the necessary energy that was needed for large numbers of workers. Maize made the workers feel more satisfied and well fed, so that they did their work with cheerfulness and vivacity. Maize thus grew to attain the status of monoculture even at the height of the introduction of coffee among the Gusii. Women, of course, continued to give much of their labour in maize production. The working parties were now focused on maize production, but women's involvement was set to be further intensified with the introduction of coffee at a time when many men were forced to work outside the district in the 1920s. Under capitalist patriarchal production relations, women were relegated to the 'subsistence' economy to free men for the colonial and capitalist sector.

By this time, tea plantations were being established in neighboring Kericho District. Tea is one of the most labour-intensive of all crops, requiring very large numbers of workers all year round. Due to its proximity, Gusiland became the reliable labour reservoir for the Kericho plantations, and Gusii households as units of production, consumption and reproduction were radically altered in the process. Under the migrant labour system, men were drawn or forced off the land, leaving behind their women to maintain production. The costs of reproducing, maintaining and sustaining the cheap labour force were, therefore, borne by this 'pre-capitalist' sector run by Gusii women (Stichter 1982; Zeleza 1987). As the tasks and roles performed by men were changed, the workers' families remained at home, shouldering most of the burden of land cultivation while also suffering the imposition of forced labour in communal undertakings for the colonial authorities.

The costs of household production—including retirement, education, health and the rearing of the next generation of workers—were borne by the economy of the African 'reserves', which supported the workers' wives, children and themselves in sickness, old age or on leave. In this way, the pre-capitalist economy, a major preserve for women, became an appendage to the economy of estate agriculture, subsidising its low wages. In other words, women were invisibly exploited not only to keep the wages of the men in the estates sector low, but also to maintain their households with little need for productive input from the men. The men lived in an economic system based on women's productive agricultural work; they were the husbands of female agriculturists (Mies 1998:64). Household relations of production were also modified in varying ways, either in the direction of capitalist exchange

or through the intensified exploitation of traditional obligations in the service of the labour market. Women became burdened with more work in the field. They also had to take up roles formerly done by their absent or migrant husbands. Thus wives' obligations to their husbands were intensified, as they were pressed to take over more work on family land-holdings (Stichter 1982:28). Against this already tilted and burdensome position of women, it is interesting to observe how the adoption of coffee production worsened the position of Gusii women still further.

### Women's Increased Participation in the Technology of Coffee Production

For a long time, Kenyan Africans were barred from producing coffee by the colonial administration. It was claimed that Africans could not master the technical knowledge required to produce such a lucrative crop and would increase the risk of plant disease and inadequate quality control (Garst 1972:125). In districts near settler farms, it was said that the African plants would 'infect' settler coffee. The actual reason, of course, was the fear that African coffee-farmers would become self-sufficient and unwilling to offer their cheap labour on settler farms (Omwoyo 2002).

However, in 1934, Africans living in areas away from settler farms were allowed to grow coffee for experimental purposes, notable in Kisii, Embu and Meru areas. In Gusiland, 64 beds of coffee seedlings were availed for planting. In the initial period, the crop proved unpopular with the Gusii. First, the period of care before yields were obtained was too long. Secondly, the colonial administration permitted that coffee to be grown on a cooperative basis only, in the hope of controlling quality and diseases. However, without personal commitment, farmers tended their plots irregularly. At times, the distance to the plots was a hindering factor. In fact, such farms had to be maintained under threat of prosecution, and for this reason, even when it was realised that individual plots near the farmers' homes could achieve more success, most Gusii were convinced that the government would confiscate their plots if they planted coffee. Consequently, as Barnes (1976) shows, a positive response to the introduction of coffee was forthcoming from only a small number of cultivators.

The chiefs, along with a significant number of the early-educated members of Gusii society, were among the first growers. They were motivated by a combination of reasons, including the expectation of earning greater cash income. By 1936, a total of only 50 acres owned by 25 growers had been planted in the Gusii highlands, with Chief Musa Nyandusi of Nyaribari having more than eight acres alone (KNA/DC/KSI/1/4/1937). However, by 1937, the attitude of peasants had positively changed in favor of coffee growing. Writing in 1937, the agricultural officer remarked: '...it is no longer a question of persuading people to plant but of selecting the most suitable applicants and allowing them to plant small areas only' (KNA/DC/KSI/1/4/1937). In that year, the total acreage under the crop increased to 78, and, in December, the first parchment coffee, all from Chief Musa's farm, was dispatched to Nairobi for grading and sale. The reports on this parcel were encouraging—it was classed as borderline for the London Market—and, after this, there

was even more demand for the local peasants to be allowed to grow the crop. By the end of 1938, 160 peasants were growing coffee on 90 acres (KNA/DC/1/4/1938). However, a maximum individual acreage had been imposed, and most peasants had less than one acre.

Production expanded rapidly after World War II. By 1954, there were 3,197 coffee growers producing 113 tons worth more than 35,000 pounds. In 1955, there were already 68 coffee nurseries able to provide sufficient seedlings to plant nearly 1,000 acres (KNA/DC/KSI/1/17). This was a time when the Gusii had also taken to the growing of pyrethrum, passion fruit and, of course, maize, which by 1950 had established itself as a major export crop. Nevertheless, the emergence of cooperative marketing, especially of coffee, attests to the importance of the crop in a maize-dominated area. The Kisii Coffee Growers' Cooperative was started in 1947 and grew to become a Union (Kisii Farmers Cooperative Union) in 1950, with primary societies based on the various pulping stations. In the same year, a lorry was acquired and stores built to enable the union to market member's coffee and other produce.

The first coffee factory in Gusiiland was built at Mogunga in 1952. By the mid-1950s, the bulk of the crop in South Nyanza district come from the Gusii highlands, with 26 out of 31 coffee societies being in Gusiiland (KNA/DC/KSI/1/22). The Gusii peasants took advantage of the removal of the maximum acreage limitations on coffee after 1954, and total production rose from 282 tons on 2,165 acres, grown by 5,763 farmers, in 1956 (KNA/KSI/1/18) to 4,400 acres, grown by about 19,000 farmers and earning them over 300,000 pounds in 1961 (KNA/KSI/1/23). By 1963, the crop was being grown by 36,140 framers with corresponding increases in acreage and income.

### Coffee Production and Its Implications for Women

The increasing adoption of coffee production among the Gusii not only deepened social and economic stratification but also led to the intensification of women's labour while marginalising them in terms of ownership. Initially chiefs and educated people were given approval by the agricultural field staff to grow coffee after meeting certain standards of training in culturing, pruning, nursery work, planting, bench terracing and disease control. However, it was only the rich peasants, those in white-collar employment or migrant workers who were able to benefit. Almost all were men, leaving women to provide the much-needed labour in planting, weeding, picking and drying the seeds. Being in some form of employment, men devoted their time to this, while the women were left behind to tend the subsistence farms, and now the coffee farms, which in any case belonged to the men. This asymmetrical division of labour, whereby men tended paid labour outside the home while women remained at home as housewives to take care of the households and do other unpaid chores, worsened the position of women among the Abagusii. Mies (1998:68) has noted that, elsewhere in the colonial economy, the process of proletarianisation of men was also accompanied by a process of 'housewifisation' of women. Thus,

men in employment tended to turn their wives into housewives, where their role was reduced to a producers of invisible goods and services without tangible monetary value to them. Thus, the new capitalist class of coffee growers rose on the subjugation of women.

As coffee growing gradually became popular, it came to be regarded as the 'modern' sector as opposed to the subsistence or maize sector. The cash crop sector came to be seen as the men's domain, just as the subsistence sector was largely identified with women. It was the goal of all men to enter into the cash crop sector, even those in work elsewhere. The greater impetus for coffee production came after the Second World War, when a great deal of wealth poured in through family remittances of conscripted soldier's gratuities, the sale of livestock and agricultural produce. The desire for profitable investment of this capital led to unprecedented demand for coffee production after the war. Most of those who joined the industry experienced a number of problems, including poor cultural conditions, inadequate pruning and spraying and lack of mulching. Diseases, the plucking of small under-ripe and yellow cherries and poor drying procedures combined to lower the quality of coffee. Nevertheless, coffee farming became the single most popular and productive crop for all men who had the resources to grow it. Thus, the progress of the coffee farmers was based on the subordination and exploitation of their own women. The law of progress, according to Mies, is always a contradictory one: progress for some means retrogression for others, and development of productive forces for some means underdevelopment for others. The reason why there cannot be a unilinear progress is that the predatory, patriarchal mode of production constitutes a non-reciprocal relationship (Mies 1998:76).

One might expect that, in such exploitative capitalist and patriarchal relations, women would have descended into hopelessness and total dependence on men. This was, indeed, the for a few women who could not fight back to prevent the further degeneration of their position under colonialism. However, many other women devised varied strategies to counter the negative forces of colonialism and assert their resourcefulness in the agricultural sector. Women were not merely victims of these processes. To assume so is to further reduce women to merely responding to external stimuli. Women were able to perceive these changes correctly and respond positively with a view to alleviating their position. Thus, women were capable of charting their own destiny rather than being merely helpless victims of the situation.

They managed to achieve this through several approaches. First, they deliberately intensified their own labour. As they were forced to undertake duties of their absent husbands, women had no alternative but to work a little more and longer than before. Long working hours became one other characteristic of industrious women. Secondly, they used the working parties more than before. Such working parties as *ekebosano*, *egesangio* and *ekiamorogoba* were redefined, not just to pool labour for tasks requiring colossal labour, but attained an economic motive as well. The working parties went around soliciting cash jobs on rich farmers' holdings. Thus, rich people, often those who had adopted coffee production, acquired extra labour

for expanding production, weeding and plucking coffee berries. This earned the marginalised women some money, which they used for domestic requirements and other forms of investment, such as school fees for their children or group ventures (e.g., buying posho mills). Thirdly they sought employment locally in the rich men's *shambas* as individuals. This meant working for their employer in the morning hours and working on their own landholding in the afternoon. The intensification of women's labour cannot be underestimated in such circumstances.

The fourth strategy employed by the women to cope with their continued marginalisation from the cash crop economy was to increase production of profitable crops within their reach. Such women established vegetable gardens and were often seen selling vegetables in market places on appointed market days. Others grew fruits and sugarcane, which they also sold for extra earnings. The subsistence notion of producing what was required within the household was revolutionised and came to be seen as a ready source of money for those not in the cash crop sector. For women who had been consigned to this subsistence sector, only enhanced innovation ensured their survival. Lastly, women formed small-scale cooperatives or 'merry-go-rounds' to raise the required capital. Out of their meagre earnings, each contributed for one of their members in a rotational manner so as to raise a substantial amount to enable the member make some vital investments. Evidently therefore, women charted their destiny amid unfavorable patriarchal and colonial conditions. Even the production of lucrative crops such as coffee came to rely on women as domestic, hired and contract workers, initially for free, but later for a wage or fee. Yet, all along, women remained the household custodians of food. All the food requirements within their households were their prime objective even with such communal labour undertakings, household chores, and engagement in wage labour.

### Conclusion

This chapter has attempted to critically analyse the changing role of women in agricultural production in the face of agricultural innovations and, in particular, the introduction of coffee and its technology among the Abagusii. It has been argued that the role of women in agricultural production was fairly disadvantaged in the pre-colonial period, given the male dominance over the factors and relations of production. Further, it has been shown that the totality of the oppressive and exploitative relationship between men and women in pre-colonial Gusiiland was amplified by technological innovations accompanying the introduction of coffee in the area. The lucrative cash crop became the preserve of male farmers, while female farmers were relegated to subsistence crop production. This benefited the male farmers most, thus entrenching them in 'modern' agriculture, often with female labour. With the advent of labour migrancy, mainly to the neighbouring tea estates in Kericho, female farmers were further burdened, as they had to take up roles formerly done by men. Changes in women's participation in agricultural production occasioned by the introduction of coffee in Gusiiland have been tackled, showing

the disadvantaged relations of production that women found themselves in. The response of women in coping with their continued marginalisation proves that they were capable of determining their destiny in various ways, taking into cognisance that Gusii women do not constitute a homogenous group, nor were they equally and uniformly affected. Their efforts to resist and change their marginal position in coffee farming portray them as agents of their own destiny rather than as victims of male patriarchy and dominance.

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