

Journal of History and Cultural Studies

[ISSN 2957-6504]
Volume: 05 Issue: 01 | November-2026

JHCS

The Socio-Political and Economic Effects of the Making of African Chiefs among the Jo-Asembo in East Asembo, Rarieda Sub-County, Siaya County, Kenya, 1898 to 1963

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Cite this article in APA

Odo, R. O., Kithinji, C. M., & Chebai, J. M. (2026). *The socio-political and economic effects of the making of African chiefs among the Jo-Asembo in East Asembo, Rarieda Sub-County, Siaya County, Kenya, 1898 to 1963. Journal of history and cultural studies, 5*(1). 86–98. https://doi.org/10.51317/45dtvz48

OPEN ACCESS

A publication of Editon Consortium Publishing (online)

Article history

Received: 2026-09-03
Accepted: 2026-10-16
Published: 2026-11-09

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Abstract

This study examined the socio-political and economic effects of the making of African chiefs among the Jo-Asembo in East Asembo, Rarieda Sub-County, Siaya County, Kenya from 1898 to 1963. For the Jo-Asembo of East Asembo, Rarieda Sub-County, Siaya County, the introduction of colonial chieftainship from 1898 to 1963 represented a major departure from established indigenous governance, which has been insufficiently studied. The study employed a descriptive research design because it facilitated quantitative analysis. Data were obtained from oral, archival and secondary sources. The 30 respondents were purposively sampled using the snowballing technique. The study corroborated data from oral, archival, and secondary sources to ensure the study's reliability and validity. Marxist theory was used to analyse the socio-political and economic effects on the making of African chiefs in East Asembo location. The study found that the arrival of British colonial rule introduced a new administrative system that differed from the indigenous form of government that existed before colonisation. The study concludes that colonialism transformed chieftainship among the Jo-Asembo, reshaping indigenous governance structures, socio-political relationships, and economic activities to serve the colonial administration's interests. The study recommends further historical investigations into the experiences of other Luo communities to establish comparative perspectives on the establishment, operation, and legacies of colonial chieftainship in Kenya. The study contributes to localised Kenyan colonial historiography and to understanding the socio-economic effects of colonial rule in East Asembo.

Key terms: African chiefs, colonialism, economic, Jo-Asembo, socio-political.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

This study examined the socio-political and economic effects of the making of African chiefs among the Jo-Asembo in East Asembo, Rarieda sub-county, Siaya County, Kenya, from 1898 to 1963. The introduction of colonial rule in Africa transformed indigenous systems of governance, especially through the creation and institutionalisation of African chiefs, who served as intermediaries between colonial authorities and local communities. Before colonial intervention, political authority in many African societies was exercised through indigenous institutions based on kinship, clan structures, age-set systems, councils of elders, and customary law. Colonial administrations gradually reorganised these institutions by appointing chiefs and assigning them administrative, judicial, political, and economic duties in support of colonial objectives. For the Jo-Asembo of East Asembo, Rarieda Sub-County, Siaya County, the introduction of colonial chieftainship from 1898 to 1963 represented a major departure from established indigenous governance. Although chiefs became pivotal to community administration, the processes behind their emergence, the character of their authority, and the effects of their rule on indigenous governance and the broader socio-economic organisation of the Jo-Asembo remain insufficiently documented.

Ibingira (1973) emphasised the pivotal role the British strategy for implementing the Dual Mandate played in colonial governance, particularly its reliance on existing indigenous power structures, with a notable emphasis on local chiefs. Gann and Duignan (1977) provide a foundational understanding of the German colonial enterprise in Tanganyika, emphasising that the process began with Karl Peters' arrival in 1884, who played a pivotal role in establishing German influence in the region by negotiating treaties of friendship with local leaders, which were crucial for legitimising German claims to the territory. Similarly, Mudoola (1974) critically analyses the role chiefs played within the colonial administration, particularly in Busoga, highlighting that these traditional leaders were not merely figureheads but pivotal actors who cultivated vested interests that allowed them to forge essential connections among themselves and with colonial officials.

Ochieng (1975) argues that these colonial chiefs' actions and motivations should not be viewed in isolation or solely through the lens of collaboration with colonial powers. Their efforts often reflected a blend of traditional governance practices and adaptations to the new colonial realities, illustrating the resilience and agency of African leaders in a challenging context.

Rodney (1972) notes that ethnic divisions and state conflicts pose significant challenges for African nations, often as a legacy of colonialism. He indicates that colonial disregard for existing cultural differences and the establishment of artificial boundaries have fragmented ethnic groups and intensified violence. This aligns with Shillington (1985) and Hochschild (1998), who argue that colonial administrative practices have shaped contemporary African politics and ethnic conflict.

Jackson and Marquette (2003) delve into the intricate relationship between traditional governance systems and local government structures in Sub-Saharan Africa. They highlight the historical backdrop of colonialism, during which colonial powers appropriated traditional lands for the benefit of white settlers.

Tahiru (2024) conducts a comprehensive examination of the role of traditional leaders in implementing social protection policies in Ghana, emphasising their critical position as grassroots figures within modern development initiatives. The study employs a mixed-methods approach, utilising semi-structured interviews, participant observation, and informal discussions to gather rich qualitative data. In this context,

a study on the socio-political and economic effects of the making of African chiefs among the Jo-Asembo in East Asembo, Rarieda Sub-County, Siaya County, Kenya, from 1898 to 1963 was conducted.

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

Gifford and Roger (1982) provide a comprehensive analysis of the profound and lasting effects of colonialism on governance structures in the Bini Kingdom in Nigeria. They argue that colonial rule marked a major transformation in the political landscape, particularly for traditional leaders of prominent kingdoms who had previously held substantial power and influence over their communities. They show that under colonial rule, the Bini Kingdom was fragmented into smaller administrative units, effectively dismantling its traditional governance structures. This approach allowed colonial administrators to exploit pre-existing power dynamics, aligning local governance with colonial interests while undermining the traditional authority of the kingdom's leaders. In contrast to the earlier study, the current study shifted its geographical focus to the Asembo community of East Asembo in Rarieda sub-county, Siaya County, Kenya, which presents a unique socio-political and economic context that differs significantly from that of the Bini Kingdom, where the previous study was conducted.

Berry (1987) explained that during colonial rule, Europeans used indirect approaches to manage African populations by leveraging pre-existing political frameworks. This strategy often involved forming alliances with local chiefs and elders, who were incentivised to support colonial rule in exchange for benefits such as increased status, economic rewards, or access to resources. This method not only facilitated the administration of colonial policies but also helped to legitimise European authority in the eyes of the local communities. However, while Berry (1987) provides valuable insights into the mechanisms of indirect rule, the author does not address the complex circumstances, obstacles, and broader consequences associated with these local leaders' roles during the colonial period. This gap is what the current study addresses.

Geller (1986) provided a critical analysis of the role of traditional chiefs within the colonial administrative framework, highlighting their position as subordinate figures who were often caught in a complex web of colonial power dynamics. The study shows that these chiefs were often tasked with unpopular responsibilities, such as tax collection and labour recruitment, which not only alienated them from their communities but also eroded their authority and respect among the local populace. While Geller's (1986) research primarily focused on French West Africa, it also draws parallels with British colonial practices, particularly indirect rule. This comparative perspective is invaluable for the current study, which explored the integration of traditional administrative authorities in Asembo, Siaya County, Kenya, by 1963. Specifically, this study highlights the transformative effects of colonial rule on the roles and functions of established African chiefs within the Asembo community's socio-political landscape.

Onyango (1994) conducted a comprehensive examination of the intricate relationship between the church and politics in the Padhola region, with a particular emphasis on the ramifications of colonial rule in that area. He showed that these Protestant and Catholic churches were not merely spiritual entities; they also played a pivotal role in the political landscape by influencing the selection of African chiefs, intertwining religious authority with colonial administrative structures. His research offers valuable insights into the historical dynamics that unfolded as Protestant and Catholic denominations established their presence and sought to propagate their religious doctrines within local communities. Building upon Onyango's (1994) foundational work, the current study delved deeper into the partnership between Christian churches and the making of the African chiefs in East Asembo, Siaya County, Kenya, during the colonial period from

1898 to 1963. This research examined how these alliances formed and functioned to advance the colonial administration's socio-political objectives among the people of Asembo.

Cau (2004) conducted a comprehensive investigation into the role of traditional authorities in land management and rural governance in Mozambique, employing a dual methodology that includes both documentary analysis and field research. The study finds that in post-independence Mozambique, the lineage level of traditional authority retains significant influence over land distribution, underscoring land control as a vital function of traditional administrative authorities. Building on these insights, the current study explored the economic effects of the making of African chiefs among the people of Asembo in Siaya County, Kenya, between 1898 and 1963.

Ntsebeza (2007) examined the dynamics of land politics in South Africa, particularly focusing on the role of traditional chiefs and their influence within the broader governance framework. The study established that the coexistence of traditional leaders, who are often appointed through hereditary succession, and democratically elected representatives creates inherent tensions that undermine the principles of accountability and representation that are central to democratic governance. These insights from Ntsebeza's (2007) work provided a foundational framework for the current study, which investigated the relationship between colonisers and African chiefs in the context of land issues among the people of Asembo up to 1963.

Tutu (2008) conducted a comprehensive exploration of the influence of traditional authorities in South Africa, highlighting their significant historical role and potential future impact. His research revealed that traditional leaders are not merely relics of the past; rather, they play a pivotal role in enhancing the living standards of their communities. This improvement in community welfare benefits the local level and also contributes positively to the national economy. In contrast to Tutu's (2008) study, which was focused on the South African context, the current study shifted to Asembo, a region in Siaya County, Kenya, which presented an opportunity to examine the economic effects of the making of African chiefs among the people of Asembo in East Asembo, a different cultural and socio-economic landscape.

Mahama (2009) examined the complex relationship between local government structures and traditional authorities in Ghana, highlighting the multifaceted challenges that arise from constitutional and legislative ambiguities in their interactions. The research underscored the enduring importance of traditional authorities in Ghanaian society, despite a noticeable decline in their influence since independence. Mahama (2009) noted that Ghana's legal frameworks governing local governance lack clarity on the position and functions of traditional authorities. Furthermore, the current study assessed how dynamics between colonial and African chiefs affected the economic conditions of the Asembo community, particularly in the colonial context up to 1963.

3.0 METHODOLOGY

The study used a descriptive research design, which enabled the researchers to collect, describe, record, analyse, report, and account for the socio-political and economic effects on the making of African chiefs among the Jo-Asembo in East Asembo, Siaya County, Kenya, from 1898 to 1963. Kathuri and Pals (1993) add that the systematic and scientific nature of the descriptive research design brings valid and reliable outcomes.

The study was conducted in East Asembo, Rarieda Sub-county, Siaya County, Kenya, selected for its historical significance in the establishment of British colonial administration among the Luo of former Central Nyanza. The introduction of colonial rule in 1898 transformed indigenous political authority through the emergence of African chieftainship among the Jo-Asembo. East Asembo provides a setting to examine how British officials identified, appointed, and empowered chiefs as intermediaries responsible for implementing policies on taxation, labour, law enforcement, and government regulations. These activities affected indigenous governance and the community's socio-political and economic organisation. The area also offers evidence from archives, oral traditions, and people familiar with Jo-Asembo colonial experiences. Despite chieftainship's influence on local governance and community relations, little research has examined its emergence and effects among the Jo-Asembo. This study addresses that gap by tracing colonial administration and changes to indigenous governance in East Asembo from 1898 to 1963.

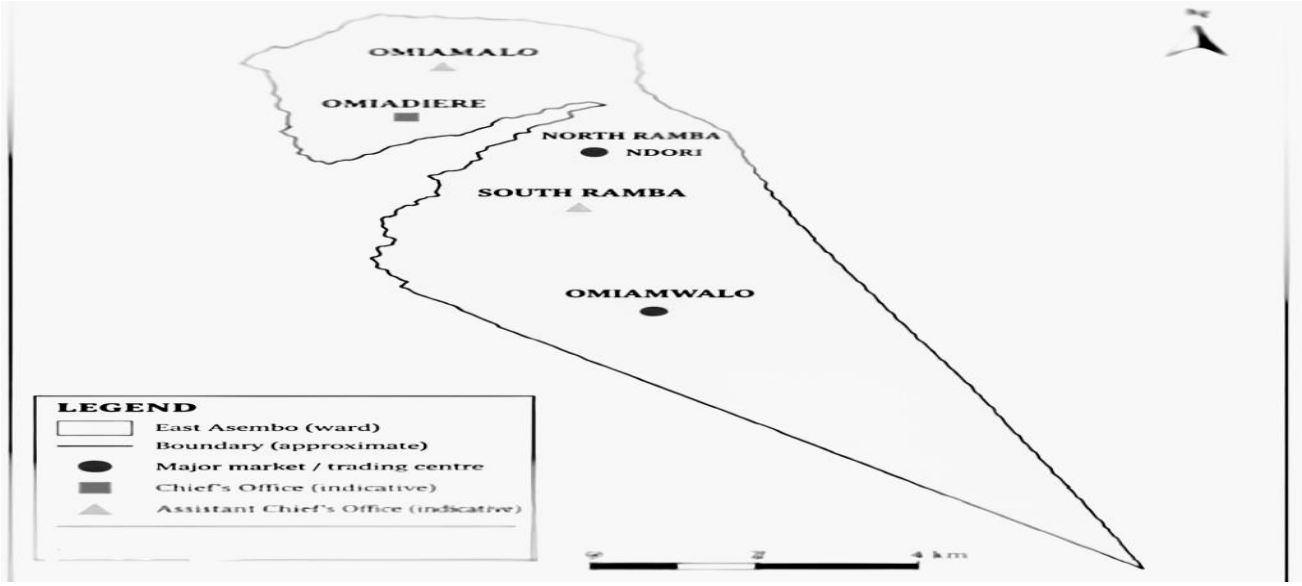


Figure 1: Map of East Asembo

Source: Author

This study used purposive sampling with the snowballing method to select respondents. A sample of 30 respondents was interviewed, including local administrators, members of the Luo council of elders, religious leaders, and respondents with adequate knowledge of the colonial history of Jo-Asembo, guided by Kathuri & Pals (1993).

Data were analysed using Qualitative Data Analysis (QDA), guided by content analysis. Interview recordings were transcribed verbatim, while archival records and secondary sources were reviewed, assessed, and organised according to the study's objectives. The researchers coded recurring ideas concerning indigenous governance, African chiefs, and socio-political and economic transformations among the Jo-Asembo, then grouped these codes into broader themes. Data were interpreted chronologically and thematically to identify historical continuities, changes, and relationships between colonial policies and indigenous institutions. To strengthen credibility, the researchers triangulated oral interviews, archival

records, and secondary sources. The researchers assessed conflicting accounts against documentary evidence and independent sources to minimise bias and support reliable historical interpretations.

Ethical Considerations

The researchers presented an introduction letter to the respondent and, with the respondent's consent, conducted the interview. The researchers obtained a recommendation letter from the Post-Graduate and International Studies at Chuka University, which was used to obtain a research permit from the National Council for Science, Technology, and Innovation (NACOSTI). The researchers booked appointments with respondents to conduct the interview. The purpose of the interview was explained to the respondents, who participated in the interviews willingly, and where the respondent sought to remain anonymous, the researchers respected the will of the respondent.

4.0 FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This section provides a comprehensive and detailed historical account of the socio-political and economic effects of the making of colonial African chiefs among the Jo-Asembo in East Asembo, Siaya County, Kenya, from 1898 to 1963.

The Intrusion of Colonial Powers and Its Effects on Indigenous Administrative Systems, 1898 to 1914

The years spanning 1898 to 1914 marked the beginning of a profound restructuring of how Jo-Asembo's political systems were organised. The *jodongo* served as a vital institution for governing behavioural standards, settling disputes, allocating resources, and strengthening social bonds within the community.

Atieno-Odhiambo (1976) explains that the establishment of African chiefs under colonial administration represented a pivotal moment in this institutional shift. Rather than merely reinforcing the existing power of community elders, the colonial administration established a new position whose legitimacy and authority derived directly from the colonial state apparatus. This means that the transformation consequently transcended mere administrative restructuring because it shifted the foundation of political legitimacy.

Owino (O.I., 2026) observed that the Jo-Asembo traditionally relied on lineage authority, wisdom and collective consensus. The colonial system disrupted this arrangement by placing chiefs at the centre of local administration. This meant the relationship between colonial African chiefs and the people of Asembo was complex and often marked by significant tension, despite the notable role these chiefs played in facilitating communication between colonial authorities and the local populace.

Language served as a critical mechanism for conveying this emerging authority. As Oloo (O.I., 2026) observed, *Dholuo served* as the dominant language in chief-led *barazas*, enabling widespread comprehension and allowing chiefs to disseminate directives, proclamations, and colonial mandates on taxation, labour recruitment, agricultural initiatives, dispute settlement, and governance. *Dholuo translated* colonial policies into terms accessible to the Jo-Asembo, giving the colonial administration a pathway to influence communities' social fabric.

Ndege (O.I., 2026) also noted that English was the official language of colonial governance but was seldom used directly during local *barazas* because most community members had limited English proficiency. When District Officers or European officials participated in these gatherings, they spoke English, while chiefs or interpreters then conveyed their statements in Dholuo or Kiswahili. Archival records preserved in KNA/DC/CN/3/1 similarly underscore the critical role of such linguistic intermediation.

Institutionalisation of African Chieftainship and the Consolidation of Colonial Authority, 1914 to 1931

Okeyo (O.I., 2026) showed that colonial governance policies often produced tensions between traditional leaders and the Jo-Asembo. Chiefs became increasingly linked to revenue collection, workforce requisitions, territorial distribution, and conflict-resolution mechanisms. In some contexts, their enforcement capabilities eroded public confidence, as inhabitants saw them primarily as agents of colonial interests rather than as authentic advocates for their people.

This transformation also impacted indigenous political structures. According to Akoth and Ouma (O.I., 2026), colonial administrators granted appointed chiefs legal, administrative, and coercive authority, substantially diminishing the influence clan elders and lineage heads had previously held. Historically, elders functioned as custodians of justice and arbiters in resolving conflicts. Their influence derived from adherence to customary practices and community recognition. The colonial framework, however, equipped chiefs with authority reinforced by the state's administrative and enforcement mechanisms.

The establishment of colonial judicial institutions accelerated this shift in legal governance. Ogot (1967) and Ochieng' (1985) document the development of a bifurcated legal framework wherein traditional dispute resolution practices persisted concurrently with colonial court systems. Traditional elders maintained their role in adjudicating conflicts about property, matrimonial affairs, livestock, and domestic relations. Conversely, Native Tribunals and African Courts progressively assumed responsibility for handling minor disputes under colonial administrative oversight.

Ogola (O.I., 2026) noted that Native Tribunals and African Courts, while occasionally incorporating elements of customary law, operated fundamentally within the colonial administrative apparatus through chiefs and court elders appointed by colonial authorities. The appellate process, which allowed cases to be elevated to district officials, reinforced the colonial power hierarchy.

Archival evidence in KNA/DC/CN/1/6/1 indicates that serious cases were handled through District Courts and Magistrates' Courts, where British common law predominated. English and Kiswahili were used in proceedings, while *Dholuo* was excluded from formal judicial proceedings. This created an important distinction between customary justice, which remained accessible within the community, and colonial justice, which increasingly operated through formal bureaucratic procedures.

Mobilisation during World War and Centralised Chiefly Authority, 1939 to 1945

Local chiefs played a crucial role in facilitating recruitment and communicating colonial demands to the Jo-Asembo. According to Ogola (O.I., 2026), chiefs became especially vital in enforcing recruitment initiatives and maintaining administrative control during periods when many non-disabled men were away from East Asembo.

The expanded duties assigned to chiefs strengthened centralised colonial administration. Okumu and Owuor (O.I., 2026) noted that wartime conditions led to increased taxation, heightened labour demands, restrictions on movement, and stricter enforcement of public order. African Chiefs were instrumental in carrying out these policies, which included curfews, movement controls, production mandates, and recruitment drives.

Education, Healthcare, Political Consciousness and Contestation of Chiefly Authority,1945 to 1959

Education held considerable significance in the region, as Akoth and Owuor (O.I., 2026) document; formal educational institutions in Asembo were initially established by the Church Missionary Society, Mill Hill Missionary, and Seventh-day Adventist organisations. These educational facilities offered instruction in literacy, numeracy, religious studies, and fundamental vocational training. Beginning in the 1920s, both government-funded and grant-supported schools proliferated, frequently operating in partnership with missionary institutions.

Consequently, advances in education improved the colonial administration's operational effectiveness. However, education eventually produced an unintended consequence (KNA/PC/NZA/4/5/6). It created an emerging African elite capable of understanding, questioning and challenging colonial political structures. Teachers, catechists, clerks and other educated Africans became intermediaries not only for colonial administration but also for political mobilisation.

District Commissioner Charles F. Atkins observed that while primary schools were adequately distributed across densely populated areas, certain institutions were founded primarily because of competing denominational interests rather than educational necessity. Additionally, the region lacked any facilities dedicated to teacher training. Despite these limitations, the expansion of educational infrastructure facilitated the rise of novel social hierarchies that operated independently from the established chiefly system (KNA/DC/KSM/1/23/42). This observation was documented in archival sources as follows:

> *In the well-populated locations, the distribution of primary schools is fairly satisfactory, although many are redundant because they were established primarily because of denominational rivalries among local communities. However, no teacher training schools existed in this location.*

This suggests that the interplay between formal education, colonial administration, and community initiatives redefined power dynamics in Asembo, leading to a hybrid governance structure.

Decolonisation, Expanded Representation and the Transformation of African Chieftainship, 1960 to 1963

Nevertheless, by the early 1960s, African populations increasingly sought political voice through democratically elected bodies rather than through unelected colonial representatives (KNA/PC/NZA/3/1/9). This shift became evident in Africans' growing involvement in the Legislative Council and comparable democratic institutions. Although colonial constitutional frameworks continued to limit this process, African citizens increasingly engaged in electoral activities and joined political movements.

In East Asembo, this advancement was intertwined with the Luo people's broader political mobilisation efforts. According to Ogola (O.I., 2026), Jaramogi Oginga Odinga emerged as a significant regional political

leader whose endeavours created a platform for expressing Jo-Asembo's interests, despite not serving as the direct representative of Asembo as a specific local constituency.

According to archival evidence, KNA/PC/NZA/3/1/273, the functions of African District Councils (ADCs) underwent significant transformation. The Siaya African District Council (SADC) incorporated traditional chiefs alongside educated African participants, notably educators, religious instructors, and administrative personnel who had studied at institutions including Ruwe, Maseno, and later Ng'iya. Berman and Lonsdale (1992) highlight the critical role educated African intermediaries played in establishing new political structures.

4.3 The economic effects of the making of colonial African chiefs among the Jo-Asembo

Colonial Penetration, Taxation and the Disruption of Indigenous Economic Systems, 1898 to 1914

The installation of colonial chiefs fundamentally transformed this dynamic, as their power increasingly stemmed from colonial governmental structures rather than exclusively from community endorsement. Ogot (1967) and Atieno-Odhiambo (1976) contend that colonial governance similarly dismantled pre-existing political and economic arrangements by instituting officials whose legitimacy originated from the colonial apparatus.

Oral evidence from East Asembo showed that taxation became intertwined with labour recruitment practices, as African households needed either currency or saleable commodities to meet colonial tax requirements (Owuor, O.I., 2026). Consequently, taxation functioned as more than a revenue-generating mechanism for the colonial administration.

Okoth (O.I., 2026) explained that chiefs wielded administrative power to levy taxes, adjudicate conflicts, and preserve peace, which enabled the integration of Asembo households into the colonial economic framework. (Maxon, 1989) similarly argues that hut and poll taxes operated as instruments that motivated Africans to pursue monetary earnings. Through a Marxist lens, taxation thus played a role in the commodification of labour, as households that had previously depended heavily on subsistence production were compelled to obtain cash to meet colonial fiscal demands.

Labour Mobilisation and the Emergence of Wage Labour, 1914 to 1939

According to Okoth (O.I., 2026), chiefs played a significant role in commodifying labour by enforcing taxation and mobilising Africans for colonial economic activities. Maxon (1989) and Ochieng' & Maxon (1992) similarly demonstrate that colonial labour policies increasingly required African labour for roads, bridges, railway maintenance, administrative buildings, settler farms and other colonial projects. This enabled the colonial authorities to obtain labour at low cost while disrupting the agricultural activities of households whose members were removed from their farms.

Tax enforcement was therefore closely connected to labour mobilisation. Oduor and Okeyo (O.I., 2026) observed that hut taxation placed considerable financial pressure on Asembo households, regardless of income level. Families increasingly needed cash earnings to meet their obligations. Men consequently sought employment outside the community, including on settler farms and in urban centres.

From a Marxist analytical framework, this mechanism constituted the appropriation of excess labour from African agricultural communities. African leaders served as intermediaries between the colonial governing structure and indigenous populations, ensuring compliance with tax obligations and labour mandates. Their power consequently became intrinsically tied to the transformation of local production systems.

The chiefs themselves could benefit from this emerging economic structure. Ochieng' and Maxon (1992) argue that colonial African chiefs could derive material benefits through commissions associated with tax collection, fines from native courts, preferential access to land and opportunities in trade. Salaries, better housing and educational opportunities for their children further distinguished chiefs from ordinary households.

Land also became increasingly important in this process. Chiefs became gatekeepers to economic opportunities and, according to Odhiambo (O.I., 2026), some exploited their authority through favouritism and bribery. Their authority to allocate or influence access to land gave chiefs opportunities to accumulate resources and build patronage networks. This contributed to the weakening of older communal systems of wealth distribution based on kinship and mutual access to productive resources.

World War Mobilisation and the Intensification of Economic Extraction, 1939 to 1945

Asembo men had previously participated in the First World War between 1914 and 1918, both as soldiers and members of the Carrier Corps. During the Second World War (1939–1945), recruitment expanded through the King's African Rifles (KAR), the Carrier Corps, and other forms of military and colonial service. According to Ogola (O.I., 2026), chiefs played an important role in recruitment and enforcing wartime requirements. Their increased responsibilities strengthened their administrative position because the colonial government depended upon local intermediaries to mobilise resources and maintain order.

The wartime economy therefore intensified the relationship between chiefship and economic extraction. Chiefs were expected to facilitate recruitment, taxation and labour mobilisation while ensuring agricultural production and public order. Okumu and Owuor (O.I., 2026) observed that wartime conditions increased taxation, labour requirements and restrictions on movement. Chiefs and local agents helped enforce these requirements, strengthening top-down colonial administration.

The economic consequences for households were considerable. Removing young men from Asembo reduced household labour at a time when agricultural production remained essential for survival. Akoth (O.I., 2026) explained that women, children and older adults increasingly assumed agricultural, household and conflict-resolution responsibilities. The wartime absence of men therefore altered the gender division of labour and increased the economic responsibilities borne by women.

Cash-Crop Production and the Consolidation of Local Economic Elites, 1945 to 1959

Owino (O.I., 2026) observed that colonial chiefs participated in land allocation, surveying, and registration processes, and in enforcing relocation orders. Some chiefs were alleged to have acquired land themselves or accepted bribes from settlers. Their involvement weakened the authority of traditional elders, who had previously played important roles in regulating access to land.

The colonial transformation of land relations represented one of the most important economic consequences of chiefship. As documented in KNA/DC/KSM/1/23/42, colonial authorities used surveys, registration procedures and land titles to reorganise property relations. Customary claims and communal tenure arrangements were frequently subordinated to colonial legal and administrative procedures. Chiefs served as intermediaries in implementing these processes, including enforcing relocation orders.

Owino (O.I., 2026) further noted that reduced communal access to productive land and lakeshore resources affected the economic autonomy of Asembo households. The traditional system in which land provided the material basis for household subsistence was increasingly constrained by new forms of property control. The implications included declining food security, greater dependence on wage income and increased economic differentiation.

Economic Politicisation and the Transition to Independence, 1960 to 1963

The concluding period spanning 1960 to 1963 was marked by the transformation of economic complaints into political issues and the erosion of credibility in colonial governance institutions. The African District Councils offered constrained avenues for African involvement in local governance. Nevertheless, colonial administrators limited their influence (KNA/PC/NZA/3/1/272). Scholarly examination of colonial Kenya shows that Native Authorities could oversee vital local functions, including agriculture, water management, education, and public health, even as their financial allocations and strategic choices remained subordinate to colonial administrative frameworks.

In Asembo, political mobilisation in the late 1940s and 1950s increasingly linked economic grievances to demands for greater political participation. Atieno and Oloo (O.I., 2026) reported that support for KAU, public rallies, *harambees* and village meetings provided spaces through which grievances concerning taxation, forced labour, land and abuses by Native Authority chiefs were articulated. Ouma and Oketch (O.I., 2026) further noted the importance of youth associations, debate groups and church networks in spreading political ideas.

5.0 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion: The study concludes that colonialism transformed chieftainship from collectively negotiated authority into a hierarchical institution of political control and economic extraction, reshaping social relationships. East Asembo's experience contributes to Kenyan colonial historiography on African political authority, state formation, and the socio-economic effects of colonial administration among Luo communities in western Kenya.

Recommendations: The study recommends that historical and local governance institutions should recognise the role of traditional leadership structures in shaping colonial administration and community relations among the Jo-Asembo. The study also recommends preserving and documenting oral histories, archival records, and community narratives about the appointment, roles, and experiences of colonial chiefs and elders to safeguard this historical heritage for future generations. Moreover, local historians and researchers should investigate how colonial chieftainship transformed indigenous authority, land relations, taxation, and labour mobilisation, including the long-term effects of these changes on contemporary community structures. Finally, community-based historical education initiatives should be strengthened to promote a deeper understanding of the interaction between colonial administrative systems and indigenous leadership institutions.

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