

# The Role of Colonialism in the Transformation of the Indigenous Naming System of the Amuthambi of Tharaka Nithi County, Kenya, 1920-1963

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## **Abstract**

Naming is a universal phenomenon and as old as human history. In traditional Africa, naming was complex and authentic. The cultural values, traditions, beliefs and norms were highly linked with the African naming. However, colonial policies, practices and activities such as taxation, cash crop farming, wage labour, modern health care, Christianity and Western education impacted heavily the traditional naming system of the Amuthambi. The current

research focused on establishing the role of colonialism in the transformation of the indigenous naming system of the Amuthambi from 1920 to 1963. The research was conducted among the Amuthambi of Mitheru and Muthambi wards in Tharaka Nithi County, Kenya. The study employed the structural functionalism theory and the acculturation theory. A descriptive research design based on a qualitative approach was used to describe the phenomena. A purposive sampling procedure and snowballing technique were employed to identify the respondents. The concept of data saturation was applied and the information was mainly gathered using primary sources including; oral sources and archival. Secondary sources including books, journals, dissertations, articles, thesis and electronics were also used to corroborate the primary data. An interview guide was used to aid in collecting the oral data. Data was analyzed thematically and later presented in narrative form. The findings of the study established that the introduction of taxation, forced labour, cash crop farming, wage economy, western education, modern healthcare and Christianity weakened the traditional naming principles, patterns and procedures and a new naming system emerged. At the end of the colonial period the society became more individualistic, and matters about the birth and naming of the child became more of a private affair contrary to the traditional setup. Consequently, a new version of the naming system that characterizes the hybridity of both traditional and modern naming systems became evident among the Amuthambi. The study documents the historical influence of colonialism on African cultural practices by investigating the influence of colonialism on the transformation of the indigenous naming system of the Amuthambi.

**Keywords:** colonialism, indigenous, naming system, acculturation, transformation

## 1. Introduction

### *1.1 Background of Information*

All societies across the world confer names to both tangible and intangible things. The practice of naming is as old as human history and can be traced back to the creation of man (Genesis 2:19). The basic purpose of naming objects and human beings is identification and differentiation (Mutunda, 2011). After the birth of a child, the next event of great importance in the life of that child is naming. Among many traditional African societies, naming was not just a random act but rather a complex process based on traditional naming principles, procedures and patterns. Through this process, the cultural values, norms, ideologies, traditions and beliefs of the society were expressed (Nyaga 1997). Mbiti, (1990) adds that it was a celebrated rite of passage. Akinnaso, (1980) citing the case of the traditional Yoruba community indicates that naming was a celebrated communal affair attended by the relatives and members of the community). Communalism was an essential fabric of the traditional African communities. Additionally, the social, political, religious and economic experiences of the society played a significant role. In the pre-colonial era, the Amuthambi observed an indigenous naming system rooted in the culture of the society. Adherence to the naming principles, procedures and patterns was paramount. The choice of the name for the newborn child was the prerogative of the elderly women within the community (KNA/MRU/1951, particularly those present during the time of child delivery and past the childbearing age.

However, in response to the colonial policies, practices and activities in the period from 1920-1963, the naming culture of the Amuthambi has been through a series of transformations. The introduction of taxation, forced labour, cash crop farming, wage labor, Christianity and Western education by the Europeans during the colonial period greatly influenced the traditional naming system of the Amuthambi. According to Vansina (1992), societal traditions and history continuously transform to meet the demands of social mobility, colonization and the religious realities within the society at different epochs. Colonialism undermined the traditional African practices to the periphery terming it heathen and barbaric. According to Gerald (2009), colonialism infringed the African cultural practices at the expense of European culture. This is evidenced in the naming systems expressed by some Africans in contemporary society.

Naming takes place in society and cannot be separated from political, economic, social and religious changes. According to Abongo (2014), colonial policies and practices such as the introduction of Western education, healthcare, taxation, land alienation, forced labor and wage labor on Kenyans during the colonial period were directly or indirectly responsible for the disintegration of African culture. According to Morley and Robins (1995), there is always a history behind any cultural identity. One important event that marks Kenyan history is the advent of colonialism and the social, political, economic and cultural changes that took place. The introduction of modern healthcare, taxation, Christianity, wage labour system, western education and forced labor greatly disrupted and undermined the traditional way of life of the Kenyan people.

Using the Amuthambi as the point of focus, this study sought to investigate the historical transformation of the indigenous naming system of the Amuthambi from 1920 to 1963. The study endeavors to establish the influence of colonial policies, practices and activities on the naming procedures, patterns and principles of the Amuthambi Community.

## **2. Literature Review**

In Euro-western countries, colonial activities led to the introduction of a capitalist economy and the destruction of the indigenous culture. According to (Genger, 2018), colonial processes in Australia led to forced assimilation into reserves, alienation of land, and resources and devaluation of the native culture. Additionally, Wolfe (2006) notes the application of the cultural genocide model of colonial rule by the British led to the destruction of indigenous cultures in Australia, America, Africa, New Zealand and Canada. This was geared toward depriving the indigenous people of their identity through the destruction of their cultural heritage characterized by language, social structures, names, beliefs and practices (Genger, *ibid*). Similarly, Palmiste (2018) instantiates that this progress led to the alteration of fundamental cultural identities of the Americans. The native beliefs, values and rituals were highly condemned and termed as primitive and heathen. In school, the students were forbidden from the use of their mother tongue and also discouraged from engaging in traditional practices. In this case, Christianity and foreign education are cited as the major tools by the Europeans in the transformation of the traditional culture in the colonized Western worlds. This information supports the argument in this study that

colonialism impacted the cultural practices of the colonized. However, there exists a gap since the study does not specifically focus on the transformation of the naming system.

The colonial policies and practices discouraged the Africans from carrying out their indigenous cultural practices (Arowolo, 2010). For instance, Oni and Segun (2014) state that colonialism in Africa led to changes in traditional marriage institutions, the family systems, led to the promotion of corruption, the destruction of communal lifestyle, the destruction of African traditional religion, the introduction of foreign food and language, introduction of western education, Christianity and modern health care among others. Mumford (1929) argues that the European missionaries looked down upon the African traditional customs and practices such as rites and ceremonies. They worked by all means to see them erased from the African culture. This was witnessed in Gold Coast (Ghana) when a Native Customs Ordinance of 1892 was enacted prohibiting the practice of all forms of African traditional customs referring to it as witchcraft (Omenyo, 2001).

Dickens (1985) conducted a study on the Western influence on the Zulu naming system (1849-1982). Her work was based on linguistic characteristics of the Zulu names. Dickens stated that the traditional naming system of the Zulu was highly influenced by missionary activities, the introduction of Western education, urbanization and industrialization. However, in the period (1959-1982), the Zulus started reverting to their traditional naming systems following the wave of black consciousness in South Africa. Neethling (2003) pointing to the case of Zimbabwe, indicates that Christianity and Western education served a significant role in the transformation of the naming among the Xhosa society. For instance, the former president of South Africa Nelson Mandela narrates of how he acquired his name “Nelson” from the British institution of learning (Mandela, 1994). Similarly, western education led to a generation of Africans who despised their own culture and strived to be like white men. The adoption of English names was associated with prestige and civilization. According to a study carried out by Mathangwane and Gardner (1998), the influence of foreign religions, the effects of colonization and the migrant labor system played a significant role in the adoption of English names among the people of Botswana. Mphande (2006) asserts that the key purpose of name-changing on people of African descent was to enable the Africans to meet the social, political, economic and religious conditions of the colonialists. The current study investigated how the aspects of naming such as procedure, pattern and ceremony were transformed during the colonial period.

Among the Xhosa and Ambo of Namibia respectively, significant influence on the traditional naming system of the Africans by the Europeans, particularly through the adoption of a foreign names was noted (Neethling, 2003; Saarelma-Maunumaa, 2003). According to Simelane-Kalumba (2014), the contact between the Xhosa and the Western societies resulted in a tremendous change in the Xhosa culture and customs by the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. The development of industries and urban centers compelled many people to move from the rural to the urban areas in search of cheap labor from the mines and other wage jobs. This rendered many Africans as migrant laborers. As a result, western values started gaining ground more than the African cultural values in the urban areas. In the urban settings, many Africans started adopting Western names and the cultural way of life of the Western employers. This

study sought to understand the colonial-related motivations of the Africans to move into the urban areas and its consequence on the naming system.

Ikotun (2013) argues that the bestowal of the traditional-based names among the Yoruba has been on the decline. Ikotun attributes this phenomenon partly to the rise of the western health facilities including the church maternity services. Unlike in the traditional days when the people who assisted in the child delivery were traditional midwives or elderly women who were familiar with the naming culture of the society, the introduction of the modern health facilities meant that the delivery of the child was conducted in the hospitals. Therefore the nurses and doctors would at times take the role of naming the child even without observing the set period before name giving and the ritual ceremony involved by the indigenous societies. Due to a lack of knowledge of the Yoruba culture, the names accorded in most cases do not reflect Yoruba culture; hence not meaningful to the named society. Due to diversity in culture, the current study discussed in detail how the introduction of the introduction of modern healthcare impacted the indigenous naming system of the Amuthambi.

Karari (2018) examines the experience of Kenyans under British rule. Focusing on the people of Mount Kenya region, Karari notes that, the settlement and colonization of Kenya by the British changed the history of the country. The British colonial government employed all manner of tactics to conquer, suppress and colonize the Kenyans. These policies, practices and activities included the land policies, taxation, forced labor system, creation of reserves, the introduction of the *Kipande*/pass system, the Villagization program, the introduction of a wage economy, and the declaration of a state of emergency among others. These developments destabilized the total way of life of the Kenyans. It is important to note that in traditional days, there existed an interplay between the social, economic, religious and cultural organization of the people. Whereas this study was on the role of colonialism in fueling ethnic violence in Kenya, the current study explores how the colonial policies, practices and activities transformed the indigenous naming system

Hogg (1992) notes that the introduction of the restriction of movements of livestock among the pastoralist communities of North Eastern Kenya during the colonial period interfered with their social and cultural practices such as the naming, and marriage ceremonies. However, the colonization of Gusiiland led to the transformation of indigenous crop production. During the pre-colonial period, the people of Gusiiland relied on the cultivation of indigenous crops both for consumption and for exchange. However, during the colonial period, European colonization led to the introduction of foreign crops in the region particularly cash crops such as tea, pyrethrum, white maize and coffee. These cash crops played a significant role in undermining the production of indigenous crops such as finger millet, bulrush (*mwere*), sweat potatoes, sorghum and potatoes (Motaya, 2019). This information indicates that the economic practices of society played a major role in cultural practices such as marriage, circumcision and naming ceremonies. However, it is not clear how the displacement of the indigenous crops impacted the traditional ceremonies and practices.

Fadiman (1993) narrates how the European colonialist led by Edward Butler Horne

(Kangangi) arrived in Meru in 1908 with Horne as the District Commissioner of the whole of the Meru region. The colonial administrator was nicknamed *Kangangi* due to his habit of wandering in the region. In 1911 the Amuthambi were administered from Embu. It was not until 1933 when the administration of Amuthambi was reverted to Meru District. Fadiman notes that shortly after the establishment of colonial rule in Meru, the Christian missionaries followed. The colonial administrators and the Christian missionaries maintained a symbiotic relationship (Shillington, 1995). This motivated the Ameru to claim that there was no distinction between a missionary and a colonizer. Ndubai (2012) conducted a study on the participation of the Ameru in the Mau and established that the Ameru played an active role in the Mau Mau movement. He describes the experience of the Ameru under colonial rule and the factors that led to the involvement of the Ameru in the Mau Mau movements. Ndubai notes that the colonial government introduced measures to curb the spread of the movement. These measures had far-reaching political, economic and socio-cultural impacts on the Ameru. For instance, the declaration of a state of emergency and the mass villagization program highly disrupted the socio-cultural way of life of the Ameru.

### *2.1 Theoretical Framework*

The study was guided by the functionalism theory and acculturation theory. The functional theory is often referred to as the structural functionalism. According to the functionalists, society is compared to a living organism which has various parts/components that are interrelated and perform specific roles in the life of that organism (Crossman, 2016). The components that make up a society have specific functions and are interdependent. The theory is based on the principles of togetherness, integration, solidarity and stability. According to Durkheim social facts: customs, laws, morals, fashions, rituals, values, beliefs and the cultural rules of a society serve to enhance the stability of a society. They are passed down from one generation to another. Society is conceptualized to be a system consisting of sub-systems which include: political, economic, religious, social and cultural sub-systems. Different parts of the system (sub-systems) are generally interdependent and are designed to fulfill the various needs of society. In a case where one part is dysfunctional or is faced with a crisis, the other parts are affected as well or the whole structure is affected and may require the whole system to be reorganized altogether (Holmwood, 2005). Furthermore, the sub-systems also interact with one another and are subject to change due to the changes that prevail in society. As such, the naming system within the Amuthambi cultural institution and its functionalities interacted with the other social-cultural, economic and religious institutions to enhance the stability of the society. However, due to the changes affecting society and various institutions, change in naming has not been left behind. Change in naming among the Amuthambi has been influenced and transformed by the social, cultural, religious, economic and political changes affecting the entire society at different epochs. These changes are observed in naming procedures, patterns, ritual ceremonies and principles.

To enhance the weaknesses of functionalism theory, the acculturation theory advanced by (Kroeber, 1948) was also used. This theory was used to account for the cultural change within a society. Based on the concept of the process of cultural change due to cultural contact, Kroeber defined acculturation as a gradual process that results in a change of a society's

culture due to prolonged contact between societies from diverse cultural backgrounds. The influence may be through direct or indirect contact. In some cases, both cultures are affected though the effect may not be balanced with one culture being more acculturated than the other. A case observed within the naming system of the Amuthambi following the contact between the African culture and the European under different circumstances.

### **3. Research Methodology**

#### *3.1 Research Location*

The study was conducted among the Amuthambi residing in the Mitheru and Muthambi wards of Tharaka Nithi County, Kenya. This researcher visited the informants in their natural setting.

#### *3.2 Research Design*

The study was carried out using the descriptive research design to provide information on the area of study. A qualitative approach was used to allow for an in-depth collection of data and analysis on the role of colonialism in the transformation of the indigenous naming system of the Amuthambi.

#### *3.3 Target Population*

The target population consisted of elderly men and women who were aged 70 years and above. A purposive sampling using snowballing technique was adopted to determine the respondents who were knowledgeable on the naming system of the Amuthambi community. .

#### *3.4 Sampling Procedure*

The study adopted a purposive method of sampling and snowballing or chain technique to determine the most appropriate respondents for the study. The purposive sampling technique targeted informants who offered relevant and reliable information on the Amuthambi naming system. Therefore, it called for the researcher to make an informed judgment on the selection of the respondents and their habitat through the use of common sense and inferences. The snowballing technique was used in the identification and location of required respondents to uphold the reliability of the data collected. Some respondents who were interviewed could direct the researcher to other possible informants. Cochran (1977) contents that snowballing is suitable in studies when the respondents are difficult to locate.

The purposive and snowballing sampling method was used to identify respondents from the Amuthambi group of people who are presumed to have information on colonial experiences. Elderly men and women 70 years and above, consisting of government administrators, religious leaders, educators, health practitioners, clan and community leaders among others, believed to be knowledgeable on the European colonialism in the region, either through first hand or second-hand experience and believed could offer reliable and accurate information were considered. Different categories of people from both genders were involved to get views from diverse groups of people.

### *3.5 Sample Size*

The concept of data saturation was employed to arrive at a sample size of 30 respondents who were interviewed using both closed and open-ended questions to give relevant information on the role of colonialism in transforming the Amuthambi naming system. The concept of data saturation states that when all important themes, experiences and perceptions are uncovered in an interview-based research, the information reaches saturation and begins to be repetitive. This means that it is unlikely that conducting more interviews will reveal new information. The sample size was also justified by Kathuri and Pals (1993), who states that the minimum sample size for a major sub-group should be made up of 100 cases while that of a minor subgroup should be between 20-50 cases. Amuthambi is a minor subgroup of Ameru people.

### *3.6 Research Instruments*

An interview guide was used as the main instrument to collect primary data from the informants where the respondents were orally interviewed through one-on-one in-depth interviews.

### *3.7 Data Collection Procedure*

The data collection procedure employed was geared toward addressing the objectives of the phenomenon under study. Different sources including primary, secondary, archival and electronic sources were employed. The primary sources were a major source of information which included the oral data obtained through in-depth interviews of the respondents and the analysis of archival records, while secondary data was derived from various published books, thesis and dissertations, seminars and conferences, articles and journals. The electronic sources were also used.

### *3.8 Data Analysis*

A qualitative method of data analysis was conducted on a thematic basis. The analysis of the data involved the organization of the information according to themes. Data obtained through oral, archival, secondary and electronic sources was corroborated to enhance the validity and reliability of the study. The analyzed data was then presented in the form of narration enhanced by quotations from the primary informants.

## **4. Research Findings**

### *4.1 The Effects of Introduction of Taxation and Wage Labor on Naming*

Urbanization is one of the primary factors that played a significant role in the cross-cultural interaction and erosion of African culture during the colonial period. Before the emergence of European colonialists in Kenya, the people of Meru observed subsistence production where barter trade was the order of the day. The main economic activities included crop production and rearing of livestock and people hardly lived outside their village. However, colonial rule resulted in the disruption of the traditional economic and social order of people. The introduction of taxation, money economy, wage labor and cash crop farming brought by the colonialists disrupted the stability of the African societies (KNA/DC/MRU/1952). Mwaniki



(1974) adds that during colonial times, African culture mostly that of the Aembu, the Achuka and the Ameru interacted with one another freely. The main factor for colonialism was to accumulate wealth for the mother country. To meet this goal as well as to support the administrative operations of the colonialists, restructuring the indigenous economic order of the colony was key.

During the colonial period, a series of economic policies were introduced in Kenya based on land alienation, (Sorrenson, 1968) taxation (Tarus, 2004) and forced labour (Zezeza, 1992) cited in (Ndege, 2009). The collection of the hut tax in Meru was conducted by the local chiefs who were appointed by the European administrator (Thomas, 1992). It was noted that the poll tax was levied per year on every adult male as well as the hut tax for every hut that a man owned (Colonial Report, 1948). The exercise of collecting tax and forcefully recruiting young men into labor was new to the local people, therefore, the chiefs experienced a lot of resistance and hatred from the local people. Munyua (O.I, 2022) states that the local chiefs were very ruthless in their collection of the tax and sometimes they could confiscate goats or chicken from those who were unable to pay the tax. Since the tax could only be payable in colonial currency which the Africans did not have, they opted to seek employment in cash crop production in European plantations or other public works to earn money to pay the tax (Nyakwaka, 2013). On top of paying taxes, the need to purchase the manufactured goods that had been introduced to them by the Europeans also motivated young men to seek wage labor (Cooper, 2002). Ndubai (2016) indicates that men from Meru were readily used by the colonialists to provide cheap labor in European farms and railway construction. According to an oral interview conducted by Murangiri, Benjamin Nyaga who hailed from Itara, Maara district sought wage labor at Mombasa, Ruiru and Thika. He recounts how Nyaga was employed to make ropes that were used in trains (Murangiri, 2014).

It was noted that the high taxation imposed on the Africans and to escape the forced labour, some Amuthambi, particularly decided to seek for wage labour from settler farms in Kiambu and Nyeri (Ndiga O.I, 2002). They worked as domestic workers and farmers in settler farms where they earned a meagre salary. When these men returned from their workplace in Kikuyuland, they injected new ideas into the Amuthambi culture and in particular the naming system. He gives an example of the name Njeri (a Kukuyu name) which he said was borrowed from the Agikuyu community. Similarly, he posits that these people did not want to participate in traditional cultural activities. They wanted to be more like the Europeans or the Agikuyu who had come into contact with the Europeans earlier than the Ameru people and thus got influenced culturally. At the same time, some found their masters name/s attractive and when they returned home they gave their children these names (KNA/DC/MRU/1937). In the same vein, Mboya (2009) reiterates that following the introduction of colonialism in Kenya was the introduction of taxation policies which compelled many people from Luo land to migrate in urban areas in search of wage labor. As a result, the Luos in the urban centers maintained a close interaction with people from diverse cultural backgrounds leading to borrowing of marriage and sexual practices from those people. It is evident from this statement that a lot of cultural exchange takes place in the urban area including the borrowing of the naming practices from diverse urban dwellers a situation that undermines the

traditional naming of the affected society.

In the urban centers, people from diverse cultural backgrounds including European and African cultures interacted at different levels during the colonial period. Some moved to the urban center and got marriage partners from different cultural backgrounds. Others who had gone to urban areas in search of employment were influenced by the cosmopolitan culture found in the urban centers. The weakening of contact between the urban dwellers and their rural kinship led to the disintegration of the families and susceptibility to cultural change. The naming principles, patterns and procedures of the Amuthambi were highly compromised to pave the way for the European ideas that were viewed as civilized and prestigious. For instance, the name giver, clan and age-set names and order of namesake were highly compromised. Moreover, urban areas acted as avenues for the promotion of single-mother families and the development of the concept of individualism. The traditional collective social life demonstrated by the Africans faced a big challenge due to the migration of people into the urban areas resulting in loss of family ties. Individuals could make decisions on child naming in total disregard for the role of the community and particularly extended family. Bearing children out of wedlock also became rampant among urban dwellers (Nkonge, O.I 2022).

#### *4.2 Effects of the Introduction of Cash Crop on the Indigenous Naming System*

Traditionally, the Amuthambi observed subsistence farming which involved the rearing of cattle, goats, sheep, and chicken as well as the cultivation of sugarcane, yams, bulrush millet, finger millet, cassava, indigenous bananas, beans and cowpeas. These crops were very important since some of them were ceremonial. During the naming ceremony, the new mother had to prepare gruel and traditional food for the children who had gathered to celebrate the outdoor occasion (Gaaji, O.I 2022). The yams, bulrush millet, traditional bananas, pigeon peas, cowpeas and sugarcane were very significant during the birth and naming rite of passage since they were ceremonial crops used to prepare the traditional foods and drinks that were used during the traditional ceremonies. The food was balanced and nutritious promoting quicker recovery of the new mother and ensuring faster and healthy growth of the new child (Mukwamugo, O.I, 2022). However, the European colonialists used all methods possible to achieve their capitalist objective in Kenya. One of the methods was through marginalization of the indigenous crop production which was termed as primitive, illogical, and archaic. This led to the introduction of cash crops such as coffee, tea, cotton and pyrethrum. The growing of coffee by the Africans was done with a lot of restrictions (Ndubai, 2016; M Itha, O.I 2022). By 1935 coffee planting was introduced around Mwimbi and Muthambi many farmers around the region developed an interest in it (Annual Report, 1937). The beneficiary of these cash crops was the white and Europe in general. (Sobania, 2003). The Europeans also introduced new food crops such as maize, English potatoes, beans among others (KNA/DC/MRU/1951). Berman, (1992) informed the same by positing that during the European activities in Africa food crops such as Maize, beans and potatoes entered Africa. Due to the high cost of production and long maturity period of crops such as bulrush millet, sorghum, millet and yams, the new crops introduced by the Europeans were received very well. Consequently, the production of traditional food crops such as yams, bulrush (*mwere*),

sorghum, millet and sugarcane declined. This called for transformation in the naming system of the Amuthambi since these traditional foods were a delicacy during childbirth and the naming of a child.

#### *4.3 Influence of Christianity on the Naming System*

The advent of Christian missionaries in Kenya led to a profound transformation in African traditional practices. The Christian missionaries regarded the African culture as filled with primitivism and barbarism. Muyebe (1999) notes that African culture was portrayed as satanic and full of superstitions hence it was the responsibility of the missionaries to liberate the Africans from the outdated culture. Traditional practices such as F.G.M., polygamy, ceremonies and offering of sacrifices were highly discouraged by the Christian missionaries. The African naming was also regarded as paganism. Therefore, Africans who became members of the Catholic Church underwent catechism and were later required to acquire a new name during baptism (Irima, O.I, 2022). The new name must have been acceptable to the church leaders. She continues to state that practices like brewing local beer, polygamy and F.G.M were not allowed to those who converted to Christianity. This was reinforced through oath-taking. Ndege (2009) argued that the Christian missionaries preached against the African traditional religion while discouraging the converts from engaging in traditional cultural practices. The Christian converts were prohibited from involvement in anything traditional (Nukunya, 2003). It was therefore impossible for one to be a Christian convert and at the same time continue with the traditional cultural practices. The traditional birth rituals and naming practices slowly lost meaning in the lives of Africans who had converted to Christianity. The adoption of the baptismal name was an outward indication that a person had accepted conversion into the new faith and other requirements associated with it. It was noted that at the end of the colonial period, Amuthambi who became Christians had to present a name derived from a list of biblical or saint names during the baptism of their children, otherwise the priest would pick the name from a list of names contained in one of the books of reference (Irima O.I, 2022). These names had no cultural orientation and were very difficult to pronounce. This is very ironic since this was the same reason that made the Europeans resist African names. According to many respondents, the Christian teachings emphasized the need to adopt the Western culture terming the indigenous practices as outdated and barbaric

Moyo (1996) posits that the acquisition of a Christian or European name was an outward indication of the civilization of a person. Consequently, the biblical and European names penetrated the African naming system. This is contrary to many African cultures where names could be given in the context of trees, crop harvest, mountains, famine, rivers, etc. (Agyekum 2006; Akinnaso 1980). According to Mukwamugo (O.I, 2022), the local people had very little knowledge concerning the new names introduced to them by the missionaries and they did not make any sense to them apart from associating them with the European culture. However, since they were motivated by the desire to acquire, white-collar jobs, western education, manufactured goods such as clothes, soap and oil offered by the Christian missionaries, they willingly embraced the new religion and culture without questioning (Gachobi, O.I 2022). Through the acceptance of Christianity, the Meru people were influenced into the adoption of

Anglicized names such as Mary, Johnson, Beatrice and Andrew (Ndubai, 2016). The European missionaries encouraged the converts to identify a Christian namesake who was capable of being a good role model to the child (Irima *ibid*). Many people as a result started ignoring the traditional naming pattern especially by avoiding naming their children after individuals who were not morally upright.

#### *4.4 Effects of Modern Health Care on the Naming System*

In the Amuthambi society, one was said to be healthy if he/she did not have any physical, spiritual or social ailment. The body had to be physically well-built, not deformed, strong and free from pain. One had to be of sound mind; that can think, reason and judge as expected as a human being. Some types of conduct made one to be unacceptable socially. Occurrences like bloodshed or killing could make one unacceptable in the family and society at large. The Amuthambi believed that all ailments needed treatment of one type or another (KNA/MRU/1948). Some treatments would be administered privately while others were public. Some would be for private individuals and others for communal consumption; like when an epidemic threatened the society at large. The traditional medical practitioners were also varied and with varied training, this included the general herbal medical practitioners, surgeons, psychiatrists, midwives and special individuals like the medicine man (*mugo*) and diviner (*kiroria*). These specialists were available within the society and used traditional methods to treat diseases. However, in modern society, seeking health care relies on several factors including the availability of the facility, the distance, terrain and means of getting the service (KNA/6/26/1957). Diseases such as tuberculosis and leprosy were associated with curses and therefore incurable.

During the colonial period, the provision of health care underwent a drastic change. This was a result of the introduction of Western medicines and health care. The British Europeans played a significant role in the provision of modern health facilities and services in Kenya. The introduction of Western medicine reduced infant mortality and maternal deaths. Though this had a positive impact, there was a danger of death in the traditional rituals and practices associated with childbirth. On one hand, the colonial administrator was involved in paving the way and allocation of land for missionary activities while the missionaries were involved in the putting up of health centers in the provided sites. The European missionaries and the administrators maintained a symbiotic relationship in their effort to achieve their objective in the colony. Making an account of the coming and establishment of mission stations in Meru south, Mwiandi (1993): Mbae, (O.I 2022) states that when Clive Irvine of the Church of Scotland came looking for a piece of land where he could settle and do missionary work, people were reluctant to offer him a site. Finally, he was offered a portion in current day Chogoria which was believed to be a dwelling place for very powerful evil spirits. This was done in an attempt to test the power of the religion (Christianity) he was claiming to preach. However, the site was ideal for the mission site since the senior chief Mbogori who hailed from the area gladly welcomed the European missionaries and offered the required security and support in the establishment of the station (KNA/DC/MRU/1952).

The missionaries led by Clive Irvine established the Chogoria health facility in 1922 where

services in diagnosis and treatment of varied diseases using modern methods were offered. Initially, the locals were reluctant to receive any formal health services from these institutions but due to the increase in high infant mortality rate and need for treatment of diseases that had proved difficult to handle through traditional methods, they slowly decided to give it a trial. At this moment the expectant mothers were advised to seek assistance from trained medical personnel while delivering their children. In research conducted on the role of African evangelists and teachers in the development of Western education and Christianity Nithi Division of Meru District, the early station started by the missionaries in the region served both as schools, churches and medical centers (Mwiandi, 1993). Many people who visited the stations with health issues and were treated went out preaching the good news about the new modern methods of treating diseases. However, the research revealed that the use of modern healthcare was very different from the traditional healing systems. According to the experience of one respondent Kangai (O.I, 2022) who delivered some of her children in Chogoria Hospital, she noted that the traditional custom of special handling of the placenta was overlooked. Similarly, there was no ululation immediately after a successful child delivery due to changes in the delivery environment as well as the delivery attendant. The observance of the “unclean” days and “outdooring” ceremony was not adhered to as well (Kangai, *ibid*)

Therefore, the fact that the delivery of the child was conducted in an unfamiliar environment and by people who were not the norm, the naming was systematically disrupted. Unlike in the traditional setup where the selection of the name for the newborn child was done by the elderly women; preferably from the extended family, with the introduction of modern health care, child delivery was done by hospital attendants. The rituals associated with childbirth such as special preservation of the placenta and ululation were not conducted according to the traditional guidelines. Following the introduction of the mission hospital, many Christian converts were encouraged to take their boys to the hospital for circumcision while female circumcision was highly forbidden (Mbae, O.I, 2022; Ileri O.I 2022). The new trend of hospital circumcision for boys led to the promotion of individualization at the expense of communalism which was common in traditional set-ups. The result was the destruction of the age-set system which plays a significant role in the generation and maintenance of names. Gradually, society continues to lose control over the decision of naming which many term it as a private affair. Ayisi (1992) argues that the British emphasized the importance of individualism as the measure of civilization as characterized by the Europeans in comparison with communalism which was associated with backwardness as demonstrated by the Africans. As a result, the communalistic lifestyle that was embraced in many aspects of the African societies declined including the naming practices.

Table 1. Implications of modern health services on indigenous naming system

Naming pattern, principle and procedure	Frequency	Percent
1. Absence of seclusion for mother and child	27	90 %
2. Absence of ululation	25	83 %
3. Absence of special handling of placenta	28	93.3 %
4. Change of the name-giver	23	78 %
5. Introduction of new names	20	68 %

The respondents revealed that seclusion did not add value in the modern era. The traditional beliefs which influenced the people to practice seclusion were watered through Christian teachings and the acquisition of Western education. Ululation was also slowly abandoned; since many children were born in the hospitals it was impossible for many rituals attached to childbirth to take place, so childbirth and naming were becoming more of an individualistic affair. The Africans were also discouraged from the unhygienic practices that took place during traditional childbirth practice. Mbiti (1969) in support of this argument notes that the individualistic lifestyle introduced to the Africans through Western education and Western influence greatly undermined the solidarity of the Africans. The fact that most of the child delivery activities conducted in the hospital and dispensaries did not involve members of the family and the society undermined African communalism.

#### *4.5 Influence of Formal Education on the Naming System*

In the pre-colonial period, the Africans observed a structured indigenous education system that was aimed at equipping the individual with the necessary knowledge and skills to enable him or her to cope well within the society. The education was founded on the traditional beliefs and practices of the Africans. The culture of the society played a significant role in indigenous education. However, to introduce and inculcate Western values to the African, western education was introduced in Africa through colonialism. This education was designed to provide the trained (African) with the necessary skills and make him a usable loyalist to the colonial projects (Weriebor, 2005).

The colonial education in Kenya was based on technical skills such as carpentry, agriculture, tailoring, craft work, hygiene and masonry and building courses taught to Africans in schools. These schools were run by the missionaries who worked hand in hand with the colonial administrators. For one to be admitted to the mission school, he/she had to convert to Christianity (Fadiman, 2012). Formal education led to a change in attitude towards the indigenous naming system which was viewed as unprogressive and archaic. Mission schools and churches acted as the best avenue for acculturation. According to Coopers (2002), the

introduction of formal education by the European missionaries led to the tremendous breakdown of traditional beliefs, values and practices of the African societies. In other words, the main role of colonial education was to erase the culture and identity of the indigenous people. It is noted that the missionaries influenced the Africans to look down on the traditional cultural practices terming it as for the illiterate and the old people.

By 1935, mission schools were already established in Meru. The Early mission schools were sparsely distributed depending on the population and the considerations of the mission group involved in the establishment of the school. (Micheni, 1988) notes the location of some of the early Catholic-based schools in Meru included Igoji (1911), Athwana (1912), Tigania (1913), Kiereni (1920), Chera (1922), Chuka (1923) and Nkubu (1948). The schools were used as the most appropriate avenue for the transmission of Christian traits. Some people could move from Muthambi and Mwimbi to attend a Catholic school in Igoji (KNA PC/CP/1/6/1930). Through formal education, one was able to secure a white-collar job for himself or herself thus improving his/her status compared with the locals who were not elite. Such elites viewed themselves as different from the other Africans who had not acquired formal education. A situation that encouraged them to abandon some of the cultural practices that were not in alignment with the expectations of the Europeans and modern society. Motivated by the desire to acquire a new social status in society, many Africans sought schooling opportunities from the European mission schools. Western education was designed in a way that was meant to alienate the Africans from their cultural environment (Mbae O.I 2022). Western education influenced the elite to perceive the African traditional practices negatively terming it outdated. Traditional practices such as the age-set system, initiation ceremonies, traditional naming system and communalism among other practices associated with African culture were gradually and systematically dismantled.

## **5. Conclusion and Recommendations**

In this study attempts are made to explain how European colonialism occasioned by Western education, Christianity, migrant labor, taxation, modern health care, cash crop economy resulted in an unspoken implication on the indigenous naming system of the Africans. The findings of this research indicate that colonialism played a pivotal role in the transformation of the indigenous naming system of the Amuthambi. The British European colonialists filled with economic interest, racial and cultural superiority undermined the African traditional way of life which they termed as barbaric and archaic. As a consequence of this notion, Europeans introduced their social, economic, political and religious system in an attempt to civilize the colonial state. The missionaries preached against the traditional cultural practices, beliefs and ritual customs. On the other hand, there was the introduction of Western education where students were brainwashed and taught to despise their own culture. It is worth noting that many shifted to Western culture due to the benefits that were associated with the acquisition of Western education and adherence to Westernization. It is confirmed beyond reasonable doubt that the introduction of the hut tax and wage economy in Kenya during the colonial period compelled many locals to move away from their families to seek employment as migrant laborers. This made them lose ties with their families and also exposed them to the culture of their employers and urban dwellers. Many were influenced by the Western culture

due to its perceived superiority and its predominance in the urban areas. As a result, radical changes in the indigenous way of naming among the Amuthambi were transformed. The traditional naming patterns principles and procedures were neglected. The values, beliefs, rituals, traditions and ideologies attached to traditional naming were abandoned. This study recommends the government and other social institutions to encourage the members of the society to maintain and promote healthy traditional norms and values regardless of Western influence.

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